The Christian image and contemporary British painting: (the communication of meaning and experience in religious paintings)

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The Christian Image and Contemporary British Painting:
(The communication of meaning and experience in religious paintings)

by

Nicholas Wyatt

Doctoral Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of
Doctor of Philosophy in Fine Art
of Loughborough University

2015

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Nicholas Wyatt
PhD by Practice
Loughborough University
School of the Arts
(28th January 2015)
Abstract

The Christian Image and Contemporary British Painting;
(The communication of meaning and experience in religious paintings)

My research uses my painting practice as an experimental and investigative tool to test the capacity of practical aesthetics to generate similar or analogous experiences to the non-dualist reception aesthetics of certain key examples of post-Tridentine (1563) Catholic Counter-Reformation devotional imagery, particularly, The Ecstasy of St. Theresa (1647-1652) by Gian Lorenzo Bernini and the Incarnation (1596-1600) by El Greco. I apply an interpretative method to the development of Christian imagery within painting in the post-Reformation period and its relationship to the economic system of modern capitalism and the Enlightenment aesthetic of the sublime. My research aims to see what, if any, meanings and experiences, which, I believe, were present in the affective aesthetics of certain Counter-Reformation imagery can, through the contemporary aesthetics of my painting practice, be reconstructed or re-generated again as similar experience to those original pre-Enlightenment non-dualist meanings and experiences. The experience I aim to generate in my paintings is an affective and experiential narrative of presence, - Eliot’s ‘unity of thought, feeling and action’, which I argue is found in the meaning and experience of those key Christian devotional images.

Key words: The Christian Image, devotional, dualism, contemporary British painting, affective aesthetics, capitalism, the sublime, reception aesthetics, communication, experience, meaning, Catholic Counter-Reformation,
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I would like to record my deepest gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Malcolm Barnard, for his dedication in helping me to realise this research project. My most special thanks to Dr. Anja Baumhoff for her significant and substantial role in research supervision and to Mark Wright for his ‘painter’s knowledge’ and the vital contribution he brought to the supervision of my practice research. My thanks also to, Dr. Marion Arnold for her support and encouragement, and to Barbara Whetnall and Charlotte Greasley for their assistance. My profound appreciation for the insights of Gough Quinn and Petra van Harte and my very special thanks to Suzy Wyatt, Louisa Knox and Jane Cook for their help, encouragement and steadfast support. Finally, my thanks to the Examiners of this thesis, Professor Marsha Meskimon and Professor Nicholas Davey for their constructive engagement with my research.

Declaration

I, Nicholas Wyatt, declare that the original research submitted by me in this thesis, consisting text and artefacts, is my own work and that neither this thesis or the original work contained therein has been previously submitted to this or any other institution. I was admitted as a research student in October 2009 and as a candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Fine Art in October 2010, the higher study for which this is a record was carried out at the University of Loughborough between 2009 and 2014. Copyright subject illustrations reproduced in accordance with ‘fair dealing’ provisions of sections 30 & 32 CDPA, 1988
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Section 1. The Argument and Methodology

Introduction

The title of this research relates two systems of thought: that are routinely dissociated by modern secular concepts and values: religion and aesthetics. My research title, *The Christian Image and Contemporary British Painting*, suggests an intervention, not in what is generally regarded as a defunct system of vision – Christian imagery, but an intervention in the discourses of a contemporary visual system - the contemporary painted image, by a defunct system of representation, Counter-Reformation devotional imagery. This may seem a somewhat paradoxical position to adopt in relation to a study of aesthetics and when I commenced the research I was asked whether this research was intended as an intervention or a supplement to the tradition of Christian imagery. The term ‘Christian Image’ in Western art is the subject of such a vast array of variable interpretations that it would be futile to talk of it as one homogenous unified concept. The iconographic tradition and meaning of certain key images within Catholic Counter-Reformation Christian imagery, particularly *The Ecstasy of St. Theresa* (1647-1652) by Gian Lorenzo Bernini and the *Annunciation (Incarnation)* (1596-1600) by El Greco is the object and instrument in my research for an intervention in the contemporary painted image. This is a practice-based research enquiry, which will consider contemporary painting (including my painting) and certain aspects of its relationship to the experiences of a number of key artworks of Christian imagery in European painting from the time of the Counter-Reformation, in particular the marginalisation of such experiences and meanings within the theory, practice and discourses of recent and contemporary art. My painting practice looks at the apparent or supposed obsolescence of the transcendent realities depicted in the theological and sacred ‘spaces’ of certain key works within Counter-Reformation affective aesthetics and the unity of thought, feeling and action (Eliot, 1921) which, my thesis suggests, those works represented and asks whether my painting can reproduce similar non-dualist experience, or whether classic Cartesian ‘dualist’ metaphysics of mind/body, rational/sensory, knowledge/belief, transcendence/immanence, must inevitably return in any contemporary iconographies of transcendence. And whether those sacred pictorial ‘spaces’ still constitute an active, relevant visual system, which may be reconstructed
or whether, by redundancy or prohibition, it is no longer available as a form of representation to contemporary vocabularies of painting - its meaning reduced instead to an act of nostalgia and aesthetic ‘\textit{Sehnsucht}’ for a loss that cannot be recuperated.

The origins of this research arose from my own practice as a painter and my recognition of what I believe is the relevance to contemporary painting of certain experiences which I discerned in some key works of Counter-Reformation devotional art. The realisation of an historical perspective on contemporary painting, which analyses the processes by which painting acquires and discards sacred meaning and experience, and the transfer of value in its production, transmission and reception, which the painted image undergoes over time has, however, produced an interpretative tension- between reading as discrete, key works- or as a top-down narrative of the development of post-Reformation European religious painting. A growing awareness of a bias in my original text, which disproportionately favoured historical and art historical analysis, over close reads of key works caused me to think through my material differently, because, it is in fact, my discussions about discrete, specific, key historical works and their affective, visceral qualities, that go to the question of pictorial experience, which is at the heart of my thesis and provides the impetus for my thought on my painting practice and produces the insights that inform my research. These issues were explored in some detail in the course of my viva and I was able to offer some close readings of certain key historical works, which were crucial to the thinking and development of my practice and it is these close readings of key works, which I address in my thesis in the interests of focusing my argument on the experiences of Counter-Reformation painting. I do not claim all Catholic Counter-Reformation painting produced these experiences, but certain key works. So, in recognising a narrative that favours more closely the affective and visceral qualities of pictorial close reads/micro- histories, I have therefore discussed some key historical works in detail (e.g. \textit{The Ecstasy of St. Theresa} (1647-1652) (fig.24) by Gian Lorenzo Bernini and the \textit{Annunciation (Incarnation)} (1596-1600) from the Aragon Altarpieces by El Greco (fig.40). These works will support my argument and were instrumental in the formation of my practice concerns and research enquiry.
Dualism and Christian Imagery

My thesis seeks to discover whether certain historic pictorial experiences such as the religious ecstatic, the religious sublime, the visionary, can be reproduced or regenerated within the discourses and practices of contemporary British painting and my painting practice in particular. I argue that the experiences of certain key works of the Catholic Counter-Refomation (e.g. The Ecstasy of St. Theresa) (fig. 24) disclose a unified field of consciousness. I rely on historical and contemporary textual evidence and my own responses to these works, as a practitioner, to support my argument. The argument - that these works disclose a unified field of experience - of ‘thought, feeling and action’ (Eliot, 1921) and my research aim to reproduce the experiences of such unified, non-dualist consciousness – was discussed at some length during the course of my viva, in relation to the evidence of my painting practice, which suggests the presence of binary fields of pictorial vision that appear to maintain a dualist separation of mind/body, transcendence/immanence. In the next section on thesis content and in the conclusion, I discuss the issue of dualism in European Christian iconography and the difficulties that attend aesthetic aims of representing non-dualist experience pictorially within those systems of vision.

Content of thesis
Research aims

My practice-based research aims to see what, if any, meanings and experiences, which, I believe, were present in the affective aesthetics of certain key works of the Catholic Reformation image (i.e.post-Tridentine,1563) can, through the contemporary aesthetics of my painting practice, be reproduced or re-generated again as similar experience to those original pre-Enlightenment meanings and experiences. These meanings and experiences, I will argue, were transvalued in the Enlightenment to the aesthetics of the modern sublime which, I claim, capitalism functionalised as ‘otherness’ to the dominant economic narrative of emergent industrial capitalism. This ‘hybridity’ was developed in the writing of the chapter Capitalism and the Symptom of the Sublime, as examining ways in which similar Christian experience was generated in the Enlightenment aesthetic concept of the sublime. By contrast, the experience I aim to generate in my paintings is an affective
and experiential narrative of presence, unity of thought, feeling and action which, I argue, is found in the experience of certain key works within the visual system I refer to as the post-Tridentine (1563) Catholic Reformation painted and sculptural devotional image. The aspiration of a unity of mind and body was not just influential in Catholic Reformation art theory and practice, but is also one of the characteristics of the Antique or the ‘Longinian’ sublime as well as running through the thought of the Romantic movement - and described by Eliot (1921) (in relation to the Metaphysical Poets) as a unity of thought feeling and action. This non-dualistic divergence-self and world ‘chiasmically’ entangled through the agency of my work, is my stated ambition for my painting, which sets out to find if it is possible to generate similar experiences to those key works I describe from Catholic Reformation art.

The foregoing opening remarks and reflections on dualism, as it relates to my research, are intended to address and describe how I see the nature of the problems I encountered in my practice in relation to the question of dualities within representational painting. In attempting to represent non-dualist experience pictorially, I used my work as a painted/painterly exploration/ experimentation into ways of overcoming or avoiding dualism. In the concluding statements to my thesis I offer an evaluation of what insights my research produced on the issue and how these findings contribute to knowledge.

Dualisms in relation to mind/body, rational/sensory, knowledgebelief, and transcendence/immanence are a convention and characteristic of post-Cartesian metaphysics. Post structuralism, including recent theoretical work on the subject such as (e.g. Vattimo- Belief, 1999; The Future of Religion, 2007) argues against such binary oppositional models of mind/body, transcendence/immanence, knowledgebelief separation. These theoretical perspectives inform my practice-based argument that the experiences of certain key works of the Catholic Reformation sublime such as The Ecstasy of St. Theresa, (1647-52) (fig. 24) can be understood in these non-dualistic terms, in which Eliot’s(1921) ‘unity of thought feeling and action’, which he ascribed to the Metaphysical Poets, becomes integrated and manifest in such works. My research enquiry seeks to understand, through practice, whether my contemporary painting can generate similar experiences of unity of thought, feeling and action as part of a religio-aesthetic that
was the basis of such non-dualist experience represented in works of the pre-Enlightenment Catholic Reformation sublime like *The Ecstasy of St. Theresa*. I argue that in such works the erotic and the sacred were part of one unified field of human consciousness when this work was made, because, I suggest, there was then no cognitive separation of the erotic and the sacred religious.

The question my thesis asks is whether it is possible for my painting to represent a ‘unity of thought, feeling and action’ (Eliot, 1921) in a non-dualistic pictorial way - or whether my paintings maintain a fundamental separation between a profane, materialist earthly realm and a transcendent heavenly one. For example, my painting *All Night Long* (2010), (fig.2) appears to disclose a mind/body, knowledge/belief, rational/sensory, transcendent/immanent dualism that seems to operate within its pictorial logic. The cosmopolitan woman in western dress, against the background of a neon-lit night time cityscape represents consumer capitalism and the rationalist, materialist, immanent cultural system that characterises it. This is contrasted with the ‘metaphysical’ iconography of resurrected bodies ascending heavenwards, in the same painting, connoting a belief-based, mind-oriented culture of transcendence that sits in dualistic relationship with the ‘materialist’ iconography in the painting. What the painting actually seeks is a corporealised spirituality where a unity of thought feeling and action are entangled through the agency of the work.

This dualism may be demonstrated in the contrasting responses I had to key specific artworks, such as the corporealised spiritualties of Bernini’s *Ecstasy of St. Theresa* (1647-52) (fig.24) and Pietist meditations like Caspar David Friedrich’s *Monk by the Sea* (1808-10) (fig.27) which, for me, offer entirely oppositional ways of understanding and receiving Christian religious imagery; - the former, I argue in this thesis, based upon a non-dualist unity of mind/ body/ spirit and the Friedrich denoting a separation of that unity wherein the former corporealised, immanent spirituality is translated to the discreet category of aesthetics - the modern notion of the sublime: a quasi-religious experience and a subject of passive contemplation rather than an active ‘physiological’ spiritual engagement.

These insights, arising from my painting practice, are formulated in my thesis, which argues that there has been a fundamental shift of reception between the two art-
historic periods (17th century Counter–Reformation and 19th century German Romanticism) when these works were made - from experiencing Christian artworks as vehicle for religious devotion- to experiencing them as aesthetic ‘devices’. Aesthetic transmission and reception are social practices and beliefs, but within this, they are also medium specific artistic languages and models of ‘plastic’ form. They are the memory that art has of itself. An historical example of this might be Caspar David Friedrich’s *Tetschen Altarpiece* (1807) (fig.1), which caused controversy because, whilst its use as an image for devotional purposes had not changed, (it was designed for private devotion) its aesthetic form had, because of the use of landscape as a genre to represent religious sentiment. Aesthetic transmission in painting is a social practice insofar as it is a function of art practice, but it is also a medium specific ‘language’(basic code), which has its vocabularies, its grammar and its historical tradition. The above example demonstrates how aesthetic form is modified to reflect changes in social and cultural context although use function remains the same.

Although my research conjectures a theory of meaning about the development of Christian painted imagery in western European painting in the post-Reformation period and differences in the cultural meanings, realisms and experiences it represents, I am not making a claim for an over-arching meta-narrative of the development of the painted image in European painting since the Reformation. Instead, I have chosen to focus on some key works (from Catholic Reformation imagery and subsequently) - explaining what I think these works are doing in terms of their meanings, experiences and reception aesthetics - and why they are relevant to my argument, in relation to whether my work can generate/reproduce similar experiential registers to those Catholic Reformation artworks.

My thesis adopts a working assumption that post-Enlightenment, Christian imagery, in general, declined as a significant visual system in western European painting practice, as a result of which certain ‘affective’ meanings and experiences that had previously been present in this particular type of Christian imagery system (alternative ‘realisms’- the devotional, the transcendent, the visionary, the ecstatic, the miraculous, the rapturous, the compassionate, the contemplative) have become disabled, marginalised or unreproducible experiences for contemporary painting. I
am aware that these are meanings and experiences of the pre-Enlightenment and are separated from contemporary painting by cultural, historical and religious difference, (for example the Cartesian concept of Mind/Body dualism). My research seeks to discover, through practice and writing, how historic and contemporary pictorial meaning interact and whether I can overcome these historic religious and cultural differences that separate my painting from the meanings and experiences of key historical artworks from the Catholic Reformation. I seek to discover whether, through aesthetics, my painting can generate a cross-cultural non-dualist religious-aesthetic response ‘similar’ to the ‘affective’ reception aesthetics of certain key works within Catholic Reformation devotional art. My paintings are about historic, religious, emotional experiences and whether similar affective emotion can be generated in spite of cultural and historical difference. By ‘affective’ I mean an emotional, aesthetic and religious response in the viewer, similar to those generated by the properties of some key Catholic Reformation devotional artworks.

My interest, as a painter, with the history of the sublime image and its challenge to contemporary theories of the image was the impetus for this enquiry, which emerged from cultural interpretations I made of my earlier ‘modernist-inspired’, theologically-based abstract practice and the relationship it suggested to me with what, I argue, is a religious and particularly Calvinist notion of the image (fundamentalist, iconoclastic, imageless icons). I argue such aesthetics share an ‘affinity’ with the legacy of German Idealism/Romanticism, particularly the secularised Pietist religious iconographies of Caspar David Friedrich, (1774-1840), (although Friedrich’s work never suggested the absolute renunciation of all representation), which provide an historic example of the recuperation of religious imagery within the context of a modern movement in painting (Romanticism) and the significance such models of recuperation had for my own practice within the discourses of contemporary painting. Whether serendipity or a logical outcome of the direction I was pursuing in painting, but a dialectic began to take shape in my mind, which had as its fulcrum, the articulation of Christian imagery as a significant formative influence on the aesthetic development, transmission and reception of sacred/transcendent/sublime imagery in western European painting - a dialectic essentially between a Catholic and a Protestant notion of sacred imagery - its cultural causes and manifestations.
Statement of Argument

I argue that before the Protestant Reformation (1517-1540) painted Christian imagery was an invocation of God’s presence. Its power or authority derived more from its function than its aesthetic form, which, although assuming greater importance during the Renaissance was in general regulated by the Church. Its function was devotional and contemplative of religious practices and obligations. But, increasingly after the Reformation, during the art historical period known as Mannerism (although this consciousness had been present in painting since the early Renaissance) the experience of Christian painting was mediated through the interpretation of the artist and the development of the ‘idea’ of art. A system of aesthetics, based upon the senses and emotions assumed greater dominance in pictorial vision. By the time of the Catholic Counter-Reformation and the Decrees of the Council of Trent on holy Christian imagery in 1563, Christian painting had become increasingly an interpretation through the eyes of the artist and at the service of an idea of art, but was now subject to more rigorous theological oversight that regulated its use and function as an aid to devotion, prayer and metaphysical experience in western European and South American Catholic cultures. However, in Northern European Calvinist cultures Christian imagery was excised from public space and by the early Enlightenment (i.e. late 17th century) painted pictorial production, especially in Calvinist Northern Europe, was largely secular in its subject matter and reception. I argue that the use of the painted image for Christian devotional, contemplative or compassionate, sacred, meditative purposes stops as a significant institutional value in painting by the era of the Enlightenment. Thereafter, these roles were not so much lost as changed - It makes a difference. Whereas formerly painted images of the Christian narrative had been used for religious practice and prayer, by the Enlightenment this image system had become, in a secular era of aesthetics, displaced by processes of the aestheticisation of formerly sacred images. Post-Enlightenment Christian imagery migrated and became metaphorised as sacred meaning spilt over into aesthetic meaning. I mean by these terms that Christian imagery became replaced by a new system of values based on subjective aesthetic judgments and feeling, not a religious structure of reception. I argue that these qualitative changes, which mark the decline of Christian imagery in painting, are a consequence not only of changes in use and function of the painted
image argued by the art historian, Hans Belting (1994) and the philosopher Walter Benjamin (1970, auth. 1936), but equally to changes in the transmission and reception aesthetics of painting and its structures of feeling. Benjamin’s case is about mechanical reproduction and my case is about the change/marginalisation of Christian painting experience found in certain key works of post-Tridentine (1563) Catholic Reformation painting, brought about by the axis of the Protestant-capitalist ethos, (Weber: 1992) as instrumental on a number of diverse socio-economic and cultural influences that destroyed this system of vision. However, Benjamin’s identification of the qualitative change the painted image underwent from sacred cult value to the cult of beauty (aesthetics) is important for my case.

Aesthetics are a qualitative measure. By this I mean that they are a strategy or measure for dealing with quality. They are an indication of changes in kind of painted Christian imagery and may be considered by the use of the metaphor of light, which is also a qualitative measure. In my thesis I will consider the Christian concept of the ‘light of God’ in relation to the light of experience (painting). I argue that meaning and experience in this particular Christian imagery system (post-Tridentine (1563) Catholic Reformation painting) did not condense into secular meaning simply because of changes in social practices, beliefs, functions and uses of this Christian imagery, but also because of changes in the aesthetic transmission and reception of such images.

I argue that aesthetics are separate from and more complex and subtle than a Marxist/materialist analysis of painted images e.g. Hauser, (1962) or Berger (1972). My research acknowledges and discusses the importance of socio-economic factors contributing to the decline of Christian imagery, be it capitalism, the Enlightenment or the Protestant Reformation, but I also use my own practice and writing to discover what part aesthetics plays in the decline of Christian painting. For example, what part does aesthetic fatigue play? Christian painting as a dynamic visual system became obsolete in Western Europe by the end of the 17th century, but Christianity as a social practice enjoyed widespread observance in Western Europe until the late 19th century. Aesthetics in painting is a product of the relationship between cultural values and artefacts. Aesthetic fatigue, according to Kubler (1962 : 77-82), is related
to use and obsolescence, which drives the development and modification of form in artefacts.

I do not argue that the Enlightenment killed off religious faith or even a religious feeling in images. I do argue that the Enlightenment completed a process in which new subjective structures of feeling came to be the paradigm against which pictorial vision was created and measured and these replaced the old Christian narrative of presence and the experiences it projected. My research aims to see what, if any meanings and experiences, which I believe were present in the affective aesthetics of post-Tridentine Catholic Reformation imagery can, through the contemporary aesthetics of my painting practice be reproduced or re-generated again as similar experience to those original pre-Enlightenment meanings and experiences.

The above argument is formulated in the following principle research question:

Principle Research Question:

How can I, as a painter, representative of my time, generate a similar aesthetic and religious experience in my painting as can be found in certain key works of the pre-Enlightenment religious imagery? Can I do this and, if so how and if not, why not?

Subsidiary research questions:

What meaning, if any, can contemporary painting generate from the experiences and aesthetic forms of the post-Tridentine Catholic Reformation Christian imagery and can this be meaningfully reproduced in contemporary painting?

Do such visual systems, as the post-Tridentine Catholic Reformation Christian imagery maintain any meaningfulness in secular vision, and if so what?

How do historical and contemporary pictorial meanings interact?

My stated research aims are that I want to discover whether I, as a painter representative of my time, can reproduce/reconstruct certain experiences and meanings found within key works of Counter-Reformation Christian imagery.

Here is an outline as to how I intend to go about answering these questions:
Methodology

Section 1

Overview

In chapter 4, *Redeeming Images*, I give an account of the role that my practice plays in this research, comprising a commentary analysis on my practice. My painting practice is my response to an historical circumstance in which I find myself (i.e. an artist working with theological meaning in a secular culture). The practice is the means I am using to get a successful outcome to my research enquiry. The methodology of my practice is the bridge to the theory. The method I am actually using is my painting practice, which is based on collage, montage, *bricolage* and the transmutation of photographic sources. These are the physical processes of my method. The methodology I use in the practice is the bridge to the theory and applies to my whole research process. Drawing upon the models of collage and montage, if, in my painting, I place two iconographic elements in tension this ‘physical’ methodology finds parallel interpretation in my written text, which is a cross-disciplinary *bricolage* that deepens and develops the cultural, psychological, existential and spiritual significance of what the practice physically manifests. The practice can only show people the results of what I am doing, in terms of my doing it and whether it is succeeding in painting terms. The theory (my writing), which emerges from the practice, explains to people why I am doing it and how I am doing it. Travelling across the painting practice and the writing is a tension between two worlds of meaning and cultural expression and my theoretical work unpicks what these tensions are really about. My painting practice elicits questions as to what is *representable* for painting in the contemporary world; to what extent are painted images aesthetically autonomous, that is to say to what extent, if any, are the forms and meaning of painting independent of use function and whether certain historic painted appearances are reproducible meaningfully (i.e. to contemporary understanding), so that they continue to affect us on an aesthetic level, that is to say through the meaning of their forms and content.

It is a given that cultures move on and believe in different things and hold different values at different times and places. My research however, asks whether the memory that art has of itself, can generate again, disabled, obsolete or marginalised
forms of its aesthetic experiences, realities and meanings that are similar to those original meanings and experiences.

The contemporary German painter, Gerhard Richter, has said that although the ideologies behind paintings change these objects continue to move us. (1995: 132-165) I suggest that he was here referring to the way aesthetics retains a memory of itself through and what it signifies as structures of feeling. Aesthetic obsolescence is real in terms of its social and cultural use function. But, aesthetics retains a ‘half-life’ as fossilisation of appearances and those appearances continue to move and affect us. The reason why my research focuses on this particular type of Christian pictorial appearance (i.e. post-Tridentine Catholic Counter-Reformation painting), is firstly because Catholic Counter-Reformation imagery is a good example of when an ‘idea of art’ itself was used to effect a transfer of aesthetic meaning, and secondly because the nature of this aesthetic transformation meant that the sacred image was communicated through emotion and an intentional, purposeful affective aesthetics. This corresponds with my personal aesthetic as a painter which, is based on an emotional affective subjectivity in the production of paintings. I want to discover through my experience, at painting, whether painting can retain an aesthetic truth. Aesthetically true means that the painting ‘works’-(i.e. its plastic visual form retains meaningfulness).

Aesthetic values change through time and between cultures and Kubler (1962: 77-82) refers to this process as ‘aesthetic fatigue’, which he applies to ‘use function’ and this affects their reception. But aesthetic appearances within themselves retain something that is connected with origins, or to quote Wollheim (1987: 187-8) ‘where it comes from’ and this remains more durable in pictorial development than use function. I accept that ‘where it comes from’ is an historical and cultural location, a specific cultural and temporal moment, but I argue that when painting becomes affective in a way that transcends temporal (i.e. cultural) changes in aesthetic fashion, this is when a painted image may be said to be ‘aesthetically true’ to those cultural groups with appropriate values/beliefs.
Historical, religious, spatial and other cultural differences separate my painting from pre-Enlightenment painting. These are existential differences that cannot be overcome but the differences are susceptible of aesthetic experience and reason. A modern person can have a ‘similar’ experience to a pre-Enlightenment person in front of a pre-Enlightenment painting (by careful interpretation of the recorded response of such a pre-Enlightenment person and the careful interpretation of the recorded response of such a post-Enlightenment person). But, if the works are historically separated, my work can obviously not be seen by a pre-Enlightenment person to compare experiences. So, I propose to use methods of collage, montage and palimpsest to discover whether my painting can generate experiences that a viewer of my painting today would find similar or something like the recorded response of a pre-Enlightenment audience to those pre-Enlightenment paintings.

It is also possible to stage a contemporary comparison with those pre-Enlightenment Christian paintings that have survived and that are in museums and churches and can be experienced contemporaneously with my paintings. I argue that it is possible to compare the contemporary experience of the viewer in front of those pre-Enlightenment paintings and compare the contemporary experience of the viewer in front of my paintings. The contemporary experience of those historic paintings cannot be the same experience a pre-Enlightenment audience had, because cultures change and people believe and experience things differently at different times in different cultures. I also accept that under this method, the criteria for what constitutes a similar experience can only be formulated from a contemporary viewpoint and experience. I do not make any a-historical claim, but Bal suggests ‘dealing with the past today’ by adopting from anthropology the notion of ‘shared time’ and Eliot’s (1919) designation ‘preposterous history’ (i.e. ‘reworking the past’)

Like any form of representation, art is inevitably engaged with what came before it, and that engagement is an active re-working. It specifies what and how our gaze sees…. and creates new versions of old images instead. (Bal 1999:1-7)

My practice-based methodology relies in essence on experiential knowledge and aesthetic reason. (Reiber, 2009) The core of this research is grounded in the experiential - the experience of the viewer, my experience of painting and the experience of making meaning through painting, which, I argue is a form of emergent knowledge. I can prove by producing evidence that those pre-Enlightenment
Christian paintings were intended to produce certain experiences. I seek to prove through practice, reflexive, exegetical writing and ‘triangulation’ response that my contemporary paintings generate certain types of similar or comparable experience. That experience cannot be the same experience because it is separated by historical, cultural, temporal and spatial difference. However, the aim of my research is to see if my painting can produce similar/comparable/equivalent religious and aesthetic experience. I define ‘religious’ as those experiences provoked by the intention, subject, form and affective feeling generated by the institutionalised post-Tridentine Catholic Reformation painted image. Painting, both contemporary and historical can, I suggest, provide interpretative experience - the interpretation of historical experience through painting and this is discussed by, amongst others, Ankersmitt, (2005) Bal (1999) and Frayling (2008). Ankersmitt, in arguing for pragmatist aesthetics as an historical ‘tool,’ contends that images of the past are experienced as a direct connection to the life and thought of the past (recalling Johan Huizinga, 1924). Frayling (2008) maintains that painting is embodied knowledge and should be understood as a ‘knowledge’ within the terms of the language of its medium. This is how I will negotiate the historical, religious, spatial and cultural differences that separate my painting from pre-Enlightenment Christian painting. I adopt a method of inter-textuality - that is to say I borrow or quote from an historical painting, which generated those experiences, and I overlap that image with a contemporary image that I paint. The experience and meaning of the old image is experienced by contemporaries as quite different from the way its original audience experienced it, for whom it was most likely a devotional image. The old image now is most likely experienced in terms of its aesthetic qualities. I make an intervention in the old image by painting a contemporary image over it. A palimpsest is created. A third space of meaning is created between the old and the new image. This is how I will ‘negotiate’ the historical, religious, spatial and cultural differences that separate my painting from pre-Enlightenment Christian painting.

The original religious imagery is ‘contaminated’ by my painting over it with the representation of contemporary experience. The way I ‘contaminate’, contrast and counterpoint them is to use the concept of ‘overlapping horizons’ of experience in the same painting, e.g. All Night Long (2010) (fig.2.). I am not trying to preserve or recuperate a ‘lost’ experience, but to generate/reconstruct a new experience that is
comparably similar to those ‘lost’ experiences and that new experience arises from the space between the representation of those old experiences and the representation of the contemporary experience. It is a ‘new’ ‘hybrid’ affective experience that my paintings seek to generate. And two examples of how I have done this in my painting are *All Night Long* (2010) (fig.2) and *Annunciation* (2012-13) (fig.3.).

It is in this third hybrid or ‘contaminated’ space between old and new that I argue similar/comparable/analogous or equivalent experiences and meanings can be generated by my painting. In order to negotiate the historical, religious, spatial and other cultural differences that separate my painting from pre-Enlightenment painting, I take some modern imagery, which generates a bit of pictorial absence and I appropriate historical religious imagery, which generates presence and I stage a ‘war’ of meanings. By using photocopy and painted imagery, different surfaces are presented, not just physically, but aesthetically and culturally, (overlapping horizons). The experiential properties, processes and aesthetics of painting are the method I have used to negotiate cross-cultural social and historical difference. By my staging a ‘war’ of meanings I call attention to obsolete/marginalised/defunct pictorial experience, in a way that the differences in culture that would generate "religious" meanings in the religious, does not beyond a restricted social group. My writing positions my painting practice so that it is accurately understood within its research field. MacLeod (2000) cites positioning practice as one of three functions of the written text in practice-based research - the other two being theorizing practice and revealing practice. My practice will be represented by a display of paintings and painted studies that demonstrate overlapping horizons of historical experience. I will negotiate factors which separate my painting from Counter-Reformation painting by overlapping horizons of historical experience through aesthetic practices of play, bricolage and heuristic testing. I want to find out through my painting and writing whether metaphorically, the light of God is the same light as the light of human experience. The eclecticism of my painting practice means that in contrast to most doctoral research methodologies, this study has needed to adopt a comprehensive approach to the topic because my painting practice covers broad areas of historical thought, belief and practices.
Methodology continued

Section 2

Overlapping horizons

After the Enlightenment a combination of influences, capitalist economics, changing cultural practices, (including the increasing importance of aesthetics, subjectivism, individualism and the psychologisation of ethics and selfhood), influenced the aesthetic reception of Christian imagery. The relation of these influences to each other and to Christian imagery, along with the aesthetics of that visual system, are discussed in the following chapters. Their combined socio-cultural effects contributed to the abandonment of a visual system grounded in theological vision. Instead, under the new conditions which these relationships generated, visual representation in painting acquired an increasingly independent status as art, which, whilst not excluding spirituality, marginalised spirituality, as well as particularly the religious, theological and sacred functions of the painted image. Experience in painting became secularised aesthetics and phenomenological experience.

I want to see whether contemporary secular subjects can have some "similar or comparable" form of aesthetic and "religious" experience in front of my paintings. That is, precisely not the former experiences but comparable modern ones. I want to see if it is possible to generate ‘similar or comparable’ aesthetic and religious affective experiences through the aesthetics of my painting. My practice quotes the rhetorical forms of Mannerism and Catholic Counter-Reformation painted imagery. Practice acts as ‘hinge’ between past and present usage of Christian imagery and is located within the ‘overlapping horizons’ of past and present cultural meaning. This ‘hinge’ of my practice permits the movement of an arc across two intersecting planes of past and present usage of Christian imagery, which I designate ‘overlapping horizons’.

My methodology mirrors my painting practice, which adopts processes of bricolage and the palimpsest. I am aware that bricolage and palimpsest are postmodern concepts, but, these concepts are effective in negotiating historical and cultural difference. I think they are appropriate methodologies to use in this research because bricolage and palimpsest are well suited to the heuristic, iterative and intelligent play applications of painting and demonstrate in contemporary aesthetics
of painting, relative and hybrid viewpoints within pictorial structure and subject matter. Through my practice, I discover what these general art historical meanings, forms of consciousness and experiences mean on a subjective level as a modern, white middle class male participant-observer. Overlapping horizons of historical experience mean, I suggest, that before the Enlightenment, audiences experienced Christian imagery through the lens of religious belief, and contemporaries today experience it through aesthetics. As an analogue of the qualitative change, which Christian imagery undergoes in the transmission and reception of its aesthetics cross culturally, I adopt the metaphor of light, - both the light of God (faith, belief) and the light of human experience (reason, understanding).

I want to find out if aesthetics can remain true cross-culturally. According to Wollheim (1987:187-8) at the heart of aesthetics and aesthetic ‘borrowing’ or ‘quotation’ is something that is about origins. In the ‘borrowing’ of pre-Enlightenment Christian painting, I am trying to distil from those images, certain experiences, which they once produced. Wollheim considers two ways content enters a work of art - textuality and borrowing:

> When the way of borrowing works, then a borrowing enters the content of painting. A painting acquires historical content or meaning. By a borrowing I mean the fact that a certain motif or image has been borrowed from earlier art. I do not mean the borrowed motif or image itself - that after all invariably belongs to the painting that borrows it as well as to the work from which it is borrowed. I mean something about the borrowed motif or image, specifically where it comes from. And this fact belongs only sometime to the painting that borrows the motif or image - that is when the way of borrowing works - and it never belongs to the work from which the motif or image is borrowed. (Wollheim, 1987: 187-8)

I think Wollheim is here referring to the aesthetic origins of content in painting and a painting acquires historical content or meaning when a ‘borrowing’ from earlier art works, that is to say when the aesthetic origins of the ‘borrowing’ enters the content of the painting that borrows. I argue that borrowing is a form of *bricolage* - improvising new meaning from what concepts and meanings are at hand - ad hoc. It is a purposeful and meaningful method of constructing pictorial meaning.

My writing completes a process where general, discursive, historical meaning is translated into subjective, specific private meaning in the practice and this subjective
knowledge is then broadened and deepened in the writing to a new public meaning representing the experience and perception of a modern, white, middle class, west European male. In this way the writing generalises subjectivity. Bolt (2007:33) explains that, ‘in the exegesis, particular, situated, emergent knowledge has the potential to be generalised, so that it enters into dialogue with existing practical and theoretical paradigms’. I suggest that Bolt (2007:33) here means that the writing expands and develops particular, individual, subjective experience/knowledge, (e.g. my experience of painting) into a communicable and reproducible form of discursive knowledge.

Section 3

Research design

This is a practice-based research enquiry. The methodology employed is that of a researcher who is a painter, who writes. The experience of my painting practice generates this research enquiry. My methodology mirrors my painting practice, which is bricolage. (French translation, ‘tinkering’ - using what is at hand or available – Levi Strauss, Savage Mind, 1994). That is to say, I construct my paintings from a diverse range of sources in my cultural environment, for which I happen to find a use and meaning, which may not be their original use or meaning. And, although, an improvisational, heuristic and iterative process, I submit my methodology works.

The eclecticism of my painting practice means that in contrast to most doctoral research methodologies, this study has needed to adopt a comprehensive approach to the topic, because my painting practice covers broad areas of historical thought, belief and practices. The artist and writer, Simon Morley (2000) has commented that painting covers ‘the whole surface of art’, and, I would add, the surface of thought. I suggest this means that painting, due to its histories and traditions, could be used as a visual analytical ‘tool’. Through my painting I conduct my response to certain cultural histories, but from an auto-ethnographic standpoint. My painting practice is a philosophical and moral act, as well as an aesthetic act. I reflect about the world through my painting. Painting is, for me, a form of philosophy (i.e. a form of structured thinking) that is conducted through the visual (Bal, 1999,). I generate thought (representation) through symbolic representation (painting) and interpret this using the same methodology of collage, bricolage, and montage into a different kind
of discursive representation (writing). Painting, I suggest, has also been understood, since the early 20th century ‘psychologisation’ of self, as an act of Narcissism, which I discussed in a redacted chapter entitled The Christian Image and the Psychology of Self. My painting practice is philosophical and psychological, in that it is a way of discovering a sense of self, and through practice I am enabled to ask questions.

My thesis explores what association might exist between Christian painting, (particularly certain key works of Catholic Counter-Reformation imagery) and contemporary British painting, considering painting practices through art-historical, socio-economic and cultural, as well as aesthetic contexts. The location of the research in British painting is a ‘lens’, through which to see the phenomena of Christian imagery in the highly secularised societies of North West Europe. So, frequently I adjust the ‘lens’ to look at this larger context of which British secular culture is an important part. I chose British painting and the nominal commencement date of 1990 because my own painting experience emerges from this location and this period of art practice, thereby furnishing the research with auto-ethnographic evidence. However, the subject of my research is intended to be understood in the context of a framework of cultural, aesthetic and art historical development of meanings and experiences that accompany Christian or neo-Christian painting. The nineteen nineties inaugurated a resurgence of academic and critical interest in the aesthetics of the image. The chapters on Christian imagery, capitalism and the sublime, aesthetics and aesthetic recuperation describe, analyse and discuss what I feel to be essential, obvious and unavoidable areas of knowledge in any study of Christian imagery and contemporary painting practice. Paradoxically, I have excluded Divinity from this study, because it seems to me that Divinity is an area where Christian imagery sits protected within the rituals, practices and assumptions of that discipline. The later chapter on recuperation reflects on the situation of Christian imagery in the cultures of contemporary secular vision of North West Europe at the beginning of the 21st century and makes a cultural comparison with an example of contemporary Christian imagery from the Kieskamma community South Africa (fig.22).

My research is cross-disciplinary and practice-based. Drawing upon models of embodied knowledge in practice proposed by Bolt (2007), Biggs (2003, 2004) and
Davey (2006, auth.1994). Through my practice, I seek to find out visual solutions/demonstrations of my argument by repeated process of trial and error and in my writing - my theoretical research - testing, broadening and deepening my understanding of what comes up in the practice, - projecting, as Jameson says, (quoted in Eagleton, 2003:124), 'some broader screen of structural meaning'. That is, the writing expands and develops particular, individual, subjective experience/knowledge, (e.g.my experience of painting) into a communicable and reproducible form of discursive knowledge.

My writing and theoretical research come out of my painting. The painting and the writing developed in tandem in this research and this is reflected in the arc of the painting practice over the course of the research. Practice in the early part of my research focused on the socio-economic context of Christian imagery within a broad historical frame; the painting, All Night Long (2010) (fig.2), produced at the time of writing the chapter on capitalism alerted me to the possibility of an 'overlapping' model of discourse between past and present. My painting in the later part of the research experimented with subjective histories and discourses on Christian imagery (namely aesthetics and psychology). For example, The Gospel According to St. Matthew (2011) (fig.4) and Drifters (2012) (fig.5) were later paintings made during the writing of the chapters on aesthetics (chapter 3) and the psychology of self (now redacted). My painting makes me move into theory, and in my writing and theory, I am testing, discursively, what comes up in my painting practice. Painting precedes the writing as the nucleus of the research and generates, as Bolt (2007: 33) describes, 'emergent knowledge'. This tacit, 'emergent knowledge', my writing then broadens, discusses and deepens in a different way in a different disciplinary realm. The writing and theory originate from and test what emerges in the painting practice. This qualitative 'soft system' reflexive methodology involves elements of action research, phenomenology, subjective experience, auto-ethnography and participant observation.

Section 4.

a.) Role and Aim of Practice

My work may draw on 'ironic' visual processes, but it is not driven by irony or satire. Neither is it motivated by 'pastiche', as in the photographic Baroque Christian
tableaux of David La Chappelle (fig.6). Although *bricolage* and collage have been used as ‘ironic’ processes in modernist and postmodern art practice, my use of these forms with religious iconography, to say something in a different way, is using ‘ironic’ methods and concepts, but, to see if they can produce a different, more ‘affective’ form of expression. The work of Vermeulen (2010) and Holden (2013), in describing irony in recent art production is of interest in this regard.

Neither does my work deliberately set out to critique or test taboos. Rather, it is motivated by a need to experience, represent and understand Christian narratives of ‘presence’, with which it plays, experiments and tests to generate the emotional ‘spaces’ which those pre-Enlightenment pictorial forms of experience disclose. My paintings are, for me, both vehicles for emotion, but also ways to understand the rhetoric of emotion and the emotion of rhetoric (see *The Interpretation of Rhetoric and the Rhetoric of Interpretation*. Editor, P.Hernadi, 1989). My practice is a response to my situation as an artist and theorist reflecting upon the forms of experience represented in certain key works of pre-Enlightenment Christian imagery and what contemporary plastic forms in painting might, if any, constitute a similar aesthetic and religious experience in the theory and practice of contemporary painting. The role of practice is to show how aesthetics can generate similar affective, cross cultural experience, despite the changes in use/function and changes in the transmission and reception aesthetics of Christian imagery. The working assumption of my thesis is that Christian imagery was disabled by the time of the early Enlightenment, due to changes of use/function (when aesthetic display replaced devotion as the meaning of the painted image). This working assumption is tested by my practice. The faith/reason split, which is an Enlightenment idea, and the assumption that it disabled Christian imagery (Catholic Reformation image), through change of use, is tested by aesthetic recuperation in my painting practice, which seeks to discover whether, despite change of use, aesthetics is able to generate experience that is 'something similar or comparable' to the affective aesthetics of certain key works of Catholic Counter-Reformation painted and sculptural devotional imagery.
As currently defined my practice serves two functions:

1. **Positioning Research**

The aesthetic ‘propositions’ and pictorial critiques, demonstrated in my painting practice, when located within authorial style, expression and conceptual approach, generate, for me, a position, which is discursively broadened, deepened and articulated in my writing- and so the practice informs my writing in articulating the position of my research within the field through the activities of exhibition, review, and publication. To theorise an argument is already to have positioned the argument and MacLeod (2000) cites positioning practice as one of three functions of the written text in practice-based research—the other two being theorizing practice and revealing practice.

2. **Painting as Action Research**

My painting practice is ‘emergent’ methodology, using a heuristic method which seeks to find out by action research, that is to say theorising an activity from which ‘emergent knowledge’ is gained. (Bolt, 2007: 33). Practice acts as ‘hinge’ between past and present usage of Christian imagery and is located within the ‘overlapping horizons’ of past and present cultural meaning. In the practice, paintings and a large number of painted ‘case studies’, have sought a visual representation of that conceptual representation, through painted and digital processes using post-modern concepts of appropriation, bricolage, palimpsest, overlaying historical with contemporary imagery. I describe this method in further detail in chapter 4, Redeeming Images, in the section titled, ‘The Process of my Painting and the Role of Practice’.

b.) **Knowledge Generation and Communication**

In the process of generating communicable knowledge, I adopt Davey’s formulation of ‘theoria’ in *Art and Theoria* (2005: 20-39), which states that in the practice:

> The aim is not to recover the past per se, but to use the difference between past and present usage to create a space in which new meanings might arise.

This formulation is a trans-historical, conceptual ‘hinge’ which vectors Christian imagery through time, image development, and cultural and aesthetic transfer, and may be expressed in the following diagram:
The above diagram shows how my practice works in this research. My practice adopts the concept of ‘meaning transfer’ from iconological study in art historical practice. Bal (1999:9) discusses this in the context of historic quotation. Through my painting, I transfer past meaning into present meaning. The process is demonstrated in my painting, entitled, *All Night Long* (2010) (fig.2). This painting was made at a point in the research when I was trying to find a ‘hinge’ or fulcrum in a ‘plastic’ form that articulates a ‘porosity’ ‘between past and present forms of consciousness. Elkins, (2009) quotes Ruth Waller’s (n.d.) account from her dissertation, ‘Miraculous Scenes from the Altarpieces of Siena and Florence of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries’:

> Developing a body of writing out of a process of the sustained scrutiny analysis and interpretation of pictures was a process of interrogating my own enthusiasm, of finding ways to account for an intuitive sense of connection to paintings from a time and culture quite remote from my own. (Elkins, 2009: 211).

I adopt Elkins’ (2009: 211) observation that this formulation ‘shows how the history of art including its research protocols and interpretative methods can be understood as a support for painting practice’. My methodology engages interpretative and intuitive methods in generating new knowledge from my painting. Gerhard Richter’s *Annunciation*, (2005) Richard Hamilton’s *An annunciation* (2005) (fig.7) and Chris Ofili’s *Upper Room* (2002) (fig.8), each demonstrate how the history of sacred art is used as a ‘support for contemporary painting practice’ (Elkins, 2009:211).
The concept of *theoria*, (contemplation) that the artwork itself is capable of transmitting not just sensual knowledge (aesthesis, phenomenology) but embodied knowledge, both critical, art-theoretical and ethical derives in its modern form from Gadamer’s (1975), (auth.1960) hermeneutical approach which argues that ‘theoria,’ lies in its ability to articulate a notion of contemplative engagement, which enables that, which is in a work of art to come forth.’ Developing this hermeneutical approach, Davey (1994:36) in *Art and Theoria* states that, ‘*theoria* is what happens to us when an artwork addresses us. The occasion of this address constitutes the *experience* of art’.

I argue that Gadamer (1960) and Davey’s (1994) ‘experience of art’, aesthetic contemplation, includes ‘super-sensory’ knowledge, moral, psychological and aesthetic, which my writing enables me to develop as forms of communicable knowledge. The notion that the artwork ‘speaks’ has been discussed by a growing number of theorists, including Mieke Bal (2002). Similarly, Davey (1994) states a ‘hermeneutical engagement with art is fundamentally ‘dialogical ’and adopts the analogue of ‘conversation’. Along these lines of a conversation, I regard my writing as a practice albeit discursive and my practice as experiential, embodied knowledge- ‘Action is intelligent’ (Paikes: 2004). Mieke Bal (2002) asserts that, ‘the notion of knowledge has become fluid, unstable and various’. Tormey (2009) also observes that:

> Neither does the visual always require explanation by a verbal text. However, an image or object can address the same question. An art or design object can be seen as a reflection of, or even a commentary on a wider cultural field. (Tormey,2009)

Embodied knowledge is emergent knowledge that is borne of experience. The experience of painting requires a framework of language, concepts and words in order to have and know what the experience is.

The embodied knowledge of this research comes from interpreting the artefact (painting) and *my process* of making the paintings, which is not necessarily limited to material form and surface of the paintings. The process of my painting involves, very often, either subconscious or unconscious instinctual and aesthetic judgments, which
are fluid, transient and dynamic in nature. A good example of what I mean by ‘embodied knowledge’ is referenced in my journal on practice (Appendix D) and the numerous stages of development in pictorial thought a painting like *Resurrection at Eldena*, (2009-10) (fig.9) underwent, which are comprehensively documented in photographs and journal notes, specimens of which are illustrated (figs.10-13). This documentary data demonstrates a process is going on, however resistant and difficult to isolate, describe and analyse. But, that is what I engage with in my writing. I am a painter and in that process of painting, interpretative ideas arise, about the history and context of the painted image, which drive me to a parallel investigation in the act of reading and writing. With my writing, I am qualifying concepts of language. Until conceptual art, the relationship of painting to the world was with symbol as idea. In Platonic thought - the Idea existed in the mind of God - any human (worldly) version of it (e.g. painting/writing) was a second or third generation ‘copy’ of the Idea. Words are ideas, but pictures, culturally in the western painting tradition, (increasingly after the Renaissance) looked like things. They are based on phenomenological and optical experiences. Words and images are initially different, but both are representations. Within writing I may ask myself questions, which might never have arisen in my paintings. Can the image and the word describe the same world of meaning? How can contemporary painting develop/analogically reproduce the experience of historic religious and aesthetic experience? Paintings can reveal what and to some extent how I am doing it, but text explains *why* I am doing it. I want to generate similar affective experiences in painting, so my practice quotes the rhetorical forms of Mannerism and the Counter-Reformation Baroque.

Michael Craig-Martin (Karlin, 1995) asserts that ‘art is a highly metaphoric way of acting things out in the real world’. My paintings try things out, enact things, through metaphor and representation. The practice functions as a form of ‘intelligent play’ with images (Paikes, 2004). This ‘play’ involves elements of *bricolage*, iteration, phenomenology, associative thought, serendipity and instinctual and aesthetic judgments, which I explore in more detail in chapter 4, *Redeeming Images*, in the section ‘The Process of my Painting and the Role of Practice.’ So, in a painting of mine, like *The Fourth Ecstasy of St. Theresa* (2004), (fig.14), religious experience is viewed simultaneously as immanence, an affective state, but also with a reflective,
dispassionate distance, as if the ontology of sacred experience exceeded the capacity of contemporary painting to represent; a failure of meaning in which the idea of sacred presence can only be understood through the lens of a contemplative and voyeuristic disengagement. This is an example of how my practice ‘plays’ with constructions of ‘presence’ in painting.

c.) Contribution of Practice to Research
In the process of painting I experience/ empathise vicariously through metaphor and representation those historic forms of consciousness, experience and meaning, which Christian imagery once stood for, like the example cited above. Quinn (2000), referring, inter alia, to my painting, Beata Albertona (1997) (fig.15.) in an exhibition text, which included that painting, wrote revealingly about my practice: ‘Wyatt’s tableaux are trance-like and ‘carnal’, rather than sensuous, as if the artist sought to merge his own body (rather than just mind) with the ‘essence’ of the art object’.

The above comment on my work, points up, I suggest, the nature of vicarious experience that the process of painting generates for me. There is a ‘carnal’ quality to my aesthetic experience of painting and this may be described as an ‘embodiment of meaning’. This ‘carnal’ quality is both concerned with the physical substance of my paintings (paint, sometimes wax), and also my expectation/demand of the painting experience.

Through this process of play and experience, discursive questions and further ideas for images take shape. This form of experiential, tacit, emergent knowledge of process has been described by Carter (2004) as "material thinking", that generates for me, in visual form, new insights, questions and ideas, which I then develop and amplify in my writing, to achieve a broader and deeper discussion in a different disciplinary realm. For example, my series of paintings All Night Long (2010) (figs.2, 16-20), were developed in parallel with my writing about the relation between the aesthetics of the sublime and the economics of capitalism. A journal note made in my studio, (fig.16) translates the initial visual idea in words and a further studio journal note on 8/5/2010 (fig.51) records, ‘the experience of sublimity in late capitalism’. By ‘remaking’ these Christian iconographies, I ‘re-live’, through metaphor
and representation those experiences, which institutionalised Christian imagery once
stood for, but now, on a subjective, personal level. In this way art historical meaning
and experience are translated from a general public interpretation to individual,
specific, subjective meaning, which I ‘play-test’ and ‘act out’ in the practice. Through
my practice, I discover what these general art historical meanings, forms of
consciousness and experiences mean on a subjective level as a contemporary,
white middle class male participant -observer. The contribution of my practice to the
written text can be understood if we take a painting like All Night Long(2010). (fig.2)
How did this painting drive the quest to answer the research question? How can my
painting generate similar experiences to pre-Enlightenment Christian imagery? In
this painting my understanding of a particular ‘capitalist’ vision and my understanding
of a particular Christian vision overlap, creating a third ‘hybrid’ space of meaning and
understanding. This hybridity was developed in the writing of the chapter Capitalism
and the Symptom of the Sublime, as examining ways in which similar Christian
experience was generated in the Enlightenment aesthetic concept of the sublime.
The writing develops the theory that the Enlightenment concept of the sublime
generated similar aesthetic and religious experience to pre-Enlightenment Christian
imagery. My paintings are an attempt to enable experiences in today’s society and
culture that are like or akin to the experiences of the earlier Christian, pre-
Enlightenment religious sublime. The point is, I argue, capitalism in its modern forms
flourished, because of the mindset of Protestantism (Weber, 1905) and the cultures
of Protestantism,( which has no intercessionary ‘agent’ with the divine), invented the
idea that God can be accessed through nature - the Natural sublime - and the
relation of the individual subject under capital has to be understood in a context
where the sublime (Nature/God) is the big Other to capitalism – or at least it was
as a response to anxiety in the industrial age. Now, it is a mathematical sublime
(Lyotard’s (1991) ‘sublimity is no longer in art but in speculation on art’).

My argument has to do with appearances. I make paintings about appearances.
What my practice does is to show how appearances can be aesthetically
manipulated and, in my writing, I ask who the appearances are for - God or Man?
Who is doing the looking? I suggest Catholic Reformation painting represents
experiences that can be understood by members of different cultures. However, the
meanings of those experiences that are generated in different cultures will inevitably
be different meanings. Their sacred, devotional function may have been subsumed, but through aesthetics those experiences are able to be simulated analogically. As I cite in chapter 2, *Capitalism and the Symptom of the Sublime*, Reiber, (2009: 77-91) proposes Aesthetic Reason as a third way of ‘knowing truth’. Aesthetic truth and aesthetic subjectivity are Ideas of Reason and possess validity as subjective feeling. My paintings are experiments and experiences, which I subject to ‘aesthetic reason’ in the written analysis and discussion of my writing, from which I draw conclusions and this is how new knowledge is produced.

Using the production of a cultural artefact, such as a painting as a research tool, confers a certain use function on painting, which is extrinsic to its aesthetic meaning, and it is aesthetic meaning with which I experiment in the practice and write about in my thesis. The practice seeks to discover whether, how and to what extent aesthetic form and practice can generate similar religious and aesthetic experience, within a working assumption of the thesis that changes in the reception of Christian painted imagery (Friedrich, Blake, van Gogh, Burne-Jones, Malevich, Spencer, Ofili) are the result of use/function (Belting: 1994) and context (Benjamin: 1970, auth. 1936).

My writing completes a process where general historical meaning is translated into subjective, specific, private meaning in the practice and this subjective knowledge is then broadened and deepened in the writing to a new public meaning, representing the experience and perception of a contemporary, white, middle class, west European male. In this way the writing generalises subjectivity. Bolt (2007:33) explains that, ‘in the exegesis, particular, situated, emergent knowledge has the potential to be generalised, so that it enters into dialogue with existing practical and theoretical paradigms’.

I suggest that Bolt here means the writing expands and develops particular, individual, subjective experience/knowledge, (e.g.my experience of painting) into a communicable and reproducible form of discursive knowledge.
Section 5

Methodological Testing

Here is how I will test the reception and interpretation of my paintings for the presence of that experience and meaning in people who encounter them. The methodological questions - How does my methodology of producing ‘hybrid’ imagery amount to anything; and how do I test for the presence of those ‘lost’ experiences in my painting? - requires a twofold response by me:

Firstly, my original formulation for testing my methodology was to get a focus group to look at my paintings and record their impressions. I would take ‘evidence’ from three ‘experts’ who would have background knowledge when approaching responses to my work. They would record, evaluate and assess their responses to my work. The three participants would be culturally informed and reasonably familiar with the form -. ‘credible’ experts like fellow painters or theorists, possibly someone at the University.

As my thesis discloses, there is little Christian painting around in the contemporary British art scene. Certainly, Modern and recent art has rarely attempted the recuperation of Christian imagery. However, pre-Enlightenment Christian paintings can be experienced in museums and compared contemporaneously with my paintings. I argue that it is possible to compare the contemporary experience of the viewer in front of them with the experience of my paintings. The contemporary experience of those historic paintings cannot be the same experience a pre-Enlightenment audience had, because cultures change and people believe and experience things differently at different times in different cultures. The experience of a contemporary viewer in front of those historical Christian images is, in secular contexts, I suggest, an aesthetic, cultural or psychological experience. The original meaning and experience of those paintings, which my evidence shows, was devotional has, in contemporary secular culture, been discarded as a function except for the specific area of liturgical ritual. However, it is, I suggest, possible to make comparison of experience through the lens of aesthetics, which my thesis argues. This form of evidence, I suggest, is of a higher quality because it would be academically independent and avoids the potential compromise of quality on the grounds of bias that ‘partisan’ focus groups (e.g. present day equivalents of Jesuit and Oratorian religious orders) could cause.
Given the time constraints available to my research it has not been possible to obtain evidence yet from a focus group. I suggest that specific testing for the meanings of my paintings is not strictly part of the current project, which is primarily concerned with investigating the **conditions** for the experiences and the meanings I seek to simulate. Finding/testing the meanings and experiences is the task of another project.

There is an aspect of the painting process that can be seen as ‘posing an audience’ - when the artist is generating an untried and untested language or vocabulary of form and has to decide whether the painting communicates the artist’s intention (i.e. ‘works’/‘speaks’). This has been a working method of artists in the production of new work. The issue of whether the form creates the audience or the audience creates the form, is, I suggest, a consideration in the testing process and is connected with the relationship between artistic intention and cultural context in the construction of meaning. I suggest the audience has to ‘learn’ the new form and I postulate that the ‘artist’ is engaged in the nominal position of ‘audience’, simultaneously trying to ‘learn’ the language as they are inventing it.

Painting was used as an **affective** aesthetic in post-Tridentine Catholic Counter-Reformation art. I am a painter and I know from the experience of my own practice and of looking at other paintings, that painting, as a visual form, can generate affective aesthetics, which are different according to time and cultures. What I am aiming at with the paintings is the point where it changes from simply being a borrowed image, to it being an ‘affective image. The image then becomes experiential. That is what painting can achieve - an ‘affective’ experience (reflective, meditative, sacred). The reception of painting is determined by its use, but, I suggest it is also now determined by aesthetic form as well as use - so that the way Christian imagery is generally experienced and communicated today, is through the aesthetic - not the religious register. Aesthetic form in painting changes pictorial meaning from being a functional image to the painting being an affective experience.
The interpretation of this affective experience is understood through Davey’s (1994) formulation of the aesthetic concept of *theoria* - that paintings *address* us and I argue that ‘*address*’ includes spiritual, religious and moral elements in painting in addition to its aesthetic elements, as the art criticism of Ruskin (1843) and Fuller (1988) advocated. I suggest that painting can be both critique and spiritual at one and the same time (e.g. the crucifixion paintings of James Ensor and Edvard Munch). My painting *All Night Long* (2010) (fig.2) is both a poetic/spiritual response as well as implied critique of modern culture.

The above methodology outlines the conditions for how I explain that the experience of my paintings is similar to the aesthetic and religious experiences of certain key works of Catholic Reformation painted imagery.

*How I critiqued my research and methodology.*

‘Soft system’ discourse analysis was used in the theoretical element and iterative, heuristic and emergent knowledge in the practice (see Bolt, 2007:33 *op.cite*). The proof/reliability of data used, comprised contemporaneous notes and photo/film which documented the studio practice with subsequent exegetical writing of the practice and authoritative sources of scholarship cited in the discourse analysis.

If all images undergo historic trans-valuation - why do ‘hybrid’ secular and sacred images in my paintings have any special contemporary meaningfulness? Christian imagery, I suggest, represents as Hervieu-Leger (2000: 31) asserts a ‘chain of memory’, which, this thesis argues, has undergone cultural rupture. By that, I mean a loss of original meaning. Trans-historical processes of morphosis and trans-valuation in Christian imagery were the basis upon which I used my painting practice to conduct an ‘intelligent play’ of meaning between ‘new and old’, ‘past and present’, which I could develop, critique and broaden discursively in my writing. The task was to see whether my painting could generate, through ‘plastic’ means, similar religious and aesthetic experiences to certain key works of pre-Enlightenment Christian imagery. I experimented with a number of pictorial forms, (for example using social realist forms of painting to create a metaphorisation of Christian imagery, but I found the forms of consciousness specific to Christian imagery was missing). A form, which
did work, was the pictorial interpretation of ‘overlapping horizons.’ I took Christian imagery and I took contemporary imagery, which creates a sense of absence and I ‘staged’ a war of meanings between the two. It is through the articulation of absence and difference that the new meaning arises. Q But how does this result in meaningfulness? A. As my methodology argues, it is in the new space created between the meanings of past and present where the aim is to ‘distil’ new meaning. Q. How then, is this new meaning manifested? A. Initially, through the meaning of the painting, and this is developed and deepened in the writing. Q How do you know it is new meaning? A. Whilst tests of originality and authenticity can be applied to the painted image it is somewhat more difficult to apply tests of innovation and new knowledge without recourse to contextual information and this is the function of my writing.

I chose painting as my research tool, because I am a painter who can draw upon my own practice experience in painting. I stand in the middle between my painting and my writing, to help me find a ‘language’, both visual and written, to achieve an expression for the above-mentioned experiences in a contemporary context. I have chosen painting as a medium, which demonstrates recuperation, because my experience as a painter tells me that element of meaning in painting, which is embodied meaning is coded with a ‘memory’ of itself and of its histories of meaning, which in the course of its development, painting has been able to re-visit and re-invent. Painting as a medium is particularly suited to addressing notions of absence or loss, due to its patterns of aesthetic meaning and theoretical evolution. Gingeras, (2005), asserts painting has a ‘memory’ of itself (i.e. a coded ‘language’) and of its histories of meaning, which include pre-Enlightenment Christian imagery. I suggest this ‘memory’ is connected with the element of ‘presence’. Benjamin (auth.1936) states:

 Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be. This unique existence of the work of art determined the history to which it was subject throughout the time of its existence. (Benjamin, 1970: 222)(auth.1936)
Both my previous abstract work and my current painting make manifest the idea of embodied meaning and presence through an emphasis on the materiality of painting. Works of mine like *All Night Long* (2010) (fig.2) and *Resurrection at Eldena* (2009-10) (fig.9) draw upon embodied meaning, presence and the materiality of painting to disclose paintings’ capacity for recuperation of its histories of meaning. Contemporary digital information/image technologies and practices may have rendered some distance and critique of Benjamin’s, (1970, auth. 1936) now classic materialist/modernist position on the issue of originality, but Benjamin’s text retains relevance to my use of the notion of ‘presence’ in this research. Whilst photography and film record duration, or fragments of time, and are thus indexed by the fragment, record or event, they cannot register presence like the painted mark, because of its unique embodied existence in time and space and its gestural index of the presence of thought. Photography may function as surrogate or artificial memory, but as a medium, painting is better suited to addressing notions of absence or loss in terms of its own cultural history because of its aesthetic development and function within the history of its own use, so that in 15th-century Italy painting meant a ritual, cult, sacred object and today a fetishized, ritual cult commodity in 21st century New York. Painting can address the cultural and aesthetic ‘shattering’ of its own traditions (Benjamin, 1970, auth. 1936) - its cultural rupture /fracture / loss/ transformation, because of this ‘memory’ of itself. It is embedded within the ontological context of its own histories of meaning and tradition.

A ‘superstructural’ aim of the research has been to develop a theory of Christian painted imagery with respect to its transfer of meaning and trans-valuation. All image systems are maps of meaning, but is all meaning in our culture now located within a materialist, linguistic or textual reading of art? The implication of the questions raised in my thesis propose a different map and a different set of meanings. The mobilising or transformative influence of any form of image system, which seeks to offer an alternative model of representation to the dominant discourse has been a corollary of the research ambitions.
Structure of Argument

Here is an outline of the structure of my argument for generating similar aesthetic and religious experiences and meanings to Catholic Reformation painted imagery, which, I claim, have been disabled/marginalised in contemporary British painting and here is how I intend the examiners to see/understand my research:

The practice part of my submission will consist of a group of paintings and pilot studies, which I made in order to conduct the research. I will present these artefacts in the form of a research display/presentation rather than an exhibition format, which involves extraneous considerations like artist/venue profile, ‘formal’ hanging issues and dialogues between works. This will be in a location, probably on the university campus.

The role of my paintings, the nature of their display and context will provide the evidence of affective aesthetic experience to satisfy the conditions I outlined as being necessary to test for a transfer of similar meaning and experience across time and cultures. The purpose of the display is to allow the paintings to demonstrate the generation of similar experiences to Counter-Reformation imagery. How will it do this?

A.) The form and interpretation of the paintings.
B) Their environment and context, (lighting, position, location, etc.).

The display will display my paintings and show what my paintings are doing. My written thesis will explain why and how they are doing it.

In order to assess and compare whether I have generated similar aesthetic and religious experiences to pre-Enlightenment Christian imagery, I must first establish a set of terms and parameters for those experiences that I say were disabled, obsolete, marginalised, so I have a background against which I can compare.

In chapter 1, on Christian imagery, I produce evidence that those meanings and experiences existed (the devotional, the visionary, the miraculous, and the ecstatic) and which pre-Enlightenment audiences experienced them. I argue that these meanings and experiences that were in certain key works of Christian painting before the Enlightenment have become marginalised or obsolete in the discourses
and practice of recent British and western European painting and offer an interpretative account of the reasons for this decline. I define what I mean by the term, ‘Christian imagery’, which I apply to the experience and meaning of post-Tridentine Catholic Counter-Reformation painting. Adopting Poulat’s (1986) notion of religion as ‘trace’ I ask how does contemporary secular culture view the ‘trace’ of Christian imagery as a private or public image - institutionalised and communal, or a product of the subject’s processes of psychological obsession and the unconscious; or does it function as an ‘ancestral mark’ – preserving by its continuing existence and presence what Danielle Hervieu-Leger (2000:31), describes as a ‘chain of memory’? Finally, is Christian imagery meaningful – or meaningless in secular regimes of the visual? Does such a thing, as a contemporary ‘Christian imagery’ exist now? In order to address these questions this chapter will adopt two central themes of: post-Reformation Christian imagery as Institutionalised Form and Religious imagery as a Chain of Memory.

In chapter 2, *Capitalism and the Symptom of the Sublime*, I show how modern economic forces (capitalism) functionalised and universalised Christian imagery and aesthetic thought through the Enlightenment concept of the sublime and will argue that the sublime is ‘spilt’ religion, although Christian beliefs and practices were maintained on a fairly widespread social scale until the mid-19th century. I show how former sacred meanings spilt over into aesthetics - particularly the sublime - in the cultures of emerging industrial and mercantile capitalism. I argue this change of usage and context was accompanied by a transfer of meaning in Christian imagery, which became functionalised in the nascent capitalist economies of those cultures, so that the painted image became an expression of an individualised private sensibility - aesthetics and the aesthetics of the sublime which assumed and replicated certain spiritual qualities of the former sacred image, but functions as a ‘symptom’ of the subject’s relationship to ‘otherness’ in modern forms of capitalism. I adduce evidence from my own paintings to demonstrate how the ‘overlapping horizons’ of capitalist and Christian vision produce hybrid pictorial spaces, wherein new ‘intertextual’ aesthetic/pictorial meaning is generated.

In chapter 3 on aesthetics, I produce evidence to show how meaning in Christian imagery changed due to adaptations not only in its use and function, but in the
transmission and reception of its aesthetics. I quote from the art historian Hans Belting, (1994) to show that Christian sacred imagery became obsolete in its pure form at the time of the Renaissance and the philosopher, Walter Benjamin, (1970, auth. 1936) that the work of art underwent a qualitative change from sacred ritual to profane ritual (beauty) - and ‘exhibition value’. I adopt this evidence to argue that post–Reformation the transmission of Christian imagery was ‘metaphorised’ and its reception was determined by aesthetics, rather than religious devotion. I show, by example from my own practice, how ‘private’, ‘individual’ meaning now in Christian painted imagery can be formed through intrinsic aesthetic qualities of the artefact and not just how the use of that artefact socially and culturally determines its function, meaning and the experiences it generates.

My argument adopts, as a working hypothesis, the Enlightenment idea/assumption that a split exists between faith and reason. I suggest that a metaphor for this qualitative change in the pictorial painted image may be to consider the Christian concept of spiritual light, (the Light of God) in relation to the light of Reason (Enlightenment); and that this metaphor for what St. Augustine describes (Derrida, 1993:118 transl.) (auth.378AD:10.34) as the ‘true, good Light’ that is ‘revelatory’ of God’s presence, in the Enlightenment - becomes, (at least in Northern European Protestant cultures), the light of experience - a light that illuminates darkness and ignorance with sense perception and reason. The individual is now the perceiving eye - the receptor of appearances. The question is whether the light of Painting can generate similar aesthetic and religious experience to the pre-Enlightenment Catholic Reformation image, now its function has changed from devotion to display. Derrida, (2002) maintains there has always been faith - that the idea of a split between faith and reason is an Enlightenment assumption. My working hypothesis is that faith, as an interpretation and means for the reception of Christian painting, effectively disappeared by the time of the early Enlightenment and was replaced by aesthetics. Derrida, (1993), and (2002: 46) states the linguistic roots of light are in a definition of God (Dieu), so faith and light are always present, but are interpreted differently and take different forms in different cultural periods.

In chapter 4 Redeeming Images, I explain how my practical aesthetics experiments and tests these two positions. I consider what, if any, form of recuperation of
Christian pre-Enlightenment painted imagery is possible for my painting to achieve as a painter, representative of my time and culture. I produce evidence from my own painting practice to show what, if any, Christian experience and meaning, a secular aesthetics can elicit/disclose through my practice to discover whether, certain affective meanings which attached themselves to the visual system known as the Catholic Reformation image can be generated as similar experience in contemporary painting. By affective I mean whether these images can still produce an emotional, affective response similar to the experiences of the Catholic Reformation painted image in the culturally determined reception aesthetics of contemporary cultural groups of viewers,

I present my written evidence and explanation of what, if any, similar meanings and experiences I have generated, which I claim have been disabled/marginalised. I do this by writing about a group of paintings, pilot studies, journal notes, documentary photographic records and exegetical texts that provide evidence of what religious and aesthetic meanings and experiences my painting has been able to generate. My exegetical writing on my paintings broadens and deepens the experiential ‘emergent knowledge’ my paintings generate. My painting and writing demonstrate that aesthetic form in practice and theory produces changes in the reception of Christian painted imagery. The question is what dictates aesthetics? Is aesthetics an autonomous entity - self generating and independent of all external influence- (capitalism, the social or the cultural), as certain Modernist theories of the painted image tried to persuade (Greenberg’s formalism) (1939) - or is it more subtly connected to and inter-dependent with external contexts? And this is what I deal with in the final section of this chapter, the Power of the Image and Recuperation. I also compare and contrast my practice with an example of contemporary painting, the South African, *Kieskamma Altarpiece* (2005) (fig.22) where the intended use and meaning propose redemptive and recuperative functions, meanings and experiences of Christian pre-Enlightenment painted imagery as represented by the *Issenheim Altarpiece* 1512-16) (fig.23) the painting after which it models itself.
Terminologies

Christian imagery and Christian cult-image.

I adopt the general epithet ‘Christian imagery’ in this thesis to describe the post-Tridentine (1563) Catholic Counter-Reformation painted image. On occasion, in chapter 4, Redeeming Images I use the term ‘Christian cult-image’ in very specific circumstances to define the devotional paintings, of pre-(Protestant) Reformation culture deriving from Benjamin’s (1970:225) application of the term sacred ‘cult-value’ to identify the value and function of the image - not the nature of the religion.

I am mindful of the criticism that the term ‘cult-image’ is unnecessary and I think this criticism is valid for Christian imagery in the post-Reformation period, which is why I have adopted the generic term ‘Christian imagery’. However, before the Reformation, perhaps a majority of painted images were based upon a sacred ‘cult-value’ and it is the specific forms of meaning and consciousness that are generated by this sacred ‘cult-value’ and its qualities of ritual and presence that is the subject of my research. I do not suggest that the Christian religion is a cult; it is the use of the imagery. Christianity is a global religion and Christian imagery represents a normative system of meaning across various Christian cultures throughout the world.

My use of the term ‘cult’ derives from Benjamin (1970:225) and applies to its use as a ritual image in art-not the nature of the religion.

Cult-Image

In the context of this research the term ‘cult-image’ means, those pre-Reformation Western Christian images, made and intended for the purposes of Christian worship and veneration. Until the Reformation in 1533 in Western Europe, Christianity practised a ritualised use of the image from which a cult of Christian imagery emerged and it is the specific forms of meaning and consciousness that arise from its cultic qualities that I examine in the chapter, entitled Redeeming Images. Britain rejected Roman Catholic cult-imagery in 1536 with the Dissolution of the Monasteries and ‘rituals related to images have not been a significant feature’ of British ecclesiastical life since then.

In an art-historic sense I adopt Belting’s (1994: 9) description of a ‘sacred image’ ‘implying both appearance and presence.’ He quotes Erhart Kastner (n.d.), ‘the
ancient antithesis between representing and being present, between holding the place of someone and being that someone’.

Furthermore, the epithet ‘Christian cult-image’ is apposite for two reasons:
1. This research is about the experiences and forms of consciousness represented in pre-Enlightenment Christian imagery, particularly the painted imagery of the Roman Catholic Counter-Reformation. The term ‘cult’, as distinct from ‘religious’ connotes a system of worship for a specific person, idea or thing - or a particular set of religious rituals - in this research, the figure of Christ and painted images pertaining to Christian culture.

2. Secondly, the term ‘cult’ permeates affiliations with a wider ‘common culture’. Scruton (1998: 5) proposes ‘the core of common culture is religion’. This definition suggests that the Christian cult-image is embedded within the cultural memory of secular western European society. In electing the term ‘cult’ I am aware of the implied criticism it provokes toward Christianity. My intention however, is not to use the term pejoratively, but descriptively in relation to an image-system that existed in England until 1536 and in southern Roman Catholic Europe, certainly during the Counter-Reformation.

The term ‘cult’ implies a certain degree of provocation to the religious mind, but my intention is not to use the term pejoratively, but as an analytical tool in relation to an image-system - not a religious system of belief and practice.

Religious Painting

Religious painting for the purposes of this research are those painted images, whose meaning is collectively agreed, devoted to or derived from a particular, widespread and organised system of beliefs or practices in a divine authority, governed by conditions of belonging to the community of that organised order or church, (e.g. Catholic Counter-Reformation painted imagery.) In the course of this thesis I use the term ‘religious imagery’ to mean Christian imagery.
'Aura' in Benjamin and 'Aura' in Belting

Benjamin (1970:223) defines the concept of ‘aura’ in terms of art as uniqueness and its role in ritual and presence. However, Belting (1994) uses the term aura in a different sense – a religious sense, referring to the ‘old’ pre-Reformation western Christian imagery possessing ‘sacred aura’ that was not a representation of God, but was an invocation of God. Although the Catholic Church was sensitive to the idolatrous ‘misuse’ of sacred images, nevertheless popular practice conferred magical powers on these images that were considered to possess sacred aura. They were not symbol - they were direct evidence of God’s presence in the work. Blunt describes the efforts of the Council of Trent in its last session (1563) to prescribe the correct ‘veneration’ of holy images without idolatry, which had in 1533 provoked the reforms of Luther and Calvin:

The images of Christ, of the Virgin Mother of God and of the other saints are to be had and retained and due honour and veneration are to be given them; not that any divinity or virtue is believed to be in them on account of which they are to be worshipped. (Blunt 1980: 107-9)

In Belting’s definition ‘sacred aura’ ceases at the time of the Reformation and its link with idolatry proscribed by the theologians at the Council of Trent in 1563. Henceforth the idea of art and how that mediated sacred ‘representation’ regulated the reception of Christian imagery.

Aesthetics and Aesthetic autonomy

In the course of my argument I refer to the following differentiations of aesthetics:

a.) The formal ‘language’ of painting and its phenomenological understanding.

b.) The structures of meaning and feeling that are the product of the relations between cultural production and social context.

c.) I adopt Davey’s (1994) notion of ‘theoria’ (argued by the critics Ruskin and Fuller) in support of my methodology. Theoria is the concept of aesthetic contemplation as a super-sensory (ethical, spiritual, moral) reception as well as a sensual apprehension of works of art.
I understand aesthetic autonomy as a formalist concept, whereby the medium-specific nature of material, process, ‘vocabulary’ and ‘grammar’ and their interaction with content/subject in painting exist as independent qualitative measures of kind.

**Redeeming**

I accept that my adoption of the term ‘Redeeming’ causes confusion and ambivalence in describing what I am doing with Christian imagery and I understand the valid criticism it has attracted. I have retained it for chapter 4, Redeeming Images which deals with issues of the generation, reconstruction and recovery of the experiences of the Counter-Reformation painted image. The term, ‘redeeming’ relates to my work, but in a metaphorical, *not a methodological sense*. It is not intended to imply ‘loss’. The methodological function is now performed by the terms ‘generate’ and ‘reconstruction’. The present participle ‘redeeming’ refers in a metaphorical, not a methodological sense to the process my painting enacts of reconstructing defunct religious imagery. My use of the term does not imply any religious agency, rather a religious sentiment, which relates to how I see my painting practice. ‘Redeem’ is textually rich with multiple meanings, two of which I have used metaphorically because they bear on the arguments in this particular chapter 5, which deal with the *Issenheim* (1516) (fig.23) and *Keiskamma* (2005) (fig.22) altarpieces are:

1. The first applies to the function of the traditional Christian imagery of the pictorial contemplation of the ‘mystery of suffering’ of Christ (the Redeemer) within Roman Catholic iconography. Painting as a Christian concept, finds its expression in the pictorial tradition/convention of the representation of the Christian Passion in the redemption theology of the Christian religion. Therefore ‘redeeming’ in this chapter refers to those painted images that are images which represent the Christian *idea* of redemption.

2. Secondly, I use ‘redeeming’ to refer to the generation, and reconstruction of ‘similar’ original meaning and experience. The concept of redemption is a metaphor that I apply to the historical reconstruction of the meaning and experiences represented in Christian imagery. In the course of their art historical development images are ‘redeemed’, or brought back from obsolescence and transvalued through
processes of re-appropriation and hybridization. It is such processes of recovery or reconstruction that find parallels with the theories of iconography and iconology proposed by the art historians Erwin Panofsky, (1939;1955) Aby Warburg, (2000) and Robert Rosenblum, (1994) in their writings. ‘Redeeming’ is an active present participle and is the achievement of this action of reconstruction and recovery. ‘Recuperation’, is the process by which it happens.

**Recuperation**

Again, I am mindful of the valid criticism this term has attracted and my research restricts the term to a very specific usage in my thesis chapter, *Redeeming Images*, which discusses the Issenheim (1516) (fig.23) and Keiskamma (2005) (fig.22) altarpieces in the context of perceived recuperative power of the image. I use the term recuperation to describe a process, not my research methodology. In ‘*Redeeming Images*’ I define ‘recuperation’ as ‘the reconstruction and recovery of something ‘lost’, missing, or mislaid’. The ‘*narrative of recuperation*’ (metaphorical sense) in the context of this research is about repairing an absence, a cultural and aesthetic rupture or disablement of pre-Enlightenment Christian imagery. T.S. Eliot indicates the nature of this rupture with his concept of ‘dissociation of sensibility’, which he defines as the ‘loss of sensation united with thought’:

> The poets of the 17th century...possessed a mechanism of sensibility, which could devour any kind of experience. In the later 17th century a dissociation of sensibility set in from which we have never recovered. (Eliot, 1972: 281-291).

This definition I apply to the notion of cultural rupture in painting, discussed in chapters 1-3, in the next section.

In the context of chapter 4, Redeeming Images, ‘recuperate’ means to reconstruct and recover a 'similar' quality to the original meaning and experiences - their ‘structures of affect and feeling,’ (Rosenblum,1994:7-8) embodied in pre-Enlightenment, painted, Christian imagery. The properties of Christian imagery are those imaginary pictorial spaces, whose meanings and experiences are represented. The meaning or experiences that are being recuperated are alternative realities, which are discourses of the body where thought and feeling are united rather than separated into discrete compartments within a scientific rational culture; in aesthetic
terms, a ‘gezamtkunstwerk’ that embraces a unity of human experience and thought, where feeling is not regarded as an antithesis or contradiction to thought, but a constituent of it. Amongst those types of experience and meaning, which this chapter suggests are disabled/marginalised or have fallen outside contemporary aesthetic experience, are affective, ontological states such as - visionary experience, immanence, transcendence, rapture, the ecstatic, the irrational as well as later forms of consciousness like the 19th century investment of ‘belief in the immanence of God in His creation’ which derived from individual, self-reflective, and immersive religious attitudes like Pietism, reflected in the work of the German theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) and his contemporary, the painter Caspar David Friedrich (1774-1840) (fig.1).

**Trans-valuation and Transfer**

Trans-valuation is an art–historical concept, which describes the process by which image systems, forms and subject matter in art production undergo, through time, changes in the valuation of their reception, (for example, a Mediaeval Book of Hours now performs an *aesthetic function* as distinct from its original purpose as a devotional religious text). The term ‘transfer’ is employed to firstly describe this *process* of change in use/function. Trans-valuation is used as a secondary term to describe the *qualitative* changes, which this process results in terms of aesthetic reception of Christian imagery.

**Literature Review**

The meanings, experiences and forms of consciousness to which I refer are identified by Blunt (1940:133) in the theories of artistic reception of the Jesuit and Oratorian religious orders of the Roman Counter-Reformation Baroque, which ‘relied on an appeal through the senses for an excitement of religious emotion.’ These experiences feature in the music of Vittoria,(1548-1611) and Palestrina,(1525-1594) or the texts of ascetic Spanish Mysticism - theological writers of the 17th century Catholic Counter–Reformation - St. John of the Cross (*Dark Night of the Soul, 1578-9*), St. Ignatius Loyola, (*Spiritual Exercises, 1548*) (incidentally practised by Bernini,(1598-1680) and St. Theresa of Avila (1567). The writing discloses no separation between the bodily, the intellectual and the spiritual, which is
a phenomena of Baroque Counter-Reformation art. These writers suggest in literary form the types of consciousness my practice excavates as may be evidenced in my painting *Beata Albertona* (1997), (fig.15) that represents discourses of the body, disclosing the carnal, the corporeal, and their affective states of sensation, thought, emotion and spirit. Like Eliot’s (1921) assessment of the English 17th century Metaphysical Poets (Donne, Marvell) the above quoted text denies separation of sensation, action thought and feeling. A pre-Enlightenment notion of transcendence existed in the form of the ‘Longinian’ sublime – a classical treatise, *Peri Hypsous* (‘On Height’ or ‘On the Sublime’), which began to be translated in 16th century and its appeal to rhetoric and simplicity of affect was influential in both secular and sacred Baroque and Counter–Reformation cultural production (Hamlett, 2013)

The dialectic between pre-Enlightenment consciousness, (as represented above) and post-Enlightenment *self-consciousness*, the classification, not only of knowledge, but of human experience,- between sensation and thought in relation to spiritual or metaphysical experience is apparent in the emergence of *aesthetic subjectivity* in 18th century discourses on transcendence in the ‘modern’ aesthetic of the sublime. So in Kant, (2007), the aesthetic includes moral judgment and quite possibly Christian moral judgment. Indeed Kant draws analogy in the Dynamic Sublime between the *might* of Nature and the *might* of the Divine. Whereas for Burke in his *Enquiry* (1757) the aesthetic of the sublime is a dynamic form provoking a feeling connected with the passions of horror and terror. The theologian, Karl Barth (2002) has talked about the 18th century as being a process of ‘humanising’ theology. For Hegel (*Phenomenology of Spirit*, 1807) the idea of ‘Spirit or geist as immanent God, incorporating us all’ suggests a cultural compensation for the erosion of public, collective, religious belief and identity which pertained before the Enlightenment. The alienating effects of Enlightenment individualism betray for Scruton (1998) the loss of a ‘common culture’ and his alignment of the origins of culture in cult (after Herder) prompted my research (both written and practical) to describe a theoretical, discursive and visual pattern of relation between culture and religion.
It is from the realm of the social sciences, Max Weber’s *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (2000, auth. 1905) that my thesis adopts, as defining, the social and economic forces that marginalise ‘religious’ painting practice in the post-Enlightenment period. Recent literature, which casts doubt on Weber’s thesis of a religious basis for a form of economics-capitalism, suggests Weber overstated the affinity between capitalism and Calvinism. Although Weber may have overstated the influence of Calvinism on the development of capitalism, his theory remains important for my thesis because of the link he suggests. Few writers have dealt with the relationship between religion and the capitalist mentality in greater depth than he and my work is indebted to him. Weber himself was careful to emphasise Calvinism was only ‘one of a number of elective affinities leading to modern capitalism’. However, there is no doubt that Weber in the course of this text identifies the Protestant ethic as the ethos that favours the *rational* pursuit of economic gain.

Weber’s alignment of capitalism and Calvinism and his adoption of the term ‘*Disenchantment*’ from Schiller,(1759-1805) to describe a demystification of the religious purposes of Christian belief in favour of a rationalist paradigm of knowledge formation derives from the ascetic well regulated life, which Calvinism brought from the monastic movement. Benjamin Franklin (1706-90), would cite such virtues in a more secular context and this model of economic rationalisation would form the basis of modern capital investment, the division of industrial wage labour and processes of mass production and modern capitalism. *The Protestant Ethic* (2000, auth. 1905), merely explores one phase of the ‘Great Dis-enchantment’, which Weber used to describe the emancipation from a religious view of the world that underpinned the early religious foundations of the Capitalist/Calvinist spirit.

Weber’s thesis that capitalist economics has religious-cultural roots in the form of Calvinism is important for my research because it demonstrates how Northern European Christianity, including its cultural expression, was functionalised as the result of religious ‘ethos’;

commodity form, which demonstrates a ‘sublime’ transcendence of its material form to immaterial value. This text is important because it supports my argument that religion and aesthetics in the form of the sublime have been functionalised by capitalism. My argument is re-enforced by White (2010), who in the specific context of contemporary art production argues that Damien Hirst’s ‘shark’, and I suggest his skull, For the Love of God (2007) (fig.26) can be read as economic commodity forms whose signification is best understood in terms of the aesthetic of the mathematical sublime.

Eagleton (1997: 267-268) makes an important contribution to the research in that he suggests the erstwhile spaces of difference – art, culture, sexuality, religion have been subsumed within the general culture of commodity production now and the classic Enlightenment bourgeois subject has today become a ‘subject without subjectivity.’ The de-centring of subjectivity was presciently recognised in literary and pictorial form by the British Neo-Romantic artist, Cecil Collins, (1947), who speaks of the ‘individual serving a usefulness in modern society.’ The functionalization of aesthetics, which I apply to capitalism in this thesis, is supported, I suggest, by Eagleton (1991), who discerns in Enlightenment aesthetics, a ‘social, psychical and political reconstruction’ by the early European bourgeoisie.

A materialist view of the work of art through its ‘emancipation’ from sacred ritual and changes in its modes of reception is argued by Benjamin (1970:226-7), to have led to a ‘qualitative transformation of the nature’ (of a work of art). He argues this ‘qualitative transformation’ in its function from ‘sacred cult-value’ to ‘exhibition cult-value’ occurs when the emphasis of painting transferred from sacred cult value to the profane cult value of beauty. Most importantly, Benjamin (1970:222-223) argues that, mechanical (mass) reproduction, destroys the ‘aura’ of the work of art - its uniqueness and its place in ritual - its ‘testimony to the history it has experienced’ - its ‘authenticity,’ which are properties of its uniqueness, are ‘eliminated’ by mechanical reproduction. Benjamin ‘subsumes’ this process under the term ‘aura’-the loss of ‘aura’. The term ‘aura’ only applies to uniqueness and place in ritual and only to images which are mechanically reproduced. In the light of the subsequent ‘virtual’ cultures of the image and the cultural interpretation of images produced by digital
reproduction, Benjamin’s (1970) theory could now be seen as a materialist projection which only has historic significance, but for the purposes of my research I rely on Benjamin’s thesis as relevant because it draws attention to the uses and function of the painted image and the qualitative change in their nature. Qualitative change in the painted image is interpreted differently by later theorists such as Belting, Likeness and Presence (1994), WJT Mitchell, What do Pictures Want? (2005) and Freedberg, The Power of Images (1991). Belting’s (1994) study of the decline in the power of sacred Christian imagery is important because he identifies how images are used, as being central to their meaning at a given historical moment. Belting’s thesis that a change in attitudes to how the painted image (including the sacred image) was produced and received at the time of the Renaissance, resulted in the sacred image being ‘mediated’ through the ‘idea of art and the artist’. During the Renaissance the painted image began to be used in a different way - from a sacred function - to an interpretative, reflective function, and inaugurated a later culture of painted images being collected as aesthetic objects to display-echoing Benjamin’s notion of the image going from an emphasis on the value of its existence to its exhibition value. Benjamin, (1970, auth.1936) defines the concept of ‘aura’ in terms of art as uniqueness and a product of the object’s place in ritual. However, Belting (1994) uses the term aura in a different sense – a religious sense. Belting argues essentially that Christian imagery was not destroyed because of a movement of belief to non-belief, but because of a change in use/function and context. The idea is beyond this study to empirically research, but this thesis adopts a working hypothesis that the religious aesthetic declined long before religious subjectivity, because its reception was functionalised by a ‘Calvinist’ mentality that permeated Enlightenment bourgeois thought including its economic form-mercantile capitalism, (Weber, 2000). Christian belief continued to be a widespread practice until well past the middle of the 19th century, whereas as a viable visual system Christian imagery ceased to have an influential place in the discourses of painting after the mid-17th century, i.e. 1650. This is not to say that the movement of belief to non-belief and rationalism, occurring during the Enlightenment was not contributory, but Christian imagery had lost its function as a result of a change in context and how it was transmitted and received.
The changes in transmission and reception of the original meaning of Christian imagery in Northern European painting is the subject of Rosenblum's (1994:10) seminal study, Modern Painting and the Northern Romantic Tradition, which draws art historical connections of meaning and intention between a work of German romanticism - Friedrich's Monk by the Sea (1808) (Fig.27) and an abstract work from the period of High Modernism - Rothko's Green on Blue (1956). By arguing for a continuity across different historical periods and cultural contexts, of the 'feeling and intentions', which inform paintings that share certain formal similarities, Rosenblum (1994: 10) was developing Panofsky's theory of 'pseudo-morphosis', developed in his text, Tomb Sculpture, (1964). But, whereas Panofsky attributes only 'accidental' formal co-incidental correspondences, Rosenblum, (1994) interprets a trajectory for a visual system of thought- the Christian religious imagery, - which 'jumps' the Enlightenment watershed and continues a new life, post- Enlightenment, in the Northern European visual cultures as a fundamental impulse in Northern romantic painting- predominantly as landscape. This is a foundational text in the context of my research because it proposes a theory of meaning for modern painting (particularly Rothko) that is not formalist but spiritual in the development of the Northern Romantic painted image post-Enlightenment. However, Rosenblum’s theory is essentially an account of the post-Enlightenment concept of the Sublime, ignoring Christian imagery proper, seeking to base his argument instead, on its metaphorisation as a ‘religiose’ image. Neither does his theory consider this transfer in its broader socio-economic and cultural contexts. From an art historical viewpoint however, this was a major re-assessment of Parisian-based modernism and a re-visioning of the Romantic sublime image. In the wake of Rosenblum’s pioneering text (1st edition 1975), studies of Caspar David Friedrich (1774-1840) and German romantic art in general, by William Vaughan (1980) and Leo Joseph Koerner (1985), established the reputation of Friedrich and German romantic art, as occupying a position of central importance in the development of the modern pictorial image in Northern Romantic painting.

One recent major exhibition appeared to signal something of a curatorial ‘sea–change,’ by at least acknowledging the difficult relation between religion and modern and contemporary art. Traces du Sacre, Centre Pompidou, Paris (2008), which I attended, and its touring sequel ‘Holy Inspiration; Religion and Spirituality in Modern
Art’ Staedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (2008-9) were huge, major survey exhibitions; ambitious, multi-disciplinary curatorial projects, that examined what Weber’s ‘Great Dis-enchantment’ meant for modern art. Loissy and Pacquement, (2008) the curators of Traces du Sacre (2008) argued that since what has come to be called ‘the great disenchantment of the world’, a ‘significant strand of modern art has found its cultural roots in the turmoil attendant upon the loss of conventional religious belief’. Examining the entire period of Modernism from Caspar David Friedrich to the contemporary (Bill Viola, Paul Chan) the exhibition comprehensively cited evidence of what it described as ‘the ineluctable need to rise above the quotidian’. However, the exhibition seemed to accept as a working premise the current, art historical convention of the ‘metaphorisation’ of Christian imagery and avoided asking the question: ‘why did it disappear in modern and contemporary art?’ Academic theories of iconographic continuity (Rosenblum, Belting - cited above) and curatorial examples (Traces du Sacre) draw on earlier studies of iconography and iconology proposed by the art historians Erwin Panofsky (1939, 1955) and Aby Warburg (2000, published posthumously) and my thesis builds on these texts and uses them for analysis of my research topic.

The tension between cultural continuity and rupture, metaphysics and cultural materialism, tradition and the new and between the cultural left and right are articulated in the aesthetic theories of Peter Fuller, (1947-1990) the English art critic, and writer whose critical reputation is characterized by his ‘unconversion’ from Marxism – the cultural inheritance of his mentors - the critic and writer, John Berger, (b.1926) and the art historian Arnold Hauser. (1892-1978). Because of this intellectual volte face Fuller is, I believe, an interesting figure from the point of view of this research because he is a ‘fulcrum’, who did articulate, certainly in British art criticism and theory of the 1980’s, the positions of the cultural Left and Right on aesthetics. Because of the range of his writings on art, artists and aesthetics, his breadth enables an analysis of complex ideological and aesthetic positions to be refracted and examined through the lens of his writings. Fuller,(1988:45-51), like Ruskin over a century earlier, formulated the aesthetic as a moral and ethical as well as a sensual, concept, which he codified in Ruskin’s interpretation of ‘theoria’. Despite the passage of time that has elapsed, I believe Fuller’s use of the concept of
‘theoria’ in the aesthetic reception of paintings remains valid for the arguments I advance in my research. He articulated a critical and theoretical framework for the contemporary aesthetics of the painted image, which accommodated not only aesthetic but metaphysical, spiritual and religious frameworks of thought - particularly Romanticism. In the two decades since his untimely death in a car accident, critical thought has, post-post-modernity, been directed at forms of knowledge- experiential, subjective, aesthetic, for which Fuller had long-argued. Fuller’s perspective on theoria thematises a position that, defines the work of a large number of theorists, artists and writers, whose work is relevant to my research.

The situation of religion and contemporary art was the subject of the conference Re-Enchantment, (2008, Dublin). The publication of the same name (Elkins, Morgan: 2009), asserts that ‘the near absence of religion from contemporary discourse on art is one of the most fundamental issues in post-Modernism’. In his introduction David Morgan (2009: 3) writes that, ‘the process of western secularization, according to Max Weber, began with ancient Jewish monotheism and took a decisive step in capitalism’s debt to Calvinism’.

Elkins (2004) is troubled by the difficulties in discussing religion and art. For example, he does not believe the sublime is a concept useable beyond 19th century Romanticism. Paraphrasing the literary theorist Maurice Blanchot (1907-2003), Elkins writes:

> The name God does not belong to the language of art, in which the name intervenes, but at the same time and in a manner that is difficult to determine, the name God is still part of the language of art, even though the name has been set aside. (Elkins 2004: 116)

Morgan (2009:3-22) also asserts in relation to the religious imagery and contemporary art that, ‘the professional discourse on art will resist recognising it, because it does not fit the grain of the discourse, which does not run in the direction of personal or institutional affirmation of metaphysical commitments’.
At the conference *Contemplations of the Spiritual in Contemporary Art*, Liverpool, 2010 (where this researcher presented a paper), Elkins argued that it is the unironic Christian imagery that provokes resistance from the institutions of contemporary art in the west and the strategy of contemporary artists who wish to deal with the religious in an ‘unironic’ way has been to ‘burn away’ the ecclesiastical husk in contemporary Christian ‘religious’ images which they produce. A topical example of this situation has arisen at the Venice Biennale of 2013, where, for the first time, The Vatican state were hosting a pavilion. The ‘burning away’ (Elkins, 2010) of the liturgical or the adoption of metaphorisation, which appears to be the curatorial approach of the Vatican, seems to me to either ‘throw the baby out with the bath water,’ or avoid the issue of the religious imagery in contemporary art altogether. One artist, some of whose work has confronted religious imagery unapologetically is David La Chapelle, (fig.6), whose ‘kitsch’ photographic ‘pastiches’ of Baroque religious narrative places his work within a broader interest in (re)-representing that was a feature of late 1980s and 1990s art practice. For my research the use of quotation and appropriation as analysed by Mieke Bal (1999:9) preserves an identity of Christian imagery. Bal’s notions of quotation as ‘supplement’ to original works and her notion of ‘preposterous history’ (1999:1-15) as a reciprocal, but reverse dialogue with painted images of the past, in which present art ‘modifies’ the past, provides for my research, a working, theoretical framework, upon which to base my practice method of quotation and appropriation. But, first I need to organise my material so I set out the problem and that starts with defining exactly what the experiences of Catholic Reformation imagery were that I wish to reconstruct. So, in the next section I start with the chapter, Christian Imagery and its Meanings and Experiences.
Section 2 Cultural Rupture in Painting

Chapter 1

Christian Imagery and its Meanings and Experiences

‘Religion in itself is not an empirical, observable reality. All we can grasp are expressions and carriers: gesture, word text, edifice, institution, assembly, ceremony, belief, place, time, person, group. Religion is by nature a composite, inseparable from the design that animates it, not uniformly stable; when it is broken down, only the objectifiable element remains, the one that manifested it.’

Emile Poulat

Introduction

This chapter will define what I mean by the term, ‘Christian imagery’, which I apply to the experience and meaning of certain key works of post–Tridentine (1563) Catholic Counter–Reformation devotional painting and sculpture. I produce evidence of the meanings that existed in the reception of this image system (the devotional, the visionary, the miraculous, and the ecstatic) and which pre-Enlightenment audiences experienced them. I argue that some meaning and experience that was in Christian painting before the Enlightenment has become marginalised or obsolete in the discourses and practice of recent British and Western European painting. I offer evidence and discuss why these meanings and experiences have become absent/disabled from contemporary painting image systems in British and Western European art. Establishing exactly what the experiences were and the specific image system to which they relate will enable me in the following chapters to prove what, if any, similar experiences and meaning my painting practice can generate through affective aesthetics.

The term ‘Christian imagery’ in Western art is the subject of such a vast array of variable interpretations that it would be futile to talk of it as one homogenous unified concept. Even if one confines the question to post-Reformation Christian imagery in the West then what is meant by ‘Christian imagery’? The Calvinist images of 16th century Germany; the ‘affective’ art of the Catholic Counter-Reformation of 17th century Rome; Protestant pictorial imagery in 19th century Sweden or America or the
‘religiose’ images of Late 20th century Modernism and post Modernism (Rothko, Beuys, Viola)? Such diversity defies individual monolithic categorisation and as the above quotation suggests the inherent instability of interpretation, when applied to religion (and I would suggest religious imagery), betrays a system of meaning that is highly contingent, so I will define the type of Christian imagery that is the subject of my thesis.

The term, ‘Christian imagery’, for the purposes of this research, are those painted and sculptural images, whose meaning is collectively agreed, devoted to or derived from a particular, widespread and organised system of beliefs or practices in a divine authority, governed by conditions of belonging to the community of that organised religious order or church, (e.g. Catholicism or Protestantism - in the case of this research post-Tridentine (1563) Catholic Counter-Reformation painted and sculptural imagery). In the course of this chapter I use the term ‘religious imagery’ to mean Christian imagery.

Post-Tridentine refers to the decrees on Catholic Counter-Reformation sacred painted imagery and artworks promulgated by the Council of Trent in 1563. This was a devotional image system, based on affective reception aesthetics and the rhetoric of emotion. Its purposes were didactic and functional - to instruct a largely illiterate laity in the narratives of Christian liturgy and to incite piety and contemplation during the Mass. In pursuit of these objectives artists who interpreted the Christian themes were permitted to use whatever artistic means at their disposal to generate maximum emotional affect, provided they directed the spectator/worshipper towards pious contemplation and devotion during the Mass. Communication of its ideological (Counter-Reformation) message was meant to be clear and unambiguous. Examples of this image system would be Caravaggio’s Seven Works of Mercy, (1607) or Bernini’s Ecstasy of St. Theresa. (1647-52) I describe these sacred iconographies as an image system because it was an institutionalised image - sanctioned and ordained by a Vatican conclave - The Council of Trent, 1563, and regulated by the Catholic Church in the form of the Inquisition. The form of address was a highly organised structure of affect and feeling, quite self-consciously manipulated in many
instances (rhetorical), and it was also ubiquitous - becoming an important element in international Catholic Baroque.

The experience I aim to generate in my paintings is an affective and experiential narrative of presence, unity of thought, feeling and action, which I argue is found in the experiences of certain key works within Catholic Reformation painted and sculptural imagery. I do not claim all Catholic Reformation imagery produced these experiences, but certain key works. But I need to define those experiences:

**What were the Experiences and who had them?**

In post-Tridentine Catholic Reformation reception aesthetics, art and prayer were inter-related. Sources, both contemporary with the period and recent scholarship support the idea that the religious imagery served a specific devotional function; painting and sculpture were used as an aid to devotion and prayer. The Council of Trent, (1563) on the use of Christian imagery, placed great emphasis on such imagery being clearly instructive for the largely illiterate laity. Paintings and sculpture were to serve a didactic, devotional function designed to incite piety by dramatic or pathetic effect, but avoid impropriety or impious sacred representation. Obscurity was held to be a 'sin' by any artist, whether this was caused by aesthetic affect or ignorance. Commenting on the pious use of images the Spanish mystic, St. John of the Cross wrote:

> The church established the use of images for two principal reasons: the reverence given to the saints through them; and both the motivation of the will and the awakening of devotion to the saints by their means. (St. John of the Cross, 1994:35; 3)

The reception of these painted and carved images was exclusively through the lens of religious contemplation. My paintings are not devotional, neither are they about the motivation of the Christian will - perhaps the aesthetic will. My research is about representation, meaning, and what can be represented meaningfully within certain secular cultural contexts. My paintings investigate whether the meanings and experiences of Catholic Reformation imagery have different cross-cultural significances than their original uses/functions (e.g. similar aesthetic and religious experiences that are received through the aesthetic notion of *theoria*), which is what I test in chapters 3 and 4 (aesthetics and aesthetic recovery).
Blunt describes the efforts of the Council of Trent in its last session (1563) to prescribe the correct ‘veneration’ of holy images without idolatry, which had in 1533 provoked the reforms of Luther and Calvin:

The images of Christ, of the Virgin Mother of God and of the other saints are to be had and retained and due honour and veneration are to be given them; not that any divinity or virtue is believed to be in them on account of which they are to be worshipped. (Blunt 1980: 106-9)

It is not surprising that painting was to be guarded against accusations of idolatry, and equally it is clear from the writings of St. John of the Cross (auth.1578-91) that neither was the work to be read as possessing any aesthetic or sensual merit accorded by any virtue of art or craftsmanship, but instead a ‘favour’ of God.

If God sometimes bestows more favour through one statue than another, he does not do so because of its greater ability to produce this effect - even though there may be a notable difference in craftsmanship- but because the devotion of individuals is awakened more by means of one statue than another. (St. John of the Cross 1994: 36; 1).

Qualitative judgments on respective aesthetic eloquence were not the result of ‘craftsmanship’ or artistic genius, but a property of God’s ‘favour’. This presents those works, which posterity has subsequently adopted into the canon of western European painting a somewhat different basis of meaning. Chorpenning, writing on the religious paintings of Caravaggio explains:

Friedlander attributed the ‘spiritual relationship’ Caravaggio establishes between the sacred scene and the spectator to the fact that,”almost all of Caravaggio’s religious works, beginning with the San Luigi series, were altarpieces designed for the worship of the Christian community and its members”. The liturgical piety of the age, the interrelationship between counter-reformation art and prayer, suggests Caravaggio’s altarpieces were intended to help worshippers to meditate while they attended mass. They serve to help the spectator/worshipper meditate and be conscious of the presence of the supernatural vivid pictorial equivalents to the descriptions of ecstasy found in the writings of the great Catholic Reformation mystics. (Chorpenning 1987: 149-158)

What emerges from the literature is that these works were intended to be received and understood as artefacts, which invoked devotion and religious emotion. My paintings investigate whether it is possible to generate ‘similar’ aesthetic and religious experiences within the context of secular culture. The post–Enlightenment
notion of disinterested aesthetic contemplation of beauty would not have been an approved mode of reception for these works. This is not to deny there was a significant and growing appreciation of ideas of ‘craftsmanship’ and taste, as St. John of the Cross, cited below, admonishes, but the Catholic Reformation sacred image was a functional image in the service of devotion:

You will see some who never tire of adding statue on statue to their collection, or insist that the statue be of this particular kind and craftsmanship and placed in a certain niche and in a special way - all so these statues will give delight to the senses. As for devotion of the heart, there is very little... People who are truly devout direct their devotion mainly to the invisible object represented, have little need for many images and use those that are conformed more to divine traits than human ones. (St. John of the Cross 1994: 35; 4)

However, simply because the image was devotional, did not mean it should eschew all rhetoric or emotional address, provided that rhetoric was intended to incite piety. The similar aesthetic and religious meanings, experiences and ‘realisms’ I seek to generate are identified by Blunt (1940:133-4) in the theories of artistic reception of the Jesuit and Oratorian religious orders of the Roman Counter-Reformation Baroque who ‘relied on an appeal through the senses for an excitement of religious emotion.’ These experiences feature in the music of Vittoria,(1548-1611) and Palestrina,(1525-1594) or the texts of ascetic Spanish Mysticism - theological writers of the 17th century Catholic Counter-Reformation, namely St. John of the Cross (Dark Night of the Soul, 1578-9) and St. Ignatius Loyola, (Spiritual Exercises 1548) (incidentally practised by Bernini).

Asceticism, mystical devotion, the visionary, the ecstatic also appear in the text of Dark Night of the Soul (1578-9) by St. John of the Cross, a Jesuit text, narrating the purgation of the soul:

But, as I say, when these aridities proceed from the way of the purgation of sensual desire, although at first the spirit feels no sweetness, for the reasons we have just given, it feel that it is deriving strength and energy to act from the substance, which the inward food, the which food is the beginning of a contemplation that is dark and arid to the senses (St. John of the Cross 1994, Ch.9, v.6), (auth.1578-9)

The appeal to the emotions and the rhetorical, affective nature of post-Tridentine Catholic Reformation imagery was dedicated to disseminating doctrine, but does find secular parallels (and quite possibly origins) in the widespread translation of
Longinus (also known as pseudo-Longinus) classic text *On the Sublime (Peri Hypsous)* (1554; 1st transl.) This antique, pre-Enlightenment rhetorical 'affective' notion of the sublime had a significant effect on 17th century visual culture. Hamlett (2013) writes:

This period of interest in *Peri Hypsous* coincided with a time when effect and affect, as well as an intense identification with the spectator were considered to be especially important and when both Church and state were attracted to powerful persuasive rhetorical systems... these terms can be understood to refer to the emotion that lied behind an action (affect) and an impression produced (effect). (Hamlett: 2013)

The representation of these types of emotion and experience find their most intense expression for me in the Bernini sculpture, *The Ecstasy of St. Theresa* (1645-52), the significance of which I lighted upon in 1997 in my practice, which was then concerned with the relationship between the religious sublime and monolithic abstraction and, which prompted my first figural ‘religious’ paintings on this subject. I consider this artwork from an experiential viewpoint, in terms of its affective aesthetics and I am reading the work in this way, because I argue that *The Ecstasy of St. Theresa* represents an example of a unified field of consciousness - a non-dualist meaning which this artwork conveys. Because of its religio-aesthetic significance to my argument for non-dualist experience, I wish to devote some discussion to this key historical work in my research.

**Bernini: The Ecstasy of St. Theresa and Erotic Christian Mysticism**

The experiences which are the subject of my practice-based argument include the religious ecstatic and the similar emotional experiences that might be generated by it through my painting practice. This emotion, I suggest, is represented in Bernini’s *Ecstasy of St. Theresa*, (1645-52) as an example of erotic Christian Mysticism a subject written about by Marina Warner in the context of eroticism and Christian mystical literature (*Alone of All Her Sex*, 1976).Bridal Christian Mysticism is also the subject of Nigel Wingrove’s film *Visions of Ecstasy*,(1989) - a filmic interpretation of St. Theresa’s writings, which was banned for blasphemy as it assumed a celestial orgasm/bride of Christ narrative of the saint’s writings. But these are both contemporary interpretations. I have chosen this sculptural work rather than a painting because I believe it is an example of the capacity of the rhetorical, ‘Longinian’ sublime to transcend mind/body dualities, and, I argue, embodies the
idea of a unity of thought feeling and action in affective aesthetics. I do argue that the erotic and the sacred were part of one unified field of human consciousness when this work was made, because, I suggest, there was then no cognitive separation of the erotic and the sacred religious. This becomes apparent, if one examines the writings of St. Theresa of Avila. In a passage, which directly provided the literary inspiration for Bernini’s *Ecstasy of St. Theresa*, (1645-52), she wrote around 1567:

> I saw in his hand a long spear of gold and at the point there seemed to be a little fire. He appeared to me to be thrusting it at times into my heart, and to pierce my very entrails, when he drew it out, he seemed to draw them out also and to leave me all on fire with a great love of God. The pain was so great, that it made me moan, and yet so surpassing was the sweetness of this excessive pain, that I could not wish to be rid of it. (St. Theresa of Avila 1976), (auth., 1567).

This passage demonstrates how close Bernini interpreted the text of the saint and is, I suggest, the literary equivalent of the very same visual experiences encountered in the works of her contemporaries-Bernini, El Greco, Zurburan and Ribera, because, I argue that the writing discloses no separation between dualisms such as mind/body, rational/sensory, knowledge/belief ,the spiritual and the carnal, which is a defining characteristic of Baroque Counter-Reformation art (although not exclusive to it,- for example the thought of Romanticism and Antiquity also privileged a unity of mind/body/spirit in their discourses). I have cited this text because it suggests in literary form the types of consciousness my practice seeks to generate; it may not be completely or entirely possible, but that is what I am seeking to establish- a similar experience - the conjunction of the sacred and the erotic, as may be evidenced in my paintings Beata Albertona (1997), (fig.15) and *The Fourth Ecstasy of St. Theresa of Avila*, (2004) (figs.14 & 29). And this consciousness may be represented by Eliot’s (1921), description of Metaphysical poetry, contemporaneous of the period, representing a 'unity of thought feeling and action', disclosing the carnal, the corporeal, and their affective states of sensation, thought, emotion and spirit-a 'carnal intellectualism', or to use Ruskin’s formulation of artistic constitution- a ‘stout and robust animality.*(Fuller,1993).*
A Corporealised Spirituality

In *The Ecstasy of St. Theresa*, I argue that Bernini represents the saint as experiencing a total unified experience - there is no mind/body duality. Corporeally, spiritually, emotionally, intellectually, sensually, devoutly, erotically her being is surrendered to a rapture that is an aesthetic and experiential logic, which surpasses atomised, artificial separations of mind/body experience/consciousness. As Victoria Turvey Sauron (2007: 189-201) observes, even her interiority-her inner mental passion is turned inside out. Bernini conceives of her robes as flames symbolising her interior mental and bodily passion. Lacan has observed in relation to the *St. Theresa*, that ‘she is about to come’. He writes:

> The feminine *jouissance* that is rapture beyond the expressible, beyond signification or measurement or valuation.it is a *jouissance* that woman ‘hides and steals. (Lacan, 1973, b., p23)

Verhaege (2001:118), writing on affective aesthetics explains,

> This Other- *autre, jouissance*, implies a knowledge acquired by the body through experiencing it, and this experiencing causes its inscription within the body  Verhaege (2001:118).

Equally, from the viewer’s point of view, the experiencing of this work, depends upon the viewer’s capacity to establish a ‘mental reciprocity’ with the emotion represented. Seeing depends on our capacity to understand what it is to be seen. To be sentient and sensible best describes this divergence, but not dualism of our embodied situation - an overlapping between these aspects of embodied experience. (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 2012) (auth.1945) (source Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy (http://www.iep.utm.edu/merleau/).

In terms of perceptual psychology, Bernini’s *St. Theresa*, I suggest, represents a unified mind/body experience:

> The *Phenomenology of Perception* is united by the claim that we are bodies and that our lived experience of this body denies the detachment of subject from object, mind from body’. (pp. X11)

(Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy (http://www.iep.utm.edu/merleau/)}
Bernini’s St. Theresa and erotic fetishisation in the devotional image.

As stated earlier, I argue that the erotic and the sacred were part of one unified field of human consciousness when this work was made, because there was then no cognitive separation of the erotic and the sacred religious.

From a feminist reading of the sculpture Turvey Sauron (2007: 189-201) charts what may be described as the pre-Enlightenment ‘male gaze’ and its hostility toward female viscerality-linking this fear with a male visual misogyny. Turvey Sauron (2007:189) observes that Bernini represents a fetishistically excessive ‘outside’ of St. Theresa in the flames of her robes, arguing that, ‘it may be possible that the sculpture’s surface visually realises externally, the inner experience of religious ecstasy’. What in contemporary aesthetics is now described as the ‘male gaze’ that fetishizes a part of a woman’s body or clothing is, according to Turvey Sauron (2007:195), in the case of Bernini’s St. Theresa, a ‘euphoria of surfaces’, and describes the sculpture thus:

Theresa is a masterpiece of exterior surface: there is no interior because everything is exterior - body and spirit alike are represented in the play of light and shade on marble. (Turvey Sauron, 2007:195)

The labyrinthine folds of the saint’s draperies uphold a fetishized visual economy, Turvey Sauron argues, as represented in the excess of the folds. Referencing Kristeva’s Powers of Horror (1982, auth.1980), Turvey Sauron (2007:194-5) explains that:

The abject is the borderline between subject and object. Psychosis is the result of the inability of the subject to identify an exterior object, resulting in the failure to construct its own identity.....poised before penetration the saint becomes a cipher of masculine psychosis where sexuality and desire are either diverted or abjected via the mechanism of excessive surface. (Turvey Sauron, 2007: 194-5)

The self can now be inherent in the object - in this case the saint’s draperies. (see Lacan’s concept of the ‘mirror phase’ in psychological individuation). Turvey Sauron also notes:

The first instance of a point of view, Bal (1999) notes in Quoting Caravaggio, seems to be articulated in Baroque art... The gaze can now be situated outside the self; it becomes non-monolithic and multiple. This means that the subject is put in danger; its position is no longer certain, as it can be inherent in the object. (Turvey Sauron, 2007:196)
Bal’s reading of the sculpture however, according to Turvey Sauron, (2007:195) also reinforces a masculine, fetishistic visual economy. The engulfing of the saint’s body in flames, invokes Kristeva’s (1982, auth. 1980) suggested function of religious rituals to ward off the abject, the fear of masculine identity sinking irretrievably into the mother. According to Turvey Sauron, (2007:195) fear of castration - being engulfed in draperies that bear uncanny resemblance to female genital folds- condition the visualising of this sculpture as a product of the male gaze.

I use these quotes not to suggest that the original meaning of this sculpture was conceived in these terms; indeed, it would almost certainly be reckless and inaccurate to suggest the reception and original interpretation of the work derived from any conscious or intentional sexual/erotic impulse/reading. Such emotions, I suggest, were not then discreet realms of human experience, as they became under bourgeois individualism and subjectivity, but one and the same within a unified field of consciousness. Furthermore, my interpretation also reflects the values and experiences of a 21st century middle class west European male, for whom Freudian and Lacanian sexual psychology is a cultural reference. My purpose was to emphasise the non-dualist immanence of the experiences portrayed in this sculpture.

Notwithstanding the affective aesthetics of such canonical works as The Ecstasy of St. Theresa, it has to be said that this art was borne of an institutionalised and prescriptive theocratic culture and so in the next section I will briefly survey the status of Christian imagery as institutionalised form in the post-Reformation period.

**Post-Reformation Christian Imagery as Institutionalised Form**

The term ‘religion’ refers to the widespread, non-cultic organized major system of belief by a community of followers who share an agreement of meaning about the rituals, liturgy and practices of that belief system (in the case of the research Western European Christianity). A definition of religion from a contemporary aesthetic theoretician is offered by Elkins who defines religion as:

> A named, non-cultic, major system of belief by a community of followers who share an agreement about the rituals, liturgy and practices of that belief system, often catholic, sometimes protestant, seldom Judaism. It is public and social, requiring observance. Religion also means the trappings of such systems, religion is therefore public and social, requiring observance. It
involves the family, the congregation and the wider community. (Elkins 2004:1)

Elkins concedes that this interpretation is somewhat neutral, but I believe should be cited alongside the anti-theological academic position of Dawkins, (2006) who, in his book *The God Delusion*, declares that belief in a personal God qualifies as a delusion, which he defines as a 'persistent false belief in the face of strong contradictory evidence'. Elkins' definition overlooks one very important quality of the phenomena of religion - its embeddedness within subjectivity and permeation of common culture, - the quality, which Poulat (1986), quoted in Hervieu-Leger (2000:31) touches upon - that of 'animation'. As institutionalised form, the Christian cult-image (i.e. that which served a sacred liturgical function in the pre-Reformation era), not only represented a devotional purpose - but, the expression of a life force - or rather an emotional and cultural identity, which as Hervieu–Leger (2000:31) argues, 'cuts across the totality of human experience'. The term 'religious', that is to say, imbued with religion, pious, God-fearing, devout, suggests a norm of practices and beliefs that comfortably apply to certain types of painted genre image produced up to the mid-19th century in the cultures of Western Europe and North America. However, the decreasing influence of the Christian 'religion' as a force of social and cultural practices and attitudes in Western Europe after this period, renders the term 'Christian religious imagery' obsolete from a socio-cultural point of view.

Furthermore, Jean Seguy (1989) quoted in Hervieu-Leger (2000:66-67) and Max Weber (2000) contend that the Christian religion undergoes 'metaphorisation' and 'analogue transformation' in the nineteenth century, which I suggest also applies to 'Christian religious imagery'- thus rendering the term somewhat transitive. Post-Reformation Christian imagery in the West, even if confined to the painted Christian images produced between the Reformation and the mid-19th century in Western Europe and North America, is the subject of such a vast array of variable interpretations that it would be futile to talk of it as one monolithic concept. Such diversity defies unitary categorisation and as Poulat (1986), again quoted in Hervieu-Leger (2000:31) suggests, the inherent instability of interpretation when applied to religion (and to Christian imagery) betrays a system of meaning that is highly differentiated and contingent.
All this suggests that Christian imagery proper -that is to say a collective, institutionalised, iconographic system in the modern versus the ancients debate did not fulfil a significant role in cultural output, certainly in Northern Europe and America beyond the mid-17th century. I cite this date because as Harrison et al point out the French Academy was founded in 1648 and the Dutch republic in the same twelve month period, which meant that:

The identification of modernism with the currency of the Enlightenment project...seemed we could fix no later starting point (for the modern) than the middle 17th century. (Harrison 2000: 2)

From the mid-17th century Christian imagery begins a long process (1650-1850) of assuming an ‘otherness’ within Northern European visual culture - from when the sacred and the imaginary were part of everyday life to where they become the possession of 'shamans, magicians, destroyers' to quote the narrative of a 1995 film on the artist Cy Twombly.(Karlin,1995) This status of ‘otherness' in relation to Christian imagery is at the end of a process which sees it go from a constituency of power, to that of subaltern status - that is to say the experience of a subordinacy - without a voice in discourse.

The marginalisation of Christian imagery in the secular societies of Northern Europe is a-priori. In art historical terms, an argument might be made that this marginalisation signifies the beginnings of a transition from painting representing collective experience, to painting representing a private, individual sensibility.

However, Durkheim in The Division of Labour in Society (1984:119), quoted in Hervieu-Leger, (2000) believes such a powerful imaginative force is unlikely to disappear without a trace in the social and the cultural contraction that religion has undergone in the west.

The post-Tridentine Catholic Counter- Reformation painted image is a good example of how a hegemonic class (The Roman Catholic Church) used the image as a doctrinal and propagandist tool not only to instruct and encourage devotion from an illiterate laity but, as a demonstration of power to promote and secure obedience to a particular ideological system of belief and practice. The use of the image as an appeal to communal and subaltern experience (until the Reformation the text and
Latin were the preserve of the ruling educated elite, i.e. the clergy or the feudal landowning classes) occurs frequently in art history (Counter-Reformation Rome, Stalinist Russia, National Socialist Germany, the mega-visual tradition of capitalist mass advertising). However, the process by which aesthetics becomes an instrument of institutionalized power and control depends on the image system in question representing a ‘logic’, by which I mean a social or collective agreement of reason. The elective axis of modern capitalism and Protestantism - that capitalism and the capitalist spirit (pace Weber) flourished because of a serendipitous and symbiotic affinity between the values and beliefs of Protestantism and the values and beliefs of modern capitalism (self-invention and construction) is, I argue, given momentum by the printed text and, as Curran ,J (1982) suggests, the important role it played in the Protestant Reformation and the dissemination of Protestant values and beliefs. Mechanical reproduction of text may have occurred in northern cultures that were originally Catholic, but, the transmission of secular knowledge/information through the printed book proved essential for the scientific method and the rational pursuit of profit in the various capitalisms that flourished in northern European Protestant cultures.

The functionalisation of Christian imagery (and after 1450 printed Christian imagery) in the Counter-Reformation to secure institutional power and control and therefore social, political and aesthetic as well as theological meaning, becomes apparent from such examples as the system of the Inquisition. Compared with dynamic, new systems of vision (e.g. secular genres such as landscape, still life), the institutionalized Catholic Reformation image lost its hegemony, because it lost a collective agreement about its legitimacy or ‘logic’ amongst new social and religious groups in Northern Europe (the burgher classes, Protestants) whose aesthetic production/patronage reflected property, possessions and were the product of emerging forms of bourgeois patronage and aesthetic fashion, which would in turn become themselves institutionalized systems of vision as in the bourgeois aesthetic concept of the fine art tradition. There is no doubt that before the Protestant Reformation, the Christian image possessed a social and cultural influence it failed to achieve again. Protestant Fundamentalism sought a different form of control over Christian imagery - its destruction as a communal iconography. Catholic images were seen as false idolatry, which obstructed a direct communion with the Divine-
and this fundamentalist attitude to the Christian image led to the great iconoclastic purges of the Protestant reformers in late 16th century Northern Europe. Protestantism thought that by stripping bare the Church of all its images, you would be able to touch a Divine presence. Instead it created a space of Nothing—always waiting to be filled (Karlin, 1995). This backdrop of empty white space signified for the northern European visual imagination an abstract concept of the Divine. And of course in other belief systems (e.g. Judaism, Islam) that space of Nothing is a Divine space—that which cannot be represented. But, by destroying the images that represented Catholic beliefs and worship, Protestantism was not left with a purified, sacred *tabula rasa* but a great nothingness that the text and the spoken word attempted to articulate through discursive rather than visual meaning. The Christian notion of ‘kenosis’ or emptying out is analogous to the aesthetic iconoclasm of Reformation fundamentalism. ‘Kenosis’ or emptying out is a feature, I suggest, of much Modernist painting, which has its roots in Calvinist asceticism (e.g. the paintings of Robert Ryman and Agnes Martin).

The text and the spoken word were the necessary semiotic systems a fledgling economic order like capitalism required. The Christian image was a part of the ‘Old Order’—an imaginary, symbolic order, which had regulated and instructed human conduct through its use of images. The development of printing technology, the quicker transmission and dissemination of knowledge and ideas meant that the printed text served as a vehicle for Protestant iconoclasm, Rationalism and economic liberalism in its early form-mercantilism.

Far from being an inimical antithesis, Protestantism and early mercantile capitalism were sympathetically affiliated. Weber(2000) analyses the virtues and attributes both systems shared and concluded that their mutual ‘ethos’ provided the optimum cultural and social conditions for the form of economics known as capitalism to flourish in the West.

The relationship of aesthetics to economic, political and social power has been a theme much explored by theorists of the Left, (e.g. Levi-Strauss, Williams, Berger). According to Berger, (1972:86-7) art serves the interests of the ruling class
As he himself admits, the implication that the ruling class always represents the world to itself in the way it wishes to be seen, is not saying anything new. However, the connection between economic power and the ‘logic’ of a way of ‘seeing’ the world may have something to do with what the anthropologist Levi-Strauss (quoted in Berger, 1972:84) described as ‘possessing’ the world visually. Thus, with Counter-Reformation Rome, hierarchy power and obedience are visibly present in the great ceiling decorations of both sacred (The Jesuati- Fr. Andrea Pozzi *Triumph of St. Ignatius Loyola, (after 1685)* and secular architecture (Pallazzo Barberini -Pietro Cortona,(1633-39)). Equally, the decline in the liturgical religious imagery by the mid-17th century is just a reflection in the shift of power from a theological to a secular ruling class-the embryonic mercantile bourgeoisie- which may be first witnessed in Puritan culture (e.g. the Dutch Republic of the mid-17th century or the Puritan colonies of New England in the same period), where the painted image becomes a reflection, not of a sacred power, but of the patron’s own wealth and status.

But, as a dynamic institutionalised image system (by which I mean a processor of cultural thought, ideas and development), the painted Christian image proper was dead by the mid-17th century. The growth and supremacy of bourgeois individualism, which I discussed in a now redacted thesis chapter ‘Christian Imagery and the Psychology of Self’, was a consequence of liberalised economic, social and religious practices and beliefs, in both cultural and economic spheres and the accumulation of widespread private capital by the emergent middle class comes from Weber’s (2000) account of capitalism. According to Weber, bourgeois individualism is common to capitalism and Protestantism. I suggest this new socio-cultural constituency saw the manifestation of that individual sensibility in the art, which the new bourgeoisie collected, supported and controlled. The founding of a professional academy and salon culture of art patronage was created as institutions to serve the interests of the new economic and power elite, with the express purpose of cultivating specialisation, expertise and excellence in the system known as the fine art tradition. Entrepreneurial capitalism, which thrived in Britain and America especially in the later 18th and throughout the 19th centuries, provided the ethos and stimulus for this form of secular image - the fine art tradition to proliferate, having achieved this with the management and regulation of a bourgeois social class in the consolidation of their own social position. In these conditions the status of Christian imagery in
painting becomes precarious and difficult to discern. However, secular acknowledgements to religious feeling are made, even in the fine art tradition, even as late as the mid-19th century in the work of the Pre-Raphaelites in England (e.g. Millais, Holman-Hunt, discussed below), the Nazarenes in Germany (e.g. Runge), whilst a form of social conscience and ‘religiosity’ may be seen in the work of artists like Jean-Francois Millet in France—(e.g. The Angelus). and the work of the Hague school painters Josef Israels and Vincent van Gogh in the Netherlands.

Slightly earlier in the century, as the new economics of industrial capitalism are born-in the early decades of the 19th century in Britain, Germany and America an aesthetic cult of the ‘Divine in Nature’ in the works of artists of the British Romantic movement (e.g., Blake, Palmer, Turner, and Linnell), German Romanticism, (for example Friedrich in Germany, whose work I discuss in the next chapter in terms of the religious sublime); and Frederick Edwin Church in America demonstrate how a Romantic individualism displaces the religious or the divine as a quality of sensibility and moral value for the bourgeois subject. This characteristic of bourgeois individualism in early industrial capitalism is indexical of the ethos of liberalism from all institutions, which the new economic elite supported in the genre of landscape painting. This type of ‘religiose’ image in 19th century painting (and by ‘religiose’ I mean a painting whose function is secular, but its form, feeling or sentiment is religious) reaches its apogee about mid-century, certainly in Europe, and maybe a decade later in America, where Church was still exhibiting his ‘religious sublime’ landscapes to great acclaim into the 1860’s. The efforts of the critic John Ruskin (1853) and the writer Mathew Arnold (1869) in England document some of the last writings that make a direct correlation between religion and art in mid-19th century England.

Christian Typology in the Pre Raphaelite Brotherhood:
The Scapegoat (1854-6). William Holman Hunt

Corresponding to the ‘religiose’ writings of Ruskin and Arnold, the paintings of the pre-Raphaelites give visual expression to that phrase of Arnold’s (1867) ‘the long withdrawing roar’ of the Sea of Faith, so poignantly portended in William Dyce’s
Pegwell Bay, Kent - a Recollection of October 5th 1858 (1858-60) with its subtle references to the new Darwinian theories of evolution, but it is Holman Hunt’s *The Scapegoat*, (1854), (fig.54) which is a good example of the experiences of Christian imagery as metaphor and of metamorphosis which the systems of Christian imagery underwent in the post Reformation period.

What does the form of Christian meaning in such works as *The Scapegoat* give visual expression to? I argue that it gives spiritual expression to Mediaeval Christian Typology - a language of symbols, like Friedrich’s painting, *Winter Landscape*, couched in the aesthetic garb of 19th century truth to natural appearances and the idea that Divinity can be represented as residing in landscape genre rather than an earlier humanist figural tradition. (Fuller, 1993, p23. auth. 1990). Both images rely on certain similarities in their treatment of form-that is to say, a faithful transcription of natural appearances. But both the *Scapegoat* and *Winter Landscape* constitute that class of painting which Fuller describes as ‘higher landscape’. (Fuller, 1993, p.23. auth. 1990) That is to say, these painting address themselves to moral as well as purely aesthetic issues. So within the literalness of their respective depictions of landscape a Christian Typology is at work, which transmutes the simple image of a goat in distress into an elegiac narrative of the Christian Passion. This notion of Christian experience, refracted through the lens of nature and natural appearance as types of Christian meaning is a development in the expression of Christian spiritual experience that is quite different from the figural Humanist tradition of pre-Enlightenment Catholic Reformation imagery, which is the subject of this thesis.

This displacement of experience and meaning, which different forms of Christian representation produce is at work in my painting, *All Night Long* (2010). The painterly representation of a sacred body from a 17th century devotional sculpture shares the same visual field with cuts from late capitalist fashion and cinematic photography referenced alongside the gestural, drawn image of the *Scapegoat* from Holman Hunt’s mid Victorian painting of the same name (fig.54). The conflation of these time slippages creates a *mise en scene* where religious and secular meanings collide. The occlusion of these ‘mentalities’ - Christian and capitalist - creates a space of contested meanings and experiences. The question: ‘how is it possible to make the
experiences of Christian imagery in cultures of secular vision?’ - becomes here both a ‘duel’ and a duality of experiences. The unrepresentable aspect of the sublime here finds a response in the pictorial form of the visionary - a religious, visionary articulation of the image of capitalism.

The situation of religious imagery or even the ‘religiose’ image (by which I mean a secular image with religious overtones) is further marginalised, not only by the ‘new science’, but by the industrialization and urbanisation of society and the cultural and social developments flowing from that, which gave impetus to modernism. In contrast to England, metropolitan France, particularly, saw the emergence of a culturally ‘progressive’ bourgeois class, an avant-garde, which viewed tradition as obsolete to the modernist project. Writing on the salon of 1846, Charles Baudelaire declared:

Many people will attribute our present decadence in painting to our decadence in behaviour…It is true that the great tradition has been lost and that the new one is not yet established. But what was this great tradition, if not a habitual, everyday idealization of ancient life. Before trying to distinguish the epic side of modern life and before bringing examples to prove that our age is no less fertile in sublime themes than past ages, we may assert that since all centuries and all peoples have had their own form of beauty, so inevitably we have ours. That is in the order of things.’ (Harrison & Frascina, 1982:17-18) (auth.1846)

The audience to whom early modernism addressed itself - the emerging, metropolitan bourgeoisie class of the expanding European and American cities - were not only Materialists to a fault, but saw their world and their art, which represented that world, as being a corrective to the corrupt culture of the ancien regime, whose images (including the religious) had served an older, and by now, obsolete ruling class. The dynamism of early modernism came from the fact that its avowed aims were to purge the symbols of tradition and reaction, which the clerical and landowning classes represented, as for example, demonstrated in Courbet’s Burial at Ornans (1850). If part of the modernist project was to reconcile art and life, then the individual’s experience of industrial and urban life would be reflected in art. From now on the industrial, entrepreneurial urban elite would have their world reflected back to them and that did not include reactionary forms of mysticism and tradition such as religion. Modernism, which was an international movement, produced the form of Parisian, metropolitan modernism, which was the engine of a vibrant bourgeois urban, capitalist visual culture after 1850. As an image system, the
institutionalised Christian imagery was defunct by late 17th century, but now, even as a system of moral instruction, Christian imagery failed to carry meaning through which the needs of modern urban industrial bourgeois culture after 1850 could identify.

The dominant art historical narrative of modernism was, until the early 1960s, written about largely as a cosmopolitan, principally Parisian phenomenon. Of course modernism did include an anti-cosmopolitan, romantic, Nordic/Slavic art history concerned with ideas of Man’s relationship to Nature, primitivism, folklore and cultural identity, but such an art history was excluded from the major discourses on the modernist image until, for example the American art historian Robert Rosenblum (1994) began to publish his early research, which was later to lead to his seminal work, *Modern Painting and the Northern Romantic Tradition: Friedrich to Rothko* (1994). In the foreword to this book, I fully agree with Rosenblum’s analysis when he states:

> I have had glimmers of a new structure of the history of modern art… My own reading is based on the impact of certain problems of modern cultural history and most particularly the religious dilemmas posed in the Romantic movement, upon the combination of subject, feeling, and structure shared by a long tradition of artists, working mainly in Northern Europe and the United States, by viewing them through the context of a long Northern Romantic tradition, whose troubled faith in the functions of art they all share. (Rosenblum 1994: 7-8)

Rosenblum examines these ‘problems’ from a purely art historical point of view and whilst revising the unrecognised importance the religious/religiose image played in the development of a modernist art history, his argument tends to overlook the larger socio-cultural consequences this revision implies. Because modernism’s logic in large part was a radical reformulation of the individual subject under the heroic materialism of capitalism and concerned with the perpetually new, such a logic *per se* excluded ideas of historical continuity and it is modernism’s trajectory of cultural rupture that can be detected in the relation of the modern sublime and capitalism, which I shall examine in the next chapter.

**Christian Imagery as a Chain of Memory**

The cultural hiatus, which modernism provoked, as it developed toward the end of the 19th. and the early decades of the 20th. century, incubated a strain of primitivism,
spirituality and mysticism in aesthetics and the visual arts. Whilst not related to conventional traditional monotheisms of western belief these ‘alter-spiritualities’ did originate from marginal or exotic cults and beliefs (e.g. Theosophy). Although lacking a traditional liturgy, these cults or beliefs, produced a visual image system that was ‘religiose’, (that is to say with religious feeling or overtone) or at the very least with spiritual aspirations. Its form was commonly but not predominantly abstract. A survey exhibition of the spiritual image in the modern world, Traces du Sacre at Centre Pompidou in 2008, explored the hybridity the sacred image has developed since the romantic era in a process the introduction described as:

The long process of secularisation, which delivered artists from the subordination of the Church and the accompanying crisis of religion which did not at all mean the disappearance of metaphysical questioning. The argument of this exhibition is that a significant strain of modern art has its roots in such concerns. (Loissy, Jean de & Pacquement, Alfred. 2008. (Catalogue Editors). Traces du Sacre)

The curatorial starting point in the mid-18th century in Europe-(Goya) and the reference to ‘Traces’ in the title of the exhibition- suggests a cultural rupture or absence/loss. But, how does this ‘aesthetic rupture’ apply to the sacred Christian image, that is to say an image that is ‘set apart’, possessing ‘otherness,’ presence and producing devotion as holy objects-, based on an agreed idea and tradition as to its divine iconographic meaning which is handed down by one generation of believers to the next?

Belting (1994:14-17,458-9) defines the ‘sacred image’ as ‘unmediated’ by art or artist and states that, ‘at the time of the Renaissance there were two kinds of images, the one with the notion of the work of art, the other free of that notion existed side by side’. Belting’s definition points to a dichotomy of aesthetic reception of the painted image in the Renaissance. This implies aesthetic rupture. Benjamin’s (1970), notion of the ‘sacred cult-value’ of the image displaced by the ‘profane cult of Beauty’ may, I suggest, indicate the termination of a certain use of the sacred cult-image, by the Enlightenment, but also, as Benjamin puts it - a ‘qualitative change’ in the work of art. By the period of the Enlightenment a clear rupture or transformation has occurred in relation to the nature of the sacred Christian image. Benjamin’s (1970) theory of the image applies to the effect of mass reproduction on works of art - secular as well as sacred images. His notion of the ‘loss of aura’ of the painted
image should not be confused with any kind of religious aura, but rather a cultural interpretation of uniqueness of artefacts and their place in ritual.

This notion of ‘loss of aura’ only became possible post de facto when the uniqueness and ‘authenticity’ of works of art was already compromised by mass photographic reproduction. Benjamin’s theory can be understood as a phenomenon of loss, because it describes a process of disappearance and human cognition/awareness works with contrasts. All aura is cultic in Benjamin’s terms, which means that all hand-made unique images and their place in ritual – whether sacred or secular - generate presence as part of ritualised human practice. Michael Craig- Martin, (Karlin, 1995) suggests art is ‘highly metaphoric ways of acting out things in the world’. In such a reading the `link between art, ritual and religion bears close affinity; for example, the case of Theosopy, which prompted the self-styled ‘spiritual’ claims certain artist-followers made for their work, e.g. Mondrian, Kandinsky, Hilma af Klimt, Franz Marc, Kasimir Malevich et al. Works like these and certain early modernist forms, in particular abstraction, that sought to re-imbue the image with certain properties of iconicity that it had lost, for example the determinant of iconic status that the ground of the pictorial space be infinite. This characteristic extends as far `as High Modernist work such as Rothko and Newman. I suggest this attempt to locate a religious presence in the art object and its mode of reception was a secular compensation for the loss of the sacred aura (Belting’s definition) of the overt religious iconography which the painted alter-piece once possessed and this compensation may be described as ‘religiose’. By ‘religiose’, I mean a secular image with religious overtones The problem now becomes how to distinguish Christian religious meaning proper (and by implication Christian religious imagery) from other systems of signification which may include ‘religiose’ meaning,(e.g. Aesthetics) in modern western society, as Danielle Hervieu-Leger argues in her book, Religion as a Chain of Memory:

By placing tradition, that is to say reference to a chain of belief, at the centre of the question, the future of religion is immediately associated with the problem of collective memory....modern societies are no longer societies of memory...change, which is a function of modernity itself has resulted in modern societies being less and less able to nurture the innate capacity of individuals and groups to assimilate or imaginatively to project a lineage of belief. (Hervieu-Leger 2000:123)
There is a contiguous relationship between memory and religion and between cultural memory and religious imagery. Yet, what is not clear is the trans-historical nature of that connection and how economics affects the cultural reception of religious imagery. In the next chapter on Capitalism I will examine how this connection was modified and attenuated under various forms of capitalism and how the hermeneutics of rupture may apply to a theory of the development of Christian imagery in the modern age.

Weber (2000) has described the ‘ethos’ of the Protestant/Calvinist view of the world, which equated the ethical life with the industrious, abstemious and specialised application of the individual’s labour—all ingredients vital to capitalist economics. The private, atomised individual who is responsible for his own salvation in Protestantism is necessary for private enterprise, ownership and responsibility in capitalism. Under mercantile capitalism the painted image serves a new hegemony—the emerging bourgeoisie class, who to enhance their view of themselves, patronised an art that would reflect their power, (the art of the Dutch Republic perhaps being the first example of this). But, this increasing secularisation of the image to serve the self-image of a dominant socio-economic class may also be seen in the landscape and portrait genres from the mid-17th century onwards in the expanding mercantile-capitalist economies of Germany, France, Britain and the new American colonies. The religious imagery was of no use to an emerging capitalist bourgeois culture and the predominant religion of that culture, Protestantism, a religion of the word, used the Christian text, (in the form of the King James Bible)—not Christian imagery to instruct the faithful.

The expansion of the economic base of individual wealth occurs concurrently with an increased emphasis on the priority placed on individual selfhood and perception, as opposed to collective religious experience and ritual, although I am not in this text suggesting a causal link, but the category of aesthetics (Kant, 1790 and Burke, 1757) acquires great importance in the 18th century as part of a new cultural privileging of subjective experience.

The importance of religion-based ethics as a guiding principle in public as well as private life undergoes a process of subsumption within aesthetics during the later
18th and early 19th centuries - so that what is seen as aesthetically good is conflated with what is morally good. Examples such as the cult of Divinity in Nature, and the Romantic notions of individual feeling and natural law during the earlier 19th century, including the writings of the critic John Ruskin, (1843; 1853), reproduced in Harrison, (1998:199-210) on Christian ethics and aesthetics. Cultural meaning derives more and more from the experience of individual sensibility rather than a collective experience. The implications of this for art are discussed by Suzy Gablik (1984) in *Has Modernism Failed?* Debating the conflicts between capitalism, a secular bourgeois art market and the function of the modern artist, Gablik argues that:

> Art has come to lack what used to be its unquestionable moral substance, its link with intrinsic value…behaviour, whatever it may be, directed toward the personal ends of the individual does not have moral value. (Gablik, 1984: 96)

In the context of this research I argue that the decline of religious imagery actually preceded the decline in religious practice in Europe, which until mid-19th century comprised significant proportions of the population who observed religious worship obligations and based their ethical framework on Biblical example. To prove this I rely on Benjamin (1970, auth. 1936) and Belting (1994) and their theories of the change of use/function in the reception aesthetics of the sacred image. To this extent aesthetics which may be more directly connected to the collective cultural libido or social unconscious than ethics reflects changes in society much quicker and indeed may lead social practice.

**Conclusion**

Some contours of Christian imagery begin to emerge from the above argument. First, that the experiences of the Catholic Reformation painted and sculptural image were devotional. Meanings and experiences similar to the devotional are what I will be trying to regenerate in my paintings and I discuss this in chapters 3 and 4 on aesthetics and aesthetic recovery. Secondly, that in the definition of Christian imagery a distinction must be drawn between religious, (meaning the institutional), ‘religiose’ (meaning a personal piety), sacred (that which is hidden) and spiritual (that is of the spirit). Thirdly, that the Christian image proper is the product of a collective, institutionalised agreement about its identity and is the result of a system of power relations. As such, it faces the same fate as all image systems which are subject to and the creation of discourses of power - economic, political, and theological. In the
context of the decline of Christian imagery in the West the triangulation between religion and the various liberalisms in economics, thought and social change meant that it was discarded as public discourse long before it started to decline in public practice. Fourthly, that although its anthropological meaning may have changed for all but a minority in society and the social agency of such images may have dissipated - we are still affected by them because as aesthetic connections to a cultural past they possess an ‘otherness’ in their relation to other image systems today and are affective in the way that religion still affects us - as a ‘chain of memory’.

Finally, that as a trace of Christian identity, ‘religiose’ imagery may still reside as an ‘ancestral mark’ kept alive either as personal obsession or universal aesthetic form. Christian imagery in contemporary capitalism does survive however in a ‘migrated’ and metaphorical form of aesthetic meaning. The pre-Enlightenment ‘rhetorical’ form of the antique Longinian sublime was widely translated and influenced Baroque visual culture (including the Catholic Counter-Reformation image), which I discussed earlier in this chapter. But, as previously argued, it was in the later 18th century - when ethics (religion) was subsumed into aesthetics as a guiding principle of morality for the individual subject - that the aesthetic concept of the Enlightenment sublime in its modern form emerged. And although no causal link can be demonstrated, the development occurred more or less contemporaneously with the incipient development of modern capitalist economic theory. What happened in the development of the Enlightenment sublime in relation to modern capitalism is the subject of my next chapter. The modern sublime image, although an Enlightenment conception, attained its fullest expression during the Romantic era – the cultural response to the onset of the first wave of industrial-based capitalism in Europe, especially England. Although the sublime may be said to be the inheritor of religious or transcendent meaning in early modern visual culture, it is, (at least in its modern, i.e. post-Enlightenment formulation) an aesthetic based on ideas of subjective experience, rather than pre-existing, culturally and collectively defined meaning, which the Christian image proper embodies. This differentiation should be made between the two modes of vision, but the importance of the sublime in its relation to both capitalism and religious imagery is of such relevance, because it demonstrates processes of functionalization and instrumentalisation of Christian meaning and experience that I devote my next chapter to it.
Chapter 2

Capitalism and the Symptom of the Sublime

Sublimity is no longer in art, but in speculation on art...there is a kind of collusion between Capital and the avant-garde. There is something of the Sublime in Capitalist economy.

Jean-Francois Lyotard, from 'The Sublime and the Avant-Garde', 1983

Introduction

This statement by Lyotard (1993:105) formulates what I intend to explore in this chapter, which will examine capitalism and its relationship to the post-Enlightenment aesthetic concept of the sublime (which may include Christian ‘religiose’ imagery) and how Christian imagery sits historically and contemporaneously with the narratives of capitalism and the sublime. This chapter will compare the two modalities (Kant: 2007, auth.1790) of the post-Enlightenment sublime - the mathematical sublime, and the dynamic sublime (particularly rapture, divinity, religion) in relation to the category of capitalism. I have chosen this category because capitalism enables cultures of sublimity and their visual meaningfulness to be tested and measured against a contemporary socio-economic paradigm. I will consider how my painting ‘overlaps’ modalities of capitalist and Christian visionary experience to generate new ‘hybrid’ spaces of meaning and experience.

Weber (2000) argues the ‘spirit’ of capitalism in its modern forms flourished because of the mindset of Protestantism. The ‘ethos’ of the cultures of Protestantism, (which has no intercessionary ‘agent’ with the divine), invented the idea that God can be accessed through nature - the Natural sublime and the relation of the individual subject under capital has to be understood in a context where the sublime (Nature/God) is the big Other to capitalism - or at least it was as a response to anxiety in the industrial age. Now, it is a mathematical sublime (Lyotard: ‘sublimity is no longer in art but in speculation on art’) (Lyotard, 1983).

The relationship between the aesthetic concept of the sublime and capitalism was identified by Lyotard in The Post Modern Condition (1984) and in his above-mentioned essay, ‘The Sublime and the Avant-Garde’, (auth.1983). These writings
appeared in the context of a widely perceived cultural and political turn toward neo-conservatism in the early nineteen eighties. Governments of the political right in the UK and USA pursued neo-liberal economic policies, resulting in the de-regulation of markets. Later in the decade an art-boom was given impetus by the critical/institutional support for traditional 'commodity' art forms like Painting, which manifested themselves in the movement known as the Transavantgarde. It was perhaps the 1980s new-found enthusiasm for individual and corporate protean and Dionysian impulses in capitalism that prompted Lyotard to remark (1991:105): ‘Capitalist economy is in a sense an economy regulated by an idea- that of infinite wealth or power.’

I argue that the sublime image, which is not limited to, but may include Christian ‘religiose’ imagery, (e.g. the paintings of Caspar David Friedrich), far from being a Romantic obstacle to the capitalist mentality has, since the emergence of theoretical economics and mercantile capitalism in the mid-18th century, occupied what I argue is both a symptomatic and symbiotic relationship with Western capitalism.

The argument in this chapter is based on White (2009: 162), who conjectures that ‘the natural sublime of Romanticism and its successors is itself a displaced and reassuring projection of a relation of the modern subject to capital’ and Reiber (2009: 77-91), who identifies the loss of meaning as a defining feature of post-modern society, which, she argues, the sublime addresses in its contemporary form. My argument employs examples of work by the German Romantic artist Caspar David Friedrich, the contemporary artists, Jeff Koons and Damien Hirst and my own practice which generated some of the initial ideas for this chapter, in particular a painting entitled, All Night Long (2010) (fig.2), to which I refer later in this chapter.

**The Sublime and Capitalism**

The sublime is a concept, which is articulated aesthetically, through history according to the social, economic and political conditions prevailing within capitalist society at a given time. In other words, there are many formulations of the sublime, an aesthetic concept contingent on different cultural and social practices, beliefs and values its identity is transitive. It is most obviously located in early 19th century aesthetics.
Lyotard’s (1991:105) references above to ‘infinity’ and ‘power’ are both characteristics of two canonical 18th century formulations, - Kant’s Third Critique of Judgment (1790) and Burke’s Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Beautiful and the Sublime. (1757). Kant focused on the mathematical sublime. This concerns ideas of quantity or magnitude and connects to notions of boundlessness and infinitude, which I will argue in this chapter, constitute a contemporary sublime.

Kant’s theory of the transcendent, mathematical sublime needs to be distinguished from the Dynamic sublime, deriving from Edmund Burke (1970). His theory of the sublime, based on the notion of physiological shock and terror caused by the forces of nature, which provokes sentiments of the sublime in the individual, was applied, with varying degrees of licence, to the so-called ‘Young British Artists’ movement of the 1990’s, in particular the work of Damien Hirst. (fig.26).

The aesthetic of the sublime, in its modern form - as magnitude (mathematical sublime), or as quality (dynamic sublime) - is actually an Enlightenment concept, which came to be adopted by the Romantic Movement initially in literature and then visual art. The pre-Enlightenment, ‘antique’ concept of the sublime, based on Longinus’ text Peri Hypsous (On the Sublime) (auth. 1st century A.D.) (1554; 1st transl.), which I discussed in the previous chapter, relies on rhetoric. The experiences of this (Longinian), pre-Enlightenment sublime, which includes the Catholic Reformation sublime image (e.g. Bernini’s Ecstasy of St. Theresa) should, in my argument, be distinguished from later forms of metaphysical (including Christian) consciousness, like the 18th century concept of the sublime or the 19th century investment of ‘belief in the immanence of God in His creation’ which derived from individualised, self-reflective, and immersive religious attitudes like Pietism, and dualist thought; knowledge/belief, rationalist/sensory, mind/body; man/nature reflected in the work of the German theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) and his contemporary, the painter Caspar David Friedrich (1774-1840) (fig.1).

Romantic interpretations of the sublime, especially within Northern Romanticism, for example the paintings of Caspar David Friedrich (1774-1840), represented Kantian
notions of boundlessness in the face of Nature, (fig.27). This de-limitation is a property of the mathematical sublime, which has been defined by Lyotard in the following terms:

The modality of the mathematical sublime relates to magnitude and formlessness of what appears before us that is paramount, conveying a perceptually intractable impression of unlimited extent and absence of boundaries. (Lyotard, 1994: 77-97).

This Romantic notion of the modern sublime, deriving from natural theology and individual sensibility, is well represented by Caspar David Friedrich’s Monk by the Sea, (1808-10) (fig. 27). I am reading Monk by the Sea in terms of a ‘religiose’ transcendent experience. I am applying this reading because, I argue in my thesis that, this modern sublime displaced the earlier, older and figural religious sublime, (Peri Hypsous/ Longinian sublime). I want to show how Monk by the Sea articulates themes of selfhood, individualisation by way of a religiose, private sensibility and response in the face of Nature.

Monk by the Sea (1808-10):

Caspar David Friedrich, German Romantic Painting & the Sublime

Caspar David Friedrich (1774-1840) lived at the outset of this modern order and thus his interest in the sublime may be said to have reflected the particular anxiety of his period whereby the cult of sentiment and personal feeling in the face of Nature provided an anodyne against the uncertainties of socio-economic and later industrial change. In Friedrich’s work this was often articulated through the lens of Christian iconography and narratives of redemption. This may be seen in works of his, such as Winter Landscape (c.1811) which, for example, translates the redemptive promise of the Christian Passion symbolised by the body of Christ in the Issenheim altarpiece onto the genre of landscape - what Fuller (1993, auth.1990) terms ‘higher landscape’, after Ruskin - where the pictorial representation of landscape functions as symbolic Christian typology. What Fuller (1993, auth.1990) describes as, ‘that most tenuous transformation - aesthetic redemption - redemption through form’, occurs, he suggests, in a later British painting of Neo Romanticism, Paul Nash’s Totes Meer (transl. Dead Sea), which bears comparison with Friedrich’s The Ice Sea, or as it is sometimes called The Wreck of Hope, (1824) and this image of the abject by Friedrich was formative in my thinking for my painting, The Lonely Protestant (1999), (fig.68), representing a crucifixion scene amidst a frozen landscape of ice.
Friedrich’s *Monk by the Sea* (1808-10) was discussed right from the outset in terms of an apocalyptic vision within the aesthetic of the modern sublime - then relatively new. (see Brentano and the essay *Empfindungen zu friedrichs Seelandschaft von Apokalypse und Uferlosigkeit by Heinrich von Kleist*). There was virtually no precedent for the type of ‘religiose’ consciousness this painting proposed (perhaps Joachim Patinir being the exception). The ‘individualised’ consciousness the painting proposes would later probably be described by Kierkegaard as Protestant angst - later existentialism - the expression of solitude that the self-constructed world of Protestant thought in the 18th and 19th century that imbued aesthetic responses. This existential angst is present in the writings of the Protestant theologians, poets and mystics of the period in Germany (Schliermacher, Feurbach, Kosegarten, Kierkegaard) and it is this angst between the idea of the individual and God, which is played out in Friedrich’s work - in the form of Nature and Human nature, that, I think, lies at the heart of understanding the particular response to the sublime in his work.

For the first half of the nineteenth century the sublime in visual art appears almost as a cultural counter-weight to the impending dominance of industrial capitalism. Cultural ambivalence to progress, for example, is played out in the early 19th century concept of ‘Manifest Destiny’ as it was applied to the sublime landscapes of the American wilderness by the painters of the Hudson River School (Cole, Church, Bierstadt *et al*) whose works crystallise the great unease and ambivalence that the effects of industrial capitalism provoked in the cultural mind. The apparent paradox of progress and the neo-religious belief of ‘Manifest Destiny’ represents a particularly Protestant American attitude of ‘self-construction’ in their relationship to nature, which both legitimates not only the worship, but the utilisation of nature through Divine sanction.

In determining the relationship between these earlier classical notions of the modern sublime and the aesthetics/ethics of the contemporary sublime, it is instructive to consider the work of Jeff Koons (born 1955) and Damien Hirst (born 1965) as prominent examples of a particular type of art practice under Anglo-American free-market capitalism and the work of these artists represents certain ideas about the fetishization of the art object as a commodity form and the foregrounding of the
notion of excess as being instrumentally meaningful in readings of both artists’ work. The processes by which such themes in their work refer to a quality of magnitude and suggest therefore affects of the mathematical sublime, but ones derived from the functions of culture rather than nature. This distinction between these two notions of the mathematical sublime, one predicated on the magnitude and boundlessness of nature, the other on the boundlessness of culture and cultural consumption is, this chapter will suggest, not exclusively an aesthetic, but, also a socio-economic distinction that points to the way modern capitalism and aesthetics mutually function.

Karl Marx’s (1843) famous epithet that ‘religion is the opium of the masses’ suggests an anodyne function for Christianity within the economic order of capitalism. A thumbnail sketch of capitalism as understood in its modern sense (i.e. pertaining since mid-18th century) may be seen as the accumulation of the means of production (materials, land, tools) as property into the hands of a few (Capitalists) and the production of goods, products and services for profit known as Productive Labour. The division of labour, the economic specialization of productive tasks and services – is an especially pronounced feature of late Anglo-American Capitalism in its post-WW2 high phase - giving rise to a mass-market consumer culture, which describes an economic system, where the majority in society do not produce the goods they consume. Instead, their socio-economic function within society becomes defined as consumers. The economic system called capitalism produced the commodity form and as Joseph Lough (Lough, 2010) explains the movement of the commodity form is to abstract immaterial value. This movement finds a powerful expression in the economics of surplus value as represented in art and fashion, (Barnard: 2002) – witness the growth of investment in the contemporary art market from what has been described as the ‘new bourgeoisie’ over the last decade. The economic system of capitalism and the concept of the sublime obviously have different meanings within culture. Capitalism, being an order of economics, carries a different cultural weight than the aesthetic concept of the sublime, the origins of which are older, but in its modern incarnation, the concept of the Enlightenment sublime surfaced at roughly the same time as modern economic theory in mid-18th century. In the next section I will argue that the sublime in its modern form was given
a new lease of life by the dynamics of the system of capitalist economics and has historically tended to surface at moments of crisis or transition in the capitalist order.

**The Sublime as Symptom of Capitalism**

Elkins, (2010), in ‘Against the Sublime’, argues that the sublime is not well used as a trans-historical category and is limited to particular, (mainly 19th century) categories of visual art. However, it may be observed that discourses around the concept of the sublime, when looked at historically have not been limited, either by category or time to a particular period.

Reiber, (2009: 77-91) argues that there has been a tendency for the discourses of the sublime to surface, either at times of crisis or at the threshold of new eras in the development of Western capitalism. The economic theory of free market capitalism developed by Adam Smith (1776) and the formulation of a concept of modern aesthetics in the form of the sublime as developed by Kant (1790) and Burke (1757) were both products of the development of individualism in thought and socio-economic relations that occurred in the Enlightenment. The freedom of thought and feeling which bourgeois individualism represented produced the cult of sensibility, which the early Romantics adopted across the art forms. The Romantic vision of the Sublime in Nature coincided with, and some have argued, was a shocked and critical response to the rise of early industrial capitalism in England. This can be seen in such works as de Loutherbourg’s Coalbrookdale by Night (1801) and the works of Wilson, Martin, Blake and Turner. In Europe political emancipation and revolutionary conflict in France, the growth of the bourgeoisie and the economics of investment and mercantile capitalism in the 18th century presaged a period of rapid social, economic and political change. In Friedrich’s work this was often articulated through the lens of Christian iconography. This may be seen in works such as Winter Landscape or his Monk by the Sea (c.1808-10), (fig.27).

The rise of Parisian modernism however and the new metropolitan cultures in Europe and America in the second half of the nineteenth century reflected a renunciation of the discourses of the Natural sublime in favour of heroic Materialism, reflected in the great confidence and positivism that the new age of industrial monopoly capitalism brought (witness the Great Exhibitions in Hyde Park and the
World Fairs in America and France). Subsequently, the twentieth century, and the immediate aftermath of World War Two, saw a cultural emphasis on the moral responsibility of the individual in Europe and America. Discourses on the sublime in visual and literary culture reflected intellectual unease with the tension between the individual and the social, presaging the nascent culture of consumer capitalism. One thinks of the discourses of the sublime in Abstract Expressionism (particularly Barnett Newman) in America and the exploration of the unrepresentable in the literary works of writers like George Bataille (1991, auth.1962) and Maurice Blanchot (1955) in France. In the contemporary period, a reassessment of aesthetics in critical theory, including the concept of the sublime, and the work of artists like Damien Hirst,(born1965) Bill Viola and Jeff Koons,(born 1955) are found to occur during an historical period which has seen the Gulf and Kosovan Wars of the early nineties, the events of September 11th and the 'rupture of the symbolic order' which they putatively implied, the subsequent 'Axis of Evil' and the near collapse of global financial markets and sovereign economies at the end of the decade. I would argue that discourses around the sublime manifest themselves as a 'neurotic symptom' displayed by the capitalist mentality at times of anxiety or uncertainty in its future.

The term 'neurotic symptom' refers to a perceptible indication of the presence of a disorder of anxiety within the 'logic' of the capitalist mentality. The capitalist mentality, as a collective form of consciousness, possesses, I suggest, a dynamic parallel to individual psychology in that, in order to maintain equilibrium, the capitalist mentality balances opposing, conflicting and repressed forces within its dynamic - even forces which may contradict its logic- as in the concept of the sublime. In cultural influence capitalism is very large, and the sublime is very small, but it acts as a counter-weight to the larger economic narrative of capitalism. With the emergence of modern capitalism, it could be put crudely that the sublime acquired a new role, like 'saving us from capitalism', or making us feel better about our situation within capitalism, by providing, in cultural terms, quite literally a process of cultural 'sublimation', whereby the basic drives of the subject under the mentality of capital are converted into activity regarded as higher in cultural or moral value. It is within this role that the contemporary sublime has been functionalised by capitalism.
The process by which the capitalist mentality functionalised for socio-economic purposes institutional religious practices and belief in Weber's (2000) notion of the Protestant ‘work ethic’ and the ‘specialist calling’ famously documents the mentality of the capitalist spirit, that, I suggest, has similarly functionalised aesthetics in the form of the concept of the sublime.

Lyotard (1991) in the *Sublime and the Avant Garde* refers to the notion that capitalism is teleological. It is concerned only with the future, and with the new, which it collapses into a continual present of ‘innovation’ -the past is of no relevance to its purposes. The idea that the cultural present is discontinuous with the past also lies at the origins of modernism. In this sense capitalism shares a similar tendency with modernism-that the image is removed from historical time/development and therefore cannot have a place in history or the dialectical process of historical evolution. According to Berger (1972: 7-34) the fundamental paradox at the heart of capitalism’s relationship to the history of the visual image is that whilst seeking to preserve a false mystique of timelessness and permanence to historical images, capitalism, in order to continue and function, must create a discontinuity with the historical past and of memory. The historicity it denies is its relationship to property and to exchange value and in short to the commodity form, of which the tradition of oil painting belongs.

Ranciere, (2007) argues from a similar point of view in relation to recent images-in *The Future of the Image* where he expresses concern at a perceived tendency of the contemporary image toward a ‘reactionary mysticism’. Within this materialist view of the image it is said that bourgeois culture ascribes to the painted image spiritual values, despite the fact that since mid-17th century the main motivation for the practice has been market-led, which Berger(1972: 83-112) argues for the majority of the tradition produced repetitive, cynical work or work that was produced for a commercial purpose. This Marxist argument overlooks the paradox that capitalism *functionalisesthe* art of the past-both as economic commodity, but also aesthetically. Marxists would say under these conditions painting has both exchange value and use value. The visual cultures of late capitalism tend to situate the historical painted image so that it can only be understood aesthetically. I suggest
Lough’s (2010) religious analogue of ‘Transubstantiation’ accurately accounts for the consumer capitalist process of converting aesthetic value into surplus economic value (Koons, Hirst) and vice versa. The post-modern identity-consumption equation of consumer capitalism places the commodity form (Materialism) at the heart of its system of subjective relations. According to this post-modern equation, individuals are socially and economically identified by what they consume. This is of course a post-Modern, post-Marxist argument, but I suggest, it is against this background of socio-economic relations that the sublime may be seen to operate in the work of artists like Jeff Koons and Damien Hirst. Capitalist value (i.e. surplus exchange – value) is a key meaning within interpretations of the sublime in their work, because the ‘surplus’ profit their work generates within the art market assumes a magnitude of immensity that prompts elective affinities with Kant’s (1790) mathematical sublime.

The rise of the 1990s bourgeois interest in contemporary art, the new money of hedge-fund billionaires and Russian oligarchs, led the art critic J.J. Charlesworth (2007: 5-8) in an article entitled, ‘The Bonfire of the Vanities’ to compare the situation to that described by Bataille (1949) in The Accursed Share, as the ‘squandering of the surplus’. The superabundance of corporate profits in the earlier part of that decade, led to a reckless profligacy by new ‘speculative’ money in the art market rather than its diligent re-investment in the expansion of productive activity. Two events in the U.K. within the past decade serve as a useful illustration to this phenomenon. The first was the exhibition, Beyond Belief, (2007) – which included the media-hyped presentation of a diamond encrusted platinum cast of a human skull made under the direction of Damien Hirst, (fig.26). The work, entitled: For the Love of God,(2007),came with a reported price tag of £50million. This spectacle was followed by what the Art Newspaper (Bevan,2008, issue,195.) termed the ‘unprecedented’ event of Beautiful Inside My Head Forever (2008) when the same artist consigned 223 lots to Sotheby’s direct from the studio, realizing record profits of £111 million as the Dow dropped 500 points and the day Lehman Brothers filed for bankruptcy, announcing the onset of a global financial crisis. The irony was probably not lost on Hirst, but what do these events signify in the context of Lyotard’s (1991:89-107), argument that ‘sublimity is no longer in art, but in speculation on art’?
I suggest Lyotard was perceiving in the art boom of the 1980’s a developing trend of the very close relationship between economics and aesthetics in mature capitalist societies.

In a recent research paper, ‘*Damien Hirst’s Diamond Skull and the Capitalist, Sublime*’ (White, 2009), Luke White refers to an observation of Guy Debord (1977: 50) from the *Society of the Spectacle* that the spectacle is capital to such a degree of accumulation that it becomes image. Surplus exchange value, amassed to such a degree of accumulation, unrestrained by regulation, (whether governmental, religious or ethical) produces a problem of ‘adequation’. In other words, it challenges language, comprehension or representation (a characteristic of the mathematical sublime). It is at this point, Debord argues, that ‘capital becomes image.’ Hirst’s diamond skull and Koons chromium stainless steel hanging heart (from the *Celebration* series), (1994-6) now achieve that condition which attends the spectral position of Late Capitalist art; between an aesthetic object, apprehendable by the senses and the abstract, quasi-mystical status of Kant’s (1790) ‘super-sensible’ thing’ and in Marxist (1867) economic theory of the value form- a capitalist object of desire. I suggest the arguments of both White (2009) and Debord (1967) describe a kind of modern apotheosis- an elevation to the divine - of the cultural ‘commodity’ object through the mathematical sublime. And this represents the moment of ‘transubstantiation’ a moment of the ecstatic sublime when the movement between aesthetics and economics becomes one and capital becomes image- that is to say representation.

**The Capitalist Sublime and Christian Imagery**

Whilst works such as Koons’ *Celebration* (1994-2006) and Hirst’s *For the Love of God* (2007) demonstrate the ecstatic moment of the capitalist spirit, the exhilaration these works generate through affects of excess and infinitude belies a strange slippage of meaning. Despite the theatrical presence these works undoubtedly possess, the viewer standing before them experiences a strange sense of evasion or absence in attempting to assimilate what these works propose. They manifestly proclaim the ‘new’ and the ‘innovative’ but somehow fall into the limbo state between the ‘new’ of capitalism and what Lyotard (1983: 89-107) describes as the ‘now’ of the sublime- (i.e. an unrepresentable event/occurrence). It is this ambivalence between
the conceptual and the aesthetic cognition, which renders art works of this nature dislocated from their capacity to mediate experience between the art object and the viewer beyond anything that is either pecuniary or aesthetic.

This suggests a process of functionalisation of the sublime by capitalism, in the form of the art market, but it is questionable if the sublime has been successfully colonized by capitalism yet. In ‘The Sublime and the Avant Garde’ Lyotard (1991: 89-107) argues that capitalism (the market) is in fact inimical to the real meaning of the contemporary sublime, because of a conflict in the understanding of temporalities between the ‘new’ of capitalism and the ‘now’ of the sublime, which he cites as the ‘Ereignis’- the ‘Now’, the ‘Event’, the ’Is it happening?’ question, which, he argues is found in the work of Modernist artists such as Barnett Newman. He argues, the metaphysics of capital is a technology of time and innovation, and since innovation assumes there will be a continuum of events and more innovations, capitalism, by its own logic, must discount the challenge to temporality–the ‘will anything further happen?’ question- which the Sublime in its pure, dynamic form presents. The sublime is about privation, (i.e. the possibility of nothing further happening.). I argue that for this reason the sublime will always evade total absorption, assimilation or normalization by the mechanisms of capitalism. The ‘Now’ of the sublime is in opposition to the temporalities of capitalism (i.e. ‘the new’ and ‘the innovative’). That is why in late capitalism the image of the sublime and its challenge to temporality-to the endless succession of ‘new’ events, which capitalism promises- is death itself. Any ideology, according to Zizek,(1989) requires a sublime object . In the case of ideological capitalism the Sublime object can be understood or seen as death itself- finality. In psychoanalysis the defectiveness of perfect systems underlies Freud’s theory of the ‘Death Instinct’ and much has been written about oceanic feeling and the death drive of the sublime. Baudrillard, writing on the libidinal economy of capitalism in Symbolic Exchange and Death, asserts:

It becomes impossible to distinguish (Lyotard) the libidinal economy from the system’s economy (that of value)...Because the system is the master: like God, it can bind and unbind energies; but what it cannot do is to be reversible. The process of value is irreversible. Only reversibility the, and not release or drift is fatal to the system. (Baudrillard, 1988: 124)
The dynamic of finality/entropy haunts the capitalist unconscious—or mentality. Hirst’s skulls and sharks, Warhol’s electric chairs and Koons’ promise of an eternal ‘new’ in the commodity form represent for capitalism both a vision of its sublime obsession—Death and, through visual representation, the symbolic, ritual vanquishing of its ultimate terror. The ‘temporalities’ of capitalism find both a critique and parallel in the Christian imagery with its cult of sacrifice, and salvation and the promise of a posthumous a-temporal, eternal ‘new’ for the resurrected. Christian imagery with its emphasis on death and the resurrected body is both antagonistic to capitalism’s ‘temporal aesthetics’, but, paradoxically, an equivalence of value—with its promise of an eternal ‘new’ body in the Life after death that is the Christian concept of the resurrection. Both iconographies - the Christian cult of sacrifice and resurrection and the capitalist sublime of Magnitude—are discourses of the body. And, the Christian (particularly Calvinist) ascetic mentality is functional for capitalism’s aesthetic programme. The academic, Terry Eagleton describes the development and character of modern aesthetics thus:

Aesthetics is born as a discourse of the body. In its original formulation by Baumgarten, the term refers not in the first place to art, but as the Greek aisthesis, would suggest to the whole region of human perception and sensuality. The distinction, which the term aesthetics initially enforces in the mid-18th century is not between art and life, but between the material and immaterial, sensation and ideas, which is bound up with our creaturely life (Eagleton 1991:14)

This antagonism between aesthetic sensation—the phenomenological spaces of the ‘creaturely life’ of perception as Eagleton puts it—and the idealist spaces of Christian imagery is formulated in my painting entitled All Night Long 2010,(fig.2). The antithetic, yet symbiotic affinity which Christian imagery/mentality negotiates with the images of capitalist culture is here presented as an alternative reality or consciousness. It is in the ‘intelligent play’ and bricolage of images—where collisions of meaning between past and present, sacred and secular occur—that one can find within these overlapping horizons ‘spaces of new meaning’. For example, the space where the ‘visionary’ mode encounters the secular spaces of a capitalist realism. Within my practice the iconographies of the religious, the sublime and images of capitalist culture are conflated in order to call into question capitalist-realist representation with certain hypothetical models such as the visionary and the
ecstatic, as for example expressed in the writings of the 17th century Spanish mystic, St. John of the Cross. *The Dark Night of the Soul.* (1579).

My painting, *All Night Long* (2010) (fig.2) is emblematic of the paradoxical position of the Christian sublime in mature capitalist cultures; paradoxical, because, addressing itself to the task of creating a contemporary Christian imagery in a culture of secular vision, the painting serves as emblem to a largely irreconcilable and some might say futile question-how can the image of such (religious) experiences be made meaningful in today's cultures of secular vision? As a metaphor of this condition, *All Night Long,* (2010), (fig.2) presents the painted image of a cosmopolitan woman in contemporary western dress advancing toward the viewer. Rising behind her, the night sky and the backdrop of a neon-lit 'westernised' cityscape. Above and around her, the corpses of the dead ascending heavenwards; whilst beside her the gestural drawn image of the biblical scapegoat sits incongruously in the nocturnal vista. The painting makes possible various different interpretations of alternate ‘realities’ and their aesthetic reception by groups sharing the values and beliefs, which the experiences of the painting proposes. Having the values and beliefs make those experiences meaningful. Pictorial reality is contingent and culturally relative. Different modes of historical vision and painterly materiality co-exist, which denote slippages of time. The painterly representation of a sacred body from a 17th century devotional sculpture shares the same visual field with cuts from late capitalist fashion and cinematic photography referenced alongside the gestural, drawn image of the Scapegoat from Holman Hunt’s mid Victorian painting of the same name (fig.54). The conflation of these time slippages creates a *mise en scene* where religious and secular meanings collide. The occlusion of these ‘mentalities’- Christian and capitalist - creates a space of contested meanings and experiences. The question: ‘how is it possible to make the experience of Christian imagery in cultures of secular vision?’- becomes here both a ‘duel’ and a duality of experiences. The unrepresentable aspect of the sublime here finds a response in the pictorial form of the visionary- a religious, visionary articulation of the image of capitalism.

I am looking for a certain emotion - a heightened experience in painting Christian imagery. By conflating contemporary fashion and film photography and historical Christian imagery, my painting proposes an associative moment of presence - an
ecstatic moment when the experience of capitalism and the experience of the Christian sublime collide/overlap to create a space of new meaning—a credible metaphysical space, in which different realisms are simultaneously experienced by those groups with the appropriate cultural values, recognition and empathy for this visual system. It is the distance/conflict between these two spaces that creates the emotion and therefore the experience and the meaning. The mentality is not religious per se, neither is it materialist or spiritual. It is not a mind/body dualism. What I seek in the experience of making and the reception of the paintings is an affective, experiential narrative of presence, where unity of thought, feeling and action are one, in the sense that, as Eliot (1921) has observed, in the writing of the word, no separation between thought feeling and action occurs in 17th century Metaphysical poetry (Donne Marvell). Human experience was not reduced to atomised discrete categories.

Weber’s (2000) identification of the ambivalent relationship of Christian (particularly Protestant) doctrine toward money and the getting and spending of others is interpreted in my painting in terms of the Christian concept of transubstantiation. The paradox of dead bodies defying gravity and ascending to a supernatural realm of abstract immaterial value parallels, as Joseph Lough (2010) argues, the process of the ‘transubstantiation’ of the commodity form that I have cited in such examples as Koons and Hirst.

Transcendence and ‘Transubstantiation’ are central concepts of western Christian doctrine and iconography; a discourse of the body where the corporeal is represented as being liberated from material constraints in death. Whereas in life, - (at least for the affluent in the advanced capitalist societies) - the body is placed in the service of consumerism, commodity culture and the promise of manufactured desire and perception. Capitalism’s visual agencies (advertising, the media) represent this as transcendent aesthetic experience, as distinct from transcendent spiritual experience which is the promise of Christian imagery. According to classic Marxist Materialist analysis, consumer capitalism places the commodity form and its exchange value at the heart of human relations. The political argument of the cultural Left (Hauser, Berger, Benjamin), is that the tradition of painting within the fine art
sphere has, since 17th century, been the property of, and controlled by a hegemonic class - the bourgeoisie. The work of Koons and Hirst simulates some aspects of the commodity form, e.g. ‘branding’ and capitalism is a mentality which says: this butcher is better than that butcher - this artist, better than that artist; this painting better than that painting - unlike mediaeval scholasticism where all painting was anonymous, all painting mattered and all painting was valued as much for its 

existence as any instrumental value. In this sense I suggest, capitalism, in the form of the art market, controls thought, because, as a system of value and meaning painting within capitalism has been reduced to the functions of aesthetic appreciation, exchange value, ‘brand’ competition, and commodity investment. Former meanings/ experiences/ functions of the painted image - (e.g. religious, spiritual, narrative, symbolic, and didactic) have been rendered obsolete because those functions are redundant for the purposes of consumer capitalism.

Christian imagery in Western art offered transformation, salvation and redemption. Capitalism promises the new, but not hope. The space of difference between these two systems of meaning has been largely absent from critical discourses in recent painting and institutional curatorial practices in Western Europe, (witness the near absence of contemporary exhibitions on theology and art). That is why in the context of my painting practice I am attempting to represent the former experiences of Christian imagery in a secular culture, which has turned away from religion as a system of value and meaning in the visual.

And this is why in a painting like All Night Long (2010) (fig.2), those spaces of difference of experience are represented as contesting for the pictorial space, which the female protagonist articulates. and serve as a reminder that the painted image has always, even in the various phases of capitalism, preserved a sequestered space for an alternative reality of the subject under capital - whether social (Millet’s ‘Angelus’, 1857-9), or political (Courbet’s Burial at Ornans, 1849-50) or visionary (Holman Hunt’s The Scapegoat, 1854-56), (fig.54); and redemptive (Stanley Spencer, Burghclere Chapel, 1922-32), (fig.21); cultural, (Chris Ofili, The Upper Room, 2002), (fig.8); nihilistic (Bacon’s Three Studies for Figures, 1944). From the medium of
photography I add to this list Anna Mendieta, Orlan, David La Chappelle and Andre Serrano, all of whom have produced images deriving or commenting upon Christian meaning in various capitalist cultures.

The problem of meaning in contemporary capitalist culture was identified by Lyotard in the ‘Post Modern Condition’ (1984), which cited the loss of meta-narratives (except of course capitalism itself) as problematising meaningfulness. The contemporary painted image in the cultures of western capitalism has invariably responded to this situation by colluding with the conditions that the programme of aesthetics under capitalism sets for itself (witness recent paintings’ use of quotation, ironic distance, aesthetic modes of capitalist vision (the use of mass media imagery).

Frederic Jameson (1991:1-9) identified the symptom of post-modern culture as a crisis of historicity and posited that dialectical thought had become homogenised as a result of the new cultures of corporate capitalism and institutionalised pastiche, which ‘unlike its earlier counterpart, parody, had no ethical or moral platform from which it exercised its cultural power.’:

The aesthetic features of the post-modern: a new depthlessness, which finds its prolongation in a contemporary ‘theory’ and in a whole new culture of the image or the simulacrum, a consequent weakening of historicity, both as a relationship to public History and the new form of a private temporality. (Jameson 1991:section 1)

In a recent paper, Reiber, (2009: 77-91) identifies the 'loss of meaning' as being a central condition of post-modern experience for the individual. Analysing Kant’s Third Critique of Judgment (1790), her paper proposes Aesthetic Reason in the form of the sublime as a source of meaning, As Reiber (2009: 77-91) states:

(Aesthetic) truth becomes a question of inter-subjectivity and by offering a rational grounding for the quest for meaning, the judgment on the sublime offers help out of the seeming impasse deplored as the post-modern condition. (Reiber, 2009: 77-91)

Reiber argues aesthetic reason provides an ‘inter-subjective’ way of ‘knowing truth’ which, although not objectively provable, is neither an arbitrary opinion. Because aesthetic judgment is an Idea of Reason, it possesses a ‘subjective validity’ as knowledge because a statement about an aesthetic response to a sublime feeling
can legitimately be expected to demand assent from another, if it acknowledges a universal truth in aesthetic judgment, (Reiber, 2009: 77-91). The loss or changes of meaning in the experiences which Christian imagery embodied is a product of cultural difference, but they are also a product of one ideological aesthetic (the post Tridentine Catholic Reformation image) being overcome by another ideological aesthetic (the post Enlightenment bourgeois system of capitalist vision.

**Conclusion**
This chapter has argued that the modern form of the sublime as an aesthetic response to the world grew out of the self-same Enlightenment project of individual and economic freedom as modern capitalism and that the sublime has tended both historically and in the contemporary period to surface at times of crisis or transition in the development of modern capitalism. As such, I argue it is therefore a symptom of capitalism, which has functionalised its meaning in terms of its reception. The contemporary sublime may now be read as much in terms of cultural socio-economics as well as an aesthetic category. Under this reading of the capitalist sublime, vision reaches its ecstatic moment when ‘capital becomes image’.

However, capitalism and the sublime share a different metaphysics of time. The perpetual ‘New’ of capitalism is structurally different from the ‘Now’ of the sublime and while the sublime image may have been functionalised by capitalism it can never be totally colonised because of this temporal distinction. Both capitalism and the sublime share a ‘Death Drive’. In the case of capitalism infinite increase in surplus exchange value to the point of mathematical sublimity exposes the defectiveness of a system, whose logic if reversed would destroy itself. By contrast, the dynamic sublime since it is not a closed economic system, but a subjective idea of aesthetic reason, provides a form of subjective knowledge. And, because the sublime is a category loaded with subjective meaning it may, therefore, enable methods of visualizing imaginative experience through such discourses of the sublime as the Religious, or Rapture or Divinity, which, lie outside the temporal and functional constraints of capitalism. These alternative discourses are inscribed within the sublime image and it is these alternative discourses, which I suggest, offer the possibility of a re-visioning of the Romantic concept of the sublime image from the perspective of late capitalism. In the next section I will look at aesthetics as being both the problem and the solution (in my argument) to the above set of
circumstances that I claim have contributed to the decline of Christian imagery in modern painting. My next chapter, *Christian Imagery and Aesthetics*, looks at the relationship of Christian imagery to aesthetics and the following chapter, *Redeeming Images* explains how my painting practice tries to negotiate a space of meaning between Christian imagery and contemporary aesthetics.
Chapter 3:

Christina Imagery and Aesthetics

Introduction
My previous chapters dealt with how social practices and beliefs have shaped the formation of religious subjectivity in respect of painted Christian imagery in the post-Reformation period. Yet, no study of Christian imagery is possible without understanding its relationship to aesthetics; because Christian imagery has undergone a qualitative change in its aesthetic and aesthetic reception, so great, that in terms of meaning it is a different species to its pre-Reformation incarnation. Therefore, in this chapter, I discuss Christian imagery and its relation to aesthetics in the post-Reformation Christian cultures of Northern Europe and America and why changes in its aesthetic transmission and reception over the modern and contemporary art-historical periods is important for understanding how aesthetics, as opposed to use function/context also shape meaning. I begin by focusing on Belting’s (1994) thesis that Christian imagery was usurped in an era that inaugurated the ‘idea’ of art and the ‘mediation’ of the artist into the meaning of Christian imagery. In the context of this thesis I have restricted the term ‘Christian imagery’ to denote the post-Tridentine (1563) Catholic Counter-Reformation painted image.

In this chapter I argue that a capitalist aesthetic, (influenced by the values of Protestantism-(Weber) acquired its modern identity during the Enlightenment and this can be seen in the pictorial evidence of the individual subject under capital, whether as shocked and critical response to early industrialism (the sublime) or the psychology of self in relation to Materialism (Expressionism-van Gogh, Munch). I further argue that this ‘capitalist aesthetic’ subsumed an older pre-capitalist aesthetic, (significantly religious in character that is a ‘theo-logic’ aesthetic of devotion and the motivation of the will). Belting (1994) argues this older theological status of the image, precedes the ‘idea’ of art and the artist that begins to develop in the Renaissance period, along with the emergence of mercantile capitalism. I argue a modern capitalist/Protestant aesthetic changed/subsumed a pre-capitalist or proto-capitalist aesthetic. By ‘pre-capitalist’ I mean pre-modern forms of capitalism.
Modern capitalist economics, I argue, start about the mid-17th century and are characterized by surplus profit, speculative economics and the gradual abstract quality that economic structures acquire in relation to the individual subject.

I am interested in seeing whether my paintings can reconstruct something similar to that pre-capitalist aesthetic. As a condition of generating similar aesthetic and religious experiences in a cultural group who have the aesthetic empathy/understanding in the reception aesthetic of this visual system I rely on the following account to define my use of the term aesthetics.

For the purposes of my argument I adopt a theoretic interpretation of aesthetics. I adopt Davey's notion of ‘theoria’ (argued by the critics Ruskin and Fuller) in support of my methodology. Theoria is the concept of aesthetic contemplation as a super-sensory (ethical, spiritual, moral) reception as well as a sensual apprehension of works of art.

There are different aesthetics for different social and cultural groups. There is the phenomenological definition of aesthetics (i.e. aesthesis-line, colour, shape etc.), which plays a part in the reception of form in painting—especially in Modernist painting. But there is also Ruskin (and Fuller's) notion of theoria (aesthetic contemplation, as opposed to mere aesthesis - the sensual perception of line, colour shape etc.)—an integrated aesthetic appreciation (ethics, values, beliefs) Eliot (1921), writing about the Metaphysical poets of the early seventeenth century, (Donne, Marvell - contemporaneous with those key works of Catholic Reformation imagery, which I discuss in my thesis), suggests that they could 'devour any kind of experience'. This is important for my argument, because I suggest the aesthetic reception of pre-Enlightenment Christian imagery possessed a theoretic faculty, of 'sensation united with thought' (Eliot; 1921) which I claim as an aesthetic element for the reception of my paintings.

Whilst Beauty and the Beautiful are aesthetic concepts, the aesthetic is not defined by concepts of Beauty alone. Indeed, I argue in this thesis that the aesthetic extends well beyond the spaces of traditional cultural thought to include questions of ethical,
social, economic and theological value. The formal ‘language’ of painting was in some Modernist theories of painting (Greenbergian formalism) held to be pre-eminent, but in this thesis I argue for an integration of those formal properties of painting to be apprehended alongside the structures of meaning and feeling that are the product of the relations between cultural production and its social reception and context.

A revisionist interpretation of the aesthetic development of modern painting in the Northern Romantic tradition (revising Parisian based history of modernist painting), which cites the influence of Christian imagery was the subject of an important study by art historian Robert Rosenblum, who throws some light on the situation when he describes it as:

Problems of modern cultural history and most particularly the religious dilemmas posed in the Romantic Movement, upon the combination of subject, feeling and structure (by artists) whose troubled faith in the functions of art they all share. (Rosenblum, 1994: 7-8)

Rosenblum’s text restricts its application to art historical enquiry and avoids a wider socio-economic analysis of aesthetics, which, for example, White (2009) in writing on the Sublime, explores in the individual subject under capital.

Use function and context as being responsible for meaning in Christian imagery in the pre-Enlightenment period is a case that can be readily made. It was once possible to argue that painting was the medium of Christian imagery. It possessed (represented) a ‘theo-logic’ within the discourses of pre-Enlightenment cultural practice and belief and values. According to Virilio (2007), Christian imagery once represented an aesthetic that was also a logic. Whilst it may be said that every aesthetic possesses a ‘logic’ within its own terms, Virilio is here referring to an ‘ideo-logic’ or a ‘theo-logic’. Aesthetics, like religion is a system of meaning. Virilio suggests these two systems of meaning overlapped in pre-Enlightenment Christian imagery where aesthetics and the ‘ideological’ representation of modes of consciousness and belief occupy common ground. And it is the relationship of aesthetics to Christian imagery I shall discuss in the next section.
Painting and Christian Imagery before Aesthetics

Aesthetics as antithesis to the Sacred Image (Belting)

A characteristic of Christian imagery is the emphasis placed on immanence, presence and affect as properties of meaning in the work. Working with Belting’s (1994) thesis that sacred Christian imagery disappeared with the advent of the ‘idea’ of art, (applied aesthetics), I will explore the apparent ‘cultural rupture’ that occurs in the relationship between the ‘theo-logic’ representation of Christian imagery and the privileging of aesthetics as a system of meaning in the post Enlightenment development of the painted image. Belting (1994:14-17,458-9) asserts that, ‘at the time of the Renaissance there were two kinds of images, the one with the notion of the work of art, the other free of that notion, existed side by side.’

The irreconcilable tension between the old Christian cult-image and the classic bourgeois Enlightenment conception, of modern aesthetics, (i.e. since Kant) is an example of what Kubler describes in his book The Shape of Time (1962: 80-82), as ‘aesthetic fatigue’. Kubler defines this term as ‘tedium’ with the ‘memory-image’ and the tempo in differentiations increases as a style approaches its end. This discarding of the ‘memory–image’, (aesthetic and practical in Kubler), finds parallels with Belting, who suggests that meaning in images comes from their use. He explains:

Images reveal their meaning best by their use. I therefore deal with people and their beliefs, superstitions, hopes and fears in handling images. This context whether social religious or political in the German title of the book is summarised by the term ‘kult’. (Belting, 1994: XX11)

According to Walton (2000) religion discards certain functions once they lose their purpose within the social context. This also applies to Christian imagery, which lost its function at the service of sacred ritual and cult practice in post Reformation Protestant, Europe a lot sooner than the loss of the social function of Christianity, which retained widespread religious practice in Europe until well into the 19th century. The function of Christian imagery at the service of sacred ritual and cult practice was discarded in Northern Europe with the schism of the Church (1517-1540’s). But, according to Belting (1994) the primacy of aesthetic meaning over sacred meaning in the painted image begins to appear as early as the Renaissance. This process was fully completed, codified and achieved by the early Enlightenment. Concomitantly, the rationalisation and separation of the unity of thought, feeling and
gesture, which had been embodied in Christian imagery, devolved in the Enlightenment to the discrete area of aesthetics within human cognitive experience—so that all visual meaning within the Enlightenment paradigm of scientific rationalism was refracted through the lens of one value-system—aesthetics. This was the classic bourgeois notion of the unique, individual, private sensibility imposed upon inter alia the visual world.

*Christian imagery as Direct Evidence of God, in Opposition to the Aesthetics of Metaphor.*

Before the Renaissance most painted images were made in the service of the Church, largely anonymously. The function of the ‘old’ Christian image, according to Belting (1994) was as direct invocation of God’s presence on Earth. These were received as ‘holy’ images and the relationship of a worshipper before them was ‘unmediated, that is to say their address and content were transparent and not mediated by artistic interpretation or ‘metaphor’. This ’unmediated’ experience, as Belting (1994) describes it, requires belief in that image by the beholder. Belting (1994:17) notes that between 800 and 1300 the Eastern Orthodox tradition of the icon held sway as an artefact votive object that was direct evidence of God’s presence on earth. Before the Renaissance painted Christian imagery accommodated meaning on ethics, morality, divinity/theology, logic. As Belting (1994:1-17) states: ‘the constellation of visual symbol still united the subject with the world’.

Then, during the Renaissance, there arose in painted pictorial production an awareness of self - the role of the ‘I’, as the mediating artist. (the awareness of authorial selfhood) and then later in the scientific revolution of the early 17th century, the ‘eye’ of the artist, (that is to say – optics - the realisation of the individual sovereignty of perception and what that meant for representation). And then later, in the Enlightenment, the mediation of aesthetics as a discrete area of human consciousness and values, all of which rendered the former ‘unmediated’ experience of the divine, in Belting’s (1994:16) words, ‘an archaic mentality’. Belting is important for my painting practice because his thesis goes to the question of the reception of the existence and presence of the work of art over its appearance. His insight about
Malevich seeing the ‘indigenous icon, as an alternative to the artistic tradition of the west’ illuminates the attempt of an early 20\textsuperscript{th} century modernist artist to recover the ‘power’ of the iconic painted image. Rothko, Newman and Reinhardt tried something similar in American High Modernism and the idea of the \textit{existence and presence} of the painting has been a recurrent theme of my painting practice, especially in a preceding body of abstract ‘imageless icons’.

Rationalist thought formulated the notion of the perceiving self, the optical and cognitive lens through which a growing sense of individualisation mediated experiences, both that of the artist/maker and that of the beholder. The mediation of the artist who was conferred with a power over the image, hitherto unknown, destroyed at the same moment the former power of the image. That power transferred to the artist and the idea of art, which, Belting, explains, expressed itself in a description of ‘the Divine through metaphor’:

> The modern subject estranged from the world severed into the purely factual and the hidden signification of a metaphor, as opposed to ‘the old image’ which rejected reduction into metaphor, rather it laid claim to being immediate evidence of God’s presence revealed to the eyes and the senses. (Belting, 1994: 15)

He goes on to further explain this transitional crisis of the image thus:

> Art becomes the sphere of the artist, who assumes control of the image as proof of his or her art…. Subjects seize power over the image and seek through art to apply their metaphoric concept of the world. The image henceforth, produced according to the rules of art and depicted in terms of them, presents itself to the beholder as an object of reflection. Form and content renounce their unmediated meaning in favour of the mediated meaning of aesthetic experience and concealed argumentation. (Belting, 1994:16)

This qualitative change in production, transmission and reception is of immense consequence for Christian imagery. The painted image becomes an object of infinite interpretation, which Belting explains in these terms:

> The surrender of the image to the beholder is tangibly expressed at the time in the emergence of art collecting, in which pictures represent humanistic themes and the beauty of art. Even Calvin accepted the use of images for these purposes. (Belting, 1994: 16)
The painter was now required to ‘interpret’ Christian imagery, according to the judgment of his individual vision, within the constraints of the Council of Trent, which advocated an ‘affective’ art for the laity that would not only instruct, but persuade through the use of rhetorical images. With the ‘emancipation’ of interpretation, aesthetic expression became subject to ‘style,’ which is an expression of attitude. So, the rapid evolution of painting styles, which began in the early Renaissance, had, by the Enlightenment, become an important characteristic of painting; aesthetic style as a product of individual attitude and interpretation. The rapid succession of styles meant, as Benjamin (1970) and Belting (1994) both assert, that the meaning of an image transferred from the artefact to the producer – so the meaning of an image was not what was represented but how it was represented. This conflicts with the ‘old’ Christian imagery, as described by Belting, which resists the development of styles, the Byzantine icon tradition, perhaps being the best example of how the old Christian imagery rests on the continuity of a painting tradition. Belting (1994:17) expresses the differentiation thus: The cultic sphere is concerned not with the art of memory in this sense, but with the content of memory.

Kubler’s (1962: 77-82) theory of ‘aesthetic fatigue’, cited earlier, becomes inherent to an understanding of the post-renaissance painted image, so the function of painting as mediation for individual aesthetic expression and style (attitude) allows style to develop as aesthetic ‘gesture’. The Pre-Raphaelites (e.g. Millais’ Christ in the House of His Parents, 1849-50) adopt certain mediaeval stylistic painting devices and typology to create Christian imagery in the midst of 19th century Victorian Materialism. Salvador Dali employs a Baroque pictorial ‘style’ to effect a contemporary Christian painting in mid-20th century consumer capitalism (Crucifixion: Corpus Hypercubus), (1954), (fig.55). This is important for my practice because it demonstrates how Belting’s (1994) ‘art of memory’, in precedence to the older ‘content of memory,’ determines post-Enlightenment Christian imagery. The humanistic Renaissance painting tradition of the western Christian church, included the freedom to interpret amongst its aesthetic permissions, thereby liberating painted Christian imagery from the retardation of a prescribed iconographic system. However, this aesthetic liberation of the image and the freedom of the artist to
interpret came at a cost - the ‘loss’ in the reception of the sacred power and authority of painted Christian imagery

Benjamin’s (1970:223) theory of the image explains how mechanical reproduction ‘detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition’- a qualitative change in the image, which he describes as a ‘shattering of tradition’. However, Benjamin’s (1970) theory of the image applies only to the effect of mass reproduction on works of art - secular as well as sacred images. Benjamin argues that mechanical reproduction destroys aura. His notion of the ‘loss of aura’ of mechanically reproduced images should not be confused with any kind of religious aura, (as in Belting’s use) but rather a cultural interpretation of uniqueness of artefacts and their place in ritual. Images which are mechanical reproductions of works of art (e.g. paintings) lack aura. But, a painting painted today can and will still have aura, in Benjamin’s sense, because it exists uniquely and was produced in something like a secular ritual (the process of being painted).

This notion of ‘loss of aura’ only became possible post de facto, when the aura and ‘authenticity’ of unique works of art was destroyed by their mechanical (photographic) reproduction. In describing this very important qualitative change, Benjamin (1970: 226-7) makes an alignment between sacred cult value and the existence of the unique image and its place in ritual. This, he contrasts with a new function of the image, which mechanical reproduction made possible - the exhibition value of the image. This new function, (its ‘exhibition value’ to use Benjamin’s phrase), displaces the sacred cult value of the unique painted image and its basis in ritual, but only if the painting is made into a reproduction; the original will still have aura. Benjamin, (1970: 226) (auth. 1936) concedes that the process is a secularising of cult value, since its uniqueness as a ritual cult object is now located in secular ritual - the ‘cult of beauty’:

In the imagination of the beholder the uniqueness of the phenomena which hold sway in the cult image is more and more displaced by the empirical uniqueness of the creator or of his creative achievement’. (Benjamin, 1970: 246, note 6) (auth.1936)
The ‘emancipation of the various art practices from ritual’ reflect what Benjamin (1970: 227) describes as an instrumental and ‘qualitative’ change in the social purpose and function of the work of art.

The issue of function is addressed by Belting (1994), who asks: ‘how do humans use a particular image system?’ As my thesis argues, before the Reformation, many images possessed a different purpose and function - essentially a devotional or intercessionary function which was grounded in sacred ritual. They were not treated as aesthetic objects, but as objects of veneration, which possessed the tangible presence of the holy. Benjamin, commenting upon this distinction, notes:

To the extent to which the cult value of the painting is secularised the ideas of its fundamental uniqueness lose distinctness...with the secularisation of art authenticity displaces the cult value of the work. (Benjamin, 1970: 246, note 6) (auth. 1936)

The sacred cult object or relic, represents value of the traditional kind. Belting (1994) asserts this function later came to be supplanted by a different function in the Renaissance, the function of art, which Benjamin cites as another form of ritual, a profane ritual, now based on the ‘cult of beauty’(1970: 226). This reception of the painted pictorial image in the post-Reformation period resulted in individual paintings becoming the subject of profane veneration - what in a religious culture would have been described as idolatry. Sontag (2008:155), rehearsing Gombrich’s argument, states images were originally not a representation but an invocation of the signified. This also accords with Belting’s view of the pre-Reformation image as possessing an ‘unmediated existence’ or having a ‘divine/sacred presence’ as a property of the power they possessed as images. The change of painting in the Renaissance from its existence to its appearance is illustrated by the following excerpt from Belting, who cites Raphael as example, of the conflict of sacred and profane. Raphael’s Sistine Madonna, (1512) is an occasion where the artist’s ‘idea’ of Beauty displaces the painting’s former ‘power’ as unmediated evidence of God’s presence in the actual work:

The vision of the idea which the pious romantics later trivialised had for Raphael a double meaning derived both from the work and from the person of the artist. It is the new art of painting that changes the nature of images, against which the reformation was directing its polemics. The work loses its aura as an
‘original ‘in the religious sense—an image exerting power over believers by its actual presence. Instead it becomes an original in the artistic sense, in that it authentically reflects the artist’s idea. This idea is ultimately tied to a philosophical or even a metaphysical experience, which was formulated by the Mannerist theory of Art. (Belting, 1994: 484)

There is a difference between ‘original’ in the religious sense and ‘original’ in the aesthetic sense. Belting (1994) uses the term aura to signify ‘original in a religious sense - (i.e. sacred cult object whose existence/presence determined its reception). The ‘idea’; of the artist and the ‘idea’ of art, according to Belting, destroyed this. Benjamin (1970), in discussing the work of art, uses the term ’aura’ to define uniqueness and place in ritual. Benjamin argues that this ‘aura’ is destroyed in the mechanically reproduced image of the work of art. The importance I attach to Benjamin and the effect of mechanical reproduction is Benjamin’s identification of the qualitative change the painted image underwent from sacred cult value to the cult of beauty is important for my case. This is not to suggest that mechanically reproduced images cannot be used for devotional purposes, but their aesthetic reception is qualitatively different from painting.

The function of Christian imagery, certainly in Catholic Counter-Reformation painting, served a devotional and mediating purpose between the Divine and the laity. That function stops as an institutional value by the Enlightenment. Where formerly, it had been used for devotional practice and prayer, (i.e. institutional practices), thereafter, I suggest, these roles were changed. It makes a difference. The purpose of the painted image post–Enlightenment was as an object of contemplation which served a ‘disinterested’ aesthetic (the beautiful, the sublime). This qualitative change in reception aesthetics amongst the dominant social and cultural class of the early European bourgeoisie regulated the idea of art as it applied to the painted image post-Enlightenment.

From the early Enlightenment onwards the reception of the visual system of Christian imagery begins a long process of assuming ‘otherness’ within early Enlightenment visual culture. This process which sees the reception of the aesthetic of the religious imagery go from a constituency of power, to that of subaltern status, without a voice in discourse reflects more generally the diminishing role of painting.
as a conduit of knowledge and values. As Arnold (2004:77) explains: ‘the rational scientific idea of knowledge that predominated in the 18th century was that thought was superior to sensory knowledge’.

Correspondingly, the relation of aesthetics, not to a divine order but to, the social political and economic power of mercantile capitalism assumes a more urgent and functional purpose under the early European bourgeoisie, who, to enhance their view of themselves, patronised an art that would reflect their power, (the Dutch Republic of the 17th century perhaps being a good example of this).

Cultural hegemony by a dominant social class is a materialist theme in Hauser, (1962) who links aesthetic ideology and social power, - the relationship between the ideology and the social group to which it relates. And Max Weber (2000) identifies the ‘ethos’ of the Protestant/Calvinist religion with North European mercantile classes, which equated the Christian life with the industrious, abstemious and specialised application of the individual’s labour - all ingredients vital to capitalist economics. Under this incipient capitalist system we see the aesthetics of the painted image become subject to a new social hegemony – the emerging bourgeoisie class, who, to enhance their view of themselves, patronised an art that would reflect their power. Berger echoes Hauser in this:

> The art of any period tends to serve the ideological interests of the ruling class...that a way of seeing the world, which was ultimately determined by new attitudes to property and exchange, found its visual expression in the oil painting and could not have found it in any other visual art form. (Berger 1972:86-7)

Levi-Strauss, quoted in Berger, also talks from an anthropological perspective of dominant social groups ‘possessing the world visually.’

> It is this avid and ambitious desire to take possession of the object for the benefit of the owner or even of the spectator, which seems to me to constitute one of the outstandingly original features of the art of western civilization. (Berger 1972: 84)

I suggest that the aesthetics of the painted image today are those of essentially a private and individual image and meaning - a unique image in a culture of copies and is so partly as a result of what Eagleton (1991) describes as ‘the aesthetic and
psycho reconstruction' of representation initiated by the European-Enlightenment bourgeoisie. Benjamin (1970, auth. 1936) and Belting (1994) account for this qualitative change by use/function and context (social practices). But there is also the question of a change in aesthetic transmission and reception, which is a social practice and belief, but can also be interpreted through aesthetics and phenomenology.

Painting and Christian Imagery in the Era of Humanist Aesthetics
The preceding section suggested that a qualitative change in Christian imagery occurred, according to Belting, (1994) at the time of the Renaissance - from such imagery being an 'original' in the religious sense - an image exerting power over believers by its actual presence – to, instead becoming an ‘original in the artistic sense’.

Aesthetic values change through time and different groups have different aesthetics. Kubler (1962, 80-82) refers to the transformation of aesthetic forms as 'aesthetic fatigue' - a concept borrowed from Goller, (1888) - and this affects their reception. I suggest the concept of ‘aesthetic fatigue’ affects the reception of images. Kubler, applies the theory of aesthetic fatigue to those ‘meaningful and pleasurable man-made objects, made for an emotional experience’, which, he writes, ‘is one way of describing a work of art.’ He argues that ‘tédium’ or ‘déjà vu’ sets in with the memory image because:

our pleasure in form diminishes as we succeed in reconstituting its complete and distinct memory-'familiarity breeds contempt’. These total recollections occasion fatigue and they lead to the search for new forms. (Kubler 1962: 80-82)

Kubler makes a formalist argument which is that historical change in cultural objects (including works of art-images) as a continuous modification and adaptation of aesthetic forms. I suggest that within aesthetic appearances, there is retained something that is essential, or to quote Wollheim (1987:187-8) ‘where it comes from’ and this (i.e. origins) remains relatively stable in pictorial development. This is when a painted image may be said by a particular cultural group to be ‘aesthetically true’, that is to say when it becomes affective in an ideological way that transcends temporal changes in aesthetic fashion.
The painted Christian image, by the Enlightenment, had become an image, whose function was no longer mediating, but rather an autonomous image in its own right that could and would be interpreted by artists. The relationship between the concept of Holy light that gets modulated into the ‘light’ in the ‘Enlightenment’ is, I suggest, a metaphor of this change. God does not get banished in the Enlightenment- Nature merely replaces God as an explanation of phenomena, but God is still held in omnipotence to Nature at the level of social belief. The metaphor of light – ‘The Light of the World’ and the religious and aesthetic experiences which that concept generated in painting, allows me to ask, metaphorically, through my painting and writing- whether it is the same as the Light of experience - the post Enlightenment notion of Reason.

St. Augustine (Derrida, 1993:118 transl.) (auth.378AD:10.34) draws a distinction between the Light of God and the light of the senses. According to St. Augustine, the ‘true, good light’ of God does not reveal earthly, sensual delights or pleasures, but inner, spiritual light (which, for example, is the metaphor in El Greco’s paintings.), (fig.40). St. Augustine’s ‘true, good Light’ that was revealed by God as a sign of His presence, becomes, in the Enlightenment (at least in Northern European Protestant cultures), a light that illuminated darkness and ignorance with sense perception and reason. According to St. Augustine’s world - view these two types of light may be formulated as Revelatory Light (the light of religious vision) and Illuminatory light (the light of aesthetic experience).

Derrida, (2002), concurring with Benveniste, (1973), argues that the notion of God derives from the term for light (deiwos.). My thesis adopts Benveniste’s linguistic alignment of God=Light, but argues that culturally, conceptually and cognitively there is a difference between the Light of God and the Light of Reason (experience, perception, painting). Derrida does not say there is no distinction between faith and reason, but that rather at the heart of reason is faith - as a belief that anything is worth proceeding with. Derrida, (2002:46), quoting Benveniste (1973:445-446) states:
Light (phos), wherever this arche commands or begins discourse and takes the initiative in general (phos, phainesthai, phantasma, hence spectre etc.), as much in the discourse of philosophy as in the discourses of revelation (Offenbarung), or of a revealability (Offenbarkeit), of a possibility more originary than manifestation. More originary, which is to say closer to the source, to the sole and same source. Everywhere light dictates that which even yesterday was naively construed to be pure of all religion or even opposed to it and whose future must today be rethought (Aufklarung, Lumieres, Enlightenment, Illuminismo). Let us not forget: even when it did not dispose of any common term to designate, as Benveniste notes, 'religion itself, the cult, or the priest, or even any of the personal Gods'', the Indo-European language already concurred in "the very notion of God, of (deiwos) which 'the proper meaning' is 'luminous' and 'celestial."

(Derrida, 2002: 46),

Light, (phainesthai) enables appearances. It is the origin of phenomenology. My argument utilises the Enlightenment idea/ assumption that a split exists between faith and reason - between the revelatory Light of God, which I argue is an event (or in Derrida’s term ‘originary’, derivative of the source) and the illuminatory Light of Reason, knowledge and sensory experience, which I argue is a state or condition (for Derrida, a manifestation). As a demonstration of this distinction between the Light of God and the Light of Reason, I argue certain experiences and meanings (alternative ‘realisms’ - the visionary, the miraculous, the compassionate, the contemplative, the meditative) have been marginalised/disabled from the contemporary painted image. This dichotomy comes about because Enlightenment rationalism conceives the world humanistically rather than theologically.

This relates to my argument about regenerating the meanings and experience, because it suggests that what matters is how the world is looked at and who is doing the looking. The motif of light has frequently been associated with Christian religious imagery as both descriptive and metaphorical light and in secular aesthetics as a vehicle for emotion - sometimes religious. For example, in the Four Quartets (Burnt Norton) Eliot (1936) talks about how the roses had the ‘look of being looked at’ (i.e. visible to God). Through the gnostic universe everything is perceivable through the mind of God. The way a religious view of the world imposes meaning on everything is evidenced in van Gogh - a piece of wood in a chair is an expression of absence (Van Gogh). In mediaeval aesthetics and theology everything appears to God. It can only be looked at by God. Compare a mediaeval painting of the Annunciation by Fra Angelico with a Catholic Reformation Baroque painting on the same theme, (e.g.
Barocci or Gentileschi). The perfect, shadowless, lucid, absolute light in the Fra Angelico, becomes in the Baroque paintings a contingent light, subject to the interpretation of the artist and the vagaries of lighting conditions and light becomes a spiritual effect on the emotions. The light of the Fra Angelico and the meaning and experience implied is not what I am trying to recover because it is not recoverable. What I am trying to do is generate similar experience to that intermediary phase of Christian imagery, during the Catholic Counter-Reformation, when Christian painting became *interpretable*, (subject of course to Tridentine doctrine) through the eyes of the artist, (whilst retaining its use and function as an aid to devotion and transcendent experience).

A good example of this intermediary phase in Catholic Counter-Reformation painting, in which the artist has interpreted light for metaphorical meaning and effect, are *The Dona Maria del Aragon altarpieces* by El Greco, specifically, *The Incarnation* (*Annunciation*), (1596-1600), (fig. 40). I wish to read this work in response to the examiners suggestions of micro-histories by considering the nature of the representation of light in the El Greco work and how this informed the development of my painting *Annunciation* (2012-13) (fig.3) with its conception of overlapping horizons of sacred and secular experience and how this would be achieved in my painting through the unifying field of light as metaphor - for the light of God and the light of experience.

*The Dona Maria del Aragon altarpieces by El Greco: The Incarnation* (*Annunciation*), (1596-1600): *Light as Erotic Fetish in Christian Mysticism and Christian Devotional Art*

I have applied the term ‘light as erotic fetish’ in relation to my reading of this painting by El Greco, but it may also apply more generally to his oeuvre, especially those works produced in Toledo. I use the term to mean an investment of an object, or, in this case, a phenomena, a quality - light, with magical powers, inhabited by spirits. Fetish originates from its 17th century meaning ‘charm’, - that is to say made by artifice, factitious, artificial created. (source:www.oxforddictionaries.com). And I suggest because, of its subject - The Annunciation- and the mode of its
representation - the depiction of light, this painting assumes an erotic quality because of the appeal to the senses which El Greco’s form of painterly visuaality assumes. The notion of light as erotic quality in painting was raised by me in my viva in relation to my painting *Annunciation*. The greatest difficulty I encountered in the making of my painting *Annunciation* (2012-13) (fig.3) was the representation of the metaphor of the ‘Light of God’ - how to find a visual, formal vocabulary that articulates that metaphor. Like Bernini’s *St. Theresa*, the surfaces of El Greco’s *Annunciation (Incarnation)* (1596-1600) (fig. 40) shimmer with light - not the light of illumination - the everyday - but like the *St. Theresa* - the light of revelation. In my painting *Annunciation* (2012-13) (fig.3), I have represented this metaphorically with the Californian light of a West coast Los Angeles apartment. The representation of the angel in my painting is directly quoted from El Greco’s Aragon/Prado *Incarnation (Annunciation)* (1596-1600) (fig.40).This representation functions as descriptive metaphor of the ‘Light of God’. I chose to quote this specific iconographic example of Catholic Mysticism because of the specificity of the experiences I am trying to reconstruct. The articulation of the angel in the apartment in my painting, *Annunciation* (2012-13) is intended to metaphorically generate an aesthetic tension between the concepts of the Light of God (faith) and the Light of Reason (experience).

Writing about El Greco’s *Annunciation (Incarnation)* (1596-1600), Berit Luhr observes:

El Greco eschews narrative schemes in favour of distinct devotional images. He dispenses with literal interpretation and seizes on the spiritual significance of the subject in relation to the economy of man’s redemption and salvation. . (Luhr, 2002: 126).

I suggest the ‘spiritual significance’, Luhr refers to is articulated in the *Annunciation (Incarnation)* (1596-1600) Aragon altarpiece, not just with its bifocal composition, but light (and its absence), as a visual economy within the conception of the image. Luhr states: ‘Obscuritas, darkness serves as well as equivico to animate’. (Luhr, 2002: 138)
The space depicted in the painting suggests that the earthly, profane realm has been 'visited' by a transcendent heavenly presence and, as a result, the 'spiritual darkness' in the El Greco is transformed, not by the light of everyday experience, but an inner, spiritual light - a revelatory light - the light that reveals a spiritual event-an Annunciation. All is made visible - the heavenly host, the clouds, the angel, the Virgin- by the Light of God - symbolised in this case by a white dove - the heavenly host. El Greco was able to envision light as the divine light of God because the values and beliefs of the culture he painted for recognised this system of meaning and experience. Paintings like El Greco's *Annunciation* and Bernini’s *St.Theresa in Ecstasy* sculpture were received by contemporary religious audiences as prototypes - imitations of Divine presence. El Greco's *Annunciation (Incarnation)* (1596-1600) was made and received in a culture for whom the experiential register of sacred religious devotional meaning was a very real presence in understanding that world. The idea of the representation of angels and angelic visions are connected with supernatural divine agency. Amongst their many types of representation in Christian symbolism, angels are instruments of divine compassion and grace, as well as agents of salvation and redemption. The angel in the El Greco is the representation of a prototype whose reality was accepted at a cultural and institutional level and was intended to evoke piety and motivation of the will in the imitation of Christ.

Because I am making this representation in a secular culture the status of the angel in my annunciation is a representation/postulation of the woman's imaginative and mental life. The gesture of the angel connotes that the woman in the painting is 'visited' by a benign and protective presence. Berit Luhr, comments on this moment in the El Greco *Annunciation (Incarnation)* (1596-1600):

> Incarnation is a bifocal composition. The painting shows the moment of conception when Mary accepts her commission and the archangel Gabriel looks down on her with compassion. (Luhr, 2002:132)

*Is El Greco’s *Annunciation (Incarnation)* a dualist or non-dualist image? Whilst El Greco depicts a bifocal composition – an earthly realm occupied by the Virgin Mary and the transcendent heavenly realm of celestial musicians - it is the archangel Gabriel who acts as divine intercessor between the two worlds. Like my paintings *All Night Long (2010)* and *Annunciation (2012-13)* the elements of the material and the*
spiritual are visually enumerated in the painting’s iconographic scheme, but the difference with the El Greco, I argue, is that it achieves a non-dualism because these elements are bound pictorially within a unified field of vision which, as Berit Luhr (2002: 126) observes, prioritises the ‘spiritual significance of the subject’ above a narrative of elements by means of a particular way of looking at the world - a system of vision that accommodated and, as Eliot (1921) put it, ‘devoured all experience’.

Decisions on how to represent a similar experience and an equivalent ‘realism’ to the example of corporealised spirituality of Counter Reformation painting as evidenced by this painting were the key difficulties articulated in relation to the cinematic/photographic realism of the apartment ‘scene’ in my painting Annunciation (2012-13), (fig.3). The purpose of the painting was to see if I could create a new hybrid meaning and experience from where representations of the secular and the sacred overlap. I wanted to represent a miraculous image that resisted rational explanation. I am still searching to imagine a way with Annunciation (2012-13) (fig.3) to make the pictorial, theological and historical ‘space’ of the angel -a convincing metaphor for the ‘Light of God’; and establish a tension that postulates whether a distinction exists between the ‘Light of God’ and the ‘Light of Reason’. A study I made for Annunciation (2012-13), Angel in Flames (2013) (fig.41) was tried unsuccessfully and the Angel in Annunciation (2012-13) presently appears amidst a negative ‘black light’/dark flame.

Conclusion
My research adopts the role of a detective of structural and cultural meaning. I want to discover through my painting practice what, if any of these religious and aesthetic experiences, structures of feeling, my painting can generate that are similar or comparable to those pre-Enlightenment religious and aesthetic experiences. I do not suggest there is good light and bad light. Light is originating - it enables cultural processes of ‘seeing’, which accounts for how faith and reason both get metaphorically described as light. My argument rests on the question of who is doing the looking - God or Man? This is why the metaphor of light is apposite to the qualitative change in the painted image post-Enlightenment. The function of my
paintings is not to act as mediator between the viewer and some divine reality, but rather as a poetic, critical, reflexive, ‘discourse’ on the way meaning and experience is communicated in religious paintings to discover whether the religious imagery can only be understood today as an aesthetic, illuminatory light, or a Divine, revelatory light similar to the experiences of pre-Enlightenment Christian imagery and this is a question of aesthetic reception (context) as well as a change in use/function. In the next chapter I will explain how I use my practice as an experimental tool to discover what, if any, form of ‘recuperation’ of the meanings and experiences of the pre-Enlightenment Christian painted image is possible for my painting to achieve.
Section 3 Aesthetic Re-Interpretation

Chapter 4

Redeeming Images

(Narratives of Recuperation in Contemporary British Painting)

In pre-historic times, when by the absolute emphasis on its cult value (the image) was first and foremost an instrument of magic. Only later did it come to be recognised as a work of art. In the same way today, by the absolute emphasis on its exhibition value, the work of art becomes a creation with entirely new functions, among which, the artistic function, later may be regarded as incidental.

Walter Benjamin (1970: 227, auth.1936)

Introduction

Walter Benjamin, in the above quotation, provoked the question of cultural rupture between tradition and modern usage in art, which I will address in this chapter in relation to contemporary painting practice (including my own) and Christian cult-images. What forms of recuperation (if any) are available to the contemporary artist in Western European secular cultures?

I argue that what is lost with Christian cult-imagery, which may be recuperated, is the spiritual dimension to forms of imaginative pictorial consciousness that represent alternative ‘realities’, which were overtly present in the pre and Counter-Reformation painted image in the West and implicitly present in modified form in pictorial iconography until the mid-19th century.

My use of the term ‘cult-image’ defines the nature of art-not the nature of the religion and derives from Benjamin’s (1970: 225) use of the term. I argue that certain forms of Christian ‘cult-imagery’ represented certain meanings and experiences, which appear to be no longer in use in contemporary secular modes of vision and aesthetic experience. Amongst these meanings may be included the visionary, the miraculous, religious rapture, immanence and the sacred ecstatic, as well as later forms of
consciousness like the early 19th century investment of belief in the immanence of God in Nature.

The apparent obsolescence of these ‘alternative realities,’ depicted in the sacred spaces of the Christian cult-image, raise the question of whether this iconographic tradition, whether by redundancy or prohibition, is no longer available as a form of representation to contemporary vocabularies of painting, because of its anachronism and obsolescence for the cultural needs of secularism, or whether it is still an active, living visual system, which may be recuperated/reconstructed.

This chapter focuses on the situation of the pre-Enlightenment Catholic Reformation cult-image from the perspective of the contemporary practitioner creating and theorizing a model of theological representation in contemporary secular vision and asks what meaningfulness such a visual system retains within the contemporary secular visual cultures of Western Europe.

I consider whether any form of recuperation of the Christian pre-Enlightenment painted image is possible for my painting to achieve as a painter representative of my time and culture. I produce evidence from my own painting practice to show what, if any, pre-Enlightenment experiences and meanings of Christian imagery a secular aesthetics can elicit/disclose through painting. I also compare and contrast my practice with an example of contemporary British painting with Christian references, The Upper Room by Chris Ofili, (2002), (fig.8) and an example of contemporary painting, the South African Kieskamma Altarpiece,(2005),(fig.22) where the intended use and meaning propose redemptive and recuperative functions, meanings and experiences of the Christian pre-Enlightenment painted image as represented by the Issenheim Altarpiece,(1512-16),(fig.23) the painting after which it models itself.

But, in the first section of this chapter, I show how I use my painting practice to negotiate the historical, religious, spatial and other cultural differences that separate my painting from pre-Enlightenment painting.
The Process of my Painting and the Role of Practice

The imagery of Catholic Reformation painting was viewed, and I will argue, received in the context of religious devotion by an audience, who held the values and beliefs, which that cultural context provided. The previous chapters on aura, capitalism and the sublime have described cultural developments, that in the combination of their effects one to another, precipitated a change in the reception aesthetics of Christian imagery. My paintings are obviously made in a different time and a different culture - a secular culture. The context and reception of my paintings will be different because, amongst other reasons, I produce paintings in the cultural context of aesthetics and not religion. The problems that prevent contemporary viewers from reading my paintings in the same way as, or in a similar way to, pre-Enlightenment viewers are temporal as well as cultural in that a contemporary audience patently cannot have had any pre-Enlightenment experience. Equally, I cannot call upon a pre-Enlightenment person to compare their pre-Enlightenment experience of painting with the experience of my painting. They can have had no experience of my painting but they had experience of pre-Enlightenment painting and by interpretation of what they said about those paintings a ‘map’ of that historic experience can be interpreted by a contemporary person to evaluate and compare the experience of my painting against the experience of pre-Enlightenment painting. I submit the methods of art historian Robert Rosenblum, (1994) in his book Modern Painting and the Northern Romantic Tradition and Mieke Bal (1999) in Quoting Caravaggio make similar cross-cultural analysis and comparison of historic pictorial experience and is, I suggest, an effective method of hermeneutical aesthetics.

The artefacts - the pre-Enlightenment paintings - still exist and an interpretation of responses to those paintings recorded by a pre-Enlightenment person also exist, so it is possible to prove what those experiences were. And obviously, it is possible to interpret contemporary responses to my paintings, so I have information upon which to conduct an interpretative comparison of the two historically separated experiences to assess how similar or otherwise those experiences are. I suggest ‘overlapping horizons’ of experience occur when those experiences are sufficiently similar. However, those historic experiences can never be the same and they can never be reproduced. My practice aims to see if it is possible to create ‘analogous’ experiences through methods of bricolage, collage, montage and palimpsest.
My purpose in this chapter is to show what my painting does and what happens as an aesthetic process and the experiences it conveys (e.g. Representation, place of viewer, presence, aesthetic reception). The core of this research is grounded in the experiential - the experience of the viewer, my experience of painting and the experience of making meaning through painting, which, I argue, is a form of emergent knowledge. The role of my practice is to show what aesthetics can generate as ‘similar’ affective cross-cultural experience, despite the changes in use/function and changes in the transmission and reception aesthetics of Christian imagery. How and why I do this is made explicit in my theoretical writing. The carefully interpreted responses of a pre-Enlightenment person to a pre-Enlightenment religious painting would amount to evidence of historic experience of a particular type of visual system. I suggest, such evidence could be interpreted by a contemporary person to enable comparison with recorded responses of contemporary experience to my paintings. I acknowledge the test of ‘similarity’ can only be conducted from a contemporary perspective and it is retrospective and partial.

The working assumption of my thesis that the experiences of institutionalised Christian imagery was disabled by the time of the early Enlightenment, due to changes of context and use/function (when aesthetic ‘display,’ exhibition value and the cult of beauty (Benjamin, 1970, auth. 1936) replaced devotion and sacred cult value in the reception aesthetics of the painted image, is tested by my practice. The faith/reason split, which is an Enlightenment idea, and the assumption that it disabled Christian imagery (Catholic Reformation image), through change of use, is tested by aesthetic recovery in my painting practice, which seeks to discover whether, despite change of use, aesthetics is able to generate ‘similar’ cross cultural transfer of affective meaning and experience, within cultural groups who have an empathetic understanding of the values of that aesthetic system, notwithstanding the historical, spatial, cultural and religious changes in difference of Christian imagery.

Over a considerable period of time now, my painting practice has engaged with how a contemporary artist generates an interpretation/analogue of theological/sacred presence through aesthetics in cultures of secular vision. I cite as examples of this
two paintings, made at different times of my painting practice, *Triptych*, (1993) (fig.28) and *The Ecstasy of St. Theresa*, (1997) (fig.29), as different examples of how I have approached the problem of generating similar aesthetic and religious experiences and meanings to key artworks of Catholic Reformation imagery. Each painting I make arises from my cultural values, which are aesthetically based and therefore ideological. And each painting generates its own particular set of aesthetic and conceptual issues for me, within the broader framework of my theoretical and methodological approach to painting, and each painting will generate a different set of aesthetic and conceptual issues for every different viewer, within the framework of their values, beliefs and approach to painting.

**Commentary on Practice**

In this commentary on practice I have written about my practice with an emphasis on the role of aesthetics and my reflection on art historical context during the making of my paintings because this is what I think about when making the paintings. Aesthetics, and art historical awareness, symbol rather than concept determines the development of my painted images. Although the image is based upon concept – for example, the Christian iconographic of the Annunciation - the process of realising the image is what I do with aesthetics to translate the concept of the Annunciation into an ‘affective image’. Discursive, conceptual thought about the image emerges as a result of practice and is made explicit in the writing process. An example of this may be seen in the relationship between my painting *All Night Long* (2010) (fig.2) and my writings on capitalism and the sublime, (Chapter 2) where sketchbook notes made during the painting process were first instance conceptual responses to that process. These sketchbooks were made available at my viva (figs.16, 51). Experiential evidence is at the heart of this research, but it does not precede language, without which I would not be able to identify, describe, analyse or explain the experiences I write about.

In my painting *Annunciation* (2012-13) (fig.3), decisions on how to represent and articulate an ‘alter-realism’ and experience in relation to the cinematic/photographic everyday realism of the apartment ‘scene’ were a key difficulty The purpose of the painting was to see if I could create a new hybrid meaning and experience from where representations of the secular and the sacred overlap. I wanted to represent a
miraculous image that resisted rational explanation. The idea of the representation of angels and angelic visions are connected with supernatural divine agency. Amongst their many types of representation in Christian symbolism, angels are instruments of divine compassion and grace, as well as agents of salvation and redemption. The biggest problem in the making of the painting Annunciation has been the representation of the metaphor of the ‘Light of God’ - how to find a visual, formal vocabulary that articulates that metaphor. The angel borne of flames was tried unsuccessfully and it presently appears amidst a negative ‘black light’/dark flame. I am still searching to imagine a way with Annunciation to make the pictorial, theological and historical ‘space’ of the angel—a convincing metaphor; and establish a tension that postulates whether a distinction exists between the ‘Light of God’ and the ‘Light of Reason’. I have represented this metaphorically with the Californian light of a West coast Los Angeles apartment. The representation of the angel in my painting is quoted from El Greco’s Prado Annunciation (Incarnation) (1596-1600), (fig.40). This representation functions as descriptive metaphor of the Light of God. I chose a specific iconographic example of Christian post-Tridentine painting to quote because of the specificity of the experiences I am trying to reconstruct. The articulation in plastic pictorial space of the angel in the apartment is intended to metaphorically generate an aesthetic tension between the concepts of the Light of God and the Light of Reason (experience).

The experience I aim to generate in my paintings is an affective and experiential narrative of presence, unity of thought, feeling and action, (Eliot, 1921) which I argue is found in the experience of Catholic Reformation painted and sculptural imagery. My paintings address those cultural groups with appropriate, empathetic values and/or beliefs and are about my being situated in an historical moment and reflecting upon the historical experience of sacred painting as an essential element in the construction of meaning and response for the audience who has the framework of cultural values to receive those meanings in my contemporary secular painting. When I write about ‘my paintings reflecting my being situated in an historical moment’, I am referring to the socio-cultural and historical awareness that the paintings disclose, by means of subject style form context etc. In my account of my practice and the explanation of the meanings and experiences I am trying to engender in various cultural groups, according to the beliefs and values they have, I
argue that social and cultural groups who have the cultural cognition and empathy may understand those experiences represented in my paintings, without necessarily sharing the meanings of the values and beliefs that gave rise to the original cultural artefacts. My painting methodology, I believe, generates new meanings that are ‘similar’ to the pre-Enlightenment meanings for different cultural groups. Although the original pre-Enlightenment paintings were about devotion and the motivation of the Christian will, my paintings are not devotional, neither are they about the motivation of the (Christian) will - (perhaps the aesthetic will). My research is about representation and what can be represented within certain secular cultural contexts. I believe those pre-Enlightenment meanings and experiences have wider cross-cultural significance. I intend the similar meanings and experiences of my paintings to be received by atheists, agnostics as well as Christians, if they have framework of cultural values and recognition to receive and understand the references and meanings of such a ubiquitous visual system in my contemporary secular painting.

What is the basis of this original sacred transcendent experience-use, context or aesthetics?

According to Belting, (1994) and Friedberg, (1991) the meaning of images is dependent upon the way they are used and I discuss this important theory in my chapter on aesthetics. However, some of what I have said above implies meaning in my painting being produced by intention (the artist’s intention, certainly as disclosed by form). However, this explanation of intention=meaning cannot account for how historical meaning is formed because, for example, in the post-–Tridentine Reformation image the subjective intention and the freedom to exercise independent artistic intention was very much restricted by cultural context. (i.e. the decrees on visual images by the Council of Trent (1563) and the Inquisition) as well as artistic tradition. Neither can intention adequately explain meaning in modern painting, because whilst modern artists may assign specific meanings and modes of reception to their work (see my comments in methodology on Rothko and Spencer) the voice of the ‘author’ in developed capitalist cultures like North West Europe and America is essentially a ‘private’ voice, which is quite quickly subsumed within a larger ‘public’ discourse when work is disseminated and it is this public discourse which assigns
cultural meaning, as distinct from whatever private meaning an artist claims for their work. This raises the subject of context as creating meaning.

My painting practice tests what happens if I change the use of a Christian or fashion or media image in the service of my painting. If I place a fashion model next to an image of Christ or the Virgin Mary, the meaning and experience of both the secular and Christian image is changed for the social group/audience who have the appropriate cultural values and/or beliefs to know the original meaning contexts of both those image systems. A comparison with the work of American artist/photographer, David La Chapelle, (fig.6) might be instructive here. La Chapelle has, like Koons, and Warhol before re-contextualised Christian imagery with the celebrity icon; - in the case of La Chapelle and Koons - Michael Jackson. La Chapelle, claims that the experience of celebrity is the same experience as its Christian ‘model’ and seems to suggest that his appropriations create equivalences of experience - that they are inter-changeable experiences -, almost as if aesthetics denies historical context:

I have always been fascinated by the idea of religious ecstasy, whether crying over the Jonas Brothers or the Beatles. It’s the same emotion, the apparition, whether Elvis or the Virgin Mary. It’s definitely some sort of devotional ecstasy, fainting, swooning. (Dannatt, 2009)

My painting and written research is more reflexive in that I acknowledge historical and socio-cultural difference and I ‘overlap’ different visual systems. My research has been conducted in the knowledge that those historic religious experiences are not recoverable in their original form, but something like them may be reconstructed. La Chapelle presents the Baroque Christian narrative as if it had happened today on the streets of New York, without a contextual art historical or cultural ‘frame’ to distinguish contemporary and historic experience. La Chapelle’s aesthetic ignores historical and cultural difference in the interests of affect. I am also interested in the aesthetics of affect, but my practice is about the difficulty of overcoming or negotiating those historical and cultural differences and explicitly reflects awareness of historical and cultural context.

But, what is the relationship between the context and use of images and the change in the reception of their aesthetic? Through the aesthetic, - the aesthetics of emotion,
affect, *theoria*, ethics, spiritual, intellectual - through the recovery of those aesthetic affects - the palimpsest, *bricolage*. But, if the experiences were devotional how do you recover that? By being a devotional person is one solution, but if you’re not devotional (religious, a believer) then, I suggest you will never recover it as a *devotional* experience, but as an aesthetic or even a ‘religiose’/transcendent experience.

If the original use/function and context of the Counter-Reformation Christian painted image was a devotional experience (as I argue in chapter 1, on Christian imagery), - one to aid the meditations of the faithful in the sacred contemplation of the Mass - then that ‘devotional experience’ in my paintings is quoted and overlaid with a contemporary painted fashion or media image or cinematic image, whose principal use is one of ‘display’.

When these contrasting uses of devotion and display are combined in one pictorial gestalt, the result is both a cancelling of their former meanings and the creation of a new hybrid meaning and experience. The nature of this new hybrid experience can no longer be based on devotion, but neither can it function purely as aesthetic display. Rather, I argue the new hybrid experience that is generated amongst a cultural; group with empathetic aesthetic and cultural values is the experience of an aesthetic and poetic critique of the contemporary painted image. It is the experience of the palimpsest - one text overlaying another. It is the experience of *bricolage* -the construction of meaning from appropriated and improvised forms.

**My Painting Practice and Aesthetics**

My painting deals with original meaning in aesthetics through processes of *bricolage, and palimpsest*. I appropriate (quote) images, both religious and secular, historic and contemporary by reproducing their appearances sometimes by way of mechanical reproduction and sometimes by means of paint, very often combining these two forms of representation in one painting. This produces hybridization of surfaces (physical, cultural) and meaning, I use this method to reconstruct similar or analogous experiences of pre-Enlightenment Christian imagery, because I argue aesthetics is more independent and less temporally connected than use/context.
Those aesthetic experiences include the visionary, the religious ecstatic, rapture, the miraculous, the sacred imaginary and immanence. My painting tries to reconstruct similar/analogous aesthetic and religious modes of experience, as represented in certain key works (inter alia *The Ecstasy of St. Theresa* by Bernini, *The Annunciation* by El Greco) of Catholic Counter-Reformation painted and sculptural imagery. But, this can only be achieved through aesthetics. Because, if the form is not right, the image does not ‘work’ (i.e. fails to communicate intention). What is ‘right’ is contingent on the aesthetics of a particular cultural group, but I am referring to those socio-cultural groups having empathetic values and/or beliefs (aesthetic beliefs - not necessarily religious or ideological beliefs) in the visual systems of those cultures. I appropriate this form of Christian image system, because it uses self-conscious affective aesthetics and emotional rhetoric, which coincide with my aesthetic sensibility as a painter. I also suggest that key works of Catholic Counter-Reformation devotional imagery demonstrate an image system that managed to reconcile the representation of sensuality and corporeality with the spirituality of Christian imagery. This type of Christian imagery is, I suggest itself, an early example of hybrid form in art, that is to say it is a transitional form of Christian imagery which sought to combine the ‘archaic mentality’ as Belting describes, of the old ‘unmediated’ devotional image, and the sensuality of the artistic mediation of human form, whilst retaining its function as a devotional image. I quote some of the forms of Catholic Reformation devotional imagery in my painting *All Night Long* (2010), (fig.2.), which proposes alternative realisms/realities that travel across the qualitative change in aesthetics and ethics that I discuss in the writing. In this painting I used the methods of *bricolage, palimpsest and quotation* outlined above. In this painting *All Night Long* (2010) different painterly forms are used,(traditional, modern, illusionistic, graphic), which are indexical of historical and contemporary ways of seeing,(e.g. photographic, cinematic, painterly, graphic) and different ‘realisms’. The painting incorporates representations of the differences in cultural/temporal constructions of ‘realism’. These differences in modes of representation are demonstrated by the role of process and aesthetic forms, as a *quality of kind*, not only in what the image manifests, but the *type of emotion* which that image calibrates. So in the case of my painting *All Night Long* - 17th century Christian Mystical imagery occupies the same pictorial space as the 21st century
cinematic and fashion media image and the typological symbolic image of 19th century (Holman-Hunt’s Scapegoat) (fig.54), the effect of which suggests a visionary emotion, but one borne of bricolage.

Measured against the aesthetic, cultural values and reception aesthetics of the audiences familiar with the development of painting in Western Europe, my painting is a physical manifestation of a particular painterly form, (i.e. gestural marks that make the image are explicit), which represent a culturally specific optically faithful resemblance of the sensations and appearances of the visible world, elements of which are reproduced again within a culturally specific understanding of naturalism and represent different experiences of ‘realisms’. Painterly techniques such as wet into wet, glazing and layering are conscripted to achieve the aesthetic of the surface appearance. The above qualities are apparent in the short film and still photographs of the surface of the painting I made (figs.56-58).

My painting All Night Long (2010), (fig.2) proposes the idea of a spiritual ‘alter-existence’. The painting refers or quotes Christian imagery and its forms of experience because it adopts the iconography of Christian resurrection. In the painting these ‘alternative realities’, which are forms of Christian consciousness, represented in the ontological experiences of 17th century Christian Mysticism, are collapsed onto the aesthetic appearances and ethical values of global capitalist culture. This ‘collapsing’ or overlapping of meanings is achieved through processes of quotation, bricolage and the palimpsest, one text overlaying another. These processes/methods are described in my writings on methodology in the introduction, which builds upon Mieke Bal’s theory of ‘quotation’. This ‘overlapping of meanings’ provokes questions about how Christian imagery and the consciousness and values it represents, negotiates its position (a cultural, epistemological space) in late capitalist aesthetics cultures. The ‘modern’ images in the painting generate pictorial absence and against that I put historical Christian imagery, which generates presence and I stage a war of meaning.

Aesthetics matters in regard to my use of Christian imagery, because if the form is not right, (within the reception and understanding of a defined cultural group), the
image does not work and fails to communicate effectively. This is connected to the ‘rhetoric’ of the painted form and the ‘rhetoric’ of the way painted form generates the type of emotion that is possible in the painting. The aesthetic ‘form’ calibrates the type of emotion that is possible in the reception of Christian imagery. For example, the effect of an Andre Rublev or a Cimabue crucifix, based as it is in Late Byzantine aesthetic form, represents a schematic approach to aesthetic form which the icon tradition demanded, whereas a different aesthetic form, say the Northern Baroque paintings of George de La Tour - generates a different type of emotion because of the way aesthetic form is used and mediated by the artist, in this case the Baroque address to the senses (illusionistic summoning of light effects textures atmosphere), whereas the Cimabue addresses itself primarily to the contemplation of its content. The question becomes somewhat more complex when you ask the question of two or more works sharing the same cultural context of iconographic and aesthetic ideology. What role, for example, does aesthetics play in the difference of emotion calibrated between, say an El Greco, and a provincial religious painter of the same period in 17th century Spanish mysticism? Here, the content is the same, but the ‘aesthetic’ mediation of the artist calibrates the quality of the emotion differently and in this context aesthetics is a quality of degree and not kind. I suggest that aesthetics as a quality of degree is an element in Belting’s definition of the idea of art, which he argues replaces the old, ‘archaic,’ unmediated Christian imagery which effectively disappeared with the Renaissance.

When I take a religious imagery and the type of transcendent experience it implies in terms of the cultures of understanding of western European pictorial vision, then the experience of the contemporary image must perform as an equivalence of experience either to validate the original meaning and experience or to differentiate the original experience-e.g. visual paradox and my paintings frequently present as cross cultural tension or paradox. The culture may move on and that is not the problem. The problem is whether the contexts have anything or enough in common for anything like a similar meaning to be generated? The memory of itself that Art has can generate again disabled or marginalised forms of its aesthetic experiences or realisms.
Wollheim, in *Painting as an Art*, considers the way content enters a work of art and cites two ways, - textuality and borrowing:

> When the way of borrowing works, then a borrowing enters the content of painting. A painting acquires historical content or meaning. By a borrowing I mean the fact that a certain motif or image has been borrowed from earlier art. I do not mean the borrowed motif or image itself-that after all invariably belongs to the painting that borrows it as well as to the work from which it is borrowed. I mean something about the borrowed motif or image, specifically where it comes from. And this fact belongs only sometime to the painting that borrows the motif or image-that is when the way of borrowing works- and it never belongs to the work from which the motif or image is borrowed. (Wollheim, 1987:187-8)

Belting,(1994) asserts that the reception of painting is determined by its use, but, I argue, the reception of painting now is also determined by aesthetics-so that the way a Christian image is experienced today is through an individual sense - aesthetic (i.e. concepts of beauty, taste, sentiment, emotion) - not through the religious. This of course will depend on the cultural group, (e.g. believers may still view as religious), but secular west Europeans, I argue, will most likely receive the image through the aesthetic values, which those cultural groups hold. What I am aiming at with my painting is the point where it changes from being an image to becoming an ‘affective’ image. The image then becomes experiential. That is what painting can achieve - an ‘affective’ experience through aesthetics. (reflective, contemplative, emotional, sacred).

Is not the affective experience determined by use/function rather than aesthetics? If I take a fashion image and put it next to a Christian imagery it signifies a social, cultural and historical value difference. The question of what this collage/montage process amounts to in terms of an affective image is determined by its mode of reception. Contemporary cultural groups can never experience what a pre-Enlightenment audience experienced, but a contemporary audience can experience a contemporary aesthetic response to my paintings, which my thesis claims can amount to a similar emotion to those pre-Enlightenment experiences.

The conflation in my paintings of religious and fashion images demonstrates how I use image systems differently from their original intended contexts, meanings and,
functions, although both religious and fashion images have a rhetorical function - aiming to change/reinforce thought or action - they both function to communicate beliefs and values, they both have a social, cultural etc. function. Context is different. In my paintings, they become ‘appearances’ and subject to aesthetic rather than ideological or functional determinations because of the change in cultural context. The Catholic Reformation paintings and sculpture I have looked at were used for public devotional purposes, were institutional images and, I suggest, had iconic status. By that I mean that those images held widespread significance for ‘religious’ people as religious symbol and they proposes an ‘infinite’ space. The contemporary fashion/advertising image is also a public, institutionalised image, addressing itself to a mass audience and frequently, I suggest, attains similar iconic status in the same sense, that is to say as an image system, which holds widespread significance and addresses an ‘infinite’ space. Its purposes are not devotional, but ‘display value’. Its function is to be seen and to influence consumer behaviour. It suggests a transformation of the consumer’s social and lifestyle circumstances; whereas, Christian imagery promised a transcendence of the subject's earthly materiality and mortal finitude. Although, when quoted in my painting as part of a unique production, the photographic fashion image has aura and is not reproducible. My paintings counterpose the emotion of a fashion or advertising image with the emotion of a religious imagery. Is there any similarity in the emotional aesthetics and power of these image systems? I suggest both are in a limited sense 'affective' ritualised images, and belief is involved in the fashion image - the belief in communication, if nothing else. But is there any contiguity in their emotional power? That is to say what, if any equivalence or affinity do they share in their systems of affective aesthetics on the subject?

The fashion image, I suggest, is received as a ‘cool’ image in McLuhan’s terms (1967), partly because the medium of photography, I suggest, is a 'cool' medium, but also because the fashion image relies upon a sense of 'power relations' through glamour, between it and the consumer/viewer. Photography is technical reproduction, but quoted in my painting it ceases to be a reproducible image. However, my painting, (as representative of painting’s capacity), translates the ‘coolness’ of the photographic fashion image into the 'hot' emotion of the painted image, whilst correspondingly, the old religious imagery is indexed photographically
through the medium of a black and white photocopy, although is now part of a unique production, which has ‘aura’ and is not reproducible. Surfaces, both aesthetically and culturally compete and become reversed and paradoxical; - the emotional rhetoric of Counter-Reformation Catholic narrative painting is rendered by mass information-image technology, whilst consumer-orientated fashion photography is represented, using painting vocabularies and forms of optical, pictorial, painterly representation/realism, which function as ‘shorthand’ for those 17th century visual systems in painting.

By taking modern examples of public imagery like cinema and fashion iconography, I suggest an argument can be made that such visual systems propose experiences ‘beyond the normal’, the ‘transcendent’. The proscenium arch and the screen were ‘the entrance to the temples’ to the Gods of their time. Transcendence invests Hollywood, especially early Hollywood. The question becomes in what sense was this regarded as transcendence?

Christian imagery, cinematic images, fashion images- all are images borne of social ritual and all rely upon affective reception aesthetics, similar for example to those employed by Bernini in the Cornaro chapel (1647-52)- that is to say they orchestrate structures of affect and feeling for emotional response. (see Bernini: Flights of Love, the Art of Devotion, Careri, 1995). I refer to illustrative examples of certain media images (cinema, documentary, fashion, advertising), which I have quoted in my paintings.(silent Hollywood film still, fig. 52) and (Paloma Faith, publicity photo, fig.53).

So, what are my paintings doing in this research and what does my practice show me? The importance of my practice to this research is that it enables me to experiment and discover through aesthetics whether certain affective experiences are available or reproducible for contemporary painting.
Christian Imagery in my Aesthetics.

The manipulation of formal properties in my paintings, according to a modernist formalist argument is an aesthetically autonomous act. But my thesis suggests painting is aesthetics and ethics, as in Eliot’s (1921) definition of metaphysical poetry, possessing a unity of thought feeling, emotion and action. In other words, the aesthetic, or what could be described as the aesthetic in 17th century. Rome was not separate from ethics, theology, and metaphysics. This of course changed with the post-Enlightenment image where, for the first time, the aesthetic was conceived as a separate and discreet category of human cognition. The kind of aesthetic experience, which I am trying to generate from the Catholic Counter-Reformation painted image, (e.g. El Greco, Caravaggio) is an emotionally heightened sense of lived experience that is focused and intense yet, not fantasy, a part of the everyday, wherein the human subject is possessed of an integration of thought, feeling, action and emotion in one unified consciousness, which, my thesis argues, conflicts with and is resisted by the socio-economic and cultural influences that I have described in the previous chapters. Through the process of my painting I attempt to reconstruct these experiences with the intention that a ‘trace’- something like or similar to those experiences and meanings is generated in the finished work and may be transmitted and communicated to an empathetic audience (i.e. culturally informed and reasonably familiar with the form). I attempt an emotional as well as an aesthetic reconstruction of the sacred spaces of pre-Enlightenment Christian imagery in my painting practice for those social groups who have the appropriate values, beliefs, empathy and a cultural understanding of the form. The paintings are about reconstructing a contemporary equivalent/analogue of the emotional and aesthetic forms of experience (the visionary, the religious ecstatic) in the medium of painting that incorporates that unity of thought, feeling and action, (of which Eliot speaks in his literary criticism on the Metaphysical poetry of Donne or Marvell) and which, I suggest, is present in pre-Enlightenment Christian imagery (for example 17th century Spanish Mysticism in painting).

The question of whether my motivation to make these kind of paintings (the visionary, the religious ecstatic), is formed as part of what I see as ‘historical necessity’ or for some autobiographical reason (e.g. van Gogh syndrome) is determined by whether I regard the artwork as autonomous or whether it functions as part of a process of
historical necessity. My motivation as a painter is to make these images, from an autobiographical viewpoint. But, it is also about the situation and condition of certain aspects of the painted image today and a possible absence, marginalisation or disablement of certain potentialities of meaning within its current discourses. I am trying to generate a new space of meaning and experience in my painting that negotiates the difference between past and present, sacred and secular, corporeal and spiritual.

My thesis argues that Christian imagery in the modern period is inimical to a certain modern cultural aesthetics because the form of consciousness Christian imagery represents addresses itself to a moral value, rather than an aesthetics of sensibility, taste or judgment (Kant). I argue for an aesthetics of a unified experience. Some conceptions of aesthetics do contain reference to moral value (e.g. theoretic interpretations of aesthetics-Ruskin, Fuller). My thesis argues that the ‘agency’ of aesthetics today has broken free of the frame (enclave) of art and permeates contemporary lived experience, attitudes and outlook on the world. I argue that in order for aesthetics to reconstruct the experiences of the key works I have discussed within Counter-Reformation devotional imagery, a theoretic faculty would need to be adopted in regard to aesthetic reception, which is absent from most current discourses on aesthetics.

I argue that the Counter-Reformation painted image, the purpose of which was to invoke Catholic piety and observance, was intended to address itself to the emotions and associative experience, (i.e. Eliot’s unity of thought, feeling and action) (1921)

I accept, however, that if thought is involved, language will be involved because thought works with concepts and concepts are represented in language.

I seek now through my painting practice to discover if and what I can generate as similar religious/aesthetic experience to Counter–Reformation Christian painting. Since those paintings were experiential events, only painting, (in this case, my painting), can answer the problem of any ‘loss’ or disablement of experience in relation to that form of Christian imagery. And it can do so in a way no other method
of research evidence allows, because the evidence I seek is experiential - is and can only be generated by paintings.

What criteria do I use for assessing any religious/spiritual experience my painting can generate? A structuralist response would be that any object/artefact can assume religious sacred presence according to the social/anthropological context it is assigned in a culture - it is the product of a collective social/linguistic agreement about the relationship between cultural values and objects. Therefore how can I assign religious/spiritual experience to my paintings if it is assigned by collective cultural agreement? Cultural meaning can only be assigned by collective agreement. However, the construction of meaning as I have discussed above and in the methodology section, in the modern and contemporary period in the absence of an institutional aesthetic for the contemporary representation of religious experience – there would seem to be no collective context for assigning religious meaning except the Church who would assign a functional religious meaning to the artefact, in the service of devotion. In contemporary secular societies individual artists may produce artefacts, to which they assign a ‘private’ meaning - a meaning that may be connected with the intention, subject, form or affective feeling which the work generates for the artist. Two contrasting examples of this assignment of the artist’s ‘private’ meaning are Wilhelm Worringen’s Abstraction and Empathy, (1997: 3-5) in which he argues-painted images of the past, (contra abstract images) generated empathy ‘objectified self-enjoyment’ in the viewer and Mark Rothko’s (1957) observation that when people broke down and cried in front of his paintings they were having the same religious experience he had when making them. Both examples rely on artistic intention as the generation of meaning. But any religious meaning Rothko intended for his paintings had to rely more on context than intention, (witness his withdrawal of the Seagram murals for reasons of context and his approval of the ‘religious’ context of the de Menil chapel). A recent Supreme Court ruling in the UK has seen a re-alignment of the definition of ‘religion’ move away from a collective institutionalised agreement to a ‘self-definition’ provided the ‘self-definition fulfils all the requirements of what constitutes the commonly understood criteria of a religion. But, again, whilst the social trend may be for individuals and individual intention to be able to define a ‘private’ meaning for either ritualised artefacts or practices/beliefs - as a matter of collective cultural meaning,
(which is the platform the working assumptions of my thesis are based upon)-
‘private’ meaning is subsumed by the construction of cultural (i.e. collective
meaning).

The question of whether the experiences a viewer would have when looking at my
paintings are or can be similar to those religious and aesthetic experiences of those
key works of Catholic Reformation imagery depends on what aesthetic and cultural
values they bring to the work. As a white middle class, middle aged west European
male. I get a certain experience when looking at the work in the studio. Cumulatively,
the works communicate an aesthetic experience that is, for me, extraordinary,
beyond the normal,- transcendent, but in what sense this is transcendent is harder to
define and others will experience the paintings according to their values. Although
my paintings reference religious subject matter this does not mean that they
automatically generate transcendence in a religious sense. My earlier analogue
about early Hollywood film, which discloses great respect for the transcendent
image, provokes the real question - in what sense transcendent? In an
institutionalised religious sense, this would require a qualitative change of context
from an image based on display to an image based upon contemplation and
meditation in the service of a religious ritual. In the next section, The Power of the
Image, I ask what, if any, forms of transcendent meaning and experience can
contemporary painting, including my own, generate and for which cultural groups.

The Power of the Image and Recuperation

The previous section on my practice raises the question; what cultural and individual
transformative power does the painted image retain? According to Belting, (1994)
the ‘power of the image’ stems from its purpose, function and use in a particular
culture. Mitchell, (2005) turns the question on its head and asks what are the
demands of the image-what do pictures want? and he answers with the response
‘mastery’. The formerly sovereign status which the pre- Reformation sacred image of
intercession possessed in its purpose, use and function was relinquished in its
change of status in Enlightenment aesthetics to one of art- the profane ritual of
aesthetic contemplation and surplus economic value. It was at this time that a large
scale market developed in the sale of pictures in Northern Europe and the fine art
tradition as it is known today was born. I am not suggesting there was no religious art in the eighteenth century, but its status, power, uses and function were increasingly received through the eighteenth century notion of aesthetics. Aston (2009), in the Introduction to his book, Art and Religion in the Eighteenth Century concedes as much when he acknowledges that the display of religious paintings after 1750 in non-religious buildings is on face value an indication of the ascendancy of the aesthetic in the reception of religious paintings.

The philosophers Alain de Botton (2012) and Roger Scruton (2011) have recently proposed aesthetic forms of recuperation - including sacred aesthetics- as a value system of meaning for contemporary secularism The problem with this post- modern, post- ideological ‘profane cult of beauty’ argument is that it treats its object purely aesthetically and to aestheticise something is to detach it from lived experience as an object of contemplation. If a form of recuperation of the meanings and experiences of the Christian cult-image is to work in the contemporary visual cultures of west European secularism, it must entail the dynamic qualities of that image system which are recovered in such a way that their agency is still active within a visual culture.

By way of example of what I mean I wish to refer to the Issenheim Altarpiece by Mathias Grunewald (1512-16) (fig.23). I have chosen to conduct a close read of this image because I believe it is an example of how a Catholic cult-image, made just before the Protestant Reformation, has been effectively recuperated by contemporary pictorial production - the Kieskamma Altarpiece in South Africa (2006) (fig.22).The example also demonstrates how specific key works from Catholic cult-imagery before the Enlightenment and their micro-histories produce insights on recuperation in contemporary pictorial practice.

Issenheim Altarpiece. (1512-16), Mathias Grunewald,

One form of continuing ‘power’ of the devotional Christian cult-image (at least amongst believers in that image system) is its perceived efficacy as an instrument of healing - witness Catholic shrines, like Our Lady of Lourdes (1862) or the
Keiskamma Altarpiece, in South Africa (2006) (fig.22) created by AIDS/HIV sufferers and modelled on the historical example of the Issenheim Altarpiece (1512-16) (fig.23). In this instance art historical ‘recuperation’ of a canonical Christian cult-image was believed to yield a form of power of the image when applied in the context of health and its efficacy as a psychological anodyne for disease. The known purpose and function of the Issenheim Altarpiece in the pre-scientific culture of mediaeval Northwest Europe suggests that a transformative and redemptive power was believed to inhere in the contemplation of such images of suffering. Regardless of whether the ‘healing’ properties of those images were of a physical or spiritual kind – the notion that the sick would, by contemplating the mystery of suffering of the Christ Redeemer, (depicted in this case with the same affliction as the supplicants – St. Anthony’s Fire) gain hope, consolation or psychological comfort is described in Freedbedrg’s (1991), The Power of Images quoted in Pardee (2009), which states:

> Beholders...... were attracted to an image because it had or showed a physical body like theirs; one that (they) could identify with. Because of this similarity, beholders felt close to the image and suffered with it because it bore the marks of suffering. By suffering alongside of the image, the beholder was transformed from passive to active participant. Power shifted from the image to the beholder and back to the image. (Pardee, 2009)

This power of the image rests on an investment of belief in the sacred authority of that image which no longer pertains in readings of the Issenheim altarpiece today (fig.23). However, this image, in common with other images of its kind, still exerts a form of power over different cultural groups (believers and non-believers), but in contemporary Western European cultures such ‘power’ is now based on its ‘otherness’ to secular vision within those cultural groups.

By contrast, in terms of its intended function, the Kieskamma altarpiece, amongst the cultural groups that both created it and share its values and beliefs, I suggest, fulfils some kind of sense of empowerment of the patient/observer - a sense of a narrative of their experience being articulated. This is alluded to by Hinze (2007:457), who comparing it with its earlier ‘model’ speaks in the context of Issenheim as, ‘a narrative of illness, suffering, transformation and hope. The story of Issenheim is the story of every patient who came before it’. This is echoed by Pardee, (2009) who
states in relation to *Issenheim*, 'the beholder entered a visual relationship with the image of the saint and the saint acted as intercessor'. (Pardee, 2009)

*Kieskamma* is designated an altarpiece, which suggests a devotional or at least a contemplative reception. But, it is the nature of the reception of images like *Issenheim* that the purpose of the Western Christian cult-image, not as a polemic, arousing compassionate action, but a passive *contemplative icon of suffering* was argued by Dr. Neil McGregor (2011) in a recent talk on the representation of compassion in Western Christian art at St. Martin-in-the Fields Church, London.

I suggest *Kieskamma*, which is separated spatially, temporally, culturally from *Issenheim* projects a more interactive, 'equal' less distanced relationship between observer and image. *Kieskamma* is an example of a collective religious imagery and how contemporary religious meaning can arise, not only from use/function and context but an aesthetic and religious re-interpretation and reconstruction of Christian imagery in a non-European context.

One British contemporary artist whose work, I suggest, has investigated the ‘power of the image’ and the role of the Christian cult-image in contemporary painting within the context of aesthetics is Chris Ofili. One of the few exceptions to the absence of Christian iconography in recent British painting, his work, in paintings such as *The Holy Virgin Mary* (1996) and *The Upper Room*, (2002), (fig.8) relied upon the tensions and cultural paradoxes provoked by the Western Christian cult-image, as evidenced in his representation of a black Virgin Mary with elephant dung and collaged pornographic motifs on the richly decorated surfaces of his canvases. These devices (i.e. the placing of elephant dung alongside images of the Virgin Mary within the context of an artwork) caused the then Mayor of New York, Rudy Guiliani, to call for the closure of the exhibition of this work when it went on display in New York in 1996. The slightly later and rather more contemplative statement of the *Upper Room* (2002), now in the Tate Collection, enacts an anthropomorphism - the change from human to animal form- on the Christian Biblical narrative of the Last Supper. Transposing Christ and His disciples into Rhesus Macaque monkeys, in each of the 12 elaborately decorated panels surmounted by a ‘Deity’, the artist seems to draw parallels with Hindu sacred imagery. The substitution of human for a form of sacred animal animism is both a visionary act, which bears relation to certain
traditions in English visionary Painting, (for example Blake), but also challenging in its equation of Judao-Christian culture with the origins of ancient, ritualistic totemistic culture and post–Darwinian evolutionary theory.

Such works point to a form of recuperation which recovers the unity of thought, feeling and action demonstrated in the meaning and experience of the pre-modern Christian cult-image. However, recuperating the magical or transformative power images such as these once held remains doubtful within a culture conditioned to see the world, in Belting’s words as:

Severed into the purely factual and the hidden signification of a metaphor, as opposed to ‘the old image’ which rejected reduction into metaphor, rather it laid claim to being immediate evidence of God’s presence revealed to the eyes and the senses (Belting, 1994:15)

This might suggest a contemporary form of recuperation involving Rosenblum (1994) and Elkins’ (2004) ‘metaphorisation’ of the religious, (see also Seguy, 1989). David Morgan (2005) explains how cultural influence informs a religious act of seeing in his book The Sacred Gaze, in which he states:

Seeing is an operation that relies on an apparatus of assumptions and inclinations, habits, routines and historical associations and cultural practices. Sacred Gaze is a fixed term that designates the particular configuration of ideas, attitudes and customs that informs a religious act of seeing as it occurs within a given cultural and historical setting. A sacred gaze is the manner in which a way of seeing invests an image, a viewer, as an act of viewing with spiritual significance. The study of religious visual culture is therefore the study of images, but also the practices and habits that rely on images, as well as the attitudes and preconceptions that inform vision as a cultural act. (Morgan, 2005: 3-7)

Another British artist whose work addresses how painting can recuperate a ‘religious’ way of seeing in the absence of a shared system of religious meaning in secular society is George Shaw, (born 1966). For a number of years now, Shaw has produced exquisitely wrought images of suburban working-class social housing estates and their enclaves. His paintings employ textual and coded references to the Christian cult–image. Two particular series, Scenes from the Passion and Ash Wednesday (2005), (fig.61) are of special interest because they provoke the question: how are these Christian images? The titles the artist has given these works
indicate that they are Christian images, but if one accepts the absence of an agreed communal idea of a contemporary religious imagery then it becomes very difficult to designate any choice of secular imagery as being religious or even ‘religiose’ (morbidly or excessively religious) unless one has regard to the context of its meaning and presentation. In this case the title provides a context and it says ‘this is religious.’ Shaw’s work is intended to be and is shown in ‘white cube’ commercial gallery spaces - but does that automatically disqualify their potential as religious or religiose images? If we look at a painting from the series titled Ash Wednesday, (fig.61) we see the artist depicting the early morning sunlight bathing the side wall of a prosaic, vernacular end of terrace council house. Is the viewer meant to take this as an attitude of religious benediction? Certainly, we are drawn into a sense of contemplative immersion with the image which locates this image in an arthistorical line of descent with the studied melancholic Romanticism of an artist like Caspar David Friedrich. Shaw has spoken about this series of paintings thus:

Ash Wednesday began for me with a dirty smudge of ash placed on my forehead by the serious thumb of a Catholic priest. It was the tradition to remain marked until midday. It was not strange to find these paintings stuck in the morning of that day unable to shake off the words of that priest telling me that I was dust and unto dust I would return. For Christ’s sake it seemed as if I had only just started. It was to be a day off school, thinking of the end of days. (Jones, P. 2006:58)

This is not to say that these images of the suburban hinterland put themselves forward as indexical religious signifiers, (i.e. a representative ‘type’ of religious imagery). But, certainly, we are drawn into this sense of contemplative immersion with the scene, that locates this image in the iconography of the abject and as stated, the studied melancholic Romanticism of Caspar David Friedrich in his Monk by the Sea (c.1808-10), (fig.27). Furthermore, having regard to Morgan’s (2005) definition above of the ‘sacred gaze’ and the attitudes that inform vision as a cultural act - then the scenes and the titling of Shaw’s paintings locate the religious in the everyday of these works. On Morgan’s definition, I suggest we see the aesthetic equivalent of Weber’s (2000, auth. 1905) Calvinist ‘mentality’ played out in Shaw’s paintings, in terms of their sense of individual isolation and atomised ‘self-construction’, which is an attitude of the Protestant work ethic, identified by Weber. Their pictorial and conceptual mode of expression engages with a modern spiritual
condition described variously by the philosopher, Julian Critchley (2012) as the ‘faith of the faithless’ and - what T.S. Eliot (1921) earlier described as that ‘dissociation of sensibility’ and which Ruskin and Arnold originally identified as accompanying the great ‘withdrawal’ of religious belief from everyday life that had begun by the mid-19th century - characterised by Arnold as the “long withdrawing roar of the Sea of Faith” (quoted in Fuller, 1990 British Romantic Landscape Painting). They are withdrawals, because the paintings address the representation of absence. They provoke certain questions about the place of religious meaning in a secular society, for whom mass social housing represents a Materialist model of Christian ethical ideas of community and social inclusiveness. In this regard, it is interesting to compare Shaw’s auto-biographical scenes of the everyday from his childhood surroundings, with those depicted by a predecessor, the British artist, Stanley Spencer in his visionary paintings of Cookham, the small Berkshire village where he was born and continued to provide the motivation for much of his work. The representation of an embodied Christian divine presence in the everyday which is manifest in Spencer’s work, is replaced with a more problematic melancholic absence in Shaw’s paintings. Applying Morgan’s (2005) definition of the ‘sacred gaze’ to Shaw’s work ‘recuperates’ a tradition of seeing that I would describe as a ‘Calvinist’ notion of the image:

A sacred gaze is the manner in which a way of seeing invests an image, a viewer, as an act of viewing with spiritual significance. (Morgan, 2005: 3-7)

The type or particular configuration of gaze that painting mediates or is permitted to mediate, in this case, the Christian gaze, within the context of a globalised consumer capitalism is the subject of my painting All Night Long, (2010) (fig.2). It is an image of Christian recuperation, the resurrection of souls, but is the image enacting a recuperation, by which I mean, recovering and making again those experiences found in Christian imagery, their unity of thought feeling and action (Elliot, 1921). The question of whether an image alone can effect a recuperation of original symbolic meaning/consciousness will depend on the way it is used and the context of the use. By making an image an artist asserts a certain reality-whether realist or utopian, spiritual or profane, either based on self-expression, belief or aspiration. Under current conditions of pictorial production the painted image will always assert an individualised reality. In a painting like All Night Long, 2010 (fig.2) I individualise
forms of Christian experience, such as the visionary and the ecstatic and place these meanings alongside contemporary ‘mentalities’ such as consumer culture, glamour, and fashion. In this cross-fertilisation of meanings I intend that a new hybrid consciousness emerges in which the experiences of the Christian gaze are once again mobilised within the reception aesthetics of contemporary painting. But does this mean that an image alone can recuperate original meaning? Such a belief assumes a context that guarantees the autonomy of the art object and the autonomy of the artist.

The problem concerns the reception of the meanings and experiences of Christian imagery not amongst Christian viewers, but amongst secular cultural and social groups, art institutions and systems of vision. My thesis argues that Christian imagery represents meanings and experiences which in reconstructed form may be received as aesthetic and religious/religiose experience by such cultural groups and constitute alternative realisms to the systems of vision which dominate those cultures.

I am not persuaded that the art object is autonomous or that I, as the artist-maker, can create absolutely autonomously because the artist is subject to cultural, social, political influences and attitudes and conventions of seeing – ‘gazes’. I have in the past regarded previous bodies of my paintings as autonomous aesthetic objects; that is to say they are products of the autonomy of the artist. However, this is all an example of the autonomy and self-actualisation of the individual preached by Calvinist culture. Does All Night Long (2010) conform to this model? It certainly adopts some of the features of individualised vision and is intended to be shown in white cube commercial gallery spaces where it will be promoted as the product of individualised and unique vision and it will be collected by individuals who are members of that self-same bourgeoisie culture exercising individual taste and discrimination. Therein lies the problem of recuperation because it is not a collective image; it is a private image. Value, under present conditions of pictorial production of the painted image is invested in the authenticity and uniqueness of the painted artefact as a product of an individual autonomous and unique vision and is received individually on the same terms.
The image does not reflect a collective belief but an individual obsession/viewpoint, so one may say, perhaps, that those forms of meaning/mentality can be recuperated as private individual meaning but they cannot be recuperated as collective Christian meaning because, to do so, would entail a collective agreement and belief in the authority of their gaze or their way of seeing in the same way that people today believe in the photographic authority/gaze. To summarise- *All Night Long* may exist as an individual and private recuperation of original meaning/consciousness and in its exhibition and dissemination it will be acknowledged as a private recuperation, if it successfully enters the art world system. But, it can never exist as a *collective recuperation* because a collective Christian gaze, at least in the cultures of North West Europe is de-legitimised socially and culturally and because a collective Christian gaze lacks a collective belief in its authority. The icon tradition of the Eastern Orthodox church is, I suggest, still received as a religious ‘gaze’- a fact which probably contributed to the excessive authoritarian response to the counter-aesthetics protests of the agitprop group *Pussy Riot* (2012) (fig.59) in Christ the Saviour Cathedral, Moscow.

Whether some paintings have a Christian significance for an individual Christian or religious viewer or group of viewers, is not the issue. The argument is the lack of, ‘a collective Christian gaze as a way of seeing (a ‘majority’ gaze) and the lack of a collective belief in its authority with the emphasis on collective. There cannot be a collective belief in the authority of the Christian gaze because this is not possible within secular society. Contemporary cultural groups who have the appropriate codes of cultural recognition will be able to receive an *aesthetic experience* of those historic works and my contemporary paintings. But, the *Christian* meaning of those experiences will only be shared by those who share those values and beliefs.

The practice which has some of the closest affinities with the themes of my research is the photographic practice of American artist/photographer. David La Chapelle, (figs.6,39) and although it is strictly outside the remit of my research title his work is of such relevance in the context of the historical recovery of the Baroque Christian imagery, that I thought it should be included to better position my own practice and
concerns with this subject matter. David la Chappelle openly models some aspects of his diverse body of work (and in certain respects himself) on the iconography of the Catholic Counter-reformation Baroque. For example, such pieces as *The Last Supper* in the *Jesus is my Homeboy* series (2008) disclose direct quotations of Caravaggio’s painting of the same subject—*The Supper at Emmaus* (1601). As the ‘Caravaggio’ of post-modern New York, La Chapelle successfully ‘recuperated’ the appearances of that visual system, which my own practice also reproduces. However, I suggest that La Chapelle’s appropriations and quotations do not recover (and are perhaps not intended to recover) more than the appearances and aesthetic grammar of that iconography. The voice which he uses is the public voice of media communication, not the private voice of painting which my images represent. The meanings and experiences of La Chapelle’s work are the meanings and experiences of capitalist vision (he was a commercial fashion photographer). His images are, I suggest, intended to be popular and communicate clearly their visual message and in this sense his work bears very close affinities with the Catholic Counter-Reformation Baroque, because La Chapelle’s images ‘illustrate’ affective baroque emotion of the religious, seen through the contemporary lens of fashion and media photographic surfaces with their accompanying production values. However, although his images may represent that iconography, I suggest they do not recuperate those meanings, experiences except on a formal, aesthetic level. What I am attempting to do in my work is to reconstruct something like the presence, meanings and experiences of those paintings in the medium of their original transmission. Although, as I have made clear the method and reception of that transmission have vastly changed.

My paintings cannot possess a spiritual dimension because they are material objects but they can *represent* a spiritual dimension, which can be understood in its reception, because, I argue, through processes of interpretation and empathy, a cultural group with similar cultural and aesthetic values will have the appropriate framework of experience to assess whether my paintings generate a ‘religiose’ aesthetic experience as part of the affects of their reception. This cultural group will possess the cultural context by having empathy with the values and beliefs transmitted by the paintings and familiar with the aesthetic and religious forms
employed in the paintings. If the viewer shares a cultural context, a viewer will have empathetic values and beliefs. However, Christian belief is not a requirement in the aesthetic reception of my paintings. The ‘religiose’ experience I seek to generate in my paintings is not contingent on their reception as ‘Christian’ painting. Indeed I argue they are not Christian paintings (in any liturgical sense), but reference Christian iconography. Signs of authorial intention that these paintings are simultaneously about presence and absence in contemporary painted pictorial experience are encoded in the forms of the paintings – their formal conventions and styles, which refer to a number of different conventions of representation in painting. I argue those cultural groups with the appropriate knowledge, values and beliefs will receive those readings in the context of aesthetics. In many of my painted studies I present Christian imagery reproduced by contemporary information/image technologies, which generates absence and I paint over this mediated Christian imagery, which I claim will generate presence as indexed by the painted mark. It is as if a pictorial ‘memory’, connoting the absence of the religious imagery in contemporary painting, is experienced as a form of negative aesthetics through modern reproductive and lens-based technologies.

In this thesis I have provided an account of my practice and an explanation of the meanings and experiences I am trying to engender in cultural groups, according to the beliefs and values they have. Aesthetics is culturally determined. Different cultural groups will have different experiences of my paintings, which will generate different meanings according to the values and beliefs they have. Their cultural values and beliefs will determine the type of experience and meaning they have in front of my paintings. Christian and non-Christians can have experiences of my paintings. Christians may construct Christian meanings and non-believers may construct secular meanings based on the aesthetic meaning their values and beliefs produce. But, only Christians can share the Christian meaning of the resurrection of souls, the divinity or the value of charity. There is a distinction of hierarchy between meaning, which is culturally determined and experience (phenomenology), although experience is constructed according to values. The formal conventions of my paintings (i.e. its ‘aesthetic language’) would not be understood by Christians unless they understood the language of 20th century painting practice. The existence
of a Christian group does not validate the meanings and experiences of my paintings, which are transmitted through painting conventions as well as content. The experiences and meanings - the visionary, the ecstatic, the miraculous - can be reconstructed as ‘similar’ experience within the formal conventions of contemporary painting and I argue the meaning of my paintings is available and may be received aesthetically by non-Christian groups who have the appropriate knowledge and empathy with the formal conventions of my paintings.

There is the experience of my paintings which different groups will bring their cultural values to and interpret according to those cultural values. They can have the experience but they can’t share the meaning of Christian painting, unless they share those beliefs and values. The experience is the experience of the formal ‘language’- the ‘conventions’ of the painting – its phenomenology. The meaning is the content and to share the meaning you have to have values and beliefs that generate those meanings. But, the nature of meaning is also in an ‘aesthetic gaze’-(embodied meaning) the paintings conventions - its forms, formal languages, its coded interpretations of symbolic and art historical meaning. (See - the subject and object of painting- Newman, Selected Writings 1992). There is no neutral, non-cultural aesthetic gaze, which can construct meanings that are essentially Christian. Of course the reception of this aesthetic gaze is also culturally determined (i.e. being able to culturally recognise the forms used). But, it is impossible to separate the meaning of painting from the way it is painted - (Picasso’s Crucifixion, Bellows’ Crucifixion, Beckmann’s Crucifixion, Dali’s Crucifixion, Munch’s Crucifixion) - all depict the same subject, but all are painted in different ways. The different ways they are painted will generate different experiences and meanings in an aesthetic gaze.it may generate the same experience in the Christian gaze, which is concerned with the narrative content rather than the aesthetic ‘language’/expression. What meanings/experiences can contemporary cultural groups share with those pre-Enlightenment meanings and experiences? Contemporary cultural groups who have the appropriate codes of cultural recognition will be able to receive an aesthetic experience of those historic works and my contemporary paintings. The Christian meaning of those experiences will only be shared to those who share those values and beliefs.
Conclusion

This chapter has shown that Christian imagery continues to exercises a power of fascination on contemporary artists within the context of aesthetic recovery or reconstruction of meaning, but for the recovery of something like the experiences and meanings of pre-Enlightenment Christian imagery, that seems more contingent on how the image is used and its context. It will have power to those who believe in Christian imagery, (witness Kieskamma) but western institutional art context is secular and atheistic. A purely aesthetic, as opposed to a theoretic ‘recuperation’ is possible, but religious experience depends on the values and beliefs of those to whom the image is meaningful. The issue of cultural rupture and recuperation as it applies to the Christian cult-image in contemporary art practice revolves around how images are used and who controls that power. Cultural power and control over image systems relies on ‘maps of meaning’ collectively recognised by institutional culture. The collapse of some underpinning that supported the gravity-defying economic ‘physics’ of a globalised market in contemporary art has dissipated the logic of the capitalist aesthetic in recent years, but despite its recent reverses the capital market in paintings is as strong in 2014 as it was when the market ‘cooled’ in 2008-9. However, that hiatus did open the possibility of a space for a new ‘map of meanings’ by which art may be received and understood. This chapter suggests one of those meanings is ‘recuperation’- both as reconstruction of historical meaning and experience and, in some cases, as a holistic narrative of experience (Issenheim, Kieskamma). The ‘unity of sensibility’ represented in the theological visions of the pre-Enlightenment Christian cult-image and the recovery of similar meanings and experiences challenge and resist current Capitalist modes of vision. Recent socio-economic and political influences may suggest that the meanings, values and experiences which informed those historic modes of vision now find a renewed relevance for the subject under a failed, moribund capitalist enterprise. The imaginative spaces embodied in the potentially radical position of the Christian cult-image point to alternative modes of perception, de-legitimized in the institutional cultures of secular vision. Ironically, its very marginalisation may provide the religious imagery with the freedom to critique the hegemony, role and function of capitalist vision and the spectator/consumer relationship, it imposes on the aesthetic cultures of highly secularised societies. The terms ‘art’ and ‘religion’ in contemporary western
capitalist cultures have become much overloaded. Certain images made today we may categorise as ‘art’ or ‘religious’, but for whom later generations will interpret according to the needs of their own particular cultural moment. The quotation from Benjamin about the function of the work of art at the beginning of this chapter, serves as a reminder of the fallibility of any assumption of an uninterrupted continuum with the visual past as well as the potential, in some cases, for the misidentification of the real purposes and functions of some contemporary art. The visual image is constantly evolving; nothing about it is ever settled - like Benjamin’s ‘Angel of History’ (1970) it is propelled into the future but cannot avert its gaze from the contemplation of the past.
Chapter 5

Conclusion

Summary
This research arose from my own practice as a painter and my interest with the history of the religious sublime and its challenge to contemporary theories of the image. The research topic was chosen because there are some lacunae in the current situation with the field of research, which this research addresses, particularly, it seems to me with the role that ‘recuperation’ (i.e. reconstruction or re-visioning) of the experiences of certain key works within historical systems of vision like post–Tridentine Catholic Reformation imagery can play in the imaginative discourses of the contemporary (painted) image. Aside from the research examples cited above there has been very little research around the critical viability of the recuperation/reconstruction of the experiences of historico-religious imagery within contemporary painting practice.

My research has sought to discover, through practice, whether the experiences and meanings embodied in pre-Enlightenment Christian imagery may be reconstructed as ‘similar’ meaning and experience in the discourses of contemporary painting. The objective of this research has been to assess and outline the conditions for the capacity of contemporary painting, to reconstruct similar meanings to a historic-religious model of representation, like Catholic Reformation painted imagery and the forms of experience it represented.

The research was designed to adopt a ‘broad brush’ approach to the topic. Contrary to academic recommendation and the protocols of doctoral research, my study has found it necessary to employ expansive, cross-disciplinary methods of research, because the process of my painting practice itself adopts an eclectic/bricolage approach to the subject of cultural history. But, moreover the nature of my research topic and question is unavoidably trans-historical and could not be discussed analysed or interpreted without regard to historical context. The research was, however, undertaken and conducted with an intention to maintain a centrifugal bias on contemporary painting practice, predominantly British in the period1990-2010.
because it covers a period from which I can draw upon my own experience as a practitioner and my personal knowledge of other practice and practitioners during that period. The period around the early nineteen nineties also witnessed renewed academic and critical interest in the aesthetics of the painted image.

These objectives were formulated in the following research question, which my study was intended to answer and so contribute to knowledge:

Principle Research Question:
How can I, as a painter, representative of my time, generate a similar aesthetic and religious experience in my painting as can be found in the pre-Enlightenment religious imagery? Can I do this and, if so how and if not why not?

Subsidiary research questions:
What meaning, if any, can contemporary painting generate from the experiences and aesthetic forms of the post-Tridentine Catholic Reformation Christian imagery and can this be meaningfully reproduced in contemporary painting?
Can such visual systems, as the post-Tridentine Catholic Reformation Christian imagery maintain any understanding in secular vision, and if so what?
How does historical and contemporary pictorial meaning interact?

My research has produced a number of conclusions drawn from my own practice, my theoretical writing, historic record and textual evidence by authorities in the field.

1. Christian imagery proper, that is to say, the pre-Reformation Christian cult-image was the product of agreement between a clerical, ecclesiastical community about its identity as a system of visual representation and represented a system of theological-political power relations. It occupies a foundational part of the art historical development of the painted image in the west. The Christian cult-image was usurped in the Renaissance era that inaugurated the ‘idea’ of art and the ‘mediation of the artist into the meaning of Christian imagery. The post-Tridentine (1563) Catholic Counter-Reformation painted image, which is the subject of this
research was a functional image system, the purpose of which was to aid devotion and to incite piety. It relied on an appeal through the senses for an excitement of religious emotion.

2. Qualitative shifts occur in the transmission and reception of Christian imagery in the periods of the Renaissance and the Reformation (Belting, 1994) and in the Enlightenment (Benjamin, 1970, auth.1936) from sacred cult value to profane cult value. The acknowledgement of aesthetics as a discipline in the Enlightenment meant the freedom to interpret the painted image had become predominantly a question of authenticity and individuality of a private vision. Interpretation had become individualised and privatised.

3. As a collectively understood institutional value, the visual system of pre-Enlightenment Christian imagery in North West Europe was discarded as a public visual discourse by the mid-17th century long before the decline in the social practice and belief in Christianity in North West Europe.

4. Pre-Enlightenment Christian imagery was metaphorised in the Enlightenment by the aesthetic concept of the sublime and its reception was governed by aesthetic and not religious values from thereon. In the process Christian imagery also transformed from being an image of public discourse to a private image—the interpretation of the artist. Christian imagery still affects mainstream West European society, but as a ‘chain of memory - witness its presence in popular cultural forms, such as cinema, fashion, media.

5. As a result of my painting practice in this research, I have discovered that aesthetics is an important element in the secular reception of contemporary Christian imagery, because these images are understood now through the limited reading of aesthetics, (I am not referring here to those liturgical images, which perform a different function and are outside the scope of this research). Within the cultures and institutions of ‘fine art’, if the form is not right, the image does not work and lacks an aesthetic reception. Otherwise, the painted Christian image is merely read as ‘type’, ‘category’ or ‘information’, which is a philosophical viewpoint, not an aesthetic viewpoint. In post-Reformation painting practice, aesthetic form articulates the quality
(in kind and degree) of the emotion and experience transmitted through pictorial vision of Christian imagery. My practice has revealed that it is in the interpretation of Christian imagery, that my painting must seek to generate similar experiences of ‘presence’ to pre-Enlightenment Christian imagery. All painting continues to possess ‘presence’, by virtue of its function in secular artistic ritual, but paintings now can only be read through the experience of art, not through the experience of the sacred, because this is their context and how they are used. The idealist, Thomist, reception of Christian imagery, which Belting (1994) identifies as the defining characteristic of Christian imagery before the era of art, represents a different use/function and a different context. The large number of painted studies I made tell me that ‘old’ images or contemporary ‘new’ images do not, on their own, address the absence of sacred meaning and experience in contemporary painting, but it is in ‘the spaces of difference between’ those forms of consciousness, where they overlap and interplay, that my research practice found a process and a dialogue occurring that is capable of reconstructing similar experiences and meaning as exist in pre-Enlightenment Christian imagery.

6. Although there were different form of capitalism prior to the Enlightenment, (principally mercantile), I conclude the modern (Enlightenment) notion of the sublime (which excludes the older ‘Longinian’ sublime), as an aesthetic response to the ‘unrepresentable’, grew alongside the self - same Enlightenment project of individual and economic freedom as modern capitalism. As such it is a symptom, that is to say a part of capitalism, which has functionalised its meaning, by processes of instrumentalisation. Under this reading of the capitalist sublime, vision reaches its ecstatic moment when ‘capital becomes image,’

7. An increasing individualisation of self and selfhood and the psychologisation of ethics in the societies of Northern Europe and North America have contributed to a culture of narcissism both in ethics and aesthetics, distinct from former religious practices and values. Psychologies of self and the psychologisation of ethics have come to displace the Christian ethic in the secular visual cultures of Northern Europe in the past 150 years.
8. Although the anthropological and cultural meaning of Christian imagery may have changed for all but a minority in Western European secular cultures, and the social agency of such images may have dissipated - Western audiences are still affected by them because as aesthetic connections to a cultural past they possess an ‘otherness’ in their relation to the secular image systems of today and are ‘affective’ in the way that religion still affects us - as Danielle Hervieu-Leger points out- a ‘chain of memory’.

9. The issue of communication of meaning and experience in religious paintings as it applies to the Christian cult-image in contemporary art practice revolves around the context of religious painting, how images are used and who controls that power. Secular social groups will interpret those images, meanings and experiences through aesthetics and social groups who are believers in those values,(e.g. Christians) will interpret the meanings and experiences through religion.

**Conceptual conclusions**

In Benjamin’s definition of art all aura (i.e. uniqueness) has a part in ritual. This can take the form of either sacred cult value or profane cult value. Christian painted imagery is, essentially, cult-imagery within the definition that Benjamin ascribes to painted images, that is to say its value is that of sacred cult value, which underwent a qualitative change in the Enlightenment to a profane cult value-that of Beauty (Kantian aesthetics). It may be said that after the Enlightenment Christian imagery as it was manifested in painting (e.g. Friedrich, Palmer, Blake, Spencer, Bacon) was no longer a religious image within the above sense, but a ‘reliogise’ image; that is to say, its sacred function came to be displaced or ‘spilt over’ into a new aesthetic function, and within that, a new hybridity applied to painted Christian iconography.

This is important because it demonstrates one of the arguments of this thesis that the Western Christian imagery is adaptable for evolving usages through processes of, *hybridity, bricolage and appropriation*. From its inception as a sacred coded image in antique pagan Rome, through its development as a stylised form in the Eastern Orthodox/Byzantine icon, to a growing naturalism and humanism in the Renaissance; to an illusionistic, optical spectacle in Counter–Reformation Baroque art, an ‘idealism of Christian imagery’ gives way to an ‘experiencing of Christian
imagery’ and this has to do with a discourse of the mind/ body in relation to phenomena. The ‘metaphorical’ interpretations of Christian imagery in post Enlightenment art, be they Nature (Romanticism) or Aesthetics (e.g. Symbolism, Expressionism), further suggest an image system that could adapt to new uses. I do not suggest this is an attribute exclusive to Christian imagery. As I argue in the introduction to my thesis, the visual image as a whole is never settled; it is always evolving. In this sense it can be said that image systems possess a ‘viral’ quality and it is possible to speak (as WJT Mitchell, 2005) of images and image systems having a ‘life and death’, and indeed a ‘resurrection’.

The theories of Benjamin (1970) and Belting (1994) with respect to the sacred work suggest that the qualitative changes Christian imagery underwent arose from changes in its social function and how it was used, transforming from a sacred public image to a private and individualised aesthetic image. My practice and writing reveal that those qualitative changes, which Christian imagery post-Enlightenment undergoes, are equally changes in the reception of its aesthetic, which proved far more fugitive than the social practice of Christianity, which continued to be widespread until late in the 19th century. My painting practice element of this research demonstrates what aesthetics does in terms of bricolage, hybridization and collage and the material processes of painting to invent/generate new forms of aesthetic experience that is 'something similar or comparable' to the affective aesthetics of the post-Tridentine Catholic Counter-Reformation painted image. The work of art and aesthetics are not however, autonomous entities. In this thesis I have argued that both the work of art and aesthetics encompass super-sensory experience,- ethics, belief, social value-subsumed under the term ‘theoria’.

My painting practice demonstrates how processes of bricolage quotation, appropriation and the hybridization of painting forms and styles can reconstruct imaginative visual spaces through processes of ‘grafting’ imagery, and the palimpsest. The migration of meaning within contemporary iconography as an alternate reality and otherness to capitalist vision (i.e. oppositional), articulated by the example of my painting All Night Long (2010) (fig.2) serves to underline the role of my practice in revealing how reconstruction of experiences similar to pre-
Enlightenment Christian imagery may be framed visually in the discourses of contemporary painting as a transfer of the narrative of presence. The question really becomes whether historical experience and meaning can be reconstructed/recuperated by contemporary painting as a result of these processes and this is a question of context.

Is the Research Question(s) answered?  
Are the hypotheses proved/disproved?

This research has described the historic circumstances which have shaped the decline of Christian imagery in the development of painting in Western Europe since the Protestant Reformation with the purpose of establishing the parameters which prevail and constrain the painted Christian image in contemporary pictorial production in Western Europe. Those parameters are both secular, economic, cultural and to some extent psychical and obviously represent an absolute opposition to the transmission and reception, which Christian imagery enjoyed historically. In other words the context shapes pictorial meaning because as I have demonstrated through the work of Benjamin and Belting—pictorial meaning derives from the way images are used in a particular culture. I have outlined the conditions necessary for the reconstruction of those experiences. Those forms of consciousness - the miraculous, the visionary, the religious ecstatic, the pietist, which are the subject of this study are 'portrayable,' as visual metaphor of those experiences, demonstrated by my practice research, but that is not the same as representation which implies a cultural 'voice' and a right to be heard. Culturally, rights are conferred and in the highly secular consumer-capitalist economies of Western Europe the institutions of so-called ‘high’ visual culture have not, in the contemporary period conferred 'rights of audience' on the discourses of Christian imagery in high visual culture. This is not altogether unjustified, given the ideological, hierarchic and hegemonic tradition which Christian imagery represents. However, the lacunae becomes harder to reconcile when other areas of cultural production in Western Europe and America, (academic as well as popular culture) have shown the capacity to engage in dialogue with the contemporary cultural meaning of Christian imagery in those cultures.
In the opening chapter I argued that the changes of transmission and reception of Christian imagery run parallel with a movement of the painted image from a collective entity to that of an individualistic private entity. My practice shows that within the parameters of contemporary context for the painted image, which are, as my research has argued, largely aesthetic and economic and individualist orientated, a hybridised form of Christian imagery does survive in contemporary painting, but its transmission and reception are meaningful only within the terms of a secularised aesthetics. The power which Christian imagery once possessed is destroyed. It exists as an ‘otherness’ in contemporary visual culture and some aspects of that ‘otherness’ have been functionalised by capitalism in the form of the sublime image. Painting in the West and Christian imagery before the Enlightenment shared a ‘logic’ (Virilio). The sundering of this logic post-Enlightenment destroyed the idea of the sacred cult-image in western painting. In its place, since then cult-value in the painted image was invested with Beauty (aesthetics), Authenticity (individualism) and Metaphor (interpretation). Contemporary painting in Western Europe, in its present configuration, no longer has any meaningful idea of the religious or the sacred in its discourses (that is to say an image which is set apart, hidden) because that is no longer its function. Instead, its function lies in the confirmation of aesthetic and economic value which western neo-liberalism and individualism preserve as an index and value of cultural, political and social freedom of expression.

**Representation and the return of dualism in my painting**

In the course of my viva we explored insights generated by my paintings that are about reproducing similar experiences to certain key works in Catholic Reformation imagery that I have discussed above - states of embodied experience - both sacred and erotic in conjunction. The insights that my practice and the contextualising case which my written text contributes to knowledge, relates to the potential of practical methods of a corporeal figural painting practice to generate, in certain cultural groups of contemporary viewer, experiences similar to key works of the pre –Enlightenment Catholic Reformation visual system that can be argued to have the potential in the contemporary viewer to evoke a religio-aesthetic response similar to those pre –Enlightenment visual experiences.
My methodology adopts ‘bricolage’, ‘quotation’ and ‘assemblage’ in relation to cultural meanings and appearances that, I argue, have the potential to evoke a particular kind of ‘religious’ sensibility in the contemporary viewer; my argument seeks a corporeal religious figuration that refuses a separation of mind/body, immanence/transcendence.

The implicit question my thesis asks is whether it is possible for my painting to represent a non-dualistic ‘unity of thought, feeling and action’ in a pictorial way. Or whether non-dualist concepts of unity of thought, feeling and action cannot be represented, but remain a property of mind; and that all painting can do is to plastically inventorise across a two dimensional surface, those elements of unity - thought, feeling, action - mind and body so that they lead to an understanding within mind of the concept of unity of thought, feeling and action-so that they become entangled through the agency of the work.

The question of whether this method creates a dualism at odds with the stated aims of my painting practice, (because the paintings appear to disclose a dualism of rational/sensory, knowledge/belief, immanence/transcendence that represent separate mind /body states) can best be addressed by acknowledging that part of the problem of the return of dualities is the use and operation of the concept of overlapping historical horizons within my pictorial gestalt, that brings elements of historical and contemporary imagery together in a corporeal form of visuality. Overlapping horizons is a concept that relies on a dialectic between past and present. The difference between the two, I argue, constitutes the space of new meaning, wherein the experiential register of those pre-Enlightenment affective aesthetics has the potential to be generated. I suggest the space of ‘new meaning’ is the cognition within mind of a unity of thought, feeling and action toward which, my paintings lead understanding.

Inscribed within my pictorial gestalt of overlapping horizons are assumed dualisms of Mind/Body, Immanence/Transcendence. In Thomist theology, the Light of God is both a concept of transcendence and immanence. Its expression in pre-Reformation Christian imagery focuses, as Belting asserts, on the content of memory (and
image). The light in Enlightenment is that which enables appearances and is the light of experience and perception, which relates to the senses and the effect appearances have on our senses. In classical Humanist metaphysics and Cartesian Dualism, light becomes a property of the senses and aesthetics and post-Enlightenment imagery is concerned with the *appearance* of the memory image. The light of experience (Enlightenment) is the same light as The Light of God. But, as Belting asserts, one, is concerned with the *content* of the memory image and the other is concerned with the *appearance* of the memory image - its perceiving subject is different. The perceiving subject of this light is not God, but the unitary individual of classical Enlightenment metaphysics. Pictorial gestalt reconceptualised aesthetic vision.

My thesis has argued that my paintings represent a divergence, not a separation of mind/body experience. As Merleau-Ponty, quoted earlier, suggests, embodied experience, (viz perception and sensation) is in a reciprocal relationship with intellectualism, which is to say seeing is not just about perceiving, but also the acknowledgement of being perceived - that is to say a cognitive assimilation of reciprocity. Equally to touch is to understand the experience of being touched. (Merleau-Ponty uses the analogue of touch).

So, the generation of those historic experiences within the context of new meaning depends on an acknowledgement of the conditionality of historic, cultural and temporal difference-dualisms. The paintings can't prevent dualisms returning because they are representation and representation works with dualisms. That is what thought is – dualisms. Discursively, it may be possible to postulate concepts of non-duality before the mind (see Vattimo- *The Future of Religion*), but, I suggest, you can't paint concepts of Mind and you can't paint concepts of Transcendence. Mind and Transcendence are unrepresentable. I have to put elements in the paintings that stands for those concepts. It has to be represented, therefore there has to be dualism. You inevitably get dualism - dualism comes back. I can paint aspects of materialism (e.g. the painting of the woman in the yellow dress and the cityscape in *All Night Long*) and I can paint aspects of the concept of Resurrection in the same painting that are representable, like the ascending bodies in *All Night Long*. But, my
research to date, indicates that I cannot paint/represent directly a unified experience of the two. I can only use painting to create metaphors which lead to an understanding in Mind of non-dualist concepts. That is the nature of pictorial representation in painting - it represents elements that lead to an understanding of non-dualist concepts, but it can’t represent non-dualist experience because that is a property of Mind and Mind cannot be represented.

**Evaluation of Outcomes and Contribution to Knowledge.**

My research indicates that whilst Counter-Reformation devotional art did not eschew bifocal composition and the representation of earthly and heavenly realms, the understanding and reception of those works was dictated by a religious ‘gestalt’ which predicated the reception of those works within a unified field of vision that was not only devotional, but ‘innocent’ of separations of human experience/consciousness into discrete categories. In contrast to such unified fields of pictorial vision, my painting operates under a representational ‘logic’ of post-Cartesian metaphysics- that is to say a binary field of vision, which figural representation in that ‘gestalt’ will always produce (figure/ground, transcendence/immanence, illusion/picture plane.) Iconic, or rather aniconic ‘theological' High Modernist abstraction (e.g. Reinhardt, Newman), which operated under the reception aesthetic of ‘painting as ‘event’, achieved unitary pictorial fields and, I would suggest, unified fields of vision, because of its self-contemplative mode, but abstraction is, by its nature, generalised and cannot represent very specific experiences and meanings which Christian iconography does. Christian iconography of the type I have discussed, employs figural representation. So, the field of vision in my painting *All Night Long* (2010) (fig.2), although binary, represents the concept of ‘overlapping horizons’ of experience and the heterogeneous fields of vision and experience it depicts produces ‘hybrid’ meaning and experience – because, although those iconographic elements in themselves cannot represent a unified consciousness or transcendence, my research has shown that the experience of painting as an event - a narrative of presence - has the potential to lead to an understanding of non-dualist experience.

The contribution to knowledge of my research resides in the insights derived from the way I use my painting practice as an experimental and investigative tool to
explore the capacity of practical aesthetics to generate similar experience to certain key works of Catholic Counter-Reformation art and how I have contextualised these insights within a broader, discursive, art historical framework, using an interpretative method applied to the development of Christian painted imagery in the post-Reformation period.

Whether representation is informed by the unitary Modernist subject or the de-centred post-Modern subject, the issue of what is representable. I suggest, still applies, and for the reasons I have explained above, my research has found representing non-dualist experience in the pictorial terms of contemporary painting can be achieved, but only by representing dualist elements that lead to an understanding within Mind of non-dualist experience. In evaluating what this means as outcomes and contribution to knowledge, I have shown how the dualism argument (transcendence/immanence) is conditioned by the nature of figural representation in painting. The contribution of original knowledge to that debate in my research lies in how I have shown the difficulties of dualism/non-dualism to work a bit better through insights gained from my practice in relation to pictorially representing the experiences of Christian imagery - how El Greco’s Annunciation and Bernini’s St. Theresa overcome dualism and the difficulties of contemporary representation in painting to reproduce those unified, non-dualist experiences, the investigation of those difficulties in answering the thesis question- the difficulties of reproducing similar non-dualist experiences.

The claims for a contribution to knowledge of this research study are:
1. The painting practice demonstrates a method for the reconstruction/trans-valuation of similar experience and original meaning in religious paintings through processes of bricolage and hybridization to interpret cross cultural meaning and experience in religious paintings.

2. The painting practice and the written text have produced insights into a theory of the trans-valuation/reconstruction of painted Christian imagery in contemporary narratives and discourses of absence and presence in painted pictorial production.
3. The practice and written research have formulated the conditions necessary to demonstrate how the communication of meaning and experience in religious paintings may be interpreted through an ‘experiential’ source of ‘emergent knowledge’, (painting) and become communicable knowledge through the interpretation of the aesthetics of reception.

4.) This research involved a series of practical experimentations in painted figuration using *bricolage*, quotation and assemblage in ‘overlapping’ historical and contemporary imagery in a corporeal form of hybrid visual aesthetics that can be argued to have the potential to generate in the contemporary viewer a religio-aesthetic response ‘similar’ in its experiential register to the affective aesthetics of certain key works of Counter-Reformation devotional art. The contribution this research makes to original knowledge lies in the ‘emergent knowledge’ gained from practice and the contextualising of that knowledge, experience and insights in the written text.

**Epilogue**

All image systems are maps of meaning, but is all meaning in our culture now located within a materialist, linguistic or textual reading of art? The implication of the questions raised in my thesis propose a *different map and a different set of meanings*. The mobilising or transformative influence of any form of image system, which seeks to offer an alternative model of representation to the dominant discourse is a key application this research has proposed.

Nicholas Wyatt,

28 January 2015
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Appendix A
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APPENDIX B
Illustrations

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Fig. 1 Caspar David Friedrich (1808-10). Tetschen Altarpiece. Oil on Canvas. Alte Nationalgalerie Berlin.
Fig 2. Nicholas Wyatt (2010) All Night Long (Final state), November 2010. Oil on canvas 186cm x 216cm
Fig. 3 Nicholas Wyatt (2012-13) *Annunciation*. Oil on Canvas (Unfinished Nov. 2013) 180cm x 240cm.
Fig. 4. Nicholas Wyatt (2011). The Gospel According to St. Matthew. Oil on Canvas 120cm x160cm
Fig. 5. Nicholas Wyatt. (2012) *Drifters*. Oil on paper 60cm x 90cm
Fig. 6. David La Chapelle. (2009) *Beatification* (Re-photograph) La Chapelle studio
Fig. 7. Richard Hamilton. (2005) *An annunciation (b)* v2. Oil on Inkjet print. Private Collection
Fig. 8. Chris Ofili (2002) *The Upper Room* Installation view Tate Britain, London
Fig. 9. Nicholas Wyatt (2009-10) *Resurrection at Eldena*. Final state. Summer 2010 Oil on canvas 110cm x 220cm
14/2/10

In terms of Naturalism and ‘painterliness’, look at Van Gogh, Matisse, and Sargent (gassed 1WW)

Re Drum & Church are lit up by the last dying embers of the sun setting at the left of the picture.
Fig. 11. Nicholas Wyatt (2009) Resurrection at Eldena studio view of painting in progress October 2009
Fig. 12. Nicholas Wyatt (2010) Studio view of Resurrection at Eldena in progress. Spring 2010
Fig.13. Nicholas Wyatt (2010) Studio installation view October 2010
Fig. 14. Nicholas Wyatt (2004). *The Fourth Ecstasy of Saint Theresa of Avila*. Oil on Panel 120cm x 240cm
Fig. 15. Nicholas Wyatt (1997) *Beata Albertona*. Encaustic on Panel 120cm x 210cm
Fig 17 Nicholas Wyatt (2010) *All Night Long* (study1) (Digital print) (May, 2010)
Fig. 18 Nicholas Wyatt. (2010). *All Night Long* (study 2) (August, 2010) Oil on Inkjet print
Fig. 19. Nicholas Wyatt (2010) *All Night Long* (studio view of work in progress, October 2010)
Fig 20. Nicholas Wyatt. *All Night Long* (2010). (Detail). Oil on canvas 186cm x 216cm
Fig. 21. Stanley Spencer. (1926-32) Resurrection of the Soldiers. Sandham Memorial Chapel, Burghclere
Fig. 22 Kieskamma Community (2005) *Kieskamma Altarpiece*. Mixed Media. Kieskamma Community, Kieskamma, S.A..
Fig. 23. Mathias Grunewald. (1512-16) Issenheim Altarpiece. Oil on panel. Unterlinden Museum, Colmar
Fig. 24. Gian Lorenzo Bernini (1647–52). The Ecstasy of St. Theresa. Santa Maria della Vittoria, Rome
Fig. 25. El Greco (1586). *The Burial of the Count of Orgaz*. Santo Tome, Toledo
Fig. 26 Damien Hirst (2007). For the Love of God. White Cube Gallery, London
Fig. 27 Caspar David Friedrich. (1808-10) Monk by the Sea. (Oil on Canvas). Alte Nationalgalerie, Berlin
Fig. 28 Nicholas Wyatt.(1993) Blue Triptych. Oil on Canvas 230cm x 640cm
Fig. 29 Nicholas Wyatt (1997). *The Ecstasy of St. Theresa*. (Encaustic and Acrylic on Panel). 120cm x 240cm
Fig. 30 Atom Egoyan (2005) *Where the Truth Lies* (Film still). Serendipity Point Films
Fig. 31 Nicholas Wyatt (2003) Annunciation. (Encaustic and pigment on panel). 240cm x 240cm. Collection, the artist
Fig. 32. Nicholas Wyatt. (2010) *Annunciation (unfinished)* Oil on canvas.
Fig.33 Nicholas Wyatt (2012) *Annunciation* (work in progress- studio installation view, February 2012)
Fig. 34 Nicholas Wyatt (2012) *Annunciation* (work in progress- studio installation view, June 2013)
Fig.35 Nicholas Wyatt (2013) *Annunciation* (detail of angel’s head) (August 2013)
Fig. 36 Nicholas Wyatt (2012). *Amnesia* (Oil on Paper) 60x90cm
Fig. 37 Nicholas Wyatt (2010) *All Night Long* (Detail) Oil on canvas
Fig.38 Nicholas Wyatt (2013). *Annunciation* (in progress) (detail of swimming pool)
Fig. 39. David La Chapelle. (2006) Heaven to Hell. Re-photograph. La Chapelle studio
Fig. 40 El Greco (1596 - 1600) *Annunciation*, (Oil on Canvas) Prado, Madrid.
(Formerly, Collegio de Dona Maria de Aragon)
Fig. 41 Nicholas Wyatt. (2013) *Angel in Flames* (study for Annunciation) (Oil on Paper)
Fig. 42. Nicholas Wyatt. (2013) *Fashion Model* (study). Oil on photocopy. 30cm x 45cm
Fig.43 Nicholas Wyatt. (2013). *Stop in the Name of Love*. Oil on photocopy 30cm x 45cm
**Fig. 44** Nicholas Wyatt. (2013) *The Agony in the Garden*. Oil on photocopy. 25cm x 30cm
Fig 45 Nicholas Wyatt (2011) *The Seven Acts of Mercy*. Oil on photocopy 30cm x 35cm
Fig. 46. Nicholas Wyatt. (2013). The Vision of St. Phillip Noailles. Oil on photocopy. 30cm x 45cm
Fig. 47. Nicholas Wyatt (2013). Loudon Painting 1. Oil on photocopy. 30cm x 45cm
Fig. 48. Nicholas Wyatt. (2013). *Song to the Body Sublime*. Oil on Paper. 30cm x 45cm
Fig. 49. Nicholas Wyatt. (2013). *Saint Joan*. Oil on Paper. 30cm x 45cm
Fig 50. Nicholas Wyatt. (2013) Saint Bernadette. Oil on Paper. 30cm x 45cm
Fig. 51 Nicholas Wyatt (2010) *All Night Long* (sketchbook entry 8/5/2010) (pen on paper)
Fig. 52 Silent Hollywood Film Still (c. 1920) (Unidentified Film)
Fig. 53 Paloma Faith (undated) Publicity Photograph. Rebecca Pierce & Interview Magazine
Fig 54. William Holman Hunt (1854-6). The Scapegoat. (Oil on canvas) Lady Lever Art Gallery, Port Sunlight
Fig. 55 Salvador Dali (1954) *Crucifixion (Corpus Hypercubus).* Oil on canvas. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
Fig. 56. Nicholas Wyatt (2010) *All Night Long* (detail)
Fig. 57. Nicholas Wyatt (2010) *All Night Long.* (Detail)
VIDEO on CD ROM
(Duration 1 minute)

Fig. 58 Nicholas Wyatt (2010) *All Night Long*. Digital film of painting (CD ROM only)
Fig.60 Nicholas Wyatt (2013) *The Seven Acts of Mercy 2*. Oil on photocopy, 25 cm x 30 cm
Fig. 62. Nicholas Wyatt. (2012) *Modern Theology*. Oil and Acrylic on canvas. 70cm x 100cm
Fig. 63. Nicholas Wyatt. (2006) Jerusalem (detail). Mixed media & Encaustic on panel 150cm x 300cm
Fig. 64. Nicholas Wyatt. (2011) Solipsistic. Oil on paper 25cm x 30cm
CD Rom only

Fig. 65 Nicholas Wyatt (2013) *All Night Long* (short digital film 2) (CD Rom only)
CD Rom only

**Fig.66** Nicholas Wyatt (2013) *Annunciation.* (Short Digital film) (CD Rom only)
Fig. 67 Nicholas Wyatt (2013) Installation view of studio, December 2013
Fig. 68 Nicholas Wyatt. (1999). *The Lonely Protestant.* Encaustic & Acrylic on Panel 122cm x 153cm. Collection: The artist
Fig. 69. Nicholas Wyatt. (2014) Installation view of Doctoral Exhibition. Loughborough University, July 2014
Fig. 70 Nicholas Wyatt (2014) Installation view of Doctoral Exhibition. Loughborough University, July 2014
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Appendix C
Journal of Process

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Appendix C

A Journal of Process

The Annunciation, 2012-2013 (fig.3)

The Source

I began painting this work in the spring of 2012, but the research for it dates back to the autumn of 2011. The basis of the image comes from a contemporary ‘noir’ film, Where the Truth Lies (Atom Egoyan, 2005), which I recorded and took photographic stills from one particular scene-set in an affluent Los Angeles apartment, filled with light and a swimming pool outside. (fig.30) A young female approaches the camera in a hurry to leave the apartment and the light behind her throws her into silhouette. The scene is obviously cinematic and the wide angle nature of the shot appealed to me because the camera is close enough to register the emotional state of the woman but wide angle enough to situate that emotion within the ‘cool’ context of modernist west coast luxury domestic architecture. In short the scene is a slice of affluence, filled with light but the female, looks troubled and anxious. For me the shot represented an image of the good life where anxiety and disturbance are controlled and contained below the surface of social appearance. I became interested in the idea of how to represent in painting a condition of affluence that produces a materialist ‘envelope’ of experience and how that mentality might, be disrupted by something transcendent—an ‘impossible’ alternative realism and experience that represents transformative experience.

The image developed from a theme, which was the subject of two previous works, on the theme of the Annunciation, one as yet unfinished (figs.31 and 32). In the course of making Annunciation I saw the Richard Hamilton exhibition at the National
Gallery, London, in which the artist employs the Annunciation theme frequently in his late practice.(fig.7)

Journal of Process
2/9/2013 London
When I am making a painting I am not thinking about capitalism, sociology or whatever. I am thinking about the best way to make the image convincing and thinking about my position as a contemporary artist in relation to the history of the painted image.

I began by ‘appropriating’ the foundation image for the painting Annunciation, by recording the ‘appropriated’ image first onto VHS tape and then photographing still shots from the tape. The degraded quality of the image and the diffuseness this created with the light and its effect on the image was part of the aesthetic appearance I wanted for the painting. At this point I did not have an idea of what I wanted to juxtapose with this image apart from the fact that I wanted it to be religious/spiritual/metaphysical and represent a totally different realm of experience and consciousness than that suggested by the base image. I experimented with Photoshop, layering a translucent second layer image over the scene on the right- a projected image of a figure on a screen in perspective. This did not really work for me and was not developed further. I had a 10x15 inch colour photo of the image made (fig.30) and started painting in spring 2012, laying down a yellow ochre unifying base layer. Being ‘warm’ in tone it would act as a necessary contrast to the cool blue violet green tones that would overlay the base colour. I then ‘laid in’ with a brush the painting of the central ‘protagonist’ of the painting – the female on the left
of the image. From the outset I always wanted this compositional device of a human figure close to the picture plane, occupying the whole frame of the painting on the left and behind and beyond to her left the spacious light-filled interior which gives onto the intense light of a sprawling Los Angeles panorama. This ‘glamour’ element was for me always very important to retain in the painted image because the image has been filtered through a cinematic vision, so what is being appropriated is not just the image but a system of vision. I was quite happy with the image at this stage. And then writing on my thesis intervened for the next 18 months and I did not resume work on the painting again until July 2013. I kept documentary photographic records of each stage of this painting process, including some film footage. (figs.33-35)

During the interim the painting just remained on my studio wall and I would look at it each time I went into the studio. In the autumn of 2012 I worked on some studies on paper which were tangentially connected with this image, amongst them, Amnesia (2012, fig.36) and Drifters, (2012, fig.5).

However, in July 2013 work resumed on the painting apace and good progress was made during July and mid-way into August 2013. The July 2013 painting session began with establishing underlying warm tones to the interior of the room and pool outside, because I was working around a colour orchestration where the only warm element in the painting would be the female protagonist on the left and the entire environment that surrounded her would be comprised of cool blues, violets and greens. These underlying warm hues may be seen from the documentary photographic record of the painting’s development. Because of the nature of the medium this process of establishing translucent undertones takes time with drying processes. I then painted the ‘languid’ cool light of the poolside area outside to
gauge the tonalities of the painting of the interior. It was important to retain a sense of the ‘horizontal repose’ and calm of the poolside area.-almost a ‘still life’of a scene suspended in time, (fig.38). Eventually the ‘cool’ diffuse light of the interior and the transparent curtain wall of glass, which makes inside/outside ‘porous’ was painted using ‘wet into wet’ painting techniques and translucent layering of colour over the warm underpainting.

With these elements established I then painted the other major element of the painting -the figure on the right- the angel. The painting is actually comprised of three elements- the woman, the angel and the apartment. Why paint an angel? Throughout most of the 18 month intervening period I was lost to know what image would occupy the right hand side of the painting, except it would be totally different in experience from the ‘realism’ of the woman and the apartment.

I felt the image needed something that was extraordinary, revelatory and out of time- that defied a logical or reasonable explanation.-a visionary or miraculous image; an image that represented a different ‘realism’ a realism that, my thesis argues, was experienced in the reception of the pre-enlightenment Christian image. My aim was to see if a similar experience could be generated in my contemporary painting. By ‘similar’, I mean an analogous experience that as about an experience of presence, not an emblematic presentation or ‘pastiche’ of a Christian tableaux, which, for example is a feature of the narrative photographs of American artist David La Chapelle (Heaven to Hell) (fig.39). This was connected with my research aim of overlapping different historical experiences. The alternative consciousness or experience that seemed most unlike the realism of the apartment and the woman
were to my mind the images of Spanish religious mysticism painted by El Greco in the 1560's in Toledo—a city that was the religious centre of the Spanish Catholic counter-reformation. I 'quoted' El Greco's image of the Archangel Gabriel from a version of the Annunciation, which he painted for the Collegio de Dona Maria de Aragon (now in the Prado) between 1596-1600. (fig.40). I appropriated this image because of the intensity (aesthetically, emotionally and religiously) with which the whole painting is made. The dramatic use of light and the turbulence of the Angel's draperies as well as the Mannerist distortion of form (elongation) lends a supernatural quality to the image and the gesture and face of the angel express compassion and grace. The light that exists in El Greco's paintings is not the sensual, empirical light of reason and experience, but the inner, contemplative light of Christian revelation and salvation. It is a light that is borne of a belief in a different realism— a realism of the religious imagination. This distinction is made by St. Augustine (398 AD. Repr. Derrida, 1993:118) and its endurance in the iconography of Christian theology is widespread across both ‘high’ and 'low' visual systems (e.g. the Hollywood film, and inter-alia, The Vision of Bernadette).

Once the angel was established the problem was then how to 'articulate' the space in which I wanted the angel to sit in the painting. I conceived the idea that the angel would be delivered through flame (this idea does originate from El Greco’s use of flame iconography in his paintings, although in the Collegio Annunciation the iconography of flame is limited to burning bushes—not the angel. I attempted a painted study of this element, which proved problematic (fig.41).
The Annunciation. (fig.3) (Continuation) 5/9/2013. The Hague

The problem was partly technical, in that there was an issue with tonalities and the form of the flames engulfing the angel, but moreover, the image still seemed inert in terms of its purpose to see whether I was able to generate similar experience. So I decided to do some experimental studies in oil on photocopies of religious works of art in an attempt to discover what form would work. It seemed to me I needed some contemporary image to overlay the angel in *Annunciation*. I considered using the Terry O’Neill portrait of Faye Dunawaye by a Los Angeles hotel poolside after Oscars night, 1977. I made an oil study over a photocopy of a Norman Parkinson fashion photo from the 1960’s (fig.42) and a study in oil over a photocopy of a live broadcast image of the Supremes in 1965. (fig.43).

20/10/2013 London, the studio

The task of my painting, ‘*Annunciation*’, is to distinguish between illuminatory light and revelatory light. So, I look at El Greco and Zurburan and I compare that light with the light of Vermeer or de Hoogh. In Christian iconography and theology God is related to light.

2/11/13, London, the studio

The studies on photocopy paper are about the interplay of surfaces—both aesthetically and phenomenologically as well as culturally. The most direct research evidence has been this study form, of which I have produced a good many. In the most recent series of painted studies I have experimented with the representation of visionary experience and the feminine. This series may be said to have started with the painted study of the 1940’s fashion model, which overlays a photocopy image of
El Greco’s painting, *The Agony in the Garden* (1588) in the National Gallery, London. (fig.44) This was followed by *The Seven Acts of Mercy* (2011) (fig.45), where I have painted over a photocopy of the 17th century painting of the same name by Caravaggio.

More recently I painted a study of *The Vision of St. Phillip Noailles*, (fig.46) where I have overpainted a copy of the scene depicted by Zurburan (1598-1664) over a 1960’s documentary image of female hair fashions. I chose this overlapping imagery because the female model's gaze is fixed heavenwards as if she was aware of another experience of reality, another mentally projected realism. Two different realisms and surfaces are presented in this image- a photographic realism as an index of record and a painted art historical idea of realism from the 17th century Catholic Reformation. The purpose of the painting was to reveal a hybrid space of the experience between sacred devotional and secular transcendental or ek (static) experience.

4/11/13, London

The theme of what constitutes a contemporary equivalence of those historical religious and aesthetic experiences was developed with the most recent studies, from October through November 2013, including *Song to the Body Sublime*, *Loudon Painting 1*, *The Passion of St. Joan*, and *Saint Bernadette*.

*Loudon Painting 1* (fig.47) overlaps a documentary still from a 1960’s street scene with a devotional scene of nuns at prayer from Ken Russell’s (1970) film *The Devils*.
about the Christological visions experienced by a 17thcentury religious order of nuns in the French town of Loudon.

*Song to the Body Sublime*, (2013) (fig.48) represents the deposition of Christ from a 17th century painting by Barrocci, where my painted imagery overlays a 1960’s documentary on leisure, showing a film still of racegoers at Epsom Downs on Derby Day.

*St. Joan*, (2013) (fig.49) represents a close up of the saint offering prayers at her execution in a scene from Theodore Dreyer’s account of the life. This overlays a film still of the silent Hollywood actress, Louise Brooks’ gaze heavenwards in an apparent devotional attitude.

*Saint Bernadette*, (2013) (fig.50) is a painted depiction of the peasant girl, Bernadette Souburious who experienced Marianne visions in the locale of her village in 19th century rural France. The attitude of the saint in my painted study is presented as an alternative experience, realism, consciousness to the 1960’s documentary still of a gent’s barber’s, where the photographed image of a modern social ritual is shot through its reflection in a mirror. The study presents two systems of vision and two cultures of vision- one historical and one contemporary. The image implies an observing viewer of these different spaces who is neither located in one space nor another. The notional viewer occupies a dislocated, relativistic position that is where the subject is contingent and distanced. This suggests an emotional disengagement from the image, which is the reverse of affective aesthetics. In fact the image is neither disengaged nor sympathetic or a subjective identification, but
rather trans-subjective. In other words the implied subjectivity of the viewer is an experience of hybridity, ambiguity and ambivalence.

During the course of making these experimental, heuristic studies I was conscious that the reading of my painting Annunciation (2012-13) (fig.3) was too simple, not self-reflexive enough. I believed that the superimposition of another layer of imagery over the angel (e.g. the Terry O’Neill photo of Faye Dunawaye) adds a layer of meaning to the image, which disrupts an automatic, reflexive response that the image of the woman and the angel provokes. This added layer of meaning relates to a qualification and a critique of the assumed narrative of Christian contemplation. The downside is it over complicates a clear, straightforward reading, which the image currently possesses. After making the studies I came to the conclusion that an overlaying of further imagery over the angel in Annunciation (2012-13) would over-complicate the reading of the image as too complex and the original simplicity of a woman in a Hollywood apartment being visited by an angel reassumed its previous importance. Ultimately I have decided to favour a clear descriptive, narrative reading to allow the image to articulate itself clearly. My own experience of practice and the old painting maxim- ‘don’t try to make three paintings in one’- weighed persuasively in the decision.