

# SCIENCE FICTION (OR PAINTING; THE ABSTRACT MACHINE)

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## PREAMBLE (FROM MEANING TO MATTER):

What is it to paint abstract paintings today (especially when paint and paintings are not necessarily involved)? Is it only to repeat the end game, to remain within a space of mourning, to rehearse the death of painting one more time? This is certainly one-way of approaching contemporary painting: as irony, pastiche – as second-order abstraction (in fact, as not abstract at all, but illustrative – illustrating a prior moment in an already constituted history of painting). The same goes for looking at such painting; we can always mobilise already-set frameworks of reference, refer back to previous knowledges, see the painting through other (past) paintings. This is the habit of art history.

Neither of these instances are regrettable in and of themselves. Indeed, art – here painting – is a complex object that operates on a multiplicity of registers, asignifying (affective), but also signifying (or, we might say, conceptual). Painting is an event, but is also always more than just the event of *that* painting. Painting is a singular gesture, but must also be understood as always already caught up in a network of differences that give it 'meaning'. In fact, the affective and conceptual are not completely distinct, the former working as a platform for the latter (concepts are always created off the back of specific affects). Indeed, the affective always accompanies the conceptual, and often works as a corrective, even sometimes a rupture, to/in it.

Whenever a new technique of painting arrives then these relationships, these differences, this 'history' is activated; painting breathes again. *This* painting as the latest adventure in painting's immanent evolution. *These* paintings as taking up the challenge once more: what is it to paint? (Especially when painting is as much about clearing away the clichés of painting as it is about the making of new marks). It is in this sense that before a painting is 'of' anything, it is always already 'about' painting. But this is not the end of the story. Indeed, an exclusive attention on the above (a *reading* of painting) can stymie any other kinds of work the painting might demand (we might say that such a reading mechanism can disable the genuine encounter that constitutes art). After all, art is never just an object of knowledge, but is also precisely that which breaks knowledges. And painting is never just a text, but also the matter upon which a text is written.

And so how to write *on* such painting? What to say in front of an object, which, at a stroke, goes 'beyond' any discursive account one can give of it? (There is always a remainder – an excess – after any given interpretation, and if there is not, then you were not dealing with art to begin with). Surely, it can only be to write with painting, to follow painting's own lines and gestures with lines and gestures of its own. Such writing will also have different moments: moments of signifying clarity, of conceptual work, and moments when it stops making sense, when it stutters, foregrounds asignification, or tells lies. What follows then are eight lines of writing, eight 'fictions' spun around the abstract paintings of DJ Simpson, themselves understood as forms of concrete thought.

## 02 COLOUR IS AN OPERATION THAT HOTLINES THE NERVOUS SYSTEM

A process that circumnavigates the usual person constructing mechanisms. Colour *is* affect, and colour *produces* affects (when I see *that* blue again (routed by *that* line) then I will be happy!). There is nothing to read here. On the other side of time I find Black monoliths scarred by a non-human hand. These paintings are the traces of an abstract machine, they want to tell us something, but they cannot use our words (haven't you heard? God is dead!). Set up your abstract algorithms, and let them go spinning into infinity. Non-sense *always* has a utopian moment, a moment of bliss. There is a chemistry of painting; painting has a molecularity that persists beneath molar interpretation (when I paint I am *in* my painting, when I paint I *become* painting). Painting is a chemistry-set: this surface, this material, this particular test. Yellow-sulphur to synthetic blue-sky. Silver Surfer. You are beautiful like the star trails you are made from. When I look at you I see myself more clearly. When I look at you I want to dance.

## 03 COMPOSITION OF A SPECIFIC WORK TO COMPOSITION ACROSS A BODY OF WORK

Not necessarily random marks though random marks will necessarily play their part (chance, accident, mistakes – these are always the germ of a new world). Doodles from the discarded diagrams of this world (a coil of wiring, an airplane trail, the laughter of a child...). The canvas is never blank, empty, but always already teeming with possibilities. The trick is always censorship (always avoid the cliché). For those with eyes and a mind to read the messages are *everywhere*. A hyper signification accelerating meaning towards non-sense, coupled with a cold impassivity (this is just matter after all). Repetition 1: within a painting (the repetition of simple forms: replication). Repetition 2: between paintings (the repetition of motif: reproduction). But always a repetition with difference. These paintings are different from those that came before – and different to those paintings yet-to-come (a shimmering chain of painting spreading throughout space and time). This colour, this line, this shape, is different to that. I work out my own autonomous code – jam the sensible, scramble the dominant. I am the inter-galactic-world-creator – and this is the assembly of abstract machines.

## 01 FIRST IMPRESSIONS, OR SURFACE-SCALE-SEDUCTION

The look of them looking back at you pulls you in. A hall of polished mirrors, a startling assembly of routed-surfaces. Placed on the floor, you are tempted to call them sculpture, but they are paintings, nothing but paintings. Bigger than human as if made by a future hand (these are not anthropomorphic – and this is not human time), gesture is there, but it has been twisted, stretched, an electric-robotic-gesture – asexual and intelligent. These are the machine-paintings of a stuttering AI, stammering toward an absurd and invisible end point (what are the rules of this strange game, and why this particular move?). Irony is too human a concept for these atypical worlds (humour, forever taking us beyond ourselves, is their operating terrain). There is a physics of painting: painting as a composite of different materials, a synthesis of different speeds. The trick is to see each painting as an experiment, the coming together of different variables in the constitution of something *different*. Always a new combination, always a new dice throw. And then the eternal question: what about *this* one?

## 04 THE GOTHIC LINE: I PAINT IN A VACUUM, I PAINT WITH AIR

Like incense-smoke and cloud-systems, my lines self-organise. Worm-sign, worm-trail, I weave myself around the struts, the architecture, of your world. In painting I tie knots of proto-subjectivities. These paintings are singularities. Indeed, what am I, but a composition of lines also? I *need* the different widths and speeds of line – and the different materials I layer. By gouging out, I reveal the 'depths'. I scratch the smooth space-surface of your Capital (unmarked surfaces disgust me; scarification is my *modus operandi*). I give you frozen movement. I am the abstract stammerer, the bastard offspring of a long-thought-dead-modernism. Centred but sprawling, my paintings are alive. There is a cold reptilian time of painting (a time that has nothing to do with human duration) and believe me when I say *it is on its way*. This is a smuggled in, stealth painting. These are the abstract diagrams for those who do not recognise themselves in the image clichés that surround them (we will out spectacularise their spectacle). I give you what you call commodities, but for a people-yet-to-come. I give you electro-pop-painting for a blank-people.

## 05 FROM SPEED TO STILLNESS, THE TIME OF PAINTING

Painting has always been an alchemical practice, but here it is reversed: matter becomes liquid becomes form. All is fluid. All is gaseous. There is an energetics of painting: electricity is the real creator of these new forms. And these paintings are the negative of another, more secret painting, sculpted in air. Indeed, what is painting? A captured event? A slice out of time? These paintings are amphetamine paintings, painted at speed and painted on speed. But there is also a stillness here; these paintings, *all* paintings, are meditations. From noise to quiet – activity recollected within tranquillity. I offer you a moment of hesitation, a step back from your own duration. If there is a time to these paintings then it is not human linear time (work-time, clock-time...). 1. The time of painting (how fast must I move to make this painting? What prosthesis can make my body move *faster*?). 2. The time 'caught' within the painting (each painting a sedimentation of time, a captured process, a matter-event). 3. The time of viewing (the time of day, the mood...a whole atmospherics of painting, and this will include the time of the subject that interfaces – couples – with the painting). 4. The time of matter (these paintings are made from the same cold-dark-material as the stars).

## 06 MATTER IS SELF-ORGANISING — I PAINT MYSELF OUT OF THE PICTURE

Slabs of routed matter. Anti-monuments from an anti-prophet. I give you something tough but seductive. Something impenetrable but easy. Matter, the stuff of the world, is non-hylomorphic, it is never waiting for the hand of God, but is always already working, organising. What is the connection between matter and music? They are the same (my paintings are music-matter, each a different refrain). What is the connection between intention and non-intention? One is used to get to the other ('I do not paint my paintings — they paint me!). With tools I track matter's singularities and the bifurcation points of the cosmos: the painting paints itself (what else has 'truth to materials' ever meant?). The intention is always to remove oneself from the equation: abstraction, always abstraction. And when people say: 'your paintings are too abstract', I howl with laughter, for they are never abstract enough! I am that hot materialist; I am that purveyor of inorganic life (my paintings are alive!). Matter, inert? The trick is in fact to *slow it down*, to capture its movement. Why do I paint? Because it is only through painting that I come to know the matter-body that I am and the energy-force that I may become.

## 07 EVERY ABSTRACT PAINTING IS A REGION OF BEING AND ALL PAINTING IS MYTHSCIENCE

Abstract lines producing 3D shard-worlds. A ZX schematic landscape. Synthetic and artificial, painting is a world-creating-technology. These are science fiction objects with a science fiction agenda: why all this and not something else? Why not something *really* different? We want more possibilities, more potentialities — and not the controls on expression we see everywhere today. It is never what is (banality) but what can be that interests us. Our art is never concerned with those assemblages already in place (we do not shop, we do not watch TV). Each of our paintings is a possible world, a new fold of matter. My style constitutes my universe — my planets are my experiments. I will continue with the endless play of the same elements until all variations have been actualised, all possibilities incarnated. I will be that virtuoso, the painter of all infinite possibility — and I will do it all at once! This is what painting the virtual means; this is what it means to be the baroque-sky-dancer. Are you ready to take this motionless journey?

## 08 THE DIAGRAMMATIC FUNCTION OF PAINTING IS THE ABSTRACT MACHINE

The abstract machine does not represent a world already existent but diagrams a world-yet-to-come, a world always in process. A virtual world co-existent with this one but masked by our habitual tendencies and fears (the visual/psychic clichés that constitute us and the world through which we move). It is not the artist who is the abstract machine, but the painting that paints itself as abstract machine. You ask what is this machine and how does it operate? Like a blind lizard that pulls you towards the water, like a wasp that refuses to return to the hive — the abstract machine is instinct-intelligence forever opening up to the new. It is at the edge of any given assemblage — the entry point onto the mecosphere. You ask why painting, the abstract machine? Because experimentation is life and painting is where it finds its logic most keenly. This is painting accelerating away from painting. From within representation — from within the human — we twist and writhe, stammer and stutter, push our materials and languages to their limits, until, at last, we uncover the secret painting within painting, the stutters, the glitches, the lines of flight that are our highest form of hope. You ask if this is still painting? I reply: has painting ever meant anything else?