

... I will not however go on about the death of painting or the non-death of painting or any of that. I think that would be a disservice to us all. Rather, I want to speak about this process of associative image building, through painting references in many formats, that is itself about painting. One item of reference to consider, that I mentioned to Stefan when visiting his studio, is Hito Steyerl's text, In Defence of the Poor Image, which I would now title in this instance as, In Praise of the Poor Image.

The poor image is a copy in motion. Its quality is bad, its resolution substandard. As it accelerates, it deteriorates. It is a ghost of an image, a preview, a thumbnail, an errant idea, an itinerant image distributed for free, squeezed through slow digital connections, compressed, reproduced, ripped, remixed, as well as copied and pasted into other channels of distribution.

The poor image is a rag or a rip; an AVI or a JPEG, a lumpen proletarian in the class society of appearances, ranked and valued according to its resolution. The poor image has been uploaded, downloaded, shared, reformatted, and reedited. It transforms quality into accessibility, exhibition value into cult value, films into clips, contemplation into distraction. The image is liberated from the vaults of cinemas and archives and thrust into digital uncertainty, at the expense of its own substance. The poor image tends towards abstraction: it is a visual idea in its very becoming.

The poor image is an illicit fifth-generation bastard of an original image. Its genealogy is dubious. Its filenames are deliberately misspelled. It often defies patrimony, national culture, or indeed copyright. It is passed on as a lure, a decoy, an index, or as a reminder of its former visual self. It mocks the promises of digital technology. Not only is it often degraded to the point of being just a hurried blur, one even doubts whether it could be called an image at all. Only digital technology could produce such a dilapidated image in the first place.

Later on ...

This flattening-out of visual content—the concept-in-becoming of the images—positions them within a general informational turn, within economies of knowledge that tear images and their captions out of context into the swirl of permanent capitalist deterritorialization.

And if we consider these beautiful politico-poetics in the context of the wunderschön Salzburg that I spoke initially about and this painter working there, we might see some interesting parallels.

The circulation of poor images thus creates “visual bonds,” as Dziga Vertov once called them. This “visual bond” was, according to Vertov, supposed to link the workers of the world with each other. He imagined a sort of communist, visual, Adamic language that could not only inform or entertain, but also organize its viewers.

Later:

The poor image is no longer about the real thing—the originary original. Instead, it is about its own real conditions of existence: about swarm circulation, digital dispersion, fractured and flexible temporalities. It is about defiance and appropriation just as it is about conformism and exploitation.

In short: it is about reality.

So back to the paintings here: This framed portrait with a found frame attached later as an afterthought. The gesture of the frame is repeated by the texture in the picture, almost Roccoco... and the tonal qualities, grey to silver, bring us to a sense of a generic photograph. The painting, this picture is the epidemy of a struggle with painting. A. Struggle. With. Painting. Somehow the first part of this text – the sense of place (Salzburg), the activities of the artist there, and this Steyerl text about the cheap image (“in praise of,” in my mind), all

comes together for me when we think of painting here as an act, as a struggle with painting.

The Caravaggio painting, with the Apostles in epiphany after the resurrection, has a mushroom cloud boldly painted over the centre of the painting. I remember as a child – I am a bit older than Stefan but not much – my father telling me about the realities of nuclear war, and this having a lasting impact on my adolescence and even my adult psyche. This bomb madness frames my unconscious until today. With Trump coming into power – well it looks that way but I guess anything can happen – my first primal thought was, now nuclear war will happen. This mad dream that filled my adolescent years as I presume it also filled Stefan's, this mad dream, I can imagine the artist still also having, here represented in a painting as it cannot be elsewhere. Here it is within the overall painted struggle that is a painting, here imbued with madness and fear, but layered over its opposite. That is, it is layered over a narrative of the resurrection. Here is sketched the possibility, often the probability of a modern, mortal annihilation of everything human. This indescribable nuclear nightmare thing annihilates the idea of resurrection. Or is this a mad Christian's realization of the final book in the bible, the book of revelations, which is itself almost "nuclear war" in its aesthetics too. This is a struggle of meaning and fear and reality and representation in the painting, as it cannot be done elsewhere. Perhaps it could have in early modern cinema, like Eisenstein might have done, but that would be antiquated now. I do remember 1980s films such as *The Rapture* that combined this end of days narrative with the nuclear threat. But they relied upon a Christian redemption. In literature this story could only be some sort of pulp fiction Christian science fiction narrative. But here it is hanging in a contemporary art gallery ... with other paintings, that have gestures and images and relationships that are seemingly disjunctive.

To find a conclusive meaning in this work is treacherous to its act.

Actually a small footnote – everything has conspired against me in writing this text for Stefan's work, and I had serious doubts I could craft the flow and conclusions of this text ... as I write this, my ten month old son is across from me on the train. He has vomited several times, thrown things around the train car, refused to sleep, whined, cried ...as does our idiot dog below us. Coffee has spilled over the table. The baby formula exploded in the carry bag. The man sitting behind me is eating so noisily that I can barely resist picking him up and throwing him off the train. There is constant distraction. But like the nature of these paintings, it is not necessarily incorrect to incorporate the distraction, but to instill some sense of anticipated reality with it. It is as if we were here before and we remember this moment, and we don't panic before it. These paintings are like that, for me. It is not that they are copies, they are anticipated images that struggle with themselves. We could be wrong to assume that we know what is going on in them in terms of a contained meaning, but at the same time, we might try to sense what has gone on to make them with an unfixed meaning.

When I spoke to Stefan about this painting, I mentioned the fear of nuclear war instilled in me by my father. This immediately has so many Freudian references, which we will skip for now, but it was a sense of understanding how dystopian and dark and hopeless this nightmare of nuclear war is, that it is also an aesthetic. The closest parallel I can think of is Kant's notion of the sublime, *Das Erhabene*, which can also be immense and terrifying (depending on which version he refers to), but we can eventually get our head around it. That is the point actually. There is even an imperative to do so. This sense of astonishment ... terrible wonder ... is it something fading now with global developments, with the hyper-activity of capital, with the rise of the Wizard of Oz as the President of the USA? How does one represent then a fading sublime? It cannot be on its own ... it must be accompanied by other fading cyphers. And what greater fading cypher than a Baroque painting represented on the internet?

Here *Das Erhabene* appears like a whisper or a passing gesture. Although it emerges from existential fears, we have to put our heads around it, as Kant would say, but where Casper David Friedrich would make this the central notion and

defining aesthetic, here it is a post-cliché image, or rather, a whisper.

Maybe here Stefan is in search of a sort of shock, to wake up painting from its ongoing spell. And here I think, we begin to premise that to paint is to be problematic, and therefore to struggle, with meaning, for one, with references, for another, then ultimately with painting itself as a praxis.