

Metàfora Studio Arts

## The Age of Lingerin

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In this thesis I discuss how, nowadays we are experiencing a “shrinking of the present” due to the ever-increasing multitude of short-lasting experiences and how painting defies the hectic pace we take on daily in order to achieve those experiences. This is because painting is a medium that calls for *lingering*. In this exploration I reference Polish sociologist Zygmunt Bauman’s concept of the pilgrim and stroller and Swiss-German philosopher Byung-Chul Han’s ideas on the art of lingering. In this discussion about painting as a medium, and beyond its medium specificity, I investigate its own relationship with time by referencing Lacan’s concept of the screen and how one must apply a contemplative gaze in approaching painting. At the very end, I juxtapose the previous exploration of the painting medium with photography, whose relationship with time has generally been investigated to a much greater extent. Furthermore, I end the thesis by giving an introduction to the juxtaposition of the two media in my current project.

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# **I. The Age of Haste**

## **- Acceleration and the shrinking present**

It is no secret that today's society is defined by a compulsive need for improvement and progress. However, the phenomenon of progress is not a new one, yet one that has been present since the industrial revolution. This teleology of progress is something characteristic of modernity. This is very well recognized in the opus of the Italian Futurists. Namely, when one reads Filippo Tommaso Marinetti's manifesto one can easily sense the aggressive and accelerated need for moving forward. However, no matter how frantic that movement is, it is nevertheless linear and goal-oriented. This need to move from *here* to *there* is also not a new concept to the age of modernity and is something that has defined the human civilization throughout history.

According to sociologist Zygmunt Bauman the modern human is a form of pilgrim, as they are always on the move *forward*. A pilgrim spends their life on the journey from *here* to *there*. "*Here* is the waiting, *there* is the gratification." (Bauman 22) They have one goal and they dedicate themselves fully in reaching it. Similarly, the *modern pilgrim* shares this idea of the one goal. Their common traits are determination and direction, but what the modern pilgrim lacks is patience. It is precisely this modernist idea of progress which puts a wide gap between the present and the future, which consequently creates the pressure to accelerate. With the technological improvements of modernism, time gained different meaning and became an obstacle to overcome. Time, when taking the role of duration started acquiring pejorative semantic values. Such as *killing time* or *wasting time*. Therefore duration started disappearing due to the acceleration of processes, which led to a sense that time itself started accelerating. Therefore, a significant distinction between the original pilgrim and the modern pilgrim is the accelerated pace of the modern pilgrim. The *there* gains more value and overshadows the journey. However, in this regard, philosopher Byung-Chul Han argues that the modern pilgrim actually does not strive towards a *there*, but towards a better or different *here*. (Han 28) This is owed to the progress-oriented teleological acceleration of processes.

Given that today's society lives in an age of many opportunities, both the journey and the goal become overshadowed. According to Han we are living in an era that is characterized by a hectic rush and nervousness, which does not permit us to achieve rest or conclusion. (Han 10-11) He argues that this hurtling from one possibility to the next is the cause for "the shrinking present". It is not acceleration, as "acceleration in the proper sense is a genuinely modern phenomenon. It assumes a linear, teleological development." (Han 32) Whereas, post-modernism is defined by a restlessness and directionless of acceleration of processes. The idea of the one goal is lost and quantity, in terms of experience starts gaining more value over quality. "When we are constantly asked to begin anew, to choose a new option or version of something, we may get the impression that life is accelerating. In reality, what we face is an

absence of any experience of duration.” (Han 33) Due to the absence of teleology or finality, the idea of the final goal or outcome disappears. As Zygmunt Bauman puts it, “time no longer structures space... there is no more ‘forward’ and ‘backward’; it is just the ability not to stand still that counts.” (Bauman 24) Contemporary life is defined by short pleasures and urges us to reach completion of each goal as quickly as possible. “Above all, do not delay gratification...whatever you are after get it *now*, you can not know whether the gratification you seek today will still be gratifying tomorrow.” (Bauman 25)

### - The Hectic Flâneur

Historical time presupposes a linear movement, while mythical time is restful like a picture. (Han 17) Nevertheless, what binds the two is their possession of a narrative tension. “Point-time” (Han 17), on the other hand, does not. It emerges from historical time when a loss of narrative or teleological tension occurs. In other words, the line of historical time “disintegrates into *points* which *whizz* around without any sense of direction.” (Han 17) Zygmunt Bauman argues that this phenomenon of point-time or *fragmentation* of time (Bauman 25) owes its existence to the over-saturation with information that we are experiencing nowadays. In this regard, our attention span weakens and only shocking content has the ability to get caught in its net. Afterwards it is immediately wiped in order to make room for the next incoming message.

Therefore, after historical time, a certain fragmentization or atomization of time occurs. As Z. Bauman says “Time is no longer a river, but a collection of ponds and pools.” (Bauman 25) Between these ponds or points empty intervals occur which give way to boredom. Due to these in-between spaces being filled with *empty nothingness*, a tendency for acceleration emerges. This is due to a lack of narrative tension in point-time. Therefore, owing to this lack of narration, point-time cannot hold our attention for long. This leads to anxiety and hectic behavior, which is then followed by a vague feeling of acceleration. Therefore, acceleration is a mere manifestation of the tendency to shorten the in-between spaces in point-time. “One of the symptoms of de-narrativization is the vague feeling that life itself is accelerating, while in reality nothing is accelerating. When looking more closely, what we find is a feeling of being rushed.” (Han 33) What we are left with is a disoriented, directionless movement. By attempting to find peace, one *whizzes* around from point to point in hope of accomplishing *gratification*. In other words one keeps bouncing from *there to there to there to there...*

This phenomenon gives birth to the idea of the *hectic flâneur*. As defined by Zygmunt Bauman the pace of modernism was characterized by the pilgrim and postmodernism is the time of the vagabond, stroller and tourist. The stroller or flâneur has no strings attached, *they are in the crowd, not of it* (Bauman 26). They experience human reality as episodic, fragmented. It implied a certain leisureliness. Today, all that is left of the flâneur is the purposelessness or better said lack of destination and predictability. We are living in a multidirectional hence directionless strategy of life where the leisureliness of the flâneur was given

up in favor of the accelerated, hectic movement of modernism. One could argue that an accelerated pace is understandable when a goal is mind, a one absolute goal. However, when there is no final goal, an acceleration of pace makes no sense. A rush for the sake of the rush.

Therefore, as mentioned, acceleration is not the cause for the loss of duration, but a mere consequence. The reason is precisely the lack of direction where time no longer contains anything to *hold on to* within itself. Hence, Han claims that this anxiety and hectic behavior owe their existence to the lack of *hold* we have been experiencing since postmodernity. (Han 31) This lack of hold is a consequence of the contemporary human being surrounded by short-term existences: from grander factors such as relationships and job positions to smaller ones such as smartphones and software versions. This phenomenon leads the contemporary human or the *hectic flâneur* to adopt a tendency to avoid commitment and develop a *no strings attached* attitude. Han argues that it is this groundlessness that occurs in the absence of holds, that causes acceleration. “Without hold what occurs is the tearing away of time [*Fortriß der Zeit*], the bursting of the temporal dam.” (Han 72)

## **II. Painting as a defiance to hecticness**

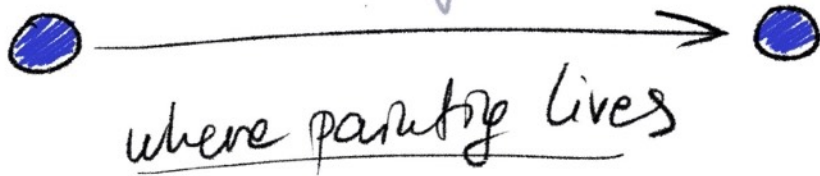
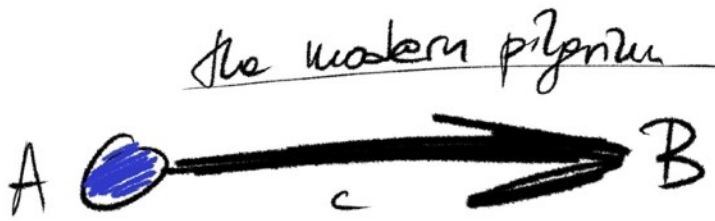
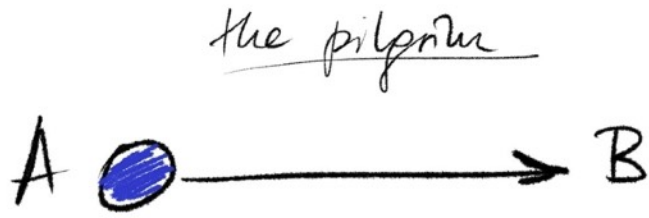
In lieu of the many socio-economical consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic, Kevin Brazil argues that “one thing recent painting might be able to do, as a practice of reflection on the pressures of our new present, is give us a sense of how these interlocking crises...are shaping our experience of time. A “crisis” after all is a temporal phenomenon: a decisive turning point that changes our understanding of what went before, and our experience of what will come next.” (Brazil) Therefore, if what we are experiencing is a point-like hectic present, how does painting help us regain the sense of *hold*? The answer, perhaps lies in exploring another question - where is a painting in terms of its *place* in time?

### **- The art of lingering**

“‘Distance’ translates as ‘delay’... Passage through space is a function of time, distances are measured by the time needed to cancel them. (Bauman 22) Therefore if we remember the previously mentioned definition by Zygmunt Bauman ‘Here’ is the waiting, ‘there’ is the gratification.” and if what we are experiencing today is a point-time present, with this multitude of ‘there’, what happens to the ‘here’, or the ‘waiting’?

Since we are living in the age of many opportunities, many goals occur. In order for the goal to be completed, we are constantly in a process “and the faster the goal is reached, the more efficient the process.” (Han 70) Hence, due to the multitude of goals and the accelerated pace used for their completion, the present is in danger of disappearing. “The present has no substance of its own; it is only a

figure 1



transition point.” (Han 13) Due to this acceleration, the time and space between the goals, or points, or the *theres* are significantly decreasing. This leaves no room for *lingering*. Han believes that it is precisely the inability to linger in contemplation which creates the centrifugal forces which brings about a general haste and dispersion. (Han 69) If we are no longer able to linger in contemplation, those things which we can only experience in contemplation are not available to us.

“‘Immediate enjoyment’ is not capable of experiencing beauty, because a beauty of a thing appears ‘only much later’... Beauty is owed to duration, to a contemplative synopsis” (Han 48) If we take the complex notion of ‘beauty’ as one of the ultimate goals of visual art, then I believe this statement can draw a connection with painting, as painting stands opposite to short-term, immediate enjoyments. Painting is a medium that requires time both in its production and consumption. It is a direct testimony of the time invested in its making. Hence, painting is a medium that stands in direct connection with duration and lingering. Therefore, if what we are experiencing is a hectic point-like present, I believe painting finds its habitat in-between the points, in the space where, when expanded, one can encounter duration and contemplative lingering. (*fig. 1*)

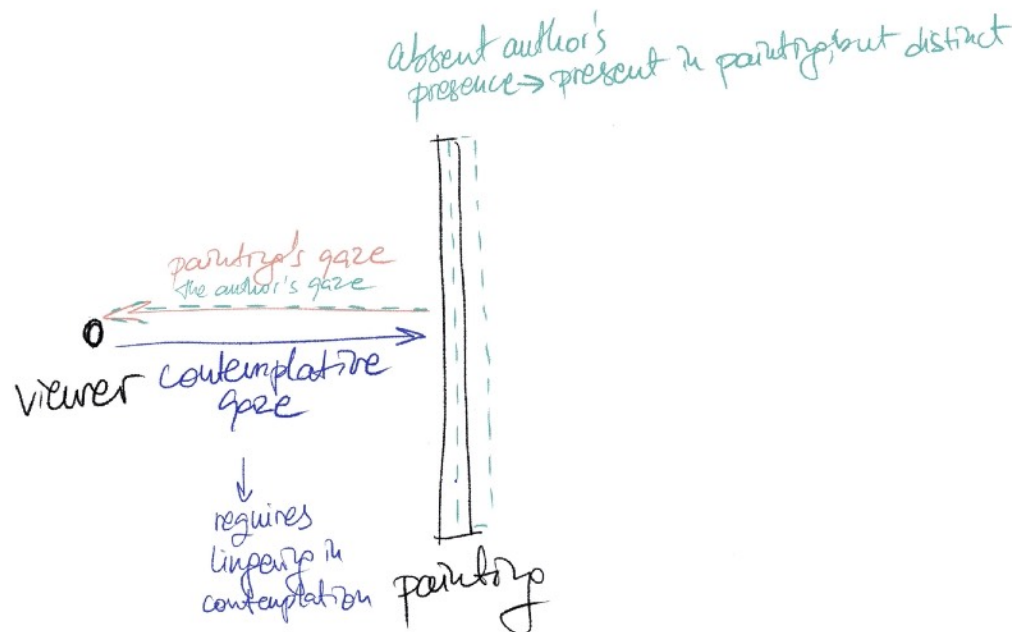
#### - A distanced nearness

Han claims that this age of haste that we are experiencing nowadays resembles ‘cinematographic time’, as with the disappearing of duration what happens is a mere succession of moments or ‘point-like presences’. (Han 48) Therefore, one could claim that film is a medium that dictates duration, or yet, one that is defined by its duration, which is established and independent with no regard to the viewer’s presence. Painting on the other hand, can not be defined by a certain finite duration, as it belongs to the age of lingering, rather than the age of haste. Its duration is in direct correlation with the viewer. In order to grasp this statement, I believe that one needs to refer to Jacques Lacan’s notion of the *screen*.

The screen mediates our perception and represents the image of the world shown to us through our own eyes. It works as a filter, showing us the image of what we see, not what is *Really* there. However, when this concept is applied to painting, it is the painting that becomes the screen. And it is painting that helps us become aware of the screen’s existence. “The screen, to an eye that is simultaneously overbought and ignorant, seems invisible; we are not aware of its existence because its existence is all that we have ever been aware of.” (Schwenger 60) Therefore, painting (which is, in this case the screen), helps us become aware of the existence of the screen. The solid surface of the canvas is that which serves as a reminder of the screen’s existence. When looking at a painting, the viewer is aware that they are looking at a painting of a thing and not the *Real* thing, therefore that knowledge mediates our next thoughts. This Lacan calls the *dompte-regard* or the *taming of the gaze*. However, if we recall Isabelle Graw’s statement that a painting stores the time and the labor of the artist, and therefore evokes the absent artist (Graw 81), one could argue that it is not the viewer’s gaze that is tamed, but that of the artist. The tamed gaze of the artist

is a manifestation of the artist's views and assertions. In regard to her painting *Red Cannas*, Georgia O'Keeffe states "Most people in the city rush around so, they have no time to look at the flower. I want them to see it whether they want to or not." (Schwenger 62) Therefore, even though the painting stands as an independent object, it is nevertheless charged with the artist's own statement. The painting's gaze associates with the tamed gaze of the artist, but is not equal to it. Isabelle Graw claims that painting has the capacity to appear particularly saturated with the life and labor time of its author, while remaining distinct from it. (Graw 101) (fig. 2)

figure 2



Therefore, if a painting belongs to the space of contemplative lingering, one must approach a painting with a *contemplative gaze*. Here it is important to differentiate the working gaze and the contemplative gaze. While work or action strives towards domination and assimilation, it destroyed the distance to things. What occurs is a tendency for absorbing an object into oneself. The contemplative gaze, on the other hand, "trains itself in the preservation of a distance to the things, without, though, losing their nearness. Its spatial formula is that of 'a distanced nearness'". (Han 77) This formula, I believe applies to painting.

Its distance lays in its autonomy and ambiguity; it takes its imagery from reality, but doesn't stand in direct contact with it. It allows the painting to remain enigmatic in its generosity. I believe a good painting shouldn't reveal much to the viewer, as "the stronger the removal of meaning is visually evident, the more emphatic the search for profanity becomes". (Geimer 39) Painting plays an interesting game in-between its obligation to itself, the autonomy it inevitably possesses and its referral to meaning outside



the canvas. This is also where titles play an important role. They help guide the viewer in the quest for meaning, without giving away all the clues. This refusal or deprivation of the immediate answer is when duration occurs. And that is where/when *contemplative lingering* finds its place. (Han 48)

The painting's nearness, on the other hand, comes from the raw physicality and materiality of the painted surface. This is where a painting differs from a photograph, mainly in the digital realm. This distanced nearness implies that painting is in constant tension, or better said in oscillation with itself. (*fig.2*)

### III. Painting vs. Photography

#### - An attempt to regain the physicality of a photograph

My exploration of the juxtaposition of the two media - painting and photography, began with the a series of paintings called *The Anticipation series*. The series emerged as a response to the *Quiet Afternoon* series of photographs by Fischli and Weiss. The photographs show everyday objects placed in a delicate equilibrium and thereby present intriguing and slightly uncanny images, as the objects used are familiar to us. It is their placement, and one could argue, this newly gained function that is unfamiliar or rather new to us. Given the choice of medium, one could argue that this project poses important questions on the medium specificity of photography. "The series exploits the camera's ability to elasticate time, presenting and eternal split-second, and a permanent precariousness." (Wells 631) Therefore, one could assume that what ensued after documenting this miraculous balancing act of objects is an inevitable fall of the same.

Photography seizes time and space and therefore immortalizes a certain moment. However, since a photograph traditionally represents a documentation of time and space, or more accurately of the past, the action that ensues is already determined, as it had already happened. Although the outcome may be unknown to us, what we know for certain is that there was one. This is where painting plays an interesting role, as its medium specificity has a different relationship to time. In the *Anticipation series* I wanted to explore this moment *just before* the action by constructing delicate balances, similar to those of Fischli and Weiss, that imply an action, a movement. Although, I was hoping to discover how the two media differed from one another, what I ended up with was a knowledge of their similarities. If we consider The *Quiet Afternoon* series as staged photography, then both the photographs and the paintings stand distant to reality. "Although there is a sense in which the camera does indeed capture reality, not just interpret it, photographs are as much an interpretation of the world as paintings and drawings are." (Sontag 4)

However, even if a photograph is staged, therefore considered an interpretation of reality, it will always be one step closer to *life* than a painting will ever be. Isabelle Graw believes that this is the reason for an ever-growing interest in photography's participance in the contemporary painterly practice, or in other words, painting from photographs. "I believe that the reason for the lasting fascination with this painting form, which numerous artists have taken on, lies in its coordination of the indexicalities of the two media.

The paintings based on photographs evoke the indexicality characteristic of photography: a reference to life.” (Graw 62) This ‘reference to life’ is what gives us assurance while looking at a photograph. It provides a comfort of vision. I believe that this comfort of vision is ‘in crisis’ while looking at the Quiet Afternoon series, as the objects photographed are familiar to us, but their function and placement are not. As a result we are confronted with an uncanny image that puts that assurance in question. This ‘crisis of vision’ is something, I believe, a painting can never stage, due to its lack of reference to life.

Painting, if anything is a genre that is never finished. Although so is a contemporary photograph. Today, with all the digital tools we have at our disposal, a photograph can be always be edited and modified. Therefore, this is where the two media collide. A painting is a traditional, even analogue medium, that somehow shares this quality with the contemporary digital photograph. But the difference is precisely in the physicality. Photographs nowadays are experienced on screens. They circulate the intangible space of the internet and rarely find their way into our hands. Unless what we hold in our hands is another screen. A painting on the other hand, will always prevail in its physicality. It stands as an object taking its place in the world.

With all this in mind, I wanted to take the approach of making a painting in *building* a photograph by combining the physicality of a painting with the photograph’s reference to life. I am currently exploring this approach in a series of digital photographs intervened by hand. The interventions, cuts and folds of paper, I perceive as brushstrokes. The quality they share is tangibility. As each brushstroke is made by my hand, so is each cut and fold. After building the ‘first layer’ of interventions, I would take another photograph, print it and continue with the interventions. The time it takes me to build each photograph resembles the time it takes me to build a painting. The result of this process left me with an uncanny image, that can still be called a photograph, because of its reference to life.

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