Moonie S.

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Thematizing failure: The morbid fascination of Luc Tuymans

Stephen Moonie, Newcastle University

Abstract

Luc Tuymans' paintings are often heralded as exemplary of contemporary painting's historical dilemma. This article argues that a discourse of failure has been formative in shaping Tuymans' critical reception: a discourse that has drawn heavily on the postmodern critique of painting in the 1980s. Further, this discourse has been formative of Tuymans' own practice. However, this article argues that despite the productiveness of the discourse of failure – especially with regard to the relationship between Tuymans' painting and the technologically mediated image – such an approach runs up against certain limits. This is especially apparent in Tuymans' recent work, which exemplifies a more pronounced ambivalence towards modernism and its legacy.

Keywords

Luc Tuymans

failure

iconoclasm

modernism

postmodernism

contemporary painting

Luc Tuymans is firmly established as one of the most prominent contemporary painters: his CV includes a pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2001, a major retrospective at Tate in 2004, and a slew of publications on his work (Dexter 2004; Koerner 2009; Looock 1996; Molesworth 2009). However, what is notable about Tuymans' success is the discourse of 'failure' that accompanies his work. Tuymans dismisses this discourse with an irritation that characterizes his attitude towards critics and art historians (Ruyffelaere 2013: 159). However, the notion of 'failure' is formative of the reception of his painting: it has even been formative of his own practice, as we shall see.

In a summation of this attitude, Ulrich Looock remarks that Tuymans 'denies

from the very start the historical legitimacy of his own practice' (1996: 34).

Similarly, Jordan Kantor claims that Tuymans and his followers

deploy the aesthetic of technical failure as a way to thematize the situation of painting today, a predicament in which the very possibility of the autonomous, or even complete work, has been discredited by three decades of postmodern critique. (Kantor 2011: 170)

However, the 'aesthetic of technical failure' is as old as modernism itself, dating back to Charles Baudelaire's letter to Edouard Manet ('you are only the first in the decrepitude of your art' (Baudelaire 1947–53: 96–97). A contemporary gloss is provided by Kantor's use of the verb 'deploy', which suggests the strategic manoeuvring of our managerial culture, while 'thematize' suggests that Tuymans employs the notion of 'failure' in a historically self-reflexive manner. The precise 'predicament' of contemporary art is not clearly defined by Kantor. Scepticism towards painting's autonomy is at least as old as the unravelling of Clement Greenberg's modernism in the 1960s.

However, Kantor's reference to 'postmodern critique' is more specific: in particular, it reminds the reader of the journal *October* and its critique of painting. Kantor's reference is a testament to the persistence of the journal's influence, but it also acknowledges that postmodern critique has itself become historical. It is now almost 35 years since *October*'s Spring 1981 issue 'Art World Follies'. Largely directed at the market-driven resurgence of neo-expressionism, the issue formed part of a broader theorization of postmodernism by Benjamin Buchloh, Douglas Crimp, Rosalind Krauss and Craig Owens. Among these canonical postmodern texts, Krauss' 'The originality of the avant-garde: A postmodernist repetition' (1981) is one of the most influential: here, Krauss argued for 'the discourse of the copy', which inhabited the artwork as a vessel of originality, undermining it from within (1981: 64). Given that Krauss' distinction between 'original/copy' is broadly aligned with the terms 'painting/photography', this left painting in an awkward position: Krauss' challenge to painting's historical validity left commentators sympathetic to painting at risk of appearing provincial, and in turn ghettoizing the medium. However, in the intervening three decades,

painting is still here, while photography is no longer the ‘rebel’ discourse it once was. Cindy Sherman, one of the exemplars of postmodern theory, is firmly established in the academy: this is testified to by her recent retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art (Respini 2012).

Postmodernism’s theoretical legacy has undoubtedly left its mark on Tuymans’ work. However, it is a discourse that runs up against limits (and it is here that the artist’s frustration with his critics is justified). If painters still paint, then claims of painting’s historical insufficiency ring increasingly hollow, however much these claims have a seductive ring for critics and art historians enamoured by the consolations of theory. Tuymans’ painting, like that of Gerhard Richter, is especially interesting for its uneasy relationship to these debates. It is precisely Tuymans’ relationship to the discourse of ‘failure’ that requires further consideration.

First, it is helpful to go back to the artist’s early development: he made his breakthrough as a painter during the mid-1980s, when he briefly abandoned painting to work in film and photography. Between 1982 and 1986 he also

studied art history at Vrije Universiteit in Brussels, having studied painting in Brussels and Antwerp during the late 1970s. In an interview with Juan Vicente Aliaga, Tuymans recounts that ‘In 1982 I didn’t see any point in going on with painting. I had a sort of crisis. Coincidentally I got a Super-8 camera with which I could shoot in black and white’ (Tuymans 1996a: 10). In the same interview, Tuymans recalls an early *Self Portrait* from 1978 as a key moment in his breakthrough. As a budding teenage artist, he received a prize for the work, which was a book on James Ensor. Tuymans recalls,

I thought that I had made something original, but then I discovered that it was impossible. The idea of the original faded away and after a short crisis that gave me a new idea: all you can do is make an authentic forgery. (1996a: 8)

The above remarks highlight two issues: the first is the idea of the ‘authentic forgery’, while the second is the relationship between painting and film, which will be discussed later. This paradoxical term, ‘authentic forgery’, articulates the impossibility of originality that was at the heart of

postmodernism, but it also reflects the sophistication of the notion:

postmodernism did not deny originality so much as claim that reproduction is embedded in the very structure of originality itself (Krauss 1982).

This idea is rendered concrete in Tuymans' work. His palette, especially in his early works, eschews the freshness of the painted surface in favour of a frequently pallid and anaemic tonality. He also distresses the surface of his paintings to render them 'old from the start', imitating the *craquelure* of ageing picture surfaces (Tuymans 1996a: 8). *Craquelure* may be an index of a work's authenticity, but conversely it is also the aim of the forger to (re)produce the appearance of authenticity. The infamous Vermeer forger Han van Meegeren 'cracked' the problem by adding the compound used in Bakelite to his pigments in order to attain a suitably irregular *craquelure* (previous attempts to bake his forgeries in the oven produced an effect that was too evenly distributed across the surface). Van Meegeren provides us with an interesting counterpart to Tuymans: the 'inauthentic' as opposed to the 'authentic' forger. There is a concrete link between the two: Tuymans claims to have executed *Petrus and Paulus* (1998) in the style of van

Meegeren. Further, the artist's 2010 essay 'Just an image' (Ruyffelaere 2013) remarks upon the undercurrent of resentment that motivated van Meegeren, whose forgeries were a sublimated revenge against modern painting. The fascination still exerted by his forgeries appeals not only to the public's appetite for art crime, but more deeply it arouses a desire to see modern art revealed as a hoax (Wynne 2006; Lopez 2009). It is precisely this desire to which Tuymans calls our attention: van Meegeren questioned the nature of authenticity by attempting to prove that it can be forged (in his instance with only brief success). To use the currency of the 1980s, van Meegeren produced a *simulacrum* of authenticity. There is an intimation that Tuymans sees a part of himself in van Meegeren. However, whereas the forger's attitude towards modernism was one of outright hostility, the Belgian views it from an ambivalent perspective. As Kantor remarks, Tuymans appears to both affirm and deny painting, which accounts for the fascination his work exerts (Kantor 2011: 174).

An exemplary instance is the early work *Body* (1990; Figure 1). Cracks can be seen quite clearly across the surface of the canvas. The paint appears to

stain and smear the canvas, while the greasy, pallid hues suggest olfactory connotations. Tuymans claims that he wanted the body to look like a doll or a puppet, robbing it of agency (likewise, van Meegeren's painting is, according to Tuymans, a 'flaccid interpretation' of Vermeer) (Ruyffelaere 2013: 22). The body is also cropped: the head is removed, while the zip fastener is signified by two desultory slashes of paint, which jab into the sides of the painting 'like a wound, like a cut' (Tuymans 1996b: 140). There is a further act of violence against the painting: one of its most disquieting aspects is the manner in which the body has been 'squashed' into the picture. Instead of preparing adequate space for the depicted object, *Body* gives the viewer the impression that Tuymans has simply run out of space through lack of forethought. The arms and hands (which are little more than cursory V-shaped smears of paint) are crammed in at the edges of the support, giving the impression of incompetence. However, this cannot be the case, since Tuymans works on un-stretched canvas, cropping it *post facto* (Tuymans 1996a: 26). The idea of framing as a calculated compositional decision is thus turned on its head.

In a sly twist, Tuymans suggests that the unease elicited by paintings such as *Body* resides not in the object but in the viewer. He remarks that ‘the sickness is in the spectator’ (Tuymans 1996a: 42). Joseph Leo Koerner, in perhaps the most sophisticated discussion of the artist’s work, suggests that the viewer takes pleasure in this showing of violence (‘monstrance’). Koerner writes, ‘Mortification begins before [Tuymans] even starts to paint: “I look at the imagery until it’s completely dead.... That’s the cruel act of painting”’ (2009: 39).¹ If the cropping of *Body* inverted the conventional notion of the frame as a compositional decision, the conception that the painting ‘kills’ the imagery from the outset is an uncanny inversion of Henri Matisse’s statement in ‘Notes of a painter’, where ‘all is in the conception’: ‘conception’ here aiming towards freshness, harmony and visual plenitude (1995).

Tuymans favours thin, diluted paint, which accentuates a dashed-off quality reminiscent of Manet’s *morceaux*. Koerner describes this as Tuymans’ ‘Lenten manner’:

Preferring bitter turpentine to luscious oil as his binding medium, [Tuymans] evokes the old Protestant critique of images as wasteful ‘oil idols’ (*Ölgötzen*) that consume a community’s resources both in their making and in their lighting, by oil lamp and candle. (Koerner 2009: 39)

Tuymans counters the lusciousness of paint not only as part of his aversion to ‘expressionism’, but, as Koerner highlights, this choice implies a moral crusade against wastefulness, luxury and splendour: in a word, iconoclasm. However, as Koerner has argued extensively, iconoclasm is a sophisticated affair. Following on from the claims made in his study *The Reformation of the Image* (2004), Koerner contends that iconoclasm is built in to the very act of image-making itself, a paradox that had long been overlooked in earlier accounts of the Reformation (2004). Koerner notes that the Protestant reformers were not mere vandals. In fact, as he writes, ‘The very people who “founded” images – that is, who commissioned, crafted and worshipped them – were the very same people who, sometimes days later, as a result of some Copernican turn of mind, went about smashing images’ (Koerner 2009: 32). Similarly, Tuymans has remarked upon his own interest in the

“‘makeability’ and the ‘breakability’ of the image’ (Ruyffelaere 2013: 139).

Further, the iconoclasts did not assail wildly; instead, they aimed very precisely at specific, symbolically charged features, such as the eyes and hands: as Koerner notes, ‘the image breakers *remained* image makers’ (2009: 32, original emphasis). Placing Tuymans in this tradition, he writes that ‘like all good iconoclasts, Tuymans... wields his hammer with astonishing precision’ (Koerner 2009: 44).

Of special interest to Koerner is *Church* (1990; Figure 2), which is derived from a photograph of a model church. Pared down to flimsy pictorial facets of cream and beige (the spire ‘wobbles’ slightly due to the speedy over-painting), Tuymans’ fluid, matter-of-fact application of paint strips the church of its ornament, while the small scale of the canvas subverts its imposing power. Koerner writes, ‘Its magical likeness effaced, Catholic monstrosity is revealed as empty, artificial, and perniciously manipulative, in Tuymans’ testimony, “a blind façade, a Potemkin village”’ (2009: 35).² Koerner claims that Tuymans shows, like the Protestant reformers, the invisibility of truth: ‘the blind spot in the monstrosity, the sacred image

itself' (Koerner 2009: 35). From this perspective, the visual splendour of the Baroque conceals an emptiness at its heart, which is the unrepresentability of the deity in the Sacrament: this emptiness is compensated for in Baroque art by an excess of visual abundance. Koerner uses the historical example of Adolf Menzel as a dispassionate observer of this visual plenitude (2009: 35–36). Tuymans' exposure of 'the invisibility of truth' aligns him with the impulse of iconoclasm, but it also suggests the fundamental emptiness at the heart of the hermeneutic impulse, a view propounded by Tuymans' fellow Belgian, the literary theorist Paul de Man. Koerner studied at Yale University, where de Man taught for many years, and this notion of 'emptiness' might be read in terms of de Man's own reflections on the nature of literary interpretation (de Man 1983).

Tuymans' 'unveiling' of the emptiness of Catholicism's façade can be put into alignment here with the iconoclastic impulse of postmodern critique: *October* aimed to aggressively deploy 'a complex of cultural practices, among them a demythologizing criticism and a truly postmodernist art, both of them acting now to void the basic propositions of modernism, to liquidate them by exposing their

fictitious condition' (Krauss 1981: 66). The journal avoided the lush illustrations of other art publications, which they deemed to be mere handmaidens to the art market. As Thomas Crow remarked, 'The *October* editors made a measured iconoclasm into policy, declaring in a Quaker-like way that it would be "plain of aspect"' (1993). Tuymans' painterly parsimony accords nicely with this attitude, but his 'Lenten manner', rather than indicating a hostility to painting as a medium, is indicative of a more broad-ranging scepticism towards the image in general. This brings us to the second issue, which stems from his early development: the relationship between painting and film.

In the interview from Aliaga cited earlier, Tuymans said of his early work in Super-8 film that 'Strangely enough, although I could never make a photograph, I could make films. There is something similar about filming and painting' (1996a: 10). Tuymans elaborated upon this in his interview with Luk Lambrecht in 1996, where he proposed painting as operating in tandem with film. His work in film led him to the following realization:

I began to see the painted image as a kind of *découpage*, something that

could suggest content outside the boundaries of the canvas... I was very aware of painting being an antiquated medium, and this could help me achieve exactly the opposite results to film. A film usually leaves you with a couple of selected images, whereas one can personally turn an intriguing painting into a whole film; in other words, one can conjure up a compelling reconstruction of the 'before' and 'after'. (Lambrecht 1996: 78)

The nature of painting as a discrete image allows not only for a specific quality that film, consisting of a succession of images, lacks; but what is also interesting here is that the claim for the painting to operate 'outside' the frame is remarkably similar to the postmodern claims that were made for Cindy Sherman's early work, such as her *Untitled* series in 1977: here each image is a fragment suggesting a broader, absent narrative. However, Tuymans aligns painting with film rather than photography: whereas photography is a static image capturing a singular moment, both painting and film involve the construction of an image that elapses over time - 'painted time' as Tuymans has called it (Ruyffelaere 2013: 94). Further, Tuymans has implied that painting has an indeterminacy that evades the viewer's recollection. He notes,

After seeing a film I try to figure out which single image is the one with which I can remember all the moving images of the movie. Painting does the opposite; a good painting to me denounces its own ties so that you are unable to remember it correctly. (1996a: 12)

This distinction provides an interesting way to differentiate Tuymans from Gerhard Richter: the two artists are sometimes compared, although Tuymans himself claims that he is neither interested in nor influenced by Richter. However, a comparison between the two sets certain key issues into relief. While Tuymans is framed by the discourse of postmodernism, Richter's work grappled with late modernism. Richter's first photo-painting of Brigitte Bardot was a means to escape the burden of painting's legacy, especially that of abstract expressionism. As Richter has noted, 'I had had enough of bloody painting, and painting from a photograph seemed like the most moronic... thing that anyone could do' (Obrist 1998: 132). The use of photography as a 'ready-made' was not only consistent with the 'dead-pan' approach of many of his contemporaries, but it also provided a stable refuge for Richter's scepticism, anchoring his practice within a consistent routine. In a contrarian article, Max Kozloff has remarked that this consistency comes at a cost,

in that Richter's work rarely falls below a certain aesthetic level. Kozloff writes that 'The energy of Richter's pictures never exceeds or falls beneath certain bounds determined by their idiom, device or gesture. His changes of modes may well surprise, but his performance within them is constant and predictable...' (1994: 100). The structures imposed by the photographic source offer a sufficient, if not a necessary, condition of attaining a consistent level of aesthetic performance (the paintings still need to be painted, after all). It is notable that Kozloff expresses a dissatisfaction with Richter's painting not because his work is unsuccessful but because it does not risk failure. Tuymans too has expressed a similar reservation, noting that Richter 'confines himself to demonstrating the art of painting.... it allows no flaws to show through and it doesn't dare affront the question of the importance of the work' (Lambrecht 1996: 78). However, not all of Richter's works are such consummate demonstrations of the art of painting. T. J. Clark has recently written

There are some cityscapes painted in 1968 and 1969, in particular *Stadtbild SL* [fig. 3, 1969] (from which Luc Tuymans learned brilliantly), where all the achieved non-life of modernity is painted with a truly chilling lack of

affect, as if seen by a sociopath looking through the sights of a gun. (2011:

3)

The uncharacteristically rapid execution of Richter's cityscapes hints at one of the 'lessons' that Tuymans may have drawn from Richter. Here, Richter's usual finesse is sacrificed: in other cityscapes from the series, the scenes hover between photo-painting and abstraction, where the veracity of each seems to dissolve. Like *Church*, the source is an architectural model that appears insubstantial, even hollow, due to the brisk, pedestrian blocking-in of the painting's facets. Clark's remarks on *Stadtbild SL* form part of his broader lament for the failure of modernism. If *Stadtbild SL* unveils the 'non-life' of modernity beneath the spectacle of late capitalism (or its mirror image, the drabness and uniformity of the German Democratic Republic), this act mirrors Tuymans' unveiling of the empty facade of *Church*. Both works are ambivalent, however: despite Clark's interpretation, Richter's cityscapes also evoke the residue of hopes for post-war renewal. If, on an aesthetic level, one might differentiate Richter and Tuymans, there is also a broader difference that we might make in terms of method: this is the distinction between photography and film - or, to be more accurate, the televised image. As Helen Molesworth notes, although Tuymans sometimes works from photographs,

he derives much of his imagery from the more elusive televised image (Molesworth 2009: 19). A generation younger than Richter (b.1933), Tuymans (b.1958) grew up with television, as he recounts to Aliaga,

For my generation, television is very important. There's a huge amount of visual information which can never be experienced but can be seen, and its impact is enormous.... For an artist like Gerhard Richter, the fight of true painting against photography was very important; for me it's much more interesting to think in terms of films, because on a psychological level, films are more decisive. (1996a: 12)

This reference to imagery 'which can never be experienced but can be seen' is, as Samuel Weber has claimed, a characteristic of television's distinctive ontology as a medium. For Weber, television does not present us with a conventional image: rather it presents 'the semblance of presentation as such', placing before us a 'surrogate for the body... but it does this in a way that nobody can, for its perception takes place in more than one place at a

time' (1996: 117). Here we find a revealing insight into the appeal of Tuymans' aesthetic: the insubstantial feel of his painterly images might correspond to the insubstantiality of the televised image. While the sharpness and definition of the televised image has developed rapidly since Tuymans' youth, Weber's remark about its fundamental insubstantiality still holds. However, Koerner makes a broader claim for Tuymans, that the medium of painting transcends the technologically mediated image: 'Tuymans exhibits painting for what it is, elevating – improbably – his ancient craft once more to its status as art of arts by allowing it to expose what the rival technologies, in their transparency to what they represent, occlude' (Koerner 2009: 42).

This is a rather knotty passage, in that it begs the question of what is the 'thing' that is exposed by painting and yet occluded by technology. However, we might consider this from the perspective of modernist 'demystification': the hesitant, fragile quality of Tuymans' paintings alert us to the fabricated nature of the image that is naturalized by the spectacle of late capitalism. Koerner's claim for Tuymans as 'elevating' painting is more

problematic, however. Rather than ‘elevating’ painting, Tuymans evinces a scepticism towards the image in general, whether the image is constructed through paint or via its technological counterparts.

Tuymans’ more recent works have expanded his earlier ‘Lenten manner’ into a more assured style, described by Molesworth as a ‘faded sumptuousness’ (Molesworth 2009: 18). This pertains especially to works such as *The Perfect Table Setting* (2005; Figure 4), which Tuymans based upon a 1954 book for housewives (Tuymans 2010: 82). The image has a shallow pictorial space, achieved partially by cropping the upper section, which can be seen in the photographic source image (Sigg et al. 2010: 180). The empty table setting might be viewed in terms of loss: the loss of modernism or the loss of the social optimism of the post-war era.

Nonetheless, an ambivalence is at work: pleasure is evident in the manner with which Tuymans has painted the decorative scheme of closely valued hues of avocado and lilac. This is accentuated by the repeating rhythms of the painting: the rims of the wine glasses are echoed by the circular placemats and the dinner plates, and these circular motions are offset by the intervals established by the candlesticks placed off-centre.

This ‘faded sumptuousness’ and its proximity to the decorative is also evident in the exhibition ‘Allo!’ at the David Zwirner gallery in London in 2012. The series of six paintings were derived from *The Moon and Sixpence* (Lewin, 1942), based upon the Somerset Maugham novel of the same title. The paintings have a limited chromatic range, but from a middle distance they emit a warm, suffused radiance, which is not easily captured by reproduction. Each canvas has a grey ground, accentuated by the warmth generated by the offset colours of red and electric blue/green, which lend the paintings an otherworldly radiance. Tuymans states that his working procedure was inverted for these works:

Normally I paint starting with the lightest color, then go into the contrasts. Here, I had to do the reverse in order to find the right strength of the color and the qualities of the darkest areas within the painting. (Haq 2012: 63)

In adopting this procedure, Tuymans mimics the technicolour process used in the original film, which was long unavailable, and has only recently been

restored. The central character, played by George Sanders, is loosely based upon Paul Gauguin: a London stockbroker who leaves his wife and his job for Tahiti. Following his death, the main character's doctor travels to Tahiti to discover the paintings left behind in the studio: they are large, swirling, sensuous nudes in the manner of Gauguin. Tuymans derives the paintings from this final scene of the doctor in the studio. This scene takes place moments before the fictional artist's paintings are destroyed in a fire lit by his Tahitian widow. This twist undoubtedly appeals to Tuymans, because failure is at the heart of the project: the artist's labour comes to nothing in the engulfing fire, demonstrating the contingency of the modernist project and its now canonical artefacts.³ When Tuymans claims that the paintings function as 'a joke on modernism', this is presumably what he means, although there is a detached sensuality to the works that belies this claim (Haq 2012: 64).

In *Allo! I* (2012) the doctor is seen from behind in the darkened studio, where the light seems to emanate from the glowing heat of the canvases surrounding him. Tuymans' own shadow can be seen in the image, as a

result of capturing the film still on his own camera. This might be seen as an example of wilful incompetence, but it also serves to make explicit his own investment in the scene, and, by implication, with modernism's legacy. In *Allo! III* (2012; Figure 5) we see the doctor in close-up, as though face to face with the decorative nude on the canvas before him. Translated into paint by Tuymans, the doctor is fused into the same fictive plane as the canvas on the studio wall: in fact, he appears to be in dialogue with the figure of the primitive 'other'. The doctor might also be seen as standing in for Tuymans himself, who is simultaneously detached from, and involved in, the scene. The polarity of 'detachment' and 'involvement' reveals Tuymans' ambivalent attitude to modernism. If, earlier, we noted an identification with van Meegeren, the 'inauthentic' forger, here Tuymans identifies, albeit indirectly, with a conventionally 'authentic' modernist: Gauguin. Nonetheless, given the context of colonialism that subtends Gauguin's work, this authenticity is deeply compromised, as Tuymans is well aware.

The postmodern critique of painting is now historical, and yet its afterlife has proved tenacious. Notions such as fragmentation, the loss of autonomy

and the failure of representation offer a seductive lexicon to frame Tuymans and his followers, among whom Kantor mentions Eberhard Havekost, Magnus Plessen and Wilhelm Sasnal (Kantor 2011). But Tuymans' aesthetic – the 'look' of his painting – threatens to distract us from the more substantial underlying impulse behind his work, which is marked not only by his ambivalence towards modernism but by his scepticism towards, and his interrogation of, the nature of the image. While this attitude continues to prove fruitful for emergent painters, a more productive, but more arduous, task for art writing is to develop a critical frame for painting that moves beyond the theoretical legacy of the critique of painting.

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Contributor details

Stephen Moonie is Lecturer in Art History in the Department of Fine Art, School of Arts and Cultures, Newcastle University. He completed his Ph.D. in 2009 at the University of Essex on the subject of modernist painting and its criticism. He contributed to the catalogue *The Indiscipline of Painting* (Tate, 2011). His recent publications include: 'Painting and performance', *AbstractCritical* (December 2012); 'Historians of the future: Harold Rosenberg's critique of *Artforum*', *Visual Resources*, 31:1–2 (April 2015); 'A poet of non-*ressentiment*? Lawrence Alloway, Ray Johnson, and the artworld as a network', *Getty Research Journal*, 9 (forthcoming, February

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Contact:

School of Arts and Cultures, The Quadrangle, Newcastle University,
Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 7RU, UK.

E-mail: stephen.moonie@ncl.ac.uk

Captions

Figure 1: Luc Tuymans, *Body* (1990), 49cm × 35cm, oil on canvas.

Photographer: Felix Tirry. Courtesy: Zeno X Gallery, Antwerp.

Figure 2: Luc Tuymans, *Church* (1990), 51.5cm × 64.5cm, oil on canvas.

Courtesy: Zeno X Gallery, Antwerp.

Figure 3: Gerhard Richter, *Stadtbild SL (Townscape SL)* (1969), oil on
canvas, 124cm × 124cm, Massimo Martino Fine Arts and Projects,

Mendrisio, Switzerland. © Gerhard Richter.

Figure 4: Luc Tuymans, *The Perfect Table Setting* (2005), oil on canvas, 51 5/8inches × 62 1/4inches (131cm × 158cm × 4cm). Courtesy: David Zwirner New York/London and Zeno X Gallery Antwerp.

Figure 5: Luc Tuymans, *Allo! III* (2012), oil on canvas, 50inches × 69inches (126.9cm × 175.1cm). Courtesy: David Zwirner New York/London and Zeno X Gallery Antwerp.

Notes

¹ The citation is from ‘Luc Tuymans interviewed by Martin Gayford’ (Tuymans 1999: 116).

² The citation is from Luc Tuymans, ‘Disenchantment’ (Loock 1996: 136).

³ One might add that these are blue-chip artefacts: Gauguin’s *When Will You Marry?* (1892) was recently sold at auction for £197 million.