

The Last Judgment in Cyberspace

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(1) Substitution and Transformation

A sculpture can be looked at from multiple sides, whereas a painting can only be viewed from the front. Imagine what would happen if we looked at a painting from the back?

How would Michelangelo's *The Last Judgment* appear from behind? I think the figures considered important in the original work would become less conspicuous, while the secondary figures situated on the edges of the picture plane would assume principle roles. The original meaning of the fresco would be dramatically transformed. Perhaps even Michelangelo himself never imagined such a way of looking at his fresco.

In light of the imagined scenario above, I substituted all four hundred or so figures in *The Last Judgment* with a 3-D image of myself. I then reversed the original structure of the painting, as if we could walk behind the fresco and look back at the mural through the wall.

Substituting my own image for all the figures in the fresco effectively erased the identities of those judging and those being judged. The differences in their statuses no longer exist. The person who ascends to heaven is the same who descends into hell.

If all of these forms have a marble-like texture, it is because the sculptor Michelangelo elicits my admiration even more so than the painter.

In the construction of the entire scene, I transformed a previously 2-D image into a 3-D space. I can view it not only from the back, but also from the sides, from the top and from

below. I can even walk through the scene and take photographs. Taking photographs of a real space transforms a 3-D scene into a 2-D image. Now, I am turning a 2-D image into a 3-D digital scene, from which I can, furthermore, take static 2-D photographs and moving videos.

(2) Theme

When I was making this work, I subconsciously related it to current international politics, as well as religious and cultural conflicts. These were all things that I necessarily had to confront.

Are my views towards myself, my nation, and my national religion and culture overly compassionate or overly critical? Are my views and judgments of other people, other nations, and other religions and cultures too severe or too respectful?

(3) Questions and responses between those judging and those being judged:

Where will I go? --- You will go there.

Where can I go? --- You can go there.

Where should I go? --- You should go there.

Where do I want to go? --- You want to go there.

Where may I go? --- You may go there.

Where must I go? --- You must go there.

Where can I only go? --- You can only go there.

Where will I go after all? --- You will go there after all.

Where will I really go? --- You will really go there.

Where will I go right now? --- You will go there right now.

Where will I immediately go? --- You will immediately go there.

Where do I have no choice but to go? --- You have no choice but to go there.

In the end, where will I go? --- In the end, you will go there.

(4) Introspection

Thinking about my own behavior and conduct, it seems that doing bad things doesn't make one a bad person, nor does doing good deeds make one a good person. If I normally do things that are neither good nor bad, then in facing the last judgment, do I deserve to go to heaven or hell? Most of the time, we are the ones who judge ourselves. Should I do this or do that? Is doing this good or bad? To judge oneself is a painful thing, perhaps much harder than being judged by someone else. These days, there are countless people who don't attend church on Sundays. Rather, on Sundays, they are in the forests, by the seashore, in the sunlight, on the mountains, on the meadows, driving on the road...do they stop for a moment to examine their own behavior, do they stop for a moment to serve as their own God? Or, in the flash of another moment, would they answer a call, accept criticism, reproach, advice or admonishment?

(5) Abandonment

I think that Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* serves only as a point of departure for my work. In moving forward, I have found that my work has become more and more removed from the original painting. This is probably due to my substitution of all the characters in the picture with the same figure. Such a substitution automatically abandons the distinctions between high and low, left and right, good and evil, honorable and humble, east and west, ancient and modern.

(6) Fairness

Fairness? How can one achieve fairness? God? How can he make impartial judgments? Is he omnipotent and omniscient?

(7) Nature

This work was completed entirely on the computer. What surprised me was that, in the end, I generated more clouds on the computer than originally appeared in Michelangelo's fresco. If I had not done so, I would have felt the work too rigid and lacking in "spirit consonance"! Furthermore, I realized that my method for adding clouds derived from the same ideas used in traditional landscape painting: the attempt to achieve a "shifted perspective," to conceal the difficult connections between the different parts of such a shifted perspective, to play with the false and the real, etc... As such, my cultural tradition cannot help but manifest itself in this work.

(8) The Last Judgment in Cyberspace—The Front View

Almost all the figures were arranged according to Michelangelo's original composition. However, in the original fresco, some figures were positioned in extremely exaggerated ways. The 3-D model couldn't make such exaggerated movements, which are difficult even for a living person. I wondered if even more complicated actions existed in the inimitable Michelangelo's mind. I simply stopped trying to imitate these movements as precise imitation was not my ultimate goal anyhow. I did my utmost to succeed in arranging in place, in cyberspace, each of the nearly four hundred figures: this was the first step.

(9) The Last Judgment in Cyberspace—The Rear View

When I turned the video camera to the rear view of the figures, I realized that I would have to rely on my own imagination to arrange those occupying the back rows. In the original work, perhaps only their heads were visible, but from the back view, they became the most important figures. From this rear view, then, my work is a complete re-creation. It was necessary for me to add a bit of innovation here: this rear view is not a 180-degree rotation, but rather was angled so that the central point shifted to the right-hand side. The scene from the back is focused in this area, and interested persons can compare the front

and rear views. However, the most important part remains the large blank area on the left, a space left for me to elaborate. The empty sky also holds a kind of symbolic meaning. Preceding Michelangelo's work, Giotto painted a mural of *Last Judgment* (1303-1305, Scrovegni chapel, Padua). In the background of his painting, a sun and moon are visible in the sky. Nowadays, however, people may wish to "see" and "feel" an even more distant universe. Following Michelangelo, there were many artists who created depictions of hell, for example Rodin's *The Gates of Hell* or Delacroix's *Dante's Boat*, etc... Thus, in the rear view, I added three figures flying in the sky and gesturing at the tragic scene on the ground. They are reminiscent of the three figures in Rodin's *The Gates of Hell*. I imagined the lower part of the painting to be consumed by a massive flood. In the midst of the swirling water, groups of people surround a plank of wood, struggling for survival. Those familiar with Art History will probably be reminded of Delacroix's *Dante's Boat*.

(10) The Last Judgment in Cyberspace—The Vertical View

Figure C.1 (Rizzoli Publishing House, The Vatican Museum, "The Last Judgment") shows an old woman holding open her hooded mantle with both hands. She occupies the upper left-hand corner of the picture. I suspect that Michelangelo placed her at this corner, holding open her hood, as a way of allowing her to witness the entire process of the last judgment as he imagined it. From the back, the old woman's position resembles a modern person holding up a camera and taking photographs. Thus, I would very much like to look down at the entire last judgment scene from her point of view, an angle from heaven looking down into hell through a billowy human tide. In a split second of judgment, one could either fly into heaven or crash into hell. If a modern person came upon such a scene, he would certainly, either subconsciously or consciously, look for a tool with which to record it. This is like when the first moments of September 11 were subconsciously recorded by an amateur reporter and when the Gulf War was consciously recorded by a professional journalist. Such pictures have been presented over and over again before humanity.

(11) The Last Judgment in Cyberspace—The Upward View

Take the point of view from No.1-35 (Rizzoli Publishing House, The Vatican Museum, "The Last Judgment"), we can see a man who raises his eyes to look up at the sky, not knowing if he will be condemned to hell or ascend to heaven. Maybe all of us are ignorant of the future like him. In the foreground, angels pull people towards heaven, even as demons tow these same figures towards hell. This image is a symbol of redemption. Above, an angel sounds the clarion call to judge, as the judgment scene unfolds in the sky.

(12) The Last Judgment in cyberspace—The Side View

Although I began the different views of *The Last Judgment in Cyberspace* around the same time, I finished the side view first. The arrangement and composition of this view particularly fascinated me, as I saw them as being very similar to those of landscape painting. From the perspective of the second floor corridor in the Sistine Chapel, it is like viewing nearby mountains and distant rivers from a pavilion halfway up a mountain.

(13) The Last Judgment in Cyberspace—Where will I go? (Video)

The five pictures allow viewers to see, in detail, all of the groups of figures, and the relations among them, from the top, bottom, front, back, left, and right sides. The video, however, weaves absentmindedly among these busy throngs of people. If it can be said that the static pictures constitute full views, then the moving video mostly captures partial views. Besides the many shots taken within the last judgment scene, I also added some others; for example, views taken from a distance, as if one extricated oneself from the scene. When these views appear, everything suddenly becomes quiet and hazy. In the end, I also added a scene after the last judgment. Large groups of people fly towards an unreachable heaven, towards an universe in which there are no people. I have always been interested in what happens after the last judgment: What is there outside of the last judgment? What is there after the last judgment? After the judgment, people who deserve

to enter heaven ascend, and those who should go to hell do so. So, are heaven and hell no longer related to each other? In heaven, will people be treated in different ways? Have they all met some criterion or conformed to a certain standard? Will the world return to quietude and serenity?

(14) Evidence

I don't believe that animals, after they are satiated, don't think about their fates or life journeys. Think about intelligent monkeys, mighty lions, and magnificent elephants, they all raise their heads to the sky with such abstruse looks in their eyes. Maybe they have more time to think than us busy humans. Yet, humankind uses writing, painting, and photography, etc...as different means of documenting ideas and leaving behind evidence of our thoughts. Our human bodies, along with the plants and animals on this planet alike, will turn to dust. Only the questions and answers we have raised will still remain. Along with the generations that precede and follow us, this evidence will form a river, and only this little bit will suffice to give value to all of our thoughts.