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## Reflections on and Refractions in Painting Practices

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**GOLDSMITHS COLLEGE**

**University of London**

Ph.D. in Visual Arts

**REFLECTIONS ON AND REFRACTIONS IN**

**PAINTING PRACTICES**

By

**Patricia P. Paxson**

Under the Supervision of

Professor Gerard Hemsworth

and

Dr. Janet Hand

A Dissertation submitted to Goldsmiths College for the degree  
of Ph.D. in the Visual Arts from the University of London

2004

## **Dedication**

To my family, who have supplied love and encouragement all along the way.

## **Declaration**

No portion of the work referred to in this dissertation has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification from this or any other university or other institution of learning.

**Patricia P. Paxson**

## **Acknowledgements**

I am very grateful to Gerard Hemsworth and Janet Hand for their supervision, thoughts and inspiration in both the written work and the studio practice.

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Dean provided continued support and encouragement, for which I am very thankful.

The Arts and Humanities Research Board provided a three-year grant in support of my doctoral study, for which I am very grateful.

## **Abstract**

My aim in the written thesis is to scrutinize a particular stage in the process of image making by means of ideas generated by psychoanalytic theory, in particular Lacan's concept of the gaze. I propose a three stage model of image making: 1) planning, 2) absorption or 'un-thought', and 3) judging; they are seen together as a spiral process. My primary interest is the second stage, both in my studio practice and in the written thesis. In the studio this can be seen in the conjunction between passages emphasizing energy, for instance passages emphasizing a 're-invigoration' of the figure by means of an investigation into mark making and cartoon elements, and passages emphasizing form and colour.

In the written work, by using Lacan's concept of the gaze as template, then employing ideas such as 'figure' and 'dissimulation' within the libidinal economy (Lyotard), syncretistic scanning and the ability of the primary processes to learn and develop (Ehrenzweig), and the matrixial gaze (Lichtenberg-Ettinger), I aim to illuminate the 'un-thought' stage of image making by means of a consideration of libidinal as well as semiotic processes. By including aspects of schizoanalysis (Deleuze and Guattari), I 're-contextualize' Lacan's concepts of 'lack' and the empty signifier and retain his other ideas relating to his (late) concept of the gaze. Schizoanalysis, in providing an extended concept of the unconscious, aids in re-considering Lacan's concept of the gaze within the context of the process of image making.

Working from this basis I propose a grouping of (existing) ideas that I term the libidinal gaze, brought together for the purpose of reflecting on the un-thought stage in the process of image making. In doing so, I consider both concepts of perception as influenced by the processes and energy of the unconscious, and concepts of the unconscious as reflected through post-Freudian and post-Lacanian psychoanalytic thought.

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**Rhetoric** : Barthes, R., “Rhetoric of the Image”, *Image, Music and Text*. London: Fontana Press, 1977.

**Wisdom** : Barthes, R., “The Wisdom of Art”, *Calligram*, ed. N. Bryson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

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**Wit(h)nessing** : Lichtenberg Ettinger, B. “Wit(h)nessing Trauma and the Gaze”, *The Fascinating Faces of Flanders*, ed. P. Vandenbroeck. Antwerp: Hessenhuis, 1998.

**Matrixial** : Lichtenberg Ettinger, B., *The Matrixial Gaze*. Leeds: Feminist Arts and Histories Network, Department of Fine Art, the University of Leeds, 1995.

**Dream-work** : J.-F. Lyotard, “The Dream-Work Does Not Think”, *The Lyotard Reader*, ed. A. Benjamin. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1989.

**Beyond** : J.-F. Lyotard, “Beyond Representation”, *The Lyotard Reader*, ed. A. Benjamin. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1989.

**Tensor** : J.-F. Lyotard, “The Tensor”, *The Lyotard Reader*, ed. A. Benjamin. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1989.

**Newman** : J.-F. Lyotard, “Newman: the Instant”, *The Lyotard Reader*, ed. A. Benjamin. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1989.

**Approach** : J.-F. Lyotard, “The Psychoanalytic Approach to Artistic and Literary Expression”, *Toward the Post-Modern*, eds. R. Harvey and M.S. Roberts. Amherst, New York: Humanity Books, 1999.

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**PROLOGUE**

**Prologue:** Hospital story

The hospital...we are occupying part of a hospital, an old hospital, whose upper floor is no longer in use... haunted corridors, endless empty ward rooms, window after (dirty) window stretching into the distance...footsteps, echoing laughter, a group of us spread out in this huge unused space...(and yet not completely unused since the ground floor is busy, life (and death) going on as usual, preoccupation, quiet voices, people in and out). My colleagues wander off in diverse directions, looking for who knows what....

*The other one died a perfect death. Is there a 'perfect' death? Age 96, clear in mind. Not alone. She said he looked so peaceful...but where to send his remains? His remains: that which remains when life has departed, spirit gone...no movement...no mental murmur.*

The image of spreading out in the hospital, different people in different directions, different people at different speeds, different aims and objectives – some people wandering slowly and poking in all the corners, some people striding out in a wider search for something so far missing. Some people breaking boundaries, climbing into unused beds, opening cupboards, rummaging in the closed drawers of desks no longer used, but containing detritus, once important keys, files, written notes...some people...some...

*The other one died a perfect death ... where is he? where is he gone? gone elsewhere? else? – where? I won't know (while I am alive).*

I go into the room which was the largest ward, huge windows down each side, a long empty room: I hang my three big paintings on the blank end wall, and back way off to see them from a distance. When I heard about people building fires and cooking food, when I heard about people climbing into disused beds, I felt outraged, I felt somehow the overall sanctity of the space, and of the permission to use the space, had been violated. Almost as though I myself had been somehow violated... equating me with the space, equating me with the hospital space...my permissions for myself, and the permissions somewhat ambiguously granted to our group for the use of the hospital space.....somehow as though an unknown, or uncontrollable, some uncontrollable parts of me, were doing things over which I had no control, or about which I had no awareness. Like when I have flu or a headache, when it has occurred to me that there are

little bits of me running around in back of, *behind*, my consciousness applying these pains or these illnesses...but which seem to me at the time to be induced by outside influences.

*Where is he gone? I won't know.... But he, this He, is with us still, age 86. Hurt, injured (broken?) in mind and body, his well-spring wounded, his life force bent. WHY? Love, anger, frustration alternate...in him and in me.*

What are these bits of me, what is this skin of blindness, what is this ...what is this wall, this sheet of hidden-ness behind which things are happening (in my mind and body) of which I am not conscious. What I *am* conscious of is the end result, the runny nose, the sore throat, the headache, the anger and frustration ... what I don't seem to be aware of is the coming on, the cause, the onset, the mental process that results in these end products. Why is my consciousness limited, why is it blinded to these aspects of my well-being that could perhaps be better dealt with if I were conscious at the onset stage, at the causative stage.

*The other one died a perfect death...*

I think of the hospital, with all of my fellow artists pushing out in all directions to explore... all these feet walking along all these corridors, all these eyes peering into all these corners and disused spaces... It makes me think of what must be happening under the layer of consciousness, under this surface, this subjectile, this tableau (no not tableau), this *impediment* to consciousness. As I think these words, I become more aware of my whole body, I become more aware, as though there were many (internal) feet, many eyes, increasing my awareness and consciousness; (my) physicality is becoming more evident to my conscious state of mind. In order to feel the edges of consciousness, in order, for instance, to feel this slightly increased awareness of physicality, it is necessary to... not dilute my attention, but... not divert my attention...but to *spread it out*, to spread out my attention rather than focus my attention. Rather like dropping marbles out of a bag – the marbles go in all directions...one can keep one's mind on the place where the marbles first hit the ground, or one can diverge and spread one's attention to encompass all the spreading out mass of the marbles as they roll.

*Walking back down the street, the dog just behind me came up alongside under my left hand – wrong dog – he went on ahead.*

To catch those thoughts that are shimmering around that subjectile surface ... the answer whenever I have fears is.... (a way forward? a way out??)... *combine* how I'm *feeling*, the

physicality, the body, and how I'm *thinking*, in rationality. The preverbal semiotic, the reflection and refraction of pre-verbal experiences, bodily experiences, sensations, and their irruption into our conscious life, our writing, our painting ... is this what stretches boundaries, and allows us to be innovative?

*Another dog did the same thing – again wrong dog. The third dog came up under my left hand, it was Pepper...and as he was also going ahead, I wanted to control him, asked him to come to heel...*

The 'skin' or support on which a drawing is laid down, can be seen as a metaphor for the skin of the repressed, the unconscious – beating it, poking it, burning holes in it...trying to allow into –into what -- into -- *allowing us to see* into a series or a group of feelings, thoughts, emotions which for one reason or another we don't allow ourselves to access in normal day to day experience, partly because of the convenience of having a limited consciousness, but partly because of the strength of the trauma or pleasure that might override the social conventions we have been taught are so necessary to our survival...are necessary to our *survival*.... Why then would anyone want to pierce the skin and deal with some of those sensations? Why would anyone want to do that? ..... these mysteries.

*He, this he, the one with us still. The delicate connection between life and body, the differences...body as host and recipient, body as performer of growth and function, the receiver and temporary maintainer of life.*

Why would anyone want to? Mysteries. Dealing with mysteries... wanting to know more, wanting to have more control, wanting to understand better. Wanting to get a more complete picture of oneself and one's fellows. Wanting to have at one's disposal energies and forces which are not always at one's fingertips – and yet could that be dicing with death, could that be dealing with forces that are stronger than we might suppose? So there are the fear particles coming in, the fear of the unknown, the fear of the possibly uncontrollable...the fear of falling back into that subsumation with the maternal, which we had to pull ourselves out of with so much pain ... so much pain, but possibly also so much pride and pleasure.

*The visit...stress, helplessness, loss of control, unpleasantness, guilt, shame, (where is death?) ...which is his? which is mine? (don't claim more than I need to...) ... leave (me) leave in peace.*

Remember the marbles – dropping a handful of marbles, the marbles go in all directions. One can keep one's mind on the place where the marbles first hit the ground, or one can spread one's attention to encompass all the marbles as they roll out from the point of impact ... both at once?

## **INTRODUCTION**

---

The Introduction sets the stage for the development of the argument of the thesis. A 'model of image making' is described, including three 'stages', the planning, the 'un-thought', and the judging stages. From this model, the thetic question is developed. The thetic question is put into a context of both theory and practice. The theory being used, and reasons for its use, are stated and there is a summary of some basic theoretical concepts. There is an overview of the thesis, chapter by chapter.



## Introduction: The ‘Un-thought’ Stage of Image Making and the Gaze

*‘The most graceful moments in the covenant between art and theory occur when theoretical elements, only indirectly or partly intended for particular works of art, and visual elements which refuse theory, collide. In doing so, they may transform the borderlines between the two domains so that art is momentarily touched by theory while theory takes on a new meaning from the encounter with art.’<sup>1</sup>*

### Section 1: Overall aim of the written thesis

The major claim of this thesis is that there is an absorbed or ‘un-thought’ aspect of image making, which can be better articulated and understood as ‘agency’ and ‘cause’ of image making.<sup>2</sup> In this way I aim to avoid a ‘descriptive’ discourse concerning maker and object, and concentrate instead on the process itself. As an artist, a maker of images, I am closely involved in further development of understanding about this ‘absorbed process’, through experience in my studio practice.<sup>3</sup> Such an aspect is indefinable in exactitude; it is fluid in differences *among* artists and often *within* an artist’s practice. It is difficult to pinpoint, and difficult to articulate. Nevertheless it is an area which has been addressed theoretically, albeit tangentially. I believe that theory and practice can be brought together to extend understanding of this particular aspect of image making. However at the same time it is important to note that, while I bracket and juxtapose various elements of psychoanalytic theory, I am not claiming to extend psychoanalytic theory *per se*. Instead I am a practicing artist, and my primary interest here is illuminating certain aspects of image making by means of a combination of the ideas used in the present work.

---

<sup>1</sup> Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger, “Woman – Other – Thing; a Matrixial Touch”, from exhibition catalogue, *Matrix Borderlines* (Oxford, Museum of Modern Art, 1993), 11.

<sup>2</sup> In this thesis ‘image making’ is used in place of the more generally used term ‘painting’ because I wish to include drawing. However I do not mean to include photography and other modes of image making.

<sup>3</sup> A term used by Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger, *The Matrixial Gaze* (Leeds, Feminist Arts and Histories Network, Department of Fine Art, The University of Leeds, 1995), 22.

In this Introduction a specific methodology of making images is described, setting up a ‘model of image making’.<sup>4</sup> This particular process is chosen because it is one with which I am personally acquainted; it is also one that contains particular reference to an absorbed, or un-thought, element, which opens out the process for discussion in relation to the application of theory. It is a process that intrigues me and is basic to my practice. On the other hand, it is not a process which is individual to my practice, nor is it the only process I use within my practice.

After developing the model of image making, there is a brief consideration of a historical context for the process being modelled, and a thetic question is developed from the descriptive terms used in the model. The model thus becomes one part of the criteria for the choice of theoretical considerations. This thetic question results in a way forward for research. A particular aspect of psychoanalytic theory, Jacques Lacan’s concept of the ‘gaze’, is chosen to provide a foundation and context for the development of the thesis. The concept of the gaze is extended and elaborated by means of the ideas of several post-Freudian and post-Lacanian writers. From the point of view of image making, I consider the borderlines between un-thought processes and rational thinking, leading to ideas of the interconnection and interaction of the influence of un-thought processes on image making. There is a summary of several background concepts useful to the understanding of the argument of the thesis. This is followed by a summary of the argument of the thesis.

My aim for the thesis is three-fold: 1) to combine certain Lacanian and post-Lacanian ideas of the gaze and the unconscious, incorporating also understanding gained in my studio practice, 2) to contribute in this way to thought concerning certain aspects of the process of image making in art practice, and 3) to make available new ideas for use in pursuing and contextualizing my own practice as well as others.

The Prologue is included as an introduction to a state of mind involving reflection on aspects of the borderlines of the ‘appearing’ unconscious by the (wondering) conscious mind. It is an example of the function of creative writing as opposed to the analytical writing that comprises the majority of this written thesis. There is a sense in which ‘I’, as the author of this ‘Hospital’ writing, am performing the subject, ‘me’, as a compendium of individuated cultural aspects. This is staged in the ‘Hospital’ piece by foregrounding personal issues and significances, both experiential and ‘thoughtful’. In a similar sense it is possible to argue that I,

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<sup>4</sup> There are other examples of the process of making images, for instance process orientated, rule based.

in my role as image maker, am also performing the subject, in a spatial manner.<sup>5</sup> The absorbed and un-thought stage of image making is seen to be pivotal in this matter. This notion of the ‘un-thought stage’ retains fluid boundaries, with cultural and linguistic influences, but keeps them at least somewhat within the arena of the individual subject who is making art. It is necessary, I believe, to keep concepts of such boundaries and borderlines fluid, even permeable, while not losing sight of them altogether.

First a word about my use of the word ‘image’, as in ‘image making’. In this thesis, ‘image’ is used within the fine art tradition, as historically the word ‘painting’ has been used, in the sense of a visual imitation or representation of a person, thing or idea, with the attribute of being recognizable in some way to some number of people, by means of drawing or painting. An image can be ‘new’, new in certain contexts, or already accepted culturally. Aspects of images can go further, in being equivalent (in some ways) to ‘signifiers’ in Lacan’s sense of that word. This will be discussed more fully in later chapters, but it does indicate my means of discussing what I call the layers of resonance and complication that can be implied by this word ‘image’. From another point of view, in this thesis ‘image making’ is used in place of the more generally used term ‘painting’ because I wish to include drawing. However I do not mean to include photography and other modes of image making.

## Section 2: A three-stage model: the process of image making

### 2.1 The model

*In the beginning, there is an urge to make, a longing, a desire.*<sup>6</sup>

For myself as a visual artist, this ‘longing’ sets in motion a set of procedures which I hereafter term a ‘process of image making’. To describe the particular process of image making referred to in this thesis, I use a ‘model’ that includes three stages. The first stage of image making is the planning that is required for making an image, whether a sketchbook and pencil are picked up, or a large board is obtained and prepared as the support for an oil painting. The availability of time requires planning. The ‘subject’ of the image may be considered. Planning

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<sup>5</sup> Others have referred to the performative aspect of the visual arts, for instance H.M. Sayre, *The Object of Performance* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1989), and J-F Lyotard, *Toward the Postmodern* (New York, Humanity Books/Prometheus Press, 1999).

<sup>6</sup> It should be noted that throughout the thesis I occasionally include a section in italic print, providing an arena for self-reflexive ‘wondering’ that originates within my studio practice, and introducing the following section of theory/discourse.

involves conscious thought. In this case, planning comprises a *formative* 'mode of attention' to a problem of how to proceed with the image making enterprise, in that one is formulating the problem and formulating a programme of procedure in a mental 'pre-viewing'.

The second stage in the process of image making is the 'absorption' stage, the no-longer-self-conscious part of the making process. I refer to it as the 'un-thought' stage because there is no apparent (conscious, rational) thought process taking place. While it is 'un-thought', in that rational thinking is not involved, that is not to say there are no mental processes in operation. This is difficult to put into words because from my point of view it is in some way 'unspeakable', indescribable, even un-observable, although some aspects may be 'inferred'. In attempting to describe this mode of attention I think of various other concepts of unconscious processes, for instance Freud's concept of the dream-work, in that he 'inferred' his ideas about the unconscious (partly from) a close observation of dreams. In the un-thought stage, perception is included, because looking as well as other senses are involved. I consider that some mode of attention (mental process) is present even though it is non-reflexive, meaning not a conscious rational thought process. It is a *focus*, to the extent of my no longer being conscious of myself, or of anything other than the process in which I am engaged. It is a 'being-absorbed', being wholly occupied. It is all of these, with no consciousness-of-self or consciousness-of-process-as-it-goes-on: I am not aware of conscious planning nor of conscious direction of the manipulation of materials or images. At this moment, conscious and rational control are superseded by other forces within the psyche; it appears to me later to have been 'unconscious'. Sometimes it happens that I am aware of emotions, even while not 'thinking'. In a sense, I am reflecting (or refracting) something somewhere in my mind. The time involved in this 'stage two' may be seconds or minutes. The resulting marks may or may not have much to do with whatever ideas I had in the planning stage. In fact at first glance they may not make any sense at all. The important point here is that I regard the un-thought stage in the light of being an *agency* of image making. As such I see it as an absence of rational thought but not of mental processing. There is further discussion of this un-thought stage in the 'exemplification' Section (2.2) below. It is this stage of the process of image making that I wish to illuminate further.

Then comes the third stage. Normal self-consciousness returns. I look at what I've done. I judge. My 'judgement' at this time may see the results as being anything from disastrous, through banal, to eloquent and interesting. This stage of judgement can also slip back into stage one and stage two for 'editing', re-touching, adjustment. Sometimes (often) the third stage contains excessive amounts of subjective emotional investment, positive or negative, with little objective judgement or awareness for some period of time. The quality of attention in this third

stage, while similar to stage one in being conscious and utilizing words and images, is distinct from stage one in that the 'mode of attention' is *reflexive*, rather than formative, emphasizing a focus with major reference to the past, what has (just) been done rather than what is to be done, judgemental rather than planning. This stage is one which includes a mode of thinking that involves aesthetic judgement (is there an energy, an excitement, about the mark?), an evaluation of how 'close' I have come to what I had planned (in stage one), and a third and intertwined judgement concerning whether the marks made can 'stand' on their own, based on training and experience. This latter judgement, for instance, may allow 'accidents' to remain if they are judged to have a potential for further development, or contribute in some way to the overall drawing/painting. In fact, the operations of mark making (un-thought stage) are inveigled in amongst these sometimes practically instantaneous planning and judging stages, albeit these latter may be foreclosed while the actual marking takes place. Thus, while the judgement can swing around, and, at least initially, is not always very objective, there is a 'conscious' judgement stage after the un-thought stage.

This whole process is a spiral, or iterative, process insofar as I can then return to the planning stage and go through the cycle of three stages again on the material produced thus far. In other words, the model of image making as a whole can be seen as a complex of related modes of attention circling and spiralling around each other as the making proceeds, depending on the density of the project and the solidity of the effort/motivation and even the overall time frame. In a big painting, these three stages can be reiterated a great many times, in a spiral effect where one stage works on, or with, the results of the previous stage. In a small 'idea sketch' it might be 'finished' the first or second time around, or the three stages may happen a number of times very quickly.

In this model of process, affect (emotion), ranging from minimal to strongly felt, may also be involved, whether the making of the marks is done in certain intense moods, or seemingly more neutral ones.<sup>7</sup> Ideas are evolved in image format. An attempt is made not to involve words, so that the images evolve from seemingly random marks into a form of their own, not 'governed' by language, perhaps, in the linguists' sense of the word, but emerging in the sense of becoming, for instance, what Roland Barthes terms a 'system of signs'.<sup>8</sup> It seems to

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<sup>7</sup>As conceptualised to have been the case in Abstract Expressionism, for instance, Robert Motherwell, "The Modern Painter's World" in *Dyn*, Vol 1 #6 (NY, November, 1944), 8-14, as collected in *Art in Theory 1900-1990*, eds. Harrison and Wood (Oxford, Blackwell, 1992), 636, says: "The function of the artist is to express reality as *felt*. In saying this, we must remember that ideas modify feelings. ... By feeling is meant the response of the "*body-and-mind*" as a whole to the events of reality."

<sup>8</sup> R. Barthes, "Rhetoric of the Image", in *Image, Music and Text* (London, Fontana Press, 1977), 32-51. Etymologically, the word image comes from the root *imitari*, or to copy. Can images as analogical representations

me in the studio that, language or not, this process of making images is one of having conversations with myself, one part of me with another part of me. It is a conversation between my conscious mind and some other part of my mind, which ‘invents’ new forms and juxtaposes ideas in a new way. It is a one-sided conversation only insofar as one side is conscious and rational, while the other side is not. These are conversations that involve images as a major component, rather than words. It is a conversation that can involve ‘questions’ as well as ‘statements’. As a painter, this type of conversation is an important aspect of my ‘research’ for paintings, in terms both of eliciting, and of developing, images. Sometimes the ‘conversation’ seems to happen without conscious interference, in the absorbed stage; sometimes it is more rational, involving also the planning and judging stages.

In this thesis the primary focus is on stage two, the un-thought stage. This is because to me it seems to be of great importance, but at the same time the least well understood of the three stages. It is important to me as an artist because it is this stage that is often the basis for surprising and interesting results. It is important to me theoretically because I see that my own personal experience is unlikely to provide a basis for better understanding this un-thought stage, due to the very fact of the mysteriousness and inaccessibility (to the conscious mind) of this aspect of making images. So I look for assistance from those who work professionally in this arena. One discourse that makes attempts to articulate and give signification to what I describe (albeit often indirectly) is psychoanalytic theory, which I consider to be relevant because the ‘un-thought’ nature of the process can be related for instance to various concepts of the unconscious. Its propositions can be relevant as ‘supporting evidence’ for the un-thought and invisible aspects of the process of image making I have described. For instance Freud’s idea of the dream-work in psychoanalytic theory is pertinent to developing my understanding since it directly considers the relationship of pictorial and linguistic signs with each other, with perception and with various un-thought processes (i.e. not conscious and rational) happening in

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(the ‘copy’), he asks, ‘produce true systems of signs and not merely agglutinations of symbols?’ He points out that on the one hand an image is seen to be an ‘extremely rudimentary system in comparison with language...’. And on the other hand, an image is seen as complex and resonant to the point that ‘the intelligible is reputed antipathetic to lived experience’ and the signification of an image ‘cannot exhaust the image’s ineffable richness’ (p. 32). After an analysis of a Panzani Italian food advertisement, he proposes that all images are polysemous; he says: a ‘floating chain’ of signifieds is implied, which often needs to be ‘fixed’ by context, title, media, etc. He proposes that there are three sorts of language-type communications. One is a ‘true’ language, being doubly articulated, for instance word language (which can reflect upon itself). There is an agglutination’ of symbols, as in strictly ‘analogous’ languages, such as a language of gestures, for instance, or the ‘language of bees’. However, the image and its symbols he sees as resulting from (in part) various condensations and displacements. Barthes says: ‘...in the total system of the image, the structural functions are [there but] polarized: on the one hand there is a sort of paradigmatic condensation at the level of connotators (that is, broadly speaking, of the symbols), which are strong signs, scattered, “reified”; on the other hand a syntagmatic “flow” at the level of the denotational...’ (I understand that he refers in the latter case to the Freudian idea of displacement.) Thus he concludes that while images are not language(s) as such, they can be seen as ‘systems of signs’.

the unconscious mind.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore some of these ideas present me with a useful historical context for my own work, as well as providing a context for other work being made today. But before I discuss the context for my work, I will outline a few practical details of stage two of this model of studio practice to indicate why I use it as a model.

## 2.2 Exemplifying stage two, the ‘un-thought’ stage

*There is an energy in me, which is often covered over. Attempting to consider this energy in order to describe it causes it to shift ‘out of sight’. Remembering back to this energy afterwards in an attempt to describe it causes it to become dim, whereas I experience it as strong and pervading my whole body. If I feel it while drawing or making music, for instance, I can feel it from head to foot. I believe it is akin to sexual energy, but it lacks that particularity of arousal; it is a strong but more neutral effervescence. This energy does not involve words or pictures in my mind, it is not related to thinking or knowing; it is just energy and the feeling of energy. Perhaps this begins to explain why it is so hard to encompass it, encapsulate it or tie it down in words. My wondering concerns the nature of this energy, in the sense of how to articulate and ponder about it as an ‘effervescence’ (an object?) when in fact it seems to be closely related to the very means of production for my image making.*

In terms of exemplifying the un-thought stage of the process of image making by means of my drawing practice, I make, eradicate, and re-inscribe what can be described as ‘lines of desire’.<sup>10</sup> They are lines of desire insofar as they are made wordlessly, ‘automatically’, sometimes with emotion (affect) within the making of the marks themselves. As these lines are made, eradicated (also a ‘mark’ making, random, affect-ful operation) and re-inscribed, I am, as the maker, in an unthought mental state. It is absorbed and energetic, but not logical and rational and conscious. As discussed in the previous section, it is a mode of attention that is non-reflexive in terms of analytical thinking. What seems in hindsight to happen in this absorbed stage is that self-conscious-doing is absent, as such, but I *am* doing and something appears in front of me: a compendium of what look to be random marks and erasures, several blobs of paint, a particular detail, or the like. There is an accompanying level or layer of excitement, a sort of ‘lit-up’ feeling, even one of surprise, especially when it’s going well. As this stage

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<sup>9</sup> S. Freud, *Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. Joyce Crick (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1999), especially Chapter 6, ‘The Dream-Work’. See the review of relevant aspects of the dream-work in Section 5.1 below.

<sup>10</sup> This was suggested to me by an exhibition and catalogue by Liverpool Art School and Oldham Art Gallery and Museum touring exhibition, ‘Lines of Desire’, 1998, curators: Jagit Chuhan, Kim Merrington and Alnoor Mitha. This ‘international drawing exhibition’ made a positive impression on me because of its divergent energies, ideas and methodologies, as well as an overall ‘joie de vivre’. It was a show whose declared intention was to encompass both a literal and a metaphorical meaning, exploring the boundaries between the human body and the creative potential of mark making.

alternates with the other two stages, what appears is sometimes beyond what my conscious mind could have, or would have, worked out by means of conscious reasoning.<sup>11</sup> *Sometimes* what appears is much better than what I could have done ‘rationally’, than what I was planning or thinking: more interesting, more unusual, more distinctive, or more original. This is what elicits the fascination. It is obviously quite *subjective*, in that it is me doing the marking. But there is a strange feeling of not knowing who-in-me or what part of me has done this thing. This idea was elaborated in a recent talk at the Tate Modern, given by the New York painter, David Reed, who spoke about his painting practice, which he described as having ‘no reference to atmosphere or nature’.<sup>12</sup> He stated that he was interested in a radical combination of thought and process, and related this to Barnett Newman’s way of working. Reed’s comment was that he needs to feel ‘in’ the mark as he is making it, and then ‘outside’ the mark to see what he is doing. He remarked that this resulted in what felt like a ‘psychological split’, which was quite uncomfortable: a double consciousness, a switching back and forth between a subjective and an objective state of mind. I find this description very similar to my feeling of moving in and out of ‘thinking’ and ‘un-thought’ mental states. Having been ‘submerged’ in this process of ‘un-thought-ness’, then the two surrounding ‘thought-ful’ stages, the planning and judging stages, begin to influence the marks, at least to some degree, into recognisable forms or symbols, most often (in my work) as human figures. In my painting ‘*Silver*’ (detail, Illustration In.2), the early marks are sometimes semi-obliterated, but often remain as foundations for final, more descriptive marks. In terms of the ‘language’ of painting, I employ a process which allows/encourages transgression and transformation of compositional elements. In my painting ‘*Silver*’ (Illustration In.1) the ‘active’ image is inscribed within a notional rectangle that is then ‘over-ridden’ by the lower black mark on the right. The mark-making and the dialogue with the process influence the images that evolve. My interest in these figures and symbols is partly an ‘interpretive’ one, but a strong interest for me is the ‘representation’ of figures and symbols by means of particular marks that have been made ‘purposively’, but *not* for the purpose of delineating that precise figure or symbol. In other words there is a clear distancing between the making of the marks, and the emergence of a particular figure suggested by these marks after they have been made.

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<sup>11</sup> See Illustrations In.1, In.2 and In.3 of examples of my work which relate to the un-thought stage.

<sup>12</sup> David Reed, ‘Painting Present’ series of lectures, Tate Modern, London, 29 October, 2002.



**ILLUSTRATION In.1**

**ILLUSTRATION In.2**



To this end, having made these ‘purposive’ marks as foundation, or rather palimpsest, my conscious interest becomes attached to hints of (emerging) figures, their attitudes and interaction(s) or lack of interaction. There is an encouragement to make a few more marks, for instance in order to clarify the image minimally, to see how it works with other images in the drawing/painting. Images in my work are understood as metaphors for interactions, or relationships, between people as seen on an affective or ‘energetic’ level. It is to effect these metaphors that I work with a combination of mark-making and elements of form and colour. I make ‘minimally’ clarifying marks, because I want always to maintain a fluidity of meaning and a somewhat ambiguous manifestation of images.<sup>13</sup> In ‘*Silver*, detail’, one can see how ‘minimally’ clarifying the marks can be and yet still create the effect in the overall painting of two figures interacting. To some degree, the history of the *process* of mark making is indicated and retained in the painting, which adds another dimension to the image, such that not only is the dimension of space indicated but also the dimension of time. Notions of borderlines and boundaries play a part in the work from a number of points of view. For instance, borderlines evolve between figures that are indicated by marks but are not ‘enclosed’ in mimetic outlines. There are also borderlines existing between marks still seen purely as marks, and marks that have evolved into recognisable figures. For me it is not of interest to become ‘mimetic’ in image making. Instead the idea is to end with a drawing that, by means of the use of somewhat ambiguous marks and of unusual juxtaposition and conjunction of marks and images can suggest not only a number of possible meanings, but can denote and/or connote energy and affect, and can also indicate a ‘history’ of development of the drawing/painting. These ‘suggestions’ can arise from marks, images, colour, form and/or material, as well as their interactions. The process of *enhancement* of emerging images becomes primarily related both to the planning and the judgement stages, but even here the ‘un-thought’ stage can play a part.

My interest in, or obsession with, non-closure and even fragmentation ensures that the drawing remains sketchy and ambiguous. I’m not sure I can (or even wish to) produce a conscious reason for this. There are several reasons I have articulated in the past. One is that the distortion that results from non-closure encourages viewers (and me as viewer) to find their own ‘meanings’. Another is that my interest is to avoid ‘over-use’ of the ‘edit’ and ‘closure’ functions which the conscious mind can so easily slip into. This is because it seems to me that

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<sup>13</sup> ‘Ambiguous’ has two definitions: one is that of having two or more possible meanings; the other is that of being uncertain, unclear, or indefinite. I wish to incorporate both meanings because both have a relationship to the non-closed aspect of image making being considered here. See also the discussion in Chapter Five.

the imposition of detailed consideration and closure can remove any relationship to ambiguity, and so to the mystery of the resonances of the image, which is explicitly to do with the qualitative impact on the image of the ‘un-thought-ness’ involved. For me, as I discuss throughout the thesis, the carefully edited piece of work becomes more of a considered articulation; in this way it becomes more an ‘answer’, than a ‘question’, which is not my intention in making images. A third reason for my interest in non-closure has to do with foregrounding the manner in which the image is rendered such that there is a revitalizing of the conventional or recognized aspect of the human figure and of the painting as image. For me a key idea is that of ‘effect’ (as Barthes terms it) rather than of ‘representation’.<sup>14</sup> In other words, I am stressing the perceptually ‘particular’ quality of the image in itself, rather than the conventional recognition of its general subject matter, or ‘content’, as a painting or drawing.

However, a danger with non-closure, as with formal abstraction, is that one basis for communication between artist and viewer becomes blurred, in that the artwork is not obviously symbolic and ‘meaning-ful’ as such. The viewer may ‘give up’ looking, since the desire for understanding in conventional form is frustrated. As I see it, this is another arena of ‘borderlines and boundaries’: some viewers are more able to put aside a need for rational understanding of what they are seeing, and content to be aware of the more ‘experiential’ or ‘affect-ful’ aspects of a piece of work.

These considerations coalesce to a degree in reflecting on the related ideas of ‘representation’, ‘meaning’ and ‘expression’. For me, ‘representation’ (for instance figures in a painting) can emerge from un-thought mark making as a result of the three interactive stages in the model of image making. ‘Meaning’ emerges as I attach significance to these representations, for instance by means of a mental ‘story line’. If necessary or desired, these story lines can be communicated in discourse, such that meaning becomes successful articulation, dissemination and reception of semantic structures in some form. Within the painting I have the choice of making this story line to some degree obvious or leaving it in a state of non-closure. ‘Expression’, the more problematic of these terms from the point of view of articulating a description, arises as a result of underlying, associated affect and emotion. The reason it is problematic is that I feel that what I am trying to articulate is a ‘more than personal’ element. By ‘more than personal’ I mean not just my personal angst or anger, for instance, but something that is not consciously acknowledged or controlled (thus not ‘Expressionist’). This is difficult to

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<sup>14</sup> R. Barthes, “The Wisdom of Art”, in *Calligram*, ed. N. Bryson (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988), 173-4. In this article considering the work of Cy Twombly, Barthes refers to ‘effect’ as ‘... not a rhetorical trick; it is a veritable category of sensations, which is defined by this paradox: the unbreakable unity of the impression (of the ‘message’) and the complexity of its causes or elements. The generality...is nevertheless irreducible.’

articulate from the (limited) point of view of my self-observation. On the other hand expression obviously emerges on a 'personal' basis. One way of understanding expression is that it implies an outward movement of an inward state of combined mental and visceral attributes. As this writing develops I refer to this inward state as the 'real', so the un-thought stage becomes an outward movement of the 'real', seen as combining both personal and transpersonal aspects, as well as both conscious and unconscious elements. This is one of the key concepts being considered in this thesis, in the sense that my concern is how and whether the un-thought stage contributes to, associates with, helps to define, and/or enhances this 'outward movement' in image making.

### 2.3 Context

In terms of a historical context, Surrealism in the 1920's and '30's provides a fitting background for this model of the process of image making. Some Surrealists were interested in the writings of Sigmund Freud, for instance as manifested in written form through contestations between Georges Bataille and Andre Breton. This included and supported a concern with the workings of the mind and especially the 'discovery' of an aspect of the mind, the unconscious, which has a driving power to which we are subject, but of which we are unaware. They said: 'Surrealism is not a new means of expression [...] it is a means of total liberation of the mind'.<sup>15</sup> One way they saw to accomplish this was to 'bypass' the conscious mind, using for instance the techniques of automatic drawing and writing.

A Manifesto written jointly by Breton and Aragon, explains that the Surrealist project was 'trying to use painting to open up a bridge to the unconscious', such that 'trans-personal or impersonal realities might be expressed through the painter'.<sup>16</sup> However it is well to keep in mind that, as D. Lomas articulates, the surrealist hopes for the unconscious in this matter did not wholly accord with the Freudian model: on the one hand 'the doctrine of 'pure' psychic automatism holds out the promise of a certain plenitude, that by tuning in to the unconscious one could listen to its 'unadulterated speech', while on the other hand:

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<sup>15</sup> Sarane Alexandrian, *Surrealist Art* (London, Thames and Hudson, 1970), 50 includes this quote from the 'Declaration of 27 January, 1925', Manifesto of the Surrealist movement. H. Foster, *Compulsive Beauty*, (October Books, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 1995), 209: 'Breton hoped that the surreal would become the real, that surrealism would overcome this opposition with liberatory effects for all.'

<sup>16</sup> Julian Bell, *What is Painting? Representation and Modern Art* (London, Thames and Hudson, 1999), 161, 163. In these pages he explains what he sees as important in this context.

Freud, at least when in a cautious frame of mind, speaks of the unconscious as an inference made from the gap or omissions in conscious discourse, or from the roundabout form in which unconscious wishes manifest in dreams or symptoms, but not as something that is knowable in itself.<sup>17</sup>

In other words, says Lomas, a search for the 'discourse' of the unconscious is in opposition to (at least most of) Freudian theory; it is in fact an impossibility.<sup>18</sup>

Nevertheless, it seems to me there is a valid and interesting way forward for investigation, involving the idea of trying to identify a *basis* for understanding. In other words, in terms of the above statement that 'trans-personal or impersonal realities might be expressed through the painter' by way of 'by-passing' the conscious mind, such a basis might in the

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<sup>17</sup> D. Lomas, *The Haunted Self*, (New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2000), 9.

<sup>18</sup> There is a particular trajectory of Surrealism within the work of Georges Bataille, who was involved with Surrealist notions while being somewhat removed from the 'central' group led by Breton. Within a series of articles published in 'October' magazine, Issue 36 (Spring, 1986), there are three articles in which Bataille considers the idea of 'un-knowing' in a way that is related to the present thesis. He says that there is un-knowing with regard to death, such that un-knowing is a state of mind rather than a 'state of knowing' (p. 82). Hereafter all page numbers refer to 'October', op.cit). He is not arguing against the use of discourse, but he is arguing against the idea that discourse should be considered the only mode of 'knowing', thus against the idea that rationalism can be seen to define what is 'real'. Bataille means by the experience of 'un-knowing': 'it is wholly detached from concern with the future, it is wholly detached from the hold exerted by the possible threat of suffering, it is now only play.' (p. 95.). It becomes, therefore, in one sense a sort of philosophy of negation of the total importance of knowing in a rational sense. This is pursuant to his view that we are enslaved by knowledge, that without it our contact with each other would be only play: 'play in which my thinking, the working of my thought, dissolves' (p. 87).

I understand Bataille's notion of un-knowing to relate to the un-thought stage I am proposing, as a 'mode of attention'. I see 'un-thought' to be functioning outside of rationality as such, but that both rational and un-thought, or sense and non-sense, are vital to human existence. It is the relationship of these to image making that forms the heart of my thesis. It is what I understand Bataille to be considering.

Bataille proposes that the major paradox within Surrealism is that: 'Surrealism cannot speak. If it speaks it betrays itself [in that one 'speaks' from rational 'knowledge']. But on the other hand if it does not speak, it abdicates its responsibilities. Others will then speak for it, and destroy the intransigence it sought to maintain' (p. 25, my addition). I believe that, in using the theory and especially the practical experience of psychoanalytic practice as a discursive 'model', the probability (in trying to 'speak' for surrealism) of 'destroying its intransigence', becomes reduced (in proportion, of course, to the validity of the articulated observations and theories). This 'risk of destroying its intransigence' becomes less in that although psychoanalytic practice is, in fact, a claim by rationalism to define/articulate what is real, there is a distancing and a non-hermeneutic approach, which I believe gives what the surrealists term the 'real' room for existence as a phenomenon co-existing with rationalism. The classic example of an attempt to avoid the paradox and pitfalls of gaining information from the unconscious by means of discourse is the methodology of 'free association'. I am proposing that image making, in its resonances, expressions and ambiguities, may play the same role in some circumstances, albeit for different (for instance exploratory rather than 'healing') emphasis/purpose.

This leaves Bataille, as well as myself, with a paradox: 'I have', he says, 'in assuming the posture of un-knowing, returned to the categories of knowledge' (by knowing about the state of un-knowing) (p. 84). He proposes that 'One can move indefinitely between the two positions; neither one has greater validity than the other.' (p. 84). He is speaking of being outside or 'beneath' the reflexive aspect of language, simultaneously to operating on the platform of knowledge and language. As I articulate the process of image making, I am attempting to consider (in reflexive language) an 'alien-to-language' or 'un-thought' process that I see as part of my three-stage model. In Bataille's writing I see his struggle with this same problem. I see also a congruence with stage two in that, as he speaks of thought as being abdicated, so too do I leave language/reflexion behind *in the making* of the image. Without language, where then is rational knowledge? Yet here I am writing a thesis about it. This is paradox indeed. And he throws down a further gauntlet. Perhaps, Bataille goes on to say, 'thought cannot conceive that un-knowing might be the greater game'. (p. 87). And so it is for me – the challenge of giving an account of what he refers to as a 'greater game', in spite of the *logic* that says knowing or articulating the 'un-knowing' discursively is to remain within the paradox of attempting to represent the impossible, the un-representable.

present decade have a firmer foundation based on theories of both the conscious and the unconscious that have been proposed over the last 80 years.<sup>19</sup> This can result in a better basis for understanding and discussing these hopes of the Manifesto, both in our experience and our representations in art, that do not conform to recognition of ‘mimetic’ forms, the fully ‘enclosed’ image, the repetition of ‘conventional wisdom’. For instance, this seems to me to be what Jacques Lacan’s theory can offer, at least as a basis, indirectly and by ‘extension’ (of his largely linguistically-based observations), in his exposition and development of Freudian psychoanalytic theory. This was perhaps partially influenced by his own long-term involvement with surrealist discussion groups and soirees in the 1930’s.<sup>20</sup> I am referring especially to two of Lacan’s ideas. One is his concept of the ‘gaze’ as an introduction to the concept of the unconscious as an important (over-riding) influence on perception.<sup>21</sup> The other is his idea of ‘gap’ as the ‘locus’ of the (unplanned and ‘surprising’) appearance of what can be thought of as material from the unconscious un-edited by the conscious mind (jokes, symptoms and the like).<sup>22</sup>

### Section 3: Thetic Question

My aim in this section is to develop a thetic question, using as a basis the points and questions raised above. In short, the thetic question arises from a desire to elucidate the ‘un-thought’ aspect of the making of images. This is a guiding focus. A secondary focus is: what is the accompanying ‘affect’, or emotion of excitement and motivation to do with painting? Is this also relevant to the process of image making? This refers back to the Prologue, where there are textual references to the unconscious ‘appearing’ in the conscious mind, as well as the subject being ‘performed’ by the unconscious.

Before proceeding with the question itself, I want to consider the related question of how the *process* of making in this stage two can be distinguished from the resulting image. This is a relevant question since, by definition, it is not possible to observe consciously the ‘un-thought process’ of stage two; it must be understood in the main as implied by its product, the resulting ‘image’. On the one hand there is a combination of unobservable processes that result in marks on paper. On the other hand there is the physically present ‘stand-alone image’. The

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<sup>19</sup> For instance, as I consider, throughout the thesis, notions of J.-F. Lyotard, A. Ehrenzweig, B. Lichtenberg Ettinger and G. Deleuze and F. Guattari.

<sup>20</sup> E. Roudinesco, *Jacques Lacan*, (Cambridge/Oxford, Polity Press/Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1999 (1993)). See especially Chapters 12 and 13, where she speaks of the history of surrealist ideas in the 1930’s.

<sup>21</sup> Lacan’s concept of the gaze is discussed in more detail in Chapter One, Section 1 and in Chapter Four, Section 1.

<sup>22</sup> Lacan’s notion of the gap is discussed in more detail in Chapter Three.



question is this: what can be learned about a non-observable process of mind from the resulting marks on paper? In my view there are two ways of learning about the non-observable process. Both involve learning by implication. The first is elucidated by means of ‘psychoanalysing’, or analysing by some other means, the stand-alone resultant image. The second is by identifying and extending ideas of ‘processes’ *similar* to the image making process, so that, by extension theory may become relevant to image making. Because I am interested in better understanding the underlying structure, the forces and energies at work in this un-thought stage itself, this rules out the ‘analysing the resultant image’ option. There would, in any case, be a number of complications here, among which would be the resulting requirements to analyse a great many ‘resultant images’, the relationship of the image to the maker of the image, and the discounting of the subjective bias of the person analysing. For these reasons I have chosen the second option, that of identifying, picking apart, and re-grouping existing theory that is particularly relevant to this un-thought stage of image making due to consideration of related phenomena.

The next step is to identify a particular theoretical vehicle for this investigation. My choice is psychoanalytic theory. This is for several reasons. The concepts of the ‘subjective’ and the ‘unconscious’ are ideas that have been considered in depth in psychoanalytic theory. ‘Unobservable processes’ of the unconscious have been studied by theoreticians in the case of both dreams and symptoms, based on considerable experience in practice. The ‘dream-work’ as theorized by Freud is a phenomenon closely related to, and in my view possible to be extended to, the arena of image making, in that images can ‘arise’ in both cases without conscious or rational control.<sup>23</sup> Theoretically this ‘allows’ the un-thought stage, as un-thought process and agency, to be included among these un-observable processes, even though the surrounding stages of image making are conscious and ‘rational’. The primary theoretical source could therefore be the work of Sigmund Freud. In fact a more relevant choice for this particular topic is the work of Jacques Lacan. This is because he not only studied, practiced, and explicated Freudian theory in great depth, but he also had the advantage, from my point of view, of being familiar with the primary work of Ferdinand de Saussure and other developments in the realm of the symbolic in general and linguistic theory in particular.<sup>24</sup> Another reason for choosing Lacanian theory is that the other writers whose work is included in this investigation are grounded in Lacan’s and/or Freud’s theories. This maintains a unified context for the application of certain aspects of psychoanalytic theory to image making and its ‘subjective’ enterprise in this thesis.

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<sup>23</sup> While it is true that for Freud both unconscious and pre-conscious are ‘unobservable’ and the operative difference is repression, I leave this differentiation to be considered as the thesis progresses.

<sup>24</sup> F. Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, ed. C. Bally (London, Duckworth, 1983).

Lacan's theory is broad, complex and oriented towards the psychoanalytic practice of the 'talking cure'. In order substantially to narrow and focus this theory to aspects particularly relevant to the second stage of image making, I have chosen to concentrate on specific elements of his concept of 'the gaze'.<sup>25</sup> This also helps to focus the wide angle lens of my thetic question, insofar as the concept of the gaze considers the interaction between the concept of the unconscious and that of perception.

As a result, my thetic question is: 'Can Lacan's concept of the gaze elucidate the 'un-thought' stage of image making?'

As we shall see in the development of the thesis, Lacan's concept of the 'gaze' refers to the complex interaction and relationship between visual, symbolic, and unconscious matters, here applied to aspects of making images. What Lacan refers to as the 'gaze' (which I 'extend' as the thesis progresses, by means of other writers' ideas) may reflect us back to ourselves, often having been refracted by passing obliquely from one 'medium', or level, of the psyche to another of a different 'density'. This 'gaze' can be reflected and refracted further by interactions with affect. Although the theory can be quite complicated in articulation, the basic premise of this thesis is that, by means of the idea of the gaze, a number of related ideas concerning the unconscious are considered in the light of their various contributions to the enrichment of the understanding of image making.

A question can be raised at this point concerning why am I considering the un-thought stage as a function of the unconscious rather than of the pre-conscious. My answer is based, as is Anton Ehrenzweig's as seen in Chapter Three, on the idea that what is seen to be emerging from the un-thought stage can be seen to 'fit' with psychoanalytic concepts of processes and energy that are considered to play a part in the unconscious. This idea is developed throughout the thesis and can be seen more clearly by the end of Chapter Three. A second question at this point relates to Lacan's ideas in general being more applicable to *interpretation* of art as cultural product than for use in explaining an element of the *process* of image making. My answer is that

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<sup>25</sup> J. Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis, Seminar XI* (London, Vintage Books, 1998 (first published 1973)), 108. The gaze is discussed in detail in Chapters One and Four. Note that the notion of the 'gaze', in Lacanian theory, developed essentially in three steps. The first, early, step consisted of a 'look' from one person to another. The second step was an idea parallel to that of Sartre, where the 'gaze' referred to some degree of conflation of object with subject, where the subject who looks sees the person (object) being looked at *looking back*, and thus suddenly sees that person (until then seen as an object) as another subject. (This seeing the 'looking back' person can cause shame/anxiety, a sudden self-consciousness of being judged, in the original subject who is looking). The third version is the 'radical' version as described in my text. See Lacan, 'Seminar XI', Chapters 6-9, particularly p. 84.

I believe the un-thought stage is *agency* in this regard, that agency implies process, that relevant processes are included in Lacanian thought (as we shall see not only his version of the dream-work including primary processes, but also his notions of gap and stain), and furthermore, that the concept of the gaze itself can be seen to be a process, and an analogous process to the un-thought stage.<sup>26</sup>

There are several specific ways in which the model of image making provides criteria for choosing pertinent elements from the concept of the gaze to be used in the argument that is being developed. In the first place, the process of image making involves looking (perception), as of course does the concept of the gaze, which is in part, but not solely, optical (primarily in its history, and in its association with the scopic drive). In the second place the process of image making involves desire, the desiring subject, as does the concept of the gaze (as I shall discuss in Chapter Four). This is apparent, for instance, in the sense of wanting to make the image, wanting it to elicit interest or precipitate desire itself. Furthermore, the ‘unrealized’ aspect of the unconscious, the use of ‘meaningless’ signifiers can be seen in the mark making stage. This is discussed in Chapters One and Two.<sup>27</sup> In this sense, the ‘enhancing’ stage of the process, the pulling out of images from the marks made, can be seen to be a development from the unrealized realm of the unconscious into more recognizable symbols (also discussed in Chapter Two). This involves interactions between the conscious mind and the unconscious mind. One way in which this happens, according to Lacan’s notion of the ‘gap’, is via an ‘irruption’ of unconscious material into the conscious mind, in this case as emerging signifiers.<sup>28</sup> For me the un-thought stage plays an important part here that is considered further as the thesis progresses.

These observations highlight a further reason for choosing Lacan’s concept of the gaze as a foundation for this thesis. One of my concerns in developing the thesis has been to maintain a focus emphasizing a structure, content and process more related to the dream-work than to the ideas of ‘expression’ of a consciously manifested ‘angst’ or as a result of a conscious process of ‘imagination’ – in other words to highlight aspects of the ‘real’ as they may manifest, rather than working solely with results of the *re-presentation* of various aspects of the real.<sup>29</sup> One

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<sup>26</sup> A further question is why not use (or use also) the notions of Merleau Ponty. My answer is two-fold. One is to retain a focus in psychoanalytic theory. The other is that phenomenology can be seen to concern itself more with perception, while psychoanalytic theory concerns itself to a greater extent precisely with notions about processes and content of the unconscious, which is the focus I wish to maintain.

<sup>27</sup> In brief, the ‘pure signifier’ for Lacan is the notion of the Saussurian ‘signifier’ detached from its ‘signified’, i.e. from ‘meaning’. In this sense it is ‘unrealized’. Lacan claims that the content of the unconscious consists of signifiers and as such is unrealized, as discussed further in Chapter Two.

<sup>28</sup> R. Barthes, “Rhetoric”, 32-51, where he speaks of images as ‘system of signs’ rather than a true language, as seen earlier.

<sup>29</sup> See the next section but one for an overview of some of Lacan’s basic concepts, including the ‘real’.

description Lacan provides for his concept of the gaze is that the gaze ‘operates in a certain descent, a descent of desire’, meaning that the subject is not completely aware of it, as he/she is operating in the arena of an unconscious desire that Lacan sees as the desire of the Other.<sup>30</sup>

When I wrote earlier of my desire to maintain a fluidity of meaning, this can now be seen as an attempt to keep a balance, in the sense of emphasizing the ‘real’ of the un-thought, but seeing also a growing realization or recognition of meaning(s) which can be attached. This is what suggests a ‘conversation’ between the unconscious and the conscious mind – a kind of reciprocity. This reciprocity can be seen from another point of view, that of communication with others. In Lacan’s terms, ‘speech’ involves an intentionality that goes beyond that of the individual subject’s conscious intentionality of conveying a ‘message’ to another person. The speaker’s message, Lacan theorizes, is directed not only at the addressee but at the addresser as well, via the field of the Other. In other words, communication can become also communication to oneself as subject, via the Other of language/symbolism. Language is speaking the subject, and this can apply to image making (as another form of symbolism) as well.

An objection can be raised here to the effect that the concept of the gaze is over-complicated for what is required. This is in the sense that both the first stage, the planning stage, and the third stage, the judging stage, are bathed in language. Language is seen in Lacan’s theory to be based in the ‘Other’, *an aspect of the unconscious* that involves language and symbolism as a cultural ‘package’, which can be used (‘particularized’) by individuals.<sup>31</sup> Consequently, following Lacan here, stages one and three can be conceived equally as unconsciously influenced/driven. The second stage, as I have proposed, is influenced by the unconscious too. However, a further (and reverse) complication is that the unconscious, for Lacan, is ‘structured like a language’, and can therefore be seen also as bathed in language.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, goes the argument, why not deal just with the concept of the unconscious, rather than the extra complications of the concept of the gaze?

My answer to this is based on my experience in the studio. On the one hand, for Lacan, the notion ‘structured like a language’ does not mean it *consists* of rational discourse. On the other hand, although the unconscious as defined by Lacan is a very powerful component of the

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<sup>30</sup> J. Lacan, *The Psychoses, Seminar III*, ed. J. A. Miller (New York, Norton and Co., 1993 (1981)), 24. The notion of the Other is discussed in detail in Chapter Two. Basically it is a notion encompassing the symbolic – for instance law and language.

<sup>31</sup> This is discussed in Chapter Two.

<sup>32</sup> Lacan, ‘Seminar XI’, 20. By ‘structured like a language’, Lacan posits that unconscious processes observe linguistic ‘rules’ while not utilizing the ‘logic’ of the rational processes of the conscious mind. These ideas are discussed more fully in Chapters One, Two and Three.

un-thought stage, ignoring those other aspects I have identified (perception, affect, materiality, energy) would, I believe, make my ensuing considerations too narrow. Therefore I feel that, although it is more complex, it is worthwhile pursuing a number of these complexities of the concept of the gaze. Whereas the three ‘stages’ of image making form a model which is a ‘complex’ of several related and interactive ideas, as the concept of the gaze and my thetic research also result in a ‘complex’ of ideas. This is in the sense of bringing together a number of contrasting views on the relationship of perception, the unconscious and libido, which are drawn together in considering the particular arena of image making.

My interest is in exploring *process rather than object*, in exploring energy intensities rather than rules or mimetic representation, in exploring the idea of the *process* of representation as seen in painting and drawing.

#### Section 4: Notes on methodology

I use italicised sections to set the tone of what I am investigating from the point of view of my practice. I use theory to investigate what I don’t have direct access to by way of reflection and observation. But conversely I use reflection and experience to gauge the usefulness of various aspects of ideas related to my enquiry.

My interest is in maintaining a coherent orderly unified playing field in terms of theory – in this case using aspects of post-Freudian psychoanalytic theory from writers who study, theorize and exposit within that field. This is the reason for choosing a ‘template’ such as Lacan’s concept of the gaze, which can then be adjusted and extended by way of other related ideas from writers who come from a like-minded ‘base’.

In one sense this is the record of pertinent and relevant ideas from my interaction with my studio practice, brought together with ideas, from authoritative and primary sources that are related to each other and related to my studio practice. In another sense it is a contribution to the literature in terms of the further understanding of the *process* of image making. In my view, because this process is an internal and, as we shall see, not always a conscious rational process, this dual process of intermixing personal and theoretical strands of investigation is a necessary one, balancing the theoretical against a personal experience.

One result is that elements of various theories are used in what can seem a somewhat arbitrary and ‘patchwork’ manner. My reason for this is a personal one, in that I am searching for a pathway to better understanding within a paradigm which I attempt to keep consistent, but which has a few twists and turns along the way.

## Section 5: Background concepts

It is useful at this point to provide a review of some background concepts that are important for understanding the argument of the thesis and the concept of the gaze.

### 5.1 Freud’s concept of the dream-work.

The first background concept is Freud’s concept of the dream-work, that is the ‘processing’ done by the unconscious as a basis for the ‘emergence’ of dream material. Not only does this provide a foundation for thinking about image making, in that images form part of the dream, but it also provides an encapsulation of Freud’s ideas about the unconscious, which in turn form a basis for the thinking of Lacan. The concept of the dream-work can be seen as a summary of the arena within which this thesis arises and from which it extends.

Freud understood his work with dreams, with the resulting concepts of repression and the primary processes, to be so important that he referred to it as the ‘royal road’ to the understanding of the concept, as well as the manifestation, of the unconscious. For Freud, the concept of repression, a form of censorship by the conscious, ‘civilized’, rational mind, is basic to the understanding of the idea of the unconscious in the sense that repression is able to ‘hide’, to keep repressed, ‘pleasurable’ desires and energies that might result in ‘un-pleasure’ for various reasons, such as social mores, the opinion of others.

Dreams arise, posits Freud, as a mechanism for wish fulfilment. All dreams are about the dreamer and only the dreamer.<sup>33</sup> In addition all dreams are a result of what he terms the ‘dream-work’. His concept of the dream-work is that it comprises a group of *operations* that transform the latent dream-thoughts into the manifest dream content that is the dream as such. This group of operations he refers to as the primary process.

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<sup>33</sup> Freud, ‘Interpretation’, 388. See also Chapter V, section d, ‘Typical dreams’, 207.

The dream-work, as proposed by Freud, involves distortions of ‘input’.<sup>34</sup> This input consists of the day’s thoughts and experiences, along with memories of all kinds, as well as libidinal interference (for instance the presence of inadmissible sexual desire), and/or ‘somatic stimuli’ (extraneous sounds during sleep and the like).<sup>35</sup> This input becomes what he refers to as the ‘dream-thoughts’, or the ‘latent content’ of dreams.<sup>36</sup> The dream-thoughts contain a kernel of a (forbidden and unconscious) ‘wish’. The distortions of the dream-work are a result of unconscious processes working on the ‘input’, in order to ‘mask’ (a form of repression) the forbidden wish, resulting in dreams as remembered by the dreamer. The dream, as dreamed and remembered, is referred to by Freud as the ‘manifest content’ of dreams.<sup>37</sup> But what he finds of particular consequence is the *operation* of the dream-work on the original dream-thoughts, since this can enable the retrieval (and understanding) of the original (soon to be masked) thoughts. The distorting operations of the dream-work he terms condensation, displacement, means of representability, and secondary revision, which together he refers to as the ‘psychical processes’ or the ‘primary processes’.<sup>38</sup> *Condensation* consists of compression of aspects of various persons, places, and/or events into one symbol, when those various aspects share a particular feature.<sup>39</sup> Freud states in this regard that: ‘the elements formed into the dream are drawn from the entire mass of dream-thoughts, and in its relation to the dream-thoughts each one of the elements seems to be determined many times over’.<sup>40</sup> He refers to this as ‘over-determination’.<sup>41</sup> *Displacement* involves the displacement of intensity among the elements of the dream, for instance the use of one symbol for another when there is some aspect of similarity between them, but the chosen symbol is not so heavily weighted with some ‘forbidden’ quality or intensity. As Freud states, the result is that: ‘the content of the dream is ‘centred differently’ than the content of the dream-thoughts.’<sup>42</sup> He points out that this distortion of the dream wish can be traced to repression, for instance censorship and resistance. Displacement includes the transposition of *words* used to express the dream-thought concerned.<sup>43</sup> Displacement (always) involves a chain of associations. Displacement can be seen as a *basis* for condensation and also figurability (representability), insofar as displacement of intensity accompanies these processes. This basis of association may happen along lines of either similarity or contiguity. The third distorting process, *means of figurability* includes an aspect of a word, event, and so on, which

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<sup>34</sup> Freud, ‘Interpretation’, Chapter IV, ‘Dream-distortion’ section in particular.

<sup>35</sup> Freud, ‘Interpretation’, 97-105 in particular, also Chapter V, ‘Material and Sources of Dreams’.

<sup>36</sup> Freud, ‘Interpretation’, see especially Chapter V, 126.

<sup>37</sup> Freud, ‘Interpretation’, Chapter V, 120.

<sup>38</sup> Freud, ‘Interpretation’, 398 and 340.

<sup>39</sup> Freud, ‘Interpretation’, see especially 212-214.

<sup>40</sup> Freud, ‘Interpretation’, 217.

<sup>41</sup> Freud, ‘Interpretation’, 235.

<sup>42</sup> Freud, ‘Interpretation’, 232.

<sup>43</sup> Freud, ‘Interpretation’, 255.

can be ‘encompassed’ in, and thus ‘translated’ to, an image. This can ‘benefit’ condensation and also censorship in obvious distortional ways. In addition to these processes, there are (some) ways in which dreams can if not represent, then at least indicate, logical relations. For example simultaneity of happenings in the dream can be seen as representing logical connections of some kind.<sup>44</sup> Sensory intensity in a dream may indicate not psychical intensity in the corresponding dream-thoughts, but the most over-determined elements of the dream.<sup>45</sup> The fourth distorting processes, *secondary revision* includes for Freud two possible aspects – censorship and re-translation/distortion when the dream is being formed, and/or censorship and re-translation/distortion when the dream is being remembered. The first aspect would take place in the unconscious, and the second would happen in the pre-conscious/conscious. It consists of the ‘insertion’ of ‘cementing thoughts’ by the psychical agency of censorship – connections as needed to reduce the dream’s appearance of absurdity and incoherence’.<sup>46</sup> Like the other three processes, it is ‘mainly’ manifested, he says, by choosing from ‘already-formed psychical material in the dream thoughts’.<sup>47</sup>

Freud, as a result of his work with dreams, proposes two modalities of the functioning of the psyche, two types of ‘thinking’, or processes of psychical energy. These are the primary processes (the four distorting mechanisms above) in the unconscious, with chaotic results, and secondary processes, in the preconscious/conscious, resulting in rational, logical thoughts. He proposes that a ‘sliding’ of meaning can take place in both types of process, but this sliding is much more restricted (i.e. ‘bound’) in secondary processes.<sup>48</sup> I discuss this in greater detail in Chapter Three, Section 1.2. Freud sees the ‘irrational’ primary processes, as he writes, not as falsifications of normal waking thought, not negligence, not intellectual errors, but qualitatively ‘something completely different from it [from normal waking thought] and so not at first comparable to it.’<sup>49</sup>

In addition to the primary processes, Freud proposes various attributes of dream material and processing, and thus the unconscious in general. For instance, dream material is not subject to considerations of time or rational logic. There is no negative (except, he adds later, by ‘inference’). Trivial episodes may be used as ‘code’ for latent content (to avoid the censor), but the dream itself is never trivial. A basic principle is that feelings that are not acknowledged

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<sup>44</sup> Freud, ‘Interpretation’, 239-249.

<sup>45</sup> Freud, ‘Interpretation’, 250.

<sup>46</sup> Freud, ‘Interpretation’, 319.

<sup>47</sup> Freud, ‘Interpretation’, 320.

<sup>48</sup> For me the ‘modes of attention’ I discussed earlier are related to these two types of thinking, where the unthought stage is primarily influenced by primary processes.

<sup>49</sup> Freud, ‘Interpretation’, 329. My addition.



consciously can find expression in dreams; to this end affect is always ‘true’ in dreams, albeit attached to misleading events/ideas/people. The dream is unable to express (represent) bonds of logic, such as ‘when’, ‘because’, ‘just as’, ‘although’, ‘either-or’, etc.; in other words, relational terms. His claim is that anything that resembles rational thought in a dream ‘is all dream-material [e.g. already included as such in the dream-thoughts], not the representation of intellectual activity in the dream.’<sup>50</sup> An exception could be that of certain secondary revision as seen in the pre-conscious.

For Freud, the results of these premises are that it is necessary to understand and make use of the concept of the ‘dream-work’ in order to ‘understand’ the dream and its originating basis (dream-thoughts). However for me as image maker what is of particular interest here is the processes and content of the unconscious that *result* in the dream. There are many similarities between the product of the dream-work and the products of the un-thought stage, in that images can be seen to contain many of the attributes that I have listed for dreams.

Freud proposes that art, too, can be a result of primary processes, and similarly art includes the inability to represent logical bonds. For him, this is true of the fine arts to a greater degree than of literature, which makes use of speech.<sup>51</sup> Again, this indicates in a general way the trajectory of this thesis, in that unconscious processes become associated with the un-thought stage, as discussed below. This is why, working also from the historical context of aspects of Surrealism and more recent developments of psychoanalytic theory, I can see a way forward for development of my thetic argument relating to the un-thought stage of image making.

The following background concepts are to be understood in the context of psychoanalytic theory from the point of view of Lacan. In general Freud concerns himself with a ‘development’ of the infant in terms of chronological time, for instance moving from one pre-genital stage to another and resulting optimally in a ‘final synthesis of sexuality’.<sup>52</sup> But Lacan emphasizes instead the concept of the ‘subject’ in the context of ‘obviously more complex [psychical] structures’, since ‘it is by starting with the experience of the adult that we must grapple, retrospectively, with the supposedly original experiences’.<sup>53</sup> Here the past exists in the psyche as a set of memories, and these memories are constantly being reworked in the present, not only by ‘present’ circumstances, but also by means of what Lacan terms ‘retroaction’ and

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<sup>50</sup> Freud, ‘Interpretation’, 238. My addition.

<sup>51</sup> Freud, ‘Interpretation’, 238-9, 405.

<sup>52</sup> Dylan Evans, *Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis* (London, Routledge, 1996), 40.

<sup>53</sup> Lacan, ‘Seminar I’, 217.

‘anticipation’. For example retroaction is seen where the Freudian pre-genital stages are ‘ordered in the retroaction of the Oedipus complex’, and anticipation can be seen where ‘[i]n the mirror stage, the ego is constructed on the basis of the anticipation of an imagined future wholeness (which never, in fact, arrives).’<sup>54</sup>

Background concepts included here are Lacan’s concepts of the ‘three orders’ (Section 5.2), ‘need, demand and desire’ (Section 5.3), ‘lack’ (Section 5.4), and the ‘subject’ (Section 5.5).

## 5.2 Lacan’s principles of the three ‘orders’

Lacan’s concept of the three ‘orders’ of the psyche includes the symbolic, the real, and the imaginary. They are profoundly heterogeneous, interdependent, but distinct, as we shall see below.

The symbolic order encompasses law, language, and culture, because of their linguistic dimension, but also because of the Law, which regulates desire and thus society (see further discussion in Chapter, Section 1.1.3). The symbolic dimension of language (language also includes aspects of the orders of the imaginary and the real, see below) is the signifier (see further discussion in Chapter Two, Section 1.1). Lacan says: ‘As soon as the symbol arrives there is a universe of symbols’, since these symbols, or signifiers, are a matter of a structure of differences and ‘constitute a totality’.<sup>55</sup> For Lacan, signifiers can exist on their own, prior to being signs. As they acquire meanings (signifieds), they can ‘slip over’ (vary) these associated meanings. Lacan sees the symbolic order as ‘in travail, in the process of coming, insisting on being realized’

In terms of the individual, Lacan sees that ‘the introduction of the signifier’ to the psyche of the individual occurs at a point in life crucial to the structure of the psyche, termed the Oedipus complex.<sup>56</sup> For Lacan, this ‘introduction’ is what gives the Oedipus complex its primary importance, since by this means individuals ‘acquire, conquer, the order of the

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<sup>54</sup> Retroaction: Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits, A Selection* (London, Routledge, 1999), 197; anticipation: Evans, 207 and see also Lacan, ‘Ecrits’, 306 and 1-7.

<sup>55</sup> Lacan, *Book II, The Ego in Freud’s Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis, 1954-1955*, ed. J-A. Miller (London, W.W. Norton & Co., 1991), 29.

<sup>56</sup> Lacan, ‘Seminar III’, 189. See also my discussion in Chapter Two, Section 1.1.

signifier’, in other words enter into language as a ‘universe’.<sup>57</sup> Simultaneously the individual becomes a ‘subject’, subject to the order of the symbolic. In other words, for the individual there is no gradual acquisition of language. The symbolic order exists prior to the individual and it is transindividual, as can be seen for instance in language and law. The symbolic order is ‘essential for the human being to be able to accede to a humanized structure of the real’.<sup>58</sup>

Lacan quotes Freud’s example of ‘fort/da’, wherein Lacan glimpses the symbolic as it is first manifested in a childhood ‘game’.<sup>59</sup> Lacan (re-)interprets the sound the baby makes as the spool disappears in such a way that: ‘the symbol manifests itself first of all as the murder of the thing – and is thus deeply implicated with death’, while at the same time manifesting ‘the eternalization of his desire’.<sup>60</sup> For Lacan this is an illustration of how a sense of death, lack and desire permeate the symbolic order from its earliest ‘acquisition’ by the individual, due to the close association of this acquisition with the complex circumstances of the Oedipus complex stage, and the Law. This is discussed further in Chapter One, Section 2.

From the point of view of the unconscious, Lacan sees the unconscious not (as with Freud) ‘merely the seat of the instincts’, but rather as primarily linguistic, since it is composed of signifiers, and these signifiers are not only of the symbolic order, but are ‘structured like a language’.<sup>61</sup> By this he means both that the unconscious is structured synchronically using language-like operations (for instance metaphor and metonymy), and also that ‘we only grasp the unconscious finally when it is explicated, in that part of it which is articulated by passing into words’.<sup>62</sup> ‘What we teach the subject to recognize as his unconscious is his history’, as he grasps it subjectively (i.e. in words).<sup>63</sup> This is why Lacan can speak of the subject as both subject to the unconscious and subject to/of the symbolic. For Lacan there is also a diachronic aspect to the unconscious that he speaks of as the opening and closing of the unconscious in a ‘temporal pulsation’.<sup>64</sup>

Lacan’s concept of the Other, ‘the realm of radical alterity’, is another way of looking at the symbolic order, where the ‘Other’ is understood as a radical ‘otherness’ to the individual as

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<sup>57</sup> Lacan, ‘Seminar III’, 189.

<sup>58</sup> Lacan, ‘Seminar III’, 198.

<sup>59</sup> The spool is ‘a small part of the subject, detached from him’ says Lacan. See Lacan, ‘Seminar XI’, 62 for further discussion of Freud’s example, and Lacan’s interpretation.

<sup>60</sup> Lacan, ‘Ecrits’, 104.

<sup>61</sup> Lacan, ‘Ecrits’, 147; Lacan ‘Seminar III’, 167.

<sup>62</sup> Jacques Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959-60, The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII*, ed. J-A. Miller (London: Routledge, 1999), 32.

<sup>63</sup> Lacan, ‘Ecrits’, 52.

<sup>64</sup> See Chapter Three, Section 1.3.2 for further discussion of the ‘gap’.

‘subject’.<sup>65</sup> As Lacan explains: ‘The Other is the locus in which is situated the chain of the signifier that governs whatever may be made present of the subject’.<sup>66</sup> In other words, the unconscious is seen by Lacan as the discourse of the Other, belonging wholly to the symbolic order, such that it pre-exists ‘outside’ of the subject such that it pre-exists and yet ‘defines’ the subject (see also Section 5.5 below).

The imaginary order is seen as ‘the world, the register, the dimension of images, conscious or unconscious, perceived or imagined’.<sup>67</sup> David Macey speaks of the imaginary as ‘an illusory construct’, involving ‘profound misrecognition’, and says ‘the imaginary traps the subject into alienating identifications that prevent the truth from emerging’.<sup>68</sup> Lacan develops the idea of the ‘imaginary order’ as ‘formative of the function of the I as revealed in psychoanalytic experience’.<sup>69</sup> This ‘I’ is the specular ego. The concept of the mirror stage is used to exemplify ‘a relation between the organism and its reality’. Lacan develops this concept in relation to ‘the assumption of the armour of an alienating identity, which will mark with its rigid structure the subject’s entire mental development’.<sup>70</sup> These original identificatory procedures are both repeated and reinforced throughout life. For Lacan, ‘alienation is constitutive of the imaginary order’, as seen in the identificatory process for the young child in relation to its *image* seen in a mirror.<sup>71</sup> The imaginary order is hypothesized as creating a bridge between inner mental notions and outer-directed mental acts.<sup>72</sup> It is important to note that the imaginary for Lacan is not simply the illusory, for instance imaginary identifications can have very real effects, and the image certainly belongs to reality.<sup>73</sup> Elizabeth Wright describes the imaginary order as ‘a belief in images that cover over the veiled object that promises *jouissance*’ (where *jouissance* is seen as ‘opposite to lack’).<sup>74</sup>

The order of the real, for Lacan, ‘is that which always comes back to the same place – to the place where the subject insofar as he thinks [...] does not meet it’.<sup>75</sup> The real is

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<sup>65</sup> Evans, 202.

<sup>66</sup> Lacan, ‘Seminar XI’, 203.

<sup>67</sup> Lacan, ‘Ecrits’, ix (A. Sheridan, Introduction). See also Lacan, ‘Ecrits’, 30, “Rome Report”.

<sup>68</sup> Lacan, ‘Seminar XI’, xvii; and xxi.

<sup>69</sup> Lacan, ‘Ecrits’, 307.

<sup>70</sup> Lacan, ‘Ecrits’, 4.

<sup>71</sup> Lacan, ‘Seminar III’, 146.

<sup>72</sup> Lacan, ‘Ecrits’, 4.

<sup>73</sup> Lacan, ‘Seminar XI’, xii and ix (Introduction: D. Macey).

<sup>74</sup> Elizabeth Wright, *Feminism and Psychoanalysis, A Critical Dictionary* (Oxford, Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 173, 185.

<sup>75</sup> Lacan, ‘Seminar XI’, 49.

undifferentiated, whereas the symbolic can be seen as a set of differentiated elements he calls signifiers. The real encompasses both elements in the real world: events, objects, for example ‘little sister’ and ‘penis’ in the case of Little Hans, where Lacan distinguishes these ‘real’ elements which intrude and disrupt the child’s imaginary pre-Oedipal harmony, and also ‘events’ in the mental world: for example trauma, where the real is the object of anxiety.<sup>76</sup> But the real is not reality *per se*: it is the impossible, ‘it is the opposite of the possible’, insofar as it is outside of the symbolic (meaning the symbolic can never encompass or explain it) and opposed to the imaginary, even though both the symbolic and the imaginary can affect it.<sup>77</sup> Lacan refers to ‘the cut’ in the real, which is the introduction of the symbolic in the sense that the world of words ‘creates the world of things’.<sup>78</sup> The real is outside the subject, since the subject is defined by the symbolic. The real is also defined as the ‘impact with the obstacle’.<sup>79</sup> In Seminar XI the real is defined in terms of *tuche* and automaton, where the real is ‘beyond the automaton [that is] beyond the network of signifiers’.<sup>80</sup> Here Lacan defines the automaton as the ‘coming back’ of the real, as in repetition; the *tuche* is the ‘encounter with the real’, an encounter which is beyond the automaton and ‘as if by chance’. The real is seen as ‘separated from the pleasure principle [the function of which is to ‘satisfy itself through hallucinations (the imaginary)], by its desexualizations, and by the fact that its economy later admits something new, which is precisely the impossible’.<sup>81</sup>

The relationship between the three orders is complex, deeply interactive and not easily or directly articulated. It is an example of Lacan’s preference for triadic rather than dialectic methods of conceptualisation (for instance also need, demand, desire, as seen below). Lacan uses the topography of the Borromean knot (or chain) to describe how the interdependence of the elements of the triad is such that any one element could drastically affect the others. With the Borromean chain, if one link is broken, all links fall apart.<sup>82</sup>

Following are various examples of interdependencies among the three orders. The real is outside the boundaries of the other two orders and cannot be assimilated by them. Nevertheless

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<sup>76</sup> Lacan, ‘Seminar IV’, (untranslated), from Freud, “Analysis of a Phobia in the Five-Year-Old Boy”, 1909, *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. J. Strachey (London, Hogarth Press, 1957), Volume X, as quoted in Evans, 160.

<sup>77</sup> Lacan, ‘Seminar XI’, 167.

<sup>78</sup> Evans, 159.

<sup>79</sup> Lacan, ‘Seminar XI’, 167.

<sup>80</sup> Lacan, ‘Seminar XI’, 53-54. My addition.

<sup>81</sup> Lacan, ‘Seminar XI’, 167. My addition.

<sup>82</sup> Lacan, ‘Ecrits’, 281.

the symbolic can affect the real, as the 'cut' in the real.<sup>83</sup> The real exerts a strong and unequal pull on both symbolic and imaginary. The symbolic is deeply implicated in the imaginary in terms of the latter's 'structure' and meaning/articulation. The imaginary can also influence the symbolic - they are an interdependent and yet contrasting pair. However, their influence and interdependence are not manifested symmetrically, e.g. there are no final consolidations or syntheses. From another point of view, the experience of the imaginary order is seen as relations between the ego and its images, where experience of the symbolic order is seen as relations between the subject and that to which it is subject, e.g. signifiers, speech, language.<sup>84</sup>

Language includes aspects of all three orders since both the imaginary and the symbolic can influence the real and can be influenced by the real.<sup>85</sup> In one summary of the interconnections and interactions between the three orders, it is proposed that Lacan's concept of 'being human' is defined by the *interferences* between these orders.<sup>86</sup> The three orders considered as a tripartite system are seen by Lacan to define and delineate the enormous complexity of human reality. The three orders also influence and help to define Lacan's ideas of 'truth' and 'knowledge' (see Chapter Two Section 1.1.8), as well as 'full and empty speech' (see Chapter One Section 2.2.3), which are relevant for the process of image making as considered in this thesis.

### 5.3 Need, demand and desire

Lacan's tripartite system of 'need', 'demand' and 'desire' forms alliances with, and differences from, the tripartite system of the orders of the symbolic, real, and imaginary. In the context of human development, 'need' is related to the real. 'Demand' is related to the imaginary in that the cries of the infant are pre-symbolic 'signifiers' that structure the demand. 'Desire' is related to the symbolic, in the sense of identification with the desire of the Other, where the Other is the order of the symbolic, as well as the Other in the sense of Other as represented in a particular subject, here the mother.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Lacan, 'Ecrits', 65.

<sup>84</sup> Lacan, 'Seminar XI', 278-9. For a discussion of 'ego' as a formation in the realm of the Imaginary and 'subject' as a product of the Symbolic, see Lacan, "Ecrits", 128.

<sup>85</sup> Evans, 201.

<sup>86</sup> Malcolm Bowie, *Lacan* (London, Fontana Press, 1991), 99.

<sup>87</sup> Lacan, 'Ecrits', 1-2.

Lacan sees 'need' as biologically based, thus the above reference to the real. Here need is conceptualised by Lacan as 'manifested in the organism at several levels and first of all at the level of hunger and thirst'.<sup>88</sup>

He proposes as an example of 'demand' the case of the child who learns that asking for (demanding) food can also gain attention, which then becomes an attached requirement, changing 'need' to 'demand'. Demand, because it is articulated in signifiers/language, is based on a 'metonymic undertone of death and "lack" '.<sup>89</sup> Lacan states that 'all speech is demand; it presupposes the Other', since as we have seen, the Other is the symbolic.<sup>90</sup>

'Desire' is a more elusive term, basic to Lacan's theories (see also Chapter One, Section 2.2). For Lacan, desire is embryonically formed in the gap between need and demand, as we saw above, and is the need for 'attention' magnified to the requirement for the (impossible) total love and approbation of the Other (originally the caring adult). Thus desire is based on, and 'situated in dependence on' demand, meaning that Lacan's concept of desire is not in relation to an object that is missing, but to the lack itself.<sup>91</sup> In Chapter One, Section 2.2, I discuss the relationship between lack and desire, where lack (for instance the lack of total love and approbation) is one way of seeing the *origination* of desire. Lacan sees desire as a 'nodal point' by means of which the 'pulsation' of the unconscious is linked to sexual reality. More specifically, Lacan insists that 'the motives of the unconscious are limited [...] to sexual desire'. These motives he describes as the agency of the 'combinatory' laws of marriage alliance and kinship.<sup>92</sup> For Lacan, desire is not a kinetic energy or 'shock force'. It is not a 'life force' and it is not related to a biological function, as these are rhythmic in nature. Instead he sees desire as a 'constant force'.<sup>93</sup> Desire is also an un-requitable force, it cannot be satisfied in that nothing we as individuals do or have can assuage lack and quench desire. Lacan explains that desire can also be seen as the desire of the Other: 'Man's desire is the desire of the Other'. This is understood in (at least) two ways: as the desire for the Other's approbation *or* the desire for whatever the Other desires.<sup>94</sup> This too is discussed in more detail in Chapter One, Section 2.2.2

#### 5.4 Lack

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<sup>88</sup> Lacan, 'Seminar XI', 164.

<sup>89</sup> For 'lack', see next section.

<sup>90</sup> Lacan, 'Seminar XI', 269.

<sup>91</sup> Lacan, 'Seminar XI', 154 and 'Ecrits', 263, 287.

<sup>92</sup> Lacan, 'Ecrits', 143.

<sup>93</sup> Lacan, 'Seminar XI', 168.

<sup>94</sup> Lacan, 'Ecrits', 285-6.

As we saw above (Section 5.2) ‘the symbol manifests itself first of all as the murder of the thing’. Lacan refers to this ‘murder of the thing’ as lack, and its result as un-requitable desire. The basis of lack is described by Lacan in different ways. At one point the basis of lack is seen as ‘lack of an object’, summarized from three different points of view: lack of the (imaginary) phallus, the (real) breast, and the (symbolic) phallus (this is lack as ‘castration’).<sup>95</sup> In another conceptualisation Elizabeth Wright says of Lacan: ‘The Symbolic Other is supposed to occupy the place of *jouissance* itself’. However ‘*jouissance*’ cannot be fully translated into words’. The remainder ‘which cannot be spoken’ is seen as *objet a*, or lack as it is seen in the symbolic/Other.<sup>96</sup>

Lacan states that ‘a signifier is that which represents the subject for another signifier’. However there is no signifier, which fully represents the subject (for instance, as above, *jouissance*).<sup>97</sup> This again is lack. Lacan also discusses the idea of ‘lack of being’.<sup>98</sup>

Another symbol for lack is ‘*objet a*’.<sup>99</sup> Lacan states: ‘the *objet a*’ is something from which the subject, in order to constitute itself, has separated itself off as organ. This serves as a symbol of lack, that is to say of the phallus, not as such, but in so far as it is lacking.’<sup>100</sup> In Seminar 7, Lacan discusses the forbidden object of incestuous desire, the mother as *das Ding* in this light.<sup>101</sup> *Objet a* can also be seen as the signifier that is missing in the Other, that is the signifier of the subject as such, for instance ‘the subject is presented as other than he is, and what one shows him is not what he wishes to see’.<sup>102</sup>

The realization of ‘lack’ is, in short, a trauma or loss that results in desire, and this desire can be most forcefully conceptualised through dependence on, and symbolic production of, demand. This instigates the conquest of the symbolic, the resulting coming-into-being of the subject, and the idea of the subject as split (see below).

## 5.5 Subject

As seen above (symbolic, Section 5.2), Lacan understands that the initiation of the ‘subject’ at the time of the ‘conquest of the symbolic’, takes place at the point of the Oedipus

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<sup>95</sup> Lacan, ‘Seminar IV’, untranslated, 264, as quoted in Evans, 96-7.

<sup>96</sup> Wright, 298; see also Lacan, ‘Ecrits’, 316-7.

<sup>97</sup> Lacan, ‘Ecrits’, 316-7.

<sup>98</sup> Lacan, ‘Ecrits’, 259. The idea of lack is discussed more fully, and more critically, in Chapter One.

<sup>99</sup> Lacan, ‘Seminar XI’, 103.

<sup>100</sup> Lacan, ‘Seminar XI’, 103.

<sup>101</sup> Lacan, ‘Seminar VII’, 67.

<sup>102</sup> Lacan, ‘Seminar XI’, 104.



complex. Lacan states: ‘In order for there to be reality [...] the Oedipus complex has to have been lived through’, where reality is seen in the sense of a ‘reliable guide’.<sup>103</sup> This is due to the field termed the Oedipus complex having a symbolic structure.<sup>104</sup> As Evans reminds us, ‘The Oedipus complex is thus nothing less than the passage from the imaginary order to the symbolic order’.<sup>105</sup>

For Lacan, the process of the initialising of the subject brings together a number of the background concepts I have just discussed. In ‘need, demand and desire’ (Section 5.3) I pointed out that desire can be ‘embryonically formed’ in the relation between need and demand. In ‘lack’ (Section 5.4), we see Lacan relates his concept of desire to his concept of lack. In the section about the orders of the ‘symbolic, the real and the imaginary’ (Section 5.2) the order of the symbolic realm ‘defined’ in terms of language, Law and culture and is understood as pre-individual, and trans-individual. The symbolic ‘forms’ the unconscious, which is structured *of* signifiers and *as* language to which the subject becomes ‘subject’.

Lacan theorizes that from the time the subject is born ‘with the signifier’, the subject is born ‘divided’.<sup>106</sup> ‘The subject is born in so far as the signifier emerges in the field of the Other’.<sup>107</sup> This he sees as the primary condition of the human subject. This split is, from one point of view, between the unconscious and consciousness, and from another point of view between the posture of subject as *being* and subject as *represented in language*, that is between being both the enunciator of language and the subject of language.<sup>108</sup> The subject is ‘an effect of the symbolic’.<sup>109</sup>

Julia Kristeva’s concept of the ‘subject in process’ is a topic that provides a conceptual stepping-stone in my thetic model. This is in the sense that Kristeva accepts Lacan’s concepts of the subject and the symbolic in general, but proposes an additional pre-symbolic, pre-genital process as foundation and heterogeneous realm in relation to the Lacanian concept of the symbolic order, as manifested by the speaking subject during ‘practices of signification’.<sup>110</sup> She is exploring a process: the effects of the drives on the symbolic realm of subject formation. She

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<sup>103</sup> Lacan, ‘Seminar III’, 198.

<sup>104</sup> Lacan, ‘Seminar III’, 199.

<sup>105</sup> Evans, 127.

<sup>106</sup> Lacan, ‘Seminar XI’, 199.

<sup>107</sup> Lacan, ‘Seminar XI’, 199.

<sup>108</sup> Lacan, ‘Ecrits’, 269, 288.

<sup>109</sup> Lacan, ‘Seminar XI’, 279.

<sup>110</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. M. Waller (New York, Columbia University Press, 1984, 1974 in French).

elaborates a concept of the function and place of this pre-verbal 'semiotic' and its dialectic with the symbolic, as well as the derivation and difference from Lacan's three orders of the imaginary, symbolic and real.

In terms of the manner in which the speaking subject is constituted, Kristeva conceptualises the child's 'earliest pre-oedipal sexual phases' as correlated with what she terms 'the "semiotic", the unspoken and un-represented conditions of signification'.<sup>111</sup> The semiotic is understood as the manner in which the drives, as 'discrete quantities of energy', become 'arranged' by influences of 'mother and family structures' in this early phase.<sup>112</sup> Kristeva explains that 'it is the mother's body [... that] becomes the ordering principle of the semiotic chora' for the infant, the 'subject who is not yet a subject'.<sup>113</sup>

Kristeva speaks of the *chora* as the *site* of the semiotic. The chora is a 'receptacle, unnameable, improbable, hybrid, anterior to naming, to the one, to the father and consequently maternally connated'.<sup>114</sup> It is site, as process, for 'pre-signifying impulses and drives' in the infant. From another point of view, the chora is 'rupture and articulations (rhythm), [that] precede evidence, verisimilitude, spatiality and temporality'.<sup>115</sup>

The semiotic forms an active underlayer that is then sublated to the symbolic, beginning with the Oedipus complex phase, also referred to as the thetic phase. She says: 'both the completion of the Oedipus complex and its reactivation in puberty are needed for the *Aufhebung* [sublation] of the semiotic in the symbolic to give rise to a signifying *practice* that has a socio-historical function (and is not just a self-analytical discourse, a substitute for the analyst's couch)'.<sup>116</sup> Although after the time of the Oedipus complex the symbolic predominates, it is 'unable to exist' without the 'energetic force' of the semiotic. On the other hand, the semiotic 'can only be discerned through its Symbolic overlay [...] The semiotic (mythically, retroactively) precedes and exceeds the Symbolic, overthrowing and problematizing its boundaries.'<sup>117</sup> One way to 'see' the semiotic is through materiality and physicality as they subvert meaning, for instance in 'poetic' texts and art.

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<sup>111</sup> Wright, 194.

<sup>112</sup> Kristeva, 'Revolution', 25.

<sup>113</sup> Kristeva, 'Revolution', 25, 27. (My additions.)

<sup>114</sup> Kristeva, *Desire in Language*, 1980, as quoted in Wright, 195.

<sup>115</sup> Kristeva, 'Revolution', 26. (My addition.)

<sup>116</sup> Julia Kristeva, "Word, Dialogue and Novel", *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi (Oxford, Blackwell Publisher, 1986), 51.

<sup>117</sup> Wright, 195.

For Kristeva, the idea of the ‘thetic’ is ‘a boundary between the two heterogeneous domains’ of semiotic and symbolic.<sup>118</sup> This is a ‘permeable’ boundary, through which the semiotic can make its influence felt. Kristeva speaks of the realm of signification as a realm of *positions*. Positionality is a ‘break’ in the signifying process during which the identification of the subject is established, for instance in the sense of enunciation, which requires an ‘identification’, such that the subject must separate ‘from and through his image, from and through his objects’.<sup>119</sup> This break she terms the ‘thetic break’ or rupture.<sup>120</sup> She says: ‘the thetic continues to ensure the position of the subject put in process/on trial’.<sup>121</sup> For Kristeva, the ‘subject in process/on trial’ is the perpetually becoming (speaking) subject in the process of accommodating the dialectic between the drives/imaginary/identification semiotic, on the one hand, as manifested *during the involvement* with the symbolic, on the other hand. In her words, the subject being put ‘in process/on trial’ involves a ‘*practice* calling into question (symbolic and social) *finitudes* by proposing *new signifying devices*’.<sup>122</sup> Textual (or artistic) experience becomes a ‘most daring exploration’, delving both into the constitutive process of the subject and also the ‘very foundation of the social’.<sup>123</sup> This is what enables an art practice, for instance, to develop in terms of the dialectic between the semiotic and the symbolic.

The semiotic chora, she says, ‘can be read not as a failure of the thetic, but instead as its very pre-condition.’<sup>124</sup> She states:

The subject must be firmly posited by castration so that drive attacks against the thetic will not give way to fantasy or to psychosis, but will instead lead to a “second degree thetic”, i.e. a resumption of the functioning characteristic of the semiotic chora within the signifying device of language. This is precisely what artistic practices, and notably poetic language, demonstrate.<sup>125</sup>

For Kristeva, the idea of the ‘thetic’ is that there is a ‘space’ in the symbolic where the semiotic can make felt its influence, and that this is what enables an art practice to develop. The semiotic chora, she says, ‘can be read not as a failure of the thetic but instead as its very pre-condition.’<sup>126</sup>

With regard to the concerns of the present thesis, Kristeva proposes the chora as an arena for (her concept of) the ‘semiotic’ that can effect and affect ‘artistic practice’ in terms of its

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<sup>118</sup> Kristeva, ‘Revolution’, 66.

<sup>119</sup> Kristeva, ‘Revolution’, 63.

<sup>120</sup> Kristeva, ‘Revolution’, 43.

<sup>121</sup> Kristeva, ‘Revolution’, 63.

<sup>122</sup> Kristeva, ‘Revolution’, 210.

<sup>123</sup> Kristeva, ‘Revolution’, 66.

<sup>124</sup> Kristeva, “Word, Dialogue and Novel”, 50.

<sup>125</sup> Kristeva, “Word, Dialogue and Novel”, 50.

<sup>126</sup> Kristeva, “Word, Dialogue and Novel”, 50.

potential for ‘attacking’ and ‘developing’ the symbolic order. This is opposed to Lacan, who does not propose a conceptual framework for the pre-symbolic (except as a retrospective imaginary fantasy).

Although Kristeva’s ideas can be seen as a ‘conceptual stepping-stone’ for my thesis, for instance insofar as she speaks of the ‘developing’ art practice, Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger, whose ideas I consider in Chapter Four, Section 2, moves even further into this pre-Oedipal pre-subjective disposition that is dismissed by Lacan. She proposes ‘wombic’ influences (perceptions and ‘drives’) working in parallel with what Lacan sees as psychical realms, the stain and the gap. In this way, and importantly for this thesis, she conceptualises an additional libidinal pathway extra to the Law that works alongside, rather than in conjunction with (as with Kristeva), the structural symbolic. She also proposes further ‘perceptual pathways’. She makes resulting observations on the process of image making from the point of view of an artist. These ideas add to my understanding as a practicing artist considering the un-thought stage in the process of image making and are incorporated into the developing schema of the thesis in Chapters Four and Five.

These overviews of underlying concepts are intended as a background for the thetic question and for the developing thetic argument that follows. In the argument of the thesis I do not emphasize all the ideas just discussed, since the focus of the argument is centred on the un-thought stage of the process of image making. Lacan’s concept of the gaze is based on his ideas of lack, desire, and perception. It includes space for the influence of unconscious operations concerns slippery and ‘new’ meaning within the structure and shifting of language and the symbolic in general. As I have indicated, it is for these reasons that I use the concept of the gaze as a *basis* for the argument developed in the thesis.

For my purposes in this thesis, concepts of desire, lack, the realm of the symbolic, the realm of the real, and their interactions and influences, assume a primary significance as investigatory tools.

## Section 6: Overview of the development of the thetic argument

In Chapter One, I scrutinize Lacan's ideas concerning the 'origin' and 'basis' of the unconscious: 'lack' and its consequent 'desire'. I consider some ways in which these ideas are helpful to my project and point out some problematics. These problematics are then considered from the point of view of J-F. Lyotard, working within the context of psychoanalytic thinking, who contests Lacan's idea of lack as the sole basis of the unconscious. However this leaves an un-resolved dichotomy between the two writers, for which a resolution is found in Chapter Two.

In Chapter Two, Lacan's concept of the 'content', or text, of the unconscious is considered. The primary focus is on two of Lacan's related ideas, the signifier and the 'Other'. These are seen particularly in the light of Lacan's conceptions of the 'realm of the symbolic' and 'realm of the real', and his ideas of 'truth' and 'knowledge'. While Lacan's ideas are helpful in understanding the un-thought stage, I find paradoxes in his writing to do with the relationship between signifiers and affect. Lyotard's proposals of 'figure' (expression) and its manifestation by way of dissimulation of the structure of signs are based on seeing libidinal energy itself as the basis of the unconscious. Deleuze and Guattari's concept of schizoanalysis substantiates Lyotard's notions, proposing that desiring machines and the libido are the basis for all social and personal production, and including the proposal that the idea of lack (with its basis in tragedy and absence) as a *basis* of the unconscious is not only unnecessary but contra-indicated. They emphasize instead the role of energy (libido) as a basis and 'engine' of the unconscious, and enable Lacan's concepts, including lack, to be accommodated and better understood within this wider definition.

In Chapter Three I consider Lacan's ideas concerning 'processes' of the unconscious as they are relevant to the un-thought stage of image making. His ideas are based on the idea of 'primary processes' as seen in Freud's concept of the dream-work (which can produce images), and then re-contextualized by Lacan through his employment of structural linguistics (which I understand as more limited than Freud's concepts in terms of image making). These ideas of Lacan are extended by Anton Ehrenzweig's notions of syncretistic scanning, dedifferentiation, and re-introjection. Syncretistic scanning also comprises a mixture of the unconscious and perception (both interior and exterior), but seen from a different point of view. He adds substantially to a detailed notion of what can be seen to be happening in the unconscious and thus in the un-thought stage itself.

In Chapter Four I examine Lacan's concept of the gaze as a complex of related ideas to do with concepts of the unconscious and perception, for instance Lacan's proposals that the gaze is the 'object of the act of looking', and the split between the eye and the gaze reflects the

subjective division itself, as well as the notion of ‘the gaze of the image’. B. Lichtenberg Ettinger’s related proposals about the ‘matrixial gaze’ extend both the basis and the ‘focus’ of Lacan’s gaze, providing a notion of the dispersal of both perceptual and libidinal processes.

Finally, in Chapter Five, Lacan’s concept of the gaze is extended to a notional ‘libidinal gaze’, within which I seek to pull together the ideas that have been developed in the preceding chapters. This includes retaining much of Lacan’s concept of the gaze as a foundation for thinking about the un-thought stage of image making, as well as accommodating extensions to his ideas, seen together under the umbrella of a more broadly defined concept of the unconscious. This more broadly defined idea is a complex of ideas, articulated by writers working within the paradigm of psychoanalytic theory, and seen through the filter of experience I have gained in my studio practice. It provides a basis for situating my practice within the paradigm of contemporary art.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

Chapter One considers one aspect of Lacan's concept of the gaze, his ideas concerning the basis and origin of the unconscious. The specific ideas he develops are lack and its generation of desire. Some aspects of Lyotard's contestation of, and extension to, Lacan's ideas are considered.



*Working in the studio after the first stage of planning is ‘complete’, I am left looking at a ‘blank page’ – ready to begin. I look. I look with my eyes; I also have the strange feeling of looking into or with my mind; I become absorbed ... and again I look at the page. There are now marks on the page. Without consciously addressing how or where to make the marks, or how to relate them, there are now marks on the page. Where have they come from, ‘who’ has made these marks and why, ‘what’ is looking back?*<sup>127</sup>

In order to consider ‘answers’ to these questions, as I explain in the Introduction, I propose to consider whether, and how, Lacan’s concept of the gaze can be used as a *basis*, or template, for elucidation of the ‘un-thought’ stage of my image making model.<sup>128</sup> I am not arguing for a transparent articulation and comprehension, either of the unconscious or of the image or indeed of image making. Instead, my particular aim in this chapter is to emerge with ideas concerning the origin of the unconscious within the general aim of arriving at a way of understanding Lacan’s concept of the gaze. This is a step towards the better understanding of the un-thought stage, in terms of, and in the context of, my studio practice. Within Lacan’s focus on the theory and practice of psychoanalysis, he refers to the process of image making itself only rarely. Nevertheless, the elements of a basic understanding can be developed by extension from within his discourse.<sup>129</sup>

### Section 1: Preview of Lacan’s concept of the gaze

At this point, before I begin considering individual ‘elements’ of Lacan’s concept of the gaze, my intention is to provide a ‘preview’ of the salient points of the gaze as an overall concept, so that from the beginning of the thesis there is an overview within which to build up a picture of its more detailed component elements. I return to this overall concept in Chapter Four, after considering several individual aspects of the gaze in more detail.

The first thing to note is that the gaze is not the eye as it manifests ‘looking’. Lacan’s basic premise is that there is no ‘coincidence’ between the eye and the gaze. In other words it is

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<sup>127</sup> As noted in my Introduction, these inserts in italics represent my ‘wonderings’ in the studio, and introduce the questions that the thesis is aiming to address.

<sup>128</sup> I deal, in this thesis, with Lacan’s ideas as developed and articulated, for the most part, in the 1960’s. Note that, as explained in my Introduction, I use the word ‘image’ in place of ‘painting’ (my specific medium) to include painting and drawing.

<sup>129</sup> Lacan teaches that language is the basis of what is for him a ‘talking cure’, as well as the basis of the ‘structure’ of the unconscious. Culture today is suffused with various aspects of Lacan’s theories in various forms. I consulted his writing/seminars to identify aspects of his theory that are to me, as a painter, particularly relevant to the ‘un-thought’ stage of image making.

not the eye that manifests the gaze. This he maintains because he defines the gaze as *objet a*, in other words functioning at the level of lack. As we will see in the rest of this chapter, for Lacan the concept of lack is a basic aspect of the unconscious. In other words, Lacan is implying that what I see is not necessarily (exactly) what is there, insofar as the unconscious influences perception.<sup>130</sup> This implies a number of component elements. Perception is the basis of the gaze insofar as ‘looking’ is involved as the overt action; my looking and my ‘seeing’ another person ‘apparently’ looking back in a certain manner. But more importantly for Lacan the gaze contains an ‘un-thought’ aspect of looking insofar as what I am ‘seeing’ is being influenced, although I am unaware of it, by (unconscious) processes.<sup>131</sup> Each of these two aspects of the gaze, perception and the unconscious, is in turn made up of its own components. On the one hand, perception includes seeing and conscious mental processes. On the other hand, the unconscious can influence seeing, and includes the psychical field related to the eye that Lacan refers to as the ‘scopic’, which involves lack and desire.

Lacan writes that the *objet a* in the field of the visible is the gaze, where *objet a* is defined as ‘the portion of emptiness that my demand presupposes’.<sup>132</sup> This term is a symbol for lack, for instance for one of the four ‘causes of desire’ (the ‘objects’ of sucking, excretion, the gaze and the voice, resulting in oral, anal, scopic and invocatory ‘partial’ drives).<sup>133</sup>

The concept of the gaze becomes a theorization about how we see and how we ‘interpret’ the objects, events and persons around us. Lacan terms the gaze ‘the underside of consciousness’ in the sense that ‘seeing oneself see oneself’ as a subject is understood by Lacan to be an illusion, an illusion ‘in which the gaze is elided’.<sup>134</sup> By this he means that this process of the gaze is not apparent to the one who gazes. But, he asks, if the gaze is elided, how then to imagine it? And he answers: by means of understanding it ‘in the dimension of the existence of others’. For Lacan, as we shall see, this ‘dimension of the existence of others’ refers to his notion of the unconscious as the Other.<sup>135</sup> He is explaining that the function of the gaze includes an aspect that allows it to *elude* that form of vision which considers itself to be conscious.

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<sup>130</sup> Lacan, ‘Seminar XI’, 84. His notion of the ‘Other’ is considered in detail in my next chapter. For now it can be read as another ‘subject’, insofar as he/she particularizes aspects of the culture in which we live. Note that I see the word ‘imagine’ in this quote as implying not the ‘realm of the imaginary’, but related to desire.

<sup>131</sup> My notion of ‘un-thought’ includes mental processing which takes place in the unconscious and is not related to rational thought.

<sup>132</sup> Lacan, ‘Seminar XI’, 114.

<sup>133</sup> Lacan, ‘Seminar XI’, 103.

<sup>134</sup> Lacan, ‘Seminar XI’, 83-84.

<sup>135</sup> Lacan, ‘Seminar XI’, 84.

As a result, the gaze is, in relation to desire, where reality appears ‘only as marginal’.<sup>136</sup>

## Section 2: Basis of the unconscious

*Reflecting in the studio one wonders – why? Why the desire to make images? Why make the images that I do? There are depths of depths here, reflections and refractions. Each answer leads to another question, each question leads to another answer. What is finally elicited is the feeling of blindness – I don’t know why I want to make my images; what I do know is that I want to and that, for me, they are significant. There is a blank wall at the end of the questions and answers – I still don’t know (but I wonder)...is this what is meant by the ‘unconscious’? Nevertheless - I persevere in the face of unknowing.*

In terms of understanding Lacan’s concept of the unconscious, which is an important component of the concept of the gaze, I propose to begin at the beginning, the *basis* of the unconscious. Lacan develops two relevant concepts. These concepts are ‘lack’ and ‘desire’. His ideas are related to Freud’s concept of the Oedipus complex and have been questioned in various contexts over the years. My aim is to establish an understanding of these ideas as a foundation for the argument of the thesis as it is developed in subsequent chapters.

### 2.1 ‘Lack’

Lacan proposes that the unconscious as a whole has a common origin. He posits the unconscious as being initiated by (and based on) what he terms ‘lack’. Over the years Lacan theorizes several versions of the concept of lack: for my purposes, the two that are relevant are ‘phallic lack’ and what he refers to as ‘anterior lack’ (being anterior to the phallic lack).<sup>137</sup>

#### 2.1.1 Phallic lack

One way of understanding phallic lack is as a symbol for the early trauma, posited originally by Freud and known as the Oedipus complex, which includes the child’s realization

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<sup>136</sup> Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XX, Encore 1972-1973*, ed. Jacques Alain Miller (London and New York, W.W. Norton & Co., 1998, (1975)), 126.

<sup>137</sup> Where ‘phallus’ is defined as a representation in the field of the symbolic that symbolizes a loss, an absence, engendered by ‘prohibition’, which has become associated with a fear of castration.

that he/she is not the mother's (only) object of desire.<sup>138</sup> The phallus is a symbol for loss, and one way of picturing this 'loss' is as the loss or lack of being desired exclusively. The fear that Freud posits as rising during the Oedipus complex (wherein Freud relates psychological development to biological determinants) is re-inscribed by Lacan as he connects castration with the idea of 'lack', and further with a basic understanding of cultural subjectivity by means of language theory. Language and the symbolic in general, according to Lacan, are 'conquered' at this point of the Oedipus complex in order to help to ensure survival, and to overcome the fear engendered by the realization of basic 'lack'.<sup>139</sup> But language involves another (reflective) lack – the lack of being able to *embody* the real, or the 'being', of the 'speaker', insofar as lack and fear are seen by Lacan to be the basis of the individual's interaction with the symbolic. Because of being based on an experience of 'lack', languages and symbols of all kinds become closely linked with fear. This fear and trauma result in the 'repression' of much experience of the period prior to the 'Oedipal phase'. In other words, the repression (or naturalization) of the 'phallus' function results in the idea of the 'primary repression' of lack, which Lacan posits as the basis of the unconscious, the basis of the complex arena of the symbolic, and the basis of the acquisition of both by the individual. I extend this to the process of image making insofar as my view of images is understood primarily as aspects of the symbolic order, rather than the imaginary order.

### 2.1.2 Implications for Lacan

Although for Lacan the significant early relationship for the infant is formed in a dualistic connection with the mother (nurturer), 'proper' relationships are only established with

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<sup>138</sup> The three phases of the Oedipus complex, as first proposed by Freud, and then extended by Lacan, can be summarized, from the point of view of the child, as follows. First there is an *imaginary* triangle, which consists of Mother (the Other for the child at this point), child, and phallus, phallus being the mother's desired object. At this stage the child 'understands' that he/she is the phallus for the mother, which has connotations of all the mother could desire, including erotic fulfilment. Second there is an intervention by the '*symbolic*' father. He is seen to refuse the mother access to the child as phallus or object of desire, which causes deep trauma for the child, who thus realizes that the mother has desires other than for the child. The third step is an intervention of the '*real*' father, who *has* the phallus (imaginary, symbolic and real), presents an interdiction of mother being phallus for child (prohibition), and thus (metaphorically but nevertheless traumatically) castrates the child – the final blow as the child realizes he or she cannot win the undivided attention of the mother, cannot 'be' the phallus, or the object of desire of the mother, and is thus 'castrated'. By virtue of other associations (for instance emerging infantile sexuality), this instils a traumatic fear of loss of penis (male) or lost penis (female), which is repressed into the unconscious. However this allows (or forces) the 'conquest' of the symbolic realm in all its complexity (language, culture, law, prohibition of incest, etc.), in order to help deal with the trauma. In this last step, it is the *repression* of the (sexually linked) trauma that originates the formation of the unconscious, and at the same time causes the formation of the 'subject'. The subject is subject *to* the unconscious. They are both formed at the same time by this 'originary' repression, and by the subject's 'conquest' of the symbolic. For Lacan, there is no subject, as such, before this psychological 'event'. This happens between the ages of three to five years. The primary reference for this is D. Evans, *Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, (London, Routledge, 1996), taken from Lacan, (untranslated) Seminar V; there are other references throughout his later work.

<sup>139</sup> Lacan, 'Seminar XI', 198. Freud posits that the male child eventually identifies with the father and the female child with the mother. Lacan posits that the 'loss', or what he terms lack, is true of both male and female children; gender roles are acquired in a different arena, that of culture.

the introduction of a third element, the realm of the symbolic.<sup>140</sup> Inter-subjective relationships are initiated triadically such that there is always ‘mediation’ by the symbolic (for instance language) so that the relationship can be acknowledged.<sup>141</sup>

For Lacan, the symbolic is a ‘re-presenting’ function, attempting to represent and encompass the ‘real’. The symbolic, he explains, can also be seen as a ‘wall’, being on the one hand a *mediator* between two subjects, enabling a condition wherein communication can occur, and on the other hand a *hindrance* to direct communication in the sense that the symbolic cannot ‘em-body’ affective experience. Images, insofar as they are part of the symbolic, form a part of this ‘wall’. Furthermore, while this wall is always there, its role becomes ‘transparent’, insofar as the subject doesn’t notice that in dealing with symbols, affect and ‘being’ are not (fully) embodied (see Chapter Two, Section 1.1.9 for further discussion). For now the two important points are that representation, the symbolic, can never embody or assuage the underlying and unconscious lack, and that this symbolic order was gained in association with fear/lack.<sup>142</sup>

The major relevance for Lacan of the phallic stage, he has said, is not so much the ‘genital’, or sexual, dimension, but the importance of the ‘conquest of the symbolic’.<sup>143</sup> However, in effect, are these two ideas so different? The realm of the symbolic, being a ‘wall’ between subjects, also gives rise to the sense of ‘castration’, or lack, which pervades the notion of the Oedipus complex, in the sense that the individual is able neither to encompass nor to assuage lack and desire. Thus ‘castration’ is used here in the sense of the individual being unable to deal directly with the real, only with the representations of the real as the symbolic. For Lacan, this amounts to the ‘cutting off’ of a direct ‘commerce’ with ‘truth’ and ‘being’ as desire. The phallus becomes a primary ‘signifier’, an organizing principle with regard to all experiences of lack, any form of physical separation (from the placenta, the breast, and so on).<sup>144</sup> The phallus becomes an organizing principle even for experiences that have occurred prior to the time of the Oedipus complex, meaning that the ‘organization’ of experience can happen in

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<sup>140</sup> See the Introduction, Section 5.2.

<sup>141</sup> According to psychoanalytic theory the initial dual relation of child/(m)other is unacknowledged as such because it is symbiotic; language is not involved.

<sup>142</sup> Lacan also relates the realm of the symbolic to death, in terms of the death drive. See Jacques Lacan, ‘Seminar II’, 210 and 326.

<sup>143</sup> Lacan, *Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book III, 1955-56*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (Routledge, London, 1993), 199-200.

<sup>144</sup> V. Burgin, *The End of Art Theory* (London, Macmillan Press Ltd., 1986), 39. Also Lacan, ‘Seminar XI’, 198. ‘Signifier’ is Lacan’s term for a sign divorced of its signification as such. Again this is discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

retrospect (retroactively).<sup>145</sup> This is one reason the phallus is known to Lacan as the ‘primary’ signifier. It is also known as the ‘empty’ signifier, in that the phallus does not represent what is present, it represents the ‘fact’ that there is a lack, thus it has no content even though it has a function.<sup>146</sup> This is discussed in more detail in Chapter Two.

### 2.1.3 Implications for the studio

As I considered above, Lacan proposes a ‘wall’ (the order of the symbolic) between subjects. Certainly the feeling of non- or mis-communication is rife in the (my) studio, insofar as ideas and indistinct images emerge, but with difficulty and mystery. Sometimes (but not always) fear and anxiety accompany image making. The important point here is that Lacan’s realm of the symbolic, with its complicated half-hidden meanings, with its gaps and ‘absences’, and with aspects of both societal and individually particularized unconscious, is seen to embody certain ‘associations’.<sup>147</sup> It also brings attendant problems, such as not embodying or allaying in a straight-forward manner the concerns of the individual.

I see three specific implications for the un-thought stage of image making regarding Lacan’s notion of ‘lack’. One is the idea of the lack as being the basis of the unconscious. As a result, in one sense, language and image making, as the (limit-less) symbolic, have endless potentiality. In another sense, this potential is ‘castrated’ since it only ‘circles’ the ‘real’; in Lacan’s terms the real is actually missing from the symbolic. The second implication is the close connection to notions of fear, resulting from lack, as an unconscious basis for action. This connection arguably leads to the understanding of image making as a negative, even symptomatic, activity. The third implication is the idea that ‘something’ (the realm of the symbolic) is both interfering with, and mediating between, subjects, as they try to communicate by means of the symbolic, for instance (here) by means of images. However, while this latter is relevant to image making as an activity, it is perhaps less relevant to the un-thought stage itself. This is because in this stage meaning and a ‘logical’ sense of communication are not relevant, and conscious thought is being by-passed.

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<sup>145</sup> Lacan sees this as closely involved with his notion of temporality, involving an idea of ‘logical time’ that has to do not only with the temporal order of events in a subject’s life, but with the influence of these events on the subject in terms of his/her ‘understanding’.

<sup>146</sup> It is termed a signifier because, as I discuss in Chapter Two, it is not a sign in Saussurian terms, a signifier plus a meaning, but rather a signifier which signifies ‘lack’, and is therefore ‘empty’.

<sup>147</sup> In my Introduction, in the description of the un-thought stage of image making, fear was not articulated as an important factor. Furthermore, there seems to me to be a mis-match between my experience in the studio and the description here. Sometimes in the studio there is a feeling of resistance and ineptitude. But what about the feelings of surprise, excitement and pleasure that can be present? This can be widened to the question: is there any content or process of the unconscious, which is unrelated to fear, and repression of trauma/base instincts? I will return to this question in Chapters Two and Three.

#### 2.1.4 Anterior lack

I turn now from Lacan's notion of phallic lack to his parallel notion of 'anterior' lack. Anterior lack, he states, has to do with the 'truth' about the subject's 'beginning' and 'end', and therefore concerns non-being and the un-knowable aspect(s) of being human. He refers to this as the 'myth of the lamella', where, confusingly, he labels the lamella as 'unreal', as an 'organ', and also as being the libido. He says:

This lamella, this organ, whose characteristic is not to exist, but which is nevertheless an organ [ ... ] is the libido. It is the libido, *qua* pure life instinct, that is to say, immortal life, or irrepressible life, life that has need of no organ, simplified, indestructible life. It is precisely what is subtracted from the living being by virtue of the fact that it is subject to the cycle of sexual reproduction [and thus individual death].<sup>148</sup>

He calls the lamella the 'unreal' organ not in the sense of being imaginary, but because it is 'defined by articulating itself on the real in a way that eludes us.'<sup>149</sup> Thus, importantly for this thesis, Lacan re-inscribes the libido of Freudian theory *as* the lamella. His re-inscription physicalizes the libido as an organ that has the characteristic of non-being.<sup>150</sup> The libido is not treated here simply as an energy, a drive, although he does add to its description that it is an instinct. This 'subtracted' 'lamella' is the result of a primary lack from which the human (as individual and as species) is never able to recover; a void that is never able to be filled, in that it is *immortality* that is lacking. Within his understanding of Saussurian semiotics he links the lamella with a primary signifier (signifier as a 'sign' without its signified, here the phallus), as well as with 'force', an energy, not a static formal principle or thing, but an energy that, he claims here, is lacking.<sup>151</sup> Consequently, for Lacan, in terms of representation, this somatic force is a 'radical' re-inscription of the death drive. In other words, by extension, implications for image making include an idea that representation, based on lack, incorporates attributes of 'non-being' or death in terms of the death drive:

in the sense that [...] the death instinct is only the mask of the symbolic order, insofar [...] as it [the symbolic order] is dumb, that is to say, insofar as it hasn't been realized. The symbolic order is simultaneously non-being and insisting-to-be, that is what Freud has in

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<sup>148</sup> Lacan, 'Seminar XI', 197-98. (My additions.)

<sup>149</sup> Lacan, 'Seminar XI', 205.

<sup>150</sup> An un-acknowledged economy notably taken up by Deleuze and Guattari (see Chapter Two) in a direction that can be seen as machinic. Note that in other contexts Lacan refers to the libido as that same notion of sexual energy that Freud employs.

<sup>151</sup> For an example of the 'embodied' lamella, see Parveen Adams, "The Violence of Painting" in *The Emptiness of the Image, Psychoanalysis and Sexual Difference* (London, Routledge, 1996), 118-120, where she understands certain elements in various Francis Bacon paintings as being (inadvertent) illustrations of the idea. She points out aspects of the 'detachment of the gaze', which are 'inexplicable in terms of the phallic metaphor', for instance the 'escape of libido' through 'orifices' in the figures and resulting in 'flat bounded shapes'.

mind when he talks about the death instinct as being what is most fundamental – a symbolic order in travail, in the process of coming, insisting on being realized.<sup>152</sup>

The consequences he draws from these ideas are powerful. Pure and indestructible life force is what the individual human does not possess: immortality.<sup>153</sup> The lamella is, in this case, the primary signifier with no content, reflecting the lack of immortal life for any individual. This lack, he proposes, is the basis of the unconscious, in the sense that on the one hand its consequences are the precipitation of anxiety or fear and the repression of our lack of immortality. On the other hand, the arena of the symbolic is adopted as a way of attempting to assuage this fearsome lack.

Anterior lack can be seen as a shadow of phallic lack: again death and the erotic (sexual reproduction) together constitute a lack that forms the basis of the unconscious in highlighting the concept of ‘lack of immortality’. Lacan’s concept of the anterior lack of immortality points to a more clearly defined connection with death and non-being (for instance in terms of the conquest of the symbolic). In so doing, he adds a further sense of gravitas to the notion of phallic lack, insofar as anterior lack highlights an aspect of the concept of lack that can be lost in the more obvious relationship of the notion of the phallus to the erotic and to the fear of physical castration.

## 2.2 Desire

Moving on from the concept of *lack* to the closely related psychoanalytic concept of ‘*desire*’, the basis of desire is seen by Lacan to be the unconscious desire to assuage the lack (whatever its particular definition). Thus Lacan’s concept of ‘desire’ is the reverse side of his concept of lack: both are unconscious, and thus ‘unknowable’; each is intimately related to the other, and both together form the very basis of the unconscious. While Lacan’s *descriptions* of lack may vary, he insists that there is only one lack, and likewise there is only one ‘desire’ aroused by lack. Lack, in any of his versions, is indestructible. Desire to assuage lack is aroused, but this desire can never produce the means to *assuage* lack, because lack is ‘irreparable’.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Lacan, ‘Seminar II’, 210 and 326. (My additions.) This is related to Lacan’s notion of the unconscious as ‘unrealized’, which is discussed in the next chapter.

<sup>153</sup> In fact, ‘the drive’ becomes singular for Lacan, ‘embodied’ in the notion of the lamella as organ, the (again) primary signifier with no content (‘Seminar XI’, 193-4), wherein he comes to the conclusion that the life- death drive opposition seen in Freud is the opposition between the realms of the symbolic and the imaginary.

<sup>154</sup> Lacan, ‘Seminar II’, 221-234. In this Seminar Lacan elaborates his understanding of ‘desire’.



Lacan states that desire can never be erased, and ‘desire lies at the origin of every variety of animation’. He states: ‘the name of what animates the deep-seated conflict at the heart of human action [is] ineffable.’ Furthermore: ‘as soon as one wants to spell it out, one ends up with all sorts of contradictions.’<sup>155</sup> This underlying ‘desire’, described by Lacan in terms of its ‘ineffable’ qualities, refers to an energy that is on the borderline of the somatic and the ‘mental’, or encompasses both. It is furthermore an energy that is spoken of in terms of both quality (mental and/or somatic), and quantity (energy). At some points, Lacan equates desire with the concept of libido (his notion of the lamella notwithstanding), although he writes that the term ‘libido’ possesses a greater ‘relative objectification’.<sup>156</sup> ‘Libido’, he argues, implies states, and changes of states, in terms of ‘transformations, regressions, fixations, sublimations’, whereas as we saw earlier (in the Introduction) desire is also defined as a ‘constant force’. In other words, at some points Lacan favours an economic model of desire over his model of the lamella, which is a biological given and thus (passively) mechanical. He *equates* desire and the libido in the sense that the concept of the libido is helpful in substantiating the understanding of different structures of sexuality as Freud initially observed them.<sup>157</sup> For Lacan, this makes the concept of libido a theoretical domain, but closely related to his notion of desire.

In this way desire is a ‘threshold’ concept, which is used somewhat differently within different contexts.<sup>158</sup> This idea is developed further as the thesis progresses. The point for now is that Lacan conceptualises desire solely as a *result* of lack, and, even though pervasive, it is not able to be assuaged.

### 2.2.1 Circling of desire

Lacan develops the idea that, although there is only one desire arising from one lack, this one desire *appears* to change and proliferate by changing metonymically, for instance as it relates to the world of material goods, the order of the symbolic, and the arena of affect. In other words, desire may be felt for a new pair of shoes. When they are acquired, desire might be felt

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<sup>155</sup> Lacan, ‘Seminar II’, 222-223. (My additions).

<sup>156</sup> Lacan, ‘Seminar II’, 221-234. See also D. Mundy, Tate exhibition catalogue, *Desire Unbound* (London, Tate Publishers, 2001, 55-56), where he points out the ‘convulsive beauty’, which Surrealists (Breton for example) felt so important in the repressed and the return of the repressed as embodied in the hysteric, on which the Surrealists built a poetics and aesthetics of desire. This desire epitomized their belief in erotic desire, says Lomas, as the agent of a critical transformation in human consciousness: ‘a convulsive force to be pitted against the despised status quo of bourgeois, patriarchal society and religion’. In this they were deeply influenced by Freud.

<sup>157</sup> This is referring to the oral, anal and genital stages of organization, see S. Freud, “Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality”, 1905, *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. J. Strachey (London, Hogarth Press, 1957).

<sup>158</sup> This is confirmed by Laplanche and Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-analysis* (London, Karnac Books, 1988), 239: ‘A satisfactory definition of libido is difficult to give.’

for a new car. Desire remains; the objects are *symbols* of this desire. Each new object is substituted for the one already acquired as being the consciously desired object. These symbols circle ‘lack’ but can never approach or assuage it, *because* they are symbols, whereas lack is ‘real’, in that it is not a representation but a ‘real absence’. As we have seen, Lacan posits that the symbolic cannot embody the real, and the real does not include the symbolic.

### 2.2.2 Desire of the ‘Other’

Specifically, Lacan discusses one particular arena of the appearance of desire in terms of making images: ‘What occurs as the brush strokes [...] fall like rain from the painter’s brush is not choice but something else.’<sup>159</sup> For him, these brush strokes are something in which a movement is *terminated*. Furthermore, for Lacan the painter: ‘Operates by remote control’, operating in an arena of the ‘desire of the Other’ (he uses the word Other here in the sense of the locus of the symbolic and as being a trans-symbolic ‘unconscious’ – see Chapter Two, Section 1.2.2 for further consideration of the concept of the Other). In this case, the process of image making is also for the purpose of satisfying ‘some appetite of the eye on the part of the person looking’.<sup>160</sup> He explains that this ‘desire of the Other’ can be read in two ways: the subject desires to be desired *by* the Other, and also the subject desires *what* the Other desires.<sup>161</sup> For Lacan, the ‘Other’ is the order of the symbolic in its radical alterity to the subject, as discussed in Introduction, Section 5.2. It can also be read as another subject who particularizes elements of the symbolic as it attempts to deal with the real. Since desire, in Lacan’s view, is a product of lack, the implication is (simplistically) that the flurry of brush marks made by the artist is the result of unconscious lack. Because the Other is seen as unconscious, for me this relates closely to the un-thought stage of image making in terms of an unconscious, un-thought stage that can drive the process of mark-making. However as I have pointed out, this also implies that image making is a symptomatic activity, an implication with which I cannot fully agree. This is discussed further in the next chapters.

### 2.2.3 Full and empty images

In relating lack, the symbolic and questions of immortality to image making, images become related to ontological questions, such as where have I come from, where am I going? Lacan implies that lack/desire, the ‘real’, is the basis both for the action I may take (making

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<sup>159</sup> Lacan, ‘Seminar XI’, 114.

<sup>160</sup> Lacan, ‘Seminar XI’, 115. Here he is referring to the scopic field.

<sup>161</sup> Lacan, ‘Seminar XI’, 104.

images) and for the array of symbols I may use (of which images form a portion). In this sense some image making can be seen to be ‘closer’ to the ‘real’ than others, echoing the gravitas of the real in terms of whatever ‘search’ may be engendered, whatever ‘questions’ asked. In this regard, Lacan speaks of full speech and empty speech, to indicate whether speech (another aspect of the symbolic) is approaching the ‘real’ or the ‘imaginary’, as (respectively) two ends of a spectrum. Lacan speaks of ‘full speech’ as being ‘an ideal – a joining of one subject to another subject on the other side of the wall of language.’<sup>162</sup> As an ideal, this cannot happen fully. ‘Empty’ speech is ‘chit-chat’, and he relegates it to the realm of the imaginary. For me, this hypothesis implies that ‘full’ images in visual art, by extension, would be able to ‘join’ one subject (the maker) to another subject (the viewer) who is on the other side of the wall of the ‘system of signs’ called images, while ‘empty’ images would not.<sup>163</sup> In any case, both ‘empty’ and ‘full’, are in *relation* to the concept of desire, implying that while some images may be ‘closer’ to the ‘real’ of desire than others, all are based in a search/desire for a lacking ‘object’.

There are certain image making endeavours in which this ontological search for the indescribable is clearly reflected, for instance in the early drawings of Joseph Beuys (Illustrations 1.1 and 2.1).<sup>164</sup> He later said that the years spent making those searching, inarticulate drawings formed the basis of his subsequent ideas and art-making. Bernice Rose’s essay in the ‘Thinking is Form’ catalogue of an exhibition of Beuys’ drawings, quotes Beuys as saying: ‘Drawing is the first visible form in my works [...] the first visible thing of the form of the thought, the changing point from the invisible powers to the visible thing’.<sup>165</sup> In other words for him mark making is seen as the manifestation of ‘the form of the thought’. Looking at an example of his early drawings (Illustration 2.1) with that comment in mind shows us a compendium of marks. Some marks form a recognizable image, for instance a stag’s head can clearly be seen in the lower left. Other marks seem to indicate some thing, although exactly what thing is not clear, for instance the rising forms could be trees or energy. Overall the image is apparently incompletely formed; any ‘meaning’ is mysterious, unclear in itself and not much

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<sup>162</sup> Lacan, ‘Seminar II’, 246.

<sup>163</sup> R. Barthes, “Rhetoric”, 32-51. As discussed in Footnote 8 in my Introduction, Barthes discusses the semiology of images, listing three possibilities: language, which he dismisses because language is ‘doubly articulated’, ‘system of signs’, or merely ‘agglutination of signs’. His choice is the second option, ‘systems of signs’, because of the syntagmatic (flow) and paradigmatic (condensation) interactions of denoted and connoted meanings respectively. This analysis indicates that images can form ‘systems’ with some language-like attributes. I see ‘system of signs’ as appropriate for my purposes, because while there may be an energy and/or a materiality connecting the signs, there is no given structure equivalent to grammar in language.

<sup>164</sup> In the early 1950’s Beuys spent several years reading widely and drawing. During this time he made literally thousands of drawings. Two exhibitions devoted to these drawings, each with an exhibition catalogue are: ‘Joseph Beuys, *The Secret Block for a Secret Person in Ireland*’, Samlung Marx (Munich and London, Schirmer/Mosel, 1996), and ‘*Thinking is Form, the Drawings of Joseph Beuys*’, Ann Temkin and Bernice Rose, (New York, Thames and Hudson, 1993).

<sup>165</sup> Bernice Rose, “Joseph Beuys and the Language of Drawing”, ‘Thinking is Form’, 73-118.

clearer with the help of the title. For me, these drawings represent the musings of a mind in conversation with itself, rather than primarily involved in communicating with others. Insofar as these early drawings *are* meant to be a communication with others, the idea of the ‘wall between subjects’ is clearly seen in the multiplicity of meanings/interpretations that might be attributed to them. But insofar as they are seen as the musings of a mind grappling with the indescribable, in an ‘ontological search for the indescribable’, I believe that they can be seen by the viewer as affecting and gripping rather than slick and ‘empty’. This accords with my experience in the studio, where the ‘leap’ from mind to matter, from an interior phenomenon (perhaps a combination of (previous) thought and (present) energy) to marks on the page, is precisely what can happen in the un-thought stage of the process of image making. It has both an ‘ontological’ aspect as being the birth of something ‘in the world’, and an ontological basis as being a ‘search’ for a form of ‘truth’ because insofar as it touches on the ‘real, I believe, it becomes interesting in some way, to the artist as both maker and viewer, and/or to the viewer as one who wonders.<sup>166</sup>

### 2.3 Caveat

Lacan’s ideas are of value to me as an image maker in terms of his concepts of the Other (unconscious) as the locus of the symbolic, lack and desire as being the cause of the conquest of this symbolic, and the symbolic as a transindividual phenomenon. This provides a theoretical basis for communication by way of the symbolic, and for the basis and definition of the symbolic as a phenomenon. Linking the symbolic so closely with the unconscious, as Lacan does, makes it more understandable that an ‘un-thought’ stage of image making should be seen to be of importance, insofar as here the real may be better able to ‘permeate’ the symbolic.

Lacan’s ideas provide a basis for understanding why some image making can be more affecting than others, in terms of fullness or emptiness. His ideas about the chain of signifiers and the motivation behind making images are useful, for instance in the sense exemplified by Beuys’ early drawing (for instance as meaning ‘evolving’). I return to this below by way of Lyotard’s ideas.

However, in the present context of the un-thought stage of image making, for me there are anomalies in Lacan’s schema. The descriptions of the lamella in relation to sexual desire can

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<sup>166</sup> Lacan posits that ‘truth’ is closely related to ‘desire’. I consider this relation earlier and in the next chapter.

**ILLUSTRATION 1.1**

be opaque. For example, in the quotation from Lacan (see Section 2.1.4) about the lamella, the leap I find problematic is precisely exemplified in the leap between two adjacent sentences. One sentence is: ‘It is the libido, *qua* pure life instinct ...[it] has need of no organ, [and is] simplified, indestructible life.’ The next sentence is: ‘It [the libido] is precisely what is subtracted from the living being by virtue of the fact that it is subject to the cycle of sexual reproduction.’ While immortality may be lacking, it is less tenable in Lacan’s own terms to describe the life force as ‘subtracted’, since it is, also, paradoxically, with us, even if only until death. In my view, confusing immortality with life force, as Lacan appears to be doing, reflects the very problem with his notion that desire rests on a basis of lack. The life force is not lacking, indeed it can be seen as *embodying* the notion of desire, as is articulated, in their various ways, by both Jean-Francois Lyotard, and the joint authors Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, and discussed in Chapter Two, Section 2. In the next section Lyotard’s ideas help to articulate my misgivings about Lacan’s concepts of lack and desire, the idea of lack as the basis of the unconscious and of desire resulting only from lack. In the present context, for instance, this does not encompass the surprise and pleasure, and the resulting ‘harmonious’ images that can arise in connection with the un-thought stage.<sup>167</sup>

### Section 3: Lyotard: contestations

#### 3.1 Libido or lack as the basis of unconscious?

J.-F. Lyotard contests Lacan’s concept of lack as a basis of the unconscious. For Lyotard the concept of the libido assumes a more direct relationship to the idea of energy, thus emphasizing a notion of the (physically) quantitative rather than (mentally) qualitative aspect of the psyche. He proposes an ‘economy’ of dispersal, concentrations and intensities of this energy, developing Freud’s ‘economic’ model of the psyche and as contesting Lacan’s ‘constant force’ of desire.<sup>168</sup> He disputes Lacan’s notion of lack as the basis of the unconscious by arguing that because lack is by definition a negativity, it is theoretically impossible to propose it as a basis of the unconscious.<sup>169</sup> This is on the grounds that Freud’s definitive ‘characteristics’ of the

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<sup>167</sup> I mean the word ‘harmonious’ here as indicative of some underlying order, for instance as discussed by A. Ehrenzweig as I consider in Chapter Three, Section 3.

<sup>168</sup> See, for instance, Freud, ‘Interpretation’, Chapter 7.

<sup>169</sup> J.-F. Lyotard, “Beyond Representation”, *The Lyotard Reader*, ed. A. Benjamin (Oxford, Blackwell Publishers, 1989). This article was first published in 1974 as Foreword to Anton Ehrenzweig, ‘The Hidden Order of Art’ (in the French edition), which is discussed in Chapter Three, Section 3.

unconscious include notions not only of there being, in the process and content of the unconscious, no dealing with time, space and so on, but equally no negation. Lyotard states that:

if it is indeed true that the primary processes know no negation, then in the economy of drives there is not, nor can there ever be, an absence of *the mother*, or especially an absence of *mother* (an absent object); nor will there ever be a person to suffer from absence.<sup>170</sup>

In other words, the notion of lack, for Lyotard, fails as a notion intended to explain the basis of the unconscious, both from the perspective of the idea of the lost ‘archaic mother’ (or any lack), and from the perspective of the subject who ‘suffers’ lack (the unconscious ‘includes’ no absence or contradiction). Lyotard argues that in the field of the unconscious (with reference to the drive), because of the impossibility of negation in the economy of drives, pain and pleasure must therefore be seen as equally affirmative. However, for Lyotard it is true that our *re-presentations* of pain and pleasure are not equally affirmative. In this way he argues that the unconscious, and unconscious desire, are not equivalent to the ways in which we make and interact with (their) re-presentations. He says:

we must deal in some *other* way with the place and role of representations [...] in relation to drives; not as substitutes concealing objects or the goals of drives, but as *concentrations of libidinal energy* on the surfaces of the visible and the articulable – surfaces that are themselves part of the endless and anonymous film of primary drives.<sup>171</sup>

He argues here for a notion of libidinal energy, rather than the idea of lack or absence, as a basis for understanding the notion of the unconscious, and indeed of the value and place of ‘representations’ or the symbolic. On the other hand, he substantiates Lacan’s notion that the symbolic as re-presentations of the real (as pleasure and pain) do not encompass the real itself.

Lyotard, in support of his claim that ‘representations’ (‘symbols’), are *themselves* concentrations of libidinal energy, extends the notion of ‘disreal spaces’. His reference to ‘disreal spaces’ includes sacrificial areas, temples, theatres, doctors offices. These, he claims, are regions ‘where desire can play in all its ambivalence’ because of the substitution of ‘accepted images’ for ‘proper objects of desire’. His argument can be extended to apply to making (mimetic) images, such that making a work of art is equivalent to making a sign (in the linguistic sense of the word), because it replaces something (for instance a landscape in the country) for someone (in this case, the maker of the image). But, he explains: ‘for the student of the libidinal economy this function of the image or sign is not pertinent because it presupposes what one must try to produce by a theoretical argument: negativity’ (that is, the ‘absent’

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<sup>170</sup> Lyotard, “Beyond”, 159.

<sup>171</sup> Lyotard, “Beyond”, 160. (My emphases.)

landscape), which thus involves ‘all the components of the theatrical space’.<sup>172</sup> For me this would be an actor-spectator (the image maker), an object-sign (the image being made), a memory (an (absent) landscape), a final affect or goal (catharsis or the final image). Lyotard uses this model of theatrical (disreal) space (where rational considerations can be suspended) to emphasize his own critique of the ‘negativity’ of Lacan’s model (in its emphasis on the notion of lack, the absence of the ‘real’ object being re-presented), through which Lyotard’s ‘positive’ libidinal economy can be extended. In Lacan’s concept, claims Lyotard, the viewer must ‘go into’ the image to perceive or apprehend the meaning. Lyotard uses this argument to point out the *dependence* of Lacan’s model on representational (for instance theatrical) assumptions, which constitutes, claims Lyotard, a confusion between the unconscious itself, which rests on energy, and the realm of the symbolic, which rests on beliefs. Deleuze and Guattari, with their notion of schizoanalysis as discussed in the next chapter, also find Lacan’s use of lack problematic as a basis for the unconscious for similar reasons. In other words both Lyotard’s ‘concentrations of libidinal energy’ and Deleuze and Guattari’s ‘schizoanalysis’ contradict the idea that lack belongs to an explanation of the basis of the unconscious. However, the notion of lack is not proved incorrect or useless as such, only inappropriate in the context of the *basis* of the unconscious.

### 3.2 Libidinal energy and art works

Having critiqued the notion of ‘lack’ and its overall ‘negativity’, Lyotard presents his ‘positive’ idea of libidinal energy with regard to art works. Rather than treat art as ‘images’ per se, distinguishing between their ideational content and their libidinal (aesthetic) content, he explains: ‘we should understand that their power to please resides wholly in the *formal labour* that produces them on the one hand and in the *work* of various kinds they stimulate on the other.’<sup>173</sup> In this way, he supports his idea of a ‘surface’ of ‘libidinal energy’ as opposed to notions of ‘what appertains to truth on the one hand and what belongs to beauty or pleasure on the other’.<sup>174</sup> If we were to see truth and beauty, not as comprising a binary opposition of individual unrelated attributes, but rather as being ‘united’ within the context of libidinal energy, then, he hypothesizes:

It would become clear that in both cases, on both sides, we are dealing with transformations of libidinal energy and with devices governing these transformations – none of which, neither devices nor transformations, could be privileged and labelled as more profound than another, since they are all on the surface.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> Lyotard, “Beyond”, 160.

<sup>173</sup> Lyotard, “Beyond”, 159-160. (My emphases).

<sup>174</sup> Lyotard, “Beyond”, 160.

<sup>175</sup> Lyotard, “Beyond”, 159-160.



He is proposing that both ‘truth’ and ‘beauty’ in fact exist on the same ‘surface’ of libidinal energy, within various forms and strengths of transformations of energy.<sup>176</sup> In addition I understand that he is (implicitly) issuing a challenge with regard to the un-thought stage, in terms of the meaning and import of ‘devices and transformations.’ The challenge he issues is this:

Understanding will no longer be a matter of establishing an ultimate libidinal content (be it even a lack, the effect of an empty signifier) but rather of identifying, in all its ineffectual delicacy and complexity, the *device* by which the energy of drives is guided, blocked, freed, exhausted or stored up – in short channelled into *extreme intensities*.<sup>177</sup>

And so, with his idea of ‘extreme intensities’ in the field of ‘libidinal aesthetics’, he refers to the identification of a device of ‘ineffectual delicacy and complexity’, which I regard as a challenge to my thetic question regarding image making: can I see the un-thought stage as a device for channelling intensities of energy? His notion provides me with a better understanding of one purpose of the un-thought stage of my image making model (which I have claimed as agency), since ‘channelling into extreme intensities’ is not conceived to be a conscious process. I use this as a guiding question as the thesis develops.

### 3.3 Laxity and art-making

In terms of the *process* of image making, Lyotard proposes the idea of the artist entering a state of ‘laxity’, which results in lowering the barriers that separate ‘exterior from interior reality’. This ‘lowering of barriers’ again gives prominence to Lyotard’s notion of a single libidinal surface ‘without thickness or limits’, which results in image making such that it:

does not exist prior to what might be inscribed there by pen, brush, noise or voice, but is produced by the operations that transform affective intensities into colours, sounds, sentences. The artistic body extends beyond the body of the artist and beyond any body closed in on itself in its supposed three-dimensional identity. Freud said that there is communication within the unconscious or between one unconscious and another. There is nothing paradoxical in this if by communication we mean the transmission of intensities into new intensities and if we recognize that as it occurs such transmission produces its own

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<sup>176</sup> Lyotard, “Beyond”, 160. Note that David Maclagen, in his book *Psychological Aesthetics*, (London, Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2001), agrees that aesthetics can usefully be seen as a reflection of feelings aroused by attributes embodied in a painting (by way of materials, etc.), rather than ‘attributes’ such as beauty and harmony, which are disembodied concepts. There is an intermingling of rational and irrational since all perception involves an interweaving between subject and object. His book is parallel to my thesis in its interest in the psychoanalytic contributions to considering paintings. However, he concentrates on *aesthetics* as a subject (including the influence of the unconscious and ‘feelings’) and the viewer in *relation* to that, whereas my thesis is conceived from the point of view of the artist, in the process of *making* images.

<sup>177</sup> Lyotard, “Beyond”, 159. (My emphases.) See also, for instance, Lyotard’s analysis of the dream-work, discussed in Chapter Three, Section 2.

medium: the heterogeneous surface that includes skins, organs, streets, walls, canvases, instruments.’<sup>178</sup>

For Lyotard, because paintings do not ‘stand for’ anything, they simply ‘stand’, then communication becomes a transmission of intensities into new intensities, and the ‘device’ or operation which helps to enable this transmission is a lowering of barriers between interior and exterior reality, by means of ‘laxity’.<sup>179</sup> The basis of his notion is a point that Freud makes concerning laxity, which Lyotard paraphrases: ‘The ability to sublimate is associated with a certain laxness [...] a laxness in repression that normally ends conflict.’<sup>180</sup> For me, Lyotard’s re-inscription of this state of ‘laxity’ relates closely to the un-thought stage of image making with regard to ‘relaxing’ rational thought, ‘giving way to the reserves of energy’ and to the devices that bring areas of intensity to this energy. This is opposed to the idea that image making occupies only an arena of logic and rationality, by way of thought and representation, and involves only a rational topic/plan and/or judgement. Lyotard discusses the importance of the concept of extreme intensities by considering libidinal energy as the basis for his major claims for art. He says: ‘It [the importance] is in this region of contact, this laxist libidinal space or region of free displacement potential that is always at work in art, or at least in true artistic initiatives.’<sup>181</sup> So he recommends that we abandon the (‘safe’) category of ‘works of art’ or of signs in general, and that we instead recognize as truly artistic ‘nothing but initiatives or events in whatever domain they may occur.’<sup>182</sup> In this sense, image making for Lyotard is a ‘region of contact’ with a ‘laxist libidinal space’, a place of ‘free displacement potential’. Art becomes defined not in terms of ‘notions [knowledge] but as initiatives or events [intensities], in whatever domain they occur’. For Lyotard, then, image making is an ‘enabling’ of the metamorphosis of the libidinal into the pictorial in terms of areas of intensity by means of ‘devices’ such as ‘laxness’.<sup>183</sup> I see this occurring in the un-thought stage; some particular devices for this enabling are seen in the Chapter Three where I discuss the views of Anton Ehrenzweig.

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<sup>178</sup> Lyotard, “Beyond”, 164. This is discussed also in Chapter Four, from Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger’s point of view.

<sup>179</sup> A term Lyotard borrows from Freud.

<sup>180</sup> Freud, “Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis”, 1917, in *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. J. Strachey (London, Hogarth Press, 1957). This is as understood by Lyotard, “Beyond”, 162.

<sup>181</sup> Lyotard, “Beyond”, 165.

<sup>182</sup> Lyotard, “Beyond”, 165.

<sup>183</sup> The critique one could make of this proposal is the one that Freud makes of Jung’s notion of a ‘life energy’, which is opposed to the more specific ‘sexual energy’ that Freud proposes. Freud believed that the notion of life energy was too broad and non-specific to emphasize the particular aspects that he saw as being of over-riding importance, for instance the basis of sexual energy for drives, the objects of drives, and so on. The more radical reply to that observation is that perhaps there is no need for an *array* of drives and partial-drives.

#### Section 4: Summary and implications

In terms of the *basis* of the unconscious, the subject of this chapter, I have now considered Lacan's ideas of lack and desire. He exemplifies the notion of lack as 'phallic' or 'anterior'. He proposes further that 'desire' is a result (only) of this lack, and consists of pervasive and on-going, but futile, attempts to assuage the lack. There is one lack and one desire; for him these two together form the basis of the unconscious. The argument as it relates to image making has several aspects. Lacan's concepts of lack and desire provide the foundation for his notion of the 'conquest' of the symbolic as each individual attempts to re-present, understand and communicate the 'real'. Thus there is a close association between Lacan's concepts of the unconscious as the symbolic and fear/death. He proposes that the symbolic can not encompass the real and that as such the symbolic can be seen as a wall, both mediating and hindering communication between individuals. In this sense, the un-thought stage can be seen as unconscious agency, in terms of lack and desire. However I believe there is more to art than the position of the 'symptomatic'; as I have indicated, I question this as a complete explanation of the un-thought stage of the process of image making.

Lyotard's ideas have addressed the caveats I raised earlier from my viewpoint in the studio, namely the notion of lack as the basis of the unconscious, and the notion that desire is solely a result of lack. For Lyotard there is another (than lack) idea of the origin of the unconscious, and there is another (than Oedipal) context for the notion of desire. He sees the libido as a flow of energy, and itself the basis of the unconscious.

At this point, I see these ideas of Lyotard's as developing a critique of that aspect of Lacan's hypothesis of desire that depends solely on lack. By this means Lyotard is able to emphasize the centrality of the drive to issues of cultural productivity (for me, image making) such that the notion of lack is seen as if not unnecessary, at least not requisite. In other words lack can (sometimes) be replaced, or influenced, by the force of libido and other 'devices' that channel this energy into 'extreme intensities'. Lyotard describes image making in terms of intensities of libido metamorphosing into art objects. In this way I see him dealing with what I am concerned with in this thesis, the appearance of aspects of the 'real' in image making. This can be seen as supporting my idea of the un-thought stage as agency, but disputing Lacan's related notion of lack and its centrality as the origin of the unconscious. Lyotard posits as a platform for the process of making art what he terms the 'laxity' of the artist, which, for me, is closely related to my idea of the un-thought stage.

The argument so far, then, involves Lacan's notion of the basis of the unconscious, lack and its consequent desire, with many useful implications, including the conquest of the symbolic. Lyotard contests Lacan's notion of lack as the *basis* of the unconscious by introducing instead the idea of the libido itself in this role. My contention is that while some of Lacan's ideas are useful in general and to image making in particular, they do not illuminate some aspects of the process of image making as I see it in the studio. The ideas of Lacan and Lyotard appear to be mutually exclusive in that without 'lack' and the Oedipus complex, for Lacan, 'desire' would not arise and nor would the symbolic develop and be 'conquered' by individuals. But Lyotard argues that 'lack' as a basis of the unconscious is theoretically impossible and practically insupportable. At this point, I have left these two sets of ideas in contention, awaiting discussion of further relevant ideas in the next chapter.

#### Section 5: Next chapter

The next chapter considers the 'content' of the unconscious, focusing on Lacan's concepts of the signifier and the Other. In terms of the un-thought stage of image making, there is a consideration of what is useful and what is less useful within his relevant ideas. In addition, I consider what aspects of Lacan's ideas can be seen to be 'extended' by accommodating ideas of Lyotard, and of Deleuze and Guattari, within the context of my continued emphasis on 'new' forms of 'knowing' or modes of attention.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

Chapter Two considers a second aspect of Lacan's notion of the gaze, the 'content' of the unconscious, including signifiers, the 'Other', in connection with their relevance for the unthought stage of image making. Lyotard, as well as Deleuze and Guattari, provide critiques of, and extensions to, Lacan's ideas.

## Chapter Two: The Unconscious – Content

In Chapter One I established a foundation for the thesis by discussing Lacan's idea of the basis of the unconscious, since the unconscious is itself an integral part of his notion of the gaze. In addition, I questioned his concept of lack as a basis for the unconscious, and as the 'cause' of desire, by means of Lyotard's contestations in terms of libidinal energy. However, in Chapter One I did not propose a resolution of these seemingly conflicting ideas. My aim in this chapter is three-fold. One is to discuss Lacan's notions of the 'content' of the unconscious on the basis of the foundations laid in Chapter One. The second is to contest certain elements of these notions of 'content'. The third is to propose a means of seeing these two contesting sets of ideas, which include the two sets seen in Chapter One, as accommodating each other under the 'umbrella' of a third set of ideas, rather than remaining binary opposites. The aim in this chapter (and the thesis as a whole) is not so much a comfortable 'synthesis' of varying views, but a means of seeing these varying views as individual parts of a 'larger whole', where the parts can all contribute to the larger picture.

Lacan makes use of the word 'content' in relation to the unconscious in a number of ways which are relevant for the process of image making. In one sense, he uses this word to mean 'text' of the unconscious, in the sense of mental 'storage' (rather like the 0's and 1's in a computer). Note that this 'text' is not understood as being equivalent to a piece of writing, or (any) discourse, but as 'unrealized' text as discussed below. Lacan refers to this 'text' as 'signifiers' because, like the basis of computer language as 0's and 1's, this 'text' of the unconscious does not encompass meaning (signified).<sup>184</sup> A second way he uses the word 'content' is in terms of 'subject matter'. This refers to two component concepts, 'the Other', and 'censored chapters'. For Lacan, as we have seen, the word 'Other' with a capital 'O' includes his notion of the realm of the symbolic, which he defines as 'a transindividual phenomenon insofar as it is particularized in each individual'.<sup>185</sup> A third sense of the 'content' of the unconscious for Lacan is in terms of 'process', which is the subject of Chapter Three.

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<sup>184</sup> In general (Saussurian) linguistic sense, a sign is seen as a combination of signifier (as for instance sound) and a signified (meaning). Lacan divides these attributes and refers to signifiers on their own.

<sup>185</sup> Lacan, 'Ecrits', 49. Lacan also writes: 'We must distinguish two *others*, at least two – an Other with a capital O, and an other with a small o, which is the ego. In the function of speech, we are concerned with the Other.' ('Seminar II', 236).

## Section 1: Unconscious as the ‘unrealized’

*Musing again in the studio, I consider the question of ‘content’. How to consider image making in terms of it being influenced by the ‘content’ of the unconscious, by definition, unknowable, unspeakable? Content...what is content? Could it be an encapsulated idea, which can be somehow ‘caught’ in images? The more I try to control it rationally, the more elusive the results. It seems to me, as I ponder, that words and images possess a seemingly irrational and unpredictable dimension of references and resonances. Is it possible to access or ‘allow’ the unconscious to become in some way ‘present’, to recognise it for what it is, and to ‘understand’ its manifestation? The mystery of the unspeakable...*

### 1.1 The signifier

My aim in this section is to consider Lacan’s concept of the signifier, in its relevance both to his understanding of the unconscious, and to my understanding of the un-thought stage of image making. The notion of the signifier is important to this thesis because, by this means, mark making can be seen to be related to (mental) signifiers as the ‘text’ of the unconscious ‘manifested’ materially on the artistic support. Lacan explains his concept of the signifier in two ways that are relevant to my thesis, experientially and linguistically. The experiential point of view has to do with perception and memory, and the ‘traces’ involved. The linguistic point of view is related to memory and its implications in terms of ‘content’ of the unconscious. From these ‘definitions’ there emerge a number of implications for the un-thought stage of image making.

#### 1.1.1 Perception and the relevance of ‘the story’ – the experiential point of view

What does Lacan mean by the term ‘signifier’?<sup>186</sup> Basically, he refers to signifiers as ‘unrealized’ in the sense that they do not include ‘meaning’. In one sense, Lacan uses Freud’s understanding of the connection between perception and memory to consider what I term the ‘experiential’ basis for the signifier. For Freud, images and events from the preceding day can form part of latent dream content. Lacan adopts Freud’s idea that a mental ‘trace’ manifests somewhere between perception and consciousness (therefore being ‘unconscious’) as a basis of

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<sup>186</sup> In classical linguistics, a signifier is ‘attached’ to a signified to form a sign – in other words a physical sound or image is attached to an idea to form a symbol, which has become a culturally agreed ‘notation’ for an idea/thing. Lacan’s proposal ‘detaches’ the signifier from the ‘meaning’ such that the signifier is then ‘unrealized’ in terms of meaning, and he refers to this as the ‘pure signifier’. This is differentiated from the *rhetoric*, the ‘meaning’ that might be revealed when interpreting a dream, for instance.



the transfer of material from external visual cognition to mental recognition and memory. Lacan also adopts Freud's 'need to make an absolute separation between perception and consciousness'. In other words, in order for these traces of perception to pass into memory, 'they must first be effaced in perception and reciprocally.'<sup>187</sup> This happens in a synchronous fashion. However, Lacan, moving away from Freud, 're-inscribes' these traces of perception as 'signifiers'. Furthermore there is the important point that, for Lacan, not only synchrony but diachrony is involved. This is by virtue of there being analogous layers of traces that are associated with each 'trace'.<sup>188</sup> I see this as 'reflections and refractions' of perception. Lacan argues that the signifiers constitute themselves in simultaneity 'only by virtue of a very defined structure of a constituent diachrony.' In other words, there exists a 'story' or concept to hold them together and relate them.<sup>189</sup> This is an important point in that it implies some sort of connecting 'system' between certain signifiers that is not implied in the notion of 'pure signifier'. This 'connecting system', as a network of associations, allows scope for a concept that allows for subsequent 're-attachment' of signifier with signified, *except*, I believe, for the important matter of the actions of the primary processes, which presumably would not take account of these 'connections' and they would be lost.<sup>190</sup> In any case, since the emergence of the 'signifier' is 'between' perception and the conscious mind, and therefore not in a conscious/rational arena, I propose that this emergence relates to my un-thought stage. For example, as a result of these ideas, the un-thought stage might be seen as a *locus* for the *formation*, and even association, of signifiers, within the process of image making, congruent with the formation of signifiers as a result of perception. The further step implied here, that of the signifiers being 'grouped' by an overarching 'story', can add a complexification to the spiralling of the three stages of image making proposed in my Introduction. This I consider further in Chapter Three, Section 3, with the discussion of the relevant ideas of Ehrenzweig. His notion of syncretistic scanning can be seen to assume and accommodate some such 'connecting story', while for Lacan this is more problematic.

### 1.1.2 Memory – the linguistic point of view

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<sup>187</sup> Lacan, 'Seminar XI', 46.

<sup>188</sup> Lacan, 'Seminar XI', 46.

<sup>189</sup> R. Barthes, "Rhetoric". In his analysis of the rhetoric of the image, Barthes suggests the image is held together by means of a 'field', such as a concept or story, within which to 'read' or understand it. However this raises the question: how can a 'story' (discourse) be seen to exist in Lacan's notion of the unconscious? Lacan is specific, as we see below, in saying the unconscious is not a discourse. This is discussed further in Chapter Three, where Ehrenzweig's notions of syncretistic scanning can be seen to provide a possible way forward.

<sup>190</sup> See Introduction, Section 5.1 for Freud's version of primary processes. See Chapter Three, Section 1 for Lacan's version.

Lacan also uses Freud's ideas to consider the concept of signifier from another point of view, that of memory. Memory is an aspect of image making that is only implied in the description of the image making process in the Introduction, but which is nevertheless implicitly and intricately important. Lacan discusses Freud's ideas about the 'laying down' of memory. For Freud this happens in four 'stages': 1-4 years, 4-8 years, pre-pubertal period, and period of maturity.<sup>191</sup> Because of this, claims Freud, the consequent 'laying down of the psyche' involves a process of stratification. Freud's final point, which is the most riveting for Lacan, is that these memory traces, at each stage, are subjected to a *rearrangement* in accordance with fresh circumstances – in fact to a *re-transcription*. What Lacan finds important is Freud's statement: 'what is essentially new about my theory is the thesis that memory is present not once but several times over, that it is laid down in various kinds of indications.'<sup>192</sup> These kinds of 'indications' are various types of mnemonic inscriptions employed by individuals as they mature, which influence both how memory is laid down and on what basis its content is ordered. The important point here is Lacan's interpretation of Freud's ideas: as memories pass from one stage of development to another, and, as they are rearranged, *the signified may not get carried across with the signifier*. This is the basis of Lacan's 'linguistic' explanation for his use of the term 'signifier' – the signifier which has lost its meaning. Furthermore, for Lacan, this: 'is where any explanation of the existence of repression has to begin.'<sup>193</sup> The idea of the possibility of the 'readjustment' of memory, as such, is consistent with Lacan's basic principles about the psychoanalytic 'talking cure', in that memory can be 'changed' in retrospect, by learning and realization; and that this 'readjustment' can work to modify symptoms, views, character traits and dream content. Lacan's idea is that this 'readjustment' happens in psychoanalysis with the help of analysis, *the re-attachment of signified to signifier, by way of association of ideas*. I believe that such 'readjustment' happens in everyday life, particularly relevant here in the process of image making, in that signifiers can be manifested as marks, but meaning can become 're-attached' as the making progresses. A final image may bear little relation to the initial version, not only visually, but in 'meaning' and 'resonance'. The points here are that memory is implicit in image making, for instance as being the source of many unconscious 'signifiers', and additionally that memory has implications in terms of development and re-assessment of ideas as the un-thought stage is en-acted and the spiral stages of image making proceed.

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<sup>191</sup> Fleiss letter # 51. For references to Freud's letters, see Lacan, 'Seminar III', 180.

<sup>192</sup> Lacan, 'Seminar III', 180.

<sup>193</sup> Lacan, 'Seminar III', 182. However, note that Freud does not mention here that 'meaning' is being *lost*, just 're-written', in that memories are 're-organized'. See "A Note On The Mystic Writing Pad", 1905, *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. J. Strachey (London, Hogarth Press, 1957) Volume 19, 227. Here Freud describes perception as being 'written', then (partially) erased and over-written. But, he says, there is a sub-layer of the 'writing pad', and likewise of memory, which can retain a 'permanent trace'. This is not emphasized by Lacan.

### 1.1.3 Unconscious comprised of signifiers and structured like a language

What role does the signifier play in the unconscious? There is another side to Lacan's argument about the content of the unconscious. He sees there is a 'primary, classificatory function' in terms of the 'structure' of this 'text' of signifiers.<sup>194</sup> He implies that this is due to the 'primary classificatory system of the pre-cultural', by which he means that nature provides 'signifiers' which allow the overlay of culture on nature, in other words the 'innate' prohibition of incest.<sup>195</sup> He proposes that this primary system is the basis of the 'organization' of the unconscious. He sees this manifested in the unconscious as a combinatory operation functioning in a 'pre-subjective way', which assures us that there is 'beneath the term unconscious, something definable, accessible and objectifiable.'<sup>196</sup> These combinatory operations are the primary processes of condensation, displacement, secondary revision and the attribute of figurality as discussed by Freud in the dream-work.<sup>197</sup> Lacan re-inscribes these processes in terms of linguistic tropes. He speaks specifically of metaphor and metonymy. 'Metonymy' as a combinatory linguistic operation, for Lacan, is that by which the part is *taken* for the whole – e.g. 'sails' taken to mean 'ships' in the statement 'thirty sails' – a word-to-word connection.<sup>198</sup> It is the combination of one term with another to produce an 'effect'. Lacan's proposal is that 'condensation' is a form of metonymy.<sup>199</sup> 'Metaphor' is the conjunction of two signifiers such that there is a disparity of images signified. Lacan explains that this happens in such a way that meaning:

flashes between two signifiers, one of which has taken the place of the other in the signifying chain, the occulted signifier remaining present through its (metonymic) connection with the rest of the chain [of signifiers].<sup>200</sup>

In other words, for Lacan, 'displacement' is a form of metaphor. He proposes that the 'symptom' is a type of metaphor, such that something (body part or function) that cannot be 'allowed' to signify 'acquires' a substituted term. He proposes further that 'desire', as seen earlier in the notion of the 'circling' of desire, is a type of metonymy, which, as such, becomes

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<sup>194</sup> Lacan, 'Seminar XI', 21.

<sup>195</sup> Lacan, 'Seminar XI', 20.

<sup>196</sup> Lacan, 'Seminar XI', 21. He goes on to say that this notion does not include some concepts Freud and others have attributed to the unconscious, such as the 'creative imagination'.

<sup>197</sup> See Introduction, Section 5.1.

<sup>198</sup> Lacan, 'Ecrits', 157.

<sup>199</sup> Lacan, 'Ecrits', 258.

<sup>200</sup> Lacan, 'Ecrits', 157. (My addition.) The chain of signifiers is a reference to the word groupings and differences which constitute language, but which revolve around the one desire, and is discussed more fully below.

indestructible.<sup>201</sup> This reference to linguistic tropes ‘used’ in the unconscious includes also Lacan’s discussion of ‘mechanisms of defence’ that can be seen within the arena of psychoanalytic practice. He sees these as being the ‘reverse side of the mechanisms of the unconscious’, and they include such linguistic tropes as ellipsis (dropping of words grammatically required but understood as if present), suspension, anticipation, digression, irony and retraction.<sup>202</sup> In a somewhat altered sense, what Lacan describes as linguistic operations can be seen to be applicable in the context of image making. My interest is less in the conscious application of these ideas, more in the unconscious primary process sense. For instance, an image, or part of an image, can be seen as a metaphor for something else, even if that was not the conscious intention of the artist.

Based on these observations, Lacan further proposes that the unconscious is ‘structured like a language’.<sup>203</sup> This is clarified with the proviso that: ‘If I say that everything that belongs to [psycho-] analytic communication has the structure of language, this precisely does *not* mean that the unconscious is expressed in discourse.’<sup>204</sup> In other words, while it is structured like a language, it is not ‘realized’ as a language, nor is it in the form of understandable discourse. Again he posits that with signifiers, meaning, as encompassed in discourse, is absent.

It is useful to note in the reference to the ‘occulted signifier’ in the quotation above, the implication of a *structure* of signifiers, connected by means of metonymy, which also refers back to Section 1.1.1 and the ‘analogous layers of traces’. This is an exemplification of the idea of the unconscious as structured like a language.

I find Lacan’s re-inscriptions of aspects of unconscious processes into linguistic modalities to be more restricted than Freud’s original ideas, in terms of complexity and richness of mental material. One example is that ‘text as signifier’ implies a paucity of detail and resonance not seen in Freud’s notions that include ‘ideas’ incorporating memory and affect. However Lacan’s concept of a complex ‘structure’ of the unconscious in terms of metaphor and metonymy can *to some extent* dilute my concerns, since the underlying (possibly complex) metonymic ‘associations’ provide his idea with resonances not immediately obvious.

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<sup>201</sup> Note that Lyotard, among others, critiques Lacan’s notions of metonymy and metaphor as being eccentric with regard to both Saussure and Jakobson. However, for my purposes, the important point is that linguistic operations are understood to be taking place. The ‘circling of desire’ is discussed in Chapter One, Section 2.2.1.

<sup>202</sup> Lacan, ‘Ecrits’, 169.

<sup>203</sup> Lacan, ‘Seminar XI’, 20.

<sup>204</sup> Lacan, ‘Seminar III’, 166. (My addition)

In any case, the concept of signifiers as being the unrealized ‘text’ of the unconscious is useful in relating them to mark-making within image making. ‘Text’ in image making, by extension and in the present context, can be marks, colours, materials, or erasures, which may be signifiers, but which do not, on their own, immediately ‘mean’ anything in the sense of discourse; this is ‘content’ as raw, and not immediately ‘meaningful’, material. Lacan proposes that in language the signifier has an ability to anticipate meaning by ‘unfolding its dimension before it’, for instance in the sense of a sentence beginning ‘I shall never...’. He speaks of meaning (in words) in terms of the *chain* of signifiers in that it is in the chain of the signifier ‘that meaning insists’, and yet, none of the individual elements of that chain ‘consists’ of the overall meaning being expressed.<sup>205</sup> The mark-making ‘text’ emerging from the un-thought stage of image making can share this attribute.

#### 1.1.4 Signifiers and dreams

As we have seen, one way that Freud studies the ‘content’ of the unconscious is by studying the ‘content’ of dreams (see Introduction, Section 5.1). Although by the time the dream is being ‘narrated’ it is already a ‘polluted’ or moderated medium, in that it is influenced by secondary revision as it emerges into, and is realized by, the conscious mind, it nevertheless includes two points of interest in the present context. First, Freud investigates dreams as a tool for better understanding the ‘text’ of the unconscious, since more direct access is denied, by definition. He does this by analysing and ‘interpreting’ each individual element of the dream and its narration. Lacan makes use of, and re-inscribes, these findings, as we see below. Second, in my view, Freud’s dependence on the relationship of dreams to the unconscious as a tool for investigation of the unconscious can be (further) extended to the relationship of the un-thought stage of image making to the unconscious, since the manifestation of images plays such a large part in dreams. I am not implying that this process of image making involves the conscious use of dream images. The point is that images manifesting in dreams and images manifesting in the un-thought stage of the process of image making can arise from the same source, the unconscious. In this sense, the psychoanalytic study of dreams can be helpful to my consideration of the process of image making, in the sense not of the *meaning* of dreams (or images), but in the sense of a basis for the *emergence* of images.<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>205</sup> Lacan, ‘Ecrits’, 153.

<sup>206</sup> There are differences between the interests and methods of surrealists and the present project. For instance, the surrealists believed in the power of *erotic* desire to ‘transform’ society in terms of the role of the ‘freeing’ of the individual, as noted in their manifestos (See Introduction). The surrealists used actual dream images in their work. The present approach relies on a more questioning attitude to the underlying processes and content of the unconscious.

Lacan refers to the *text* of the dream, the dream content, as being the reflection of the text of the unconscious, in that both consist of signifiers. In the case of both the unconscious and dreams, the ‘text’ does not ‘make sense’ or constitute discourse. In manifest dream content, the ‘rhetoric’, the ‘story’, may tell us one thing, while the underlying meaning, when analysed signifier by signifier, may be entirely different. In other words ‘content’ and ‘meaning’ are different attributes from one another. This emphasizes the point that ‘text’ as I am using the term here is not in any way equivalent to discourse or rhetoric. My understanding is that since signifiers are ‘unrealized’, in general they cannot be seen as related to each other (structured) in any ‘logical’ way. This is an important notion for this thesis, in that, while content and meaning are different attributes, the important questions include whether, in the unconscious, there is any ‘logical’ or over-riding *relationship* between them, and if so how robust this relationship might be, and in what way(s) it might be manifested. We saw in Section 1.1.1 that there may be ‘associations’ between signifiers. The problematic with this is that the primary processes can be seen to destroy these associations. Within Lacan’s thinking, the idea of associations between signifiers is interesting in relation to image making and the un-thought stage because content with no attached meaning implies chaos, and yet he speaks of ‘interpretation’ of signifiers included in dreams and symptoms. I want to consider the relationship of signifiers as they appear on the artistic support as marks (and so on). Can there be seen (theoretically) to be a relationship or not (e.g. is it just chaos)? This ‘relationship’ is what I refer to as a ‘harmony’ of marks as the thesis progresses. For me these are questions to be asked of the unconscious itself, and of the dreamwork, as clues to the un-thought stage of image making. In other words, in terms of the enigma of making art, does the un-thought stage reflect a chaotic unconscious in the sense of primary processes comprising mechanical and ‘meaningless’ combinations and displacements? Or does the un-thought stage involve a more cohesive and potentially meaningful process (as proposed for instance by Anton Ehrenzweig and discussed in Chapter Three)?

#### 1.1.5 Signifier as the unrealized

Having discussed aspects of Lacan’s concept of the signifier, what then is its ‘function’? The notion of signifier has a number of implications and cross-references for Lacan. Because he proposes that the unconscious is ‘made up’ of signifiers, he claims that the content of the unconscious is:

neither being nor non-being, but the unrealized [...] by definition what happens there is inaccessible to contradiction, to spatio-temporal location and to the function of time [and is] also indestructible.<sup>207</sup>

This is a logical result of his idea that signifiers do not encompass meaning. It is also a re-inscription of Freud's notion of the primary processes in terms of *what* it is that they process, since Freud did not speak of signifiers as such, but rather psychic events, memories, affect (as seen in Section 5.1 regarding the dream-work in my Introduction). In my view, Lacan's notion of the 'unrealized' allows expression and affect to be under-theorized. In other words, because signifiers are seen as re-presentation, and because re-presentations are distanced from the real, signifiers would appear to be totally divorced from any direct relationship to affect. In the studio, expression and what I term 'harmony' (the opposite of chaos) are of importance to me, so this under-theorization is problematic. This topic is considered a number of times in differing contexts in the following chapters. What is important here is Lacan's further point that the unconscious (notwithstanding the linguistic points made in the next section) is radically different from the field of the conscious (or the preconscious), in terms of both logic and structure. In positing this radical alterity, Lacan explains that the preconscious and the unconscious cannot be seen as related because the preconscious material is already manipulated and revised, in other words to some extent 'realized', with attached 'meaning' (signified). I see the idea of a 'radical alterity' between unconscious and conscious material as being based, in Lacan's thinking, on an assumption that there is a predominance of signs, rather than signifiers, in the conscious and pre-conscious, whereas the reverse would be the case in the unconscious. There is, in addition, the notional effect of the primary processes breaking up and condensing any 'associations' of signifiers in a non-logical and non-meaningful manner, theoretically resulting in complete chaos.

#### 1.1.6 Signifiers and meaning, the chain of signifiers

This leads to a preliminary consideration of the connection between signifiers and meaning. According to Lacan, signifiers are (sometimes) formed of associations of traces of perception. Such a network of signifiers can be seen as unrealized 'thoughts'. My question is - can we see signifiers, or associations of signifiers, as ideas?<sup>208</sup> And how would 'meaning' be related to this? For me the notion of ideas includes the notion of meaning. As I indicated above, even if there is a complex network of signs/signifiers, it seems to me it could still be prey to primary processes, which result in 'randomness and chaos'. From my point of view, as signifiers

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<sup>207</sup> Lacan, 'Seminar XI', 131. (My additions.)

<sup>208</sup> Lacan, 'Seminar XI', 24-26.

'emerge' from the un-thought stage, as in (for Lacan) psychoanalytic interpretation and (for me) image making, their possible/probable meaning is unrealized. According to Lacan, meaning is not attached to signifiers that make up the 'text' of the unconscious, although as we have seen there may be 'associations' between signifiers. This implies that meaning is attached as or after the material 'emerges' from the unconscious. This would indicate that the first and/or third stages, the planning or judging stages (see my Introduction, Section 1.1) of image making are the relevant stages to relate to meaning, not the un-thought stage. Thus, meaning is outside my immediate focus on the un-thought stage. Nevertheless, I want to take a side-step to consider the attachment of signified to signifier here, as it introduces some ideas that are useful as the discussion progresses (see Section 1.1.7). Lacan explains that the signifier emerges as irreducible and non-sensical, in other words composed of non-meanings, un-realized, and, I would add, resulting from un-thought process.<sup>209</sup> In this context, as developed in the thesis, 'un-thought' implies mental, but non-rational, processing. How then does meaning become attached? Lacan's notion of meaning is that in language it emerges in connection with the sign by means of differences from other signs, thus by means of a structure of signs, and it can do this in two particular ways. One of these is through the process of metonymy, the other is through the process of metaphor, so that both are a result of (or result in) linguistic structure. Metaphor, he says, occurs at the precise point at which sense emerges from non-sense, and it is effective in terms of the *parallelism* of the signifier with others in the same language, within the particularized arena of a given subject(s). 'But', he goes on to posit, 'the whole signifier can only operate [...] if it is present in the subject'. By this he means if the language is understood by the subject, 'and has thus passed over to the level of the signified', then that meaning has become 'attached' for the subject. In other words, meaning of the signifier evolves out of the relationship of one signifier/sign to others in the 'same language'. This can be seen in the notion of 'association of ideas' in psychoanalytic interpretations, for instance. But he also points out that 'the structure of the signifying chain discloses [...] the possibility [...] insofar as I have this language in common with other subjects, to use it in order to signify something quite other than what it says.'<sup>210</sup> This is metonymy. It implies, for one thing, that, while the unconscious is comprised of un-meaningful signifiers, meaning 'emerges' both as a result of the subject and his/her grasp of the language, and of the structure of that language, or indeed the structure of the unconscious (as seen above), in the sense that the signifier can slip over various signifieds, always depending on the ability of other subjects to apprehend this within the bounds of their knowledge of the language. This is proposing that 'meaning' resides not only with a word/sign,

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<sup>209</sup> Lacan, 'Ecrits', 158.

<sup>210</sup> Lacan, 'Ecrits', 155. 'Signifying chain' here refers to the development of meaning, in terms of metonymy and metaphor, and the slippage of meaning occurring.



not only in the structure of differences of a particular language, but in addition within a ‘collective history’ and particularized history of usage. Lacan posits this connection between signifier and meaning with reference to the problems in the analytic interpretation of dreams, which is not based on a ‘code’ of images to be ‘decoded’, but depends rather on associations provided by the client/patient.<sup>211</sup> Jean Laplanche provides a thoughtful analysis in which he argues against the idea of psychoanalytic matters in general and dreams in particular being manifested in such a way as to be ‘interpretable’ in the sense of there being an over-code, or language, on which such an interpretation could be based. For Lacan the unconscious consists of seemingly inchoate associations of signifiers that following a ‘logic’ differing from our conscious rational logic, and that are accessible (if at all) only by ‘association of ideas’.

Meaning in image making can arise from gesture, presence, erasure of marks, materials, colour and so on. Such meaning is not necessarily ‘realized’ as it emerges in the un-thought stage.

This leads to another of Lacan’s concepts, the ‘chain of signifiers’. This is closely related to the circling of desire, as we saw in Chapter One, Section 2.2.1. The realm of the symbolic is the never ending, and never succeeding, circling of symbols in an *attempt* to assuage lack in the realm of the real, our individual relationship to non-being. In other words this circling is driven by desire. Lacan states: ‘This attempted meeting is always a failed one, because the realm of the real contains no signifier’.<sup>212</sup> In my view, images, as well as aspects/elements of images, can be thought of as signifiers circling metonymically in various contexts, attempting, and failing, to assuage lack in the realm of the real. This could be conceived of in terms of marks, where various marks can be tried; in terms of images, where different images are tried; in terms of particular signs or symbols; in terms of subject matter, and so on. In this sense, the ‘value’ for the artist is, as in any chain of signifiers, to keep trying. In each case, the next trial will be the one which truly expresses the idea ‘wanting’ to be expressed, the ‘being’ of the maker. Some attempts may be ‘closer’ to the ‘real’ than others, as we saw in Section 2.1 in Chapter One about full and empty speech/images. In this sense, image making itself, the process, the materials and the subject matter, can all be seen as dealing not only with signifiers, but also with chains of signifiers. The still unanswered problematic remains that, even

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<sup>211</sup> J. Laplanche, “Psychoanalysis as anti-hermeneutics”, *Radical Philosophy*, Vol 79 (Sept/Oct. 1996), 7-12. For me, image making shares these attributes, as I discuss in the next section. However, note that I am interested in the ‘location’ of meaning only insofar as this can be seen to be included, or indicated, in signifiers as being the ‘text’ of the unconscious and therefore directly relevant to the un-thought stage. Insofar as meaning is located in ‘codes’ or linguistic structures in the conscious mind, it is outside the focus of my thesis.

<sup>212</sup> Freud called this the primal repressed. See for instance Freud, ‘Interpretation’, 399-402.

if it is accepted that some linguistic tropes are also appropriate to image making, where and how are affect and desire involved in the un-thought stage?

### 1.1.7 Signifiers and the un-thought stage

Lacan's ideas about the circling of signifiers, and the unconscious as 'structured like a language', help to elucidate the un-thought stage as a necessary but indeterminate link between the unconscious mind and its manifestation in the on-going process of realization of image making. Earlier I posited that there is a predominance of signs in the pre-conscious/conscious mind, and a predominance of signifiers in the unconscious. In thinking about various linguistic tropes that can 'happen' in both unconscious and conscious arenas, the difference seems to me to lie not so much in the type of *process* (metaphor, metonymy) but in the *level of meaning* that is 'attached' to the signifier as it is being (mentally) 'processed'. For instance, the linguistic trope of metaphor involving two *signifiers*, thus happening in unconscious mode, could be much more of a 'wild card' and produce more of a surprise than a metaphor involving two *signs*, happening within a rational arena and trailing their encumbrances of meanings along with them. This can be seen also in image making. 'Meaning' can restrict the placement of an object, for instance, in a mimetic image – a hand needs to be placed (in general) at the end of an arm. In language, even in something as experimental as 'Finnegan's Wake', James Joyce is concerned to 'invent' words that combine several 'known' words and which carry reflections and refractions of the meanings of those words in their own right, thus complexifying the meaning(s) of the resulting invented word. This can be seen as the rational basis for the combinations, even though no doubt intuition also plays a role. However, in the un-thought stage of image making, marks as signifiers can be made without meaning being 'attached', until a later stage. In brief, I argue that *rationality and the gestalt can severely limit the field of opportunity of slippage and surprise*, and that the un-thought stage can enhance this field of opportunity. In one sense, this limitation might not be a bad thing when we consider Barthes' idea of the 'terror' entailed for viewers when meaning is 'not tied down'.<sup>213</sup> Nevertheless, the relevance to some aspects of mark making and images is clear, for example, in the Joseph Beuys drawing, see Illustration 2.1 below, where some marks have 'evolved' into recognizable images, some have not. Some hover in between.<sup>214</sup> In some cases an image maker wishes to 'tie down' implicit meanings, in some cases images are left more 'open-ended'.

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<sup>213</sup> Barthes, "Rhetoric", 39.

<sup>214</sup> See also the reproductions of the Beuys early drawings, 1.1 and 2.1, and further discussion in Section 1.1.8 below.

### 1.1.8 'Truth and knowledge'

Lacan's notions of 'truth' and 'knowledge' are relevant to this question of the field of opportunity for slippage and surprise. He says of the subject: he may not know his 'beginnings' (which is his truth that is itself inexpressible); he can only describe a chain of discourse (the order of the symbolic) *around* the real.<sup>215</sup> In this way the *chain of discourse* circles and slips away from the real, the 'truth', and becomes instead 'knowledge', science, technology and the like, which is instead an attempt to 'control' the 'world' of the individual, and to 'protect' the individual from repressed and hidden traumas.<sup>216</sup> Lacan's terms 'truth' and 'knowledge', and their differences, give other clues as to his idea of the 'contents' of the unconscious. In one way, his 'truth' refers to the unconscious awareness of non-being (viz. the 'lamella') and its implications for the individual.<sup>217</sup> In another way, truth refers to the unconscious desire for the lost (archaic) mother. In any case, for Lacan, in this context 'truth' always refers to the truth about desire and its engendering lack.<sup>218</sup> 'Truth' is not always beautiful, he argues, not even always beneficial to learn. In addition, truth relates to each subject; it is a particularized matter, not a 'universal truth'.<sup>219</sup> For Lacan, desire, although 'particularized', is a basic aspect of the human condition. 'Truth' has to do with the 'real' (or desire/trauma), 'knowledge' has to do with the symbolic (or re-presentation). These ideas about truth and knowledge can be used to extend the understanding of image making as being a part of the 'chain of signifiers', like science, or any 'knowledge'. This would be image making as (part of) a discourse. But these ideas may also, conversely, allow image making to be seen as a possible arena for a reflection of 'truth'. This can happen as the unconscious 'irrupts' (via what Lacan terms the 'gap') into images.<sup>220</sup> Lacan proposes that this can happen in certain forms of language discourse, where the unconscious might irrupt, if circumstances permit, through witticisms, accidents, and slips of the tongue.<sup>221</sup> It happens also in dream images, which leads to the idea that in image making too there is a relationship with Lacan's idea that it is a direct connection with 'desire' in the unconscious that lends elements of 'truth' and 'fullness' to the results of image making. This I see as a result of the 'un-thought' stage, insofar as the suspension of rationality can allow the 'real' more opportunity for manifestation. Image making, in terms of its link with the un-thought

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<sup>215</sup> Lacan conceives that truth and knowledge are located in *non-communicating* parts or aspects of the psyche, in terms of the orders of the real and the symbolic respectively.

<sup>216</sup> Benvenuto and Kennedy, *The Works of Jacques Lacan* (London, Faber, 1986), 166.

<sup>217</sup> See the notion of the 'lamella', the 'organ', the 'libido', based on lack of immortality as discussed in Chapter One.

<sup>218</sup> Lacan, 'Seminar XI', 36.

<sup>219</sup> Evans, 215, taken from Lacan, (untranslated) Seminar XVII, 122.

<sup>220</sup> See the discussion of the notion of 'gap', Chapter Three, Section 1.3.3, referring to a 'point' where aspects/contents of the unconscious may issue forth inadvertently from the unconscious.

<sup>221</sup> Lacan speaks of 'true speech' as being: 'an ideal – a joining of one subject to another subject on the other side of the wall of language'. Lacan, *Book II*, 246.

stage, is also erratic, unpredictable and often untranslatable directly into ‘meaningful’ representation, either in making or understanding images. Truth and knowledge are exemplified for me with regard to images in that I see some as being ‘closer to truth’, for instance many of Beuys’ early drawings (see below). Other images are based much more on ‘knowledge’, such as anatomy charts or maps, a result of rational thought/knowledge, but without resonance or interest as art (as such) for me.<sup>222</sup>

While I am speaking in this thesis from the point of view of the *process* of image making, I believe that it is possible in some images to see, as *viewer*, this process ‘in flight’. The idea of signifiers being manifested in image form is exemplified for me by an early drawing of Joseph Beuys, ‘Aus: Warmephysiologie’ (Illustration 2.1). Groups of marks can be seen in this drawing ranging from signifiers (no signified) to structures of signs (the overall drawing). It is as though the drawing were terminated before a final ‘editing’ stage. For me, this drawing is a juxtapositioning of the *dim* (column), *mysterious* (body with arrows), *calm* (curtain: soft pencil lines all vertical), *fairly clear* (standing figure), *completely in-decipherable* (mass at centre: a cliff or building, with perhaps road and tree or shield), and *unclear* (arms outstretched, or wings in motion), such that the drawing allows the viewer wide scope in terms of ‘attachment’ of meaning. There is no ‘mastery of technique’, no classical perspective, no clarity of message; it is open to interpretation. There is enough information to elicit ideas, but not enough to ‘tell’. In some ways this resembles a dream: elements that are somewhat focused intermingle with elements that are completely mysterious in a condensed manner, with no particular emphasis to one or the other, as they co-habit in the space or non-space of the picture plane. It appears to me that Beuys is using these drawings as a form of unconscious signifiers-into-marks-into-image process. In this sense, some of these marks are still signifiers for us as viewers, and perhaps for him as image-maker, while others have migrated into more ‘meaningful’ associations of marks. This drawing exemplifies how signifiers, and even accidents and ‘facture’, can be incorporated within the drawing itself and allowed to remain as such, rather than being ‘made into’ understandable signs, while at the same time including various ‘signs’ (i.e. the standing figure) and furthermore becoming a ‘system of signs’ working as an overall image.

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<sup>222</sup> J.-F. Lyotard, “Newman: the Instant”, *The Lyotard Reader*, ed. A. Benjamin, (Oxford, Blackwell, 1989). Note that here is another relevant use of the word ‘empty’, where Lyotard refers to Newman’s realization that the orange line in his first ‘zip’ painting, *emptied out* the painting. This I believe is in terms of the need for ‘interpretation’ or ‘going into’ images, for instance when images are seen as being a re-presentation of a referent. Note that this is closely related to the discussion in Chapter One, Section 2.2, Full and Empty Images.

**ILLUSTRATION 2.1**

Although Lacan's ideas about signifiers being 'manifested' with various degrees of 'truth' are helpful in considering what can appear to be 'non-sense', there remain problematic areas. As one uses these ideas in a particular analysis, as for instance in this Beuys drawing, or in a dream, one feels that there is 'something left out', something to do with affect and excitement: visceral reactions.<sup>223</sup> In other words the concept of signifiers de-emphasizes the influence of affect. Lacan discusses the links between signifier and meaning, but there is little consideration of the role of desire/affect in this role.<sup>224</sup> In other words, the important question for me, at this point, is: are signifiers the only relevant content of the (linguistic) unconscious, and if so how does 'affect' enter the picture? Lyotard, and Deleuze and Guattari, again help to articulate my concerns (see Section 2 below).

#### 1.1.9 Communication and the 'wall'

Moving on, still within the realm of Lacan's thought, there is also a connection between signifier and the un-thought stage that has to do more specifically with the idea of communication. Communication is an aspect that is only implied in the descriptions of image making in my Introduction and in the discussion about phallic lack in Chapter One, Section 2.1.1. Lacan explains that in communication there is an appropriate use of the 'pure signifier' whenever what is important is not the meaning of the message, but the fact that the message arrives.<sup>225</sup> For instance, the communication of a neurotic symptom always represents the 'essential duality' of signifier and signified, in that in presenting as a signifier with no signified, its importance as a message is that it 'arrives'.<sup>226</sup> It's meaning is unknown at that point to the conscious minds of both analyst and patient. It is an 'unknown knowledge'.<sup>227</sup> In psychoanalysis it is only after analysis (via the methodology of interpretation by way of free association of ideas) has been 'successful' that the signified, the meaning of the symptom, can become connected to the signifier for the individual concerned.<sup>228</sup> This can also be true in image making situations: the meaning of an image or of marks in an image can become clear(er) through a process of association of ideas. Lacan explains that the order of the signifier *begins* insofar as it differs from the order of 'meaning'; the signifier signifies precisely nothing. The order of

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<sup>223</sup> It is possible to conceive of the 'meaning' being lost, but the 'affect' remaining.

<sup>224</sup> Although see 'sexuality in the defiles of the signifier' as he discusses it in Seminar XI, where he relates desire and the signifier by means of the association of lack, desire, the subject and the signifier.

<sup>225</sup> Lacan, 'Seminar III', 200.

<sup>226</sup> Lacan, 'Seminar III', 167.

<sup>227</sup> Lacan, 'Seminar III', 189.

<sup>228</sup> However, in my view a paradox remains. From the point of view of the unconscious, they were presumably always connected, otherwise how could the 'connection' be 're-established'? But from the inception of the symptom, albeit via a trace or a very circuitous connection/ history, this connection was lost, as in the explanation of re-transcription of memory just below. Yet it is proposed by Lacan that it is possible, by way of psychoanalysis, to re-connect them. See also Section 1.1.6 above.

meaning would ‘emerge’ within the structure of signs in language. This can be seen also in the case of images. The popular concept of effective communication requires transindividual meaning to be attached; the idea of the incoherent in communication can be explained by the lack of such meaning.<sup>229</sup> One point of making art rather than advertising imagery is that art deconstructs the notion that communication by means of images is part of a rational, collective, easily decoded system. My point in terms of the un-thought stage is that it is difficult to do this effectively from *within* this rational, ‘easily decoded’ system. In this thesis, dreams are seen as a bridge to the better understanding of the formation of images insofar as certain images have an affinity with dreams in the sense that both encompass elements the (exact) ‘meaning’ of which is not immediately (or ever) obvious. Dreams are not always effective means of communication, even between dreamer and dream. Likewise, many images are ‘unclear’ in meaning as they are being made – indeed in the un-thought stage meaning is not an issue at all. What matters at that stage is the mark making itself. Later these marks can be thought of as ‘unrealized’ signifiers. This is related to Lacan’s idea of the symbolic as a ‘wall’, where it can function as a mediator for, and/or as a hindrance to, communication. Lacan’s notion of signifier opens language and image making to the ‘un-known’, the unrealized. Considering the signifier as a ‘cause’ of signification, or considering the signifier as existing with a potential but unrealized signified, for me, begins to get very close to the challenge of making images, insofar as the apparently meaningless within certain conditions can be ‘allowed’ as part of the process of image making.

The ‘wall’ in communication, and the potentiality of the signifier in the realm of the un-thought as the un-realized, can be exemplified by Cy Twombly’s painting, *The Bay of Naples* (Illustrations 2.2 and 2.3). Here I am again in the position of viewer of a completed painting, speculating about the process of making, even about what I term an un-thought stage of making. One reason I can do this is that the overall image is a compendium of marks, erasures, ‘gestures’ and so on such that, as with some of Beuys’ drawings, one can ‘see’ results of the process of making, since they are not painted over or out, but are still visible in the finished image. This painting can be seen to highlight both appearance (signifiers) and meaning (signification), and especially their interaction, in the sense that these two attributes do not always emerge in a connected manner. In other words, neither ‘images’ nor meanings always appear fully; there are elements of trace and absence; a sense of meaningful communication is sometimes unclear, unrealized. Looking at *Bay of Naples*, one sees pencil marks and paint marks scattered over a large, otherwise bare, stretched canvas. The canvas provides a luminous background, interrupted by the ‘detritus’ of marks. There are not only the contrasts between

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<sup>229</sup> The idea of communication is used here in a popular sense of ‘putting out ideas for the consideration of others’, whether visual or verbal, and implies a ‘system’ of ‘language’ of which all participants are aware.

painted marks and pencil marks, but between painted marks evidently applied by brush, tube or fingers (detail, Illustration 2.3). Although many of the marks do not consist of recognizable signs, nevertheless some structures of marks are recognizable enough to give a hint of what they might signify. Twombly's work offers an approach to Lacan's concept of the pure signifier in the sense that there are marks in the painting that have no immediately apparent attached meaning. But somehow, as Barthes points out in his discussion of Twombly's work, they contribute to what Barthes calls the overall 'effect'. Here I draw on Barthes' consideration of Twombly's work in the essay 'The Wisdom of Art'.<sup>230</sup> 'Effect' for Barthes 'is the very general effect which can be released, *in all its possible dimensions*, by the word/title [in Cy Twombly's case] 'Mediterranean'.<sup>231</sup> This includes all the 'enormous complex' of associated memories, sensations, languages, certain histories, mythologies, all the forms, colours and lights 'that occur at the frontier of the terrestrial landscape and the plains of the sea,' in this geographic area. All this, says Barthes, even though Twombly starts with material and marks that have no analogy 'with the great Mediterranean radiance'.<sup>232</sup> Thus, as well as 'including' signifiers in the image, the painting as a whole can be conceived as a signifier of the painter's experience. It is not a *sign* for the Bay of Naples because of the lack of being a pre-agreed societal connection of signifier and signified, as for instance a picture postcard might be. But it can be seen as a signifier of something of importance for the painter, the Mediterranean, and can create an 'effect' to that end. The notion of 'effect' can be seen as an 'interim' notion between signifier and sign, between meaningless marks and 'meaningful' images – in other words it is a 'phenomenon' which is not explicated by Lacan's notion of the signifier.

Thus this painting can be seen in terms of Lacan's ideas of signifier and sign. But my question remains concerning any sense of 'expression', or visceral excitement.

Liotard's notions of 'figure' and intensities of libido metamorphosing into images are more helpful than Lacan's notion of signifiers in this instance (see Section 2 below). As such Liotard's ideas highlight 'deficiencies' of Lacan's notion of signifiers and help to account for Barthes' idea of effect insofar as the notion of 'effect' can be seen to rely partly on affect and its *effect* on a structure of signifiers.

#### 1.1.10 Caveats - signifiers

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<sup>230</sup> Roland Barthes, "The Wisdom of Art", *Calligram*, ed. Norman Bryson (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988), 174, in which Barthes describes his notion of 'effect'.

<sup>231</sup> Barthes, "Wisdom", 174. (My addition and emphasis).

<sup>232</sup> Barthes, "Wisdom", 174.



**ILLUSTRATION 2.2**

**ILLUSTRATION 2.3**

Again we see that Lacan offers useful ideas in terms of image making, for instance the (possible) approach to the real through the un-thought stage of ir-rational content (signifiers) and processes. However, again we see that there are caveats. A problematic is articulated by James Elkins, who presents an ‘anti-semiotic’ stance. He proposes that:

Pictures are most interesting when neither alternative is possible [neither semiotics nor semeiotics] so that a viewer is forced to attend to the ways that outlandish and partly incomprehensible marks both hinder and enable whatever story the picture seems to tell. The incoherence of the pictures begins here, with the admission that things are very strange indeed.<sup>233</sup>

He argues that there are graphic marks that are neither ‘visual chaos’ nor similar to ‘signs of writing or notation’. He gives a number of examples of particular manifestations: for instance, ‘marks swirled into washes, scumbled into larger areas or smudged into continuous gradations [where] they lose their disjointedness but not the *idea* of disjunction’.<sup>234</sup> The play between particular types of marks and contours on the one hand, and ‘stepless’ change on the other is also part of the way marks carry meaning. He proposes that ‘graphic marks’ be understood as objects that are simultaneously signs and not signs, calling this ‘visual semiotics’. Certain visual phenomena are ‘ignored’ by the viewer as inconsequential to what is seen as the ‘image’. In other words, for Elkins, the notion of signifier is not adequate to describe all aspects of imagistic ‘content’. While he is speaking from the viewer’s point of view, for me the un-thought stage in the process of image making can be seen as one locus and/or agency for this manifestation of ‘incoherence’ that can nevertheless result in an ‘effect’. Thus, even though the Lacanian signifier has proved helpful in understanding some relationships between the ‘content’ of the unconscious and its manifestation as marks and images, other opinions indicate that there are imagistic phenomena not included in Lacan’s conceptualisation of the signifier as such.<sup>235</sup> Barthes’ notion of ‘effect’, as seen earlier (Section 1.1.9), is also relevant here in pointing out that ‘partly incomprehensible marks’ can contribute to an ‘effect’ which is integral to the understanding and appreciation of the overall image, and yet that are not seen as particular signifiers or signs. This is considered further in Chapter Five, Section 5.

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<sup>233</sup> J. Elkins, *On Paintings and the Words that Fail Them* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998), particularly Chapter One.

<sup>234</sup> Elkins, ‘Paintings’, Chapter 1.

<sup>235</sup> There is the further point that there is an inherent link between the content and process of the unconscious and the mysterious stage of image making. See in relation to this point A. Schore, *Affect Regulation and the Origin of the Self* (Hove, U.K., Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers, 1998), in which he summarises his recent research in the area of neuro-psychology, that of right/left brain research. He further develops the idea that there is an inherent link between the workings of the unconscious and the workings of the right brain, on the one hand, and the way images ‘work’, on the other.

A further caveat concerns the (re-iterated) question of the relationship of signifier and affect, visceral reactions. Earlier the question was: how to re-attach meaning, meaning which is assumed to have been attached at some prior moment (for instance as the event is being ‘perceived’) and then ‘lost’ in terms of ir-rational primary processing. For Lacan, as we have seen, meaning can be ‘re-attached’ by means of linguistic-type tropes, for instance by means of association of ideas. This is complicated by the fact that for me meaning can also arise directly from affect. While the notion of the unconscious as unrealized approaches a tenable analogy to mark making, there is still the point that signifiers as ‘defined’ do not include affect, even though they may be re-presentations of affect.<sup>236</sup>

## 1.2 ‘Subject matter’ of the unconscious

### 1.2.1 Individual ‘censored chapters’

Having now considered Lacan’s notions about the ‘text’ of the unconscious as signifiers, I can now consider the ‘subject matter’ of the unconscious. One aspect of the subject matter is Lacan’s notion of ‘individual censored chapters’, about which he maintains: ‘The unconscious is that part of the concrete discourse, in so far as it is transindividual (someone, somewhere knows) that is not at the disposal of the subject in re-establishing the continuity of his conscious discourse.’<sup>237</sup> In this sense, these chapters are an individual’s ‘extimate’ (intimate but not consciously available) knowledge, in that others may know of these events, but the individual concerned does not ‘know’. Again, Lacan terms the knowledge ‘unrealized’. However, he proposes that this knowledge can be ‘rediscovered’ by the individual. The notion of the unrealized results in (and supports) his notion that the unconscious embodies the function of *cause*, as opposed to that which is determined in a ‘chain’, where something is happening in the arena of ‘Law’.<sup>238</sup> In terms of the process of image making I see this as adding an element of the personal, the subjective, to what has so far been a more universal and transindividual idea of the order of the symbolic.

### 1.2.2 The notion of ‘Other’

The second aspect of the ‘subject matter’ of the unconscious is Lacan’s notion of ‘Other’ with a capital ‘O’. This concept is complementary to that of the subject, it encompasses the

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<sup>236</sup> Lacan also posits the notion of the screen, which I see as a reflection of the unconscious into the arena of the subjective.

<sup>237</sup> Lacan, ‘Ecrits’, 49.

<sup>238</sup> Lacan, ‘Seminar XI’, 21.

notion of the signifier, and is seen as the realm of the symbolic. The notion of the 'Other' is similar to the notion of 'censored chapters', but it has a different emphasis in that rather than 'extimate' knowledge particularized for a given subject, it is a trans-personal knowledge. The Other can also be seen as particularized in a subject for another subject. The Other in general is seen as the symbolic, the discourse of the 'unconscious', the locus of speech and an arena for the attempted treating of the real by means of the symbolic. Seen as a broader canvas, it is for instance culture as a whole. This 'originary' Other is exemplified and particularized in the discourse of the Other (first as mother) such that the desire of the subject is that point of lack where the desire of the mother is beyond what *she* (as mother) is able to articulate as meaning. The concept of the Other is included here because it is so closely related to the idea of the symbolic and the unconscious. It is also closely related to the notion of the gaze itself, in that both incorporate the idea that the unconscious plays a significant but 'invisible' role for the subject in terms of perceptions 'received', 'knowledge' accepted, and conclusions 'reached' and adopted. The significance for the un-thought stage of image making is that 'surprises' may result, in not having been pre-apparent to the rational self/subject/mind, and in not having been pre-determined by previous cultural 'discoveries' (or inertias). There are a number of aspects of Lacan's notion of Other that are relevant to the un-thought stage of image making, as I now consider.

#### 1.2.2.1 Where speech is constituted

The Other, for Lacan is 'the locus in which speech is constituted'.<sup>239</sup> The 'location' of speech and language, therefore, is not the ego, not the subject, but the Other. Speech and language are beyond conscious control, and so come from 'beyond' consciousness, in that our language pre-exists us as the cultural milieu into which we are born. Therefore, argues Lacan, 'the unconscious is the discourse of the Other', in the sense discussed earlier (Chapter One, Section 3.3) that unconscious desire is made up of a 'lack' in the discourse of the mother. There is, then, a reflexive relationship between subject and Other, in that the Other is an influence on, and particularized in, the individual, but with much of its importance and influence located as a transindividual unconscious rather than in the conscious mind. Again we see the subject as subject to the unconscious (Other). Nevertheless the Other, like the symbolic, is closely linked with lack and desire. The discourse of the Other, he states, 'indicate[s] the beyond in which the recognition of desire is bound up with the desire for recognition'.<sup>240</sup> Lacan's use of the word 'Other' implies not only the locus of the constitution of speech but also the locus of the process

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<sup>239</sup> Lacan, 'Seminar III', 274.

<sup>240</sup> Lacan, 'Ecrits', 267. (My addition.)

of image making, being also symbolic. For me, these ideas are intricately connected to the un-thought stage, in that it is this stage that most obviously ‘allows’ the ‘emergence’ of unrealized material, whether it be marks or words.

#### 1.2.2.2 As praxis

A second theoretical aspect of the notion of the Other involves the notion of praxis. For Lacan, praxis ‘designates a concerted human action, whatever it may be [in his case the practice of psychoanalysis], which places man in a position to treat the real by the symbolic.’<sup>241</sup> I understand that ‘treating’ of the real (in other words for Lacan, lack and desire) by the symbolic is also the position of many painters, in that there is a search, in some way, for ‘truth’ by means of the symbolic, as seen in the discussion above about ‘truth and knowledge’ (Section 1.1.8). The praxis here is image making.

#### 1.2.2.3 As cause

A third way Lacan considers this notion of the Other is as *cause*, where, he proposes: ‘[...] the Freudian unconscious is situated at that point where, between cause and that which it affects, there is always something wrong’, meaning a surprise, a shock, an unexpected jump of some sort.<sup>242</sup> The Other can be seen as beyond the limits of what any individual can know, in that some things will always exceed one’s knowledge. This is the Other as the ‘unrealized’. It can manifest in image making such that the emerging image, as Other, can surprise us, as makers, as well as surprising viewers. In other words, an image can be thought of as Other in the same sense that another subject can be Other, which is to say insofar as it represents something of the Other for the subject (the painter and/or the viewer). The Other is the locus in which images are *constituted*, because insofar as the Other is unrealized it is difficult for the conscious mind to ‘plan’ and ‘execute’; instead it is necessary to offer an encouraging environment, the un-thought stage, if surprise and the real are of interest.<sup>243</sup> For me, an example of the Other as the locus in which images can be constituted is Beuys’ large collection of early drawings, titled ‘Secret Block for a Secret Person in Ireland’. It has been suggested that this collection may have been meant as a ‘gift’ to James Joyce. I would go further, however, and say it is a document in

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<sup>241</sup> Lacan, ‘Seminar XI’, 6. (My addition.)

<sup>242</sup> Lacan, ‘Seminar XI’, 22.

<sup>243</sup> As an example in which language and making images are put on to an ‘equal footing’, Antonin Artaud says: ‘My drawings are documents...’. One can see in many of his drawings the erasures, the scrubbing through the paper, burning parts of the paper, as though he were trying to pierce and thus to document the very surface (subjectile) of his unconscious in order to enter this domain. (Quoted from writings by Artaud in J. Derrida and P. Thevenin, *The Secret Art of Antonin Artaud*, trans. Mary Ann Caws, (Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, 1998 (1986)), 106.

‘reply’ to ‘Finnegan’s Wake’. This is in the sense that Beuys felt that he was experimenting both with the idea of representation itself (as did Joyce), as well as with an attempt to manifest ideas as they were developing in his head. In this sense Beuys was experimenting with ideas as yet ‘un-realized’ (Illustrations 1.1, 2.1, and 3.1). As discussed earlier, ‘true’ images in visual art would be able to join one subject (the maker) to another subject (the viewer) who was on the other side of the wall of the ‘system of signs’ called images; this would be a communication of the ‘real’, and as such, difficult or impossible to achieve. As Lacan states, this is only an ideal, but for me it makes clearer some aspects of ‘what’ is happening in the un-thought stage of image making, and what might be seen to be a goal. It is seen to be mysterious, or even chaotic, because something is happening on the level of the ‘wall’, the attempt to represent the un-representable and/or the unrealized, the attempt not only to ‘tap’ the unconscious but also to ‘pierce’, as if in metaphor, the support by means of marks, erasures, etc. A ‘cause’ is trying to initiate an ‘effect’. This is reminiscent of Antonin Artaud’s work, as discussed by Derrida, where Derrida makes an issue of the term ‘subjectile’ as it is used by Artaud (Illustration 2.4).<sup>244</sup> Derrida interprets this as being, for Artaud, the surface of the paper (support for Artaud’s drawings), which gets burned, scraped, or distressed by Artaud, as well as the nominal ‘surface’ or surface membrane (thus subjectile) of the unconscious itself, as though scraping and burning *that* surface away to get closer to a truth for which he was searching. In other words, in Lacan’s terms, this can be seen as an (extreme) example of the attempt of the artist to grapple with and re-present his ‘truth’.

#### 1.2.2.4 Caveat - Other

In amongst these ideas of Lacan, there arises a caveat for me. Lacan sees the unconscious as the discourse of the Other that consists of signifiers, and as such the unconscious is a ‘cause’ that has yet to be ‘realized’.<sup>245</sup> For Lacan: ‘The unconscious is that which is in the subject but can be realized only outside, that is to say in the locus of the Other in which alone it may assume its status.’<sup>246</sup> However the notion of ‘re-attachment’ of meaning remains opaque. As I have already discussed, in terms of images I understand that in some instances marks can be seen as signifiers, a transitional concept between mental material and manifestation. I see that the unconscious mental material may have ‘associations’ as it is assimilated. But the irrational primary processes work over this material, resulting in the inchoate, according to Freud and Lacan, and, as we shall see, also Lyotard. What *then* happens in terms of image making? Marks

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<sup>244</sup> Derrida and Thevenin, ‘The Secret Art of Antonin Artaud’, in the section called ‘*to Unsense the subjectile*’. See the reproduction of the drawing by Artaud, Illustration 2.4.

<sup>245</sup> Lacan, ‘Seminar XI’, 131.

<sup>246</sup> Lacan, ‘Seminar XI’, 147. (My addition).

**ILLUSTRATION 2.4**



are made, associations are made. What keeps them related? What can produce ‘harmony’, relatedness, *as they emerge*? Why is the result not complete and total chaos? What links or associations are maintained in Other and unconscious, both ‘internally’ and as they emerge in ‘response’ to some stimulus?

One way of understanding this is that in the un-thought stage the ‘marks resulting in images’ come first, and meaning may be ‘added’ later, as the images evolve and ‘come together’ with other mental associations over the spiralling three stages of image making (as posited in the Introduction, Section 1.1). In such a case, meaning, as it develops, is implied by Lacan to be random with regard to the signifiers from which it is ‘developing’. In addition to this the connection between signifiers and affect is opaque. However I maintain that, in the studio, there is (often) a relatedness and ‘harmony’ of marks from the beginning, and my question is: how can this be explained by Lacan’s ideas? I don’t believe that it can, except obliquely by the notion of initial diachrony (but prey to chaotic distortion by primary processes) as stated earlier (Section 1.1.10) with regard to perception. I consider the contestations of Lyotard and of Deleuze and Guattari in Section 2.

On the one hand, in spite of my caveats, I continue to believe that Lacan provides a useful foundation for a better understanding of the value of the un-thought stage of image making. For instance, this value includes a consideration of the un-thought stage as reflecting results of primary processes. On the other hand, the authors Deleuze and Guattari, as well as Lyotard, provide a wider context within which to view Lacan’s concepts within the present context.

## Section 2: Contestations and extensions

### 2.1 Lyotard

#### 2.1.1 Figure and dissimulation

Having contested Lacan’s notion of lack as the basis of the unconscious, as we saw in Section 2 of Chapter One, Lyotard proposes further that (as opposed to Lacan) the real *can* be seen to interact with the symbolic, and that ‘expression’ can be seen to ‘emerge’ as a

consequence.<sup>247</sup> He retains Lacan's idea of signifiers and signs as being of importance, but he proposes that there is more to the story. Lyotard relates 'meaning' to Lacan's concept of structures of signs. He then relates 'expression' to Lacan's notion of desire/libido. He agrees that *meaning* as encompassed (or not) by structures of signs (signs seen as signifier allied with signified) does not automatically, and indeed cannot theoretically, include *expression* (affect, feeling). But, in line with his interest in the libidinal economy in general, and within the general context of Freudian/Lacanian thinking, he proposes a remedy. This is a notion he terms the 'figural'. The 'figure' is the 'influence' on the field of the semantic by the libido. Lyotard agrees with Lacan's proposals that the linguistic structure of signs, working by means of difference (although of course for Lacan based on the primary signifier, the phallus), can be seen as the basis of language and meaning. However Lyotard argues that this structure can be 'dissimulated'. Dissimulation is the ability of the energy of the libido to 'bend' the structure(s) of signs, such that 'figure' (expression) is the result.

To explain the idea of dissimulation in terms of art, Lyotard proposes that meaning can result from looking 'into' a piece of art, for example from a notion of theatricality that carries on from his ideas as seen in Chapter One, Section 3. Theatricality for Lyotard has to do with the idea of the difference between, but the conjunction of, reality and phantasy, or inside and outside, or house and stage, in other words the existence of 'disreal' spaces.<sup>248</sup> Lyotard argues that historically art works have fallen into this arena of theatricality with a characteristic 'quieting of pre-conscious censorship'. This results in an understanding of the work of art as reducing the necessity for the 'function' of censor. But Lyotard says: 'no longer does it [art] have essentially, not to say exclusively, the role that Freud assigns to it of quieting pre-conscious censorship', by consciously assigning it to an arena of phantasy and thus other than an arena of reality.<sup>249</sup> Instead Lyotard's concern is with *the function of form*. He argues that through figure, and dissimulation, works of art include expression, not by means of the signifiers without meaning, or the system of signs with (deferred) meaning, and not by being in a 'place' of a lowered censorship, but instead by means of the *dissimulation* of these structures of signs by the workings of the libido. Thus, for Lyotard, both the structure of signs and the notion of figure, in other words concepts of meaning and expression taken in conjunction, are necessary to a clearer understanding of the overall content and process of art. I see this as dissimulation of systems of signs by libidinal energy, resulting in apparent changes to the shape

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<sup>247</sup> 'Expression' in this case has a different meaning to that being used when speaking of the Expressionist movement, where the painter attempted to illustrate or 're-present' his/her feelings and thoughts.

<sup>248</sup> Lyotard, "Beyond", 156.

<sup>249</sup> Lyotard, "Beyond", 157. For instance, there are artists who involve themselves substantially with formal considerations.

or form of, or within, the object. For him, this ‘figure’, in a work of art, refers to a ‘certain density’, which cannot be described or translated into words, as can the meaning, but which is contained as a distortion *within* the ‘structure’ of the words or image.<sup>250</sup> Lyotard refers to this ‘certain density’ as ‘intensities’ of libidinal energy. ‘Expression’, argues Lyotard, ‘is the presence in the secondary process, in discourse and in realist representations, of operations belonging to the unconscious system.’<sup>251</sup> For me, this explains the relationship of these notions to the un-thought stage, in that these intensities are not planned or conscious phenomena. In other words, although secondary revision can delete much ‘censor-able’ material, some aspects of the primary process and the libido seep through (for instance they appear to the conscious mind as being of little or no consequence to the project in hand).

Lyotard identifies three types of ‘figure’: an *image* ‘induced in the viewers mind’ (an example in art would be elements as ‘perceived’ and/or retained in the viewer’s mind), the *trope*, or order of artistic signifiers (which could be exemplified in terms of style, or ‘code’ of the image), and the *form* of the representation (as for instance drawing, painting, materials, and so on). These result in the expression of a different kind of meaning than that of the work’s ‘immediate significance.’ He mentions the work of Van Gogh as an example, where the paintings themselves provide much more, qualitatively and quantitatively, than is provided in Van Gogh’s descriptions, in his letters to his brother, of what it is that he is painting, and painting about.

Lyotard exemplifies this difference between meaning and expression by discussing the work of Marcel Duchamp and Barnett Newman (Illustrations 2.5 and 2.6).<sup>252</sup> His argument is that the large glass of Duchamp is (in the main) an organization of symbols, of codes, which presents certain ideas (and certain confusions), but which can, in effect and with study, be ‘decoded’ into articulated ideas, at least to a degree. On the other hand, he says, a work by Newman, for instance *Onement*, has no codes or symbols to be interpreted or translated. Rather, it can have the *effect* of making the viewer become aware of his *own* presence there in front of the painting. The viewer’s attention or awareness is channelled away from ‘going into’ the work in front of him and its interpretation, as required in the Duchamp piece, and instead awareness ‘bounces back’ to that of the viewer’s own perceptual processes and concomitant bodily existence. In other words, the painting seems to empty out and the viewer becomes re-focused, away from immersion in ‘meaning’ ‘within’ the representation that becomes predominantly

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<sup>250</sup> J-F. Lyotard, “The Psychoanalytic Approach to Artistic and Literary Expression”, in *Toward the Post-Modern*, eds. R. Harvey and M.S. Roberts (Amherst, New York, Humanity Books, 1999 (1978)).

<sup>251</sup> Lyotard, “Approach”.

<sup>252</sup> See J-F. Lyotard, “Newman”.

**ILLUSTRATION 2.5**

**ILLUSTRATION 2.6**

important as an intellectual endeavour. In front of the Newman piece, the intensities of ‘energy’ of the colour field and the structure of the painting, together with the lack of symbols, is one in which sensorily induced affective reactions to the object become predominantly important, as an experiential, visceral, phenomenon. The latter is a reaction that is less easily explained by means of signifiers. In other words, one is an intellectual adventure, while the other is an adventure of bodily participation, although of course each piece of work involves something of both types of experience.<sup>253</sup>

These two forms of interpretation, meaning and expression, are discussed in Lyotard’s article ‘The Tensor’, where he states that the libidinal economy aspect, or ‘figure’, is not meant as a substitute for the semiotic, but can be read ‘under its cover’, so to speak.<sup>254</sup>

He also does this in his article ‘The Dream-work Does Not Think’ in speaking of secondary revision (and indeed the figure) being present in both the form and the foundation – the underlying fantasy and the ‘text as object’.<sup>255</sup> In another essay, his analysis of the shortcomings of the semiotic analysis leads him to suggest an account of the ‘economy’ of works of art as being:

cast in libidinal terms [which] would have as its central presupposition the affirmative character of works; they are not in place of anything; they do not stand for, but stand; that is to say, they function through their material and its organization. Their subject is nothing other than a possible formal organization (not an inevitable or necessary organization); and it conceals no content, no libidinal secret of the work, whose force lies entirely in its surface.<sup>256</sup>

In this way Lyotard extends Lacan’s notion of the signifier. He critiques what he sees as Lacan’s binary between meaning and expression, and instead amalgamates the two ideas as a material surface. This begins to address my concern about the place for affect within the semiotic domain, and I see it as showing a way forward for reconciling the meaningless signifier and the meaningful sign, where the libido as a dissimulator of the structure of signs can introduce expressivity into this structure. The consideration of further relevant aspects of Lyotard’s work, and their relationship to Lacan’s ideas, is continued in the next chapter, concerning processes of the unconscious. But first I want to consider a set of ideas that can

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<sup>253</sup> As Lyotard has overcome ‘opposition’ between expression and meaning by means of his notions of dissimulation (within the structure of language), there is a similar ‘dissimulation’ (within the system of signs) proposed for images.

<sup>254</sup> J.-F. Lyotard, “The Tensor”, in *The Lyotard Reader*, ed. A. Benjamin (Oxford, Blackwell Publishers, 1989), 9.

<sup>255</sup> J.-F. Lyotard, “The Dream-Work Does Not Think”, in *The Lyotard Reader*, ed. A. Benjamin (Oxford, Blackwell Publishers, 1989), 41-51.

<sup>256</sup> Lyotard, “Beyond”, 158.

provide a useful ‘bridge’ between Lacan’s and Lyotard’s ideas, showing them to be more compatible than is at first obvious.

## Section 2.2 Deleuze and Guattari in ‘Anti-Oedipus’

The work of Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, as seen particularly in their book ‘Anti-Oedipus’, contests some of Lacan’s views and supports others, in terms that are relevant to the paradigm of the unthought stage of image making.<sup>257</sup> While psychoanalysis bases its model of the psyche on the process (or condition) of neurosis (not the neurotic individual), with its guilt, lack and fear and its basis in the nuclear family, Deleuze and Guattari propose ‘schizoanalysis’ as a model of the psyche based on the process of schizophrenia (not the clinical schizophrenic), emphasizing scattering, and breaks and flows, of energy.<sup>258</sup>

At the root of the concept of schizoanalysis is the notion of desiring-machine production, which Deleuze and Guattari insist is *not* a metaphor.<sup>259</sup> There are several ways of understanding this ‘machine’ of which they speak (meaning the workings of desire) and its three modes. One mode is that ‘Every machine [...] is related to a continuing material flow that it cuts into,’ for instance the mouth that cuts off the flow of milk, of air, of sound.<sup>260</sup> The second mode is:

every machine has a sort of code built into it, stored up inside it. This code is inseparable not only from the way in which it is recorded and transmitted to each of the different regions of the body, but also from the way in which the relations of each of the regions with all the others are recorded.

For example, an organ may have connections that associate it with several different flows; it may waver between several functions, and even take on the regime of another organ – the anorectic mouth, for instance. ‘These indifferent codes [indifferent in the sense of no signification] follow no plan, they function at all levels and enter into any and every sort of connection’.<sup>261</sup> These codes approach Lacan’s idea of signifier in terms of having no signified. The third mode is the residual break, which produces a subject alongside the machine, functioning as a part adjacent to the machine. This subjective break, they say, ‘is not at all an

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<sup>257</sup> G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus, Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. R. Hurley, M. Seem, and H.R. Lane (London, The Athlone Press, 1984 (1972)).

<sup>258</sup> From the vast array (dare I say structure) of schizoanalytic notions, ideas and concepts, I propose to choose only those which pertain to the psychoanalytic ideas chosen as being immediately relevant to the ‘un-thought’ stage of image making, thus providing a balance to, and additional context for, Lacan’s ideas, while not considering Deleuze and Guattari’s contributions in other directions such as in the political arena.

<sup>259</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, 41. Note that Deleuze and Guattari speak of ‘desire’ in a different sense than does Lacan. It is closer to what Lyotard terms ‘libido’, as being defined as a life energy, not an energy engendered by lack.

<sup>260</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, 36.

<sup>261</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, 38. (My addition).

indication of a lack [...] but on the contrary a share that falls to the subject as part of the whole, income that comes its way as something left over.’<sup>262</sup> They refer to this as consumption (or ‘consommation’). They provide a ‘shorthand’ summary of these processes by naming the three stages:

- production of production: a ‘connective’ synthesis,
- production of recording: a ‘disjunctive’ synthesis, and
- production of consumption: a ‘conjunctive’ synthesis.

### 2.2.1 Lack

Deleuze and Guattari (as well as Lyotard) do not agree that Lacan’s concept of ‘lack’ provides a credible explanation of the basis of the unconscious and the well-spring of desire. They propose instead a re-thinking and re-visualizing of libidinal energy and its relationship to what we call the unconscious. In particular they make a radical move away from psychoanalytic concepts of lack. They argue that Lacan’s idea of lack (an ‘insufficiency of being’, or a ‘lost object’) as a *basis* of the unconscious, is incorrect, on the basis that the idea of lack is a belief, not an energy. Deleuze and Guattari say:

The schizoanalytic argument is simple: desire is a machine, a synthesis of machines, a machinic arrangement – desiring-machines. The order of desire is the order of *production*; all production is at once desiring-production and social production. We therefore reproach psychoanalysis for having stifled this order of production, for having shunted it into *representation*. Far from showing the boldness of psychoanalysis, this idea of unconscious representation marks from the outset its bankruptcy or its abnegation: an unconscious that no longer produces, but is content to *believe*. The unconscious believes in Oedipus, it believes in castration, in the law. It is doubtless true that the psychoanalyst would be the first to say that, everything considered, belief is not an act of the unconscious; it is always the preconscious that believes.<sup>263</sup>

In other words they disagree with an unconscious seen as made up of representations, Lacan’s linguistic orientation, and propose instead the idea of an unconscious based on the libido as a basic life ‘force’. They point out that in even the psychoanalytic paradigm, production ‘continues to rumble, to throb beneath the representative agency that suffocates it.’<sup>264</sup> On this basis they propose that the concepts developed by Lacan (Other, signifier, with lack and desire as a basis of the unconscious) indicate, or presume, that beliefs, concepts, representation are present at a certain, but not *originating*, level of the unconscious. Furthermore they propose that these beliefs and concepts can place restrictions and limitations upon the

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<sup>262</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, 40. (‘Subject’ is used here as subject to the unconscious as discussed in Chapter One Section 2.)

<sup>263</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, 296.

<sup>264</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, 297.



libido, consistent with an economic model of the drive. For Deleuze and Guattari, the *basis* of the unconscious is pure libidinal energy, with attendant breaks and flows.

### 2.2.2 Desire and the ‘body without organs’

Concerning desire, Deleuze and Guattari say: ‘the sign of desire is never a sign of the law, it is a sign of strength (*puissance*)’.<sup>265</sup> In other words, desire is not a signifier in the representational sense, nor is it dependent upon a belief (in lack); instead it is power itself, an energy, wildly scattered and scattering.<sup>266</sup> Here we return to the idea of libido as force, or energy, as in Lyotard’s ideas and as in Freud’s ‘economic’ proposals for desire.<sup>267</sup> Deleuze and Guattari say of desiring:

It is at work everywhere, functioning smoothly at times, at other times in fits and starts. It breathes, it heats, it eats [...]. Everywhere *it* is machines – real ones: machines driving other machines, machines being driven by other machines, with all the necessary couplings and connections. An organ-machine is plugged into an energy-source-machine: the one produces a flow that the other interrupts. The breast is a machine that produces milk and the mouth a machine coupled to it. [...] Something is produced, not mere metaphor.<sup>268</sup>

They posit that desire, for them the energy of the libido, is a given, a bottom line, in the constitution of human individuals, in the constitution of life itself. It is an immanent energy, manifesting (optimally) in desiring-production.<sup>269</sup> They speak of ‘desiring-machines’ in connection not only with breaks and flows of energy, but as energy flows that can actually produce in the sense of forming syntheses. Desiring-machines occur in both molecular and molar circumstances (for instance, neurologically and in terms of belief). The interesting questions for them, they say, are how to ‘describe’ desire, and what can ‘become’ of it, both individually and socially. The unconscious, they argue, is ‘ignorant’: ‘it knows nothing of castration or Oedipus, just as it knows nothing of parents, gods, the law, lack’.<sup>270</sup> The unconscious does not ‘believe’, it just ‘produces’. The unconscious, they say, is not structural or personal; it does not symbolize, imagine, or represent. The unconscious engineers, is machinic. The unconscious is the ‘real’ in itself, the ‘impossible real’ and its production.<sup>271</sup>

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<sup>265</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, 111.

<sup>266</sup> This is scattering in a different sense than as used by Ehrenzweig later in the thesis: here I understand scattering to imply not a process developed for a purpose (for instance to enable fight or flight reactions based on a perceptual and rational basis), but rather a process of energy production and dissemination that facilitates production by desiring-machines.

<sup>267</sup> Reference for this is Freud’s ‘economic’ theory, as seen for instance in ‘Interpretation’, Chapter 7, especially the section on ‘regression’, where Freud develops an idea of the excitation and paths of excitation taking place in the psyche.

<sup>268</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, 1-2.

<sup>269</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, 110.

<sup>270</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, 61.

<sup>271</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, 53.

I see these ideas as a *context* within which to approach more directly the un-thought stage. The un-thought stage is then an aspect of the content and processes of the (human) unconscious at the *molar* level. In other words there is a level at which beliefs and concepts influence and/or thwart the flow of desire, but this is what might be termed a ‘deep pre-conscious’ level rather than the level of the unconscious. Hereafter I term this the ‘human unconscious’ to differentiate it from Deleuze and Guattari’s more comprehensive notion of the unconscious, but avoiding the connotations of the term ‘preconscious’.

In the schizoanalytic view, the *repression* of desire is equivalent to the repression of ‘production’. In terms of their interest in the breaks and flows of libido, Deleuze and Guattari say: ‘Oedipus presupposes a fantastic repression of desiring machines.’<sup>272</sup> This is in the sense of the *concept* (Oedipus as lack) closing down desire in many directions. Again they are ‘admitting’ the importance of Oedipus, but ‘re-locating’ it. Repression does exist in schizoanalysis, where it is seen as breaks rather than flows of energy. As well as potentially causing malfunction and even stasis, breaks can play an important part in the *functioning* of production.

To understand this, it is necessary to understand Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of a non-productive identity (or agent) termed the ‘body without organs’ – the body without an image. The body without organs is seen to be, for instance, the earth, or the *socius* (the body of the social or society). When that ‘body’ reaches a catatonic state of inertia, a total lack of intensities, it is termed a ‘full body without organs’. It then ‘belongs to the realm of antiproduction.’<sup>273</sup> While an *element* of antiproduction is a necessary concomitant to production, the *full* body without organs involves a non-productive stasis to the point of catatonia – or death. One way of thinking about the ‘body without organs’ is as a version of Lacan’s notion of ‘Other’, in that it can include symbolism, the trans-personal field of knowledge as an entity. Deleuze and Guattari have developed this notion in pursuit of their own ends, in connection with desiring-production, and independent of the notion of beliefs, at least at the molecular level. What emerges from Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the body without organs is the idea of ‘primary repression’ defined as the *repulsion* of desiring-machines by the body without organs.<sup>274</sup> In other words, what becomes important in normal production is the ‘opposition of the process of *production* of

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<sup>272</sup> Oedipus here implies the myth and more importantly the complex. Deleuze and Guattari, 3. Note that their use of schizophrenia is a matter of process, not the description of a schizophrenic patient: ‘the artificial schizophrenic found in mental institutions is a result of tampering with the process of production’ (5).

<sup>273</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, 8.

<sup>274</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, 8

the desiring-machines and the *non-productive stasis* of the body without organs'.<sup>275</sup> But extra repression and stasis ensue when there is an overload of anti-production.

### 2.2.3 Signifiers and libido

Deleuze and Guattari say:

What the schizophrenic experiences, both as an individual and as a member of the human species, is not at all any one specific aspect of nature [e.g. the production of sexual pleasure], but nature as a process of production.<sup>276</sup>

For Deleuze and Guattari production and consumption are understood as immediate and un-mediated processes (i.e. 'no intermediate, interfering laws, lacks, myths, beliefs'). As stated above, they posit an equally un-mediated production of a 'recording' process, which I understand as a 'non-human' version of the symbolic.<sup>277</sup> They say:

the recording process and consumption directly determine production, though they do so within the production process itself. Hence everything is production: *production of productions*, of actions and of passions; *productions of recording processes*, of distributions and of co-ordinates that serve as points of reference; *productions of consumptions*, of sensual pleasures, of anxieties, and of pain.<sup>278</sup>

Note here the interesting point that emotions (passions) *result* from the desiring-production machines and their process. Everything is seen as a process of breaks and flows of the underlying desire, even the idea of 'expression' is one which can be explained in this manner.<sup>279</sup> In this way they avoid describing even the expression of affect, without relating it to the process of production.

Deleuze and Guattari not only critique, but extend Lacan's, and to some extent Lyotard's, understanding of the cooperation (or co-existence) between signifiers, signs and the libido, in other words the relationship between the symbolic and the real, as relevant to the un-thought stage. They do this by expanding and strengthening the idea of the libido and its role and influence by way of their proposal that desiring-machines produce either 'desiring production' or 'social production' (depending on the context) and are thus integral. The coding produced is concomitant with desiring production, which is described as an inscription on the 'body without organs'. Deleuze and Guattari congratulate Lacan for his notion that 'signifiers'

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<sup>275</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, 8.

<sup>276</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, 3. (My addition.)

<sup>277</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, 4. (My additions, their emphases.)

<sup>278</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, 4.

<sup>279</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, 6.

(their ‘codes’) in the unconscious are ‘meaningless’ (while dismissing his notion of the empty signifier). I see ‘codes’ and ‘signifiers’ as equivalent insofar as they serve a purpose, but both remaining ‘meaning-less’ as such. In terms of the idea of the ‘recording’ of ‘codes’ on the body without organs, they say:

If this constitutes a system of writing, it is a writing inscribed on the very surface of the Real: a strangely polyvocal kind of writing, never a bi-univocalized, linearized one; a transursive system of writing, never a discursive one; a writing that constitutes the entire domain of the “real inorganization” of the passive syntheses, where we would search in vain for something that might be labelled the Signifier – writing that ceaselessly composes and decomposes the chains into signs that have nothing that impels them to become signifying. The one vocation of the sign is to produce desire, engineering it in every direction.<sup>280</sup>

Here ‘signifiers/codes’ and desire are intimately interrelated. In the last sentence of this quotation, I understand ‘produce’ as being machinic in the sense of ‘encouraging’, or ‘directing’, the flow of desire, making it a functional notion in the sense of ‘engineering’ the breaks and flows in the ‘flow’ of libidinal energy. This puts into a different context Lacan’s theory of signifiers as the ‘text’ of the unconscious, in that it emphasizes the non-linguistic aspect of this so-called ‘text’. Deleuze and Guattari make more understandable the idea of a signifier as not having a meaning *per se*. For them it exists as a ‘code’, at some level between molecular and molar, in a machine where the machine has to do with neurology and the code is necessary in terms of production, for instance as if it were a code in a machine producing textiles. I had read Lacan’s notion of signifiers previously as referring to elements of language, even if (partially) in a basic imagistic sense (as hieroglyphs). Deleuze and Guattari are talking about codes as having a *function* rather than a (potential) meaning, because for them codes ‘engineer’. Lacan’s signifiers are exemplified through language, while Deleuze and Guattari’s ‘codes’ are understood on the level of the neurologically functional. But I don’t see this as mutually exclusive. They say: ‘[...] the unconscious of schizoanalysis is unaware of persons, aggregates, and laws, and of images, structures and symbols. The unconscious is not figurative, since its *figural* is abstract [...] it is not representation but solely machinic, and productive.’<sup>281</sup> This is close to Lacan, but in the context of a (desiring) machine code rather than an element of language.<sup>282</sup> Codes at a ‘molecular’ level of unconscious functioning are more understandable in

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<sup>280</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, 39.

<sup>281</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, 311.

<sup>282</sup> Deleuze and Guattari speak of ‘non-human’ sex at this molecular level. In another sense Lyotard (*The Inhuman* (Stanford, CA, Stanford University Press, 1991), 4-5) speaks of ‘the inhuman’ element of the human being, where humans ‘forget’ their helpless and indeterminate childhood before the process of acculturation. This is from a different point of view than that of Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of ‘non-human sex’, but it presents a similar result in that while their notion proposes a ‘libidinal’ underlayer to the human, Lyotard’s underlayer of the ‘inhuman’ is one of ‘animal’ life as seen in the young child but which may still result in what he terms the ‘unharmonizable’, the reluctance or resistance to the ‘humanizing’ which happens with ‘constraint and error’, for instance the ‘education’ which ‘Freud calls castration’.

these terms rather than in linguistic (but unrealized) terms, even though at a molar level the latter are comprehensible.

#### 2.2.4 Libido: qualitative and quantitative

There is another point of particular interest to this thesis. Deleuze and Guattari regard desire as having both qualitative and quantitative attributes. While quantitative attributes include levels of energy, qualitative attributes are seen in terms of liquidity, resistance, viscosity, and the like.<sup>283</sup> They discuss this in relation to the psychoanalytic ‘session’, but I propose that this can be seen in terms of libidinal energy both in the un-thought stage and processes of artistic production, and in resulting images (although not ‘symmetrically’, as one does not necessarily produce the other). Sometimes the process of making has a lugubrious or even tortured ‘feel’ to it, while sometimes it flows like clear water.

#### 2.2.5 Extensions: the ‘real’

It seems to me that in these Deleuze and Guattari terms the un-thought stage of image making can involve the *flow* (quality and quantity) of libido to result in production (the object) as well as the on-going *recording* of this flow on the body without organs. ‘Coding’ may operate at the level of the (non-human) unconscious (functional rather than representational), whereas all ‘representation’ (viz. signifiers) operates at the level of the ‘human’ unconscious, even though it is a very basic level (including the concept of lack and the Oedipus complex for instance). Both ‘codes’ and ‘signifiers’ may include aspects of memory and perception as Freud proposed with regard to the dreamwork, which can be seen to imply also image making. I propose that aspects of mark-making are representation (partly because based in a molar level of human unconscious and conscious making) but they also incorporate, partially at least, a ‘coding’ at a more ‘molecular’ level. We can now see ‘real’ defined by Lacan as (sexual) desire (human unconscious), and also ‘real’ as the (Deleuze and Guattari) unconscious based on the libido. Representation, in the sense in which Deleuze and Guattari speak of it, ‘no longer applies to a distinct object, but to a productive activity itself’, in other words, it is a process.<sup>284</sup> This is similar to Lyotard’s views about the ‘surface’ of the libido and its productions and intensities. Again the question of the relationship of the real to the symbolic arises; again discourse suggests that there is a ‘radical alterity’, albeit now in a differently defined context, that of libidinal

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<sup>283</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, 65-66.

<sup>284</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, 263.

energy seen as desiring machines and the symbolic seen as signifiers at the human level of the functioning of the unconscious.

### Section 3: Summary and implications

In this chapter I have discussed the considerable contributions made by Lacan's notions of the signifier and the Other to the understanding of the un-thought stage of image making. These include the notion of 'unrealized' signifiers as 'text' of the unconscious as well as some linguistic-type characteristics of these signifiers and their structure. What Lacan's idea of the signifier addresses most graphically in this context is *the 'leap' from the mind to materiality*, from the signifier in the unconscious to the mark as signifier on the artistic support, allowing us to conceptualise the 'link' on each 'side' being the signifier. The image can emerge as signifiers, then as a structure of signifiers, which may then mutate into a 'system of signs' (with Barthes as seen earlier), and include meaning. The signifier can be seen as a basis of the symbolic, and as unrealized 'text' of the unconscious in this reading.

For me there are several relevant implications. One is the idea of the potentiality of signifiers 'manifesting' as marks on an artistic support without 'rational' guidance, and the related idea that the gestalt (perception) and rationality (process) can *limit* the field of opportunity of slippage and surprise occasioned by the emergence of the real by way of (the appearance of) the unrealized symbolic. This is due to the predominance of signs rather than signifiers in the conscious mind, as seen in Section 1.1.7. A second implication relates to Lacan's definitions of truth and knowledge. The notion of signifiers enabling a glimpse of truth, being closely allied to desire and what I refer to as the 'real', can differentiate art from other imagery. This is at an individuated level of interest and experience. As I said above, the real can now be seen to be libidinal energy (Deleuze and Guattari) and/or sexual energy (Lacan - a result of 'lack'). The enabling of a glimpse of (individuated) 'truth' is what explains my thetic interest in the un-thought stage insofar as it can encourage the appearance of the real as intensities of libidinal energy. I see this in the close connection Deleuze and Guattari propose between coding and desiring machines – they are seen as interactive, inter-dependent and inter-related.

Another implication is related to Lacan's proposal that signifiers have both diachronous and synchronous 'links' in the unconscious, forming a structure there similar to linguistic structure. This structure is based on lack and its connection to the symbolic, by means of the primary signifier, as well as by means of the linguistic operations of metonymy and metaphor.

He sees signifiers as a type of communication, and as a link between perception and memory. One major implication for the un-thought stage is my queries about his notion of primary processes, in that they can be seen to 'break' these links of association between signifiers. At this stage of the thesis, this is still unresolved.

Lacan's concept of the Other contributes a sense of the Other as the unrealized, such that it can emerge as *cause* for us as individuals, resulting in shock and surprise. In this way the signifier and the Other are seen as closely related ideas. The Other is seen as the locus of the symbolic as humans make an effort to approach and communicate the real, on the one hand, and as the locus of transpersonal culture and language on the other hand. Implications for the un-thought stage include an enhanced understanding of the content of the unconscious as unrealized and trans-personal.

My caveats in Chapters One and Two have concerned the status of lack and desire as basic to Lacan's notion of the unconscious, in view of my interest in the relationship between what Lacan terms the realms of the real and the symbolic. In other words this involves notions of knowledge and truth, knowing and un-knowing, thinking and other mental processing, and the borderlines and boundaries of (visual) semiotics. When these are seen in the light of the un-thought stage of image making all result in the feeling that within Lacan's linguistic re-inscriptions of Freud's ideas, the question of meaning is too narrow when it de-emphasizes expression of affect/desire, and sees desire as a result of lack rather than a force in its own right. Lacan's propositions are helpful to, and provide a basis for, my enquiry, but, for me, do not provide 'the whole story', in terms of the connection between signifiers, meaning and affect (even though he does consider desire as 'existing' in what he terms the 'defiles of the signifier').

In terms of contestations of, and extensions to, Lacan's ideas, I see Lyotard's development of the notion of quite particular 'devices' of the libido, such as figure, dissimulation, and representations as 'intensities' of libidinal energy, as introducing a bridge between Lacan's notion of the 'linguistic' unconscious and Lyotard's 'intensities' of libidinal energy (see Chapter One, Section 2). At this point an initial synthesis can be achieved whereby Lyotard contributes the idea of figure and dissimulation to my debate and brings together Lacan's binary of meaning and expression.<sup>285</sup>

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<sup>285</sup> There are other ideas in terms of the connection of image making with the 'real'. For instance Kristeva proposes that in the semantic element of speech the speaking voice contributes in such a way that the materiality of voice and desire are not yet stripped away, as they are in for instance printed language. Even with handwriting there is the element of materiality of body and desire, seen in gesture and emphasis. (Julia Kristeva, 'Revolution in Poetic

Deleuze and Guattari contest Lacan's notion of lack, which they say ignores the overall picture. They argue that in any case 'lack' is based on belief and therefore cannot be a part of the unconscious. They propose different ideas in their notion of schizoanalysis. For me, this opens out a larger arena for thinking about the un-thought stage. This is done firstly by arguing for the flow of energy rather than the flow (or not) of specifically (lack-induced) sexual energy. The latter is not ruled out, but seen as a 'sub-set' of psychical phenomena. Secondly, by way of Lyotard, it provides an understanding of the image as other than (only) re-presentational, that is, also more directly influenced by codes, the 'production' in the 'real' (including the intensities of which Lyotard speaks), by means of what I can now understand as the force of the libido.<sup>286</sup>

I can now propose a direction for 'coming to terms' with my various queries and caveats. This direction is to *incorporate* into the Deleuze and Guattari notion of schizoanalysis that which Lacan terms 'lack', such that the latter is seen as being of (fundamental) importance in our culture, although not seen as the *basis* of the unconscious. In addition, there is the idea of 'codes' inscribed, which can be seen to include signifiers as a 'sub-set' at certain levels. My proposal, in line with that of Deleuze and Guattari, and as implied by Lyotard, is that human beliefs and concepts (for instance the Oedipus complex) can indeed result in Lacanian-type lack and 'sexual desire', with the associated phenomena and implications (signifiers, the symbolic, and the like). But there is more to the story in that not *all* libidinal energy is affected by such beliefs and concepts – some of our (creative) energy is less influenced by (for instance Oedipal) beliefs than others. In other words there are multiple libidinal pathways. The importance of this for image making is at this point quite subtle, since image making *is* on the whole representational, and subject to beliefs and concepts. My argument here is that what is at stake is the potential *influences* of libidinal energy per se, as well as lack driven desire, and the mixture of these influences in the un-thought stage.

In other words Deleuze and Guattari's arguments broaden the context within which Lacan's ideas are to be understood. include their notion of libido as an energy that is understandable by means of its results (production) that *form* the unconscious in the molecular sense and *on* which can be built representation and meaning in a molar sense. Deleuze and Guattari see Lacan's observations as being relevant not in the arena of the basic (schizoanalytic

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Language' (New York, Columbia University Press, 1983 (1974)). This I see as related to Lyotard's 'figure' and dissimulation and relevant to image making.

<sup>286</sup> There are the concomitant queries about the relationship of signifiers to both meaning and affect, which I discuss in the next chapter. I see Deleuze and Guattari's notion of schizoanalysis as tenable notions of the workings of the body/psyche, based on a depth of practical experience and I use it in this context. It can also be seen as a basis for considering political bases, connections and interactions in other contexts.



notion of the) unconscious, but in the arena of a particular ‘human layer’ of this unconscious (or perhaps, a ‘deep’ pre-conscious) that we as humans have evolved – thwarted sexual energy, beliefs, concepts and language. This implies varying qualities and quantities of libidinal energy extant at any given time. Lacan’s concepts of the unconscious, the gaze, the conquest of the symbolic would be very difficult to envisage *without* the concept of lack and the desire it engenders, Lyotard’s notions of figure and dissimulation notwithstanding. But understanding Lacan’s concept of the Oedipal as operating at a level of *belief* leaves room for other actions and interactions of different levels of ‘energy’. Deleuze and Guattari propose that ‘non-human’ sex is the unconscious investment of the large molar aggregates (social and or biological environments) such that ‘sexuality is everywhere’, while human’ sex involves persons, things, beliefs (needs and interests).<sup>287</sup> They posit that Lacan’s notion of the ‘Other’ is his attempt to ‘determine the non-human nature of sex’ (in seeing the Other as a body without organs, as discussed above).<sup>288</sup> In this way, the representations and beliefs of which Lacan speaks are still very pertinent when seen as being *supported* by, or within, such notions as those of production and desiring-machines developed by Deleuze and Guattari. In fact Lacan’s notion of desire in the defiles of the signifier is actually supported by the idea that there is a less thwarted flow of libidinal energy also ‘available’.

These ideas add to the understanding of the un-thought stage by proposing a (radical) context within which to ‘see’ the un-thought stage occurring, as well as a clearer idea of the un-thought stage as encompassing not only Lacan’s concepts of the unconscious in terms of origin, process and content, but also additional libidinal pathways, devices and intensities. There is a sense that the unconscious and its ‘energy’ is a ‘wider than human’ field of energy in the sense that any ‘humanizing’ aspects of language and belief are only part of the story. One can now visualize Freud’s ‘deep and dangerous currents’, as well as signifiers.<sup>289</sup> What might then be seen is signifiers manifesting as the ‘beginning’ of aspects of human meaning, representation, and belief. This puts Lacan’s notions into a molar context where his concepts and beliefs are appropriate and useful. In this way the ideas of (Lacan’s) desire and (Lyotard’s and Deleuze and Guattari’s) libido can be seen to accommodate and enhance each other, rather than being distanced by different basic assumptions.

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<sup>287</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, 293.

<sup>288</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, 295.

<sup>289</sup> Recall Freud’s polarity: on the one hand the unconscious of dangerous currents/drives and on the other hand the unconscious as beliefs needing help (his praxis was as an analyst who worked with beliefs). Deleuze and Guattari, ‘Anti-Oedipus’, 293.

In answer to my (*italicized*) query at the beginning of the chapter, I can now see the unconscious not so much as ‘encapsulating ideas’, rather as encompassing unrealized signifiers.

#### Section 4: Next chapter

There is still the unresolved caveat stated above, which has to do with Lacan’s notion of the primary processes producing ‘chaotic’ results. This is important to me in that I feel there can be a certain ‘harmony’ (see Chapter Two, Section 1.1.4) and feeling of association in terms of marks made in the un-thought stage that Lacan’s ideas de-emphasize. This is dealt with in the next chapter, where I not only consider Lacan’s notion of ‘processes’ that take place in the unconscious, but importantly I discuss Ehrenzweig’s notions about processes that (implicitly) both critique and extend Lacan’s ideas within the paradigm of the human unconscious and the un-thought stage of image making.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

Chapter Three includes consideration of a third aspect of the unconscious as part of Lacan's notion of the gaze, which is the 'processes' he sees operating in this arena. Lacan's view of the 'primary processes' and the 'appearance' of the unconscious are considered. Ehrenzweig's and Lyotard's relevant ideas about unconscious processes are discussed and related to Lacan's ideas and to the un-thought stage of image making.

### Chapter Three: Unconscious - Processes

Having considered Lacan's theories of the basis and the content of the unconscious in the first two chapters, as I stated in Chapter Two there is a third relevant sense of the 'content' of the unconscious for Lacan, the category of 'process'. My aim in this chapter is to consider and expand the notion of primary processes taking place in the unconscious by continuing to use Lacan's ideas as a basis. However again in this chapter reservations arise, and I deal with these reservations by incorporating other points of view, here as proposed by Lyotard and Ehrenzweig. In a surprising manner these several ideas dovetail together when seen within a wider context relating to an economic understanding of process.<sup>290</sup>

#### Section 1: Dreams and other processes

*I wake up from a dream...a long and complicated dream, with several major episodes. The dream seems to shrink, stretch and shape shift all at the same time, as I try to remember it – rather like looking at oneself in a funny mirror and trying to make sense of the image. As I lie waking up and reviewing the dream, I have the strange feeling that the dream is somehow 'transposing' as I re-view, rather like a decoder automatically transposing words as they arrive. This 'transposition' involves my 'searchlight of awareness' moving over a dishevelled and water-y series of scenes and events. But as the light of awareness hits each event, the event becomes transformed, tamed down, it loses much of its 'surprise', its 'weirdness'. It's like a comic film, as the camera pans across a group of people, the viewer catches a glimpse of each one doing something intense just as the camera catches them, but they instantly freeze into a pose for the camera. The events of the dream get 'translated' as I represent to myself an understanding, in order to remember and in order to narrate to others. I reflect in the studio on this process of translation. I see that it is a very similar phenomenon to one that can happen in and around the un-thought stage of image making: the idea of the unrealized, the 'wall' of*

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<sup>290</sup> Note that B. Lichtenberg Ettinger's notions also constitute a process. However I reserve her ideas for Chapter Four, 'The Gaze', because she provides a path of 'synthesis' with Lacan's notion of the gaze since her ideas are developed particularly within the overall context of Lacan's notion of the gaze.

*symbolism, with the subsequent 'translation' of clues and hints, of evident chaos, into something more coherent – an image. The quality of the experience can be the same.*

## 1.1 The dream-work as a process of the unconscious

Lacan agrees with Freud's concept of the dream-work (see Introduction, Section 5.1) in terms of the basic set of 'operations' or processes occurring in the unconscious. However, again Lacan re-inscribes it. While he retains the basic four operations of condensation, displacement, figurality and secondary revision, Lacan emphasizes the linguistic operations of metaphor and metonymy as equivalent to condensation and displacement respectively. Looking back at Chapter Two (Sections 1.1.3 and 1.1.4), Lacan makes use of Freud's findings, but re-orientates the Freudian conceptualisation of the unconscious, proposing a basis of lack and a linguistic framework. He re-inscribes the unconscious as 'structured like a language'. The linguistic operations of metaphor and metonymy are working on the 'pure' signifiers comprising the unconscious. In Chapter Two I made known my disquiet about what I feel is Lacan's over-emphasis on psychical structure and (from the point of view of the un-thought stage) his 'under-theorization' of affect and the real and their interrelationships with signifiers.

## 1.2 Word-presentations, thing-presentations, and cathexis

I return to Freud's ideas once again in this section in order to provide a specific example of what I feel is de-emphasized in Lacan's re-inscriptions of Freud's concepts of the dream-work and the structure of the unconscious. As a basis for his concept of the dream-work, Freud proposes a relationship between *perception* and the conscious and unconscious. As I discussed in Chapter Two, Section 1.1.1, he posits that the unconscious includes material 'between perception and the conscious mind' (which Lacan re-inscribes as signifiers). In his paper 'The Unconscious', Freud discusses word-presentations and thing-presentations, each of which involve complex *associations* of various aspects of, and within, perception.<sup>291</sup> Word presentations, he proposes, work by means of auditory, visual and kinaesthetic elements (in terms of speaking, reading, writing) and as such are complicated associative processes. They are '*closed presentations*', meaning that although 'capable of extension' these associative processes are limited.<sup>292</sup> However a word acquires *meaning* by means of links with a 'thing presentation' (at least, he says, 'in terms of substantives'). A thing-presentation also works by means of a

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<sup>291</sup> S. Freud, "The Unconscious", 1915, *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. J. Strachey (London, Hogarth Press, 1957), Volume XIV, 159 – 217.

<sup>292</sup> Freud, "Unconscious", 200-202.

complex of associations, made up this time of a nearly infinite variety of ‘visual, acoustic, tactile, kinaesthetic and other presentations’ (one can look at a thing from a limitless number of angles, etc.) and thus are ‘*open-presentations*’.<sup>293</sup> Both types can be ‘stored’ in the unconscious and can be cathected in varying degrees.<sup>294</sup> Thus these word-presentations and thing-presentations as perceived and carried in the unconscious *include* cathected energy (attached psychological energy), the amounts of which can vary, in particular here by means of the operations of the ‘primary processes’.

For Freud, there is a qualitative difference as material moves from the unconscious to the pre-conscious/conscious system. He argues that: ‘the conscious presentation comprises the presentation of the thing plus the presentation of the word belonging to it, while the unconscious presentation is the presentation of the thing alone,’ each along with their cathected energy.<sup>295</sup> However, he posits, this energy is much more freely mobile from thing-to-thing in the unconscious, while much more tied down and less mobile to the thing-plus-word in the pre-conscious system.<sup>296</sup> He refers to this latter energy as more ‘bound’, so quality of energy and its level of binding are seen as equivalent. These ideas of Freud comprise, I believe, the basis for Lacan’s notion that there exists ‘desire’ in the defiles of the signifier.<sup>297</sup> They also support my earlier conclusion that in general the conscious is comprised of signs and the unconscious is comprised of signifiers. In addition they describe aspects of the differences between primary and secondary psychological processes, in that these processes are working on different types of ‘data’.

In re-inscribing Freud’s ideas, as we have seen in previous chapters, Lacan describes signifiers as the ‘content’ of the unconscious, as signs ‘minus’ attached meaning, and as enabling the unconscious to be structured like a language with linguistic-type operations happening rather than the more comprehensive view of primary processes that Freud proposes (stressing ideas, cathexis of energy and so on).

Freud’s arguments pinpoint for me a precise value of encouraging the emergence of marks (as signifiers, or thing-presentations) without mentally attached descriptions (meaning, or word-presentations), in that the increased mobility allows for increased slippage and surprise. It also addresses two things I have pointed out as being problematic for me in Lacan’s ideas. One is the ‘detachment of meaning’ and its ‘re-attachment’. The other is the ‘relationship’ in terms of

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<sup>293</sup> Freud, “Unconscious”, 213.

<sup>294</sup> Cathexis is the association of psychological energy with a word, object, person, part of the body, etc.

<sup>295</sup> Freud, “Unconscious”, 210-215.

<sup>296</sup> Freud, “Unconscious”, 201.

<sup>297</sup> Lacan, ‘Seminar XI’, Chapter 12.

associations *between* signifiers. In terms of meaning, it is my view that what Lacan does, in defining and emphasising the importance of signifiers, is to de-emphasize the idea of mobility of cathected energy, and to translate this instead to loss of signifieds/meaning.<sup>298</sup> It seems to me that my concern about the loss and then possible ‘replacement’ of *meaning* (as seen in the last chapter) is not what Freud is emphasizing, rather his emphasis (in this reference) is the loss and shifting of *energy*. Freud proposes that the (radical) difference between the unconscious system and the pre-conscious system lies in the fact that within the unconscious system the ‘thing-presentation’ is much less likely to have a ‘word’ associated with it, while at the same time having a greater mobility of cathexis. Conversely, in the pre-conscious system, the likelihood of such a word association is much greater, while the mobility of cathexis becomes much reduced. Again according to Freud, the meaning of a word-presentation evolves (partly) from the thing-presentation-association, which happens (mostly) in the preconscious. I see that Freud’s ideas also include more emphasis on relationships and ‘associations’ between word presentation and thing presentation. The importance of these ideas for the un-thought stage is that attempting to work at a level of mind where these associations have not been made has a value insofar as it involves wider parameters, more open associations, and more mobile (less bound) cathexes of the thing-presentations. This can be seen clearly in poetry, for instance Ted Hughes’ collection ‘Crow’, where widely varied analogies and references are knitted together into a meaningful, yet surprising, collection of ‘poetic images’.<sup>299</sup>

Although these observations do not invalidate Lacan’s notion of signifiers, they call into question Lacan’s emphasis.

My question at this point evolves from a query about the (dis)placement of meaning to a query about the ‘attachment’ of language and rational processes to a thing-presentation. For Lacan, the dreamwork is seen more formally as a series of linguistically-structured operations, in the sense that the ‘objects’ become ‘text’ (signifiers) on which textual operations take place (for Lacan, as we have seen, condensation is analogous to metaphor and displacement to metonymy). Recall that, while he proposes that ‘the unconscious is structured like a language’, he insists that this does not imply that it involves meaningful discourse. In this sense he refers to ‘objects’, but makes of them linguistic objects; he retains the dreamwork but makes of it a process that emphasizes linguistic-type operations. For me, as I also pointed out in Chapter Two, what is lost or under-stated by Lacan is both an integral connection between ‘signifiers’ as

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<sup>298</sup> See also the discussion in Chapter Two about signifiers and meaning.

<sup>299</sup> Ted Hughes, *Crow – From the Life and Songs of the Crow* (London, Faber and Faber, 1972). This also points up the co-existence of words and images in terms of modes of expression.



having ‘associations’ and an integral connection between signifier and affect as psychic energy. This unease is articulated by Lyotard as described in Section 2 below. But first I want to consider Lacan’s ideas about the ‘appearance’ of unconscious material, since this also involves a type of ‘process’.

### 1.3 ‘Appearance’ of unconscious material

#### 1.3.1 The stain

Lacan’s concept of the stain involves the idea that the realm of the ‘real’ can affect the realm of the symbolic by way of a circuitous route. This route involves aspects of trauma that can leave traces on the psyche. These traces can in turn influence the symbolic. I see this as related to Lyotard’s notion of the figure and dissimulation, as they can affect particular semantic structures (see Chapter Two, Section 2.1). However Lacan’s notion does not concern particular semantic structures, but is rather a more generalized ‘influence’, perhaps seen instead as ‘character traits’ as they affect the individual’s particularized grasp and use of the symbolic. In other words, Lacan’s concept of stain is a more ephemeral and non-particularized influence than Lyotard’s concept of dissimulation.

#### 1.3.2 The gap and ‘impediment’

At the ‘heart’ of the structure of the unconscious is a process that Lacan terms the ‘causal gap’. This is the unplanned emergence of ‘unconscious’ material, for instance as a slip of the tongue, ‘accidents’ in painting, etc. This he refers to as the ‘Law of the signifier’ as seen in the domain of cause.<sup>300</sup> Lacan sees that the unconscious as it appears does so as an ‘impediment’ to conscious mental processing.<sup>301</sup> The unconscious, he states, has an intentionality of its own, and a ‘strange pulsating temporality’, with ‘something other demanding to be realized’.<sup>302</sup> For Lacan:

What occurs, what is produced, in this gap, is presented as the discovery, surprise, that by which the subject feels himself overcome, by which he finds both more and less than he expected – but, in any case, it is, in relation to what he expected, of exceptional value.<sup>303</sup>

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<sup>300</sup> Lacan, ‘Seminar XI’, 46-47 and 23.

<sup>301</sup> Lacan, ‘Seminar XI’, 24.

<sup>302</sup> Lacan, ‘Seminar XI’, 24. In considering this ‘strange temporality’, Lacan posits a ‘temporal pulsation’ between the ‘opening’ and ‘closing’ of the unconscious, the gap, which is one way that the unconscious manifests itself. This he terms ‘logical time’ in that it is related to ‘internal’ subjective matters, rather than day to day hours and minutes.

<sup>303</sup> Lacan, ‘Seminar XI’, 25. (My addition.)

This discovery, he explains, is always ready to ‘steal away again’, thereby establishing the ‘dimension of loss’, and leaving the conscious mind to cope with its manifestations.<sup>304</sup> There are ‘thoughts’ in the unconscious, but it is impossible to represent them except as in dreams, because they are unrealized signifiers.<sup>305</sup> Their common attribute as they emerge into the conscious mind is what Lacan calls the ‘colophon of doubt’ – an accompanying feeling of doubt. To me this is close to a description of what can happen in the un-thought stage – it can act as an impediment to the conscious mind, it has its own intentionality, and its results are very often subject to doubt as, and just after, they emerge.

This notion of ‘impediment’ relates back to Lacan’s concept of the radical alterity between the unconscious mind and the conscious mind. There is a feeling that something is missing, or hidden, or distorted as the content of the unconscious emerges. While the signifier of an idea is present, the meaning (signified) has been stripped away, or left behind, causing the feeling of ‘impedance’ in two senses.<sup>306</sup> One sense is that the material emerging is impeded (unrealized) as it emerges and the other sense is that its emergence impedes (disrupts), for that ‘moment’, the functionality of the conscious mind. In terms of image making, this concept of ‘impediment’ can further explain the ‘mysterious’, the inchoate, the ‘very strange indeed’ (Elkins). For example, see again the Beuys drawings, which include meaning-ful as well as apparently meaningless marks, marks that apparently appear with difficulty since one is working ‘blind’, in the sense that one is not functioning in a conscious rational arena.<sup>307</sup> Recall also in my description of the process of image making the emergence of surprise and a feeling of ‘exceptional value’ (which is not always justified with hindsight).

### 1.3.3 The subject: the gap and aphanisis

Lacan’s notion of the unconscious is important for me because image making can be seen as a praxis involving the treating of the real by means of the symbolic. However, before proceeding to a consideration of Lacan’s wider concept of the gaze in the next chapter, I want to take a side-step to consider his concept of the ‘subject’ as relevant in this thesis (see also Introduction, Background Concepts, Section 5.5). What is close to the heart of this thesis is the

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<sup>304</sup> Lacan, ‘Seminar XI’, 25.

<sup>305</sup> Lacan, ‘Seminar XI’, 44.

<sup>306</sup> There is, logically, a further aspect of the appearance of content by irruption and with impedance. This is the important matter of attaching or recapturing particular associated meaning, whether in the context of a dream or an image. Lacan addresses this, in one way, by use of what he calls ‘rhetoric’, which for him is the use of linguistic tools such as condensation and displacement in the interpretation of dreams.

<sup>307</sup> See also for instance J. Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind*, trans. P-A Brault and M. Naas (Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press, 1993).

relationship of ‘being’ (the real) and ‘meaning’ (the symbolic). For Lacan, one way of thinking about ‘meaning’ is the subject seen as signifier for another signifier, because in this way the subject is ‘petrified’ as a signifier in the eyes of others, insofar as the signifier in the field of the Other ‘makes *manifest*’ the subject of its signification.<sup>308</sup> In other words as the subject represents himself as subject, at the same moment this subject is ‘petrified’ into a signifier (for another subject/signifier). This means that as the subject ‘speaks’, the unconscious as desire ‘closes’. Thus the subject *manifests* him/herself in this movement of disappearance, or fading, of his ‘being-as-subject’. Lacan terms this ‘aphanisis’. He uses an understanding of the joining of mathematical ‘sets’ of information to illustrate the idea of the subject as ‘being’ and its relationship to the concept of the Other as ‘meaning’.<sup>309</sup> This joining of sets is one way Lacan explains the ‘split’ of the subject from the unconscious. He uses the mathematical idea of the ‘vel of alienation’, the joining of two sets of elements such that *in* the ‘joined’ or overlap area (seen as two circles that overlap) neither one set of elements *nor* the other set is possible. If ‘being’ is a set of elements in one circle, and ‘meaning’ is a set of elements in another circle and the circles overlap, then, explains Lacan, if ‘being’ is chosen, then the subject *as such* disappears, because it ‘falls into non-meaning’. If ‘meaning’ is chosen, what falls away is that which constitutes the *realization* of the subject, unconscious desire, such that meaning in a particular individual’s case becomes eclipsed by the ‘disappearance of being’ that is ‘induced by the very function of the signifier’.<sup>310</sup>

From another point of view, for Lacan, as seen in Chapter One, there is a link between re-presentation and death insofar as the conquest of the symbolic is born of the unconscious acceptance of lack as lack of immortality or ‘prohibition’, with unconscious desire being the result of this lack.<sup>311</sup> Lacan’s idea of the phallic function connects, within the individual, the *conquest* of the symbolic (meaning) and the *force* of the drive (being).<sup>312</sup> But the radical difference between the two (e.g. that they can never ‘meet’) is the basis for understanding his notion of the split and alienated subject. In undergoing what he calls aphanisis, as seen above, the subject fades out to allow the unconscious to ‘emerge’, and then this ‘gap’ for emergence closes again and the self-conscious subject returns.<sup>313</sup> Lacan’s notion of ‘gap’ describes the ‘locus’ of the appearance or emergence of unconscious material into speech, and/or symptoms,

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<sup>308</sup> Lacan, ‘Seminar XI’, 207.

<sup>309</sup> Lacan, ‘Seminar XI’, 211.

<sup>310</sup> Lacan, ‘Seminar XI’, 211.

<sup>311</sup> Deleuze and Guattari propose that beliefs (re-presentations) can negatively affect the workings (flow) of the libido. Bataille proposes that un-knowing is closely connected with the sacred, sacrifice and death.

<sup>312</sup> The partial drives, for Lacan, are a result of desire in search of particularized ‘objects’, as opposed to desire itself, which is a result of ‘lack’. See for instance Lacan, ‘Seminar XI’, 103-4.

<sup>313</sup> Lacan, ‘Seminar XI’, 210-11.

which ‘happen’ to a person without their being aware of either wanting them, or consciously performing them, or even understanding them, as seen in the previous section (1.3.2).

The important point here is that I see this fading in and out of the subject as occurring in the un-thought stage of image making. Whereas in Lacan’s version aphanisis happens ‘inadvertently’ from the point of view of the conscious mind, from my point of view it can be encouraged, for instance in terms of a (momentary) ‘withholding’ of conscious rationality. Lacan refers to such fading as an irruption from the unconscious; an artist may refer to it as coincidence, accident, or synchronicity. What is interesting to me in the studio is to encourage this process as a basis for image making, as I describe in the Introduction. In this way, surprise and intensity can result

In terms of the un-thought stage, aphanisis is an interesting description of the un-thought stage as it ‘emerges’ and replaces ‘meaning’ with ‘being’. This is the direct communication of the real – not meaning or re-presentation, but *being*, for instance gestures, marks, colours, ‘wrestling with the materials’ as such. The ‘reduction of the non-meaning’, in terms of the artist, could be seen as operating in stages one and three of the model of the process of image making (as seen in the Introduction). The real can appear as ‘being’, emerging in an impeded fashion in the un-thought stage, but ‘intentional’ enough to enable a series of (somehow connected) episodes on the artistic support.<sup>314</sup> In Section Three below, Ehrenzweig’s ideas can be understood to substantiate this notion, which coincides with my experience in the studio.

Referring back to the description of artistic processes in my Introduction, there are a number of attributes that appear as a result of the un-thought stage of the process of image making as it is described there. The juxtapositions, conjunctions, overlaps and merging of forms and figures are such attributes.<sup>315</sup> The attribute of non-completion and/or non-closure of images is another. In addition, images produced can have the feeling of ‘notes’, traces, fleeting thoughts caught hold of. There can be elements of obliteration, of traces and absence. Accidents happen. These are likely results, given the absence of conscious rationality concerning compositional factors, mimetic attributes, and the like, and given the attributes of the unrealized, the gap,

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<sup>314</sup> This relates to the idea of performance (see also footnote 264 considering the topic of performance) in terms of the bodily presence, for instance gestures of the mark maker still incorporating aspects of desire. Dissimulation of structures can be seen to happen here.

<sup>315</sup> See the reproduction of a portion of my painting ‘*Silver – detail*’ in the Introduction (Illustration In.2).

impediments and the aphanisis of the subject that are currently being considered.<sup>316</sup> It is also opens the possibility of the (later) emergence/development of meaning not previously planned.

Anton Ehrenzweig articulates a set of notions that help to visualize and particularize the processes of artistic creativity within the particular arena of the un-thought stage itself. But first I consider Lyotard's relevant ideas about processes in terms of dream-work and the libido.

## Section 2: Lyotard – libidinal economy

*As I review my dreams in the quiet of the studio, I notice an overall pattern or 'flavour' of my dreams as they relate to my day-to-day experiences. Rather than reflecting particular events or producing particular knowledge or discourse, there is a particular flavour of current events in my life concerning breaks and flows of energy. If I am at a crossroads in some particular area of my life, if there is a break in energy flow due to some anxiety or other, (some) dreams may have a break element emphasized. This might be, for instance, an anxiety dream where I cannot pay a bill, something is about to explode, the lights won't go on. When I have resolved a situation to some extent in my life, the dreams tend to reflect a flow: there may be a problem in the dream, but somehow it gets resolved, the flow outweighs or resolves the break in energy, and the outcome of the dream no longer provokes (or reflects) a state of anxiety. In this case the flavour becomes quite different, more flowing than breaking. This is in spite of the fact that the details of the dreams themselves may seem to have little to do with the actual events of the preceding days.*

*It seems to me, as I ponder, that there is a related 'effect' in image making. As I am 'catching a drawing in flight', for instance, the process can also be seen to produce a similar 'flavour'. I suggest that image making may have a similar 'feeling' of breaks and flows. The breaks and/or flows can happen within the un-thought stage itself. Sometimes the drawing*

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<sup>316</sup> This chapter relates to what I refer to as the *emergence* of ideas and thought onto the 'support' of the art work. There is a sense that insofar as painting and drawing are a process of image making, they are also a performance. This idea is developed, for instance, in G. Currie *An Ontology of Art* (London, Macmillan Press, 1989). He thinks about how the artist comes to solve various technical and conceptual problems within 'artistic tradition and convention' and develops the idea of 'action types'. I understand this also as including the 'irruption' of unconscious material, and how that material is 'handled'. This idea opens the field of painting and drawing to some of the critical thinking within the context of performance – as for instance Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked* (London, Routledge, 1993), and H.M. Sayres, *The Object of Performance* (London, University of Chicago Press, 1989), exploring the relationship between image and desire. However, for me, 'performance' implies an outline or plan of procedure, which takes it outside of my exact focus on the un-thought stage, where (ideally) no plan or outline is being 'followed'.

*process flows, the effort seems focused and coherent; sometimes there is more an effect of break than flow, with fidgets and distractions as breaks in concentration.*

In Chapter One, concerning the *basis* of the unconscious, I consider Lyotard's contestation of Lacan's notion of lack and its concomitant desire insofar as Lacan terms this the basis of the unconscious. In Chapter Two, concerning the *content* of the unconscious, I discuss a third set of ideas, schizoanalysis, within which both Lacan and Lyotard's ideas can be accommodated. In Chapter Two, I also discuss Lyotard's notions of figure and dissimulation that enable a 'synthesis' of ideas related to semiotics (Lacan) and expression (Lyotard), such that they can be seen theoretically not only to co-exist but in some measure to be co-dependant, since expression appears 'within' the structure of language and its meaning. For the purposes of the present chapter, Lyotard by means of elaborating Freud's concept of the dream-work concerning *processes* of the unconscious, develops his notion of the *processes* taking place that *effect* this 'instant of dissimulation'.<sup>317</sup> Whereas in dissimulation he develops the idea that the influence of desire is able to affect the structure of signs, in terms of the dream-work he develops his ideas regarding the overall *processes* of desire in the field of the unconscious.<sup>318</sup> In this way he offers a different perspective to Lacan's ideas about linguistic-type operations happening in the dream-work.

Lyotard sees that the dream-work consists of processes of desire 'working over' the dream-thoughts, rather than of 'imitating' discourse. In other words, as in the title of his essay, the dream-work '*does not think*'. Lyotard's claim is that each of the operations posited in Freud's dream-work proceeds 'according to rules which are in direct opposition to those governing discourse'.<sup>319</sup> He further claims that: 'desire does not speak; it does violence to the order of utterance'. Lyotard not only makes it sound like a fluid process, and non-intelligent (e.g. there is no 'thinking' or censoring entity controlling it), but also locates these fluid movements of desire as happening in two 'locations'. He explains: 'The figure is hand in glove with desire on at least two counts. At the margin of discourse it is the density within what I am talking about retires from view; at the heart of discourse it is its 'form''.<sup>320</sup> In other words expression and transformation/distortion can manifest in (at least) two distinct manners, image and form. Furthermore, his idea of dissimulation, the distortion of language by way of the 'violence' of desire, applies also to the dream-work, and for me extends to image making.

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<sup>317</sup> Lyotard, "Dream-work". See also Freud, 'Interpretation', Chapter 6.

<sup>318</sup> Lyotard, "Tensor".

<sup>319</sup> Lyotard, "Dreamwork", 19.

<sup>320</sup> Lyotard, "Dreamwork", 19. (My emphasis). See also Introduction, Section 5.1.

## 2.1 Desire, dissimulation and dream-work

Regarding Lyotard's concept of desire, he proposes that it carries its own 'primary repression'. This is in the sense that it has never 'spoken', never been 'put into words', so it is not being disguised, but rather being *transgressed*. In other words, it is the *act* of dreaming that fulfils desire, it is not the dream content that fulfils desire. It is the process, not the content, of the dreaming that becomes the basis for the representations of the dream.

Freud states that the function of the dream is wish fulfilment and posits that the motive of distortion is censorship, forcing desire to disguise itself.<sup>321</sup> But Lyotard reminds us that according to Freud the essence of the dream is *not* in the manifest content, and that the dreamwork is *not* like waking thought (e.g. discourse), but instead the importance of the dreamwork lies in the processes that diverge, transform and transgress the original dream-thoughts.<sup>322</sup> Thus, in extending these ideas to include image making, *it is not only that desire 'causes' or influences the image to be made, but, as a process, it infiltrates the very making!* In this way, censorship, for Lyotard as for Ehrenzweig (as seen below), is de-emphasized as a concept.<sup>323</sup> For Lyotard what 'takes the place' of censorship is the process of being 'worked over' by desire, rather than a knowing and purposeful intervention by a 'knowing' entity.

Lyotard points out that there is an element of deception in the image, and an element of deception in writing, in that the objects of the text/image can be taken either for themselves or for what they represent. This was seen in Chapter Two with Lyotard's notions of the theatrical and disreal spaces. There is a similar element of deception in the dream, where the operations of desire have the function of interfering with the text 'by fabricating a manifest text' which appears to be readable/understandable, but is in fact an element of 'deception'. Lyotard explains:

At this point we pass from the energistic to the linguistic, which is readable. But this readability is a pseudo-readability. As we have seen, even when it is possible to read it, we ought not to read it, because this 'content' is not a text, but an object.<sup>324</sup>

This is desire as 'pseudo-linguistic'. Again, any 'meaning' for Lyotard is purely accidental, in the sense that the transgressivity appears to leave no room for retaining any meaning. The implications of this for image making are complex. A pseudo-readability would imply that any resulting meaning would be arbitrary, or un-determined, or un-related to the original (dream)-thoughts. In other words, it would be arbitrary, and lodged not so much in the

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<sup>321</sup> Freud, 'Interpretation', Chapter 4, 'Distortion'.

<sup>322</sup> Lyotard, "Dreamwork", 21.

<sup>323</sup> Lyotard, "Dreamwork", 25.

<sup>324</sup> Lyotard, "Dreamwork", 50.

dreamer's (maker's) mind as in the narrator (viewer's) – not so much in the dream-thoughts (thoughts) themselves as in the narrator's (maker's) subsequent interpretation. This idea provides a basis, for instance, for such notions as 'the death of the author'. Lyotard says:

We are thus discouraged from too hastily attributing secondary revision to a rational agency inasmuch as what results from its intervention is precisely not rational! Every *translation* passes through the signified; here it is simply an equivalence in the order of signifiers that is given.<sup>325</sup>

In the same way, a 'pseudo-readability' with regard to images can be seen to involve seemingly realistic (readable) images that are in fact quite distorted in the sense of being an 'object' rather than 'mimetic'.

## 2.2 Desire and art making, with caveat

However, this leaves me, on evidence from the studio, rather than from dreams, as dissatisfied. While there may be elements of truth in dream situations, I argue that art is an 'intentional' and 'positive' activity, as opposed to symptoms and dreams which are more 'passive' – e.g. not connected directly to human will and intent. How is this important to the process of image making? Again we come to a juncture where making images is introduced into a context of dreaming. Again it is worthwhile remembering why this can be valid. It is because in the un-thought stage of image making I propose that there is a relaxation of rational thought and planning, which, as Lyotard posits, allows more freedom for desire to play its part. This was originally seen by Freud to happen in dreaming while relaxed in sleep, making dreaming, as he states, a 'royal road to the unconscious'.

In one sense, my claim becomes a reflection of that of Lyotard such that there is 'work of desire' which takes place in the production of an image in fine art, which consists of 'doing violence' to the 'utterance' conceived in the conscious (or pre-conscious) mind. This is an extension of Lyotard's notion that 'figure' can be seen both in the 'margin of discourse' (for me, the margin of image making, for instance its intensities and energy) and in the 'form of discourse' (for me, the form of image, for instance as manifested in the materiality). Note that what is (still) not included in this notion of dreamwork is 'subject matter', in the sense of 'meaning', or in the sense of any kind of 'harmony'. One thought, as seen also in Chapter Two, is that there is a 'quality' of, as well as various intensities of, libido. In my view, this dual function can be extended to image making in that the libido introduces, by way of form (as in materiality) the attribute of the integral, and by way of figure (as intensities of libido), the

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<sup>325</sup> Lyotard, "Dreamwork", 45-46. (See also Freud, 'Interpretation', Chapter 6, Secondary Revision section).



attribute of the ephemeral. Lyotard's proposals as extended to the process of image making can reflect the interaction of image making with the underlying energy.

My purpose in including these ideas is to point out that what Lyotard adds is a picture of the libido in action as such, in contrast to Lacan's concept of lack-induced linguistic operations happening in a linguistic structure of mental material.

As I have proposed, Lyotard's argument that the dream-work is the process of desire 'working over' unconscious material can be extended to the second stage of the process of image making, in which it can be argued that a dreamwork-like process is taking place, where the 'closure' of rational thought, as in dreaming, allows more free play to the energy/force of desire, producing hybrids of images from cross-fertilized and 'worked-over' memories, phantasies, learning and thoughts. Lyotard's ideas extend this with his ideas of spatiality, and the 'work' of desire. On the other hand this still leaves open the dichotomy between the notional chaos of the unconscious and the notional relatedness and 'harmony' of an emerging art-work. This is addressed in detail by Anton Ehrenzweig.

### Section 3: Ehrenzweig

Anton Ehrenzweig looks at the process (he uses the word in the singular) occurring in the unconscious from a different point of view than either Freud or Lacan, while remaining within the Freudian paradigm.<sup>326</sup> His proposal is based on the idea of a direct relationship between perception and the energy of the libido, in this sense more related to Lyotard. He sees this specifically as related to the process of making art. This idea also draws out the economic paradigm in Freud to recast ideas of the process that happens in unconscious perception, in the sense of the idea of the attachment of cathected energy to mental material.<sup>327</sup> He emphasizes the results as well as the process, rather than the (static, formal) elements of the unconscious, as does Lacan, or the force/energy in itself, as do Deleuze and Guattari, and Lyotard.

#### 3.1 Perception, the libido and the unconscious

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<sup>326</sup> Taken primarily from Anton Ehrenzweig, *The Hidden Order of Art, A study in the Psychology of Artistic Imagination* (London, University of California Press, 1967). Ehrenzweig is the exception to my list of post-Lacanian writers, and was in fact influenced by the British School. However I have included his ideas due to his lucid and experience-based visualizations of the unconscious process at work in exactly the arena with which this thesis deals. In this case his roots in Freudian theory are enough to qualify him for inclusion here.

<sup>327</sup> 'Economic' is used here in the sense of the ebb and flow and potential re-distribution of 'libidinal' energy, as seen in different aspects of perception, related to the unconscious.

The paradox in art, Ehrenzweig explains, results from the fact that art is constructed to some extent within the unconscious; for this reason, conscious perception cannot perceive all the complexities of the resulting structure. He argues that:

The classical concept of the primary process (which forms unconscious phantasy) denies it any structure. Unconscious phantasy does not distinguish between opposites, fails to articulate time and space as we know it, and allows all firm boundaries to melt in a free chaotic mingling of forms. Art, on the other hand, appears the embodiment of rigorous organization. So it has been assumed that art's structure is exclusively shaped by conscious and pre-conscious functions, the so-called secondary process.<sup>328</sup>

However, Ehrenzweig posits, the primary process is not unstructured and chaotic but has its own structure. Art, and indeed everyday consciousness, have recourse to material shaped by this primary process. This means that both the conscious mind and the structure of artworks *reflect* in some measure the primary process.<sup>329</sup> The process of the unconscious is seen by Ehrenzweig to be *integral* to the making of art. In addition, for him, the study of the process of art making contributes to the study of the unconscious.<sup>330</sup> He proposes that not only are unconscious structure and process not 'merely chaotic', but they can be conceived as both purposeful and capable of development through learning.<sup>331</sup> Ehrenzweig argues that the seeming lack of structure in the unconscious components of art, for instance the scribbles of 'artistic handwriting' or background textures, is due to a *superficial* appearance, due to the fact that the conscious mind cannot grasp all the complexities involved. He shows that:

the complexity of a creative search [...] has to explore many avenues, [and] needs an advance on a broader front which keeps *contradicting* options open. In the solution of complex tasks the undifferentiation of unconscious vision turns into an instrument of rigorous precision and leads to results that are fully acceptable to conscious rationality [...] In contrast to [mental] illness, creative work succeeds in *coordinating* the results of unconscious undifferentiation and conscious differentiation and so reveals the hidden order in the unconscious.<sup>332</sup>

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<sup>328</sup> Ehrenzweig, 3.

<sup>329</sup> Ehrenzweig, 268.

<sup>330</sup> Ehrenzweig, 253. Lacan (1960's onward) saw the ego as existing in the realm of the imaginary, dealing with identity, for instance, and the subjective as being in the realm of the symbolic. (See also Chapter Two above.) There is a basic difference between Ehrenzweig's discourse and that of Lacan in that Lacan speaks of the 'subject', while Ehrenzweig speaks of the 'ego'. For my purposes, in considering the process of making images, I have concluded that these two terms, as used by these two writers, are analogous enough, that is have enough of an overlap, to overlook the theoretical differences between the two terms. This is because my focus is on the 'individual who is making' and for whom conscious states and 'unconscious' states alternate. For this reason, I will treat the terms, for practical purposes, as synonymous.

<sup>331</sup> This differs from Lyotard's more violent and transgressive model, as I considered in the previous section of this chapter.

<sup>332</sup> Ehrenzweig, 4-5. (My emphases). This idea of contradicting options, and their relationship to image making, is directly related to my idea of the 'libidinal gaze', as elaborated in Chapter Five. The motivation for this research he describes as follows: 'My concept of an undifferentiated matrix of perception arose from the need to interpret the long-standing failure of psychoanalytic aesthetics to find the unconscious substructure of art. One could account for the failure in two ways. It was possible to discard Freud's approach to aesthetics altogether (this was what E. Kris ultimately did), or one can assume that we have failed to find art's substructure because it defies our conscious powers of visualization. This is the solution proposed here. It does, of course, expand the use of the term 'unconscious' as understood by current theory. But this is only another way of saying that the term 'primary

These points are integral to my developing argument of the ‘usefulness’ to, and indeed integrality of, the process of the unconscious with the un-thought stage of image making. This is because he proposes a theoretical basis for this process visualizing the ‘coordination’ and ‘emergence’ of relevant (but sometimes surprising) material. The last sentence in the quotation supports my emerging view in this thesis that the study of dreams and symptoms (in psychoanalytic theory), while useful in emphasizing the idea that image making can result from coordination of conscious rationality and unconscious process/material seen as dis-similar psychological elements, is not wholly adequate for illuminating the un-thought stage.

### 3.2 Basic terminology

But before considering Ehrenzweig’s arguments, it is necessary to set the stage by reviewing his definition of basic terms. In his proposal, Ehrenzweig utilizes five basic terms that relate both to perception and to the unconscious, and which are linked them closely to the thetic interest in Lacan’s notion of the gaze. He uses ‘perception’ in the sense of perceiving the exterior world, and ‘phantasy’ when perceiving the interior world, such as phantasies, memories and affects. His five terms are: differentiation, dedifferentiation, undifferentiation, syncretistic scanning and re-introjection. ‘*Differentiation*’ is used in reference to conscious perception, either in a general sense or in the particular sense of looking at visual art. Differentiation is the result, in everyday perception, of the workings of the ‘gestalt’.<sup>333</sup> In other words, differentiation can be understood to be the differentiation between the figure and the ground. In the visual field, the gestalt is said to ‘improve on’ what is perceived, by smoothing away glitches and imperfections, thereby generalizing and ‘missing out’ individual blemishes, distortions, etc.<sup>334</sup> An example of individuality, which is ‘smoothed away’ by the gestalt, would be a distinguishing mark on the face of a stranger that soon becomes ignored with familiarity and the action of the gestalt principle, whereas in scanning that face in a crowd, the distinguishing mark would be more noticeable. The point here is that ‘normal’ vision’ is what he terms ‘differentiated’, being

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process’ needs revision. The quality of being unconscious is not dependent on the superego’s censorship directed against certain contents, but automatically follows from a change in the formal structure of image making, i.e. from the ego’s dedifferentiation of conscious gestalt. This implies that we cannot produce the originally undifferentiated structure of the primary process for conscious inspection, but only its conscious derivatives like conglomerated, bizarre condensations, illogical displacements and the like. This difficulty should not deter us. It applies to any phenomenon of the unconscious. The concept of the unconscious is not a physical fact open to direct demonstration, but an explanatory concept which allows us to explain certain phenomena which otherwise could not be satisfactorily explained.’

<sup>333</sup> This ‘gestalt’, or pattern of ordinary analytic perception, is described by Ehrenzweig as follows. ‘From the undifferentiated mosaic of the visual field we are compelled to select a “figure” on which attention concentrates while the rest of visual data recedes and fuses into a vague background of indistinct texture.’ (Ehrenzweig, 11 and 21.)

<sup>334</sup> Ehrenzweig, 11.

divided into ‘important’ and less important visual information for the particular moment in time, for whatever reason: swift recognition, habit, and so on.

‘*Dedifferentiation*’ happens when, for various reasons, normal conscious perception gets put under pressure – the gestalt becomes more and more fragmented, or ‘scattered’, and conscious perception becomes less and less able to handle the complexifications that ensue. This can happen due to physical causes such as dim lighting, speed, or being in unknown circumstances. It can also happen, he proposes, in any problem-solving situation, from physics to art making. In such circumstances, involving various options, not only does the scanning introduce major (exterior) perceptual complications, but for instance in art making it also introduces various (interior) beliefs and knowledge of the artist, which, as they come forward for ‘consideration’, again hugely complicate the perceptual field. Ehrenzweig calls it ‘the dynamic process by which the ego scatters and represses surface imagery’.<sup>335</sup> The great virtue of this process is that it allows an overall grasp of the details of the total object. It is a process of scattering of details, but consequently greater overall grasp of material. This process of perception moves into the unconscious because of the inability of the *conscious* gestalt processing to function adequately in these circumstances.

‘*Undifferentiation*’ is the third term. For Ehrenzweig, the difference between ‘undifferentiated’ and ‘dedifferentiated’ is only that the latter is initiated by the ego in a purposeful manner. The former, he posits, is happening to some extent much of the time. Undifferentiation and dedifferentiation are closely linked to the fourth notion, ‘syncretistic scanning’.

Ehrenzweig proposes that *syncretistic scanning* is the basis of both dedifferentiation and undifferentiation in the sense that when the gestalt of conscious vision becomes overloaded (or before it has been learned), syncretistic scanning takes over.<sup>336</sup> It is an unconscious process and thus both impossible to experience consciously and difficult to visualize (or articulate) consciously. To normal awareness, this scanning appears as chaotic and finally a blank. Yet, he points out, the ‘recognition of objects from cues rather than from the analysis of [the gestalt] abstract detail is the beginning of syncretistic vision’ and is exemplified in the difference of the human nose as triangular from the side and ‘a shapeless squiggle’ from the front. His important point here is the difference between perception based on ‘cues’ and that based on analysis of

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<sup>335</sup> Ehrenzweig, 19.

<sup>336</sup> Where syncretistic scanning refers to attention which is scattered to the total appearance without regard to detail, and where gestalt refers to focus on abstract details, as in drawing an individual nose, face, lips, which can then be compared one by one with objects being drawn.

(‘abstract’) details such as shape of nose from the side. On the basis of cues, he says, ‘we easily recognize a face which we have first seen in profile when it is presented later in a frontal view.’<sup>337</sup> Ehrenzweig explains:

syncretism can be as precise, if not more so, than the analytic matching of detail. Picasso’s incredibly convincing portraits defeat all analytic matching by jumbling up and distorting all the details of a face. But we can judge the likeness of the portrait only if we have become attuned to this kind of representation.<sup>338</sup>

In this kind of representation, the viewer learns not to judge by analysing single features, but rather allows an intuitive (syncretistic) grasp of the portrait as an indivisible whole. On the basis of the ‘results’ of syncretistic scanning, for instance in art, Ehrenzweig proposes that this scanning involves the primary process in the psychoanalytic sense. This is a scanning that encompasses hugely fragmented ‘data’ in such a way that opposites can be accommodated and intermingled, ‘logic’ as we know it has no place, spatial differentiation and time are not represented or taken into account. The important point here is that undifferentiation refers not only to the results of an unconscious scanning faculty, but is also reflected in the static structure that results from unconscious image making.<sup>339</sup> This notion of an unconscious scanning process, which ‘naturally’ involves all the ‘totally illogical’ operations, which Freud found in his studies of the dream-work, is a basic tenet of Ehrenzweig’s thinking. The idea that ‘art’ involves a resultant and ‘hidden’ sub-structure on this basis is a second basic tenet. Ehrenzweig sees this process in a context of processing that is to a degree ‘non-chaotic’, in the sense that it retains an unconscious ‘structure’. As opposed to Lacan’s ‘linguistic’ combinatory structure, Ehrenzweig’s notion encompasses not only Freud’s conception of primary process, but cathected energy as well. It includes Freud’s ideas of a comprehensive definition of the content of the unconscious, for instance memory, affects, associations, that Lacan’s ideas appear to de-emphasize. As an example, condensation for Ehrenzweig involves the overlap, interjection, and intermixing of various ideas, perceptions, memories and affects, in a hugely complex, but not chaotic, manner.<sup>340</sup> Ehrenzweig posits that undifferentiation, then, is the ability of syncretistic scanning to hold the ‘total structure of the work of art in a single undifferentiated view’, as a mode of attention that he terms syncretistic scanning on ‘scattered’ material that, as such, seems essentially ‘blank and empty to conscious memory’.

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<sup>337</sup> Ehrenzweig, 15. (My addition). Note the similarity to Freud’s ‘open association’ of thing-presentation as discussed in Chapter Three, Section 1.2.

<sup>338</sup> Ehrenzweig, 7.

<sup>339</sup> Ehrenzweig, 19. He refers to a ‘static’ structure of unconscious image making, ‘based on a mixture of images which to conscious introspection appear incompatible and so blot each other out’ when referring to undifferentiation. This is opposed to what he refers to as a ‘dynamic’ process of scattering (and thus repression) of surface imagery by the ego when he refers to dedifferentiation.

<sup>340</sup> Ehrenzweig, 7 and 19-20.

Ehrenzweig posits further that the results of the primary process may develop aspects of the material being scanned into a state of simplification to the point where the conscious mind can again cope. He terms this '*re-introjection*', his fifth important term.<sup>341</sup> For me this is a ray of light in the otherwise seemingly random and chaotic results of the processes of the unconscious in psychoanalytic descriptions. Not only does this give credence to the highly important part that the unconscious plays in the un-thought stage, but it makes me as subject, although I am still a split subject, subject to a (to some extent) non-chaotic unconscious. It returns me, as subject, to some semblance of a kind of intent-ful and personal input. Furthermore, it provides an integrated and developed notion of the creative process. In addition it 'supports' in some detail Lacan's related notion of 'full' and 'empty' speech, and Barthes' notion of 'full emptiness', in that there is an (invisible) 'attachment' or relationship of some kind between conscious and unconscious material in the 'full' end of the spectrum of speech (or images), as well as between affect and other elements of unconscious content. At this point in my argument I have described Deleuze and Guattari's 'passive' machinic syntheses as well as Lacan's 'random' displacement and condensation. Here I see that Ehrenzweig offers a clear and coherent middle way, which is developed in the next section.

### 3.3 Unconscious scanning and structure

Having considered Ehrenzweig's terminology, a second area of his proposals considers the question of *how* unconscious scanning can grasp the widely scattered material in a single immediate act of comprehension. He posits that the broadening of focus in undifferentiation brings about an enormous increase in efficiency of scanning. He argues that this unconscious scanning is needed by the artist in order to build the complex (not necessarily overtly perceivable) *structure* of a work of art. In addition, it is required by humans in rather different circumstances than those in which 'gestalt' perceptual organization is useful, for instance 'fight or flight' situations or any problem solving circumstance. Ehrenzweig agrees (implicitly) with Lacan in advising that sensory data should not be taken as a secure unquestioned basis for our understanding of objective reality, because of the interaction of, and close relationship between, perception and unconscious processes. In other words, Ehrenzweig's ideas can also be seen as a type of gaze, but one that includes a greater emphasis on perception than that of Lacan and one that adds the notion of scanning to unconscious processing. Ehrenzweig posits that a 'rapid

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<sup>341</sup> Ehrenzweig, 102-105.

pulse of differentiation and dedifferentiation goes on continually undetected in our daily lives’—this he calls a ‘dynamic theory of perception’.<sup>342</sup>

### 3.4 The ‘basis’ of the unconscious and ‘intuition’

We have now seen that Ehrenzweig proposes an important distinction in the mental *processing* that occurs between differentiated (primarily pre-conscious and conscious material) and undifferentiated material (primarily unconscious material, such that ‘logical’ (secondary) operations are used in the pre-conscious, while different (primary) operations are used in unconscious (as do Freud and Lacan).<sup>343</sup> However Ehrenzweig bases his concept of the unconscious also on a *type* or form of material being processed (de-differentiated or not). In other words, Ehrenzweig’s argument has to do with his basic thesis that syncretistic scanning happens as a part of the primary process, it happens on dedifferentiated material, and furthermore that this process of the unconscious is not in fact chaotic, although it can seem that way to the conscious mind with its dependence on gestalt principles.<sup>344</sup> In addition, it would seem that there are no sharp borderlines between the various processes; to a limited extent each type of process can take place in both unconscious and conscious situations. Ehrenzweig elaborates his notions:

There is no sharp division between the conscious, preconscious and unconscious systems, but only a smooth transition with two or three critical thresholds. The process of dedifferentiation describes a dynamic process that works gradually within certain critical limits. From the vantage point of conscious introspection – we have no other – the transition first produces experiences of ‘vagueness’, then a gradual dissolution of precise space and time, and in the end, when the last critical limit has been overstepped, complete blankness occurs, still replete with intense emotional experience, the much vaunted ‘full’ emptiness of low-level vision.<sup>345</sup>

I see this as substantiating my argument earlier, based at that time on Freud’s ‘presentations’, that the ‘radical alterity’ between the unconscious and conscious is not only that different processes are involved, but what is also important is that the material being ‘worked over’ is different (Chapter Three, Section 1.1.2). For Freud, unconscious mental material is more complex with more possibilities for association as thing-presentations, while in the

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<sup>342</sup> Although of course Lacan’s concept of the gaze can be seen as dynamic in the sense that it is driven by, and dependent on, the Other looking back. This is discussed in more detail in Chapter Four, ‘The Gaze’. One can see that there is not such a great difference in that Ehrenzweig’s idea is that the energy effecting syncretistic scanning is the libido.

<sup>343</sup> Ehrenzweig sees ‘preconscious’ as the mental information waiting for when it is needed, as does Freud, in other words, not in the conscious mind, but with no ‘barriers’ to being in the conscious mind. Freud discusses this in his paper ‘The Unconscious’.

<sup>344</sup> Ehrenzweig, 268. Also: ‘The quality of being unconscious is not dependent on the superego’s censorship directed against certain contents, but automatically follows from a change in the formal structure of image making.’

<sup>345</sup> Ehrenzweig, 270.

conscious mind there is a ‘gestalt’ orientation and much higher percentage of word-presentations, and thus less opportunity for association.

Ehrenzweig describes true intuition as being an event where ‘the normal differentiation of time and space is suspended and events and objects can freely interpenetrate.’<sup>346</sup> He sees this as a ‘full’ emptiness in that to the conscious mind it appears empty because the material ‘cancels each other out’, while in the unconscious undifferentiated state *several mutually incompatible thoughts/images are being held at once*. Note that this is a different ‘full’ from Lacan’s notion that ‘full’ is determined by the ‘inclusion’ of, or closeness to, his notion of desire. However it is not totally unrelated because ‘desire’ can be seen as one of the many ‘complexifications’ included in the notion of dedifferentiation. Because of its complexity and richness, Ehrenzweig’s notion provides a (theoretical) rationale for Georges Bataille’s call for the importance of ‘un-knowing’, in that much of ‘value’ can still be happening in the un-knowing state of mind. What this means for my developing argument is that not only is the un-thought stage, seen here as a complex and well articulated notion of ‘intuition’, a part of the artistic process, it is theoretically (in outline form) understandable and imaginatively visualize-able. To see intuition and un-knowing and un-thought as (to some degree) equivalent, and as the holding mentally of several mutually incompatible ideas/images at once, such that these operations become ‘invisible’ to the rational mind, elucidates both the ‘surprising’ results and the ‘mental anguish’ which can accompany, and linger from, the un-thought stage.

According to Ehrenzweig’s ideas it is possible to go a step further. It is possible ‘theoretically’ to relate un-thought and ‘un-knowing’ to death and the ‘death instinct’ insofar as Ehrenzweig refers to dedifferentiation as a kind of entropy.<sup>347</sup> He elaborates further by saying that, as dedifferentiation progresses, it can be felt by the making artist as ‘an approaching danger and threat of total chaos’, in that the *ego* appears to be ‘decomposing’. He describes the artist as needing to be able to face this inner void openly, accepting the temporary loss of ego control ‘which is often unconsciously experienced as the destruction of the ego’.<sup>348</sup> As I consider in more depth the interactions of the idea I am working with in this thesis, specifically the ‘connections’ for Lacan between re-presentation and death, the connections for Bataille between

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<sup>346</sup> Ehrenzweig, 132.

<sup>347</sup> Ehrenzweig, 296, where entropy can be understood in the sense of inorganic molecular structure tending to be uniform and un-differentiated.

<sup>348</sup> Ehrenzweig, 124. At this stage I am faced with the question of ego: subject. Ehrenzweig doesn’t discuss ‘subject’, was probably unaware of Lacan’s ideas, (and indeed might have disagreed with many of them). As I explained in footnote 278 above, I have decided to ‘overlap’ the two concepts for the purposes of this chapter, so that I can read, for Ehrenzweig’s ‘ego’, instead Lacan’s concept of the subject. I feel this is justified since what concerns me at this juncture is the interaction between the conscious/pre-conscious and the unconscious, which is also what Ehrenzweig is dealing with here.



un-knowing and death and finally and more particularly the connections for Ehrenzweig between syncretistic scanning and the (perceived) 'death' of the ego, I now 'remember' the 'fear' which is also a part of the 'model of making'. Standing in front of a half finished painting, knowing it is time to go back into the un-thought stage as I proceed, my heart skips a beat, my stomach contracts: visceral signs of fear. Until now I had always put these down to 'extraneous' factors, such as being tired, being stressed for other reasons, but Ehrenzweig has provided a clue which ties these visceral signs of fear to the un-thought stage (and the fear of the 'death' of the ego, with its 'rational' but more or less 'invisible' control to which we are all held in thrall). Ehrenzweig has provided the reason for embracing the un-thought stage, as well as the reason for avoiding it: while it is the foundation of creativity, it can also induce a fundamental fear. By these means, he succeeds in furthering my idea of the creative process and the un-thought stage, in that what can be perceived as fear of the 'death of the ego' can produce strong and complex 'resistance' to the un-thought stage.

### 3.5 Unconscious processes and art making

Whereas Freud uses dreams to investigate the unconscious and its processes, Ehrenzweig uses art and the process of art making to help understand the structure and process of the unconscious, and then re-investigates art with the outcome of his understanding. He approaches this quite differently from, for instance, Lacan's notion of the gap (Sections 1.3.2 and 1.3.3), with its indirect and chaotic effect on the realm of the symbolic, or of the stain (Section 1.3) with its (also indirect) effect on the realm of the symbolic. For Ehrenzweig, the implications for art, and specifically for art making, are directly a result of the deeply unconscious process of syncretistic scanning, with its ability to produce new combinations of the relevant material and to maintain resulting 'structures' of material with the possibility of its consequent re-introjection into the consciously perceived world. This implies integral associations and 'connections' amongst the mental material, which helps alleviate concerns I expressed in earlier chapters about concepts of Lacan in this regard (for instance Section 1.2).

Ehrenzweig proposes three stages as a basis for his ideas about creativity, for which his notion of pictorial space is also important. The *initial stage* of creativity he terms 'schizoid', in that it involves projecting fragmented parts of the 'self' into the work such that 'unacknowledged split off elements will then easily appear accidental, fragmented, unwanted and persecutory.'<sup>349</sup> This is the dedifferentiation stage where the ego scatters and fragments the

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<sup>349</sup> Ehrenzweig, 102.

information, as discussed above. Here the ego is introduced as an influence on the process, in that it ‘forces’ the perceptual apparatus into the mode of dedifferentiation, thus rendering it unconscious, rather than perceiving in the conscious gestalt mode of differentiation.<sup>350</sup> Schizoid anxiety is associated with this initial ‘fragmentation’ stage, at least partly due to the apparent ‘death’ of the ego.<sup>351</sup>

The *second stage* of creativity, termed the ‘manic’ stage, initiates unconscious (syncretistic) scanning of this fragmented material, which ‘integrates art’s substructure as it forms an unconscious substructure’. However, this may not necessarily ‘heal the fragmentation of the surface gestalt’<sup>352</sup>. For instance, the systematic disruption of the surface faculties in some trajectories of modern art remains partly unresolved in the final result.<sup>353</sup> ‘But’, he argues, ‘the unconscious cross-ties still bind the single elements together, and an unbroken pictorial space *emerges* as the conscious signal of unconscious integration.’<sup>354</sup> Thus what he terms art’s ‘undifferentiated substructure’ is formed during this unconscious scanning. This is to say that all relevant material is related and inter-related (condensation, displacement, and so forth) in such a complex fashion that the conscious mind is unable to encompass or understand it; at this point all differentiation ceases. This is a very important point for this thesis, in that Ehrenzweig is proposing that this mental material is *related* in various ways. The various widely different associations and distortions occurring maintain (in many circumstances) a network of ‘connections.’ These ‘connections’ become an ‘answer’ to my queries in earlier chapters concerning the ‘barren-ness’ of Lacan’s concept of signifiers in terms of any (perceptible long-term) connectors or relationships between them. Although Lacan’s idea of signification does not extend to those ideas, for me it is useful to consider the intermixing of Lacan’s ideas of linguistic structure as subsumed within the complex network of interconnected information proposed by Ehrenzweig.<sup>355</sup>

Moving on from this point, for Ehrenzweig the *third stage* of creativity is referred to as ‘depressive’. It involves the unconscious and conscious worlds beginning to merge, insofar as

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<sup>350</sup> Is it the ego which is fragmenting or perceptions (by the ego) which are fragmenting? Ehrenzweig uses perception to include both external perception (vision, etc.) and internal perception (phantasy, memory), and as such it is perception that is being fragmented by the ego.

<sup>351</sup> Note that Ehrenzweig was writing before ‘Anti-Oedipus’ was written.

<sup>352</sup> Ehrenzweig, 102.

<sup>353</sup> His example is the Picasso portraits, in the sense that details are ambiguous, but the overall impression is lively and ‘coherent’.

<sup>354</sup> Ehrenzweig, 102. (My italics).

<sup>355</sup> Ehrenzweig speaks also of ‘art’ that is, for instance, copied from another source, which as such has thereby lost these unconscious connections and become flat and less ‘moving’ – in other words ‘empty’, used in a similar sense to Lacan’s notion of ‘empty speech’.

fragmentation begins to be resolved.<sup>356</sup> Some material becomes re-introjected, while material which appears fragmented to the conscious mind can nevertheless remain integrated on an undifferentiated level. Ehrenzweig explains that in this stage: 'All opposites merge, death and birth become one, the differences between the sexes, the differences of parent and child disappear. Temporarily all splitting is undone.'<sup>357</sup> He points out that in this process, the surface ego must have learned the tolerance to be resilient enough to allow these phenomena, these fragmented and apparently chaotic structures, to remain as such, rather than calling on secondary revision 'by the rational gestalt principle' to get to work and 'tidy up the mess'. Again we can, following Ehrenzweig, use the example of Picasso's work, where he allows inconsistencies and illogicalities to exist within the pictorial surface and yet as one views his work the image 'comes together' with strength and power, there is a 'hidden structure' which holds together the apparent inconsistencies to the benefit of the entire painting. Ehrenzweig's notion is directly important to the un-thought stage of image making, in that this powerful faculty for scanning fragmented and diverse material and enabling consequent newly arising combinations and changes provides a theoretical basis both for seeing the interaction of libidinal energy and mental content, and for seeing the consequent emergence of previously un-thought marks and images. Thus, about his 'third stage' of creativity, he states:

a partial re-introjection of the oceanic imagery into consciousness occurs. Because it is only partial the rest remains repressed and forms art's unconscious sub-structure. What comes together in 're-integration' can re-emerge in the conscious mind as symbols and integrated 'pictorial space.'<sup>358</sup>

But because narrowly focused conscious perception cannot comprehend the wider sweep of undifferentiated imagery, the final result of creative work can *never* achieve the full integration that is possible in the second oceanic-manic phase of creativity. In other words only a portion of this scanned and primary process-ed material can re-emerge in the conscious domain. Depressive anxiety is the inevitable consequence. This is because not only is there a 'chaotic' appearance from the point of view of conscious perception and analysis, but there is also the feeling that 'there is more' which hasn't been 'caught' in the current manifestation. The re-introjection back into the conscious ego is done by means of symbols emerging from the process of unconscious scanning (e.g. including primary process). The symbols formed are now able to be 'understood' in a differentiated or gestalt manner, and thus 'perceived' by the conscious mind.<sup>359</sup>

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<sup>356</sup> Ehrenzweig, 192-3.

<sup>357</sup> Ehrenzweig, 192.

<sup>358</sup> Ehrenzweig, 192-3. This is opposed to Lacan, who sees that 'condensation' and 'displacement' of 'pure' signifiers happens more or less by chance, with little provision for connections and associations being retained.

<sup>359</sup> Lacan stresses the overriding importance and autonomy of the 'Other', with regard to the symbolic; Ehrenzweig similarly includes a strong reference to the importance of the 'social'. He says: as the child grows and matures –

### 3.6 Processing perceptual information

In terms, then, of the *processing* of perceptual information, while Lacan posits a ‘pure’ signifier undergoing the primary processes seemingly randomly, Ehrenzweig posits a complexification of perceived material – memories, images, sensory perceptions, words, concepts, affect - all undergoing syncretistic scanning. As I pointed out above, there is the feeling of an underlying, if ephemeral, ‘connection’ of mental material that can be maintained in the context of an ‘intelligence’ (or at least complexity) of libido and its processes, rather than just random movements of desire. This is reinforced when Ehrenzweig argues that the unconscious process is capable of learning and developing, including for instance, as seen earlier, in and within the development of the ability to ‘allow’ the seeming ‘disintegration’ of the ego into ‘chaos’.<sup>360</sup> Ehrenzweig terms this process of creativity the ‘poemagogic’ in order to ‘describe its special function of inducing and symbolizing the ego’s creativity’ by way of the central theme of death and rebirth, for instance as it mirrors the ego’s approach to its perceived ‘death’ and then rebirth.<sup>361</sup> ‘The results, for me, reflect (and refract) Barthes’ notions (considered in Chapter One) of both diachronous and synchronous processing – in some way there remains within the context of dedifferentiation enough of an ‘overall story’ or relatedness for the resulting re-introjection to comprise some sense of relatedness and relevance for the conscious mind, albeit with surprises. Ehrenzweig referred to this in an earlier quote as ‘coordinated material’. I see this as supporting Freud’s concept of the primary processes working on thoughts, affects, memories and so on. These ideas also *add* to Freud’s concepts by proposing the syncretistic scanning process and clarifying (and yet at the same time seen as less clearly demarcated) Freud’s differentiation between the conscious and unconscious systems. As I have stated, we can incorporate Lacan’s idea of the signifier into this system; in this sense they are not mutually exclusive. (But there is no indication of any need for such concepts as the primary signifier or lack.<sup>362</sup>) To me as a painter, Ehrenzweig’s notions appear practical, robust

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and ‘in order to enrich ourselves as individuals we have to re-shape and change our human relationships without respite by projection and introjection [...] We have to give our substance freely, project it onto other people or creative work for further transformation. As in creative work we must be humble and grateful to receive back far more than we ourselves have put in.’ He says ‘The social aspect of creativity cannot be over-emphasized.’ This is in the context of a discussion of the ‘body social’ or ‘womb’ of society, including measuring the health of a society by its tolerance of diversity (fragmentation). (Ehrenzweig, 192-3). Note that these become symbols rather than memory traces in that they are formed from an ‘integration’ of various, not-always-logically-consistent memory traces, and are ‘backed up’ by these unconscious traces. Note also the link to Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of the body without organs (the *socius*).

<sup>360</sup> Ehrenzweig, 124.

<sup>361</sup> Ehrenzweig, 176.

<sup>362</sup> There is no evidence I know of to indicate that Ehrenzweig had any knowledge of Lacan’s writings, although he appears to have been widely read in contemporary psychoanalytic theory in Great Britain. Ehrenzweig died soon after the publication of ‘Hidden’, in 1967.

and applicable. This is borne out not only in terms of work produced in the un-thought stage being (sometimes) surprising and ‘full’ for me, but in terms of the accompanying states of mind proposed by him.

### 3.7 ‘Reappearance’ of processed information

In terms of the *re-appearance* of ‘processed’ material as images, Lacan posits an appearance through what he terms ‘the gap’, of randomly articulated mental material, without ‘meaning’, unrealized. Ehrenzweig posits a processing and ‘re-introjection’ into the conscious mind of ‘re-differentiated’ symbols. Ehrenzweig’s ideas allow me to elaborate Lyotard’s notions of figure and dissimulation, in the sense of visualizing one way in which this dissimulation might happen, that is via dedifferentiation and redifferentiation. This also enables a development of Lyotard’s emphasis on the energy of the libido enabling/driving the process by seeing the libido as the energy underlying the process of syncretistic scanning.

Ehrenzweig proposes that symbol formation is closely related to the making of art.<sup>363</sup> He explains his notion of the manner in which the process takes place:

In order to symbolize another object the symbolic image must interpenetrate with it in the undifferentiated matrix of image making. On being re-introjected into consciousness, the undifferentiated linkages will contract. The symbolic image alone catches the narrow focus of secondary revision and the other symbolized object remains repressed. But as long as unconscious linkage persists the symbolizing image will not be dissociated and remain(s) imbued with unconscious meaning and reference. Its symbolic power wanes as soon as its unconscious linkage is severed. This will inevitably occur owing to secondary processes that tend to dissociate surface imagery from its undifferentiated matrix.<sup>364</sup>

Ehrenzweig’s idea of ‘dissociation’ is related to Lacan’s notion of ‘empty’ images (speech). However, Ehrenzweig relates it to more than just the association/dissociation with ‘desire’ per se. Ehrenzweig’s proposal that dissociation is *encouraged* by secondary processes of editing and intellectualisation supports my interest in relaxing rational control as much as possible in the un-thought stage of image making, and leaving ‘open-ended’ aspects to marks and images in this process. Not only are there, for Ehrenzweig, inter-connections amongst ‘groups’ of mental material, but these inter-connections can even ‘survive’ some fraction of these elements ‘coalescing’ into forms the gestalt can ‘recognize’, thus potentially becoming conscious. My interest lies in structures and processes of image making that help to ‘retain’

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<sup>363</sup> Ehrenzweig, 191.

<sup>364</sup> Ehrenzweig, 193-4. In one sense this could be seen to be happening on that material which Lacan describes as pure signifiers. In other words, here Ehrenzweig is describing a process, while Lacan is describing ‘contents’ or a ‘text’ of the unconscious. I am saying that in this sense they are not mutually exclusive.

Ehrenzweig's idea of mental material imbued with unconscious meaning and reference.<sup>365</sup> By linking Ehrenzweig's ideas of dedifferentiation, syncretistic scanning and re-introjection, the visualization of mental processing is enhanced.

### 3.8 Exemplification

For this thesis, Ehrenzweig's notion of the difference between differentiated, articulated, conscious perceptual and mental material, on the one hand, and fragmented, no 'logic', no negation, no 'space/time', dedifferentiated unconscious perception and mental material, on the other hand, is of particular interest. One 'structure' being conscious, and one being unconscious, the 'event' of art making is more readily seen as the pulsation of conscious and unconscious processes and the 'emergence' of art making from this form of exchange, transformation and emergence. There are (some) 'unconscious' structural aspects present, many being impenetrable to the articulations of conscious perception. The underlying harmony is related to his ideas about the 'hidden structure of art', in other words his notion of the existence of a structured basis of the unconscious that is more complex than what appears to the conscious mind, but is at the same time basic to and supportive of what appears, since this is the 'database' from which the marks/images emerge.

An example of the process I am describing can be found (again) in the early drawings of Joseph Beuys.<sup>366</sup> As well as being in the role of viewer of this drawing, I am encouraged to visualise aspects of its process of production because it leaves visible so many 'clues' to its production. In the drawing entitled 'Kadmon' (Illustration 3.1), there is a general pictorial space, and there are marks of no specific meaning, as well as marks delineating figurative elements. There are symbols interacting in ways that may be more concerned with energy than with form. In his discussion of this drawing, Dieter Koepplin relates images within the drawing to each other: for example, the huge figure (in relation to the 'mountain range') 'sinking down' into the material world; the figure itself evidently 'creating' this world by the emanations from its mouth; with the 'spherical circling above' being seen as the spiritual world. He makes use of the name given to the drawing: Adam Kadmon (an image found in Jewish cabala of the middle ages, and later in the work of Rudolf Steiner), such that the figure sinking down into the

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<sup>365</sup> Ehrenzweig's notion of the three stages of creativity I see, based on my practice, as a believable description of what happens within the mysterious and absorbed stage of image making, as can be seen in the similarities between them. For me it is 'believable' both from what I know (and have described), of the absorbed and un-thought stage of image making, and from the results obtained from that stage (or from skipping over that stage).

<sup>366</sup> This example is based on Dieter Koepplin, "Kadmon", in the exhibition catalogue *Thinking is Form* (New York, Museum of Modern Art, 1948). See also Bernice Rose, "Joseph Beuys and the Language of Drawing" in the same catalogue.

**ILLUSTRATION 3.1**

#### Section 4: Summary and implications for the un-thought stage.

In this chapter Lacan's ideas have made a number of contributions to the understanding of the un-thought stage of image making, this time in terms of the *processes* of the unconscious. I recall Lacan's re-inscription of Freud's notion of the dream-work. For Lacan, the concept of 'gap' explains an 'appearance' of unconscious material into the world of the conscious mind as absence, distortion, accident or the like, as material (unrealized signifiers) that manifests in an 'impeded' manner, and can 'impede' conscious processes. This also involves the concepts of 'subject' as subject *to* the unconscious, and as 'split'. The split subject is seen in the process of 'aphanisis', or fading, where the 'opening' and 'closing' of the gap involves the appearance of unconscious material in a manner such that the subject as such 'disappears' and 'reappears' respectively. These ideas are useful to me in thinking about the un-thought stage 'appearing' and 'disappearing', and consequent (or pre-requisite) side-lining of conscious rational processes. However, referring back to Freud's notions of thing- and word-presentations, I see that Lacan's ideas of signifier and primary processes, as related to Freud's ideas, can lose some of the richness of resonance and association that Freud's ideas entail.

Ehrenzweig's notions support these views and re-invigorate this area of thought by elaborating more fully the processes and material of the unconscious, while confirming and enhancing the idea of a working interaction between conscious and unconscious operations.

It becomes clearer in this chapter that my interest is from a different *perspective* than that of Freud and Lacan. While they see this aphanisis as non-volitional (from the conscious-mind point of view), I am considering it as a process that can be encouraged and that can produce surprising and non-chaotic results. Therefore I see now that there is an essential difference between making art and dreaming, such that art is to some degree intentional, dreams are not, even though both are a result of relaxation of rational thought allowing more freedom for desire (however defined) to play a part.

Lyotard's notion of the dream-work as desire 'working over' dream thoughts is useful to my argument about direct (rather than lack-induced) action of the libido, since it results in a de-emphasis on the notion of censorship. In this way Lyotard's notion is closely related to that of Ehrenzweig, who posits that the notion of censorship is 'replaced' by the process of dedifferentiation, the play of the libido on fragmented perceptual information. Both dedifferentiation and dissimulation are notions concerning the process of unconscious mental material being worked over by desire, in a given mode of attention, even though seen from



different points of view. However Lyotard, like Lacan, assumes these processes to be non-volitional and with 'chaotic' results, which Ehrenzweig (implicitly) contests.

This leads to consideration of Ehrenzweig's proposals about the 'hidden order of art'. Freud and Lacan think about the unconscious, its processes and material, largely from the point of view of psychoanalysis as praxis, and Lyotard, one can say, from a philosophical consideration of psychoanalytic ideas. However, Ehrenzweig's ideas, while grounded in Freudian theory, see unconscious process and material from the point of view precisely of art, and art-making as praxis. His ideas relate directly to my thesis from the standpoint of a searching and to some extent intentional (although unconscious) activity (for instance image making), as opposed to an activity whose function is seen to 'repress' and to 'obscure' for reasons of fear and confusion (for instance symptoms). He proposes several new ideas to deal with this new orientation, for instance dedifferentiation and syncretistic scanning, which I see as (unwitting) examples of Lyotard's notion of (unconscious) '*devices*' that can focus libidinal energy into 'intensities' of energy. What Ehrenzweig also provides is a return to what I have referred to as Freud's richness of resonance of material, in connection with an 'extension' to Lacan's dependence on linguistic form, operations and 'text'. With Ehrenzweig we can understand the mental material as having synchronous and diachronous associations by way of Freudian ideas about traces left from perception as it is effaced, and the association and layers of these traces (termed signifiers by Lacan) in the psyche. What this means for my developing argument is that not only is the un-thought stage an important part of the artistic process, it is theoretically and imaginatively visualize-able. To see intuition or un-knowing or un-thought as a result of mentally holding and manipulating several mutually incompatible ideas/images at once, such that they become 'invisible' to the rational mind, elucidates both the 'surprising' results and the 'mental anguish' that can accompany and result from the un-thought stage.

Ehrenzweig, while beginning from, and assuming, a Freudian theoretical background for his ideas, does not provide his own rigorous theoretical *context* apart from his notions about the hidden order of art and the material and processes of the unconscious in this context of art-making. He assumes a Freudian context. In this thesis a further context is being provided by way of an extended consideration of Lacan's (and Deleuze and Guattari) ideas that can also be seen as a basis within which to understand Ehrenzweig's ideas. Much as I was able to see an accommodation of Lacan's ideas within those of Deleuze and Guattari (as they themselves propose), likewise I see no obstacles to a similar accommodation of Ehrenzweig's notions.

Ehrenzweig's ideas are a major pivotal point for the ideas in this thesis – encouraging a move from Lacan back to Freud in some areas such as associations amongst unconscious material, encouraging extensions of Lacan's ideas in other areas such as primary processes being not (only) chaotic and by studying the 'intentional' activity of art-making rather than activities (neurosis and psychosis) whose function is to 'protect' the individual from fear and lack. His ideas of syncretistic scanning and dedifferentiation are also pivotal in joining some of Lacan's (and Freud's) ideas with the idea of the direct intervention or 'working over' of the material of the unconscious by the energy of the libido as seen by Lyotard. Lyotard's notion of the 'laxity' in which an artist may engage as a particular mode of attention, allows further insight into the un-thought stage and relates directly to Ehrenzweig's notion of 'death of the ego'. In terms of the un-thought stage of image making itself, his theories provide a rationale (this stage is unconscious because of fragmentation and complexification), as well as a *raison d'être* (this stage is useful in terms of manifesting the structure and content of art) for considering it to be of importance in the arena of image making.

In terms of the thetic argument, including Lyotard's ideas about the dream-work might seem a retrogressive step (in terms of the 'chaotic' processing of the primary process), but they are included in order to point out two things. The first point is that again, it seems to me *possible to visualize both sets of ideas* as being relevant in certain situations. The *first set of ideas* is Lacan's semantic structures, wherein it is difficult to see room for expression, in combination with Lyotard's ideas of figure and dissimulations, which introduce room for expression as well as meaning. This includes the dream-work as seen by Freud, Lacan and Lyotard – basically unconscious 'random' operations providing 'chaotic' results in the conscious mind. The second point is that these so-called irrational and *chaotic results can be applicable for dreams and symptoms, but are not necessarily quite as relevant for intentional purposes like art and problem solving*, when they are seen against Ehrenzweig's ideas, and against my experience in the studio. My proposal now is to change the direction of focus and so to see the Lacan/Lyotard set of ideas as being only one standpoint from which to view unconscious operations, that of *dream and symptom*. This standpoint does not involve any notion of conscious volition as 'surrounding' the unconscious process, in other words as 'included' in the un-thought mode of attention. Against this, Ehrenzweig's standpoint, that of the conscious intention to make art, provides a different context and different results in terms of quality (if not quantity) of libidinal influence. Ehrenzweig also proposes that it is possible for this process to be 'learned' and developed.

As I stated above, it seems to me that these three sets of ideas (Lacan, Lyotard and Ehrenzweig) all contribute essential elements of understanding to the unthought stage of image making. In addition, they can be seen to co-exist within a wider view of the unconscious – for instance that of Deleuze and Guattari as discussed in Chapter Two. In other words, put simply, pathways of ‘thwarted’ energy (thwarted in terms of certain beliefs in terms of lack) and of ‘freer’ energy (in terms of Lyotard’s, Deleuze and Guattari’s (and Ehrenzweig’s) concepts of libido) can co-exist in the human psyche. Thus, although at first sight these writers appear to be proposing quite disparate sets of ideas, in fact they dovetail together in quite a useful manner for my purposes. They each look at the unconscious from a separate point of view – force, energy, type of mental material, perception (internal and external), processes – but in conjoining the various ideas a more detailed picture is provided than in any one set of ideas on its own.

#### Section 5: Next chapter

In the next chapter, I am now prepared to consider Lacan’s overall concept of the gaze, in which his theory of the unconscious plays such an important part. I include extensions to his ideas as proposed by Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger, in which she provides a way of considering a separate pathway for libidinal energy, a specific extension of the paradigm provided by Lacan.

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## **CHAPTER FOUR**

Chapter Four includes a consideration of Lacan's notion of the gaze as an overall concept, in particular as it relates to the second (un-thought) stage of the process of image making. B. Lichtenberg Ettinger's relevant contestations and extensions of Lacan's ideas are discussed, including her notion of the matrixial gaze as an 'additional pathway' of the libido.

## Chapter Four: The Gaze

Having considered a number of aspects of Lacan's concept of the unconscious as an important element of the concept of the gaze, now is the point at which to consider the gaze as an overall concept, in its relationship to the un-thought stage of image making. For Lacan the gaze is the influence of the unconscious on perception, in which perception is all but over-ridden by the influence of the unconscious. We have seen that Lacan's concept of the unconscious includes his concepts of the Other, the realm of the symbolic, the signifier, and the primary processes seen as linguistic operations; included also, more controversially, is the concept of lack and the desire to which it gives rise. At this point in the thesis I have considered other concepts from within the psychoanalytic paradigm that provide a wider context within which to understand Lacan's concept of the unconscious, with ideas of Lyotard, Ehrenzweig and Deleuze and Guattari. In Seminar XI, Lacan uses the notion of the gaze to exemplify implications of the structure and influence of the unconscious, and its basis of lack, as teaching aides in understanding psychoanalytic theory. As a subset of ideas, he uses painting to exemplify the notion of the gaze and its function. He speaks of painting from the standpoint of the viewer, and occasionally also from the point of view of the *process* of painting. In this chapter, I find Lacan's concept of the gaze useful, but I also aim to further re-consider its single-track view of psychological functioning by means of Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger's proposal concerning a particular additional non-object-orientated 'libidinal pathway'. This continues my chosen path of using, rather than discounting, Lacan's concepts, while also re-contextualizing them.

### Section 1: Lacan's concept of the gaze

*Now I return not only to the studio, but to regarding an image. I am left with a page of marks, which has evolved through various spiralled stages into an image, having undergone various 'accidents', mistakes, impedances of all sorts. I regard the image. In being thus regarded, the image 'looks back'. In fact it 'looks' back even when not being regarded – it is somehow lodged internally in me and returns to haunt my conscious mind. What does it 'say' as it looks back? This is the question. What does it say? And where does 'what it says' come from?*

Lacan's concept of the gaze is described briefly in Chapter One, Section 1. That serves the purpose of making available an overview while consideration is being given to one element

of that gaze, his concept of the unconscious. Here I consider the gaze as an overall concept, one that reflects and refracts many of Lacan's underlying ideas and concepts.

### 1.1 The gaze as *objet a*

The gaze is seen by Lacan as operating in the scopic field. The scopic field is a psychological field, associated with the eye as it comprises the visual field.

Lacan states: 'In the scopic field the gaze is outside, I am looked at, that is to say I am a picture', in other words the subject becomes a representation, a signifier.<sup>367</sup> He says that 'the institution of the subject in the visible is determined by the gaze that is outside me'.<sup>368</sup> This makes me as subject other than what I am (my being). Furthermore 'what I am shown is not what I desire to see'.<sup>369</sup> In this way, for Lacan, the eye functions *at* the level of lack, *with* regard to the desire of the Other, and *within* the arena of the unconscious as he understands it.

Lacan sees the 'scopic drive' as the 'partial drive' associated with the scopic field.<sup>370</sup> It is a question of the 'relation to the phallus insofar as what is lacking in the real might be attained in the sexual goal'.<sup>371</sup> In other words, the eye can function as an object that is a symbol for lack insofar as what we think we see, or what we desire to see, is a result of underlying lack. What we think we see is influenced not only by what is being looking at (or is 'looking back'), but also by the symbolic order, the field of the Other. This is why I have stated that the gaze is the influence of the unconscious on perception. Because lack is involved, it engenders desire, as discussed in Chapter One. Scopic satisfaction, Lacan tells us, results from the 'fall of the subject', *which remains unperceived*, leaving the subject 'in ignorance as to what there is beyond the appearance'.<sup>372</sup> In this way, the gaze is seen as a manifestation of the divided, alienated, 'split' subject.<sup>373</sup>

In this way Lacan conceptualises the gaze as *objet a* in the field of the visible. The concept of *objet a*, for Lacan, is that it has no being at all. The *objet a* is 'the portion of emptiness that my demand presupposes'.<sup>374</sup> The *objet a* is the object of desire, but insofar as this

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<sup>367</sup> Lacan, 'Seminar XI', 105.

<sup>368</sup> Lacan, 'Seminar XI', 106.

<sup>369</sup> Lacan, 'Seminar XI', 104.

<sup>370</sup> As I noted earlier, Lacan lists the partial drives as the oral, the anal, the gaze and the invocatory. See 'Seminar XI', 103-104.

<sup>371</sup> Lacan, 'Seminar XI', 102.

<sup>372</sup> Lacan, 'Seminar XI', 77.

<sup>373</sup> See Chapter Three, Section 1.3, also Introduction, Section 5.5.

<sup>374</sup> See Introduction, Section 5.3, 'Need, demand and desire'.

'object' has no fixity.<sup>375</sup> This *objet a* 'belongs to the symbolic order. It is the lining of the subjective and the double lining of the intersubjective.'<sup>376</sup> It 'sets desire in motion, it sets the drives circling around it.'<sup>377</sup> This exemplifies the lack as engendering desire, as discussed in Chapter One.

Not only is the gaze an *objet a* in the scopic field, but also we see the intertwining and interacting of the three orders for Lacan as he considers the gaze in his habitual '*modus operandi*' of 'defining' terms by means of metaphor, metonymy, allusion and association. Lacan writes that the gaze 'is the look I imagine in the field of the Other' – thus it is seen as operating (partially) in the imaginary order. The gaze as *objet a* is the object of desire, alluding to the order of the real, and it 'belongs to the symbolic order' and as such is referred to above as the lining of the subjective.

## 1.2 The gaze as the gaze of the painting

Lacan's notion of the gaze of the painting is not a matter of this gaze being overt in the image, just as the concept of the gaze as such does not involve that which is overt in the world of the subject. Instead the gaze of the painting is seen as attribute(s) in the painting that could be said to lie behind it, or to the side of it, in the sense of being something that draws us to look at it, as we are driven by the scopic drive. I am considering this from the standpoint of the *making* of the image, since looking is essential to that process as well as to viewing.

For Lacan 'the relation between the gaze and what one wishes to see involves a lure'.<sup>378</sup> He proposes that what is at issue in a painting is 'deceiving' the eye – a painting is a 'lure' for the eye, where a 'lure' works by 'capturing' the subject [as viewer] as for instance through the medium of masks.<sup>379</sup> Man as subject is not entirely caught up by this 'lure', this capture – instead 'he maps himself in it'. Another way of saying this is that 'mimicry is that function which in man is exercised as painting'.<sup>380</sup> Lacan explains that it is not at the level of the representations of the painting itself that he is speaking – 'nor is it the dialectic involving the noumen beyond the phenomenon so to speak'.<sup>381</sup> Instead he approaches it from the point of view of the 'being' of the subject involved, whereby this subject is 'split', but accommodates

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<sup>375</sup> Lacan, 'Encore', 179.

<sup>376</sup> Lacan, 'Encore', 179.

<sup>377</sup> Lacan, 'Encore', 179.

<sup>378</sup> Lacan, 'Seminar XI', 105.

<sup>379</sup> Lacan, 'Seminar XI', 107. My additions.

<sup>380</sup> Lacan, 'Seminar XI', 109.

<sup>381</sup> Lacan, 'Seminar XI', 106.



him/herself to this split. His proposal is that ‘the purpose of [the process of] painting is for the subject to be inserted in a function whose exercise grasps it’.<sup>382</sup> This exercise is desire. Again we see reference to an ‘un-thought’ stage. The split is seen as between the subject itself (as its being) and that which it shows to another (as its re-presentation). I see this as parallel to the ‘split’ or ‘gaze’ of the painting – between its ‘being’ and its ‘representation’.

Lacan argues that there is in a painting not only a gaze of the painting, but a ‘certain taming of the gaze’ of the viewer, which he terms ‘*dompte regard*’.<sup>383</sup> By this Lacan means ‘he who looks is always led by the painting to lay down his gaze’.<sup>384</sup> I see this as an important concept from the point of view of this thesis – to tame the gaze would be to tame the alienation, the separation of being from representing. The value in the social field, Lacan points out, is that it is a ‘creation of desire’, which is pure at the level of the painter, and which is seen to take on commercial value, such that it ‘calms [people] by showing them that at least some of them can live from the exploitation of their desire’. But it also calms because their ‘desire to contemplate finds some satisfaction’ in the painting.<sup>385</sup> However Lacan does not emphasize this idea of the calming of the viewer. He sees the painter working under the influence of the ‘domination’ of the gaze. There is always a gaze behind a painting, he says, and always has been. So the concept of the gaze introduces the concept of lure but also stresses the influence of the gaze as *objet a*.

How does this gaze of the subject influence the painting? Lacan applies his idea of the gaze of the painting to ‘pictorial creation’, with the idea that the artist’s function does not lie in the act of representation, but in what can be seen as the (unconscious) mapping of him/herself (as aspects of desire) in and/or on the art object, with the resulting inclusion of a ‘lure’ in the painting. Lacan explains that this happens by means of the painter as creator, who sets up a dialogue with lack. The process of painting occurs such that painters’ strokes, and marks, do not ‘fall by choice’ onto the canvas, but instead: ‘the painter’s brushstroke is that in which something is terminated’<sup>386</sup> What is terminated is the element of ‘motive’, in the sense of a response to its own stimulus. Therefore these markings are to be thought of as being in the form of gestures rather than acts – the gesture is the *result* of what is being created (the picture) as a theatrical situation that allows, or calls for, the gesture. This is the gaze operating in a ‘descent of desire’, but with the subject (the painter) being ‘not completely aware of this – he operates by

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<sup>382</sup> Lacan, ‘Seminar XI’, 100. My addition.

<sup>383</sup> Lacan, ‘Seminar XI’, 109.

<sup>384</sup> Lacan, ‘Seminar XI’, 109.

<sup>385</sup> Lacan, ‘Seminar XI’, 111.

<sup>386</sup> Lacan, ‘Seminar XI’, 114.

remote control'.<sup>387</sup> This is closely related to Lacan's notion that the desire of the subject is the desire of the Other. Because this desire is unconsciously 'perceived' it would not be consciously noticed, but it can 'disorganize' the field of perception of the image *maker*, as subject to the desire of the Other. For me, this effect can be exemplified in the later sculpture of Giacometti, in which he insisted he was attempting mimesis (Illustration 4.1). However, his sparse, even emaciated, works had other effects on viewers, for instance eliciting and reflecting resonances of the (then) recent war. The *gaze* of the artwork could then be seen as the reflection of the artist's own unconscious 'desire' in the field of the painting or sculpture, the dissimulation of the symbolic in the sense of being subtle reflections and refractions of the image maker's particularized lack and desire (the real) incorporated within the image. About the painter, Lacan claims:

in the picture, something of the gaze is always manifested. The painter knows this very well – his morality, his search, his quest, his practice is that he should sustain and vary the selection of a certain kind of gaze.<sup>388</sup>

I see this as the 'gaze' manifesting a 'lure' for the subject, in other words a lure manifested by means of desire of the painter that can 'hook' the desire of the subject (as both viewer and painter-as-viewer). The gaze of the painting, then, is the lure with which the painting is impregnated.

### 1.3 The gaze as process

Lacan proposes that the 'remote control' under which the painter works is 'a desire on the part of the Other', implying an exemplification of his idea that man's desire is the desire of the Other. At the end of these lack/desire driven gestures is the 'showing'. These ideas emphasize the 'appetite of the eye' (for both maker and viewer, I would argue), and take us back full circle to the scopic field/drive, and Lacan's notion of the 'profound relation between [*objet*] *a* and desire'.<sup>389</sup> The gaze, then, can be seen as a *process*, parallel to my notion of the unthought stage, in both of which perception (and consciousness) are all but over-ridden by the influence of unconscious mental material and psychical processing.

### 1.4 Implications

Lacan's notion of the gaze, as we have now seen, is not optical insofar as it does not reside in the visual field *per se*, but in the scopic field. The scopic field is defined such that it

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<sup>387</sup> Lacan, 'Seminar XI', 115.

<sup>388</sup> Lacan, 'Seminar XI', 101.

<sup>389</sup> Lacan, 'Seminar XI', 115. My addition.

**ILLUSTRATION 4.1**

comprises the psychical field *associated* with opticality. The gaze is also an un-thought process, as I pointed out above. Lacan says the state (or mode of attention) of the subject at this point is such that the subject as representation becomes elided and the subject as ‘being’ or ‘real’ can issue forth, as we saw in aphanisis.

The gaze is a concept concerning the interaction of unconscious and conscious processes – borderlines and boundaries, reflections and refractions of individual mental processes, libidinal energy, and cultural material.

One begins to see (and reflect – and reflect on) both the hindrances (negativity, negative influence, negative undertones) of the symbolic as well as the powerful excitement of the potential of the symbolic. Lacan’s concept of the wall of the symbolic as both the hindrance and the mediation of the communication of ideas shows us within ourselves reflections and refractions of that symbolic, the developing of the unrealized, the emphasizing of the play of, and the particularization of, reflections and refractions of the ‘unrealized’.

Image making is one clear example of the gaze as reflection and refraction of the borderlines and boundaries of the interlinking between conscious and unconscious, rational and un-thought mental processes, individual and culture, past and present, particularized and general, realized and unrealized. The particularization and realization of aspects of ideas by the individual adds to the fertile matrix of both realized and unrealized potential, the already fixated ideas/ruminations/visceral influences and the censored chapters, exemplifying concepts of truth and knowledge, the full and empty image. The gaze in art can ‘manifest’ as content of the unconscious ‘appearing’ as ‘lure’, as trace/reflection/refraction of desire. This gaze is the desire of the maker and the ‘desire of the Other’ impregnating the painting. It becomes a ‘lure’ for the viewer. It can also result in the ‘taming of the gaze’ of the viewer. There are consequent borderlines and boundaries to related concepts of truth and knowledge, and to the irruption of the unrealized unconscious with its impedances.<sup>390</sup>

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<sup>390</sup> In terms of expositing Lacan’s ideas clearly, the difficulty is in precision. What Lacan presents in one context may be half negated or given a different meaning in another context. He cultivates this method of communication because it is parallel to the way he understands the unconscious to function, and because it becomes rich in its meanings and connotations; it is not didactic. The ‘confusion’ can be accepted because of the overall richness of the picture, with its implications, connotations and potential, as well as its seriousness of purpose in his proposal ‘to elucidate’ the gaze. In some ways, his style of speaking resembles development of the images described in this thesis, and even the form and style of the thesis itself. In the images I refer to, there are juxtapositions and conjunctions of ideas, the frequent use of metaphor, imprecise or mysterious closure of an idea; there are ideas which are not clearly and thoroughly spelt out at any one time – unclosed and ‘emerging’ images such as occur in the work of Beuys and Twombly. This ambiguity is directly parallel both to the development of this written thesis and to the development of a painting in my studio practice.

In these ways, for me, Lacan's ideas continue to be unquestionably useful in thinking about the un-thought stage of image making. My occasional unease is assuaged by the accommodation of Lacan's ideas under the umbrella of those of Deleuze and Guattari, and additional ideas of Lyotard and Ehrenzweig. What continues to be problematic for me is that image making in Lacan's sense becomes akin to symptoms, being theorized on a basis of trauma and loss, which I argue is an unnecessarily limited view of the process of image making. By now this has been ameliorated to a certain extent by seeing Lacan's ideas as a sub-set of certain aspects of the concepts of schizoanalysis, seeing the human unconscious as manifesting within a wider (than lack) libidinal arena. I return to this in Chapter Five. Before that there is another step that can be taken. Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger develops her notion of the matrixial gaze in parallel with Lacan's concept of the gaze, but circumvents the 'object-orientated' nature of Lacan's gaze by positing a separate, and specific, libidinal pathway.

## Section 2: 'Extending' Lacan's notion of the gaze – B. Lichtenberg Ettinger

### 2.1 Another (side to the) story

*'...beyond yet inside the visible...'*<sup>391</sup>

Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger (hereafter Ettinger) develops the notion of a 'gaze' which is parallel and complementary to Lacan's notion of the gaze, but which extends his notion in ways that are relevant to the un-thought stage of image making. As she explains in a number of notebooks and articles, Ettinger's notions have developed in part on the basis of her practice as a psychoanalyst, and in part of the basis of her practice as an artist. I have included an example of her art work (Illustration 4.2) as an introduction to her artistic ideas, while at the same time I do not see her work as an 'illustration' of her psychoanalytic ideas.

In introducing her idea of this parallel gaze, which she terms the 'matrixial gaze', Ettinger explains:

Inasmuch as the [Lacan's] gaze is non-visual but enters visibility to perplex it and to entangle the tableau from within and from outside, the matrixial gaze penetrates and alters the scopic field even if its origin is non-visual, because each dimension of partial sexuality and sensibility is inseparable from other unconscious dimensions of the psyche – other partial sexualities and sensibilities. [...] Since sexuality delivers keys to understanding the

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<sup>391</sup> B. Lichtenberg Ettinger, "Wit(h)nessing Trauma and the Gaze", in *The Fascinating Faces of Flanders*, ed. P. Vandebroek (Antwerp, Hessehuis, 1998), p. 141.

Illustration 4.2

[Lacan's] gaze in the wider context of the unconscious, the matrixial sexual difference linked to another experience and another body, gives supplementary links between libidinal action, affect and traces, subject, object, Other, and desire. It therefore offers supplementary understanding of the 'visuality' of the gaze.<sup>392</sup>

This quotation introduces a reason for including her ideas in my argument, in that her concept of the matrixial gaze initiates the development of an idea of a 'gaze' outside of but not excluding Lacan's paradigm. On the other hand, her ideas incorporate some of Lacan's assumptions, as seen in some aspects of her notions, that have already been contested and 'extended' in this thesis. One such assumption is (a different) lack and its consequent desire as the basis of the unconscious, which I have contested through the ideas of Lyotard, (Chapter One Section 3.1) and Deleuze and Guattari (Chapter Two, Section 2.2.1). Another is 'sexual difference' and the female body, which I can re-inscribe in that Lacan refers to sexual representation as residing not in the 'being' of the subject, but located in the Other.

Inasmuch as the [Lacan's] gaze is non-visual but enters visibility to perplex it and to entangle the tableau from within and from outside, the matrixial gaze penetrates and alters the scopical field even if its origin is non-visual, because each dimension of partial sexuality and sensibility is inseparable from other unconscious dimensions of the psyche – other partial sexualities and sensibilities. [...] Since sexuality delivers keys to understanding the [Lacan's] gaze in the wider context of the unconscious, the matrixial sexual difference linked to another experience and another body, gives supplementary links

Deleuze and Guattari propose that these can be seen as 'residing' in the 'human' aspect of the unconscious (Chapter Two, Section 3), and it is this 'human' aspect that is precisely what I am 'extending' in the ideas being developed in this thesis. I re-interpret Ettinger's references to the female body and the feminine influence as libidinal energy (as the basis of the unconscious), since she is speaking of an 'alternate libidinal pathway'. In other words I translate her 'enigma of femininity' to a (non-gendered) libidinal pathway involving a desire for borderlinking, outside the bounds of Lacan's 'human unconscious' with its object orientated lack and desire. In other words I am redirecting the Lacan/Ettinger idea of feminine and masculine here into a differently orientated notion of matrixial and phallic, where what differentiates them is not an issue of 'gender', but different libidinal pathways, different 'locations' in the wider notion of the unconscious (with Deleuze and Guattari) – one in the 'human unconscious' and one in a 'deeper' libidinal unconscious. As will be seen as this section develops, I do not see such Lacanian ideas as indispensable to the basic thrust of her idea of the matrixial gaze; in fact I

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<sup>392</sup> Ettinger, "Wit(h)nessing", 133. Note that an important part of Ettinger's work is her development of a critique and a 'resolution' of Lacan's ideas about 'feminine jouissance'. I do not address these issues because of my focus on the un-thought stage of image making.

believe she has moved outside the Lacanian paradigm into that of libidinal energy as such. In this way, I see that Ettinger's ideas can be usefully incorporated into the extended view of the workings of libidinal energy that is being developed here, rather than in Lacan's 'human unconscious' of beliefs and concepts, including lack and its engendered desire as its basis.

### 2.1.1 Ettinger and Lacan

Ettinger's understanding of Lacan's concept of the gaze forms a model and context for her ideas of the matrixial gaze. She accepts Lacan's domain of the phallic, including lack, as a basis of his concepts of the subject, the symbolic and the gaze. However she bases her notion of the matrixial gaze on a separate libidinal pathway. Ettinger sees Lacan, in his search for clues relating to the 'talking cure', as being deeply involved with his concepts of the realms of the symbolic and the imaginary, which are adopted as the symbolic is 'conquered' and the subject-unconscious split occurs at the Oedipus complex stage. She agrees with this, as far as it goes, but, for her, this ignores the very early years of human experiences and learning. Lacan theorizes, she says, that anything 'relating to the maternal womb and its jouissance between conception and birth is considered occultism and mystification' and that 'anything before birth is considered as undifferentiated welding, foreclosed to knowing'.<sup>393</sup> By circumventing the role of the Oedipus complex as being the whole story, Ettinger adds to Lacan's concept of the gaze.<sup>394</sup>

Lacan's notion of the stain as being a direct effect of the real (albeit a differently orientated 'real') continues to be of direct importance in Ettinger's ideas. For Lacan (Chapter Three, Section 1.3.1) the stain is one of the few arenas where the real may (indirectly) influence the symbolic. In Ettinger's exposition of Lacan's concept of the relationship of the gaze and art, she explains that they are related by means of the notion of the stain, in that the gaze can contribute to the stain, and the stain can 'affect' the symbolic. As we have seen, Lacan sees the gaze as an *objet a*, and he posits that the real and the symbolic cannot 'meet'. However, Ettinger proposes that these limitations are addressed in her ideas concerning the matrixial gaze. To introduce these ideas, she asks the question: 'Does the gaze operate in the *sphere of drives* searching for objects or does it operate *on* the sphere of relations themselves?'<sup>395</sup> In other words,

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<sup>393</sup> Ettinger, "Wit(h)nessing", 128.

<sup>394</sup> As I mentioned in my Introduction, Section 5.5, while Julia Kristeva is an example of a post-Lacanian writer who also considers this early period of life in her discussion of pre-oedipal proximity of the mother, her notions emphasize a semiotics that relies on Lacan's structuralism. Ettinger's contribution to this discussion focuses on what can be seen as the non-human (Deleuze and Guattari) aspect of the real. J. Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*.

<sup>395</sup> Ettinger, "Wit(h)nessing", 332. (My emphasis.)



can ideas concerning the paths of the libido be re-examined? A basic question, for her, then becomes how the ‘paths’ of the libido organize themselves: is this organization based on lost objects per se, the lost mother, the phallus as a symbol of loss, *or* could the organization *in addition*, be based on some sort of (lost) processes, linkages, relationships? Ettinger pursues this latter idea.

### 2.1.2 The matrixial model

Ettinger develops a ‘matrixial model’, as a basis for the notion of the matrixial gaze.<sup>396</sup> There are four basic elements to the model: the ‘matrixial stratum’, (of the psyche), the ‘matrixial gaze’, ‘metramorphic change’, and ‘eroticised aerials of the psyche’. In addition, there are the notions of borderspace, borderlinking, and borderswerving.<sup>397</sup> In considering the underlying desire in this concept, Ettinger’s argument is that:

elevating woman to the level of “the Thing” in art does not necessarily concern the foreclosure of woman-m/Other-Thing behind a schize. Another desire can be formulated, *other than desire based on lack*, whose metaphor is connected to female body, where *not a lacking object* is the cause of desire, but *an action* – the process of border linking itself.<sup>398</sup>

This ‘desire’, she proposes, would involve different libidinal pathways in parallel to Lacan’s model.<sup>399</sup> This is where the value of her observations lies for my purposes. I see the ‘other desire’ as libidinal energy, un-bound by a belief in lack. In other words, Ettinger agrees that the ‘becoming’ of the Lacanian subject, which enables signification and intelligibility, is a necessary process, and that the signifier (for Lacan) is not only a replacement for what is ‘not there’ anymore [...] it is what *founds* the subject.<sup>400</sup> But she posits that something is missing from this notion that can be addressed. Ettinger’s argument is that ‘a *special kind of link* must be

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<sup>396</sup> A model may be valuable as a metaphor enabling a clearer meaning for the concepts being dealt with. However, as always when dealing with a model, it is important to be clear about limitations and false trails in meaning, especially at the edges of the applicability of the metaphor. In this case, it is necessary to be clear about which point of view is being taken – that of infant and mother, as in the model, or of relationships in ‘real’ life. Ettinger refers to both viewpoints at different times.

<sup>397</sup> These notions have been developed in answer to questions which can be summarised as follows: - is there another kind of lack, or lost object, or *objet a*, which is not due to the castration model, but which can, among other things, enhance understanding of creativity; in other words another libidinal pathway within the psyche? Ettinger’s model gives an affirmative answer to this question by describing an alternative libidinal pathway, by way of the matrixial stratum of the psyche. In other words, Ettinger has been disturbed, as I have, by the paucity of explanation of creativity in Lacan’s models. Her explanation as being due to ‘another kind of lack’ I have placed in a wider notion of libidinal energy, as developed in this thesis.

<sup>398</sup> Ettinger, “Wit(h)nessing”, 131. (My emphases.)

<sup>399</sup> Ettinger, “Wit(h)nessing”, 131.

<sup>400</sup> Ettinger, “Wit(h)nessing”, 128-9. This was discussed in Chapter One.

maintained to this world-where-desire-meets-reality'.<sup>401</sup> I see her idea as emphasizing a (libidinal) desire for linking, rather than a desire raised by a lack/loss of linking.<sup>402</sup>

Ettinger develops the idea of a '*matrixial stratum of the psyche*' as a matrixial stratum of (partial) subjectivity, where a 'partial subject' is subject to links with others, but not (yet) subject to (Lacan's notion of) the (object-orientated) unconscious. She maintains that:

The matrixial unconscious sphere is a borderspace of simultaneous co-emergence and co-fading of the I and the *uncognized* non-I – partial subjects, unknown others linked to a fragmented me, part objects – in neither fusion nor rejection. [...] Co-emerging and co-fading I(s) and non-I(s) interlace their borderlinks in metamorphosis.<sup>403</sup>

She insists that by the womb experience she is precisely not intending the particular organ, but rather a 'complex apparatus' *modelled* on feminine-pre-natal encounter, which is also a model for continuing life experiences.<sup>404</sup> The matrixial stratum, then, is an 'originary unconscious', which I see in terms of the libidinal unconscious. It's basis is a desire for linking. What happens over time, in this model, is that there are traces of (necessarily) joint experiences: joys, traumas, pictograms, fantasies. There is not a fusion between mother and unborn child, as the term symbiosis in Lacanian theory implies, instead the I and the non-I are individual entities. Nor is there repudiation: while there is proximity, there is no feeling of threat or of rejection. These joint experiences are the basis of the sub-symbolic matrixial processes which permeate the symbolic (by means of the notion of 'stain') and 'change it' from within.<sup>405</sup> Ettinger refers to the others-to-the-infant, and the effects of the matrixial gaze, as being 'uncognized,' in other words, there is no cognitive process or language (or Other) involved. For this reason it is by definition unconscious. This is not consistent with Lacan's notion of the unconscious, but seen instead as in an 'originary' unconscious. Thus her use of the word 'sub-symbolic' is based on Lacan's idea that the 'phallic symbolic' can be influenced or 'swerved' by means of traces on the psyche (the stain), but she refers to a different (pre-Oedipal) stratum of the psyche with

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<sup>401</sup> Ettinger, "Wit(h)nessing Gaze", 128. Lacan has said that feminine jouissance can be experienced by women, but cannot be apprehended or represented as such, even by women. My argument below is that the notion of 'originary feminine difference' can be circumvented without compromising the value of her argument for this thesis.

<sup>402</sup> However she does sometimes imply a type of lack, a lack of borderlinking.

<sup>403</sup> Ettinger, "Wit(h)nessing", 134. (My emphasis.) Note the difference between the model and its application to the real world: the womb involves a very close physical presence, which is not present in the life situation after birth. She says: the 'womb stands for fusing symbiosis and undifferentiation that can emerge in culture as psychosis only. I suggest that evocations and irruptions of the feminine/prenatal encounters and emergence of matrixial cross-scripting of imprints are not psychotic. They only become psychotic-like when they have no symbolic access whatsoever in a culture that takes them for non-sense. Not only [are] such cross-scriptings [...] not psychotic, but they are a ground for thinking the enigma of the imprints of the world on the artist and of the inscriptions of the artist on the world's hieroglyphs.' (p. 135.)

<sup>404</sup> Ettinger, "Wit(h)nessing", 134. She upholds this view in other places (pages 135 and 136), yet in some other texts she seems to be saying it is the *loss* of the actual experience in the womb that is important.

<sup>405</sup> Ettinger, *The Matrixial Gaze* (Leeds, Feminist Arts and Histories Network, Department of Fine Art, the University of Leeds, 1995), 23.

'stain' laid down in the matrixial mode.<sup>406</sup> I see this as a type of direct trans-personal communication that circumvents Lacan's notion of the wall of the symbolic, while yet co-existing with it.

In her development of the term 'matrix', Ettinger explains that she put aside its original meaning, that is the usual connotation of the uterus as a basic passive space that is an imaginary 'only interior' locus, and instead emphasizes the matrix as a:

dynamic borderspace of active/passive co-emergence *with-in* and *with-out* the unknown [but non-threatening, non-subsuming] other [...] a concept which accounts for a *transforming borderspace of encounter of the co-emerging I and the neither fused and not (sic) rejected unknown non-I*. This concept has implications ... for a *broader Symbolic which includes sub-symbolic processes of inter-connectivity*.<sup>407</sup>

Her ideas of transforming borderspaces of encounter (borderlinking) and of sub-symbolic processes are of importance to the present thesis, as seen below.

Secondly within the matrixial model Ettinger develops the concept of *the matrixial gaze*.<sup>408</sup> She proposes that the matrixial gaze (as with Lacan's gaze), 'is the most slippery of all the objects on which the subject depends in the field of desire.'<sup>409</sup> The instant the subject tries to tame the gaze, it slips away or fades out.'<sup>410</sup> For Lacan this is because there is a schism between the seeing eye and the gaze.<sup>411</sup> Lacan's gaze is an enactment of the unconscious and its phallic lack, which involves fear of loss, the drive to recapture the 'phallus', this 'object', in the scopic field. The matrixial gaze 'acts like' the gaze, but from a different angle.<sup>412</sup> While having (still) nothing (or little) to do with the eye, it infiltrates the 'scopic' drive by virtue of including other types of 'perception', pushed by a desire for linking and relationships. The two gazes are both comprised of traces and memories, influences on and by the body of the current 'I', even though the first matrixial influences arrive long before the Lacanian 'subject' is engendered. In spite of

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<sup>406</sup> It is closely related in principle to Lacan's notion of 'stain', which is a result of traces laid down on the psyche, which can 'influence', or swerve, elements of the realm of the symbolic.

<sup>407</sup> See her footnote on page 23 of the 'Matrixial'. (Her emphases.)

<sup>408</sup> In this section, a number of terminological questions arise. It seems to me that Ettinger, when using the term 'gaze', is referring more to the Sartrean (that which permits the subject to realize that the Other is also a subject) than the late Lacanian terminology (Lacan developed the notion of the gaze as being not a drive, but the object of the scopic drive and thus the 'gaze of the Other' (See Chapter Three)). Likewise, her use of the term 'Other' is closer to the meaning of the 'other subject' than to the symbolic *per se*.

<sup>409</sup> Again, I see this as libidinal energy rather than desire in the Lacanian sense.

<sup>410</sup> Ettinger, 'Matrixial', 9. This is based on Lacan's notions.

<sup>411</sup> Ettinger, 'Matrixial'. Ettinger's (as Lacan's) definition of the 'real' is a psychic realm, not 'nature' or 'the body' but more closely related to the real world than to the realms of the imaginary and the symbolic. She also says that 'the gaze is the look I imagine/desire in the field of the Other'. This quote indicates that she is using Lacan's late definition of the gaze in general. However, it is difficult to see how this definition applies to the matrixial gaze, which (for me) resembles more closely the earlier Lacanian definition of the gaze, in that it indicates the existence of another subject, rather than the existence of the field of the Other, as the Symbolic.

<sup>412</sup> The word 'gaze' on its own always refers to the Lacanian notion of the gaze in this chapter.

their differences, both gazes result in changes to the psyche, as seen in the notion of stain, which can then swerve the symbolic. The matrixial gaze is a way of apprehending and relating to other subjects or partial-subjects, which is more ‘archaic’ and more diffuse than that theorized in the gaze of Lacan, or in his concept of the relationship of subject to object. This matrixial gaze can be modelled by the pre-natal relationship in order to give a flavour of tendencies and processes in border-linking overshadowed by more ‘obvious’ ways of relating to others, but it is a (another un-thought) process that carries on un-apprehended throughout life. In any case she proposes that this ‘sub’ gaze, along with Lacan’s notion of the gaze, is what can ‘illuminate’ art works, as I discuss in the next sub-section. Her matrixial gaze is a ‘gaze’ because it is an influence of unconscious processes (the flow of libidinal energy) on various types of perception, with a resulting effect on the psyche.

The third element of the matrixial model, *metamorphosis*, is for Ettinger a *process of change* that implies, or is a result of, non-phallic ways of contacting the archaic m/Other. It is ‘a process of intra-psyche and inter-psyche or trans-individual exchange of transformative and affective “communication” between/with-in several matrixial entities.’<sup>413</sup> By ‘transform’, she means: ‘turn both of us into “partial-subjects”; still uncognized but unthoughtly known to each other’, as well as ‘transform’, or partially transform, the psyche by means of ‘traces’.<sup>414</sup> Metamorphosis is a result of the process that she terms borderlinking and happens via her notion of the ‘erotic aeries of the psyche’, an additional perceptual faculty that is discussed below. Metamorphosis is seen as a creative principle, in that changes to the psyche are in the form of ‘non-obliterating’ traces, as opposed to Lacan’s metamorphosis with obliterating changes. Females, she says, experience the womb both as a ‘past-site’, which is true for males as well, and as a ‘future-site’, ‘whether they are mothers or not’. She is quite explicit that the ‘unconscious lanes’ of which she writes are equally available to both male and female.<sup>415</sup> Ettinger posits that ‘access’ to these unconscious lanes implies ‘allowing our subjectivity to linger in its partial dimension at the risk of regression, fragmentation and dispersal.’<sup>416</sup> She is positing *subjectivity as encounter* at this level.<sup>417</sup> This she refers to as a ‘fragilization’ process, and as one that correlates with various unconscious lanes of ‘communication’ of (traces of) libidinal energy (the real). In other words, in this model the non-I is unknown but is not an

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<sup>413</sup> Ettinger, “Wit(h)nessing”, 136.

<sup>414</sup> Ettinger, “Wit(h)nessing”, 136.

<sup>415</sup> Ettinger, “Wit(h)nessing”, 136.

<sup>416</sup> Ettinger, “Wit(h)nessing”, 134.

<sup>417</sup> She refers to this as a ‘feminine’ field, ‘beyond’ the phallus.

intruder, becoming instead a ‘partner-in-difference’, implying a tenuous connection. The ‘partial subject’ results from this borderlinking, as well as metamorphic changes in the psyche.<sup>418</sup>

A fourth supporting concept for in the notion of the matrixial model is the concept of the ‘*eroticized aeries of the psyche*’, which helps to explain how the matrixial gaze and metamorphic change in the psyche are able to take place. Ettinger conceives of the matrixial as a ‘subjacent sub-symbolic network’. The ‘network’ consists of ‘the unseen, not-seeing, different eroticized aeries of the psyche.’<sup>419</sup> They apprehend links occurring and mark a stain, via metamorphosis, on the psyche through which, and by which, imprints between subjects are ‘interwoven’, making this aspect of the notion of the erotic aeries a linking mechanism between the psyches of subjects. The stain is thus the result of both ‘ordinary’ and ‘matrixial’ form(s) of perception. Her definition of the borderlinking process includes oscillations of touch, pressure, sound, light levels, shared sensorial impressions.<sup>420</sup> Importantly for this thesis, this process encompasses ‘communication’ of aspects of the ‘real’, trauma and jouissance.

In Ettinger’s model, the erotic antennae are direct receivers of stimuli, while the matrixial gaze is a *product* of this direct contact with the real. Thus Ettinger ‘describes’ what Lacan ‘denies’, an access route where (partial) subject meets trauma (the real), where ‘I’ meets the uncognized ‘non-I’. This is where the (partial) subject can participate in trauma and jouissance of another subject via (fragilizing) borderlinking, and outside of the context of representation and the ‘wall’ of the symbolic (as seen by Lacan). In this way she conceptualises not only repercussions from experiences in the womb, but results of that experience and learning in terms of on-going border-linking and border-swerving in adult relationships. She refers to the state of partial-subject as being the *result* of a ‘fragilizing process’. The matrixial ‘subjectivity as encounter’ is an important basis of the whole matrixial concept. It refers to ‘plural, partial and shared unconscious desire.’ *This desire is for ‘linking’*, which she believes becomes ‘active’ originally in the last trimester in the womb.<sup>421</sup> The result is that ‘relations without relating transform the uncognized other and me and turn both of us into partial-subjects [...] where another is not an absolute separate other’, and traces of this are incorporated into the stain.<sup>422</sup> If we see this desire as an innate aspect of libidinal energy, rather than due to a lack of some kind, then the idea of a separate libidinal pathway becomes clearer.

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<sup>418</sup> Ettinger, “Wit(h)nessing”, 134. (My additions.)

<sup>419</sup> Ettinger, ‘Matrixial’, 44.

<sup>420</sup> However in the next paragraph her descriptions include sharing of affects as such, which I find more challenging – does this begin to touch on the telepathic?

<sup>421</sup> Ettinger, “Wit(h)nessing”, 138.

<sup>422</sup> Ettinger, “Wit(h)nessing”, 136.

In addition to positing another libidinal pathway, the matrixial gaze adds a dimension of trans-subjective awareness to Lacan's concepts, by way of different libidinal pathways and processes, with different attributes, but it does not override or invalidate his concepts.

### 2.1.3 Matrixial model and art

Ettinger is also concerned with the effects of the matrixial gaze on art and the process of image making. The overall notion of the matrixial sphere proposes a process of potential psychic transformation and a resulting 'sub-symbolic' influence on the realm of the symbolic, thus 'available' to influence image making. However, she explains: 'No content, no form and no image can guarantee that border-linking will take place via a particular artwork for particular viewers and that the gaze will inspire to (*sic*) attract a matrixial response.'<sup>423</sup> In Ettinger's view:

But when artwork does carry traces of the matrixial encounter(s), traces are engraved as traces in the unconscious, kept alive through phantasy and, in their share-ability, can change and transform individuals, art and culture.<sup>424</sup>

As the concepts of matrixial borderspace and metamorphic change imply, there are faculties (the eroticized asexuals of the psyche) that, she posits, 'register imprints that return from others as traces and transmit a centre-less matrixial gaze as a sieve-like veil.'<sup>425</sup> By border-linking in this way Ettinger posits that the artist can bear wit(h)ness to sub-knowledge of and from the Other (in later life), and other partial-subjects, via the 'tableau', or painting, which was until then (and possibly remains) 'non-knowledge'. Here she refers to trans-subjectivity and non-symmetric border-linking within a mixed and changing borderspace. Here she also emphasizes what I refer to as the un-thought nature of these transactions. Thus she extends the faculty established in her model of the womb, in relation to the relationship of mother and child and based on an alternate libidinal pathway, to a faculty existing, but uncognized, in relations between adults and now applied to the artist, namely the borderlinking of a fragilized partial-subject (the artist) as an influence on the making of the tableau, with implications for culture in general. This can happen because there is a pathway for libidinal energy which:

is foreclosed to the phallus but emerges and fades-by-transformation in the matrix. Something of those co-emerg[ing] and co-fading in the Real is delivered to the Symbolic's margins via covenants hidden in art.<sup>426</sup>

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<sup>423</sup> Ettinger, "Wit(h)nessing", 139.

<sup>424</sup> Ettinger, "Wit(h)nessing", 139.

<sup>425</sup> Ettinger, "Wit(h)nessing", 139.

<sup>426</sup> Ettinger, "Wit(h)nessing", 141. This quotation touches on the privileging of the feminine, which has been contested by others, and addressed by me above. This latter is in terms of a wider notion of libidinal energy than Lacan's notion of the desire engendered by lack. In this same vein I see her notion of 'originary' repression of the

Ettinger is clear that the concept of the matrixial gaze is based on the idea of interlinking, the consequent transmission of affect(s) and pathic information, and the trans-scribing of uncognized sub-knowledge on various psychological layers, resulting in influences on image making. I see her proposals as another example of the inculcation of desire (now as the libido) into art in parallel to the discussion earlier (Section 1.2) of Lacan's notion of the 'lure' being the inculcation of (his concept of) desire into a painting.

#### 2.1.4 Matrixial model and the un-thought stage of image making

The basic question for me is *how* this idea of the matrixial could be seen to operate in the act of image making. Whatever definition of Lacan's notion of the gaze is chosen with which to compare and thus better understand Ettinger's notion, it is clear that the matrixial gaze involves more basic, and more subtle, sensory input, with a libidinal pathway 'by-passing', or underlying, that of the phallic-based notion. If Ettinger's 'gaze' is regarded as a *type* of influence of the unconscious on perception, a hazy, diffuse, but still libidinally based element of the unconscious, it becomes more clearly related to the un-thought stage of the process of image making, in (at least) two ways. One way is that the 'psychical' influence on the tableau is swerved by the matrixial sub-symbolic as it infiltrates the symbolic by way of traces on the psyche, thus 'swerving' the symbolic to new subtleties of meaning.<sup>427</sup> Ettinger retains Lacan's idea of stain, but in her case this involves an out-of-conscious-mind 'web' of border-links and borderspaces in relation to the psyches of others. For Ettinger, the stain includes an influence of one's 'experience' of the trauma/jouissance of relating/linking to others, i.e. the real. The second way is that the 'matrixial' emphasizes the play of directly trans-subjective communication in terms of the real. While the 'phallic' concepts emphasize social/cultural input (the symbolic), Ettinger introduces into the process of image making an extended idea of trans-subjectivity in that at least some of this unconsciously perceived material involves direct 'contact' with the 'realm of the real' of other (partial) subjects.<sup>428</sup> One implication of this is that, for Ettinger too,

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Thing, related to Freud's 'primal repression', as explicable in more helpful terms in this present context by such notions as (with Lyotard, and Deleuze and Guattari) libidinal energy as the basis of the unconscious in conjunction with (Ehrenzweig) dedifferentiation, for instance of mental data that is vague, unarticulated and possibly affectful and thus very complex and very fragmented.

<sup>427</sup> As Lyotard's idea that 'libido' swerves the symbolic, in his notion of figure.

<sup>428</sup> Lacan had hinted this in his ideas of social/cultural influence in the development of his notion of the Other, in that the Other *is* this influence. In 1964-65 the Other as the symbolic becomes for him an essential part of the gaze. The gaze is an aspect both of the make-up of the artist as he/she evolves an image and eventually an aspect of the image itself, both for the artist and for others, in that the libido, influenced by these two types of traces in the psyche, 'plays' within the tableau.

the ‘real’ has changed ‘flavour’, from relating purely to ‘phallic’ desire, to encompassing *also* libidinal energy ‘untouched’ by Oedipal matters.

This leads to a consideration of the artist *per se*. Specifically, from the point of view of image making, for Ettinger, the matrixial gaze can fragilize the artist (and the viewer), she argues, by enabling the artist:

to follow it [the matrixial gaze] into a space beyond yet inside the visible, to abandon defences and become fragmented and fragile, to become open for sharing and absorbing and further redistributing fragments of trauma on condition of weaving into the artwork one’s own matrixial threads and letting the artwork penetrate one’s own psychic space of severalty.<sup>429</sup>

To me, this statement implies that her notion of ‘fragilizing’ is related to loosening the grip of rational thought during the process of image making, relating it to my notion of the un-thought stage. It hints, as well, at just *what it is*, as a process, that can contribute to the painting what wouldn’t be there if it were a ‘non-art’ sort of object, for instance a map or a sign. By this is meant a certain ‘forbidden’ meeting of real and symbolic by way of the matrixial gaze and the subsymbolic, *outside of conscious control*. It implies that there is, as well as stain, a more direct connection between partial subjects that involves the real and not the symbolic. These ideas side-step Lacan’s ideas of the signifier and structuralism, allowing access theoretically to an influence on image making (and image viewing), from an other than signifier-based notion, which has been difficult to conceive within the Lacanian psychoanalytic frame of thought.<sup>430</sup>

This is, for me, the crucial step of the un-thought stage of the process of image making itself, where the results of the unconscious perception and resulting traces on the psyche are precariously, unknowingly, held in the mind/psyche of the artist. The libido is involved in this process, albeit indirectly insofar as the ‘pathway’ is opaque. But in order to ‘access’ or ‘allow’ these traces to appear in some way in the tableau, it is necessary, says Ettinger, for the artist to let go (become fragilized) of his/her conscious/rational plans, knowledge, assumptions, to become a ‘partial-subject’ as we saw above, perhaps a more ‘direct’ route of ‘communication’ than by way of the stain. This requires opening to the unknown, which may include frightening, horrific, traumatic material, as well as silly, joyous material – but affective information rather than linguistic/symbolic.

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<sup>429</sup> Ettinger, “Wit(h)nessing “, 141. (My addition.)

<sup>430</sup> For example N. Bryson, A. Ehrenzweig, J. Elkins, as was pointed out earlier, for instance in Chapter Two, section 1.1.10.



### Section 3: Implications

Ettinger's ideas provide a particularized extension of Lacan's ideas. While upholding (most of) his concepts about the symbolic rotating around phallic law and the idea of the phallus, she introduces another, parallel, set of ideas. In Ettinger's thinking this level of communication detours around Lacan's realm of the symbolic, but can still leave 'traces' on the psyche (of all partial-subjects concerned), which can also affect the symbolic as in Lacan's notion of stain. She avoids the Law, the primal scene, and Lacan's notion of structure by positing another pathway for libidinal energy besides desire based on lack/castration. Her idea is a different level of communication based on what she terms desire with regard to links and relationships rather than desire based on lack of an 'object'. I extend her idea by re-interpreting this as being an example of 'non-human' libidinal energy as discussed at the end of Chapter Two, insofar as there is no possibility of beliefs, concepts and the symbolic influencing desire in this notion of 'archaic' borderlinking and borderswerving. In this way, Ettinger affords me a particularized notion of an alternate pathway of the libido that can work alongside Lacan's concept of desire. This puts more detail into what I have been proposing about Lacan's ideas being 'fitted together' with notions of Lyotard, Ehrenzweig and Deleuze and Guattari, in that the action of the libido as such can be seen not only in a direct relationship to Lacan's notion of the pathway of desire, but explicitly in parallel with it, co-existing. The libido doesn't 'run' in only one pathway in the body/psyche and nor does only one belief, basic though it may be (Oedipus), affect every aspect of libidinal energy. The matrixial gaze now becomes an intermediate step towards Deleuze and Guattari's concepts, where libido 'continues to rumble along' beneath the belief(s) that curtail (or enhance) energy.

Ettinger's notion of the matrixial gaze introduces a number of innovations important to this thesis, as well as providing as model a set of ideas that retains much of Lacanian theory and yet adds a radical element to co-exist with the rest. First, she posits the matrixial gaze as non-visual, but still 'perceptual'. Second, the matrixial gaze is based on the notion of a direct trans-personal communication of the 'real', outside of the realm of the symbolic, on the basis of perceived bodily and mental 'clues'. Third, and closely related, she also posits a 'new' perceptual 'route', the additional perceptual apparatus she terms erotic aeries of the psyche. The important point here is that the real is not 'communicated' through the 'interference' of the (phallic) 'lack' and the realm of the symbolic, but through a more direct trans-personal process of communication and apprehension of the 'real' through a differently conceived libidinal pathway. Fourth, she uses the term 'partial-subject' to indicate not being subject to Lacan's notion of the (linguistic/Oedipal) unconscious, but to a libidinally based desire for linking. The

transmission of these ‘clues’ happens not as subject to subject in the Lacanian sense, but as ‘partial-subject’ to ‘partial-subject’. Ettinger sees that the notion of the matrixial gaze directly affects art and art-making. Importantly for my purposes, there is her idea of the ‘fragilizing’ of artists, in allowing themselves to be open to (if not aware of, at least allow) such (unconscious) influences and perceived material, without tipping into psychosis. In other words the artist must become a partial-subject without letting go of the position of subject altogether. This is related (implicitly) to Lyotard’s notion of laxity in its relinquishing of rational ‘control’. Ettinger’s ideas are also related to Ehrenzweig’s notions of the ‘death of the ego’, and the related ‘schizoid’ anxiety and direct (and un-thought) relationship to the processing of the libido. These ideas implicate the un-thought stage in the ‘non-human’ unconscious/real as well as the ‘human unconscious’. Pulling these ideas together leads me into a more generalized notion of the gaze that is developed in the next chapter.

#### Section 4: Next chapter

The concluding chapter is a consolidation of the proposals presented in this thesis, emerging with a working notion termed the ‘libidinal gaze’ that further illuminates the un-thought stage of image making.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

Chapter Five summarizes and extends the ideas presented in this thesis, emphasizing their relationship to each other and to the illumination of the second (un-thought) stage of image making. In this way I am able to put forward a speculative contribution in the context of art practice to ideas about the process of image making with an idea termed the 'libidinal gaze'.

## Chapter Five - The Libidinal Gaze

### Section 1: Introduction

My aim in this thesis is to understand more clearly the stage two aspect of my ‘model of image making’. The model has three stages: planning (formative), absorbed (un-thought), and judging (reflexive) modes of attention, which can occur again and again as a spiralling process. ‘Un-thought’ is used in the sense of mental material and processes that are not apparent to the conscious rational mind, of which the dream-work is an example. In this thesis I focus on this un-thought stage, because I feel it is important to the process of image making, but not well understood. It is also something I cannot ‘discover’ within my painting practice *per se*, by definition.

I develop my ideas by using Lacan’s idea of the gaze as a template, where he considers the influence of (his concept of) the unconscious on perception. I use this idea both because of its emphasis on the idea of the unconscious, and because it involves the element of perception (as the scopic field). In addition to Lacan’s ideas, I draw on experience gained in my studio as a painter. In pursuing Lacan’s concept of the gaze, I find that there are a number of aspects that are helpful to better understanding the un-thought stage. I also find some aspects that are less helpful or even problematic in terms of my experience in the studio; these I re-focus with the help of the related thinking of certain other writers.

The point is to emerge at first with a putative ‘picture’ of what might have been Lacan’s view of the un-thought stage of the process of image making, had he considered that to be of equal importance to the training of analysts and the ‘talking cure’. My aim is to end with a compendium of ideas that deals with the un-thought stage in such a way as to further illuminate that stage, to be compatible with my experience in the studio, and to develop a basis for the contextualization of my own practice with regard to contemporary culture.

### Section 2: Summary of thetic argument

In Chapter One I consider Lacan’s hypothesis that lack and its consequent desire comprise the origin and *basis* of the unconscious. He posits that lack is indestructible, it engenders desire, desire is the origin of ‘every variety of animation’, and desire is ‘irreparable’.

At the Oedipal complex stage lack and desire are related to fear, a figurative castration, and death, and the realm of the symbolic is 'conquered' in this context. Lack and desire form the basis for Lacan's concept of the 'realm of the real'. From this basis he develops an idea of full and empty speech with regard to the realm of the real, which I extend to full and empty images.

Lacan understands his concepts as an integrated and 'complete' system of thought with regard to the practice of psychoanalysis. For me, these ideas provide useful illuminations of the un-thought stage, such as the nature of the symbolic, as well as its conquest and the motivation to use it. However for Lacan the real can never be embodied or assuaged by the symbolic since the two can never meet. In this sense, image making could be seen as a negative, even symptomatic, activity, which I find problematic.

As a result of my unease, I consider Lyotard's ideas that put into contention Lacan's scenario of lack as the originator of desire and this desire as the animator of all action. Lyotard posits an alternative hypothesis, the libido as a force of energy in its own right. For him 'expression' (aspects of the real) emerges as a dissimulation of the symbolic by means of this libidinal energy. Libidinal energy can be focused into 'intensities' by way of 'devices' of various sorts. For him, art is one such location of intensities. Artists' *processes* include a state of 'laxity' during which intensities of libidinal energy are focused, for instance by the 'devices' of primary processes. The artist can 'enter' (as a mode of attention) this state whereby borderlines and boundaries between interior and exterior material become blurred. I see his notion of 'laxity' as closely related to my 'un-thought' stage in terms of a mode of attention during which mental processes not encompassed in, or by, the rational conscious mind can encourage libidinal intensities as 'seen' in art.

In this way Lyotard addresses some of my concerns, particularly my concern about the pervasiveness and necessity of the notion of lack and its consequent desire, and the notion that these form the basis of the unconscious. However, there is an apparent inconsistency when attempting to reconcile his system of thought with that of Lacan, since Lacan's concepts, including the gaze and the unconscious, are, precisely, *based* on the notion of lack.

I leave these two ideas seemingly in opposition until the end of Chapter Two.

In Chapter Two I consider Lacan's relevant concepts concerning the *content* of the unconscious, particularly in terms of signifiers and the Other. Lacan's notion of signifiers is explored from two points of view, the experiential and the linguistic. The experiential notion of

signifiers involves perceived material as it ‘migrates’ from perception to memory, where the ‘in-between’ traces involved are seen as ‘signifiers’. The linguistic notion of signifiers has to do with signifiers as being ‘signs’, but signs that lack their ‘signified’ (meaning), and are thus ‘unrealized’. He proposes that the content of the unconscious is signifiers that are ‘structured’ in terms of a ‘primary classificatory function’. By this he refers to the example of the ‘innate prohibition of incest’ by means of signifiers promulgated by ‘nature’ (rather than culture). For Lacan, the primary classificatory system is closely related, by way of combinatory organization, to the way in which language is structured, such that he sees the unconscious as made up of signifiers that are manipulated by linguistic-type operations, although not ‘realized’ as a discourse. Linguistic operations taking place on this mental material include, for example, condensation and displacement as metonymy and metaphor respectively.

An implication of this is that *signifiers*, as ‘text’ of the unconscious, when processed in the un-thought stage, can produce more surprising results when in the grip of primary processes than can *signs* as text of the conscious mind when undergoing ‘rational’ processes. This is because signifiers are, for instance, less restricted in terms of possible combinations, since there are also ‘illogical’ ways in which they can be affected/combined by linguistic operations. The notion of signifiers is also useful when they are seen as ‘manifesting’ as marks on a surface in the image making process. However Lacan’s view of the unconscious as structured like a language causes me misgivings since it is difficult to see a basis for any lasting associations or relationships among the unrealized signifiers as worked over by the chaotic primary processes. This is an important point for image making in terms of the ‘harmony’ (opposite to chaos) that can accompany (or not) the emerging of marks onto a support in the un-thought stage.

Lacan’s notions of truth and knowledge are useful in thinking about the influence of the ‘real’ on the symbolic in terms of the un-thought stage of image making insofar as this stage can be seen to encourage the emergence of ‘truth’. My misgivings here relate to my idea that Lacan’s notion of ‘unrealized’ signifiers allows expression and affect to be under-theorized.

Because I question Lacan’s (under-) theorization of affect as residing within and/or associated with signifiers, I consider the relevant ideas of Deleuze and Guattari in their concept of schizoanalysis. They develop a system of thought with a different basis of ideas and assumptions than Lacan’s (the idea of the schizophrenic rather than the idea of the neurotic), and one that also contests Lacan’s notion of lack and its consequent desire as the *basis* of the unconscious. For Deleuze and Guattari, like Lyotard, libidinal energy is seen as a force, or energy, and as the basis of the unconscious. Schizoanalysis is based on an idea of the scattering

of this energy into what they see as 'desiring machines'. These libidinal flows can have effects in both micro and/or macro ('molar') levels and as such depend on and produce results ranging from (micro) neurological functioning to complex (molar) level beliefs and concepts (such as lack, the symbolic and the like). Not only desiring-production results from these desiring machines, but also the unconscious 'molecular' level code-recording on the 'body without organs'. But at all levels, individual and social, desiring machines are driven by libidinal energy, which thus posits the real as an integral part of the material as it is processed.

As the 'recordings' become more molar, gradually the codes approach the complexity of what Lacan terms signifiers, the symbolic, and the Other. Deleuze and Guattari posit that only at this point do Lacan's concepts of unconscious, pre-conscious and conscious become viable. Lacan speaks of the pre-conscious in speaking of beliefs, social 'exchange', and so on. But, for Deleuze and Guattari, Lacan's notion of the unconscious is also a phenomenon of the 'deep pre-conscious' rather than a definition of the unconscious. This is because they see that Lacan's concept of lack and its resulting desire is due to the formation/influence of a *belief*, not a physical or neurological phenomenon. Hereafter, I refer to their 'deep preconscious' as 'human unconscious', as they also suggest, since this keeps it firmly differentiated from (Freud's and Lacan's) concepts of the pre-conscious. For Deleuze and Guattari, beliefs and the symbolic are flows and break-flows of energy at the human unconscious, as well as pre-conscious and conscious molar levels. They see a spectrum of many levels from deep unconscious and molecular to the conscious mind, to the social, all based on the energy of the libido. In addition they visualize qualitative as well as quantitative fluctuations in libidinal energy.

In this way Deleuze and Guattari have formulated a broad and complex system of thought, although without proposing ideas particularly related to image making. I see, *within* Deleuze and Guattari's system of thought, the accommodation of Lacan's concepts of the unconscious and the gaze, as well as the accommodation of Lyotard's ideas about libidinal energy and its intensities, art, and the mode of attention of the artist, with all their implications for the un-thought stage. In this way, 'expression' can be seen to emerge from a complex of energy levels including unconscious libidinal energy in its various pathways, some by way of the human unconscious and the notion of lack, and some by other routes, personal and social. Rather than schizoanalysis being *opposed* to psychoanalytic theory and thus the gaze, it opens a space within which to accommodate and better understand psychoanalysis and the gaze as a description of the 'human' mental world. In this sense lack and desire, as conceived by Lacan, influence a *subset* of libidinal pathways, albeit an important subset in terms of our human-ness. The notion of schizoanalysis seen in this light accommodates both Lacan's and Lyotard's ideas.



This also allows me to include other ideas of Lyotard's that are related to art, such as intensities of energy, dissimulation and figure, and the mental state of laxity, alongside Lacan's ideas.

But this still leaves the particular arena of image making and its related un-thought stage less than thoroughly theorized, since Deleuze and Guattari are dealing with a system with more widely and differently focused concerns.

In Chapter Three, I consider Lacan's ideas about *processes* occurring in the unconscious that make a number of contributions to an understanding of the un-thought stage of image making. For instance the process of the dream-work (first theorized by Freud) illuminates the workings of the unconscious from the viewpoint of mental material and processes. It is helpful to this thesis, since the results of the dream-work (as images) and the results of the un-thought stage (as images) can both proceed from a relaxation/absence of rational conscious thought and as such both can appear 'meaningless', full of surprises, and as encompassing 'more than meets the eye'. However, Lacan re-inscribes Freud's ideas of the dream-work in terms of linguistic-type operations, for instance metonymy and metaphor, taking place on linguistic-type material. Lacan understands the primary processes as having (mainly) chaotic effects on this material, even though there may be certain associations within the material. I discuss Freud's concepts of 'word-presentation' and 'thing-presentation' as providing a notion of the 'mobility of energy' I find de-emphasized in Lacan's ideas, which emphasize the *lack of meaning* instead. Insofar as I am considering the un-thought stage of image making, Freud's notion of word-presentations and thing-presentations allows the visualization of associations of 'ideas' and an association of energy encapsulated with these ideas, which also calls to mind Lyotard's idea of intensities of energy. For me Lacan's ideas under-theorize the subject of making art.

Another relevant process proposed by Lacan is that of the 'gap', by means of which unconscious material is manifested. Unconscious material arrives as 'absence', distortion, or accident, in other words it is material (unrealized signifiers) that arrives in an 'impeded' manner, and whose arrival can 'impede' conscious processes. This notion of gap also involves the concepts of 'subject' as subject *to* the unconscious, and subject as 'split'. The split subject is seen in the process of 'aphanisis', or fading, such that the 'opening' of the gap is where the subject as such (representation) 'disappears' as unconscious material (being) 'appears' (a slip of the tongue, etc.) and the 'closing' of the gap is where the subject, as signifier, reappears and unconscious material no longer appears as such. These ideas are useful to me in thinking about the un-thought stage 'appearing' and 'disappearing' and the consequent (or pre-requisite) sidelining of conscious rational processes. However, to me, the notion of the gap has an air of being

too chaotic, limited, and 'pushed from behind' to be useful in illuminating image making. It may help to explain the field of emerging symptoms or even character traits (for Lacan), but does not (for me) explain the whole arena of the un-thought stage of image making. But my interest in the gap is highlighted due to the fact that it illustrates that my overall focus is from a different perspective than that of Lacan. While he sees the gap as non-volitional (from the conscious mind point of view), I am considering that the un-thought stage as a process that, while it is not conscious and/or rational, can be 'encouraged' (in terms of 'relinquishing' the conscious mind mode of attention) and can produce surprising and non-chaotic results in terms of consequent mark making that can include a 'harmony' and (sometimes) an underlying 'idea'. This leads me to realize that symptoms and the dream-work are not in themselves sufficient as models to help explain unconscious 'effects' on the process of image making. There are differing underlying characteristics between the arena of the dream-work and symptoms, being born of fear and an effort to dissemble, and the arena of making images, as an effort of 'intention' and 'search'. This highlights an essential difference between making art and dreaming, which is that art is to some degree intentional, dreams are not, even though both include an aspect of relaxation of conscious and rational thought, allowing more freedom for the 'real' to play a part. The difference becomes whether what Lacan terms 'desire' is being influenced by an underlying 'intent' in terms of search, experiment, art making, or (only) by lack and its desire, which can also be seen as an 'intent', but one guided by distress and fear.

At the end of this section about Lacan's ideas of processes in the unconscious, I am left with queries concerning the nature and inclusion of affect, the effect of (qualities of) intent, and the idea of harmony (not chaos) in art making. Lacan, Deleuze and Guattari, and even Lyotard, leave much unexplained from the point of view of what can usefully be seen to be happening in the un-thought stage of the process of image making. For these reasons I include a consideration of the ideas of Anton Ehrenzweig, which articulate and develop a more detailed picture. He provides both elaboration and extension of Lacan's and Lyotard's ideas of primary processes. One elaboration is to propose a 'replacement' notion for repression, by positing that what is often seen as repression can be seen more profitably as being due to the inability of the conscious mind (gestalt) to comprehend the complexities of fragmented 'dedifferentiated' mental material. New ideas include dedifferentiation and syncretistic scanning, as well as a more distinct picture of the process of simplification and re-introjection of mental material into the conscious mind. His processes can be seen to be taking place in a libidinally based unconscious (based on Freud's ideas of libidinal economy) and thus understood in a broader context than Lacan's notion of lack engendered desire. It is a small step to see this notion of Ehrenzweig's as related for instance to Lyotard's notion of the libido 'working over' unconscious mental

material – but with one very important difference. Whereas with Lyotard we are left to assume (as with Lacan) that the primary processes working over the dream-thoughts have ‘chaotic’ results, Ehrenzweig allows, going back to Freud, more capacity within the mental material to enable interconnectivity and associations strong enough to maintain links even as the primary process and scanning work over the material. This helps to account for the ‘harmony’, or ‘hidden structure of art’ (as opposed to utter chaos) that I find in image making in the studio.

This leads to and reinforces several developments in my argument. Insofar as I have linked desire with ‘intent’, I effect a critique of intent as synonymous with rationality. I critique Lacan’s overarching ontology of lack as a corollary of desire (or intent) in that I rework desire in terms of a desire to produce rather than (only) a desire to signify (or assuage fears of) death/lack. My critique places the ‘tragic’ (aesthetic) at the heart of being (Lacan) into a wider context of a libidinal economy unbounded by lack.

In Chapter Four I consider the gaze as an overall concept, having now considered its major component, the unconscious, in detail. Again my consideration continues to be driven by relevance to the un-thought stage of image making. My point here is that the gaze is an example of an ‘un-thought’ process and as such directly comparable with the un-thought stage of image making (except, again, for the understanding that the un-thought stage has an underlying intentionality of search and make, while the gaze does not). This direct comparability between the two ‘un-thought processes’ is what has encouraged me to use Lacan’s notion of gaze-as-process as a template for my investigations.

Lacan’s ideas are useful in that they provide a basis for seeing a connection between the unconscious and looking. However by now in the argument I have overturned or circumvented some of Lacan’s basic principles. This is not in the sense that they have no validity, but in the sense that there is a wider context in which to understand them, that of the libidinal economy as seen by Deleuze and Guattari. The idea of there being a ‘level’ of the (libidinally based) unconscious at which beliefs and concepts can begin to be apparent in a ‘human’ dimension results in Lacan’s linguistically based ideas being seen as a ‘human unconscious’, and having a great deal of value, but being seen also as only one subset of possible libidinal pathways operating at any one time.

Because of this, in Chapter Four I consider the ideas of Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger, who, while working closely with the paradigm of Lacan’s concepts, develops the idea of an additional (to the phallic) pathway for the energy of the libido. She emphasizes that she sees her

ideas as co-existent with those of Lacan. She terms her concept the ‘matrixial gaze’, and for me it is an example of a pre-Oedipal, sub-symbolic, partial-subject (to the desire for ‘encounters’ as links and relationships, rather than to lack as object-orientated) pathway for the libido. In other words, Ettinger agrees that a pathway defined by Lacan’s notion of lack and desire is valid in his notion of the gaze, but she is proposing an ‘extra’ pathway for the libido and a different ‘gaze’ as a result. In addition to the notion of the matrixial gaze, Ettinger contributes the idea of a ‘transpersonal’ communication that circumvents Lacan’s notion of the ‘wall’ of the symbolic and encompasses the real. The developing argument of the thesis has included seeing that *repression* can be seen as due to ‘complexity’ of mental material, while *lack* can be seen as a ‘belief’, and thus belonging to the human unconscious. In this context I depart from some aspects of Ettinger’s notion of the matrixial gaze (as she in any case implies in some of her statements), so that the matrixial gaze can now be considered without recourse to the idea of lack from Lacan’s paradigm. As such, the matrixial gaze becomes a different (than Lacan’s) example of what I term below a ‘libidinal gaze’, an extended idea of the gaze, since it can also be accommodated within the Deleuze and Guattari ideas of varying qualities and quantities of libidinal energy and also desiring machines as results of multiple libidinal pathways. The matrixial gaze can be seen as ‘outside’ of the ‘human unconscious’. It affords an example of the co-existence of different ‘types’ of gaze (as device) and energy (as intensity) within a wider view of the basis of the unconscious.

### Section 3: The ‘libidinal gaze’

#### 3.1 Definition of the libidinal gaze

The notion of the gaze is notoriously difficult both to define and to exemplify, as both Lacan and Ettinger attest. Nevertheless I have gathered from both of them and from other writers some means of articulation that can be assembled into an idea I term the libidinal gaze.

The *gaze* for Lacan is ‘a look I imagine in the field of the Other’, where the ‘look’ implies perception (as the scopic field), ‘I’ is the subject (to his notion of the unconscious), ‘imagine’ is an effort at representation in order to (try to) deal with desire, and ‘the field of the Other’ tells us that it is in the symbolic that the *result* is manifested, via the closely associated route of Lacan’s concepts of lack and desire. The gaze is seen by Lacan as *objet a*, such that the eye (in the scopic field) is driven by lack and the Other, resulting in a belief(s) not necessarily in accord with the ‘reality’ of the situation.

Thinking about the idea of a ‘gaze’ in terms of the ideas of the other writers, Lyotard’s gaze would have to do with unconscious ‘devices’ resulting in intensities of libidinal energy. For Ehrenzweig it would be seen as the scattering and scanning of perceived information, its processing by the primary processes, and a resulting re-introjection to the conscious mind. Ettinger’s idea of the matrixial gaze is the influencing of the psyche by perceptual material gathered by means of ‘archaic’ and diffuse pathways of perception, including sound, movement and the erotic antennae of the psyche, pushed by a desire for linking and relationships. In other words, all these writers consider the process of a gaze in one form or another. And all also link their ideas to the arena of image making.

The *libidinal gaze* is, for me, a summary of the above. It is an affect and/or frisson I apprehend at the edges of intuition. This is where affect and frisson are experiential matters, ‘I’ is a partial-subject (subject to the energy of the libido, including for example the desire for linking), ‘apprehend’ is (subtle forms of) perception, and ‘the edges of intuition’ can be seen to include both Ettinger’s unconscious perception (for instance erotic aerals of the psyche) and Ehrenzweig’s definition of intuition as an event where ‘the normal differentiation of time and space is suspended and events and objects can freely inter-penetrate’.<sup>431</sup> As such, ‘intuition’ can be seen to be a result of intensities of libidinal energy with regard to mental events that are not always filtered through the belief/concept of lack in the ‘human unconscious’.

What is the *effect* of the libidinal gaze relative to the (Lacanian) gaze? The effect of the libidinal gaze is to tame Lacan’s gaze to some extent. It can modify the alienation, the split, by adding aspects of individual intentionality and intensities of energy. Rather than just the masking and identifications resulting from lack, there is a resulting feeling of sub-perceptual linking to others, their joys and traumas, and of a pulsing of one’s energy and an accompanying optimism. Borderlines and boundaries of lack can be permeated by other aspects of one’s characteristics, energy and perceptions.

Desire/libido from the libidinal gaze point of view accommodates a number of ‘sub-definitions’. Libidinal energy includes desire as conceived by Lacan’s notion of ‘desire’ based on lack, Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of ‘desire’ as libidinal energy including desiring machines and ‘coding’ written on the surface of the body without organs, and ‘desire’ in

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<sup>431</sup> Ehrenzweig, 132. See Chapter Three, Section 3.4 where I quote Ehrenzweig’s definition of the word intuition as an event where ‘the normal differentiation of time and space is suspended and events and objects can freely interpenetrate.’

Ettinger's sense that includes a pre-phallic libidinal pathway, desiring and apprehending links with others. But as Ettinger points out (Chapter Four Section 2.1.4) there is no way to predict, or control, who, when, or how the borderlinking/gaze desire might take place, and no way to predict (or control) who can or will (and when) 'respond'.<sup>432</sup>

The libidinal gaze is 'libidinal' because the notion of the unconscious here depends on multiple pathways of libidinal energy in addition to that of desire as proposed by Lacan (seen now as 'human' functioning). My notion of the un-thought stage of the process of image making has to be partially situated in the human unconscious, insofar as it deals with signifiers, signs and systems of signs. However, Deleuze and Guattari's (concept of the) unconscious is (also) operating, 'rumbling along' at a 'level' beneath and alongside the 'beliefs' level. This means that other devices and intensities can manifest in parallel with effects from the human unconscious. I see that Ehrenzweig's notion that there is an inability of the conscious mind to apprehend very complex (and/or un-articulated) content and processes (because of the limits of the workings of the gestalt) can apply to the human unconscious and can apply also to 'non-human' level mental material and libidinal processes as proposed by Deleuze and Guattari. This is directly applicable to my understanding of the libidinal gaze in that aspects of energy unrelated to lack can be understood to be operating.

Within this 'definitions' section, it is as well to review the meaning of the 'real' in the new context. My view is that the 'real' is seen as libidinal energy and as 'unobtainable' from the point of view of re-presentation. Lacan's ideas are valuable in articulating this. In this sense, the nature of the real has migrated from being characterized only by trauma, loss and fear to being characterized as including also a less thwarted productive energy. This is because the notion of 'real' can now be extended from being based in lack, and its desire, to include 'other' energy and processes, although still foreclosed from the conscious mind as it functions in the realm of the symbolic. Examples are, for instance, Ettinger's notions of both *jouissance* and trauma (as experienced trans-personally by means of the erotic antennae of the psyche), as well as Ehrenzweig's notions of the poemagogic, and the 'stages of creativity', including notions of the perceived 'death' and rebirth of the ego, as well as intentionality and various affects and states of mind. Our symbolic re-presentations of the real are (still) unable to embody this extended notion of the real. I see this as 'explained' by Ehrenzweig's notion of over-complexification in that the conscious mind, in its processing and 'focusing', lacks the ability to symbolize and thus to re-present, the complexities of emotion, affect, being and non-being, and 'truth' as opposed to

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<sup>432</sup> My own definition of desire/libido is close to the word 'spirit' as in a spirited horse. It is related to the idea of 'will'. It is easier to recognize than define.

knowledge, in other words the 'real'. The grounds for this view are laid in schizoanalysis, where emotions are 'recorded as well as functions – all are "engineering"'. I see this as meaning that there may be no reason except for one of *complexity* that affects, emotions and the like are not 're-presentable' and must 'appear' by way of for example dissimulation and intensities, the gap, the stain and re-introjection of simplified mental material.

### 3.2 Characteristics of the libidinal gaze

It is important to bear in mind that any notion of the gaze being dealt with here includes the characteristic of being unavailable to the conscious mind of the person 'gazing'. In Lacan's notion the process of the gaze does not 'appear' as 'looking' over-shadowed by the person's unconscious beliefs and affects, but rather *appears in the conscious mind* as an event happening in the outside world. Lacan's concept of the gaze and Ettinger's notion of the matrixial gaze are (different) subsets of the libidinal gaze, in that both are examples of the unconscious influencing perception, but with different focus, emphasis and 'definitions' on/of their ideas about perception and unconscious. The libidinal gaze is a 'gaze' because it consists of influence on perception by an *extended* notion of the unconscious seen as based in libidinal energy. It also includes an *extended* notion of perception by including not only sensory perception as we know it, but also for instance Ehrenzweig's idea of syncretistic scanning, as well as Ettinger's notions of hitherto non-articulated pathways of perception, 'erotic aeries of the psyche', which can pick up (and pass on to art work for instance) 'jouissance and/or trauma' pertaining to oneself and others, even though not apprehended by the conscious mind.

A related characteristic concerns the notion of the libidinal gaze supporting the idea of an underlying 'harmony' or structure of mental material. In other words, there are associations and resonances amongst various 'groupings' of mental material, thus adding elements of 'harmony' to the (Lacan/Lyotard) idea of 'chaos' resulting from unconscious processes and content. At the same time it is to be understood that this is not the 'harmony' of rational thought and logic. The basis of my idea here is what is seen clearly in Ehrenzweig's notions of the poemagogic, the 'intelligence' manifested in the phenomena he describes. One can conclude that there is an 'intelligence' (optimizing tendencies, associations) at the molecular level, which carries on, even magnifies (in optimal conditions), as the macro levels develop in complexity – if not there initially, it is hard to see how these could be grafted on. Thus Ehrenzweig's ideas play a dual role, not only describing in detail the un-thought stage, but showing us also just how complex, how inter-related, interactive and powerful, the human unconscious content and processes can be. He contributes also the notion that unconscious processes can be subject to

learning. In this sense, it is possible to understand more clearly Ehrenzweig's notions of fragmentation to dedifferentiation, processing by various primary processes (condensation, displacement, figuration) on (more than) linguistic signifiers, and consequent re-introjection of (some of) the 'de-fragmented' (differentiated) material. The implication of these notions of Ehrenzweig's is that there is a relevant relatedness of material that can enable a structure of related information to be maintained – forming a basis for what I term 'harmony' or relatedness in the ensuing emergence into consciousness (for instance as art) and what he names the 'hidden order of art'. The un-thought stage is 'un-thought' because it is dedifferentiated, but it is also 'creative' because many seemingly (that is rationally) unrelated bits of 'information' can be related in terms of not-obvious-to-rationality attributes by means of the primary processes. My view is that chaos is more likely to result from situations involving fear and trauma, while greater harmony may predominate in situations involving search and experimentation. Furthermore, I am proposing that it is possible to see ('positive') 'intent' associated with desire (libido) and that this can be related to Deleuze and Guattari's idea of the 'quality' of libido.

One characteristic of what I am finding in the combined descriptions of the happenings of the un-thought stage of image making is a way to 'tame the gaze'. This is analogous to taming (Lacan's) concept of lack as being the only basis for the unconscious and thus for the gaze. The process of the (Lacanian) gaze happens, but now I can see the existence of mitigating material and processing, with other devices and intensities taking place.

### 3.3 Implications of the libidinal gaze in connection with the un-thought stage

The focus of interest of this thesis, the '*un-thought* stage', is seen by Lacan as functioning partially or predominantly in the human unconscious, where the realm of the symbolic exists in unrealized form, and where unconscious primary processing of this mental material can happen. For Deleuze and Guattari, this human unconscious is also where beliefs (such as the Oedipus complex) can have an overt influence, interfering with flows of libidinal energy. For me, this 'unrealized' mental material means that, since meanings are not present (as with Freud's thing-presentation and Lacan's signifiers) the conscious mind must be pre-empted and over-ridden to permit the 'appearance' of this material.

In addition to Lacan's concepts, I have proposed that various other libidinal energy pathways can be active in this un-thought psychical arena and some can be visualized as more direct and less thwarted (than by the belief in 'lack'), or influenced in other ways by other beliefs. Lyotard envisages libidinal energy freely available to 'work over' dream material. He



proposes further that, for instance in art, one can see ‘intensities’ of libidinal energy formed by ‘devices’ for channelling and manifesting these intensities. These devices can be enabled by entering a state of laxity, an *un-thought* mode of attention in which an artist may engage unconscious processes (devices) on unconscious mental material. In this regard Ehrenzweig speaks of the ‘death of the ego’ and Ettinger of ‘fragilization’ of the artist. Deleuze and Guattari propose not only quantitative fluctuations of libidinal energy, but qualitative fluctuations as well, for instance some libidinal energy can be understood to be ‘thicker, less fluid’ than others (for example by way of interference by (their ideas of) repression, certain beliefs, and the like). I see that Ettinger’s concept of the matrixial gaze and Ehrenzweig’s notions of syncretistic scanning (which can also be seen as a gaze), dedifferentiation and redifferentiation are examples of Lyotard’s notion of ‘devices’ that can influence the pathways taken, and intensities developed, by libidinal energy in the human unconscious. The point is that while the *un-thought* stage may be seen primarily in the human unconscious and thus influenced by ‘lack’, there are other libidinal influences ‘available’, happening also within the un-thought stage.

One particular way of visualizing the libidinal gaze as being associated with the *un-thought stage* is in the following manner. As I discussed earlier, from Lacan’s concept of the gaze we can visualize signifiers ‘manifesting’ as marks on the artistic support. As the signifier ‘leaps’ from mental to material support, it can add something of ‘truth’ and ‘fullness’, in that as the subject becomes split, or elided, the ‘real’ can issue forth. The other writers propose similar ideas, based on slightly varying notions of the state of mind involved, but all relating to what I term the *un-thought* stage, where rational thought is absent, but mental processing continues. The important point in this ‘example’ is that from the point of view of the libidinal gaze, I can visualize (other) libidinal energy pathways where libido ‘works over’ the signifiers and other mental material, resulting in ‘dissimulation’ or distortion of a resulting system of symbols working hand in glove with distortions by primary processes.

This is difficult to exemplify, since it is not possible to differentiate marks inspired specifically by the ‘human unconscious’ from other marks. Nor is it possible to differentiate between (or even describe) Lacan’s ‘real’ and Ehrenzweig’s ‘hidden order’ in the detail of their manifestation. The point is that this thesis is concerned primarily with investigating a process. The exact results of that process are more or less indescribable, although it is sometimes possible to speak about the related ‘effect’.

In any case, taking the ideas in this thesis together, one can see not only the *possibility* of an un-thought stage, but the *prevalence* of the un-thought mode of attention in terms of overall

functioning and operation of the mind/body. This phenomenon is not peculiar to the process of image making: for instance Ehrenzweig proposes that it can apply to problem solving situations in general. Importantly here, these writers agree that some form of ‘access’ to the real, as opposed to re-presentation and the symbolic alone, is a pre-requisite in the process of making art. This would be the ‘extended real’ as I have described it just above. Art as such involves a particular mode of attention in that there is a particular (unconscious) influence within the art-making procedure. This is facilitated by a willingness to be fragilized, to become a partial-subject, to fade out as a subject and then be able to return to subject-hood having transmitted (unconsciously) something ineffable and indefinable to the art object along the way. All of which, by definition, is inaccessible to the conscious mind of the artist. In other words, I see fragilization along with the notions of laxity, aphanisis and the death of the ego, as illuminations of the un-thought stage seen from various points of view, but all able to accommodate particular processes such as primary processes, dedifferentiation, syncretistic scanning occurring on unconscious material in what is not a conscious/rational mode of attention, but one that is more ‘permeable’ to influences from other libidinal energy pathways. One way of seeing this is Lacan’s idea of the ‘lure’, the permeation of desire (*now including multiple concepts of desire*) in an image and its consequent effect(s) on the viewer(s).

With the consideration and development of the concept of the libidinal gaze, my aim is to visualize ‘theoretically’ something that is deeply concerned with the real, that is, to account for communication of passion and energy. Ettinger speaks of emphasizing the real to the point of over-riding the symbolic in her ‘erotic aerials of the psyche’ – wordless ‘knowing’ of others’ trauma and jouissance, conveyed in a non-rational, non-sequential, non-orderly, non-‘total’, non-representational manner. The stain (Ettinger and Lacan) is also a useful concept in this regard, describing an avenue of connection between the symbolic and the real. Ettinger’s notions open a door to the theoretical consideration of two hitherto foreclosed topics in Lacan’s thinking. One is that of experience and ‘learning’ in the womb. The other is the direct communication of the ‘real’, without the symbolic intervening as ‘wall’. In the main, direct communication between humans must, it seems to me, include rationalism, re-presentation and common codes and symbols which are understandable to ‘both subjects’. But there is more to the story – the sub-symbolic communication that I have been considering. In the Introduction I speak of my work in terms of ‘lines of desire’. These ‘lines of desire’ ‘obscure’ meaning (by definition) from me, but they have a ‘gaze’ for me, a look and a feeling that (seems to) comes off the images.<sup>433</sup> This I relate not only to Lacan’s ideas, but to Lyotard’s idea of intensities of

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<sup>433</sup> This can be seen theoretically as both in the ‘look’ I desire from the drawings, and the look I desire from others with regard to the drawings.

libidinal energy and Ehrenzweig's idea of redifferentiation and re-introjection of mental material. Lacan's concept of the gaze includes the notion of the gaze of the image, as does my notion of the libidinal gaze, but again based on extended notions of the gaze, the unconscious and desire.

What has been extended to great effect, for me as an artist, is the idea of the 'availability' of a wide and subtle range and variety of energy, devices and perceptions (internal and external) that Lacan was not able to develop owing to his conception of desire being based on lack. The unconscious level of complex processing of perceptual material proposed here provides for coherent combinations, re-combinations, variations and distortions of that material, and the potential 're-emergence' of the modified material into the conscious mind. 'Trust the process', which is one aspect of what I am discussing, implies a 'laying down' of the aggressivity and defensiveness implicit in Lacan's concept of the gaze, and a cessation of conscious manipulation and interference. This in turn implies a more freely (rather than 'thwarted') flowing energy, differently orientated modes of attention and a complex 'processing' of complex mental material.

It can now be seen that the notion of the libidinal gaze extends what is already, in Lacan's concept of the gaze, of importance for the image maker as the idea of the reflections and refractions of 'cultural' influence (the realm of the symbolic) as it is perceived, 'interpreted' and 'used' (e.g. refracted and reflected) by the individual, and then the viewer. The libidinal gaze encompasses an extended complexity of borderlines and boundaries in and between perception and the unconscious, in which reflections and refractions of perceptual and mental material, along with the energy and influence of the libido, its devices and intensities, are understood to influence, even cause, a particular stage of the process of image making, the unthought stage. To 'trust the process' of any productivity given this emphasis on complexity is the best advocacy and summary of this thesis. The complexity of which I speak is most forcefully legitimated as 'art' culturally.

#### Section 4: Disadvantages and advantages

Disadvantages of this notion include the 'slippery' and in-describable unconscious mental material, organization and processes in all their complexities, which makes them vulnerable to over-intellectualisation, (attempted) over-control, (attempted) over-observation.

These are matters about which we are blind, about which we can only surmise, into which we can only go by not trying. This is a short paragraph, but a very important point.

Among the advantages of the notion of the libidinal gaze, to my mind, are the following points. It helps to (re-)establish, extend and re-contextualize the contributions of ‘phallic’ ideas to understanding the un-thought stage of image making. This is done by proposing the addition of certain perceptual and unconscious operations, as well as ideas extending the concept of desire, such that some of the perceived disadvantages/shortcomings of Lacan’s ideas are overcome. The notion of the libidinal gaze takes advantage of Lacan’s (and Freud’s) insights and rich experience with (mentally disturbed) patients, but it includes certain ideas that add a dimension of further possible/probable ‘devices’ leading to intensities of libidinal energy, especially those seen in the more positively orientated scenarios of problem solving and image making. The notion of the libidinal gaze makes a serious contribution to the notion of the un-thought stage, that is to the processes, mental material and structures of mental material, of the not-rational (unconscious) mind, and to our ability to visualize and perhaps to encourage appropriately what can be understood to be occurring at these moments. Insofar as the usefulness of the notion of the libidinal gaze arises, in the present case, from its application to image-making in art, this latter is not, I have suggested, an imaginative process, in the common use of the word imagine, but a pulling together of ‘edges of perception’ with ‘processes of the unconscious’, in other words the realms of the real and the symbolic. Operations of the unconscious are seen now not only as a series of mechanistically driven processes with results driven by chance, but operations subject to a ‘hidden order’ and obliquely open to influence and learning, albeit in ways opaque to the conscious mind. Rational thought is not seen as the only useful form of mental process, even though other ‘forms’ are not controllable consciously. The unconscious processes are not seen as governed (solely) by the Law.

This notion gives the process of the gaze a firmer basis, involving the idea of the libido as a driving force, and adding to, but not replacing, Lacan’s concept of desire as being based on lack.

## Section 5: Reflections on my practice

In conclusion I return to the painting practice with which I began. As I described in the Introduction, my practice in the studio includes un-planned mark-making. For example, the process of image making I consider in my thesis can be seen in many of my drawings and

paintings in terms of the basic underlying marks. Each of the basic marks laid down is unplanned and non-mimetic, made ‘spontaneously’, without forethought, rational planning or specific minute observation of some aspect of the world. This has at least two results: a) each mark is ‘non-descriptive’ in its own right, b) there is a vitality in the combined effect of the marks at this level.

It is these mark making processes that provide the context for my consideration of ideas of the gaze and the libidinal gaze, seen as the results of the play of unconscious processes on perception and mental material, where perception becomes (nearly) elided. Thus the ‘technology’ of the original process of (in this case my) image making, occurring within a mental state I call the un-thought stage, can be thought of in one sense as signifiers, the ‘unrealized’, being manifested onto the artistic support. These form a palimpsest on which other more rationally planned marks can be laid to emphasize or encourage the emergence of more or less ambiguous images.

There is, also, another side to the story. From the viewpoint of one who is looking at paintings like mine, rather than making them, it is interesting to think about how the process of the libidinal gaze might be *seen* in the painting. One approach is to look for hints and clues as to the ‘history’ of the making of the painting, for instance by means of looking at the order in which the marks may have been laid down. Another is to make a special point of looking at, and for, various kinds of marks that, for whatever reason, by themselves, mean or describe nothing. Elkins has studied these kinds of marks.<sup>434</sup> As I stated earlier, he describes marks that contribute to the overall effect, but in a non-meaningful-in-themselves manner. His examples include the ‘edge’ of a mark, where there is a choice of ‘mark and field’ or ‘mark and surface’; and further when an ‘orlo’ (*very thin outline*) is laid down such that ‘with the orlo there is no longer even a binary opposition from which to begin. This is the simplest and most damaging equivocation that stands in the way of visual semiotics’.<sup>435</sup>

In other words, there are always other than ‘meaningful’ happenings within the painting or drawing.

Elkins describes various modes of marks, each of which amounts to a distinct and yet non-semiotic structure, for instance 1) ontological instability of the mark (it exfoliates into

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<sup>434</sup> Elkins, see especially the first and last chapters. See my earlier reference to his book *Paintings and the Words that Fail Them*, in Chapter Two, Section 1.1.10.

<sup>435</sup> Elkins, 42.

surrounding fields), 2) a mark is undecideably a part of a whole, a composite rather than an entity, and 3) ‘when marks are swirled into washes or scumbled into larger areas, or smudged into continuous gradations, they lose their disjointedness, but not the idea of disjunction,’ and so on. He uses these examples to show that *unlike written signs*, drawn and painted marks are insecurely linked to their grounds. The same is true at the level of the figure, in that it is not often so distanced or differentiated from the background that it is legitimate to ‘pick it up and interpret it on its own’, so to speak.<sup>436</sup>

Elkins proposes that these types of marks can ‘be understood as objects that are *simultaneously* signs and not signs’ and goes on to propose that these ‘outlandish and routinely partly incomprehensible marks both hinder and enable whatever story the picture seems to tell’.<sup>437</sup> This echoes and exemplifies Lacan’s idea of the ‘wall’ of the symbolic.

Elkins also considers a class of marks relating to what he terms ‘a class of things that are irretrievably or necessarily absent from pictures.’<sup>438</sup> He proposes that elements of a picture, sometimes entire pictures, are ‘gestures in the direction of meaningless, invisibility or unrepresentability, whether they aim to evade meaning or encompass it.’<sup>439</sup> He also lists and discusses such ‘attributes’ as the inconceivable and the un-seeable. These are the antithesis of ‘classic rhetoric’, where the clearer the meaning, the better in terms of harmony, balance and beauty. His claim is that ‘much of the project of modernism, and virtually all of postmodernism, is to undermine, question, abandon and otherwise tear down the clear communication of meaning’.<sup>440</sup>

For me, this is a clear view of at least one aspect of my practice – partly a different than rationally planned and enveloping message to convey, partly an investigation of the effects marks can convey, and partly an investigation into how far marks and images can be left minimally ‘edited’ and yet remain interesting and energetic, i.e. retaining some measure of ‘lure’ (Lacan). One way to see this is a dialectic between passages emphasizing a ‘re-invigoration’ of the figure by means of an investigation into mark making, and the introduction of more rational, ‘meaningful’ figure-describing marks, even cartoon elements, as well as passages emphasizing form and colour.

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<sup>436</sup> Elkins, 42-43. ‘Figure’ here is used in the imagistic sense, not the Lyotardian sense.

<sup>437</sup> Elkins, 46.

<sup>438</sup> Elkins, 213.

<sup>439</sup> Elkins, 213.

<sup>440</sup> Elkins, 214.

As an example of seeing both the image from the point of view of its development, and also where the smears, quality and edges of lines and fabrication are ‘clues’ that tell a different story than that of the ‘content’ or ‘subject matter’ of the image, let us think about Illustration In. 2, *Silver*, (detail), in the Introduction, Section 1.2. Some marks enhance the figurative (meaningful) aspect of the painting, for instance each of the heads. These heads are seen relatively clearly, in that there are few marks obliterating or seriously modifying them. Other marks, while to some extent descriptive, are ambiguous – for instance the larger figure’s right arm and shoulder (to our left) – there is a choice of two positions for the arm and shoulder, neither of which is especially fortuitous on its own, although the darker one is the less ably descriptive of the two. Yet from a distance (*Silver*, Illustration In.1), this anomaly causes only mild consternation, it provides a sort of ‘hook’ for the eye that wants to ‘figure it out’, as well as providing a sense of movement. Other marks, those between the two figures and some of the semi-obiterated marks ‘under’ the legs of the smaller figure indicate to us that they are part of the original palimpsest. Again from a distance they add energy and a kind of movement, as well as a sense of ‘mystery’ – how can I make sense of these marks as a viewer? On a closer look, the marks on the legs add a feeling of three-dimensionality as well as leading to a wondering about what else might be seen to be going on there. Are these marks mistakes? Were they meant to contribute to the three-dimensionality of the legs? Are they contributing to some sort of ‘effect’ of haziness or movement, a quick glance with no chance to sort out details? There is also the idea of a cartoon like overlay of the figures on to the palimpsest of unrestful marks.

These comments and queries refer back to the Introduction, where I write about my practice as including an interest in making minimally clarifying marks in terms of creating an ‘effect’ but yet maintaining a fluidity of meaning and a somewhat ambiguous manifestation of images.<sup>441</sup> My interest includes maintaining a degree of transparency in terms of the history of the making of the image. For me, these aspects of the image making process support my underlying dual interest in considering the affective or ‘energetic’ level of interaction/relationships between people, and in the ‘conversations’ possible between conscious and unconscious material and processes of the mind.

The notion of the libidinal gaze consists of a complex group of ideas that help me as an image maker keep my mode of attention wide and unfocused – in the sense of edges of perception, intuition and affect. The libidinal gaze proposes that an awareness of an un-thought ‘mode of attention’ of the artist is essential, but consciously un-governable. It allows a clearer

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<sup>441</sup> Introduction, Section 2.2. See also Chapter Two, Section 1.1.8, related comments about a Beuys drawing.

visualization of what may be happening in that mode of attention, involving 'hidden order' and great complexity of process. These observations describe one aspect of my studio practice, which is an attempt to avoid over-reliance on the conscious mind and rationality by hypothesizing a helpful and useful visualization of the word 'intuition' as a process. This is in the Ehrenzweig 'definition' of the word 'intuition'. My sense of the un-thought stage is closely related to this idea.

It seems to me that a viewer aware of these ideas is in a position to 'see' more, to involve him/herself more in the fabrication and objectification of the painting, as well as whatever representation is presented. In other words these many combined ideas both support and clarify the use of (this idea of) 'intuition' by the viewer in viewing, as well as by the maker in making.

For me as an artist, the un-thought stage, the libidinal gaze, is a way of being more fully involved in the manifestation of the complicated, reverberating, resonating image with pleasure, excitement and questioning.



## **Appendix One:** Documentation of the Practice Section of the Thesis

The ‘thesis’ for this PhD degree consists of both written theory and an art practice - in my case painting and drawing practice. The requirement is for the writing and the painting practice to be related in some manner. For the final examination, the viva voce, I presented a series of recent paintings, as well as undergoing an oral examination on the written thesis. This section includes representations of these paintings (*The Visit*, In.3, seen in the Introduction, was also included).

My written thesis consists of an enquiry into one aspect of a *process* of image making in painting practice, where this process is represented in a necessarily simplified model. The paintings, developed over five years of painting concurrently with thinking and writing about theory, include some aspects that are discussed and related to the written theory in the text of the thesis. However, my painting practice is neither circumscribed by, nor based solely on, the theory utilized in the written thesis. I have experienced, and maintained, a decided ‘mental distance’ between the writing and the painting in that I neither paint wholly about the theory nor write in total and specific detail about the painting process(es) I employ .

Having said that, the fact that these paintings rely heavily on drawing *per se* is consistent with the interest shown in the written thesis about images in painting and drawing *other than* images resulting from the studied, careful and detailed representation of specific objects in the world around us. As we have seen, my intention in the written thesis is to investigate ideas about influences on making images that are other than conscious, rational, intentions. Many authors have discussed drawing/sketching as an activity where mistakes, accidents, trials, and the passage of time can remain apparent. Visual ambiguities are thereby incorporated and left evident to some degree, such that the ‘perceptual processes’ of the viewer must ‘work’ to make sense of the images. Some relevant authors are mentioned in the text (for instance Anton Ehrenzweig, Dieter Koepplin, Bernice Rose). This is discussed more fully in the Introduction to this thesis.

Ap.1 *Two Figures with Watcher* (Blue), 6' x 5', acrylic paint on board, 2003

Ap. 2 Untitled (Nickel Azo Yellow), 6' x 5', acrylic paint on board, 2004.

Ap. 3 *Green Gathering* (Chromium Oxide Green), 4.5' x 4', acrylic paint on board,  
2003.

Ap. 4 *Two Figures Pale at Dawn* (Unbleached Titanium), acrylic paint on board, 2004.

Ap. 5 Untitled (Small Pink), 2.5' x 4', acrylic paint on board, 2003.

Ap. 6 *Cinnamon Synergy*, 4.5' x 4', acrylic paint on board, 2004.

Ap. 7 *The Weight of the Dream*, (Lavender), 6' x 5', acrylic paint on board, 2004.



Ap. 8 *Missed Encounter* (Sea Green), 6' x 5', acrylic paint on board, 2004.

Ap. 9 Untitled (Green Gold, 4.5' x 4', acrylic paint on board, 2004.

Ap. 10 Untitled (Cobalt Teal), acrylic paint on board, 2004.

*Ap. 11 Teacher in Blue Robe, Late in the Afternoon, 3.5' x 4', acrylic paint on board,*  
2004.







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