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Approaching trauma: South African painting through Kant, Greenberg and Lacan

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Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to consider a concept of trauma which may offer support for a notable contemporary interest in and practice of painting. My own interest in writing this thesis is two-fold. One is that as a painter, I am concerned to think through the rationale for and value of a practice which seems to work against direct meaning. Secondly, I am drawn to theory concerning human subjectivity and the psyche, especially in relation to Jacques Lacan's ideas on trauma. My central argument is that some painting is reflective of the world by enacting nonobjective vicissitudes of trauma. I consider a form of latent and archetypal trauma elaborated by Lacan in terms of *das Ding*, a hypothetical construct that resonates with Immanuel Kant's epistemological and moral philosophy, while it also structures a psychoanalytic field of the subject. Lacan's seminar on *das Ding* develops the notion that philosophical and social functions of art are primarily aimed at structuring the traumatic and tragic sphere of experience.[1] I see Lacan's structural and abstract articulations of the subject of trauma elaborated by certain formal qualities that figure in both the making and reception of painting.

[1] My understanding of the complexity of the concept of *das Ding* has been guided by three English-language interpretations which approach the Lacanian subject of *das Ding* as a main focus of interpretation, and which to differing ends explain the connection of philosophy with psychoanalytic theory and art. These are Lacanian theorist Richard Boothby's *Freud as Philosopher: Metapsychology after Lacan* (2001), philosophical researcher Marc de Kesel's *Eros and Ethics: Reading Jacques Lacan's Seminar VII* (2009) and art historian Darien Leader's *Stealing the Mona Lisa: What Art Stops Us From Seeing* (2002).
Boothby's discussion (2001) utilises Lacan's concept of *das Ding* to advance his interpretation of how philosophy, particularly of the German and French schools, concerns the unstable relation between perception and language. For him, the enduring question of the relation can be tied to Freud's metapsychological approach to the subverting function of desire in human development. Finally, he works to explain how a metapsychological schema, the keystone of which is *das Ding*, can be found in the workings of written and spoken language itself.
My understanding of the ethical value of distance and proximity in relation to making and perceiving the painted surface was gained through De Kesel's (2009) detailed examination of Lacan's philosophy and psychoanalysis of the discipline of ethics. His emphasis on the *distance* of human cognition to *das Ding* enable me to visualise how the abstract concept of *das Ding* escapes binary oppositions and therefore, paradoxically, becomes a question of how notions of perception and language are fundamentally limited: cognition must be evaluated as ideal, even as language may treat objects as real.
Leader's (2002) very entertaining exegesis of *das Ding* in art is nevertheless informative for how he frames the notion that art's source of fascination and engagement may not be dependent on the subject-matter of any given artwork, but for how the subject-matter has been worked to provoke the core emptiness or 'void' that constitutes human perception. His art-historical emphasis on the often chillingly invisible influences on art production, and their psychoanalytic rationale, solidified my conviction in approaching a fundamentally absent concept.
All three have been deeply influential on my thinking in their own way, while aiding my close reading of Lacan's *Seminar VII* as it is woven from an intricate and historical web of psychoanalytic theory, mainstream Western philosophy and art history.

The connection of philosophy with Lacan's lesser-known[2] psychoanalytic construction of *das Ding* provides the support for considering painting on its formal terms or, 'within its own conditions of emergence' (de Duve 1991: 1). While much of the literature I deal with is not new, I use insights from the fields of art philosophy, epistemology and trauma theory to think through the practice of painting and the act of viewing painting. As such, my research and writing is engaged with a certain domain where the competence of contemporary painting is both put into question and established. The new question arising from my research involves whether painting, as a particular mode of psychosomatic engagement, occupies a special position within discourse and artistic practice.

My interest in painting's role in philosophical discourse may thus be introduced by the proposition that 'painting may be a machine to convey philosophy – but already to elaborate it' (Dubuffet in Bois 1998: 257). My interpretation of some of the philosophical roots of theorising experience in reality and aesthetics may recoup certain theoretical devices of indirectness and enigma which are 'already' elaborated by the painted surface. These indeterminate qualities of painting relate to trauma studies, and the issues of representation arising from these.

In the briefest terms, trauma studies may be characterised as the attempt to conceive how – particularly in the bloody circumstances of much of the 20th century – the perplexing experience of trauma has affected and continues to affect the individual and social body.[3] I look at some theories of trauma which address these experiences and their affects as being demonstrated in artistic representation.[4] However, I am resistant to the idea that painting, or any art, can communicate trauma in direct ways. Particularly during apartheid and its aftermath, many South African artists have tried to evoke the trauma of these circumstances in their work, both in terms of depicting traumatic subjects and/or embodying traumatic states as a material

[2] Lacan developed his well-known concept of the *objet petit a* from *das Ding* (Johnston 2014). Briefly, the multiple values of *objet petit a* were evolved from the singular force of *das Ding* by thinking about the partial objects associated with Freud's anal, oral and phallic stages of development. Lacan added constructions of the gaze and phoneme, among others (Boothby 2001: 243). These 'figures' that resist symbolisation are therefore a more complex specification of the fundamental role of *das Ding*, eventually formulated almost entirely in mathematics (Grosskurth 1994: 138).

[3] Kirby Farrell states in his book *Post-Traumatic Culture* (1998) that trauma, as 'a trope of modern life', functions as 'a strategic fiction that a complex, stressful society is using to account for a world that seems threateningly out of control.' As Colin Richards also asserts, 'Trauma is clearly a contemporary reality and almost the master trope of our time' (2009: 262).

[4] The perplexing and paradoxical implications of trauma have stimulated the making and reception of much contemporary painting (Bennett 2005: 6; Richards 2009: 259). Literary theorist James Berger (1997: 572) suggests that the inundation of society by traumatic events, broadcast through media and continually portrayed in movies, has contributed to this phenomenon, producing what he describes as 'contemporary modes of viewing the world'.

and formal condition of the painted surface. As in my painting practice,[5] my research focuses on trauma as something which is already emergent in certain medium-specific approaches to the painted surface, and their formal engagement with the cultural and intellectual history of painting. This focus avoids explicit involvement with the ideological deconstructions of cultural practice at large that Lacan's more popular theories of the 'gaze' and traumatic memory have offered.[6] Rather, in *das Ding* the psychic and libidinal aspects of trauma intersect in a way that has bearing on the more abstract and nonobjective conditions which some contemporary painting may 'already elaborate'.

This introductory section concerns a review of the theoretical motivations of the thesis, in which I introduce the core themes and terms which have driven my research and writing practice. The thesis also includes an 'Index of Terms' which is aimed at providing the reader with a reference point as s/he progresses through the often complex and tricky ground of abstract thought underpinning the work. I recommend that the reader explore the index first. Before embarking on Parts 2 and 3, the reader may want to consider the basic hypothetical structures I have summarised in regards to Kant's and Lacan's mental schemas of cognition in the 'Addenda', earmarking it for orientation should the need arise.

[5] A primary motivation in both my Master's degree and reading for a PhD has been to establish a critical framework of trauma for my own painting. I do not discuss my practice in this thesis, but my interest in the formal and abstract conditions of the surface is generated by my material processes: how tensions between materiality and iconography, surface and depth, gesture and line can come to register acute states of experience, without necessarily portraying that experience. Furthermore, I am often made aware that the successful realisation of some of my paintings cannot be attributed to my knowledge of technique or established conventions for 'good' painting. Something more than can be said or written in rational terms creates affect: in my work this tends to manifest as something both beautiful and pervaded with a sense of threat. I see the psychology and philosophy of affect, especially concerning its traumatic aspects, as encircling the question of this capacity in some painting.

[6] Film theorist Laura Mulvey's (1989: xviii) seminal interpretation of Lacan's concept of the 'gaze' articulated the political and sexual conditions of spectatorship as fetishizing the woman's body as a 'spectacle'. Mulvey's interpretation is not strictly based on Lacan's own conceptualisation of the gaze, but it gained much traction in feminist scholarship as a deconstruction of patriarchal modes of cultural practice and reception (Manlove 2007: 83).

1.1 Pain and Painting

Painting and trauma studies in general have been related in being capable of disrupting perspectives on identity and experience. Trauma theorist Ruth Leys (2000: 32) contends that trauma as an object of study is itself subject to 'the arche-trauma of identification'. Traumatic events and acute experiences of terror can never be fully extricated from the insight that human cognition, as well its interpretation, is developmentally and psychologically primed to encounter the question of shock in ways which are culturally and contextually determined (Leys 2000: 6). For Leys, the identification of trauma as being caused by both subjective traits and objective events is therefore an ethical procedure which define the borders of the discipline of trauma studies itself.[7] These complexities unfold in painting insofar as certain historical 'antagonisms' which drive contemporary definitions of the painterly medium are subject to vacillations on the question of its purpose in production, and the related encounter with its aesthetic and social effects in reception (Rottman 2012: 9). Both trauma and painting, as I will discuss, seem to be nodal areas of analysis in art theory because they are also complicated by theories of mythic sources, metaphysical affects, and ambiguous effects on the self and the social.[8] But it is for these reasons that the ideological and experiential construction of painting can be viewed through the lens of a notion of trauma, and notions of identity and meaning can be made complex and, perhaps, gainfully disruptive.

In my Master's dissertation, I found a compelling approach to the relational operations of trauma and painting in Mark Seltzer's critical text, 'Wound Culture: Trauma in the Pathological Public Sphere' (1997). Seltzer argues that contemporary culture has become fascinated with the 'wound', and displays a mass attraction to the 'torn and opened body' found in car accidents, serial killer novels and movies, and its proliferate occurrence in the media (1997:3). Seltzer bases his theory of 'wound culture' on the 'borderland concept' of trauma as something which occurs between the physical and psychical. He describes how trauma has come to

[7] Ruth Ley's influential book *Trauma: A Genealogy* (2000) explores major theories in trauma from Freud to present day 'neurobiological' schemas. As she contends, conceiving the 'veracity' of witness and victim testimony has become an ethically fraught area of debate (2000: 2, 298).

[8] Karyn Ball (2000: 2) defines trauma in its most basic form as a 'transformative event that is realised in a variety of historical, rhetorical and cultural symptoms'. These vicissitudes have been linked to the way in which painting can, on the one hand, feature trauma by depicting violent events or, on the other, register trauma by destroying conventions and therefore embody traumatic events to the extent that they shock spectators negatively (Wallace 2006: 4). My own approach is that trauma comes about in a painting that registers certain slippages in content, but that such slippages are open to confusion because they are experienced as symptomatic of certain desires which are both pleasurable and unnerving.

function as a borderland between the 'individual and collective, private and public order of things': 'The wound and its strange attractions have become one way… of locating the violence and the erotics, the erotic violence, at the crossing point of private fantasy and collective space' (1997: 5). He designates the beguiling uncertainty of trauma, as it signifies a 'breakdown' of 'private and public registers', as disrupting conventional forms of communication and identification (1997: 4).

But painting is not a 'trauma' which provides fetishized satisfaction in these ways. Rather, painting intersects with Seltzer's conceptualisation insofar as it might enframe certain violent or traumatic conditions of experience which are complex to locate and define, and therefore raise notions of borderline tensions between language and embodiment, and private and collective spheres of cognition. These tensions are further entwined in Julia Kristeva's comment that 'traumatism illuminates the relation of the subject to the thing' or of the subject to the strangeness of external objects and events (Kristeva in Critchley 2001: 73). The relationship of these categories may inform the conceptualisation of some painting. In particular, certain methods of painting reflect on art historical formal traditions that are invested in the integrity of the picture plane: its flatness and depth, two-dimensionality and attention to colour, gesture, and materiality. The pictorial iteration of other media, such as photography and the readymade or found object, are also considered as conceptual points of reference. However, by way of their signifying systems and specific medium, certain points of articulation embody traumatic dimensions by partaking in tensions between discursive and physical values of materiality. I will explore how painting can address primary tensions between signifier and signified, language and embodiment, subjectivities and notions of objectivity. It offers a space for reflection and potentially links back to philosophical structures that are theorised in terms of human experience and the conditions of representation.

Lacan's (SVII: 32) modern and 'evil' concept of *das Ding* as a traumatic psychic entity is intentionally created to prevent direct identifications between language and embodiment, subject and soma.[9] The theory of *das Ding* resonates for me in the ways in which the enigma

[9] What has become clear through a review of my reading and writing is that my focus is on the question of the relationship between external reality and psychic reality and importantly, on how these constructions become represented in theory and practice. Primarily, these terms can be cast as theoretically constructed signifiers in notions of embodiment and language respectively. These terms are a complex set of values in that one cannot polarise them into simplistic opposites of 'outer and inner worlds'. Furthermore, both terms have been used in the field of art theory to mean conflictual things regarding cultural, class, gender or racial specificity, or have been deployed to make claims to the objective, external real in representation. My emphasis, however, is on a theory of embodiment *through* thinking language and psychic reality.

of wounds and of looking is made an implicit aspect of both daily life and artistic production. In Lacan, human life is given to trauma because an aspect of cognition is always hidden from view. In *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* (SVII: 1969-1970), *das Ding*, or the Thing, is characterised as a remainder of perception which operates as an unconscious obstruction to thought and vision (Boothby 2001:61).[10] But it is a potent weight on consciousness which elicits the desire for knowledge, or for peering into wounds. During the course of normative language development and subsequent social relations, this remainder is substituted and displaced by signifiers or words which cover over or disguise aspects of life that are otherwise perceived as strange and unknowable (Boothby 2001: 65-7).[11] However, *das Ding* manifests in a number of ways, one of which is the will to transgression. Criminality, fascism and violence in all forms are conceived as attempts to overcome the mysterious traits of mental life by identifying the self with power and domination over vulnerability and weakness (SVII: 2-3). Much philosophy and intellectual discourse, meanwhile, could be said to form its inquiry by interminably deconstructing and reconstructing potential passages of thought which may lead to beholding the substance of being, or witnessing the truth of its latency (SVII: 4-5; Boothby 26-61; De Kesel 2009: 66-72).

Lacan suggests that both intellectual discourse and modern forms of violence arise from the same place: *das Ding*. The concept is developed from Freud's understanding of the libidinal subject as driven by sexual urges which do not strictly correspond with our natural or animal instinct. Rather, desire is predicated on the at times mechanical facture of human language systems which frustrate attempts to objectify the point of origin of self, or fully experience the organic properties of existence. *Das Ding*'s effects are therefore based on Lacan's notion that *das Ding* arises from the enigmatic gap between language and the body, through which a libidinally-invested desire translates symptomatically into war, religious fanaticism, or the

[10] Boothby (2001: 26-61) develops Freud's notion of metapsychology by comparison with Nietzsche's, Heidegger's, Sartre's, Merleau-Ponty's and Foucault's respective philosophies as similarly concerned with the hidden aspects of cognition which structure the field of perception and thought. I have sacrificed engagement with my deep interest in these theories in order to focus on constructing a particular view of painting and its interpretation. I consider the potential weakness of such a narrowed down perspective in my conclusion.

[11] Lacan's notion of *das Ding* differs from Heidegger's involvement with '*das Ding'*. In Heidegger's essay 'The Thing' (1971), he attempts to account for the space of nothingness inside a vase. His ambition is to resist the 'forgetting' of things which constitute daily life, where the special nature of Being is disregarded. He therefore focuses intensely on how the emptiness of the vase functions as an authentic object in and of itself, which unites human experience with nature and world (Heidegger 1971: 71). While the reference to Heidegger is strategic, Lacan's emphasis is not on the content of 'nothingness' so much as *how* the vase generates the form of signification, and its metaphors of emptiness and fullness (SVII: 119). Further, how the dualistic qualities of emptiness and fullness, or absence and presence, are considered as being proximate to trauma is explored by him in this seminar.

authority of reason in discourse. These issues thus concern the question of 'ethics' Lacan wants his listeners to bear witness to. But *das Ding* 'itself' remains in Lacan's seminar an object which is characterised by a non-conceptual non-identity. He insists that *das Ding* always arises in a displaced, disguised form and can therefore only be referred to 'operationally' or through the system and symptoms hypothesized for both individual and collective behaviour (SVII: 12; 104). This indirectness or displacement of registers can, however, be represented in art.

The representation of the non-identical relationship between language and embodiment is furthermore conveyed in the paratactical delivery of Lacan's seminars, according to his own resistance to reifying an object which, necessarily, slips from objectification. As he says, 'The fact is I sometimes make the Thing itself speak' (SVII: 132). These distortions often create discursive and material points or gaps of confusion in the text itself. It has made my reading and writing on the relationship between trauma and painting laborious and often frustrated by the lack of direct meaning. The disabling of fluid thought processes destabilises and constantly shifts implications off its axis. It is a process where awed moments of truth are thrust almost immediately against banal conclusions. The trauma of *das Ding* as theory and text feels very much like the obsessive process of painting. But this struggle for meaning, especially as painting and *das Ding* are worked together, is a struggle I have pursued reflexively in an attempt to understand the complex relations between language and embodiment, interpretation and its object. Art theorist W.T.J Mitchell (1984: 100) states that 'breaching' the boundaries between writing and painting is not a 'marginal or exceptional practice but a fundamental impulse in both the theory and practice of the arts'. But the process itself leads me to the conclusion that the relationship between interpretation and painting doesn't ever find a point of singular clarity or unadulterated logic, and remains in a state of 'breach'.

Paradoxically, however, the difficulty of disentangling reception from practice, real from ideal forms, symbolic from explicit material facture, is the significant gain painting offers for intellectual life even as these precise qualities are what often makes it unpopular in much contemporary art criticism and discourse. In painting, the appearance of a borderline which recognisably delimits its artistic identity (two-dimensional canvas frame), while insisting on something of a non-identity or purposelessness, can provide some perspective on other cultural events and discourses which are less straightforwardly definitive than can be assumed. In other words, painting embodies a structure of difference which critically reflects a social sphere I see as often weighed down by empirical pragmatism.

My research is thus motivated by certain issues involving simplified and immediate ideas of identity which tend to deny the real distance between symbolic and embodied spheres of experience. The disavowal of difference between that which is real and that which is metaphorical in thought and practice lends itself to the particularly human facility for actions and reactions that impose on bodies and the environment in ways which can be destructive and traumatic, as Seltzer's elaboration of 'wound culture' demonstrates. Regarding the recent student protests in South Africa, Achille Mbembe (2015) writes on the tension between symbolisation and objectification, and the level at which this can become threatening. He suggests that 'the force of affect' in current discourses on 'decolonization' of and resistance to predominantly white university institutions has signalled some underlying allusions, by a few, to the possibility of using actual violence. Similarly, notions of injustice, black pain and traumatic apartheid history have become such a pervasive language for black youth in Mbembe's eyes, that it questions the very notion of 'identity and agency' itself.

> Psychic bonds – in particular bonds of pain and bonds of suffering – more than lived material contradictions are becoming the real stuff of political inter-subjectivity. "I am my pain" – how many times have I heard this statement in the months since #RhodesMustFall emerged? "I am my suffering" and this subjective experience is so incommensurable that "unless you have gone through the same trial, you will never understand my condition" – the fusion of self and suffering in this astonishing age of solipsism and narcissism (Mbembe 2015).

A discourse, then, that tends towards an identity politics of victimisation is also where feelings become confused as a site of manifest embodiment, where resentments might play out co-extensively in the realm of people and things. Mbembe proposes that a better resistance to unfair discrimination takes place on the level at which its power is understood as symbolic and in need of 'demythologisation'. For him, this sphere is the same one which, to a large extent, is 'unconsciously' governed by an ideology of victimisation which objectifies the self as 'other'. Establishing distance from a traumatic past is therefore centred on delimiting our status as subjects mutually dependant on the symbolic potential of the 'Other', writes Mbembe: an intersubjective and shared realm of cognition and language, which is separable from suffering and pain to the precise extent that we are able to symbolise our pain, rather than suffer it in an imaginary realm of 'being' it.

Ultimately my undertaking here speaks to such questions indirectly, or as the first section of this thesis explains, nonobjectively. As I discuss below, painting can evoke precisely the call of the mythic void of origin and affect, the absolute and imperialist fantasies of possession, a kind of transcendent figure of experience even through such themes of pain and suffering.

But it also augurs a space of reflection which is not immediately analogous to lived experience.[12] For me, it is a stimulating choice of practice because it tends towards the abstract, formal and material conditions of subject and object in ways that assert above all the relationship's provocation of 'forces of affect'. Painting vigorously and even shamelessly 'thinks' symbolically and imaginatively, and thus has access to a reality which is less than transcendental but more than merely subjective (The transcendental and the subjective are often misperceived as the same, a complex theme I explore in this thesis.) Joseph Margolis discusses how painting's solicitation of traditional effects such as 'aura' or 'sacred presence' have value for demythologising the 'profane occasions' on which these themes have played out as ideological determinations of identity. Margolis exemplifies this displacement of sacred and profane effects via Anselm Kiefer's material handling of Nazi-era symbolism (1992: 78).[13] By recognising and asserting the historical framing conditions of representation, contemporary painting 'quotes' these conventions and can embody a 'fresh memorial recovery' by which the past might be critically recollected.[14] Thomas Lawson (2005: 143) similarly advocates the subversive potential of painting to 'deconstruct' real life as it is presented in the media. Painting, for Lawson, is the 'perfect camouflage' because it enacts its old mandate for authentic transcendental experience (2005: 153). But for him, that experience is likewise present as an ideological yet hidden demand presented in the contemporary 'capitalist marketplace' which sustains notions of the 'freedom' to individual rights and self-gain (2005: 151). Yet it is the

[12] This specialised space painting inhabits was made clear for me when a participant in the student protests asked an academic Facebook forum what role the arts were seen to be taking in engaging with the rallies. As he asked, 'Where are all the performance artists during the student protests? Where are the offers of interaction, satire, education, visual provocations, symbolic amplifications etc. Where have you all been?' (Gray 2015: Online). The critical question led me to wonder where painting might visually provoke or interact with these events. My answer is that it would hardly be effective for paintings to be put on display on their easels in and amidst the powerful visual, auditory and embodied space of the protest. Paintings that do and will arise in response to these occasions will do so in the 'white cube' of the gallery space and could elicit perspectives that take a manifest distance to the events by registering more difficult or abstract emotional aspects which could be read as controversial, or even transgressive in the space and time of it happening.

[13] For pictorial illustrations of paintings which reference and reinterpret historical symbols and icons, please see the following examples of local and foreign painters listed as figures and provided at the end of this thesis. Figure 1: Anselm Kiefer. 1969. *Untitled*; Figure 2: Maja Maljevic. 2016. *Between the Lines*; Figure 3*:* Ian Grose. 2015. *Keinmal*; Figure 4: Adrian Ghenie. 2012. *Pie Fight Interior 8*. The works referenced here deploy traditional and symbolic iconography to different expressive ends. The conceptual function – on its most basic level – is to return to classic themes of figuration as a manifest quality of the painted surface, i.e., painting in these instances is asserted as an embedded cultural form of history and ideology, while being suggestive of the notion that this embeddedness may be disinterred from its very site of its formation: in the materiality of painting.

[14] Peter Osborne (1991: 70) defines 'postconceptual' painting in similar terms to Margolis, where contemporary methods address 'the framing conditions of representation' by way of 'its interventions within the realm of representation itself'. In this regard, Gerhard Richter's paintings register 'a memory of the past of painting', where emotional affect was experienced as constitutive of the painted surface, Richter 'knowingly' recoups these forms into a 'second order' of representational strategies (Osborne 1991: 72). However, this 'life' of painting is now beset by a 'shadow,' or a 'melancholy quality': Figure 5: Gerhard Richter. 1997. *Torso*.

way in which it is central to that marketplace that gives painting greater scope to up-end notions of 'freedom' and objective laws of transcendence. It is painting's own 'discursive structure' that enables painting to 'represent' or take a certain distance to reality in ways which reveal 'the hidden structures of desire that persuade our thoughts' (Lawson 2005: 153). [15]

Painting therefore offers a resistance to much contemporary art and theory in which I see evidence of a naturalised fidelity to empirical reality and objectivity. Karyn Ball (2000: 7) notes that in regards to the contemporary intellectualisation of cultural practice, there has been an implicit rejection of the challenges to empirical life by the French and Frankfurt Schools that in the sixties and seventies inaugurated a critical focus on issues of subjectivity and desire. In its place, a direct identification of seemingly coherent social identities and associations with an 'authentic' embodied experience of the external world is often made (Ball 2000:7).[16] In regards to artistic production, Rosalind Krauss criticises what she calls a 'homogenising principle' whereby meaning is conceived as transparent to the object and signifying in equivalence to social and political features of contemporary experience (1999: 15).

A conception of reality as simply available to meaning, which often poses as a moralizing or social-activist stance on meaning production,[17] has its roots in philosophy and art historical values regarding the authenticity of the subject, although this is seemingly repressed. Boris Groys (2009) mounts a critique of art installation insofar as it resumes an underlying discourse

[15] Thuli Gamedze (2017) makes a strong argument for how much contemporary art can be seen as a 'de-weaponisation' of anti-apartheid representation dealing with the struggle, and is consequently 'capitalcentric'. She is critical of current modes of art leaning towards 'other themes and dealing with subjects – and their own subjectivity – in more "nuanced" ways', thus elevating a work's aesthetic value to a more palatable level for investors. I do not address the political loss of impact upon audiences who have to grasp the significance of less direct artwork. However, I do argue for the ethical legitimacy of a 'nuanced' view of painting, discussed throughout this thesis. Moreover, the market value or 'capitalcentrism' of artwork is an aspect for critical interpretation, of the role painting may hold in the social sphere, as Lawson suggests (2005). As I contend in the conclusion of this thesis, the return of nuance and complex aesthetic forms of practice and interpretation may be tools for reconstructing, and even decolonising, hegemonic world views.

[16] Bryant, Srnicek and Harman (2011:3) have established the presence of a globally recognised stance in opposition to the French and Frankfurt schools of philosophy, characterising the latter as assertively 'anti-realist'. So they write, 'In the face of the looming ecological catastrophe, and the increasing infiltration of technology into the everyday world (including our own bodies), it is not clear that the anti-realist position is equipped to face up to these developments. The danger is that the dominant anti-realist strain of continental philosophy has not only reached a point of decreasing returns, but that it now actively limits the capacities of philosophy in our time.' I discuss the problem of these perspectives on what constitutes the 'real' and non-real in regards to Kant and Lacan in the following section of this chapter.

[17] Penny Siopis (2005: 29) has criticised what she sees as the limitations of a 'now rather fixed specular binary politics' in cultural practice. Ball (2004: 121) is critical of the emphasis on video installation, in particular the proliferation of television documentary displays of traumatic events at *Documenta 11* (2002). For Ball, these displays constituted a 'political agenda' which 'encourage visitors to take self-affirming pleasure in their sense of enlightened' solidarity with its aims. The exhibit was also in danger of reifying the very suffering it displayed as a means to an institutionally sanctioned end'.

of ‘sovereignty and autonomy’ by ‘privatizing’ public space. A space becomes appropriated but can become a framing device that is invisible and naturalised for the spectator. Moreover, the concatenation of the ‘everyday’ and readymade objects is silently underwritten by the artist deploying the ‘democratic’ (Westernized) ‘freedom’ of *both* curator and artist, ultimately enforcing a particular mode of engagement from the viewer which again does not assert its institutional frame. But these values were once afforded outright and most of all to painting. An example is available in the discourse surrounding South African painter Jacobus Hendrik Pierneef (1886-1957), whose aesthetic landscapes were regarded as having an immediate correspondence with the outside world: an inner world of divinely-bestowed reason spatially congruent with the teleology of nature (Coetzee 1992: 17–30).[18] The authority of painting as a place-holder for ‘truth’ in this manner has been rightly deconstructed, often by way of artistic practices exploring other technologies and mediums. However, there is a growing sense of discomfort with similarly sovereign claims made for practices focused on lived experience and embodied identity politics.

These troubled vicissitudes of aesthetic identity and social or political meaning are particularly strong where art and trauma are thematically related. In a review of a 2012 exhibition titled *September 11*, Hal Foster (2012: 210) delineates what he sees as a problematic set of relations between art and the events of 9/11. The programme of the show was to exhibit objects made years before the attack, but were essentially re-framed by the after-effects of 9/11.[19] As outlined by the curator, Peter Eely, the artworks were now conceived in newly traumatic understandings and insights serving to ‘transcend the specificities of its epoch, form, or content to uncannily address the present’. Foster identifies two interrelated critical issues. The first is that reality and its traumatic events become confused with the explicit act of artistic representation. As such, the lens of devastation activated by the 9/11 framing did not ‘add resonance’ to the works but served to ‘rob [the works] of their actual significance’; for instance, work that was instigated by the AIDS crisis was immanently suppressed in favour of a turn to provoking traumatic perceptions of 9/11 (Foster 2012: 210). Secondly, the interpenetration of real-life trauma and past art created a direct presumption of experience as common to both. Foster suggests that this emphasis on ‘experience’ creates an overly-generalised premise of ‘pathos’ dominating certain prevalent modes of artistic reception corresponding to trauma discourse. As Foster writes, ‘If Kant asked, “Is the work beautiful?” and Duchamp, “Is it art?” we tend to

[18] Figure 6: Jacobus Hendrick Pierneef. 1925-35. *The Maluti Mountains*.
[19] For images and media statements on the show, see http://momaps1.org/exhibitions/view/338.

wonder, "How does it affect me?"' (2012: 211). What is passed over in favour of affect are both the formal implications of each work's structure and the critical social interest previously carried by the work: the specificity of how the work as artistic representation might communicate objectively or as critical interpretation. But the main issue underscoring the blurred borderlines of subject and object represented as 'trauma', for Foster, is an immanently ethical question:

> …Eely believes that the 'terrorists had spectacularly politicized our visual sphere'. Clearly this is so, yet is the best response to traumatically aestheticize this same sphere? (2012: 211).

Certainly, many of the aims and objectives of much recent art production and analysis within the sphere of trauma have tended to follow the tendencies outlined by Foster. Much of trauma as a field of study in aesthetic experience tends to reorganize and/or flatten the difference between the real as experienced by victims of trauma and the potential work of trauma in artistic representation. Some trauma-affiliated analysts do so by reference to an uncritical notion of the immediacy of bodily experience or affective dimensions of trauma, which are then equated with the 'truth' of lived experience, and art's own reception.[20] The deployment of affect as being a kind of open aperture or indeed gaping wound between the aesthetic experience of art and the lived experience of trauma finds a problematic expression in Jill Bennett's books on trauma and contemporary art. In *Empathic Vision* (2005), Bennett theorises artwork which is traumatic by arguing that an affective tension is evoked by 'putting an inside and an outside into contact'. One of her central tenets is that trauma evades clear-cut binaries of the 'subject,' 'self' or other – rather, it is 'always lived and negotiated at an intersection' (2005: 31).

Although Bennett recognizes trauma as appealing to a conceptual structure in art reception, her focus is on work which is motivated by particular events. The affective tension then, becomes one in which art can 'register the *true* experience of violence or devastating loss' (Bennett 2005: 3).[21] Traumatic realities (here of 'trauma and war') and art are placed in a contingent

[20] Susan Sontag (2003: 90, 68) addresses the fetish of 'spectacle' produced by representation which seeks to establish a direct confrontation with trauma. Richards (2008) cites traumatic spectacle as producing effects which erase the symbolic dimensions of representation and obliterate reflection, '"condemning the viewer to a world in which we can see everything but understand nothing – allowing us viewer-victims…only a random choice of ephemera"' (Wollen in Richards 2008: 253).

[21] Bennett analyses South African photographer Jo Ractliffe's work *End of Time* (1999) to illustrate her interest in the proximity of trauma and art. However, Ractliffe's own intentions (1999) are stated in terms of 'a revelation of absence' – the work documents not the sources of identification between trauma and visuality, but the very way in which these relations escape each other. The photographs are not meant as 'intersectional' in Bennett's terms, but as manifesting an interstitial lack: non-identical elements that Ractliffe sees as being 'left out' of contextualisation: 'their silence and the spaces they occupy between reality and desire'.

relationship so that their boundaries might be 'challenged' (Bennett 2005:4).[22] Bennett further interprets Gilles Deleuze's philosophy of affect as the mediating quality between art and real (traumatic) life: most particularly his term the 'encountered sign' is read as a sign that 'is felt rather than perceived through cognition' (2005: 7). Although Deleuze has been recognized as challenging hermeneutical approaches to interpretation based on an ideal subject, Bennett ignores the fact that his stress on the affective dimension of experience always pertains to the work as a form of representation: *in* painting for instance, as I will discuss below (Bogue 2003: 122; Somers 2013: 1).

As will already be clear, my intention is not to claim that painting stands in proximity to actual war or trauma, or to say that it comments directly upon a particular traumatic event. As I will argue, there is an ethical motivation for preserving a cultural sphere focused on the limits of representation in its own right, as a medium-specific form of visualising individual and collective conditions for cognition.

The difference is well-articulated by art theorist Whitney Davis's (1994: 571) division of branches of interpretation into two disciplinary approaches that are both focused on addressing the relationship of art to reality. The first relates to my discussion of Bennett above and is what Davis calls a manner of interpretation which sees the artwork as 'subject-constituting'. This perspective involves supposing art to be commanding enough authority to instil a vital shift of subjectivity in viewers. The mediating element is a notion of 'causality'. The theorist or art historian will parallel historical causality, as it has modified subjective outlooks and social structures, with an 'aggrandizing' sense of an artwork's ability to change attitudes.

The second approach, according to Davis, is that of analysing art in terms of its 'secondariness' or 'reflectedness' (1994: 570). Here, the artwork is evaluated for how it has absorbed 'subject-constituting' events and images pertinent to its period *and* for how it is constituted by historical modes of artistic production. The symbolic and material relationships that are worked within

[22] Bennett's most recent book *Practical Aesthetics* (2012) takes the question of affect and the potentially traumatic 'aestheticization of the visual' into the terrain of the everyday. As she notes, '[Practical aesthetics] is to conceive of an aesthetics informed by and derived from practical, real-world encounters, an aesthetics that is in turn capable of being used to put into effect in a real situation. In other words, it is to orient aesthetics – with its specific qualities and capacities – towards actual events or problems' (2012: 2). Bennett cites her interest in affect as derived from philosophies on aesthetics, for the reason that 'affect gives us the feeling of life; it makes us feel *alive* and in turn gives images *life*' (my italics, 2012: 26). Her approach to affect as an interpretative (but still problematically self-sufficient) mediatory experience between art and the lived would not be so disturbing if it wasn't based on determining the 'life' of affect through the lens of 9/11, which serves as an elective model of intense emotions on both 'Ground Zero' and in the media.

the site of its making thus refer to a more complex contact with the external world. Davis links this account to Freudian psychoanalysis, which understands interpretation via a 'traumaticity' that invokes tensions between the revisions and 'repetitions' of psychic and social histories, and the 'scenes of notation' where representation is registered in 'primal perceptual and bodily visualisations' (1994: 570).[23] What occurs between history and visuality as a drawn or painted surface encompasses a distancing from the subject-constituting events in reality, the elaboration of a gap or space whereby psychic complexity is foregrounded. Davis calls it

> a *material distance* between the separation of what is essential to subjects (they all have bodies, for example, and an initially "undifferentiated" sexuality) and what is constitutive of them (their bodies might be identified as male and any homoerotic wishes suppressed in a specific personal sexuality) (my italics, 1994: 571).

In another text on trauma and art, Foster (1995: 128) indicates a possible source of the 'scene of notation' which evades the conventional subject-constituting themes of interpretation. He cites two basic models of more regular interpretation: 'That images are attached to referents, to iconographic themes or real things in the world, or alternatively, that all images can do is represent other images, that all forms of representation are auto-referential codes.' However, both 'referential' and 'simulacrul' readings are opened to a traumaticity or material distance through an artwork's mode of *enactment*, which can be seen as a material assimilation of a shocked or traumatised subject. Foster draws from Lacan's notion of trauma as marked by repetitive acts of dissonance and confusion between 'subject and world, inside and outside'. Foster sees this embodied in certain artworks which register 'slipping and streaking, blanching and banking, repeating and colouring of images' (1995: 134).[24] These techniques refer to the 'material distance' from reality, as described by Whitney.

[23] Davis (1994: 571) references Sergei Pankejeff's 'Wolfman' drawings to illustrate the material visualisation of his psycho-sexually traumatic past as indirect translations made effective by autographically uncertain tracing and symbolic imagery. Figure 7: Sergei Pankejeff. c.1910. *Untitled* (Wolves sitting in a tree). However, one may also see an installation Bennett analyses (2005: 88), South African artist Gavin Younge's *Forces Favourites* (1997), as formally invoking the 'primal perceptual and bodily visualisations' Davis discusses. The work consists of Angolan Post Office bicycles linked in a circle. On top of each pair of handlebars are TV sets with video imagery of a bike being ridden along a rough country track. While Bennett focuses on the significance of the bicycle's origin and the content of the video documentation, ironically she ignores the signalling of affect occurring through the work's specific form: the bikes have been asserted in the exhibition space as an impassable sculptural 'repetition', an endless circularity of present and past. Further, the TV box-sets weigh heavily on the antiquated curves of the handlebars, suggesting the 'weight' or imposition of media representation on history and the practical body. Figure 8: Gavin Younge. 1997. *Forces Favourites.*

[24] Foster (1995: 134) is referring to the serial screen printing techniques of Andy Warhol, whose 'Pop' art is more often than not interpreted from the perspective of whose portrait he printed, or on which source he based the screens.

While much of this thesis is devoted to elaborating the material points at which psychic affect may be embodied, my discussion here aims at reviewing the strange withdrawal from direct meaning and interpretation psychoanalytic models of trauma can bring about. What is interesting to me is that considering 'secondariness', 'material distance' or modes of enactment resonates strongly with traditional enlightenment and modernist values that were in favour of a critical distance predicated on the formal workings and medium specificity of an artwork.[25] Even though these values were once framed by notions of autonomy, originality and authenticity, they nevertheless parallel the psychoanalytic claim to certain subjective foundations for the creative objectification of affect. Donald Kuspit (2000: 124) has more recently recovered the claims for the medium in modernist abstract expressionism to propose a psychoanalytic reading of painting's subject, which takes as its starting point the medium as 'the facilitator of one's being at its most fundamental, the source of one's individuality at its most creative and consequential, the truth of one's existence at its most compromising'.[26] This rootedness in fundamentals of intuition and perception in both instances invokes a specialised sphere of intellectual and aesthetic activity. Indeed, this thesis comprises an exploration of symbolic historical values which insist on art's real and imagined delimitation from reality. The space of contemplation asserted by Kant's notion of aesthetic judgment's 'disinterestedness' from the object and the heightening of the experiential play of imagination and understanding is not dissimilar to the focus on similar capacities for fantasy and cognition of the psychoanalytic subject. Further, the modernist framework that is given rigorous shape and form in Clement Greenberg's art criticism and theory centrally concerns the ways in which we find a critical distance from everyday experience by the ways in which art generates an intuitive 'twist in attitude toward your own awareness and its objects' (De Duve 1996: 97).

My formal analysis of certain paintings focuses on this aspect of difference in awareness of the subject at hand, elaborated by the distance from direct identification and often based in thinking

[25] This view stands in contrast to Frederic Jameson's assertion that critical distance has been collapsed in 'what is called postmodernism' as a distinctly political stance towards late capitalism. Yet critical distancing does not have to be equated with 'high culture', as Jameson also affirms (2001: 482-3).

[26] A recent retrospective of South African painter and printmaker Walter Battiss at the Wits Art Museum (2016) frames his work in similar terms: http://www.jozilife.co.za/art/walter-battiss-i-invented-myself/. As a modernist artist who, in many statements, asserted the intuitive and imaginative possibilities generated by his practice – the show's title is 'I Invented Myself' – Battiss's abstracted figures can only be conceived through the history of forms he deploys, and their reinterpretation in colour and surface. Perhaps a critical analysis of Battiss requires taking his social context and degree of success as a sign of his privilege into account. Ultimately, I think the connection with the formal investigation he can be said to achieve, or forsake, should be thought via the mode of surface Battiss himself privileged. Seen through the lens of traditional African art, the flattening of figures, the inflated augmentation and collapse of sexual body parts and their non-compositional placement may actually question his 'invention' of self within the wider sphere of social and political experiences.

about affect. For instance, my intensive examination of Penny Siopis's practice delves into her own stated interest in the 'performativity' and 'provisional form' offered by the medium for 'fugitive forces such as energy, excitement, terror, fear, eroticism' (Siopis 2005: 28-9).

I deliberately raise my interest in the expressive construction of affects and emotions, disengaged from daily life and re-embodied in the medium, because it invokes a controversial mixture of ideas concerning the metaphysical absolute, spiritual aspects of myth, and the transcendental noumenon, or division from reality. My research is intended to provoke the art historical values of much modernist painting of the 20th century. It therefore depends in some ways on conventions of spontaneity and individual expression which, I argue, are inalterably part of the cultural consciousness of painting. As Harold Rosenberg (1952: 23) states, the 'act' of expressive gesture and abstraction conducts a 'lucid drama', embodied as a 'metaphysical substance' that coincides with the artist's own 'existence'.

As noted above, concepts of trauma in art and literature seem to make claims to a sovereign realm of truth and experience which lie perilously close to the field of metaphysics.[27] Definitions that explicitly relate trauma to the 'unrepresentable' owe much to Cathy Caruth's concept of trauma, which determined the ground of much trauma theory since the nineties (Ball 2000:13). In Caruth's analyses of artistic representations (1996: 56, 4), new ways of 'seeing and listening' emerge from trauma *itself*, taking on an almost metaphysical character in that the viewer partakes in a 'reality or truth' that is nevertheless 'unknown in our very actions and language'. Caruth's contemporary in trauma and literary studies, Geoffrey Hartman (1996: 631), sees this aspect of trauma that is fundamentally 'not experienced' as comparable to the thirteenth century theologian Meister Eckhardt's concept of 'unknowing knowing'.

As in discussions on religion and art, trauma studies therefore tends to declare a universality which disturbs boundaries between the ecstatic and shocked subject in troubling ways. Trauma theorist Dominick LaCapra (1999: 674) sees the difference between traumatic affect and its theoretical structure in art practice as a question of ethical limits. The very distinct and

[27] The relationship between an aesthetics of transcendence and suffering is conventional and not as exceptionally new as it seems to be suggested in more recent trauma studies (McCallister & Levington 1995: 99). Traditionally, 'aesthetics' as a category has been aligned with conceiving the material embodiments of 'vehement passions (fear, grief, rapture) and the minor and major affects and emotions (humiliation, shame, envy, irritation, anxiety, disdain)' which provide the spectator with the means for catharsis or surmounting these states of being (Highmore 2010: 120). The argument I am building through Lacan is that one does not overcome or behold these emotions to their full extent: rather, one may bear witness to the paths through which we *cannot* ultimately see or visualise the truth of our experience.

particular losses incurred by victims cannot be legitimated by what LaCapra terms an 'overly generalized discourse of absence', which includes the 'absence of ultimate metaphysical foundations' (1999: 698). The deconstructive techniques that he identifies in Cathy Caruth's work are strongly aligned with these concerns, which 'often involve forms of traumatic writing or post-traumatic writing' but are ethically 'dubious' interrogations when enacted in the context of global crises such as the Holocaust or apartheid (1999: 938, 951). The focus on the problem of language tends to approach traumatic events as the fatalistic sign of an absent origin. For LaCapra, a posture of 'endless melancholy, impossible mourning, and the interminable' contradicts the constructive effort towards an empathic acknowledgment of actual losses in the present which could guide processes of mourning, substantially initializing the possibility of 'working through' trauma (1999: 711). He writes that when 'absence' is used to elide real loss, 'one increases the likelihood of misplaced nostalgia or utopian politics in quest of a new totality or fully unified community' (1999: 698). LaCapra further characterises the aestheticization of trauma as something of a rash pursuit of absence in search for the 'absolute' and the human being as 'origin of meaning and value' (1999: 750). It is in this vein that LaCapra articulates his critique of what he calls 'conflation', suggesting that there should be a delimitation between historical research and artistic representation and its interpretation. The purpose is not to conflate internal and external realities, but, to the extent that this is possible, to keep categories of experience distinct so that questions of identity remain critical. He therefore outlines a dual causeway between notions of 'absence' and 'loss' as pertaining to understanding trauma as either 'structural' or 'historical' (1999: 750).

It is on the complex, sometimes controversial limit between the 'structural' and 'historical 'that Lacan elaborates the exigencies of *das Ding*: a 'Thing' which structures both real experience and art, but avoids being equated with either. On one hand, *das Ding* pertains to how he articulates the historic and real dimensions of trauma and violence as it affects the self and others. As he asserts, 'tragedy is in the forefront of our experiences as analysts' and it remains an inalienable presence in contemporary life (SVII: 243). But on the other hand, the way in which tragedy or trauma comes to be embodied in artwork is structural: it is predicated on the 'secondariness' Davis describes because *das Ding* is assertively representational, rather than making an appearance in and of itself. As I'll discuss, *das Ding* is felt to the extent that representation, the 'scenes of notation,' are in Lacan's view doubly distanced by being the 'representatives of representation' (SVII: 102). What is provoked in the artwork is the 'purely' imaginary character of the human will to aggression (SVII: 248). *Against* the presence and

force of trauma, art will instil the qualities of *das Ding* as something which is, in reality, absent from our grasp. But this is not to rely on a reading of representation as empty simulacra, where image and gesture merely duplicate and copy previous reproductions.[28] Rather, both spheres of trauma and art lie close to another limit at which a spectre of anguished embodiment is made tangible in a complex relation of proximity and distance (De Kesel 2009; Leader 2002).

This proximity and distance is schematised as follows: Lacan insists on the impossibility of fully inhabiting our bodies or achieving unconditional knowledge of this aspect of experience. Instead, the body is represented through libidinal drives which structure a 'polymorphous' relationship between language and embodiment to the extent that we are always off-centre or non-identical with the desire for truth and being (de Kesel 2009: 14-5).[29] The complexity at the core of Lacan's theory of *das Ding* is that metaphysical qualities are based *in* human relationships to the physical. Joan Copjec (1996: 8) conveys the deeply structural idea of embodiment in Freud and Lacan's own development of the concept. In particular, she argues, Lacan's theory of the drives is aimed at ways in which we might recognise our 'incarnate subjectivity'. But bodies are the enigmatic point at which the mania of absence arises. Copjec (1996: 2) asks in this regard:

> What's the matter with bodies? Why do they suppurate (for that's the word for it) so much trouble for themselves? Why does human embodiment manifest itself as a pitched battle between our bodies and our biology (or, as we will see, our physiology), such that it would be a mistake to take them as synonymous? To be embodied means, of course, that we are not just any body, but this body here. But why does our corporeal particularity manifest itself in cravings such that we are constantly overeating or starving ourselves, cutting up other bodies into little pieces or prostrating ourselves at another's feet? In other words, why, even in their 'basic' pursuits of nourishment and sex, are human bodies given to compulsion, inhibition, sadism, idealization?

It is at the level at which the drives alter their course from natural needs for survival that Lacan examines the tensions between language – the symbolic realm – and the metaphysics of embodiment. His focus is on the invisible aspects of desire which manifest in various forms of perverse enactment, and which perforce characterise the field of individual and collective

[28] Jean Baudrillard's seminal writings have influenced many art practitioners dealing with fraught modern questions of the relationship between the real and representation (Camille 1996: 38). Baudrillard's (2006: 454) baneful description of the 'mirror of being and appearances, of the real and concept,' is supplanted by 'models of control' systematised and reproduced mainly through technology, where only artificial constructs reflect a ruinous and lost private and public 'imaginary' as pure sign. I tend to think that these are aspects of modern society and experience that do not reflect on other facets, which are experienced as close to the real of trauma, and even of nature. Baudrillard does however affirm the simulacrum's force of affect in this way.

[29] As Lacanian theorist John Rajchman (1991: 34) contends, affects of anxiety or guilt are always processed through unconscious bodily schemas of drive and desire, and can therefore not be viewed as simply immediate to a situation or mental state.

behaviours, and the material states of embodiment these behaviours give rise to. *Das Ding* is the ultimate object of desire which precisely 'serves to hold open the site of judgment when comparison to the subject's own body fails to provide adequate orientation' (Boothby 2001: 242).

I briefly summarise some key elements here. Lacan locates the mythic body of the mother in relation to *das Ding* (SVII: 67). The mother's body is characterised in terms of myth because it structures an imaginary field in which the ultimate source of embodied knowledge is unavailable to us and thus remains absent, except through metaphor.[30] This fundamental source is based on a 'desire for incest', or, more palatably, the wish to be returned to an organic state of 'unknowing knowing' in the womb. Based on this Freudian assertion, Lacan not only insists on the universality of the desire for incest, but also insists that the facture of language keeps us at a distance from *das Ding.* The real truth is that we remain outside of the womb by the simple law of physics, a 'law' which is conceived as the fissure from embodiment, and through which the 'Law' of language arises (SVII: 68). Psychically, we are subject to a heterogeneous distance through which only familiar representations of that 'Thing' or primordial ground can filter, which is why the thought of really popping back into the mother's orifice can be unbearable, or uncanny.[31] The 'bad' Thing is what Lacan views as certain efforts to retrieve the real body *in* the space of the symbolic – that space of the psychic real in which the presence of *das Ding* has been substituted for pure absence.

But this intense space of perverse desires and aggressions, indicative of a 'wound culture' which is often based precisely on the opening of women's bodies, is also the limit at which Lacan elaborates his philosophy of artistic sublimation. As he says, the question of sublimation 'belongs to the destructive drive' (SVII: 139). Sublimation is furthermore a concept which will

[30] Ruth Leys (2000) discusses the affect of trauma as having to do with spectres of identification with the mother's body. This identification is based on fundamental desires, says Leys (2000: 31), and posited by Freud in an emotional bonding with the mother figure. It is what has otherwise been called the 'lost object', and it does not make a perceptible appearance to the subject. It operates as an unconscious time or 'prehistory' where neither subject nor object are distinguishable, yet can be characterised or witnessed as a 'hypnotic openness to impressions and identifications'. The anxiety-provoking notion of extreme identification in this primordial era of development is analogous to the imitative conditions of traumatized subjects, who seem to be fundamentally 'altered' or identified with a space of non-recognition of self and other (Leys 2000: 32). In other words, trauma as an external event is seen by Freud to re-enact or repeat a state of manifest embodiment separate from drives and perceptions and it is an ambivalently emotional-bodily affect (Leys 2000: 33).

[31] Mary Kelly (1999: 209) contends that Lacan's model of the mother as primordial generator of metaphoric substitutions for her body excludes the experience of mothers themselves. Kelly's thesis is that for the mother, the baby's body is instead fetishized as a metaphor for lack. Thus there is a reversal of roles in which the mother sees the ultimate object of desire in the child, and has to experience losing that connection for herself. While Kelly's notion may resonate, the point in Lacan is that the metaphor which comes to be fetishized is strictly relational, and is thus empty of real material content.

join the question of art, religion and discourses on science as a central framework for *das Ding*. Sublimation does not involve the Hegelian notion of *Aufgebung* or the 'sublation' of entities into a higher logic of the whole or absolute totalities (Adorno 1984: 164). Rather, it operates in these cultural spheres of activity by sustaining a distance from the 'supreme evil' of *das Ding* and thus illuminating its absence, rather than its presence. Lacan (SVII: 131) states that religion is formed by certain rituals and codes which involve 'avoiding' *das Ding* by 'respecting' it as a god-like sphere which prohibits certain behaviours. Science, on the other hand, is a form of 'unbelief' in psychic reality and takes the physical world as its object. As such, it tends to leave the strange or hostile aspects and desires of subjectivity out of its equations, and therefore creates a space which is essentially empty of content and knowledge. Lacan places the tradition of philosophy from Kant to Marx within the discourse of science, an aspect that I will address in further detail below. Lacan also sees art as the most ethical form of sublimation. This is because some artworks successfully articulate a relationship to absence that embodies both a distance and a proximity to *das Ding*.

On the one hand, art reveals the way in which human life is constructed by a world of signs and is, on this basic level, at a distance from nature and the body (De Kesel 2009: 84). All art is therefore conceptual because before it does anything else, the symbolic is invested within objects (Leader 2002: 74). On the other hand, Lacan invokes art which engages with the traumatic aspects of existence. By way of its play with the symbolic and discursive framing of representation, it features the tensile relationship through which a fulsome grasp of embodied life remains fundamentally veiled. In other words, art cannot try to present itself as an embodiment of *das Ding* as such. Rather, an artwork's specific operation will register the veil as a blocking off from the truth of lived experience. An interpretation of how such a veil might be constituted is the work of this thesis.

1.2 The Veil and the Lack: Philosophy and Interpretation in a Real Aesthetic

It is the representational or veiling function of the signifier which marks an incurable wound between embodiment and language, and which enables Lacan to insist on the inaccessibility of *das Ding* (Boothby 2001: 201-2). Furthermore, Lacan sees the signifier as a 'phallic' unit of meaning.[32] Thus there is a seemingly simplistic opposition between the male and female themes of a phallic signifier and a female site of original absence, understood as '*Ding*' or 'lack' of phallus and to which Lacan will not ascribe any content. But Lacan (SVII: 185) asserts that where this *psychic* lack is posited as something real, it often manifests as a depraved and concrete confrontation with bodies, the very place of trauma.

In my understanding, *das Ding* seems to be something of an open lens through which various political or gendered themes might be viewed.[33] However, Lacan's central thesis that the symbolic is predominantly phallic has come under feminist criticism in the past decades. His formulation of the phallic signifier is seen as excluding women's contribution to meaning and cultural production.[34] While I do discuss some of these theoretical points of resistance, I am interested in the seminar on *das Ding* specifically because it calls neat binary oppositions into question. Indeed, *das Ding* prescribes an indomitable power that invigorates and drives meaning, while the phallic signifier plays a highly impotent role in mirroring its force. These poles of attraction and repulsion are also significant to thinking the reality of trauma. The fact that the abuse of women so often entails the frantic beating, thrashing and slicing open of our bodies suggests that there is evidence for locating the origin of Lacan's notion of the desire for *das Ding* at the female sex organ. Again however, Lacan resists characterising *das Ding* as 'being' the female sex in reality, as it may be conceived in some alternative theories of feminine

[32] Please see my index for a detailed explanation of certain Lacanian terms which are not explicitly cited by Lacan in *Seminar VII*, but are implicit to his discussion.

[33] Lacanian theorist Derrick Hook (2010) explores Foucault's theorisation of power through the structure of *das Ding*. As Hook contends, *das Ding* can provide substantial ways to think about how the libidinal enjoyment of power might be conceived in conjunction with such genealogical concepts as 'governmentality', 'disciplinarity' and 'biopolitics'. *Das Ding* thus might articulate how desire or 'passionate attachments' influence regimes of control (Hook 2010: 856).

[34] One of the reasons I have decided not to focus too much on the gender politics surrounding Lacanian theory is my view that gender difference is more complex than recent transgender theory might express. As a disabled person, my outlook is that the human body's upright posture is the pre-eminent phallic symbol. While art and media have historically featured the woman's body as supine, the reality is that the power to be 'upright' (a power which I recognise doesn't always hold in media and artistic representations of women) is given to both genders, while the threat of castration is real in terms of historical and contemporary perceptions of disability. This is a basic opinion which deserves much more discussion than the space that is available here, although the course of my writing is suggestive of these tensions.

subjectivity. Rather, the mother's body is always referenced in terms of its metaphorical value, as I have already indicated. Lacan's ethical position is to analyse absence or lack as a result of the subject's *own* imaginary lack of selfhood or wholeness, and symbolic dependence on language and representation.

My research is focused on a specific group of art critics and writers who have been concerned to assert the signifier as creating a conflictual condition of veiling and lack, distance and proximity to meaning, that emerges from the material construction of artwork. The writings of Hal Foster, Rosalind Krauss, Yves-Alain Bois, Thierry de Duve and David Joselit constitutes a certain 'ethics' in art criticism which focuses on the Lacanian exigencies of desire. Centrally, I see these core members of the *October* group (1976 -; MIT Press) as informing my strategy insofar as they demonstrate how such notions as 'secondariness' resist straightforward readings of iconography and materiality. A principal objective is to question notions of causality and constitutive experience by way of rigorously examining the tension between languages of artistic convention and the technical 'scenes of notation' of an object.

While Hal Foster most directly deals with trauma and art, during my research I have been more strongly occupied with Rosalind Krauss's work.[35] Her scrupulous attention to material sites and modes of enactment both refuse and 'scandalise' direct identification or gendered positions. While I focus on Krauss's texts specifically in the last section, I have worked as far as possible within a Lacanian theoretical structure whilst remaining influenced by her methodology.[36]

Krauss's (2011: 3) discussion of the historically inescapable 'phallic' framing conditions of practice is articulated across a wide field of 'postmedium' or multimedia practices, all of which could be said to subvert the institutional frame of painting on an internal and formal level. Her objectives resist historical modernist values, but also the contemporary deterioration of

[35] Hal Foster's seminal book *The Return of the Real* (1996) offers my research a strong practical foundation for the relationship between trauma and its perpetual 'return' as a signifier in art practices. The course of this thesis can be seen to 'touch down' on certain aspects of his interpretation: in the main, his description of material and affective elements draw signifying operations away from abstract thinking into more immediately identifiable terms, which has helped anchor my writing.

[36] In theorist Brian Grosskurth's review (1994) of Krauss's most seminal book *The Optical Unconscious* (1993) he is critical of Krauss's dependence on Lacan's early formula of the L-schema, which serves as a foundation for her deconstruction of modernist opticality. It is a model she also employs in other critical texts (Krauss 1986: 276; 1981: 46). Grosskurth contends that the book would have been richer had she involved Lacan's later elaborations of the *objet a*, *jouissance* and the 'Thing' (1994: 142). This review came to my attention after my selection of *das Ding* as a framework. However, I see the trajectory of research that led me to *Seminar VII* as a logical step taken from my attempt to get to grips with *The Optical Unconscious*.

medium specificity. Indeed, Krauss (2008: 61) has identified herself as 'the complete dinosaur who is not only committed to reinventing Modernism, but never admitted in the first place its eclipse by Postmodernism'. Krauss's positioning of herself and her discourse on the borderlines of traditional and contemporary thought regarding art and its objects takes complex, often not fully decidable turns. But I see these operations as maintaining a potential for the present challenge of art's interpretation, in that she works on the site of interpretation itself. [37]

Krauss (1993: 74) has made stinging attacks on Greenberg's formalism, but her philosophical reasoning is generated by projecting Lacan's schema of unconscious language onto the values and conventions which delimited modernist practices.[38] Her goal is not to change the canon of modernist art so much as to reveal certain 'repressed' conditions which disrupt and traumatise modernist discourses on 'purity' and originality (Krauss 1993: 5). The interpretative act is therefore seen as the 'medium' or place of a 'discursive unity' which provokes tensions with the non-identical aesthetic property of the object (Krauss 2011: 7). Krauss (1986: 1-2) thus emphasizes interpretative 'method' against Clement Greenberg's formalist commitment to judging art strictly on the basis of the object's particular physicality, posited as distinct from language, where a straightforward evaluation of art's content as valorising a 'universal consciousness' is considered ideologically and non-problematically equal to that medium.

But the question of desire for universal origins is central to Krauss's (2010:116) evaluation of modern art, and also to her interest in art's 'sources of power'. The guiding line in Krauss's repeated unravelling and restructuring of these concerns is, as noted, the theory of the unconscious and repression. Krauss (1979: 13) links Lacan's assertion of this Other space pressuring the limits of 'common sense' to Levi-Strauss's anthropological structure of the function of myth in cultures more generally. Most simply, it is by way of myth that cultures

[37] The question of Krauss's fidelity to various schools of thought – most basically understood as structuralist or poststructuralist – can frustrate her most eminent commentators. In one qualitative summation of *The Optical Unconscious* (1993) James Elkins (1998: 110) contends that even though Krauss attempts to fashion innovative poststructuralist approaches to the subject of art, she does not escape more conservative traditional schemes of analysis, as she claims to do. For Elkins, her attachment to logic, even in its psychoanalytic attention to desire, occludes any really inspired production on the site of discursive form when it comes to the affective evocation of art and surface. Rather, he writes, "*The Optical Unconscious* has to be a better guide to the system it deplores than the nonsystem it advocates: the former can be analysed, the latter only evoked" (1998: 110).

[38] In his 'intellectual biography' of Krauss, *Rosalind Krauss and American Philosophical Art Criticism* (2002), David Carrier explores the influence her scholarly approach has had on art-making, history and criticism since the 1960s, particularly in America but also in Europe. He works to construct a 'style' of writing which he calls 'philosophical art criticism' (2002: 92). 'Philosophical art criticism', as the name suggests, is described by Carrier simply as art criticism which displays an interest in philosophy and 'abstract reasoning' (2002: 97). In this regard Krauss's methodology operates in the empty sphere of the discursive subject of representation and withdraws from reification by an emphasis on the 'fictions' and deferrals of the signifier which are constituted by the formal production of certain artworks (Krauss 1986: 4).

are able to maintain belief systems from the past in a 'para-logical suspension' with present empirical knowledge (Krauss 1979: 13). Krauss argues that avant-garde art can similarly retain a 'heterogeneous' suggestion of myth and origin as an 'unconscious' counterpart to its objective subject-matter. For Krauss, then, the elemental condition of the artistic medium is its 'self-differing' heterogeneity, arising from its being ineluctably split by language and embodied materiality (2010: 44).[39] As such, the paradox of debunking formalist interpretation through the deconstructive logic of psychoanalysis is that it doesn't tend towards grander narratives of an object's significance within the greater social sphere, or posit a new or restored knowledge of psyche and soma. Rather, it deconstructs objective certitude itself, and raises another mode of formalism which destabilises existing cognitive frameworks on its deepest, invisible levels of ideological identification.

Krauss (2000: 17) has written about this logic as 'feminising the viewing subject in a move which is deeply antipatriarchal'. Her own method of interpretation works to decentre straight comprehension by a combination and arrangement of sources and key theoretical figures espousing a code that is reflective of, if not embodied in, the formal structures she posits as internal to a given artwork or body of art. Krauss adopts much from the French school of Lacan, Derrida and Lyotard for differing effects appropriate to the kind of artwork under discussion. However, one could surmise that these authors all draw from Freud's understanding of the libidinal drive to account for stranger, more enigmatic turns of expression than straightforward identification would allow.

Critic Daniel Siedell (2004: 99, 104), describing Krauss's extensive body of writing as a 'byzantine mosaic', concludes that 'ultimately, however relevant her criticism is for analytical philosophy or responsive to paradigm shifts in the nature of meaning, it is clear to me that she has made it up as she has gone along; her texts are, without doubt, narratives of intuition'. However, it is the very 'para-logical suspension' between the kind of immediacy that is granted

[39] Marcel Broodthaers's 'postmedium' or multi-media references are often exemplified by Krauss (1999: 52) as the paradigmatic condition of contemporary art making and reception, particularly his video piece *A Voyage on the North Sea* (1973-4): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dQPKG1efWGg. In this analysis, Krauss draws from Broodthaers's techniques for its compound references to forms of art-making and, centrally, in its direct assessment of modernism. The film takes on a storybook-like character with each frame, numbered as pages, depicting ever-closer aspects of a painted ship. As the frames progress, the imagery shifts away from the illusionist depths of Enlightenment classical painting to focus on incrementally smaller details of the canvas, evoking the modernist monochrome and its premise of flatness and immediacy of the pictorial surface. However, the frames thereafter are "scrambled' by Broodthaers, offering an altered account of art history's teleological development (Krauss 1999: 52). For Krauss, the film both fictionalizes and mimics art history's progression in thought. But importantly, in the disruption of its successive and digressive waves of distant and close-up still imagery, it reveals what for Krauss is the timeless, elemental condition of the artistic medium – its essential 'heterogeneity'.

to intuition in traditional modernist terms, and the labyrinthine modelling of non-sensuous textual propositions which collapses notions of art's autonomy and its dependence on reality. In its place, I find in her work that an affective Thing is made palpable: it represents a modern, traumatic subject split from naturalised or transparent associations with objects. The claims Krauss makes for art are thus reflected in her criticism, for example in her statement that:

> The attack on the male ego – on its wholeness, its strength, its stable centre – is the task of the Medusa who, acting against the armouring of the male psyche, works to shatter it. An alliance with the Medusa is thus not an attack on women, but an assault on a view assumed to be male and an award to his fantasies of their worst fears (Krauss 2000: 19).

Krauss (1999:56) has also expressed her interest in the 'postmedium condition' of video, performance and installation as challenging the 'etiolated' forms of traditional practices such as painting. However, the proliferation of painting on the contemporary scene has only increased. Yet, to me, her theory has allowed a return to thinking the painted surface in ways which are current to postmedium strategies but which make the art historical scaffolding of practice explicit. Her contribution has in large part delimited a sphere of interpretation in which painting cannot be taken as mere 'painting', a triumphal constitution of an object-thing, in and of itself. Instead, the associations it provokes with its own history and other mediums are always pressing at the limits of its practical and theoretical frame. The totalizing ambitions of modernism (and art history) to support the self-sufficiency of a given medium in a unified practice, particularly severe for painting, are shown to have an inescapable relationship, a 'layering' or 'passage' with discursive subjects as well as other material supports (Krauss 1999: 52).

Contemporary painting might be seen as exemplary of the heterogeneous nature of the medium, especially where it unequivocally references the art historical frame and the presence of the artist's individualism, her autographic trace, while its format is simultaneously opened to subversion by the development of language and conceptual studies aimed at a critique of the autonomous subject. This primary split that is registered by the contemporary painted surface has prompted me to consider Greenbergian discourse from an angle which might be seen as oblique to Krauss's (1986; 1993) own critical opposition to him.

Centrally, the loss of authenticity and autonomy, the 'etiolated' condition of painting, might be the starting point from which to return to modernist terms which are productively engaged with the notion of a *loss* of value. These repetitively tautological and delayed effects are relevant to recent critical observations about the somewhat shameful purposelessness of the return to

painting and its traditionally modernist expressions of figure and form (Sewell 2005: Online). As I will discuss below and throughout this thesis, these very questions of purpose and purposelessness are linked to the Enlightenment enquiry into the framework of human cognition and judgement, and remain pertinent to the extent that much philosophy is based on the notion that singular or totalising solutions to art are not available.

As Lacan argues, the history of painting and its function in society can be seen in very similar metaphorical terms to *das Ding* in that its real content is undecidable. Painting, for Lacan (SXI: 108), is generally made in order to emphasise the absence or blind spots which accompany daily perception, and therefore has a specific 'end and effect' which is different from the normative 'field of representation'. Whether the work is abstract or figurative is therefore not important. As he says, painting only 'pretends' to imitate objects or styles. The central reason for its being is to 'project a reality that is not that of the object represented' (SVII: 141).

These insights are not necessarily original, except in consideration of the reality Lacan has in mind. The registration of surface as an illusionary window on the world, a layered and thickened substrate, the play of forms or collisions with materiality, work in very specific ways to reveal that something fundamentally ungraspable has entered the field of perception. It is precisely found *wanting*.[40]

This descent (or ascent) into emptiness, this vain pursuit of Nothingness, an elaboration of pure 'lack' in Lacan's sense, is also the reason why much painting is difficult to evaluate. Recently, art critic Jerry Saltz (2014) coined the term 'zombie formalism' to describe the contemporary proliferation of abstraction. For Saltz, much of the new work is dissipated by a wave of practices utilising a mixture of styles and methods through which the work identifies itself as painting by the mere deployment of recognisable signifiers for 'painting':

> All this painting employs a similar vocabulary of smudges, stains, spray paint, flecks, spills, splotches, almost-monochromatic fields, silk-screening, or stencilling. Edge-to-edge, geometric, or biomorphic composition is *de rigueur*, as are irregular grids, lattice and moiré patterns, ovular shapes, and stripes, with maybe some collage.

The knowing impotency and irony with which painters somewhat rashly approach or

[40] Craig Owens (1998: 77) contends that art practice in general has, in 'postmodernist' terms, been centrally concerned with a 'loss of mastery.' For him, this loss describes painting as an instance of 'simulating' mastery and therefore 'disavowing' the conventional values of originality and aesthetics. This is not the 'loss' I am necessarily invoking with *das Ding* although aspects of reproduction are pertinent. I am discussing loss as an authentic and even positive state of recognition for humanity, which I see justly reflected in paintings which, further, do indeed 'master' this state.

appropriate surface has led to a situation where questions such as competence and rigour, quality and experience become lost in the sheer proliferation of 'painterly' attitudes (Saltz 2014).[41] For Saltz (2014), this is reflected in the market, where investors will hastily buy up work without recognising the difference between strongly affective painting and mindless dabbling with surface qualities: 'The saddest part of this trend is that even better artists who paint this way are getting lost in the onslaught of copycat mediocrity and mechanical art.'[42]

But at the same time, some recent painting which redeploys explicitly modernist qualities of surface has been recognised as a call for a renewed criticality. That is, a focus on form and the integrity of surface might re-instate some of the direction required for understanding the use-value and 'area of competence' by which art in general can be appraised (Reylea 2003: 6). Accompanying many deliberations on contemporary painting are somewhat nostalgic references to the authority by which Clement Greenberg judged the split between 'high' and 'mass culture,' the avant-garde and the merely 'kitsch' and convincingly commented on questions of experience and quality (Boym 2001: 29; Schwabsky 2002: 10).

At the same time, some of his assertions on difference in physicality and form between painting and sculpture – for example, that painting is specifically two-dimensional and emphatically registers its flatness, while sculpture is three dimensional and free-standing – are seemingly not relevant to the range and possibilities being currently explored. As I will discuss, 'painting' can literally escape its frame and spill out into three dimensional objects. But various techniques of production nevertheless refer to key values of painting practice which pertain to 'another reality' in aesthetic experience and are framed in precise terms by Greenberg.

I look at certain aspects of Greenberg's criticism and philosophical ideas which have unalterably shaped the way in which painting is produced and viewed. His stated intention to frame a medium as critically specific involved exploring how subjective judgement, as 'undefinable, unparaphraseable [and] undiscussable…, in being a question of taste, might achieve objectivity and social consensus' (Greenberg in Batchelor 1991: 48). While his method of writing has been criticised as being a particularly male or phallic exercise in claiming

[41] Pictorial illustrations of zombie formalism can be found through the links below to local and foreign painters' work. These painters can be said to be intentionally invoking a superfluous flattening and discoloration of values through the reinterpretation of modernist conventions. Figure 9: Lucien Smith. 1989. *Two sides of the same coin*. Figure 10: Jacob Kassay. 2009. *Untitled*. Figure 11: Günther Herbst. 2014. *High Holborn 5*.

[42] Benjamin Buchloh (2012: 255) similarly describes the disorder of modern practice as a whole stemming from a state of 'blindly producing purveyors and blindly ingesting consumers of culture'.

universality and transcendental values of rationality for the object,[43] my discussion of his work will concern the way in which these *same* values might offer the site for imaginatively releasing questions of identity from instrumental or fixed ideas of self and other. I propose that such a reading of the 'undefinable' take place by way of Lacan's treatment of the cognitive phallic subject as psychically indebted to the throb of an unconscious *Ding.*

I draw a reading of Greenbergian modernism from Lacan's (SVII) analysis of enlightenment philosopher Immanuel Kant, to whom Greenberg claimed his conceptual allegiance. The vicissitudes of *das Ding* are founded upon a re-interpretation and symbolisation of the space of demarcation between cognition and the thing in itself, *das Ding an sich,* in Kant's moral and aesthetic philosophy. Part 2 of this thesis involves a more detailed discussion of Kant's meticulous distinction and connection between subject and object.[44] But the significance of Lacan's project in this regard is that it establishes a field of inquiry where certain modern and dominant conceptions of reason are developed for understanding reality and its potentially traumatic dimensions.

As I discuss below and throughout this thesis, Kant's idea of cognitive representations which order all possible forms of experience lays a certain foundation for the necessity of purposelessness, or loss of purpose in aesthetic experience. These qualities in aesthetic judgment have come to be seen as playing a 'systematic' role in Kant's pure and practical epistemologies of reason (Ginsborg 2014). Seen through the lens of *das Ding,* both Kant and Greenberg's venture can be integrated with a possible reading of how some painting manifests an affective displacement between being an object, and represents aspects of the Thing. I will briefly explain and summarise this displacement here, as it pertains to the ethical way in which *das Ding* is conceived in relationship to 'phallic' objectifications; *das Ding*'s *de-purposing* function becoming conceptual in painting, as section 1.3 discusses below.

Kant's transcendental argument concerns how we only create representations based on our

[43] Conceptual artist Lucy Lippard's (1973: vii) sustained attack on Greenberg rejects the 'lightweight' and 'cheap' focus on the 'object status' of the medium. Instead, she sees the imaginative possibilities offered by work that is wholly 'dematerialised' as valorising the 'democratic implications' for women's and civil rights. My objective is to show that both idea and the idea of materiality is present in the medium, and has always been. The material medium is thus for me the operational site for the deconstruction of ideology.

[44] Kant's texts could be said to serve as a 'primal scene' for much discourse since the time of the three *Critiques* (1781-1790) insofar as a 'primal scene' or first traumatic act of witnessing is reminiscent of the meaning of a modern text being dependent on a historical primary text for its subsequent understanding and interpretation (Lukacher 1988: 24). Ned Lukacher (1988: 14) describes the conditions of the primal scene as constitutive of interdisciplinary textual analysis, especially where philosophy, psychoanalysis and literature are involved.

intuitive experience of the appearance of objects. The thing in itself, *das Ding an sich*, is an element of objects which we cannot relate to appearances and is therefore an aspect which remains unknown to cognition. As a remainder of perception, the thing in itself is blind or empty of content because it is simply not available to experience and judgment.[45]

However, in Kant's second critique, which is dedicated to moral philosophy, he makes the paradoxical move of situating the subject as a noumenon or thing in itself. He does so in order to introduce the notion that humans have agency *beyond* our understanding of the laws of nature, and may utilise our powers of mind for attaining the moral good. It is this manoeuvre which Lacan seizes upon, where he characterises *das Ding* precisely as a 'beyond-of-the-signified' (SVII: 54). Centrally, Lacan (SVII: 7) will question why the noumenal agency our transcendental grasp of reality enables us to have cannot be used for the most sadistic and evil purposes. Indeed, his analysis departs from the fact that 'man' tends towards destructive behaviour, however much he is entreated by society and its moral laws not to. While Kant's philosophy might be seen to have structured a dominant scientific world view, he also 'foreclosed' on addressing the pressing questions of perversity and violence (SVII: 131). Lacan proposes (SVII: 213) that we see the desire for transgression in relation to this foreclosure: the restraint of the structure also 'points to the site that I designate alternatively as impassable or as the site of the Thing'. Says Lacan (SVII: 55) in this regard:

> …it is in the same place that something which is the opposite, the reverse and the same combined, is also organised, and which in the end substitutes itself for that dumb reality which is *das Ding* – that is to say, the reality that commands and regulates. That is something which emerges in the philosophy of someone who, better than anyone else, glimpsed the function of *das Ding*, although he only approached it by the path of science, namely, Kant.

The 'function of *das Ding'* is precisely to affirm the constraints of our ideal capacities, but its unconscious function is also to drive the desire *for* such a delimitation (de Kesel 2009: 92-93). Lacan's theory implies that on the one hand, our understanding of good and bad is formulated within the framework of Kant's insistence on representation as excluding things in themselves, which Lacan projects in terms of the rule of the phallic signifier itself. On the other hand, the

[45] While Lacan gave his seminar on *das Ding* in the late nineteen sixties, there have been recent arguments doubting Kant's contribution to asserting an inalterable split from things in themselves. But literary theorist Andrew Cole (2015: 320-3) develops a tough argument against such 'object-oriented ontology', or theories on realism, which have been used to support artistic and activist discourses on re-materialising or rethinking the ontological nature of objects and bodies as purely real, untouched by phallic insertions of the signifier. For Cole, the attempt to consider objects as autonomous does not effectively depart from Kant's own separation of cognition from things in themselves. Furthermore, new claims to the ontology of things append new words and descriptions to these relations, unwitting of the fact that these *remain* representations of thought.

rule of representation reveals the paradox that these regulations tend to incite desire even more, and create the possibility that 'breaking' rules lead to *un*imaginable gains (de Kesel 2009: 96; Leader 2002: 59-60; Boothby 2001: 194). For Lacan (SVII: 2), the concept of a boundary that contains and provokes desire is necessary because it defines the field of his concern: the presence of trauma and aggression in modern society.

Lacan asserts that Kant's terms and conditions for the boundaries of reason have continued to reflect the workings of modern society insofar as we remain mired in ethical questions of identity and diverse cultural realities. The world of concepts, sign-systems and language divides and splits up the phenomenal world into categories and classes of things and people who do not themselves always know or feel that division. In question is the actual fact of a continued uncertainty about what an authentic relation to objects or between subjects might best consist of. The fraught nature of the question in South Africa, to name but one example, is edged by a slim dividing line between ideological contestation and physical conflict. The desire to *own* the supernal bridge crossing the cleft between cultures and nature is further convoluted by a nuclear infestation of virtual reality, a reinvigorated split between man and nature. Especially since the dawn of the Enlightenment era, the rapid development of science and technology has created an ever greater schism between civilization and the environment. Wars, pollution, economic inequality and other systemic abuses of both the environment and people signal the ever-increasing gap between the powers of reason and the external real.[46]

Importantly, this is why Lacan 'adds' the problem of desire as elaborated by Freud to Kant's epistemology: a purely objective framework severs our relation to the external world because it denies the role of our own desires where meaning is made. According to Lacan, it is no wonder that since the Industrial Revolution, the human experience is characterized by exponential pathological and violent behaviour, guilt and depression (SVII: 1-10). In that it is thoroughly repressed, the separation from our 'real' libidinal relations in the modern world manifests a central 'void' or emptiness around which the desire to re-find that lost connection circulates (Leader 2002: 81).

As I contend, thinking about the practice of painting as being historically rooted in the Kantian philosophy of this ideal difference or gap between language and embodiment helps us identify

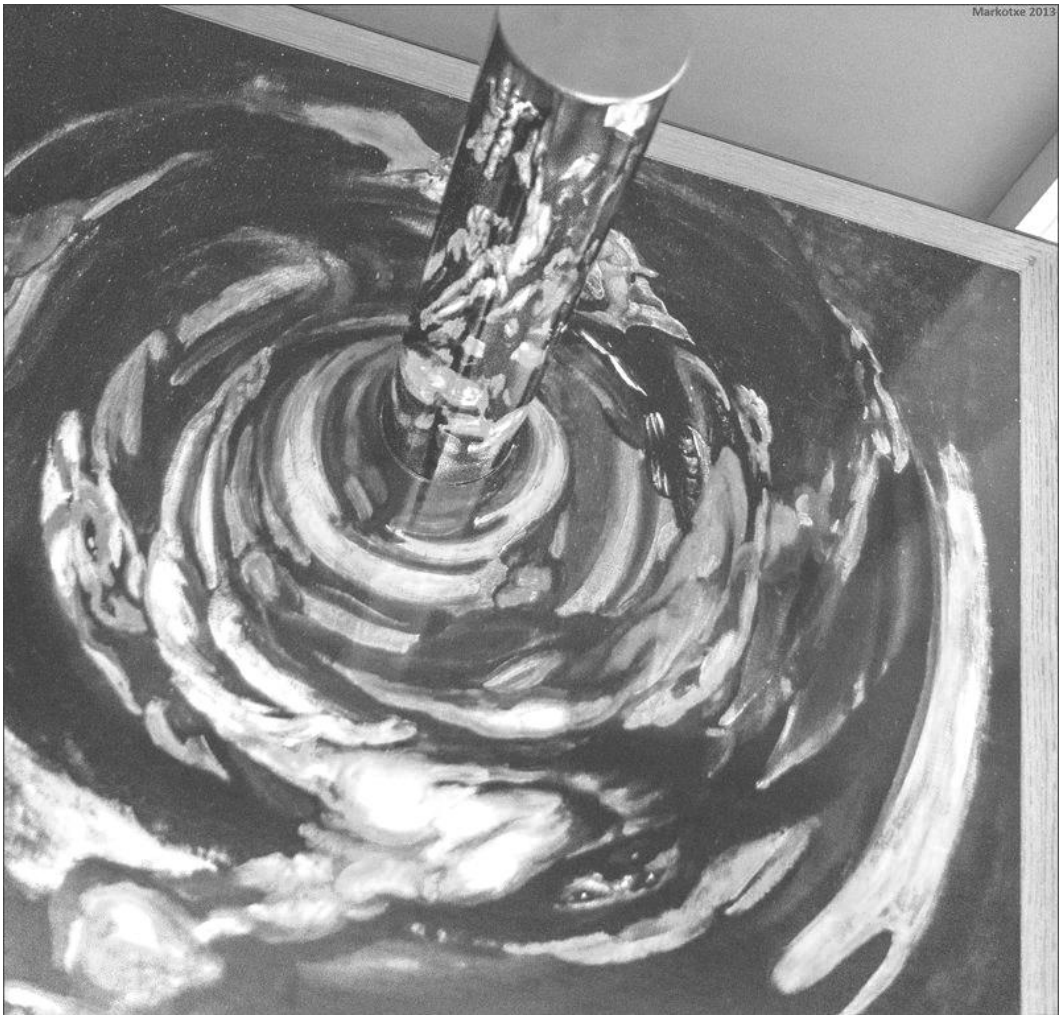
[46] Anthony Giddens (1991: 4, 18) discusses 'ecological catastrophe' and the 'collapse of global economic mechanisms' as a defining concern of much contemporary art. While these themes also occupy much contemporary sociological and anthropological theories, I see these conditions, along with Lacan, as ultimately symptomatic of a universal state of psychic life for the modern subject.

something which endures as a ‘reason for being’. For Lacan (SVII: 107), this empty, non-conceptual and purposeless space is crucial to the way in which sublimation finds ‘social consensus’. While he asserts the ‘historically-situated’ nature of all sublimations – ‘You don’t paint in Picasso’s time as you painted in Velasquez’s; you don’t write a novel in 1930 as you did in Stendhal’s time’ – there is nevertheless a core process by which society may find satisfaction in art. A crucial aspect of the experience of art is that the viewer is effectively cut away, made ‘disinterested’ in Kant’s terms, from direct identification. But again, this pleasure is complex, in Lacan’s analysis, because the viewer is made aware of a ‘missed encounter’, or of the sense of an ‘unsatisfiable presence’ (Foster 1996: 132; Leader 2002: 45).

1.3. Embodying the Language of Form in an Interpretative Structure

The structural operation of all art which evokes the negative or non-identical space of perception is embodied in Lacan's articulation of an anamorphosis. The concept and physical structure of a particular anamorphosis provides a paradigm of painting for this thesis. Lacan describes a 'cylindrical anamorphosis' as being

> …formed of a polished cylinder that has the function of a mirror, and around it you put a kind of bib or flat surface on which there are indecipherable lines. When you stand at a certain angle, you see the image concerned emerge in the cylindrical mirror; in this case it is a beautiful anamorphosis of a painting of the crucifixion copied from Rubens (SVII: 135).



Domenico Piola. 17th century. *Anamorphosis XVII: Peter Paul Rubens*. 68 x 83 cm. Glass, oil on canvas. Rouen, Musée de Beaux Arts. Courtesy of Markotxe (Online)

The purpose of the anamorphosis is to achieve a certain trickery of the eye. Methods of formlessness and disorder in mark and line are key to the 'bib,' because part of the pleasure in beholding the image from an altered point of view is that it displays a sublime contrast to the clarity of order, form and beauty seen behind the space of the mirrored surface.[47] Significantly, while the 'bib' of the cylindrical anamorphosis can be dismantled or repainted, the image in the mirror remains fundamentally out of reach. Lacan (SVII: 135) refers to another early form of anamorphosis to illustrate the (Western) cultural significance of the anamorphosis, Hans Holbein's painting *The Ambassadors* (1533).[48] The work represents two noblemen facing the viewer, surrounded by objects associated with European scientific, cultural and geographical discoveries of the time. Influenced by early Dutch realism, the expert detailing and geometral perspective are painted in almost photographic accuracy, relaying the lucidity of reason and rationality. But a curious feature of the composition is a spaceship-like disc seeming to float above the picture plane, even escaping off the bottom of the frame. The image is abstract when seen from the traditional frontal position of the spectator. The painted object only becomes legible when the spectator moves towards the far left, where the image of a skull comes into view.

The reflexive deployment of perspective against its own laws conjures a situation where the viewer is forced to take more than one position around the painting. There is no best way in which to look at the work: in fact, each viewing position entails the loss of the other perspective (Leader 2002: 135). In this the ostensible subject of the work shifts. Rather than affirming an ideal view of the subject of imperial conquest, the viewer herself is decentred, and the system of perspective is destabilized. If the anamorphosis entails the self-reflexive treatment of convention, it is also historically specific as to the particular form it takes. In the case of *The Ambassadors*, Lacan describes the anamorphosis as forcing the work to return to its 'hidden reality' (SVII: 141). In archaic architecture, God was immortalised as the sacred emptiness enclosed by the temple walls. As space became mathematicised and geometrally ordered according to the Renaissance development of perspective, the techniques for creating illusion in painting became more elaborate and realistic. Painterly illusion thus came to stand in the 'place' of real emptiness (SVII: 135). Lacan describes geometral development as incurring a 'wound', thus showing the first signs of a break with religious ideology. He calls it 'a sensitive

[47]Also see Figure 12 – 15: William Kentridge's classic but contemporary version of an anamorphosis (*What Will Come* [2007]) in real time: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yOeILd5bQDo.
[48] Figure 16: Hans Holbein the Younger, 1533. *The Ambassadors*.

spot, a lesion, a locus of pain, a point of reversal of the whole of history' (SVII: 140). The point of the anamorphosis in painting is then for Lacan complex: it forces the illusion represented by the signifier 'into the original goal' of inscribing a space that is beyond or greater than the sum of the human cognitive faculty (SVII: 141). In this way, Holbein's anamorphosis poses an imminently threatening reality beyond the 'Vanitas' of conquest (SVII: 135). But in both examples, the illusionary force of the anamorphosis underwrites its position as man-made: it isn't naturally present to the eye, nor is it 'anything material, intuitive or lived' and therefore the emphasis is on the artificial character of the signifier. Paradoxically, this emphasis reveals the space 'beyond' its signification as image, as an ultimately inaccessible dimension of embodied life. Lacan (SVII 136) insists on this point of the anamorphosis, even as it includes the most viscous of twists and flowing morphology of Baroque art. Anamorphosis 'lends primacy to the domain of language above all', and the revelation of the distance from the Thing evokes a pleasure because it coincides with the human experience of libidinal finitude.

Deleuze (1993) seems to resist this distance from an unattainable core by focusing on materiality and the way in which the texture of things is realised in painting. His undertaking instates a strong tension with language in that he suggests that there *is* a stronger proximity to materiality and libidinal life, especially in painting. His exegesis of Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz's 'monad' describes the baroque work of 'folding' and matter as embodying a state of interiority of things in themselves. Deleuze (1993: 27) proposes the use of the idea of the monad for looking at art in particular because it works to explain how much modernist art, like baroque architecture, is a 'surface' which 'stops being a window on the world'. In other words, painted surfaces like Rauschenberg's grids or Pollock's drip paintings invoke a play and process of line which demarcates a sense of the inside of objects that is not available to mere appearance. This strictly 'autonomous' inside registers a 'fixed point' which bears a likeness to the metaphysical nature of things because it 'encloses the soul' (Deleuze 1993: 28; 31).

> Finally, the way that all these textures of matter tend toward a higher point, a spiritual point that envelops form, that holds it enveloped, and that contains alone the secret of material folds below…Are they the phantasmagoria of the order of thought, as Dubuffet would say? In another manner, the sculptor Jeanclos finds an analogous way which goes from the physical leaves of cabbage – infinitely folded, tied, bloodied – or infinitely stretched sheets, to metaphysical peas, spiritual crabs, heads of monads that concretise the meaning of the expression 'the folds of sleep' (Deleuze 1993: 37).[49]

[49] Figure 17: Georges Jeanclos. 2011. *Dormeurs*. In the argument being developed here, it is worth noting that Deleuze directly connects the sense of sculpture with the aims of painting. But Deleuze does emphasise that this sense is merely evocative in painting: it is predominantly representational as an affect, as his description of 'metaphysical peas' and 'spiritual crabs' avers. My argument here follows the line of thought that even as the representation of an affect, a 'metaphysical pea' remains out of reach to philosophical knowledge.

Both fold and matter do not render embodied life as a relation to an inaccessible Thing of desire but subsume representation into an inner space of being and experience. Deleuze therefore pressures the limit of the separation between representation and embodiment. His resistance to Freud and Kant is constituted by his locating a point of concretisation or embodied thickening of experience (Smith 2002: xx). Within the sphere of representation, he thus stands in relative opposition to Lacan who insists on the inaccessibility of a fully realised and embodied aesthetic. Lacan (SVII: 137) lays emphasis on the 'operational' and necessarily signifying structure of all art, through which the authenticity of an original monadic space can only be glimpsed. As he notes, in anamorphosis, as in sublimation in general, 'The blood of the Grail is precisely what is lacking' (SVII: 142).

The idea of the monad is in conflict with Kant's notion of an unbridgeable division between appearances and things in themselves, which expressly remain unknown to cognition. For Lacan, the heart of experience is traumatic *because* it is incompletely available to representation. In this respect, his view remains Kantian: it clearly deliberates upon observable phenomena and does not stray from a formal analysis of appearance, or what is separate from things in themselves. Again, he insists on lack and the unknown because he perceives the modern state of things as traumatic and given to aggression, being enfolded by the same desire for grails of truth and nodes of real being. For Lacan, this state of trauma determines the ethics of both psychoanalysis and art, as both practices bear witness to the conditions under which the will to transgression – to break the anamorphic mirror and seize its image, to stick our fingers into folds – emerges. Nevertheless, something is visualised behind the mirror of the anamorphosis, and it is this wholly dematerialised Thing which causes interest. In other words, *das Ding* is recognisable by certain effects on the viewing subject, who bears a 'veiled' relationship to the work in terms of a structurally conceived material distance.

Detailing the material articulations of paintings which anamorphically disrupt straightforward viewing and interpretation will be the work of this thesis in the following two sections. Here I would like to reiterate that the representational status of the 'Thing' glimpsed in classical anamorphosis is something that is both the same and different in contemporary painting. Obviously, Ruben's crucifixion or Holbein's caveat against imperial vanity is not the same kind of uncoded message which appears in contemporary painting. While there is a core sense of a strange and empty emotive register, the historical value of considering Lacan's notion of *das Ding* against Deleuze's monad is that the representation of *das Ding* is altered in

relationship to the current moment. But work that is deemed canonical could be said to effect this register across time and history, and to find new, equally significant senses in the present.[50] These reflections bring me to the second point: that contemporary painting does not evolve into a visual disclosure of its play with perspective or the 'trickery' of optical devices. Rather, through the historical development in which such devices have played a structural part in framing the experience of painting, the Thing is constituted as a manifestly *invisible* aspect of a painting's work with presence and absence, and its analysis is made complex and controversial by this condition.

Greenberg (2000: 6) draws on Kant's definition of sensual perception as being grounded in primary 'intuitions' to explain this invisible register.[51] He insists that experiencing art is characterised by an immediate intuition of its value, from which all discussion and evaluations are produced. It is not something that 'can be arrived at through reasoning', but is 'intrinsic, final – and utterly and immediately present'.[52] Greenberg devotes much of his writing to attempting to explain the way in which consensus is produced: we all are able to intuit this moment of quality involuntarily, before we embark on more indecisive, often conflictual accounts of an artwork's significance. In fact, most of his criticism is constructed upon this moment as the governing stimulus of avant-garde art. As I will discuss, his dogged claim about the force of intuition is motivated by the idea that there is a space in culture which transcends the uncertainties of artefactual history and puts us in brute confrontation with the limits of our perceptual being, 'both at our worst and at our best' (Greenberg in Harrison 2000: xxvii).[53] Lacan also insists on this aspect of sublimation and *das Ding*, in that its zone of emptiness

[50] Rosalind Krauss (2010: 42) discusses the notion that while the art historical form has shifted dramatically – as witnessed in the difference between Velasquez's seventeenth century realism and Frank Stella's abstract 'stripe' paintings (1965) – the 'content' is the same insofar as it attempts to 'say something' beyond the material conditions of its production.

[51] The notion of intuition has been problematic in much philosophy since its origins in Plato's notion of intuition as offering 'noesis', an insight into core philosophical truths (De Paul & Ramsey 1998: 6). However, I will discuss the empirical value given to intuition by Kant in the following chapter, as well as interpret Greenberg's use of the term as standing for aesthetic judgment and feeling.

[52] As noted elsewhere in this thesis, Greenberg likens aesthetic intuition to the experience of moral value, which he describes as aesthetic to the degree that it is facilitated by a 'unique' and immediate sense of something good, or bad, which lies beyond the temporality of deliberation. As I draw out in chapter 2.6, these thoughts link up to the structure of proximity and distance to the senses that is elaborated in Kant's moral reason and Freud's pleasure and reality principles.

[53] The burning of paintings by students affiliated with the #RhodesMustFall movement at the University of Cape Town (2016) stands as testament to the complexity of the difference between seeing painting as a contemplative or provocative form of its own, or as a historical document (See: http://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2016-02-17-groundup-rhodes-must-fall-protesters-burn-uct-art/#.V2OpwPl97IU). In the case of the UCT burning, it seems less that the students were attacking the content of the paintings themselves as either provocative or enigmatic, than that the action was produced in defiance of the works as an artefactual collection felt to be exclusionary.

affectively provokes ‘a question that cannot be answered by any document, by any material image’.

There is a particular essay by Lyotard about the intuitive sense of something impenetrable and traumatic that is evoked through gesture in painting. In *Anamnesis of the Visible* (1999) Lyotard discusses a mimesis of psychic behaviour in which painting enacts a ‘labour’ of signification rather than signifying as content itself. He calls it a process of ‘anamnesis’ because the objective, paradoxically, is to recollect what is ‘invisible’ in experience (Lyotard 1999: 22). The anamnesis bears a marked relation to extreme events of trauma which cannot be remembered, because of the invisible and overwhelming sense of terror attendant upon the otherwise concrete sequential episode. Recollection or anamnesis as used here is a difficult understanding of what it means to ‘work through’ the circumstances and affects of an event while not depending on the ‘cognitive certitude’ of the historian’s account. Rather, gesture registers as repetitive ‘events’ which attain a certain ‘disposition’ which can bring incommensurable, even ‘scandalous’ or ‘absurd’ aspects into relation with the subject-matter. The devolved or evolving relation of gestural units does not offer a ‘completeness’ or narrative end (Lyotard 1999: 23). The process therefore refuses the historical story of its being because it attempts to work through the generative *possibility* of signification that is made present by the repetition of an irreducible sign characterising the ground of thought, conditioned as marks on canvas. Lyotard (1999: 24) further delineates the process as follows:

> The principle of the anamnestic procedure remains to be explained: the ‘reason’ for the chain of associations is never presentable as a past event (the primal scene); it is immemorial. Nevertheless, it is always ‘present’ as that which governs the association. Absent to memory, unpresentable, it has ‘some presence’.

This elusive ‘presence’ Lyotard encircles throughout the essay is related to a dark recess and origin of the psychic experience. He does not articulate it with reference to any specific signifier, gesture or painting. Rather, the focus is on describing the process of the signifier as encircling a ‘*thing*’ which never becomes present in and of itself but is made manifest by material process and gestural elaboration (Lyotard 1999: 24).

This anamorphic materialisation is given a sense of absence in an interpretative act of *writing* in Yves Alain Bois’s analysis of the ‘recurrence’ of the signifier in Picasso, particularly in his psychoanalytic reading of *Les demoiselles d’Avignon* (1907) in his essay ‘Painting as Trauma’

(1988).[54] Only once does Bois (1988: 134) mention the notion of trauma directly, relating it to the 'deferred action' *Les demoiselles d'Avignon* had in the tradition of painting. According to him, the painting didn't register an immediate shift in painterly conventions. Rather, Cubism was seen to develop from the 'breach' the painting inaugurated, and that later development would instantiate new forms and models of practice. Bois's attention to the painting rather works on the peripheries of the painting, provided by an exhibition at the *Musée Picasso* which had collected all the studies and sculptures Picasso modelled in preparation for the eventual painting, a painting which Bois (1988: 131) refers to as a 'precise question'.

The essay is devoted to notating the number of sketchbooks, studies in oils and other 'peripheral works' (Bois 1988: 132). He describes in detail the architecture of the museum and the particular layout of the materials in each room. Also, he analyses the writing of the catalogue by Leo Steinberg and William Rubin. Touching on various aspects of the 'countless possible historical readings' of *Les demoiselles,* he conveys some ideas about the progress and content of the sketches as successively pared down to a theme or 'primordial question of sexual difference' (Bois 1988: 36). He deliberates on the formal analogy of sexual difference being portrayed by the 'protention/retention' of graphic form in the Iberian and African masks Picasso referenced. The emphasis on form is heightened by all these material products which surround the main painting like a 'constellation' or 'sanctuary' (Bois 1988: 140). Picasso's studies and modern texts elucidate an element which signifies the 'destruction of previous representational conventions' and as such, the exhibition as a whole structures the site of *Les demoiselles* as 'a point of origin' (Bois 1988: 172). In this way, 'Painting as Trauma' largely leaves the painting itself open, as a gap in knowledge about its real effect on the viewer.

As noted in the beginning of this introductory chapter, my own process of writing this thesis has been something of an obsessive struggle to straddle the empty zone of *das Ding* as it might arise as a central node of representation for both painting and interpretation. Jacques Derrida devotes his book *The Truth in Painting* (1987) precisely to the ideological tension between language and the painted object. For him, the 'truth' arises in the question of the 'remainder'

[54] Literary theorist Roland Barthes (1977: 53) articulates a similar sense of something enigmatic and invisible in writing, in his essay 'The Third Meaning'. For Barthes, the third meaning disrupts the capacity to write in direct ways. This 'third meaning' described by Barthes is 'evident, erratic, obstinate', and he goes on to write that 'I do not know what its signified is, at least I am unable to give it a name, but I can clearly see the traits, the signifying accidents of which this – consequently incomplete – sign is composed.' Barthes (1977: 56) also calls it an 'obtuse meaning' which can only be found through detailing the traits of the surface and composition which encircle it. Significantly, however, the essay focuses on how the writer must reflect on the analysable language or 'metalanguage' of critical writing s/he deploys in view of the work.

by which language 'parasitizes' the silent trait of gesture and stroke, while something also 'overflows and exceeds' the relationship (1987: 4). These remainders are elicited by Derrida in his deconstruction of Kant's founding aesthetics and Heidegger's elaboration of the 'thing' in Van Gogh's paintings of empty shoes. Indeed, he concludes that the space of a seemingly ineffable registration chased by philosophy, through painting, is organised and 'paregonally' framed by traces of the signifier and made present and absent by the way language ratifies physical materiality (1986: 381).[55] However, his lengthy and anamorphic exegesis of philosophy and painting does not justify the criticism that gesture may be 'Nothing but another kind of writing, a kind of graphic sign that dissembles itself as a direct transcript of that which it represents, or of the way things look, or of the way they essentially are' (Mitchell in Smith 1999: 165). What Derrida suggests is that it is the very process of Kant's deduction and analysis, his classifying and categorization of convention, which sees the 'ergonal' or unfathomable aesthetic experience rise up. Significantly, he achieves a textual registration of this affect by way of his own perverse framing of the signifier according to the libidinal inflection of signification as a 'fetish' for the 'mother's phallus,' an 'originary metaphor' for an alterior space of both substance and lack (1987: 332-3).

I spent a year of my research excavating and analysing *The Truth in Painting*, trying to grasp and at times imitate the subtle ways in which Derrida registers the stricture of language on objects, as well as explore the sites of impotence and failure where glimmers of the painted surface seem to become embodied in the poetics and shape of the text. But it became necessary to narrow my focus on a close reading of Lacan's *das Ding* and art critical texts which respond to it. There is a strong relationship between Lacan and Derrida's *Truth* insofar as questions of sublimation bring forth tensions between embodiment and language. However, the question of their divergence in the grander scheme of their philosophical projects warrants another body of research which would become quite unrelated to the physical act of painting. However, I do discuss Derrida's deconstruction of Kant's notion of the aesthetic *subject* structured by ideal reason, because it helps me develop an understanding of how Lacan ultimately situates a subjective and psychic emptiness in the *object*.

I have ended up simplifying the question, in ways which might seem overly-ingenuous, by

[55] Heidegger's (1972) view of 'the Thing' or *das Ding* as a self-sufficient sphere of 'Being' is treated critically by both Lacan and Derrida. While Derrida shows that this sphere of 'being' does not depart from Kant's own linguistic structure of form and matter and is thus not distinct from language, Lacan invests the notion with desire for pure absolutes which make the real traumatic (Derrida 1987: 112; Lacan SVII: 120).

dividing the following sections into two basic spheres of 'language' and 'embodiment'. My reading of *Seminar VII* follows Lacan's own trajectory: from how language establishes the space of *das Ding* as empty, to how some art contains aspects of embodiment *but* by reference to language and zones of emptiness. Theorist Adrian Johnston (2014) describes the space of *das Ding* as a 'convergence of opposites', 'a register of volatile oscillations and unstable reversals between excesses and lacks, surpluses and deficits, flooding presences and draining absences'. In this regard, I see the following sections as dealing with two kinds of trauma relative to *das Ding*: one of hollow absence from self, even unto death, and one of violent corporeal contact between self and other.[56]

I have selected two South African painters, Mary Wafer and Penny Siopis, whose work not only mirrors or enacts different types of traumatic experience, but whose practices can also be seen to bookend two poles on either side of the spectrum in contemporary modes of painting. The most basic manifestation of this difference is that Wafer deploys strictly ascetic modernist values of two-dimensional flatness and geometric shape, while Siopis's form and materiality literally extends out of the frame in a grotesque proliferation of three-dimensional objects. The 'phallocentric' retention of a discursive and historical framing of surface by Wafer might be seen in contrast to the feminine 'jouissance' of errant materiality in Siopis. Siopis's work seems to embody much of Deleuze's (2002: 20) evocation of painting as flesh-like and 'meaty' or folded into monadic physical states of being. However, my exploration of Lacan's notion of 'jouissance' ultimately leads me to configure her formal operations in close relationship to the notion of 'death' in painting that I establish in Part Two of this thesis. Undergirding the relationship between parts 2 and 3 is an abiding question of what it may mean to sustain the notion of a subjective 'imagination' in regard to the judgment of painting, in both practice and reception. The question of finalising a 'judgment' on painting, as it is displaced by imagination in its death-like and traumatic properties, will be reviewed in my conclusion.

[56] In her genealogy of trauma theory, Ruth Leys (2000) distinguishes two forms of trauma in the dual terminology of 'mimesis' and 'antimimesis'. A patient can be submerged in 'blind' identification with an event but simultaneously able to both 'see' and 'represent' certain conditions underwent during the episode (Leys 2000: 37). Mimesis and antimimesis then describes two kinds of representation which occur: 'One defined in terms of a 'representative theatricality that underscores notions of specular self-distantiation and conscious recollection in trauma; the other defined in terms of an originary and affective 'mimesis' or identification that emphasizes notions of nonspecular absorption in a traumatic scenario that is immemorial not because of a constitutive breakdown of all representation but because that scenario is unavailable for *a certain kind of representation* – theatrical self-representation – and hence for conscious memory' (Leys 2000: 275, my italics).

Part 2. The Nonobjective Formation of *das Ding* in Painting

Part 2 of this thesis concerns how we might see the painted surface signify in 'nonobjective' ways, as informed by the theory of *das Ding*, and thus enable an in-depth interpretation of the relationship between concept and affect in some contemporary painting. The nonobjective is often taken to mean an aspect of cognition only partially related to an object of knowledge and therefore, can be seen to rely partially on subjective discernment. These associations are conventionally translated in painting as abstract, geometral and nonrepresentational subject-matter. While these significations are central to some formal devices in the painting I consider here, I aim to develop a philosophical understanding of the nonobjective whereby image and pictorial content signify equally in an abstract framework. This is made possible by Kant's philosophical structuring of transcendental judgment, which can be said to provide a formulation of the role of subjective apprehension which is necessarily constrained by rational cognition: a structure of judgment I see occurring in both the practice and reception of painting. In 'judgment', the relationship of internal and external worlds relies on the subject in ways which are not caused by the objects in the external world, but are *a priori* represented in the subject (Longuenesse 1998: 20). The notion of representation as *a priori* (preceding the cognition of objects in the outside world) involves an abstract understanding of its formal relations, which are internal to the subject of judgment. Thus, these schemas may result in objective cognition, but there are nonobjective processes of representation which significantly contribute to cognition.[57] Kant's focus on the 'judgment of beauty' illustrates the significance of the relationships between a priori processes that are involved in making judgments at large (Ginsborg 2014). The experience of beauty also demonstrates the contingency of our understanding of the objective world, and ultimately of the potential for new interpretations of it (Cohen & Guyer 1982: 5).

My writing in this section concludes with a new interpretation of a South African painter, Mary Wafer. However, I also see my selection of philosophical and psychoanalytic theory as establishing the means by which much interpretation of painting already takes place. My structural perspective emphasises the nonobjective potential of critical thought itself: the

[57] Kant's philosophy in general can be seen to mediate the relationship between 'dogmatic rationalism' and 'spiritualistic immaterialism' by the 'modest' ideas by which he recognised transcendental judgment (Ameriks 2003: 6). As I discuss in the following chapter, this 'modesty' had to do with the limited capacity he afforded cognitive structures.

linguistic conjunction indicates the very border between subjective and objective judgment, which I will discuss as being prone to productive and even necessary displacement through properties of the imagination. The matter of correspondence and conflict on the borderline of the subjective and the objective can be seen to be embodied by Lacan's psychoanalytic conceptualisation of a cylindrical anamorphosis that I discussed in the introduction. Below, I propose the anamorphic paradigm of *das Ding* for viewing painting: in brief, an anamorphosis reveals the objective means of its construction, while it nevertheless also reveals something else which cannot be fully grasped. The cylindrical anamorphosis embodies a nonobjective form of perception that Lacan understands in terms of notions of pleasure and the metaphor of 'death'. In my reading of Greenberg, the analytic schema of pleasure and death is inherent to the form of criticism he developed for modernist painting. Further, the nonobjective qualities of pleasure and death continues in much contemporary painting. Mary Wafer's painting can be said to put these schemas into practice. Finally, I consider how such a nonobjective structure of formal relationships in representation may be interpreted as pertinent to current socio-political realities.

2.1. Death and Pleasure: Constructing the Painted Surface

In this chapter, I explore the contradiction of both pleasure and a notion of death being present in a single painting. As Part 2 ultimately aims to articulate, a painting which refers to traumatic subjects may be affective because, paradoxically, it invokes philosophical questions of aesthetic pleasure and beauty. Death is here considered as a philosophical metaphor in painting. Furthermore, I contend that rather than the painting pictorially depicting a traumatic state, affect and meaning is evoked because the interrelation of concepts of death and pleasure emphasises abstracted form and material surface.

People have been announcing that 'painting is dead' since the advent of photography displaced the realism or objectivity previously accorded to much painting.[58] The phrase became generally used in the seventies when it seemed that Conceptual Art and a myriad of new technological mediums made painting seem like an outdated mode of meaning production and furthermore, mawkishly based in emotive expression.[59] But I would like to distort the terms by which painting might be seen as 'dead' without completely losing the negative sense in which the phrase has been used to denigrate the practice.

In Lacan's *Seminar VII*, death is viewed as a metaphor for attaining the meaning or truth of a thing. Death thus concerns notions of rational objectivity (SVII: 171). The question of being 'objective' in a scientifically valid representation of the world is viewed by Lacan in terms of

[58] Painter Paul Delaroche is credited for first using the phrase, 'Painting is dead' after he had seen the first photograph, a daguerreotype, in 1839 (Leggat 1999: Online). The notion was given grist in poststructuralist writer Roland Barthes's essay 'The Death of the Author' (1967), which challenged common perceptions of the unique artist whose identity or psychobiography is seen to give the text an exceptional meaning and shape. Barthes's call to pay heed to the cultural and class context, signifying the ways in which a book comes to hold special prominence in society, encouraged claims of painting being 'dead' because it was seen as promoting a speciously subjective, often elitist, expression.

[59] Adorno (1984: 222) has influenced the turn away from painting in his comments about Impressionism's 'failure' to romantically redeem subjectivity in the face of the 'thing-likeness' that characterises modern experience, and which he sees photography and montage as aptly reflecting. However, it is clear that in his seminal book *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno was not in fact therefore rejecting painting or Kant's notions of subjectivity, but interpreting Kant's notion of the subject to include the more traumatic subject matter of modern experience and art (Adorno 1984: 193; Kuhn 2004: Online). Adorno's theory has largely been perceived as advocating an outright rejection of aesthetics as an inappropriate or unethical stance towards traumatic realities, which was interpreted by conceptual artists as endorsing textuality over plastic form. However, it is by simply reading the text that one sees this is not what he has to say at all. Shoshana Felman (1992: 34) asserts that 'paradoxically enough, [Adorno meant that] it is only art that can henceforth be equal to the task of its historical impossibility, that art alone can live up to the task of contemporary thinking and of meeting the incredible demands of suffering, of politics and of contemporary consciousness and yet escape the subtly omnipresent and the almost unavoidable cultural betrayal both of history and of the victims'.

the metaphor of death because it requires that subjective qualities of feeling and emotion be ruled out of observation and testing.[60] 'Objectivity' might be said to be another word for what Lacan means by the 'phallic signifier' which overpowers heterogeneous meanings caused by sensation and emotion.[61] Moreover, potential aspects of an object which do not appear to us are lost in objective representation. Therefore, subjective desires as well as qualities of things which do not appear to us *both* suffer a kind of death in objectivity. Lacan subsumes both of these remainders under a metaphor of death which he calls *das Ding. Das Ding* is a potentially 'evil' psychical force, so the metaphor of death is not hyperbolic on Lacan's part (SVII: 32).[62] In that *das Ding* also bears a close relationship to the pleasure principle, there is an association with pleasure which becomes acute and even traumatic. Painting can and does represent this metaphor in nonobjective ways.

In light of the above, one can identify two interrelated kinds of 'death' which some painting addresses, and whose representations lie between the imaginary subject and things in themselves. The first involves the notion that painting is 'dead' because it is intolerably entangled in archaic romantic qualities that are often perceived as privileging the elite's fantasies of self and, therefore, cannot reflect objectively on social and political circumstances of modern life. As art philosopher Arthur Danto (2009: 6) argues, the gradual removal of emotion and heightened affects from art enabled claims of painting's death. At the same time, through the deployment of modern technologies of reproduction and representations of the everyday, much art became immured in a critical perspective of reality and its hierarchical social structures until the difference between art and reality very often became (intentionally) indistinguishable. For Danto, Duchamp's readymade object or Warhol's *Brillo Box* (1964) are produced via a conceptual evaluation of art and its domain in society, so that now it can only be evaluated epistemologically, according to its linguistic definition as art or 'non-art'.

[60] The notion of 'objectivity' is itself given to some conflict (Burnett 2010: 133; Peacocke 2009: 739). For my exploration of Lacan's inferences of the objective scientific world view, I invoke Lorraine Daston's (1992: 110) working definition of the term: 'Current usage allows us to apply the word as an approximate synonym for the empirical (or, more narrowly, the factual); for the scientific, in the sense of public, empirically reliable knowledge; for impartiality-unto-self-effacement and the… restraint of the emotions…'. In sum, objectivity in this thesis means to regard things based on a non-biased observation of facts in reality.

[61] Please see my index of terms for a more detailed explanation of the phallic signifier.

[62] Philosophers from Descartes to Hume were cognizant of a fraught and anxious motivation in formulating systems of objectivity, to the extent that more recent studies have characterised the field by pointing out that 'All epistemology begins in fear' (Burnett 2010: 134).



Andy Warhol. 1964. *Brillo Box (Soap pads*). Synthetic polymer paint and silkscreen ink on wood. 43.3 x 43.2 x 36.5cm. Courtesy of The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts: New York

I discuss the idea of the consequent 'death' of subjective aesthetic delectation in brief below, and via Duchamp in Chapter 2.4 of this section. The idea of painting's death as a result of it being fantastically dissociated from real life did not spell its real end. Rather, it is at the historical point where some art began representing the world through photography and objects from the external world that painting took on a more tortured aspect in comparison to earlier experiments with surface and colour. In order to sustain its difference and specialised sphere of activity, painting began to register another kind of death through its focus on the medium rather than on image or affect. The medium aims at offering a 'wholeness' of the object-surface which 'imitates' or corresponds to 'visual experience as a whole': with the very limit of appearances (Greenberg 1961: 173). Foucault (2009: 25-8) ascribes the first instance of the modernist shift in pictorial modes of representation to Édouard Manet, whose flattened and discoloured material surfaces inaugurated a 'deep rupture' in the illusionistic depths of classic realist form and surface. Foucault describes one painting as follows: 'Depth, it is now closed, it is closed by a thick wall; and as though to signal clearly that there is a wall and that there is nothing to see behind' (2009: 35).

This 'wall' blocking vision shifted ideas of representation from their historical axis: painting would no longer attempt to depict subjective qualities of the individual, nor render the world

realistically, but would be focused on the nature of its own noumenal objecthood as two-dimensional surface. Thus, the second kind of death some painting might be said to represent has to do with its objective claim to truth as a thing in itself, as purely autonomous.[63] Theorist Yves Alain Bois (1998: 229) insists on this way of thinking 'death' which some contemporary painting might represent. Writing in respect of the manifold discourses on death in postmodern art theory that developed under the influence of Barthes, Lacan and Derrida, Bois suggests that 'one must examine the tone of the apocalyptic discourse: its claim to be the pure revelation of truth, and the last word about the end'. This is because, Bois goes on (1998: 230), the claim to truth and ends is first and foremost associated with modernist abstraction:

> Freed from all extrinsic conventions, abstract painting was meant to bring forth the pure *parousia* of its own essence, to tell the final truth and thereby terminate its course. The pure beginning, the liberation from tradition, the 'zero degree' that was searched for by the first generation of abstract painters could not but function as an omen of the end.

The idea that abstract painting would reveal its final 'essence' or 'truth' relates to the way in which a second kind of death occurs for painting: its reason for being as an object in life is necessarily destroyed when it becomes an autonomous expression outside of normal meanings. However, to me it is evident that the way in which painting is essentially negated both inside and outside of its sphere of practice brings about a particular kind of pleasure. Painting remains, in another metaphor, 'alive and well', but this is not because it maintains old sentiments of romanticism. It is because painting cannot help but invoke the doubled sense of its death that it can be asserted in affective and meaningful ways for understanding modern experience.

Understanding the relationship of these deaths can be achieved through an examination of Kant's three seminal critiques, which is my starting point. I devote chapters of this section to Lacan and Derrida's interpretations of Kant's ideas on reason, morals and beauty because these interpretations concern questions of pleasure in the nonobjective on an unconscious level of desire, and *das Ding*.[64] But what will become clear in my analysis is that Kant himself offers

[63] Figure 18: Barnett Newman. 1949. *The Promise*. Newman expressed the motivation behind his paintings as '[starting] from scratch, to paint as if painting never existed before'. These blank fields of colour, with minimal lines being traced vertically down the plane of canvas, signified for him a state beyond or before language, a state of nothingness that resonates with a 'thematics of Origin' (Bois et al. 2004: 364). In the manner of Kant's description, he could be said to be striving to embody the thing in itself in his paintings: simultaneously however, he referred in his statements to an internal state or human 'origin' of cognition. In this way, his work could be said to reflect the mirroring Lacan asserts occurs between a philosophy which abuts things in themselves, and an internal *Ding* against which cognition comes into being.

[64] As will become clear, the nonobjective refers to the structure of irrational or non-logical impulses in relation to rational thought and transcendental judgment. It focuses on the internal gap between the object of cognition and moral or ethical action, rather than on the irrational qualities of pleasure or desire for action itself.

a formal structure by which nonobjective painting can ultimately be seen to mediate concepts of death, and its pleasurable underside.

My understanding of nonobjective form in practice and interpretation is introduced by a brief preliminary description of Mary Wafer's paintings in general. Wafer draws from more 'postmodern' forms of representation in photography and conceptual art, but strictly delimits surface by methods that I will discuss with reference to Greenberg's modernist ideas on painting. The tension between conceptual referentiality and modernist autonomy partly arises from Wafer's deployment of imagery which depicts the most severe spaces of modern existence, but which also constructs the surface as abstract. Wafer's paintings consistently feature petrol stations and power substations, highway bridges, underpasses and parking lot basements.[65] While the integration of photographic sources is recognisable, the expressly flat and monochromatic coats of blackened paint keep returning the eye to the heightened visibility of geometric shapes and contours. With strictly no more than two layers covering the surface, paint registers as stiffened sheets which seam the canvas texture, reducing the sense of the figural aspects as embodied things in the external world. The perceptual experience is made complex in this way: ghosts of images signify possible instances of invisibility, provoking a look which is then repelled by the 'wall-like' physicality of surface. Her painting can thus be said to work with and against both modernist and postmodernist frameworks of ideal and conceptual cognition.[66] Rather than a harmonious resolution of these modes of representation being found, the interplay between subject and object, materiality and iconography is cruelly regulated and sometimes conflictual – for instance, softer registers of stroke and blending do not balance out harder lines, but seem to provoke or intensify the sense of weight and leadenness of the forms. As I argue, while the content – petrol stations and underpasses – signifies a certain aspect of lived experience in built environments, meaning is equally made from the more affective relationships between the two-dimensional surface and the conventions Wafer deploys via painterly marks. However, meaning may also be said to be 'unmade' or suspended: most simply, the paintings are not identified with a specific time, place or event, but come into being by the various breakdowns of surface and subject-matter. What I wish to emphasize at this point is that both identification and its suspension – and the moment of

[65] Figure 19: Mary Wafer. 2011. *Track*. Figure 20: Mary Wafer. 2011. *The Bridge*.

[66] The notions of 'ideal' and the 'conceptual' have been misrecognised as meaning different things – an issue which this section of my thesis explores, but does not claim to resolve. For now, I see 'ideal' as privileging an autonomous spectator's subjective perception of a painting, and 'conceptual' as a non-partisan view of the structuration of representation and symbolic subject-matter in the social sphere.

estrangement and desolation achieved through both – are products of the viewer being compelled to experience the formal relationships between modes of representation rather than, for example, read a pictorial depiction of a strange object or lonely figure.

Citing a dialectical tension of difference and opposition between qualities of surface and subject matter is a customary strategy in much contemporary interpretation which attempts to account for affects the viewer may experience, but which cannot be directly described. In *The Return of the Real* (1996), Hal Foster makes a persuasive argument for the significance of the painted surface as a potential reserve for trauma by way of its historical and contemporary modes of signification. Here Foster (1996: 127) invokes trauma in art as a 'contact' between the 'referential *and* simulacrul, connected *and* disconnected, affective *and* affectiveless, critical *and* complacent.' While this formulation is evocative, I think a consideration of the possible root of these oppositions, *das Ding*, enhances an understanding of the kind of nonobjective formal play of thought at hand. Leader (2002: 123) addresses this convention of dialectical play which, for him, tends in some instances toward an empty form of rhetoric. He writes that the name of any artwork can be substituted for others as generative of meaning from somewhere between poles of "'nature and culture', 'presence and absence' and subject and object (or 'nonsubject')". But Leader also upholds the necessity of this dialectical structure in his own interpretation of Lacan's *das Ding* and art. This is not because artworks represent a positive objective sublation of their inherent formal oppositions in the Hegelian sense. The very nature of artwork is that it is often structured according to an anamorphic indeterminacy which mirrors the conflict between identification in language and the embodied reality of things and subjects. The artwork is thus located between poles because it embodies some aspects of a non-identifiable remainder which is not totally absent to cognition, but, in language, can only be represented as an empty gap or aporia:

> The opposition of concepts is an empty, formal feature of language, and artworks…can never avoid being turned into language, and hence may strive for an existence as 'non-works' – one of the effects of which is to generate contradictions in the field of concepts. The gateposts might not matter, but the in-betweenness does (Leader 2002: 124).

My focus here is not on the fact that words can fail to adequately define things and artwork. Rather, as Leader suggests, this mode of interpretation points to painting's own element of emptiness or absence, its non-graspability that is analogous to death. This condition occurs especially where the painting is worked in a purposefully contradictory way between formal art historical languages and material content. These uncertainties are embodied by the operation

of anamorphosis as the painting falls between two aspects of experiencing it. One is perhaps the critic's position, focused on the conditions of representation or physical 'bib' of the cylinder and its objective construction, evaluating *how* the work comes to be. The other position, perhaps the traditional philosopher's, seeks to interpret the deathly absent mirage, the Thing, which much art gives rise to. However, neither part of the anamorphosis is enough to define what happens in the device as a whole.

The cylindrical anamorphosis can be approached as a visual embodiment of what is meant by Kant when he says that objects conform to our representations of them by way of their condition of *relation*, rather than resembling our representations (Longuenesse 1998: 18). Both the object – the cylinder and bib – and its fractal image in the mirror are representations which do not resemble each other, but are related to each other through purely formal means. This structure also pertains to objects in the natural world, but art and the anamorphosis illuminate that function. Simply, Lacan emphasizes the fact that we construct representations for objects by way of other representations. This is the core meaning of the Symbolic realm of signifiers in Lacan. The illusion generated by the anamorphosis underwrites its status as man-made and stresses its artificial character: it 'exists only as a signifier' (SVII: 136).

Lacan sees Baroque architecture as an attempt to provoke the sense in which this symbolic condition is both erotic and traumatic. The twisted and tortured coils of stone are an 'effort to restore the true meaning of artistic inquiry', which is based on the question of what happens when we create the signifying terms of objective representation. For Lacan, Baroque form represented the aspects of human imaginary qualities that were being put to 'death' by the beginning stages of Enlightenment objectivity, and embodied a state of libidinal torture.[67]

Baroque form can therefore be understood in devices known to modernist art history as providing a strong focus on the material properties of mark-making and line, or on how properties of the signifier come into being. One could venture to say that an ever-increasing focus has been put on the 'bib'. The attention to the material grounds of construction, initially begun in modernist painting, is described by Jean Clay (1981: 50) as a form of affective 'leprosy' that is characterised by an obsession with the 'appearance' of surface and the inner

[67] Lacan's emphasis is not on a pure solipsism in science. The image which remains ungraspable in the mirror is Real because it represents to Lacan a space 'beyond' the mirror that is an inaccessible dimension created by the artist. This 'death' constituted by the constructions of a 'beyond' also represent the internal space of representation that Lacan calls *das Ding*. *Das Ding* is stranger, more enigmatic and more Real than any metaphysical or divine quality because it regards the 'matter' of humanity as a psychical thing in itself.

psychic depths evoked by this.[68] This form of 'leprosy' is evoked by Lacan (SVII: 272) as the surface of the anamorphotic cylinder's 'bib': something 'appears beyond the mirror, whereas something decomposed and disgusting spreads out around it'.

One is reminded of the effacement of pictorial illusion, the sense of decomposition in mid-20th century abstract expressionism. As I construe it, the work of Jackson Pollock, Barnett Newman, Robert Motherwell and their ilk focused on the imagined resemblance between psychical strata and the material foundations of the painted surface in order to provoke the sensual or nonobjective possibility of anamorphosis: that which lies between two deaths. But the attempt at this imaginary embodiment developed into a radical motivation. As Ann Gibson (2005: 463, 465) writes, the group were increasingly at pains to find a 'rhetoric' capable of expressing their final aim, for painting to function 'not as a symbol or metaphor but as the indescribable absolute': a metaphysical thing in itself. It is therefore perhaps not surprising that abstract expressionism was ultimately denigrated as an exclusivist strategy venerating the heroic (male) artist and sophisticated viewer who would understand the historical progression of such form (or constitutive formlessness) to its zero-degree, where a supposed inner force is read as present and absent in surface qualities alone. But it is equally not surprising to read in the concluding paragraphs of Gibson's essay that a split was formed in the last stages of abstract expressionism by those who sought to revive an 'allegorical impulse' which involved a return to aspects of figuration, or at least to the potential appearance of figure and form.[69] Writes Gibson,

> The switch by some abstract expressionists to multiple and simultaneous kinds of signification and the alternate use by others of various ways of referring imply a belief that the human search for a primordial totality is in vain, that a God's-eye view is not available (2005: 473).

It is indeed the implicit vanity, the inherent narcissism of such a search on which Lacan focuses (SVII: 99). However, for Lacan art can avoid being a merely narcissistic exercise when the

[68] Art theorist E.H. Gombrich's (1960) account of illusion remains seminal to many discourses on art. For him, illusion meant less the imitation of objects than it did the 'stimulation' of perceptual and emotive registers which were 'aroused' in response to an artwork. These subjective affects thus accounted for the meaning of the work, as not necessarily present to the material form or iconography of a painting.

[69] See the illustration of this shift between Figure 21: Jackson Pollock. 1947. *Sea Change*, and his later work, Figure 22: Jackson Pollock. 1953. *Easter and the Totem*. I select these two paintings for the difference in signification one can see between his material use of pebbles in the earlier work, and the narrative introduction of figure in the second. From manifestly deploying the poetic symbol of a thing in itself par excellence, a pebble (Schwenger 2001: 108), Pollock shifts to invoking or 'allegorising' the signifier of form as invested in judgment, prone to the displacement and distortion of the imagination. My argument in this thesis develops the notion that both kinds of approach to surface result in similar effects: for example, one doesn't gain a greater understanding of things in themselves by using pebbles. Rather, the estrangement represented by a pebble can be construed as thrusting the viewer towards her ideal limits – the limits by which judgment is contained by the conditions of relation in representation only, as figuration more directly implies.

depiction of 'God's eye' on things in themselves is intentionally substituted by the *metaphors* of a blinding Thing, representing primarily the impotence of the human eye which fails to see a true resemblance between inner and outer worlds. In such art, *das Ding* is asserted as fundamentally blocked from view: it 'suffers from the signifier' in formal terms (SVII: 118). In this argument, abstract art would fulfil the conditions of an anamorphosis if it knowingly inscribes its facture as a signifier or symbol *representing* the thing in itself. This emphasis on the signifier and its formal relationship to objects is what I argue Greenberg attains in his criticism. But a simpler route, as noted by Gibson, is the return to the image and recognizable narrative influences, which has become a strong feature of much contemporary painting. The heightened involvement of language and narrative can serve to underscore the physicality of the 'bib' and the human construction of values as signifiers. Again, the tension between two poles – language and the mute material surface – has developed into the primary condition of representation in painting and other media. But I contend that form is not so much focused on the signifying realm, as that it can make the allegorical, metaphorical 'death' of the internal *Thing* ever-more pronounced. Trauma features precisely in the evocation of the death implicit to a psychical non-object suffering under the weight of its conceptual and discursive frame.

Something similar has been pointed out in different terms in recent contemporary theory, where the reflexive nature of Greenberg's modernist discourse has been analysed as a reduction to a traumatic sublation of 'talk' *as* 'thing' (Jones 2004: 329). For art theorist Caroline Jones (2004: 332), the visuality of form is seen as analogous to the rationality of a 'civilised order' in Greenberg's thinking. However, Jones points out that the 'crystallisation' of a visual regime in this sense is less visually orientated, less causally connected to the object, than Greenberg seems to describe it (2004: 333). According to her, both the expressivity and geometry of modern painting is conveyed through Greenberg's experience of the work, and therefore cannot rest on the artwork alone. It is the literary strength of his 'talk' as 'thing' which might be seen to have conditioned the modern experience of materiality in painting. In this sense, Greenberg's criticism itself can be said to embody 'the texture of modernity': the 'urban grids' and 'labouring bodies' of industrial city life (Jones 2004: 330). The visual system put in place via the dialectic of discourse and materiality in modernity, is seen by Jones to imply notions of trauma:

> One mode…attempted to make seamless the regimented movements of the modern body, and the other…hoped to arrest singular segments in order to expose the structuration of the modern self as *traumatic* (2004: 331).

The traumatic revelation of the self as 'regimented' or 'arrested' becomes manifest in the way Greenberg seems to freeze the visible and the invisible conditions of both experience and the object in a single rational point of aesthetic interest. By seeming to privilege the visual as a *real* resemblance to ideal cognitive structures, he obviates the symbolic or relational nature of inner and outer representation. As I discuss later, this is not strictly true of his philosophical values; in fact, I argue that he was acutely aware of the difference. But the public recognition of his output as object-centred, for Jones, critically reflects the potency of discursivity in shaping the objective world. As she asks, 'If it is said, then is that what is historically available to be seen? If it is not said, then is it not seen at all?' (2004: 336).

This focus on a real generated by institutionalised discourse defined the terms under which painters and conceptual artists of the mid twentieth century laboured to deconstruct painting. Minimalism and Conceptual Art has as its basic motivation the exposure of signifying mechanisms dominating art theory in the 20th century. The priority of the 'said' over the 'seen' indicates a transcendental aesthetic, and was perceived by younger artists to imply a set of ideological values in naturalised possession of the object. By way of deconstructing institutional framing conditions, these artists and writers expressed a desire for a more adequate perceptual and material mode of engagement than the positing of a Westernised and male transcendental experience. The direct engagement with the material and discursive relationship, as a condition of representation, was meant to bring about the 'death' of painting as a pre-eminent figure of the ideal viewing subject. However, I argue that the concepts involved do not escape the frame as they were meant to, but reproduce it in ways which are still constructive for the field of contemporary painting. [70]

In 1981, theorist and critic Douglas Crimp (1981: 81) famously declared 'the end of painting' as the corresponding end of modernist discourses which propagated a visual field of ontological 'essence' simplistically founded on the 'boundless imaginations' of painters. Seen in this way, painting stands for the universalising tendencies of Kantian thought conveyed by Greenberg.[71]

[70] Terry Eagleton (1990: 71) similarly designates the modern subject of the 'Kantian Imaginary' as having created a world mirrored by its own desire and ideal structure, centrifugally overshadowing the materiality of substance and nature. Capitalism culminates in a liberation of the subject that inscribes a 'certain objectivity as the very condition of subjecthood'.

[71] Diarmuid Costello (2007: 2) states that postmodern art practice developed largely in resistance to Greenberg, but because Greenberg so fully subsumed Kantian aesthetics into a modernist framework, Kant's writing became the cipher of all that is modernist and thus his version of aesthetics was rejected out of hand. Through different means than those employed by Costello, I will discuss below how postmodern practices which sought to break the bonds of Greenbergian modernism only succeeded in preserving them.

Crimp identifies this universality as fundamentally illusional and based on the 'myth' of the transcendental subject. This 'myth' is the belief in an autonomously objective grasp of reality. Crimp's view of Greenberg's Kantianism thus corresponds to Jones's more recent analysis of 'talk' which classifies concrete properties of experience in modern life. However, the complex tension in Greenberg's view of painting as reflective of objective experience makes a somewhat inadvertent reappearance in postmodern criticism of the autonomous subject. This is evident in Crimp's assertion that the new interrogation of sign and signifier has a more objective grasp on meaning, implying that conceptual and minimalist art distinguished themselves by dealing with the effects on a 'real, historical world' (1981: 75).

For Crimp (1981: 72), certain forms of representation deal with the subject of painting, but are critically engaged with the conditions under which painting is viewed. The artist who stands as exemplary in Crimp's essay is Daniel Buren, whose work consists of black vinyl strips ordered in repeated vertical lines. Placed on museum windows, under lintels and on billboards around New York, these works manifest a literal invisibility that offers a comment on the invisible institutional conditions structuring the painted surface. Seen as 'paintings', Buren's work subverts the naturalised tendency to invoke transcendental affect in the luminous context of seeing a painting in a gallery (1981: 74).



Daniel Buren, 1973. *Within and Beyond the Frame*. Fabric, paint and steel cables. Photograph courtesy of John Weber Gallery: New York

Crimp (1981: 77) claims a parallel with more strictly conventional modernist painters of the sixties, especially Robert Ryman's flat and opaque grids and striped paintings, which are also engaged in the literal transformation of painted surface into its 'surfacing' in unconventional locations.[72] Ryman's thick painterly strokes, 'reduced to the stark physical components of painting-as-object', 'make visible the most material of painting's conventions'. While Buren deals with the surreptitious linguistic character of painting, Ryman belongs to a (supposed) post-Greenbergian school of thought that worked to reveal the material product-base of society. He sought to make paint self-evident by removing the traces of gesture, depositing paint in a purely mechanical manner onto the canvas (Buchloh 1990: 112).

But for Crimp (1981: 77), both conceptions foreground painting as an empirically evident and non-mystified mode of production: 'its frame, its stretcher, its supporting surface, the walls on which it hangs' are asserted and emphasised as prior to aesthetic experience. However, Buren's success in particular lay in the relative invisibility it simultaneously promoted: the act of looking is no longer an autonomous act but one torn between the visible and invisible.

> At the moment when Buren's work becomes visible, the code of painting will have been abolished and Buren's repetitions can stop: the end of painting will have finally been acknowledged (Crimp 1981: 86).

By drawing attention to the structures of discursivity, I contend that the paradoxical effect of these practices is to simultaneously and concretely affirm the formal conceptual structure of relations inaugurated by Kant. Indeed, by focusing on the manifest products of the signifier, painters like Ryman and Buren saw these formal values as the grounds of representation, over and above things in themselves.[73] The gains made by minimalism and conceptual art were thus in re-asserting that our representations de facto *limit* the means by which we make objective sense of the world.[74]

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[72] Figure 26: Robert Ryman. 1970. *Surface Veil*.

[73] Other writers have reached similar conclusions via different methods of analysis to the ones I explore below. As Benjamin Buchloh (1990: 112) states in a seminal essay questioning the real institutional effects of Conceptual Art, both painters and conceptual artists of the 60s 'attained…highly comparable formal and structural results…Furthermore, even while made from opposite vantage points, the critical arguments accompanying such works systematically denied the traditional principles and functions of visual representation, constructing astonishingly similar litanies of negation.' Thierry de Duve (1994: 64) also points out the paradoxical 'compression' of values between Modernist and Minimalist or Conceptual art theories: 'To question the nature of art through the means of art is, of course, a strategy that corresponds perfectly to the definition of modernism given by Greenberg in [his essay] "Modernist Painting".'

[74] Ameriks (2006: 224) states that no major philosophy, particularly Kant or Hegel's, claims to encapsulate the grounds of reality by philosophy. Rather, understanding their objectives rests on knowing that 'We are not the master but rather the subject of nature, and that we remain, at least in part, dependent upon a ground beyond anything that speculative thought can demonstrate'.

As I discuss in the following chapter, this is the very meaning of transcendental idealism in Kant. In chapter 6, I show that the value of delimitation from an often perverse and violent dominance of reality and the environment is an ethic Greenberg insists upon.

Perhaps, more than effecting an 'end' or 'death' of painting, an unintended consequence of the assertion of conceptual representation by postmodern artists is that conventional (mis)perceptions of painting might be shifted by degrees from the mere illumination of subjective affect to providing a more direct reflection on the traumatic representations of authority, control and violence which governs public and private experience in modern society. While I find these developments useful for painting, I retain a formal, more abstract logic of representation as a schema for this thesis. As I will discuss in further detail in the last chapter of this section, painting may represent the metaphor of 'death' according to more postmodern ideas of how we relate to reality. But death in painting can be particularly acute and traumatic, because it also emphasizes a formal concept of pleasure.

I conclude here by introducing the question of pleasure, which leads me to some final statements on the mediating role of the 'nonobjective' in painting that is representative of *das Ding*. Lacan (SVII: 33) suggests that because subjective desire and the unknown qualities of things in the external world are put to 'death', scientific mores of objectivity illustrate the Freudian psychoanalytic notion of 'negation'. In reference to Freud's text *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930 [2002]), Lacan (SVII: 93) discusses negation as being felt like a 'curse', but one which also necessarily delimits our perception. The scientific world view is described in terms of a 'death drive' (SVII: 205). The phrase 'death drive' alerts us to the notion that desire is involved in this death. While certain desires associated with *das Ding* are negated by the signifier, desire simultaneously 'drives' the signifier (de Kesel 2009: 49, 125). The psychical operation of both being driven by and being stopped or cut off by signification *is what causes pleasure* for the subject. Certain desires are necessarily put to death, we will see, because their object leads to pain. A correspondence or confrontation with the ultimate goal of desire, *das Ding*, tends to lead to pain, pathological mental pain, and trauma. In that a certain aspect of the desiring self is negated in rational modern discourse, it is important to consider not so much *what* is put to death, but *how* desire simultaneously drives our desire for a 'zero degree' identity between language and embodiment. Art can embody the deep formal structure of how pleasure drives sensation, judgment and representation, and thus also envision the metaphor of *das Ding*,

being reflective of the state of irreconcilability with it that, for Lacan, governs human experience.

Although not stated in explicit terms by Lacan, Kant's notion of 'disinterested pleasure' in aesthetic judgment can be seen to address the psychoanalytic notion of a pleasure that occurs because it has been separated from direct, potentially perverse desires. Simultaneously, however, it is precisely through 'disinterest' that art's capacity for demonstrating certain 'lawless' or nonobjective conditions of judgment and representation reveal what Kant calls the 'supersensible ground' or 'noumenality' of cognition (Kulenkampff 1990: 100). Art is an area of activity which concerns judgments of experience which may not be universal themselves[75] but can be theorised as operating on a formal logic which touches off a universal supersensible ground in ways that are particular and nonobjective. Americks (2006: 212) devotes much of his analyses on this mediatory role that Kant himself is seen to play between the emotionally-freighted 'discontents' of civilisation engaged by early Romanticism, and Enlightenment objectivity.[76] As I argue, the 'non-conceptual' play of nonobjective qualities in art are elicited *by* the negation inherent to objectivity, and this very act demonstrates the contingency on which our everyday judgments in the domain between subjective and objective qualities are based.

I end by referring to what seems to be a point of conflict in understanding Kant's central moves in formalising transcendental idealism, which become a productive area for conceiving the nonobjective focus of much painting. Kant asserts a potentially universal condition of self-consciousness which doesn't seem to provide for the specificities of cultural identity and context. The paradox is that many of our notions of viewing cultural practices have developed from his view of pure and practical reason (Brook 2013). For example, notions of diversity and identity in the academic artistic sphere are indubitably based on perceptions of difference in experience and cultural representations, while attempting to account for essential aspects of a metaphysical nature, or things in themselves, has largely been abandoned in contemporary discourses. Understanding the level at which difference and similarity is rationally perceived can be said to have been influenced by Kant's philosophy of the ideal delimitation of cognition

[75] William Melaney (2001) stresses how the view of art as an autonomous sphere of activity 'deprives it [art] of its cognitive claim to truth', and is thus instead restricted to consideration of the 'harmony among the subject's interior faculties' or the formal play of representation internal to the subject.

[76] As I will discuss, it is often difficult to say in what way Lacan contributes to Kant's formal schema of the non-objective, except to invoke 'evil' and traumatic qualities of the mother's body mediating suffering and science, or pain and pleasure.

from things in themselves.[77] Yet difference itself becomes homogenised. Kant's final argument – that there is a nonobjective interplay of our internal representations in critical aesthetic judgment – seems to be foreclosed upon: as I argue in the introduction, representation in contemporary discourse tends to become unselfconsciously reified. This is because certain values are accorded to representational methods and techniques which, through history, have come to signify as holding certain identities and tend to be treated as an unconditional ground of meaning. As a 'lite' but significant example for this thesis, a painting is often perceived as signifying first and foremost in terms of its style, i.e., as realist, classical, expressionist or 'pop', and is driven to 'reason' in this way. These practices lose the contingent, hypothetical nature of Kant's insistence that reason concerns the *relation* of our representations to each other. Lacan (SVII: 72) impresses upon his listeners to reference Kant's critiques and absorb the complexity of Kant's own formulation so that finally, the involvement of *das Ding* as a deformative aspect of the nonobjective is fully recognised. Responding to this order of Lacan's, my reading helps me consider why the conflict between citing universal forms of cognition on one hand, while acknowledging the nonobjective aspects of representation on the other, is a condition of interpreting painting: one which may ultimately deliver reflection on traumatic exigencies of social reality.

[77] Just how misunderstood Kant's objectives were in this regard is evidenced in Allan Sekula's (1978: 231) highly influential essay on the supposed postmodern break with Kantian aesthetics: 'The meaning of an artwork ought to be regarded, then, as *contingent*, rather than as immanent, universally given, or fixed. The Kantian separation of cognitive and affective faculties, which provided the philosophical basis for Romanticism, must likewise be critically superseded.' As my thesis draws out, Kant's divisions were formally necessary in order to see the way in which they relate to each other. However, cognition and affect are not ideal or 'fixed', but are transcendental because they involve the contingency of judgment. This contingency is part of Kant's understanding of universality.

2.2 Kant's Supersensible Ground as Lacan's *das Ding*

This chapter serves to frame my analysis and interpretation of modernist art and critical discourse. It is a necessary but brief exegesis of some key elements of Kant's and Lacan's epistemological and ontological frameworks that support an understanding of the ethical vicissitudes involved in judgment and the notion of beauty developed in chapter 2.3. I elaborate on the notion that both knowledge and cultural production can come into being in relation to an unconditioned ground or 'Thing': most simply cast as an absent aspect of perception, but which we will see evolving as a blind spot or absence in a universal condition of cognition itself. Again, this look at the formation of *das Ding* as an absence will further help to clarify the way in which both Kant and Lacan are committed to seeing their respective disciplinary fields being elucidated by an art-conceptual understanding of form, even as art is simultaneously viewed by both philosophers as an autonomous field of practice.[78] This discussion thus lays the groundwork for my more detailed discussion of aesthetics in chapter 2.3, which concerns how certain nonobjective elements of cognition may translate into an analysis of the material and conceptual construction of painting.

Here, I focus on how Kant develops the notion of self as a noumenal 'supersensible' entity, in terms of which the object of reason is conceived as internalised and not based in the contents of experience of the outside world. As noted in my introduction, this is the precise aspect of self that Lacan (SVII: 104) relates to *das Ding*, and which he ultimately values as a 'supreme evil' or traumatic object which gives both pleasure and 'death' to experience, even as it plays a formal, a priori, role in organising representations of experience.

Kant and Synthetic Reason

I draw from Kantian theorist Beatrice Longuenesse's (1998: 17) emphasis on the notion of 'judgement' in Kant as constituting a 'fundamental shift' in epistemological understanding of the relationship between subject and object. This shift is foundational to the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), where Kant asserts that 'the relation between the representation and the object'

[78] Kant's three *Critiques* have been traditionally analysed in separate parts and as pertaining to different purposes. However, more recent analysis has affirmed the indispensable value of recognising the interrelation of the *Critiques* themselves (Ameriks 2003: 3; Guyer 1993: 2).

occurs as an 'internalisation': the relation is already embedded as a faculty 'within representation itself' (Longuenesse 1998: 17) .[79] Kant asks in this regard, 'What is the ground of the relation of that in us which we call representation?' (Kant in Longuenesse 1998: 18). Determining this 'ground' does not come about by attempting to discern the qualities of reality, as things in themselves, or as a possible metaphysical truth of existence. The 'ground' or capacity of cognition can only be viewed obliquely, from the point of view of certain synthetic relations between sensation and understanding: scrutinizing and emphasizing the particular conditions through which representation comes to take form in the mind.

The emphasis on these conditions is formal because it refers to questions of 'how' the mind comes to represent experience a priori to external events – the cognitive structures which make thought possible – rather than 'what' the content of such experience will be known as (Pippin 1982: 8). In the first two critiques, these synthetic conditions are approached via an analysis of scientific reason and moral action, both of which are emphasized by Kant for their 'mind-dependence', rather than being elicited by objects in the external world (Brook 2013). For lack of space I cannot discuss all the ways in which he offers proof of the mind-dependence of objects in these categories. However, Kant's approach to critical reason radically affected how reality was subsequently viewed in academic spheres.[80]

His assertion of experience as dependent on certain cognitive forms involving sensation, judgment and understanding instated particular *limits* on empirical and rational knowledge which were difficult to deny.[81] Further, these limits construct both the 'transcendental ideal' and the potential for 'transcendental judgement'. Kant's philosophy strictly delimits the capacity for objectifying certain affects and experiences, and refuses speculation on things in themselves, which may potentially cause illusion. Rather, the 'transcendental ideal' stipulates

[79] Kant (*CoR*: 1378) claimed that his philosophy of the subject-object duality constituted a 'Copernican Revolution'. Nikolaus Copernicus's heliocentric model of the earth and planets revolving around the sun bears a complex relationship to Kant's own model of the subject of reason (Cousin 2014). Copernicus could be said to have decentred the role of the spectator, as a result of which certain scientific laws that were deemed to be objective would now be based in an active recognition of the difference between perception (it looks like the sun revolves around the earth) and reason (there are natural laws of causality that can be calculated in advance of perception and common sense). Kant progressed from a strictly Copernican view of active and passive spectators of the cosmos, because he examined the capacity for reason itself to realise this difference, rather than it being reliant on the observation of objects in the outside world.

[80] Kant's philosophy of human experience earned him the title of the 'All Destroyer' amongst his peers, for 'devastating reason's pretences to transcendent insight' (Williams 2014).

[81] Kant develops a world view rooted in Western culture, particularly René Descartes's division of soul and body, which conceived knowledge as already foundational of the 'cogito' or mind. Kant would redefine the form of this inquiry, asserting that certain conditions of thought and sensibility need to be in place before possible claims on knowledge might be made (Bird 2006: 367).

that objects are made to 'conform' to our mind-dependent representations of them through certain procedures of judgment which are both sensate and conceptual (Ameriks 2003: 4-5). As such, knowledge can only be partial or limited to the active capacities of the subject. The value of judgment thus depends on the *self-consciousness of this synthetic capacity and its limitations.* This self-consciousness arises from the subject's internal 'supersensible ground' or noumenality (Ameriks 2003: 4-5; Burnham 2015).

The supersensibility of the individual informs the way in which both science and morality are practiced from the same rational ground in the subject (Burnham 2015). Consideration of the mind-dependence of representation establishes the domain of science as an autonomous discipline from natural chaos. The self-consciousness of autonomy further results in the possibility of a 'free will' or sovereign subject who is able to both judge and act in accordance with reason (Brooks 2013; Guyer 2006: 13). However, the a priori base of knowledge production nevertheless corresponds to our ideas of reality, insofar as we are solely responsible for constructing it in objective ways. The notion of the supersensible ground responds to the 'crisis' of the Enlightenment, where traditional religious authorities were being undermined by Newtonian science. The value of maintaining reason's autonomy was that concepts like 'God' or the divine could remain tangible through valuing the mind's own formal power for synthesising the faculties of representation (Rohlf 2014).

The formal conditions of experience are structured by Kant in different sources of representation, whose interrelations as a certain principle of 'synthesis' constitute the supersensible ground (Please see Addendum A for a detailed explanation of these representational functions). Kant insists that experience maintains the potential for objective consistency based on the rules of synthesis of representations (Rohlf 2014). The argument is grounded in primary internal representation: the content of intelligible experience may change, but the relational nature of representations remains fundamental and universal to any cognition of things (*CoR*: 183). In part, these sources of representation are organised by the 'primitive' or 'sub-rational' character of intuition and imagination (Pippin 1982: 30; Ginsborg 2008: 67). The operation of intuition apprehends and synthesizes the sensual appearance of objects affecting the subject, while judgements are reproduced through the imagination's act of synthesising intuitions (Brooks 2013). Finally, the understanding marks the final decisive way in which a concept of objects is recognised (Longuenesse 1998: 35). As Kant says, these representational systems work to produce knowledge of an object through the synthesis of

different perceptions and conceptual extensions: 'Understanding cannot intuit, and the sensuous faculty cannot think' (*CoR*: 2334; Robert 2014).

However, this 'metaphysical deduction' to key formal relations has the effect of constructing the understanding as a logic invested in language (Longuenesse 1998: 23). The ultimate significance of the 'discursive' operations of concepts – as it is formed by synthetic representations of intuition through to 'logical understanding' – is that it anchors our perception of the external world within legislative properties of mind which are primarily linguistic, as opposed to sensual and embodied. A significant consequence is that reason as 'the [discursive] law of nature' provides for the moral practice of both freedom and restraints (*CoR*: 2494; Rohlf 2014).

Without the 'practical' aspect of reasoning, reason cannot be viewed as 'real' and thus cannot say how moral 'freedom' can be realised (*CoP*: 10030). In this regard, Michael Rohlf (2014: Online) says, 'Theoretical philosophy deals with appearances…and practical philosophy deals with things in themselves'. In effect, the very principle which enables us to be cognisant of, or represent objects of experience to ourselves as self-conscious, supersensible subjects is proven by our active capacity to effect change in the external world (Guyer 2006: 17). The 'paradox' is that moral practice is a necessary metaphysical inquiry for Kant, where ideas of 'God and immortality' are significant to the degree to which the supersensible conditions of a moral law or 'categorical imperative' are enacted (*CoP*: 10042). In this way, Kant appeals to a 'concept of freedom' as a 'pure' form of moral law (*CoP*: 10105).

Thus, the question of synthesis in representations is not an entirely stable notion. For Kantian philosopher Lucy Allais (2010) the ideal law generated from the unknown or noumenal suggests a metaphysical understanding of freedom that, even as it is discursive, does in fact have a basis in things in themselves. For many philosophers, there remains a question about the extent to which Kant allowed the notion of the reality of things in themselves to occupy a specialised status in his structure of representation (Bird 2006: 758; Allais 2010: 2).[82] Allais's instructive essay suggests that there is clearly a way in which Kant acknowledges a 'more fundamental or ultimate aspect of reality'. For her, the very conditions of knowledge expressed by Kant require for their legitimate applicability that there ultimately must be a difference

[82] As Bird (2006: 132) notes, it is perhaps relevant to say Kant wanted to account for the 'illusory' effects of experiences as much as for our truthful relations to the external world. But later philosophers such as Hegel, Fichte and Schelling would develop Kant's enterprise as necessarily promoting the subject as a transcendental origin and capable of achieving the sublimating power of the 'Absolute' (Pippin 1982: 20).

between appearances and things in themselves: knowing what is 'relational' must depend on knowing what is 'non-relational' (2010: 15). Therefore, the contingent aspects of experience must rely on a grounding 'totality' which makes these conditions possible. This 'totality' is perhaps dependent on an unconditioned ground within the subject herself (2010: 27). It is the only way in which freedom is rendered 'coherent' because it 'depends on the possibility of an intelligible cause which is not a part of the empirically real world' (Allais 2010: 28). This 'metaphysical' aspect of moral law, and its relationality both internal and external to the subject, is developed by Lacan.

Synthetic Pleasure as Moral Law

In Lacan (SVII: 54), the supersensible ground of reason and moral law is given a formative power (See Addendum A for how this supersensibility is thematised upon the mythic and traumatic origin of the mother's body). In line with Kant, Lacan asserts that this ground is noumenal because it remains fundamentally unknown where these faculties originate from, except, in his hypothesis, through metaphors associated with the maternal being. Lacan also schematises the way in which we may envision the supersensible ground through a theory of the *drives*: a parallel concept of viewing the synthetic relations between internal representations (De Kesel 2009: 95). The relation of the drives to *das Ding*, an essentially non-relative ground, creates the culture-specific terms in which feelings of pleasure and pain are delimited. Kant's moral philosophy can be taken as a universal paradigm of these divisions, Lacan suggests, because the question of the 'good' analysed by Kant is seen by Lacan to harbour the same drives which provoke the 'bad' in individuals and society across differing (albeit European) cultures.

Lacan asserts that Freud's thinking initiated a shift in the conceptualisation of the ethical relationship to reality because Freud conceives synthetic capacities in an unstable position to desire (SVII: 30). Freud's approach to desire is informed by the hypothesis of a fundamental split between the psyche and soma. This is a traumatic primary or *a priori* split, which affects how the 'polymorphous perverse' nature of the drives is utilised by the subject, but are also repressed (De Kesel 2009: 14). In *Seminar VII*, Lacan lays emphasis on Freud's

metapsychology[83] of this split, represented by the pleasure and reality principles, for perceiving the function of judgment of reality. I understand that this digression from Lacan's own founding schema of the imaginary, the symbolic and real, has to do with stressing how the principles of pleasure and reality concern a more dominant relation to the body, rather than to the representational realm of language. The basic thrust of Lacan's argument is that the desires which arise from bodily affects and sensations drive the formation of reason, while their representative relation to (scientific, objective) reason requires a certain censoring of their 'polymorphous perverse' properties: an area which Lacan argues is neglected by Kant.[84]

Lacan bases his inquiry on the form pleasure takes in relation to philosophy and the scientific world view which have dominated Western and global industrial civilisation. He contrasts Freud's notion of an unstable pleasure to Aristotle's moral philosophy of the 'Sovereign Good' (SVII: 5). In Aristotelian philosophy, pleasure and happiness are generally thought of as truly available within the horizon of the outside world. Wherever desires are fulfilled, this is viewed as a rational consummation of pleasure. However, Freud's contribution in regards to happiness is that '"…absolutely nothing is prepared for it [our happiness], either in the macrocosm or the microcosm"' (SVII: 13). This lack of preparedness for the real harshness of modern experience has to do with the embodied subject's 'hallucinatory' desires, and the way in which the law of language cannot adequately synthesise these desires (SVII: 29; Barrett 2014).

[83] The hidden activities of the mind that become visible in its symptoms, effects and actions by the subject thus brought Freud to introduce a 'metapsychology' or mechanical view of internal reality whereby the formal construction, or investment and output of drives and unconscious motivations which reduce and corrupt autonomy, could be theorised. Although the mechanical artifice of metapsychology has contemporarily become unpopular (Barrett: 2014), for me the structure works in parallel to the attempt to comprehend form as the seat of representation and interpretation, as was Kant's aim. Not only this: the invocation of the pleasure principle and the reality principle, as will be discussed below, allows some elaboration of the relationship between material and discursive boundaries to experience. It has already been suggested that the notion of drives and supplementary metaphors of psychic 'energy' can be viewed in terms of the 'methodological' composition it offers, rather than assuming a direct and immediate source of meaning (Kitcher & Wilkes 1988: 102). Freud (1950 [1925]: 137) considered the descriptive deployment of the psychic apparatus as offering 'normal prototypes' by which mental states could be conceived. As Richard Boothby (2001: 5) argues, the value of metapsychology is that it 'forms a bridge' between psychoanalytic theory and lived experience on a descriptive level of bodily affect. The examination of what Lacan (SVII: 102) terms Freudian 'atomism' is also strong metaphor for understanding the way in which 'psychic material' is organised, because it is involved in perceiving the formal structures of assimilation and difference between intuitive and symbolic fields of experience. Lacan defines metapsychology as an 'economic or even dynamic essence' that will ultimately have a bearing on how he visualises the abstract topology of formal relationships in the aesthetic work of sublimation.

[84] I don't believe this is strictly true, since Kant (*CoP*: 324) spends time in considering how we 'distinguish between higher and lower desires'. However, Lacan is right to the extent that Kant is largely dismissive of how questions of 'pleasure or non-pleasure' enable the determination of a universal moral law. As will be discussed in detail below, Kant sees 'pain' as the necessary signal for exercising practical reason. Lacan is thus deploying Kant's boundary of pain and pleasure in order to understand not the content of desires, but the formal ways in which he sees them as being 'driven', and affecting experience (de Kesel 2009: 49).

However, Lacan (SVII: 2) introduces the symbolic law of language as also positively invested in the desire for happiness insofar as it establishes certain limits to pleasure. He sees the critical limit exhibited in the 'psychoanalytic experience', which pertains to witnessing the 'patient's demand' for happiness. Where language makes its authority most strongly felt is in a demand which is, in fact, culturally conditioned and naturalised as an identification with a 'Sovereign Good'. But what is further clear and evident, says Lacan (SVII: 5), is that there is a 'whole sphere of sexual desires' (which were dismissed as the realm of the 'bestial' by Aristotle) that are in reality 'situated in the forefront of our experience'. Lacan insists on a primal sexual aggression constituting subjectivity. It is the ethical task of the psychoanalyst to not allow a direct and accessible identification with a 'good' that would seem to equate to a happy resolution of an event, traumatic or otherwise. Such acquiescence would 'let its deeply unconscious meaning be adulterated by that demand' for happiness. Rather, the analysand should come to realise the difference between socially acceptable narratives and her real desires (De Kesel 2009: 253).

Lacan therefore follows Kant's transcendental argument insofar as self-consciousness of both limits and capacities are acknowledged. His contribution to the problem is that the limit to pleasure which the symbolic law installs is *also* the border which instils the 'attraction of transgression' (SVII: 1-2). The evidence for the 'polymorphous-perverse' relationship between pleasure and transgression is the 'omnipresence [of] a sense of guilt' (SVII: 3). The 'perverse drive' of desire is therefore situated by Lacan on the limit between real embodied experience and its guilty contrast with the demands of language (SVII: 4-5). The perverse element of drives is thus opposed by the essentially moralising, censoring nature of the symbolic law. Transgression implies a 'beyond-of-the-signified' that desire aims at, and therefore pleasure and transgression are linked as two sides of a signifying limit, which is the 'moral law' in Kant's terms (De Kesel 2009: 81).

Kant's motivation was to singularise the noumenal self as an autonomous moral self, focused on attaining the 'good' (De Kesel 2009: 110). In view of the evident desire for transgression in Western modern society, Lacan posits (SVII: 20) the moral law as an agency which 'actualises' the traumatic real. Kant's formulation of the pure form of moral law is recognised by Lacan as the boundary between the 'good' and 'bad' qualities of behaviour as it is practiced today across disciplinary fields, especially in questions of ethics (SVII: 135). This is not a colossal insight on its own, except where Lacan (SVII: 54, 11) focuses on the fact that Kant asserts that

transcendental judgment becomes enacted on the real (see my second last paragraph on Kant above). In other words, the foundation of an *ideal* relationship of *difference* between external appearances and things in themselves becomes inadvertently disregarded. The representations motivated from an inner source of 'non-relation' (Allais 2010: 15) become the source for action in the external world. 'Real' freedom is thus problematised in that Lacan has determined this inner supersensible ground upon which actions, good *or* bad, are based as having a potentially terrible force (De Kesel 2009: 112). It is this ground, *das Ding*, which pressures the limit of moral behaviour at every turn.

Lacan casts the death and trauma of *das Ding* as being internal to Kant's concept of the supersensible self, because Kant is concerned to view a moral universal law from a perspective which negates certain impulses of desire. However, Kant also knowingly reveals this negation because he delimits pleasure from pain (SVII: 72). In his *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788), Kant informs Lacan's thinking by asserting that the application of 'pure reason' may not have anything to do with objects which provide pleasure. Anything that may threaten the supersensibility gifted man has to do with his *Wohlsein* – his wellbeing – and would thus corrupt his capacity to practice his ethical choices in purely objective ways (*CoP*: 401). Only from the formal space of pure reason and its 'maxim' of transcendental judgment may he view the horizon of '*das Gut*,' the Good.[85] This horizon is where Lacan also posits *das Ding* (SVII: 77, 73). Kant's insistence on the autonomy of the subject of reason in finding the objective 'Good' alone is therefore, for Lacan (SVII: 73), a form of negation, or, fundamentally, 'lying about evil'. Lacan thus implies a repression that lies within Kant's 'demand' for the good. Kant's articulation of the limit of duty performs a 'sublimation' of the tension between psychic desire and reality *because* it reveals the modern reliance on the symbolic order as the source of a demand for moral certitude. But this symbolic law of the signifier lacks pleasure and simultaneously actualises pain in the domain of the real.

In this sense, Lacan does not stray from Kant's own avowal of the human subject as noumenon, as capable of manifesting reason as its own object for practical action. However, because Kant

[85] As Kant (*CoP*: 486) maintains, the individual should 'act so that the maxim of thy will can always at the same time hold good as a principle of universal legislation'. This rule of law is characterised by Lacan as the 'almost insane… corner that we have been backed into by the existence, indeed the insistence, of science'. Lacan (SVII: 77) reinterprets Kant's maxim in contemporary terms: 'Never act except in such a way that your action may be programmed.' De Kesel (2009: 112) writes that as potentially radical as Lacan's reinterpretation sounds, it is merely a 'harsher' equivalent of the theory of autonomous reason.

has escalated the moral law to a maxim, a law unto itself, there would be no contradiction in positioning the 'sadist' fantasies of the Marquis de Sade's *Philosophy in the Boudoir* (1795) within 'Kantian criteria' (SVII: 78). De Sade explores an 'anti-morality' which views libertine pleasure as the sole goal of the individual. Lacan's citation of de Sade seems to suggest that Kant's avowal of moral duty based in reason might be unethical itself. However, Lacan's interest is rather to show how both Kant and de Sade's texts illuminate the relationship between the law and desire (Žiźek 1998: Online). For Lacan, it is no coincidence that both texts were published in the same era of the Enlightenment, its scientific and linguistic developments in understanding reality.

As forms of sublimation, both texts clarify what occurs when notions of pleasure are taken to an extreme limit. This is the presence of pain. According to Lacan (SVII: 80), Kant himself, in his efforts to deny pleasure, was forced to acknowledge the logical outcome of such a form of knowledge, that it '"must produce a feeling of pain."' Similarly, de Sade demonstrates in literal descriptive form that his degree of enjoyment will lead to pain: says Lacan, 'The other's pain as well as the pain of the subject himself, for on occasions they are simply one and the same thing.' Kant's strong imposition of the law thus demonstrates for Lacan (SVII: 76) that modernity has 'brought about the submission of man to the law of the unconscious', or the language of pleasure and pain that arises from unconscious mechanisms associated with *das Ding*.

It is in pain that the limits of representation find the noumenal object. Kant's text functions as a sublimation in this sense: the moral good is given a domineering 'weight' or an 'overevaluation of the object' of reason, which signifies the negative instance of the libidinal sphere of desire operating as its motivating force (SVII: 108, 109).

However, I have not conclusively explained how this sphere of desire drives such a pure form of moral law. Both in Kant and Lacan, transcendental judgment becomes more fully elucidated in view of aesthetic judgment, which produces both pleasure and pain. In Kant, the unconditioned ground of reason is glimpsed in beauty. For Lacan, it will be the task of art to expose this encounter in representation as resting against the crucially empty space of *das Ding.* Thus it is in beauty – and precisely not in a leap to the more obvious idea of an overwhelming and potentially traumatic sublime – that the internal supersensible object of reason is most apparent. This is because the form of beauty initialises, one could say, the way in which human activity can, realistically, only occur on one side of the fence. If I am following Lacan's

interpretation correctly, this 'fence', created by the law, is the borderline across which the notion of lack and absence is most clearly surveyed. [86]

In the following chapter, I deploy some of Derrida's deconstruction of Kant's notion of beauty and aesthetic judgment to substantiate the idea that 'beauty' is based on what Derrida (1987: 67) calls a 'violent' frame of reason. He affirms that reason necessarily includes subjective qualities of desire, which affects viewing the painted surface in ways which concern notions of pleasure and death. It is this inclusion of desire in judgment which contributes to my understanding of nonobjective signification and its relationship to *das Ding* in the making and reception of painting.

[86] Kant accounted for the sublime '*within* the vocation of reason' and not as reason's polar opposite, as it has been suggested in more contemporary theory (Guyer 1993: 191). Indeed, philosopher Jean Luc Nancy (1993: 38) articulates Kant's sublime as working on the 'same site of the beautiful', and yet, it can make the vulnerability of the borderline of imagination more tangible. I think that Lacan focuses on beauty because the subjective contours of reason elaborate the space of tension between feeling and psychical concept, rather than a purely imaginative sublime collapse of concept. In this regard, the kind of painting I have selected 'reads' more in accordance with Frederic Jameson's notion of a productively worked theme of the sublime, in his contention that, 'In the most interesting postmodernist works… one can detect a more positive conception of relationship, which restores its proper tension to the notion of difference itself' (1991: 530).

2.3 Tailored to Pleasure: From the Non-Conceptual to the Conceptually Nonobjective Painting

The experience of beauty, as described by Kant, may tell us more about the construction of the capacity for reason (Ginsborg 2014). Meanwhile, Lacan's excursion into aesthetics will enable a description of how reason serves to avoid and sustain both the presence and the absence of the psychical *Ding* (De Kesel 2009: 93). For both philosophers, furthermore, a supersensible or noumenal aspect governs how aesthetic judgment and beauty come to hold social significance. This chapter serves to review some key claims made for beauty that reveal its basis in a mode of judgment that I see as lying 'between two deaths', or as sustaining nonobjective processes that are key to the interpretation and production of some paintings. The relationship of death and pleasure is significant in how painting may come to 'synthesise' aesthetic experience.

As I discuss in Chapter 2.4, it has been a criticism against Greenberg that he made use of Kant's ideas on reason rather than Kant's aesthetic. However, Greenberg's strength is in understanding how the synthetic judgment of reason is revealed in aesthetic experience. Greenberg's focus on nonobjective painting is the first signal of his appreciation of the formal connection between the judgment of art and the transcendental judgment present in the experience of the everyday, including its potential moral constraints. However, here I start from the 'deconstruction' of the synthesis of transcendental judgment in Derrida's book *The Truth in Painting* (1987) because I see it illuminating various parts of both Lacan and Greenberg's thought. As I discuss below, my view of Derrida's deconstruction is not that he unravels Kant's thinking so much as demonstrates that much philosophy which seems to oppose Kant is un-selfconscious of the necessarily subjective elements of judgment which pervade an objective perspective; the self-consciousness which, I argue, is present in Greenberg's criticism.[87]

The Freudian component in Derrida's deconstruction and Lacan's notion of *das Ding* is that both highlight that self-consciousness of a supersensible ground is not fully available to cognition (although they both also seem to suggest that their use of Freud makes that ground

[87] Derrida (1987: 19-26) writes that these elements pervade Hegel's opposition to Kant, in his dialectical development of a purely objective 'Absolute' (which would finally guarantee the end of art). One could say that Derrida elaborates Kant in order to deconstruct Hegel's formative text by proxy, in that he underscores the 'non-identical' components of Kant's texts in general (Spivak xi: 1974).

more available, if only through the dense knot of significations they perform). As per Allais's assertion (2010), Derrida (1987: 50) suggests that Kant indicated a necessarily 'metaphysical' aspect of his epistemology. Derrida's reading emphasizes the view that relational aspects of objects always require a concurrent recognition of its 'non-relational' aspects (Allais 2010: 27). It seems, therefore, that Derrida and Lacan are doing no more than considering the non-relational ground as potentially traumatic and full of perverse desires. Yet, in my view, this is also why they affirm Kant's thinking: the self-reflexivity of the limits of representation art offers can also be viewed as positively reflective of the elements of non-relation, or the sense of lack thereof, if we conceive this other side of the veil of cognition as the space of trauma.[88] Positing the space of 'non-relation' as traumatic is itself a logic which is hard to deny, because productive qualities of cultural difference simply disappear at this level. We are homogenous in a purely non-relative, dissociated state, such as in shock or death.

In Kant, a non-relation decentres the subject's grasp of things in objective knowledge but allows us to act in moral ways because we are aware of that conflict. The theory of *das Ding* locates this non-relation in, or because of, the body. In Freudian terms, Kant's aesthetic judgement constitutes a 'negation' whereby 'beauty is the very sign of a repression', because it emphasises that certain psycho-somatic aspects are inaccessible to representation (Damisch 1992: 46). This 'death' or repressive element is recognised by Kant as representative in beauty. Jane Kneller (1986: 314) explains that

> Kant tells us that… although [an aesthetic judgment] may contain the general subjective conditions for cognition...its ground of determination lies in a sensation immediately connected with the feeling of pleasure and pain.

Similarly to Freud, Lacan (SVII: 47) points out that in Kant's critique of moral judgment the delimitation of pleasure and pain reveals the bodily basis of desire, and the pleasure that stops and sustains the drive to death. He sees this 'deep subjectivization of the world' as framed by the pleasure principle which Freud articulated, and also as the basis upon which beauty can be recognised as a 'symbol of morality' in Kant (*CoJ*: 20242). While the ethical side of art's production and reception are touched on in this chapter, I am more interested in understanding a formal schema which can define the nonobjective, as it is examined by Derrida. Further, the

[88] My thesis does not rest on the idea of a catharsis offered to spectators by tragic depictions. I do not presume to think that a viewer may find some kind of release from their grief or fears by beholding a traumatic space of lack. I rather tend to point to 'affect' without the need for too much determination, because it would constitute lending a content to judgment, whereas I am concerned to understand and provide understanding of how the formal system abuts a space of trauma.

way in which Lacan proposes that the subjective elements internal to judgment are embodied by the art object defines the formal frame of my inquiry into contemporary painting.

Beauty: Signifying Experience

Derrida (1987: 45) writes that the value of aesthetic judgment for Kant was its mediating role in establishing the limits between 'mind and nature, internal and external phenomena, the inside and the outside'. He further suggests that desire and, thus, aspects of the bodily drives, distort the terrain in which judgment takes place, draining the subject of his autonomy in making such distinctions. But Kant invites this deduction: for him, 'beauty' provides a 'non-conceptual' framework based in pleasure, whereby the 'unity' of the supersensible ground for reason and morals can be viewed in all its complexity. Thus, there is a way in which the judgment of beauty frames *both* the objects of science and moral duty (Burnham 2015: Online).

The principle of the unconditioned ground is provided by nature and art, but it is the *internal* form of the judgment which is organised by a non-relation, and that I focus on here. As Kant (*CoJ*: 17263) says,

> This perplexity about a principle (whether it is subjective or objective) presents itself mainly in those judgments that we call aesthetical, which concern the Beautiful or the Sublime of Nature and Art. And, nevertheless, the critical investigation of a principle of Judgement in these is the most important part in a Critique of this faculty. For they do not by themselves contribute to the knowledge of things, yet they belong to the cognitive faculty alone.

Because it determines the form of cognition, Kant sees the role of aesthetic judgement as bridging a 'chasm' between the theory of reason and the avowal of a supersensible agent of free will (*CoP*: 5202; Rohlf 2014). But the key to understanding the purposiveness of this bridging function lies in aesthetic judgment's purposelessness: its 'non-conceptuality…its non-cognitivity, its non-lawfulness, and its essential relation to feeling and pleasure' (Ameriks 2003: 306). I address these tenets below as they can be considered under the central term 'nonobjective' aspects of cognition. The main thrust I emphasise here is the nonobjective relation to 'feeling and pleasure', and the way in which a non-conceptual aesthetic 'symbol' of a 'moral infinite' pertains to 'the fundamental shape of reality' (Ameriks 2006: 221).

This 'fundamental shape' refers to a universal form of cognising reality.[89] But why is it important to accept that humanity is universally bound to certain limitations which ensure the 'morally infinite' and contingent nature of judgement? Primarily it is because Kant, through aesthetics, emphasises that true objectivity is found where humanity may be able to find agreement or, 'intersubjective validity' (Guyer 1997: 309). The idea of something being universally valid must consider the uniqueness of private and public senses and feelings (Guyer & Cohen 1982: 5).[90] Paul Guyer (1993: 14) writes that for Kant, philosophy can be 'fallaciously derived by attempting to use concepts of the understanding without corresponding evidence from sensibility'. Aesthetic judgment demonstrates a resistance to fallacy because its nonobjective faculties forbear 'reason's natural inclination to discover a kind of completeness in thought' (Guyer 1993: 14). This 'completeness' parallels the drive of objective reason toward attaining the zero-degree of thought or thing in itself that Lacan associates with a 'death'. 'Death' as a kind of 'completeness of thought' necessarily excludes intersubjective relativity, whereas features which we can agree upon provides a basis for objectivity (Carrier 1989: 344).

As described in Addendum A, the role of relating sensibility to understanding is ascribed by Kant to the imagination. Significantly, however, the imagination can also process concepts of practical reason by way of representations in the world which correspond to ideas of the noumenal self. On Kant, Guyer (1993: 39) writes that,

> These 'representations of the imagination' are called 'ideas' precisely because 'they strive after something lying beyond the boundaries of experience and attempt to approximate a representation of concepts of reason (intellectual ideas).'

[89] This 'fundamental shape' refers to a universal form of cognising reality which is the basis of much postmodernist criticism. Owens (1998: 67) encapsulates postmodernist 'deconstruction' as being aimed at undermining the 'authority' by which Kant claimed that there are universal grounds 'deep-seated and shared alike by all men' which he sees as a representational system of the West, and which, furthermore, is 'constitutive [of the] male subject'. I contend that Kant's idea of universality is the least satisfactory object for deconstruction, even if it is infected with the bestial versions of Freudian desire. Kant never stipulates the content of beauty even if he may use 'common-sense' or Western examples of its form, such as a rose or historical artefact (*CoR*: 2045; *CoP*: 16267). Form cannot define a male subject himself (it would then be a male object), however, it *can* lead to ultimately discriminatory thinking on a hierarchical basis of gendered positions and race. This is because form can lend itself to contingent understandings of social relations: Kant's own objective in this sense. That it is open to both negative and positive meaning and actions is one of Lacan's contributions to the debate.

[90] I neglect discussing Kant's notion of 'taste' in this regard. The notion of 'taste' has been misrecognised in many contemporary art discourses as an elitist sophistication of aesthetic perception. However, Kant's determination of 'taste' involved what one considers today in terms of a society's 'culture' or characteristic language and cultural output, and therefore was a term considering the collective 'subjective conditions' that need to be in place in order to recognise different modes of satisfaction in aesthetics (Petock 1973: 183). For the purposes of contemporary painting, I feel that 'taste' now has too many superfluous connotations to be successfully rejuvenated.

There are therefore three crucial functions of imagination that occur in relation to the supersensible ground, or the attainment of its conceptualisation, in aesthetic judgment. One is that the imagination in its non-cognitive qualities seems to resist a complete or conclusive grasp of the object. Two is that the imagination also provides the motivation to 'strive' to achieve an internal representation which amounts to the noumenality of reason. In both these ways, the subject in judgment is witness to the 'free play of imagination and understanding' triggered by the object of beauty (Allison 2001: 49). Third, this dual activity is driven by the imagination as an aesthetic faculty. Cohen and Guyer (1981: 6) designate the capacity of the 'spontaneity of feeling' to conform to concepts in reason as a 'sign of the aesthetic itself'.[91] As noted, the governing source of this aspect of imagination is 'an essential relation to feeling and pleasure', or 'an immediate reference to the feeling of pleasure or pain' (Ameriks 2003: 306; *CoJ*: 17263). In aesthetic judgment therefore, it seems that the nonobjective qualities of the imagination dominate a reflection on reason and morals.[92] Furthermore, the imagination in Kant bears a strong resemblance to the paradoxical function of desire Lacan develops from Freud's notion of the unconscious that I have discussed in chapter 2.2.

Derrida also indicates the presence of desire and the unconscious driving judgement. His elaboration of Kant's 'parergon'– Kant's structure or framing of the role of judgment in aesthetic experience – is focused on the multiple levels of distortion and difference the imagination may be seen to cause for the frame of *reason* (1987: 46). The imagination and understanding become 'logical functions' in the analysis of reason and morals, but the 'truth in painting', for Derrida (1987: 69), reveals that both reason and morals find their bridging principle or foundation in an inquiry giving emphasis to the 'non-logical' aspects of pleasure. Further, Derrida (1987: 43) deploys a Freudian notion of pleasure to undercut the harmonious synthesis of these already nonobjective qualities. He is concerned to show how the 'spontaneity' of feeling and imagination is a demand arising from a conflict between language

[91] Hannah Ginsborg (2008: 65) contends that while Kant combines a 'conceptualist' and a 'non-conceptualist' logic in judgment, judgment can nonetheless eventuate in a conceptual role which is given to the rational mode of the understanding. Therefore, the 'primitive character of perceptual experience' leads to the deduction of categories and is not an unstable variant of subjective processes. This question is, however, held 'under erasure' in Derrida (1987: 322), and is ultimately indeterminable.

[92] Robert Kauffman (2000: 712) contends that the sign of the aesthetic as such is misrecognised by much contemporary theory which understands the demand for universal agreement as a 'coercive mandate' which enforces a singular (white male) subjectivity. But for Kauffman, the question of universal agreement instils 'flexibility' or 'conditionality' on the framework. The requirement for agreement between persons exists in order to waylay direct identification with an object, which leads to forms of 'fanaticism'. Rather, the non-conceptual structure provides a productive 'aporia' or 'impasse' which precludes any notion of force or coercion in the sphere of judgment.

and desire: the demand for 'spontaneity' or 'non-conceptuality' reveals the signifier's inadequacy or lack of full meaning (1987: 36). This internal non-relation is the 'truth' that painting reveals about perceptions of external reality.[93]

I focus on parts of Derrida's book which approach Kant's notion of pleasure more directly. This is most evident in Kant's description of 'disinterested pleasure' as a feeling which is '"entirely-other"' because it recedes from direct libidinal satisfaction (Kant in Derrida 1987: 47). For Derrida, this presence of a 'pure outside' of embodied experience, in disinterested pleasure, takes on the function of the signifier: its lack of embodied content indicates that a negation has taken place, a negation which nevertheless provokes a particular kind of synthetic pleasure.[94] The question of pleasure also indicates his own compulsion in writing the book: without this 'entirely-other' model of pleasure occurring, discourse on art (or any other topic) would have no need to happen either:

> And yet there is pleasure, some still remains; *there is*, *es gibt*, *it gives*, the pleasure is what *it gives*; to nobody but some remains and it's the best, the purest. And it is this remainder which causes *talk*, since it is, once again, primarily a question of discourse on the beautiful and not only of a discourse supposed to happen accidentally to the beautiful (1987: 48).

In another essay, Derrida (1981: 7) affirms Kant's assertion that the notion of aesthetic judgement distinguishes itself as a form of freedom insofar as it requires a specific pleasure outside of the normal meeting of needs, such as hunger. Even further, this question of pleasure as disinterested negates even subtle satisfactions: for Kant, this is because there is little basis for agreement in the 'sensual pleasures', which are bound to an object's 'causal' properties, i.e., the flavour of a fruit (Ameriks 2003: 295). Disinterested pleasure is still a sensation-dependent exercise but it is more purely subjective because it does not rely on objects which cause a need or demand for its material properties, and thus the objects do not 'resemble' the

[93] Derrida (1987: 155) defines his interest in this difference and cohabitation of the qualities of the signifier in terms of a vital difference evoked in painting: 'As for painting, any discourse on it, beside it or above, always strikes me as silly, both didactic and incantatory, programmed, worked by the compulsion of mastery, be it poetical or philosophical, always, and the more so when it is pertinent, in the position of chitchat, unequal and unproductive in the sight of what, at a stroke [*d'un trait*], does without or goes beyond this language, remaining heterogeneous to it or denying it any overview. And then, if I must simplify shamelessly, it is as if there had been, for me, two paintings in painting. One, taking the breath away, a stranger to all discourse, doomed to the presumed mutism of "the-thing-itself" restores, in authoritarian silence, an order of presence. It motivates or deploys, then, while totally denying it, a poem or philosopheme whose code seems to me to be exhausted. The other, therefore the same, voluble, inexhaustible, reproduces virtually an old language, belated with respect to the thrusting point of a text which interests me.'

[94] By deploying Freud, Derrida sought in much of his practice to unearth the system of signifiers which reveal a metaphysical factor as the work of desire (Roudinesco 1995). Derrida himself defines this aspect of the signifier as the 'arche-trace,' which is related to the non-identical aspects of language and its object, but which seems to have transparent meanings (Spivak 1976: xviii).

sensation felt (Ameriks 2003: 303). Disinterested pleasure ensures 'freedom' because the spectator is able to represent and contemplate the sense of beauty in her mind, rather than be immured in the fact of an object's existence. The subject is thus able to exercise transcendental judgment in heightened ways, being in neither a fully subjective nor objective state. Ruth Leys (2000: 125-6) briefly discusses the question of such a notion of disinterest by referring to psychoanalyst Sandor Ferenczi's deployment of Arthur Schopenhauer. Schopenhauer's philosophy was in large part focused on a critique of Kant, and he evaluated the notion of disinterested pleasure as an 'absorption' with form so that the ego disappears and the subject can enact a state of replete single-mindedness: 'The original wish is: nothing should exist that disturbs me, nothing should stand in my way' (Leys 2000: 126).

While Kant did not appeal to a loss of ego that might mirror a state of absorption and 'replete single-mindedness', he saw value in how the pleasure given by a certain disengagement with direct interest can ultimately offer the basis for intersubjective agreement.[95] Pleasure as such is then subject to a form of 'reflective judgment' which everyone is universally capable of making. The notion of reflective judgment is opposed to the normal objective cognitions of 'determinate judgements' (Burnham 2015: Online). As noted, it does not require there to be an external object by which one should measure the objective accuracy of the cognition, because one is reflecting on the mind-dependent form of the cognition of the object.

Ginsborg (2014) states that aesthetic judgment as a formal reflection of representation to the self is thus the very 'ground of pleasure'. Derrida (1987: 46) characterises this pleasure as an 'inexistent subjectivity arising on the crypt of the empirical subject and its whole world'. However, his suggestion that there is a death of the empirical and the embodied implicit to disinterested pleasure is also what provokes the presence of the 'remainder' in the discursive framework of judgment. In other words, the notion of disinterested pleasure contains a remainder because it recognises and affirms a space where embodied pleasure is recognisably lacking.[96] Derrida (1987: 56) suggests that Kant's recognition of this lack in judgement mirrors

[95]Writes Kant (*CoJ*: 17941), 'We may see now that in the judgment of taste nothing is postulated but such a universal voice, in respect of the satisfaction without the intervention of concepts; and thus the possibility of an aesthetical judgment that can, at the same time, be regarded as valid for everyone. The judgement of taste itself does not postulate the agreement of everyone…it only imputes this agreement to everyone, as a case of the rule in respect of which it expects, not confirmation by concepts, but assent from others.'

[96] The 'pure cut' between the existence of an object with ends, and the perception as disinterested and therefore purposeless, reveals for Derrida an origin which is instantiated in an 'absolute interiority' (1987: 114). This cut between internal and external have the paradoxical effect of 'suspending the relation' by putting them 'in the relation of nonrelation' (1987: 100). Something of both gets reproduced, in other words, which keeps on distending back to a common denomination of subjective form (1987: 117).

the transcendental ideal where objects as things in themselves are necessarily lacking. Derrida therefore explores an indeterminable border upon which he implies that the unconscious is the root cause of signifying experience, both of lack and pleasure, in aesthetic judgment as well as judgments made elsewhere.

Derrida (1987: 64) finds the potentially unconscious motivation of disinterested pleasure in Kant's singular focus on form at the expense of matter. In that sensuous matter holds the risk of inciting a libidinally-invested desire for the object outside of pure aesthetic contemplation, it was deemed by Kant as 'bad' and extraneous to pure forms of judgement. However, the separation of form and matter creates a binary set of terms which is still deployed in contemporary conceptions of art. As Derrida writes, the object which seems lacking is provided with a 'conceptual schema' which instantiates a naturalised set of values:

> It suffices to associate the rational with the formal, the irrational with matter, the irrational with the illogical, the rational with the logical, to couple the whole lot to the subject-object pair, in order to have at one's disposal a *Begriffsmechanik* [conceptual schema] that nothing can resist (1987: 65).[97]

The business of framing these divisions for the role of judgment, or the aesthetic 'parergon', is described in Kant as '*Nebensgeschäfte*' or a 'secondary task' of interpretation in relation to the aesthetic object (Derrida 1987: 56). Yet, as Derrida asserts, this framing is in fact not a 'secondary task' at all, but also constitutes the structure of the object of contemplation itself.

Derrida's close examination (1987: 63) reveals that the real function of the parergon actually confuses the boundaries between what an object consists of and what supplies it with its discursive frame for interpretation. Significant to my interest in painting and *das Ding*, he suggests that these discursive concepts for understanding the experience of beauty have instituted a standard of objectivity which parergonally constructs not only the system of judgment as a 'pure cut' from the body, but then determines the nature of this cut in what lies 'beyond' the frame of experience (1987: 114). The substance of the 'remainder', or metaphysical element of the supersensible, lies within the subject of language, but is claimed as a 'trait' of the painted surface (1987: 4). Implicit in his deconstruction of aesthetic judgment

[97] As Derrida (1987: 69) works to reveal, the crucially mimetic faculty operative in Kant's aesthetic judgement is that it resembles Kant's deduction of categories in the understanding of reason. In both of Kant's models, twelve aspects of cognitive experience are tabulated. In the understanding, the categories provide concepts or rules contouring the imagination. In aesthetic judgment, these concepts become 'logical functions' for analysis.

in painting is that the property or 'trait' of this 'pure cut' is also imposed on other bodies and objects beyond the subject of painting.

The parergon thus has the effect of being a 'violent imposition which falls aggressively upon the thing' (Derrida 1987: 67). However, describing this as 'violence' is not a direct attack on Kant's parergon, as it may have an analogous function to something violent and strange at the heart of the subject. This reflection of external representations as a discursively encoded property of the self holds significance because it is based on Kant's assertions for moral behaviour: that the viability of judgment as a faculty or moral subjective orientation 'theorises… the grounds of democratic possibility for newly conceived and constructed socio-political arrangements' (Kauffman 2000: 713). Derrida can be said to be performing the way in which Kant's text illuminates (or sublimates) the matter of private and public ethical conflicts by highlighting the weight Kant gives to his evaluation of the object of judgement – the 'object' here being the signifying function of the imagination and the understanding – the contingency of which finds its meaning in heightened instances of pleasure or pain. In Derrida, the contingency or '*différánce*' of the relationship is now unconsciously driven, and is thus not harmoniously synthetic nor spontaneous. Like Lacan, Derrida implies that the projection of these 'traits' on a 'beyond-of-the-signified' or a 'pure outside' of beauty in subjective experience may contain a wish for transgression. The notion of freedom that is embodied in the experience of aesthetic judgement is therefore both problematized and affirmed by Derrida in *The Truth in Painting* as always already dependent on the operation of difference of the signifier and thus not as 'free', according to a Freudian schema of pleasure, as desired. This is the nonobjective basis of intersubjective validity for Derrida.

Das Ding as Representation in Painting

It is suggested in Derrida's deconstruction of Kant that the ideal difference between appearances and things in themselves is driven by an essential non-relation already embedded in judgment. Thus, a non-conceptual schema which divides form from matter is predicated on a subject-object relation which reflects the contingent and permeable limit between rational and irrational desires (Derrida 1987: 65). This reflection of subjectivity is deployed as a mode of interpretation where the tension between two poles of representation, language and the mute materiality of surface, is contrasted. The domination of a

supersensible concept by imagination (see pgs. 71-2) and its representation of pleasure and pain not only shape the painted surface, but may be said to develop a 'fundamental shape of reality' or universal ground for intersubjective agreement (Ameriks 2006: 221; Guyer & Cohen 1982: 5). The formal framework also privileges experience rather than the object, but again this experience is delimited by Kant in ways which can reveal, for later philosophers, the unconscious ground of discourse and reason shaping objects themselves. Some paintings can be seen as representing these schemas as a nonobjective quality of surface.

According to Lacan, the workings of the unconscious is what art in general demonstrates – but this form reflects a modern experience pervaded by the painful cut from the body. In brief, if the painterly articulation of the signifying form of *reason* is emphasised as governed by a non-relation that is acute in its transgressive potential, it can make the allegorical, metaphorical 'death' of the internal *Thing* ever-more pronounced. But this is not pictorial: it occurs in representational relationships. Furthermore, art demonstrates that there is an uncrossable distance to *das Ding*, constituted by the conceptual frame of art production and interpretation. The articulation of this distance is the way in which *das Ding*, as the unrepresentable, comes to be represented in painting. In this section, I add more detail to Lacan's theory of affective artwork, before progressing to a more practical analysis of this theory in Greenberg's criticism in chapter 2.4.

While Kant emphasizes synthesis in the relations of different faculties, Lacan emphasises the 'distance' these set of relations have to external reality, as a mirror of the 'distance' to the internal Real of *das Ding* (De Kesel 2009: 82, 92). To reiterate Kant's argument: aesthetic judgment offers a space where we might take pleasure in reflecting on both the complexity of our cognitive capacities and the internal horizon at which the subject finds her limits of understanding. At this inscribed curve, one bears witness to a beyond of human experience. If this space beyond experience was defined as unknowable in Kant's historical period,[98] Kant wrote that it is yet potentially open to the practice of moral reason. Insofar as one has recognised the autonomy of science, these laws might represent the noumenality of self, and as such correspond to the objects in nature and the external world which we ourselves have

[98] Much theory in ecology and human sciences works with the apocalyptic notion that science has captured every living subject and subject matter to the extent that nothing is left to keep sacred or untouched. The literature is so large as to not require a full reference list but the thrust of the thinking is clear: the result of scientific domination is that we and the ecology are vulnerable to the authorities who have control over science and its developed weaponry and pesticides. Below I discuss this as a psychoanalytic aspect in Lacan, who asserts that the most fundamental core of the psyche remains untouched by science, but is all the more dangerous for that.

constructed. We can act in freedom, in other words, because we are conscious of the supersensible ground of our rational limits.

This form of reflection on freedom and limits is recognisable by the disinterested pleasure it provokes in us. Leader (2002: 48) describes the notion of disinterested pleasure as having its roots in religion: whereas once sacred images would manifest a revelation of God, more modern theories of art propose that a similar feeling of revelation attends the art object which does not rely on its use-value, but rather is embodied within its autonomous objecthood. Lacan affirms the condition by which self-representation becomes a matter of transference to the formal construction of objects. Like Kant, he insists that the horizon constituted within the subject can be conceived as an unconditioned ground that is Real, and not only a contingent function of the signifier, as Derrida would have it.[99] According to Lacan, however, religion remains formative in how the Real of *das Ding,* the Real as a traumatic entity, is represented, and ultimately, how this representation causes pleasure.

The fundamental structure of religious belief also characterises how intellectual inquiry forms its object (SVII: 170). While this may be a controversial claim from the perspective of science, Lacan follows Freud in thinking religious belief in terms of myth. Introducing the concept of myth helps to illustrate how knowledge production has been designed according to a law of language which ensures an inalienable split between nature and culture. Science refuses to take invisible or enigmatic phenomena as its object, and constructs a view of reality solely on the side of identification with laws articulating objectivity. In primary ways, Lacan says, reason has not strayed from a religious structure which is based in a rigorous division between the sphere of observable phenomena that is deemed to hold proof of existence, and a realm which is tangible in its absence – for example, strong emotions and fantasy life, the origin of which Lacan posits as the Imaginary.[100] Where once absence was assigned value and power precisely because of its absence, in science it is negated as having untestable features which do not bear examination. These values do not change the fundamental structure of presence and absence. Lacan (SVII: 167) characterises both cultural forms as implying 'the death of God'. Whereas

[99] Lacan and Derrida were in famous disagreement over the symbolic function of the signifier: the matter of its scope as marking something transcendental or supersensible within the subject, or as informing and constructing the *idea* of a transcendental signifier purely through the difference and similarity internal to signification as a whole (Johnson 1977: 457). I tend to think that the difference of opinion is nominal: neither Lacan nor Derrida give this ultimate signifying space any content, and the ideological result of this emptiness is one they agree on: power structures tend to be hierarchically imbalanced and people tend towards violence.

[100] As Addendum B explains, In *Seminar VII*, this split is theorised as originating at the indeterminable and hollow spectre of the mother's body, the vaginal orifice symbolising the duality of presence and absence.

this death is recognised as a powerful absence within belief, in science it is purely negated in a state that Lacan calls 'unbelief' (SVII: 131). Yet he insists that, as in Freud, negation points to its other lying beneath the surface of unbelief: it is reproduced in the realm of the psychical Real, as a noumenal 'remainder', *das Ding*. As perceived by Kant, moral duty is enacted on the external real as a practical form of reason. For Lacan, so are its negated aspects, here perceived as the origin of violence and trauma. The extremities of moral duty and violence are intertwined with judgment and its nonobjective forms – the pleasure and reality principles – and are characterised as following a track around *das Ding* (Boothby 2004: 208).

Kant's notion of aesthetic experience is therefore posited as having a proximity to *das Ding* because it reflects on nonobjective pathways in the subject. Lacan's notion of aesthetic sublimation is equally aimed at considering the operation of judgment, but is put in the service of representing something he asserts has developed into a modern source of trauma. The epistemological grounds of reason, as embodied in freedom of will, reaches its apex in the spectre of nuclear apocalypse:

> Confront that moment when a man or group of men can act in such a way that the question of existence is posed for the whole of the human species, and you will then see inside yourself that *das Ding* is next to the subject. You will see that you will beg the subject of knowledge who has given birth to the thing in question – the other thing, the absolute weapon – to take stock, and you will wish either that the true Thing be at that moment within him (in other words that he not let the other go or, in common parlance, 'let it all blow up') or that we know why (SVII: 105). [101]

The notion of *das Ding* is therefore tied to a question of ethics: the question of knowing 'why' the law of the symbolic realm manifests and sustains the categorical imperative of splitting the subject between her pleasure and her desire. Further, why does this constraint, having become the law of science, seem to provoke ever greater ways in which to be destructive or experience pain? Complexity is established because the 'why' *itself* is posited in the inaccessible space of *das Ding*. As Lacan (SVII: 124) says, 'The Thing is involved insofar as it is defined by the fact that it defines the human factor – although, as we know, the human factor escapes us'.

Psychoanalysis, according to Lacan, does not aim to provide a final resolution of the question. Analysis is geared towards the analysand achieving self-representation of only the difference

[101] As discussed in previous sections, Kant's insistence on the autonomy of the subject who acts according to the moral freedom of her own noumenal self explicitly detaches the material and desirous character from moral behaviour. However, Lacan insists that the progress of modern history provides evidence of the inextricability of desire, and thus the possibility of transgression, from ethical behaviour.

and the tension he experiences between his conditioned pleasure and unconditional desire, and hopefully learning to stop enacting this tension in the real world (De Kesel 2009: 166). Artworks are a form of sublimation because they are an appropriate way in which a visual, material and linguistic definition of this 'factor' can be seen to be enacted on the real. In analogous ways to Freud's hypothesis of organic and mechanic principles, some art creates the conditions where society may see how the nonobjective judgments in psychic reality cuts into and deforms the world of objects.[102] But artwork is not a reflection of the signifier: Lacan's definition of sublimation (SVII: 112) is that 'it raises an object to the dignity of a Thing'. An art object offers Real dimensions of pleasure by enacting the abstract schema of the drives always encircling *das Ding*, inscribing both its presence and absence (SVII: 95).

Lacan therefore makes death, the death of excessive libidinal enjoyment, a central aspect of why an artwork remains pleasurable and doesn't depict objects of pure trauma per se. Here, there is an affirmation of the Kantian preference for form over matter: for the primary affirmation of a 'fence' initiated by the form of judgment the pleasure and reality principles augur. Lacan emphasises the embodiment of this form of judgment – a negation of matter or things in themselves, and an emphasis on the nonobjective structure in the subject of cognition – as creating the conditions for the pleasurable aspects of art, but also its ethical function. For Lacan (SVII: 239), 'the function of the beautiful' is precisely concerned with appearance rather than things in themselves. This assertion of an object as representing a primary aspect of

[102] Adorno's complex deliberation on certain artistic values that reflect the Kantian subject are also instructive here. Adorno's emphasis (1984: 176) on the 'patently unreal' or 'distorted' reality of idealism is what art seeks to imitate. This mimetic process ultimately makes a proposition about 'truth'. Yet Adorno (1984: 234) sees the object fundamentally and dynamically constructed as a non-causal representation that relates to Kant's concept of beauty. Construction and form is understood by Adorno as a mimetic process by which the artwork enacts Kant's formal conditions of the subject. Thomas Kuhn (2004) writes that Adorno therefore saw the modern artwork as the 'reverse image' of Kant's subject. Insofar as the object of aesthetics is to understand questions pertaining to objective perception, Adorno sees this qualification of the object of aesthetics as the most convincing aspect of Kant's critiques, because the artwork is the prime instance of an object which is mediated by the supersensible ground within the subject. 'The primacy of discursive logic' in Kant thus is predicated upon the significance of reason as an operation which 'grounds aesthetic objectivity *in* the subject, not replace objectivity *by* the subject' (my italics. Adorno 1984: 235). Artworks do not easily assimilate themselves to this logical operation insofar as they highlight the effects of reason on materiality. Writes Adorno (1984: 193), artworks 'are negative per se because they are subject to the law of objectification; that is, they kill what they objectify, tearing it away from the context of immediacy and real life'. This version of objectivity emphasizes a necessary process of 'repression' analogous to the notion of disinterested pleasure, which withdraws from immediate identification with matter and its sensuous libidinal values (Kuhn 2004: Online). However, it is in this way that the artwork emphasizes the transgressive 'other' of experience haunting the unconscious boundaries of an instrumental and reified culture. For Adorno then, the effects of centralising reason as immanent to aesthetic objectification points to art's value as autonomous from reality: the 'experience of reality' itself is reformed within the object, and thus embodies traumatic and repressed aspects of society (Adorno 1984: 236). As Adorno (1984: 164) writes, 'It is as if artworks were re-enacting the process through which the subject comes painfully into being.'

cognition serves to emphasise a primary separation or distance from things in themselves, while it may also provoke the sense of proximity to an internal noumenal thing which remains just out of reach. It is thus important for beauty to accentuate its appearance, the sheer and diaphanous 'lure' of its seductive surface. In this way, beauty embodies a final limit which 'intimates and stops desire' (SVII: 238).

As touched on in the first chapter of this section, the relation between appearance and thing in itself is most provocative in much modernist painting, because it becomes a complex interplay of values which insist on both the distance and proximity to something fundamental, to the thing in itself, as either inside or outside of subjective judgment. This is where Lacan is most instructive, if the operation of difference between appearance and thing in itself is thought about in terms of the psychological Thing as the original place of this division. Lacan's psycho-somatic reference to 'the death of God' is structured upon the inexorable split from an origin defined as the vaginal orifice. Lacan positions this 'eye of God', the religious sublimation of desire, on the abyssal gap whereby pleasure is refused its transgressive potential for incest. The law confirmed by religion makes this split (patriarchally) incisive, and as such, determines the field of self-representation within a horizon that is doubly negated on the site of forbidden incest *and* a forbidding God. Lacan (SVII: 115) describes the structure of artistic practice embodying the Christian notion of creationism, 'creation ex nihilo' in this way. He thus lifts the production from the transcendent fingers of God, and places the operation firmly within the reproductive schema of the imaginary and the signifier, reproduced in terms of the presence and absence, pleasure and pain, that artworks offer. Self-representation then involves the reflexive act of the (polymorphously-perverse) self, creating in the place of God. As Lacan (SVII: 121) says in regards to the logic of creation ex nihilo, 'The fashioning of the signifier and the introduction of a gap or a hole in the real is identical.'

If art is to provide a sublimation which can be intersubjectively affective, both imaginary and symbolic forms of representation are required. An artist works on the site of the 'representatives of representation' because she enacts in materiality what precisely is doubly removed from the insensible aspects of matter (SVII: 102). On a general level, sublimation involves representing the intensification of the imaginary elements of desire, which are not given over to direct representation of *das Ding* but evolve in a thicker substrate of detour and delay. I posit this form of play as resembling what Kant meant by the 'free play' or spontaneity triggered by the imagination. For Lacan (SVII: 99), these qualities are vested within the object and as such

'colonise the field of *das Ding*'. He says that it is at this initial point where society is able to 'find a space of relaxation' – he mentions 'designers of dresses and hats' – in that it can 'delude' itself of the presence of *das Ding*. This delusion manifests pleasure as a purely imaginary 'veil' or 'lure' (SVII: 118).

In some art however, the status of *das Ding* as 'fundamentally veiled' is also predicated on the principle which delimits reality as something cut off from desire:

> That is why the spheres [of *das Ding*] are defined thus; it always presents itself as a veiled entity…the second characteristic of the Thing as veiled [is that] it is by nature, in the refinding of the object, represented by something else (SVII: 118).

The 'second characteristic' is the space where appearance is doubly removed from its origin in matter, and delivered as the final objective cut whereby the self-reflexive medium is raised to signifying the condition of the Thing. The convention that is deployed delimits representation by making it a representation of 'something else': that of the cut from the psychical Real. It consummates the way in which the non-relational, purely absent element of *das Ding* is unavailable (De Kesel 2009: 166). Sublimation thus consists of revealing the complex act of negation that takes place in the cognition of experience. A general summary of sublimation Lacan (SVII: 119) offers in this regard is that 'an object, insofar as it is a created object, may fill the function that enables it not to avoid the Thing as signifier, but to represent it'.

Sublimation offers pleasure because it deals with the borderline between Imaginary and Real desires.[103] In theory, this can occur where an artwork deploys the veil-like or delusionary aspects of imaginary forms, but also emphasises the decentring or distancing effects of these forms on things in themselves. In sublimation, one is made aware that a non-relation, something

[103] I recapitulate the function of the anamorphosis and its correspondence to Kant's function of the imagination in judgment to explain this shift in emphasis, which I see as exemplary in Greenberg's analysis of modernist painting. The anamorphosis and Kant's notion of how imagination functions in judgment reveal both the death and pleasure involved in aesthetic experience: death as a sign that certain libidinal desires are repressed, and that a synthetic, disinterested pleasure displaces and replaces Real desires. In both an anamorphosis and the hypothetical structure of aesthetic judgment, a space or gap creates the conditions where a viewer may reflect upon the causality of the relationships between different representations. However, this gap between construction and effect removes identification of the cause, or the content of the cause, from the viewing experience. This veiling of an embodied or real cause of experience functions less to exclude or puzzle the viewer than it lays stress on how a judgment comes into being: it engages the imaginary and nonobjective processes of perception within the viewing subject him/herself. The 'second characteristic', which cements this shift from the delusionary 'lure' of surface to a representation provoking the imagination and desire, is that a weight is given to the processual relationship between form and meaning: the mirroring function of an anamorphosis doubles as a mirror of the viewing act itself. This doubling of process, as a distance between cause and product, raises 'an object to the dignity of a Thing' (SVII: 112).

'entirely other', is playing a role in grounding perception: it is driving the search for meaning (Derrida 1987: 47; Lacan SVII: 118).

To me, the conventions of modernist painting creates potential metaphors of the medium that can characterise the psychic cut or gap, and therefore reveal a fundamental character of the search for the meaning or nature of this non-relation to *das Ding*. The cause of pleasure in modernist painting is that it provokes the distance from external reality by firstly asserting a certain noumenality or autonomy of surface, and secondly, thus affirms form as an internal condition of judgment. As I argue, modernist painting makes an object of distance itself. This objectification of a distance to reality becomes a signal of pain in postmodern art. In this way, modernist painting's stress on autonomy, and the echoes of this autonomy in contemporary painting, remain significant sources of its value in interpretation.

I would therefore like to further elucidate the development of the relationship with the 'creation ex nihilo' of both pleasure and death in considering some aspects of Greenberg's criticism. As I will discuss, a characterisation of modern reality is crystallised in his formal criticism insofar as his approach shapes the metaphors associated with medium-specificity, an element I develop further in chapter 2.5 as the representation of the signifier of *das Ding* in Mary Wafer's paintings. I argue that many subsequent modes of artistic representation are shot through with the remainders of Greenberg's incisive approach. To me, his discourse has enabled a development which may be representative of a conceptual logic of trauma as it reveals the weight of signification and its pure cut from *das Ding*.

2.4 Clement Greenberg and the Ethics of Distance

Although Greenberg was not single-handedly responsible for the canon of modernist art, he laid emphasis on some key aspects of Kant's critique of reason and aesthetics which are often unconsciously assumed as an inexorable set of conditions in representation today (Reylea 2003: 5).[104] The 'rules' he put in place have been internalised even in practices which were developed in manifest resistance to his aesthetic perspective on experience and its relation to the physicality of surface.

These rules concern the following: Greenberg (1961: 5) focuses on nonobjective or abstract painting which he describes as 'in search for the absolute'. The search is all-important because it was never claimed to find its goal in a single painting or judgment. Rather, various 'discoveries' by certain modernist painters reveal the way in which historical values, or signifiers, construct the painted surface in ways which are less affective than defining the progression of painting as an object within a sphere of intellectual inquiry in general (Greenberg 1961: 50).

The 'object' can be defined as an embodiment of the contingency of transcendental judgment, because it establishes the conditions of relation between representations; again, rather than being an 'absolute' representation itself. In painting, these relations are often reduced to a material elaboration of, and even a confrontation with, the ideal difference between appearance and thing in itself, in order to establish the condition of this contingency as focal. In this way, they engage the question of human autonomy.[105] Greenberg (1961: 232) underscores autonomy as a positive value. Autonomy, in Kant's terms specifically, concerns the sensate and cognitive relations through which judgment comes to be enacted and experience of the world made

[104] Allan Sekula's postmodernist text *par excellence*, 'Dismantling Modernism, Reinventing Documentary (Notes on the Politics of Representation)' (1978), expresses the postmodern paradigm in ways which are difficult, if not impossible, to extricate from Greenberg's modernism, as this chapter sets out to demonstrate. Sekula (1978: 231) writes, 'Suppose we regard art as a mode of human communication, as a discourse anchored in concrete social relations, rather than as a mystified, vaporous, and ahistorical realm of purely affective expression and experience. Art, like speech, is both symbolic exchange and material practice, involving both the production of meaning and physical presence.' My emphasis on *das Ding* works to reveal the parallel with Greenberg's thought, as well as the metaphysical element in 'symbolic exchange' and/or 'material practice' itself, which pervades postmodern discourse.

[105] The apparent autonomy which Greenberg accords to the 'optical' experience of surface as the truth of its construction has been Krauss's (1986: 1; 1993: 7; 2011: 7) main criticism of him, and the starting point of her attacks. I intend to show that he may not always have been explicit about the difference, but that his writing is undergirded by a distance between his viewing position and the surface which is seen to embody and structure that difference, which is what makes his writing competent and convincing even today.

possible.[106] The central schema of Greenberg's thought thus yields a fairly rigid idea of the aesthetic, which assists me in analysing some tensions by which a productive logic of interpretation – from the perspective of a psychic real – can realise the spectre of *das Ding* in contemporary painting. This chapter does not therefore aim to define Greenberg's discourse as traumatic in and of itself, but explores how his reinterpretation of Kant concretises a relationship between a notion of beauty and *das Ding*. I explore how these relations produce a certain distance that is articulated according to the nonobjective processes discussed in terms of Kant and Lacan above. My contention is that modernist painting thus makes an object of distance itself. That postmodern representational practices circumscribe this distance with notions of 'death', underscore the ethical dimensions which makes Greenberg's nonobjective distance pertinent up to the present day.

Greenberg deploys aspects of Kant in order to subsume the painted surface in an objective frame which makes the '*Begriffsmechanik*' of rational form ultimate. In reference to Carolyn Jones (2004: 330) in chapter 2.1, I have argued that Greenberg's discourse can also be viewed as reducing the spontaneity of feeling, or the free play of imagination and understanding of an artwork, to the singular density of a hypothetical 'thing'. The 'Thing' (with a capital T, an internal object) is also highly evocative because Greenberg's emphasis on the nonobjective already elicits a *signifying* sense of embodiment in his interpretation, which is compatible with Derrida's illuminations of the basis for judgment. For example, Greenberg's (1961: 51) explanation of Cézanne's 'turning point' in painting rests on the painter's understanding of volume and depth, which is evident in 'the Old Master's' deployment of the 'members and joints of pictorial design' whereby 'the eye [is] led through a rhythmically organised system of convexities and concavities…[and] marshalled around points of interest'. One might construe these 'convexities and concavities' as 'rhythmic' 'points of interest' in terms of Melanie Klein or Freud's psychosexual 'part objects', such as the oral, anal, phallic and mammalian signals of embodiment. Greenberg's assertions on aesthetic judgment may indeed be appreciated more for their metaphorical value than for the immediacy of his perspective on painting.

In the terms I have explored in preceding chapters, his view of experience seems to play on a

[106] Peter Osborne (1992: 90) comments that 'The single most notable feature of Greenberg's criticism as a whole is the consistency of defence of certain basic principles for the interpretation of modern art, independently of variation over time in the judgments of specific artists and their works.' My argument is based on this notion, in that Kant's formal approach can be treated as a stable element, while the (nonobjective) content of a painting may change.

version of pleasure that is made acute by signifying the 'death' or amputation of certain imaginary embellishments which are not necessary for provoking the nonobjective qualities of 'reason' in painting. In these philosophical terms, Greenberg's criticism seems to be designed to emphasise and make concrete what I have called 'this side of the fence' of an aesthetic law, where quality is internally regulated by Kantian notions of the self, governed by a kernel of metaphysics that, as Lacan asserts, arises from a signifying split with the material body. These issues become embodied on the site of painting as 'medium specific', where painting analogously enacts the self-definition of its classification and historical frame. By making certain conventions of two-dimensionality and flatness a 'law', painting would for Greenberg make its status explicit, and define itself as a primary object similar to the noumenal object of reason. Form is in possession of 'itself' insofar as it has set the limits of materiality according to painting's own autonomy within the sphere of cultural practices, cut off from 'incestuous' associations with other mediums.

The Kantian method of judgment Greenberg performs is generally viewed as being expressly determinative of objective phenomena (Harris 2005: 41; Osborne 1992: 90). For this reason, it has been suggested by de Duve (1991: 156) that the objective logic of self-referentiality might paradoxically have led to practice exceeding its frame, to become real, as 'readymade' or found objects. This is because 'reason' is ultimately established in the realm of the symbolic as real: the linguistic nature or discursivity of concepts becomes the penultimate goal of art as seen by Greenberg. According to de Duve, the escalation of the drive for ever-more specific values of flatness, the paring-down of painting's expendable conventions in order to achieve an 'irreducible essence', forced Greenberg to reach a discomfiting 'borderline' where the question of 'what is still painting and what is no longer' is raised.[107] For instance, de Duve (1991:155) invokes Kazimir Malevich's *Black Square* (1915) as constituting a profound limit-case of painting so reduced to its bare technical support as to convey its availability for reproduction to anyone in an industrial era: an 'ideological consequence' which contradicts Greenberg's intellectual ambitions and thus one he avoided making mention of. The radical deconstruction of painting's conventions could thus be viewed as pressing on the borderline between painting and an ordinary object. And indeed, writes de Duve (1991: 157), this is precisely the logical outcome effected by Duchamp:

[107] Peter Bürger (1991: 4) claims that the 'border between art and the culture industry at large' has become the preeminent question of much art criticism.

> [Greenberg's] arguments end up localizing this [state of] being on the formal and technical qualities of an unpainted canvas, a readymade bought in a supply store! Why stop there, and why not accept calling Duchamp's urinal a painting?

It is Greenberg's obstinate refusal to admit that painting that is so intensively 'essentialised' becomes a merely 'nominal' exercise that leads de Duve (1991: 157) to write: 'What is at stake on the borderline between a readymade canvas and a readymade that is not a canvas is nothing other than the *name* of painting.' But in my view, this 'nominalism' was Duchamp's invention in response to modernist painting's affiliation, however finely nuanced, with aesthetic experience and pleasure.[108] In order to draw out what I see as Duchamp's true opposition to Greenberg, one may say in brief that Duchamp deconstructed the notion of art by exploding notions of aesthetic pleasure *tout court*:

> A point which I want very much to establish is that the choice of these readymades was never dictated by aesthetic delectation. This choice was based on a reaction of visual indifference with at the same time a total absence of good or bad taste…in fact a complete anaesthesis (Duchamp in Danto 2009: 5).

But if it were possible to explode taste and beauty, this happened only on the logical terms of pure mental abstraction and of the cut, on the site of a psychic Real which so detached, allows urinals into the picture frame. Possibly then, Greenberg instituted the idea of an optical transparency which, by negating the seduction and lure of illusionary veils, stimulated the search which found its opaqueness in what I am designating as the Thing. But while I discuss other writings by de Duve concerning Greenberg, at this point I simply wish to register my disagreement with de Duve when he suggests that Greenberg's logic as such can adhere to a purely discursive logic of reason. Rather, Kant's notion of the nonobjective elements structuring reason itself is keyed into Greenberg's judgement in ways which ensure that the remainders of beauty will contaminate postmedium practices that may have worked in resistance to his version of modernism.

If the postmodern avant-gardes pursued logical outcomes, it was in resistance to the 'non-cognitivity' that, I argue, Greenberg maintained in reference to the notion of aesthetic sensibility and intuition. The route is set through aesthetic *pleasure* - the finest slice - and its remainders construct the field of death and absence in contemporary painting. Certain pleasures slide through the goalposts and create a reason for being, an area of competence, that some

[108] Some of Duchamp's emphasis on the signifier will be referenced in the next section of this thesis for the way in which perverse desire, the other side of the fence, is made central to his inquiry.

painting continues to sustain.[109] This is conceptually reliant on Kant's transcendental argument for the self-consciousness of representation and difference. If the goalpost was left open for this slippage of pleasure, it is because the posts *also* yawn at the reduction of formal values to a view from a certain side of the fence: the horizon from which a notion of self is affirmed, but which, as such, is open to challenge and contestation. In my view, this is the place from which Mary Wafer comments on certain contextualised South African traumas regarding pleasure, freedom and death.

However decisive the clarity Greenberg offered to modern art may have been, his interpretative strategy is not immediately equal to offering solutions to moral questions.[110] The form of sublimation he offers reflects the impulse and impetus involved in daily decision-making, rather than being instructive about the outside world itself. Greenberg (1999: 73) asserts this difference as the generative aspect of all aesthetic practice and reception, and defines it as 'esthetic distance':

> 'Distance' here means detachment from practical reality, the reality we live in ordinarily, reality at large, the reality that's shot through with behaviour and consequences and information. Anything that reaches the stage of being, rather than just becoming a means to an esthetic result—that is, gets swallowed in the result— does so by being deprived more or less of its 'weight,' it's practical or theoretical specific gravity, in reality at large.

The consciousness of 'distance' between subject and external object is the fulcrum on which understanding the significance of the aesthetic in Greenberg depends. The aesthetic experience of art is different from reality in that it makes *an object of distance itself*, and is therefore not immediately subject to the vagaries of daily life which tend to obscure the processes and means by which things are brought to our attention. But aesthetics gives this distance a 'weight' or gravity which informs the pleasures and pains of real-world experience. Greenberg (1999: 73) words this notion in a way which elaborates disinterested pleasure: 'You detach yourself from yourself' when feelings and emotions are not directly felt as it were, but still experienced 'at a remove'. The assertion of this distance, then, means that the object, in particular the kind of definitions Greenberg would ascribe to the object, is not equivalent to reality: it is subject to an

[109] In his book *Kant after Duchamp,* de Duve (1996: 31, 59) suggests that while the categories of 'art' do become a 'nominal' exercise based on definition, it is not inconceivable that aesthetic judgment and the feelings it gives rise to remains a part of the consideration for much art in general.

[110] Joachim Pissarro (2006: 43) discusses how Greenberg's criticism is not engaged with the 'enthusiasms' or thrilling emotional affects of artwork, but is most dependent on a discerning notion of taste in which the objective 'truth' of art is revealed. The 'truth' thus functions as a maxim lucidly distinguishing what is 'good' and what is 'bad' art. For Pissarro (2006: 44), Greenberg's success can be measured by the public perception of truth-telling in art as being on the same level of surety gained from being taught between 'right and wrong'.

aesthetic enactment of the particular ways in which objects are only partially present to ideal cognition. Thus, aesthetic experience is divided by what is evaluated in the representational space and time of the experience, and the objects themselves as they are made up of matter. A non-relation (my characterisation), where the subject is aware of what Greenberg (1999: 74) calls the 'extra-esthetic status' of the physical object, is then logically present too. The value judgement is positioned on this fundamental non-relation, and therefore instantiates processes of critical perception and evaluation. The medium too is analogously located on a difference, now between its matter and how that material is manipulated towards various representations. Here, the weight of its value is in form, which is seen to stress this distance.

There is a distance to 'real' life which occurs on three interrelated platforms. The first distance is articulated by how Greenberg interprets transcendental judgment, which is based on emphasizing the Kantian modalities of intuition and understanding. The second relates to how the painted surface embodies the distance mentioned above as ideal: by reference to appearances and things in themselves the surface thus engages the modalities of judgment. The third is the nonobjective properties of the relationship between judgment *and* surface, which qualify the weight and gravity of distance, and what I conclusively construe as the 'cut' from the Thing in reference to Lacan's seminar (chapter 2.3). I discuss these platforms below.

For Greenberg (1999: 72), the aesthetic judgment is in and of itself immediate and decisive as far as the 'value' of the object is concerned, to the extent that the cause of a judgement is subsumed by its result. Both cause and effect are internalised to the same rational point by the experiencing subject. Thus Greenberg calls the value judgment a 'brute fact.' However, an autonomous subjective judgement is not simply separable from the significance it might hold for personal and social realities, even as, or rather because, it asserts the limitations of its powers. In fact, Greenberg's aesthetic programme very clearly set out to respond to a set of social conditions in the early twentieth century. He sees society at the time as engaged in 'Alexandrianism', a pedestrian mass culture of 'kitsch' based on mere pageantry (Greenberg 1961: 3). For Greenberg, industrialization has caused the loss of a specialised space of intellectual and aesthetic inquiry previously maintained by the 'elite' (1961: 8). The 'urban masses' have latched onto art and culture as a form of entertainment and fatuous consumption.

The notion of kitsch for Greenberg is based on the existence of artificial effects as forms which imitate great art, but never develop new strategies of representation (1961:10). However, it is not in the recreation of a superior ruling class that Greenberg sees the subversion of the

prevalence of kitsch, but rather in the 'avant-garde' forms of art which would sustain a specialised space of inquiry into judgment – art that he would describe as 'in search for the absolute' (1961: 5).[111]

In order for such art to 'detach' itself from the world of blindly seductive kitsch, it would need to literally 'abstract' itself from the exigencies of ideological and political entanglements, which themselves are prone to spectacle and 'violence' (Greenberg 1961: 4). The recourse to the abstract or 'nonobjective' would then sustain a space where culture is given room for judgment.[112] Greenberg calls the avant-garde an 'imitation of God' but goes on to articulate this imitation as an 'imitation of imitating' (1961: 7). Firstly, it seeks to imitate the formal qualities of historical painting. For him, this focus on historical form is the dynamic way in which a 'historical criticism of society' could be implemented, and open up 'new perspectives in bourgeois society' for 'artists opposed to the existing cultural order' (Greenberg in Osborne 1992: 91). Secondly, therefore, avant-garde art imitates in a double sense because it is so absorbed with form that it operates to reveal the process through which form comes about: it thus 'imitates process' too (Greenberg 1961: 15).

Greenberg describes the value of formal imitation in this regard by contrasting realist romantic studies of landscape with Picasso's form of painting. On one hand, the picture of a peasant surveying the landscape places the viewer in the depicted space of the peasant, so that there is little intuitive effort for the viewer to recognise the time or space of the peasant. Picasso's paintings however, require that the viewer approach the surface at a 'second remove' from identification because the medium only describes 'immediate impressions'. Greenberg sees the initially intuitive situation of viewership developing as a 'result of reflection'. But reflection is predicated on Picasso having engaged the 'cause' of impressions rather than their mere pictorial 'effect' (1961: 14). This 'cause' is based in the subjective condition of representation: it is predicated on the apprehension of intuition in the subject, rather than an encompassing

[111] Critics of Greenberg (Lucy Lippard [1973] has been primarily influential), see his elaboration of kitsch in opposition to forms which belong to an 'elite' as meaning he was concerned to preserve only a space of privilege. However, as his essay goes on to discuss, providing kitsch entertainment to the masses was a form of propaganda instituted in Nazi Germany as a form of political suppression (Greenberg 1961: 20). Preserving a space for intellectual inquiry separate from all others is seen by Greenberg as a mode of resistance and questioning.

[112] T.J Clark (1982: 140) views Greenberg's essay 'Avant-Garde and Kitsch' (1939) as articulating a modern desire 'to salvage something from the collapse of the bourgeois cultural order'. But Clark makes a complex proposal that Greenberg's criticism is Marxist in approach. He contends that Greenberg's assertion of modernist 'purity' and autonomy could be read as a 'practice of negation' which, from a social historical perspective, may be seen to hold 'metaphorical value' for modern conditions of industrialization, as I discuss in further reference to Clark's essay below (1982: 149).

overview of self and world in generalizable or stereotypical perspectives.

Greenberg (1961) distils the mimetic qualities of form in art in his foundational essay 'Modernist Painting'. His claim to Kantian logic is stated from the beginning: as he writes, 'Kant was the first real modernist'. As Kant revolutionised consciousness of the self, Greenberg sees painting as similarly emphasising the reflective schema of self-representation. The oft-quoted aphorism of Greenberg's modernism is that 'Each art had to determine, through its own operations and works, the effects exclusive to itself'. Thus the traditional classifications which signified the medium at hand, i.e. painting or sculpture, were the very conditions upon which self-representation was focused:

> It quickly emerged that the unique and proper idea of competence of each art coincided with all that was unique in the nature of its medium. The task of self-criticism became to eliminate from the specific effects of each art any and every effect that might conceivably be borrowed from or by the medium of any other art. Thus would each art be rendered "pure," and in its "purity" find the guarantee of its standard of quality as well as of its independence. "Purity" meant self-definition, and the enterprise of self-criticism in the arts became one of self-definition with a vengeance (1961).

Greenberg's notion of 'purity' aligns with aspects of Kant's attempt to designate certain laws of cognition which would enable a 'transcendental unity' whereby the noumenal self is defined. This 'law' gains its rigour and 'vengeance' from qualities analogous to the notion of an a priori, fundamental constitution of formal values separated from things in themselves. As noted, conventional historical categories of art instated the purely formal basis, or boundary-line, on which the conditions of representation would enact this sovereign and 'pure' autonomy. The 'selfhood' of painting is thus for Greenberg (1961) that it stresses its own 'ineluctable flatness'. The two-dimensional picture plane, which had previously functioned as a technical support for the illusion of depth, was nevertheless viewed as holding a certain 'integrity' by pre-modernist 'Old Masters'. As Greenberg contends, the prodigious modelling of illusionary space was successful because of an intentional contrast with its flat support. But in asserting flatness as the primary element of the picture, modernist painters invoke the process by which illusion comes about. In this way, aesthetic experience foregrounds what was always axiomatic about painting. The disclosure of these conditions is reflective of judgment insofar as painting has founded these delimitations within its own facture, self-critically.

Inasmuch as painting may then embody the intelligible ground from which aesthetic experience arises, it therefore also is aware of the drive for a limit at which it shifts into a merely physical, 'arbitrary object': 'the further back these limits are pushed the more explicitly they have to be

observed and indicated' (Greenberg 1961). Self-reflexivity in modernist painting thus requires that its limits are observed in both directions: as they extend to the viewer and as they are contained in its objecthood, a tensile exercise of consciousness embodied on the pure limit of surface as a potential noumenon.

Pissarro (2009) contends that Greenberg pushed the formal structure of reason to a metaphysical 'completeness' which Kant, in his assertion of the priority of 'appearances' over things in themselves, would have had a great problem with, as he did with the metaphysical tradition in general. For important reasons that I consider to be ethical, however, Greenberg could be said to have latched upon the way in which Kant may have been aware of necessarily including a metaphysical element of non-relation in his moral law (Allais 2010). As noted, qualifying the 'weight' and 'gravity' of this non-relational distance to the real requires reflection on the sub-rational, non-cognitive, purposeless faculties of intuition and imagination. The nonobjective synthesis of these qualities in intuition and imagination leads to consideration of the 'ground' of representation: one which is never fully determined, but nevertheless important to reflect upon.

I therefore firstly summarise some key thoughts about Greenberg's notion of intuition as examined by de Duve, but by translating them into the terminology of my thesis. De Duve (1996: 35) sees Greenberg's rule-based inquiry as forming a 'professional ethics of criticism' insofar as it strategically aimed at articulating his 'feelings' and intuitions. By determining the 'brute fact' of his judgment as immediate, the form of his writing is located on the border at which subjectivity translates into reflection on the objective conditions for intuition to come about (de Duve 1996: 34). De Duve explores the 'rule' as an operation of 'feeling and reflection' made objective, because the discursive form of Greenberg's writing articulates the experiential conditions of representation according to Kant's notion of an ideal synthesis between intuition and the categorical finality of understanding quality and value (1996: 17). This form of transcendental judgment 'particularizes' subjectivity according to an 'isolated' concern outside of the sphere of emotional affects (de Duve 1996: 102).[113] Objectifying subjective intuition, the nonobjective, does not rest on emotional factors or erratic

[113] De Duve (1996: 94) quotes extensively from Greenberg on this assertive division between psychology and epistemology, which I use as an example here: 'Aesthetic value or quality is affect: it moves, touches, stirs you. But affect here is not to be equated with anything so 'simple' as emotion; aesthetic affect comprehends and transcends emotion; it does that in being value and in compelling you to like it more or less, or not like it more or less. Value doesn't provoke emotion. Aesthetic value, aesthetic quality can be said to elicit satisfaction, or dissatisfaction, but this is not the same thing as emotion'.

'*Stimmungen*' or moods, Lacan says, quoting Freud (SVII: 26). In Greenberg, a focus on form alone deduces two aspects which come under a single coherent aesthetic judgement:

> A first judgment, aesthetic and perfectly intuitive, from which the desire to understand the work is born, and the same judgment, but in a form nourished by reflection, where the comprehension of the work attains conclusion (De Duve 1996: 25).[114]

For de Duve (1996: 92), this framework of synthetic relation is intrinsic to the 'heuristic value' of all of Greenberg's work. However, while the reliance on the immediate apprehension of intuition provides the governing distinction between good and bad, it is further the ground of aesthetic critique based in nonobjective principles which guarantee that the search never finds its 'absolute'. As I contend below, imagination too – as formal representation – constitutes the object of modernist painting as an unyielding, pleasure-based distance. Rosalind Krauss (1993: 246) quotes Greenberg on the '"hallucinated literalness"' of a painting which has achieved 'space as a total object'. As Krauss describes it, 'Instead of the illusion of things, we are now offered the illusion of modalities: namely, that matter is incorporeal, weightless and exists only optically like a mirage.' Krauss is critical of this supposition insofar as it implies a subject's critical mastery of the aesthetic object. But Greenberg's discourse, I argue, is the mediating factor through which the question of art 'grounds aesthetic objectivity in the subject, [and does] not replace objectivity by the subject' (Adorno 1984: 235). This mediation of experience has the effect of instilling the *sensibility* of the limit ever more sharply. Rather than mastering an object itself, mastery is constitutive of the autonomous self in experience, the pure cut as a condition of self, and reflects its synthetic pleasures.

> I don't have to accept Kant's particular designation of the mental faculties in order to find that the gist of what he says about the role of cognitive activity in esthetic experience is confirmed by my own experience. As I sense it, as I introspect it, the affect or pleasure of art (when it does give pleasure) consists in a "sensation" of exalted cognitiveness—exalted because it transcends cognition as such (Greenberg 1999: 9).

Of course, this 'exaltedness' is what is open to postmodernist deconstruction. The transitive logic within Greenberg's method inaugurated a certain 'truth' of painting: his criticism offered what Derrida (1987) calls the supplementarity of the parergon or frame. It enframes painting intuitively, yet it feels as if it is physically manifest by the painted surface.

[114] Paul Ricoeur's (1976: 72) notion of a 'Romanticist hermeneutics' applies to this distinction between intuition and reflection as being 'epistemological' and 'ontological'. Ricoeur's objective is to see the more 'indirect expressions of psychic life' which are internal to these models from a perspective that provides the conditions of the practice of psychoanalysis itself.

The experience as divided and bound on the limit of the plastic and the discursive is interesting because it makes conscious a fundamentally empty gap, the nonobjective 'sensation' where cognition 'transcends' its boundaries. This is a reckoning with modern experience, because the pleasure as 'exalted' or, equally possible, tainted with the traumatic, is thrust into question.

As I emphasize throughout this thesis, 'transcending cognition' or 'the empty void of *das Ding'* is a matter of the metaphorical value one appends to the structure of aesthetic experience. The decisive value is an ethical one, of which Greenberg's 'pleasure' is foundational, because I argue that it remains a structuring force. I elucidate this through an analysis of two arguments about the metaphorical value of his work. Greenberg's protégé Michael Fried (1982: 220) is at pains to separate the possibility of utterly negative absence from modernist painting. The medium, he writes, is not merely an idea demanding the rigorous reduction of values to a singular limit-case, but is positively sourced from within the material conventions of surface. I have discussed the significance of materiality in this regard, insofar as it formally stresses a 'platform' or concrete site upon which judgment takes place. Fried (1982) therefore criticises socialist art historian T.J. Clark's (1982) concept of modernism as a perpetual act of negation. Clark (1982: 148) opposes Greenberg's insistence that the avant-garde detaches itself from the ideological struggles of society and perform its work in an autonomous sphere of engagement. For Clark, the notion of 'medium' reflects precisely on capitalist society and the 'decomposition of the bourgeoisie' because it is engaged in a never-ending task of 'negation':

> Negation is the sign inside art of this wider decomposition: it is an attempt to capture the lack of consistent and repeatable meanings in the culture – to capture the lack and make it over into form (1982: 154).

This is in line with Greenberg: as noted above, Greenberg (1961: 8) explicitly expresses the view that industrialization had manifested a certain *loss* of a specialised space of intellectual and aesthetic inquiry previously maintained by the 'elite'. The examination of the historical development of this loss (this 'death' of the subjective) is paramount.[115] But Clark's development of Greenberg concerns the fact that a set of immanently discursive values facilitates the experience of painting in a 'complex act of meaning' which thus refers to the

[115] Greenberg asserts this loss or lack as a 'historical criticism of society' by writing, 'I have offered no other explanation for the present superiority of abstract art than its historical justification…there is nothing in the nature of abstract art which compels it to be so. The imperative comes from history, from the age in conjunction with a particular moment reached in a particular tradition of art. This conjunction holds the artist in a vice from which at the present moment he can escape only by surrendering his ambition and returning to a stale past…Abstract art cannot be disposed of by a simple-minded evasion. Or by negation. We can only dispose of abstract art by assimilating it, by fighting our way through it' (Greenberg in Osborne 1992: 91).

outside world in more strongly metaphorical ways (1982: 152). Notions like 'flatness', seen as 'metaphorical', thus refer to a range of values outside of aesthetic experience. Clark writes of the 'workmanlike' or industrial quality of flatness as one example of this.

Fried's stress on the 'conviction' of the painted surface as a set of material values remains valid if one views 'metaphor' from the Lacanian perspective of the body. Metaphor remains pertinent since it is a representation which does not signify the body as such, as much as it signifies the *relation of non-relation*, or the loss that occurs between a psychosomatic representation of materiality and *das Ding*.

I would therefore like to develop the question of the metaphorical raised by Clark to show that it works in parallel to the ultimate state of reflectiveness Greenberg espoused. Achieving what is undeniably a reflexive metaphor for the *imaginary* workings of mind, as I discussed above with reference to Picasso, is dependent on the representation of nonobjective and cognitive elements being worked synthetically, to a heightened degree of incurring a distance from reality. This distance becomes *real*, in that the painting's appearance manifests qualities which make it different from any other art and any other object in the outside world. And indeed much of this quality remains in painting practice that is abstract or nonobjective. It is a metaphor of the noumenal self. But the artwork cannot be strictly autonomous in this way because reflection, in Greenberg's writing, also inscribes this distance as *symbolic* of the dynamic relation between self and representation. In modernist painting, therefore, there is a denser metaphor at play which transcends Lacan's triadic divisions of the imaginary, symbolic and real. It is a metaphor of a modern condition, of nonrelation between the external real and the psychic Real of *das Ding*. The introduction of this distance *in* the space of the real continues in the discourses on other mediums and technologies of practice developed up to the current day.

I see the first of these developments occurring where 'minimalist' artwork drives aesthetic experience into a space that is heightened as real, rather than objectively ideal as espoused by Greenberg. Minimalism can be characterised in terms of Kant's moral directive of pain: Lacan's notions of death and pleasure are therefore acute here. The movement was an articulation of resistance which asserted a shift away from Greenbergian modernism and painting specifically, and formed the ground from which much postmodernist art would develop (Buchloh 1990: 108; Foster 1996: 36). As a practice in and discourse on art, it retained some relationship to notions of medium specificity that were perceived to be formalist in

Greenberg's sense, but resisted the sensorial and intuitive dimensions of modernism by stressing that form is subject to a conceptual notion of objects.[116]

For the minimalist sculptors, intensifying the terms in which medium specificity were conveyed largely negated the demand for the emphatic nature of 'flatness' as a necessarily two-dimensional, painterly practice. Greenberg (1961: 136) states that the flattened space of abstract painting has become coincident with the viewer to the extent that it has 'lost its inside and become all outside'. Minimalism attempts to make this conjecture even more 'real': [117]

> Three dimensions are *real* space... Actual space is intrinsically more powerful and specific than paint on a flat surface… Most works finally have *one* quality…in the three-dimensional work the whole thing is made according to complex purposes, and these are not scattered but asserted by *one* form. The thing as a whole, its quality as a whole, is what is interesting. The main things are alone and are more intense, clear and powerful. They are not diluted by an inherited format, variations of a form, mild contrasts and connecting parts and areas (Judd 1965: 4-5).

Minimalism can be said to be focused on one function of the anamorphosis: that of there being no causal resemblance between the object and perception. Therefore, a concern for the objective nature of materiality is held as distinct from the desires of the subject and his enveloping schemas. These sculptures were also seen as extensions or even realisations of abstract painting's aspirations. As in much abstract painting, illusion and expressivity were rejected as 'anthropomorphic': there was, in other words, a rejection of anything smacking of an imitation of emotional qualities (Foster 1996: 40). However, notions of the self and the works identity typified a concern for the material, embodied conditions of experience. In this respect, Judd talks about 'the objectivity [of] the obdurate identity of a material' (Judd in Fried 1967). The specificity of objecthood came about through an assertion of the decision-making process of the artist. As Judd (1965: 1) states, the work should only be composed in a 'part-by-part' structure and process of making. These assertions also become manifest in conventions of repetition and seriality, the rhythmic treatment of surface and a marked emphasis on form pared down to its most unified quality. The regulatory ideals of the subject are thus not recognised as a positive 'conviction' in the medium (à la Fried) but are emphasised as constructed. The 'crux' of the minimalist object was therefore the shift to a more

[116] Fried (1967) suggests that it was a practice that could be entirely 'formulated in words' and is critical of it on the basis that it could not be specific in purely formal terms. As I will discuss below, the invisible and discursive qualities of the practice were asserted because it pointed to the manifest emptiness of art and thus informed an institutional critique of aesthetic dogma in general.

[117]: Constructivist sculpture - Figure 24: Anthony Caro. 1962. *Early One Morning*.
Minimalism - Figure 25: Robert Morris. 1966. *Exhibition View*; Figure 26: Donald Judd. 1963. *Untitled*.

comprehensive notion of phenomenological experience as necessarily contingent on the stubborn opacity of objects (Foster 1996: 38). But these conceptions, which ultimately ran parallel with modernism, represented an emphasis on the thing-like quality of art by registering what Derrida (1987: 88) calls the 'death' inherent to the 'pure cut' between signifier and object.

In the Lacanian context, minimalism can be understood as an 'overvaluation of the object'. As Lacan (SVII: 109) says of Kant's noumenal subject of moral law, he is so detached from his pleasure that his objective action can only result in an experience of pain. Although the theoretical stakes of the minimalist project imply a significant opposition to the centrality of the human subject in Greenberg's interpretation, there remains the question of the value in this manifest 'distance', which I draw out below in regards to judging Wafer's minimalist paintings. The question of the spectator's judgement – in the face of a highly articulate and intellectually dense ideological contest on one hand and a severely reduced formal object on the other – is the question to whom, precisely, these works are addressed.[118] In the retrospective view enabled by more recent times, Charles Harrison (2001: 174-5) reflects that the minimalist trajectory of abstract painting into objecthood has conceivably resulted in a 'displaced spectator' who 'loses the will or the ability to function'.[119] Indeed, Greenberg (1961: 136) had already explored the 'certain sense of loss' in the encounter of a painting's 'backdrop' with its 'curtain': the literalness and frontality of the modernist surface now being coincident with the space of the viewer. He goes on to say that the sense of loss does not relate to recognizable imagery, but rather to the loss of 'spatial rights' offered by illusionism, in and through which the viewer can no longer 'escape' (Greenberg 1961: 134-5). The loss of the satisfactions of the veil in illusionist representational painting and sculpture is further elaborated by what Krauss (1986: 280) calls an 'absolute loss of place.' With the initial subtraction of the base originally given to traditional monumental sculpture, sculptural objecthood becomes 'functionally placeless' and 'nomadic.' Krauss forebodingly anticipates a trajectory of 'more and more negativity' that could eventually become a 'black hole in consciousness'.

However, minimalist form remains present in the contemporary art scene, as I will discuss with reference to Mary Wafer's work. If anything, the prevalence of painterly abstraction and sculpture has increased. One could surmise that the loss of meaning or identity it insistently

[118] Foster (1996: 68) asks whether 'the recognition of the conventionality of art and avant-garde alike – depend on the privileged perspective that advanced capitalism offers its culture for the first time in the 1960's'.
[119] Barbara Rose criticises minimalist art as not only 'disenchanted,' but as displaying an attitude of 'demoralization' (Rose in Crimp 1981: 70).

reproduces might be triggered by the last twenty years of technological development leading to a reinvigorated sense of a split between man and nature. A renewed interest in these forms is further a reflection on the spatial reification of experience resulting from the instrumentalised economy of human relations. While the trauma implicit to these conditions is evoked in terms of a viewing experience analogous to pain, I contend that painting simultaneously and necessarily also withdraws from positing its facture as real. Instead, it lays emphasis on the metaphorical value of objectifying a distance from the psychic Real of *das Ding*. In other words, it retains the modernist signifying qualities of the nonobjective drives which come to make an object of this distance itself. As such, it bears a relation to the autonomous pleasures of the subject in ways which articulate trauma as a contemporary condition of experience.

2.5 Painting Between Two Deaths: Wafer's Rigor

Wafer's work is instructive in showing how much critical contemporary painting is no longer so concerned with the conventional issues of subjective delectation, nor with attempting to objectify the metaphysical noumenon or 'truth' of painting. To discuss painting as being 'subjective', expressive, abstract or realistic, or any number of stylistic categories which pertain to these poles, precludes the question of how artwork can emphasise the relational nature of representations: inside and outside of its frame. This has the effect of losing the significance and the competence of painting that is clearly evident in the sheer volume displayed in museums and contemporary galleries.

I have described the notion of 'painting between two deaths', but it can also be read, in simple terms, as painting between modes of representation so that their content becomes nonobjective. By deploying my exploration of aesthetic judgment and *das Ding* in previous chapters, this section serves to provide some groundwork to the interpretation of these relations as they manifest as a nonobjective quality of surface in Wafer's paintings. While clearly signifying spaces and asserting forms from documented events, experiences and the artistic canon, such painting nevertheless creates the conditions whereby the process of judgment, and its mind-dependence, becomes a focal aspect of how the work generates affect.

Wafer's evocation of traumatic subject-matter is particularly capable of demonstrating the mind-dependence of aesthetic judgment on two levels: the first being that the work is centred on an aesthetics of separation from the body, from nature and the pain this 'cut' produces. Her paintings are weighted towards evoking postmodern representations which are conceptualised as evaluating the negative effects of reason and rationality on human experience and the environment: an elaboration, one might say, of the Freudian reality principle.[120] In this way,

[120] Postmodernism in art could be framed as a critique of the transcendentally synthetic values Kant accorded to relations between internal representations, which have been perceived as harmonious and symmetrical, exactly because they are based on the negation of certain values of embodiment, specifically gendered and racial experiences. As I discuss below, conceptualist deconstruction often takes the form of representing the sites of a materially constituted reality in provocative ways. Certain postmodernist practices that I am interested in evoke the effects of reason on material reality as a sign of 'death', in the terms I have discussed with reference to Lacan. However, in some misunderstandings of the French School, these practices also tend to interpret external reality as the site itself where new judgments might be conceived, rather than judgments based in *representations of* sensibility (Kemal 1992: 282; Hicks 2004: 3). This, then, is a version of a 'death' of the subjective that I discussed in my introduction. While I am critical of this ambition and insist on a necessary psychic distance from embodied life caused by a priori representation, postmodernism developed a semiotics of trauma whereby the irrational and even violent effects of reason on experience and the environment are both visualised and documented.

the paintings strongly signify the alienated *distance* of the embodied subject to a hostile reality. However, Wafer also re-establishes the modernist surface as being undergirded by a nonobjective framework first elaborated by Kant, and then cemented by Greenberg. As painting, the subject of trauma is immediately drawn to its problematic relation with pleasure. Traces of gesture and fluid vistas create optical illusions which recoup the tension of pleasure and pain that are based in an imaginary process. [121]

The paintings involve a reflection on events at Marikana in 2012, in which seventy-eight rioting miners were violently suppressed and a further thirty-four killed by police forces.[122] Wafer drew her reference material from media images photographically recording the landscapes; the *mise en scène* of a massacre on the site of platinum extraction (DK Projects 2013). The photographic images and maps she sourced from the media and archives are characteristic of the collective imagination of the place 'Marikana': a rocky and starkly barren landscape upon which the figures of the miners seem diminutive and isolated. Wafer's Marikana images already function as publicly shared symbols, registering the mediated quality of what Shoshana Felman (1991: 105) calls 'an age of testimony, an age in which witnessing itself has undergone a major trauma'. Felman does so in the context of describing how documentary film is its own form of witnessing. 'An age of testimony' articulates an ethical demand to represent traumatic realities in the public sphere while recognising the 'incommensurability of different topographical and cognitive positions' (1991: 207). Wafer highlights this incommensurability through the translation of topographical maps of certain aerial views of the event, conveying the scenography of Marikana as compositions of largescale, flattened surfaces. The already-

[121] While some work from *Mine* is more figuratively based on landscape, for this essay I am looking more closely at the following list of paintings which are more expressly flattened and abstracted:
Figure 27: Mary Wafer. 2013. *Crowd 1*, Figure 28: Mary Wafer. 2013. *Crowd 2*, Figure 29: Mary Wafer. 2013. *Crowd 3*, Figure 30: Mary Wafer. 2013. Detail of *Crowd 3*, Figure 31: Mary Wafer. 2013. *Aerial I*.

[122] Marikana is an area near Rustenburg which holds the main source of platinum in South Africa. Lonmin mine, a UK-South African owned company whose board comprised an ANC government minister and other affluent partners, was challenged by a number of trade unions and independent striking miners to improve working conditions and provide adequate housing (Davies 2015). It is recognised that the squalid conditions and poor pay provided to the miners was a motivating factor for the strike (Hodgson and Khan 2017). At the time, tensions were also escalated by conflicts between trade unions. The events of the day came to be known in popular media as the 'Marikana Massacre', or just 'Marikana', and involved a body of weaponised miners in confrontation with South African police forces. While reports as to who began the violence differ, the outgunned miners were not only dispersed through gunfire but chased into rocky outcrops where they were slaughtered *en masse*. The event has been widely likened to the Sharpeville Massacre in 1960, where citizens burned the 'passbooks' non-white nationals were expected to carry, and which similarly led to the apartheid police force opening fire on the crowd (Maromo 2014). Greg Marinovich's (2016) comprehensive reconstruction of the events and subsequent handling by the Farlam Commission of Enquiry into police negligence, reveals that there has not been adequate action taken against government, nor reparative justice accomplished for the miners. Marikana is seen as crucially symbolic of the lack of transformation experienced by most South Africans between the apartheid era and the current ANC government.

reduced topography of Marikana is further compressed in abstract, alienated surfaces, depersonalising even more the harsh impression of being dis-communicated, thrust onto a surface which disqualifies speech.[123]

Wafer's rigorous attitude to visualising how a conventional aesthetic of painting based in pleasure turns to negativity and shock, begins to show how the concept of *das Ding* regenerates the significance of Kant's relation to imagination in judgment, while also opening it to certain deformations. My discussion below initiates a problem that remains and will be pursued in Part Three of this thesis: how to characterise the death-like aspect of aesthetic pleasure, and its association with Kant's notion of the imagination.

Painting can withdraw from the pleasures of beauty, but, in its place, manifest certain traumatic remainders of a pleasure which make the field of *das Ding*, as being between two 'deaths', an intuitive possibility. The materiality of surface acts contiguous with and in contrast to the composition of Wafer's photographic references. In her paintings, traditional pictorial dimensions of landscape and figure are deconstructed by graphic marks striating the soft and diffused surface. A resemblance to the reproduced photograph is evident, but the work is equally reduced to the 'immediate impressions' Greenberg ascribes to intuition (1961: 15). The graphic sharpness of figuration is edged in more fluid, unworked borders where surfaces do not quite meet, threatening a disintegration that rubs the graphic *écriture* into smaller and less defined dots and points. These small elisions index the warp and weave of the canvas support and damage the integrity of the surface as a smoothly graphic painted surface. This creates the impression that these photographic references are processed in an ambivalent logic, making their symbolic potential associative, generative and transformative. This, until a hyper-defined edge marks surface again as a noumenal or purely flat 'thing' fragmented across the picture plane. The symbolic function of image in Wafer's paintings is mediated through these minimalist configurations which invoke repetition, the rhythmic treatment of surface and a

[123] Julie McGee (2015: 58) characterises Wafer's work as a 'nomenclatural emptiness'. The shock of the events at Marikana, as an abysmal moment in South Africa, is still felt as the event continues to be projected and anatomised in the media as a profound signalling of socio-political breakdown. The name 'Marikana' has become a symbol representative of the deepest divisions in national ideology and the right to speak: questions of authority itself have been dislocated by contradictory testimonies of victims and government forces, and the discourses of leadership in mining institutions and among the members of powerful unions, legal entities and civilian bystanders (Bezuidenhout et al 2012: Online). The symbolic conflict repeats itself as a destabilised currency of what is seen or witnessed, and how the event is represented in media and in conversation with the public. Professor Yunis Ballim (2012: Online) asks in this regard, 'Why do we persist in turning our gaze from the suffering of the unseen, occasionally distracted by newspaper images of dead bodies, when it is already too late? How do we hold ourselves accountable for the state of our society today?'

marked emphasis on form pared down to its most unified quality, which thus hovers on a threshold between intelligible and unintelligible. These flattened strips and silhouettes clearly imitate her photographic records, but then are also formally absorbed in the process of shapes composing and decomposing across the horizontality of the rectangle canvases, seeking the limen or flashpoints which augur the 'place' symbolised by Marikana.

Art critic and writer Bronwyn Law-Viljoen (2013) suggests that the attachment of overt political content to Wafer's assertedly modernist paintings is a 'risky formal move' because she averts making specific political commentary: 'she has…left judgment to those more qualified to pass it'. But here I introduce Lacan (and Derrida's) stress on the nonobjective and its bodily severance in the aesthetic judgment described by Kant. Wafer works on the site of judgment itself precisely by provoking a manifestly disinterested pleasure in surface. The iconography is not weighted to a realistic depiction: rather, surface and subject matter relate in ways that can be characterised in terms of the 'blind', and 'irrational' powers of the imagination Kant describes *(CoJ*: 20270). Emptied of sensual associations with reality, the works emphasise the illogical, non-conceptual core through which the spontaneous event (or, more negatively, the explosive event) is forced to conform to the rationale of a modernist painting practice. Here, the contemporary nonobjective surface implies that the traits of an aesthetic judgment are always already imposed on bodies beyond the subject of painting.

I locate these restraints in the psychoanalytic metaphor of a split or cut imposed on the body: an idea which I will develop further in terms of metaphorical function of minimalism and photography in painting. Particular metaphors are patent in Wafer's work, but I explore how they function to reflect on certain 'laws' generative of a metaphor which marks the borders of pleasure and pain in painting. Thus, I discuss below the effects of industrial mechanisation and technologization on the human body, and how these have been translated as conventions signifying trauma on the painted surface. However, I contend that via Wafer's technical articulation of them, these qualities highlight the imaginary function of distance and proximity to *das Ding*.

The psychical real as a traumatisation of the external world is emphasised by signifying negation in certain (now conventional) forms of postmodernist representation. For me, Wafer's work manifests what Michael Fried (1967) maligns as the 'theatricality' of minimalist objects. Fried argues that the objecthood of minimalism eliminated a 'conviction in shape' and therefore the positive identity of painting. By making shape three-dimensional, minimalism invigorated

the physicality of the viewer in juxtaposition with the artwork. Thus an order of 'presence' is bestowed not on the painting, but on the audience, who become aware of their own positioning being different from the object of attention. For Fried, this theatrical exaggeration, this affectation of distance, is intolerable. A properly 'absorbed' visual experience, would, in his view, command 'instantaneousness', a case in which the subject can further reflect on – rather than be forced into – the relationships which make proximity and distance between self and other possible. However, his critique of theatricality is useful for the analysis of Wafer's painting, insofar as the 'distance' that minimalist objects incur involve the process of viewing a three-dimensional object. Wafer's spatial deployment of flat hues shift into depth in an optically ambiguous way: the illusion of depth is momentary; it quickly recedes through its explicitly architectural shape and blank walled-in substance. This also effects the temporality of looking, as one is struck by the instantaneity of surface but is further led to explore shape as notionally dimensional. Three-dimensionality is inferred rather than made real; at the same time, it is *de*ferred by both a conviction in the shape of its two-dimensional surface and a flattened staging of figures on the surface. This is not a realistic assertion of space, but a *realised* distance between the surface and the spectator's optical apprehension of it. In its propensity to optical blur, the work displaces the viewer's position in front of the canvas and thus functions in the same way as a traditional anamorphosis.

Anamorphic properties, the kind of reflection caused by relationships between representations, are also realised in Wafer's work by the visual effect of a flattened topography. Greenberg's intellectual inquiry is transformed by her stress on how a synthetic, disinterested pleasure come to displace real desires. Two-dimensional flatness is envisioned by Greenberg as manifesting a frontal wall or 'seamless spread' of the visual field, operating against the 'fictive depth' of illusion (1961: 172). This field offers a 'wholeness' of the object-surface which 'imitates' or corresponds with 'visual experience as a whole': with the limit of appearances, to be precise (Greenberg 1961: 173). This level of visual consistency is tangible in the experience of Wafer's work, but that experience also registers a shift to the negative moment. David Joselit (1985: 293) suggests that there is a paradoxical quality of 'psychological depth' in painting which asserts flatness in the modernist tradition. The deliberate flatness of surface necessitates, as Joselit (1985: 295) argues, a depth that must be produced from an 'inner source' in both the painter and the viewer. According to him, the shift from illusionary depth to flatness is countered by a transference of the 'event' from the conscious to the unconscious (1985: 293). Insofar as the surface is mimetic of the lucidity of visual perception in Greenberg's terms, by

making that frontality immediate the painted surface *also* blocks vision, invokes vision's concomitant blindness to things in themselves, materially manifesting the 'wall' that Foucault (2009: 35) sees as a predominant condition of modern representation. If an 'inner source' is required of this reading it is because Wafer's work closely mirrors the veiling, or walling, function of the reality principle: the subject's processing of representations absorbing the external world in 'monotony, pallor, [a] lack of colour' (SVII: 49).

The work disrupts absorption in the positive and concrete integrity of surface, and affectively empties the sense-impressions of graphic marks. But for all this reproductive monotony, Wafer's work is recognised for its proximity to imaginary traits, to the 'seduction and lure' of veils (SVII: 239). Mary Corrigall (2015) asserts that Wafer's painting is 'fixated' on design, the commodification of painted surface into the sheer reproduction of graphic marks which 'doesn't deliver on the substance that it hints or promises'.[124] However, this fixation on a design aesthetic, 'equally at home in trade and furniture' manifests, as Corrigall acknowledges, also as an 'enrapturement' with 'emptiness' which can 'lead the viewer into any psychic territory they desire, or lead absolutely nowhere at all'. But while Corrigall views these methods as an 'escape from the everyday', I see that emptiness on the basis of what Yves Alain Bois (1998: 132) describes as an 'elaboration of negativity' in minimalist painting: the characterisation precisely *of* the everyday in sullenly rigorous shape and line.

Wafer's paintings construct the minimalist signifier as that which asserts Kant's formulaic and regulatory ideals of the subject, interpreted by Lacan and others as a condition of modern industrial society: a mute industrialised enactment of surface that has become stultified, opaque and mechanic (Bois 1998: 249). The tonal values of Wafer's colour scheme are so reduced as to withdraw into the black and greys that are reproduced and routinely tinted in the paint factory. Doing away with the traditional, often sentimental activity of mixing colour speaks to another logic outside of painting: that of technological competence and efficacy. This logic is extended in her handling of the paint. No more than two layers of paint cover the surface. The effect is to make surface a literal and leaden study in colour casing the surface. Applying just one layer, two if really necessary, seems to scold the false illuminations of the quixotic layers upon layers in much painting, as devastatingly without purpose. Modernity as representation

[124] In the review concerned, Corrigall is referring to Wafer's subsequent body of work, which interprets exterior views of the apartheid-era building at the erstwhile John Vorster Square in flattened black strips. However, Wafer's formal approach there can be considered in very similar terms to *Mine*. Indeed, Corrigall's subject in this review is the paintings by a number of artists she sees as following a model or type she aligns with the parameters of 'design'.

is given to the explicit fact-of-the-matter, with no space for the waste of spurious desires. But this aspect of modernity can also be characterised as a symbolic enactment of trauma, as I have explained. In Bois's (1998: 231; 249) description of the 'technical model' of painting, painting imitates the mechanical automatism of industry by reducing the spontaneous autographic or 'organic' trace, and making the mass-produced quality of paint explicit. Dispositioned by this abstraction of the mechanical from the organic, the 'aesthetic' here becomes a purely conceptual enactment of social and political experience and the bureaucratisation of civil engagement. Bois (1998: 233) thus characterises painting as a 'task of mourning' in a state of perpetual and passive mesmerisation by the 'threat of industrialisation'. Indeed, as Bois (1998: 235) goes on to discuss, the commodification of the artwork as it is dissolved in the spheres of industrial trade and design has already been conceived of in Marx's designation of the commodity as an 'absolute repression' of material embodiment.

However, the conceptual expression of this 'commodification' or even the theatrical enactment of shallow modern experience is given a 'psychological depth' by way of Wafer's formal use of photographic references. In postmodernist painting, Bois (1998: 231) writes, 'The body of the artist moves towards the condition of photography: the division of labour is interiorised'. To explain: in much postmodernist theory photography represents the technological catalyst whereby the *métier* is separated from the artist's body. In a sense, the artist is detached from and reliant on the perfect vision of the camera lens. Thus, the assertion of photographic means in painting can represent a kind of 'theatrical absorption': the concept of painting as *enacted* mechanically, like a camera, rather than arising from subjective qualities of thought and emotion.

I elaborate on the significance of this division of labour between mind and 'eye' in photography: it can be seen to embed the mechanical metaphor within the psychical split of language and the body. Art theorist Martin Jay (1994: 126) writes about this division made manifest by the objective 'truth' offered by photography:

> So powerful has the assumption of photography's fidelity to the truth of visual experience been that no less an observer than the great film critic André Bazin could claim that 'for the first time an image of the world is formed automatically, without the creative intervention of man…' And even Roland Barthes could argue in his early essay on 'The Photographic Message' that 'certainly the image is not the reality but at least it is its perfect *analogon* and it is exactly this *analogical* perfection which, to common sense, defines the photograph. Thus can be seen the special status of the photographic image: *it is a message without a code*.'

Here, the sensual reaches of embodiment which codify subjective experience are seen as cut off by the message of, or signifier for, pure truth. Photography exposes reality being violently reduced to 'analogons' of visual experience. Concurrently, it also reveals the non-logical desire *for* a reduction, or lack, of libidinal qualities in our images of the world. The 'message without a code' in photography is interpreted by trauma theorist Eric Rosenberg (2006: 29) as analogous to language, because both are predicated conceptually on an understanding not dependent on sensation. It is indeed within the clarity and identity that language imposes on us within the domain of the everyday, writes Rosenberg, that we deny the 'other, difference, displacement, in the self' that testify to the sense of the 'self-betrayal of language' (2006: 30).

Rosenberg thus situates the 'other' side of appearance precisely in the psychological depth of the unconscious. Photography and language are marked by an inalterable 'failure' to 'assimilate' the unconscious depths of experience (Rosenberg 2006: 31). But if photography is precisely related to the ambition to 'assimilate' reality, this failure registers as a 'death' which is constituted by an experience of alienation from the world and its objects. The symbolic relationship of death and photography imagined as a frozen 'corpse' of time and memory has gained much press since Roland Barthes's seminal text *Camera Lucida* (1981). However, Rosenberg extends the notion of death as being intimately bound with the experience of trauma.[125] The 'betrayal' of appearances in both language and photography means that we strive to regain the conditions of the event, but are destined to remain outside of it, in an irresolvable state of unknowing (Rosenberg 2006: 31). In a cyclical return, photography gives the lie to language and discursive meaning, because it is itself caught in the death-snare of non-assimilation:

> The traumatic hole or wound can be closed only as being is sacrificed again to meaning, as we force language to cross the traumatic space of the unrepresentable, a space of almost immeasurable pain (Rosenberg 2006: 34).

In order not to foreclose on the presence of this wound, Rosenberg (2006: 32) asserts that the

[125] The claims made for photography as a form of trauma which connects to a trauma of language may seem a stretch of the imagination. Rosenberg performs a psychoanalytic reading (2006: 28-30) on Walker Evan's documentary photography, and bases his analysis on an essay by Evans (1931), who described his photographs as 'a photographic editing of society, a clinical process'. Evans's practice has held popular opinion in thrall over the past century because of the despondency and barrenness he captured in people and places during the Great Depression in North America. Rosenberg's attempt to account for the enigmatic attraction to the work is thus situated between Evans's visual framing of the event and as his textual acknowledgement of the frame as delimiting the event. Rosenberg's rationale can therefore be situated in thinking the affectlessness of the work as eliciting the 'psychological depth' Joselit (1985: 293) ascribes to flatness in painting: the obstruction or failure of sensation provoking the lack buried in an unconscious experience of trauma.

meaning accorded to photography must not lose the necessary 'fallacy of representation' (or 'lying about evil') which the failure represents as a traumatic 'truth', or pain. He seeks to examine the opaque 'being and materiality' photography offers through a literary analysis of language. However, I have pointed out that Derrida (1987: 35) sees the ability of language to offer disinterested pleasure as manifesting a 'wound' in Kant's elaboration of beauty: reason has instituted its 'cut' where a spontaneous 'free play' should be. But again, this can also be construed in the way Derrida finds 'truth' in painting: as a function of certain 'remainders' of substance, of a metaphysics of the body he suggests governs Kant's philosophy. Rosemary Hawker (2002: 544) sees Gerhard Richter's photo-paintings as enacting Derrida's notion of 'truth' in painting in that there is a fundamental 'failure' of 'translation' between photography and painting. She characterises this failure as ontological to the medium of painting, because something more than the discursive elaboration of its parts escapes interpretation. Again, this inadequacy becomes the psychical source of beauty and of pleasure: writes Derrida (1987: 90), 'the trace of the [cut] is the origin of beauty' because it affirms a space where embodied pleasure is recognisably lacking.

In a similar way, Peter Osborne elaborates on the 'something more' or remainder made tangible by photography in painting. Referring to Freud's pleasure and reality principles, Osborne (1991: 74) invokes 'organic' and 'mechanical' principles regarding the conventions of painting and photography respectively. He sees a 'double negation' of both principles which constitutes a certain kind of 'restoration'. Thus, in response to authors who emphasise only the commodification of painting by way of the threat and cut of mechanical industrialization, he writes that

> What…lacks is reflection on the significance of the 'organic' or painterly character of the final product. [Richter's paintings] enact an organic recuperation of the 'mechanical mediation of the organic', a counter-movement which restores the primacy of the organic over the mechanical at a *higher level* (my italics, Osborne. 1991: 74).

At hand is the determination of this 'higher level' by which organic pleasures in painting come to be 'recouped'. *Das Ding* deforms and holds in question the possibility of an organic restoration: this 'higher level' is regressive to a lower level; low in terms of a symbolic Other of death descending into the traumatic depths of another Other, the Other of the Other, where both language and the body dissolve.

To summarise before proceeding: I have emphasised the reality principle where the mechanical aspects of reason are elaborated in the enactment of minimalism and the internally divisive

structure of photography. These postmodernist signifiers, as I've drawn out, are reliant for their very concept on the reduction of sensible intuition as a corollary of trauma. This, then, is the aesthetic symbol in photography and minimalism: simply, the pain incurred by the 'death of God'. To reiterate, this symbolic level denotes a pleasure where surface exceeds both organic and mechanical qualities precisely because it is an organic state that has been made 'mechanically' 'disinterested' from its primary sphere of wildly natural subsistence. In painting, it is not this libidinal substance which is restored, but the blindness to it which comes to be recuperated, and emphasised.

The 'remainders' of the parergon or discursive frame, writes Hawker (2002: 543), are 'always outside of translation'. This 'pure outside' is found in the language of photography in Richter's paintings, especially where he emphasises photography's own technical short-comings:

> Richter refers not to the visual plenitude and truth that we usually associate with photography, but rather to its moments of representational inadequacy, to photographic blur and lack of focus that results in deliberately obscured imagery (Hawker 2002: 541).

Wafer furthers the lack or failure of the signifier by asserting the relational nature of representation in ways which differ from Richter's relative virtuosity. In her work, the weight of distance, as described by Greenberg, is given its gravity by a sub-rational frame delineating a perverse circularity of history: the dual conceptual structure of mutual negation that Richter introduced to photo-painting is further obscured by two conventions which are extremely separate in time and the historical wagers of painting in terms of a 'death of God'. On one hand, the flattened contours of topography and figure allude to historical medieval icons. On the other, the reference bleeds out in the haze of the j-peg. These two forms are not intuitively linked, but following the postmodernist signifiers of pain and death, invite a consideration of how a collective imaginary has recuperated the strangeness of *das Ding* in the current era. As I discuss below, Wafer thus offers an 'absorption', here in painting, as the shape of contemporary reality.

David Carrier (1985: 109) suggests an archaic historical source for what Joselit theorises as the 'psychological depth' of two-dimensionality. He discusses how Greenberg's strong evaluation of flatness has the practical effect that surface manifests itself as 'the picture window itself', or – as I have indicated before – that 'wall' upon which the field of vision is seen to spread out and become coincident or 'seamless' with two-dimensionality. Carrier (1985: 110) links this critical construct of surface to the value of flatness in religious medieval icons. These were not

meant to be ‘naturalistic’, because an icon which represents a holy figure is contoured by the ideal shape of man and at the same time also was meant to represent a vision of God not present to reality and human cognition. Only a ‘piece of the body’ was made available in this way. Icons further articulated repeated earlier pagan designs, invoking elements of experience which record the heightened ecstatic relation to the maternal earth, but now registering as ‘shadows’ and ‘pre-figurements of the future’. Here, the sacred power of God became invested in the hand of the artist insofar as the presence of his individual authorship or trace was absolutely reduced.

A detachment from authorship is invoked by the restraint of Wafer’s painterly gesture and the repetition of certain characters. These iconic characters become traits of the surface, most often developing from rounded bases and travelling in diagonal strokes towards honed points. Condensed, flattened and compacted, the figures assume a frontality that marks their presence in the space of the viewer as concretised and literal. As such, they lose a fundamental aspect of recognising the body in representation. The figuration abstractly striating the surfaces register as raw black wraiths making a tortured crossing, blackly consuming the unconditioned ground. But this assertion of the iconographic mark is given to elisions on specific edges which tend to soften, darken and lend moments of depth to surface. The tension seeps into the weave and emphasises a play of symbols in a static flow across the picture plane. Grading and streaking in geometric glimmers, these elements compellingly evoke a visual indeterminacy which is at odds with the ostensibly documentary nature of her references. The composition thus effects what Mika Conradie (2015: 13) describes as the ‘poor image,’ the contemporary j-peg thumbnail offering the bare traces of information required of the subject. The ‘poor image’ is

> …the detritus of the digital file-sharing world. Imperfect, disturbed. Its constituent parts are stretched. A pockmarked surface makes us hyper-aware of quality, of a definitive *low-ness*…The slumping and pockmarking on a quick cell phone snap of an instance of state violence at a protest, or of a low-res drone attack on civilians visually cues a file’s volatility: the file was leaked, the file was stolen. We know that it is showing us things that we are not allowed to see: ostensibly, reality. The poor documentary image obfuscates…Yet it is the sagginess of the low-res surface that disturbs the documentary image’s claim to truth so well; subjects and moments and situations are made almost opaque, a truth is told and a truth is obscured.

The ‘low-ness’ inscribed on the document indicates the ‘representational inadequacies’ of digital photography, but even more, it evokes the fetishising way in which the users of the internet screen freely consume the lack or ‘opaque’ nature of information. The subjects of Wafer’s work – beings in the throes of heartfelt protest, bending to violent force – are thus commodified: extrapolated, over-developed and processed into symbolic re-presentation.

Painting in Wafer thus features the explicit return of a Greenbergian aesthetic, but now diminished in vitality by the inherent lack of vigour provided by store-bought, mass-produced colour, feebly chiaroscuroed over the picture plane; and, equally, by the reduction of persons to the level of the zombie, the static figures distanced and distanced again into object, creaturely icon and dispersed j-peg effects. At the same time, the monotony of tone, its pallor and lack of colour, signals the 'zombification' of contemporary abstract painting, the mirror of a transcendental past caught in the steel gaze of a machine (Saltz 2014).

Distance is (re)found in Greenberg's terms on the level of the implicit death of a divine God, and what I argue is its technological analogue. Wafer handles these signifiers as a surface which 'intimidates and stops desire' as per Lacan's notion of beauty as sublimation (SVII: 238). But the multiple layers of conceptual enactment lend a contingency to the way in which this desire is given its sense of threat: a 'death' of something more fundamental is given shape through the compaction of these conventions. A correspondence with perceiving the Marikana event is thus nevertheless still grounded in understanding the formal principle of pleasure: the recuperation of the religious via the digital can be interpreted in Arjun Appadurai's (2001: 586) understanding of a 'global *imaginaire*'.

I do not intend to add another concept here, but deploy aspects of Appadurai's theory to support my conclusion of how painting represents the representatives of *das Ding* through a conceptual emphasis on the nonobjective. Appadurai (2001: 585) views the 'imaginary landscapes' of media and the 'technological explosion' as 'an altogether new condition of neighbourliness', where there is a sense of community 'with no sense of place'. His focus is on how the notion of imagination as a 'social practice' might not only link to the 'terror and coercion of states and their competitors', but also offers 'all forms of agency' and positive strategies to rethink or indeed re-imagine properties of 'deterritorialization' and 'displacement' (Appadurai 2001: 587; 593). Again, I do not engage with the content of these new ethnographies here: my point is how Wafer has visualised the open conditions of this possibility as traumatic.

I therefore draw three critical points from Appadurai's discussion. The first two involve his statement that 'The two main forces for sustained cultural interaction before this century have been warfare…and religious conversion' (2001: 584). He discusses the complex trajectory linking these two phenomena to colonially inscribed global and local borders and finally a 'neighbourliness' based in technology (2001: 585). In line with Lacan, however, I view this lack of 'place', these new 'ever-fluid' 'multiple worlds of 'human motion' based in the

'fantasies' enabled by technology, as a profound externalisation of an imagination always structurally bound to warfare and religion (Appadurai 2001: 589).[126]

As noted, Kant asserts (*CoR*: 2334) that 'the understanding cannot intuit, and the sensuous faculty cannot think'. The imagination *cannot do either*: in giving form to these faculties it provides a certain placeless, non-relational synthesis which is just as ably given to positive agency as it is to authoritarianism, religious fundamentalism and traditionalism.[127] The digital imaginary's lack of embodied codification thus also enables the unhinging of attention in a supersmorgasbord[128] of instant information. Perhaps many of us functioning in the global *imaginaire* have never been closer to the 'unknowing knowing' of the 'not experienced' that Geoffrey Hartman (1996: 631) equates with both trauma and medieval metaphysical theology – and that Lacan has elaborated as *das Ding* and the mother's body.

Wafer's work, in the medium specific terms of painting as a convention, suggests that the site of the global imaginary is constituted by an understanding of concepts and images in relation to the psychical Real. And, that the Real is enjoined by the conventional deployment of modernist painting which asserts its distance from things in themselves in the external world, something the electronic age is given to forgetting.[129] Wafer's deployment of modernist surface as two-dimensional further underscores this distance as a distance from the technologies of photography and digital art as they are integrated with daily life. This 'forgetting' constructs surface, tonality and form insofar as it characterises an *ideal* zero-degree of surface as obdurate,

[126] Nicholas Mirzoeff (2014) contends that the 'global visual culture' established by electronic media has led to a 'mass accumulation' which has emptied images of all significance: what he calls the 'banality of images' after Hannah Arendt's (1963) characterisation of photographic documents of the Holocaust as signifying 'the banality of evil'. However, the relationship between images and the systems in which they flow and circulate provides a similar function to war-time military strategies of 'visualisation', which calculate the effect of the visual presence of troops in certain areas as enabling the deception of hidden troops in others. This relational understanding of imagery resonates with Lacan's discussion of religion empowering certain behaviours based on the forbidden or hidden nature of other possibilities. One might say that 'visuality' in Mirzoeff's cautionary terms is a capacious realisation of the anamorphosis, the 'evil' way in which a formal understanding of the signifier and its often ambiguous and veiled signified can be rendered to violent ends.

[127] A recent essay by Philippe-Joseph Salazar reportedly 'shocked' French readers for suggesting that the 'war' with ISIS would only be won through effective counterattacks in propaganda and ideological prose online. For Salazar, ISIS's success in gaining support lies entirely in effective digital media deployment of rhetoric and images as an 'art of persuasion' (Poirier 2015). At the same time, in the very same sphere of engagement, the power of an *imaginaire* can point to its profoundly empty appeal, to its ability to enact whatever form of desire or aggression regardless of its meaning or effect. An Australian study claims that harassment of women online has become 'an established norm in our digital society', with statistics revealing that up to 76% of women have experienced verbal and sexual abuse in the normal course of internet use (Hunt 2016: Online).

[128] My word.

[129] Ball (2000: 20) explains Martin Heidegger's influential account of technology in modernity as constituting an 'essence' of lived experience which privileges the 'instrumental' or functional value of its 'means to an end', over and above its 'anthropological dimension' which concerns technology's value for human activity.

cold, death. Greenberg's (1961: 173) eliciting of 'vision' as a total 'field' is deformed through Wafer's play with signifying conventions of photography and minimalism, hardening the sheath of representation as an obdurate, non-relative state of dissociation and shock. But again, through painterly conventions, the notion of aesthetic judgment is recuperated: as a metaphor of the noumenal self, it sets up that shocked distance as an assertively subjective platform. The anamorphic absorption in how representations formally relate, rather than through their causal link to the happenings of Marikana, is thrust into a strongly autonomous sphere of reflection. It is difficult to think of any other practice which makes this act so critically based on the site of judgment that has otherwise become so immaterially imaginary in contemporary experience. Judgment in painting and its roots in beauty and pleasure, implies that the contingency of ethical actions and reactions takes place on the basis of a nonobjectively precarious non-relation to the psychic Real. On this site of lack, a democratic means of representation is visualised as systematic yet open to alteration. And it is precisely the notion of freedom that is lost, conceptually and affectively by the medium specific surface.

In this way, Wafer's work might point to a system of pleasure and death which is intersubjectively valid insofar as it maps the historical values within contemporary modes and discourses of judgment, good or bad, being based as they are on non-objective modes of perception. However, this does not mean that we can all agree that the paintings themselves are affective in terms of pleasure or 'death'. Ironically, Wafer's rigorous conception and production does not necessarily make them 'good', something I will address in the conclusion of this thesis.[130] Indeed, there are many ways to skin a cat and arrive at the conclusion that Wafer's work represents something traumatic or at least, an elaboration of negativity which Corrigall (2015) views as an 'enrapture' with 'emptiness' which 'can lead the viewer into any psychic territory they desire, or lead absolutely nowhere at all'. Perhaps that this contingency unsettles Corrigall is all that needs be said.

What is important to this thesis is that the intricate and epistemological basis of these forms

[130] It strikes me that Wafer's work might here be serving as the '*Nebensgeschäfte*', a 'secondary task' of interpretation to my evident interest in a formal-systems theory of cognition, as Derrida (1987: 56) points out in Kant's writing on beauty. In my own practice of painting, which undoubtedly proceeds in much less rigorous ways than Wafer's, I have not found that I employ these concepts in purposeful ways. However, the character of what I produce has shifted as my interest and understanding of these philosophies has progressed. This strange, indeed nonobjective parallel between painting and writing has everything to do with *das Ding*, as will be drawn out in my conclusion.

arise from somewhere: they have constructed the bib of the anamorphosis by which nagging doubts about purpose and purposelessness keep many viewers returning to a gallery filled with painting. The function of illusion in an anamorphosis is pivotal here. The invocation of the real, the real outside, the objective real in the subject is distanced and doubly distanced from that real by Wafer's materialisation of these features in paint, on an expressly two-dimensional surface, and by convention. What occurs is that the potent traumaticity between the more empirical nature of intuition and the discursive concept of understanding, is kept at a remove from the reality of the event. The 'fallacy of representation' that Rosenberg discusses is robustly calculated to incur affect, but also to assert 'judgment' as forming a near-opaque metaphor of the real content of trauma. As long as questions of transformation drive judicial, media and socio-political discourses on the back of trauma, the problem of its objective translation provides scope for reflecting on the psychological depth of our distance and proximity to meaning itself.

How we might 'transform' a Western enlightenment notion of how both representation and experience are conditioned is more directly addressed in the following section of this thesis. The role of Kant's imagination and Lacan's analogue in his notion of the 'imaginary' are pursued in greater detail as the 'navel' or governing function of much experience, in painting and otherwise. But the loss of life nonobjectively constructed in Wafer's work is recouped as an embodied pleasure in Penny Siopis's practices. Here, one sees a forceful destruction and dissolution of symbolic qualities of practice through a medium which exceeds the painted surface. As I will discuss, an ethical question is raised about how these transformative acts can counter-intuitively analogise real gendered and intersubjective violence.

Part 3 – Penny Siopis versus the Law

In Lacan's analysis, the transcendental law of the signifier separates the subject of cognition from objects in the external world and is derived from an irrevocable split between the subject of language and embodied experience. Part Two of this thesis invoked an aspect of the imagination: to approximate reality as embodied truth (see pgs. 71-2, also see Addendum A). Some painting alludes to the desire for a transcendence of the borderline that reality imposes. Penny Siopis's formal and material processes may be viewed in this way, implying that the physical objecthood and materiality of things can transcend the boundaries between internal and external states of being.[131] These qualities of embodiment in her work complicate an interpretative schema of trauma in which I have asserted aesthetic 'truth' to be located in the signifying *distance* of cognition from the external world, as well as in aspects of the psychic Real. However, I argue that Siopis's work nevertheless invokes a certain ethics of proximity and distance to *das Ding*.

Siopis's work (2005: 92) asserts a notion of female sexuality and its links to trauma. Part 3 aims to review Lacan's claims of *das Ding* as traumatic, but also as having a sexually potent basis in femininity and the mother's body. As I continue a reading of *Seminar VII*, I will examine points of embodied resistance to the transcendental ideal his own theory of *das Ding* produces. This resistance occurs in Lacan's (SVII: 167) conception of '*jouissance*'. Jouissance[132] involves the notion that the illusionary state of transcendence and trauma are intimately linked, because both are rooted in experiences which seem to breach the boundaries between subject and object, and between subjects. Here, Lacan explores the structure of artistic sublimation through a theory of the feminine based in notions of lack and emptiness. This foundation has been challenged by much feminist theory in the past decades. As I will argue, however, his invocation of the maternal sites of memory insinuates embodiment yet, for ethical reasons that I will discuss, refuses a relation to the bodily sphere of experience that implies a direct connection to the maternal. I see Siopis's artwork from a critical perspective which

[131] Figure 32: Penny Siopis. 1982. *Embellishments* (detail). The figures referenced in Part 3 and printed at the end of the thesis are used as illustrative supplements to the text. If a work is specific to a discussion, it will be noted.
[132] After deliberation, I write 'jouissance' without italics, rather than with the italics one would usually deploy for a foreign term. I am influenced by Bracha Ettinger's (2006) non-italicised use of the term in a text I reference below. In my view, this has the effect of associating the term with common-usage, therefore suggesting that it's 'foreignness' is embedded in the normal course of reading and thought.

engages the visceral particularity of her work as feminine, but interprets this as offering a necessary distancing from the domain of trauma and the woman's body. Through this lens, jouissance as a metaphor and a framing condition supports a consideration of Siopis's material and conceptual production as a reflection on the trauma of lived experience in apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa, as well as on the problem of intersubjective relations on global levels.

There is a way in which myths regarding the feminine and maternal materiality offered by philosophy and psychoanalysis seem to converge in a point characterised by acute affect: a 'navel' I construe by thinking through some exigencies of painterly colour and gesture.[133] Gesture, as a probing of this navel, can be formalised in analogy with an anamorphosis, where the borderlines between material construction and dematerialised symbol interconnect in tense ways.

The anamorphosis is also relevant to my interpretative approach to the constellation of multimedia practices in Penny Siopis's work over time, through which the Thing in her painting can be articulated.[134] In my introduction I discussed Yves Alain Bois's (1988) method of interpretation as it is linked to the function of a cylindrical anamorphosis in his notion of Picasso's 'painting as trauma'. As always, the anamorphosis is constructed so that the beautiful image which arises in the mirror is inaccessible. Similarly, the effect of the final painting, *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* (1907), was left largely as an open and yet 'precise question' in Bois's analysis (1988: 131). Bois emphasised the exhibition of plans and *maquettes* and the 'constellation' around *Demoiselles*. I used the analogy of the 'bib' of an anamorphosis in my interpretation of this essay because this method embodies the 'precise question' involved in writing about trauma and painting. It is via notions of anamorphosis in painting, and its links with allegory in writing, that I begin to conclusively address my deployment of psychoanalysis and philosophy for painting, using Siopis's contemporary practice as a paradigmatic example.

[133] As an invagination at the body's centre, the navel is scar tissue left from the umbilical attachment to, and a tearing away of the cord from, a mother. It is a sensitive area which can seem to replicate the folds of the vagina, but its presence is unisexed.

[134] Colin Richards (2005: 14) similarly discusses Siopis's work as consistently asserting a skin-like quality which pervades the objects of her practices in installation and film in a 'particular choreography of space'.

3.1. The Navel

Painting theorist Isabelle Graw (2012: 62) writes that what is most particular to painting is that 'the bond between product and person is especially unbreakable'. For Graw, painting generates the 'illusion' and the 'myth' of being able 'to grasp a fibre of the lived labour' of the artist herself (2012: 56). She therefore contends that painting can restore the aesthetic subject of 'presence' in thinking through diverse practices because, in her view, painting is indelibly marked by the artist's 'highly personalised' subjectivity. Graw calls the autographic trace of the painterly mark its 'indexicality' (2012: 50). Rather than invoking the index as a sign of a physical object, she sees it as the 'physical connection' between the author and her own subjectivity (2012:61). This marked emphasis on subjectivity escalates the vicissitudes of object relations, and thus the 'value attribution' it holds for modern life (2012: 57).

In Siopis, the 'subjective index' can be understood as the way in which she frames the aesthetic modernist subject through certain articulations of her personalised gesture, and which produce strongly affective viewing-conditions that reflect South African experiences of anxiety, trauma and violence. Furthermore, this 'subjective index' is in my view strongly based on an aptitude for registering the interconnectedness of pleasure and transgression. As I will show in my analysis, there are compelling markers in her work which locate transgression on the female body. However, the analysis of certain of her methods and processes will also demonstrate how notions of interiority and viscerality are dislocated from straightforward identifications with gender and identity politics. In part, this is because these markers activate 'Penny Siopis' on the level at which the libidinal bespeaks shared notions of origins. This nascent aspect of Siopis's work in painting is conveyed by Sarah Nuttall (2014: 181), who deploys Siopis's (2014: 253) own notion of 'first form':

> Things are too protean to name…Inside the first form, wrestling as though it were alive, there is only formation and deformation…the commingling, interlacing of matter and form is a blasphemous space, as yet undirected, hovering, at the mercy of the materiality it will assume, a tremendous internal push of life, the predisposition of the seed or embryo, an active vitality, a form of vibrant matter.[135]

Nuttall (2014: 186) sees Siopis as sustaining an aesthetic position which signifies *in advance* of painting's conventions, and relates to how a 'self' might experience and feel connected to

[135] Figure 33: Penny Siopis. 2010. *Blow Up*.

the political and the social in more indeterminable ways, suggesting a collective, even universal imagination that is pregnant with possible intersubjective sources of contact.

Because Siopis's subjective index registers as a particularly nascent quality of form, I emphasise Kant's notion of imagination. The imagination is involved with an 'irrational' and 'blind' form of synthesis, as I note in Addendum A (see also Rastovic 2013: 6). It organises 'raw and confused' impressions into primary, even primal, representations. Furthermore, it arises from an 'original source' of cognition *within* the subject. In similar ways to Freud's pleasure principle, this primal sphere of organisation is engaged in differentiating organic and mental material at its most rudimentary level, signalling both attraction and repulsion, pleasure and pain. But in art, this function lends itself to sophistication because imagination creates the means, in Kant's terms, whereby new concepts can be derived. The particularity with which art embodies these states 'before understanding' leads the viewer to the kind of reflection upon which our capacities for conceptualisation are affirmed.[136] It is precisely the operation of imagination which is foundational to how intersubjective or 'universal' communicability is achieved.

My argument for emphasising the form of imagination finds theoretical particularity in regards to the transgression that is produced by the pleasure principle's relationship to *das Ding*. In the essay mentioned above, Nuttall (2014: 185) goes on to describe the vicissitudes of 'self' and subject coming into being in ways that refer to adult sexuality that is often registered as traumatic. For example, Siopis's *Shame* series (2002-5) feature diminutive female figures roughly formed in blood red glass paint, which manifestly embody tensions between violence and vulnerability on a site of sexuality-as-threat.[137] I propose that Siopis's practice is in most instances structured around this navel of the traumatised sexed body, even in cases where this happens indirectly.

As a representation of the origin of the drives, *das Ding* can be seen to offer structure to thinking the transgressive, 'bad' relation to the concupiscent imaginary surfaces produced by

[136] These comments address Kant's notion of art being judged in 'particular' ways before it can reach the potential for 'universal' agreement. (Burnham 2015: Online). Rather than being an object falling under a concept which has already been determined, a special or aesthetic object requires judgement without-concept: a rule or purpose is internal to the artwork but is not strictly definable in common sense terms. Instead, the artist herself is responsible for figuring these 'rules' which function before a concept is formed. Kant (*CoJ*: 19509) calls this 'genius'. Genius in his sense involves 'an innate mental disposition' which powerfully generates its own particular play of imagination and understanding.

[137] Figure 34: Penny Siopis, 2004. *Shame*; Figure 35: Penny Siopis, 2004. *Shame*.

Siopis. Transgression in this sense begins to describe affect and matter being worked in surface and form. It pre-figures a realm of intense pleasure which is violated by a passage or unfolding of traumatic effects. It is a prurient zone, concentrated in the arrangement and distribution of expressive possibilities she articulates with found objects, film and painterly substances. This imaginative subjectivity serves to characterise the sphere of experience in ways which have not been unequivocally conceptualised, in both private and public domains.

Located between private and public domains, the notion of intersubjectivity is theorised by Lacan in terms of the nonobjective, anamorphic value of jouissance. In considering *das Ding*, Lacan (SVII: 191-207) discusses the properties of his notion of jouissance at length. Jouissance is an experience of extreme psychosomatic feeling characterised by an excess of pleasure and sexual excitement.[138] He refers to it as an instance of 'impasse, aberration or aporia' because it reveals the human desire for a state of pleasure which exceeds and transgresses the symbolic realm of the Law (SVII: 191). Jouissance thus indicates a space beyond the pleasure that is normally justified by the subject of the signifier. As such, it marks an experience lying in close proximity to the ultimate object of desire, *das Ding*. Jouissance therefore also bears strong ties to the foundational human desire for incest, and its excessive character is based on the feminine aspect of the motherly *Ding*, or *Nebenmensch*. But Žižek (1989: 81) expresses jouissance as the supreme instance of coming into contact with other bodies as well. The drive to experience orgasmic pleasure thus reveals itself as a 'symptom' of an impossible demand to dissolve and disappear into the body of an other. The radical singularity of the feeling of jouissance is 'literally our only substance, the only positive support of our being, the only point that gives consistency to the subject'. However, jouissance is also permeated with trauma. This is because it registers the incommunicable dimensions of experience. It is a sublime instance of libidinality, blindly burgeoning from the interior of the body and thus wounding and rupturing the veneer of concept and interpretability (Žižek 1989: 82).

[138] As a student of Lacan, Roland Barthes deploys the term' jouissance' in his book *The Pleasure of the Text* (1975). His motivation is to respond to what he sees as a neglected area of literary criticism and discourse: that the text causes pleasure. He sees jouissance as a critical positioning of analysis that emphasises and even enacts the 'bliss' that writing offers. As an extreme form of pleasure, jouissance is used to provoke the aspects of literary analysis that are 'unspeakable, beyond words' (1975: vi). I reference an aspect of Barthes's invocation of extreme modes of pleasure at the end of chapter 2.3. As I have stated, my own prerogative is to account for the pleasure that must surely accompany a critical viewing of painting. But this pleasure is complex in artwork that does not have a determinably pleasurable subject.

But if Žižek describes jouissance as a 'positive support' of being, it is also because its symptomatic manifestation can reveal the delimited role embodiment has in cognition: Lacan insists on its essentially imaginary character in experience. Jouissance is linked to the nonobjective interplay between the pleasure and reality principles. Says Lacan (SVII: 24), 'We find it in a form that we have characterized as a regressive, infantile, unrealistic phase, characterized by a thought abandoned to desire, by desire taken to be reality.' This 'desire taken to be reality' comes into being by way of the infant's conflictual wish to connect with pleasurable aspects, and separate itself from the 'strange' and 'hostile' aspects of the mother (SVII: 52). But it is precisely by dint of the subject's attempts to find familiar, pleasurable associations with this Other that a certain relationship is instituted. It creates that limit whereby we come to perceive the unknown and the hostile only by representations which associate it with separation and distance. As Foucault (1977: 30) says of sexuality and transgression, fully 'liberated' sexuality only reveals the 'limit of the law', the outside of which is *unimaginable*. The ethical truth of the psychic Real is therefore that we remain at a distance from *das Ding*, and jouissance is a purely imaginary registration of contact and proximity to the object of desire. It only seduces us into thinking we can lift the veil, and this is precisely when the Other as an evil *Ding* may emerge (Evans 1998: 12).

The psychoanalytic goal is for an analysand to realise the representative nature of sexual emotions and the desire for jouissance; to realise, therefore, that it is a fantasy of dissolution that cannot be realistically consummated. Western media and advertising especially valorises sexual and sexed-up representations in terms of an almost mythic assumption of the union between self and other, taking place in the realms of the sacred and the profane. If this is a serious problem, it is because Lacan (SVII: 194) sees the misrecognition of one's jouissance as a *real* possibility of contact with the other as manifesting in sadistic aggression and murderous destructiveness. The violence and threat to women's bodies in particular is therefore linked to the traumatic effects of the drive to jouissance. Lacan draws out this particularly feminine *causa* in an analysis of the literature of de Sade, who describes visiting the most emphatic forms of sexualised injury on his female victims. But as a 'witness to reality', de Sade's literature is a particularly potent form of sublimation (SVII: 200). De Sade's character destroys his female victims systematically, and yet each morning they rise afresh, still beautiful and untouched. De Sade therefore demonstrates that jouissance takes place to the extent that he attacks only their image, insofar as their image alone reflects his own desire (SVII: 202).

As I will draw out in the discussion to follow, art does not or cannot therefore aim to provide the pleasure of jouissance in 'its original state' (SVII: 200). The role of sublimation in relation to jouissance is that such art, inevitably, foregrounds the imaginary by invoking strong instances of its metaphorical condition. Lacan suggests that sublimation in this sense does not necessarily aim to depict the content of transgression or transgressive acts. Rather, a painting will bear the structure of jouissance in its form and affect.[139] If some artwork intensifies its operation within the model of pleasure's polymorphously perverse activity of jouissance, it works, under a Lacanian framework, with the substance of jouissance as a veil or metaphor. But the metaphor, as that which stands as an 'opaque barrier' to embodiment, can nevertheless offer the means by which we perceive *das Ding* (SVII: 209). Such art configures and constructs the work of the metaphor as perversely imagined, and comes to bear a surface or 'mirror' which is reflective of the hallowed 'blood of the grail' at which desire is aimed.

A symptomatic aspect of Siopis's work in this regard, one which inhabits very precisely the navel of jouissance before-concept, is her use of colour. The presence of reds, pinks and flesh tones is predominant in all her practice. Her tonal range has been characterised in various metaphorical values for embodied life. Brenton Maart (2009: 2) describes its values as indicative of 'passion, of guilt, of sin'. Sarah Nuttall (2005: 138) invokes Siopis's pinks as signifying an 'overbearing sexuality'. Colin Richards (2005: 26) asserts that her colour 'signifies materiality, and signals the fall of the ideal into embodiment'. Richard's notion of 'signal' and 'fall' is most apt because in Siopis's practice over time, colour also begins to *fail* to signify. Siopis's use of red is rarely set up in opposition or as contrast to other colours. It signifies as colour in and of itself. It sustains an insistent thing-like presence, enforcing a contraction of meaning through its gloaming repetition. Red and its vicissitudes become an attitude, an indelible code, or an action pointing to a navel of affect. Lyotard (1999: 3) calls repetitive colour in painting a 'spasm'. He refers specifically to painted colour, which ignores a normative identification with its objects, but rather figures a 'colouring event':

> Neither the sensorimotor body nor discursive thought attests to this virtue, though their testimony of good sense and good taste is required; it is an affect.

[139] Through certain processes, jouissance works to 'cut the [viewer] subject loose from his psychosocial moorings' by embodying the structural forms of an ultimate frenzy or euphoria, while revealing this state as marked by a cut from the real (SVII: 201). Again, jouissance is the symptom of this split insofar as it is marked by an irreducible quality signalling embodied desire in ways that challenge language. Thus, sublimation as a revelation of the signifying cut from the real reaches its fulcrum in the specific domain of the erotic metaphor.



Penny Siopis. 2012. *Skirmish: Wake-up Call* (Set of 6 paintings). Oil, ink and glue on canvas, approx. 25 x 170 cm. Courtesy of The Stevenson Gallery, Cape Town

The notion of 'red' becoming an affect in itself, a 'spasm' or pure paroxysm, unhinges signification from the sexed body, but also extends the condition of jouissance as a metaphor of imaginary embodiment. Without deferring to poetical metaphors, it is difficult to describe this condition outside of conceptualising the structure of its being. In a way that is reminiscent of the sacred and profane limit of jouissance, painting theorist James Elkins (2000: 117) discusses this affect in terms of the 'beautiful reddish light' of the philosopher's stone. Elkins approaches painting from the medieval perspective or 'language of alchemy'. His book addresses the 'final goal' of alchemy as manifesting the 'stone' and its 'reddish light' as being analogous to the ontology of the painted surface. Elkins (2000: 117) characterises the philosopher's stone as 'neither a stone, nor a kind of stone… but stone as the principle underlying the universe of substances'. Achieving its essence was a process cast in religious terms by medieval alchemists: 'If we say that its nature is spiritual, it would be no more than the truth; if we describe it as corporeal, the expression would be equally correct' (Philalethes in Elkins 2000: 180).

Elkins draws on Philalethes's theoretical structure of the stone as 'hovering' on a borderline between spirit and earth. Painting holds contradictory qualities in tension, like 'the hypnotic red powder of the Stone' (2000: 183). For Elkins, painting exists *both* in the 'mundane' sphere of the corporeal and the 'instant of transcendence': it is an exercise in embodying the 'narrowness of the gap' (2000: 184). 'When paint is compelling, it is uncanny: it hovers on the brink of impossibility, as if nothing that close to incorporeality could exist' (2000: 183).

However, I tend to see the 'incorporeality' Elkins writes about as being grounded by a 'non-relation' to substance in Kantian terms. Duchamp's practice illustrates the difference. The relation with red and the empty sphere of 'incorporeality' where painting seeks its 'brink' between the mundane and the transcendent was deconstructed by Duchamp as a transcendental set of relations, or an ideal way of judging the affects of colour. That uncanny distance Elkins seeks to close is thus opened by Duchamp's emphasis on the literal fact of colour and its 'nominal' attribution of metaphor. In works like *White Box* 1914, filled with written notes deliberating on the relationship between plastic, sensorial colour and its conceptual significations, de Duve (1991: 129) sees an invocation of the psychic Real. De Duve draws a contrast between Kandinsky and Duchamp's approach to the painterly concern with colour. Kandinsky, writes de Duve (1991: 124), aimed to develop a model of language that would express itself as a 'secret link' that would register a singular 'truth' between word and colour, and have its affective basis in an 'inner sound'. Duchamp, on the other hand, would provoke this metaphorical characterization of colour as precisely that – a mere metaphor which is culturally conditioned and attached to a perceptual equivalent. However, by invoking the literal base of the signifier, Duchamp enacted the repressive vicissitudes of the psychic Real, wrought in the terms of colour's purposeful negation. The metaphor as a formal structure which approaches objects is, in itself, the veil upon which language and the symbolic crushes the 'imaginary conditions of an ex nihilo creation'. De Duve (1991: 129) writes, 'the Real is sameness. The Real is not this terra incognita beyond language.' In other words, Duchamp asserts that signification comes into being at the regulative repetition of principles which augur the 'beyond' of experience as purely imaginary: the distant, irretrievable Thing is thus summoned as a force which in its proximity to dumb reality, puts imagination to death.[140]

As I discuss in chapter 3.3, Duchamp was deeply engaged with notions of sexuality and the conflictual matter and space of vulvas. Significantly, these themes are not intuitively available to the viewer in Duchamp, but only conceptually evident (and, it needs to be added, after much thought!). I contend that insofar as we are dealing with the intuitive and aesthetic powers of *painting*, both the reddish light of the philosopher's stone and the assertion of colour as metaphor are present in Siopis. Affective qualities of transcendence in her work sustain the metaphor in proximity to *das Ding*, the empty realm of the uncanny especially connected with

[140] My analysis of Wafer's paintings reached a converse conclusion in that her paintings embody the regimented body as a sign of death in itself. As paintings, they *provoke* the imaginary desires which put certain aspects of the body, and of the external world, to death, rather than attempting to deconstruct or negate them. This line of thought as being in tension with Duchamp's project is explored further in chapters 3.3 and 3.4.

the mother's body or vulva. However, I emphasise that 'transcendence' is limited to the transcenden*tal* sphere of the subject only, because it invokes Kant's operation of imagination as informed by a distance to external reality, and its connection to the psychoanalytic structure of the imaginary as a distance to grasping the internal real. This is why red in Siopis also registers as a traumatic instance of jouissance. It is the tension between the imaginary opening to the 'incorporeal' and the closing of meaning, due to a literal failure of signification, in which the irresolvable symptom is enacted as an indissoluble event. Something of 'red' in Penny Siopis's work, in particular, marks itself as irreducible to sensation *or* language. This psychic space of solidity or brute fact, of a certain impervious weight, troubles and seduces writing about her work. Red as an 'event' triggers the notion that, on a primary level, the subject is already divided from some elementarily embodied aspect of herself, and therefore remains veiled and opaque.

The question of 'red' introduces the conceptual framework I am working towards. The grail sought in jouissance also operates through Siopis's material processes. The notion of process is highly emphasized in Siopis's own writing and lectures. As she asserted recently, she sees her process as 'not just a method' but as establishing the very 'concept' of the work (Siopis 2015). The physicality of the identification between Siopis's aesthetic subjectivity and objects under manipulation manifests an awareness of this primary, even primordial, kind of non-relation.

3.2. The Body and the Thing: Division and Collision in Representation

Glue is not the traditional medium of painting, yet it registers as 'painting' on a two-dimensional surface while appearing to be an embodiment of the membranes of womb-like spaces.[141] In regard to her ink and glue paintings, Siopis (2014: 261) has remarked that she acknowledges the language-like structure of surface but is hyper-aware of a 'libidinal thing' invested in the process. These tensions between the painting and an object, surface and objecthood, are formally interesting to the extent that they are affective. But I also see them as structurally generating the limit jouissance represents: thus, manifesting intrinsic social and ethical questions. While the fluid surface might suggest a universal communicability, it also, through its specific surface and materiality, becomes an analogy of a torrid, overbearing intimacy between self and other.[142]

As I will discuss in further detail in chapter 3.4, surface devolves into scenes of rape and sexual violence. But the central aspect of Lacan's theory of sublimation I am following, as discussed in Part 2, is that the object is recognised *as art* on a collective social level. It thus indicates the separation of the real and the symbolic in a primary way. But more importantly, it marks the *distance* to *das Ding* because it features the 'breakdown in the depths of psychic life' or the traumatic split between nature and culture, embodiment and language, that civilization is subject to (SVII: 143). Lacan asserts that the subject is split or 'fissured' by the polarising function of the symbolic realm on the body, and that our true ethical points of intersubjective identification arise from the lack internal to the symbolic realm, and not from the imaginary contact of supreme bodily enmeshment.

Lacan's emphasis on the essential barrier to embodied life and jouissance wrought by language and a 'phallic' form of symbolic domination has come under critique in feminist theory over the past half century. Since he emblematises the inscrutable features of embodiment at the site of the female body specifically, this site is then also located in some feminist theory as a potential space from which phallocentrism can be undermined. On a very basic level, Luce Irigaray's critique asserts the presence of 'nature' and the mother's body in opposition to the

[141] As I discuss in more detail in chapter 3.4, in Siopis's works the glue is mixed with coloured ink and then flung and swirled across the canvas. Swinging and tilting the canvas at different angles, the artist is able to control how and where the glue and ink settles in ways that give form or set in states of formlessness. The effects of the patina and sheen of the glue and ink swirls are evocative of bodily matter, but also of artificial things.
[142] Figure 36: Penny Siopis, 2009. *Beast*.

'sacrifice' of sensuality and organicity that a person is subject to (Green 2008:3).[143] Her strategy is thus to reveal and, to some extent, affirm the precise borders by which gender is differentiated and the feminine always relegated to the irrational and unintelligible qualities of materiality (Butler 1993: 36). However, Bracha Ettinger's (2006) notion of a 'matrixial borderspace' can be seen to avoid essentializing the body as the space of the feminine and rather invokes feminine subjectivity as a complex and temporal process of interconnection between embodiment and language. Her argument therefore accords with my hesitation to conclusively offer the feminine subject a particular substance in Siopis's work. But as I will discuss in further detail, this 'borderspace' can *still* be viewed as problematic in relation to Lacan's theory of the phallic subject. Ettinger works to specifically accentuate the 'co-emergence-in-difference' with the Other as more explicitly maternal (Pollock 2006: 37). However, I see the 'matrixial' as also invoking its 'matricidal' effects when construed in particular ways by Siopis. [144]

As in Ettinger's writing on painting, Siopis's work puts pressure on the centrality of the symbolic because it so intensively operates on a borderline of jouissance as an index of feminine subjectivity. The transgressive presence of the 'blood of the grail' or an essential aspect of feminine sexual life is very much the enigmatic point which Siopis's painting intensifies compulsively. Her surfaces are often seductive in their sheen and patina, of glue, lacquers and wax. This process effects something of the Dutch and Afrikaans connotation of 'lekker': something sexual and pleasurable, but also something that is ready to be eaten.[145] In

[143] Laura Green (2008) also addresses Irigaray's critique of Kant in *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1985): an argument for the space and materiality of femininity in a similar vein to her critique of Lacan. Green (2008: 6) explains Irigaray's view that 'Kant's account of perception leaves no room for the body, only an awkward 'slippage' between the psychological "inner" and the "outer" of the empirical self.' This 'body' would be asserted by Irigaray as having a 'maternal origin'. Again, that origin might be argued to hold more fluid notions of gender, the power of which is to escape definition.

[144] In the introductory seminar on *Ethics*, Lacan (SVII: 9) states that foundational to his course is Freud's enduring concern with the question of feminine sexuality: as he quotes from Freud, '"Was will das Weib?", What does woman want? Or more precisely, "What does woman desire?"' As Verhaeghe and Declercq submit (2002: 8-17), while the phallus can only symbolise 'the object', the '…identification with the Real…and the choice of jouissance' 'is a particular process that is situated entirely in the line of femininity.' In other words, Lacan seems to maintain a stance on femininity as being identified with unrepresentable and obscure phenomena. However, I argue that this is a favourable construction insofar as the identification of femininity with a Real paradoxically sustains the transcendental system of relativity with objects and others, while the phallus is given to homogenous obduracy and stasis. However, if that phenomenon is explored through symbolic forms – the only access to the Real Lacan argues we have at hand (aside from trauma) – thinking material states of being becomes an evolutionary process of intellectual discovery, the site of knowledge production itself. Indeed, in the *Ethics* seminar Lacan approaches the seemingly fraught question from the context of its social implications as viewed through the lens of artistic sublimation, and its processes of symbolisation. This withdrawal from direct identification between substance and femininity is an ethical position, as this thesis concludes.

[145] Figure 37: Penny Siopis, 2002-5. *Shame*.

some cases, the work seems to be consuming itself. In the *Shame* series (2002-5), the paper support itself has been acted upon as if it were in the process of being devoured. There are fragments and slivers that are used up and literally stamped upon, the lacquer having dripped, its whiteness spotted and stained as if it has been emitted from a mouth or vagina.

The relationship of hand and eye as instruments in the autonomous act of painting is therefore transgressed as involving other body parts which do not lend themselves to the subject of linguistic enunciation, but rather to libidinal action. Isabelle Graw (2012: 54) locates aspects of the 'subjective index' in painting which withdraws from the hand and is produced by the action of the artist's body, thereby making explicit the 'agency' of interconnectivity between the 'lived labour' of self and surface. She describes Gerhard Richter's practice of wiping a squeegee across large picture surfaces as inscribing 'his own body movement into the painting' which intensifies the notion of the artist provoking a 're-entering of subjectivity into painting' (2012: 51). But the theme of the body as gesture and subjectivity can also be observed in Siopis's work in video and installation. As I contend in chapter 2.3, Siopis's glue and ink paintings are precipitates of these technological and 'real' functions of objects: the spraying, splattering and swirling process of the glue and ink utilise both the body *and* the signifying concepts of contemporary media. Significantly, then, the conceptualisation avoids a subjective psycho-biographic understanding of Siopis's own body per se. I argue that the body as a signifying device of a libidinal subject is technically *enacted*, and that it is this enactment which is open to analysis, rather than a direct identification with the artist as victim or perpetrator.

Feminist scholar Linda Stupart's (2015: Online) proposal of a 'hypersubjective' and 'personal' reading of bodies as a 'new objecthood' and 'unmediated realism' usefully draws out the difference between real subjects and enactment. Stupart asserts that while intuition or feeling is a necessary aspect of experiencing contemporary critical practices, the 'critical distance' and 'emptiness' of modernism which were historically instituted to convey the 'transcendent' aspects of aesthetic experience are now 'entirely unrelated' to the contemporary project of manifesting affective experiences. To me, Stupart confuses the qualities of 'transcendence' with what is meant in Kant by the limits of the 'transcendental'. In fact, Stupart invokes transcendence when she projects 'practice' onto an absorption or 'unmediated realism' of the spheres of artistic representation and the self as 'thing'. The problem is made tangible through her writing when she asks,

> What happens if we, as women or queers or trans folk, as black folk, as objectified, traumatised, fungible bodies, what if we as objects are in the perfect position to speak to other objects in a meaningful and rupturing way, to replace the distanced objectivity of critical distance with an empathetic exchange of ethical aesthetic objects? What happens if we treat *ourselves* – our bodies, our history as well as our 'I's, as malleable structural frames, which are grounded on every utterance – as material? (Stupart 2015: Online).

Here Stupart may be referring to practice in the sphere of performance and the performativity of critical discourse. But if performance as understood by her is invoked in painting, it works against invoking an 'unmediated realism.' I maintain my interest in Lacan's notion of *das Ding* and the (modernist) emptiness as a significantly ethical act of distance towards the body. This is because, ultimately, the language of trauma in painting and discourse is constituted separately from trauma itself. For example, Lacan makes no bones about the notion that 'sexual symbolism' and the 'play of the signifier' in Western culture arise at the 'point of origin', the space of the female vulva (SVII: 169). But he poses a question: 'Why does one resurrect the metaphor 'fuck' in connection with something that is '"fucked up"?' (SVII: 168). For Lacan it is because only a metaphor, (i.e. not a vulva) can describe something damaged or psycho-sexual, but in reality, the metaphor turns into a traumatic confrontation when it is projected as having a real relation to the materiality and hollowness of the vulva.

It is far from my ambition to reduce or deny the ability of traumatised bodies to speak in meaningful ways through the language of trauma. I rather defend the view that art and performativity makes explicit and tangible the ethical realisation that trauma erupts on the site of a language and cultural system that has *already* placed the gendered and racial other in the space of the 'fungible,' or the 'material, considered as a 'ground.' It is as a female body ruptured, shot through and sexually traumatised, and therefore *because* I've been objectified, that I hesitate to find my 'self' cast in the terms of an *aesthetic* materiality: a form of matter which has transcended the barrier of metaphor to be viewed and experienced as 'fucked up', for real.[146] In that I am a subject of speaking and writing, I concur with Lacan that trauma arises from a Real that is constituted by language and the subject's (victim and perpetrator's) own imaginary and symbolic desire to fill in that distance.

[146] I recognise the implicit act of defiance Stupart sees in doubly asserting the self as a traumatic materiality. My discussion follows similar principles, but in such a way that representation is also asserted. As mentioned in my introduction (pg. 13), the problem of seeing art as 'subject-constituting' unwittingly foregrounds an empirical immediacy associated with a phallic logic, and thus, fatally, the subject's own instrumental use-value. The issue is drawn out in Angela McRobbie's (2001: 526) essay 'Feminism, postmodernism and the "real" me' (1992), where she explores the conflict of opposing Enlightenment concepts of rationality, which can tend towards a 'new essentialism' of the feminine body, especially where it is analysed as a sexual construct.

This opinion filters through in my perspective on Siopis, whose practice, even as it might be seen to index the subjective and the body, is formal and conceptual and should thus be recognised as an enactment of a traumatised subject. Nevertheless, Lacan offers opportunities for sensing the very 'texture' of 'psychic material' as it is involved in representation. As noted, Lacan (SVII: 102) says that the operation of language in both pleasure and reality principles doubles representation, offers 'representatives of representations', and thus models a thickening of symbolic and imaginary elements which are themselves prone to manifesting the transgressive properties of jouissance and trauma.

To reiterate, Lacan asserts that sublimation involves jouissance where the metaphorical substance of experience is concerned. But it is also inscribed by and embodied as a represented space of trauma. The metaphor is coloured by this in potent forms of sublimation which are a 'witness to reality' (SVII: 200). The question of an intersubjective 'empathy' cited by Stupart is also discombobulated here.[147] Lacan (SVII: 106) takes issue with Melanie Klein's formulation of sublimation as a creative act of symbolic repair to the mother's body. For Klein, the artist is analogous to the infant who is conflicted by feelings of love and hate for her mother. The intensification of these oppositions becomes manifest in a sense of guilt, and begins the developmental process in which the infant will integrate these feelings by symbolising them. The symbols will represent the 'good object' and will be aimed at recreating a sense of harmony and love with the mother, thus in part relieving the subject of anxiety (Segal 1964: 92). This psychoanalytic theory is similar to Lacan's assertion that the subject seeks a relationship with the *Nebenmensch* only through *Vorstellungen* or symbolic representations of her pleasurable aspects. But Lacan is clear that in the case of artistic sublimation, the aim is not 'reparation' of the mother's body. Rather, the symbolic substitutes function materially as veils of a 'primordial' source of 'evil and terror' (SVII:106). In other words, while much feminist theory emphasises the body as a source of empathy in women's experiences of trauma, Lacan sees the over-identification with the female body as the origin of violence, particularly in a male-dominated society.

[147] In similar ways to Stupart's more recent proposal, Cathy Caruth's books *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (1995) and *Unclaimed Experience* (1996) both start from the view that we may empathically identify with victims of trauma by way of the literary text's provocation of extreme states of trauma. LaCapra (2001: 103) is critical of the notion that readers and spectators of representations of trauma can identify with events to the extent that they are similarly affected, and thus made *em*pathic rather than more reasonably sympathetic. I address 'sympathetic' understandings of transgression in Siopis's art in the following section, which, similar to my argument progressing here, involve a degree of distance from the artwork, based on its representational function.

There is a rubbing point in the conflict between Klein's and Lacan's hypotheses insofar as Siopis's work is concerned. The cultural signifiers of femininity and the 'navel' of affect as a maternally inflected space are strongly asserted both through the forms of her work and through her own writing (Siopis 2005: 36; Richards 2005: 22). In some paintings, surface is constructed in relief to suggest the convexity of breasts and the concavity of vaginal openings. Here the metaphor of jouissance would suggest that the mythic body of the mother is intimately available. Do these effects not espouse empathic insight into the feminine sphere of bodily experience? But invoking the feminine is not a simple case of erogenous subject-matter in Siopis's work. The singularity of affect as both erotic and traumatic arises through a set of spatial and historical processes which enable the metaphoric function of materiality and substance to reflect *das Ding* as an avowedly empty space.

The complex symbolic and imaginary process through which sublimation occurs is returned to in another sphere of cultural practice in *Seminar SVII*, and also brought to bear in the domain of an erotics which reflects social reality because it enacts its traumatic qualities by depending on the distancing function of the signifier. Again, Lacan (SVII: 139) sees an important function of reality, as we know it, as being visualised in the figure of a woman. In the seminar 'Courtly Love as Anamorphosis' he draws from medieval poetry. The poetic theme of 'courtly love' involved aristocratic nobles and counts writing epic declarations venerating certain women of the court. This specific idealisation continues in the modern day, and the idea of love as predominantly based on the love of women remains prevalent. The important aspect in both cases is that the woman becomes an ideal, and is thus emptied of everything real – e.g. her marital status or actual level of attractiveness – that might obstruct the pursuit of pleasure in the empirical world (SVII: 146). The ideal of courtly love, says Lacan, had nothing to do with women's emancipation. In medieval society, the real status of a woman was

> [n]othing more than a correlative of the functions of social exchange, the support of a certain number of goods and of symbols of power. She is essentially identified with a social function that leaves no room for her person or her own liberty, except with reference to her religious rights (SVII: 147).

But neither does the theme of courtly love leave room for thinking the potentially religious or mystical features of the woman described (SVII: 148). The construction of a woman as ideal had traumatic overtones connected to socio/political themes rather than her being as such. Lacan analyses the sublimation in courtly love from the perspective that feudal life at that stage in European history was harsh and given to bloodthirsty battles for power.

Significant to Lacan's interpretation, the poetry then fulfilled a 'demand' that functioned not to soothe despair so much as to illuminate it. Lacan shows that the structure of the poetry itself reveals that the 'Lady' in question was characterised as thoroughly 'depersonalised' to the point of being inaccessible to her courtier (SVII: 149). Even more, she is not comely or motherly, but is primed as an excessively merciless being or 'terrifying, inhuman partner':

> The Lady is never characterised for any of her real, concrete virtues, for her wisdom, her prudence, or even her competence. If she is described as wise, it is not because she embodies an immaterial wisdom or because she represents its functions more than she exercises them. On the contrary, she is as arbitrary as possible in the tests she imposes on her servant (SVII: 150).

The Lady's role is precisely to mark the space of absence of *das Ding*: if as a woman she bears likeness to the original body of the *Nebenmensch*, she is appraised by the poets for the alien, hostile aspects which characterise her. Courtly love is exemplary of how the erotics of art enacts the development of symbolisation as cut away from the body (SVII:150). Moreover, the courtly love poets show how humanity is able to play with the signifier in ways which reveal the artificial nature of the signifier: how it is constructed from the purely imaginary space of the creating subject, and not from woman's material body (SVII: 151). In this vein, De Kesel (2009: 180) discusses sublimation for how it reveals the signifier as absolutely 'autonomous' from nature and libidinal origins.

Lacan's point therefore bears a striking likeness to the (male subjective) ideals of modernism as an autonomous form from nature and the body, in which the spatial terms of a transcendental subject are embodied by the radically delimited quality of the painted surface. As I discussed in Part 2, this delimitation can incur the traumatic qualities of our pleasure as reduced and regimented in an era of mechanical reproduction in a capitalist economy. But while this traumatic quality can be sublimated in art, it also serves as an ethical limitation in regards to the transcendent fantasies made available by a dematerialisation in the digital age. Lacan's exegesis of courtly love furthermore strongly implies that *a woman* stands at this limit, and thus it *is* a feminine entity which can come to symbolise the proximity to the origin from which all representation as a 'cut' (again, not a material entity) arises.

But simultaneously, Lacan (SVII: 136) insists that the route or 'detour' through which this centre is circumscribed by an assertively phallic realm of the symbolic 'always involves artifice relative to anything material, intuitive or lived'. In Kantian terms, woman is therefore posited on the level of appearance and not the inarticulate thing in itself. For Lacan (SVII: 239), 'the

function of the beautiful' is precisely concerned with appearance in art, rather than things in themselves. It is important for beauty to accentuate its appearance and the diaphanous 'lure' of its seductive surface. Žižek (1995) maintains that, in Lacan, woman is not simply relegated to the material, libidinally irrational qualities of Lacanian psychic life. The feminine co-exists with the masculine on the level of cultural form in a particular way: the 'lack' or emptiness of her vulva gets *embodied* in a system of phallic signifiers which are manifested precisely according to the appearance of pleasures offered by the mother. This instantiates the 'hallucinatory' artificiality of the lure, and thus even the impotency of the signifier as a 'pale incubus' or imaginarily reproduced 'filler' for the hollow vulva (SVII:46). Žižek (1995) writes that 'Woman is not the phallus, she merely appears to be phallus, and this appearing (which of course is identical with femininity qua masquerade) points towards a logic of lure and deception.' Judith Butler (1993: 17) similarly links aspects of Luce Irigaray's notion of 'masquerade' to her own notion of 'performativity'. If woman is the preeminent symbol of the phallus, her intentionally exaggerated appearance as lure in the social sphere can 'displace' jouissance from the maternal body and assert 'the reiteration and extension of the primary *differentiation* and *separation* from the maternal body by which a speaking subject comes into being' (my italics 1993: 71).[148] Butler discusses how this logic of enacting lure and deception can also, particularly for Irigaray, point to aspects of the feminine and her 'chora' which do not fit with the phallic symbol, and remain outside of language as a 'nonthematizable materiality'(1993: 42). But again: the materiality which stands as potentially 'nonthematizable' in Lacan is not women's material bodies, but the psychic *Ding* which is unrepresentable. If the mother's body is that which one might *thematise* as closest in its symbolic nature to *das Ding*, the *traumatic* potential of this 'beyond' is similarly provoked. There is then a level at which Lacan invites us to think the problem of language and embodiment as the indeterminate space in which the feminine as such finds its provocative and transgressive potential. Rosalind Krauss's (2000: 19) depiction of some modernist art as 'not an attack on women, but an assault on a view assumed to be male and an award to his fantasies and his worst fears' is important here: I maintain throughout this chapter that transgression involves handing back the problem of bodies to the space of the intersubjective, transcendental realm. Thus an artist draws from the propositions internal to the phallocentric symbolic in order to articulate the 'worst fears' associated with the libidinal subject as his and her *own*.

[148] Butler's own thesis (1993: 51) enables performativity to explain how queer identity subverts the cultural domain from the inside, as for instance in her construction of 'the lesbian phallus'.

The ideal of 'woman' in courtly love, as if she is caught in the mirror of an anamorphosis, resembles the space that is non-thematizable in painting, except by metaphors. Conversely, Hal Foster ([2] 1996: 148) conceptualises art that deploys trauma and 'abjection', its material facture and affect, as working against the 'lure' and 'deception' of metaphors. Yet he does so through Lacan. In two closely related essays on art and trauma, Foster explores Lacan's notion of the Gaze. The theory of the Gaze is subsequent to *das Ding*, but can be seen as one of *das Ding*'s threatening effects in looking and being looked at (Boothby 2001: 242). While this is not the place to extend a discussion of the Gaze,[149] Foster's use of the Gaze describes the 'lure' or appearance of the surface of things as a function which 'screens' us from the psychic Real of the Gaze. A painting may operate as this image-screen, and he discusses Lacan's invocation of painting as that which historically 'pacifies' and 'tames' the 'evil eye' of the Gaze, or *das Ding* ([2]1996: 140). As Foster writes, the 'screen' can be understood as the surface or symbolic network. It is a

> […] cultural reserve of which each image is one instance. Call it the conventions of art, the schemata of representation, the codes of visual culture': as such, it 'mediates' the gap between the symbolic and the real ([2] 1996: 140).

In this sense, painting sustains a position very similar to the Lady of courtly love poetry: it is the surface or screen which irradiates the coming into being of a symbolic network or 'cultural reserve', and marks a barrier to the real and the Gaze. However, Foster wants to account for how art that is particularly traumatic or abject functions, and thus may preclude the notion that a painting might 'pacify' the real. He states that some contemporary work is not purely imaginary and symbolic in its forms but 'moves not only to attack the image but to tear at the screen, or to suggest that it has already been torn' ([1]1996: 110).

For Foster, abject imagery can be experienced as so horrifying as to suggest that no screen exists ([1]1996: 112). He references Cindy Sherman's photographs, which depict a mass of non-differentiated objects signifying 'menstrual blood and sexual discharge, vomit and shit, decay and death'. Foster's case is then that a screen that has functioned as lure or deception and as a distancing act from the real, is now torn or opened.

[149] Foster ([2]1996: 140) defines the Gaze as follows: 'Lacan distinguishes between the look (or the eye) and the gaze, and to an extent…he locates this gaze in the world. As with language in Lacan, then, so with the gaze: it pre-exists the subject, who, "looked at from all sides", is but a "stain" in "the spectacle of the world". Thus positioned, the Lacanian subject feels the gaze as a threat, as if it queried him or her, and so it is that "the gaze, *qua objet a*, may come to symbolize this central lack expressed in the phenomenon of castration".'

Further, the abject is an appropriate theme for art which expresses a manifest aggression towards art historical conventions of autonomy and opticality. Registering a direct concern with the conditions of the Real, it exposes the transcendental as a sphere of 'illusionistic representation' ([2]1996: 52).



Cindy Sherman, 1987. *Untitled #175* (*Disgust series*). 119.1 x 181.6 cm. Courtesy of The Museum of Modern Art

However, as I have begun to frame Siopis's particular subjectivity in her practice within the terms of jouissance as the irreducible yet *imaginary* point of contact with *das Ding*, I am not convinced that an extremely libidinal depiction of discharge, as one finds in Siopis's as well as Sherman's work, should be interpreted as tearing at a screen. Siopis's work might not aim at 'symbolic repair' as per Klein's theory, but it also simply cannot tear the screen away. The thought of this is pure nihilism, and that is not how her artwork is effective or affective.

To think that one sees or grasps the interior of the body as the truth or real beyond perception and experience is the ethical aberration that characterises what Seltzer (1997) calls a 'wound culture'. Moreover, Lacan's emphasis on the *empty space* of a beyond means that we do not find abject, bodily matter beyond the screen. The screen is precisely that 'cultural reserve' in which notions of body and language, however grossly or traumatically invested, *establish the*

barrier to the beyond. But if painting embodies that screen, particularly when 'it enters into a relation with desire', as Lacan (SIV: 108) says, it functions to expose a 'blindness' as the condition of this barrier: it heightens the essential absence beyond the capacity of perception.

However, in a section where Foster addresses traumatic superrealism he makes what seems to be a case for painting in general as it might veil the space of *das Ding*, as screen or barrier. The superrealist painting enacts a 'subterfuge against the real, an art pledged not only to pacify the real but to seal it behind surfaces, to embalm it in appearances' ([2]1996: 141). For Foster, superrealism registers as traumatic because it 'delays the real' and can thus be situated on, or assert, the gap between the Real and symbolic. The particular hyperreal way in which forms are constructed involve landscapes which work as multiple, 'fluid' signs of the landscape (Foster [2]1996: 142). But this notion of something real also being 'sealed' or 'embalmed' via the codes and conventions of art, with its 'schemata of representation' being hyped onto another level, also describes the operation of jouissance in Siopis.

Much of Siopis's painting refers to an excess of libidinal qualities in conflict with convention, to the extent that surface becomes grossly exaggerated. I see the imaginary signs of de Sade and the symbolic realm of the Lady of courtly love being embodied simultaneously by way of the painted surface. This is because the signs of the violated body are manifestly artificial, but have metaphorical value. The hyperreal colours of red ink, of bright pink, and of thickly plastic paint mimic the stuff of the body, rather than attempting to depict it. This stuff, I venture, is also to an extent a *poor* mimicking of bodily substances. While the glue, for instance, acts with the ink to flow in serous, lymphatic ways, it also fixes it in its synthetic gleam.

It is important that most of these materials are not traditional. Siopis's earlier work used oil paint in embellished crusts and absorbed light in ways that remind one of how human skin has traditionally been compared with oil paint (Elkins 2012: 3-10).[150] Much of her work has progressed towards experimenting with glass lacquers, bee wax and glue. I don't think it is a coincidence that these substances tend to gleam in unnatural ways. They point to highly carnally inflected spaces, but simultaneously repel as simulated things. It is as if Siopis were saying, 'You want my sex? Well, here you go!'

[150] Siopis's work has been discussed in terms of its skin-like qualities, which signifies the oppositions within a concept of 'personhood' as well as an 'intersubjective field' (Bunn [Unpublished] 2009: 6).
Figure 38: Penny Siopis, 1986. Detail of *Unrequited*.

This perverse dispensation is particularly apparent to the viewer in her *Pinky Pinky* (2002) series of paintings, which are visual representations of a mythic deviant creature in school legends, who haunts children's bathrooms, obviously with a sexually abusive agency (Siopis 2014: 141). But this abuse is given *imaginary* form, as if from the fantasy-ridden perspective of a child visualising sexual threat.[151] Some of the materials interred on the surface are found objects that become prosthetic features jutting from a leering figure. Tawdry beads embedded in the surface glisten blindly as sclerotic eyes. The flesh-coloured paint resembles a pink-tinged concrete that is pasted and brutally fixed. The paintings are inscribed by tools penetrating their surface, which make red saturated holes, or by awfully insectile facial features which raise the paint in replications of scabrous tissue. But again, these are crudely carved into the surfaces. The pinks and flesh tones 'quote' flattened exemplars of skin colour, or the raw area which lies directly beneath skin.

But the *Pinky Pinky* series also renders these effects preternatural by citing traditional modes of modernist painting as a flat, monochromatic surface. The material tension between the expressive qualities of figuration and the reduced, simplistic forms demarcating *Pinky Pinky's* outline and its correspondence with the outlying negative spaces, makes the edges and surface of the canvas optically and categorically totalised. These corpulent things are thus vulgar masquerades of the frontality and two-dimensionality of modernist painting. That spongy sickliness disinters the modernist subject from within its own convention.

My emphasis on the artificial qualities of surface are therefore not invoking the empty simulacra in Jean Baudrillard's writing (1988) or in Guy De Bord's (1967) sombre account of the utterly vacant spectacle characterising contemporary experience. The inclusion of the modernist frame is important. Deleuze's (1983: 48) notion of the simulacrum as a copy without-model, or 'model-as-Other', is closer to thinking Siopis's surfaces as the 'lady' of courtly love: as Deleuze writes, the simulacrum is endowed with a quality 'made from below, by means of an aggression, an insinuation, a subversion'. Siopis (2014: 141) has discussed this characteristic in the *Pinky Pinky* series, indicating that the surface is suggestive of something troubling lurking beneath. If something seems to hover below or beyond the surface it is because the effect arises not only from the surface's manifestly synthetic values.

[151] Figure 39: Penny Siopis. 2002. *Pinky Pinky Fly Eyes;* Figure 40: Penny Siopis. 2002. *Pinky Pinky*; Figure 41: Penny Siopis. 2002. *Pinky Pinky.*



Penny Siopis, 2002-2005. *Pinky Pinky series*. Installation of ten paintings, oil and found objects on canvas. Courtesy of The Stevenson Gallery, Cape Town

The paintings are thickened by libidinal associations, but Greenberg's ideal distance between two autonomous entities – the painted surface and viewer – draw signification into a psychical sphere. Seen in relationship with the gross bodies depicted, this ideal distance is objectified as a negative instance of the limits to cognition. Krauss (1996: 99) describes the embodiment of this negative transcendental limit as a 'conscious' and 'resolute' encounter with 'this terminal process which up until now has been seen as the abortion and the shame of human thought'.

Through a certain compaction of surface as Deleuzian simulacrum, the modernist (male) subject may recall his own impotency lying at the heart of the transcendental ideal. Thus while Ettinger envisions the notion of a matrixial borderspace reaching behind and beyond the painted surface as a special feminine space, I see that surface as manifest limit to the Other as *das Ding*: a barrier which contains an implicit refusal to reflect the stuff of the feminine and, instead, reveals the veil as a potentially traumatic screen. However, Ettinger's evocation of that veil as a 'borderspace' leads me to some conclusions in my interpretation of Siopis's work in this section. Ettinger (2006: 197) writes that

> [t]he matrixial borderline interweaves a nonconscious transsubjectivity composed of trauma and jouissance encountering. In itself, it is an *ensemblage* of psychic events woven through encounter, wrapped with affects and memory traces, which shape and expose its sense.

As discussed above, Lacan sees such an 'ensemblage' as the 'representatives of representations' which make up the unconscious mat of the imaginary and symbolic which constitutes the Real. For me, the 'encounter' and 'interweaving' of psychic and material affects and 'traces' work to seal and indeed embalm the space of *das Ding* in ways which reveal, for our age, how that absence is constructed: centrally, by the lure and deception of the surface-like quality of jouissance.

This focus on the conceptual form of jouissance is underwritten by the body, and can also be signalled through metaphor and enactment. The lure is constituted by a demand for *possession* of the body (posited as feminine). This, as I explore in the following chapter, is a demand for possession which Siopis reflects back at the viewer. The 'transsubjective' as offering access to an Other in Ettinger's formulation is here refused and the problem of jouissance asserted as an intersubjectively founded and trauma-saturated barrier to symbolic transformation in modern socio-political experience.

In regards to Siopis's painting practice, Nuttall (2014: 184) mentions that '[it] is partly in depthlessness that something of the opportunity lies for the new'. If 'depthlessness' may signify a borderline upon which contact between subjects is made, I problematise the opportunism that is implicit in this contact. Seen as an aspect of jouissance, this depthlessness mints trauma as the other side of the same coin. This thought will return in how I construe 'gesture' as an enactment of subjectivity-as-exchange in Siopis's video work and installations. These *ensemblages* begin to feature the dimensions of the 'coin' as implacable object, a literal notion of a beyond of the two-dimensionality of painting, tossed into real space. These works maintain an insinuation of an Other space of *das Ding* because they intensify the painterly logic of barrier and tortured screen to the real. But I would like to include these bodies of praxis because they also extend the question of jouissance by focusing on formal encounters with painterly notions of gesture signifying the potential for 'flashpoints' between the real and psychic Real (Seltzer 1997: 4). Imaginary encounters take place in the formal relationship of conflict and penetration between found entities; and this identity of 'betweenness' exacerbates, even hyper-exacerbates, the notion of imaginary and real relations themselves. By way of a focus on form, the traumatic exigencies of socio-political South Africa are reflected upon in particular ways.

3.3 Gesture: An Other Self



Penny Siopis, 1997. *Reconnaissance* (Detail) Installation at the Goodman Gallery. Courtesy of Penny Siopis

The sense of 'personhood' we discussed in terms of Isabelle Graw's (2012: 46) notion of the 'subjective index' in painting also encompasses, for Graw, the potential for 'social agency' in the wider cultural sphere. If the 'navel of affect' in Siopis evokes an encounter with our bodies, her formal conditioning of jouissance can be read to speak to the fantasy of social cohesion as well as marking acute sites of real breakdown.[152] It is through the particularity in which gesture is constructed in her work that the possibility of reflection on certain 'universal' or shared traumas in the public sphere arises. I see the notion of gesture as related to the concept of jouissance: jouissance as the affective encounter between subject and object, subject and subject based in a misperception of psychic and bodily boundaries. In similar ways to Siopis's use of the colour 'red' as a psychic entity or 'brute fact' (chapter 3.1: pg. 123), the materials

[152] TJ Demos (2014: 209) sees Siopis's recent videos, *Obscure White Messenger* (2010) in particular, as 'offering the cinematic means to transcend the violence of political and epistemological oppositions – between truth and falsehood, purity and hybridity, nationality and statelessness'.

she deploys *to* gesture acutely connect representations which are conditioned as resemblances between inside and the outside, self and other. What occurs is a *Ding*-like contact of signifiers, a point or navel at which neither language nor the specific contents of emotion – fear, love or anxiety – seems to adequately reveal itself in the work. *As if* from another space of primordial, animal, mystical fusion, gesture pressures the surface of manifest artifice.[153] As I will explore, this pressure of gesture can be analysed in her video and installations. Further, the form of gesture developed in video and installation works are reflected in Siopis's subsequent paintings.

Siopis (2014: 110) has commented that she views her installation work as being determined by the same method of 'contingency' as her painting. She likens the objects in the installations to 'paint tubes' as each of them is useable and expendable according to its value for a particular display. In turn, the objects function similarly to the materials in her film in that they serve as 'archives' or material objects which are subject to procedures which reference painting as a concept or process. Siopis's found objects are also painterly to the extent that they are configured in combinations and contrasts of colour and shapes of two and three dimensions in ways that are specific to the materiality of the objects. Her installations invoke what Craig Staff (2013: 131) calls 'situational painting', which literally involves the bodily space of viewers.[154] 'Situational painting' also maintains something of Greenberg's emphasis on autonomy. The form and visuality of materials may not immediately correspond with the specificity of site or context. If the objects are representative of a subjectivity, they become emblematic of realms of experience that are not strictly associated with external reality. While they rise from the surface as real objective things from the world, by their complex conjunctions they manifest surreally psychosomatic spaces. The distance between reality and art is therefore implicitly

[153] Jessica Benjamin (1995: 1) addresses the notion of 'object relations' as sometimes oversimplifying the relationship between self and 'object', and self and 'other'. Her argument advocates '[m]ental life [as] seen from an *intersubjective* perspective' and she goes on to say that '[a]lthough this perspective has transformed both our theory and our practice in important ways, such transformations [from the object relation to intersubjective relations] create new problems'. However, this chapter of my thesis works precisely to explore the problem of perceiving others as *object*s. This seems to be the ethical issue at hand for Lacan: the intersubjective realm of daily experience *is* often pervaded by an indifference to the heterogeneity of self, other and object, specifically in traumatic instances of violence and abuse. At the same time, I see the question of 'transformation' which Benjamin addresses as a historical and cultural problem of intersubjectivity being explored through Siopis's artwork, which directly deploys objects that have been in the possession of, and held significance for, others.

[154] Tony Godfrey (2009: 355) similarly discusses what he calls 'Installation Painting'. Constructing a painting show as more of an environment than pieces being separately framed is not a new idea, as he points out, but 'installation painting' can be seen to emphasise an aspect of painting which is already implicit in the act of looking: 'Painting can appeal to other senses than sight: the sixth sense, kinaesthesia, is the sense of one's own body in motion, and this is an integral part of the experience of looking.' Indeed, I argue that Siopis's work with found objects and found video is an emphasis on and extension of the body's nuanced but affective role in perception.

present as a modernist device. But for Staff (2013: 132), such distance is nevertheless 'circumscribed socially' because painting is established as something to inhabit, a 'situation' where the spatial dimensions of looking are made real as one walks through the installation. As 'ambulatory and embodied', 'situational painting' therefore inscribes the tension by which the viewer's own body activates the site as aesthetic (Staff 2013: 141). The tension between combination and contrast, proximity and distance, is also evident in Siopis's video works, made from highly edited passages and clips from found videos that she has accumulated from junk stores. As in her painting and installation work, the viewer's space is engaged by the materiality of the old film – which is assertively included – blocking and distorting the spectator's perspective. As I will discuss, these points of material juncture, or gestures, subvert the sequence of narrative and yet, paradoxically, intensify a sense of dematerialisation.



Penny Siopis, 2002. *Sympathetic Magic* (Detail). Installation at University of the Witwatersrand Art Galleries. Courtesy of Penny Siopis

I argue for the paradoxical relationship between blunt material gesture and dematerialised emptiness by first exploring some relatable theoretical terms between trauma and jouissance: now specifically posited in the intersubjective realm. The context and specific forms of harm befalling people may differ, but from Lacan's psychoanalytic point of view, the fundamental structure of imaginary desires and traumatic metaphors remain sovereign to the psychic realm of *das Ding*. Fantasy and passions imbue objects and other people with chimeras that seem to fill and dissolve the very spaces of confusion, breakdown and ruptures that are felt in real proximity to other bodies. Because such chimeras become belief, and feed into violent behaviours on collective levels which are felt as justified, they demand exploration. Lacan's notion of jouissance engages the relation of self and the self's 'neighbour', and is presented as core to a concept of intersubjectivity and its interconnectedness with object relations. I explore the specifically South African context of these vagaries with reference to a particular case-study, that which anthropologists Jean and John Comaroff (1999) conducted on the phenomenon of the 'occult economy' and 'witchcraft' in South Africa post-1994. As my discussion develops, the way in which witchcraft and superstition in South Africa can be seen to parallel the structural model of jouissance in Lacan's seminar helps to define the context-specific practice and reception of Siopis's video and installation.

In the Comaroffs' view (1999: 284), practices of human and animal mutilation aimed at 'miraculous' cures of physical and mental ailments, as well as narratives of zombies and witches infiltrating communities, arise from the sublimation of traumatic experiences under apartheid. Past and present experiences become indeterminate drivers of these practices and narratives. Witchcraft and magic also speak to the contemporary disparity that is felt between those who have rapidly acquired wealth in the change of power and those who have remained trapped in poverty. In a society colonised by violence and crime, fear *and* fascination inflect the seemingly invisible market forces which create discrepancies and a massive disproportion between haves and have-nots (Comaroff 1999: 290). This sphere of capital machinations, perceived as a 'spectrally' empty gap, is not only afforded a magical significance, but is given a particularly traumatic focus in that neighbours in the community are perceived as a threat. However, the Comaroffs see these local articulations of myth and bedevilment as coinciding with narratives being produced on a global level in both the popular imagination and academic spheres:

> Everywhere the boundaries of postenlightenment humanity are called more and more into question; hence the fascination with cyborgs, the fear of invasions by aliens clothed in humdrum bodily form, the dangerous promise of cloning and genetic mutilation (1999: 281).

Significantly, the Comaroffs (1991: 284) comment that the occurrence of zombies and cyborgs on both 'local and global' levels do not function to sublimate trauma in the sense of gaining distance from it or resolving conflictual feelings. Rather, this 'epidemic of mystical evil' 'feeds animating desires' (Comaroff 1999: 282, 289). While fear drives belief into paranoid condemnations, physical violence and death, for the Comaroffs this very same structure is paradoxically given over to fantasies of sexually tainted modes of consumption.

> The spectre of mystical violence run wild is a caricature of postapartheid 'liberty': the liberty to transgress and consume in an unfettered world of desire, cut loose from former political, spatial, moral, sexual, and material constraints. Socialist imaginings, like all utopian ideas for a new society, falter. In their place reigns the rhetoric of the market, of freedom as the right to exercise choice through spending or voting or whatever, of personhood as constructed largely through consumption. Talk in the public sphere about violence – in official commissions and the press, on television talk shows and in "people's" courts, in artistic representation and radio debate – expresses a pent up lust for the things that apartheid denied, from iconic objects (notably, the BMW) and an omnivorous sexuality unbound by Calvinist stricture, to extravagant self-fashionings and the flamboyant sense of independence communicated by the cell phone (Comaroff 999: 293).

The wider social sphere may be seen to sublimate violence and fear with beliefs of sexual proclivity and procreative freedom. The Comaroffs also comment on the indeterminately gendered way in which the magical means of sexual consumption become abstracted in the 'occult economy'. Witches, whether they be men or women, are often called 'old ladies' and seen as the source of an 'unnatural production and reproduction' through their 'red vaginas and their lethal, rotting sperm' (1999: 286).

In occultism and its corresponding allure of violence in the sphere of media representation, ideas on freedom and sexuality seem to derive from myth and the female body. These factors discussed by the Comaroffs align with the structure of jouissance in *Seminar VII*. Lacan models the constraints on freedom and sexuality on the Christian commandment to 'Love thy Neighbour as thyself' (SVII: 179). He posits the neighbour in question as him- or herself primordially tied to Freud's notion of the *Nebenmensch* or mother's body, but also inalterably divided from an incestuous restoration of the self (SVII: 170). While Lacan invokes a Western model, I see the parallel between his ideas and the Comaroffs' study of witchcraft as resonating on the level at which language and the body incur the 'magical' and perverse effects of

jouissance: again, this will be developed to understand the concept and affect of gesture in Siopis's work.

Lacan (SVII: 185) follows Freud's critical view on the paradox that truly loving one's neighbour can have devastating effects on the social body. For Lacan, love and aggression are two sides of the same coin, minted on the press of sex and sexuality. The primary point of Freud's text *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930), says Lacan, is that Symbolic 'love' can only be given to the extent that it might offer the same level of good to others in which the self finds her own comfort: by having goods that lend themselves to 'usefulness and utilization' (SVII: 187). But the *Real* dimensions of love for another as 'thyself', unfettered by the desire for goods of comfort and well-being, is theorised as also holding an 'innate aggression' to reach *das Ding.* Aggression, and the erotics of aggression, can be seen to be 'satisfied' 'at the 'expense of my neighbour' in all the criminal instances we bear witness to: abuse, slavery, rape and the passions or magic some employ to commit murder (SVII: 185). In these violent instances, Lacan (SVII: 186) departs from Freud on the question of how the 'bad neighbour' is to be ethically perceived, in that he sees 'good' and 'bad' as being more deeply related than in Freud. Freud offers more 'altruistic' examples of positive forms of the good in love, such as being empathetic to friends who experience great loss. But for Lacan, it is *because* we separate our 'goods' in order of value and usefulness – in other words on the basis of inherently phallic symbols – that jouissance becomes something forbidden, something to be repressed. The notion of good and of freedom is based on the question of the rational level of needs. As Lacan says (SVII: 187), our ego and self-image are satisfied when altruistic sacrifices are made for the neighbour in order to ensure that we all remain in equal proximity to things that are useful. However, if it were merely a question of fulfilling need, there should, in the logic of survival and our complementing of global resources, not be a problem. But this is precisely where problems arise: as laid out in Part 2 of this thesis, reason incites the drives of desire. Access to goods, to the forces of production, misses the fundamental libidinal demand that is expressed as 'love.'[155] When the notion of the useful is based on need alone, therefore,

[155] Lacan (SVII: 206) states that Marx is one philosopher aside from Freud who reveals the 'true orientation' of modern ethics. He goes on to discuss that whereas Marx showed that 'need' or 'reason' alone will not fulfil the mandate of political emancipation, he did not account for the specifically libidinal sphere of experience and therefore could not progress to what Lacan (SVII: 209) states is a consideration that cannot be separated from 'human self-realisation': an acknowledgement of the dark recesses of perverse desire and jouissance.

> …[it] becomes the pretext by means of which I can avoid taking up the problem of the evil I desire, and that my neighbour desires also. That is how I spend my life, by cashing in my time in a dollar zone, rouble zone or any other zone…where all the neighbours are maintained equally at the marginal level of reality of my own existence. Under these conditions it is hardly surprising that everyone is sick, that civilization has its discontents.



Penny Siopis, 2002. *Sympathetic Magic* (Detail). Installation at University of the Witwatersrand Art Galleries. Courtesy of Penny Siopis

In Lacan's view (SVII: 192), being oblivious to the full dimensions of what is hidden by the demand for love is how, paradoxically, the perverse freedom of jouissance also springs to life. It is because of this innate obliviousness that the materiality of the 'good' and the useful *itself* becomes the aim and goal of jouissance: whether it be an object to be devoured, or the evisceration of your sexual partner. The weight of *das Ding* makes its presence felt as long as the demand of a libidinally polymorphous subject is misrecognised as something that can simply be administered to on the basis of needs and sanitary altruism. This weight can manifest itself as excessive and fully irrational. Lacan (SVII: 188) mentions the example of an ancient mystic, who, in ecstatic subservience to the plight of the poor, would 'joyfully lap up the water in which she had just washed the feet of lepers'. Therefore that which Lacan asserts is already hidden in normal acts of altruism is sometimes brought to the fore in excessive instances of religious or orgiastic fervour. But we might also see here a correspondence with the

contemporary appearance of 'occult economies'. As the Comaroffs (1999: 285) attest, attempts to extract a supernatural meaning from the enigmatic gap between wanton commodity consumption and pauperised lack escalates the traumatic relationship of magical subjects and their profane objects to the degree that 'there is a mounting confusion of people with *things*'. As in the Comaroffs' analysis, Lacan (SVII: 188) asserts that the 'erotic side of things remains veiled' insofar as a leper's skin is imbued with divine unction, or the body of a 'witch' is slaughtered as the imagined obstacle to *true* yet otherwise *un*imaginable wealth and goods. The mysterious and unknown quality of our ultimate desire thus establishes the ground upon which the real domestic world of people and things are unwittingly inscribed with a Thingness not of their own.

In everyday life it is a well-observed fact that objects can have metaphorical value and therefore connote aspects of lived experience that are not directly connected to themselves. But some metaphors exceed their value as 'mere' metaphor, sliding off towards further chains of association. Through their radical traumaticity, they reveal a conceptual flashpoint of stubborn significance. As doubly opaque, they reveal the very veiledness of the point at which jouissance and trauma transgress the fluidity of language to become inflexibly fixated states of a nameless, faceless goal. While the readymade nature of either found object or film tends to refer in stimulating ways to other places, people, and events, Siopis's focus on the materiality and the formal relationships between image and object produces an obduracy of metaphor, inducing psychosomatic realms fissured by the exchangeability of need and demand.

Oppositions analogous to need and demand, use and uselessness, purpose and perverse purposelessness have been framed by James Elkins (1997: 89) in terms of gesture and the painted surface. For Elkins, gesture involves both 'sense' and 'semiosis': centred on the intuitive sensibility of gestural marks, or as it gives contours to shape and form, gesture is both 'prone and immune' to interpretation. I draw a structural insight from Elkin's statement that 'graphic marks [can] combine irrationally, into moments of pellucid naturalism and opaque antinaturalism' (1997: 89). Derrida extends and complicates a similar combination (1987: 6). He explores Cézanne's 'stroke' through the 'traits' of language that offer gesture its various, often contradictory meanings, as Elkins also suggests. Language 'parasitizes' upon the object by imposing meanings that 'say' more about the work of the signifier than does the painted surface. Derrida is concerned to show that the philosophical deliberation of aesthetics provides these traits to the 'stroke', or gesture. The proof, for Derrida, is that Cézanne will not deploy

his stroke in order to fulfil these 'truths', but that these 'truths' will, through the act of interpretation and discourse, come to assume the value and function of a stroke (1987: 8). However, by setting up the terms of the stroke's use-value early in the book, Derrida reveals the demand that the stroke manifests for language. Through deconstruction and enactment, he works to demonstrate that the 'remainders' 'exceed and overflow' the 'pellucid naturalism and opaque antinaturalism' offered by Kant's parergon of form and matter (Derrida 1987: 4; Elkins 1997: 89).

This 'truth' is suggested for Derrida (1987: 5) because of the way in which the 'stroke', or gesture, has a quality that provokes interpretation: it 'opens the abyss' between 'presentation and representation, … unveiling and adequation'. The natural and the unnatural qualities of the gestural mark combine in ways which are both rational and irrational. In that the stroke is subject to conventional metaphors, as a series of 'idioms' it also defines its use-value as a 'truth' of the signifier, and thus for language. Derrida names four idioms in ascending order (1987: 5-7). Firstly, the stroke registers as a thing in itself, and refuses illusion on pure terms: it exists 'without mask or veil'. Secondly, it informs the representation of an image, by revealing how the surface is constructed, 'on the order of fiction or in the relief of its effigy'. Thirdly, the gesture is viewed for how it creates a picture that is 'proper' or 'true' to the act of painting, 'in the field of the pictural properly speaking'. And fourth, the gesture can refer to the subject of painting, and thus to the question of the 'truth-value' painting may hold.

The painterly gesture or stroke is therefore subject to an almost impossible demand from language and discourse. As Derrida suggests (and enacts), it can also evoke all possibilities at once: it drives the metaphors which designate the thing in itself, it gives shape and form to the surface of representation, onwards to exemplifying the work's self-reflexive autonomy, and upwards to the very subject of the artwork itself. As I construe it, the demand contained by gesture can be understood as present in contemporary practices which traverse and exceed the two-dimensionality of the painted surface, and yet affect perception in similar ways. The limit of purpose and purposelessness – or use-value as opposed to jouissance – found in gesture not only drives meaning, but creates its possibility. I will attempt to show how.



Penny Siopis, 2002 - . An object from *Will*. Documentation courtesy of Penny Siopis

Michael Fried (1967) asserts that Anthony Caro's sculptural assemblages allay the 'theatricality' of minimalist objects because they enact 'the efficacy of [painterly] gesture'. For Fried, gesture creates meaning because it is 'possessed by the knowledge of the human body'. I see Siopis's project *Will* (1997-) as embodying the 'efficacy of gesture' that is advocated by Fried. It is present in her found objects and installations in general, as well as in particular moments which arise from some of her video work. Yet in seeming opposition to the presence of the body, *Will* is assertively conceptualised in terms of death and the gestation of meaning which may arise from that empty unknowable space. The found objects Siopis has collected over time – strange things of variable value, from precious to mere 'junk' – have been catalogued as heirlooms, and are to be given to members of her social and familial network upon her death. But I see her bequeathing of these kinds of objects as a truly macabre gesture which questions the altruism of bestowing inheritance and the selflessness that is associated with such altruism. As I explore, it is a demand from beyond the grave which cannot be reciprocated: its selflessness is a form of jouissance. But it is the form and materiality of such things as art, more particularly, which engender their traumatic gravity.

That found objects come to experience a 'changed ontological status' when entering a gallery or institutional exhibition setting is widely accepted as a result of a contemporary mode of practice in which the everyday is reinvested with supplementary symbolic resonance (Kearny 2013: 46). As Duchamp's first introduction of the readymade into institutional settings has been conceived, his substitution of a hand-crafted *objet d'art* by an object seemingly arbitrarily picked from the everyday world of things exposed the previously hidden semiotic processes applied to plastic form. For theorist Carol James (1981: 118), the success of the readymade lies in the rupture its industrially-produced objecthood established in traditional aesthetic practices. Conventional modernist terms tended to seal over the difference between interpretation and its aesthetic matter, seeing interpretation as arising from an 'innocent origin of conceptualization'. But by deploying 'strange things' as substitutes for the articulate formal conventions of painting, Duchamp highlighted the ways in which the signifier is open to 'play'. This 'play' has a decisive value in terms of embodiment and the empty sphere of dematerialisation, the gestures I see occurring in Siopis's found object installations and video. Below, I develop the implications of gesture in this structure by further reference to Duchamp.

Hubert Damisch (1979: 14) has explored Duchamp's deep interest in playing chess to elucidate the implications of this practice. Damisch sees chess as less a systematic enactment of scientific rules than working to shift and alter the function of the system at particular moments of engagement. In Damisch's development of this idea (1979: 8), the game of chess allowed Duchamp to envision a 'model of art itself' that is less dependent on its plastic qualities and more open to theoretical elaboration. Chess allows for 'play' between the modalities of intuition and logic (1979: 10). However, it would be the language-like qualities of logic that Duchamp would emphasize in all his projects, and in invoking chess as a 'kind of writing'. That the pictural qualities of an image were present to the eye had less import than the level of play certain gestures induced in the mind: certain signifying functions, like the pieces on the grid of a chessboard, invoke interpretation, reading and thought over immediate aesthetic experience. However, this is not to say that Duchamp would have stressed the predominance of the signifier as a necessary outcome of artistic practice. On the contrary, Damisch writes, his 'linguistic studies' had no 'practical utility': direct meaning was undecidable (1979: 10). For Damisch, Saussure's view on the relationship between the signifier and signified as ultimately self-referential and arbitrary in regards to objects, is further complicated by Duchamp's notion of chess. Duchamp's emphasis was not just on language and the way it comes to hold meanings, but on the 'conflictual structure' of the game (1979: 22). It was the conflict between 'two poles' – embodied as two kings in symmetrical opposition – that provided Duchamp with a 'topological model of play' (Damisch 1979: 23).

Designating an arbitrary thing as chess piece or a readymade as art therefore functions gesturally in a way that is similar to Derrida's notion of the 'stroke' because it elicits the very moment when interpretation, reading and thought tend to surface on the object's mute 'thingness'. But Duchamp was also deeply interested in the role of 'eroticism' as a means by which language takes on a universal value, as a 'thing that everybody understands'. As he commented 'I want to grasp things with the mind the way a penis is grasped by a vagina' (Duchamp quoted in Parkinson 2008: 63). Duchamp demonstrates the tension between things in themselves and the world of appearances as something that comes to be 'grasped' in an essential undecidability, something both sensible and empty. De Duve (1991:15) construes this 'revelation' of 'the gap' as a result of Duchamp's abandonment of his own painting practice. For de Duve (1991: 30), Duchamp's painting *The Passage From the Virgin to the Bride* (1912) articulates the pictural model by which the history of art is 'delayed' by the 'passage' Duchamp suggested was his real 'demand': 'woman as a metaphor of painting'. In de Duve's view, this

‘metaphor’ revolves on the point at which Duchamp realises that ‘what one desires to express through painting is no longer the imaginary accomplishment of desire, but the very truth function that breaks through this sublimative practice’ (1991: 34).

As Duchamp developed *The Passage* into his assemblages of glass and iron, painting becomes the ground upon which the gesture towards real space is predicated on desire for the woman’s body as being itself a ‘truth-function’, rather than on the body’s expressive functions. Furthermore, this focus on the ‘gap’ or ‘break’ which instates both a refusal of painting and a demand for the ‘conditions of undecidability’ in Duchamp’s work, is thus already inscribed in *The Passage* because it demarcates the space and time of Duchamp’s ‘decision’ *not* to paint. Thus de Duve (1991: 41) implies that there is a phallocentric decision to grasp that gap based on the negation, or the repression, of painting: ‘One loses one’s virginity only once; one becomes a painter in one stroke; the whole of painting is established with one’s initial choice.’

The ‘stroke’ that establishes that a choice has been made to paint can of course be viewed from the ‘kingly’ pole of its opposite: not to paint. But it is the ‘choice’ that signifies the limit upon which these conditions are put into a relationship and, again in reference to chess, this choice is the move or the act by which the function of the system is altered. The ‘choice’ reveals the empty space that the already-decided signifiers attempt to grasp. In other words, ‘choice’ is like the stroke which demands its own penetration by language and interpretation, and thus can operate beyond and outside the painted surface.

This choice defines the meaning of gesture in Siopis’s *Will*. Jennifer Law (2014: 128) argues that the ‘heirlooms’ function over and above their meaning as things. They are ‘chosen’ and for Law this choice imputes to them the values of memory, by which the donor is ‘freed’ from memory, while the recipient is ‘transfixed’ as the ‘heir’. As the result of profoundly personal choices, the heirlooms are also released from their original uses. Operating as abstracted material things which foreground ‘intentionality’ over and above their inherent meaning, they are enveloped by the subject herself, as source of the choice which will set a play of meanings in motion. But the meaning of these objects is undecidable. The ‘will’ or the choice itself is the ‘truth-function’ of this project. Indeed, Law (2014: 128) comments that the will is a ‘metaphysical strategy’ that invokes the notion of the ‘fetish’ as ‘fragments’ of the artist’s own body which are also ‘in excess of the body’.

The question of Siopis's subjective index is significant here if the woman's body is taken as the governing concept of her formal practice. Law (2014: 132) suggests that these heirlooms as fetishes 'act' on her work as a whole, and has herself curated installations that were based on the notion of a 'sympathetic magic', in terms of which objects come to reflect on one another from a 'distance' but are connected by a 'prior attachment': their indexing by Siopis's intentions. Law writes that the way in which these objects come to enact this subjectivity can be understood as embodying the 'common principles of humanity through which we are able to feel compassion or empathy with another'. While Law's text interprets the heirlooms on the basis of the 'common principles' she draws from a psychoanalytic reading of the body in trauma and as fetish, I am resisting the positive reading she brings to the work.[156] Rather, I am following Lacan's ethical focus on the 'polymorphous-perverse' structure of desire which refuses any order of the 'good' in favour of bearing witness to shared experiences of ontological lack. Julia Kristeva (1982: 33; 38) suggests a similar ontology based on a negative reading of the fetish as metaphorical of a 'lack-of-object' which 'deprives us of assurance' because it offers a solution – a truth-function – which is untenable to the law of language. Kristeva (1982: 37) refers to the fetish as a 'screen' between fear and the object of the subject's phobia. For her, the fetish is a 'metaphor' which, in fear, is produced 'in the very material of the drives' (1982: 38). It is a language therefore, but its materiality is made up by a language of demand, or, 'want':

> Not a language of the desiring exchange of messages or objects that are transmitted in a social contract of communication and desire beyond want, but a language of want, of the fear that edges up to it and runs along its edges.

I find Siopis's *Will* provocative of the trauma of jouissance in relation to her oeuvre as a whole and will continue to explore this notion below. *If* perceived on the level of these traumatic qualities, the conceptual function of 'choice' is to produce fetishised objects which include the fear and repulsion which surface upon their material. This gesture then presents a 'knowledge of the body' materialised by a language of want over need, and of demand for the 'possession' of the body, as Fried espouses. Law (2014: 136) writes that the 'possessor is herself possessed, the collector collected by the spirit of the thing embedded in the land and its history'. What is this 'spirit of the thing' that Siopis has absorbed into the object, in such a way that the

[156] Law more explicitly approaches Siopis's *Will* in terms of trauma in an earlier essay, 'The Gift' (2005). Her focus is on the significance of inheritance as 'physical evidence' of both 'suffering and celebration', and therefore on how Siopis's work is an enactment of the complexity of memory.

absorption becomes a constitutive principle of the objects she has found? For Kristeva,

> It is, as I said it earlier, a metaphor. And yet more than that...there is added a *drive* dimension (heralded by fear) that has an anaphoric, *indexing* value, pointing to something else, to some non-thing, to something unknowable. The phobic object is in that sense the *hallucination of nothing*: a metaphor of nothing. What is 'nothing'? the analyst wonders and answers, after 'deprivation,' 'frustration,' 'want,' etc.: 'the maternal phallus' (1982: 42).

This invocation of the 'maternal phallus' does not lend substance to the maternal for the simple reason that it is a metaphor – and thus also a phallic signifier. But it inscribes a 'loss of virginity' which lies very close to the 'worst fears' of the subject of both private and public domains. The fetish as a phallic symbol or metaphor is for Kristeva (1982: 38) a 'terrifying, abject referent' because it signifies as the closest proximity, 'grasping the vagina' of an alien and hostile *Nebenmensch*, who is purely empty. Siopis makes this 'loss of virginity' that of her benefactors' because the 'indexing value' of these objects literally gain value upon her death, when her loss of self, her selflessness, is consummated.

This is a deep reading of an otherwise fairly innocuous, even comical act given the type of objects Siopis has chosen, as I will discuss in further detail below. But the implicit irony is given its gravity or weight by the 'medium' of the gallery setting, as Law also comments (2014: 132). Like Duchamp's practice, the institutional setting and its requirement that one *looks* provides a necessary distancing or 'break' from the objects, whereby values of the everyday sphere of intersubjective and object relations – their implicitly sexual and violent gestures – might reveal their inner demand. As de Duve (1991: 156) contends, Duchamp made the condition of art's separation from the everyday singular and explicit. Siopis extends the radical traumaticity internal to these 'things' by making her *Will* an artwork.





Penny Siopis, 2011. *Communion* (Film stills). Courtesy of the Stevenson Gallery

I focus on the 'anaphoric' index mentioned by Kristeva above (i.e. doubled referrals to both people and things) as a phobic object of 'nothing' and as 'maternal phallus' in a particular video made by Siopis. I then consider the nature of the material points of contact which are decided by certain gestures in her formal practice of found object and video, and further suggest a reading of its 'social agency' (Graw 2012: 42). In the video *Communion* (2011), a historical South African narrative is communicated via subtitles relaying the pernicious slaughter of a nun at the hands of a violent mob during the anti-apartheid Defiance Campaign in 1952. However, the imagery utilised to tell the story are all derived from found video clips which bears the traces and scratches and streaks of their outdated 8mm film formats. The clips contain landscapes and often arbitrary scenes of activity – a servant battalion marching around a square, birds in a tree, a woman in her kitchen making tea, etc. The footage, then, does not correspond to the narrative and if it seems to interact with the story, it is often merely through 'serendipitous' moments of contact (Siopis quoted by Demos 2014: 211). It is the 'sympathetic' combination and contingency of the readymade clips themselves, as arbitrary signifiers, which start to register a 'beyond' or even a magical significance which exceed the plain language and reduced style of the narrative in the subtitles. While the gallery space is the medium in which the found objects come to interact in a specialised network of non-artefacts, on film it is the subtitles and the sound which work to support an 'other' symbolic image persisting in the material facture of the video. The sequence of *Communion* is accompanied by an African lullaby sounding a repetitive, disembodied thrum, becoming mournful and ghostly in relation to the imagery. A lute rasps rhythmically, piercing the softness of the chant. Film theorist Roger Hillman (1995: 186) points out that while music can express a narrative line, it can, through its 'motion and texture', exceed the words and reinforce 'not the visual images themselves, but what those images *imply*' (my italics). The ineffable and ghostly quality is also created by the

subtitles which 'speak' from the subject position of the dead nun. The fiction of a person speaking from beyond the grave is thus asserted by way of textual fragments and register as an autographic trace of a mental space which foregrounds absence from self and body. The interaction and interrelation of technical elements therefore instil a symbolic space of meaning which affectively transcends the objectivity that is conventionally accorded to video documentation.[157] This point of heightened metaphor, like *Will*, is centred on the disintegration and dismemberment of the feminine body. Both concern *real* circumstances which imply a splitting off of the body from physical life. In *Will*, it is the prospect of future death, and in *Communion*, the history of a death. In *Communion*, the feminine figure is given an especially sacred, and thus empty, form. The figure is thus consecrated by the real transgression of her body, but in the film this also becomes a sharply honed traumatic metaphor of intersubjective violence as jouissance.[158] In the film as such, the real goal and content of the fetish, the sphere of the feminine body, is made unavailable by *not* being represented and only alluded to as a haunted site of dematerialised emptiness.

Some theorists are critical of the way in which Siopis draws from a seemingly indiscriminate array of objects in order to centre the work on a metaphor and a mythic place of the maternal. Alison Kearny (2013:56) questions the decontextualisation of many of the objects as they are stuffed and manipulated into constructions which redefine their value, particularly where objects and figurines from African cultures are subsumed into the installations. She therefore asks,

> To what extent is Siopis empathetic to the objects and their meaning, and the contested nature of the history of the display of objects such as these, or, is she, as a contemporary artist working within established discourses of appropriation and installation, exempt from such ethical issues? (2013: 59).

[157] TJ Demos (2014: 211) writes that Siopis refers to the 'self-reflexive lessons of structural film of the 1960s and 70s' but that this focus on the materiality of the medium 'also resonates with her practice as a painter concerned with formlessness and materiality'.

[158] Diane Hampson's criticism (2007: 61) in the *The Sacred, the Feminine and French Feminist Theory* (2007) might be seen to support my reading in thinking the sacred sphere of the feminine in Kristeva's theory as being 'caught up in…Christianity as a masculinist and mythological system of thought'. Writes Hampson (2007: 71), 'Present in either male or female form, we may think the sacred to have done actual women no good at all.' However, as with Kristeva's own concern with psychoanalysis as a theory of what *is*, I see Siopis's work as reflective of these traumatic conditions, rather than proposing new ways in which to view the sacred.



Penny Siopis, 2002. Detail of *Sympathetic Magic* (traditional African crafts and tools borrowed from the gallery archives). University of Wits Art Galleries. Courtesy of Penny Siopis

I see the potentially ethical stance of Siopis's work with readymade things operating where symbolic meaning is *confused* with the real objects that are integrated into the work. Siopis (2004: 120) has referred to this idea of 'confusion' taking place as a confusion of 'thing and sign' in her paintings. She thus sees her found objects referring to a confusion 'between art and life'. The 'confusion' which Siopis forces the viewer to enact corresponds to the everyday sphere of engagement with objects, which mould the metaphorical value and meaning of objects. But through their 'sympathetic' interaction in the gallery space they become analogous to the sense of 'magic' provoked in the social sphere as a violently 'mounting confusion of people with things' (Comaroff 1999: 285). I therefore do not regard the objects as important for their original metaphorical value as Kearny contends one should, but for their more formal status as 'thing.' I emphasise the formal nature of the found objects insofar as they are worked in ways which reduce their specific meaning and content in the sphere of goods and artefacts, yet still, foreground their indexicality as real objects. This leads me to consider the possibility of an 'anaphoric' relationship between Siopis's subjective index and Rosalind Krauss's (1986)

discussion of the 'physical index' of things in art. The disruptive cohabitation of pure matter and the subjectivity of *materiality* incurs a particular truth-function that I conclude with below. As I develop it, this relationship is gestural and as such, reinters senses of both blunt force and ontological lack associated with the exigencies of jouissance.

As indicated before, I draw from Rosalind Krauss's (1986: 206) concept of the 'physical index'. The physical index as described by her is so withdrawn from subjectivity and sensation as to constitute a 'breakdown' in the function of language. It would be the 'physical traces" and 'sheer physical presence' indicated by both readymade and photography that reduces the 'conventional sign' of art to an 'uncoded' 'trace' (Krauss 1986:211). Krauss refers to the example of Duchamp's *Sieves* (1923) which fixed the dust that had fallen over a period of time to its glass surface and is comparable to his peer Man Ray's *Rayographs* (1926), which captured the indexical traces of objects placed on light-sensitive paper. For her, this 'absoluteness of [the works'] physical genesis' registers as 'sub- or presymbolic, ceding the language of art back to the imposition of things' (1986: 203). The photograph, like Duchamp's dust, would define a moment where the indexical sign invokes 'nothing other than the existential presence of just this object', thereby suspending immediate recourse to linguistic meaning. However, this presence also requires symbolic articulations that can 'fill in' the vacuum which the index signals (Krauss 1986: 208). Krauss therefore describes the index as provoking a 'trauma of signification' for the indeterminacy it manifests in the realm of an object's identity (1986: 206). This concatenation of thing with the supplementary discourse it begs for is made palpable, and thus instructive, in *Will*. The very physicality of the objects encumbers the possibility of their meaning being subject to purely discursive framing. They reproduce a 'trauma' by their sheer physicality. One could say that the physical index thus registers a 'pure cut' from imaginary figures. It is in the strong tension between imaginarily invested objects – shot through by the emphasis on her choice – and these real things as physical indices that I find Siopis exploring the traumatic opaqueness of objects. I see such moments as frustrating the desire to get lost in the maternal emptiness of sweet sorrow and death. As such, as I will explore, the 'matter' of these objects analogises the trauma-inducing blockage at the point of an imaginary sense of contact between self and other. The metaphorical value of these objects thus manifest the anaphoric metaphor of 'want' in the 'the materiality of the drive' that Kristeva describes (1982: 37).

I look at this operation in Siopis's installations. The basic logic of the installations appears to be that in the way they are combined, the objects find a central organising shape which will be consistent. Brenda Atkinson refers to this operation in Siopis's work as an 'organising principle'. But at certain points, in both 'content and form', Atkinson says, a breakdown occurs so that the whole becomes 'undone' (2005: 72). This 'becoming undone' is of interest to me, because while these slippages manifest through the strange combination of things – 'What good Victorian woman…would collect pangas, and line them up with a child's cricket bat?' asks Atkinson – I see this also happening in places where an object is registered more forcefully as physical index in Krauss's terms. I am looking at a high-resolution reproduction of the vertically hung installation *Charmed Lives* (1999):



Penny Siopis, 1998. *Charmed Lives*. Museum for African Art, New York. Courtesy of Penny Siopis

The majority of the objects are old: hand-made miniature figurines, a model ship, hoary animal skins, decorative lace, an iron axe, a gilded platter. Indeed, they are mementos and ornaments that suggest a Victorian origin, as Atkinson writes. They have the sense of aura Walter Benjamin ascribes to objects which have become obsolete, and which he describes in terms of a 'self-alienating encounter with an older self' (Hansen 2007: 342). This investment in the auratic powers of old things also registers an acute extension of surface as the 'cultural reserve' discussed by Hal Foster ([2] 1996: 140). These objects remain recognisable as a familiar collection of the kind of historical things a certain collector would seek out. Siopis's display of them is an imitation of a 'cultural reserve' of products invested with 'older selves' and colonially-inflected use-value – white folk enjoying a summer afternoon of cricket on a wine estate, served tea by their black servants, while the children play with model ships and dolls.

But the staging of such an auratic reserve is disrupted, and indeed, in Fried's terms, 'allayed' of its imitative theatricality. On top of a nestled pocket of dangling shoes – velveteen pumps, silky ballet slippers, leather mules – are a bright *red* pair of children's plastic gumboots. They are of the kind that have been moulded in a factory, sole and boot melded together in the standardised form of Chinese merchandise. The traditional stitching of a gumboot is artificially rendered in plastic indentations and mock contours across the ankle. The gumboots do not have the authentic burnish of the rest of the objects. They gleam in the rubberised way of the cheap product casually purchased. Their newness is sudden in the greater texture; indeed, they lie on top of the hanging mass and seem to be the only objects not integrated into the surface. They are also indexical to the extent that they must refer to a child that is still living and physically present. They have recently been filled by feet marching across the puddled pavements of Rosebank Mall. They thus form a moment that blocks the ephemeral fantasies of history. They are awkward attachments in the scheme of the work, a point of resistance which perverts the all-over saturation of the textural and textual field. Inappropriate to the theme, and jutting out as they do, they render an immediacy to the way in which the installation is twisted out of shape. They thus register an indexical moment in which signals cross from intricate symbolic possibilities to the pure contrivance of the entire work.[159] Optically, they thus fix the work as an imaginary schema: a common badge in front of our eyes where the depth of a psychic

[159] Walter Benjamin refers to Brecht's notion of *Epic Theatre* to describe the effects of some photomontage and collage in similar senses to my invocation of physical indexicality (Ulmer 1998: 96). He says that a strange and defamiliarised feature may elicit the mechanical anima of an object: 'The superimposed element disrupts the context in which it is inserted…[it] constantly counteracts an illusion in the audience…Epic theatre, therefore, does not reproduce situations, rather it discovers them'.

emblem should be interred. But I do not see the red boots as a purely ironic addition, flattening the aura and authenticity of the other objects. While they are almost comic, that signal of life within the boot doubles back as a 'trauma of signification' because of the demand contained by their indexicality as both subjective iconography and physical matter. The boots provoke the four-fold demand of the stroke or gesture in Derrida's terms: between the proximity of the 'thing' and the distance of symbolic representation, the surface as a depthless appearance or as depth, questioning the truth-value of this collection and, thus, the affects *materiality* provokes as a primary conflict with narrative.

This demand of the object in *Charmed Lives*, the 'trauma of signification' it imposes on objecthood 'itself,' permeates the collection of things Siopis plans to bequeath to her family and friends. While some objects seem to be genuine articles – a cameo of President Paul Kruger, a marble hand from a cherubic sculpture, an intricately hand painted statuette of St Escrava Anastacia from Portugal – other recipients of Siopis's *Will* will find in their post box three deflated yellow balloons still tied together with shiny ribbon, a plastic doll's head removed from its 'body,' or a piece of skin from a stuffed monkey.



Penny Siopis, 2002 - . Objects from *Will*. Documentation courtesy of Penny Siopis

On one level, the receivers will no doubt see these degraded objects as invested with the memorable events of Siopis's past. Law (2014: 136) writes that due to the symbolic framing of the process by which Siopis is bequeathing her collection of oddments, there is the promise of 'refinding the self in the other' after her death. She will continue to exist in these objects,

and as such the promise of immortality in giving is where 'the self is perhaps at last fulfilled'. But again, I refer to the physicality of some of these objects which remain touched by that leering inarticulacy much of her art hurls at us against the background of its entrancement and mythic sense of 'possession'. What will be made clear upon Siopis's death, when these things are packaged and posted to her loved ones, is that a collective fantasy of regaining something of the body is delayed, and haunted, by its implicit obduracy to signification. The physically indexical nature of the things contained in the gesture guarantees this aspect.

I will formulate these effects in terms of jouissance towards the end of this section. Insofar as Siopis's practice over time imbues her work with a 'sympathetic magic' between and across representations, I focus yet again on the materiality of gesture in her film *Communion*. The nodal, almost vulgar obscurity which comes from the rash reference to the physical index of Siopis's appropriations takes a different form in her videos. The psychic realm of perception is arrested by various formal techniques of cutting and editing which register as gesture in the terms I have set up. In *Communion*, the first image and the title of the work flicker onto the screen, and then fade out. But this tender treatment of moving image ends when the soundtrack is amplified, and the clips begin to show up immediately, one image after another in artless succession. Some clips even seem to be speeded up, and then suddenly switch to another scene. Siopis seems to be compressing as much of her collection of found film into as little space as time will allow. There is no gap for the viewer to escape through or fade out from, to consider his own place of reception.

This gaplessness, a lack of distance between the screen and sequentiality, also occurs by a squally switching of the imagery. While some of the clips have a determined focal point – a line of dancing children, a stand of tree tops in the middle distance, a flock of birds circling overhead – others are passive side-shots of the peripheral environment: grassy verges; road sides with swipes of a car's interior; an off-centred arm fuzzily waving across the screen; an accident scene in the distance while in the foreground a boy glances at the camera, before disappearing jerkily off the edge. The particular kind of jerkiness of these scenes often point to the camera as hand-held. The effect of this peripherality, of this shakiness, of this *lack of a frame*, is to put the subject-viewer at the scene. The viewer then himself is the physical referent of these seemingly incidental images. This inclusion of the body in the picture becomes disturbing when the videotape has clearly been burned and degraded, in interferences which Siopis includes at certain points in the film.



Penny Siopis, 2011. *Communion* (Film Stills). Courtesy of The Stevenson Gallery

The effect of the streaks, whorls and cracks that have damaged the film negative is a positive instance of surface analogous with the frontality of modernist painting. The disruptions are flattened abstract meshes of colour and line which negate the real perspective of space normally offered by the film screen. Simultaneously, the degradation of the film marks the other scenes as illusionistic, while insinuating a blindingly present encounter with their landscapes. Frontality is also achieved by the way in which the scenes rapidly shift between viewpoints: while most are projected sidelong from the position of a standing adult, the switch to viewing a scene from above, or into a high sky from below, is disorientating and flattens the scenography as the eye struggles to adjust. The flummoxing of an adequate perspective or an autonomous point of view is given an awful concretisation. The subject is thrust into the field as a blind observer behind the camera, while the materiality of the film also makes itself the very subject of process. This stiffened racking up of dazing images become the *Vorstellungen* of Kant's notion of imagination involved with the primary synthesis of irrational representations; or the primordial *Vorstellungen* of the pleasure principle: 'the origin of an aberrant or atypical behaviour' (SVII: 24). But this regression which bewilders eye and subject-

position finds another contrast again at the end of the film, similar to the trickling in of image during the very beginning. Scenes of the sublime Victorian falls softly embrace this sequence in pinks and dusk. Against the falls, the last clip frames the silhouette of a figure of a woman in a long dress. This image draws the subject back from the screen and he becomes once more a looking and perceptive subject-viewer released from the imagery.

In this blunt indexicality propelling us through the main body of the film, do we not find a parallel with the Comaroffs' study of witches and sorcery? The witch in much of the new magic turns people into zombies, a dead thing: 'Reduced from humanity to raw labour power, [the zombie] is the creature of his maker, stored in petrol drums or sheds like tools' (Comaroff 1999: 289). The indexicality of gesture, of choice, in found film, establishes the sequence as meaningless, strangulated: as dumb material things in automatic succession. As such, the imaginative 'topological' play with image and scenography is also reduced to so many signifiers jutting, regressing, and degrading against the fetish material of the unsignifiable thing. It is the demand Siopis makes of that gesture that each stop-gapped piece of film is invested with the possession of the body. But this is not a possession or knowledge of her own body. As noted above, that possession takes hold at the site of the viewer's own. The unnameable threat of a witchly Ding *surfaces* upon the screen. There is no hole or wound into which you the viewer may peer back.

As Lacan (SVII: 202) says, as we collide with our jouissance 'my neighbour's body breaks into pieces'. It is this realm of the mute index-thing that both transgresses the symbolic and points to that concrete image of the other, of people and subjects as *things*; to that *bad* neighbour. Siopis presents (or gifts) herself as the bad neighbour: her love for you is lawless to the extent that these images and objects transgress their sympathetical interplay by revealing the materiality of the fetish-as-metaphor: it *guards* its real mark jealously. The narrative evolving in subtitles at the bottom of the screen anchors this anaphoric progression. The text's juxtaposition with the visual imagery does not render the imagery more comprehensible, but serves to empty the found sources of their original context. Thus if Siopis is bestowing the affect of jouissance, rasping like the lute in the video, it is again from that empty space of *das Ding*, of another feminine self as primordial maternal, of the dead Sister's withdrawal or non-appearance, which gives indexicality its particular blunt instrumentality, its truth-function.

The fantasy of contact between self and the hallowed death-space of *das Ding* is the fantasy of jouissance. But its transgressive nature dictates that we will find it only in the blind frenzy or

perversions of contact with each other. And this is the theme and the form of *Communion* in as much as the figure of the nun as big Other is featured only as the final fantasy, or ghost of an essentially absent, barely outlined silhouette. The mob mentality which drove the crowd to stop Sister Quinlan in her car – stoning her, then stabbing her, burning her and finally eating pieces of her body – is constitutive in its gestures, its *traits*, of the trauma of a demand that had gone unheeded in apartheid South Africa. A demand that exceeded the need for shelter, just enough food. It was a demand for freedom. As that space of desire materialised, in that moment, the correspondent rearing force of a fully enraged and momentarily shared jouissance hurled the group as one writhing body at the Object represented by Sister Quinlan. This tendency to mob mentality, witnessed in many instances across the world and in South Africa's own instances of occult fantasy, reveals that the collective *dis*engagement from the frame of reality, and an impossible attachment to the *Real*, is always pressing at the borders of subjects, both past and future.[160]

In regard to the pertinence the mob-murder of Sister Quinlan might hold for the current day, Njabulo Ndebele (2014: 219) asks, 'Can love and politics ever hold hands?' For Ndebele, Siopis's film is one form of story-telling that forms a necessary act of repeating stories as testimonies to the event. As he views it, we regain subjectivity through narrative. Recounting the multiple forms in which the trauma occurred allows us to confront the opaque stain of the past and return as bearers of language and symbolic meaning. Indeed, this return to a subject relieved of the proximity to things is figured by Siopis's framing of the final scene of *Communion* in quietude and reflection. But that final image also registers an extremely haunted emptiness. The regaining of subjectivity through the passage of trauma and ecstatic violence is given a distance that yawns, an emptiness that is as hollow as it is beautiful. Ndebele (2014: 224) finds 'that love… is the chemistry of the story of Sister Quinlan…a strange chemistry of loving, and killing, and loving again.' Indeed, I see this play between loving and killing, containment and transgression, as the signifying gesture between the 'goods' of Siopis's materiality and its formal, purposeless distance. But it is upon the 'chemistry' of these principles that Siopis trains her artistic imagination. The mélange operates through her work

[160] Leys (2002: 29) addresses the phenomenon of mob mentality as bearing a parallel to the psychoanalytic sphere of the subject. She relates Freud's notion of the pleasure principle to how a crowd will ecstatically and emotionally over-identify with one another, but because of this 'love' for each other, will simultaneously be 'quietly disorganised by a gesture': a libido-based identification with something larger than the sum of the group. This gestural quality threatening to destabilise a crowd is characterised by Leys as a 'cannibalistic, devouring, incorporative identification that readily turns into the hostile desire to rid oneself of the other, or enemy, with whom one has just merged' (2002: 30).

as a questioning of and a challenge to the *ex*tricability of 'loving and killing'. This search for repossessing the 'good' self is never quite complete, and perpetually melts back into a brilliantly obdurate indeterminacy.

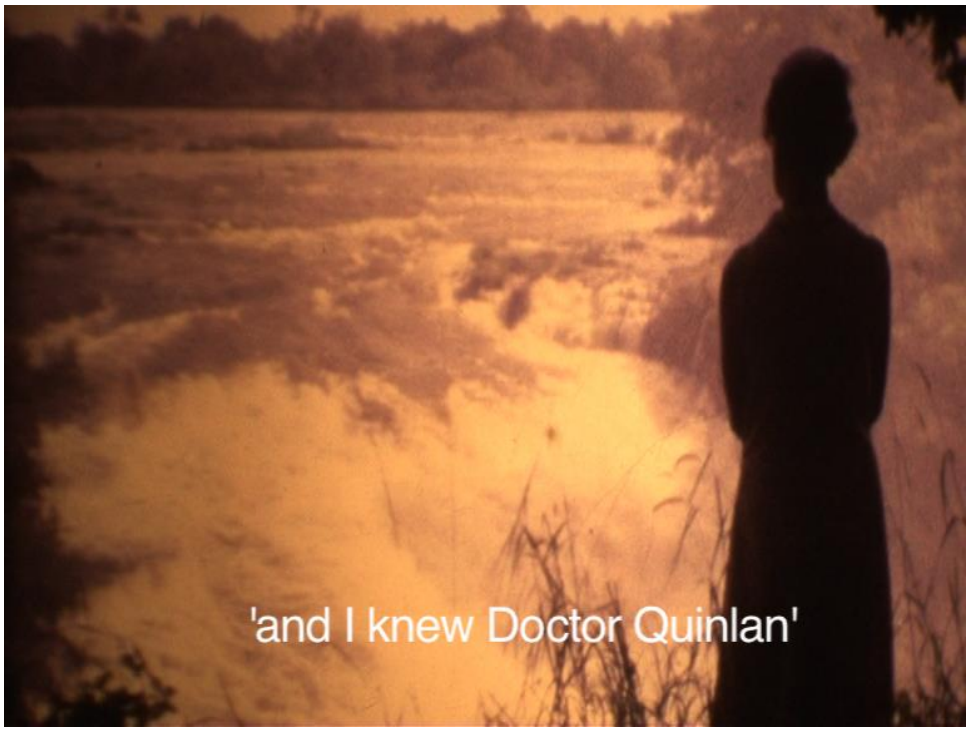


Figure 57: Penny Siopis, 2011. *Communion* (Film still). Courtesy of The Stevenson Gallery

I construe this perpetual loss of subjectivity in 'loving *and* killing' in an interpretation of contemporary painting. The freezing of the spontaneous imagination is delivered in progressive moments, progressive traits, of Siopis's 'filmy' glue paintings. These works, I submit, *allegorise* the *anamorphosis* of painting as a 'metaphor of the woman's body'. The gap that Duchamp illuminated is crossed over again, and the fictions of truth are themselves frozen in these gestures. Barthes (1986: 421) asks of the 'Cinema of a society,' 'how [do we] come unglued' from the 'truth' of the 'lure,' the deception of appearances which 'fix' us in its 'narcissistic and maternal' image? He answers that we 'loosen the glue'

> by letting oneself be fascinated twice over, by the image and its surroundings – as if I had two bodies at the same time: a narcissistic body which gazes, lost, into the engulfing mirror, and a perverse body, ready to fetishize not the image, but precisely what exceeds it.

3.4 The Eschatology of Glue: Meaning in Material Form

The previous chapter addressed formal gesture in terms of its implicit links with social relationships. I now shift register to thinking how these conditions are made particular in and for painting. The notion of jouissance that I have described – an affective encounter of subjects and objects that is based in a fundamental misperception of psychic and bodily boundaries – here may be characterised by the condition of the painted surface. I see Siopis's ink and glue works as enacting the properties of jouissance as gesture: this occurs in the physical ways in which she works with ink and glue, but also as a conceptual play of signs which work to disturb the boundaries between the signifier and *das Ding*, in painting. The history of painting and its conventions is absorbed in Siopis's paintings as a gendered paradigm which traumatises surface. I therefore conclude with a consideration of Siopis's painting which to some extent redraws the woman's body, away from a subject *in* painting towards a structure and truth-function *of* the painted surface.

In the preceding section**,** I linked Derrida's understanding of the language-like traits of the 'stroke' or gesture to Duchamp's 'choice' not to paint. The stroke, or choice as explained there, creates the possibility of meaning because it 'demands' that signification comes into play, and fill the meaningless 'vacuum' the gesture has created. Through Lacan, I have formulated this 'demand' of the gesture as a signal of jouissance, the psychic structure of subjectivity and its tension between the law of language and erotic transgression. I choose Siopis's glue and ink works for analysis, because her use of the medium establishes gesture as a form of contact between external matter and an imaginary based in the body. As the artist says, she is essentially 'blind' during the process (Webster 16/03/2017). The canvas and coloured ink dripped onto the surface are initially masked by the opacity of the glue. Holding the canvas at different angles, Siopis allows gravity to pull the mixture down, dragging liquid colours across the plane in undetermined patterns and swirls. She then lies the canvas flat on the floor, where the swirls harden in thickened blisters in certain areas and in others, become transparent membranes of dry glue, tinged by tones of coloured ink.[161]

If the glue imposes a kind of blindness in the painting process, the artist works with and against the limitation. By connecting the movement of her body with a mental process of guesswork –

[161] Figure 42: Penny Siopis. 2016. *Material Acts.*

having to imagine where fluidity and line are forming – she physically coerces a relationship between the chance event and her imagination. Negating an essential aspect of the painting process – its primary visual condition of the artist being an authority on her gesture – Siopis refuses the terms of the traditional frame and its 'traits'.[162] Rather, the choice of not-painting becomes an act given over to the dumb stuff of glue, and the 'things' it leaves in its wake. Moreover, this thingly stuff is amalgamated through a blind process directed only by what Fried (1967) describes as being 'possessed by the knowledge of the human body'. By refusing the practical conventions of visual representation, and its pictorial associations with either abstraction or figuration, the process provokes the obstinate remainders that refuse signification. The process, based as it is in synthetic matter and the real body, results in a literal manifestation of how the gesture's 'remainders exceed and overflow' the 'pellucid naturalism and opaque antinaturalism' offered by the Kantian parergon (Derrida 1987: 4; Elkins 1997: 89).

The effects of the process dominate the end-product, and displace the questions of 'truth-value' painting traditionally invokes, while illuminating them (Derrida 1987:7). They also probe the modernist notion of 'competence' in contemporary painting. I see painting's 'truth-value' and 'competence' attended to as a critical dimension of Siopis's practice, and it is through secondary procedures on the glue-surface that she intensifies the properties of gesture in the terms I have referenced. Ultimately the glue is invisible. From a mid to far distance, it is not the glue itself which *matters*, but the way in which it has been activated to figure the ink in a wild and free kind of sublime beauty, of 'first form', or of something transcendent (Siopis 2014: 253). But in the close-up view, these effects lend themselves to some notion of *ruin*. Indexical points of conflict trouble the glue works as an analogy with embryonic womb-like spaces or divine nature. This is not only because of the synthetic texture. That awkward imposition of a red boot or a gapless wedge of footage, an indexical cutting away, is also assimilated in the process whereby Siopis 'finds' potential sources of figuration.[163] The glue and ink is flung and swirled across the surface, and then becomes fixed. The spontaneous 'chance' events are halted where Siopis asserts the presence of a potential figure that she sees

[162] I repeat here the four levels of meaning Derrida draws from the gesture or 'stroke': Firstly, the stroke registers as a thing in itself, and refuses illusion on pure terms: it exists 'without mask or veil'. Secondly, it informs the representation of an image, by revealing how the surface is constructed, 'on the order of fiction or in the relief of its effigy'. Thirdly, the gesture is viewed for how it creates a picture that is 'proper' or 'true' to the act of painting, 'in the field of the pictural properly speaking'. And fourth, the gesture can refer to the subject of painting, and thus to the question of the 'truth-value' painting may hold.

[163] Figure 43: Penny Siopis. 2011. *Ash*.

forming in the swirls. This she does by tearing some of the dry glue away to leave an outline (Siopis 2014: 252). She also deepens the tonal intensity of areas and outlines with more ink and sometimes the trace of pen or brush (Siopis 21/04/2015). But this enhancement and delineation is wrought in constant tension with the uncooperative behaviour of the glue. What strikes the observer when the painting is viewed close-up is the singular way in which contour is de-skilled. The shape of a head, the curve of a mouth, flickers on the edge of being crudely drawn. But this is not the romantic crudeness of an expressionist 'child-like' figure. It is not so much drawn as it is imposed on the pseudo-natural effects of the glue. These areas, particularly where they are intensely coloured and impressed into the fixed flow, *struggle* to become figure, and at the same time they *burden* the figure and deform it. As found elements of surface, these points of intensity thus retain the instrumentality of gesture, making the indexical relationship between the objective and subjective, glue and painting, particularly evident. As with Siopis's other projects, these moments drag transcendence down into a manufactured effluvium that is manifestly human. [164]

Glue is the invisible g(l)aze upon which both high and low effects come into being. These effects are reminiscent of what Joselit (2012: 357) has called the 'convertible sign' in abstract expressionism. For Joselit, the term refers to paintings which feature a single 'magisterial patterning' all over the surface but through the process of looking seem to either feature forth figures, or 'reorganize into a series of masked voids within an array of bounded forms'. Joselit's portrayal of the sign in abstract expressionism is descriptive of Siopis's work in glue. But again, in Siopis's paintings these effects are produced by a process which reduces the relation to mental expression and places matter in direct relationship with an imaginative sphere based in the body, thus echoing a motive of Duchamp's that, 'I want to grasp things with the mind like a penis is grasped by a vagina' (Duchamp quoted in Parkinson 2008: 63).

I see the 'masked voids' produced in Siopis's paintings addressing the question of contemporary painting precisely for how its 'solution' draws from an art-historical background that itself is split between engaging the mental and physical possession of an imaginary realm: pulsing and repulsing as conceptual and non-conceptual divisions between imagination and signification, pleasure and pain, beauty and the traumatic, aesthetic and rational forms. I see 'glue' as allegorical of the modernist possession of painted surface, as well as of its dissolution and destruction through contemporary practices. The glue works thus manifest a strong

[164] Figure 44: Penny Siopis. 2011. *Hostage*.

paradigm of contemporary painting being inalterably shifted off the pedestal of origin and authenticity by critical practices of the 'postmedium condition', while sustaining a fascination with painting, as expressive and subjective, and luminously present (Krauss 1999: 56; 2011: 3). Below, I explore how this split is reclaimed as a quality of the painted surface in Siopis's locating of this space as the domain of the feminine. The terms I set up to signify this split and it reclamation are underwritten by Kristeva's (1982: 38) notion of the 'maternal phallus', which deprives us of assurance because it offers a phobic solution bedevilling the male fetish: painting as *das Ding*.

Woman as a Metaphor of Painting

It seems clear that the positive reception of Siopis's glue paintings is partly due to the consistency in which violence and the female body has been enacted throughout her work.[165] Her particular 'subjective index' is recognised as integral to the historical fabric of South African art, and therefore the paintings signify metaphors of the body in more acute ways than if they were produced by a newcomer. This is a reason why I am interested in the glue works, for how they seem to allegorise Siopis's process and practice over time. I imagine the glue paintings as an emblem of her 'things,' subjects and objects, becoming melted down into a singular viscous texture.

This melting down of things also suggests something very deliberate about the conventions of painting. The tensions conceptualised around *das Ding* are analysed in a comparable way by Dario Gamboni (2002). Gamboni articulates what he calls the 'potential image' in similar terms to the effect of viewing a cylindrical anamorphosis, but states this with reference to the formal operation of surface. He describes potential images as creating 'a dialectical tension where surface turns to subject and subject to surface' (2002: 70). His book is an art-historical inquiry into certain modes of representation from the late 19th to early 20th century, where figuration increasingly begins to slip into formless smears and fluid stains, but still retains the glimmers

[165] I note that I am drawing my interpretation from a specific set of Siopis's glue paintings. At the time of writing this thesis, her latest body of glue paintings exhibited at the Stevenson Gallery, *Still and Moving* (2015), deals with intense grief in particular (Siopis 2015: 1). I see the way in which ink and glue is worked in these paintings as requiring a different reading of the relationship between psychoanalysis and painting, which touches more on notions of empathy between individual and collective, than on the harshly transgressive potential I accord to other work.

of form which become apparent after absorbed looking. Gamboni (2002: 70) further defines 'potential images' involving 'ambiguity' and 'indeterminacy' as a negative dialectic provoking a 'crypto-image': 'a sign that oscillates between the desire to be disclosed (to be an image) and the temptation of the void satisfied by utter effacement'.

While Siopis's glue surfaces embody this tension between image and 'effacement', I bring the concept of 'crypto-images' to bear upon their structural and historical significations. The surface as 'sign' in Gamboni's terms could also be said to oscillate in a way that is characteristic of classical painting, as illustrated by James Elkin's analogy of the 'philosopher's stone' (and its 'beautiful reddish light') in his analysis of Tintoretto's painting. As noted in chapter 3.1 (pg. 121), Elkins sees painting as corresponding with the ambiguity of the stone: 'If we say that its nature is spiritual, it would be no more than the truth; if we describe it as corporeal, the expression would be equally correct' (Philalethes quoted in Elkins 2000: 180). Aby Warburg (2009: 277) relates this borderspace to enlightenment terms: 'In a peculiar way, recollection, both collective and individual, comes to the assistance of the artist oscillating between the religious and the mathematical world view.'

The 'expressive values' of the medieval and pagan pantheon are characterised by Warburg as recollected or 'absorbed' as a value in modern painting by invoking a 'life in motion'. The spiritual and corporeal depiction of the body and life may be restrained in modern expressionism because of the 'mathematical world view', which, in asserting a 'polarity' of 'outward looking rational action' versus 'inward looking fantasy', places emphasis on the objecthood of the painted surface (2009: 277). But this polarity is already a historically embedded sign in painting: Warburg writes that the division has a 'psychological history' which predates the Enlightenment emphasis on the viewer's 'tranquil contemplation' rather than depicting subjects in 'orgiastic devotion'. The values of emotional gestures signifying 'fear' and 'helpless melancholy to murderous cannibalism' were already signified in Renaissance painting as a realm of the 'godless,' which was otherwise considered '*forbidden territory'* by 'the educated individual of the Renaissance' (my italics, Warburg 2009: 277). For Warburg, the range of gesture and human movement depicted in modern painting is tainted by these archaic territories and therefore, still, 'lends the mark of uncanny experience…[which] lies in between these extremes of orgiastic seizure — states such as fighting, walking, running, dancing, grasping.'

A psychological history of painting which divides orgiastic states from rational contemplation

is also recognised as gendered. Anne Criessels (2007: 181) discusses how the separation was marked as violent in itself. 'From Leda to Daphne', much of Greek mythology as well as its Christian medieval and classic representations drawing from mythology have depicted rape as the primordial sign of 'sacrifice and creation'. This 'man-woman' dichotomy actualises the 'active-passive' characterisation of gender relations, by way of rape (Criessels 2007: 179). Thus, the violence of this splitting has the effect of placing the restrained terms of surface in a dominant position, while the 'forbidden territories' aligned with the female body are tractable.

Drawing on Foucault, Mieke Bal (2001: 109) places rape within a semiotics of power which deposits the phenomenon firmly within the sphere of language. Rape 'turns the victim into a sign, intersubjectively available'. For Bal, '[t]he speech act of rape signifies the arbitrary relationship of sign to meaning' and therefore locates the body of woman in a purely mediatory position. The body in rape is thus also, 'the destruction of the victim's subjectivity, a destruction necessitated by the problematic self-image of the rapist' (2001: 109). The range of movement in some glue paintings often gestures at scenes of rape and sexual abuse.[166] Other scenes more implicitly seem to register a female body in the process of traumatic or sexually ecstatic fragmentation. The works therefore embody an 'exploded view' of surface because they absorb expressive values of the mythical feminine citation of the body.[167] Glue is therefore a translucent screen which embodies Warburg's description of 'the artist oscillating between the religious and the mathematical world view' (2009: 277). But if glue is an allegory of Siopis's material objects being melted and returned to two-dimensionality, the semiotics of rape becomes complex for painting.

Initialised by a split from the rational world view, and fixed onto the surface by the 'postmedium condition' of the glue, the traumatic nature of Warburg's 'orgiastic seizures' is made manifest as a 'crypto-image' caught between the virginally white surface and its effacement as not-paint. Duchamp's progression from a 'virgin' to her destruction as a 'bride' comprised of real objects is frozen in time. Yet the shimmering luminosity and scale of the work resists a reading based on a simple negation of an expressive pantheon.

I have already explored painting as a state of ontological lack, and its negation through minimalist and Duchampian practices in Part 2. Here, I do not advocate the notion that painting

[166] Figure 45: Penny Siopis. 2009. *Three Trees.*
[167] Figure 46: Penny Siopis. 2009. *Floating World*.

might reabsorb its life by a return to the 'expressive values of the past', as Warburg contends. Rather, I uphold the notion that painting can maintain itself as fetish-screen in ever more explicit ways because Duchamp (and others) attempted to destroy its subjective values. If de Duve (1991: 30) places Duchamp's practice on the level of a Real demand to grasp the 'woman as a metaphor of painting', Duchamp might equally be characterised as a 'rapist'. Duchamp acted to destroy the imaginative and expressive subjectivity of the conventions of painting: he chose to retain only the arbitrary relationship between signifier and signified, which de Duve characterises as 'the very truth-function that breaks through [painting's] sublimative practice' (1991: 34). If Siopis has invoked the found object as metaphor of the woman's body – as I have interpreted it – I think it is equally important for how this inescapable 'loss of virginity' reclaims the 'forbidden territory' of the 'educated Renaissance man' in her glue paintings.

A Modern Allegory

If Siopis's glue and ink paintings are affective, it is because they also allude to the condition of contemporary painting and a possible reading of the painter's 'goal' which, I have suggested, maintains a desire for a 'beyond' of experience which is not necessarily predicated directly on the politics and issues of the day. As described in previous chapters, I see Siopis's work as a critical solution of unresolved notions of intimacy, while it is nevertheless reflective of the disinterest painting provides in productive ways. I frame this solution in terms of the multiple functions of allegory. Joel Fineman (1980: 47) interprets allegory as a form of textuality which works to reveal its own subjective desire for certain outcomes – a self-critical exposure of the opaque quality of interpretation and knowing elaboration of the 'dream-wish' for an original transparency between image and word, experience and object. Siopis's work makes manifest the desire for an inner knowledge which might instigate values for painting as its own truth-function. This project can be construed as the allegory of desire for self-definition and its fraught passage of complex negation, dissection and loss *through* destruction, in the painter's imaginative and subjective language.

In 1980, a seminal two-part essay by Craig Owens framed the postmodern deconstruction of modernism via a notion of allegory. For Owens (1980: 69), postmodern art which deploys strategies of appropriation, reproduction and the use of everyday materials works to negate any

'original meanings' that might be ascribed to a self-reflexive art object. Instead, materiality and form is read allegorically as text, connoting a much wider metonymy of themes and subjects. As Owens asserts, the paradigm of allegorical reading is the 'palimpsest', which implies two texts being read doubly, and often intentionally so, in 'fragmentary, intermittent, or chaotic' ways. The postmodern allegory does not therefore recoup another meaning or originary metaphor. All it refers to is our contemporary 'emptying' of 'resonance, significance and authoritative claims to meaning'. The postmodern *truth* arising from the 'ruins' of aesthetic tradition is therefore avowed by practices which make incontestable the 'distance between the present and an irrecoverable past' (Owens 1980: 67). Indeed, some works present themselves as a site of ruin and loss. Owens (1980:70) discusses Robert Rauschenberg's 'combine paintings' from the late fifties, where the two-dimensional surface is covered with a detritus of used and worthless objects (an umbrella, crushed metals, old signage and fabrics). The work's plane thus becomes a 'site' of dumping or hoarding which has both a visual and a verbal identification with a past, rather than offering a pure instant of opticality (Owens 1980: 69-70). The referential aspect of the work allegorizes the notion of the unconscious as a metaphorical 'dumping ground for memories co-extensive with dissolution and decay'. Owens also raises the appropriative practices of Troy Brauntuch, whose severe enlargements of some of Hitler's drawings, exhibited without titles, work to make both their reference and significance 'opaque'. Thus the images project only 'our distance from the history that produced these images. *That distance is all these pictures signify*' (Crimp in Owens 1980: 69).

The postmodern resistance to modernist lucidity works then on a logic which not only confuses visual categories. It also makes discursive framing or narrative indeterminate to the point where the work becomes an allegory of 'unreadability', reflecting a modern 'crisis of meaning' (Owens [2] 1980: 63). References to such sites of breakdown are to be found in Siopis's glue paintings. The synthetic glutinous substance provokes me to imagine Siopis's symbolic and material things being melted down, 'dumped' and even detonated. In addition, many of the works are drawn from photographs and old prints, pictographically replaying scenes in ways that are disrupted by the glue. For instance, in Siopis's exhibition simply titled *Paintings* (2009), the work references Japanese woodcut prints of finely inscribed 19th century erotica. These were displayed as tiny photocopies framed behind glass next to each painting. The hyper-coloured ink in glue construes the reproduced copies not only as overtly sexualised, but also in some sense *kitschly* pictorialized, grandiose spectacularisations of the originally delicate details of erotic life.



Katshushika Hokusai. 1814. *The Dream of the Fisherman's Wife*. Woodblock print on paper, 19 x 27 cm. Courtesy of katsushikahokusai.org[168]

But as must be clear by now, I maintain that the works do not thus fail to signify, or demonstrate that these erotic spaces of jouissance are located at an unalterable distance from their original meanings. Allegory as maintaining the formal qualities of surface has been theorised in accordance with this view. Stephen Melville (1981: 57), for example, explores the notion of artistic allegory in opposition to Owens's assertion that allegory perpetually defers to 'supplementary' meanings. For Melville, allegory potentially includes the positions on 'purity' and 'instantaneity' of the 'formalist program' and thus still has positive grounds of determining the strength and influence of postmodern practices.

Drawing on Fried's distinction between the 'absorption' of the properly modernist work and the 'theatricality' of multimedia appropriations, Melville asserts that allegory occurs as a 'dialectically charged' moment between these two practices (1981: 65). In both Parts 2 and 3 of this thesis, I indicated that Fried's notions of theatricality and absorption are revealing of what happens in painting. Indeed, Melville sees that in relation to allegory, both qualities can be represented in a single work. He suggests that an absorption in certain affective states, from

[168] Figure 47: Penny Siopis. 2008. *Ambush*.

'intense concentration' to 'deep emotion', is not necessarily an inconceivable feature of the experience of art (1981: 64, 66). Thus, in support of Fried, Melville raises his criticism of an art bogged down by its own claim to allegory and extremes in 'devices of indirectness'. While recognizing the importance of signifying complexity, ambiguity and contradiction in any plastic or performative operation, Melville sees the relentless 'detour and delay' of meaning as a bastardization of the productive qualities a concept of allegory may convey (1981: 65). What Fried is therefore really calling attention to in his critique of 'theatricality', argues Melville, is the lack of an intimate relationship to the viewer, a kind of 'soul-blindness' which makes manifest the negation of art's 'conviction' in its own identity. But in the modernist claim to self-presence and the postmodern claim to a notion of allegory that insists on *re*presentation and its continual 'othering', lies, according to Melville (1981: 82), an essential repetition of distinctions between 'purity and impurity', 'serious and frivolous' art, the 'self-critical' nature of modernism and the 'deconstruction' of postmodernism. The 'distance' invoked by allegory, may thus also oscillate with the 'presence' irretrievably attributed to painting.

Painting Antigone

It is in an acute tension between Owens's and Melville's accounts of allegory that I see Lacan addressing the tragic, theatrical conditions of allegory in Sophocles's epic play *Antigone* (441BC). His reading is not produced for the sake of analysing Greek mythological literature, rather than for how the character of Antigone embodies Kant's notion of beauty as a relationship to *das Ding*.[169] Lacan (SVII: 271-272) titles the seminar 'Antigone between two deaths'. In similar ways to Gamboni's notion of the 'crypto-image', he describes the traits of Greek mythic literature as informed by a tragic splitting of the physical body from the image of desire. In view of the pronouncements of the chorus, Lacan's analysis represents Antigone being marked as an 'uncivilised' and 'inhuman' sign: she is 'beyond' pure or impure, frivolous or serious, innocent or shameful characterisation (SVII: 263).[170]Antigone thus operates

[169] De Kesel's (2009) reading of *Seminar VII* discusses the view that Lacan has produced a partial reading of Antigone to suit his own purposes in psychoanalysis.

[170] Butler (2000: 3) challenges Lacan's reading of Antigone as a purely ethical position, and suggests that Antigone's figure produces potential sites of a 'feminist politics' which can be seen not only to transgress elemental anthropological structures of kinship, but as a profound example which conditions the realm of representation. Antigone points to 'that *political possibility* that emerges when the limits to representation and representability are exposed' (my italics). My goal is only to suggest these possibilities, as stated in my introduction, but my focus is on relating Lacan's reading to the conditions of representation in painting specifically.

analogously to Bal's notions of rape and the woman as pure sign, and thus his understanding of sublimation being located in the transgressive domain of gendered relations is made clear. I will not discuss Lacan's deconstruction of the stanzas here: we will rather follow the potential construction of allegory as it affects the reading of Siopis's glue and ink paintings: themselves allegory of contemporary painting, as a metaphor of the woman's body.

I would like to focus on what Lacan sees as the 'phenomenon of beauty' that Antigone presents (SVII: 260)[171] As Lacan discusses, Hegel's influential interpretation of *Antigone*, in which Creon and Antigone are simply two opposed moral 'principles' of discourse, is based on a false assumption (SVII: 254). Both instead operate on the level of transgression. While Creon represents sovereign power, he mistakes his moral rule as transcending the real by treating his subjects according to the 'universal maxim' of the good. As revenge for Antigone's brother Polyneices's betrayal and military subversion of the state, he tries to regain possession of his sovereignty by refusing Polyneices any burial rights, thus negating his name and stature (SVII: 259). But Antigone shows Creon the impossibility of annihilating Polyneices, either in name or in his worth as a brotherly sibling. She insists on burying her brother even though she knows Creon will punish her by the cruellest means possible – by being entombed alive. She is therefore identified with a transgression even more acute than Creon's misapprehension of his power.

Antigone refuses to accept Creon's notion of the 'good' and lays claim to the singularity by which her brother is her blood relation. Polyneices is 'unique' for her and thus she acts to protect his name and the fact of his existence with her own life. Her decision to face death thus exceeds any claim to good *or* bad that constitutes the law of the symbolic. She 'fixates', in other words, on that space which is outside of language, the 'laws of the earth' (SVII: 277). But not only does she uphold the 'sacred order' of 'respect for living matter'. Her wish holds a 'savage dimension' because the tragic consequence is her own death. For Lacan (SVII: 278), what Antigone reveals is the impossibility of staking a claim on the order of the 'chthonic laws', of our Real relation to embodiment. She thus turns *herself* into the sign of a split between embodiment and language by creating the conditions by which she becomes a pure signifier of this gap:

[171] Please see Addendum C for a brief summary of the play.

> …the ineffaceable character of what is – ineffaceable that is, from the moment when the emergent signifier freezes it like a fixed object in spite of the flood of possible transformations (SVII: 279).

At this point, the extreme way in which the subject dashes herself against the limits of embodied life, the 'forbidden territory' she has decided on, creates the 'violent illumination' and the 'glow of beauty' (SVII: 281). This sublimation exposes Antigone as the metaphorical, veiled nature of desire. She upholds a value which slips into the realm of the Other as *das Ding* and which can only, in the final analysis, be 'evil' – her own death. In this way the play functions as an allegory of judging the role of the beautiful in sublimation. Says Lacan (SVII: 261), 'Suffering is conceived of as a stasis which affirms that that which is, cannot return to the void from which it emerged.' The desire for an existence ex nihilo (the origin or vulva from which to create things anew), is illuminated as an imaginary sphere which provides substance to desire, while that substance is precisely what blocks the subject from the power ex nihilo. Revealing this paradox is the principle of beauty itself.[172]

I suggest that glue distils the transcendentalism of the signifier as founded in a fixation on the tortured passage from carnality to imagination. Siopis has discussed her painting *Pine* (2008) in terms which suggest the inextricability of pleasure and pain, love and jouissance in the process by which her images come into being.[173] She evokes this ambiguity in describing the figuration of a couple in and amidst an abstracted and frontal 'leafy glade':

> Yes, they are locked in an ambiguous embrace: aggression or love? I then dripped hot coloured ink from the top of the canvas. The drips ran around the raised dollops of glue simulating pine cones and needles, animating and binding the surface and the whole visual field like a kind of camouflage (Siopis 2009: 7).

This 'kind of camouflage' creates the veil or structure through which the painted objectivity of surface and the narrative of a potentially aggressive coupling liquefy and fuse. What occurs is a visual instantaneity which is charged with a tension between its own absorption as surface and the theatricality of a literary 'plotting' of simulated elements which continuously break up and corrupt the unformed or 'first form' of glue. For me, this process becomes the process by which looking is prescribed and itself split by these tensions. It resonates strongly with the formal language of desire elaborated in the tragic figure of Antigone, as presenting a 'violent illumination' and 'glow of beauty' (SVII: 281). Glue is the element by which these conditions

[172] As discussed in chapter 2.3, Kant included pain and suffering when he constructed a theory of the perception of beauty and its revealing of the supersensible condition of the moral subject.
[173] Figure 48: Penny Siopis. 2008. *Pine*.

become transfixed. As discussed earlier, the limit at which the surface meets glue registers both the impure and the pure medium *forcing* a 'sign' of formalism which 'fixes' a moment 'in spite of the flood of possible transformations' (SVII: 279).

Siopis reveals how contemporary painting *intensifies* surface as 'intersubjectively available' in ways that can unsettle and displace direct meaning. The glue forms a dense field that is split from the 'subject' of painting, or from what is 'true' to the practice of painting. An almost literal visual definition of jouissance answers two-dimensionality as a purely imaginary opacity: over-flowing forms 'theatrically' append to the white sheath of canvas, glue adjoins surface rather than absorbs, *tacks* onto the screen rather than unites as singularity. The 'forbidden territory' imaged is provoked as a manifest 'depthlessless', a brittle expanse delaying the tractability of gendered implosion through plasticity and density of demarcation (Nuttall 2014: 184).[174] However, this liaison with not-paint is itself effaced by the 'jouissance' with which the hyper-vivid condensation of glue and ink is handled as a putrescent psychic realm of devotion and seizure. A modernist paradigm I have described as invoking an optical distance and proximity to the autonomy of the painted surface is made a physical condition of surface itself. As I have suggested above, this occurs in how surface is possessed by *her* knowledge of the body, as the hinge by which the crypto-images between 'sacrifice and creation' are returned to painting.

Anamorphosis and the Agency of Painting

If glue allegorises Siopis's practice over time, it also functions to allegorise a historical trajectory of Western painting. I see Siopis signalling a succession of expressive values that are frozen in moments that register *both* the 'purity and impurity', the 'serious and frivolous', the 'self-critical' nature of modernism and the 'deconstruction' of postmodernism, in Melville's terms (1981: 82). I access this acute point of contact between values through consideration of the painted surface as a metaphor of the woman's body: a metaphor which is crystallised in the modernist objective for transcendental autonomy, as this thesis has drawn out in relation to *das Ding*. The complex of presence and distance that these objectives construct is allegorised through the process of bodily enactment in Siopis's work with glue.

[174] Allessandra de Angelis (2014: 280) contends that the 'fluidity' of Siopis's work amplifies the emotive registers of suffering. In this way, Siopis 'gives shape' to a 'new symbolic order'. As my discussion progresses, it becomes clearer that I view these traumatic signs as already located within the symbolic order.

This tension can be understood practically in reference to how Krauss (1986:13) (re)reads the modernist signification of 'grid' paintings, and describes an allegory of painting as the interminably ideal division between appearance and thing in itself. Further, her analysis parallels Melville's claim that contemporary modes of visual allegory invoke questions of the 'lost' origin in painting and its recouping by involving the two-dimensional surface as a 'zero degree' condition.

The grid has for Krauss remained singular to the meaning of its specific format: verticality and horizontality as the sign of pure surface (1986: 9).[175] Siopis's paintings attest to the elemental axis of the painted surface as vertical and horizontal not by figuring the grid, but again, embedding the operation as possessed by her own body deploying vertical and horizontal gestures. Krauss designates the symbolic autonomy sought by modernism to the spatial axis, where the grid manifests its absolute estrangement from natural or real objects (1986: 9). The vertical axis is the sign of 'the viewer's upright body', and thus is an 'image of culture' and the ideal subject (1997: 94). In verticality, Krauss further posits the phallic nature of the signifier (1993: 47). To the horizontal plane, she accords to the material inarticulacy of the physical index, which she sees as '*out* of the axis of the body, and thus also below form' (my italics, 1997: 95). Horizontality has an 'internal meaning' which resists the vertical because it is a sign of things which 'yield to gravity', and is therefore the means by which signification is forced to unfold across a wide terrain of meanings and associations (1997: 97). But the distinctive characteristic of the grid is that it embodies a cognitive schema wherein the juxtaposition is perceived in a synthesis, and simultaneous.

> The grid not only displays perfectly the conditions of what could be called the visual – the simultaneity of vision's grasp of its field dissolving the spatial (tactile) separation of figure against ground into the continuous immediacy of a purely optical spread – but also repeats the original, antique terms of a desire for objectivity and extreme clarity (2000: 88).

The significance of the grid painting in general, for Krauss, is that it illuminates this synthesis between the divine or desire, and objectivity as rational. However, when Siopis directs the synthetic through the 'blind' oscillation of her bodily imagination, she reclaims the primordial split between 'sacrifice and creation' as an *allegorical* condition of the transcendental judgment Krauss infers. Siopis thus places the work in a relationship to a split which does not render an active/passive gendered dichotomy, but situates her body as the mediator or 'intersubjective

[175] Figure 49: Agnes Martin. 1960. *White Flower.*

sign' which makes the axis between the symbolic and material possible.[176]

Allegory is closely linked to the structure of an anamorphosis. Jennifer Ellen Boyle (2010: 102) discusses how 'the hidden effects' of anamorphosis bring forth very similar questions of 'embodied agency'' to those raised by allegory. This 'embodied agency' is defined again by the opaqueness of meaning. Hanneke Grootenboer (2006: 132) describes the experiential effect of anamorphosis as 'being conquered' by the image because 'it shows us how we are snared within its system'. Indeed, Antigone reveals for Lacan how she is ensnared within the system of Creon's imaginary command, and her desire: the body is the site upon which these fundamentally absent aspects of judgment are both produced and enacted. Significantly however, allegory gains its meaning by creating the conditions through which the viewer experiences this form of embodied agency herself, thus mirroring the operation of the anamorphosis (SVII: 273).

In an essay on Agnes Martin's (1912-2004) 'grid' paintings, Krauss describes a conversion of the ungraspable 'Thing' to an invisible aspect which is nevertheless like an anamorphosis because it is dependent on a reading of modernism as evoking the viewer's ideal capacity of judgement, provoking what I have called nonobjective processes of reading a painting. For Krauss (2000: 76), it is mistaken to read Martin's large-scale, optically vibratory works in terms of an 'abstract sublime', beyond which one might envision 'immensity, the endlessness, the ecstasy, the *terribilitá* of nature'. Insofar as something affective exceeds the sum of its parts, Krauss sees the affect as dependent on the dematerialising effects of signifying operations of surface. These are coded in Martin's work insofar as her intricate and intensively lined grids create different effects depending on the viewer's position. Both close-up and from afar, the paintings register their extreme precision and delimitation of edge and surface materiality. From the middle distance, however, the grid's linings are neither fully visible, nor are the edges of the frame entirely within view. Rather, the tension between the two engenders an optical 'haziness' (Krauss 2000: 79). It is only in the extremity of two opposing structural delimitations of the viewpoint that the *affect* of nature as a sublime disorientation of the viewer's position comes into being.

Krauss (2000: 85) describes this moment as 'the remainder' of a 'semiological system'. Her description can be read to encapsulate the sense of embodied agency in Siopis's painting,

[176] Figure 50: Penny Siopis. 2009. *Miracle*.

insofar as the remainder is 'the thing that cannot be fitted into a system but which nevertheless the system needs in order to constitute itself *as* a system' (2000: 82). Krauss draws from Damisch's study of the remainder as a '/cloud/': his term for Renaissance and Baroque compositions in the dome above baptisteries. This area was used to signify a fundamentally unknowable aspect of perception that artists at the time wanted to represent. Intuitively palpable in vision, the dome would be overlaid in silver leaf to be reflective, or painted in as day or night sky. The dome was thus constructed as essentially empty or meaningless in comparison to the iconography adorning the rest of the baptistry (Krauss 2000: 84). The 'exact knowledge' signified by illusionistic perspective had as its backdrop the unknowable limit and condition of the 'unformed' that justified and maintained oppositions. The middle term '/cloud/' is therefore suggestive of the space between objective knowledge and subjective experience (Krauss 2000: 85). It is a meaningless space which nevertheless orders signifying relations on the level at which affect is translated as a visual logic. I see /glue/ functioning in a comparable semiological system. The 'purely optical spread' Krauss refers to is descriptive of Siopis's paintings particularly for the way in which the nature of the swirls and drips on the canvas create certain gestural effects: semiosis becomes an act of reading dependent on the viewer's own position in front of the painting.

These semiotics are not strictly readable nor describable except through a poetics of experience, or through a theoretical investigation of the paintings historical basis and material significations, as my effort speaks to here. A 'semiological system' therefore defines my distillation of the anamorphosis in chapter 2.1 (pg. 49) as divided between evaluating the conditions of representation or physical 'bib' of the cylinder and its objective construction – *how* the work comes to be – and seeking to interpret the deathly absent mirage, the Thing, which a painting may give rise to. While Owens describes the unalterable difference and therefore distance between the anamorphosis's 'decomposed' bib and its beautiful illusion, Lacan's progress through the text occurs on a similar level at which Melville insists that these illusions are not 'mere' themes of confusion but lend to the art its paradoxical conviction or substance. As I have discussed, this conviction of presence is approached through Kant's investigation of how objects and representations, and our experience of them, become tangible through their condition of relation (Longuenesse 1998: 18). But for Lacan, the *tragedy* involved in these relations are key to sublimation and the effect of beauty as a 'death'. While the figure of Antigone is established by the material 'spread' of narrative and chorus, she is made

tragically beautiful because of how symbolic forces have transgressed the limit of her body: the body only functioning here as an encrypted sign, a remainder, of trauma.

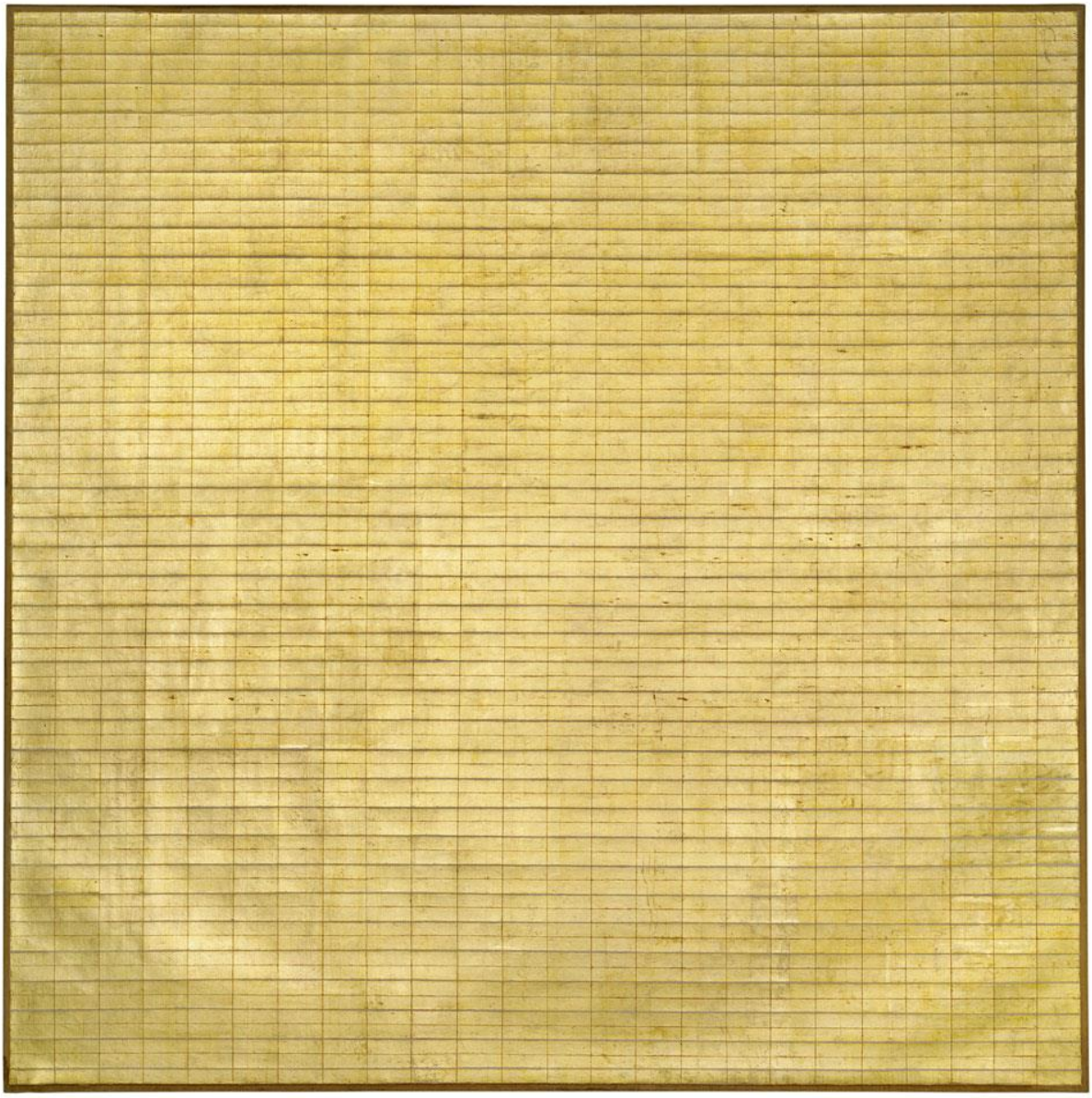
As Antigone is forced to her fate by Creon's law, so 'rape' is for Bal (2001: 109) a 'language' which is critically constructed by 'cultural attitudes' and dominated by a semiotics in which the 'rapist's usurpation of the authority of meaning…pass by unnoticed'. In Lacan, the economy of the play illuminates the 'sign' that Bal formulates as the woman's body in rape. The hero-victim Antigone is radically separated from her speaking position and cast into a tomb, as a result of which she functions, and *acts*, only as a sign of the difference between morality and transgression, life and death (SVII: 257).

Griselda Pollock (2014: 165) has linked Siopis's work as coextensive with both the goals of psychoanalysis and the political aspirations of post-apartheid South Africa. She refers to Siopis's installation of *Shame* (2002-5) paintings which make that veil an acute space of shared suffering. But Siopis is also a persuasive painter-analyst of the encounter with two-dimensional surface as the desire for a truth-function that I have framed as a form of allegory; as that inexorable unfolding and refolding, and literally melted mortification of myth and reality upon its own limits. Siopis materialises these passages and associations in a physical process which engages the latent conditions of embodiment as the governing order of consonance and contrast. In a conceptual correspondence with Antigone, she demonstrates that painting can offer a unique role in fusing the private and the public in ways which expose their emotional, physical conditions as fundamentally correlated with the shameful or tragic barriers to truth. The relationship of allegory to anamorphosis, as one that is mediated by embodied agency, is absorbed as a transgressive value in contemporary painting. This agency is realised, precisely in Graw's terms (2012: 56), as the regeneration of 'illusion' and the 'myth' of being able 'to grasp a fibre of the lived labour' of the artist herself. The 'subjective index' in Siopis, discussed through Part 3, definitively places pleasure and transgression at the site of the woman's body. In as much as the appearance and form of the images may oscillate between 'the sign and its arbitrary relation to meaning' as a general condition of contemporary painting, the way in which these 'masked voids' manifest a form of *presence*, of 'uncanny passions', may, ultimately, be theorised as a particularly feminine form of transgression.

Lacan's concluding comments on Antigone's role define what I see as the heightened relationship between *das Ding* as a fundamentally lost object of cognition, which, is just within view. That site of openness society has made a sign of the woman's body is also the place

where painting can and does feature the torrid split between the sovereign 'laws of the gods' and 'laws of the earth' (SVII: 276). If Antigone 'incarnates' desire, Lacan asks, does she not lay claim to the very space of the Other, that final destination in the mother's body? As Lacan (SVII: 283) argues, what Antigone becomes instead is the 'criminal' version of desire, situated not on the origin of her mother or her own body, but against Creon, and on the body of her brother. This perpetual 'impasse' is the 'true axis' upon which the notion of tragedy turns. If Lacan posits the insertion of the signifier as positively criminal in this instance, it is because Antigone wants to claim her autonomous desire on *a* body, the 'forbidden territory' which the social body rejects.

Contemporary painting absorbs this rejection and asserts it on a surface framed according to a Western, male parergon. But it can invoke that rejection as a state of inalterable, allegorical and repetitive distance from a surface once understood in modernist terms as the reflection of the noumenal self. Figuring and evaluating the 'criminal' value of a split between disinterested pleasure and a transgressive claim on the 'chthonic laws' is the condition of relation painting offers: between surface and subject, painting and viewer. On the level of transcendental abstraction, the decision or choice to paint is the primary axis of selection, undone by materials gestured, dropped and dumped through time and history, and across subjects. Enactment as regarding both the subjectivity and physicality of jouissance, made indexical in Siopis, *mandates* our transcendental separation from authenticity and universality. But if painting can only refer to the repetitive enactment of its parergonal positioning in art practice – the 'shame' of this 'crypto-image' – this does not account for the embodied agency my selected authors, in variable ways, have suggested is constitutive of the 'remainders', of 'beauty' or of '*das Ding'* in painting. Indeed, Melville (1981: 78) asserts that '[t]he painterly claim to the recovery of allegory unfolds into the situation of criticism as well'. It remains to consider the competence of painting for visualising this 'forbidden territory', as both outside of and elemental to the system of aesthetical and ethical communicability: a goal I now approach as conclusion.



Agnes Martin, 1963. *Friendship*. Gold leaf and gesso on canvas, 190.5 x 190.5cm. Courtesy of The Museum of Modern Art

Conclusion: 'A Testament as well as a Theatre'

This concluding chapter reviews the motivations for this thesis, and reflects on the potential value this work may have for future use in a scholarly context. As I draw out below, I see this thesis as a document for 'use' as it formulates a structure: built through a selection of key texts in philosophy and painting, it is less a source of information than it reiterates and develops a schema through which visual art can be analysed. I elaborate on the modernist 'grid', here as an abstract theoretical schema bisected by ideas of 'Testament' and 'Theatre' (Deleuze 1994: 5). 'Testament' and 'Theatre' are an initial pair of dialectical terms Gilles Deleuze introduces to describe the distortive action of what he calls 'repetition' in philosophical discourse. While I discuss Deleuze's (1994) notion of 'repetition' as something which provides a way of accounting for the role of *das Ding* in the process of writing and constructing this thesis, I emphasise the poles of Testament and Theatre. These terms concern the way in which some key philosophy and theory testifies to certain 'laws' of discourse, while also providing the possibility of new associations with painting that might be construed as imaginative, and thus open, both positively and negatively, to a kind of theatricality. Indeed, it is through the lens of a certain affected or exaggerated theatricality that I question the relation between trauma and pleasure developed in this thesis. Painting's possible contribution as a 'maternal phallus' – as that which works against common sense ideas – leads me to some final comments upon the competence painting (and writing on painting) offers to private and public conditions of communicability.

This thesis is the result of an attempt to think about the painted surface as a palimpsest. As I discuss in chapter 3.4. (pg. 172), Owens (1980: 69) views the palimpsest as a form of allegory, in that it emphasises the languages – the films and laminas of abstract thought both past and present – which affect the material construction of artwork. An allegorical reading-as-palimpsest, writes Owens, also implies that two texts are being read doubly and often intentionally in 'fragmentary, intermittent, or chaotic' ways. My choice of research, from Kant to Lacan, Greenberg to key members of the *October* group, has required this double lens, lending itself to a trajectory I recognise as often *un*intentionally fragmentary or chaotic, and also repetitive. It has been a particularly complicated and dense route, leading to an outcome which prevents any simple definition of this thesis as 'art history', 'philosophy' or 'contemporary theory' on painting.

There is a strange relationship between my appreciation of palimpsestic logic and the seeming simplicity of the 'goal' I feel is vital to the reason for being of painting. I have called this goal, this aspect, *das Ding*. It is close to something the Spanish call 'duende', which means '[t]he mysterious power that a work of art has to deeply move someone' (Tiurina 2016: Online). But in my view, it is perhaps *less* than that: it has something to do, merely, disinterestedly, with a sense of satisfaction that only comes from looking at certain paintings in person. It is a sensation that is achieved through vision, but that often comprises no more than a momentary feeling of bodily completeness, an intuitive connection to both the ideal and the objecthood of a painted thing. This thing is constructed, stroked and imaged into being by the hands and mind of another and thus has something to 'say' which is recognisable and, most often, familiar. But the part that connects with your senses does not speak or tell you anything. It merely makes itself present in the visual and bodily field of perception of you, the viewer. This sensation does not survive photographic or digital reproduction. Even more, the sense of completeness or totality is not fully available to memory: it can only be recalled by the act of experiencing it again, in person.[177] Because of its physical immediacy and its resistance to mental recollection, painting is like a trauma or an orgasm: however, such an analogy is more complex in view of my insistence on the re-collection and repetition of textual sources in this thesis.

Underlying my conviction in the ability of painting to manifest this experience, is also some doubt as to the intellectual value of discussing how it is created outside of painting-practitioner circles and a select few appreciative collectors. The practical details and intellectual aims of painting, which are often worked together to intentionally say 'nothing at all', are very specific and can therefore seem to exclude other disciplinary endeavours. The anti-social practice of painting and the naturalised sense of its format can often lead the painter to knowingly (and arrogantly) ignore the potential of other more contemporary media to convey similar senses and meanings. At bottom, I have wanted to proudly maintain the modernist self-absorption in

[177] This aspect of experiencing painting is also why it tends to confound many contemporary critics who believe art should be in search of the 'new'. Painting is not new: the 'newness' of the sensation resides in its ability to 'renew' that experience at any given moment. Lyotard (1991: 197) has analysed Barnett Newman's paintings as a 'sublime' invocation of what Lyotard calls a 'Now' in philosophical terms. One may see Lyotard's description of the 'Now' as an extension of the viewing experience I am trying to articulate: 'This "now" is one of the temporal "ecstasies" that has been analysed since Augustine's day and since Edmund Husserl…Newman's *now* which is no more than *now* is a stranger to consciousness and cannot be constituted by it. Rather, it is what dismantles consciousness, what deposes consciousness, it is what consciousness cannot formulate, and even what consciousness forgets in order to constitute itself.'

surface, but also to propose that it may be the very thing painting can contribute to intellectual reasoning: that, paradoxically, an absorption in painting may unhinge the autonomy and self-presence of some modes of critical discourse.

What has developed from this is the understanding that if this thesis is written with an elusive concept such as *das Ding* in painting in mind, that concept cannot be the object of my writing about painting. Rather, the object has developed into a consideration of the communicability of the competence painting shows for provoking complexity. Further, I see this thesis not as an attempt to communicate the satisfaction itself, but to regard the means by which that communication, in discursive form, might be sought in a way that has value for thought beyond the painted surface. As I have explored with reference to Kant, the self-consciousness required for investigating not communication per se, but its function and effects, can be viewed through an aesthetic experience upon which we (most, or just some of us) can agree. In this my interest in painting finds some potential relevance: the thesis's connection to aesthetics could be said to engage that specialised sphere where the difficulty of knowing our cognitive relations, as both private and public beings, can be analysed. Ameriks (2003: 286) helpfully lists the foundational propositions underpinning Kant's treatment of the necessary conditions for communicability in which the aesthetic can be seen as objectively valid:

1. Cognitive judgments are communicable.
2. Each cognition has an accompanying subjective state.
3. If cognitions are communicable, then so are their accompanying subjective states.
4. These subjective states involve various proportions in the activities of our faculties, and there is some such proportion that is 'most beneficial' for the relation of imagination and understanding.
5. States with such a proportion are communicable.
6. They are aesthetic.
7. Therefore aesthetic judgment (as an expression of a specific kind of communicable state) is valid.

I have formulated the necessary subjective state accompanying objective claims in the domain of the aesthetic as 'nonobjective'. Ameriks explains that while Kant's assertion that 'matching subjective states' in 'normal conditions' of perception can be objectively communicable may seem 'trivially' obvious, his notable contribution is to articulate the cognitive premise for understanding how these states are mediated (2003: 289). As quoted above, this premise concerns 'some such proportion' of the *relation between* faculties. Ameriks calls it a 'special state' or a 'special proportion', which Kant referred to as 'a harmony of the faculties' (2003: 290). Further: 'Soon after speaking of the special proportion, Kant happens to say that he has found something that is "the necessary condition of the communicability of our knowledge."'

Ameriks goes on to analyse a problem in the statement: Kant could be saying that aesthetic 'harmony' is the necessary condition of all cognition, *or* that only people with special faculties can experience and thus communicate this harmony. But as Ameriks (2003: 290) asserts, it is clearly preferable to say 'that it can be special objects or features, and not special people or faculties, that are primarily responsible for the fact that some experiences are harmonious and others are not'.

I direct this question of a 'special object' that may reflect a certain cognitive relativity to paintings which may be seen to *escape* the aesthetic value of communicability. To me, many paintings, if not most, offer something of a 'special proportion' of satisfaction. Even so-called 'bad' paintings by dabblers, or ornamental landscapes at Sunday fairs and by street-side traders, can evoke this appreciation. I see all painting as a historical form of plastic writing, and the fact that the history of all painting is defined by the subjective state of a painter, the merest trace of his or her autography, the proportion of a 'self' in surface, always arouses my interest. The translation of that subjectivity into words can be, as suggested, trivial and difficult at the same time. I have approached the question of communicating painting's competence through paintings which may be seen to unhinge the 'harmonious' or pleasurable aspect of satisfaction. This occurs not by depicting unpleasurable or horrific things, but by making something different from the traditional relations between sign and surface that are normatively associated with a decently satisfactory painting. I have defined this difference in terms of a concept of trauma, because it may reflect the kind of painting which works to disturb, and thus highlight, the possibility of communication itself. Because of this, I have selected paintings for analysis which may be seen to demonstrate my interest in the nonobjective conditions under which communicability is possible or desirable. The paradox, or irony, lies in the aim to be achieved in this consideration of trauma and painting. If my object is not to explain or describe the sense of *das Ding* in painting, *das Ding* becomes an object both producing and disrupting the conditions of communicability within the research itself. My focus has been on those authors who purposefully engage aspects of the perception of objects which augur both the obstructions to communicability and the systems by which communicability between self and other may be formalised. Nevertheless, I have not offered an overview of this particular aspect of inquiry in the fields of aesthetics and psychoanalysis. Rather, I have selected texts which reflect that goal which lies, *perpendicularly*, as I will explain, close to my personal motivation in this thesis: the embodiment of *das Ding* in painting.

The relation between *das Ding* in text and *das Ding* in painting is analogous to Deleuze's (1994: 1) invocation of 'repetition' as something of a Kantian 'special proportion' which lies between 'Testament' and 'Theatre' in philosophical discourse: between certain laws or rules of presenting an argument in academic writing ('Testament'), and areas which are concerned with exacerbating and even exaggerating the more imaginative characteristics of metaphor ('Theatre') – for example, Derridean deconstruction, or the anamorphic allegory and the allegory of anamorphosis offered by contemporary painting. I will draw out some of the characteristics of repetition in the course of this conclusion. In the meantime, repetition can be cast as a very similar concept to *das Ding* because it involves the 'singularity' by which elements of the body signify or become perceptible within the text, 'from one wave of gesture to another' (Deleuze 1994: 23). In other words, some theatrical 'thing' happens which is not a causal outcome of the sum of the parts constructing the text, but, approached nonobjectively, reveals the relation – especially their conflictual, illogical or affective aspects – between parts. In this way, repetition in philosophy concerns putting 'metaphysics into action' because it involves various modes of enactment which disrupt the 'laws' of 'generalities' associated with the scientific world view: it intentionally inserts aspects of 'humour and irony', 'suspense and ascent' and 'transgression and exception' into a Testament – the normative rule or law of relations between representations (Deleuze 1994: 5; 8).

Repetition occurs in the relation between 'Testament' and 'Theatre' and is, importantly, reached through a combination of the two (Deleuze 1994: 2). I have felt driven to offer a 'testament' in which the more invisible source of affect in painting might eventually be considered as communicable. The writing of this testament has involved the creation of an academic structure that may be useful to the student of arts. This structure is knowingly and essentially a reiteration of elements from philosophy and contemporary theory in painting. It is a repetition of the textual 'traits' between form and matter which to many scholars of art is foundational and even obvious, as will become clear in my summation of this 'testament' below. However, my testament to these structures, while it invokes contentious issues of universality and originality, is also context-specific. It arises from my sense that not only are many current South African scholars of art ignorant of the historical epistemology of perceiving representation and reality, they are also ignorant of the potential these forms have for deconstructing simplistic or overly-direct interpretations taking place in the contemporary day,

in arts and elsewhere.[178] While the palimpsestic density of this history may not provide the most efficient means by which to define critical solutions, the contribution that can be made by density, by complexity, by the 'singular' which escapes definition, is a necessary supplement to discourses in search of final solutions.

This density can be construed in terms of what Deleuze (1994: 12) calls repetition's 'natural blockage' to the 'concept'. He describes this blockage as intrinsic to Kant's 'transcendental logic', where repetition can describe the relation between representations as '[testifying] to their powerlessness or their real limits'. Repetition thus emphasizes not the economical flow of transcendental reasoning, but the way in which it will always abut *das Ding an sich*, the dumb material stupefying thought, provoking its 'non-conceptual determinations' (Deleuze 1994: 13). Deleuze further relates this 'natural blockage' to Freud's understanding of it as caused by the internal psychical phenomenon of 'repression' and 'resistance' (Deleuze 1994: 14). As Addendum B lays out, Freud may be seen to view repression itself as the very material of the blockage to truth and meaning. However, Lacan develops Freud's idea to become a blockage even more fundamental, more opaque, and more strongly administrative of the human production of representation and its repressive traits. Between the symbolic and material realms, the high and low, the active and the passive, the divine and desire, the ideal and the real, the original and the artificial, the absorption with self and solipsistic propensity to theatricality, lies the psychical trauma of *das Ding*.

Das Ding has served as something of an empty but charged blockage threatening to unhinge my thesis from its value as a testament – and sometimes succeeding in this. As my PhD supervisor cautioned in a draft of my research:

[178] De Duve's seminal essay 'When Form has become Attitude – and Beyond' (1994) contends that contemporary art academia has lost much of its critical clout by excluding earlier learning models dedicated to '*métier*' and 'medium' in the Enlightenment academy and modernist schools. De Duve (1994: 22) describes the two concepts as an 'academic model' and a 'Bauhaus model': 'The former believes in talent, the latter in creativity. The former classifies the arts according to technique, what I would call the *métier,* the latter according to the medium.' He sees the 'critical attitude' developed from the seventies as replacing skill and material-based concerns with a centralised model of being 'critical of the social and political status quo' (de Duve 1994: 27). While aspects of the former models were in need of critical challenge and deconstruction, de Duve goes on (1994: 29), 'when the culture that fosters invention starts to doubt, it ceases to oppose itself to the culture fostering imitation that it claimed to supplant.'

> Kant was wise enough to realise that our knowledge is always incomplete; that we never know the thing in itself; that we construe knowledge by representations that are as much internal as they are to do with the things outside of us. Lacan turns that into the nervous breakdown of everybody and of Western civilisation over the past at least 200 years. One can say many things about this, but it is also part of a particularly French fashion for turning the tables on everything in an almost apocalyptic scholarly performance.

I too have doubts about *das Ding*'s use-value in triggering a breakdown in the written analysis of painting as a palimpsest. Is the apocalyptic aspect of *das Ding,* as a perversely imagined pleasure and a real trauma, *really* apparent, or even necessary to conceiving or communicating the concept and affect governing the act of painting? Deleuze (1994: 17) suggests that while repetition invokes the 'mechanical, the 'death instinct, and the 'theatre of Terror'. Lacan's assertion of such a concept as fundamentally and transcendentally absent to cognition thus depletes its usefulness for a philosophy centred on putting 'metaphysics into action':

> For if we were content to treat repetition [or, *das Ding*] abstractly and as devoid of any interior, we would remain incapable of understanding why and how a concept could be naturally blocked, allowing a repetition which has nothing to do with generality to appear (my brackets, Deleuze 1994: 25).

This is where Deleuze will explore the materiality of such an interior (1994: 24; 25). But it is one he seems to constitute through a dialectical play between 'Testament' and 'Theatre': through such oppositions as 'literal' and 'masked', 'sign' and 'disguise'. It is in a similar play of surfaces and figures that I see *das Ding* becoming manifest. Below, I recapitulate the grid-like format by which this play is formalised, and through which my predominant opposing terms of trauma and pleasure may find its rationale in painting.

I see the formal structure of Deleuze's relay between the 'literal' and 'masked', 'sign' and 'disguise', as relevant to two aspects of this thesis. One is in my exploration of certain parts of the Kantian 'parergon' and the traits of painting – its most basic division being between form and matter. In combination with a Lacanian approach that internalises these divisions in aspects of the unconscious, my exploration of such aspects of aesthetic cognition may be seen as my 'testament' to thinking the more literal signifying conditions (historical and cultural) of painting. A second aspect is my treatment of the pressure painting itself brings to bear on thought, which I have tried to evoke as the metaphorical value – the masks and disguises – of *das Ding* as both death and as jouissance; the 'repetition' internal to these being provocative elements of 'theatre'. In section 3.4.4, I discuss these movements as embodied by the grid painting's vertical and horizontal significations as spatial and material. Here I raise a related

function signified by the form of the grid, in how Hal Foster (1996: xii) assigns the 'diachronic (or historical)' axis and 'synchronic (or social)' axis to art and theory respectively.

For Foster (1996: xii), the contemporary 'avant-garde' may not attempt to 'transgress' the traditional axes of art and theory, so much as to work towards a 'model of deconstructive (dis)placement'. This is also why Foster sees much contemporary art as a 'return of the Real', with the traumatic qualities of experience being invested in the displacement and 'deferred action' of reforming the conventions or 'traits' of art-making. Foster identifies this traumaticity of material processes in a range of postmedium practices such as minimalism and appropriation in sculpture, pop art and painting. While I have referenced Foster's deployment of a concept of trauma throughout this thesis, here I summarise the verticality and horizontality I have traced in the analysis of the work of Mary Wafer and Penny Siopis, and offer what I hope will be a conclusive statement on the structure of this thesis serving the traits of 'testament' and 'theatre' for future use.

The '*Begriffsmechanik*' of form and materiality, the verticality and horizontality of Parts 2 and 3 respectively, can be understood with reference to the model of the anamorphosis because they function reflectively. 'Reflective' here is used specifically: my exegesis of the discourse related to the signification of form in Wafer's paintings, and my analysis of materiality asserted in Siopis's work, reflect on the axis perpendicular to their format. To explain this in the simplest terms: while I construe Wafer's work in terms of the paintings' predominantly symbolic use of form – their vertical historical orientation – what arose in the course of writing these chapters are some precise insights into the nature of social embodiment and its position as split or cut from cognition and knowledge. In the case of Siopis's work, I attempt to qualify the bodily substance and material support of jouissance. What occurred for me was an insistent pointing away from this space towards a dematerialised, opaque realm of symbol and metaphor. As with the anamorphosis, my exploration into the philosophy that details these positions resulted in a displacement of positions: a situation I have suggested becomes the viewer's own.

Part 2 of this thesis discusses Wafer's paintings almost as diagrammatic illustrations of the abstract philosophy and modernist theory I am interested in. To me this is problematic insofar as my intuitive appreciation of her material processes can be perceived as being neglected, whereas, as I have stated, the act of intuiting and finding satisfaction in form is the primary trigger for painting's reason for being. My exploration in Part 2 was motivated by my fascination with philosophy and psychoanalysis which suggest that human experience borders

on the solipsistic: that there is an extent to which the lived experience of private and social realities is constructed by desire. But whereas perceiving the constructedness of our material and embodied world is a critical point of interest, it is of even more interest for suggesting that things may be constructed anew. However, my even deeper fascination stems from the notion that the 'new' may only be generated through a focus on certain 'laws' of representation which can be considered both universal *and* necessarily repressed by a blockage of the perverse drives inherent to the faculties of imagination and understanding. Relating the theory of this blockage to a 'beyond' of experience provokes metaphysical ideas, but also ethically responds to thinking and practice occurring on what one might call 'this side of the fence' (see pgs. 67, 88). The 'fence' is tied to the notion that by way of *abstractly* or nonobjectively respecting the lawful border or barrier to what may be excessive freedoms of desire and pleasure, we sustain a distance from the possibility of harm to self and others. The element of abstraction is important because it resists lending moralistic content to what this excess may consist of. It emphasizes that thinking itself is an ethical activity. It is an activity located at a *real* distance from physical and violent actions and reactions. In my thesis, Wafer's paintings serve rather modestly as a literal and symbolic reflection of this 'fence', and allows me to trace certain historical developments in art which envision this fence as that which negates aspects of life as a way of perceiving, and thus avoiding, death. For me, the 'beauty' of these testaments lies more in the thought of them than the material image they may assume. As I concluded, imaginatively visualising the empty and often hollow difference between the ideal point of view of reason and the embodied narratives and events affected by it, is perhaps all that needs to be re-affirmed in the continued presentation of such paintings.

The relative rigour that these vertical 'laws' of the signifier and of representation uphold are put under real pressure by the horizontal spread of Penny Siopis's multimedia practices. In this way, the question of the subject seeps and flows outwards to the relationships held with others through history and in the present; to those situations which are both pleasurable and traumatic. In my view, Siopis's work does not involve the attempted annihilation of transcendentally ideal perspectives much postmodern art may claim to have as its goal. Rather, her paintings, installations and videos may be seen to work according to Foster's (1996: xvii) notion of 'deconstructive (dis)placement'. My 'testament' to this model concerns the deconstruction and the displacement the feminine body offers to discourse in general as well as to theories of intersubjective relations. Siopis's elaboration and articulation of painting as a female act is particularly relevant to current conditions which are characterised by extreme acts against

women who are abused *because* they are idealised. But the potential of the feminine in painting, worked as a deceptively ideal modernist surface, also elicits the traumaticity of metaphor which *das Ding* brings to the relationship between viewer and object. The relationships Siopis institutes between the lubricious viscerality of material forms and her symbolic focus on the political and ideological sphere of culture, tend to displace the position of the viewer as a 'sign' of spectatorship in the gallery space. Through the manifold technical and formal devices she deploys in literal and conventionally signifying ways, her 'gestures' confront notions of desire and belief as taking place in the perceptual and experiential sphere of the viewer's own space. In this way, my interpretation of 'gesture' here rests on the transgressive provocation her work embodies as a 'maternal phallus' - principally that which registers as a confusion between private and public, or inner and outer spaces.

I will return to the potential of the 'maternal phallus' for interpreting the materiality or 'crux' of *das Ding* – an opposing stance to Lacan's insistence on *das Ding*'s utter absence and emptiness, and its cohabitation with 'nervous breakdowns'. I would like to address what I see as crucial to the testament of this thesis: the possibilities offered by Greenberg's modernist discourse. If seen through the lens of Kant's notion of beauty and Lacan's concept of *das Ding*, the ideal relational conditions Greenberg articulates for painting find both their intellectual rationale and their propensity for 'theatre'. At the same time, the conflictual and coincidental relationship between trauma and pleasure become acute and controversial.

The concepts of beauty and *das Ding* trouble the borders of the self as autonomous. This is because both assert the presence of a non-concept and manifest purposelessness as essential aspects of the aesthetic and, following from this, offer the notion that the non-conceptual elements of perception may establish the potential for intersubjective validity, or 'agreement' between persons. I argue that Greenberg focused on a conceptual model of 'pleasure' derived from a contemplation of the relations between signifying conventions in painting. Yet, through qualities like flatness and frontality, the modernist surface also evokes the non-conceptual and non-relational elements of perception both in art and the everyday. This 'pleasure' is therefore less about the affective or emotional qualities of paintings, than it encompasses a particular pleasure of spectatorship arising from the intellectual consideration of the operation between the immediacy of intuition and the discursivity of understanding. I quoted Greenberg (2009: 9) talking about the '"sensation" of [an] exalted cognitiveness'. My understanding is that the immediacy of intuition in Greenberg's thought contains the kernel of an enigma that permeates

the process of understanding: it will drive and contain the understanding of our aesthetic experiences as something of a 'search for the absolute' (Greenberg 1961: 5). The modernist painting Greenberg espoused centres his ambition on the enigma governing experience, but it also disturbs the pure autonomy he is said to have advocated.

Again, my focus here is not on the metaphysics which may or may not be present in intuition. Rather, I am more interested in the intrinsic element of non-relation for the lack of autonomy it theoretically brings to (self)consciousness. If Greenberg's discourse could be said to embody 'the structuration of the modern self as traumatic', as Carolyn Jones (2004: 31) writes, it is because his compaction of the nonobjective into the swift and 'brute' judgment that he emphasised as occurring between intuition and understanding had a certain effect on artistic discourse (Greenberg 2000: 72). *Perhaps* unwittingly, Greenberg may have evolved a concept of trauma for later multimedia practices because he reduced the 'harmonious' embellishments the sphere of *imagination* offers to the understanding. Such a reduction is already reflected in the loss of certain decorative and imaginative values in the modernist canon and is therefore not Greenberg's invention: he rather made these values a central aspect of his art criticism. The sustained interest in his work could thus be interpreted as evoked by the heightened or, in his own words, 'weightless' sense of the nonobjective as a primary 'cut' or split between the imaginary subject and the material (and practical) body (Greenberg 2000: 73). The proximity of imagination to the 'natural blockage', or traumatic site of the Real, become exchangeable: prone to both pleasure and trauma. In this way, Greenberg's discourse functions in terms of Lacan's notion of sublimating modern experience. Indeed, as I argue in the final chapter of Part 2, the role of imagination, made so opaque in modern life, confuses the boundary between psychic and social realities, a consequence of which is the exchange of psychical pleasure for real pain, wrought both on the site of vulnerable bodies and in the delusional religiosity accompanying certain facets of the digital era.

In chapter 3.3 (pg. 151-153), I extend the theoretical value of this split via de Duve's analysis of Duchamp. Duchamp can be said to affirm the modern relevance of this imaginary proximity to a traumatic real when he removes the hand and eye from a work to the extent that just about any found object may suffice as an artwork. But I think that this traumatic aspect of Duchamp's practice tends to be ignored in favour of many contemporary artists viewing real objects as generative, associative and synchronic with thought and experience in the world outside of the gallery. Therefore what seems to be necessary for viewing much conceptual art and installation

is a high degree of imagination, but this often tends to be obscured by a written statement accompanying the work which 'tells' the viewer what significance a work is supposed to hold for a current issue. Negating Kant's more irrational function of imagination and the perverse realm of the imaginary in Lacan represses the potential for non-conceptuality to incite reflection in ways which complicate ideas and open them to conversation, *at the site of the artwork itself*. But the artist-statement unwittingly continues the Duchampian project in more ways than the artist may think: the discursive 'grasp' on the signifier may contain what de Duve (1991: 30; 34) sees as Duchamp's real 'demand': to subsume 'woman as a metaphor of painting' as a 'truth function'. As I have argued, the 'truth function' for Duchamp is in fact the *arbitrary* relationship of signs to meaning: something he may have been acknowledging painting always already stands as testament to. This banality is the neighbour of trauma insofar as it stupefies signification: it is an ironic and transgressive gesture opposing the transcendental aptitude for creating ideal meaning. On one hand this gesture may be seen as a resistance to the kind of ideologically problematic cultural 'creations' represented by the West. But on the other hand, the formal structure of such an act on the metaphor of the 'woman's body' also mirrors the destruction of associative and generative signification in the 'speech act of rape' (Bal 2001: 109).

I argue that Siopis's practice in found objects and installation makes the psychosexual nature of the transgression explicit. However, her repetition of and return to painting (as well as my focus on her painting in this thesis) does not 'mean' an advocacy of the ornamental embellishments and illusionary transcendence associated with the imagination – although Siopis does make a gesture towards this possibility in the forms and swirls of her glue paintings. Rather, 'rape' is literally and conceptually subsumed back into the intemperate spread of ink and glue across large scale canvases. The fetishist avowal of the painted surface, as an imaginative surface, collides with the nature of the glue as readymade substance. What occurs then is an allegory of painting practice, where the 'ruins' of its death – in other media and critical postmodern theory – is assumed as well as displaced by the possibility of an originality and authenticity in surface and the similarly idealised, auratic, viewing experience it evokes. The scandal and the shame that her reference to the history of beauty allegorises is made explicit in and for contemporary painting.

The 'special proportion' in absorbing and reading a particular painting works to avert the sign of surface as purely arbitrary; but it can reflect the 'rape' of imaginary relations in

contemporary life as a 'sign' that is 'intersubjectively available' (Bal 2009: 109). What this means in plain terms is that much contemporary painting may not be beautiful in the traditional terms of Kant. However, it can provoke the processes by which an *idea* of beauty *as* a symbol of morality – in the particular deformations and displacements it *is* imaginatively exposed to – may present itself in the socio-political sphere.

This idea cannot be illustrated by images (digital or photographically reproduced) because it is based in the experiential conditions of an embodied state of intuition crossing, sometimes disrupting, the strands of common understanding. The contemporary painted surface can in this way be seen to function as a re-appropriated metaphor for the woman's body. It is a 'crypto-image' caught in the 'semiological' system of transcendentalism (Gamboni 2002: 70; Krauss 2000: 85).

While it asserts the continuation of transcendental values, it can also imply a perverse proximity to aspects of the imagination which both construct and deconstruct a transcendental grasp on things. I appeal to the reader to view these comments for their structural import: conceiving surface as a woman's body caught between a certain repetitive relationship of the signifier and *das Ding* requires a reading of the 'special proportion' of a specific painting. Ultimately though, this structure may be seen to advocate a return not so much of imaginary values in painting, but an increased focus on the *relativity* of certain bodily based, nonobjective 'laws' and its communicability in the public sphere.

I end with a comment about my own perceivable development of the work in this thesis for the future. I regard writing about painting as a potentially significant act of embodying Kristeva's (1982: 38) notion of the 'maternal phallus'. This figure 'deprives us of assurance' because it is 'untenable to the law of language', as I have noted (pg. 151). Yet if it is untenable to the 'law', the 'diacritical solution' I see the mother's phallus offering has a particular potency *because* of its relationship to precisely that law (Fineman 1980: 60). It can be characterised by the ancient credo espoused by the Talmudic scholar Hillel and cited in the beginning of this thesis: 'Appear neither naked nor clothed, neither sitting nor standing, neither laughing nor weeping' (30 BCE – 10 BCE). To 'be neither naked nor clothed, neither sitting nor standing, neither laughing nor weeping' may be a provocative truth-function insofar as it deliberately maintains the condition of being both naked and clothed, sitting and standing, laughing and weeping.

This distance from and proximity to identification and the law if identification is provocative,

because it enacts the question of the mother's agency – not as castrated, but as holding the power to confront the repression of the Real question: where, and why, has *she* hidden her phallus? Indeed, a denial of her capacity for withdrawal, the suspicion of her deceit, according to Lacan, features in reality precisely as the 'forces of affect' Mbembe (2015) suggests is a psychological phenomenon driving collective expressions of rage and violence. Painting may not seek to evoke the 'forces of affect' given to hurt, victimisation and rage, but it does articulate the question of coming into language through means which both undermine and re-establish the imaginary basis of signification, and the subjective relation to theatricality and threat, or the threat of theatricality. Writing on painting, or writing *as* painting, can attend or testify to this inner demand.

INDEX OF TERMS

Nonobjective

I regularly and deliberately use the term ‘nonobjective’ in this thesis. Here I offer a summary of the meaning I ascribe to it, since it has evolved into a key word which captures some of the development of my own interpretation.

The nonobjective is often taken to mean abstract or nonrepresentational painting, i.e. painting which does not refer to objects in the external world but rather to its medium-specific properties of form and painterly surface. However, I conceive an understanding of the nonobjective which may include both content and imagery, rather than simply referring to abstract form.

I see the nonobjective as mediating between thought and material processes in philosophy and painting. I consider Kant’s formal schemas concerning ‘a priori’ representation to be partially ‘nonobjective’ because there is an emphasis on the a priori as autonomous and not dependent on objects in the external world. Furthermore, a degree of abstract thought is necessary to grasp what Kant means by saying ‘a priori’, or when discussing the process of ‘synthesis’ between a priori representations. Thus, the nonobjective in painting and philosophy could be said to be forms which schematise and interpret properties of mind or psyche.

There are further values I assign to the nonobjective which concern more irrational impulses in the act of judgment. Implicit in my usage of the term is a stronger stress on ‘non-conceptuality, non-cognitivity… and their relation to feeling and pleasure’ than is normally associated with Kant’s critiques (Ameriks 2003: 306). This is because I highlight the role of Kant’s notion of the ‘imagination’ as a relation to the nonobjective. The imagination, as I discuss the term in the thesis, seems to me to have a stranger function in aesthetic and objective judgments than is often highlighted. My reading of Lacan’s imaginary functions which are internal to the pleasure principle, and my more recent exploration of Hannah Ginsborg’s (2007: 66) notes on imagination and judgment in Kant, have served to elicit my interest in the potential the imagination has for disfiguring straightforward understanding and meaning. Thus, my invocation of the nonobjective includes the possibility of a potentially distorting aspect configuring abstract schemas of judgment in the making and reception of painting.

This ‘stranger function’ of imagination may have to do with elements of embodied life filtering into operations of the psyche. While Kant already defines judgement as both sensation-dependent and conceptual, through my exploration of Lacan I emphasise notions of embodiment and its relation to desire in making judgments. One could make the argument that a priori representation is abstract *because of* the body. Because Lacan asserts that the experience of our bodies is never fully present to cognition, I see the term ‘nonobjective’ as particularly appropriate for referring to that which is more difficult to visualise.

The meanings I ascribe to ‘nonobjective’ here are both implicitly and explicitly deployed in this thesis. However, I emphasise that the notion of the nonobjective does not fully negate the objective means by which one arrives at interpretation and judgment. It is precisely in the operation by which more subjective representations may theoretically encounter the materiality of both external reality and the painted surface that an objective judgment might be made.

The Triad and *Das Ding*

Lacan’s central theory of the mind deviates from a dualistic notion of consciousness and the unconscious to encompass a triangulated schema of psychical features that he calls the ‘Imaginary,’ the ‘Symbolic,’ and the ‘Real’. Slavoj Žiźek (2002: 2) summarises the three functions as follows:

> ‘Imaginary’ is the deceptive universe of fascinating images and the subject’s identifications with them; ‘Symbolic’ is the differential structure which organises our experience of meaning: ‘Real’ is the point of resistance, the traumatic ‘indivisible remainder’ that resists symbolisation.

These categories are complex and dense in regards to representation and experience because of the way in which Lacan weaves them into Freudian theory. The imaginary, symbolic and real operate on conscious, preconscious and unconscious levels (SVII:33). The triadic structure can thus be envisioned in a topology of a ‘Borromean knot’ which articulates how all three elements are knotted or chained together in such a way that it is impossible to fully separate their meaning and functions (Lacan 1977: 281). As will be drawn out below, the knottedness of the three are examined as characteristics of the signifier and its identifications with emotions and the external world. Amanda Loos (2002) describes the function of the triad as analogous to thinking the perceptual, linguistic, and image-making structures of signification in media and representation. Writes Loos, the triad enables further consideration of the ‘interplay’ of

production and reception, thus helping to theorise the way in which particular subjectivities of viewing are 'reproduced' in the public sphere.

With my emphasis on *das Ding* as a 'real' element transcending the triad, these qualities are particularly focused on the kind of painting which resists symbolisation and narrative as articulations of trauma, and is rather based in the pleasure and reality principles. As I have indicated in this thesis, one might simply see the Real corresponding to *das Ding*. This direct correspondence would however be incorrect, since the real is more strictly unrepresentable and is, more precisely, a quality of experience. *Das Ding,* on the other hand, is susceptible to modes of artistic and philosophical representation, which can thus be said to transcend the triad's functioning as a purely psychical phenomenon. The difficulty in marking these points of transcendence – or the question of the will to do so – is the problem examined in this thesis.

The Imaginary

The imaginary is linked to Lacan's (1936) most familiar theory of the 'mirror stage'. The imaginary is a primary condition of infantile development where a child first recognises their own image as separate from other things in the world. It is thus bound up specifically with questions of identity. However, Lacan says that this recognition of the self as distinct is imbued with imaginary and fantastical impressions. It is a stage of development characterised by both excessive narcissism and aggression (Boothby 2001: 11, 164). The presence of these qualities in adult life leads Lacan to suggest that the imaginary is the root of the 'object relations' psychoanalysis is pre-eminently concerned with (De Kesel 2009: 20). As De Kesel explains, the imaginary is defined as an essential 'misrecognition' of the 'primacy of the image'. The infant 'fails' to realise the psychical complexity of her being and focuses on her base visual aspects only, such as sexual difference (Rose 1987: 90-1). Because of this over-evaluation of the image by the infant, an unalterable separation between object and self is instituted. The infant thus becomes the psychic subject or 'bearer' of the '*relation*' between his/her body and other objects (de Kesel 2009: 21). Again this will have a bearing on future experience and psychic life: we are subject to 'imagining' the perspective and beliefs of others as well as our own 'imagined' place and status in the world (Johnston 2013). But this distance from reality caused by the imaginary does not mean that we are not in touch with reality. Rather, Lacan sees the imaginary and its faultlines of identity (and sexual identity) as the ground of the factual reality humans have created since our primordial origins. But inasmuch as these have had

problematic results, such as gender inequality, the imaginary is also a 'necessary illusion' which triggers the entry into language and thought itself (Johnston 2013: Online).

The Symbolic:

In the sphere of language and signification, the symbolic derives from the imaginary stage of development. But it subsequently comes to hold a role in identification which has autonomous functions of its own. The symbolic centrally concerns notions of the 'Other,' the 'phallus' as a signifier, and Lacan's understanding of 'metaphor'. I will attend to these terms in subheadings below.

- **The Other**

De Kesel (2009: 23) states that in the symbolic realm, identity 'no longer refers to an imaginary figure in a mirror, but now also to a linguistic "figure"'. This 'figure' is conceived by Lacan as the 'Other', which is an internal representative function in the subject. On one hand the Other is the sum of shared language and belief systems an individual is born into. But the 'Other' also functions to describe the way in which the subject is even further separated from things in themselves because she is dependent on a speaking and linguistically able mother and father. Matthew Sharpe (2015) refers to this dependence as a necessary 'decentring of desire'. The child must learn to represent her needs and wishes to her parents, i.e., she must symbolise them in ways which are communicative on the level of language. Most especially, the subject must do so if she is to gain the parents' love. As with the imaginary, the symbolic is also an uneasy space of psychical life because it is decentred or split between the needs and imaginary desires of the subject herself, and the problem of desires which may belong to someone else (Barrett 2014). The subject is therefore made aware of narratives that arise from an Other and are not the wishes and fantasies of her self-image. Furthermore, the Other develops into a preeminent figure of the father or 'paternal' Other. Boothby (2001: 264) articulates Lacan's schema of the Other as a twofold structure where the father is Other while the mother is 'Thing.' This 'coincidence of two positions' describes the way in which both Thing and Other are tied into the 'law' of the symbolic. This law is primarily phallic, as we will see, because it is a law of representation and metaphor of *both* Other and Thing. The law is furthermore a decisive function whereby our awareness of the Other and Thing, their similarity and differences, materialise in the first place.

- **The Phallus**

The phallic signifier delimits the meaning of things as they appear to us and our experience of them. It holds a constraining function on perception. The phallus has a sublimating role in the fuller sense of Hegel's sublimation and '*Aufgebung*' because it tends to resolve difference in terms of dualities. Van Pelt (2012: 153) writes that '[w]hile the unconscious locates power in Otherness, the phallic signifier, by contrast, locates power in subjectivity'. The phallus is given to smoothing over heterogeneous qualities of things by being aimed at reproducing the self as a homogenous subject. The signifier as phallus is less aware of its representative function, and sees dualistic qualities as truth and essential to identification. Jennifer Friedlander (2009: 60) describes the phallus as 'an object with a fascinating material presence that represents the real'. The determination to encapsulate meaning 'puts an end to association' and offers the illusion of comprehension and accomplishment. But the phallus *represents* the real because the phallic determination to signify lends itself to delineations which inscribe an absence, or a kind of 'death', of certain qualities of things both inside and outside of the subject.

- **Metaphor**

Metaphor can be envisioned as a function between imaginary identifications with the body and the assumption of the phallic signifier. Lacan is concerned to deconstruct the phallic law by way of his emphasis on metaphor, or the phallic signifier's underlying representative function. It is by close attention to the way in which the phallic signifier reveals gaps and slippages in what it *means* to represent that Lacan 'finds traces of the unconscious' (De Kesel 2009: 24). Furthermore, the chain of signifiers, constitutive of the symbolic Other, inscribes a degree of absence from the real and matter. Again, this empty space or separation between signifying appearances and things in themselves is Lacan's central focus: it lies at the very core of the unconscious. Lacan's emphasis on the metaphors for this absence is therefore quite radical: metaphor involves 'substituting' one signifier or unit of meaning for another signifier. The metaphor never wholly represents or grasps the real or signified, but only other signifiers (Olynciw 2006: Online). The metaphorical functioning of language does not imply a fully conscious act by speakers and writers. Kelly Oliver (1995: 75) articulates the attention to metaphor in both Lacan and Derrida as concerning its phallic propensity to 'double effacement':

> The first effacement is forgetting that the relationship between signifier and signified is only the effect of a play [or metaphoric function] of signifiers. The second effacement is forgetting this forgetting of the signified effect. The phallus is erected on this double effacement.

The highly polemical and destabilising role metaphor has in philosophy and theory is also what makes Lacan and Derrida extremely difficult to read. As my thesis draws out, it often seems that Kant's grounding philosophy is itself put into question, if not insulted as an impotent attempt to structure reality and cognition. Oliver (1995: 75) notes that Kant was already 'worried' about the problem of asserting representation, and therefore its metaphorical character, as an objective faculty of viewing reality. To me, the emphasis on metaphor depends on the object of study. If I am decided that painting is analogous to the unconscious because it cannot be fully known why it affects us, I find that asserting the metaphorical character of both painting's forms and interpretations offers freedom for interpretation while a signifying structure is kept in place. The diversion and conflict involved in metaphor is more strongly allied with Nietzsche's interest in art as the tragic language *par excellence,* in which metaphor *as* 'the truth of the world' is revealed (Kofman & Large 1996: 6; Benjamin 1977: 102). The notion of 'metaphor' was all important to Nietzsche, because it revealed the 'bodily basis' from which the 'Will to Power,' or the phallic signifier in Lacanian terms, comes to be erected (Marietti 2008). Insofar as Lacan asserts that the body is a driving force of unconscious motivations, the question of metaphor having to do with the strange provocations of libidinal, visceral qualities underlying the signifying surface in painting is very pertinent to my concerns.

The Real:

The question of metaphor as an underlying value of the phallic signifier is important to the consideration of *das Ding*. This is because *das Ding* is closely related to the real, which the metaphoric significations of the phallus aim at. Adrian Johnston (2013: Online) writes that Lacan employs the real 'to physical existents handled as roughly equivalent to Kant's things-in-themselves': that which cannot be cognised. But the real is recognisable by way of the occurrence of trauma (Lacanian Trauma Online: 2010). As noted above, the real is defined by absence because of the work of signification and the symbolic Other. The state of presence and absence therefore becomes a psychic phenomenon whereby the imaginary and symbolic manifest the quality of the real. The real, then, registers as the awful presence of *unknowing* when encountered in terrifying or violent situations. Žižek (2002: 2) divides the Real as it is reflected in the triad into three basic qualities. Firstly, when the real is revealed as a thing in itself it is a 'horrifying' or traumatic entity. Secondly, when it presents itself in the symbolic it marks the space of a 'senseless formula' or dense knot of significations which cannot be translated back into ordinary language. And when it is found in the imaginary, something

'sublime… shines through'; or, as I discuss in this thesis, it becomes the site of orgasmic fervour, jouissance.

Again then, the Real is most simply understood as a thing in itself or psychical obduracy which haunts the borders of the phallic subject as she is constituted by both imaginary and symbolic structures. *Das Ding* is part of this real, but it is also not a thing in itself. As noted above in 'The Triad and *das Ding*,' *das Ding* transcends all three features of subjectivity because it is a real quality that is put into representation. It functions as a metaphor in and of itself. Lacan (SVII: 55) offers the following example of *das Ding* as representation:

> It is enough to evoke a face which is familiar to every one of you, that of the terrible dumb brother of the four Marx brothers, Harpo. Is there anything that poses a question which is more present, more pressing, more absorbing, more disruptive, more nauseating, more calculated to thrust everything that takes place before us into the abyss or void than that face of Harpo Marx, that face with its smile which leaves us unclear as to whether it signifies the most extreme perversity or complete simplicity?

As I argue in my introduction, one cannot suppose that the 'trauma' worked into the painted surface is equal to real trauma. This is especially so because my focus is not so much on the subject of a painting as it is on the conceptual interplay of formal and material qualities. Similarly, when I invoke notions of death and jouissance in this thesis, the representative character of *das Ding* and the conceptual ambiguity it may hold is involved, rather than the material wounds of trauma itself. *Das Ding* is a particularly strong metaphor which illuminates the metaphorical value of phallic signifiers, and suggests that something more than the faculty of reason and objective interpretation motivates the process of painting and of looking. *Das Ding* therefore partakes in something of a romantic idea but its traumatic qualities are emphasised.

Addenda

ADDENDUM A: Kant's Faculties in Judgement

This section of writing serves as a reference point for the reader as s/he progresses through the thesis and comprises a basic explanation of the processes Kant sees as foundational to transcendental judgment. I briefly discuss the functions of intuition, imagination and understanding, for how these may inform Lacan's interpretation of the pleasure and reality principles.

I reiterate here the condition of the 'transcendental ideal' that I introduce in the first section of this thesis. The notion of a 'transcendental ideal' instantiated the idea that humans may only intuit and therefore conceptualise a certain aspect of reality. These representations are based on the way in which things appear to us, and not as they are in themselves. Therefore, there is an irrevocable split between the world of 'appearances' and the thing in itself, or *das Ding and sich* (*CoR*: 1904).

However, where transcendental judgment is concerned, a much more complex relation to appearances is conceived by Kant. This is because he insists on certain representations which are organised by the subject in a priori cognition. While there is a way in which appearances affect us from an external source, this cannot deliver the form of reason Kant says is the optimum state of objective cognition. Paul Guyer (1992: 2) explains,

> Although we can legislate the basic forms of laws of nature, and indeed bring those laws ever closer to the details of nature through increasingly concrete conceptualisations, we can do so only asymptotically and must wait upon nature itself to fill in the last level of detail – which, because of the infinite divisibility and extricability of matter in space and time, nature will never quite do.

Thus, judgment is a key faculty of what the subject *can* cognise while 'waiting for nature'. Intuition, imagination, and the understanding all occur by way of 'synthesising' specific kinds of perceptions arising in part from appearances, and with the tiered interrelatedness of synthesis and representation. Longuenesse (1998: 37) writes that Kant sees the three agencies each produced through a 'manifold' of representative functions. Thus, the capacity for manifold forms of synthesis and relation confirms the authority of the subject's a priori cognitive faculties. I describe the representational nature of each act below.

Intuitions are not predicated on the empirical sensations of matter but are already given form by a priori representations of space and time (Pippin 1982: 59). In this way, intuition is held to not be reducible to 'immediate sense impressions' (DePaul & Ramsey 1998: 5). Kant says that space is a priori because we can never imagine or make a representation to ourselves of the non-existence of space (*CoR*: 1978). In other words, we are able to conceive space as either limited or vast, but cannot understand the absence of it. As such, space must be present to sense as a subjective form or shape in which external space can be recognised as being other than a thing in itself. Time is also a pure, or internal form of intuition (*CoR:* 2042). We can think of time without objects, but not of objects existing out of time. Perceiving time is not contingent on external aspects, and neither can the mind exist outside of time. Writes Kant (*CoR*: 2055) in this regard,

> Time is…given a priori. In it alone is all reality of phenomena possible. These may all be annihilated in thought, but time itself, as the universal condition of their possibility, cannot be so annulled.

In as much as both space and time pertain to the 'sensuous' faculty of intuition and are not yet representations on a conceptual level, they cannot be extricated from a subjective apprehension of appearances. Kant further stipulates that intuition always takes place in a 'unified way'. Even though there are a number of different sensations that occur in the empirical world, these too are apprehended in their 'manifold' aspect as a united representation of sensation (Longuenesse 1998: 37-8). Thus, the capacity to sense matter as a singular occurrence in time and space, is due to the a priori nature of intuition.

Crucial to judgment is the role of the imagination, or, the 'reproduction' of representations in the 'form of an image' (Brook 2013: Online). Cognition of things is therefore based, or indeed finds it 'origin' in an a priori mode of imagination as it 'synthesizes' representations. Rastovic (2013: 6) discusses the imagination in Kant as a more or less 'irrational' form of synthesis. Before the understanding 'draws' contours, the imagination organizes 'raw and confused' data. As such, the imagination plays a central part as an 'original source' from which synthesis begins to be given representational content. Kant (*CoR*: 2587) calls this function 'a blind but indispensable function of the soul' because imagination in these terms functions only to collect and 'unite' various contents. Highlighting the ambiguously 'non-conceptual' but vital representation of imagination, Ginsborg (2008: 66) describes this 'power' as 'having affinities both with sensibility and understanding, suggesting that their functions, of intuition and thought respectively, cannot after all be so neatly separated'. In this thesis, I focus on the complex role

Kant sees for the imagination in aesthetic judgment. I state here that it is already evident that Kant's idea of 'imagination' is not meant in the more superficial sense of creativity and mere imagery, but that it has a conceptual form when viewed in the framework of his philosophy.

Intuition and imagination are subject to conceptualisations in a process that Kant (*CoR*: 2494) defines as the logic of understanding. It is here that the identity of thought with sensation comes to play a role in understanding experience: the 'sensuous' and 'blind' syntheses will find the rational recognition of experience in certain a priori concepts. Concepts for different forms of representation are framed in a fundamental table of 'categories' or 'true primitive conceptions of the pure understanding'. The four main categories that value the representations of understanding are 'quality', 'quantity', 'relation' and 'modality' (*CoR*: 2611, 2628). I do not attend to these categories in any great detail in this thesis. Rather, I emphasize Lacan's interpretation of the understanding as bearing a close relationship to Freud's 'reality principle'.

The understanding aligns with Lacan's articulation of the development of symbolic functions because, Kant says, its concepts are immanently 'discursive'. The understanding does not relate in any immediate way to the external world, but has a role in the faculty of 'judging' diverse representations. It gives shape and form to representations, and thus creates boundaries to meaning. Kant describes the understanding as a 'drawing' of a contour, or the 'placing' of a line as a requirement for thinking the object (Hatfield 2006: 84).

If the reader progresses to Addendum B, s/he will see that I have connected the above functions in brief ways with Lacan's description of the psychical representations pertaining to *das Ding*.

ADDENDUM B: The Relation to *das Ding*

This section of writing serves as a reference point for the reader as s/he progresses through this thesis. The following articulates the abstract structure of Lacan's argument regarding Kant's notion of reason and its psycho-somatic corruption by *das Ding*.

Science has been deeply influenced by Kant's assertion of limits to the way things appear to humans, and by his attack on earlier suppositions about the essence of things being accessible to us. For Lacan, this epistemological event solidified our reliance on the approach to reality via the path of the abstract signifier, ultimately invalidating the divine character of materiality in favour of the symbolic realm of human knowledge (SVII: 70; De Kesel 2009: 106).[179] However, that dimension does not disappear in Lacan's view: it manifests as a space of trauma and longing.

Lacan views Freud's contribution to philosophy as a further 'Copernican Revolution': where Kant had delimited the objective world into cognisable parts, Freud established that the self is also 'split' between language on one hand, and the libidinal self on the other (Boothby 2001: 192; De Kesel 2009: 94). As in the case of Kant, this 'revolution' also decentres the subject's grasp of things in objective knowledge, but in addition, certain psychosomatic aspects are now considered inaccessible to self-representation. We are never fully present to ourselves, and these conditions reverberate through to transcendental systems of objective judgement. For Lacan, Freud therefore makes a central contribution to philosophy by asserting the essentially 'precarious' nature of judgment (SVII: 30-1). The proposition of an elemental precariousness is built on Freud's notion of the unconscious. By situating much of the ideal operations in an unconscious space, some features of mind are made unrepresentable to conscious awareness. Mechanisms of thought and perception become skewed and entangled in a field of associations subject to 'disguise and distortion' and thus present a decentred path towards conscious intentions of being objective (Freud 1950: 28). According to Lacan, introducing the role of the unconscious has a second yet also primary effect: a priori cognition is embodied. Via his

[179] Lacan (SVII: 93, 92) strongly disavows any philosophy concerning what he terms the 'pastoral optimism' of civilization which would rely upon a 'deep connection between our images and the world that connects us'. He points as far back as the 16th century where the crisis of an inherent separation between the natural world and the signifying subject was already felt, as claimed by Protestant Reformation theologist and monk Martin Luther. I am compelled to re-quote Luther here: 'You are that waste matter which falls into the world from the devil's anus' (SVII: 93). Lacan interprets Luther's furious rantings as the consequence of an 'exile' from the world and its matter, even our own bodies, to which man has journeyed in his path to ever-greater and more sophisticated knowledge and sign-systems.

reading of Freud, Lacan regards the notion of libidinal pleasure as integral to the operation of thought. The body seeks pleasure, but has a complex relationship with psychic life in that external reality always impinges on its aims. Pleasure is never complete or total: it does not accomplish a natural or instinctual end, especially in a technologized modern life (Copjec 1996: 2). This lack of fulfilment is precisely where Lacan (SVII: 90) will situate the drives, as operating in relationship to *das Ding*. However, the centrality of the libidinal being is key to how experience comes about through the drives. It is therefore a vulnerable position towards reality that requires both a primary defence and repression of that very vulnerability. Finally, the effect of projecting both unconscious and embodied drives onto the transcendental ideal is that the subject cannot be viewed as autonomous in her thoughts and actions, as Kant had wanted to do. Rather, the subject is conditioned in relation to these 'other' sites of experience, which become a central psychical Other governing thought and perception.

These conditions are predicated on a vital relation to what Lacan terms as the 'first apprehension of reality by the subject', which is another human being. Freud's *Nebenmensch* or 'first neighbour' is the first person an infant comes into contact with, and is in most cases the mother. According to Freud, that meeting with the first Other is split into two poles. On one pole, the subject finds identification with the Other to the extent that she offers succour and pleasure, and thus opens the route by which an infant is able to enter the process of language development and symbolic law. But in Lacan's approach the other pole Freud posits is a part that 'remains together as a thing, *als Ding*' (SVII: 51). There always remains, in other words, a part of the Other, an 'Other of the Other', that is fundamentally *not* recognized. This object or strange *Ding* lies outside of the capacity of intuitions which are based on pleasure. *Das Ding* is therefore characterised by its essentially alien nature, and is given over to qualities that for Lacan constitute the 'strange' and 'hostile' perceptions of reality (SVII: 52).[180]

But it is precisely by dint of the subject's attempts to find familiar, pleasurable associations with the Other that a certain relationship is instituted. The imaginary space of the pleasure drive is the primary source of the representation of *das Ding*. The pleasure principle is rooted in the idea of an organism subject to biological terms of exogenous and endogenous zones of stimulation. Like an organism, the subject at this level is a highly excitable and/or irritable area which seeks a devouring pleasure at all costs. Says Lacan (SVII: 24), 'We find it in a form that

[180] Marc De Kesel (2009: 84) notes that Lacan gives much greater weight to Freud's 'original division of reality' than in Freud's own theorisation.

we have characterized as a regressive, infantile, unrealistic phase, characterized by a thought abandoned to desire, by desire taken to be reality.' Based on pure intuitions of pleasure and unpleasure, the organism in this phase is irrational and imagistic, the 'origin of an aberrant or atypical behaviour'. The pleasure principle therefore functions similarly to Kant's notion of a 'blind' imagination which synthesises 'raw and confused' data into representations which make attention possible.

De Kesel (2009: 88) describes the principle organising this object-relation as driven by a demand for total pleasure from the Other. But, in that the Thing is *un*known, the subject will re-find its order of associations by continuously falling beside the Thing.[181] The subject's representations never meet the Thing but maintain a certain 'distance' from it. The pleasure principle is thus effectively the structural notion of a real distance from the Thing, and an imaginary proximity to it. Lacan will explicitly align this representative function with the potential for trauma in *Seminar XI*. The seemingly 'accidental origins' of an event are repeats of an 'unassimilable' conflict generated by a Real encounter with the hostile and unknown remainder of cognition (SXI: 55).

Avoiding this conflict is the work of the reality principle, which Lacan will further align with the contours of understanding in Kant's philosophy (SVII: 28, 70). The reality principle has a governing function which enables the pleasure principle to shift into language as we know it. The gravitational pull that *das Ding* exerts on intuiting pleasure is 'sieved' into recognizable signs by the reality principle (SVII: 47). The pleasure and reality principles, their conflict and cohabitation which will start the ball rolling from 'conceptual memories' to symbolic signifiers, do not have any fundamental relationship to reality (SVII: 33). The reality principle's ultimate function is to 'isolate' the subject from external reality (SVII: 46). 'A sensory apparatus… doesn't only play the role of extinguisher or of shock-absorber…but also plays the role of sieve,' says Lacan. This is a formulation which lends itself to a 'notion of a deep subjectivization of the world' where things are 'radically selected. Man deals with selected bits of reality' (SVII: 47). On this basis, Lacan's understanding is that our information about the outside world only comes to us through signs that are associative and combinatory with pleasure signals, which are themselves always already divided by the Thing. The reality

[181] Richard Boothby (2001: 125) describes the relation between *das Ding* and its imaginary representations as 'an engine of desire, the real oscillating in the sleeve of the imaginary like a piston in a cylinder'.

principle thus manifests *Vorstellungsrepräsentanzen*, a redoubled processing of representation which is characterized as 'monotony, pallor, [a] lack of colour' (SVII: 49).

The thoroughly disembodied nature of the symbolic processed via the reality principle still nevertheless bears the mark of *das Ding*. Therefore, *das Ding* is recognisable as a series of effects in language. These effects are determinable where the individual has pronounced what is 'good' and what is 'bad' for her. For Lacan this is already the mark of something that has occurred in the deeper structure of conceptual memory, where pleasure keeps a distance from *das Ding* in so far as it has been avoided as unfamiliar and unknown. Thus on the level of the reality principle, *das Ding* is an element characterised by something that is lacking: 'The Thing is not nothing, but literally it is not. It is characterised by its absence, its strangeness' (SVII: 63). This elemental absence is the primary work of repression in the unconscious, and the operation of the reality principle shifts the representational terms of these repressed aspects into discourse on the level of 'negation' (SVII: 64). As Freud (1925: Online) wrote in his essay 'Negation', the analysand who professes a stance against a certain feeling or event is nevertheless raising a subject, a potential enmeshment with that subject, by dint of association. Negation thus presents what is repressed in the unconscious. For Lacan, negation represents the original structure of the signifier itself, as it divides between terms of the good and the bad, the known and unknown. One term is always foreclosed upon as the opposite of the intention of a speaker. In Lacan's view, that foreclosure signals the presence of *das Ding* on the order of its absence: a term is always lacking. This negative delimitation of the symbolic is as noted, regarded as a 'law' by Lacan.

The law has a central role, which is to divide pleasure from transgression. Inasmuch as the development of the law-like structure of the reality principle is hypothetical, Lacan (SVII: 66) finds the law in a culturally sublimated form internal to Western belief systems: the Christian Ten Commandments. The commandments function in an essential way as a negation, which for Lacan exemplifies the condition of speech as rooted in the universal prohibition of incest (SVII: 67). The successive prohibitions of the commandments work to install the relation to *das Ding* insofar as the individual and the collective are shown the borderline between their ethical activities as subjects, and an unnameable threat which lies in a beyond (SVII: 70). But the fundamental law of a prohibition against incest is the guarantee that culture is separate from nature: that one will incur a distance from the 'maternal *Ding*.' That first *Nebenmensch* I discussed as facilitating the recourse to language as it develops according to a system of signs

reliant on her pleasurable associations, is also the one who institutes the unassailable character of the 'Thing' that drives the desire to ameliorate those unknowable qualities that generate a sense of lack. But the law of the prohibition of incest is based on that language which cuts the subject off from *das Ding* precisely on the basis of those pleasurable associations. This condition of language is inescapable and thus, for Freud, establishes that 'all other cultural developments are no more than the consequences and ramifications' of this a priori condition (SVII: 69). *Das Ding* and its relationship to the law is therefore radically posited by Lacan as a foundational fact of all human subjectivity and human societies.

Lacan does not aver that there is in fact something more to the thing in itself, and according to his own formula, is forced to characterize it as a 'dumb reality' (SVII: 54, 55). All we can know of it is in the linguistic realm which puts us again at a distance of not knowing. But the related question is, why does Lacan (SVII: 104) see it as the source of all evil? It is because on the level of desire, a search remains in a libidinally-oriented place: a perverse search for that hypothesized lost object. And further, identity will be sought precisely through the chain of signifiers on the limits between morals and transgression. In other words, Lacan sees the effects of *das Ding* explicitly through modern functions of the signifier and not purely on the basis of originary trauma, or religious myth. Enlightenment perspectives embody these limits between knowledge and death.

ADDENDUM C: Sophocles's *Antigone* - Brief Summary (Cliffnotes 2016)

After the bloody siege of Thebes by Polyneices and his allies, the city stands unconquered. Polyneices and his brother Eteocles, however, are both dead, killed by each other, according to the curse of Oedipus, their father.

Outside the city gates, Antigone tells Ismene that Creon has ordered that Eteocles, who died defending the city, is to be buried with full honours, while the body of Polyneices, the invader, is left to rot. Furthermore, Creon has declared that anyone attempting to bury Polyneices shall be publicly stoned to death. Outraged, Antigone reveals to Ismene a plan to bury Polyneices in secret, despite Creon's order. When Ismene timidly refuses to defy the king, Antigone angrily rejects her and goes off alone to bury her brother.

Creon discovers that someone has attempted to offer a ritual burial to Polyneices and demands that the guilty one be found and brought before him. When he discovers that Antigone, his niece, has defied his order, Creon is furious. Antigone makes an impassioned argument, declaring Creon's order to be against the laws of the gods themselves. Enraged by Antigone's refusal to submit to his authority, Creon declares that she and her sister will be put to death.

Haemon, Creon's son who was to marry Antigone, advises his father to reconsider his decision. The father and son argue, Haemon accusing Creon of arrogance, and Creon accusing Haemon of unmanly weakness in siding with a woman. Haemon leaves in anger, swearing never to return. Without admitting that Haemon may be right, Creon amends his pronouncement on the sisters: Ismene shall live, and Antigone will be sealed in a tomb to die of starvation, rather than stoned to death by the city.

The blind prophet Tiresias warns Creon that the gods disapprove of his leaving Polyneices unburied and will punish the king's impiety with the death of his own son. After rejecting Tiresias angrily, Creon reconsiders and decides to bury Polyneices and free Antigone. But Creon's change of heart comes too late. Antigone has hanged herself and Haemon, in desperate agony, kills himself as well. On hearing the news of her son's death, Eurydice, the queen, also kills herself, cursing Creon. Alone, in despair, Creon accepts responsibility for all the tragedy and prays for a quick death. The play ends with a sombre warning from the chorus that pride will be punished by the blows of fate.

Figures



Figure 1: Anselm Kiefer. 1969. *Untitled.* Watercolour, gouache, and charcoal on paper. 37.8 x 45.4cm. Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum, New York



Figure 2: Maja Maljevic. 2016. *Between the lines.* Oil on canvas. 200 x 150cm. Courtesy of David Krut Projects, Johannesburg



Figure 3*:* Ian Grose. 2015. *Keinmal*. Oil on linen. 61.5 x 52.5cm. Courtesy of The Stevenson Gallery, Johannesburg

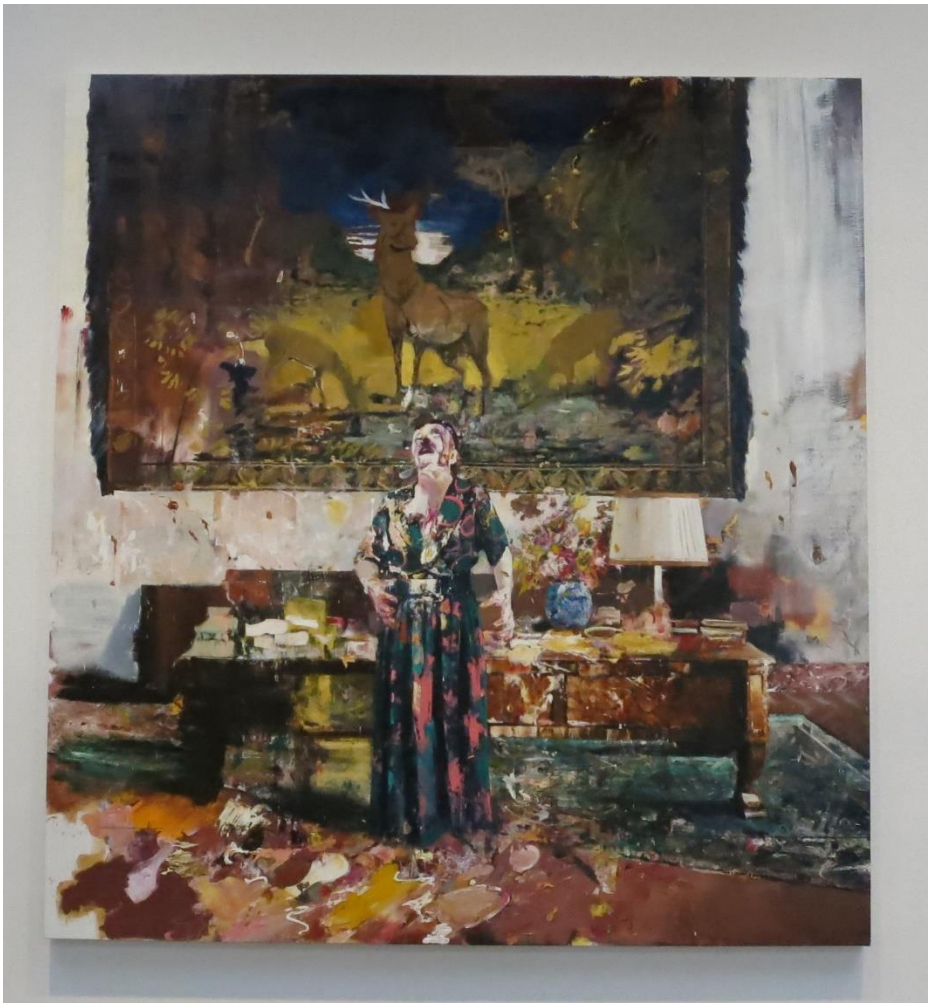


Figure 4: Adrian Ghenie. 2012. *Pie Fight Interior 8*. Oil on canvas. 198 x 150.5cm. Courtesy of Pace Gallery, London

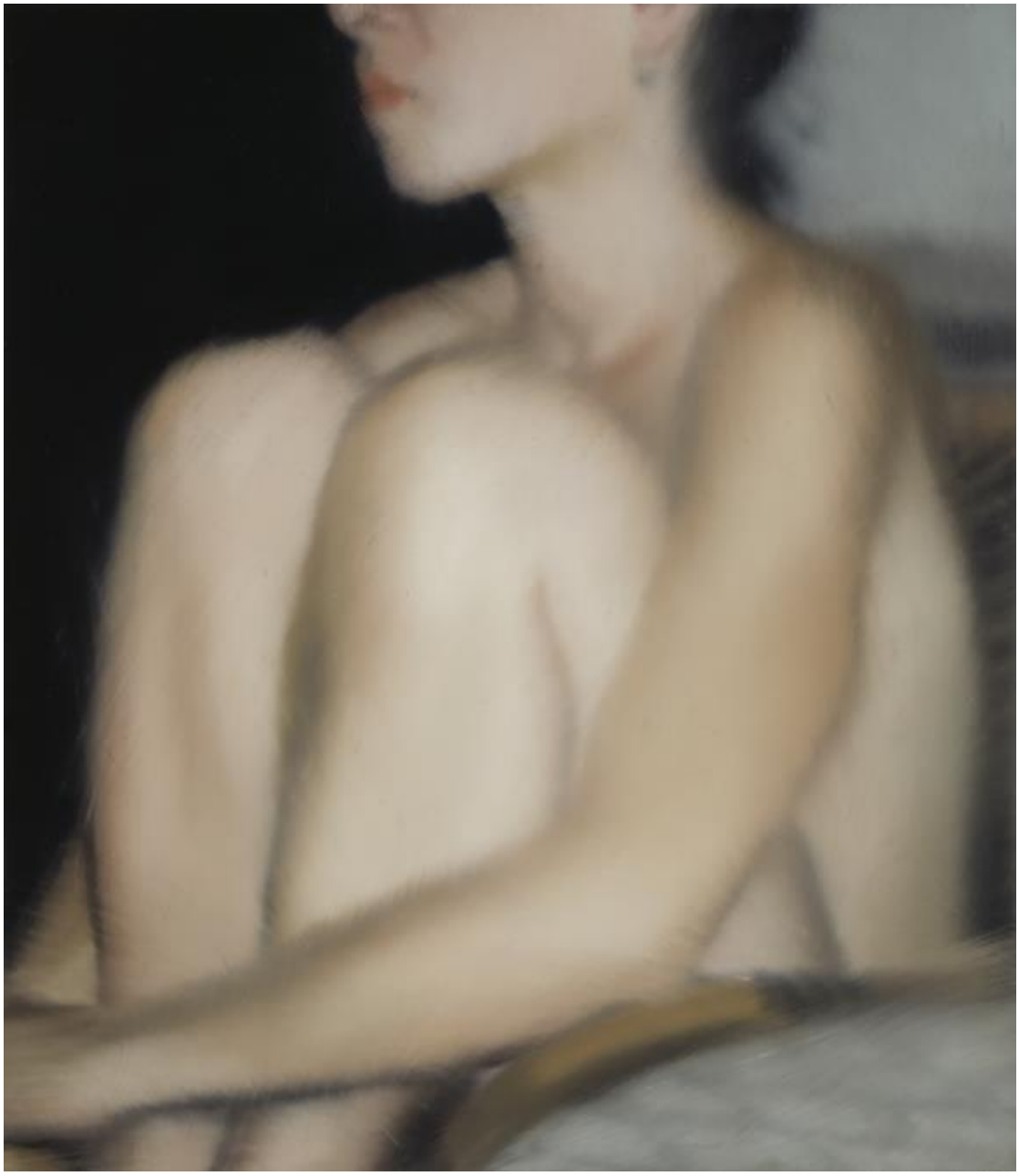


Figure 5: Gerhard Richter. 1997. *Torso*. Oil on aluminium. 55cm x 48cm. Courtesy of Gerard Richter

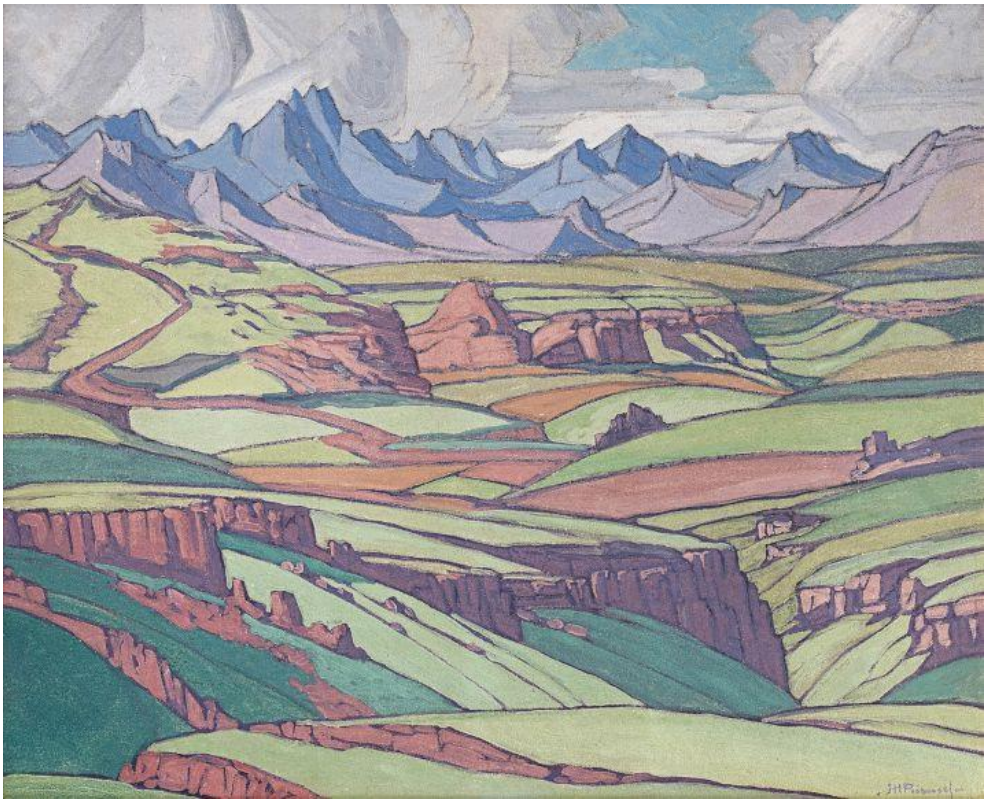


Figure 6: Pierneef. 1925-35. *The Maluti Mountains*. Oil on canvas. 29.5 x 39.5cm. Courtesy of Strauss & Co., Cape Town



Figure 7: Sergei Pankejeff. c.1910. *Untitled* (Wolves sitting in a tree). Ink and gouache on paper (dimensions unknown): Courtesy of Alchetron (Online)

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Figure 8: Gavin Younge. 1997. *Forces Favourites.* Installation view. Courtesy of Gavin Younge

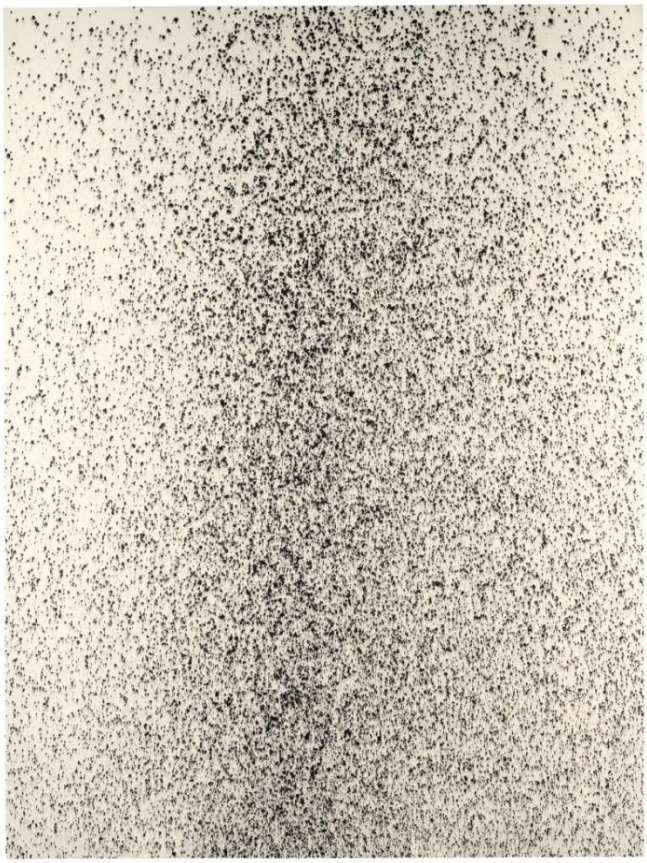


Figure 9: Lucien Smith. 1989. *Two sides of the same coin.* Acrylic on unprimed canvas. 243.8 by 182.8cm. Courtesy of Sotheby's, London



Figure 10: Jacob Kassay. 2009. *Untitled*. Acrylic and silver deposit on canvas. 213.4 x 152.4cm. Courtesy of Sorry we're closed, London



Figure 11: Günther Herbst. 2014. *High Holborn 5*. Acrylic on paper. 19.3 x 29.4cm. Courtesy of Günther Herbst



Figure 12: William Kentridge. 2007. *What Will Come (Has already come).* Drawing with steel table and cylindrical mirror. 120cm diameter round paper. Courtesy of The Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg



Figure 13: William Kentridge. 2007. *What Will Come (Has already come).* Drawing with steel table and cylindrical mirror. 120cm diameter round paper. Courtesy of The Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg



Figure 14: William Kentridge. 2007. *What Will Come (Has already come).* Drawing with steel table and cylindrical mirror. 120cm diameter round paper. Courtesy of The Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg



Figure 15: William Kentridge. 2007. *What Will Come (Has already come).* Drawing with steel table and cylindrical mirror. 120cm diameter round paper. Courtesy of The Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg



Figure 16: Hans Holbein the Younger, 1533. *The Ambassadors*. Oil on canvas. 207 x 201cm. Courtesy of The National Gallery, London



Figure 17: Georges Jeanclos. 1979. *Dormeurs (Sleepers).* Fired clay. 21 x 30 x 50cm. Courtesy of Galerie Capazza, Nançay

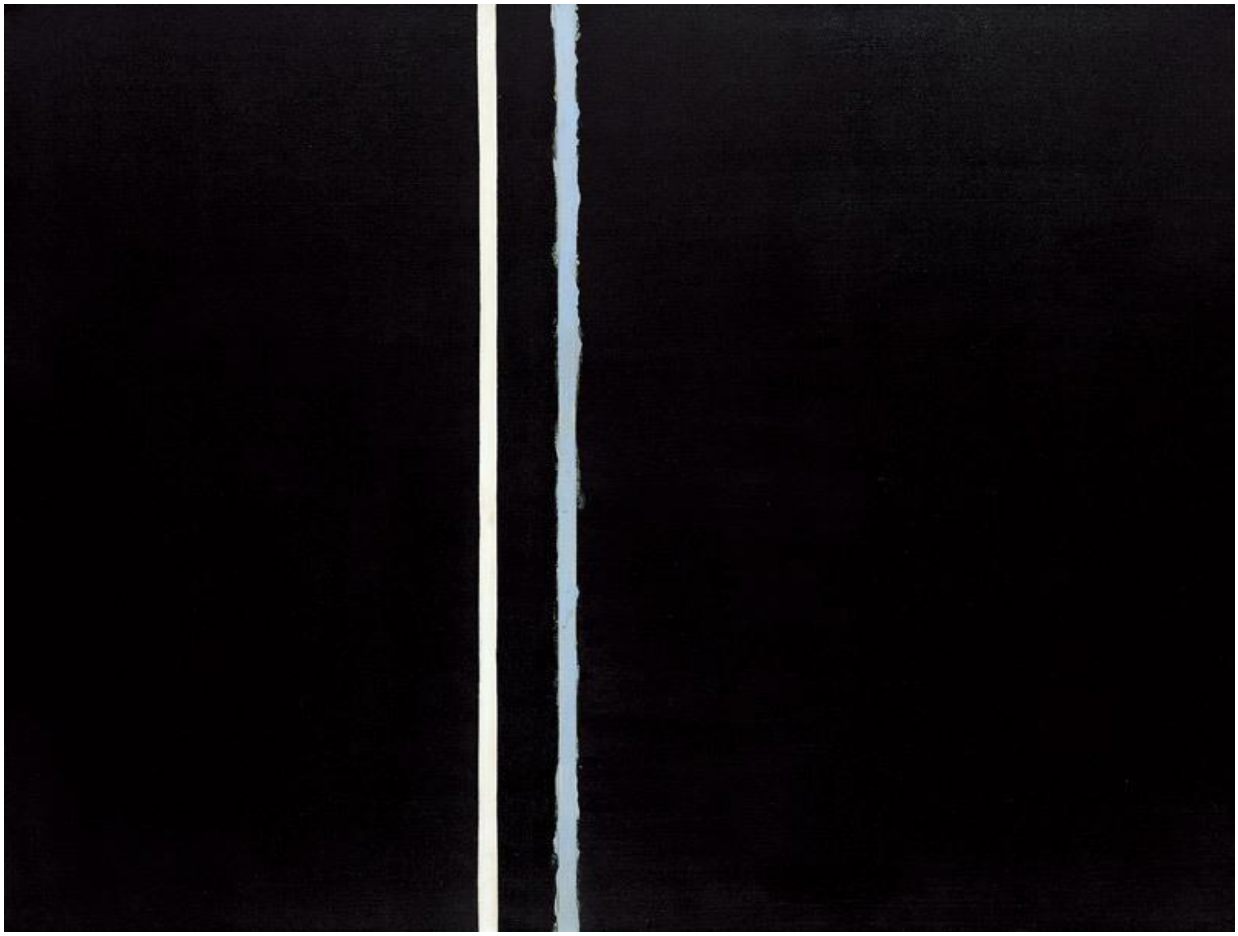


Figure 18: Barnett Newman, 1949. *The Promise*. Oil on canvas, 130.8 x 173cm. Courtesy of the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York



Figure 19: Mary Wafer 2011. *Track*. Oil on canvas, 120 x 100cm. Courtesy of David Krut Projects, Johannesburg



Figure 20: Mary Wafer, 2011. *The Bridge*. Oil on canvas, 130 x 165cm. Courtesy of David Krut Projects, Johannesburg



Figure 21: Jackson Pollock. 1947. *Sea Change*. Oil on canvas. 147 x 112.1cm. Courtesy of Seattle Art Museum, Seattle

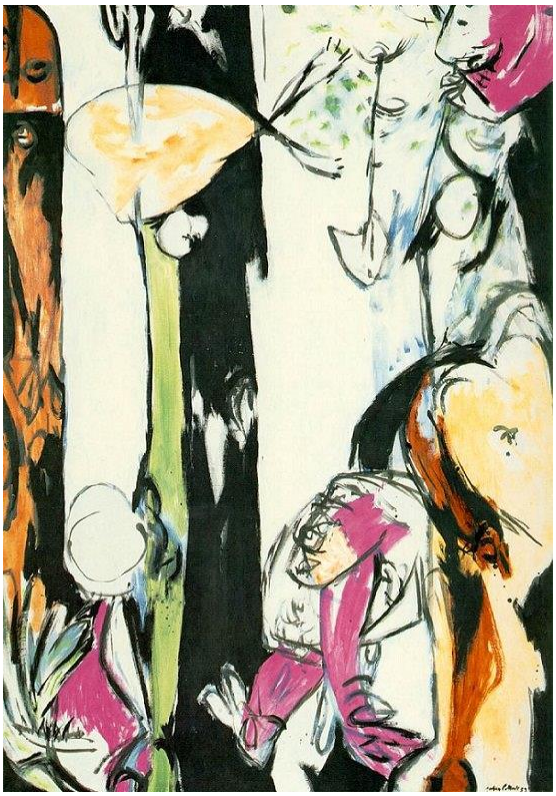


Figure 22: Jackson Pollock. 1953. *Easter and the Totem.* Oil on canvas. 208.6 x 147.3cm. Courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art, New York



Figure 23: Robert Ryman. 1970. *Surface Veil.* Oil and mixed media on canvas. 47 × 38cm. Courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art, New York



Figure 24: Anthony Caro. 1962. *Early One Morning.* Painted steel and aluminium. 289 x 619 x 335cm. Courtesy of the Saatchi Gallery, London

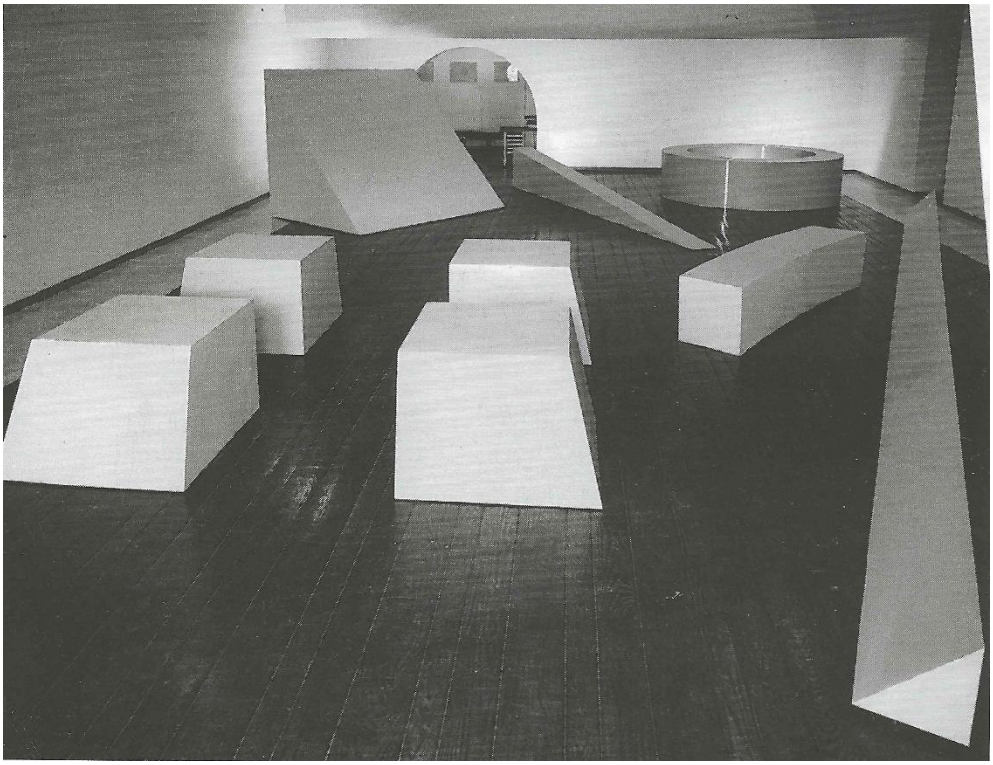


Figure 25: Robert Morris. 1966. Exhibition view. Image courtesy of the Dwan Gallery, Los Angeles



Figure 26: Donald Judd. 1963. *Untitled*. Oil and plywood with iron pipe. 56.2 x 115.1 x 77.5cm. Courtesy of David Zwirner Gallery, London



Figure 27. Mary Wafer. 2013. *Crowd 1*. Oil on canvas. 200 x 150cm. Courtesy of David Krut Projects.



Figure 28. Mary Wafer. 2013. *Crowd 2*. Oil on canvas. 200 x 150cm. Courtesy of David Krut Projects.

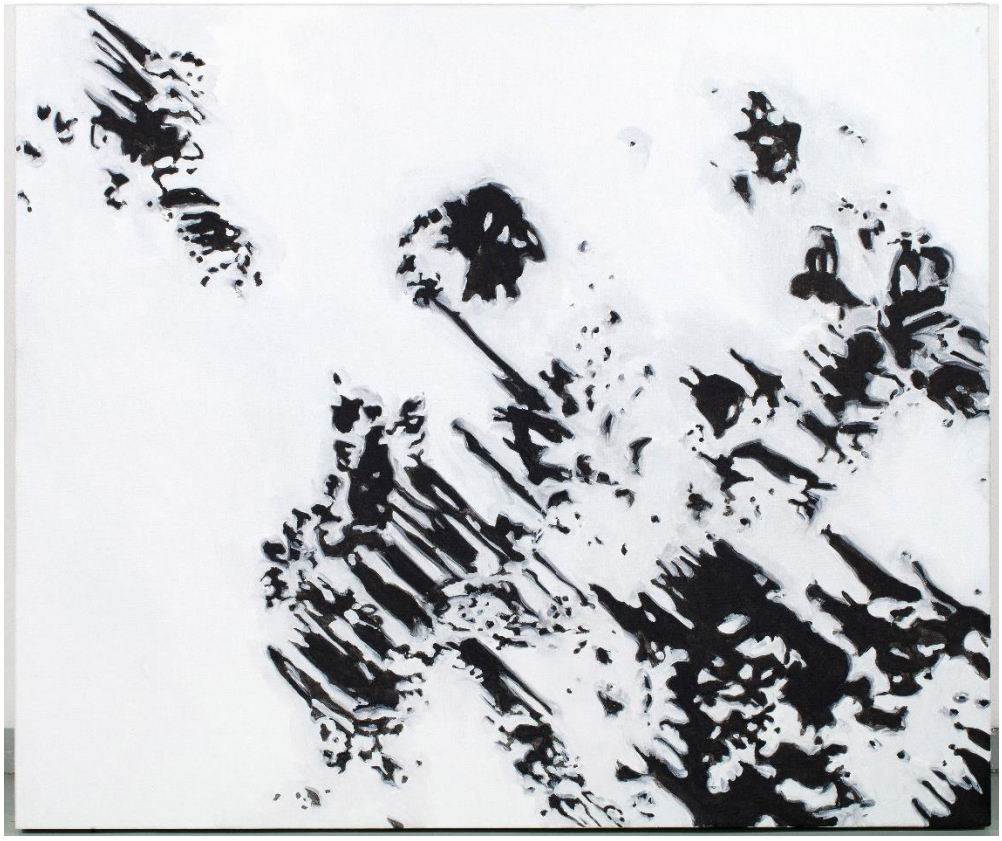


Figure 29: Mary Wafer. 2013. *Crowd 3*. Oil on canvas. 200cm x 140cm. Courtesy of David Krut Projects, Johannesburg



Figure 30: Mary Wafer. 2013. Detail of *Crowd 3*. Courtesy of David Krut Projects, Johannesburg



Figure 31: Mary Wafer. 2013. *Aerial I*. Oil on canvas. 150cm x 200cm. Courtesy of David Krut Projects, Johannesburg



Figure 32: Penny Siopis. 1982. *Embellishments* (detail). Oil paint and found objects on canvas, 202 x 150cm. Courtesy of Penny Siopis



Figure 33: Penny Siopis. 2010. *Blow Up*. Ink and glue on canvas, 200 x 300cm. Courtesy of The Stevenson Gallery, Cape Town



Figure 34: Penny Siopis. 2004. *Shame*. Mixed media on paper, 45 x 38cm. Courtesy of David Krut Projects, Johannesburg



Figure 35: Penny Siopis. 2004. *Shame*. Mixed media on paper. 18.5 x 24.5cm. Courtesy of Penny Siopis

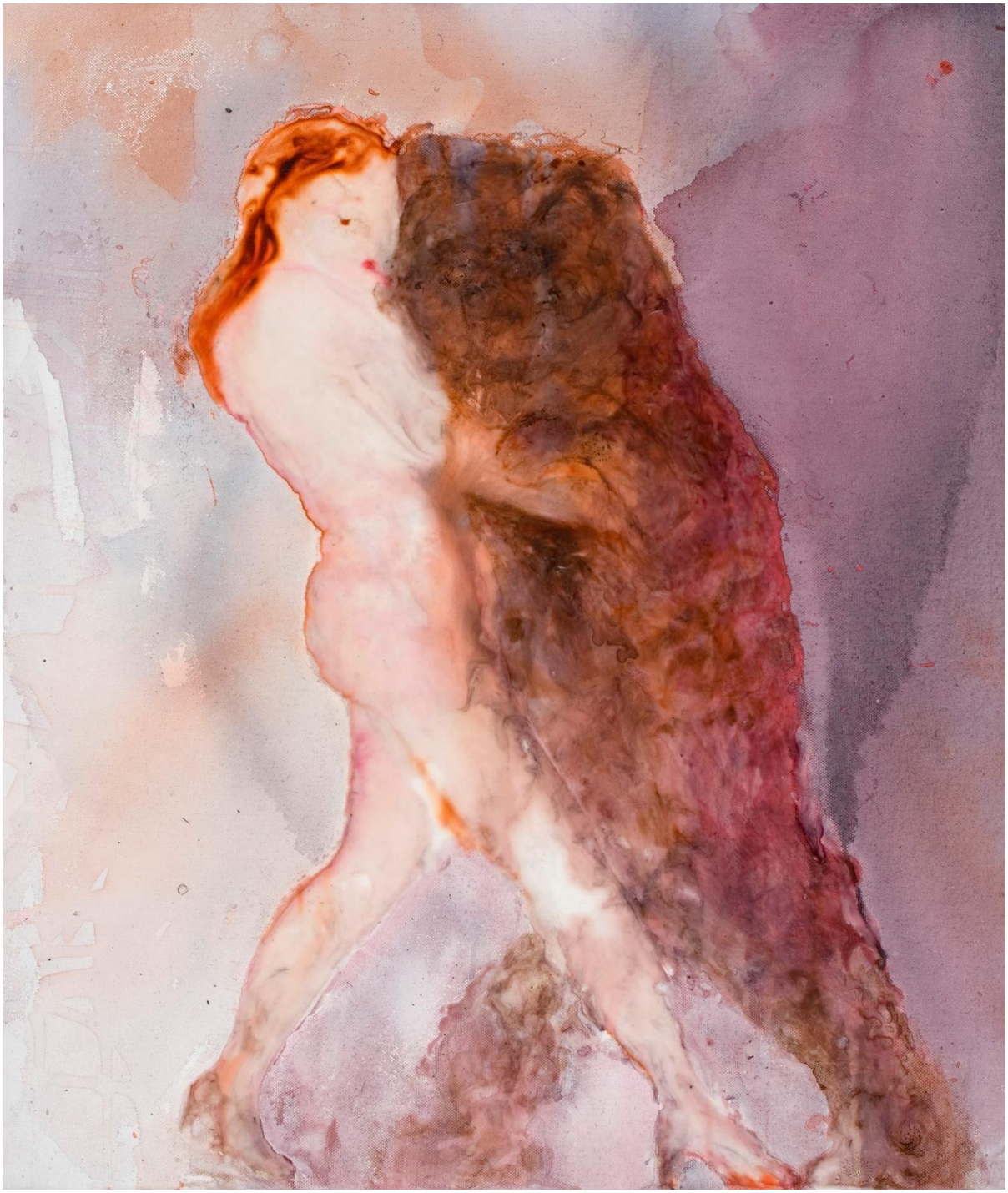


Figure 36: Penny Siopis. 2009. *Beast*. Ink and glue on canvas, 69.5 x 60cm. Courtesy of The Stevenson Gallery, Cape Town



Figure 37: Penny Siopis. 2002-5. *Shame*. Mixed media on paper. 18.5 x 24.5cm. Courtesy of Penny Siopis



Figure 38: Penny Siopis, 1986. Detail of *Unrequited*. Oil on canvas, 197.5 x 175.5cm. Image courtesy of slideplayer.com



Figure 39: Penny Siopis. 2002. *Pinky Pinky Fly Eyes*. Oil and found objects on canvas 21 x 25cm. Courtesy of Penny Siopis



Figure 40: Penny Siopis. 2002. *Pinky Pinky*: *Mirror Eyes.* Oil and found objects on canvas. 41 x 40cm. Courtesy of Penny Siopis



Figure 41: Penny Siopis. 2002. *Who is Pinky Pinky?* Oil and found objects on canvas. 152 x 91cm. Courtesy of Penny Siopis



Figure 42: Penny Siopis. 2016. *Material Acts*. Glue, ink and oil on canvas, 125 x 180cm. Courtesy of The Stevenson Gallery



Figure 43: Penny Siopis. 2011. *Ash*. Ink, glue and oil on canvas. 180 x 200cm. Courtesy of The Stevenson Gallery, Cape Town

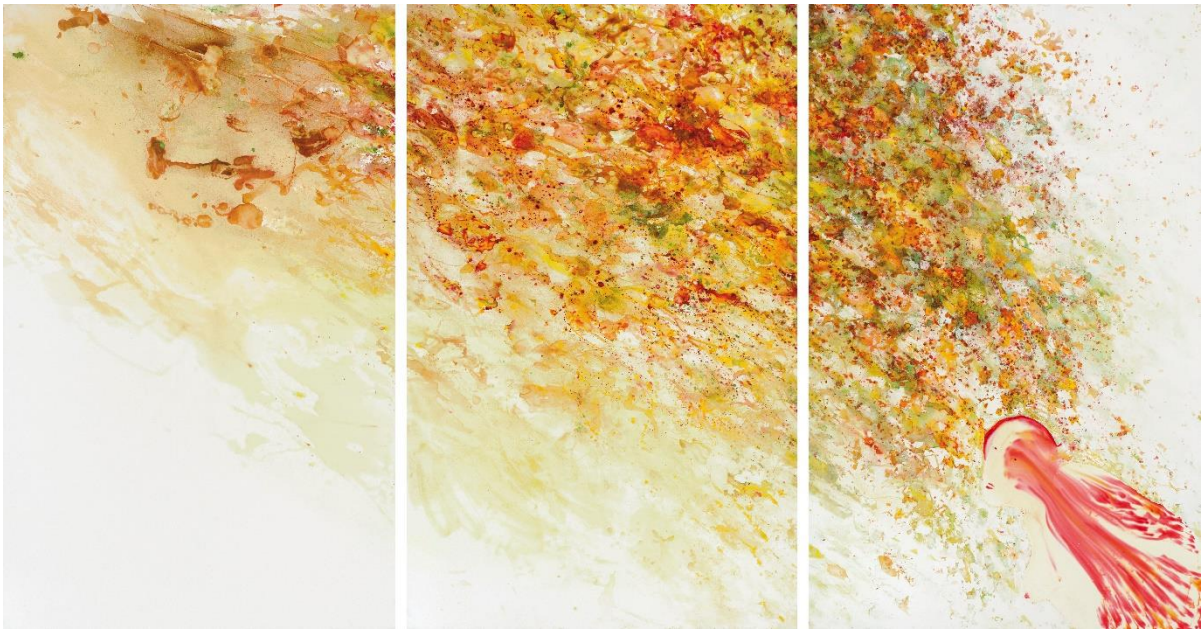


Figure 44: Penny Siopis, 2011. *Hostage*. Glue, ink and oil paint on canvas, 200 x 125cm each. Courtesy of The Stevenson Gallery



Figure 45: Penny Siopis, 2009. *Three Trees*. Glue, ink and oil paint on canvas, 200 x 250cm. Courtesy of The Stevenson Gallery, Cape Town

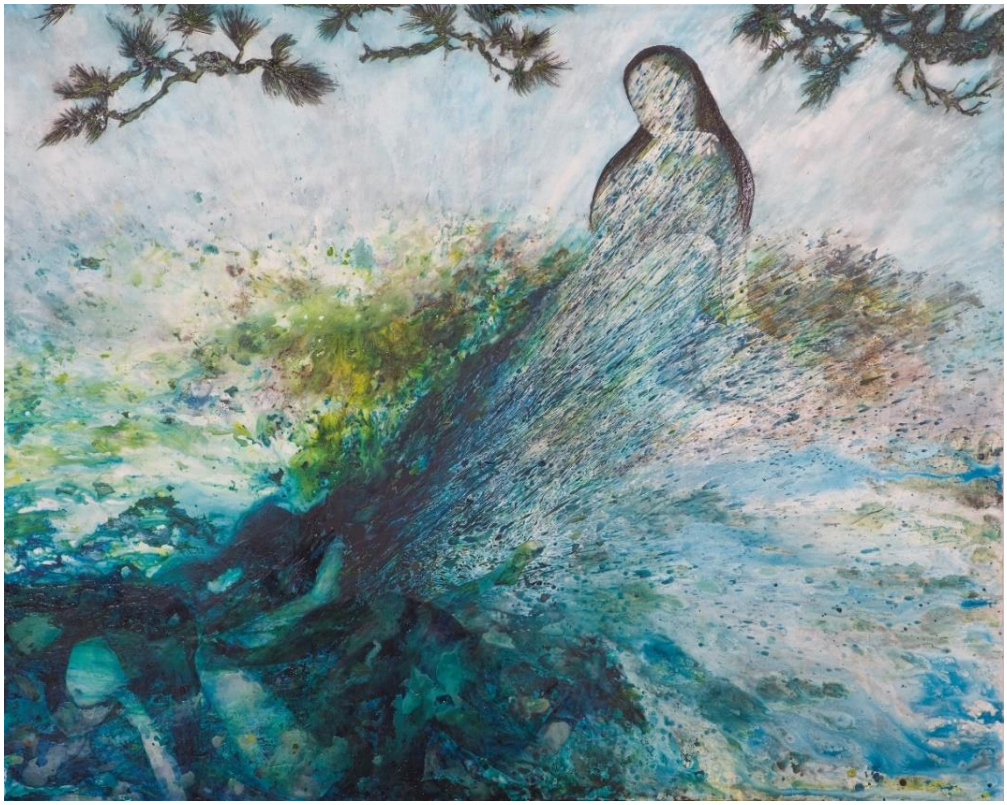


Figure 46: Penny Siopis, 2009. *Floating World*. Ink and glue on canvas, 200 x 250cm. Courtesy of The Stevenson Gallery, Cape Town



Figure 47: Penny Siopis, 2008. *Ambush*. Ink, oil and glue on canvas, 200 x 250cm. Courtesy of the Stevenson Gallery, Cape Town



Figure 48: Penny Siopis, 2008. *Pine*. Ink and glue on canvas, 160 x 206cm. Courtesy of the Stevenson Gallery, Cape Town

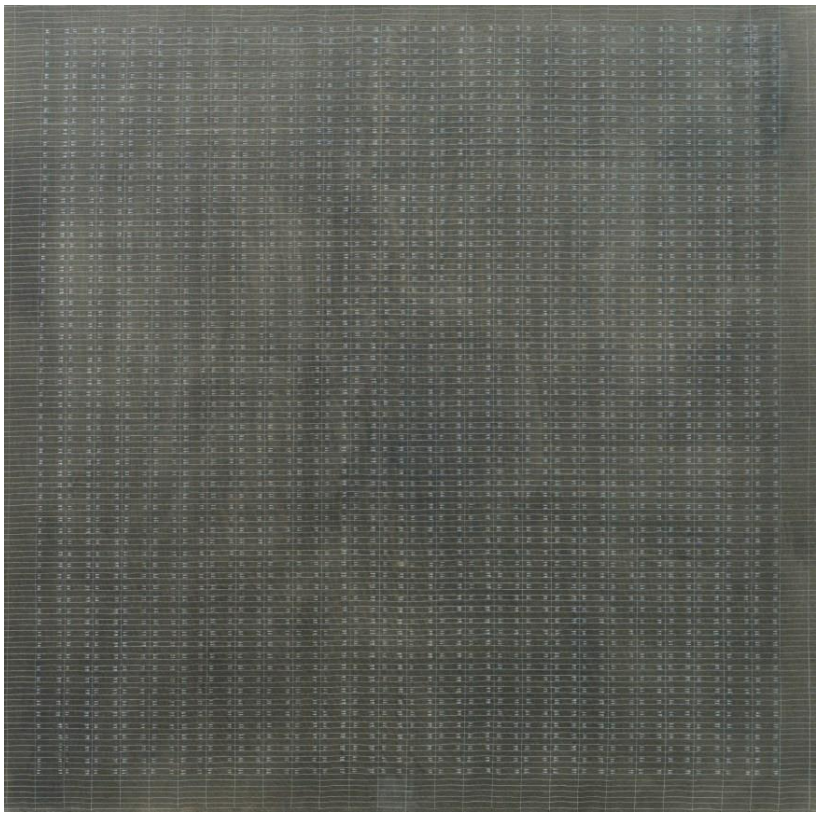


Figure 49: Agnes Martin, 1960. *White Flower*. Oil on canvas. 182.6 x 182.9cm. Courtesy of the Guggenheim Museum, New York



Figure 50: Penny Siopis, 2009. *Miracle*. Glue, ink and oil paint on canvas, 300 x 180cm. Courtesy of The Stevenson Gallery, Cape Town

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