

# **THE ARTIST'S CREATIVE PROCESS:**

## **A Winnicottian view**

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## **DECLARATION**

I, Patricia Mary Townsend, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

## **ABSTRACT**

The existing body of psychoanalytic literature relating to the process of making visual art does not include formal studies of first-hand reports from contemporary artists. This thesis addresses that gap through the creation of a new series of artworks and through a qualitative study of artists' accounts of the states of mind they experience as they work. It aims to provide new evidence relating to the artist's creative process and to question the extent to which psychoanalytic theory in the Winnicottian tradition can account for artists' experiences.

My methodology was two-fold: I kept a written record of my own states of mind as I created six video, installation and animation artworks; I also conducted thirty in-depth interviews with professional fine artists. The testimony of the artists and myself was interrogated using psychoanalytic theory from the Winnicottian and British Object Relations tradition. Winnicottian theory was chosen because it offers a particular understanding of the inter-relationship between inner and outer worlds and the thesis considers the artist's process in these terms.

Drawing on Winnicottian theory, the thesis presents the artist's process as a series of interconnected and overlapping stages in which there is a movement between the artist's inner world, the outer world of shared 'reality' and the spaces between. The research reveals aspects of artists' experiences that are not fully accounted for by the existing literature. To address these gaps, the thesis proposes the introduction of several new terms: 'pre-sense' for an as-yet undefined first intimation of the possibility of a new artwork relating to a particular aspect of the outside world; 'internal frame' for a space within the artist's mind, specific to a particular medium, which the artist 'enters' when starting work; and 'extended self' and 'observer self' for two co-existent self-states that constitute the artist's working state of mind.

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# Introduction

## Overview

The disciplines of psychoanalysis and art have had a long and complex relationship. Many artists have made use of psychoanalysis in their work<sup>1</sup> and, since the days of Sigmund Freud, art has been on the couch as psychoanalysts have developed theories about the meaning of artworks, about the motivations of artists and, less frequently, about the process of making art. Psychoanalytic theory develops out of clinical practice and psychoanalysts look to their patients to provide the material on which to base their developing understanding of the process of psychoanalysis. However, venturing into the field of the artist's creative process, most psychoanalytic writers do not have privileged access to the first-hand experience of artists, except for those artists who are in analysis. The voices of artists as artists (as opposed to artists as patients) are rarely in evidence. The result of this is that psychoanalytic writing about the artist's process has been biased towards a clinical perspective. There is a lack of studies of first-hand reports of practising professional artists who are not (necessarily) in analysis. This thesis aims to address this gap through a research study comprising the creation of new artworks and the analysis of a series of in-depth interviews with professional artists. It explores the contribution this new evidence can make to a psychoanalytic theory of the artist's creative process.

## Personal Background

For the last 25 years I have pursued two parallel careers, as a psychoanalytic psychotherapist working in the National Health Service and in private practice, and as an artist. As an artist, I initially worked with

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<sup>1</sup> Most notably in the surrealist movement, beginning in the 1920s and arising out of Dadaism, when artists experimented with ways of accessing the unconscious through art and writing. Contemporary artists who draw on psychoanalysis include Mary Kelly (1985), Susan Hiller (1991-2017), Bracha Ettinger (2006), Sharon Kivland (2006; 2017), Matt Collishaw (2009), Mark Wallinger (2009; 2016), Louise Bourgeois (2012), Paul Coldwell (2016), Emma Talbot (2016), Also, in collaboration with the Freud Museum, art students have responded to Freud's work in their art (2015; 2016; 2017).

black-and-white darkroom photography, then with video and installation. My recent work has included animation, sound and installation, shown in gallery exhibitions and in film and video screenings. Over these years I became increasingly interested in my own process of creating new artworks. In particular, I noticed that I entered an altered state of mind as I was working, that I felt excited by ideas for new works but quickly became disillusioned with most of them, and that I needed a place or time without interruption in order to work effectively. I turned to psychoanalysis to help me to understand these and other experiences and my first port of call was the literature that I found most helpful in my clinical practice, particularly writings from the British Independent tradition. I found many ideas that seemed relevant to me, particularly D.W.Winnicott's concept of transitional phenomena and Marian Milner's writing on illusion, but there remained many experiences that I found difficult to conceptualise. I took an interest in the contemporary debates between psychoanalysis and art and attended a number of conferences<sup>2</sup> but I usually came away with the sense that psychoanalysis and art were speaking different languages. What were intended as debates between the two disciplines often turned out to be parallel presentations. Artists spoke about their work and psychoanalysts spoke about their theories of art. In dialogues between artists and psychoanalysts, psychoanalysts interviewed artists but artists did not interview psychoanalysts. I wanted to redress the balance (and subsequently attempted to do so when I, together with other PhD students, organised the conference 'Making Space: Psychoanalysis and Artistic Process', described below). But something else troubled me that was more difficult to pin down. It seemed to have something to do with an emphasis on the 'Why?' rather than the 'How?' of making art. By 'How?' I am not referring to technique or physical skills but to states of mind and how these might relate to the artist's process.

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<sup>2</sup> Conferences attended include 'What is an Object?' (Brunei Gallery, 1997); 'On the Art, Aesthetics and Philosophical Significance of Bracha Ettinger' (UCL, 2009); 'What is an Object?' (Anna Freud Centre, 2011); 'Through the Writings of Louise Bourgeois: New Perspectives on Art and Psychoanalysis' (Courtauld, 2012); 'Art History and Psychoanalysis' (Colchester, 2013); 'Psychoanalysis, Culture and Society' (Middlesex University, May 2013; UCL June 2013); 'Psychoanalysis and Art' (Newcastle, 2014); 'Intimacy Unguarded: Gender, the Unconscious and Contemporary Art' (Freud Museum, London, 2016); 'Secrets of the Soul: Dialogues on Mind, Art and Psychoanalysis' (UCL, 2017).

## **Aims and Research Questions**

The aim of this research is to address the bias towards a clinical perspective in the psychoanalytic literature relating to the artist's process through the analysis of my own creative process and through studying the primary evidence of professional visual artists' descriptions of their experiences while making new artworks. The thesis aims to contribute to the body of knowledge concerning Fine Art and to the body of psychoanalytic literature by providing new evidence related to the artist's creative process and by considering the extent to which existing psychoanalytic theory in the Winnicottian tradition can account for artists' experiences.

The research aims to address the following questions:

1. Can the creation of a new series of artworks, and a qualitative study of the states of mind experienced by visual artists as they work, provide new evidence relating to the artist's process?
2. How far can existing psychoanalytic theory in the Winnicottian tradition account for the states of mind artists experience as they create new works?
3. Can the analysis of my own process of making new works, together with the results of the qualitative study, contribute both to a psychoanalytic understanding of the artist's creative process and to the discipline of Fine Art and its processes?

## **Definition of Terms**

As this research is concerned with the artist's process, I will define my use of the terms 'artist' and 'process'. By the term artist I will refer to professional fine artists who regularly exhibit visual art in the public realm. I use the term process to refer to the psychological experience of an artist during the conception, development and production of a new artwork and the relationship of this experience to factors such as the studio, the use of

materials, interaction with collaborators, routines of working, commissioning, exhibiting arrangements etc.

Thus my use of the term 'process' differs from other possible meanings in that my primary concern is not the physical use of art materials except in so far as this relates to the psychological experience of the artist. Moreover, I am not specifically concerned with the Process Art movement of the 1960s in which artists exhibited physical processes as the artwork itself. However, my definition of artist does not preclude such practices. In such a case my interest is in the trajectory followed by the artist up until the time when the artwork is shown to the public.

## **Methodology**

### **Preliminary Focus Groups**

My primary research material came from two main sources – my interpretative observation of my own experience and interviews with other artists. Before embarking on these interviews, I conducted and audio recorded three group discussions with members of the artists' group to which I belonged at the time. The purpose of these groups was to generate hypotheses to inform the interview stage of the research. These discussions were unstructured but the express purpose was to consider the ways in which the artists conceived of and produced new artworks and the states of mind experienced at different stages in their process. The artists' group comprised professional artists working in various media. I acted as moderator for these discussions. Following each focus group, minutes were circulated and these acted as a starting point for the following discussion. Artists were free either to take up and expand on areas of interest from the previous discussion or to introduce topics that had not previously been considered.

### **Stage 1 – Recording my process**

I examined my own process over a period of several months as I created a series of artworks related to Morecambe Bay. During this period I kept journals, recording my experiences regularly, whether or not I was having new ideas or working on a specific artwork. Initially I attempted to monitor

experiences as they happened but I found that this practice ran the risk of interrupting and changing the very process I was attempting to explore. I experimented with recording in various ways (e.g. audio recording) and at various times of day, before finally opting for regular journal entries – retrospective reports made as soon as possible after the experiences occurred. Having completed the journals, I examined the narrative of my thoughts about my process in order to identify topics of importance to me, particularly entries which related to my states of mind. This analysis was also informed by my research of psychoanalytic texts and by previous conversations with artists about their experiences. I identified patterns of experience and themes that seemed to me to be relevant to my process. Towards the end of this research project, I created a second series of artworks, *Spaces of Time*. I monitored my states of mind as I worked, drawing on this experience to clarify or expand on my earlier research findings.

Based on themes identified through the focus groups and the analysis of my own experience, I formulated a loosely structured topic guide (Appendix B) to be used in a series of individual in-depth interviews. The topic guide was for my own use and was not shown to the interviewees.

## **Stage 2 – Qualitative study of artists’ reports of their creative process**

### Sample and Timing:

I conducted 30 interviews with professional visual fine artists between July 2011 and May 2014. Twenty-nine interviews were with individual artists and one was with two artists who work together. The participants were 14 staff members, 7 PhD candidates and 2 MFA students from the Slade School of Fine Art and 8 other invited professional artists. The age range of participants was approximately 29 years to 65 years. Participants were chosen to represent a range of visual art practices including painting, sculpture, photography, filmmaking and other fine art media. Twenty of the participants are women; eleven are men. Although an attempt was made to have a spread of respondents in terms of medium used, gender and age, the sample is not intended to be representative of artists in general.

### The Interviews

Participating artists were asked to make themselves available for a minimum of one hour. In practice, the interviews were between 45mins and 2 hours in length. The interviews were conducted in a private space, either in artists' own studios or in some other quiet private room where there would be no interruptions. The aim was to create a contained and relaxed environment in which the artist would feel free to reflect and to explore the subject of their own process. The interviews were audio-recorded.

I began each interview by asking the artist to describe how a new artwork or art proposition begins to come into being. From here, I followed up on any areas of particular interest to each individual artist. My aim was to gain as full an account as possible of the succession of mental states involved in creating a new artwork (of course, this account was necessarily a retrospective one). The interviews also covered such topics as the spaces in which the artists worked and their working routine, if any. Interviewees were encouraged to introduce and develop whatever aspects of their process seemed most relevant to them.

### Analysis of the Interviews

I analysed the interviews by the method of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)(Smith 2009). IPA is a qualitative method by which in-depth interviews with a small sample of participants are analysed in great detail. Interpretation is an integral part of the method so IPA lends itself to a situation in which the researcher is interested not only in the conscious communications of the interviewee but also in the deeper meanings of what is being communicated. The primary purpose of IPA is to understand the individual interviewees' lived experience but it is recognised that direct access to this experience is not possible. It is also recognised that the researcher's attitudes and the nature of the dialogue between researcher and interviewer will inevitably affect the research outcome. At the analysis stage, the researcher interprets the accounts of the interviewees, introducing theory where appropriate. There is, therefore, a double translation process in that the interviewee has to find words for his or her experience and the researcher then constructs

meaning from these accounts. As IPA requires a very detailed analysis of the interview transcripts, a small sample size is recommended. Three to six participants is considered a suitable number in order that the researcher is not overwhelmed by the data.

For this study, six interviews were professionally transcribed and then analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. According to this procedure, I first worked on each interview separately before comparing them. I read each transcription several times so that I immersed myself in it before highlighting and coding topics defined as 'primary topics relevant to art process'. These were any topics that related to the state of mind of the artist at any stage in the process of making a new work. Throughout the process of reading and re-reading the transcripts, I refined definitions and identified themes (defined as clusters of inter-related topics). When comparing the interviews, I noted commonalities and differences related to each identified theme.

Five further interviews were transcribed by a student and I studied these transcripts closely, looking in particular for material that had not emerged from the six analysed interviews. In addition, I listened to the recordings of the remaining interviews and made notes on them. Any new topic, or evidence that provided a contrasting view on existing themes, was transcribed and coded.

For the analysis of my own process journals, I mapped topics onto the themes identified through the analysis of the interviews. These themes inform the structure of this thesis.

As the interviewees (and I myself) were only able to describe those elements of their process of which they were aware and which they could recall, gaps in the narratives were inevitable. In my analysis of the interviews, my stated purpose was to point to possible underlying meanings in the artists' descriptions rather than to adhere rigidly to the artists' statements. This is in keeping with the philosophy of the method of interpretative phenomenological analysis. However, it raises the issue of how to respect the artists' statements whilst also moving beyond them.



The narrative psychologist Ruthellen Josselson (2004) addresses this problem, drawing on the writing of Ricoeur (1970; 1981) to propose two forms of interpretation: the ‘hermeneutics of faith’, which aims to *restore* meaning to a text, and the ‘hermeneutics of suspicion’, which aims to *demystify* it. From the point of view of the hermeneutics of faith ‘the interpretive effort is to examine the various messages inherent in an interview text, giving “voice” in various ways to the participant(s)’ (Josselson: 1). On the other hand, ‘the researcher working from the vantage point of the hermeneutics of suspicion problematizes the participants’ narrative and strives for explanation beyond the text’ (ibid.: 1). Josselson argues that both approaches are necessary. Her paper is concerned with the analysis of narrative research in which interviewees relate life experiences. This is a different type of interview from the ones I conducted and she does not analyse her interviews using psychoanalytic theory. Nevertheless, I think that her two forms of interpretation are relevant to this study. I immersed myself in the message of each interview, respecting the evidence as an accurate representation of the interviewees’ recollections of their conscious experiences. This could be thought of as a hermeneutics of faith. But I also bore in mind the possible distortions of memory, the fact that the artists were constructing a story after the event and the possible effects of the interview situation (for instance, its influence on what the artists were and were not willing to disclose to me). This might be thought of as the hermeneutics of suspicion. The aims of the thesis also required me to use psychoanalytic theory to interpret the artists’ accounts of their experiences and in this I necessarily had to go beyond the immediate evidence.

### **Conference**

In February 2012, together with other Slade PhD students, I organised the conference *Making Space – Psychoanalysis and Artistic Process* at UCL. I also co-curated an accompanying exhibition in which I showed a sound installation based on the recordings of the interviews with artists (see accompanying DVD) and the interviewees each showed one of their artworks. The conference included talks by contemporary artists (Sharon Kivland, Grayson Perry and Martin Creed) and by psychoanalysts (Lesley Caldwell, Kenneth Wright and Valerie Sinason) and dialogues between

the artists and psychoanalysts directly related to art process. Transcriptions of these talks and discussions provided further research material. Some of the sessions can be viewed at <https://vimeo.com/channels/makingspace>

### **Addendum**

In 2015, I was approached by a curator who invited me to write the catalogue essay for an exhibition titled 'Ikke Til Salg' (Not for Sale) at Trapholt Gallery in Denmark. All the works in the exhibition were to be ones the artists wanted to keep for themselves. By this time I had completed the interviews and analysis for my research project and had decided on the themes around which my thesis would be written. But in planning the interviews and formulating my topic guide I had not foreseen the importance of the theme of the artist's separation from a new artwork. This emerged in the course of conducting the interviews and I was aware in retrospect that I had not asked all the artists to discuss it. My involvement with the Danish exhibition gave me the opportunity to gather some further evidence from the exhibiting artists. In order to gain some understanding of these artists' reasons for keeping these particular works, I emailed them to ask a series of questions about why they had chosen to keep this particular work. Nine artists replied to these questions. Their responses not only fed into my catalogue essay but also helped to inform Chapter 5 of this thesis, 'Out into the World'.

### **Theoretical Background**

There is an extensive literature related to the interface between art and psychoanalysis<sup>3</sup> but much of it focuses on the motivation of the artist, on an analysis of the artwork or on the experience of the viewer rather than on the artist's creative process. Freud himself was notoriously ambivalent

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<sup>3</sup> Including Freud (1908; 1910; 1914), Klein (1929), Segal (1952; 1974; 1991), Kris (1939; 1944; 1952; 1953), Koestler (1964), Noy (1968), Modell (1970), Spitz (1985, 1988), Rothenberg (1974; 1979; 1990), Lacan (1981), Kelly (1985), Wollheim (1987), Fuller (1988), McDougall (1995a; 1995b; 1999), Parker (1998), Leader (2002), Adams (2003), Ettinger (2006), Sayers (2007), Abella (2007; 2010; 2013), Mitchell (2012), Bourgois (2012), Pajacowska (1995), Caldwell (2000; 2014).

about visual art and yet it is clear from his writings that certain works affected him profoundly (for instance, 'the Moses of Michelangelo' (Freud 1914)). He maintained that he could not derive pleasure from a painting or sculpture without being able to comprehend the mechanisms of its effect and therefore his analyses of artworks are aimed primarily at an understanding of the intentions and motivations of the artist. Freud was fascinated by the ability of writers and artists to arouse emotions, and at times writes of them as if they are exalted beings, above the rest of mankind: 'Before the problem of the creative artist analysis must, alas, lay down its arms' (Freud 1928: 399). However, at other times, rather than idealise artists he reduces their endeavour to the level of a symptom. In his paper 'Creative writers and daydreaming', Freud suggests that the writer builds a world of fantasy to fulfill his unsatisfied desires (Freud 1908). The resulting creation is, therefore, an example of wish fulfillment, an escape from the frustrations of reality.

However, Freud himself was not satisfied with this reduction of creative motivation to the level of a neurosis. In 'Leonardo', where he attempts to analyse the motivation that drives Leonardo to pursue his calling, he writes that: 'We must expressly insist that we have never reckoned Leonardo as a neurotic' (Freud 1910: 131). Art was seen by Freud as an example of sublimation where sublimation is the unconscious transformation of socially unacceptable impulses (particularly sexual impulses) into a more socially acceptable form. Although sublimation is a defence mechanism, Freud saw great art such as that of Leonardo as a mature defence in that it displaces the original drive into a sphere that is not only socially acceptable but is lauded by society.

Despite his emphasis on the motivation of artists, Freud was also concerned with their process. He recognised that a work of art is not only an objectification of the artists' neuroses but also offers readers or viewers a new form which is both a source of aesthetic pleasure and a means of contacting their own inner conflicts. In a series of papers, he returns to the question of the means by which artists achieve this. In 'Jensen's Gradiva', he compares the work of the artist to that of the psychoanalyst in that each draw on unconscious material. He writes:

The author ... directs his attention to the unconscious in his own mind, he listens to its possible developments and lends them artistic expression instead of suppressing them by conscious criticism. Thus he experiences from himself what we learn from others—the laws which the activities of this unconscious must obey. But he need not state these laws, nor even be clearly aware of them; as a result of the tolerance of his intelligence, they are incorporated within his creations (Freud 1907: 92).

The last sentence of this quotation contains the seeds of the questions explored in this thesis. The psychoanalyst Ken Robinson takes up Freud's expression 'the tolerance of his intelligence' to point out that Freud understood the artist's process to involve the 'controlled simultaneity of unconscious and conscious processes' (Robinson 1996: 516). However, Robinson points out, Freud was not able to provide an account of how this could occur as he regarded unconscious and conscious processes as opposite principles of mental functioning.

It was left to the psychoanalyst and paediatrician D. W. Winnicott to question the accepted divide between personal inner fantasy and shared external 'reality'. He observed infants with soft toys or pieces of blanket which came to hold great significance for them and he coined the term 'transitional object' for these items. He recognised that transitional objects are both part of the external world and part of the child's inner world at the same time. Winnicott argues that this overlap between inner and outer worlds in an area that he calls 'potential space' is a phenomenon that occurs throughout life in play and in later cultural experience. According to Winnicott, it is part of the human condition to be engaged in the 'perpetual human task of keeping inner and outer reality separate yet interrelated' (Winnicott 1986: 3) and this speaks of an 'intermediate area of experiencing' which is both part of external shared reality and is simultaneously part of one's inner world. Winnicott saw adult cultural experience as on a continuum that leads from the infant's use of a transitional object through the play of children to the experience of the viewer of art.

Winnicott's theory of transitional phenomena allows me to think about the artist's process in terms of the relationship between inner and outer

worlds and this view underpins this thesis as a whole. I have also drawn on other aspects of Winnicott's writing, particularly his concepts of 'mirroring' and of the 'facilitating environment'. As both a paediatrician and a psychoanalyst, Winnicott writes about the early development of the infant and the relationship between mother (or primary caregiver) and child. He sees the mother as communicating with her infant by 'mirroring' her infant's feeling states in her own facial expressions. When she is able to do this, Winnicott argues, the infant recognises himself in his mother's face and begins to constitute his own sense of an individual self from these reflections. I have found this concept useful when considering the relationship between the artist and the developing artwork and I discuss the ways in which the artist moulds the artwork to reflect her experience<sup>4</sup>. I draw on Winnicott's concept of the facilitating environment when considering the external and internal spaces the artist needs in order to work. Winnicott sees the 'good-enough' mother as holding the infant both physically and psychologically by providing a contained space, free from impingements, within which development can proceed. In a parallel way, I argue that the artist provides herself<sup>5</sup> with spaces within she can develop her artwork.

Although Winnicott was concerned with cultural experience, he does not address the artist's creative process directly. However, his contemporary and colleague, the psychoanalyst, writer and painter Marion Milner, does so. She gives a fascinating in-depth reflection on her own experience of drawing and painting in her book *On Not Being Able to Paint* (Milner 1957). This book is unusual in that Milner gives a first hand account of her states of mind as she paints and offers reflections on her experiences based on psychoanalytic theory. I have found Milner's work particularly pertinent when thinking about the evolving relationship between the artist and the developing artwork. Milner sees the artist's central task as that of bringing about a separateness or 'otherness' between herself and the

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<sup>4</sup> The psychoanalyst Ken Wright (2009a; 2014) writes on this topic and I draw on his work in the thesis.

<sup>5</sup> Throughout the thesis, I use the pronouns 'she' and 'her' when referring to artists of both sexes. When specifically discussing the interview of a male artist, however, I use masculine pronouns.

artwork, creating a new work that will have a life of its own. She suggests that this 'otherness' (or 'twoness') is achieved through an experience of 'oneness' (Milner 1987(1952); 1969) or 'illusion' which she defines as 'moments when the inner and the outer seem to co-incide' (Milner, 1969: 416). For Milner, illusion or the sense of 'oneness' is a 'bridge to objectivity' (Milner 1957), a necessary precursor to a sense of 'twoness' or 'otherness' and it is only through the experience of illusion, understood in this sense, that symbols can be formed. I discuss this further in Chapter 2. I have also found Milner's concept of the framed gap, a bounded space which marks off 'an area within which what we perceive has to be taken as symbol, as metaphor, not literally' (Milner 1987a (1952): 81) useful in thinking about the spaces the artist sets up both for herself and for the viewer of her work.

The art critic Peter Fuller draws on both Winnicott and Milner in his analysis of his response to the painting *Reveries of a Lapsed Narcissist* by Robert Natkin (Fuller 1988). He sees the painting as offering a potential space within which he can experience moments of near 'fusion' (ibid.: 207) that are both pleasurable and terrifying:

The Natkin certainly evokes intimate, sensuous and affectionate responses, but the way in which the painting seems to call into question the autonomy of the viewer as separate from itself, the way it sets him loose and drifting in a boundless, unstructured illusion of space, can touch upon such primitive anxieties (Fuller 1988: 208).

Fuller's use of the term 'fusion' relates to Milner's concept of illusion whilst his reference to 'primitive anxieties' relates to the fear of a loss of self or, in Winnicott's terms, an interruption in the sense of 'going on being' (Winnicott 1960). Fuller's book is a fascinating, psychoanalytically informed exploration of the viewer's experience. However, Fuller does not venture into the artist's own experience of making which is the subject of this thesis.

Milner writes from her particular experience as a painter and she only addresses issues that arise within her own art practice. For a more general view of the artist's creative process, I turn to the writing of Anton Ehrenzweig (a lecturer in art education at Goldsmith's College, London).

Ehrenzweig developed a three phase model of the artist's creative process (Ehrenzweig 1967), based on Kleinian psychoanalytic theory. Melanie Klein, like Winnicott, focuses on the infant's very early relationships (Klein 1946) and the mental processes that contribute to the building of an inner emotional world. However, unlike Winnicott, she holds that the infant experiences himself as separate from his primary caregiver from the beginning of life. She uses the term 'paranoid schizoid position' for the earliest phase of development when the mother (or primary caregiver) is experienced by the infant as split into good and bad elements (or 'part objects'). The infant loves the good part object (the good breast) and hates the bad part object (the bad breast). According to Klein, later development involves a move towards the 'depressive position' (Klein 1940) in which the infant recognises that the mother/caregiver is a whole person including both the perceived good and bad elements. The depressive position brings a sense of guilt for the perceived damage done through hateful feelings and phantasies, now recognised to be towards the loved mother/caregiver and the sense of what has been lost or damaged gives rise to the desire for reparation (Klein 1929). Kleinian writers on art and aesthetics, such as Hanna Segal (1952; 1974; 1991) and Adela Abella (2007; 2010; 2013) tend to see the artist as engaged in a struggle to restore and rebuild her damaged internal world. Ehrenzweig draws on Klein's theory to argue that the creation of a work of art can be regarded as a reworking of the developmental movement from the paranoid-schizoid position to the depressive position and that this development is an attempt to integrate 'unacknowledged split-off elements' of the self' (Ehrenzweig 1967: 102).

Ehrenzweig suggests that in the first phase of the artist's process (which he links with Klein's theory of the paranoid-schizoid position), she projects fragmented and split-off parts of herself into the work. In the second ('manic') phase, a process of unconscious scanning takes place that aims towards integration. Ehrenzweig writes: 'creative dedifferentiation tends towards a manic "oceanic" limit where all differentiation ceases. The inside and outside world begin to merge.....' (ibid.: 103). In this phase, the persecutory anxieties of the first phase recede as distinctions are blurred and the fragmentation seems to be resolved. Ehrenzweig contends that most of the creative work of the artist takes place in this phase: 'art's

unconscious substructure is formed' (ibid.: 79) whilst the artist is in this 'dedifferentiated' state of mind. This gives way to a more realistic evaluation in the third phase when the artist acknowledges the gaps and fragmentation that were ignored earlier. Ehrenzweig links this third phase to Klein's 'depressive position'. The acknowledgment of limitations paves the way for a process of secondary revision and the final result, although not necessarily a complete resolution of the initial fragmentation, becomes an 'unbroken pictorial space' in which different fragments are bound together.

I have found Ehrenzweig's ideas useful when thinking about the relationship between the artist and the developing artwork. In particular, Ehrenzweig's concept of dedifferentiation seems to have something in common with Milner's concept of 'illusion'. Both terms refer to a state of mind in which 'inner and outer worlds begin to merge'. Also, both writers see this as a necessary stage on the journey towards the finished artwork. However, Ehrenzweig, along with other Kleinian writers, sees the artwork as symbolising, or standing in for, an internal object and regards the artist as reworking the achievement of the depressive position. Milner, on the other hand, does not regard the value of art as lying solely in its ability to stand in for something else. As Lesley Caldwell writes:

Milner emphasises the value, in and for itself, of the object created, its externality, its material existence, rather than its substitutive status. She diverges both from Ernest Jones's (1916) classic paper 'On symbolism', and from Hanna Segal's (1955) Kleinian reading in 'A psychoanalytic approach to aesthetics', published in the same volume of the *IJPA* (33, 1952) and then in *New Directions in Psychoanalysis* (1955). (Caldwell 2014: 341).

This seems to me to be an important point as psychoanalytic writing about art sometimes seems to see art primarily in terms of its therapeutic value for artist or viewer.

Ehrenzweig's three phases assume that there is already a 'work' with which the artist interacts. In other words, he does not include the stages of the artist's process that may precede her work with the medium. In order to conceptualise this I have brought in the writing of psychoanalyst



Christopher Bollas who, like Winnicott and Milner, comes from the British Independent tradition. In particular, I have found his concepts of the receptive unconscious and psychic genera (Bollas 2011) helpful when considering the unconscious processes that may precede a new idea. According to Bollas, the receptive unconscious is an internal space where material that is potentially life-enhancing can be received and kept out of the person's awareness in order to be worked on and linked together in new ways. Bollas' theory of psychic genera offers a conceptual framework with which to consider the way in which elements are attracted into the receptive unconscious, links are made and a new idea is formed.

In considering the making of art as a process of symbolisation, I have followed Milner and number of other psychoanalytic writers (including Herbert Read (Read 1951) Charles Rycroft (Rycroft 1956), and Kenneth Wright (Wright 2014; 2015)) in drawing on the writing of the philosopher Susanne Langer. Her book *Philosophy in a New Key* (Langer 1942) puts forward a theory of symbolisation that she takes further in relation to art in her later book *Feeling and Form* (Langer 1953). Langer differentiates between 'discursive symbols' which refer to and describe that which is symbolised and the 'presentational symbols' of art which are analogical equivalents for the symbolised. Language is the prime example of discursive symbolism in that it consists of words, each of which is itself a symbol. These words already have assigned meanings that need to be learned before the language can be used. Art, on the other hand, uses 'presentational symbols' which *show* whatever is to be symbolised and they operate as a whole so that the elements of a work only become symbolic when they are combined by the artist in the work. Langer defines art as 'a form for human feeling' and an artwork, as a presentational symbol, shows the viewer what a particular area of emotional life is like through its 'vital import' where 'vital' refers to 'the dynamism of subjective experience' (Langer 1953: 32). Many of the interviewees spoke of their artworks as acquiring their own 'life' and I have found Langer's concept of vital import helpful in considering the ways in which the artist brings this about. I also draw on Langer's work in thinking about the artist's work of abstraction whereby she extracts the essential features of whatever the subject of the artwork is to be, excluding anything that ties it to a function in the world of external reality.

In this thesis I do not refer to the writing of psychoanalysts from the Jungian school of Analytical Psychology or the Lacanian School of Psychoanalysis, although I recognise that Lacanian theory, in particular, is often cited in the field of art writing (e.g. Julia Kristeva (Kristeva 1941; 1989), Parveen Adams (Adams 2003), Darian Leader (Leader 2002)) and some artists (e.g. Mary Kelly (Kelly 1985), Bracha Ettinger (Ettinger 2006) and Sharon Kivland (Kivland 2006; 2017)) have drawn on Lacan's theories in the discussion of their own works. However, Lacanian theory does not always map easily onto a Winnicottian view and, for the sake of clarity, I have chosen not to attempt to integrate it here.

## **Outline of Chapters**

The thesis chapters are structured according to a broadly chronological view of the artist's process, starting with a consideration of the various ways in which artists begin a new artwork and ending with the completion of a work and its possible exhibition. However, I do not suggest that the making of a work is a linear process. In practice there may be many fits and starts, repetitions and recursions as the artist encounters problems or responds to new possibilities along the way.

In Chapter 1, I consider the process that leads, for some artists, to the emergence of an idea or image (the visual form of an idea) for a new artwork. For these artists, the conception of a new work is usually precipitated by an encounter with something in the outside world that has a personal significance. The artist feels a resonance with this outer something and I draw on Winnicott's concept of transitional phenomena to theorise this. I coin the term 'pre-sense' for this experience together with the intimation that this outside something can offer the means to create a new artwork. The pre-sense may call for clarification through research or experimentation and there may be a gestatory period during which, out of the artist's awareness, the pre-sense is linked with other elements (perceptions, memories, fantasies). I draw on Christopher Bollas' theory of psychic genera to theorise this process. If and when these links result in an image or idea that seems to give potential shape to the initial inner experience, I argue that there is a sense of concordance that forces the

idea or image into consciousness. At this point, the artist may feel as if she has found the perfect form.

In Chapter 2, I discuss the way in which, through the artist's struggle with the medium, the developing artwork begins to take shape. I draw on the writing of Marion Milner to argue that this stage of the process involves a movement between states in which the boundaries between artist and developing artwork are attenuated (moments that Milner calls 'oneness' or 'illusion') and moments when the work is felt to be more separate. Extending Milner's and Ehrenzweig's writings about two alternating states, and drawing on the artist interviews, I argue that the state of mind of the artist while working with her medium can be considered as a continuum between two self states that I term the artist's 'extended self' and 'observer self'. When the extended self is uppermost, the artist feels herself to be in a state of oneness with the developing work. But I argue that (except in psychosis) this sense of oneness never becomes a complete fusion as the observer self is always available to return the artist to a more separate state.

In Chapter 3, I consider the artist's interaction with her medium as a form of serious play, taking place in the potential space (Winnicott) between inner and outer worlds. During the process of its making, the developing artwork is both an object in the outside world and a part of the artist's inner world. This play has a ruthless quality in that the medium must be rendered malleable enough to reflect the artist's experience. There is a movement from a situation in which the artist relates to the developing artwork as if it is part of herself to one in which she relates to it as a separate entity. Drawing on Winnicott's paper 'The Use of an Object' (Winnicott 1969), I argue that this shift comes about through the developing artwork's survival of the artist's attacks.

The artist needs particular conditions, or spaces, in which to work and, in Chapter 4, I argue that these conditions are both internal and external. I draw on Winnicott's concept of the facilitating environment to consider the way in which external conditions such as a studio or other working space, time boundaries and self-imposed rules set the scene for entry into an internal space. I introduce the concept of the artist's internal frame within

which symbolic thinking and unconscious meaning become the stuff of 'reality'. The internal frame, a product of the artist's training and experience, differs according to the medium used so that a painter moves into an internal painting frame and so on. The crossing over from everyday life into the internal frame is often difficult and may call for preparation and an effort of will.

In Chapter 5, I consider the completion of the artwork and the separation between artist and finished work. Gradually, as the artist works with her medium, the developing artwork takes on more and more of her inner experience until it no longer needs her intervention. It has, in a sense, acquired a life of its own and is ready to be launched into the outside world. This calls for a psychological separation between artist and work that may be felt as a relief or may be painful. But this separation is not always complete. Some artworks call for a series of further works to fully explore the artist's subject matter and there are also times when an artwork seems to point in a new direction.

### **Note**

Owing to my wish to include the experiences of a number of different artists working in various media, and because my focus has been on an analysis of process, not of the work of any individual artist, I have chosen to anonymise the quotations and I have not included images of the work of the interviewees.

# Chapter 1: Taking It In

*I often begin with something that is unknown to me that I have a sense I need to know about.* Susan Derges (Read 2017)

## Introduction

The first question I want to address is that of how a new artwork begins to come into being. Not surprisingly, the interviews with artists make it clear that there is no single answer to this question and the issue of what constitutes the beginning of a new work is already complex. As one interviewee said: 'It seems to come out of my own history' (Artist N). Each artist is influenced by her personal background, by her training and by the cultural climate of her time so that, in a sense, the artist's journey towards each work could be said to be life-long. For the purposes of this research, I have chosen to define the beginning as the point when the artist has a first intimation of the possibility of a new work. In this chapter I examine my own experience and that of the artists I interviewed to trace the different ways in which the earliest stirrings of a potential in the mind of the artist may develop. More specifically, I examine how, for some artists, this may lead to the emergence of a particular idea or image for a possible artwork.

## The Pre-Sense

Among the artists I interviewed, many described an encounter with something in the outside world as usually marking their first awareness of the beginnings of a new work. One of the interviewees describes her experience:

*Generally it kind of starts with a 'hunch'... just a sense of something that is interesting and it's something that is starting to engage me. [...] the 'hunch' is actually kind of a deliciously imaginative space. It's like the space that ... I want to go to. Or something that is sort of triggering an imagination in myself.*  
Artist P

The 'hunch' as a 'space' suggests an opening up, an expansion of the mind

to allow many possibilities. The 'hunch' marks the beginning of an imaginative exploration of something that interests the artist and her description suggests that the interest is more than intellectual. It signals a personal engagement and there is a sense of a process that has already begun. The 'hunch' is not a clear idea or image of a possible work. Such an image may or may not emerge later but at this stage the lack of definition allows the artist space for her imagination to play unfettered by the restrictions of detail. The Oxford Online Dictionary gives the meaning of the noun 'hunch' as 'a feeling or guess based on intuition rather than fact' and lists 'feeling', 'impression', 'inkling', 'presentiment', and 'premonition' among its synonyms. The dictionary also lists informal synonyms as 'gut feeling' and 'feeling in one's bones'. All these terms may be relevant to the meaning that this artist gives to the word. By 'hunch' she is referring to a haptic experience that is felt in both body and mind.

The experience of finding something in the outside world that seems to have a special personal meaning and that promises the possibility of a new artwork was described by several of the interviewees:

*I was in Pongee's the silk merchant buying some silk dupion for one project and found in their display racks... some tulle, some very light silk tulle in the perfect colour of the Chanel pink that I use a lot. And I bought my silk dupion at vast expense, but in my mind was the silk tulle, what could I do with it? Artist K*

*I just came across a photograph that I hadn't seen before recently of a woman on the shore near where we are ... and there's something in the photograph that ... not quite sure what it is, and it's quite, it's not very clear, it's quite a blurred photograph, but there's something about it that appeals to me as a painter. Artist Q*

In one sense, these two experiences are rather different from one another. Artist K sees some material that she wants to use as a *medium* for an artwork whereas Artist Q sees a photograph that may offer a new *subject* for a painting. But there are also factors in common. For both artists, the discovery of something in the outside world has triggered an imaginative response. It has set off an internal process that may eventually result in a new work. An important point seems to be that there is a certain vagueness

or openness in the artist's experience at this point. Artist K's fascination with the silk tulle is related to its sensual qualities – its lightness and its pink colour – but she does not yet know where this will take her. For Artist Q, the indistinctness of the image is important in that the photograph does not tie itself too specifically to a particular woman. I will use the term 'pre-sense' to denote the initial sense of something that is of personal interest, that engages the artist's imagination, inviting further exploration and offering the possibility of a new work. In this chapter I explore the nature of this pre-sense, the various ways in which it may emerge and the ways in which it may be developed by the artist.

In order to explore this in more depth, I will give an account of my own experience of beginning a new series of artworks:

*Some years ago I began to spend regular periods of time in the Lake District in North-West England. Much of my artwork relates to landscape and my intention was to make artworks responding to some aspect of this area. But despite, or perhaps because of, the beauty of my surroundings, I could find no subject to capture my imagination. I was staying in a valley halfway between the mountains and Morecambe Bay, a vast expanse of quicksands, channels and intertidal mudflats. After a while I noticed that I would always travel to the mountains rather than to the coastline. The mountains attracted me. They seemed to me to be comforting, solid, dependable, containing. The Bay, on the other hand, seemed too open, too flat, too vast. There was something troubling about this landscape. Was it the history of the Bay, the fact that many lives have been lost here to the quicksands or to fast incoming tides? Looking out over the great expanse of the Bay at low tide, I imagined myself walking out alone towards the horizon until I could see no land. I imagined what it might feel like to be out in this wet desert, far from help. This sense of isolation and lack of containment seemed to be one aspect of my emotional reaction to the Bay. Another had to do with the imagined experience of being sucked beneath the ground by quicksands. Or being swept away, engulfed, by the incoming tide which is said to be as fast as a galloping horse. But I felt that there was more to my feelings about the Bay than these emotionally charged images. It was as if these reactions were the tip of an iceberg and that below the surface were less conscious associations, which I could not yet access. It was this feeling that propelled me to make a series of artworks related to the Bay.*

Something about the Bay resonated with something in me, leaving me with the sense that something significant was going on. This also seemed to

offer the promise that the Bay might provide the means to find a form (in the shape of a new artwork) to correspond with this experience. There was a felt sense that here in the outer world was a perceptual form that chimed with the inner. There was not an exact fit between inner and outer but there was the promise that some sort of fit could be found in the form of an artwork.

In retrospect, it seemed to me that I had been alert for some aspect or element of the landscape which would evoke a particular sort of emotional response. The mountains induced a positive response but I was not drawn to make art related to them. Rather, it seems that I was, without being fully aware of it at the time, seeking something that would arouse a more ambivalent reaction. The Bay was troubling to me and so offered the possibility of making a work that might clarify this uneasy response. It raised my anxieties and the possibility of creating a series of works related to it was both exciting and fearful because I knew that, in doing so, I would be stepping into unknown territory, exploring something that I did not yet understand and that might uncover painful or even terrifying emotions.

Artist K's fascination with the silk tulle, Artist Q's 'something that appeals', Artist P's 'hunch' and my own response to Morecambe Bay all signal a resonance between inner and outer worlds. It is this resonance, together with the artist's presentiment that she will be able to create an artwork related to this experience, that constitutes the experience that I call the 'pre-sense'. The artist has the sense of something significant that cannot yet be apprehended clearly.

In order to consider the nature of this resonance between inner and outer I turn to the writing of the psychoanalyst and paediatrician D.W. Winnicott. Winnicott observed that, as the infant begins to move towards objective perception based on reality-testing, he<sup>6</sup> may adopt a teddy bear, piece of blanket or other item that assumes great significance, particularly at moments of separation or anxiety. The bear or blanket is a substitute for the missing sensory elements of the mother's body and offers the child a

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<sup>6</sup> I will use the masculine pronoun when referring to the child in order to differentiate from references to the mother.



form to correspond to his need. Winnicott suggests that these 'transitional objects', along with other 'transitional phenomena' (for instance, for the infant, such activities as babbling or rhythmic movements leading to sleep), belong to both inner and outer reality simultaneously. In a radical departure from earlier classical psychoanalytic theory, Winnicott postulates an intermediate area of experiencing, a potential or transitional space, between the world of shared external reality and the personal inner world (Winnicott 1986). It is a space of illusion in which objects have both an autonomous external existence and a life in the inner world of the individual. Through the concept of transitional phenomena, Winnicott links the early experiences of the infant, who creates a personal 'transitional object', with the play of the older child and with cultural experience in adult life. All these situations take one into 'an area that is not challenged, because no claim is made on its behalf except that it shall exist as a resting place for the individual engaged in the perpetual human task of keeping inner and outer reality separate yet interrelated' (Winnicott 1986: 3).

My encounter with Morecambe Bay, Artist K's discovery of the silk tulle and Artist Q's finding of the photograph can all be understood in terms of transitional phenomena. When I responded emotionally to the landscape of Morecambe Bay I was in a state of mind in which the outer reality of the landscape affected me and, at the same time, I projected my own feelings and memories and fantasies onto the landscape. I imbued the Bay with my own personal meaning (though this meaning was not yet articulated). The boundaries between me and the landscape were partially dissolved so that I could no longer say whether my perceptions were of outer reality or of my own inner world. They were both at the same moment.

Although the theory of transitional phenomena is relevant to my experience of Morecambe Bay, I do not think that it provides a full conceptualisation of the state of mind that accompanies the 'pre-sense'. The endowing of something in the outside world with personal meaning is not something peculiar to artists. As Winnicott says, it is the hallmark of creative living for everyone. But for the artist there is something more to this experience on those occasions when it gives rise to the desire to make an artwork. In order to explore this further, I turn first to Winnicott's writing about the

nature and origins of creativity. Winnicott traces creativity back to the earliest stage of life. Before the 'theoretical first feed' (Winnicott 1988: 100), Winnicott describes the situation in which the infant is searching for 'something', having a sense or intimation of 'something' that will correspond to his need but not yet knowing what form this 'something' will take. The mother's response, in offering her breast, provides a form that fits the infant's intimation. According to Winnicott, if the infant imagines, or hallucinates, the breast just at the moment when his mother presents it to him, the infant has the illusion that he has created the breast. Winnicott terms this experience 'primary creativity'. This is the precursor to the stage of the transitional object. Whilst the experience of primary creativity is facilitated by the mother's presenting *herself* to the infant, the infant 'discovers' the transitional object (an object that is 'not me' and also 'not mother') for himself<sup>7</sup>. These early experiences form the basis of creative activity in adulthood where creative living is understood as endowing elements of the outside world with a personal meaning. Winnicott specifically mentions the arts as a potential area of transitional phenomena (and therefore of creative living) for the audience.

The description above assumes that the mother offers the infant the necessary care at the right moment. But maternal provision is not always attuned to the infant's need. Winnicott's view is that failures at this early stage may lead to an impairment of the ability to 'live creatively', that is to imbue the world with personal meaning. This would have repercussions for the would-be artist. In the picture of the artist's process that I depict in this chapter, the artist must be capable of experiencing something in the outer world as resonating with something inner and must also be capable of working towards the symbolisation of that experience. In extreme cases of maternal deprivation this may not be possible. However, if the lack of attunement is more limited, an artist's practice may have a reparative effect, not in the Kleinian sense of repairing damage done in phantasy to

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<sup>7</sup> Although the mother may assist by making a suitable object available at the appropriate time.

the mother/carer but, rather, offering forms to the artist herself for experiences that were not originally mirrored by the mother/carer.<sup>8</sup>

Although Winnicott himself did not write about the artist's activity, it can be seen to follow in a direct line from the infant's 'creation' of the breast, through the use of a transitional object and the older child's play. In all these activities, something in the outside world provides an external form for something from the inner world through a process that involves an overlap between inner and outer. In primary creativity the mother's response in presenting her breast to her baby at the right moment gives form to the infant's preconception that there is something to be found that will satisfy him. The transitional object gives form to the infant's sense of missing the mother's physical presence. This intimation that there is something to be found that will correspond with an inner experience has something in common with the concept of the artist's 'pre-sense'. The artist too has an intimation that a satisfying form may be found or, rather, created (whether or not she eventually succeeds in creating such a form). But there is a difference between the artist's situation and the interaction between inner and outer in the infant's 'creation' of the breast or his use of the transitional object. The infant finds the breast and the transitional object ready made. No physical transformation of the external object is necessary (although there is a psychic transformation). The artist, on the other hand, must create her own form. There is a closer parallel between artist and the older playing child as the child may build his own world, reflecting his inner landscape, through his use of toys or other materials. However, there is a central difference between child's play and art practice in that art is made within a cultural context, drawing on a cultural heritage and usually with the intention of presenting the finished work to an audience.

This consideration of Winnicott's writing on creativity has taken me some way towards conceptualising the pre-sense but to carry my investigation further I turn back to the experiences of the interviewees. One artist says of the subject of her painting:

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<sup>8</sup> See Wright, K. (2009a). Mirroring and attunement: Self-realization in psychoanalysis and art. London and New York: Routledge/Taylor & Francis.

*It's almost like kind of wanting to be closer to the thing somehow than just visually. If you can take it and recreate it as your own ... it's a closer connection somehow. It's not just a kind of visual thing any more... grabbing it in a stronger way than just looking at it maybe. Artist T*

Artist T's experience of the 'thing' in the outside world is of being drawn to it in a haptic, bodily way. 'Just looking' implies a distance between viewer and whatever is viewed but this artist seems to want to get inside the 'thing' or to have it inside her and only through this experience can she 'recreate it as [her] own'. In a similar vein, the photographer Susan Derges, speaking about her work *River Taw* (Derges 1997), says 'The ideas behind the project were about becoming close to the element of the river, as a metaphor of immersion and participation. I was looking to be part of it...' (Read 2017: 116).

The psychoanalyst and artist Marion Milner seems to be exploring a similar experience when she writes about the bodily nature of her response to her subject matter. She writes about the difficulty of preserving her experience in her painting and comes to feel that she needs to 'spiritually envelop' her subject before starting work. She quotes a passage from a diary note:

... The impulse to paint those flowers, crimson cyclamen, feels like a desire to perpetuate the momentary glimpse of timeless peace that is given by the extension of their petals in space. I want to taste it continually, swallow it, become merged with it – just like those feelings of wanting to eat a landscape, or having eaten it; as if there was an equal expense of space inside one, a sort of through-the-looking-glass land (Milner 1957: 57).

Milner's experience of the flowers is visual, kinaesthetic and gustatory. Although Milner calls this spiritual envelopment, the metaphor of eating makes it clear that, for Milner, this is a very visceral experience. She wants to incorporate the flowers in order to become 'merged' with them and she regards this act of taking in as a necessary step on the path to making a painting. The painting is intended to preserve the artist's experience, putting it (or, rather, a transformed version of it) back into the outside world. For Milner herself, this act of taking in is fraught with anxiety because she does not know whether she will be able to create a satisfactory painting. If

not, she may feel that 'by having it inside one might have destroyed it' (ibid.: 63). She speculates that 'To an established painter, who knows that he can successfully bring what he has taken inside himself back to life in the outside world as a painting, there may be less anxiety in this act of spiritual envelopment in order to paint' (ibid.).

Milner's description suggests that the beginning of a new work of art is heralded by the *taking in* of something from the outside world and she, in common with Susan Derges and Artist T, refers to a wish to merge with her subject matter. To explore this experience further I bring in a passage in which Milner examines her own desire to paint: 'I wanted to ensoul nature with what was really there, to make perception of the hidden insides and essential nature of objects fit in with what I knew, in moments of keenest awareness, to be really there' (Milner 1957: 120). She writes of the 'soul' of her subject '... a 'soul' which was both really there, but which also was something that I had given to it from my own memory and feeling, since otherwise I would not have been able to see what was really there' (ibid.). Milner insists that she perceives a hidden something in nature that 'really' exists and that it is essential to the object she wants to paint: it is its 'soul'. But this 'soul' can only be perceived by Milner through her endowment of the object with elements of her own inner world. In other words, this 'soul' belongs not only to 'nature' but to herself. Milner's use of the word 'soul', and her writing about wanting to 'spiritually envelop' her subject, are examples of her trying to find a way of describing an experience that does not easily lend itself to everyday language. At times she seems to write of the artist's experience in similar terms to meditative practice in which there may be a loss of awareness of personal boundaries. She writes that, (provided one's separate body identity has already been established): 'the demarcation of the boundaries of one's spiritual identity are not fixed, they do not have to remain identical with one's skin' (Milner 1957: 143). In relation to the artist's experience of whatever element in the outside world she responds to, Milner seems to suggest that the artist's 'spiritual identity' expands to include that element.

There is a difference between Milner's formulation of the artist's experience and Winnicott's theory of transitional phenomena. Transitional phenomena

hark back to the developmental phase when the infant is beginning to have a sense of separateness from his mother whereas Milner's descriptions relate more closely to an earlier stage. That is, Milner's writing compares the artist's experience with the very early relationship between mother and infant when the infant does not yet experience him or herself as separate from the mother (or primary care-giver). Winnicott, in writing about transitional phenomena, is concerned with the slightly later stage when the infant begins to discover that the mother (or caregiver) is a person in her own right.

To conceptualise the artist's 'pre-sense' in psychoanalytic terms, I want to draw both on Winnicott and on Milner. In my own practice, I think that the initial realisation that I have found something 'out there' that resonates with something inner and that can lead me to a new artwork can be accompanied by a temporary sense of at-oneness with the potential subject matter. It is as if this outside something is no longer outside but has become an integral part of my sense of myself. This seems to be closer to Milner's formulation than to Winnicott's. In Milner's terms I have taken the outside something into myself. But such experiences are momentary glimpses. They are accompanied and succeeded by an interaction between inner and outer that is not so much a momentary state of mind as an ongoing process. Here, Winnicott's ideas about transitional phenomena seem more pertinent. Transitional phenomena relate to a transition in time - a movement from the experience of the other as a subjective object to the experience of the other as an object with a separate existence.

For the artist, this transition includes the gradual sorting out of the elements in the outside something that are essential to the pre-sense - those elements that chime with something inner - from those that are superfluous to it. In connection with the quotation above, Milner writes 'it was necessary to select those details of appearances which emphasised the nature of the 'soul' of what I was looking at' (Milner 1957: 120). She wants her painting to convey something of her own response and this will be done through the 'details of appearances' that *she* feels capture the essence of the scene. In making the moving image installation *Under the Skin*, I wanted to create an artwork that would convey something of my experience of Morecambe Bay

as an expanse of living sands - treacherous, unstable, potentially overwhelming and yet enticing. In order to do so I had to find elements in the landscape that I could use to construct a work that might encompass these different qualities. These elements were the very ones that had first affected me and given rise to my pre-sense. They were as much a part of my own inner world as they were present in the Bay.

I understand Milner's selection of the essential 'details of appearances' and my own selection of aspects of the Bay as processes of abstraction and to conceptualise this further I will bring in the work of Susanne Langer (1942; 1953), a philosopher whose work influenced Milner. Langer developed a theory of symbolisation, differentiating between the discursive symbols of language that *describe* whatever is symbolised, and presentational symbols of art which *show* the viewer what a particular area of emotional life is like. According to Langer, abstraction is an essential feature of symbolisation. Considering the making of art, she writes of 'the paramount importance of *abstracting the form*, banning all irrelevancies that might obscure its logic, and especially divesting it of all its usual meanings so it may be open to new ones' (Langer 1953: 59-60). Anything that ties it to 'worldly offices' is dispensed with so that only those features that are relevant to the artist's experience are retained. Milner also came to see the artist as engaged in a process of symbolisation where the artwork symbolises something about the inner life of the artist. She writes: 'I could look on the artist as creating symbols for the life of feeling, creating ways in which the inner life may be made knowable; which, as Freud said, can only be done in terms of the outer life' (Milner 1987c: 226). I argue that it is usually the artist's experience of something in the outer world that sets the process of making a new work in motion and that the new work will offer a form for something previously unformed or unknown in the artist's inner life. Because this is achieved 'in terms of the outer life', the artwork will not only make the inner world more 'knowable' but also shed new light on an aspect of the outer world.

In the above quotation, Milner insists that she is painting what is 'really there'. Langer seems to describe a similar situation when she discusses Paul Cezanne's reflections on his work. She writes 'the translation of

natural objects into pictorial elements took place *in his seeing*, in the act of looking, not the act of painting. Therefore, in recording what he saw he earnestly believed that he painted exactly what “was there” (Langer 1953: 78). Langer’s emphasis on the act of looking introduces a further factor into the situation. I have considered the way in which the artist responds emotionally to whatever it is in the outside world that has captured her interest and this response colours her perception. But her perception, the way in which she sees, is also affected by the medium she uses. Artist N says:

*You can be walking down the street and your mind is absolutely not on your studio and yet you see a relationship of this object to that or the way the sun hits that and a shadow falls and immediately you think ‘Oh my God, that would be so wonderful to paint’. You’re not looking for it at all.* Artist N

Artist N’s artistic perception is honed by her years of practice within the discipline of painting. When she sees a particular scene she is struck by those elements that might contribute to a good painting. When I worked as a photographer making montaged black and white photographs in the darkroom I found myself seeing the world around me as if through the lens of my camera. I noticed differences in tone and texture rather than colour and I was aware of shapes that might or might not lend themselves to the montage process. More recently I have come to work mainly with the moving image, usually in colour, and I find that I am no longer so acutely aware of tones and textures. Instead I am more focussed on movement and colour. My very perception of the outside world is conditioned by the way I work. I argue here that the artist’s process of form-making or symbolisation starts from the moment she encounters something in the outside world that resonates with something inner. At that moment she is already abstracting those details that are pertinent to her medium and that she could use in her work.

Sometimes the interaction between inner and outer worlds may not only give rise to a desire to make a new work but may compel the artist to try to do so. There is often a sense of urgency as if a way must somehow be found. Something important to the artist is at stake. The art historian Michael Podro writes of ‘the sense of urgency that drives the making of any



work of art, the existential urgency springing from the need to be a participant and not a bystander of one's own world' (Podro 2007: 31). Podro's statement links with Winnicott's writing on transitional phenomena and his view of creativity as the endowing of the external world with one's inner life. But I think that there is sometimes something more to the felt sense of urgency. If the artwork is to provide a form for something previously unformed or unknown in the artist's inner experience, then the urgency may be understood in terms of a pressure towards meaning and coherence.

I recall an incident that gave rise to just such a sense of urgency in me. Many years ago, shortly after I had taken up photography and was in the initial stages of training as a psychotherapist, I took part in a training group that was being observed through a one-way mirror. There was an incident in the group that aroused strong emotions in me. I could find no words for my feelings but an image came into my mind of myself inside a transparent egg-shaped form. I felt impelled to make a photograph of this image. Photoshop had not yet been invented and I had never tried to construct montaged images in the darkroom but I felt I must teach myself to do so. I succeeded in producing an image that was a close enough fit for my feeling and I found that the photograph itself provided a container for my experience. The incident in the group, and the presence of the unseen observers, had stirred up emotions that were not yet articulated and my task in making the photograph was to find a form for them. The resulting photograph seemed to help me to process my feelings *without necessarily giving them verbal expression*. In this case, the initial stage of the 'pre-sense' (i.e. the feelings aroused by the incident in the group) led directly and rapidly to a specific idea for an image that would provide a form for the experience. More usually, there are intermediate stages.

Once the artist has found her subject matter, her task is to create a form that reflects her inner experience and correlates with the initial sense of significance she experienced in her encounter with something external. The analysis of the artist interviews suggests that there are two possible trajectories. Some artists go straight from here to an engagement with their medium. Through this engagement the new form will gradually emerge. I

discuss this stage of the process in the next chapter. Other artists move into the stage of the process that I call 'Preparation and Research' in order to generate a more specific idea. I use the term 'idea' to refer to a mental image (which may be more or less vague) of a potential form for the final work.

## **Preparation and Research**

Once they have found their subject matter, some artists described a period of preparation or research intended to lead them towards an idea for the new work. This preparation is the artist's attempt to clarify the pre-sense of a new work. As Artist P says: 'And then, then I kind of follow through, I kind of follow up on those hunches and start researching I guess in a way. So I start to look at the subject I'm interested in.'

After I had decided to make a work related to Morecambe Bay but before I had lighted on an idea for a particular work, I began to experiment with photography and video:

*Initially, I had no idea how I might approach the subject beyond the fact that my usual media are video, photography and installation. I spent long periods of time traversing the coastline and finding positions or vantage points that seemed 'right'. I could not necessarily say what was right about them. One favourite area at the mouth of an estuary had a small pier from which I could film the incoming tide. Another spot had deep channels in the sand that altered with every tide. I took many photographs and shot many hours of video footage in an attempt to clarify what it was that I wanted to make.*

In this period of preparation I was looking for something that 'felt right', something in the landscape of Morecambe Bay that would give form to my inner experience. Through my repeated visits to the Bay, I became familiar with the movement of the tides, the changing of the channels on the beach, the effects of the weather and so on. I was also attempting to come to a deeper understanding of the way these elements in the outside world affected me emotionally (of course, I could only come to a deeper understanding of those aspects of my experience which were available to consciousness. There was also a level of unconscious meaning that was not accessible). At the same time, my photographs and videos were

attempts to work towards a form for the final work that would satisfy me visually. These elements were closely intertwined in that the visual satisfaction I sought would largely (but not only) have to do with the ability of the photographs or films to embody my experience. In addition, the final work had to have the visual qualities that, in my opinion, would allow it to become a strong enough work within my own artistic practice.

Having decided on his subject area, Artist Q describes the next stage of his process:

*Artists traditionally use drawing to inform their practice. They sit down and draw things and look at them intently. I don't do that, it's not how I work, but I look at things intently. And so when a subject emerges I tend to read around the subject and try and get some sort of feeling for the subject. Because in order to make a painting about something you really need to know the subject inside out. This sort of immersing yourself in the subject is almost like a process of preparation for something that might happen. Artist Q*

This artist has already found a 'subject' that combines elements of the outer world with elements of his own inner experience. His 'immersion in the subject' is a deeper exploration of the overlap between these elements as his choice of reading matter is determined by his personal areas of interest. He is not only looking for information but also exploring his own emotional responses. 'Immersing' is an evocative word suggesting a transition from one element to another. The implication is that he enters the realm of his subject so that he can know it from the inside. This is an interesting reversal of the imagery used by Milner in the passage I quote earlier in this chapter in which she describes her initial interaction with the subject of her painting. She writes of the 'taking in' of something external. Here, at a slightly later stage of his process, Artist Q sees himself as immersed in (or taken in by) something external, the wider ramifications of his 'subject'. This suggests an initial taking in of some element of the outside world, with an accompanying pre-sense that then acts as a guide as the artist becomes immersed in an exploration of the subject. I think that this spatial metaphor is helpful in considering the progression of the artist's process but too literal a division between the concepts of 'taking in' and 'being taken in by' could be misleading. The imagery used by Artist Q and by Milner both convey a

sense that the boundaries between the external and the internal are permeable. Here I think that Winnicott's writing on transitional phenomena is relevant. In describing an area of experience in which inner and outer worlds co-incide, Winnicott used several different terms, including 'intermediate area' and 'potential space'. The encounter between Artist Q and his wider 'subject' can be considered to be taking place within a potential space where his perceptions of the 'subject' become inextricably mixed with his emotional responses. At this point in his process he seems actively to choose to enter this space in order to immerse himself in his subject. Artist Q speaks of his research as a preparation for 'something that might happen', something not within his conscious control, anticipating the later stage of illumination in which an idea may emerge.

The artist and photographer Susan Derges describes the early stages of her work:

The idea is never clear at the outset. I don't begin with a totally clarified concept but more of an intuition of something that I'm trying to articulate. It is *sensed*; the territory of it is defined but not completely distinct. So, the process of researching or investigating an idea, which I use as a method of testing the idea, is the process by which the nature of that idea becomes clearer to me. The research will disprove some of it and back up other parts, fleshing it out in surprising ways. The process of research is part and parcel of an idea coming into full fruition or formation (Read 2017: 117).

Derges uses the term 'idea' in different ways here. At the beginning of the passage she uses it to refer to an area of interest that is not yet elucidated. This is what I am calling the 'pre-sense'. Her research begins the process of elucidation and the developed idea in 'full fruition or formation' is what I refer to in this chapter as the 'idea'. The movement from pre-sense to idea involves a testing of the pre-sense both through contextual and theoretical research and through a speculative or tentative engagement with her medium. She goes on to clarify her use of the term 'intuition':

There has to be an intuition first, otherwise the research gives you nothing. It has to be led by the intimation of an idea but one must be prepared for the research to take you into the unknown and away from it, in order to bring you back to it again in a stronger more amazing manifestation (Read 2017: 118).

Derges links her intuition with the 'intimation of an idea', or, as I call it in this thesis, her pre-sense. Intuition is essential in guiding her research, leading her towards elements that elucidate the pre-sense and paving the way for the advent of a more specific idea. Interestingly, she implies that the artist must be prepared not only to go into the unknown but to move away from the pre-sense at least temporarily. In attempting to understand what this might mean in the context of my own work, I find that I must be prepared to let go of any pre-conceptions of what form the emerging idea might eventually take. The process of research brings me back to the pre-sense, as Derges describes, but in unexpected ways.

The psychoanalyst Christopher Bollas relates the process of unconscious data collection to intuition. He suggests that the accumulated experiences of the artist or scientist as he develops his creative work result in an 'increasingly specific vision of his object world':

What is this ability that derives from the incremental cohesion of a mental structure set up to think an as yet inarticulated idea? Is this not what we mean by a sense of intuition: the sense we have of where to look, what to look at, and how to look at it? (Bollas 2011: 71).

According to Bollas, intuition is an unconscious skill that allows the creative person both to know where to look in the outside world to find those elements that will contribute to his or her personal development and also to know 'how to receive messages or (significations)' (ibid.: 72). This formulation gives appropriate weight to the long experience that lies behind the birth of each new artwork. As Artist W says: 'I think all that intuition is just years and years of experience and ideas mulling around that you're not necessarily all that kind of conscious of.' And Artist Q puts it: 'As an artist you carry with you your own history of what you've already done, you know, the paintings you've already made.' In a sense, the artist has gone through a training in intuition so that her perceptions are increasingly refined and increasingly attuned to responding to elements which will carry her work forward.

Artist F, a photographer, describes how she searches for the image she needs:

*Right at the beginning of a piece of work I might have a very vague idea of what I might be interested in....I am always collecting images that at some point I may pull out and it may become a piece of work. Artist F*

Artist F's playful collecting of images, led by her intuition, allows her to pick out any that might take her work forward. Other artists may discover relevant items in different ways. Artist Q came across glass plate negatives in a shop:

*I'm often asked 'well that's really strange ... you're fortunate to be in the right place at the right time', or 'you found those glass plate negatives, that's incredibly lucky'. It actually isn't, you've either got your antennae up or not. So things happen. Artist Q*

Artist Q's use of the metaphor of antennae suggests a picking up of messages from the outside world that are relevant to his particular preoccupations. This process seems to relate to Bollas' description of intuition. But Bollas writes of intuition as an unconscious skill. Considering Artist Q's description in the light of Bollas' definition, the roots of his 'antennae' are in the unconscious and their function is to connect his unconscious concerns with elements in the outside world. He was not actively looking for the glass plate negatives but when he saw them he knew, through intuition, that they were relevant to his project.

The elements that seem relevant may be physical objects, such as the glass plate negatives, or intangible data such as thoughts or ideas which are stored mentally as Artist M describes:

*I have a certain set of ideas in my head – passions that I want to explore. So you're constantly looking for things that connect – that have some correspondence to those ideas ... It's what I call shed mentality ... to be so curious about the world that you absorb all these diverse ideas and then somehow make something new out of them. Artist M*

At this preparation stage, guided by intuition, Artist M collects both mental and physical data relevant to his pre-sense of new works. His 'mental shed' acts as an internal contained space within which these elements can connect and interact. He says that he 'somehow' makes something new out

of them, indicating that this interaction takes place, at least partially, outside the artist's awareness.

Bollas stresses the fact that the intuiting person is unaware of what he or she is working on. He has not yet 'thought' it and therefore it is protected from the possible judgements of consciousness: '...the intuiting person is unconsciously able to explore lines of investigation that would meet with incredulous disapproval if he were fully conscious of what was being considered' (Bollas 2011: 73). For the artist, this lack of awareness is not about the subject matter of the work. For instance, Artist Q knows that his subject matter is his father's letters. However, he does not know how the elements he finds through his research and intuitive searching will combine and interact. This combination and interaction takes place out of the artist's awareness. The artist continues in the hope and expectation that, from this interaction, an idea or image for a new artwork will emerge but he cannot predict what this idea will be or when it will present itself. In the next section I discuss the unconscious processing that paves the way for the emergence of an idea to occur.

## **Gestation**

The artist's preparation through research, introspection and exploration of possible forms (either through practical trials in drawings, taking photographs, collecting objects or by imaginative explorations) may result in the gradual emergence of a specific direction or idea for a new work. However, a new idea may not be forthcoming at first. Many artists described a time gap between their initial interest in a particular subject and the eventual emergence of the idea for a work:

*There is a push and pull, I think, as well where we'll talk about something and we won't really get anywhere and then you sleep on it and you suddenly take a step forward and so it sort of comes in cycles. Artists D and V*

Artists D and V describe an integral aspect of their process, suggesting that their ideas for each work progress as a series of discrete steps. Their description points up the cyclical nature of the process with short periods of 'gestation' occurring overnight and leading to onward steps. However, the

arrival of the 'step forward' is not predictable. Sometimes, Artists D and V need to wait:

*So it's going from having this initial thing or interest to it being at a point where it might start to become more. There is a space between those two points and that's the grumpy bit, potentially.*  
Artist D

If the time gap before a way forward emerges is a long one, this stage of the work can be frustrating as I describe:

*After I had taken many photographs and shot many hours of video there came a long period when I felt that nothing was happening in my mind, that I had no ideas. No new images came to me. I felt stuck and frustrated, not knowing how to proceed.*

This potential 'grumpiness' or frustration arises out of the fear that no way forward will present itself and that the artist will be marooned in this uncomfortable waiting state. In the gap between the point of initial interest and 'something more', the artist has to let go, to relinquish control without knowing what, if anything, will emerge.

For some artists, the time gap between initial interest and specific idea is very protracted:

*It's come back. You'd visualised it maybe 10 years ago but it didn't make sense at the time. I think the idea has been smouldering away. That little drawing... It's become an idea by bursting into flame.* Artist A

*It did come in a flash. I do get that occasionally... these flashes... things at the corner of your mind as well as your eye ... I do mull over things a lot. I do ruminate. They're with me for a very long time and mostly sketchbook scribbles rather than planned drawings of these things.* Artist W

Artist W's and Artist A's descriptions are of more infrequent events and it was only in retrospect that they could view the delay as signalling a period of gestation. They had not been working consciously on the problem for some time but had left it aside. Both Artist W and Artist A suggest that, prior to the flash of insight or inspiration, something had been 'smouldering



away' or was being mulled over at a level below full consciousness. In Artist A's case, a visualisation of a possible work, in abeyance for 10 years, has been revived and now can be seen in a new way. The word 'smouldering' suggests a very active and transformative process. It seems that, out of the artist's awareness, the previous visualisation has been linked to something new, causing it to 'burst into flame', a description which captures something of the intensity of the experience. But this ignition only occurs after an extended unconscious process that might be thought of as incubation or gestation, a period during which new links are made and a new idea is formed. As Artist B says:

*It comes together in a semi-subconscious way. I don't think though that it is completely intuitive. I think it's about all the stuff you put in beforehand and then in this fabulous wonderful way the grey cells in some way – something links up.* Artist B

Another artist describes his process:

*Generally this work takes place over quite a long period of time and sometimes I get kind of lost ... I don't know where it's going and I don't know what to do with it. I don't really dwell on it too much initially. I just put it away, I just kind of surrender ... maybe it's redundant, maybe it's a bad idea... I just put it away and do something else... Eventually, something else will happen, something else will come along, another trigger will come to be the hook I need to make this connection with what I was working on. This little chain link appears: "Oh yeah! Of course, that's the way to go"... I would say that in retrospect all the work I've done has had a period of gestation.* Artist M

Artist M's description is not of the emergence of an initial idea for a new piece of work but of periodic hitches in an ongoing work where a new direction is called for to propel the work forward. When Artist M does not know what to do with the work he puts it aside but he seems to do this in an openminded way. He does not see himself as faced with the decision as to whether to abandon this route or whether to continue with it. He recognises that it may need a period of gestation until an external 'trigger' connects with it to generate a new idea.

The artists' descriptions of periods of gestation suggest the presence of an internal protected space where thoughts, perceptions, feelings, fantasies

and memories related to the work can be stored in abeyance and where a process of linking can take place. Christopher Bollas introduces the concept of the 'receptive unconscious' (Bollas 2011) which can be understood as just such an internal space. To develop his theory of the receptive unconscious, Bollas starts from Freud's writing on repression (Freud 1915b). According to Freud, instincts and memories that would cause intolerable anxiety if allowed to enter consciousness are banished to the repressed unconscious. Encountering his patients' resistance to recalling certain memories, Freud wrote:

The same forces which, in the form of resistance, were now offering opposition to the forgotten material's being made conscious, must formerly have brought about the forgetting and must have pushed the pathogenic experiences in question out of consciousness. I gave the name of "repression" to this pathological process, and I considered that it was proved by the undeniable existence of resistance (Freud 1910a: 19-20).

Bollas states that 'an individual preconsciously represses unwanted feelings, ideas and experiences to the unconscious, where such banished contents immediately constitute a nucleus of interlocking ideas' (Bollas 2011: 61). Each nucleus of repressed material, unable to return to consciousness, collects further ideas and affects which are repressed in their turn. Bollas argues that this pathological process, which increasingly diminishes the person's self-awareness, is not the only route by which material passes into the unconscious. He writes that 'to complement the theory of repression, we need a *theory of reception* which designates some ideas as the received rather than the repressed' and that the aim of this reception is 'to allow unconscious development without the intrusive effect of consciousness' (Bollas 2011: 62). Unlike repression, which banishes certain threatening ideas from consciousness, reception allows material that is potentially life-enhancing to be stored and developed out of consciousness:

... the ego understands that unconscious work is necessary to develop a part of the personality, to elaborate a phantasy, to allow for the evolution of a nascent emotional experience, and ideas or feelings and words are sent to the system unconscious, not to be banished but to be given a mental space

for development which is not possible in consciousness (Bollas 2011: 62).

The receptive unconscious can be seen as the unconscious counterpart of Artist M's mental shed, an internal studio into which potentially useful elements are invited and within which they are stored until some connection between them emerges.

From the concept of the receptive unconscious, Bollas goes on to develop his theory of psychic genera (Bollas 2011). He suggests that when lived experience evokes intense interest, an inner space is created within which a generative psychic structure begins to form. The initial area of interest constitutes a 'psychic gravity' which attracts related elements (feelings, perceptions, ideas) and, unconsciously, new links are formed. He postulates a series of steps in the formation of genera: 1. There is a moment when lived experience evokes intense psychic interest and evoked feelings, ideas and self-states come together and create an unconscious desire for their development. This results in the 'conception' of an inner space devoted to the formation of a 'generative psychic structure'. 2. This results in a 'psychic gravity' that attracts relevant data. 3. The unconscious collection of links to the psychic complex results in a sense of chaos which must be tolerated and facilitated. 4. Gradually a sense of cohesion or 'nucleation' begins to form<sup>9</sup>. 5. The new idea emerges. Bollas writes that

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<sup>9</sup> Bollas does not give a full explanation of the way in which the sense of cohesion or nucleation of stage 4 occurs. Writing 25 years earlier, the educationalist Anton Ehrenzweig, considering the work of artists, formulated the idea of an unconscious 'womb' which seems to have something in common with Bollas 'receptive unconscious'. Within this 'womb' there are 'fruitful dedifferentiations' and the integration of different elements can occur through the 'unlimited mutual interpenetration of oceanic imagery' (Ehrenzweig 1967: 192). Here Ehrenzweig is writing about a process that goes on in parallel with the artist's work with her medium rather than the earlier phase before the irruption of an idea but his concept of dedifferentiation helps to shed light on the way in which cohesion between different elements in the receptive unconscious may occur. Ehrenzweig's 'undifferentiated matrix' is dominated by the primary process and by equivalence rather than discrimination. Dedifferentiation allows elements that seem disparate to the conscious mind to link together through unexpected concordances. Ehrenzweig, A. (1967). The Hidden Order of Art: A study in the psychology of artistic imagination. London, University of California Press.

the moment when an idea emerges may feel revelatory (as the artists' quotations in the next section of 'Illumination' show) and writes 'although it is a special experience it is not an occasion for a new theory of the sacred, but it does describe those seminal visions created by unconscious processes pushed by the life instincts' (ibid.: 71).

Bollas' model depends on the concept that 'relevant data' are actively stored in the receptive unconscious. For the visual artist, the data would relate to the elements that will eventually be integrated in the idea for the new work: elements from the outside world of shared experience, elements from the artist's own internal experience, and visual considerations. I am suggesting here that the collection of these data is, in Bollas' terms, 'pushed by the life instincts'. This assumes that the artist is not working with traumatic material from the repressed unconscious as 'the effect of trauma is to sponsor symbolic repetition, not symbolic elaboration' (ibid.: 59).<sup>10</sup> The receptive unconscious provides a space protected from the artist's own potential judgement, within which links between these three areas can be formed and tested.

Bollas does not give an explanation of why the new idea emerges into consciousness at a particular point except to say that a sense of cohesion precedes this emergence. For the artist, following the theory of the artist's process that I develop in this thesis, I propose that this happens if and when the process of linking different elements<sup>11</sup> in the receptive unconscious results in an image or idea that is a very close fit for the unformed inner experience touched on in the pre-sense. When this occurs, the artist's sense of concordance between idea and pre-sense is sufficiently strong to breach the barrier that keeps this inner work out of the artist's awareness and the idea irrupts suddenly into consciousness.

Bollas's stages of psychic genera can be related to the sub-stages of the artist's process that I discuss in this chapter as 'The Pre-sense', 'Preparation and research', 'Gestation' and 'Illumination'. The stage when

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<sup>10</sup> Works of art may also be created from a position of trauma but it is beyond the scope of this thesis to explore this trajectory in detail. Here I consider only the path of 'symbolic elaboration'.

<sup>11</sup> Following Ehrenzweig, this would be through dedifferentiation.

'lived experience evokes intense psychic interest' relates to the sub-stage of 'The Pre-sense' and can be equated with the moment when something in the outside world resonates with something internal for the artist and gives rise to the desire, or the compulsion, to make a new work. The 'psychic gravity' that attracts relevant data relates to the stage of 'Preparation and research'. Bollas's stage of unconscious linking would correspond to the stage of 'Gestation' and the new idea, which Bollas describes as 'a fundamentally new perspective', corresponds with the stage of 'Illumination' discussed below.

## **Illumination**

In the previous section of this chapter I discussed the period of gestation leading to the advent of an idea or image for a possible new work. As this period can usually only be identified as gestatory in retrospect once an idea has emerged, I necessarily touched on the sub-stage of illumination in my discussion. Here I will consider this in more detail. I will begin by describing my own experience of the emergence of an idea for a new piece in the Morecambe Bay series:

*For a long time, I felt that nothing was happening. My playing<sup>12</sup> around with different approaches did not satisfy me and I was not clear about exactly what I wanted to do. Then, suddenly, the idea came to me that I wanted to bring the sands to life and an image of how I might do that came into my mind. I would take still photographs of the channels of water in the sands, returning to the same spot on consecutive days. I would then create an animation of these photographs. I felt that the animation would enliven the still images and convey the idea of a movement over time. It would, I hoped, also capture something of the sense of instability, danger and the threat of being overwhelmed that the sands evoked in me.*

The visual image that came to mind was both a reflection of my inner experience and a transformed view of the outer world of the sands. It 'looked right' to me. This looking right included a sense that the form embodied not only those aspects of my experience of which I was aware but also something that I could not yet define.

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<sup>12</sup> I discuss play in the context of the artist's process in Chapter 3.

Many artists described the experience of the sudden and unexpected irruption of an idea in dramatic terms: 'It did come in a flash' (Artist W) or it was 'a complete epiphany, a sort of frisson' (Artist U) or 'a leap of inspiration' (Artist J). These descriptions imply a discontinuity between the conscious thoughts that were going on before this moment and the idea itself. The 'inspired' idea has not come through logical reasoning but by a 'leap' to something new. For some, this occurred only rarely and, when it did, it signalled the beginning of a new series of works. For others, each new work was heralded by the spark of an unexpected idea. These experiences were clearly differentiated from the more gradual development of an idea through research or through working with a medium<sup>13</sup>. Artist E describes the way in which such an idea came to him during a meeting with a curator:

*It was this sort of vision of, in a way, leaving myself behind and what that would be. It would be a camera attached to a weather balloon that I would sort of let go of, and it would be an eye looking back at myself, getting smaller, smaller and smaller. Almost like an out of body experience. That's what I sort of wanted it to be like. ... As far as I can tell I came up with that in that moment which really amazes me. It must have been knocking around – I have done other things with balloons – but I'd never actually crystallised it, or it'd never come out of solution, so to speak, until that moment when I absolutely needed to have an idea ... Something about what happened revealed to me something about the nature of those ideas: that they're sort of, yeah, in solution and then at some moment drop out of solution and sort of become crystallised. They feel like there's something I've been chewing on and mulling over but in a very unstructured incoherent way. Artist E*

Artist E's idea came to him as a 'vision', an image of what the final piece might look like. In using the metaphor of crystallisation, he seems to suggest that something was waiting 'in solution' in the unconscious until a particular circumstance (in this case the meeting) acted as a catalyst for it to assume a particular shape and irrupt into consciousness. Pursuing the chemical analogy, the interaction and combination of different elements in the unconscious might be compared to a chemical reaction. Artist E says 'I've done other things with balloons'. He has also done other things with

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<sup>13</sup> Although new ideas (or new directions for an ongoing idea) might also arise during work with the medium.

film. So this idea brings together aspects of earlier works, of elements in the outside world (including balloons, cameras, reports of out of body experiences) and of elements from the artist's own internal experience.

Occasionally, a period of gestation may be followed not by the advent of a new idea but by the discovery of something in the outside world that seems to correspond almost perfectly with something inner. More usually, the artist needs to abstract those elements of the outer something that are essential to her experience. But sometimes it seems that no abstraction is necessary. I describe my own experience of such a moment:

*One evening I went to a stretch of the shore that I often visited. I was intending to take some still photographs in the evening light. On this occasion, as on many others, I was aware that I was searching for something, though I had only a vague idea of what it was I hoped to find. On my solitary trips to the Bay I felt myself to be in a particular state of mind. It was as if I was in a bubble of time, a space of my own, in which I could detach myself from the concerns of everyday life. I was in a state in which I was highly tuned to elements in the landscape that seemed to resonate with something in me. On this particular evening I found something unexpected. A small spring of water emerged from underneath the sands, danced before my eyes, reflecting the setting sun, and then disappeared beneath the ground again, only to re-emerge moments later. I was immediately captivated by the sight as if it was exactly this phenomenon that I had been waiting for without knowing it. All I had to do, it seemed, was to capture it on film. Of course, having made my film, there followed a process of revision and editing to produce the final work. But, in this case, whatever doubts I had about the details of the final presentation, I knew that the film reflected something of the sense of danger and instability and the threat of being overwhelmed that I was trying to reach. (See Figure 1: The Quick and the Dead and accompanying DVD)*

On this occasion I already knew that I wanted to make a work related to Morecambe Bay. I was looking for something, although I did not know what that something was. I had already been through a period of preparation and experimentation and a period of waiting (gestation). When I discovered the spring I seemed to *recognise* it as if I had been searching for just this phenomenon. By using the word 'recognition', I do not intend to imply a conscious cognitive process. Rather, the experience was an emotional one of sensing a 'fit' between the spring and something internal. Also, the spring

not only 'felt right' but it also 'looked right': in that moment of seeing the spring I could visualise the potential work within the trajectory of my own artistic practice. Although I had only a still camera with me, I knew that a still image would not do. The movement was essential. I must take the risk of leaving the spring in order to fetch a video camera, knowing that the particular effect that had captivated me might not last until I returned. My sense of what 'looked right' was coloured by my knowledge of the history of gallery film and of contemporary video artworks. It was also influenced by art works in many media that related to circles (including Richard Long (Long 1987; 1988; 1991), Wassily Kandinsky (Kandinsky 1913) and Damien Hirst (Hirst 1995; 2003)). I had myself made previous photographic and installation works related to stone circles (*The Circles they Desire* and *Witches Dance*). In particular, this new work was closely related to an earlier piece, *Full Circle*, a looped film in which water drains and refills from a plughole. The new work, *The Quick and the Dead*, re-engaged with the concerns of the previous film, particularly the terror of annihilation, figured in the earlier work by water spiralling and disappearing down a drain. *The Quick and the Dead* renders the form of the feared annihilation more specific by involving a different aspect of the outside world, the landscape of Morecambe Bay. Here water is sucked into the body of the sands.





**Figure 1: *The Quick and the Dead*. Video still.**

It is likely that my memory of *Full Circle*, though out of my awareness at the time, contributed to my sense of recognition when I came across the spring. This experience is a rare occurrence for me and in making other works the process is much more tortuous. When no ready-made form is to be found, I must wait for an idea about how I might construct one for myself.

Sometimes gestation leading to a new idea can occur during sleep. Artist G described a dream that presented a clear image of an animated film that she then went on to create. Although her experience of a mental picture of a complete work has not been repeated, this artist still finds that ideas come to her as she wakes:

*When I wake up in the morning the first thoughts I have are probably the most important. That's a treasured time for me, that waking time and the best ideas for me come just when I'm first awake.... these ideas for work just burst out first thing in the morning and that's rather wonderful. Artist G*

Artist G's sense of wonder at a new idea was also described by other artists who spoke of feelings of 'excitement' or elation, a heightened state of mind:

*It's almost like an image flash of something that I want to see. Now I don't know what it is but then I go about trying to find it ... it's a fairly abstract vision and ... in the fantasy of it I don't have to enter into the difficulties of production.... [it's] unframed by anything that would undo its wonder, its miraculous quality.*  
Artist K

In that moment, for this artist, the new idea seems perfect, even miraculous. The artist senses something 'marvellous' and its 'wonder' is linked with the fact that it is 'unframed'. It is not fully defined and this lack of clear delineation allows the artist to sense the idea or image as unlimited, as more than just itself. This is the case even though the artist knows from experience that this heightened state of mind will not last for long.

When I began my research, this was one of the elements of my own experience that I hoped to clarify. In a similar way to Artist K, I felt entranced by new ideas:

*It is exciting. I feel elated. The idea feels brilliant, as if it is perfect. Whilst these ideas are still in my mind and have not yet been realised in the outside world they remain full of potential. They are not yet clearly defined. If they do not feel quite right they can be instantly changed in my imagination. In this state of mind, internal judgemental voices are silenced.*

Through my interviews I found that many other artists experience similar feelings when a new idea arises. The image of a potential new work often seems to be both new and familiar. One interviewee says: 'It's a little flash of inspiration but maybe not inspiration but recognition' (Artist A). This corresponds with my own experience in that, when an idea arises, I do feel that it is somehow familiar even though it is new to me.

Bollas argues that one of the functions of the receptive unconscious is to provide a space in which the developing ideas are safe from the judgements of consciousness. I extend this to suggest that, at the moment of the emergence of the idea and for a short time thereafter, these

judgements remain suspended. But I think that there is more to this state of mind than suspension of criticism. I argue that the sense of recognition and the elation stem from the initial belief that there is a perfect 'fit' between the idea and the inner experience. At the moment of its emergence, the idea is still 'an abstract vision', closely connected to the pre-sense and to all the elements that were linked to it in the receptive unconscious. It seems to offer a perfect synthesis of all these elements. Only later will discrepancies emerge. I return to this in Chapter 2.

The artists' descriptions suggest that certain conditions are necessary to enable the new idea to emerge. Many artists made the point that unexpected ideas tend not to arise when they are actively working on a problem. Rather, the flash of insight occurs when they are in a relaxed state or their mind is occupied with something else:

*The pieces that I'm most proud of, most happy with, generally come into my imagination fully formed in like eureka moments when I'm in the bath or in bed or having a walk - not normally when I'm making art. But obviously they don't come from nowhere. They come when I've been thinking really hard about something for a long time or I've been reading something new.... It will be in a moment of calm and I'm not concentrating on any of that I guess everything congeals into an idea. Artist L*

It seems that a state of relaxation, following an extended period of preparation, provides the conditions in which a new idea can emerge (although it is not clear whether the idea has been formed earlier but can only emerge in these conditions or whether the crucial links between elements in the receptive unconscious are made at the moment the idea makes itself known.)

But this is not the only state of mind in which ideas might arise. When Artist E's idea arose in the context of a meeting with a curator, quoted earlier, he can hardly be said to have been relaxed. He describes the context in detail:

*I went to have a meeting with a curator, and I showed him some past work, and everybody liked it, and then there was obviously a moment for me to say what I would like to maybe develop, and I had one thing up my sleeve. The curator really liked the piece of finished work I showed him, then I said this idea and it*

*wasn't right for him ... it was like a bit of a break for me then, having this meeting with this curator. So, it was kind of a lot of pressure. I was like "... I haven't got anything to show, or to tempt him with. I need to come up with something, but right now." That's what I sort of felt in that moment, and, sort of – in that moment – came up with this idea which then became this sort of quite big commission for me. [...] Half of the time my best ideas happen when I'm asleep, and that's not exactly true, but I think it is when they kind of catch me off guard in a sort of a non structured state... Or in extremes, like in those situations. Probably that situation with the curator is more unusual, but still – even in that situation – it was like "where the xxxx did that come from?" But I needed it, and it was obviously somewhere waiting to come out of solution. Artist E*

So, for Artist E, there seem to be two possible states of mind in which ideas might emerge. One is when he is in a 'non-structured state' that he links with sleep. This suggests that it might be a semi-conscious state, such as that experienced on first waking. The other situation is 'in extremes' when under pressure. At first sight it may seem that there is little in common between these two situations. But a link may be discerned if we see them both as times when the artist's attention is withdrawn from a conscious consideration of a problem. In the situation of the meeting with the curator, Artist E's attention had been focused on the idea he had prepared. When this was rejected he suddenly had nothing to focus on at a conscious level. It was at this point that the new idea sprang to mind.

Returning to Bollas, and his description of the receptive unconscious and psychic genera, he writes that the withdrawal of conscious focusing allows a lifting of 'the protective barrier provided by the anti-cathexes<sup>14</sup> of pre-consciousness' (Bollas 2011: 62). Then, provided that the unconscious work of psychic genera has progressed to the point where an idea has been formed, this idea or image is able to emerge from the receptive unconscious into consciousness. Here Bollas is referring to Freud's topographical model of the mind in which Freud differentiates between the unconscious system, the conscious system and the pre-conscious. The contents of the preconscious are out of awareness but are, in principle,

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<sup>14</sup> Freud uses this term for the defensive activity of the ego in impeding the access to consciousness of unconscious desires and wishes (Freud, 1916-1917: 438).

accessible to consciousness. In Bollas' terms, the 'anticathexes of pre-consciousness' act as a barrier to prevent unconscious contents from reaching consciousness. He suggests that 'conscious focusing' has the effect of keeping this barrier in place whereas the relaxation of this focus allows a more fluid movement between unconscious, preconscious and conscious. However, not all unconscious contents are capable of reaching consciousness. Bollas is specifically referring to the contents of the receptive unconscious and, staying with the topographical model, I understand him to mean that the formation of an idea through the work of psychic genera leads to its availability to the pre-conscious and hence to consciousness. Applying this to the theory I develop in this chapter, when the work of linking taking place out of the artist's awareness results in an idea or image that is very close to the unformed inner experience touched on in the 'pre-sense', the artist's recognition of this fit is strong enough to bring it to consciousness at a moment when the withdrawal of conscious focusing has attenuated the anti-cathexes of pre-consciousness.

## **Other Beginnings**

In the previous pages I have traced the trajectory towards an idea for a new work. But not all artists begin a new work with a single idea. For some, there is a more gradual development through an experimental engagement with their medium. The initial exploratory engagement with the medium, described earlier in this chapter, might flow without any clear division of stages, into the development of the artwork I describe in the next chapter. As one painter says:

*I feel that oh I really am in the mood to use a big fat paintbrush, or I've got a craving to make a very fine line, or I feel like oh, I hate paintbrushes and I just want to put on paint with a cloth... you then start with that urge rather than the motif.* Artist N.

For this artist, the element of the outside world to which she is attracted is, initially at least, the medium itself. She starts from there, choosing and using her materials according to her inner 'urge' and allowing the results of her actions to clarify where that urge may take her.

The sculptor Phyllida Barlow also wants the behaviour of her materials to disclose what it is she wishes to explore:

I'm interested in the act itself – whether it's pulled, stretched ... I want the actions to lead me to the image. I don't have a subject. I hope the subject will reveal itself through the process ... I am interested in whether the process has engaged me – whether I'm surprised or alarmed – that is a signal that it has some sort of life about it (Barlow 2012).

Here it seems that the trajectory towards an idea that I have discussed in this chapter is turned on its head. Barlow's ideas come later, arising out of her work with her medium. Her emotional response to her process is her guide as to whether she is on a promising track or not.

Whereas Barlow says she wants the 'subject' to emerge as she works with the medium, Artist Q says that he has a 'subject' when he begins a painting but his 'ideas' cannot be considered as separate from the work with the medium. These 'ideas' or visualisations may emerge both from research and through the act of painting itself:

*I think that really the practice of painting, the idea isn't something separate, it's integral to my activity as a painter... it's how the idea is given form that makes an idea interesting ... I would liken my process to an archaeologist digging for something. When I'm making a painting it's a bit like that. I'm excavating a subject and so certain things may be in that that I'm not really consciously aware of. And that happens frequently in a work, and that's usually the thing that's most interesting, is the thing that's dredged up from... the subconscious because then it's usually quite profound, and it's not literal...ideas are sort of constantly there and I may, you know, stop painting and come in here and look something up in a book that's occurred to me, or read something or go to a particular reference and I think this bringing together, this connecting of things, is what's very very exciting for me in art, where you get these kind of subliminal connections.<sup>15</sup> Artist Q.*

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<sup>15</sup> Barlow and Artist Q use the word 'subject' in different ways in the above quotations. For Artist Q, his 'subject' corresponds to the finding of an area of interest whereas Barlow uses the term to denote something more like an 'idea' (as I define it).

Here, Artist Q's use of the word 'idea' does not just denote a first image of a possible work, as I have used it in this chapter. He is also referring to ongoing ideas for shifts in direction or modifications of the original idea arising out of the work itself. It seems also that, in his process, research and experimentation, that I have designated as a stage leading to 'illumination', is intimately tied in with the making process itself (that I explore in the next chapter). This demonstrates the fact that the artist's process is not linear and that the phases I outline in this thesis may overlap or be repeated at any stage.

Artist Q acknowledges the unconscious work that results in exciting connections. This is the realm of the receptive unconscious where the bringing together of disparate elements can take place. The analogy that Artist Q draws between his process and that of the archaeologist brings to mind the fact that Freud used the same metaphor to describe the work of psychoanalysis (Freud 1937: 259-260). Artist Q's 'dredging up from the subconscious' is a phrase that could equally be used of the psychoanalytic process. The use of the word 'dredging' adds a further dimension to the archaeological digging, suggesting that what is being brought to the surface has been submerged in the waters of the unconscious. Both the artist and the analysand bring unconscious contents into relation with consciousness and the world of shared reality. However, the artist must go a step further: the bringing together of inner and outer must be achieved within a form that satisfies her as an art object.

## **Chapter Conclusions**

In this chapter I have described the way in which, for most of the interviewees, the artist first becomes aware of the beginnings of a new artwork when she responds strongly to some element of the outside world and this experience feels personally significant to her. There is a resonance between this outer 'something' and an inchoate aspect of the artist's inner world and this encounter generates the desire to create an artwork to provide a form for the experience. I have called this the 'pre-sense'. Winnicott's theory of transitional phenomena offers a theoretical framework for understanding the coming together of inner and outer worlds in the initial encounter and the way in which the artist imbues the outer something with

her own inner experience but I have turned to Milner to explore the artist's felt experience of the pre-sense. I argue that the artist's sense of personal boundaries is temporarily affected so that there is a sense of being at one with, or encompassing, the element of the outside world to which she has responded. This can be thought of the artist taking something from the outside world into herself.

Some artists move towards a more specific idea or image of the potential artwork before starting work with their medium. This idea or image may only emerge after a process of research followed by a gestatory period in which the abstracted elements of the initial encounter come together with other elements of the artist's inner world (such as memories and fantasies). This occurs out of the artist's awareness and I have conceptualised this process by reference to Bollas' theory of psychic genera. When an idea or image does emerge, the artist may experience a sense of elation and a temporary belief that the new idea is 'perfect'. This can be thought of as resulting from the artist's feeling that the idea perfectly reflects her inner state. In the artist's subsequent engagement with her medium, when the idea is gradually actualised and defined, the artist moves to a wider view and begins to see the idea in context. I address this in the next chapter.



## Chapter 2: Oneness and Separateness

*The material has vitality - it resists and makes demands.* Barbara Hepworth  
(1946)

### Introduction

The next three chapters are concerned with the central phase of the artist's process in which she engages with her chosen medium to create an external form that will embody her inner experience. Internal imaginative work continues but now it is linked to physical work in the outside world. In this chapter, I examine what happens when the artwork begins to take on a sensory form. In particular, I am concerned with the states of mind that artists experience and how these can be understood in terms of the relationship between artist, medium and developing artwork.

I make the assumption, based on the interviews, that the artist usually begins either with an 'idea' (an image of the potential final form of the work) or with the sense that something external<sup>16</sup> is resonating in a significant way with something inner. The stage of the artist's process in which she works with her medium involves a gradual shaping of the medium to the form of her significant experience to create an embodiment of it. I will start by considering the situation of the artist who begins work with her medium with an idea (not necessarily clearly defined) in mind.

### Disillusionment and the Idea

In Chapter 1, I described the way in which an idea for a new work might arise and the sense of elation that often accompanies it. For a brief period of time the artist has the illusion that the new idea is perfect. However, many of the interviewees described a sense of disappointment when they begin to work with their medium. At this point the idea often seems to lose its aura of perfection. Artist F, a photographer, says: 'I have the film processed and I just look at them and they are often quite disappointing...it's generally always disappointing. I've learned not to

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<sup>16</sup> This 'something external' is sometimes the medium itself.

worry'. Through long experience, this artist has learned that disappointment is an *inevitable* part of her process. Here I explore this experience of disappointment or disillusionment and the reasons why it might occur.

One artist describes how he deals with the 'gap' between his idea and its actualisation:

*Almost every work has that gap and some of them never make it out of that gap. But the successful ones there's always a process of disappointment and then scrabbling back up and making it work, connecting with the initial excitement in fulfilling what you thought you had nailed down which actually turned out not to be. Artist E*

Artist E speaks of 'nailing down' his idea, a metaphor that alludes to the physicality of this new phase of working with the medium. The idea is elusive, resisting clear definition, so that no physical manifestation can completely capture it. There is always something lacking, a sense of loss and disenchantment. But Artist E might be able to retrieve something valuable. His description of 'scrabbling back up' suggests a process involving effort and engagement with setbacks as he tries to find a form for his experience that is robust enough to exist as an object in the outside world whilst also regaining some of the 'initial excitement' of the idea.

For established artists such as the interviewees, this experience of disenchantment is no surprise. They have learned to expect and accept it but they may nevertheless regret the passing of the euphoria of the initial idea. One interviewee delays beginning work with her medium so that she can continue to enjoy her elated state of mind for a little longer:

*I'm putting it off, I'm putting it off in case it's terrible. In case it's weak. There's that moment ... before one has the terrible realisation of its... inherent badness... or before one has to open oneself up to failure. Artist K*

I do not think that this potential 'failure' or weakness is only the possible negative judgement of an audience. Rather, it seems to be linked to the artist's own disappointment once she begins to work with her medium. I think that the 'inherent badness' that this artist refers to is due to the

inevitable gap between the inner idea, still replete with all its unconscious associations, and its more limited external form. As long as the idea has not been given an external form it is almost infinitely plastic as if anything is possible. Once the artist starts work with her medium choices have to be made and each choice excludes others.

In the previous chapter I proposed that the artist's elation when a new idea emerges is due to a sense of perfect concordance between the idea and the inner experience that gave rise to it. Initially, the idea is still closely connected to the pre-sense and to all the elements that were linked to it in the receptive unconscious. The artist experiences a sense of 'at-oneness' with her own idea. But as soon as she starts to engage with the medium, the idea begins to be framed, defined and 'nailed down' and this process inevitably excludes the more elusive aspects of the unbounded idea. At this point, the artist is confronted by the limits intrinsic to her chosen medium. Paint behaves in a certain way, the camera produces certain types of images, certain manipulations are possible using a computer programme etc. It is no longer the case that anything is possible.

However, these artists have learned from experience that if they let go of the ideal image/idea then they can begin to make use of the medium, interacting with it and responding to its properties. Artist F says she has 'learned not to worry' because she knows that she will move on to work with her medium to develop the work in ways she had not foreseen. As she says: 'I know what I'm looking for but I know it's going to shift'. The interviewees have come to recognise and respect the particular qualities of their various media and welcome its otherness as providing them with the means to take their work forward. The way is opened for an interaction between artist and medium in which each can be pliable in response to the other.

## **Artist and Medium**

For the artist who has a preliminary idea, the next stage is to use her medium to find a material form for this idea or image. One interviewee says:

*The process of making it is mostly a matter of trying to translate the visual thing I have in my mind – the experiential feeling about it I have in my mind, into the finished object. If there's any translation at all involved it is usually some mechanical thing that didn't work quite how I expected. Artist J*

The 'visual thing' that Artist J has in mind is what I am calling his idea and 'the experiential feeling' is his sense of the interaction between inner and outer worlds that gave rise to his 'pre-sense'. The 'experiential feeling' is haptic or visceral and is not clearly defined whilst the 'visual thing' is a more specific image of the possible form of the new work. This particular artist sees the development of his idea, before he starts work with his medium, as the most important part of his process. He is unusual among the interviewees in saying that 'In many ways making work is usually quite mechanical' and claiming that the final work does not usually differ greatly from the idea. However, he does say that the medium may do something unexpected that could sometimes call for an adaptation of the idea.

Most of the interviewees lay much greater emphasis than Artist J on the making stage of their process and on the behaviour of their medium. The medium responds to the artist's actions in particular ways according to its own properties and frequently the developing artwork does not go according to plan. As one painter describes her process:

*You've got an idea and you want to do it and you think you've got the best way of doing it but of course when you've done it it's actually not what I wanted. So it can be "That's not what I wanted but it's actually quite interesting" or "How do I get it how I wanted?" but you have to do it a different way, not the way you thought it would be at all. Artist W*

This artist describes two different possible reactions to the discovery that the medium is not giving her the effect she intended. The medium does something else, something unexpected and the artist may reject this unexpected effect and try to find an alternative use of her medium to pursue her original direction. On the other hand, this unexpected effect may turn out to be a revelation, resulting in the discovery of an exciting new way of realising her project. If there was an initial idea, this might be modified (without losing the connection with the guiding pre-sense).

Dana Schutz, a painter, describes the way in which her paint resists her intentions:

You know what you want it to be like and then it goes off the rails ... the paint will do its own thing. It is a physical dance, you respond to it and if it is going well you forget that you are painting, it just feels like you are responding to it (Schutz 2013: 59).

Schutz has an idea or mental image of what she wants but the paint itself takes her in an unforeseen direction. A complex interaction is set in motion in which artist and medium respond to each other in a smooth and spontaneous way. One might question whether this dance-like movement is peculiar to the interaction of painter and paint or whether it applies to the use of other media. One of the artists I interviewed describes his interaction with his camera:

*There's something about the positive feedback you get from putting a pencil on a page. For me that relates to how I want to use the camera. And you know, I suppose there is a kind of relationship between the sort of touching with the eye or touching with the lens .... there's a nervousness ... will you be able to find a way of holding that within the limitations of what the camera can do? But then pushing what the camera can do.*  
Artist H

As in the case of Schultz, there is a mutually responsive interaction between artist and medium. In Artist H's case, it is as if artist and camera are working together, testing each other's capacities and limitations. Artist H's comparison between the physical contact of pencil and paper and the visual contact of looking (either directly or through the camera lens) seems to speak to the sense of a close connection between the artist and his subject. His nervousness is related to the question of whether he will be able to push both his own actions and the capabilities of his camera to accommodate what he wants to express about this connection.

These artists describe the way in which they use their chosen medium to externalise their inner experience. They are dependent on the medium (already in the external world) to help them to do this. But their descriptions show that the medium is not merely a passive tool. Rather, its responses can radically affect the course of the work. Artist H above needs his camera

both to have its own characteristics that will direct his work and to be flexible enough to bend to his purpose. In a sense, the artist enters into a collaboration or partnership with the medium to achieve her ends.

I want to explore the nature of the collaboration between artist and medium by bringing in the work of two psychoanalysts who have drawn on the work of D.W. Winnicott. Ken Wright refers to D.W. Winnicott's concept of mirroring (Winnicott 1986a), together with Daniel Stern's work on maternal attunement (Stern 1985), to draw a parallel between the relationship between mother and child and the artist's relationship with her medium (Wright 2009). Winnicott writes that, in the course of healthy development, the mother mirrors the infant in the sense that her loving gaze allows the baby to see himself reflected in his mother's face: 'The mother is looking at the baby and *what she looks like is related to what she sees there*' (ibid.: 131). This mirroring can be seen as an aspect of the adaptive mother in that the mother's face reflects her response to the infant's internal state just as the 'breast' corresponds with the infant's need and anticipation. Daniel Stern's work on attunement extends the concept of mirroring to include the ways in which a mother responds to her baby's feeling states not only through her facial expression but also by her movements and her voice (Stern 1985). If the mother is attuned to her baby she is engaged in a constantly changing interaction in which her bodily gestures, facial expressions and utterances all reflect the baby's state of mind. This reflection provides the infant with forms for his unformed experiences and the baby begins to constitute a sense of himself from the forms that he receives from his mother or caregiver: 'in the mother-infant relationship, maternal forms reveal the essence of the infant's experience to him, and provide him with a means of experiencing himself' (Wright 2014). Wright argues that these attuned forms 'constitute the containers of vital experience on which the integrity of the self depends' and he contends that the developing artwork can fulfil a similar function for the artist. According to Wright, the artist is engaged in a struggle with her medium in which she attempts to mould it into a form that is attuned to her inner experience, a form which can act as a mirror for her. However, unlike the baby, whose good-enough mother spontaneously provides mirroring and adaptive forms, the artist must herself act on the medium to make it perform these functions

'as though the creative person, in the act of creation, performs for himself the activities which the adaptive mother once provided' (Wright 2009a: 62).

The work of psychoanalyst René Roussillon is also informed by Winnicott's work on the early relationship between mother and infant and the need for the mother to be responsive to her baby's signals. Roussillon, a French psychoanalyst who integrates Freudian metapsychology<sup>17</sup> and the French psychoanalytic tradition with Winnicott's thinking, takes up Marion Milner's concept of the 'pliable medium'<sup>18</sup> when discussing the infant's need for his mother to be flexible enough to respond to his needs. Considering the early mother-child relationship and referring to Milner's work, he writes:

Milner emphasises the fundamental part played... by an encounter with an object that is a sufficiently pliable medium: in other words, with an object that can let itself be transformed in accordance with the requirements of the infant's creative process. It is thanks to that good enough malleability that the mothering environment can fulfil its role as 'mirror': by making itself malleable so as to respond to the internal states and impulses, it can make adjustments to the reflection that give substance to that narcissistic function (Roussillon 2015a: 100).

Roussillon, like Wright, compares the malleability of the mother to that of the artist's medium which must be responsive enough to the artist's actions. But Roussillon returns to this subject, recognising that both infant and artist encounter a medium that is not only pliable but also resistant:

The subject's effort to 'become subject' will thus be an effort 'at all costs' to render this rigid environment 'malleable'. This is what, for example, the work of sculpture makes clear: starting with a hard material and transforming it until it may accommodate a representation...In any creative work we must be able to identify this process at work; perhaps it even signals that which characterizes creative work, which always, when substantial, meets with a form of resistance of the material to be transformed (Roussillon 2015b: 593).

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<sup>17</sup> According to Laplanche and Pontalis, metapsychology is the term 'invented by Freud to refer to the psychology of which he was the founder when it is viewed in its most theoretical dimension' (Laplanche 1988: 249).

<sup>18</sup> The term 'pliable medium' was first introduced by Marion Milner in her discussion of her analytic work with a young boy. She describes the way in which the boy uses both toys and herself as 'an intervening pliable substance' that 'can be made to take the shape of one's phantasies' (Milner 1987: 99).

Roussillon cites sculpture in which the medium itself is made malleable and transformed into the developing artwork. This is not the case for all artforms. For instance, Artist H's camera (discussed above) is not a material in this way but nevertheless it acts as a medium that both resists his actions (through the limitations of its capabilities) and can be made malleable (by responding to his actions and, perhaps, going beyond its normal possibilities). The correspondence between the malleability of the mothering environment and that of the artist's medium proposed by Roussillon is clear but the maternal equivalent of the medium's 'resistance' seems to me to be more complex. The artist encounters a resistant medium that has to be made malleable by her own efforts. There is a movement from resistance to malleability. For the baby, the 'resistance' of the mother-medium lies in the fact that the mother is a person in her own right with her own needs that may not co-incide with those of her baby. At first the infant (not yet a 'subject' in his own right) treats her as a part of himself and, if all goes well, she adapts more or less fully to this demand<sup>19</sup>. Later she begins to assert her own needs again. Winnicott describes the process by which the baby is gradually disillusioned as the mother does not attune herself perfectly to his needs. The baby learns that he does not have complete control over his mother and, if the disillusionment is manageable, he begins to make his own adaptations to what is available (I am assuming that the mother is able to respond appropriately to the infant's needs so that the infant is not forced into passive compliance.) This is a reversal of the trajectory of the artist and medium, as described by Roussillon above, in which the initially resistant medium becomes malleable in response to the artist's actions. My own view is that the medium is *both* resistant *and* pliable from the beginning of the artist's work with it. Sometimes it seems to conform to the artist's wishes but at other times, perhaps unexpectedly, it throws up problems that the artist must resolve in order to move on.

Roussillon and Wright's contemporary psychoanalytic writing about the pliability and resistance of the artist's medium brings to mind the earlier work of art critic Adrian Stokes. Stokes speculated on the ways in which the artist handles her materials and how this engagement is made manifest in

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<sup>19</sup> Winnicott called this state 'primary maternal preoccupation' (Winnicott 1975).



the final work of art. In one of his early works *The Stones of Rimini* (Stokes 1934), Stokes writes about his personal responses to Italian sculpture, differentiating between two different ways in which artists work with their materials. He calls these 'carving' and 'modelling'. For Stokes, these two modes of working are not merely techniques, they also reflect the artist's attitudes towards and responses to the medium. Stokes sees 'modellers' as using their medium in a 'plastic' way so as to mould it into a preconceived form. The artist imposes her own vision onto her material. According to this formulation, the medium is almost infinitely malleable in its response to the artist's actions. 'Carvers', on the other hand, have regard for the intrinsic properties of the medium and enter into a dialogue with it, struggling with its resistant qualities and taking away from it to reveal the form within:

Whatever its plastic value, a figure carved in stone is fine carving when one feels that not the figure, but the stone through the medium of the figure, has come to life. Plastic conception, on the other hand, is uppermost when the material with which, or from which, a figure has been made appears no more than as so much suitable stuff for this creation (Stokes, 1934: 230).

Carving establishes the artist's medium as 'out there', as possessing its own characteristics separate from those of the artist. The final artwork arises out of the action of the artist *and* the behavior of the medium in response.

Stokes went on to apply these categories of 'carving' and 'modelling' to other art forms, including painting, suggesting that the carving painter uses colour to reveal the otherness and intrinsic vitality of his subject: 'The true colourist, then, is recreating by his use of colour the 'other', 'out-there' vitality he attributes to the surface of the canvas, just as a carver reveals the potential life of the stone' (Stokes, 1937:17).

It is clear from his early writings that Stokes valued carvers more highly than modellers and in his earlier works he attempted to allocate particular artists to one or other group. However, later he revised his ideas and came to see both modes as necessary for any individual artist when a new artwork is created. All artists must, to some extent, attempt to impose their own ideas onto the medium and all also respond to the particular behaviour of the medium as it reacts to their actions.

Following his analysis with Melanie Klein, Stokes theorised his concepts of 'carving' and 'modelling' in psychoanalytic terms, linking 'carving' with the 'depressive position' and suggesting that the carver's respect for the separate identity of the medium corresponds to the relationship with a separate whole object described by Klein. On the other hand, his psychoanalytic formulation of modelling (which owed more to Milner than to Klein) was of a state of oneness between artist and medium.

Stokes' Kleinian theoretical orientation differs from that of Wright and Roussillon but it is possible to consider his formulation in relation to their ideas. Carving and modelling might be understood as paralleling two aspects of the infant's relationship to the mother. In 'modelling' mode, the artist encounters a malleable 'mother' medium that conforms to her needs whereas in 'carving' mode, the 'mother' medium is resistant and has to be coerced into a mirroring response.

Although Stokes approaches the topic of the artist's interaction with the medium from his vantage point as an art critic, his later Kleinian formulation emphasises the therapeutic value of the artwork both for artist and viewer. From a different theoretical viewpoint, Wright and Roussillon also highlight this aspect of art-making. In Wright's view, the artist attempts, through art-making, to make good a deficit in the original maternal provision. That is, insofar as the mother or primary care-giver was unable to mirror or be attuned to the infant's gestures, the artist has the opportunity to provide herself with a mirroring or attuning form in the shape of the artwork. In comparing the relationship between artist and medium to that of mother and infant, both Wright and Roussillon see the artist's creative process as an act of self-realisation in which the artist moulds or coerces the medium into becoming a form for her experience. I see this as a central aspect of art-making and psychoanalysis is particularly well placed to explore this. But I think that an exclusive emphasis on the therapeutic value of the artist's creative process runs the risk of reductionism. In my view, the artwork does not *only* provide an external form for an internal experience but *also* presents some aspect of the outside world in a new light. The artist moulds or struggles with her medium to create a form that will fulfill *both* these roles.

## Medium and Developing Artwork

Roussillon, Wright and Stokes all refer to the artist's medium as if it is the developing artwork itself but here I want to make a distinction between the two terms. I define the artist's medium as any materials and tools she *uses* in order to make the artwork (including but not limited to paint, pencil, stone, wood, clay, found objects, photographs, cameras, film, digital programmes, performers, sound). The artist's interaction with her medium is the means through which the developing artwork comes into being as a manifestation in the outside world.

In an interview with Donald Kuspit in 1988, Louise Bourgeois says:

The material itself, stone or wood, does not interest me as such. It is a means; it is not the end. You do not make sculpture because you like the wood. That is absurd. You make sculpture because the wood allows you to express something that another material does not allow you to do (Bourgeois 2012: 39).

Bourgeois makes a clear distinction here between the material as the means to an end and the artwork that 'expresses something'. She claims that the material itself does not interest her but I take this to mean that it only interests her in relation to the potential new artwork. She has chosen this particular material for a reason; she senses its possibilities and has already invested it with something of herself. However, the point of making her sculpture is not to work with stone or wood but to express herself in the final artwork.

This raises the question of whether and how we can distinguish between the medium and the developing work. The photographer's camera or a computer programme is clearly a means to make the work rather than a part of it but the distinction is less clear in the case of materials such as paint, wood or stone, which are themselves transformed into the artwork itself. Some of the interviews, particularly those with painters, indicate that, as the artist works with her materials and tools, there is a point in the process at which a significant change takes place:

*When you just have the blob of paint on the palette it's a big kind of full-of-potential nothing, and then you jab at it ... or caress it or whatever you do with your paintbrush and all of a sudden meaning creeps in ... so you're going from like a nothing to a something in the painting. I mean if you just look at a blob of paint it's so gorgeous but it just is its thing and it's not meaningful in itself, but it's still outside you as just something.*  
Artist N

This artist describes the change in terms of the relationship between what is inside and outside herself. Initially the paint is outside, separate from her, 'its thing'. Although it is seductively 'gorgeous' it does not yet have 'meaning'. It does not yet symbolise anything. Yet it seems, from her evocative description of her interaction with it, that she is already deeply emotionally engaged. She may 'jab' at it or 'caress' it as if it engenders feelings of aggression or love. Through her engagement she brings her own inner experience to bear on the paint and something happens. She implies that, at this point, the paint is no longer 'outside' her. I think that this can be understood as a shift from the experience of the paint as a material medium to the paint as an element in a developing artwork. At the very moment when Artist N feels that the paint is no longer 'outside' her, the developing artwork begins to come into being as an external embodiment of her internal vision.

The philosopher Susanne Langer writes of the difference between 'elements' of a painting and the materials, or medium, used:

Elements are factors in the semblance; and, as such, they are virtual themselves, direct components of the total form. In this way they differ from materials, which are actual. Paints are materials, and so are the colours they have in the tube or on the palette; but the colours in a picture are elements, determined by their environment. They are warm or cold, they advance or recede, enhance or soften or dominate other colours; they create tensions and distribute weight in a picture. Colours in a paintbox don't do such things. They are materials and lie side by side in their undialectical materialism (Langer 1953: 84-85).

Langer uses the terms 'semblance' and 'image'<sup>20</sup> to refer to the artwork as a 'virtual object' set apart from practical usage. The artist's use of her medium or materials is a process of symbolisation that gives rise to a developing artwork, or, in Langer's terms, a 'semblance'. Langer sees the creation of an artwork as a process of infusing it with 'the dynamism of subjective experience' and she calls this 'vital import'. It is this vital import that gives the sense that the artwork itself is a living force. Langer's ideas about the artist's activity chime closely with my own view that, as the artist works with her medium, she moulds it to reflect her inner experience and, in doing so, imbues it with her own inner life.

From the artist's point of view, there is a point when the developing artwork (no longer merely materials) seems to acquire a life of its own or, in Langer's terms, vital import:

*Although you know what you're doing, what the result is is something different... After a while you've no idea of how you got to where you've got to. What you've got is something that's got its own life, its own energy, and therefore you automatically are in a dialogue with it because it's different. It's not the sum of its parts. It's something rather strange in some cases. You think "This is an absolutely awful thing that I've made and that wasn't what my intention was or what my aspiration was... But it's kind of interesting... That dialogue may very quickly turn into divorce but it's still a dialogue. It's not a romantic notion of a dialogue. It can be a very focused and a very kind of cold dialogue but you are getting something back because you never can predict what's going to happen. So each action is taking a risk, is taking a speculative step. If I knew what it was going to be I wouldn't start it. Because I could just imagine it. So I want to make something where I don't know what it's going to be. Artist A*

Artist A stresses his experience of his artwork as having its own life that is different from him and that therefore opens up a space for dialogue. But, at the same time, he recognises that the artwork tells him something about *himself*, something that he had not previously known. That is, he infuses the work with his own subjective experience so that it takes on something of his own inner life but the result is a living entity that has its own different character. It reflects his experience but it also transforms it.

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<sup>20</sup> This usage of the word 'image' differs from my own. In this thesis I use it for the visual form of an 'idea'.

In order to explore this further I want to bring in René Roussillon's concept of the 'maternal double' in which he extends Winnicott's theory of maternal mirroring:

I would nevertheless argue that we have to go beyond Winnicott's hypothesis and see this first 'mirror' as being not only the mother's face but also her entire body and her behaviour...This mirror, personified by the mother's body when she is sufficiently adapted to her infant's needs, sufficiently malleable and sensitive towards her infant's internal states, has the effect of producing a narcissistic double (Roussillon 1991). A 'double' is something that is both 'the same' — similar to the self — and also 'an other'. No double can ever be simply the same because that situation would create confusion, rather than a reflection of the self. The mother must therefore show that she is different, an other, through the way in which she reflects to her infant her sharing of emotions. The emotions and internal states that she reflects are similar, but not identical, to those of her infant. They have the same basic components, the same matrix, but not the same form (Roussillon 2015: 830).

According to Roussillon, the baby is in dialogue with his 'narcissistic double'. That is, his dialogue is with aspects of his own experience, reflected in the mother's face, body and behaviour but now presented back to him in a form that also reflects something of the mother's different identity. In an analogous way, the developing artwork can be seen as a 'narcissistic double' for the artist in that it gradually comes to embody the artist's inner experience but this experience is now transformed according to the properties and behavior of the medium. I add that, if the subject matter of the work is something other than the medium itself, the artist's 'narcissistic double' will also bear the imprint of this subject matter.

## **The Artist's State of Mind**

The engagement between artist and medium often calls for the artist to enter a particular state of mind quite different from that of everyday experience. One of the interviewees says:

*Whenever I make my work, when I do get into it, I do go into this strange place which sounds a bit odd but it's almost trancelike. It does become trancelike... I can describe it as very sure of yourself and what you're doing even though you know afterwards it might not be a good piece of work... If I'm in a*

*really good zone it's right in there, it's all about my real innermost me. It's really connecting with what is real, really real ... I don't eat, I don't drink... I couldn't stop. I would lose it. You have to stay in it. Artist C*

This artist's description conveys the intensity of her experience. She is completely focused on her work and very 'sure' of herself, suggesting that, for the time being, any internal criticisms are suspended so that she can allow the work to progress without interruption. Her use of the phrase 'in a really good zone' connects her experience with that of musicians, sports persons and many others who feel immersed in an activity. The psychologist Mihály Csikszentmihályi has studied these experiences and coined the term 'flow' for a state in which the person is narrowly focused on a particular activity (Csikszentmihályi 1996). In this state the person is immersed in the present moment, loses reflective self-consciousness, has a sense of personal agency or control over the activity they are engaged in, experiences the activity as intrinsically rewarding and has an altered experience of time. Artist C's description, and that of other interviewees, many of whom said that they lost track of time whilst working, is congruent with Csikszentmihályi's definition of 'flow'. But there is something more in Artist C's statement. She says that in this state she feels connected with something 'real' and with her 'innermost me'. I understand this to mean that she is in a state in which the boundaries between inner and outer worlds are attenuated. Her 'innermost me' is that element of her internal world that was activated by the aesthetic process. Her use of her medium allows her to translate her 'innermost me' into the artwork.

Another artist describes his experience of drawing on a photograph in his studio:

*It was about the drag of the drawing device on the drawing surface. That set up a physical sensation that put me in a certain state. Or if I was wearing a magnifier the sense of my body behind my eyes would dissolve and a sort of ... intimacy would develop.... In the studio I have to be in a certain state ... it's about being very involved. What's very schematic, very structural in its approach is then set aside as you become involved in that pocket you've created to lose yourself in the activity. Artist H*

Again, this artist describes a state that corresponds with Csíkszentmihályi's concept of 'flow'. Like Artist C, Artist H is in a state of deep involvement, different from the state he is in at other times but, again, this seems to me to be an experience over and above that of 'flow'. In order to enter this state he has to relinquish his previous schematic way of thinking and move into another space (a 'pocket') that he has set up for himself. I will come back to his use of the word 'pocket' in the next chapter, but here I want to consider what Artist H might mean by 'intimacy' and how his interaction with his medium – the drawing device, drawing surface and magnifier – enables this to develop.

In order to explore the nature of this 'intimacy', I turn to Marion Milner's writing about the state that she calls 'illusion'. In her paper 'The Role of Illusion in Symbol Formation' (Milner 1987(1952)) Milner describes her clinical work with a young boy and the way in which the boy used her as a pliable medium that would respond to his commands. Milner found that the boy treated her as if she were a part of himself that he could control and direct. Over time, she recognised that this was a necessary stage in his development:

Thus a central idea began to emerge about what this boy was trying to tell me; it was the idea that the basic identifications which make it possible to find new objects, to find the familiar in the unfamiliar, require an ability to tolerate a temporary loss of sense of self, a temporary giving up of the discriminating ego which stands apart and tries to see things objectively and rationally and without emotional colouring. (Milner 1987(1952): 97)

Through her work with the boy, Milner understood that his behavior was not merely a defensive regression. Rather, by allowing him to be in a state of 'illusion' in which there is a felt state of oneness between self and object (in this case, between the boy and her as object), she set the scene for his development towards an experience of 'twoness' and the ability to symbolise. Milner went on to compare the state of illusion that might occur in psychoanalysis with that experienced by the artist. She writes:

Could one say that by finding a bit of the outside world, whether in chalk or paper, or in one's analyst, that was willing



temporarily to fit in with one's dreams, a moment of illusion was made possible, a moment in which inner and outer seemed to coincide? (Milner 1957: 119).

Milner's concept of illusion as a coincidence of inner and outer, a merging of artist and medium, seems to speak to Artist H's sense of his body 'dissolving'. His physical interaction with the surface of the drawing surface (i.e. the boundary between himself and the work) sets the scene whilst the magnifier seems to draw him inside the work itself. He goes on to say:

*There's meaning in the method for me. Because within this process of starting to make the mark there's a sense of pushing through the illusionary space of the photograph ... back into this four dimensional space that the photograph was taken in ... in a sense I then became enveloped within the sense of this person, within the image ... the drawing was somehow allowing my imagination to fully enter the image. And then I become absorbed in that activity so I'm no longer self-conscious, I'm involved and contained within this interaction between myself and this individual as captured by this photograph. So the specifics of how that drawing goes is totally determined by that experience.*

It seems that the artist experiences the two-dimensional photograph as too separate, excluding him. He wants to get inside it, to push through the surface as if by doing so he can be enveloped in the space-time moment of the image. His use of words such as 'enveloped', 'absorbed', 'fully enter' and 'involved and contained' seems to relate to Milner's concept of illusion. He says that he is 'no longer self-conscious' by which I understand him to mean that his consciousness of himself as a person separate from the individual in the photograph is in abeyance. He bridges the gap (in fantasy) between himself and the person photographed in order to create an artwork that will embody the essence of this person as *he experiences it*. The artist's intention seems to be to achieve a 'true' representation of the person photographed but to do so he must somehow get inside that person, to inhabit them from the inside and sense what it is like to be them. But this identification is with the person as they appear in his photograph and he has already imbued this image with aspects of his own inner world. He chose this particular photograph because he sensed that it held some significance for him personally. His physical work on the photograph is

aimed towards a closer and closer identification until the developing artwork is as close as possible to *his* experience of this person. As he works, the developing artwork comes to embody and symbolise *both* the person photographed *and* the artist's inner experience at the same time.

## **The Extended Self and the Observer Self**

So far I have discussed the state of mind of the artist who is absorbed in her work, a state that seems to correspond with Milner's state of 'illusion'. But interviewees also describe more focused states in which moment to moment decisions can be made:

*It's oscillating between being very conscious – because you've got to make practical decisions—and being very intuitive and reactive.* Artist H

*When you're doing it you're absolutely making critical judgements but they're fed ... they're meshed with emotional reaction and engagement... with the kind of pleasure of handling the material. It's very complex. But I do feel perhaps in terms of this ... sort of flipping between the alienation and something about connection, disconnection ... you as a participant, you as an observer. So there's a kind of a split.*  
Artist N

The state of 'being very intuitive' or 'emotional engagement' seems to correlate with the experience of illusion described by Milner but this is not the whole story. There is a movement between a sense of oneness (artist as 'participant') and a state in which the artist can position herself outside the developing work (artist as 'observer'). However, although Artist N identifies a 'flip' between the moments when she is in the mode of 'participant' and those when she is 'observer', she also says that her critical judgements are 'meshed with emotional engagement' which seems to suggest that these two states are not fully separated in time. As she herself says: 'it's very complex'.

Another artist describes his experience in this way

*I would say it's like heightened reality and being in a trance at one and the same time. So you become totally absorbed in something which could be very mundane and at the same time your thoughts are racing and you're making lots of decisions and you're going forward and you're going back and you're unpicking it and you're developing it and you're imaging something. Artist A*

This artist again distinguishes between two different states of mind but suggests that his experience of 'trance' or total absorption occurs 'at the same time' as the sense of heightened reality in which he can make decisions. This raises the question of whether this should be taken literally or whether he is describing fluctuations in his state of mind that are so rapid or so subtle that they do not interrupt his absorption in his work.

To explore this question, I will turn again to Anton Ehrenzweig's concept of dedifferentiation<sup>21</sup>. Ehrenzweig defines dedifferentiation as 'the dynamic process by which the ego scatters and represses surface imagery' and links it with 'syncretistic vision' through which all the elements of an artwork can be taken in at once:

There must be an unconscious undifferentiated type of visualization which is free from the compulsion of bisecting the visual field in terms of figure and ground and can scan it in its entirety with impartial equality (Ehrenzweig 1962: 1010).

Dedifferentiation is the process by which the artist adopts this mode of seeing. It involves a broadening or 'flexible scattering' of attention and an 'unconscious scanning' which includes all the diverse elements of the work at once. Ehrenzweig sees this mode of seeing as alternating with a more focused mode in which elements of the work are differentiated so that the artist's process involves a 'smooth oscillation between focused and unfocused modes of perception' (Ehrenzweig 1967: 28). So far, Ehrenzweig seems to present two different ways of *seeing* but in his book 'The Hidden Order of Art', he takes the concept of dedifferentiation beyond the purely visual and writes of the artist's creative process as a 'fruitful alternation between differentiated and undifferentiated modes of functioning' (Ehrenzweig 1967: 35).

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<sup>21</sup> First discussed on page 23. Also see pp. 51-52.

Ehrenzweig's discussion of the artist's process as an oscillation between two modes of seeing and functioning has much in common with the writing of Marion Milner. In her book 'On Not Being able to Paint', Milner describes her attempts to paint in terms of a struggle between two ways of seeing (Milner 1957: 21). The academic John Turner describes her book as:

...an account of her struggle as a painter to help her eye escape the tyranny of edge and outline. It was a struggle, she thought, between two kinds of seeing: a kind of denotative, or objective seeing, necessary to perceive the otherness of the created world in all its difference from the self, and a kind of poetic, or oceanic seeing, necessary to suffuse the otherness of the outside world with the sense of self. Both kinds of seeing, she believed, belonged to human beings, and both were necessary. Objective seeing helped to establish our sense of separateness as human beings, while poetic seeing reaffirmed powerful infantile experiences of fusion, before the boundary line between inner and outer was drawn, when the breast that satisfied and the hunger that was satisfied were one (Turner 2002: 1070).

Here Turner points out how Milner links this latter type of seeing with very early infantile experiences, a time when the infant did not yet experience himself as a being separate from his mother and the world around him. This type of seeing goes hand in hand with the state of 'illusion' or 'oneness' described by Milner as integral to artmaking.

Milner was a contemporary of Ehrenzweig's and was in agreement with him about what she describes as:

... the role in art of that inherent capacity of the ego's awareness which causes it to swing between conscious, directed, deliberative attention, and an absent-minded dream-like state, in a kind of porpoise-like movement of emergence and submergence (Milner 1987b(1967): 242).

Both Milner and Ehrenzweig regard the artist's process as an alternation between two very different states of mind and seem to suggest that at any one moment, the artist is *either* in one mode *or* the other.

However, in the paper I quote from above, Turner goes on to question whether Milner's separation of these two ways of seeing can be

maintained, writing : 'I do not want to deny either the utility or the truth of Milner's typology but rather to ask whether difference is the only relationship that we can imagine between her two kinds of thinking and seeing. Need we think only in terms of either/or?' (Turner 2002: 1071). Taking Turner's question further, I am not convinced that the concept of an alternation between two states of mind is fully compatible with the experiences of the artists I interviewed. I want to explore here whether there may be another way of conceptualising the artist's experience.

I will begin by considering the terminology that Milner employs when writing about the state she calls 'illusion'. She seems to use the terms 'illusion', 'oneness' and 'fusion' interchangeably and it is the term 'fusion' that I want to question here. This word implies a complete lack of differentiation between self and object, as if there is no 'I' to observe the interaction<sup>22</sup>. Milner herself did not intend to suggest that artmaking involves a complete loss of self and, indeed, she does write of the fear that the state of oneness or fusion might go too far: '...even if it were true that one did need, at times, not to have to decide which was the other and which was oneself, such a state obviously had its dangers. It might become so alluring that one did not wish to return to the real world of being separate' (Milner 1957: 31). The allure of the illusionary state of fusion harks back to the experience of the infant at the breast, a pre-separation experience that is both enticing and threatening. Milner describes a fear of becoming lost in the illusionary state, of being unable to regain her sense of separateness. This implies that, unless the state tips into one of psychosis, the artist does retain some vestige of a sense of separateness, even whilst in the state of 'illusion' or 'oneness'. The difference between the artist's experience and that of the infant is that the infant has not yet reached a state of separate identity, has not yet 'become a subject' (Roussillon 2015b). The artist's intimacy with the developing artwork may be a recapitulation of this early state of oneness but it is usually experienced from the adult position of having already established a more reliable sense of separate identity. However, this difference between artist and infant may not be clearcut. The artist's sense

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<sup>22</sup> The psychoanalyst Michael Eigen takes up this point (Eigen 1983).

of identity may not have been firmly established at an earlier stage of life and she may also be engaged in a developmental task.

If, when in a state of 'illusion', the artist retains some sense of her separate self, Milner and Ehrenzweig's picture of an alternation between two different states seems to need modification. Milner writes that while painting 'something quite special happened to one's sense of self' (Milner 1957: 142). I now want to examine what it is that happens to the artist's sense of self as she works. To explore this, I turn to my own recent experience of making a new photography-based installation, *The Transience of Wonder* (in the series *Spaces of Time*). My work on this piece began several years ago. I knew that I wanted to make a work that would embody something of my experience of climbing mountains in the Cumbrian Lake District. I could not pinpoint exactly what it was that I wanted to capture but I knew that it had something to do with the sky as viewed when one looks vertically upwards. In the terms I use in this thesis, I had a 'pre-sense' to do with my experience of the sky on the Cumbrian mountains. I therefore began to take photographs as I climbed, stopping at regular intervals and directing my camera to the sky immediately above my head. I then printed 'slices' of these photographs and juxtaposed them into a timeline of the journey I took:



**Figure 2: *The Transience of Wonder*. Work in Progress 1**

As I worked on this I felt absorbed in my attempt to infuse the work with something of the inner experience I wanted to embody. At this point I did feel a sense of oneness with the developing work. However, in retrospect, it did not seem to me that I moved out of that state in order to make moment-to-moment decisions about such practical questions as how to manipulate the photographs or the colour balance of the print. Only when the print was

finished did I look more objectively at it. At that point I felt that it was not capturing my experience well enough. Over an extended period, I tried many different configurations and used photographs from walks on several different mountains. As I worked on each successive incarnation of the work, I entered a state of mind in which I was fully absorbed or, to use Artist A's expression, 'in a trance' but, *at the same time*, I was making practical decisions. Indeed, I could only make appropriate decisions if I retained my close connection, or sense of 'oneness', with the work as I needed to sense whether the changes I made brought it closer to, or further from, my inner experience. The essence of this close connection was the need to stay in touch with this inner experience through my 'pre-sense'. That is, the sense of oneness could be thought of as a concordance between a particular element of my inner experience – that element that had responded to my experience whilst in the mountains – and the developing artwork. I had to hold the memory of my 'pre-sense' in mind as I worked with my medium so that I could mould it into a form that would 'fit' my inner experience and so evoke it or recreate it.<sup>23</sup>

From the analysis of my own process and the evidence of the interviewees, I argue that, whilst working with her medium, the artist enters a state of mind in which she is *both* at one with the developing work *and* able to focus on details, although one or other state will be to the fore at any particular moment. This state can be thought of as a continuum between two experiences of the self that I refer to as the artist's 'extended self'<sup>24</sup> and 'observer self'. The 'extended self' refers to an extension of the boundaries of self-experience to include the developing artwork. The 'observer self' refers to the artist's capacity to focus on the moment-to-moment practical ways in which the artwork can be developed further. The two aspects of the artist's self experience are necessary to each other, operating in tandem as the artist works to coerce her medium to provide a form for her experience. Through the 'extended self', that is by the loosening of the boundaries between self and object, the artist relates to the developing artwork as if it is that part of her inner experience that she wants it to embody. But it can only become a form for this inner experience if the 'observer self',

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<sup>23</sup> I return to this piece of work and its final form in Chapter 5.

<sup>24</sup> This is distinct from the term 'extended mind' which is a subject of debate in cognitive psychology (Menary 2010).

responding to the 'extended self', directs the artist to make appropriate changes to the developing work. There is, therefore, a continuous interchange between the 'extended self' and the 'observer self', although, at any one moment, one or other will be uppermost.

These new terms address the objections that have been raised to Milner's use of the word 'fusion' when writing of the artist's state of mind (Eigen 1983). In the formulation I put forward, there is never a total fusion between the artist and the developing artwork (except in psychosis). The sense of concordance or 'oneness' experienced in the 'extended self' mode is always tempered by the co-existence of the 'observer self'.

The two self-states of 'extended self' and 'observer self' can also be related to Stokes' modes of 'modelling' and 'carving' discussed earlier in this chapter. Stokes saw the 'modelling' artist as in a state of oneness with the medium (or, I would say, the developing artwork) and this corresponds to the 'extended self' mode. He saw the 'carving' artist as relating to the medium as separate from herself and this parallels the mode of 'observer self'.

In states when the artist's 'extended self' is uppermost, the sense of losing oneself in the work can be an intense and pleasurable experience. However, this very intensity may at times be extremely frightening:

*There's something about being absolutely overwhelmed by something and being overwhelmed by the feeling you're going to just disappear altogether. But it's so exciting thinking up to the point where you can, you can still be there but to the point of obliteration in a way ... Being overcome by something or so absorbed by something that you can't get back to yourself is kind of a terrifying thing. Artist N*

This artist's description captures something of the thrill of allowing herself to be 'overwhelmed' by her work. She wants to push the experience as far as she can but this is felt to be highly risky. She fears a permanent state of 'losing herself' in the work, of no longer being able to separate herself out. However, she describes 'thinking' up to this point of no return so that it seems that it is the retention of her capacity to think that prevents the



potential disaster of obliteration. The capacity to think is primarily a function of the 'observer self' so the danger here seems to be the possibility of losing touch with her 'observer self'. In the 'extended self' state, the artist responds in a sensual, pre-symbolic way to the developing work whilst the 'observer self' functions at a more symbolic level, organising experience and responding to the developing work within a wider context. Looked at in this way, the threat of becoming lost in the state of 'illusion' can be understood as a fear of losing one's symbolising capacity.

By introducing the concept of a continuum between the extended self-state and the observer self-state, I do not want to suggest that there cannot be fleeting moments when the observer self-state seems to disappear completely. Such moments are described by poets, including T.S. Eliot, Gerard Manley Hopkins and Wordsworth, but are not the prerogative of artists and creative writers. Experiences in the landscape or while listening to music or gazing at a painting can engender an ecstatic sense of oneness. As Ken Robinson writes in relation to the experiences of one of his patients:

These ecstatic moments of standing aside are not epiphanies at the point of being experienced, but are instead known only after the event. Whilst they are happening the subject is not aware of himself as subject or of the object as object, even though they happen in the presence of and in relation to an object (albeit a special sort of relation) (Robinson 2014: 364).

These brief moments may also occur during the making of an artwork. Artist N above seems to be describing something similar. But the argument I want to make is that experiences of ecstatic union are not essential to the artist's process. It is the movement along the continuum between the deep involvement of the 'extended self' and the more focused 'observer self' that enables the development of the work.

## **Chapter Conclusion**

In this chapter I have been concerned with the artist's use of her medium to find a form that will embody her internal experience (and also present a new view of some aspect of the external world). The move from internal

experience to outside form is a complex one. The artist's idea (if there is one) may seem to be perfectly in accord with her inner experience but it exists in the realms of her imagination and its translation into the language of her medium is likely to result in disillusionment. The sense of at-oneness with the idea has to be given up and there follows an interaction with the medium in which the artist endeavours to make the medium malleable enough to respond to her demands. As the medium responds, the developing artwork comes into being and gradually acquires its own 'vital import' (Langer), a liveliness which is also an expression of the artist's own inner experience.

My argument in this chapter is that the movement from internal experience to external form in the shape of the developing artwork can only come about through repeated experiences of states where the distinction between internal and external is attenuated. As she works with her medium, the artist enters a state of mind that I have characterised in terms of two simultaneous self-states, the 'extended self' and the 'observer self'. These two positions exist in parallel but one or other is to the fore at any one moment. The 'extended self' corresponds to Milner's state of 'illusion' in which the artist feels at one with the developing artwork and the artwork becomes infused with the artist's inner experience. But I argue that this 'at-oneness' is never (except in psychosis) a total fusion. The 'observer self' is always in the background, able to reflect on the work and make decisions about its development. There is a fluctuation in terms of which of these two self-states is to the fore at any one moment but each is dependent on the other. In the 'extended self' state the artist loosens the boundaries between herself and the developing artwork so that her experience of herself *includes* the work. At the same time, she retains a close connection with her 'pre-sense', or that element of her inner experience that she wants to embody in the work. In this state she is able to compare the developing work with the memory of her pre-sense. Acting on the feedback of the 'extended self', the 'observer self' is able to make decisions about what moment-to-moment changes are necessary to bring about a fuller concordance between the developing work and the 'pre-sense'. This can be understood as a process of symbolisation as the developing work gradually comes to take on the form and the life of the artist's inner experience.

## Chapter 3: Play, Creativity and Destructiveness

*The creation of something new is not accomplished by the intellect but by the play instinct acting from inner necessity. Carl Jung (1971)*

### Introduction

In common with other worthwhile endeavours, making art involves hard work. The artist engages in research and experimentation, sources materials, works with her medium, liaises with commissioners, explores venues and so on. But an aspect of some phases of this work, particularly the phase of working with the medium, can also be seen as a form of serious play. In this chapter I examine what artists may mean by 'play' within the context of their process and the ways in which play and destructiveness are inextricably linked with each other. I focus here not on destructiveness in the *content* of the work of art but rather its place in the *process*. I draw primarily on the writing of D.W. Winnicott to provide a theoretical underpinning for the interviewees' experiences. This chapter is a continuation of the discussion I began in the previous one insofar as the processes I consider here relate mainly to the stage when the artist is working with her medium. However, I will also occasionally refer back to the earlier stage discussed in Chapter 1.

### Play and Playing

Winnicott developed his ideas about the nature of play and playing over the course of his writing career. His early writing derived from his analytic work with children but he emphasises that everything he writes about children's playing also applies to adults. Play, he argues, is a creative activity that is 'universal' and 'natural', contributing to growth and health. In his paper 'Why children play' he writes:

The repressed unconscious must be kept hidden, but the rest of the unconscious is something that each individual wants to get to know, and play, like dreams, serves the function of self-revelation (Winnicott 1942: 146).

Winnicott does not often use the terms conscious and unconscious, preferring to write of the outer and inner world. But here, specifically referring to the unrepressed unconscious, he sees play as a means of accessing unconscious contents. There is a parallel between the function Winnicott ascribes to play and one of the functions of making art. In this thesis I develop the idea that the creation of a new artwork is (amongst other things) a search for a form for something hitherto unformed in the artist's inner world. This search, as an activity, can be seen as play in Winnicott's sense of the word. The new artwork embodies something unformed in the unconscious and in doing so it allows the artist to 'get to know' this aspect of herself.

Winnicott's later writings about play owe a great deal to the development of his theory of transitional phenomena. He came to see play as situated on a continuum between the infant's use of the transitional object and the adult's involvement in cultural activity. All these activities take place in an intermediate area of experiencing, a potential space, where inner and outer worlds exist simultaneously. In his paper 'Playing: Its theoretical status in the clinical situation', Winnicott writes:

I tried to make my idea of play concrete by claiming that *playing has a place* and a time. It is not *inside* by any use of the word ... Nor is it *outside*, that is to say, it is not a part of the repudiated world, the not-me, that which the individual has decided to recognize (with whatever difficulty and even pain) as truly external, outside magical control. To control what is outside one has to *do* things, not simply to think or to wish, and *doing things takes time*. Playing is doing. (Winnicott 1968: 592)

In this paper he pays tribute to Milner's reference to play in her paper 'The role of illusion in symbol formation' (Milner 1955) where she writes that apparent regression in play may be a necessary stage in a creative relation to the world. To play, in Milner and Winnicott's view, is to endow some aspect of the outside world with inner experience and then to interact with this 'subjective object' in a creative way. For the infant, play takes place in the potential space between mother and child; in psychoanalysis or psychotherapy, the potential space is between analyst and analysand:

Psychotherapy takes place in the overlap of two areas of playing, that of the patient and that of the therapist. Psychotherapy has to do with two people playing together. The corollary of this is that where playing is not possible then the work done by the therapist is directed towards bringing the patient from a state of not being able to play into a state of being able to play (Winnicott 1986b: 44).

The psychoanalyst Michael Parsons explores the implications of Winnicott's statement in his paper 'The Logic of Play in Psychoanalysis' (Parsons 1999), writing: 'The play element is not just an occasional aspect of analysis, but functions continuously to sustain a paradoxical reality where things can be real and not real at the same time. This paradox is the framework of psychoanalysis' (ibid.: 871). It is also the framework of the artist's relationship with her medium, as I will explore in this chapter.

I start by considering my own process of making one of the pieces in the Morecambe Bay series of works:

*I was fascinated by the rapid changes in the Bay as the tide swept in or out, the in-between state of the landscape when it was both land and sea. The idea came to me of making a print in which two blocks of text, one ochre and one blue, overlapped each other, creating an intermediate space. From this beginning the piece evolved through a number of transformations or reincarnations as I tried numerous variations in the text. I also experimented with different fonts and text layouts, changing these repeatedly until it seemed 'right'. I was not entirely sure what I wanted the text to do. Initially I thought that I wanted the ochre text to relate to the outside world and the blue to the inner world and, with this in mind, I tried various alternatives. I tried using dream narratives and their interpretations and then single repeated words. I rejected each attempt as somehow unsatisfactory and further ideas came to my mind. In the final version, the blue text is composed of words related to my emotional responses to the Bay and the ochre text is related to my responses to the nearby mountains.*

This experimentation<sup>25</sup> with different texts, colours and fonts can be seen as a form of play in which I used my medium to try out different approaches, attempting to sense whether each variation was closer to or further from the inner experience I wanted to embody in the work. In trying

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<sup>25</sup> Later in this chapter I discuss the psychoanalyst Robert Caper's writing on play as experimentation.

out different configurations, I was assessing each variation not only in terms of whether or not it satisfied criteria of which I was aware but also whether it 'felt right' at a less conscious level. I was actively manipulating my medium, something in the outside world, according to inner promptings. This activity corresponds with Winnicott's notion of play.

As I discuss above, Winnicott stresses the similarities between the activities of the infant with the transitional object and the older child or adult's play. But there are also differences, as Ken Wright explains:

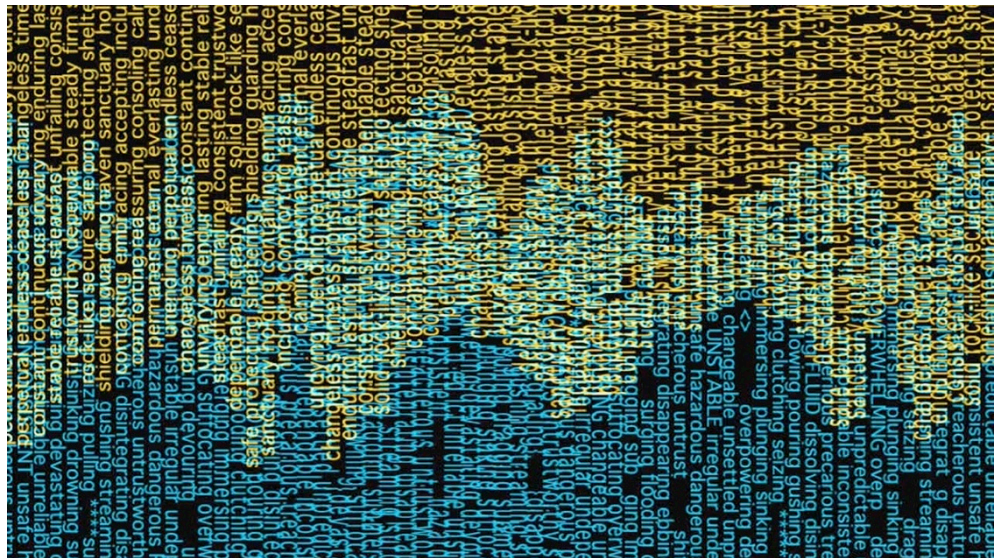
[play] lies further along the path of symbolic formation than the moment of the transitional object. Winnicott has bracketed together play and transitional experience and this may have obscured the differences between the play object and the transitional object itself. That difference is profound and critical and lies in the degree to which the pattern in the object is felt to be separate and separable from a single object. In the transitional object, the pattern inheres in that single object and in no other (except the original one); in play, by contrast, the pattern is freely transferable from object to object (Wright 1991: 248).

The infant's teddy bear or blanket is inextricably linked, for the infant, with his mother and is irreplaceable. The 'pattern' in the plaything or the art object, on the other hand, could be constituted in a variety of different ways. Here Wright uses the term 'pattern' in the same way as the word 'form' is used by Langer (and by Wright himself in other contexts (Wright 2009; 2014)). The pattern, or form, becomes a more symbolic representation as the separateness from the object increases.

My play with different texts and colours was a long and frustrating process. There was an inherent difficulty in my decision to use text in that I was trying to capture an experience that could not be put into words so that each attempt seemed to pin the work down too much. As I experimented, I realised that I did not want to use text consisting of coherent narratives as their meaning seemed too fixed. I could not describe the experience in words. That is, my experience could not be expressed in the discursive symbols of language (Langer 1953). Rather, I needed to *show* how it was in the form of a presentational symbol or 'semblance' (Langer 1957). Therefore I chose to use a succession of single words in place of a

narrative. In the ochre text these words ran smoothly but in the blue text they were interrupted by gaps and repeated punctuation marks so that the text itself took on the qualities of an image.

*Eventually I produced the print. But I was disappointed. It seemed to me to be too static, not reflecting the fluid nature of the tidal movement. For a while, I felt stuck again but then the idea emerged of reworking the piece as an animation and editing it so that the two blocks of text moved over one another. Again I experimented to achieve the particular movement and speed that felt right. Eventually I created a wavelike motion that captured something of the effect I wanted (See Figure 3).*



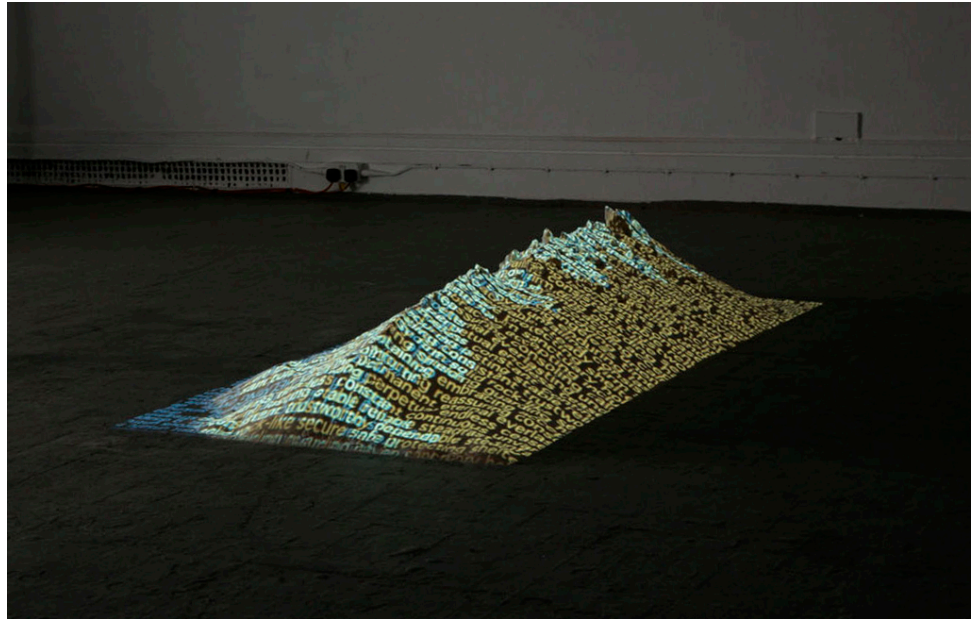
**Figure 3: Bay Mountain. Video Still. Work in Progress.**

The process of play continued here but with a different medium. No longer pen on paper or typed text, my medium here was a digital animation programme and it is this that I struggled with to achieve the effect I wanted. Again, it was a tortuous process in which I often felt like giving up altogether:

*But I was still dissatisfied. Now it seemed too flat and I wanted to introduce a third dimension. Again, I could not immediately see a way through this impasse. Eventually I had the idea of*



*projecting the animation onto a 'mountain range' of sand (See Figure 4).*



**Figure 4: *Bay Mountain*. Installation view.**

In the last stage of play for this piece I introduced yet another medium in the form of the sand. I brought something related to the physical substance of the Bay into the gallery and the ephemeral video became a physical mass, seemingly solid but actually shifting and unreliable. At last I felt that it did relate closely enough to my experience. When this piece was exhibited I discovered another, unforeseen, movement in it. As the sand dried out over the course of the exhibition, the 'mountain range' began to crumble and slip. This unpredictable movement seemed to me to add something to the work.

In using the term 'play' to describe my interaction with the sand and with all the other elements of my medium I do not want to suggest that my activity was always enjoyable. In order to find the form I needed, I had to be in touch with the disturbing feelings that the Bay evokes in me. Each time I tried a new variation I needed to measure it against my experience. In



addition, if something did not 'feel right' I was disappointed and frustrated and I had to tolerate these feelings too, not knowing whether or not another way forward would emerge. Considering these various stages in relation to Wright's quotation above, I played with different forms, transferring my experience from one to the next until I was satisfied that I had found the closest possible 'fit'.

One of the interviewees, a photographer, describes her work as a form of play:

*I am very interesting in playing ... I'm a photographer and so my camera is my tool and I will have made a decision before I begin about whether the piece (if it is eventually going to be a piece) is going to be done with a certain piece of equipment to begin with. I often use a pinhole camera...but even before that there's a sort of play action whereby I'm not sure what equipment I might be using.... Although I go at the start of the residency with some particular idea to get me started....throughout my time I would be playing so there would be a whole lot of photographs that I just take with no idea if they are ever going to go anywhere.... I know what I'm looking for but I know it's going to shift. Artist F*

Her initial 'idea' is an image of a possible work but it is provisional. It initiates a series of experiments, both in her imagination and in the outside world. To begin with there is the 'play' of the decision about which equipment to use. In imagination she plays with the idea of using a pinhole camera. Would this give the effect she wants? If not, should she use a digital camera or a large format one? This may lead her to try out different equipment and compare the results before making a decision or she may choose on the basis of her experience and her imaginative 'playing' with likely effects. Having chosen her equipment, she then moves on to a different sort of experimentation, this time with taking the photographs themselves. She 'plays' not only with the subject matter of her images but also with angle, lighting, framing and so on:

*There's a whole lot of processes I give myself. Have I looked at this building from the other side? It's a really good discipline to do ... It's this whole business of trying to make work with fresh eyes ... by either calming the brain and letting the brain become empty and therefore the eyes see something differently or*

*you're just allowing the eyes to see what you're trying to make by a different light, by different locations. Artist F*

Each new cast of the light or each angle of shot is judged not only technically but also in terms of whether or not the effect furthers the developing artwork and feels 'right' (in the terms of this thesis, whether it is consistent with the artist's pre-sense). Having taken her photographs, yet another period of 'play' follows. She must edit them. Another photographer describes her method of editing:

*I put everything on the wall - cheap prints - and don't even look at it. I live with it for a week or two and every night I'll just pick one off ...I'll suddenly look at it one day and I'll think: "Oh what's happened there? That doesn't work"...and take it out. And that's how I do it [until] I've got it to a stage where you can see that something is happening with them all working with the others. Artist C*

This artist exhibits her work as a series of photographic images. The finished artwork does not consist in any single image but in their cumulative effect. They have to 'work together' to produce the effect (an effect that reflects her inner experience) and if any one image fails to contribute to the whole it must be taken out. The quotations above are from photographers but all the artists described experimentation with their medium and it is this experimentation that I refer to as play, following Winnicott's use of the term.

In a summary of his thoughts about play, Winnicott writes:

This area of playing is not inner psychic reality. It is outside the individual, but it is not the external world... into this play area the child gathers objects or phenomena from external reality and uses these in the service of some sample derived from inner or personal reality. Without hallucinating the child puts out a sample of dream potential and lives with this sample in a chosen setting of fragments from external reality. ... In playing, the child manipulates external phenomena in the service of the dream and invests chosen external phenomena with dream meaning and feeling (Winnicott 1986b: 60).

Winnicott sees play (and, by extension, artistic activity) as rooted in the 'dream'. Here I understand 'the dream' to refer to inner phantasy and 'a sample of dream potential' to be an aspect of internal phantasy that is to be

elaborated in play. Considering the artist's play in the light of this formulation, the 'objects or phenomena from external reality' are the artist's medium and subject matter. The question of exactly what the 'sample of dream potential' relates to, in the terms I use in this thesis, is more complex. Winnicott's use of the word 'potential' links closely with my definition of the artist's 'pre-sense' in Chapter 1. The 'pre-sense' heralds the potential of a particular aspect of the outside world (in Winnicott's words a 'fragment of external reality') to offer a route towards a form for something internal. However, I argue that the pre-sense is still vague and unformed. Winnicott's reference to dream suggests something that already has the beginnings of a form and therefore I think that it relates more closely to the 'idea' in my formulation than to the pre-sense. This interpretation of Winnicott's language is consistent with the way in which Christopher Bollas links creative activity to dream. He writes that 'the total dream process is very likely the cornerstone of the creative, a movement of the 'to be represented' towards the fulfilment of this desire' (Bollas 2011a: 197). Here he seems to be referring to the 'creation' of a dream in the process of psychic genera leading to an idea, as I discussed in Chapter 1.

Winnicott highlights the physical nature of play. It involves the body and 'the manipulation of objects' and 'certain types of intense interest are associated with certain aspects of bodily excitement' (Winnicott 1968)<sup>26</sup>. Of the artists interviewed, painters were most likely to mention the physical pleasure of using their materials:

*So there was a physical sensual appetite with the mark-making that I was involved in, but also in, in the depiction of the object itself, so it was twofold. And so this relation between the object and, you know, the depictive element and the making of it are absolutely so important to me, both of them. Artist N*

For this artist, the physical pleasure of the mark-making connects with her physical experience of the object she depicts. I think, indeed, that the physicality of the object is an essential aspect of her original experience of it. That is, her project (at least partly) is to find a form for this physical experience. The application of paint provides a new form of physical

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<sup>26</sup> By this definition, the artist's imaginative manipulation of ideas would not come under the heading of 'play'.

pleasure, connected with but not the same as her experience of the object she depicts.

However, for all artists, the relationship with the medium is by definition a physical one:

*if you're working on the computer, you know, you've got a familiarity with the mouse or with how you move or what the screen looks like or the quality of light that emanates from it, or... whatever you do you've got a kind of connection to how it's being made. And so people I think are always... they have this connection to the physical somehow. Artist N*

Robert Caper, a Kleinian psychoanalyst, writes that play by both children and adults is 'a serious type of experimentation' by means of which one learns about the internal and external worlds. In this view, 'play is a way of externalising fantasies originating in one's inner world so they may be seen and learned about' (Caper 1996: 859). He goes on to write:

... when children play, they are not just testing the world to see what it is like, they are also externalising their internal fantasy world. I say 'externalising' rather than 'representing' because play is more than a representation of unconscious fantasy. It is a way of getting something from inside to outside so we can see what it is, in the spirit of E. M. Forster's question, 'how do I know what I think until I've had a chance to hear what I have to say?' (ibid: 861).

Caper insists that for this process to 'work properly', 'internal and external reality must be kept separate in one's mind'. According to him, the externalisation of the inner something in play can only go smoothly if the difference between inside and outside is clear. However, later in his paper he writes:

Awareness of the mutual autonomy of external and internal realities creates a space or gap in which one may 'play' with external reality without feeling that one's fantasies have had too great an effect on it (so that we are not inhibited in our creative or experimental play). At the same time, this gap keeps our fantasies safe from too much of an impact of external reality, so we are still free to imagine (ibid: 867).

This is close to Winnicott's concept of potential space. Rather than the clear separation between inner and outer that he writes about earlier in his paper, here Caper seems to be talking about a 'gap' between the two within which an overlap can occur. According to Winnicott, play and all creative activity takes place in the potential space between inner and outer worlds. For the artist, this potential space is between herself and her medium but also between herself and whatever aspect of the outer world she wishes to explore in her work.

Rather than a keeping separate of inner and outer as Caper suggests early in his paper, I suggest that the artist's 'play' requires *both* a separation between *and* an overlap of internal and external reality. Relating this to the discussion in Chapter 2 of the artist's two modes of functioning of 'extended self' and 'observer self', and the continuum between the two, the 'extended self' relates to the overlap of internal and external whilst the 'observer self' relates to their separation. For the artist at work, both states exist simultaneously.

Returning to Artist F, the photographer who describes her work in terms of play:

*Although I'm using reality and the visual world outside I am always wanting to change it I realise... It wants to have a whole lot of other echoes to do with the imagination. Artist F*

She does not want simply to represent what she sees. A part of the outside visual world must be extracted and, in a sense, taken apart and reconstructed so that it encompasses the echoes of her imagination. Therefore, what is externalised through her use of her medium is not only her internal fantasy, an internal phenomenon. It is an element of the outside world transformed by her fantasy. If, as Artist F states above, something in the external visual world is to be changed, its reconstruction presupposes a prior deconstruction. The 'visual world outside' has to be taken apart. This suggests that play and creativity inevitably involve destruction, a notion taken up by the psychoanalyst Joyce McDougall. Following Winnicott, McDougall also uses the term 'play' for adult creative activity. She acknowledges the pain and work involved but goes further:

Although both Freud and Winnicott advanced the notion that creativity involves playing, this must not be taken to mean that creative activity is carefree. On the contrary, creative or innovative activity of any kind is invariably associated with considerable violence and frequently arouses intense experiences of anguish and guilt (McDougall 1995: 55).

Play in creative activity, according to McDougall, always involves violence and destructiveness. I will go on to consider what this might mean in the context of the artist's process.

### **Aggression/Destructiveness towards the 'Subject' of the Work**

The artist Cornelia Parker often creates works that involve destroying objects in order to recreate them in a very different form. For one of her most impressive works *Cold Dark Matter – an Exploded View* (Parker 1991), she arranged for a shed containing various objects to be blown up. She then created an installation in which the resulting fragments were suspended in the centre of a gallery room. In another work *30 pieces of Silver* (Parker 1988-9) she had a steamroller crush silver objects and then she hung these in 30 arrangements just above the floor. In these works, Parker transforms her damaged objects into a completely new configuration with different associations.

These are overt, physical acts of violence but I want to explore the ways in which I and other artists do violence to the subject of our work in less obvious ways. In order to make work related to Morecambe Bay I had to appropriate my subject matter and use it ruthlessly in whatever way was necessary. In order to begin to symbolise my experience, I had to abstract those elements of the Bay that were essential to me for this particular work, discarding all else. When I made the piece *Under the Skin*, for instance, I was interested in the sands themselves, their movement in response to successive tides and their sinister potential to overwhelm the unwary. From early in the process, I focused on the patterns of channels in the sand and the way these were altered by each tide. Later, I chose a particular angle of shot that emphasised a threatening quality. These choices, or abstractions, were consciously made but there was also a further process of abstraction of other elements (for instance a certain quality of light, desaturated

colours) of which I was only partially aware but which emerged in the final work. By abstracting I was isolating my chosen elements from others that might tie it to everyday existence (for instance, a wider view of the shoreline, the inclusion of anything that would give a sense of scale or orientation). By abstracting as a means of working towards symbolisation, I was effectively breaking down my subject (the Bay), picking out some elements and discarding others.

Marion Milner discovered, in her first attempts to paint a representation of something in the outside world, that the subject of her painting remained frustratingly alien and her attempts to paint it seemed to her to have no life. She realised that it was necessary to infuse the subject with something of her own inner life, to inhabit it imaginatively and 'spiritually envelop the object' but that this 'certainly does not preserve that thing's essential identity and nature, it rather destroys this identity in order to merge it with one's own' (Milner 1957: 57). In Milner's terms, I destroyed the identity of Morecambe Bay in order to merge it with my own. Michael Podro suggests that Milner's difficulty stemmed from a sense that the potential subject of her painting was felt by her to be already complete in itself without her intervention:

A mode of representation that is already complete appears to the artist as alien because it is complete *despite* her. It is only by breaking down her subject matter, and that means breaking down the way it has previously been represented, that the relation to the external world can become remade for oneself, become the construction of one's own thought. This can only be done when one is sufficiently aggressive and not merely receptive (Podro 2007: 31).

According to Podro, the artist's breaking down of her subject matter is a new breakdown of whatever aspect of the outside world the artist is responding to in her work<sup>27</sup>. Podro stresses that this breaking down includes the deconstruction of previous modes of representation. The artist must find a new means of presentation, built up both from these

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<sup>27</sup> This differs from the view of Kleinian writers such as Segal (1952) and Abella (2010).

deconstructed fragments and from aspects of her own inner life. She builds, rather than rebuilds, her subject matter in her own image and this calls for a measure of aggression.

Artist H speaks of taking photographs of passers-by in the street:

*Just going back to the collection of the images on the street, you have to put yourself into a certain state because I become overwhelmed, and maybe that's important, by the kind of audacity of stealing someone's image, you know, I feel very conscious of that.*

As he takes the portrait photograph he is aware that he will use it for his own purposes, deconstructing and transforming it in the process. His description of the activity as 'stealing' suggests that he recognises the inherent aggression of his action at this point. Later in this chapter, when I discuss aggression towards the medium, I refer to this artist again and to his use of an etching needle on the print during which he partially obliterates the image of the face. That is, he attacks and uses the very element of the outside world that attracted him in the first place.

All artists who respond to something in the outside world deconstruct it in order to make something new. In some cases, such as that of Cornelia Parker, the destruction is physical but in others, such as my use of Morecambe Bay, it takes place internally. In order to create a new artwork the artist must break down her perception of the outside world. That is, she abstracts from her perception, or her internal representation of the outside 'something', those elements that resonate with her and she then manipulates these elements in whatever way is necessary in order to construct an artwork that will present her own personal view of this aspect of the outside world.

### **Aggression and Destructiveness towards the Medium**

In the previous chapter I discussed those moments in the artist's process when she is faced with the 'otherness' of the medium and its refusal to respond in predictable ways. Here I want to take up the question of the



artist's aggression and destructiveness towards her medium. The sculptor Louise Bourgeois describes her process of drilling stone:

I contemplate the penetrated cube for a long time. Then I try to express what I have to say, how I am going to translate what I have to say to it. I try to translate my problem into the stone. The drilling begins the process by negating the stone. The problem is how to complete the negation, to take away from stone, without altogether destroying it, but overcoming it, conquering it. The cube no longer exists as a pure form for contemplation; it becomes an image. I take it over with my fantasy, my life force. I put it to the use of my unconscious (Bourgeois 2012: 40).

There is a ruthlessness about the way Bourgeois uses the stone. She translates her problem (her 'idea') into it and her use of the term 'translate' indicates a transfer of something from the 'language' of her idea or image (predominantly a visual language) into the haptic language of the medium. At the same time she infuses the medium with her fantasy (a more haptic sense of her inner experience). In order to coerce the stone into becoming a form for her experience she has to 'negate' it. Freud used the term 'negation' to refer to the repudiation, or disowning, of a previously repressed idea that has just come into consciousness (Freud 1925). Here, Bourgeois seems to be using the term to express her sense that something about *the stone* has to be repudiated. In the violent process of drilling she repudiates the unyielding rigidity of the medium. She has somehow to make it malleable<sup>28</sup>. In one sense, Bourgeois destroys the stone in one form in order to recreate it in another, but, in another sense, it must not be completely destroyed. It must retain its own particular stonelike qualities. It is through her relationship with the stone as something with its own characteristics (Stokes' 'carving' mode as discussed in the previous chapter) that the new artwork will develop.

For some artists, like Bourgeois, violence towards their medium is an essential aspect of their method. The painter Howard Hodgkin explains his choice of wood rather than canvas for his painting by saying 'I want to be able to attack again and again and again, and the trouble with canvas is

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<sup>28</sup> The concept of the pliable (or malleable) medium is discussed on page 71.

that if you attack it more than once or twice there's nothing left' (Bickers and Wilson 2007: 226). The canvas is of no use to Hodgkin as it is not sufficiently resilient to withstand the aggression that is integral to his process.

Artist H describes the way in which he attacked the 'perfect surface' of a photograph in order to create a particular work:

*Drawings that I've made into large photographs I've taken of strangers on the streets, for example using an etching needle to inscribe into the surface of photograph, there's an interesting stage that you go through because you have a very expensive print that you... beautifully kind of made and this surface is undefiled in any way... When you make photographs you want to have a perfect surface, you want to be able to protect that surface... So by standing there and holding an etching needle in my hand, at first I feel quite self-conscious, quite... you know there's no Apple Undo here, you know, I've got to... I make a mark and, you know, it's there, it's permanent. So there's a dramatic tension in that. Artist H*

This artist has to mobilise his aggression in order to be ruthless enough to damage the perfect surface of his photograph. Following the promptings of his pre-sense, he has an intimation of the effect he wants to produce and this can only be achieved by this violent act. Here, destructiveness is being used in the service of creativity but nevertheless it arouses considerable anxiety. He is torn between his desire to protect the photograph and the need to damage its surface and there is a tension between these opposing impulses. He is also aware that the damage must be controlled. He must not destroy the photograph completely. It must retain something of its original character, now transformed by his actions upon it.

Joyce McDougall, a member of the Paris Psychoanalytical Society who weaves together elements from Freudian, Kleinian, Lacanian and Winnicottian schools, writes of the struggle between the artist and her medium in which the artist both enters states of union with her medium and attacks it:

Thus the medium ...will always present itself as both an ally and an enemy. The medium of creative expression has to be "tamed" so that the creator can impose his or her will upon it; it

must translate the creator's inner vision, sometimes evoking a transcendent feeling of union with it (McDougall 1995: 58).

I want to take McDougall's use of the word 'tame' here and suggest that the artist must *both* tame the medium *and* allow it not to be tamed. That is, if she has a particular idea or image of the work she wants to create she will try to impose her will on the medium, will try to 'tame' it, but it is the medium's refusal to be tamed, its assertion of its own qualities, that sets up a potential space between artist and medium from which a new form, embodying an aspect of the artist's inner world, may emerge.

McDougall bases her writing about the creative process on her psychoanalytic work with artists, writers and scientists who came to her as patients, often seeking analysis because of blocks in their process. From her experience with these patients, and from her reading of Klein, she induces that '*...violence is an essential element in all creative production*' (McDougall 1995: 55). She quotes a painter who had been in analysis as writing:

The profound primordial drives that surge up in me can become powerful enough to cause discomfort; the constant build up of tension has to be put outside me into the outer world in order to restore some feeling of harmony inside. It is creation, but it is fired by feelings of destruction. When I cannot paint, I become the target of my own violent aggression' (ibid.: 56).

For this artist the making of art is an expression of destructive drives that need to be externalised. Indeed, McDougall writes that 'we might envisage the internal world of the creative person as something like a volcano' (McDougall 1995: 249). This image epitomises McDougall's view of the creative process as intrinsically violent, rooted in libidinal drives. I think that this view is influenced by the fact that McDougall is writing from her perspective as a psychoanalyst working with patients who are artists. From my own experience and the evidence of the artist interviews, I do not think that McDougall's image of a volcanic internal world is universally applicable to all artists. However, I do agree with McDougall that the artist responds to a need to find external form for something internal.

McDougall was influenced by several psychoanalytic schools, including the Kleinians. According to a Kleinian view of the artistic process, the creation of an artwork provides the artist with a means of making reparation for the damage done in phantasy to a lost or damaged internal object. According to this view, the artwork is seen as a reconstruction of this damaged object and the act of creating it allows a reworking of the move towards the depressive position (see Segal (1952; 1957; 1974; 1978; 1991) and Abella (2007; 2010; 2013)). Adrian Stokes, writing from a Kleinian viewpoint, sees the reparative potential of art-making as dependent upon a prior destructiveness towards the artist's medium: 'A powerful sublimation of aggression contributes to the "attack", as it is called, in the use of the medium of an art, irrespective of what content is communicated' (Stokes 1955: 419-20). He links this to his own concepts of carving and modelling:

I turn now to the major overall process, reparation, in which both the good breast and the whole, independent mother must figure, a reparation dependent, it seems to me, upon initial attack. I believe that in the creation of art there exists a preliminary element of acting out of aggression, an acting out that then accompanies reparative transformation, by which inequalities, tension and distortions, for instance, are integrated, are made to "work". I have long held the distinction between carving and modeling to be generic in an application to all the visual arts. These two activities have many differences from the psychological angle, first, I think, in the degree and quality of the attack upon the material ... A painter, then, to be so, must be capable of perpetrating defacement; though it be defacement in order to add, create, transform, restore, the attack is defacement nonetheless (Stokes 2014: 74-75).

According to this reading, the destructive aspect of Hodgkin's attacks on his canvas and Artist H's attacks on the photograph seem to have a dual function. They both re-enact the original phantasised attack and contribute to its repair through the making of the finished work. On one level, a Kleinian reading seems to fit the facts of many artistic productions but, judging from the findings of this research, I think that its insistence that the prime function of artmaking is to address an internal developmental situation, to put right a phantasised act of destruction that has already happened, is not applicable to all artworks. It does not recognise the need to give form to that inner something which has given rise to the artist's pre-sense. Nor does it emphasise the value of the artwork as a new object in

the outside world. Marion Milner, whose work I discussed in the last chapter, expresses a different viewpoint:

For the artist as artist, rather than as patient, and for whoever responds to his work, I think that the essential point is the new thing he has created, the new bit of the external world that he has made significant and 'real' through endowing it with form (Milner 1957: 160).

Here, Milner seems to be using the term 'real' to denote the external existence of the artwork, its existence in its own right rather than as a substitute for something else. Milner also has a different approach to the question of destructiveness. She does not write directly about aggression towards her medium, although she does refer to many instances of aggression and destructiveness in the content of her paintings. However, I find her description of her psychoanalytic work with an 11 year old boy (Milner 1987(1952)) to be relevant here. I referred to this paper in Chapter 2 where I discussed the boy's use of Milner as a pliable medium. Here I want to focus on the destructive aspects of his play with her. Milner writes of the boy's use of her in a complex drama enacted through his play with toys and other materials in the consulting room. The drama, which included destructive acts such as setting objects on fire, was directed by the boy and Milner was required to play a series of parts. She describes the way in which she allowed him to use her as if she were a persecuted schoolboy: 'I was set long monotonous tasks, my efforts were treated with scorn, I was forbidden to talk and made to write out 'lines' if I did; and if I did not comply with these demands, then he wanted to cane me' (ibid.:91). And, of his general behavior towards her: 'He so often treated me as totally his own to do what he liked with, as though I were dirt, his dirt, or as a tool, an extension of his own hand' (ibid.:94). Whilst she played the parts he demanded, she maintained her analytic stance through her interpretations. Milner's analytic work with this boy could only progress through her willingness to act as his medium and this included her willingness to allow his destructive acts directed towards her. She came to understand that, through his play, in which he treated her as part of his inner drama, he was gradually able to relate to her as a person in her own right in the external world:

It seemed as if it was only by being able, again and again, to experience the illusion that I was part of himself, fused with the goodness that he could conceive of internally, that he became able to tolerate a goodness that was not his own creation and to allow me goodness independently ... The repeated discovery that I went on being friendly, and remained unhurt by him, in spite of the continual attacks on me, certainly played a very important part (Milner 1987(1952): 103-4).

The psychoanalyst Michael Parsons (2000) compares the boy's relationship with Milner to the artist's relationship with her medium:

The boy used her as a pliable medium that he could mould however he wanted except that she also had qualities of her own to be taken account of. So his being able to make things out of his pliable medium depended also on his discovering things about it at the same time. The artist has just such a relation to his or her artistic medium. The mixed process of invention and discovery is the same (Parsons 2000: 162).

It was necessary for the boy to be able to use Milner in whatever way he wanted, as if she were part of himself, in order to discover her and himself as separate beings. In a parallel way, the artist uses her medium, feels free to attack it and, in doing so, discovers its own properties and behaviour. Out of this interaction a new work with a life of its own may emerge.

I want to take up Parson's discussion of the boy's use of Milner to argue that the exploration of the relationship between artist and medium explored in this thesis can be compared to the analysand's use of the analyst more generally. The artist interacts with her medium, nudging or coercing it into a form that mirrors her experience. Sometimes, the medium responds predictably, following the artist's sense of what she wants it to do. But at other times, it behaves in unexpected ways, frustrating the artist's intended actions upon it. At such moments, the artist may find another way to follow her idea or she may welcome the new direction suggested by the medium's behavior. In a similar way, the analysand tries to recruit the analyst to play a particular role, to reflect her experience. But the analyst will sometimes resist this coercion and, perhaps, offer an unexpected interpretation. The psychoanalyst Joseph Sandler wrote about this in his paper 'Counter-transference and role-responsiveness' (Sandler 1976). He argues that the analysand 'nudges' the analyst to behave in certain ways in relation to him.

The analysand, according to Sandler, casts him or herself in a particular role and puts pressure on the analyst to play out a complementary role. Initially, the analyst may unconsciously comply until some incident clarifies what is happening. At this point, the analyst is able to change his or her behaviour and the meaning of the incident can be explored. Such moments may prove to be turning points in the course of an analysis. In an analogous way, an artist may coerce her medium to behave in a particular way but it may sometimes frustrate her expectations and behave differently. This may lead the artist in an unexpected and fruitful new direction.

### **Aggression and Destructiveness towards the Developing Artwork**

Above, I have discussed the artist's aggression towards her medium. I want now to differentiate the medium from the developing artwork in order to distinguish between two situations. The first is that in which the artist is pursuing an idea and finds that she must act aggressively or destructively towards her *medium* to make it comply with her wishes. I have discussed this above. The second situation is that in which the artist finds that the developing artwork does not feel 'right'. One example of this from my own practice is when I produced the print shown in Figure 2 (*The Transience of Wonder*. Work in Progress 1). In the latter case, it is not primarily the medium but the *developing artwork* that frustrates the artist. It does not seem to the artist to correspond sufficiently closely with her pre-sense and, therefore, she is not able to recognise herself in it. If there was an initial idea, it now seems that this idea was not quite right after all. In that case, there may be a shift in the idea and this shift may call for a renewed attack on the medium. A photographer describes the need for a ruthless edit when a particular combination of images does not feel right:

*I've learned you've got to get rid of your favourite quite often. In fact you have to get rid of them... You have to realise that they don't work...I suppose it's like a pruning. You've got a bush that you like and you have got to chop off a bit that's not working, even if it's a lovely bush. Artist C*

In this case it is not entirely evident whether the artist's aggression is primarily directed towards the developing artwork or towards the medium. If

it is towards her medium, she continues to pursue her first idea but some of the images do not fit with it and so must be given up. On the other hand, it may be that her aggression is directed primarily towards the developing artwork as she realises that a particular idea for the final artwork is no longer working. Her resulting *aggression towards her developing artwork* leads to a change in the idea, resulting in the need to eliminate certain images, even if they are her favourites. In that case, aggression towards the medium would be secondary.

If the artist finds that the developing artwork no longer 'feels right' she may encounter a dead end that calls for the eradication of part (or all) of the developing work and a return to an earlier stage. As one painter says: 'Everything grinds to a halt and it's really frustrating and it might be that you really have to scrape it back to almost nothing to resolve it' (Artist T). I discussed the incubation of an idea for a new work in Chapter 1 but it is also relevant here. The 'scraping back to almost nothing' may call for a period of gestation before a new way forward can be found. This point of frustration and the mobilising of aggression necessary to get rid of that part of the developing artwork that is 'not working' may be an important step in the making of a satisfying work.

Artist T continues: 'Some paintings might happen without that brick wall that you have to face at some point and they make me more anxious than the other ones because I think they've been too easy. They've come too easy in a way.' This artist insists that, for a work to be satisfying, there must be a problem to be overcome. If, as I argue, the making of an artwork is a search for a form for something that was previously formless, this raises the question as to whether, if the form comes too easily, it may have already been 'known' by the artist at a level below conscious awareness. She is looking for something in herself that is not yet known. As another interviewee says: 'I wouldn't start it if I knew what it was going to be... So I only want to make something that I don't know what it's going to be' (Artist A).

I write about my own stormy relationship with a developing artwork:



*There were times when I felt frustrated with the medium I was using because I couldn't make it produce anything that fitted the idea in my head. Although that seems to imply that I had a clear idea in my head, which, most of the time, I did not. It was a sort of love/hate relationship with the artwork as it developed. There were moments when I was involved with it in an excited way and other times when I wanted to destroy it.*

Here I am referring both to my frustration with my medium for not allowing me to follow my idea but also to my frustration with the developing artwork. The developing artwork was a manifestation of my idea but it was sometimes felt to be unsatisfactory because it was not a close enough reflection of my pre-sense. At those moments I wanted to destroy it. These destructive impulses sometimes led me to discard a particular set of images or abandon a particular approach in order to find something more satisfying, something that would fit my pre-sense more closely. This was part and parcel of my process but nevertheless called for a willingness to destroy or discard something that I had valued. In Chapter 2, I discussed the first incarnation of the developing artwork that eventually became *The Transience of Wonder*. I was not satisfied with the form of the work as a large photographic print (Figure 2), although at the time I could not see why this was or how I could develop it further. I thought at that point that the indexical nature of the work was key in that each 'slice' of sky was related to a particular moment in time and a particular spatial point. I went on to change the configuration of the 'slices' to emphasise this aspect more clearly (I discuss this more fully in Chapter 5) but the resulting form still did not feel 'right'. Eventually, after much trial and error, I decided to abandon this approach entirely. In order to find a new way forward I had to reject much of the work I had already done.

I now want to consider Winnicott's paper 'The Use of an Object' (Winnicott 1969) and its possible relevance to a consideration of aggression and destructiveness in the relationship between artist and developing artwork. In this paper, Winnicott is concerned with the way in which the infant comes to recognise others as part of external reality rather than part of himself. He uses the term 'object-relating' to refer to the situation in which the subject (or infant) interacts with the object (or mother) as if it were 'a bundle of

projections'<sup>29</sup>. By 'object-relating' he refers to the situation in which the infant does not yet experience the mother (object) as separate from himself. The projections Winnicott refers to are parts of the infant himself. 'Object use', on the other hand, implies the subject's recognition that an object exists in its own right and has its own properties:

... may I leave it at that, that relating can be described in terms of the individual subject, and that usage cannot be described except in terms of acceptance of the object's independent existence, its property of having been there all the time? (Winnicott 1969: 712).

According to Winnicott, the baby's progress from object relating to object usage does not happen automatically but comes about through the baby's 'destruction' of the object. The infant must 'destroy' the object *in fantasy* and the object must survive this 'destruction'. The infant's discovery that the object has survived his attacks establishes the object's 'otherness', its existence outside the area of his omnipotent control. The infant can then begin to 'use' and interact with an object which has its own characteristics and which can respond according to its own nature.

Winnicott is not writing of physical attack but of an act of destruction in fantasy. The external object is experienced as separate from the subject through its survival of these attacks. The infant destroys the mother in fantasy and, if she tolerates his attack without retaliation, he discovers that she has survived destruction and so is not fully controlled by him. He discovers that she is a separate object, a person in her own right who can offer him something different according to her own characteristics.

I think that Winnicott's description of the path to object usage sheds light on the relationship between the artist and the developing artwork. In Chapter 2, I argued that, as the artist works, the artist's 'extended self' is in a state of illusion or 'oneness' with the developing artwork. As the work progresses, this state of 'oneness' gradually gives way to a separation between artist and finished work and the artist comes to see the work as

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<sup>29</sup> Although the term 'relating' usually refers to a situation in which there is an interaction between separate individuals, Winnicott gives it a different meaning in this paper.

having its own life in the outside world where it can take on meaning for the viewer as well as for the artist herself. I want to refer to Winnicott's paper to explore the way in which this movement towards separation is brought about. Here I am comparing the artist to the infant in Winnicott's formulation. When the artist works with her medium, in her 'extended self' mode of functioning, she experiences the artwork as if it is part of herself. In a sense, it is 'a bundle of projections' or a subjective object. The inner world is inextricably entwined with the outer. But, in the course of creating the artwork, the artist's experience of it changes and it becomes an object in its own right, able to exist in the outside world. Following Winnicott, I argue that this transformation is accomplished when the *developing work* survives the artist's attacks. This calls for some clarification because Winnicott writes about destruction in fantasy rather than physical destruction. I think that, when the artist finds that the work does not 'fit' her idea or pre-sense and she feels the need to cut parts of it out, to 'scrape it back to nothing' or to abandon a particular direction, there is a fear that she may have destroyed it completely, that it will not survive. That is, there is a destruction of the artwork in fantasy. When the artist discovers that, despite her fears, the artwork is still there, existing in its own right, she can 'use' it in the sense of interacting with it as a separate entity. Taking the example of my making of *The Transience of Wonder*, discussed above (and in Chapters 2 and 5), I abandoned a particular approach when I had already been working on it for some time. My fear was that I might have destroyed the work completely in that I might not find another way forward. But it was only by taking this risk that I was able to move on and that the artwork could eventually acquire a life of its own. Similarly, in the case of Artist T above, the artwork is 'scraped back to almost nothing'. But it is not quite nothing. It has survived and now, phoenix-like, it can re-emerge to become something new in its own right.

## **Chapter Conclusion**

Play, according to Winnicott, takes place in the potential space between inner and outer worlds. It is in this sense that I have considered the artist's interaction with her medium as a form of serious play. The artist imbues the developing artwork with her own inner experience so that, during the process of its making, it is both an object in the outside world and a part of

her inner world. This transformation necessarily involves the mobilisation of aggression. Even before the artist begins work with her medium, she has 'attacked' the subject of her work by extracting only those elements that she wishes to use. Now, she uses her medium ruthlessly to make it malleable enough to reflect her experience. As she does so, she treats the developing artwork as if it is part of herself. But in order for the artwork to be finished it must be able to stand apart from the artist in the outside world. There is a shift from a situation in which the artist experiences the developing artwork as a subjective object towards one in which she relates to it as a separate entity. I have drawn on Winnicott's paper 'The Use of an Object' to explore how this change comes about through the developing artwork's survival of the artist's attacks.

## Chapter 4: Spaces and Frames

*The house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace.*  
Gaston Bachelard (1994)

### Introduction

The artist Shezad Dawood, speaking of the location of creative thought, describes 'a kind of inner mansion where you have a number of connecting rooms' (Amirsadeghi and Homayoun Eisler 2012: 40) whilst Grayson Perry says 'My own creativity and art practice has been a mental shed - a sanctuary as well as a place of action - where I have retreated to make things. It gives me a sense of security in a safe, enclosed space while I look out the window to the world' (Jones and Perry 2007: 23). Perry's 'mental shed' takes on the characteristics of the shed that his father used as a workshop, whilst Dawood's has grander proportions.

Speaking of the internal spaces of the imagination, both Dawood and Perry use the metaphor of rooms, envisaging the internal equivalent of a physical outside space. In this chapter I further my consideration of the artist's process in terms of inner and outer worlds by exploring the conditions the artist needs in order to work. I argue that she needs a containing space within which she can feel free to enter her working state of mind and that this space has both external and internal components.

### The Studio

The studio, a physical space set apart from everyday life and dedicated to the making of art, is the prototypical workspace of the artist. Kenneth Wright (2014) describes Henry Moore's practice of collecting pieces of driftwood and other items and keeping them in his studio where they may inspire him in relation to new works. For some artists, including Moore, the studio provides an essential environment in which to work. It offers physical boundaries and the possibility of temporal ones too in that the artist may decide to spend certain periods of time in this space. The artist Shirazeh Houshiary speaks of the importance of the studio for her: 'When you're in the outside world, you are busy with domestic or everyday events. Here

you leave all that behind; it's a place where you are free, without any involvement with the outside world ... it is a place to let go' (Amirsadeghi and Homayoun Eisler 2012: 54). Houshiary speaks of a particular kind of freedom, the freedom to cast aside the constraints of everyday life and to follow one's own path. Possible disturbances are, as far as possible, removed. One of the interviewees describes how she tries to achieve this:

*I am building a new studio. There is almost a sense of nesting: both removing extraneous stuff and being specific about what is needed. I have painted the floor grey. ... I needed it to become neutral space where things could happen. The studio walls are white because I don't want distractions. Artist S*

This artist's comparison of her studio to a nest evokes a sense of safety and containment in a carefully prepared protective space. The potential disturbances the artist wants to guard against are not only ones from outside that might threaten the external frame but also ones from within herself. The bare floor and walls will help her to remain focused on her work.

Winnicott writes about the importance of the mother's ability to provide a contained space, protected from outside impingements, within which the infant's development can progress. He called this space the 'facilitating environment' (Winnicott 1965). According to Winnicott, the mother has two roles in relation to her child – a role as an object to whom the child can relate and a role as provider of an environment that will foster development:

... it seems possible to use these words "object mother" and "environment mother" ... to describe the vast difference that there is for the infant between two aspects of infant-care, the mother as object, or owner of the part-object that may satisfy the infant's urgent needs, and the mother as the person who wards off the unpredictable and who actively provides care in handling and in general management (Winnicott 1965: 7).

The facilitating environment is a safe space within which the infant can develop but this very development is predicated on the infant's changing relationship with the 'mother as object'. That is, the infant needs a contained setting for his relationship with his mother and the mother herself provides this. In a parallel way, the artist needs a contained setting for the

ongoing relationship between her and her artwork. However, the artist must provide this environment for herself and the studio is one means of doing so.

The artist's studio can be compared to the psychoanalyst's consulting room in that both offer a contained space, protected from interruptions, within which specialised work can take place. Just as the artist needs certain conditions in order to enter the state of mind necessary for her creative process, the patient in analysis needs the analyst to provide a containing space, a 'facilitating environment', within which she can engage in the analysis. The psychoanalyst Andrea Sabbadini compares the analyst's consulting room to the artist's studio, writing that within the 'consistent and therefore relatively safe space provided by our "studios"' (Sabbadini 2013: 120) the analyst can make creative use of the material brought by the patient.

The facilitating environment provided by the psychoanalyst does not only consist in the physical environment of the consulting room. In addition, the prescribed duration of the analytic session, the analytic 'rules' and the professionalism of the analyst act together to give the patient a sense of containment. There are also parallels here with the artist's situation. Temporal boundaries provide another type of external frame for the artist. She decides how long she will spend in her studio or other workspace and at the end of that period she knows she will emerge again into everyday life:

*I do get into quite an intense state I think where the brain sort of slips into something else... But I think if I went on like that without seeing... other people then the work wouldn't work because I would have tipped over the edge. Artist R*

Because this artist knows that, at a certain point, she will stop work, see other people and return to everyday concerns, she feels safe enough to allow herself to enter her working state of mind. Similarly, in a psychoanalytic session the analysand's knowledge that, at the end of the analytic 'hour', she will return to her everyday life can enable her to enter a different state of mind for the duration of the session.

Spatial and temporal boundaries can be considered as external factors that contribute to the artist's sense of containment. I will call these factors the artist's 'external frame'. The external frame may include procedural boundaries in addition to spatial and temporal ones. For instance, one of the interviewees works by deciding in advance upon a set of processes which she then follows in order to make the work. She compares her process to a scientific procedure in which she follows her protocol in order to discover what the result might be. This procedure gives her a sense of freedom within the limits she has set herself:

*I wonder whether sometimes I set up those processes or protocols so that I can then just be able to enjoy the painting for what it is... Perhaps having set up that protocol, I am then quite free to paint each one of these layers, and be free in what they could be and in what I put in the layers because I do not have to justify each image as it appears. The protocol does that. So there is the possibility of emotion in there but it doesn't halt the process, it doesn't matter if I don't like it. Artist S*

This artist spoke elsewhere in her interview of her 'overpowering yearning' to paint. Her protocols create a frame within which she can enjoy the painting without being overwhelmed by a powerful emotional response to her work. By 'justifying each image as it appears' she seems to be referring to the experience of painting without her protocol when she feels that 'each brushstroke is a decision' and she fears that her emotional response to the developing work might be strong enough to stop her in her tracks. The structure of the protocol seems not only to provide containment but is also something to hold on to in the maelstrom of her responses.

The artist and writer Rebecca Fortnum has interviewed women artists about their working practices (Fortnum 2005; 2007). She describes the total engagement of the artist at work as 'living in' the artwork and argues that each artist creates the conditions for this state of mind by putting boundaries in place. In her interview with Fortnum, artist Vanessa Jackson says: 'I'm happy with the notion of rules because we all have rules and we spend an inordinate amount of time being in them and then trying to break them ... The rules are to set up a space that I can dwell in' (Fortnum 2007: 139). The rules provide an enabling structure and make it possible for the artist to enter her working state of mind.



Returning to the parallel between the containing space provided for the analysand by the analyst and that provided by the artist for herself, the above quotation highlights an important difference between the two situations. The analyst, like the artist, puts procedural boundaries in place. In psychoanalysis, these include the analytic 'rules' of the analyst's professional behaviour and the 'rules' with which the analysand is expected to comply (such as timekeeping, contact between sessions, payment etc.). But the artist must guard against the possibility that her self-imposed rules might become too restricting. Jackson emphasises the fact that the rules are there both to contain and to be pushed against. For the artist, breaking rules may be an important part of the process. For the psychoanalyst, adherence to the rules of professional behavior is essential.

Whether or not she works in a studio or has particular procedural 'rules', each artist finds her own way to create a bounded 'external frame' within which she can work. The function of these boundaries is to set up the conditions for the artist to enter a different *internal* space. An interviewee says: 'The spaces are important. I obviously need space to work in and I need that psychological space to be free to explore and make mistakes – to allow failure' (Artist M). I will call this 'psychological space' the artist's 'internal frame'.

## **The Artist's Internal Frame**

In the previous chapter, I quoted an interviewee as saying:

*In the studio I have to be in a certain state ... it's about being very involved. What's very schematic, very structural in its approach is then set aside as you become involved in that pocket you've created to lose yourself in the activity.* Artist H

Here I want to consider what this artist means by a 'pocket'. In everyday language, a pocket is a small containing space within a larger garment or bag and I think that here Artist H is talking about an internal space, facilitated by the external space of his studio. Once he is in this 'pocket', a space he himself has created for the purpose, he feels able to 'lose' himself in his work.

Marion Milner, writing about 'losing oneself in an activity', refers to the need for a 'safe setting, a setting that will still be there when one emerges again into ordinary self-awareness' (Milner 1987a (1952): 81). Milner uses the term 'reverie' for the state of mind of the artist while working, preferring it over the more usual psychoanalytic term 'phantasy'. She writes:

For the word 'reverie' does emphasise the aspect of absentmindedness, and therefore brings in what I feel to be a very important aspect of the problem, that is, the necessity for a certain quality of protectiveness in the environment. For there are obviously many circumstances in which it is not safe to be absent-minded; it needs a setting, both physical and mental. It requires a physical setting in which we are freed, for the time being, from the need for immediate practical expedient action; and it requires a mental setting, an attitude, both in the people around and in oneself, a tolerance of something which at moments looks very like madness (Milner 1957: 163-4).

According to Milner's formulation, the necessary physical and mental settings are closely bound up with each other and their essential function is to protect the artist while she is in an absent-minded state of mind, the state she calls reverie. I am interpreting Milner's 'absentmindedness' as a state of being absent from the concerns of everyday life. The artist is anything but absent from the concerns relating to her developing artwork, as I discussed in earlier chapters. Milner compares this state to 'madness' by which I understand her to mean that the temporary relaxing of boundaries between the artist and the developing artwork has something in common with psychotic states in which differentiation between inner and outer worlds breaks down. In the terms I introduce in this thesis, this refers to moments when the artist's 'extended self' holds sway. Milner qualifies her comparison by saying that the mental state only looks like madness to other people. To the artist herself it does not. I argue that this is because the artist retains some connection with the outer world through her 'observer' mode of functioning. However, the fear that her state of mind may tip into madness, that she might lose touch with her 'observer self', may be present.

In the quotation above, Milner points out that the necessary setting is both physical and mental. I have discussed the physical setting above and will

now consider the mental one. To begin to do so I want to bring in one more quotation from Milner:

Then I came back to the role of the will, how in painting it seems to come in through restricting one's attention to the blank space to be filled together with the model, still life, landscape or whatever, and one's own feelings about this. The will making a kind of frame for what I have come to call contemplative action (Milner 1987a(1952): 81).

Here Milner's 'will' seems to refer to an effort of concentration, a refusal of distractions. The resulting 'frame' must be an internal psychic one and it seems to relate to the 'mental setting' she mentions above (although in the previous quotation Milner represents the 'mental setting' as a tolerance of the artist's state of mind whereas here she emphasises the limitation of the artist's attention to the task in hand). At this point, I want to take up the idea of the 'mental setting' as an internal psychic space or, to use the terminology of Artist H from the beginning of this chapter, a 'pocket'.

I want to differentiate here between the artist's *state* of mind and her *frame* of mind. I introduce the concept of the artist's *internal frame of mind* to refer to an internal containing structure that holds the artist mentally and allows her to feel safe enough to enter and remain in her working *state* of mind. This internal frame, according to my definition, is a psychic space within which the artist feels free to listen to her own responses to her developing artwork. It is a space for the artwork within the artist's mind where unconscious symbolic meaning holds sway. The artist's internal frame roughly corresponds with the psychoanalyst's internal analytic setting as proposed by Michael Parsons:

The analytic setting exists not only externally but also internally as a structure in the mind of the analyst. The internal analytic setting constitutes an area of the analyst's mind where reality is defined by unconscious symbolic meaning.... The internal setting can help analysts listen inwardly to themselves in a way that is free-floating with regard to their internal processes (Parsons 2007: 441).

Parsons points out that each patient affects the analyst in particular ways that have to do with the work that the analyst still needs to do on herself.

Her internal psychoanalytic setting allows her to feel safe enough to recognise these affects and to use them both to help the patient and to work on herself. Just as the analyst at work is listening for the inherent meaning of the patient's communications through the resonance of her own internal responses, so the artist listens to the communications of the developing artwork through their effect on her. The artist needs an internal frame that allows her to feel safe enough to be in touch with her inner experience so that she can interact with the developing artwork to find a form that will 'fit'. The artist's training and experience and her resulting confidence in herself as an artist provide the background for the artist's internal frame. Within this frame, reality operates in a different way. Parsons writes about the internal analytic setting:

The internal analytic setting is a psychic arena in which reality is defined by such concepts as symbolism, fantasy, transference and unconscious meaning. These operate throughout the mind, of course. The point about the analyst's internal setting is that, within it, they are what constitute reality (ibid: 1444).

Similarly, within the artist's internal frame, symbolism, fantasy and unconscious meaning constitute 'reality'. Clearly there is a marked difference between work that takes place within the internal analytic setting and that within the artist's internal frame in that the analyst responds to the communications of the patient, another subject, whilst the artist responds to the developing artwork, a work that is the product of her own internal world. But I am putting forward the idea that the necessary internal frameworks have in common that they provide safe settings within which the analyst or artist can be sensitive to messages from within themselves and they are both made possible through extended periods of training and experience. In addition to providing herself with a suitable physical space, within which she can work with her medium, the artist has to find space for the developing artwork *in her mind*. She must find a way of moving into an internal space contained by the 'internal frame'. I discuss this below.

## Crossing Over

In order to immerse herself in the making phase of her work, the artist needs to move from her everyday life into a different state of mind, bounded by the internal frame. As one artist put it:

*You're constantly trying to be at that point of maximum engagement ... it's like the idea of breathing underwater... of course you can't do that but you submerge yourself and somehow... there's a point of anxiety and then 'oh no, I can, I can do it' and I'm in different state but there's a sort of trauma involved in terms of crossing over. Artist H*

The movement into the internal frame is like a shift to another realm. By invoking the risk of drowning, Artist H gives a sense of what it could feel like to cross over into the internal frame but find himself unable to enter a different state of mind. The crossing over is risky and potentially traumatic<sup>30</sup>. It must be followed by the discovery that he can function in this new environment, that he can breathe there after all. He needs to enter a different state of mind and there is a moment of anxiety before he does so.

The decision to move from one realm to the other is taken with some trepidation. There is a risk involved and this risk has multiple aspects. Being in the internal artistic frame means entering a state of mind in which the boundaries that normally separate the self from the outside world (specifically, the developing artwork) can be relaxed. This in itself may feel dangerous. In addition, the subject of the work may hold its own terrors. These may be overt, as in the case of my own series of works related to Morecambe Bay. It was partly the dangers of the Bay that attracted my interest and evoked the desire to make the work. These dangers in the outside world resonated with internal fears and my process necessarily involved an engagement with those fears as embodied in the developing artwork. Referring back to the discussion of Parson's paper above, my engagement with aspects of my inner experience as they became

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<sup>30</sup> Laplanche and Pontalis describe trauma as 'characterised by an influx of excitations that is excessive by the standard of the subject's tolerance and capacity to master such excitations and work them out psychically' (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1988: 465).

embodied in the artwork parallel the analyst's engagement with her inner responses to the analysand's material. The analyst needs her 'internal analytic setting' to be in place and the artist needs her 'internal frame' in order to enter into this engagement.

Given the risks involved, it is not surprising to find that some artists have particular strategies to help them with the difficulty of crossing over:

*I have a set of things that I have to do before I start work if I'm in a studio. When I had my studio in Newcastle, whenever I went in there I would sweep it. I would start every day and I would sweep it even though it didn't need sweeping. But I would do that and that would take about 20 minutes. That would be a way of cleansing my head and clearing away any extraneous stuff though it was quite unconscious – I didn't know that was what was doing but I would do it religiously every day and then I would start my work. Artist C*

Interestingly, the artist says that she was initially unaware of the essential function of her sweeping. It was done 'religiously', implying a parallel with religious rituals such as repetitive prayer which can be used to induce a meditative state of mind in the participant. The ritual of sweeping becomes an intermediate stage that begins to induce a particular state of mind in the artist. Through the sweeping ritual she can clear her mind of everyday concerns in preparation for entering her internal frame. The stage has clearly defined time boundaries so the artist knows that this is how long it will take for her to move into her internal frame and her working state of mind. One might speculate that the time limit helps the artist to feel contained and safe enough to embark on the ritual. It will not go on forever. She will not remain caught in an in-between state.

For some artists, particularly painters, an intermediate preparatory stage forms part of their process:

*For some reason I don't make it easy for myself ... I'll start from scratch with the board ... and then mixing pigments into paint as opposed to just painting out of a tube of paint. I don't know why I do that but I do, it's quite a laborious thing... maybe that is important ... maybe there's a lot of thinking that happens actually during that time: not necessarily concerted thinking but more ... your mind is in a bit of freewheel maybe. As you are*

*kind of painting on your layers of gesso and letting them dry, and then painting another layer, and then letting that dry or grinding paint... thoughts will come and go, things wash in and out ... Maybe the physical labour allows my mind to sort of get into a free-wheely type of state or... sort of dislocated somehow, just kind of drifting. Artist T*

Again, this artist indicates that she has adopted particular laborious procedures but she has not previously considered her reasons for doing so. It seems that it is only during the course of the interview that she questions herself about this and discovers a purpose in it. The lengthy physical process of preparing paint and painting surface is a familiar routine that she can follow without focused thought. In this respect it parallels the sweeping ritual described above. Also, like the sweeping, it occupies a predictable length of time and so opens up a time-boundaried space within which the artist's state of mind gradually shifts from the focus necessary for everyday life to a 'drifting' or meditative state. It seems that, for her, this unfocused state is the necessary prelude to the movement into the internal frame and her working state of mind.

Indeed, although they may not engage in the ritualistic procedures described above, all artists are likely to go through a period of preparation for work as they gather the materials or equipment that they will need. Artist H describes his preparation for a photo shoot:

*I'm kind of scoping out in the preparation as well as what cameras I'm going to be using, what's the most appropriate lenses to be using for the things I'm interested in capturing. But it's also in terms of a sort of state that I will need to be in to be alert to the things that are, that seem, most potential in that situation and then to be able to be reacted to.... it seems to me that a lot of work goes into designing and preparing the circumstances ... to enable you to be completely involved, to be completely... submerged and to be, to lose consciousness within that... a very particular experience.*

As Artist H makes decisions about his choice of equipment he is setting the scene for his entry into a different state of mind that he describes as a 'submergence' or a loss of consciousness. Here I understand him to mean a loss of everyday consciousness, although this submerged state of mind includes the ability to be alert to what is going on in the outside world. If his

inner frame is safely in place, he will be able to be in tune both with the outside world and with his inner world in order to make decisions about which images to capture. Therefore, it is worth putting 'a lot of work' into 'designing and preparing the circumstances' to set the external frame in place and enable him to enter his internal frame.

This shift from an everyday state of mind to the internal frame can also be thought of as a move into the realm of whatever medium the artist has chosen. As a painter says:

*As soon as you pick up a paintbrush all your history with what it feels like to pick up the paintbrush is activated because of the habitual relationship to the physical aspect of it. As soon as you put down the paintbrush it's almost like you're turning down the volume, as soon as you pick up the paintbrush you're turning on a kind of an energy. Artist N*

For this artist, it is the physical act of beginning to paint that shifts her into a different state of being, a different 'energy'. She can access and turn down this energy at will (although, as the artists above testify, it may not be easy to get to the point of picking up the paintbrush) but the essential point seems to be that it is associated with a physical engagement with her medium.

Christopher Bollas, considering the creative person at work with their medium, writes:

When the painter paints, or the musician composes, or the writer writes, they transfer psychic reality to another realm. They transubstantiate that reality, the object no longer simply expressing self, but re-forming it. This might be considered a type of projection – a putting of the self into an object – but it is also a transubstantial change, where psychic reality leaves its home in the mind and moves into a different intelligence. (Bollas 2011a: 200)

I want to consider Bollas' use of the term 'transubstantial object' because I think that he draws attention to an important aspect of the artist's experience and I want to take his ideas a little further. Bollas introduces the term 'transubstantial object' to refer to 'the form into which one moves one's sensibility in order to create: into musical thinking, prose thinking, painting



thinking' (Bollas 2011a: 200). The idea that the artist moves into a different form of thinking according to the specifics of her medium seems to fit the descriptions of the artists I quote above. When Artist N picks up her paintbrush she enters a form of 'painting thinking'; when Artist H picks up his camera he enters a form of 'photography thinking'. Bollas goes on to assert that 'the "object" through which we create – painting, prose, music – has its own processional integrity, its own laws, and when we enter it to express our idea within its terms, we shall be altered by the object' (ibid: 202). Here Bollas emphasises the otherness of the transubstantial object and this seems to relate to my discussion of the interaction between artist and medium in Chapter 2. Bollas asserts that 'the artist is transformed by the process he chooses' (ibid: 201). This points up the fact that the new artwork is not only an expression of the artist's inner experience but a transformation of it according to the nature of the medium and the form of thinking that medium demands.

Bollas' use of the term 'transubstantial'<sup>31</sup> object', together with his suggestion that 'psychic reality leaves its home in the mind', introduces a spatial metaphor in which something from the artist's inner world moves outside into the 'other' territory of the medium's 'language'. But it seems to me that a movement into a different way of *thinking* is an internal process. Nothing has yet become manifest in the outside world. I think that the concept of the transubstantial object conflates two separate aspects of the artist's process – a movement into a *way of thinking* that is peculiar to the medium chosen and the *making* of a new artwork. The movement into a different way of thinking entails a shift to another space *within* the mind, the space that I am calling the artist's internal frame. It is in the *making* of the work that 'psychic reality leaves its home in the mind' and becomes manifest in the developing artwork. Bollas argues for the separateness or outsideness of the transubstantial object through a comparison with the

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<sup>31</sup> The term 'transubstantial' has associations with 'transubstantiation' as used in Christian theology where its meaning is very different from that given to it by Bollas. In Roman Catholic theology, 'transubstantiation' refers to a change in the *essence* of the bread and wine whilst its *accidents* (or attributes) remain the same. At the moment of consecration, bread and wine are believed to undergo an essential transformation into the body and blood of Christ whilst their *external* form remains unchanged. For the artist, 'painting thinking' or 'photography thinking' leads to a change in the external form of the developing artwork.

child's introduction to language. He equates the artist's entering into and being transformed by the transubstantial object with the child's entering into and being transformed by language:

This challenge is not without precedent as at least once we have been presented with the challenge of language, whether to enter it and be transformed by it or whether to refuse speech...Art forms offer further challenges to the self and as with language, what emerges from one seems not to be of one's own making, but guided by the form of another' (Bollas 2011a: 200).

But I question Bollas' comparison with the child's first introduction to language. For the experienced artist, 'painting thinking' or 'sculpture thinking' is not a new and unfamiliar territory as language is for the young child. Through her training and experience the artist already knows the characteristics and behavior of her medium, she has internalised this way of thinking and it has become an integral part of her 'internal frame'. In the quotation above, Artist N says that the act of picking up the paintbrush activates all her history of painting. This is *her* history of painting, not painting as a realm separate from her. Artist H collects together his photographic equipment and activates his experience as a photographer. The internal frame takes the form of an internal painting frame for Artist N or an internal photography frame for Artist H. Once the artist, held by her internal frame, begins to work with the medium and rediscover its otherness *then* the artist is transformed by her interaction with the medium and the developing artwork reflects this.

Whilst writing this thesis I have become acutely aware of the fact that I cannot switch easily from academic writing to my art practice. The two modes of working, not surprisingly, call for different forms of thinking but what seems remarkable to me is that the required switch in orientation is so profound that I seem to have to leave one mode of functioning completely before I can begin to prepare myself to engage in the other. Writing a thesis is not an artform but this experience does remind me of a period when I was attempting to create an art installation that included photographic images and my own poetry. At that time I found that I could not work on the visual elements of the work and the poems in tandem. I had to come out of

one mode, or one internal frame, and prepare myself to enter the other and this required both time and mental effort.

Bollas acknowledges the difficulty of moving from everyday life into the new form of thinking:

An artist does not go easily into this altered state of unconsciousness. They feel the boundary between ordinary psychic life and the artistic workspace, as one that is always difficult to cross and sometimes unbearably so. Even as they become accustomed to entering this other realm they are acutely aware of leaving themselves behind, thrown into a different form of life (Bollas 2011a: 200).

Interestingly, Bollas refers to an altered state of *unconsciousness*, implying that this shift involves plunging into the unconscious and, as Artist H puts it, a trust that one can 'breathe underwater'. Bollas' emphasis on the unconscious draws attention to the fact that the artist's imbuing of the developing artwork with aspects of her own experience takes place largely out of her awareness. However, I question Bollas' assertion that the artist leaves herself behind. On the contrary, the artists I interviewed claimed that they felt most fully themselves when working. As one artist put it: 'If I'm in a really good zone it's right in there it's all about my real innermost me' (Artist C). That is, while working the artist is more fully in touch with her significant inner experience than she is at other times. I think that what the artist leaves behind is not herself but, rather, her focused way of being in the world. However, the difficulty of entering the artistic workspace is rooted partly in the *fear* that the loosening of boundaries between herself and the developing artwork might result in the loss of self.

## **The Space of the Artwork**

So far in this chapter I have considered the various ways in which the artist constructs a containing internal and external space for herself within which she can work with her medium. She frames this space physically, temporally and procedurally. With the aid of this external frame, she moves into an internal frame within which she can be in her working state of mind. In specific ways that are pertinent to their own practices, then, each artist sets up external and internal frames that act as boundaries separating two

types of activity. Outside the frame lies the everyday world organised according to a 'reality' shared with others. Inside the frame lies a different 'reality' – a subjectively based organisation of the self in dialogue with the developing artwork.

I now want to consider the artwork itself as a containing space. If the artwork is to present the artist's experience, the space of the developing work must act as a container for the aspect of the artist's inner experience that is given form. This experience is an emotional one and can include intense feelings, either positive or negative, that may be difficult to bear. A vivid example of this is the work of Louise Bourgeois whose own writings (Bourgeois 2012) reveal the fact that she used her experience of psychoanalysis not to 'cure' herself of her symptoms but to intensify them so that she could put them into her artworks. The psychoanalyst Juliet Mitchell writes:

What she grasps from the repressed, in which her individual history is but one instance of what we all share, she must force into the art object where we can understand it....It is not just that Bourgeois makes real and concrete what she feels and experiences, it is that she goes into what is unbearable/unknowable (which is why it is repressed) and makes it conscious in visual form (Mitchell 2012: 51).

Bourgeois' artworks act as containers for her unbearable experiences of hatred, destructiveness and jealousy and these experiences are 'forced' into the works. In the face of such violence, the work itself must be strong enough to withstand the pressure of its contents.

If the artwork is to offer a contained space for the artist's (and viewer's) experience it requires a boundary or frame. From her own experience of painting, Marion Milner wrote about the empty space of the blank page as a frame and suggested that this space was a necessary prerequisite of her art. She went on to write that the frame 'marks off an area within which what is perceived has to be taken symbolically, while what is outside the frame is taken literally' (Milner 1957: 158). By 'literally', Milner means that what is outside the frame is to be regarded as part of the world of external, shared 'reality'. The frame here can be understood in a wide sense to

include not only the frame of a two-dimensional work but also the frame of the screen, the edges of a sculptural object or installation and the temporal limits of a play or film. In a paper discussing Marion Milner's contributions to psychoanalytic understandings of art, the psychoanalyst Lesley Caldwell (Caldwell 2014) quotes Winnicott as writing: 'One example of...unthinkable anxiety is the state in which there is no frame to the picture; nothing to contain the interweaving of forces in the inner psychic reality, and in practical terms no-one to hold the baby' (Winnicott 1969, in 1989: 115). Although Winnicott is referring to psychosomatic disorders rather than art and his 'frame to the picture' is a metaphorical one, Caldwell links his comment with Milner's interest in the physical frame of a painting and points out the way in which he draws a direct parallel between the holding function of the frame and that of the mother.

One artist describes the whole process of creating a new work in terms of the search for a frame:

*Perhaps what you pursue through the making of art is a desire to delimit something. There is a sort of fleeting impression or something that just escapes you... [A] sort of gap opens up between the elements of your conscious experience that you wish to delimit and the actual delimitation that is the work of art. There are all sorts of ways in which this gap can appear. The process of making art is a reiterative process. It's a constant reframing. It can never be stable. Artist S*

If the 'fleeting impression' is understood as her 'pre-sense', this artist sees her work in terms of a desire to delimit, or frame, the pre-sense. But (as I discussed in Chapter 2) there is always a gap between the pre-sense and any attempt to give it form. Therefore, each attempt at 'delimiting' is felt to be inadequate and the artist's process can be seen as a succession of reframings. However, this artist's description does not differentiate clearly between the 'form' of the work and its 'frame'. I propose that the trajectory of the process of creating a new work is a search for a form to correspond with the pre-sense and that this form calls for a frame that will contain it and separate it from the rest of the outside world, indicating that the form within the frame is to be taken symbolically. As the form develops, so too does the frame. The artist's task, therefore, is not only to find a form to fit the pre-sense but also to decide on the shape and dimensions of the frame that will

contain the form. This frame may include the setting in which the work will be shown.

The stage at which the frame becomes fixed varies according to the artist's medium. Tomma Abts says of the format she uses for her paintings: 'At some point I decided on that size. It felt right. I think it relates to the size of a head space. The vertical format holds the space tight. A landscape format would let the tension flow out on the sides' (Abts 2013: 58). It is clear from Abts' description that the physical frame of her paintings acts as a container, keeping the energy of the image packed tightly into the limited space. She did not decide on this format before she began her series of paintings, however. Rather, this decision was made 'at some point' when her process had progressed to the degree that she knew 'it felt right'. Once she had made this decision, subsequent paintings in the series could start with this framed gap.

The frame of any specific work is determined by a series of decisions in which the artist gradually narrows down the available options. As artist Q says: 'before you make your next painting or your next work, everything in the world is possible theoretically, so it's a process of elimination.' This process can be understood as comprising several phases. First, the artist decides on her medium. Some artists use a range of mediums and so choose a particular one (or more than one) for each work or series of works. Others make a once-and-for-all decision to concentrate on a particular field:

*I decided thirty years ago ... that I wanted to be a painter. I'd decided I wanted to be a painter but there were lots of people encouraging me to do other things ... but I thought I'm going to persevere with painting. So ... I've narrowed things down, I'm not going to go off doing this or doing that ... I'm going to try and develop my vision as a painter. Artist Q*

Having made the decision to work within a particular medium, a second stage follows in which the artist chooses a particular methodology and range of interests. This choice will be influenced by his or her personal concerns, her inner world, as well as aesthetic preferences and the desire to work within, or react against, particular artistic movements (themselves

another kind of frame). The choice is likely to affect the artist's entire oeuvre, or, at least, a series of works, rather than a single piece:

*I'm going to make a painting and it's then about the particular kind of painting. And my painting is particularly about... awareness of paint as a natural stuff, a substance ... whether it's a painting of, you know, a man lying in a field, it's also just paint and colour ... there's that kind of self-conscious awareness of what it physically is. And... that's, that's always at the forefront of my mind. Artist Q*

In addition to these choices, each of which narrows the available options and so frames the final work more closely, the artist decides on the particular form and dimensions of a particular work, its physical frame:

*That's part of my creative process actually, deciding how thick the wood is going to be that the canvas sits on, how many openings at the back of the stretcher there are going to be ... those sorts of decisions are quite particular, and they contribute to the success or not of the painting. Once you've made a decision that you're making a canvas, it's eight feet by seven feet... it's just one thing that's become fixed. Artist Q*

Painters usually need to make decisions about the size of the canvas or board, the physical frame of the work, before they begin work. Artists in other mediums may make equivalent decisions at later stages. For instance, a sculptor may decide on the form and dimensions of the final work some way into her process whilst a photographer may only choose the size of her prints in relation to a particular exhibition.

Decisions at each of the above stages narrow the options open to the artist and so provide a metaphorical as well as a physical frame. The artist may feel contained by the limits each decision imposes. But there is, again, a danger that any decision may be over-restricting, imposing too great a restraint on the artist. Sometimes a particular framing decision may need to be reversed or revised. This is easier in some mediums than others but even painters need the flexibility to modify their decisions if the work demands it. As Artist Q says: 'you can cut it down, you can add a bit onto the side which I've done over the years, I've changed things.'

The artist Martin Creed claims that at the beginning of creating a new work everything is possible but whilst Artist Q sees his process as gradually narrowing down the possibilities, Creed sees himself as trying to keep his options open. He wants to avoid setting limits: 'I don't want to choose because I don't know what to choose' (Caldwell and Creed 2012). Rather, he wants to keep possibilities open:

In the microcosm of a work you can have everything. So on a piano you can play every note or, you know ... if you make a microcosm you can, you can, you can make your own wee world where you can have everything. I mean along certain lines (Caldwell and Creed 2012).

This statement is reminiscent of Ehrenzweig's concept of dedifferentiation when he writes: 'What is common to all examples of dedifferentiation is their freedom from having to make a choice' (Ehrenzweig 1967: 32). According to Ehrenzweig, dedifferentiation is an essential stage on the way to making a new work. But for Ehrenzweig it is a stage, not the end condition. From Creed's statement it seems that he wants to remain in a state of dedifferentiation in relation to his work, to avoid making choices that would tie the work down. Lesley Caldwell links this desire to 'have it all, all the time' to the qualities of the unconscious described by Freud and suggests that perhaps, in his work, Creed addresses the question of what art is and how it differs (if at all) from other activities in life. However, despite his assertion that he can have everything, Creed himself qualifies this by adding 'along certain lines'. As Caldwell points out, in fact Creed is obliged to make choices in order to complete a work. As just one example, in *Work no 850*, the runners in the Duveen Gallery at Tate Britain, Creed chooses the speed of the running, the interval between runners and so on. Whether he wishes it or not, these decisions delimit his work. I argue that the artist cannot completely avoid the fact that the creation of an artwork involves a moving on from the state of dedifferentiation to a more delineated form.

A further frame is provided by the setting in which the finished work is exhibited. The 'framed gap' of the Duveen Gallery provides a bounded setting that contains Creed's performance. If the artist develops her artwork with a particular space in mind then this provides both limits and



possibilities for the work in hand. As Artist K says: 'That may come right at the beginning – the thinking how... that may be built into it. Because how it's displayed produces the way that it looks. But not for all works.' For some works, such as installation pieces, her knowledge of the exhibition space has a crucial effect upon the development of the work. For others, the work may be developed without reference to a particular space. When I developed my video work 'Under the Skin', at the beginning of the process I did not have a specific exhibition space in mind. The work was intended for projection but this could be achieved in a variety of venues. Later, however, as the work neared completion, I decided that I wanted to show it as a rear projection in a doorway. I hoped that the viewer would have the impression of a room full of sand moving strangely and that this might induce a fear that the sand would flood out at any moment. This effect could not be created by a projection onto a wall. Having found a venue with a suitable doorway (the entrance hall of Ruskin's house, Brantwood), there was a further stage of development as I adjusted the dimensions of the work to fit the space (literally a framed gap), researched suitable projectors and screens and made many decisions about the final appearance of the work in this particular setting (See Figure 5).



**Figure 5: *Under the Skin*. Installation view, Brantwood, Coniston, 2013.**

Considering the framing of *Under the Skin*, in one sense the frame of the doorway separated the space outside the frame from that inside it. Following Milner's argument, (Milner 1987a (1952)), what was seen within the space inside the doorframe was to be regarded in a different way from the space of the room outside the frame. The room belonged to everyday life whilst the work, within the doorframe, was to be received as a symbolic presentation. But, for this installation, the situation was not as clear-cut as this. The impact of the work did not reside only in the moving image within the doorframe. It relied on the fact that this was situated within a domestic environment. The threatening sand appeared as if it were in the adjoining room, as if the frame of the door might not be sufficient to contain it. So the doorframe became part of the work itself and it could be argued that the whole domestic setting was intrinsic to its effect. That is, the boundaries of the work became fluid, reflecting the fact that it was concerned with exploring a sense of the uncontainable.

This is just one example of the way in which artists may both use and subvert the containing function of the frame. The painter Imran Qureshi both embraces and challenges the strictures of the miniature form. In his installation *Where the Shadows are so Deep* (Qureshi 2016), a series of exquisite miniatures depict trees with anthropomorphic qualities as they

lean towards each other, lie uprooted or communicate through intertwining tendrils. Serene in the first images, contained within the miniature's traditional multiple borders, the trees become increasingly fragmented and frenetic. As they do so, violations of the frame gradually appear. The image slips to one side as if trying to escape; bloody marks appear within it; the white border is besmirched with dabs of paint; the frame sometimes disappears altogether. The image itself, no longer protected by an inviolable border, becomes unstable. The meticulously ordered universe of the miniature begins to break down. At the same time, the floor and walls of the gallery are splashed with sprawling blood-red paintings as if this is the scene of a recent atrocity. Qureshi disrupts the strict rules of miniature paintings, allowing his images to leak out of their containing frames, creating a powerful impression of a loss of law and order and an outbreak of violence.

In Qureshi's work, and in my own installation of *Under the Skin*, the subversion of frames becomes part of the work but this does not negate the existence of a containing space for the work as a whole. For Qureshi's *Where the Shadows are so Deep*, the gallery space (the Barbican Curve) provided this. For *Under the Skin*, similarly, the entrance hall in which the piece was shown acted as a container, although the question of which elements of that space could also be regarded as part of the work remained fluid.

## **Chapter Conclusion**

In this chapter I have continued my investigation of the interplay between inner and outer worlds in the artist's process through a consideration of the artist's need for a containing space within which to work. I have argued that this containing space has both external, physical components and internal, mental ones and I have drawn a parallel between the 'facilitating environment' provided by a mother for her infant (Winnicott) and the bounded spaces the artist provides for herself. I have explored the 'external frame', constituted by physical spaces such as the studio, temporal boundaries and procedural factors and the space of the work itself and I have introduced the concept of the artist's 'internal frame'. I define the 'internal frame' as an internal containing structure, specific to the artist's

medium, within which the artist's training and experience become activated. Within this internal frame, symbolic thinking and unconscious meaning become the stuff of 'reality' as the artist allows herself to respond to the developing artwork.

## Chapter 5: Out into the World

*So it's then about bringing it into the world somehow. Artist P*

### Introduction

The American artist Agnes Martin once said of her paintings: 'The happiest moment is when they go out the door. They go out into the world ... When they go out I don't take any further responsibility' (Martin 1997). These moments were the culmination of a long process during which she was involved in an intimate relationship with her developing painting. First she would sit in her rocking chair and wait for 'inspiration'. Then she would embark on the long and painstaking process of working with her medium, coercing it into a form to correspond with her internal vision. Finally she would evaluate the result to decide whether it evoked in her the feeling that she wanted to convey. If so, then it was ready to go out of the door and have a life of its own (Simon 1996, Martin 1997).

Continuing the characterisation of the artist's process in terms of the relationship between inner and outer reality, this final stage involves the launch of the artwork into the outside world. In this chapter I discuss the completion of the new artwork and its readiness for an exhibition or some other contact with an audience. To get to this point, the artist must judge whether or not the artwork is finished and she must separate herself from it sufficiently to be able to let it go.

### Knowing when to Stop

Agnes Martin said: 'You can't make a perfect painting. We can see perfection in our minds but we can't make a perfect painting' (Simon 1996: 86). Here Martin is referring to the fact that the concrete realisation of the artist's idea or pre-sense can never capture its full richness and boundlessness. Therefore the artist must decide when the work is finished and only she can make this judgement. Like Martin, Susan Derges emphasises that a finished work must have the ability to move her:

I begin with an intuition or a sense of an area I want to explore but it's not fully conscious. At the very end, the way in which I evaluate what I've done ... depends on whether I'm moved and convinced in a quite visceral or intuitive sense. A piece of work might well do the job but if it doesn't move me I don't use it; if it doesn't speak to me on multiple levels then I'm not really interested in it ... it has to be more than an intellectual statement. It has to have the potential to be very much alive...(Read 2017: 119)

Derges speaks here about the movement from her initial partially conscious 'intuition' (her pre-sense) to a form which moves and convinces her because she can recognise something of herself in it. The work has to live and to 'speak' to her in multiple ways. In this chapter I will explore the ways in which the artist judges that this has been achieved.

One of the interviewees describes the way in which he decides that a work is finished:

*It's at the point where you think I'd best leave this alone. I think it's as simple as that. It has just reached some point of autonomy.... where it can fend for itself, it doesn't need me to do anything any more. And I think that... in some respects I'd be quite happy if I never saw something again... if it works.*  
Artist A

This artist speaks of the finished work as if it has become a living being that is capable of having its own independent life in the outside world. As was the case for Agnes Martin, it seems that there is some relief in the realisation that the piece now 'works' on its own. Artist A does not elaborate here on the point at which the work acquires the ability to fend for itself but another interviewee, a photographer, speaks about the final stage of editing that marks the end of her process for a particular work:

*I have to actually kind of get out of myself and look at the stuff with a really open mind and be quite ruthless... I am just looking. Letting go of my liking or closeness to it. I have to detach myself.*  
Artist C

This artist uses a spatial metaphor here, saying that she 'gets out of herself'. In Chapter 2, I discussed the relationship between the artist and her medium in terms of a fluid movement between the 'extended self' state

and the 'observer self' state and I argued that, in the 'extended self' mode, the artist feels herself to be at one with the developing artwork. In the artist's working state of mind, although one or other self-state is uppermost at any moment, the other is never totally absent. Artist S' description of 'getting out of' herself seems to refer to a movement out of the 'extended self' mode but this is not merely a movement towards the observer self. The shift she describes is more radical. Now she makes a deliberate choice to change her position in relation to the work. I think that this can be understood as a movement out of the continuum between the extended and the observer self states. In that continuum she felt herself to be 'in' the work and now she is 'just looking' at it from the outside. That is, she puts herself in the position of a viewer of the work.

Artist H, also a photographer, highlights a point that signals the beginning of the final stage of his process:

*Sometimes it evolves and it becomes about shedding things, and other times it's about re-introducing something else ... I suppose most often the initial set of relationships that I was interested in I will return to ... In terms of making a project... it's interesting that kind of critical mass at the point where it seems to start to define itself, it seems to have found its own logic, and then you become, you become the kind of guardian to enable that to fulfil itself... that's a really exciting moment. Artist H*

Artist H seems to be able to identify a particular moment in his process when something important changes, as if at this point he can see a clear way forward. He says that this is most likely to happen when he returns to 'the initial set of relationships' that interested him. In the language of this thesis, this initial set of relationships is the artist's 'pre-sense'. He has worked on his project over a period of time but it is at the point when he re-connects with his pre-sense that the developing work seems to come together. At this point he recognises that the work has taken on something of his own inner life. He continues:

*... and then you have to make sure that the circumstances that seem necessary for you to complete the edit, or for you to present the work ..., enable the fundamental elements that you perceive as being essential to articulating the core of the idea. Then there's a certain point that you realise that you could go*

*beyond but that there are diminishing returns in terms of how an edit might look or how something might be framed or... but you have to get to that point ... otherwise you can't rest. Artist H*

Once he has reached the point where the developing artwork has begun to acquire its own life (a life which is also the artist's own), Artist H has clarified what the 'fundamental elements' essential to his idea are and now he sets about providing the conditions necessary to embody them. These elements are also fundamental to the artist's pre-sense. He 'can't rest' until he is sure that he has articulated his pre-sense as clearly as he can. Once that point has been reached, further adjustments are no longer essential.

In Chapter 2, I discussed my experience of making *The Transience of Wonder* and the way in which I continuously returned to my 'pre-sense' to question what it was about my experience on the mountain that had touched me. Like Artist H, I could not rest until I felt that the artwork I had produced was in close enough harmony with that experience. As I re-examined my pre-sense I repeatedly questioned whether the particular elements that I had abstracted<sup>32</sup> from that experience were really the most relevant ones. For instance, I initially thought that the indexical nature of the work was important in that each 'slice' of sky referred to a particular moment in time and space. After I had rejected the timeline print described in Chapter 2, I tried separating the 'slices' and arranging them on a wall according to the altitude differences between each shot (see Figure 6: *The Transience of Wonder. Work in Progress 2*).

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<sup>32</sup> Langer suggests that the artist abstracts the essential elements of her experience and gives form to these in her artwork. It is this dynamic personal experience that gives life (or, in Langer's terms, 'vital import') to the work (Langer 1953: 59-60).





**Figure 6: *The Transience of Wonder. Work in Progress 2.***

In this configuration, each 'slice' refers to a particular moment in time and a particular altitude. However, this new incarnation still seemed to be missing something essential. I tried to recapture my memory of my pre-sense to question yet again what it was about that experience that had touched me and what might still be lacking in the work. I realised that my experience was reminiscent of childhood memories of being alone and lying in a field looking up at the sky and the passing clouds. This was associated with a sense of freedom but also of containment as the long grass formed a sort of frame for the sky itself. However, this seemed to be a happy memory and I felt that there was also a darker side to the experience I was trying to embody that was difficult to capture.

Eventually I had the prints mounted under thick blocks of perspex so that they became solid objects, 'shards' of sky. It was only at this point that I understood that this was not to be a wall mounted piece but a three-dimensional installation in which the pieces would be in a 'random' arrangement as if the sky had shattered and fallen to the ground (See Figure 7).



**Figure 7: *The Transience of Wonder*. Work in Progress 3.**

I realised that I needed to give up my earlier idea with its emphasis on indexicality because it did not embody my pre-sense sufficiently closely. Through the new configuration I began to have a clearer sense of the experience I was attempting to capture. I understood that it had something to do with a sense of boundlessness, that as I climbed the mountain the sky lost its framing of trees or of the surrounding landscape and there was a feeling of emerging into infinite space. At the same time, this experience was fleeting and unstable, liable to collapse. This verbal description can only give a flavour of the total experience of the pre-sense but it was this realisation that led me to feel that the work was on its way to being finished. Much work remained to be done in terms of decisions about exact print colours, the number of pieces, the surface on which they would be displayed, the title and so on but at this point, in Artist H's terms, the work had 'found its own logic' and I had 'become the kind of guardian to enable that to fulfil itself'.

For installation works, the final form of a piece may depend upon the conditions of the space in which the work is shown. In the case of *The Transience of Wonder*, for its exhibition at the Slade, I chose to show the pieces scattered on the grey floor of the gallery (see Figure 8):



**Figure 8:** *The Transience of Wonder*, Slade School of Fine Art, 2017.

The choice of a title for a work (even if it is 'Untitled' or, as for Martin Creed, a number) can be an important step in finishing the artwork. Susanne Langer (Langer 1942; 1953) differentiates between the 'presentational symbols' of art which are created anew by each artist and the 'discursive symbols' of language where words have relatively fixed meanings. That is, the words of a particular language are free standing symbols that represent something other than themselves. Their meanings are understood by anyone familiar with that particular language. By combining words we can describe something (such as an experience) and talk or think about it.

Presentational symbols such as artworks do not describe experiences but, rather, show how the experience is. Drawing on Langer's work, Ken Wright argues that, in child development, there are two phases of attunement between mother and child. First, the mother responds to the infant with her own facial expressions, gestures and non-verbal sounds, offering presentational symbols that reflect the infant's experiences. Wright compares this to the forms created by the artist. Later, the parents offer the child words and phrases (discursive symbols) to describe his experiences:

When words are offered in adaptive ways, they will furnish a verbal envelope to the earlier organization in a way that completes the structure and enables the infant to differentiate and name the experience (Wright 2015: 14).

Above I discussed Wright's suggestion that the artist coerces the medium to provide the presentational forms that she needs to embody an inchoate element of her inner world. Similarly, she can coerce language to provide a title that will also reflect something of the same inchoate element. As I have suggested earlier, the form of the artwork can only be an approximation to the inchoate element of the artist's inner world and can never encompass it fully. The conferring of a title onto the work (the addition of a discursive symbol to the presentational one of the non-verbal form) can refine the overall form, but this is only the case if the title is not merely descriptive. If the title relates to the visual aspect of the work without being limited by it – if it brings its own associations – then it can act as a vital element of the work. For some artists the title is decided upon early in the process and is an integral part of the work. For other artists, or for some works, the choice is made towards the end of the process. My own practice is to have a descriptive working title that changes as the work develops. As I begin to recognise myself in the developing form, this working title usually begins to feel inadequate or too limiting and I replace it with something that seems to take my associations in a different direction. For instance, the working title of *Under the Skin* was *Canal Foot Wall*, a combination of the place in which the photographs were taken and the idea that I wanted to create the sense of a wall of sand. It was only when I saw the way in which the surface of the sand (and of the screen) resembled the skin of a human being, that I gave this piece its final name. This name, in turn, relates to the fact that

Morecambe Bay does indeed get under my skin in that it both disturbs and fascinates me. Once I had conferred this title upon the work, it seemed to delineate its separate and autonomous identity.

Deciding upon titles has also marked an important step in completing the works in the recent series *Spaces of Time*. The working title of *The Transience of Wonder* was *Sky Steps*, a simple reference to the images and the circumstances of their making. But, as the piece neared conclusion, I wanted to choose a title that would relate to the emotional experience of reaching the peak of the mountain. In that case, the new title was consciously chosen in order to reflect this experience.

The process of choosing a title was rather different in the case of the video work *Black Sun* (See Figure 9). This work was prompted by my discovery of a near-spherical black volcanic rock on the island of Stromboli. I was fascinated by the rock, and wanted to make an artwork related to it (I had a 'pre-sense'). Its size and shape reminded me of a heart and I imagined it as the heart of the volcano but, beyond these associations, I had no clear idea of why it appealed to me so strongly.



Figure 9: *Black Sun*. video still.

When, having completed the video, I came to give it a title, the name 'Black Sun' came into my mind unexpectedly. It was only at this point that I researched the term, discovering its mythological significance<sup>33</sup>, and made the association with Julia Kristeva's book of the same name (Kristeva 1989)<sup>34</sup>. These associations clarified the appeal of the stone for me and led me towards an understanding of the ways in which I recognised myself in the finished artwork.

## Separation and Letting Go

In order to let go of a new artwork and allow it to take its place in the world, the artist must separate from it in a psychological sense. When the work is completed, the artist relinquishes her state of oneness with it. But this separation may not occur immediately. Indeed, many artists need a period of time to live with the work before they are ready to let it go both psychologically and physically. Agnes Martin waited 3 days before she allowed a work to be taken for exhibition (Martin 1997). Other artists may wait considerably longer or the letting go may be prompted by a particular event. For instance, Artist S spoke of a meeting with a curator and a discussion about the future of 'the work' as if it no longer had anything to do with him. This felt 'weird' and it took him a moment to accept that this was the appropriate time to let go and allow the work to have a life of its own (Artist E 2013, personal communication).

The process of separation is not always an easy one. One of the interviewees uses the metaphor of birth to describe her experience:

*It's like an umbilical cord. They are my children you know and I have to cut it. I have to cut and you've got to get yourself to a point where you can do that. You know you've got to do it ... It's part of me till then and then it's not part of me but there is still a raw thing. Artist C*

This vivid description emphasises the artist's intimate connection with the developing artwork. During the making stage, artist and developing work

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<sup>33</sup> The black sun has female connotations as both tomb and womb (Dick et al. 1989).

<sup>34</sup> Kristeva's book 'Black Sun' deals with mourning and melancholia.

are bound together by cords that she must now sever, suggesting that this separation is necessarily a violent one. She says that she has to get herself to the point where she can make this cut but the question remains of how she does this. I will address this now.

In this thesis I have traced the artist's journey as she responds to and takes in something from the outside world, works on it internally and, through her interaction with her medium, externalises it in the form of a new artwork, now transformed and imbued with her own inner experience. There remains one more stage of this movement between inner and outer worlds. I argue that the final stage involves the artist's recognition that the work does indeed provide a form for an aspect of her inner experience. Now she is able to see this experience in a new light, and this *seeing* is both visual and intuitive. Through the new form she has a deeper understanding of her own experience, although this understanding may or may not be fully conscious. In other words, she sees and *takes in* something from the artwork, something that she is now able to integrate. Anton Ehrenzweig writes: 'taking back from the work on a conscious level what has been projected into it on an unconscious level is perhaps the most fruitful and painful result of creativity' (Ehrenzweig 1967: 57). Ehrenzweig suggests that the artist initially projects fragmented parts of herself into the developing work. In the course of her process these fragments are integrated in the developing work and eventually the artist is able to take them back into herself. Ehrenzweig's assertion that the artist takes something back *consciously* seems to me to imply a greater level of awareness than may be the case. However, I do think that, if she has been successful, the artist recognises something of herself in the finished work. She senses that the new artwork provides a true form for her experience, although she may not be able to articulate this verbally. Artist A describes his own sense of recognition and the fact that it may not always be welcome: 'You [sometimes] think "This is an absolutely awful thing that I've made ... But it's kind of interesting"'. This recognition, this seeing her experience in an external form, allows the artist to internalise and integrate it.



## The Sense of Loss

I want to consider some of the reasons why this severing of the close connection between artist and work may, for some artists, be so painful. In Chapter 2, I discussed the relationship between the artist and her medium and argued that, in the extended self state the artist feels in a state of oneness with the developing work. I considered this state as harking back to the early mother/child relationship, not the pre-birth state of physical oneness that Artist C evokes, but the stage of early development when the boundaries between self and other are not firmly established. In particular, I discussed Wright's characterisation of the artist's engagement with her medium as a reworking of an early relationship between infant and mother in which the medium is used by the artist to perform some of the roles of the mirroring or adaptive mother (Wright 2009). If this is the case, then to let go of a completed artwork is to lose an ongoing dynamic relationship with a mirroring or attuning 'other'. This could leave the artist feeling bereft. A number of interviewees speak of moving from one project to another and avoiding periods in which they have no ongoing work. Artist F says: 'I don't feel alive if I'm not making work'. In terms of Wright's formulation, this sense of aliveness is related to the struggle to coerce the medium into becoming an attuning form. In other words, the artist feels alive as long as she is *in the process* of enlivening her developing artwork and enabling her medium to become attuned to her. One might suppose that when the artwork is finished and has become a form for her experience it would continue to act as an attuning form for the artist. But it seems that the feeling of aliveness is not engendered by the relationship between artist and finished work even though the artwork has now been endowed with its own life or 'vital import'. Rather, it arises from the changing, dynamic dialogue between artist and work in progress. The artist acts on the developing work and that work responds by becoming more attuned to her experience and it is this fluctuating relationship that makes the artist feel more alive.

To take this further, I return to Winnicott's writing on mirroring. If all goes well enough in infancy, the mother is able to respond to her baby so that her facial expressions and gestures provide forms that fit the infant's experience. Looking at his mother, the infant sees a reflection of himself

and this repeated and reliable experience is necessary for his 'going on being'<sup>35</sup>. Without this mirroring from his caregiver, the infant's development is adversely affected:

Many babies, however, do have to have a long experience of not getting back what they are giving. They look and they do not see themselves. There are consequences. First, their own creative capacity begins to atrophy, and in some way or other they look around for other ways of getting something of themselves back from the environment (Winnicott 1986a: 131-132).

For Winnicott, a person's sense of being alive is integrally connected with their 'creative capacity'. As adults, we continue to look for mirroring responses, usually from those people close to us. But, for an artist, a primary way of receiving this dynamic feedback is through her artistic practice, in particular through her work with her medium. Once an artwork is finished there is a need to move onto another to feel a continuing sense of aliveness.

The sense of loss that some artists experience when a work is finished may have other components too. Once the artwork leaves the artist it no longer belongs exclusively to her but is gifted to its viewers who, if they respond to it, will do so because it resonates with their own inner worlds. The academic Karen Pepper writes:

At that postpartum moment when the work of art leaves the hand of the artist, it belongs entirely to a world that must, in order to understand it, fill it with its own projected desires and intentions. And what the artist put into his art—his very soul—may have little connection, if any, to what will subsequently be drawn from it (Pepper 2001: 15).

Like Artist C above, Pepper uses the metaphor of birth and the phrase 'leaves the hand of the artist' emphasises the physical relationship between artist and developing artwork. As long as the artist is physically engaged with the developing work there is a sense of closeness that this writer

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<sup>35</sup> 'Reacting to unreliability in the infantcare process constitutes a trauma, each reaction being an interruption of the infant's 'going-on-being' and a rupture of the infant's self' (Winnicott 1965: 97).

compares to that of mother and unborn infant. The ending of this physical involvement inevitably involves a loss. The writer and psychotherapist Rozsika Parker writes:

Loss of control at the moment of parting with a piece of work is perhaps the most fearful experience of loss engendered by creativity. Once sold, published or exhibited the meaning of the work becomes constituted by the other (Parker 1998: 771).

Parker emphasises the loss of control here when the meaning of the work (that is, its meaning as an independent art object, not its meaning for the artist herself) is taken over by the viewer. The artist cannot control how the work will be received or whether, indeed, it will be capable of standing on its own without her continuing intervention. The degree of loss of control at this point varies according to the artist's medium. For the performance artist who performs his or her own work, the artist remains personally and physically involved in the exhibition. The continuing life of the piece may depend on the physical presence of the artist (though it might live on without the artist in the form of its documentation). Artists who use mechanical or electronic equipment may feel that they need to keep a watchful eye on the conditions of exhibition. For the artist who uses other performers, there may be anxieties about whether all is going according to plan. Martin Creed speaks of the difficulties of letting go of a performance piece at the point of exhibition. His *Work No. 850* at Tate Britain involved runners in the Duveen Gallery (Creed 2008): 'Then there's the question of whether or not it's been done properly which is a nightmare to me if you're... you know, always having to phone the gallery to make sure it's going on...' (Caldwell and Creed 2012). This highlights the differences between the experience of exhibiting paintings, photographs or sculptures that do not change in the showing and exhibiting pieces that continue to demand the artist's attention. In a sense, these latter pieces are always in process of creation, although the artist's control of the medium is less complete.

Although, for professional artists, the usual culmination of the making process is for the new work to go out into an exhibition or to be delivered to the commissioner, some works of art are of such import for artists that they

choose to keep them for themselves. When I was asked to write the catalogue essay for the Danish exhibition *Ikke Til Salg* ('Not for Sale') (Townsend 2015), in which the exhibits were works that the artist chose to keep, I contacted the artists to ask the reasons why they had chosen to retain these particular works. Several of the artists replied that they wanted to keep a particular work because they felt that it would be both a turning point and a source of further inspiration. As Artist Z writes 'This work has elements and ideas that I don't want to forget. There are questions in this work, I still have to explore' (2015, personal communication). He sees this painting as a 'sourdough' for future artworks. Several artists described their sense of something within the piece that they cannot yet grasp:

*It is the start of something new some yet unrevealed and not yet, at all, fully explored potential...It is my source, where I find this exact energy, motivation and volume that I want to track more of* (Artist Y 2015, personal communication).

The emphasis here is not on incompleteness but on fullness, a superfluity of life and energy, as if the painting is overflowing with possibilities. However, the way forward is not necessarily clear. As Artist X writes: 'It is like a window pointing towards, I do not know what...' (2015, personal communication). The potential is not to continue in a familiar way of working but for something different and the artist may have to wait until the painting reveals this new direction.

These artworks that take the artist in a new direction have done more than provide a form corresponding to the original pre-sense. They have also touched on further areas of the artist's inner world that do not yet have a form. That is, the artist responds to *the new artwork itself* as something in the outside world that resonates with her inner world and gives rise to the intimation that a new artistic direction can be found. This may lead the artist back to the element in the outside world that first attracted them to see it in a new way. Or it may lead them eventually to find something else in the outside world to take their explorations further.

In the meantime, the process of psychological separation between artist and artwork is not completed. The artwork itself is finished and ready for

exhibition but it is still, in a sense, intimately connected with the artist herself. The artist recognises something of herself but also realises that there is something more that is not yet fully articulated and her search begins anew.

## **The Relationship Between Present, Past And Future Works**

In Chapter 1, I discussed the artist's encounter with something in the outside world and her pre-sense that that she may be able to find a form, in the shape of a new artwork, for her experience. But each individual artwork does not stand alone. It is connected to the artist's previous work and it, in turn, will influence future work. As the painter Clyfford Still says 'No painting stops with itself, is complete of itself. It is a continuation of previous paintings and is renewed in successive ones' (Still 1961: 9–14). In this section I will attempt to unravel the various ways in which separate artworks may be linked.

A number of the interviewees spoke of the way in which concerns explored in one artwork recur in later ones. As one artist puts it: '...it seems to come out of my own history as it were. And there can be ... something that I encountered in the work years ago that winkles its way up to the surface of mind and I want to take that up again' (Artist N). The 'something' that the artist encountered seems to be something personal to her, an unformed aspect of her inner world, that could not be fully encompassed by her earlier work and that emerges again for further elaboration.

Another interviewee says: 'I think a lot of what I do is repeating the same thing done over and over again in different forms ... In a way repetition is used to push at something to try to move through it and I think that's very much how I work' (Artist K). Since the artwork can never fully embody the inchoate aspect of the artist's inner world, something will always be left undone and this can re-emerge and be taken further in the next work. One of the artists says:

*The finished painting mostly just asks for the next painting.  
There is no rest, there is no sense of that's done, put a line*

*under it ... There is still something that you haven't quite touched on or you touch on something new that you hadn't noticed before. Artist S*

I think that this artist is talking about two different situations here. In the first, the artist finds that there is something that they 'haven't quite touched on' in a particular finished work. That is, the finished artwork embodies an aspect of the original pre-sense but another aspect remains to be addressed in a new work. The emphasis is on incompleteness but also on a relatively clear way forward. The second situation is one in which the artist finds that the new artwork touches 'something new that you hadn't noticed before'. This could be something only loosely connected to the original pre-sense, something that might send the artist in quite a different direction or that might lie dormant and re-emerge much later.

This sense that there is more to be done is essential for the artist's continued urge to create new works:

*The big worry is when you think 'gosh I've never resolved this properly', or 'I only resolved it at a few different stages', but actually do I want to resolve it? you know. Is it something which is just irritating but... it will never be resolved? Or if it was resolved is that it? You know, is that it, over? Shutter closed, wrap it up and go home. And I think that perhaps that continual search for something or continual looking at something, and changing perspectives on it but still looking for this elusive or even illusionary thing ... is what drives us all on. Artist A*

There is a paradoxical need to find the perfect form and not to find it. Artist A wants to continue his search and feels that he would be lost without it. This may be partly connected with the sense of aliveness the artist gains through the attuning function of the medium while her work is in progress, as I discussed earlier in this chapter. But also, if the 'elusive or even illusionary thing' is the inchoate element of the artist's inner world then it will necessarily remain elusive since the artwork can never fully encompass it and it is this very elusiveness that will inspire future works. Each work returns to it, perhaps through a different aspect of the outside world, shedding a different light on it. As Artist P says: 'So a piece of work I made 10 years ago, I am still articulating it. I'm still talking about it and still reframing it in terms of current work that I'm doing. It just keeps on keeps

on going and has many layers to it.’ Another artist also speaks of a linkage between different works:

*I think what’s really important for me is a sense of a continuum in the practice, in my practice, and that in the different contexts and locations that I’ve looked at they share certain qualities, certain frequencies of ... of engagements between people but also certain emotional nuances as well. But also that in this idea of the continuum that there are shifts as well.* Artist H

Artist H’s ‘continuum’ relates to ongoing themes that are manifest across works related to many different elements of the outside world. In a variety of situations Artist H is looking for certain qualities in common. It seems likely that these qualities relate to a particular aspect of his inner world and that he experiences a pressure to find forms to embody this inner ‘something’.

I want to highlight two different ways in which ongoing concerns may recur in different works. In the long term search described by Artists A and P, they speak of deep personal themes that recur in separate works relating to different aspects of the outside world. On the other hand, an artist may make a series of works, all related to a single outside element. I will attempt to illustrate the difference between these two situations through a consideration of my own work.

Taking the example of my series of works related to Morecambe Bay, this began with the sense that there was something about the Bay that both fascinated me and made me uneasy. This led (through a series of stages that I have described in Chapter 1) to the first idea for a new work. The resulting artwork (*On the Shores*), a montage of still and moving image reflecting on the hazardous journey across the Bay, shed some light on the aspect of my inner world that had been activated by the Bay (See Figure 10: *On the Shores*). It also offered me a new vision of the Bay and, correspondingly, a different way of relating to it.



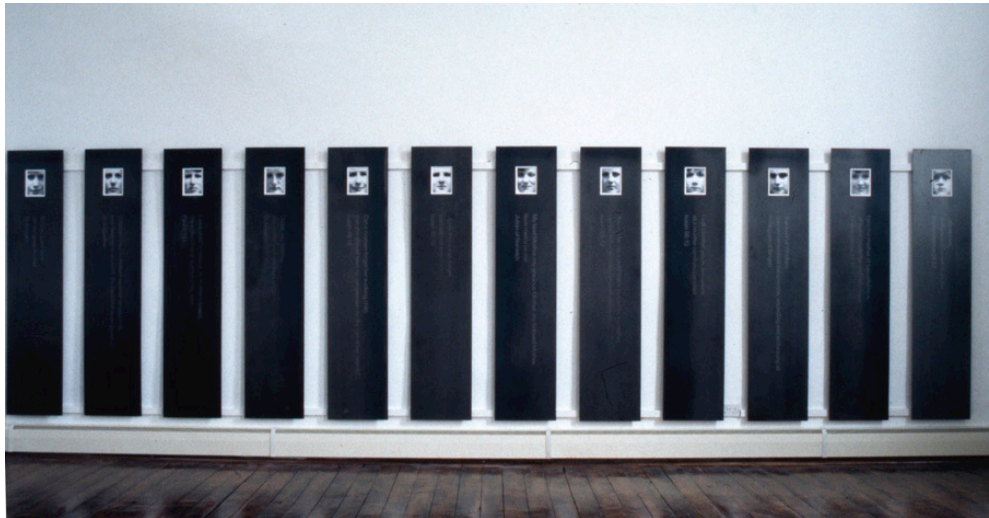
**Figure 10: *On the Shores*. Video still.**

Having completed the first work, I felt that there was more for me to explore. *On the Shores* had emphasised the Bay as an expanse of water and I wanted to make another work that would focus more closely on the quicksands. This resulted in another video piece, *The Quick and the Dead* (discussed in Chapter 1) that shed a different light on my inner experience of the Bay. The series continued in this way with several more works, all related to the Bay, each new form elaborating further on my experience of this particular landscape.

After exhibiting *Under the Skin*, (see Figure 5), one of the series of works related to Morecambe Bay, I noticed that the portrait format of the projection and its dimensions resembled previous works in different media and related to different elements of the outside world.

In 2000 I created an installation of 12 steel panels inscribed with text (see Figure 11: *Ecclesia Mater*. Globe Gallery, Hay-on-Wye, 2000.) and the shape and size of each panel was similar to that of the current work:





**Figure 11: *Ecclesia Mater*. Globe Gallery, Hay-on-Wye, 2000.**

In 2007 I created another installation, *Witches' Dance* (see Figure 12: *Witches Dance*. Dock Museum, Barrow-in-Furness 2007.) comprising photographic prints on silk, and, again, each silk panel resembled the projection in terms of its dimensions:



**Figure 12: *Witches Dance*. Dock Museum, Barrow-in-Furness 2007.**

I was aware that in both those earlier works I consciously intended the format to relate to the dimensions of a female figure. This led me to recognise that, outside my conscious awareness, the same desire was present in the new work and that I was, in this piece as in the previous ones, exploring my relationship with an internal maternal image. Reflecting on these pieces in relation to each other also led to the realisation that, across the three works, there was a movement towards increasing animation of the 'figure'. In the earliest piece, the steel panels were rigid and unmoving. In the second, the photographs on the silk panels were of solid rock but this immutability was belied by the flexibility of the silk and its tendency to move in the breeze created as visitors moved through the gallery. For the latest piece I animated still photographs to create a constant movement as if the sands themselves were alive. It seems that presentations, more or less disguised, of a maternal image are an ongoing theme in my work and the motif appears in artworks that arise from very different aspects of the outside world.

Similarly, it was only after I completed the video piece *Black Sun* that I recognised its close links with several earlier works. In *Black Sun*, a spherical planet-like rock seems to move slowly towards the viewer whilst its surface changes almost imperceptibly. Just before it fills the screen it slowly moves away again and this coming and going movement is repeated in a continuous loop. In retrospect I could see that this movement is similar to that in the video work *The Quick and the Dead*, discussed in Chapter 1, and it is also similar to a work *I am/I am not* in which viewers see their own reflection in a one-way mirror and this reflection is gradually obliterated by an expanding white light. I realised that in all these works I was trying to find a form for a personal experience that was both enticing and threatening.

At this point I want to consider how the recurrence of personal themes might be conceptualised in terms of psychoanalytic theory. I have said that the artist is driven to find a form for an inchoate element of her inner experience but this leaves open the question of the nature of this inchoate element. Freud saw art as providing disguised forms for repressed material, presenting this material to the artist herself and to others in a veiled way.

But there are also other possibilities. Repression implies that what is to be repressed has already been given some sort of form before it is denied access to consciousness by the super-ego. The psychoanalyst Howard Levine re-examines Freud's definition of the repressed (Freud 1915) and points out that:

The distinction that Freud was making was between the organized, articulatable subset of the unconscious that we call the repressed or dynamic unconscious and the second, more extensive category of inchoate forces that either lost or never attained psychic representation and, although motivationally active, were not fixed in meaning, symbolically embodied, attached to associational chains, etc. (Levine 2012: 607).

These 'inchoate forces' may have their roots in infancy when the infant was dependent on his caregivers to provide forms for his experience through mirroring (Winnicott 1986a) or attunement (Stern 1985) but even the most sensitive mother will not offer perfect forms for every experience. Indeed, it is likely that the infant's states of rage and distress would present particular difficulties in this regard. Inevitably, then, each person has a vast residue of experiences that have never been given form and cannot be brought to consciousness. Levine argues that there is an internal pressure to find forms for these states and he calls this pressure the 'representational imperative'.<sup>36</sup>

Here I am concerned with the ways in which the practice of art may provide a route towards finding forms for aspects of these 'inchoate forces'. These states are not accessible to consciousness and can never be fully apprehended. Certainly they cannot be pinned down by the fixed representational symbols of verbal language. But the more open, presentational forms of art are ambiguous and multiply determined. At a conscious level, the artist may be aware of working on a particular issue but, outside her awareness, other factors may operate. Taking the example of my realisation that different bodies of work all assume the shape of a female form, when I was in the process of creating the last work, *Under the*

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<sup>36</sup> César and Sára Botella's work on psychic figurability is also concerned with unrepresented states in psychoanalysis. (Botella and Botella 2005; Botella 2014).

*Skin*, I was unaware of this repetition. It seems that, outside my awareness, there was a 'representational imperative' (Levine 2012: 609) to return to this theme. Similarly, when I made the video *Black Sun* I did not consciously set out to revisit the themes explored in earlier works. I am suggesting that these themes relate to inchoate states in me but that they do not, and can never, completely capture those states. Rather, each artwork relating to a particular theme *points towards* something inchoate and sheds light on some aspect of it. Some artists deliberately and consciously return to certain themes during their working lives. But here I put forward the proposition that, whether they are aware of it or not, themes are likely to recur in an artist's work and these themes may relate to aspects of inchoate states that are pushing to be given form. Moreover, since the inchoate can never be apprehended in its entirety, there will always be a need to continue making work, as the artists I quote above affirm, in an attempt to approach it through these themes.

One of the artists exhibiting in *Ikke Til Salg*, a painter, describes his feelings about the work he exhibited:

*That one I never wanted to sell, because it is a rare shot. It was very dramatic to do, and a great pleasure .... It was snowing outside, I remember, and I put it on the floor and I was soaked with paint. I have done few other works in those years that were in the same league. I do them when I feel I have said everything in my normal way of painting, and suddenly stand with this dark vision in my hands, or before my eyes. I catch it, then (Artist X 2015, personal communication).*

The 'dark vision' that has to be caught speaks of something elusive, seen and yet not seen, that calls for a painting very different from his usual figurative style. Although he has now returned to his usual practice, he keeps this painting on his wall where it acts as a reminder of the experience of making it. He continues:

*Maybe I have this feeling that as an old artist I will be doing works like that – although it is hard to imagine now, looking at my project as a whole. But deep inside I have this poetic urge for paintings that seems to stare out into oblivion, or nothingness.*

Artist X recognises that the painting embodies some important aspect of his inner life that he wants to explore further, but not yet. He asserts that the making of this work was ‘a great pleasure’, perhaps because he felt able to ‘capture’ the elusive vision that came to him. But his description of an urge to make paintings ‘that seems to stare out into oblivion, or nothingness’ suggest that further exploration in new works feels risky or frightening. For the time being, this painting is the artist’s closest possible embodiment of something that has never been given a form or, perhaps more accurately, it is a presentation of his sense of the presence of the formless. He knows that he will inevitably be drawn, or ‘urged’, to explore this realm but this development, with all its dangers, is deferred. The retention of the painting seems like a pledge that he will return to it at some later date.

## **Artist and Audience**

A consideration of the audience comes to the fore in the final stage of preparing a new work of art for exhibition. The artist uses herself as viewer to judge the appearance of the work within the exhibition space. The conditions of the space must complement the form of the artwork itself or, indeed, be part of that form. My installation *Bay Mountain* (see Figure 4: *Bay Mountain*. Installation view.) consists of a pile of sand, built into the shape of a mountain range, onto which a text animation is projected. The animation shows a body of blue text interacting in a wavelike motion with another body of ochre text. This work could only be completed in the venue in which it was to be installed where I could judge its effect on me (and so, indirectly, imagine its possible effect on an audience):

*I don't really feel that a work is finished until it has been exhibited. The arrangements for a particular exhibition are an important part of the process. I have to think about how the work will look in a particular space and how the viewer will encounter it. This may involve another round of experimentation and trying out ideas in the gallery or exhibition space itself. In the case of Bay Mountain, for instance, I needed to experiment with the dimensions and position of the pile of sand, and I had to think about the sounds in the room and how they might affect the experience of the work.*

In making these decisions I considered my own experience of the work and judged each possible configuration in terms of whether or not it 'felt right'. This stage was a continuation of the stage of working with my medium but now my medium was the gallery conditions such as the size, position and shape of the pile of sand, the position of the projector and the level of light in the room. At the same time, I was aware that the gallery became the containing space for me as viewer, a frame for the work, and I attempted to display my work in such a way that other viewers might enter into a relationship with it if it resonated with their own inner experience.

Clearly, at the point of preparing for a specific exhibition, the artist must imaginatively put herself in the place of the viewer as I describe above. But I want to question whether a consideration of the audience may also be relevant earlier in the artist's process. I have left this issue until this late point in the thesis because I want to emphasise the fact that the artist first and foremost makes the work for herself in the sense that it must reflect something of her own experience. In order for it to satisfy her, for it to 'feel right', she must come to recognise herself in it. But this is not all that the artwork must do. It must also speak to its audience, not in the sense of transmitting a message (although some works may do this) but rather through its resonance with something in each viewer's own (different) experience. Through the process of making a new work, the artist must *both* link it to her own experience *and* detach it sufficiently for it to have a wider relevance.

In order to explore the way in which this is achieved I will return to Langer's writing about artmaking and symbolisation. Langer uses the term 'art symbol' to denote the artwork on the basis that there is a concordance between the artwork and the artist's experience. However the artwork does not *represent* that experience and cannot stand in for the experience in its absence. For some writers (e.g. the philosopher Melvin Rader (Langer 1957)) this precludes the use of the term symbol but I choose to retain it, in Langer's meaning of the term, because I think it assists in the consideration of the way in which the artist makes her work available to the audience.

Langer argues that the creation of an 'art symbol' involves a process of

abstraction in which the essential elements of the artist's experience are extracted and irrelevant details are excluded (Langer 1953). These details tie the experience down, linking it exclusively to the artist and to a particular situation. Their removal loosens the artwork's roots in everyday experience and results in a relatively free-floating form that can attach itself to experiences other than those of the artist<sup>37</sup>. That is, the artist creates a form that embodies only the essential elements of her experience, without its other particularities, and it can be responded to by anyone whose own inner experience (with its different particularities) relates to these essential elements.

To take this further, I return to my formulation of the artist's state of mind and the concept of the 'extended self' and the 'observer self'. As I discussed in Chapter 2, when the extended self-state is uppermost, the boundaries between self and developing artwork are attenuated and the artist feels a sense of oneness with the work. At this point I want to consider the role of the 'observer self' in greater detail. Earlier I characterised the 'observer self' as making moment to moment decisions about the direction of the work and the use of the medium but now I want to explore the basis for these decisions. The central criterion is whether or not any changes bring the work closer to a concordance with the artist's own experience. But I think that another factor is also at play. The artist's 'observer self' can adopt the position of potential viewer and consider whether the essential elements of the developing work are sufficiently prominent and whether they are unclouded by irrelevant detail. In other words, the 'observer self' considers, amongst other things, whether the developing form is abstracted enough to be available to an audience or whether it is too abstracted, so as to have lost touch with its links with the artist's particular experience. It is a delicate balance.

Showing a particular work for the first time is likely to be both exciting and anxiety provoking. Although the artist may have shown work-in-progress to

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<sup>37</sup> The psychoanalyst Gregorio Kohon points out that this loosening of the ties to everyday personal experience renders the artwork 'strange'. He writes about this strangeness from the point of view of the viewer of art, linking it with Freud's writing on the uncanny (Kohon: 2016).

colleagues or collaborators, audience reactions are never predictable. The artist has got to the point where she recognises the new artwork as a truthful reflector of an aspect of herself. That is, the artwork 'works' for her, but will it 'work' for the audience and, if it does, in what ways will it resonate for them? As described above, she has pared her experience down to its indispensable elements so that other viewers can respond to it in their own way. But only when she shows the work to an audience can she discover whether this abstraction has 'worked'. That is, she discovers whether the artwork operates independently of her experience yet retains enough of its emotional flavour. If the abstraction goes too far and formal considerations predominate, the sense of inner connection may be lost and the work might be experienced as sterile. On the other hand, if the work is too closely connected to the artist's personal experience, if the artist has not abstracted this experience enough, then the work can only resonate with those viewers whose inner experiences are very similar to those of the artist.

## **Chapter Conclusion**

During the making stage of the artist's process, the intimate relationship between artist and developing work involved repeated experiences of an overlap between inner and outer worlds. Once the work is finished, however, it is launched into the outside world where it must take up a separate existence. This moving out can only be achieved satisfactorily if the artist feels that she has arrived at the best possible embodiment of her pre-sense or when she recognises the new artwork as a true reflection of an aspect of herself. Letting the artwork go may be experienced as a relief or as a painful separation as it moves from the province of the artist herself to that of the audience. I have argued that, to make her work available to the viewer, the artist must have abstracted her experience enough to loosen it from its ties to the specifics of her individual experience and to open it up for other associations.

Once the artwork is ready to move out the artist may or may not have finished with it. It may be that its realisation of the artist's experience in relation to a particular pre-sense is felt to be incomplete and another artwork is called for to further the artist's exploration. Or the resulting work



may lead the artist in a new direction. I argue that, over the course of their working lives, artists return to particular themes that have a personal relevance for them. This return may be consciously chosen or it may surprise the artist as she recognises in retrospect that there are underlying links between very disparate works. I argue that these recurring themes relate to inchoate elements in the artist's inner experience that can be thought of as exerting an internal pressure on the artist to create external forms for them.

## Conclusion

*If you do pictures they are about what's inside you as much as what's outside you.* Paula Rego (2017)

When I began this research study, my intention was to focus on the question of *how* artists make work and to skirt the thorny issue of *why* they do so. I had experienced for myself that the making of art is a life-enhancing activity but I was concerned to avoid a reductionist approach in which art is seen primarily as a form of self-therapy. I felt, and continue to feel, that the diverse concerns of artists in their work extend far beyond their personal inner issues. But already I am making a distinction between inner and outer and herein lies the issue that is at the heart of this thesis. The artist, like anyone else, is affected by those aspects of the outer world that touch her personally. That is, her experience of the outer world is affected by the inner so that the distinction between the two cannot easily be maintained. For this reason I have turned to the writing of D.W. Winnicott whose theory of transitional phenomena acknowledges and explores the intermediate space between inner and outer worlds. The overlap of the inner and outer is also relevant to the parallel questions of *how* and *why* the artist makes work. In the course of conducting this research I have found that the two questions are inextricably linked with each other and that it is not possible to address the *how* without touching on the *why*. However, I have addressed the question of *why* only in a very general way, making no attempt to consider individual motivations.

When discussing artists and the process of making art, few psychoanalytic writers have had privileged access to the first-hand experience of artists themselves (except artists in analysis). As a result, existing psychoanalytic theory relating to art tends to be biased towards a clinical view. This thesis provides a different perspective by focusing on artists' lived experiences of making art. It does so through the tracking of my own process of creating two new series of artworks and through the foregrounding of other artists' descriptions of their states of mind while working.

My own record of creating new artworks provided a central source of evidence in that I could reflect on the states of mind I experienced as my process unfolded. However, this single case study could not speak for artists other than myself. I wanted to compare my own experiences with those of other artists, including those working in media other than photography and the moving image. I therefore conducted a series of in-depth interviews with other practising professional artists, working in a variety of media. When considering the artists' experiences in relation to current psychoanalytic theory, I chose to focus on writing in the Winnicottian tradition, particularly that of Winnicott himself, Marion Milner and Christopher Bollas. I also refer to Kleinian writers, including Anton Ehrenzweig and Adrian Stokes.

## **Results and Conclusions**

I have found that psychoanalytic theory in the Winnicottian tradition offers a useful and relevant theoretical underpinning for my own experiences of making art and for many of the experiences described by the interviewees. The emphasis by Winnicott and those who follow him on the interplay between inner and outer worlds points to a picture of the artist as concerned not only with her own self-realisation but also with objects and issues in the outside world of shared reality. At the heart of my thesis is the argument that the artwork *both* provides a form for a previously unformed inner experience *and* presents some aspect of the outside world in a new way. This is the essence of the 'newness' of the artwork. It lies in the uniqueness of this particular artist's response to this particular element of the outside world and the form that is given to the experience by this particular use of a medium. In imbuing the developing artwork with something of her own inner life, the artist also vivifies the outside 'something' that is the subject of the work, presenting it in a new and vital way. The artwork becomes a space in which inner and outer worlds coincide, first for the artist and then for the viewer.

Using psychoanalytic theory to interrogate the interviewees' testimony and my own experience of making new artworks, I have built up a picture of the trajectory of the artist's process in terms of a movement between internal and external worlds. The artist 'takes in' something from the external world

of shared reality, works on it internally in the receptive unconscious, making links with other elements. At some point she begins to work with her medium, engaging with its particular physical characteristics to translate her internal work into external form. At this central stage of her work, the artist is engaged in creating a form in the outside world that will embody both her own internal experience and the 'subject' of the work, each transformed by their interpenetration with the other. This can only be effected through repeated movements between a state of mind in which the boundaries between inner and outer worlds are attenuated and a state in which inner and outer are experienced as more separate. In Winnicott's words, the artist is engaged in the 'perpetual human task of keeping inner and outer reality separate yet inter-related' (Winnicott 1986: 3). Eventually, if all goes well, the artist feels that the developing artwork presents a close enough embodiment of her own experience and she re-introduces it, now transformed, into the outside world as a new artwork. At this point, whether consciously or not, she recognises something personal to herself in the work and she may be able to internalise this in a more integrated form.

The writing of D.W.Winnicott and Marion Milner has taken me some way towards a psychoanalytic understanding of the artists' experiences but there have been areas where I have needed to bring in the work of other psychoanalytic writers, including Christopher Bollas, René Roussillon, Anton Ehrenzweig, Adrian Stokes and Kenneth Wright, as well as writers from other disciplines such as the philosopher Susanne Langer. Having done so, there still remained some areas of the interviewees' experiences (and of my own) that I felt were not adequately theorised by existing writing. In these areas I have argued that the artists' evidence highlights gaps in existing theory and so points up the possibility of its extension. I have proposed several new concepts to bridge these gaps and I detail these here.

The artist interviews and my own experience suggest that, for many artists, the process of starting a particular new work is triggered by an encounter with something in the outside world of shared reality. This outside something resonates with the artist so that it seems to hold a personal significance. So far, Winnicott's concept of transitional phenomena seems

to provide a satisfactory theoretical underpinning for the artists' descriptions. Their experiences take place in the potential space between inner and outer worlds. But, for the artist, there is more to the experience than this. The artist feels compelled to act on this experience, to create an artwork. I have not found any psychoanalytic writing that explores this phenomenon in detail. I have proposed the term 'pre-sense' to designate the artist's experience of being drawn to something in the external world that seems to be of personal significance *and* her intimation that this encounter can lead to a new artwork (although, at this stage, there may be no clear idea about how this might be achieved). There is often an urgency about the need to make an artwork and I ascribe this to the urgency of the need to find a form for some aspect of the artist's inner experience.

In considering the way in which this pre-sense might lead to an idea or image of a potential work, I have turned to the writing of Christopher Bollas whose concept of psychic genera has been helpful. Bollas conceptualises a process of linking that takes place in the 'receptive unconscious'. However, Bollas does not fully explain why an idea might emerge at a particular moment, nor why it is often accompanied by a short-lived period of elation in which the new idea seems to be idealised. Extending Bollas' theory, I argue that the linking in the receptive unconscious may eventually result in an image or idea that is in very close concordance with the earlier experience that gave rise to the pre-sense. If so, there is a sense of recognition that is powerful enough to propel the new idea into consciousness. At the same time, the 'fit' between the idea and the earlier experience is so close that the artist feels (temporarily) that she has found the perfect form. Bollas argues that one of the functions of the receptive unconscious is to provide a space in which developing ideas are safe from the judgements of consciousness. I extend this to suggest that, at the moment of the emergence of the idea and for a short time thereafter, these judgements remain suspended.

The interviewees provided vivid descriptions of their states of mind while working with their mediums and I have drawn on several psychoanalytic writers to conceptualise this stage. In particular, Marion Milner's exploration of her own process of painting has been relevant. I have taken up her

concept of 'illusion' as a sense of oneness between artist and developing work and I have also considered the references in the work of several writers (Milner, Ehrenzweig, Stokes) to an alternation between two separate states of mind in the artist. Drawing on the artist interviews, I have argued that the state of mind of the artist while working with her medium can be considered as a continuum between two self states that I term the artist's 'extended self' and 'observer self'. The 'extended self' corresponds with Milner's state of 'illusion' but the sense of fusion that Milner attributes to this state is never complete and it is always tempered by the simultaneous presence of the 'observer self'.

The interviews made it clear that the movement into a working state of mind is often a difficult one. It calls for a sense of safety and containment and I have drawn on Winnicott and his concept of the facilitating environment to conceptualise this. Just as the facilitating environment refers to both a physical and a psychological containing space, I argue that the artist needs not only an external space (such as a studio) but also a safe internal setting. I argue that, in order to begin work, the artist moves into an 'internal frame', specific to her medium, in which all her experience and training in that medium come into play, directing her thinking. I have compared this to the psychoanalyst's 'internal setting' as proposed by Michael Parsons. Within the artist's internal frame, as within the analyst's internal setting, 'reality is defined by unconscious symbolic meaning' (Parsons 2007) and the artist can feel safe enough to respond to her own internal promptings.

## **Difficulties Encountered**

The intention in this research was to investigate the commonalities and differences between the experiences of individual artists and this was also its greatest challenge. Each artist had his or her own idiosyncratic story to tell and the extraction of common themes through IPA was no easy matter. At the stage of theorisation, the difficulty lay in remaining true to the artists' reported experiences when those experiences were so diverse. This necessitated repeated returns to the interviews to consider them anew in relation to the theoretical formulations I was considering. A further difficulty lay in identifying areas of experience shared by some artists without implying that these were common to all.

## **Possible Future Research**

The new concepts of the 'pre-sense', the artist's 'internal frame' and the artist's 'extended self' and 'observer self' constitute potential new contributions to the psychoanalytic literature relating to the artist's creative process. However, they are based on the reported experiences of a small sample of artists. Moreover, the research was not designed to focus on these issues in particular. Further research could test the usefulness and relevance of the new terms and concepts. For instance, a further series of interviews might be conducted with artists who work in several different media and the interviews might focus on the artists' experience of moving from one medium to another. In this way, it would be possible to evaluate the relevance of the concept of the artist's 'internal frame'.

Secondly, the interviews indicate possible differences between the processes of artists working in different media. Some artists do not start with an idea or image of the potential final work. The research indicates the possibility that painters may be more likely than other artists to move into work with the medium at an early stage without a specific idea in mind. Photographers, on the other hand, whose work is necessarily embedded in concrete aspects of the outside world, may be more likely to work from an 'idea'. Further research is needed to test this hypothesis.

Further studies could also be conducted to follow single artists over time. This could be done as a series of interviews over a period of months or years. Another possible avenue for further research would be to repeat the study with practitioners in other artforms. In this way the processes of visual artists could be compared to those of poets, musicians and so on.

The artist interviews provide an on-going resource for other researchers. Where the interviewees give their consent, the British Library will archive the interviews as a separate section entitled 'Interviews exploring artists and the creative process' within their 'Artists' Lives' project so that the recordings will be available to future researchers in perpetuity.

## **Lessons for My Own Art Practice**

In the course of conducting this research I have made discoveries not only about the creative process of other artists but also about my own. In particular, I am more clearly aware that periods when my work has felt stuck may be gestatory periods that will eventually result in the revelation of a new way forward. I also have a clearer understanding of the relationship between my first 'pre-sense' of a new work, the more specific 'idea' that might follow it and the way in which the idea may be modified or replaced as my work with my medium progresses. I have become aware of the fact that, when I move from working on my writing to working on my art, I go through a difficult transition. I now understand this to be a result of the fact that I need to leave one internal frame (that of writing) before I can enter the other (that of art-making with a specific medium). I use more than one medium in my art and a similar process occurs when I move from one medium to another but this seems to be less difficult than a movement into art-making from academic writing, a different form altogether.

I have also come to realise that there are deep connections between works completed at different points during my career that I had not previously recognised and I now understand this in terms of aspects of underlying themes that are of great personal significance. I have become more aware of the ways in which each new artwork arises out of those that have gone before, often in ways that are not apparent at the time of their making. The research has emphasised for me the impossibility of locating either the beginning or the end of the artist's process. I have proposed the 'pre-sense' as marking the starting point for a particular new work but this starting point already arises out of the artist's personal history and cultural heritage. In a corresponding way, the research has highlighted for me the difficulty of pinpointing the end of the process of making a new work. A particular work is sent into the outside world, perhaps in an exhibition, but it may be the stepping stone to future works. Seen in this way, the creation of any single work is a stage in a much longer, perhaps life-long, journey.

In terms of my experience as a researcher, I found that the analysis of 30 interviews presented problems due to the large amount of data. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis is a very labour-intensive process



best suited to small amounts of data and I was only able to use this method for six interviews. I also found that, in some cases, the time allocated for the interview was too short in that the artist would have gone into more depth in their descriptions if time had allowed. This was most often the case when I interviewed staff members at the Slade, whose available time was very limited. In future I would interview fewer artists and, if the time-frame of the interview seemed too limited, I would conduct a second interview to further explore the areas opened up.

## **Postscript**

Based on the creation of new artworks and the analysis of individual artists' reported experiences, I have proposed several new concepts extending the existing psychoanalytic literature relating to the artist's creative process. As the research shows, one of the problems in attempting to formulate a psychoanalytic model of the artist's creative process is that artists are a diverse group of individuals, each of whom has his or her particular way of working. It is unlikely that any single theory will be applicable to all. The findings of this study are put forward not as a universal model but as a contribution to an ongoing debate.

I would like to extend my research, and contribute further to this debate, by conducting an in-depth study of the work of five or six artists, working with different media. My intention is to follow each artist through the making of a particular work, conducting a series of interviews at different stages of their process. In the final publication, the artists would be named and images of their work in progress and of the final works would be included. This research would provide further evidence to support, contest or expand the propositions put forward in this thesis.

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# Appendices:

## Artist Consent Form

[Slade headed paper]

### Information sheet and consent form for interviews on artistic process

I am a PhD student at the Slade School of Fine Art and my PhD project is to look at the process of making art from a psychoanalytic point of view.

I would like to invite you to be interviewed about your process. The interviews will be used in the following ways:

1. The interviews will be transcribed and used in my PhD research.
2. I may use anonymous quotations from these transcriptions in my writing.
3. I will not use quotations that can be ascribed to you, or use your name, in any written work without first seeking your permission to do so.

### Participant's agreement

I understand the purpose of the interview and agree to take part. I understand that I can withdraw my consent to the use of the interview at any time.

Artist's signature-----

Interviewer's signature-----

Date-----

[researcher's contact details]



## Topic Guide

1. How does a piece of art begin to come into being (e.g. from an idea, through process etc)
2. How does it develop? Are there stages?
3. Does the process differ for different artworks?
4. What states of mind characterise different points in the process? Is the process pleasurable or not?
5. Do you find that particular places or types of space are important at particular stages?
6. Do you set aside particular times to work?
7. What is the relationship between you and the art object?
8. Do you think about the audience in the making process?
9. Do you ever feel stuck or blocked? If so, how do you deal with this?

## Recent Publications

TOWNSEND, P. 2013. Making space. In: KUHN, A. (Ed.) *Little Madnesses: Winnicott, Transitional Phenomena and Cultural Experience*. London, I.B.Tauris.

TOWNSEND, P. 2014. A life of its own. *Psychoanalysis and Artistic Process, Free Associations*, 65. <http://www.freeassociations.org.uk>

TOWNSEND, P. 2015. Creativity and destructiveness in art and psychoanalysis. *The British Journal of Psychotherapy*, 31:1. 120-131.

TOWNSEND, P. 2015. Art and the inner world. Catalogue essay for the exhibition *Ikke Til Salg (Not for Sale)*. Trapholt, Denmark.

TOWNSEND, P. 2017. Between inner and outer worlds. In: READ S. & SIMMONS, M. (ed.) *Photographers and Research: the role of research in contemporary photographic practice*. New York and Abingdon, Routledge.

# List of Artworks on DVD

## **Morecambe Bay series (2008-2013):**

*On the Shores.* SD video. 5 mins.

*The Quick and the Dead.* SD video. 2 mins 48 secs.

*Bay Mountain.* HD video projecton onto sand.

*Under the Skin.* HD video. 2 mins 15 secs.

***The Other Room (2012):*** Installation of 26 speakers with recordings of interviews with artists.

## **Spaces of Time Series (2017):**

*The Transience of Wonder.* 30 views of the sky from Angletarn Pikes. Digital photographic prints, Perspex.

*Black Sun.* 8 views of rock from Stromboli. 4K video. 5 mins.

*Spaces of Time.* 8 reclaimed Cumbrian roof slates.