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## EDITORIAL

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I am delighted to have been invited to guest edit this special edition on psychoanalysis and artistic process. This volume is based on the conference *Making Space – Psychoanalysis and Artistic Process* (University College London, February 25<sup>th</sup> 2012). The conference was intended to bring together artists and psychoanalysts and to set up dialogues in which both artist and psychoanalyst would have the opportunity to question each other about their work. To this end, the conference day was arranged in the form of three sessions, each comprising short talks by an artist and a psychoanalyst (Sharon Kivland and Kenneth Wright, Grayson Perry and Valerie Sinason, Martin Creed and Lesley Caldwell) followed by an extended dialogue between the two. Speakers were asked to provide synopses of their talks and these were sent to their dialogue ‘partner’ in advance of the conference.

This volume includes extended versions of the papers given by the psychoanalysts Kenneth Wright and Lesley Caldwell and the artist Sharon Kivland together with transcripts of the talks by artists Grayson Perry and Martin Creed and the psychoanalyst Valerie Sinason.

Of course, a public presentation is inevitably a performance. The three artists were asked to focus their presentations on their working practices and one of the fascinating aspects of the conference was the way in which these three presentations reflected the very different creative processes of each artist. In a sense, the artists not only talked about their working processes but also demonstrated them by the mode of their performances.

Sharon Kivland, whose presentation was highly articulate and theoretically rich, took as her starting point the writings of Freud and the artwork she discussed is related to Freud’s writing on art and daydreaming. Kivland based her talk on the creation of a new artwork – a bustle or *tournure* – which she made in tandem with the writing of her paper. She writes ‘It is a work I day-dreamed and its eroticization is never completely renounced, though it may be

contained.’ She described the way in which the work was built up through a train of references and associations, psychoanalytic and otherwise. She acknowledged the importance of the position of a work within a cultural history, including the artist’s own trajectory, but also pointed out that such judgements are not made during the creative process itself: ‘the bustle must find a logical place in my history, my catalogue, but I cannot yet insert it seamlessly’.

Grayson Perry’s witty and eloquent talk followed the trajectory of his work since his student days. His work draws on his childhood and he explained how psychotherapy had enabled him to gain insight into his experiences and so to find ways of incorporating references to them in his highly crafted pots, sculptures and tapestries. His presentation was fast and energetic, encompassing a huge range of different artistic productions, culminating in his exhibition *The Tomb of the Unknown Craftsman* at the British Museum (2011-12).

In contrast to the other two artist speakers, Martin Creed’s talk was unprepared. His presentation began with silence in which he apparently searched his mind for something to say, infuriating some audience members and delighting others. His hesitancy and willingness to allow silences in this very public setting reflected his artistic practice of waiting to see what will emerge from his mind. When I was in correspondence with him about the possibility of including a transcript of his talk in this volume he asked for the transcription to be ‘verbatim with all of the ums and ahs and gaps’.

The three psychoanalysts approached the subject of artistic process in very different ways. Kenneth Wright used poetry as a paradigm of artistic creation, drawing on Seamus’s Heaney’s image of the poem-as-echo. He explored the concept of ‘significant form’, suggesting that a form is ‘significant’ when it *truthfully* portrays essential aspects of experience. He linked this to the non-verbal forms through which a mother responds to her infant, arguing that the artist is engaged in a process of matching form and feeling, so taking on the role of attuning mother and attempting to make good an earlier deficiency. In Wright’s view, the world of art is a reservoir of significant (i.e. attuning) forms, and the audience approaches the art object to discover those which are resonant with his own need.

Valerie Sinason also emphasised the central importance of truth-seeking in art and pointed out that this concern is also at the heart of psychoanalysis. Her talk responded to Grayson Perry’s presentation and she praised the fact that Perry’s art is both truthful (in the sense that it accurately reflects his own experience) and also humorous. Sinason linked this with Freud’s

understanding of the origins of humour in which negative emotions are liberated in a socially acceptable way. She further suggested that both art and psychoanalysis involve transformation and she described the transformation made in the consulting room with a woman with profound multiple disabilities. For Sinason, this too was art. Warning against psychoanalysing the artist or the artwork, she called for psychoanalysis to approach art in a spirit of gratitude rather than envy.

Lesley Caldwell also insisted that the artwork must be met on its own terms and she developed this idea through a discussion of the work of Martin Creed. She endorsed dissatisfaction with Freud's general accounts of art but argued that psychoanalysis nevertheless offers a number of ways of approaching the artwork and the artist's relationship to it. Caldwell drew, in particular, on the work of the psychoanalyst Joyce McDougall as she considered 'artists as artists' and 'artists in analysis'. Discussing the process of creative work, Caldwell, like Sinason, traced links between studio and consulting room.

The intention in the extended dialogues following each pair of talks was to frame a space within which the interaction between artist and psychoanalyst might (or might not) create something new. In the first dialogue, between Sharon Kivland and Kenneth Wright, Kivland took up Wright's notion (from Seamus Heaney) that the poem or artwork is a 'true sounding' of the artist's state of mind and that, if a reader or viewer responds deeply, it is because, in the work, 'something has been said that corresponds to something deep inside you'. How might this relate to the sensuous qualities – the *frou frou* and *cri cri* – of Kivland's silk and the fantasies or daydreams these qualities evoke? Wright argued that an artist requires a protected space in which to work and questioned whether too great an eruption of sensuality would disrupt this space and so interrupt the work. Kivland, however, suggested that, far from disrupting the work, the sensuousness of the medium might itself constitute a 'true sounding'. Kivland and Wright also discussed the artistic process as a transformation from the materials of the medium into a form. Wright suggested that there is a 'constant tension between the fullness of the basic material and the kind of limitedness of what you can produce in any form'. This moved into a discussion of the meaning of waiting within the artistic process. What is the artist waiting for? Kivland claimed that she was 'waiting for something not to happen'. If something happened 'one would have to move. And everything would have to change, so that suspension ... avoids disappointment.' This potential disappointment seemed to link to the 'limitedness' referred to by Wright.

The notion of disappointment and the tension between the ‘fullness’ of an idea and the limits of the form also emerged from the dialogue between Grayson Perry and Valerie Sinason. Here, Perry spoke of the ‘golden glow’ of the initial idea for an artwork ‘it’s beautiful and it’s fuzzy and everything is right and it only has the good sparkly bits... and then you come to the moment when you actually have to make the first mark on the canvas or whatever, the first blob of clay, and then the horrible process of gradual disappointment starts’. To create a particular form is to set limits, to refine the ‘fuzziness’ of the perfect idea through an acceptance of the behaviour of the medium. As Perry put it ‘I have to go through that middle ground which is the horrible kind of pinning it down into a real thing in the now.’ Perry also spoke about the need to find ways to avoid self-consciousness as ‘you have your best ideas out of the corner of your eye’. These ideas must not be judged too hastily as ‘a big part of being creative is spotting when you’re having an idea and being kind to that in yourself, and being silly and doodle and, you know, any strategy that can kind of help, that is important’. For him, one strategy is to keep notebooks that are shown to no one else and to avoid talking about ‘things that are in gestation’. Perry also discussed the fact that psychotherapy had helped him in his work as ‘the two big things that [he] found out in therapy were who [he] was and what [he] wanted’. The insights he gained also provided inspiration for new works.

In his dialogue with Lesley Caldwell, Martin Creed insisted that his mind is ‘like a soup’ and that his process involves waiting to see what will emerge. The artwork then becomes ‘like something to hold on to in the soup.’ He described his work as an attempt to arrive at a ‘point’ or ‘surface’ that acts as a gateway between the ‘soup’ of the contents of his mind and the experience of the audience. Whilst Perry spoke of the necessity of making decisions, of ‘pinning it down’, Creed spoke of avoiding choice, of not wanting to set limits: ‘I don’t want to choose because I don’t know what to choose’. Rather, he wanted to keep possibilities open: ‘in the microcosm of a work you can have everything’. However, this is only possible ‘along certain lines’. As Caldwell pointed out, despite his desire to have everything, 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 etc. Caldwell linked this desire to ‘have it all, all the time’ to the qualities of the unconscious described by Freud and suggested 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.

Both Sinason and Caldwell drew parallels between artistic processes and the processes of psychoanalysis or psychotherapy. Following Grayson Perry's emphasis on the importance of hard work and patience for the artist, Sinason compared these factors with the analytic frame including the punctuality of the analyst and the necessity of waiting patiently until a transformation occurs. Caldwell, on the other hand, suggested that Creed's unprepared talk 'was like giving an embodiment of what the analytic session and the analytic space is about... that kind of way of being present, in a space, in a particular kind of space, and apparently not doing anything, but in the not doing anything doing really quite a lot.' This way of being present 'enables something else to happen' in both art and psychoanalysis.

The conference was accompanied by an exhibition at the Slade School of Fine Art Research Centre. The exhibition included work by John Aiken, Ed Allington, Sian Bonnell, Sonia Bridge, David Burrows, Fiona Curran, Michael Delacruz, Susan Derges, Simon Faithfull, Gina Glover, Judith Goddard, Dryden Goodwin, David Johnson, Sharon Kivland, Laura Kuch, Leah Lovett, Laura Malacart, George Meyrick, Russell Mills, Lisa Milroy, Eleanor Morgan, Aaron Murphy, Hayley Newman, Deborah Padfield, Jayne Parker, Sarah Pickering, Liz Rideal, Nina Rodin, Henrietta Simson, Kai Syng Tan, Kay Tabernacle, Johan Thom, Elly Thomas, Thomson and Craighead, Patricia Townsend, Jo Volley and Veronica Vossen.

Prior to the exhibition I interviewed twenty-six of the exhibiting artists about their creative processes and these interviews were included in the exhibition in the form of a sound installation. In contrast to the performative artist presentations at the conference, the interviews were conducted in private spaces in artists' own homes or studios or in a private room at the Slade School of Fine Art. The aim in each interview was to create a space in which each artist could reflect on his or her states of mind while making new work. This volume includes a paper in which I reflect on these interviews to consider the relationship between artist, idea and artwork. I draw a parallel between the relationship between artist and artwork and that between mother and child and suggest that psychoanalytic theory, especially the writing of analysts from the Object Relations school, can help to shed light on the experiences of artists as they create new work.

This edition concludes with an Afterword by Juliet Mitchell in which she takes up the discussion of echoes from Kenneth Wright's paper and, from there, goes on to 'play' with ideas of gender, maternal violence and the world, highlighting the ways in which these issues are alluded to (or are left out of) the various articles and transcripts. She reminds us that Winnicott

wrote not only of the containing good-enough mother but also of the mother who ‘hates the baby before the baby hates the mother’. Musing about gender issues in the artistic process, Mitchell wonders whether, as a more at-risk sex, psychically bisexual baby girls are more frightened of the hating mother than bisexual baby boys and whether the artist has to find in ‘himself’ both ‘the fear inherent in the *girl’s* heritage’ and ‘the murderousness of the mother’.

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