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MATERNAL FORM IN ARTISTIC CREATION

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Abstract: In this paper I use the making of poetry as a paradigm of artistic creation. I draw on Seamus's Heaney's image of the poem-as-echo to develop the idea that the artist is at root a portrayer of lived experience. I base this view on the work of Susanne Langer who defined art as 'the creation of forms symbolic of human feeling'. Such forms are so constructed that experience 'inhabits' the created image and lives within it; this gives such images the power to resurrect experience within a domain of contemplation. Within this view, the aesthetic concept of 'significant form' acquires a new dimension of meaning: a form is 'significant' when it *truthfully* portrays essential aspects of experience. In this context, I discuss the nature of 'found objects' and argue that in all such objects there is a perception of significant form. From here there is a route to the preverbal period and the non-verbal forms through which a mother communicates with, and responds to, her infant's emotional vitality. Winnicott emphasised maternal facial expressions (mirroring), while Stern described the mother's quasi-theatrical enactments (attunement) of the infant's 'forms of vitality'. In both cases, the maternal form is an external, iconic representation of the infant's inner state, and following Winnicott's lead that cultural phenomena derive from transitional forms of experience, I demonstrate the similarity between the maternal forms of infancy and the later significant forms of art. I argue that in his creative work of matching form and feeling, the artist is assuming the role of attuning mother and attempting to make good an earlier deficiency. From this perspective, 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.

The promise of happiness is felt in the act of creation but disappears towards the completion of the work. For it is then that the painter realizes it is only a picture he is painting. Until then he had almost dared to hope that the picture might spring to life.
 Lucien Freud¹

Introduction

In this paper I use the making of poetry as a paradigm of artistic creation. In so doing, I make the assumption that all the creative arts have a common core which is worked out in each art form within the constraints of its own particular medium. In addition to this, I make three further assumptions: first, that a work of art is a special kind of object with the potential to

communicate something that is often referred to as the object's *artistic import* or *significance*; second, that the *artistic process* necessarily involves a *transformation* of the medium's basic materials into *forms* which carry this significance; and third, that in order to receive this 'communication' and apprehend the object's artistic import, it is necessary to adopt towards it a certain posture, or *aesthetic stance*. This requires that normal practical concerns are laid aside, and involves moving from the domain of action to one of non-doing, or contemplation.

These assumptions give rise to a number of further questions: What is the primary impulse that leads the artist to create his art objects - what *inner* need is guiding his activity? And why is it that the audience – usually complete strangers to the artist - go out of their way to relate to his creations? What *value* do they see in them and what *inner* need are they hoping to satisfy through such engagement?

Implicit in these questions are two further assumptions: first, that the artist is in fact responding to an inner *compulsion* in creating his work; and second, that the audience, when engaging with such objects, is in fact responding to the art work in related, though reciprocal ways.

These issues have been the subject of repeated psychoanalytic investigation since Freud's early papers on art and artists (Freud, 1908, 1910, 1914), but in exploring them here I will keep theoretical ideas in the background until the *phenomenology* of art 'making' has become clearer. I will approach this by asking what it is *like* to create a poem, painting, or other artistic artefact, before considering the more theoretical issues involved.

Poiesis²

I will begin by considering the artistic process in relation to poetry. What is it *like* to 'make', or write a poem? In an interview with Seamus Heaney just after he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, the poet was asked this question and replied in the following way: "*It is like an echo coming back to you...*"³ What was Heaney getting at through this image?

The question can be approached by considering the nature of an echo in more detail. Imagine you are in the mountains and calling out to someone – you hear your voice, but only in a background way because the sound of your voice is overshadowed by your subjective intention; you are thinking about the message, not the shouting. If your voice then hits a reflective surface, it bounces back, and after an interval you hear it again as an echo. It is still *your* voice that you

hear, but contact with the reflecting surface has altered the sound you receive back; it has subtly changed in timbre and pitch, and your relation to your 'voice' has also changed. You might say: 'Is that really me? I didn't know I sounded like that!' *In short, through being reflected, your voice has become an external image, and through it you experience this aspect of yourself in a more detached and objective way.*

Perhaps then, Heaney is saying that writing a poem is a bit like this; it is like getting back a series of echoes or reflections that offer him (the poet) a more objective vision of his feeling self. In ordinary life he experiences the flux of life in a pre-reflective way, but somehow through his poetry-making it comes back to him in a quasi objective form that allows him to grasp it more clearly.⁴

In his critical writings (Heaney, 2002), Heaney often returns to the image of poem as echo. For example, writing about the way a poet discovers his *own* poetic voice, his *own* way of expressing things, he writes:

In practice, you hear it [your 'voice'] coming back from someone else, you hear something in *another's* sounds that enters *the echo chamber* of your heart and excites your whole nervous system... In fact, this other writer has spoken something essential that you recognize as *a true sounding* of aspects of yourself and your experience (2002: 16, italics mine).

In this passage, the image of poem-as-echo is amplified; to describe a poetic statement as a '*true sounding* of... experience' adds depth to the earlier image. It takes us into a realm of sonar mapping, of sending pulses of sound into hidden depths in order to bring back images of things which cannot be seen. It also suggests that the poet is not simply the passive recipient of such 'echoes', but is actively searching them out by reaching into these hidden domains.

In this larger image, the poet is always listening; he is turned expectantly towards the world and himself. He is on the alert for significant echoes and knows when an echo *is* significant because it '*...enters the echo-chamber of [his] heart and excites [his] whole nervous system (2002: 16).*' The poet A. E. Housman famously described how he could be engaged in some quite ordinary activity when suddenly a phrase or poetic line would enter his mind and send shivers down his spine (Housman, 1933). Such an uncanny experience recalls the story of

Moses stumbling upon the burning bush; a moment of poetic vision is not unlike an irruption of the sacred - it brings with it a spark of 'other-worldly' truth.

So Heaney appears to be saying that a poem feels significant because it is 'true', and while it may seem rash to invoke the concept of truth in this way, any discussion of aesthetic experience seems to require that we take it into account. If art does indeed refer to something beyond itself, the question of truthful representation cannot be avoided. In the passages from Heaney quoted above, the term 'true' suggests that the poem has made an accurate 'hit' - it implies that a phrase, or form of words, has hit the bull's-eye of feeling. In such a 'hit', there is felt *correspondence* between words and feeling, and this correspondence rings 'true'. Whether the words have come from someone else, or have taken form in the poet's own consciousness, is immaterial; the effect is the same - a moment of illumination in which an external image lights up 'essential' aspects of experience and makes them manifest.

When this kind of experience is mediated by an external form, as in *reading* a poem, we often say that the poem, or some part of it, has *spoken* to us. We feel it has accurately portrayed an element of experience that in some sense we 'knew', but could not have articulated until the poem expressed it for us. In this respect, the 'soundings' of poetry are not only confirmatory but revelatory, something that is well described by Heaney in his discussion of a poem by Elizabeth Bishop. He writes as follows:

These lines are *inhabited* by certain profoundly *true* tones... and they do what poetry most essentially does: they fortify our inclination to credit promptings of our intuitive being. They help us to say in the first recesses of ourselves, in the shyest, pre-social part of our nature, 'Yes, I know something like that too. Yes, that's right; thank you for putting words on it and making it more or less official' (2002: 188, italics mine).

Embedded in these remarks is a narrative about poetry - not yet about how it is made, but how it works. It tells us that the forms of poetry capture significant elements of emotional life, and that when we experience their revelation in a personal way, it strengthens our sense of who we are. We feel 'fortified... in the shyest, pre-social part of our nature (2002: 188)', and simultaneously become more aware of, more in touch with, such reticent parts of ourselves.⁵

Heaney's insight thus concerns the *value* of poetry and suggests that the making of poetry is indeed fulfilling an unsatisfied need in the poet. If poetry strengthens the core of the self and 'fortifies our inclination to credit promptings of our intuitive being', then surely the poet is using his art in this way. By giving form to the unspoken inclinations of his *true self* through poetic utterance, he is surely strengthening these core structures and increasing his resistance to *false self* living (Winnicott, 1960).⁶

The reader of poetry may be drawn to poetic form for a similar reason but with an important difference: while the poet can call up the forms that he needs through his own activity, the reader depends on the poet to make them for him. At first sight, a massive divide, this distinction may not be as great as it seems. A poetic sensibility is not uncommon – how else could the poet find a receptive audience? But the poet develops his talent through practice and apprenticeship and eventually seems to belong to another world. Perhaps there is something special about his talent, or perhaps he is more driven than the ordinary person; but he makes the quantum leap from dependence to self-sufficiency and from being a user of poetic forms (the forms of others), he becomes their maker, a resource to which others turn.

There is one further strand that I want to tease from Heaney's writing because it leads to the 'how' of poetry. It is one thing to say that the forms of poetry *correspond* in some way to inner states, but this says little about the nature of poetic forms and what enables them to function in this way. A poetic phrase does more than *correspond* to something internal; *it strikes directly on the strings of feeling and resonates with an inner state*.⁷

In his discussion of Elizabeth Bishop's poem (quoted above), Heaney describes her lines as 'inhabited by certain profoundly true tones' (2002: 188). I have emphasized the word 'inhabited' because the phrase suggests that a feeling can *enter into* a form of words and *dwell within it*. It implies a relationship between form and feeling that is no longer *exterior*, as though the form is *pointing* to a feeling; it indicates a more integral and *interior* connection, as though the word has become a *receptacle* for the feeling and is intermingled with it.

The image of 'indwelling' constellates a number of familiar psychoanalytic notions: not only *holding* (Winnicott) and *containing* (Bion), but also Balint's idea of an '*harmonious interpenetrating mix up*', and another Winnicottian term, *subjective object*, in which an external object is *infused* with subjectivity and thus subjectively transformed. However, none of these terms grapple sufficiently with how an *indwelling* of feeling in form might come about, and even

the over-used pantechnicon concept of *projective identification* (Klein, Bion) does little more than state a formal relationship between elements. By contrast, the close and specific affinity between feeling and form exemplified by a poem seems to require a more structural likeness between the elements than any of these terms suggest. As Heaney describes it, the relationship between form and feeling in poetry is one of truthfulness, which implies that each element can somehow be recognized within the other. In my view, this is a fundamental aspect of the aesthetic relationship, and I explore it further in relation to Langer's work below (Langer, 1953).

Significant Form

Heaney's writings are a valuable resource in trying to understand the impulse to poetry and the role of poetry in the life of feeling. His images evoke the phenomenology of poetic experience and provide a structure for thinking about the creative process. In the second half of my paper, I will link this phenomenology with certain strands of aesthetic and psychoanalytic theory. I will show how Heaney's 'true soundings' of experience are related to what aesthetics calls 'significant form', and how 'significant form' can be related to something the mother provides for the infant in the to and fro of pre-verbal communication (I refer to this as *maternal form*). This is an area pioneered clinically by the psychoanalyst, Donald Winnicott (1967a), and further developed by Daniel Stern and others in the context of more formal infant research (Stern, 1985).

I will first consider the place of *Significant Form* in aesthetic theory. The term (with a capital S and a capital F) was first introduced by Clive Bell nearly a hundred years ago in a book on the nature of the aesthetic response (Bell, 1914), and aesthetic theory has been preoccupied with the concept ever since. Bell used the term to refer to a certain quality, present in every genuine art object, the perception of which aroused *the aesthetic emotion* in a receptive viewer. This was a neat but tantalizing formulation, for while it captured something essential about our relation to art, it eluded precise understanding. As the philosopher Susanne Langer (1953: 23-4) put it in her book *Feeling and Form*:

[All questions in art theory] really... converge on the same problem: What is "significance" in art? What, in other words is meant by "Significant Form"? ...

“Significant Form” (which really has significance) is the essence of every art; it is what we mean by calling anything “artistic”.

The problem was that in Bell’s original statement, elaborated by Roger Fry (1924), the concept of ‘Significant Form’ was devoid of content; it transcended all the specifics of the art object in the same way that the ‘aesthetic emotion’ transcended all personal feelings and reactions. The aesthetic emotion was fired by the recognition of something ‘right’ or ‘inevitable’ in the art object’s formal structure, but this created an aesthetic divorced from human concerns.

Langer’s writings (1942, 1953) rescued aesthetics from this impasse by claiming that *the structure of the art object reflected (echoed) the structure of human feeling*. As she succinctly put it: ‘Art is the creation of forms symbolic of human feeling’ (1953: 40). In this brief sentence she re-established the link between art and experience and redefined aesthetics in a new and exciting way. Art does not exist in a rarefied medium divorced from human concerns; nor does it provide an alternative outlet for instinctual tensions, as Freud’s formulations had suggested, and Bell and Fry reacted against; it replicates the structure of human experience on a *symbolic* level. This means it is not concerned with *direct* emotional expression, which is closer to action, but portrays for contemplation the shapes and qualities of lived experience. The symbols of art are thus quite different from the discursive symbols of language with their consensual, defined meanings; they are idiosyncratic and largely non-verbal symbolic forms, which *display* their meaning through their structure and thus reveal what feelings are *like*.⁸

In Langer’s rewriting of the relation between feeling and aesthetic form, the ‘inevitable sequences’ of Bell and Fry were thus reconnected with human concerns but on a symbolic level. In her new formulation, the ‘inevitability’ of the aesthetic sequence is reconfigured as *the truthfulness of symbolic representation*: an aesthetic form is ‘right’ or ‘inevitable’ when it faithfully recreates a pattern of inner feeling. Its analogical structure replicates or ‘echoes’ a structure of lived experience, and because it resonates with it, creates a sense of meaning and significance. We can now see that a ‘true sounding’, in Heaney’s terms, is one that re-creates a pattern of experience on the symbolic level; his term is another way of describing ‘significant form’.

It should be noted, however, that when Langer speaks of the ‘forms of human feeling’ she has in mind a certain level of abstraction. An aesthetic form is not so much a representation – or

presentation as she puts it – of some specific feeling, but the replication of a *pattern* of feeling, a more abstracted vision of how the feeling ‘goes’. In these terms, aesthetic objects are *presentational symbols* that reveal through their structure the forms and interconnections of lived experience (Langer, 1942). Through the aesthetic symbol, feelings are laid out for contemplation: the way they start and stop, surge and subside, excite or depress, clash and conflict, flow into one another and repeat. Langer first developed her theory in relation to music, but patterning in time, texture and timbre, are equally important in poetry.

Found objects and transitional experience

Langer’s account of the way art replicates the textures and rhythms of feeling serves as a bridge to the work of Donald Winnicott (1967a/1971) and Daniel Stern (1985) on mirroring and attunement. These writers too are concerned with the vital qualities of experience but now in the infant context with forms generated by the mother (maternal forms). Winnicott focused on the mother’s face and her early *mirroring responses* to infant affects, while Stern was concerned with the more complex, and slightly later, *attuning responses* to what he called the infant’s *vitality affects*, or *forms of vitality* (Stern, 2010). Both writers see such forms as organising and strengthening the preverbal self, and this, together with the integral matching of form to feeling in both domains (aesthetic and infant), makes the overlap with Langer’s account of aesthetic process the more remarkable. Indeed, the overlap is so striking that it gives substance to Winnicott’s claim that cultural phenomena are a later development of early transitional forms (see below, and Winnicott, 1967b).

I can illustrate the essence of this cultural link in relation to a curious kind of ‘aesthetic’ object usually referred to as a *found object*.⁹ A ‘found object’ is an external object which possesses for the finder an aura of special significance. It is often but not always a natural object, a stone or pebble, a piece of driftwood or bone; it could be a piece of twisted metal or weathered plastic – in fact any material that arrests the eye through its form or texture, and especially if it bears the imprint of natural processes. Artists are particularly likely to collect such objects and use them as sources of ideas. Henry Moore had a little studio where he displayed such items, and would often sit contemplating them – not just visually, but also with his hands – before going into his larger workshop to get on with his sculpture (James, 1966).

However, just as poets are not the only people to find poetry significant, so artists are not alone in valuing ‘found objects’. Delighting in shells and pebbles is an ordinary experience that nevertheless contains a germ of aesthetic feeling. As you walk along the beach, unconsciously scanning as you go, your eye is caught by one particular item among the myriads on display – you pick it up because its form or combination of colours ‘speaks’ to you directly. At home it sits on your desk as a paperweight, but its value and significance lie in its sensory, aesthetic qualities, not in its functional possibilities. A kind of aesthetic communication passes between it and you – for you it has ‘significant form’.

Starting with this ‘found object’ experience, and following Winnicott’s germinal idea of linking cradle and culture, connections can be made with both art and infancy. On the upward trajectory, lines of poetry can be ‘found’ or discovered as much as pebbles; on the downward trajectory, the baby’s bit of blanket could claim to be the first ‘found object’ ever.

Consider first the lines of poetry that ‘spoke’ to Heaney in a special way. Although the experience he describes is more complex than that of finding a stone on the beach, the component elements are similar. In each case the finder is ‘touched’ by an external form – the special configuration of the stone, the special sound, imagery and meaning of the poetic lines. In each case, the ‘object’ ‘speaks’ to the person who comes across it, and in the moment of discovery, it seems to embody a known, yet not known, element of experience.

Consider now the infant’s *transitional object* (Winnicott 1953/1958). Here we find an object (the bit of blanket, for example) with huge significance to the infant – indeed, the object is so significant that it has to be always present and available. Although from an external point of view it is merely a smelly rag, the baby has found in it something uniquely important. Winnicott (1953) surmised that this was a tactile memory of the breast or body of the mother, and argued that the object had become so suffused with this remembered experience that it constituted a new kind of object. He called this a *subjective object*. In Balint’s terms, it is a *harmonious interpenetrating mix-up* (1959: 62) of blanket and mother. In either case, the object has acquired the capacity to resurrect an important experience, enabling it to be held in awareness in the absence of the original. For the baby, the mother’s presence *dwells* in the new possession.

Winnicott wonders whether the baby has found or created this object but of course it has done both. It is one of the baby’s first ‘found objects’ but equally, it is *made* by the baby,

fashioned in a moment of creative perception (finding, discovery) when the 'feel' of the bit of blanket suddenly coincided with a memory of the mother's body.

I suggested above that the bit of blanket was the baby's first 'found object' experience but Winnicott argues that this is not the case – the experience is based on an earlier situation in which the baby 'finds' the breast he is 'imagining' in the breast that the mother provides. This experience is made possible by the mother's ability to imagine what her baby is feeling; she anticipates the baby's need and provides what the baby is already expecting. Under these circumstances, the actual maternal breast is infused with the imagined breast. There is a 'harmonious interpenetrating mix up', the maternal breast becoming for the baby a *subjective object*. Winnicott argues that in these circumstances, the baby feels he has *created* the breast; although the imagined breast is made real through the mother's actions, the baby feels he has brought it into being himself (Winnicott, 1953/1958).

Key to Winnicott's thinking in this area is the overarching idea that in early infancy the mother's task is one of *adapting* to her infant: attuning to his need and responding to his gestures with a matching response. When this goes well, the attuned interaction is the norm of infant experience, and when internalized, becomes the primary unit of psychic structure out of which the core self is made.

Mirroring and attunement

Mirroring and attunement can be seen as variations and developments of this kind of interaction.¹⁰ In its newer forms, however, maternal responses are no longer concrete but take the form of patterned facial expressions, and other maternal enactments, that the baby continues to experience as echo and realization of his affective self. They confirm the sense of continuing oneness with the mother in spite of separation and simultaneously underpin the developing sense of being.

The salient image of mirroring is the mother's face as the infant's first mirror – the infant looks at the mother's face and sees his feeling reflected in the maternal expression (Winnicott, 1967a). This comes about through the mother's identification with the baby and gives the implicit message: *I am now feeling what you are feeling, and the expression on my face is what*

your feeling looks like. In other words, the feeling comes back to him as maternal reflection ('echo'), transmuted into visible form by its passage through the mother.

Attunement (Stern, 1985) is more complex than mirroring but has the same relational elements. It begins later than mirroring and peaks towards the end of the preverbal period; as a consequence, the mother's response is more varied and the infant states to which she responds are more complex and diverse. In *mirroring*, the maternal responses are limited to facial expressions, which reflect *specific* moods and emotional states in a near synchronous fashion. In *attunement*, on the other hand, the mother responds to increasingly complex sequences of infant experience, picking up on its changing tensions and rhythms (*vitality affects, forms of vitality*). To give an example: an infant is crawling around the floor, reaches for a toy, gets frustrated, then finally gets hold of it, letting out a cry of satisfaction. The mother watches, and through identification feels the changing pattern of the infant's arousal (*forms of vitality*). This is the first part of attunement. The second part is the mother's response – a multimodal enactment or display, which echoes in its contour the *vitality form* she has just experienced through identification. This is playback time, as though she is saying to the baby: 'I know how you just felt! This is what it was like!' As in earlier situations, the maternal form *realizes* an infant state but now in a less concrete and *post hoc* way. Stern calls the mother's activity a *recasting* of the infant's affective state (1985: 161), but in Langer's terms, her performance is a *presentational symbol* which displays the *form* and articulation of the infant's recent experience (what it was 'like') in a vivid and memorable way.¹¹

Art as self-realisation

In his seminal paper on maternal mirroring, Winnicott asks: 'What does the infant see when he or she looks at the mother's face?' He answers as follows: '...what the baby sees is himself or herself...' reflected in the mother's facial expression (Winnicott, 1967a/1971: 112). In a similar way we could ask: 'What does the artist see when looking at a canvas he has painted or a poem he has written?' And the answer might be similar to Winnicott's: 'What the artist sees is an aspect of himself reflected in the forms he has created.'

In order to make sense of this idea, we would have to assume that in his creative work, the artist both senses, and gives form to, structures of his own experience; it is as though he has

taken into himself the role of the attuning mother. If we then bear in mind that the artist devotes all his energies to this process, we are again confronted by the question I asked at the beginning: What powerful need could be driving the artist in this way, and what inner task is he trying to accomplish?

As I discussed above, Heaney suggested that poetry ‘fortifies our inclination to credit promptings of our intuitive being’, and this leads to the idea that the forms of poetry, and by extension those of any art, in some way strengthen the core self. The idea would be that by giving form to some previously half-sensed feeling, the aesthetic process gives it a stronger, more definite presence on the stage of the self. This idea can be extended in two ways: first, we could say that the artist is more than normally aware of deficiency in his core self (in the ‘shyest, pre-social part of his nature’); second, that artistic creation – creating forms for human feeling, as Langer puts it – is the artist’s attempt at restitution and relief from this malaise. It is here that developmental ideas come into their own because we find, in both Winnicott and Stern, a theory of development, which emphasizes the role of maternal forms in the genesis of the self. We learn that such forms are preverbal and image-based, that they replicate (display and embody) significant structures of infant feeling, and most importantly, that they strengthen and confirm the fragile outreachings of infant gesture. We learn that without them, the self does not truly come to life; and are left to assume that such deficiencies are not uncommon, given the total dependence of the infant on the mother’s ability to devote herself to her task. Her ability may be deficient because of her own upbringing, or it may be compromised by illness, depression, or excess of other commitments.

It has often been suggested that the artist is a fortunate being, both in talents and early upbringing, but the present argument points to a different state of affairs. It suggests that the artist has experienced a shortfall in maternal care, and that on a deeper level his work is a struggle to put this right. It suggests that he may have experienced enough attunement to know what he is missing, but not enough to satisfy his basic requirements. It suggests that in harnessing his talent and refining his skills he has found a way of reducing the impact of this deficit, and finally, that the process of restitution is a never-ending task. We can see that, as the artist works – I am thinking here of Lucien Freud’s statement with which I started – he is haunted by a feeling of inner deficiency. As he creates, bringing his work (and self) to life through his resonant forms, he begins to feel alive. But the feeling is short-lived – as soon as he

stops creating (when the work nears completion, as Lucien Freud said) the sense of deadness returns. He must start all over again.

What then of the *non*-practicing cultural community, the artist's audience? We could assume, as I did at the start of my paper, that the audience is a mirror image of the artist, and like the artist, is seeking to redress a legacy of maternal failure through involvement in the artist's vivifying forms. However, from a common sense perspective this seems unlikely; there may be some who seek relief in this way from their existential malaise, but the average art lover approaches art in a more relaxed and 'cultural' fashion.

So where does this leave us? Are we to say that the ordinary person uses art in a superficial way as entertainment and diversion? Or should we apply our understanding of art to the audience, but in a moderated way? There are several reasons for taking the latter approach: first, society holds the arts in high regard and is often judged by the 'richness' and 'depth' of its culture; second, the person who regularly turns to art is surely more involved than the idea of entertainment would suggest; and third, it is difficult to suppose that a serious audience is *not* relating *in some degree* to 'essential' elements in the artist's work.¹² When Heaney describes the artist as making deep 'soundings' of the self, we feel the truth of what he is saying because we experience his work as making deep soundings of our own feelings.

This brings us back to the central theme of this essay: that the forms of art facilitate a fuller realization of the self. It reminds us that the lover of art approaches it to find these 'significant forms', and though his search may be less desperate than that of the artist, it speaks of a shared concern for confirmation beyond the reach of ordinary words. From this perspective art is a reservoir of significant forms and the artist is revered because he has made them. Through his work, we experience him as a resurrection of the pre-verbal mother who first provided the attuning forms that we needed.

Notes

¹ From: *Lucien Freud: Painted Life*. TV Documentary, BBC2, 18th February 2012

² 'Poiesis' is really a suffix, not a word in its own right, but it seems an apt term for a core aesthetic process. It comes from the Greek word '*poiein*', to make, or do, which forms the etymological root of the word 'poetry'.

³ BBC Television Interview, 1994.

⁴ In describing a created form as objective, I refer solely to the fact that it has an existence outside the poet's self. It is not objective in the sense of 'detached' or 'impersonal' – on the contrary, it is filled with subjectivity and could be termed, in Winnicott's language, a 'subjective object' (see below).

⁵ I shall argue that these 'reticent' elements are frequently non-verbal, the poet literally giving words to that which has never been spoken.

⁶ If in 'false self' living, the subject over-accommodates to the forms (demands) of others and in this way dilutes and disperses his true 'essence', it is logical to suppose that forms that echo essential self structures would enhance the ability to resist the seductions of this way of life. A patient, who found it difficult to say 'no', came to me about his marriage saying: 'If I don't do something about the way things are, I'm going to lose my identity altogether.' He had no inner base from which to resist the external pressures from the other person.

⁷ I consider this more intimate kind of relation between form and feeling in my discussion of Susanne Langer's theory of art below.

⁸ A symbol of this kind thus 'contain[s] its sense as a being contains its life' (Langer, 1988: 38).

⁹ See my discussion of found objects in Kuhn, A. (ed.) 2013: 203-14.

¹⁰ I have discussed these terms at length in Wright 2009.

¹¹ In the feeding situation, the maternal contribution to the infant's experience is a tangible physical object. In mirroring and attunement, the maternal response is in the medium of the distance senses of sight and hearing. As with the facial expressions of mirroring, attuning maternal forms cannot be appropriated in a physical way; this opens up a new mental space which will later become the realm of symbols. Symbols have to be *contemplated* for their import rather than physically possessed, and understanding the symbolic thus requires an ability to give up more concrete modes of relating to the object.

¹² I refer to those elements in the art work which gave form to the artist's feelings. If it were not the case that the art work aroused in some degree a similar area of feeling in the audience, then art would not be a form of communication at all.

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