

Unspoken Moments: An Investigation into the Creative Process

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Introduction

My research investigates the creative process as a unification of mind and body. The mind/body concept explored refers to the relationship between the mental processes and bodily processes occurring during the construction of representational artwork. It examines the conscious and unconscious faculties of perception, cognition, emotion and intuition and how these mental states synthesize then interlink with the bodily processes through the physical manipulation of materials.

This physical manipulation of materials involves a process of abstraction where knowledge of pictorial conventions is infused with emotion and intuition. This aestheticising process organizes forms and spaces to create a vibrational rhythmic structure resulting in tension within the composition of the artwork. This tension enables an intensified sensation and psychological resonance to the artwork.



Deborah Marks, *Contemplating Transcendence*, 2010, ink and acrylic on card, 62 x 50 cm

Philosophies of Creativity

Philosophically, my project concerns the position that mind and body are not distinct entities. Spinoza's view was that there is a basic substance which is neither physical nor mental. The mental and physical would be properties of this neutral substance. Spinoza has influenced contemporary thinkers Giles Deleuze and Elizabeth Grosz, in their notions that this substance has the attributes of extension and thought - body and mind. An act of will and the movements of the body are a single event appearing under different aspects.¹

¹ E., Grosz, (1994a, p.11) *Volatile Bodies Toward a Corporeal Feminism*, Indiana University Press, USA.



Deborah Marks, *Liminal State*, 2010, ink and acrylic on card, 62 x 50 cm

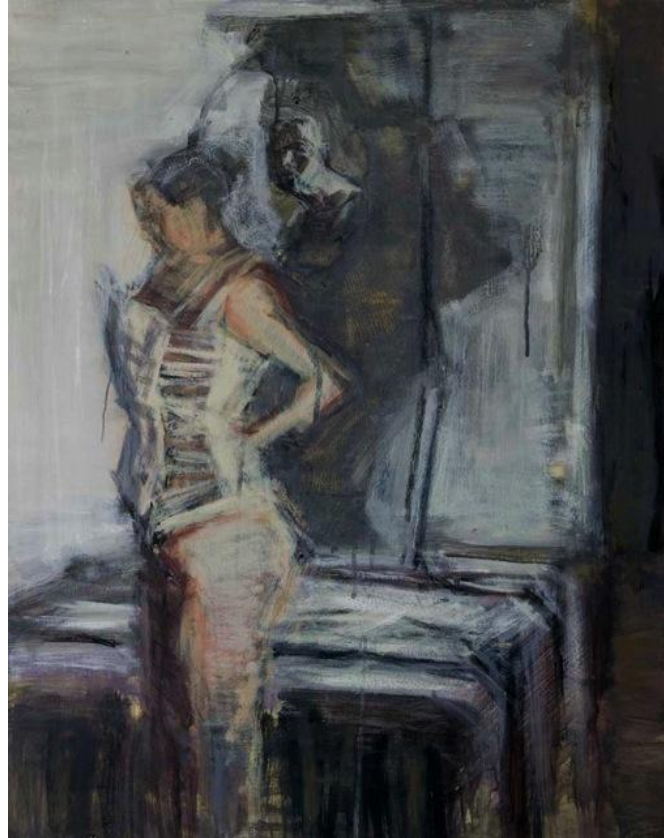
This notion of unifying mind and body is elucidated by Merleau-Ponty when he speaks about the continuity of inner and psychological life and the material world. He claims that bodies are lived experiences, that our consciousness is embodied through the way we live in our world.² Merleau-Ponty describes the concept of unifying mind/body activity during the creative process as ‘*an intertwining of vision and movement....the undividedness of the sensing and the sensed.*’³ This concept reinforces my own experience where vision and movement are united in the body which moves and sees as part of one complete process.

Merleau-Ponty’s theory of interiority and exteriority suggests we experience the world from a subjective, embodied perspective and are unable to know the truth of the world from a purely objective approach to knowledge. Our understanding of the world comes through lived experience, engaging all our senses, rather than distanced, objectified observation.⁴

²From: Shari Popen, (1995) *Merleau-Ponty Confronts Postmodernism: A Reply to O’Loughlin Philosophy of Education* http://www.ed.uiuc.edu/EPS/PES-Yearbook/95_docs/popen.html

³ M., Merleau-Ponty, (1964, p.121) *The Primacy of Perception*, Ed. James M. Edie, trans. Carleton Dallery, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press)

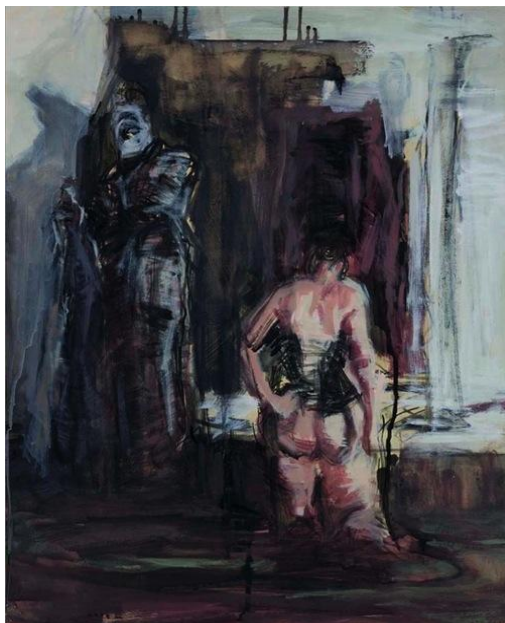
⁴ P., Crowther, (1993, p.40) *Critical Aesthetics and Post Modernism*, Oxford University Press, UK.



Deborah Marks, *Reflection No:52*, 2010, ink and acrylic on card, 62 x50 cm

Merleau-Ponty's theory coincides with my own understanding of the creative process. A synthesis of the mental processes and an interlinking with the bodily processes takes place during the construction of my own representational artwork.

This involves the synthesis of the subjective and objective aspects of perception, cognition, emotion and intuition.



Deborah Marks, *The Wish*, 2010, ink and acrylic on card, 62 x 50 cm

The objective aspect refers to the cognitive⁵ features engaged in the process of abstraction. This involves taking away or removing characteristics from the concrete realities of external perceptions and reducing the artwork to a set of essential characteristics. This is a transformation of perceptions into the “abstract visual language” utilising the elements of line, shape, volume, tone and colour. This visual language is the conduit for the pictorial conventions that are used by the artist to create the illusion of form and space in representational artwork. These include planar development and perspective devices as well as compositional principles, structures and geometry as in Rembrandt's *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp*, 1632.



Rembrandt, *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp*, 1632, oil on canvas, 216.5 x 169cm

⁵ R., Wollheim, (2003, p.86) *On the Emotions*, Yale University Press, London: The thought content of mental phenomenon which processes information.

The subjective aspect refers to the internal experience of mental states such as consciousness, pre-consciousness and the unconscious that relate to emotion and intuition. Subjectivity is the feel of a mental state. Richard Wollheim identifies unconscious intentions relating to the artist's process in terms of the:

*'...desires, thoughts, beliefs, experience and emotions, which motivate the artist to paint as they do. He identifies slips of the brush, lapses of representation, uncharacteristic crudeness of technique, as among the graphic expressions of the artist's unconscious mental states that may appear in a painting.'*⁶



Francis Bacon, *Study after Velasquez's Portrait of Pope Innocent X*, 1953, oil on canvas, 153 x 118 cm

Henri Bergson defines intuition as 'A simple, indivisible experience of sympathy through which one is moved into the inner being of an object to grasp what is unique and ineffable within it.' Bergson attests that intuition directly connects the senses with the world and is filtered through the subjective self.⁷

In my experience the synthesis of these subjective and objective mental states enables an intensification of sensation and a deeper psychological resonance to be transmitted to artwork.

⁶ J. L. Geller, (Summer, 1993, pp. 377-387) "Richard Wollheim in Painting as an Art Painting, Parapraxes, and Unconscious Intentions", *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 51, No. 3, Philosophy and the Histories of the Arts⁶ R., Wollheim, (1980, p.74) *Art and Its Objects*, Cambridge University Press, UK.

⁷ H., Bergson, (2007, pp.175 -176) *The Creative Mind: An Introduction to Metaphysics*, Dover Publications, Inc. N.Y.

Theories and Psychologies of Creativity

Freud attributed three qualities to mental processes: conscious, preconscious and unconscious. What is preconscious becomes conscious, without any activity on our part; what is unconscious can as a result of our efforts be made conscious.⁸

According to Freud, the unconscious mental processes have no easy access to consciousness, but must be inferred, discovered, and translated into consciousness. These include the phenomena of unconscious feelings, unconscious or automatic skills, unnoticed perceptions, unconscious thoughts, unconscious habits and automatic reactions, complexes, hidden phobias and concealed desires. These are too weak to reach conscious perception or are actively suppressed by the ego, because the ego is threatened by them. They often affect conscious thought and behaviour, however these unconscious aspects operate well outside the attention of the conscious mind.⁹



Peter Doig, *Blotter*, 1993, oil on canvas, 249 x 199 cm

The essential feature of conscious states is their subjective qualities - people are related to their feelings.¹⁰ According to Axel Cleeremans,¹¹ consciousness has many elements, from sensory

⁸ S., Freud, (1940, p.89) *An Outline of Psychoanalysis*, Translated by James Strachey, Norton N.Y.

⁹ S., Freud, (ibid., p.112)

¹⁰ J.,Searle, (1987) 'Theory of Consciousness': paper on 'The Problem of Consciousness', users.ecs.soton.ac.uk/harnad/Papers/Py104/searle.prob.html

¹¹ Axel Cleeremans is a Research Director with the National Fund for Scientific Research (Belgium) and a professor of cognitive science with the Department of Psychology of the Université Libre de Bruxelles, Brussels.

experiences such as vision, audition, and bodily sensation, to non sensory aspects such as volition, memory, and thought.¹²



Cezanne, *Mt Saint Victoire*, 1904, oil on canvas, 73 x 60 cm

Ehrenzweig, Deleuze and Grosz all put forward complementary theories of creativity which adhere to the notion of the mind/body unification. Ehrenzweig's theory explains what happens in the mind and its relation to the body during the creative process. Deleuze develops the idea of 'forces' which he takes to be external perceptions which affect the physical body and interlink with mental perceptions during the process of abstraction. These translate as an intensification of the compositional rhythm of the artwork that creates enhanced sensation.

Grosz elaborates on Deleuze's views and adds that the intensification of these processes stems from external forces that correspond with internal sensation through the aestheticising process of composition within the artwork.

¹² A., Cleeremans, (2003, p.78) *The Unity of Consciousness: Binding, Integration, and Dissociation*, Oxford University Press, UK.



Deborah Marks, *The Escape*, 2010, ink and acrylic on card, 62 x 50 cm

Ehrenzweig's central theme focuses on the mental processes used in constructing artwork. Ehrenzweig emphasizes the constructive role of unconscious perception and its relationship to the body. He proposes that perception is implicated in both conscious and unconscious mental processes. His main thesis is that art has a hidden spatial substructure which is revealed through a formal spatial organisation within unconscious perception.¹³

Ehrenzweig draws from Freud to explain the psychology underlying the creative process as the interplay between conscious and unconscious perception. This synthesis or interlinking as he calls it, directly implicates subjectivity and objectivity working simultaneously. He postulates creativity as a cyclical process consisting of three inter-linked phases. These aspects of perceptual experience dynamically interact and superimpose upon each other.

The initial stage where the ego splits is an experience of turbulence and disruption where fragmented parts of the ego are projected onto the artwork. In the second phase the unconscious contains the '*split-off ego fragments*', holding them in suspension. Here the artist's unspoken moment is the point at which the '*unconscious scanning*' occurs, integrating art's unconscious substructure. This is where a broader

¹³ A., Ehrenzweig, (1967, pp.4-5) *The Hidden Order of Art*, Weidenfeld & Nicholson, Great Britain.

base of searching occurs in order to unify the underlying compositional structure. An unbroken pictorial space emerges as the conscious signal of integration. The third phase, is where a 're-introjection',¹⁴ part of the work's hidden substructure is taken back into the artist's ego on a higher level of consciousness.¹⁵ In this phase a 'uniting sensation'¹⁶ takes over where shapes emerge and the logic of the underlying geometry of the composition arises. This knowledge of the unconscious scanning phase of the creative process in particular informed my research artwork by encouraging me to allow the unconscious more latitude to compose my paintings and collages.



Deborah Marks, *Lapse*, 2010, ink and acrylic on card, 62 x 50 cm

Ehrenzweig believed that during artistic activity conscious perception works simultaneously with the id in the process of unconscious scanning. Here the boundaries between ego, super-ego and id¹⁷ become

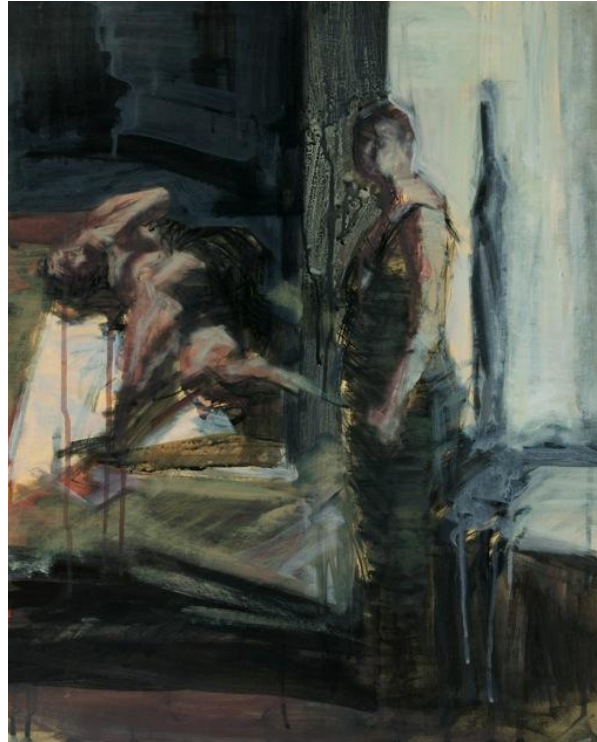
¹⁴ A., Delbridge and Bernard, (1981, p.993) *The Macquarie Dictionary*, Macquarie Library, Sydney. Re-introjection: defined as a primitive and early unconscious psychic process by which an external object or individual is represented by an image which in turn is incorporated into the psychic apparatus of someone else.

¹⁵ A., Ehrenzweig, (1967, p.102-103) *The Hidden Order of Art*, University of California Press, California.

¹⁶ R., Bogue, (2003, p.120) *Deleuze on Music, Painting and the Art*, Routledge, NY. Psychologist Erwin Straus's Term from: *The Primary World of Senses: A Vindication of Sensory Experience*.

¹⁷ R. Bock, (1983, pp.75-76) *Sigmund Freud*, Tavistock Publications, London: According to Freud, the Id is entirely unconscious and includes the instinctive, emotional, irrational, and primitive behaviours. The ego develops from the id and ensures that the impulses of the id can be expressed in a manner acceptable in the

less clearly differentiated. Our unconscious is involved in the dynamic interplay between conscious ordering and unconscious scanning.¹⁸



Deborah Marks, *Latent Moment*, 2010, ink and acrylic on card, 62 x 50 cm

For Deleuze art harnesses the chaotic vibrational forces from the world into sensation through the process of making art. Hence, sensation is linked to the colours, shapes and spatial relations that make up the composition. The materials themselves then become expressive - they transform into a new quality that intensifies the sensation within the artwork.¹⁹ Deleuze links the unconscious to the notion of chaos, whereupon the underlying compositional order of the representation is re-organized and intensified carrying the vibrational resonance through the artwork.

In my own experience force or energy is derived from external perceptions of the subject in the external world that is then conveyed through the unification of the mind and body during the process of abstraction. This energy stimulates the unconscious intuitive and emotional drives which influence the translation of the acquired knowledge of pictorial conventions and direct the manipulation of the materials. This process is reinforced by Deleuze's claim regarding sensation. He states:

real world. The ego functions in the conscious, preconscious, and unconscious mind. The Super ego is the component of personality composed of our internalized ideals that we have acquired from our parents and from society. The superego works to suppress the urges of the id.

¹⁸ N., Glover, (1970, op. cit., p.12)

¹⁹ R., Bogue, (2003, op. cit., p.169)

'Sensation is that which is transmitted from the perception of the external to internalise through the action and emotion of the body (the nervous system), and then reprojected onto artwork as formal qualities of composition, form and space.'²⁰

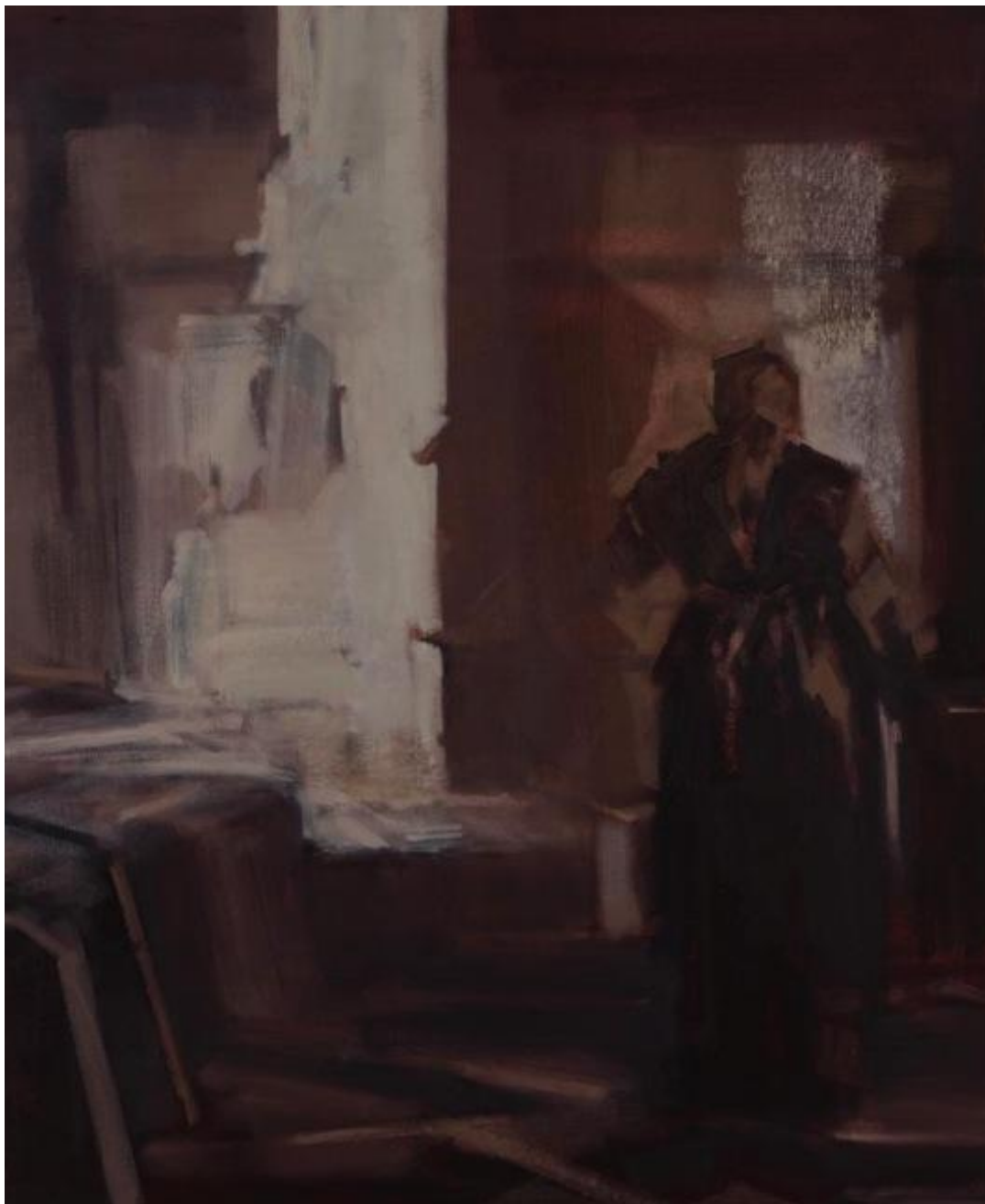


Deborah Marks, *The Judgment*, 2010, oil on canvas, 1.2 x 1 m

Deleuze suggests this synthesizing of emotion and intuition with formal knowledge during abstraction interlinks the bodily processes transforming and intensifying the artwork. The sensations are embodied as and in material forms through the energy of the gestural mark, as well as the expressive capacity of the material. This is evident when he states, '*Art is the most direct intensification of the resonance and*

²⁰ E., Grosz, (2008b, p.2 and 71) *Chaos, Territory and Art*, Colombia University Press.

*dissonance between what impacts the body most directly and that which intensifies and affects most viscerally.*²¹



Deborah Marks, *Threshold*, 2010, oil on canvas, 1.2 x 1 m

Grosz also addresses how forces and energies of chaos cohere to enable the production of art, and how art enacts and transforms perceptions. For Grosz, the impulse to art is linked to sexuality rather than to creation or production directly. Art's forms are an intensification of the body, the kind generated in sexuality - although in art this is sublimated. It is about the constriction of the materials through

²¹ *ibid.*, (p.74)

composition, so they become aestheticised or pleasurable. The pleasure of the materials relates to the intensification of the body and to the circulation of eros into the artwork.²²

This constriction of materials that Grosz refers to and the subsequent aestheticising of the artwork is a key issue in my project. The manipulation of materials through the synthesis of the subjective with the objective manifests a force and sensation in the artwork that implicates the psychological resonance of the work.



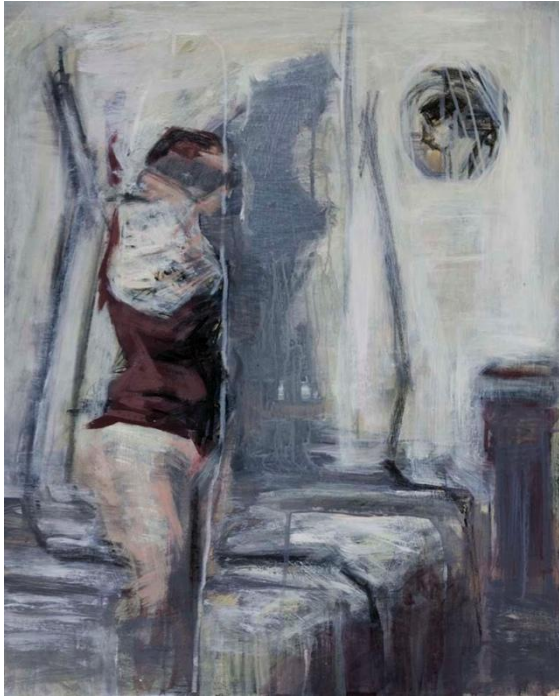
Deborah Marks, *Immanence*, 2010, ink and acrylic on card, 62 x 50 cm

The continual reworking of the research artwork contributed to create compositional tension where rhythmic vibrations carry the psychological tensions. Sensation is inherent within the constraints of the forms as a result of the rhythmic process of composing.

My experience coincides with Deleuze's and Grosz's ideas that forms become intensified due to forces from external as well as internal perceptions imposing an energy which acts on the physical

²² From: Interview with Julie Copeland: www.abc.au/rn/arts/sunmorn/stories/s1381964.htm 11:05 Sunday 05/06/2005.

manipulation of the materials as well as the tension of the vibrational rhythm within the compositional structure. Sensation and psychological resonance then emerge through these aestheticised rhythmic tensions. Visually the image is pushed out of the illusionary depth and on to the surface of the image.



Deborah Marks, *Shadow*, 2010, ink and acrylic on card, 62 x 50 cm



Deborah Marks, *Subliminal Moment*, 2010, ink and acrylic on card, 62 x 50 cm

Aestheticising involves the organization of forms and spaces to create an optimum tension between these elements within the composition. Grosz describes aestheticising as ‘a *vibratory structure extracting colour, rhythm, movement from chaos... that resonates and intensifies the body.*²³ The implication is that action and emotion are part of this complex event as formal qualities of composition are constructed. Deleuze defines this aesthetic process of refining composition as, ‘...a *process of compressing chaotic forces into forms, shapes, patterns, the extraction of rhythm from an energetic vibration.*²⁴ They both suggest that it is this aestheticising process that ultimately creates sensation in the artwork.

The painter Francis Bacon makes this point when he says, ‘*I’m trying to make images as accurately off my nervous system as I can, and concerned with aesthetic qualities.*’²⁵ In Bacon’s, *Head Surrounded by Sides of Beef*, 1954. His emotionally wrought mark-making suggests the interlinking with the nervous system, while the formally arranged composition demonstrates his aesthetic concerns.

²³ E., Grosz, (2008b, op. cit. p.71)

²⁴ E., Grosz, (2008b, op. cit. p.73)

²⁵ D., Sylvester, (1980, p.82) From *Interviews with Francis Bacon 1962-1979*, Thames and Hudson, London.



Francis Bacon, *Head Surrounded by Sides of Beef*, 1954, oil on canvas, 122 x 129 cm

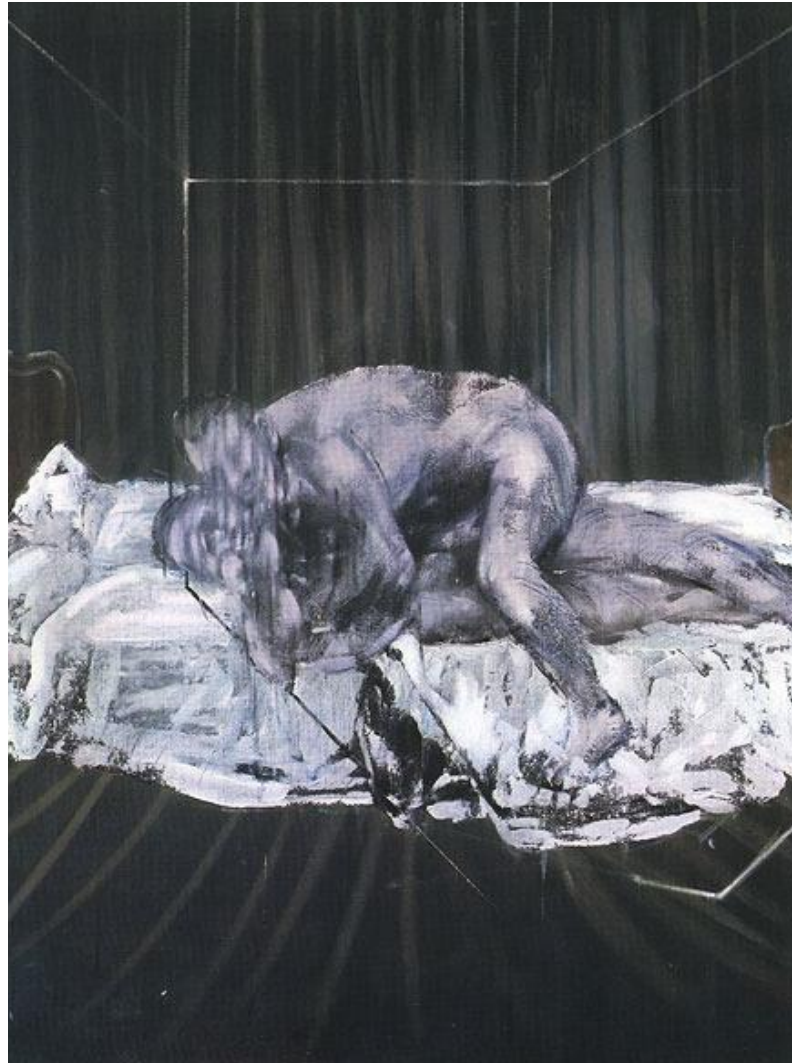
The final phase of the creative process involves the transference of sensation from the body of the artist to the artwork during its execution. The act of painting, the performative action of the gestural mark, becomes the conduit for instinctive and emotional force to emerge through the compositional structure. Deleuze refers to sensation as an outcome of the tension of composition's rhythmic structure. Grosz refers to sensation as a part of the process of attaining this outcome.

The Creative Process in Operation

The description of the creative processes by several artists confirms Ehrenzweig's ideas. Bacon's creative process encapsulates the experience of entwining conscious and unconscious activity. In his, Francis Bacon, *Two Figures*, 1953, this process is articulated in paint. Bacon explains,

*'I have an idea, start working and it evaporates. If it goes well something will begin to crystallize. Putting paint on, wiping it off...sometimes the shadows left will lead to another image. Something is only willed when the unconscious thing has begun to arise on which your will can be imposed. It is a dialogue...the paint is suggesting things to you...it's a constant exchange.'*²⁶

²⁶ D., Sylvester, (1987, op. cit., p.160)



Francis Bacon, *Two Figures*, 1953, oil on canvas, 152 x 116 cm

Peter Doig recognizes the importance, of creative emptiness, indecision, inaction, waiting, and frustration, while he contemplates an unfinished painting. Doig's working process often started with an unconscious chance encounter which he felt took time to "*get simple*".²⁷ The implication is that Doig is making an allowance for unconscious processes to direct the construction of the artwork, for example in *Jetty*, 1994.

²⁷ A., Searle, (1994, p.103) *Peter Doig From: Interviews with Peter Doig, 051 Survey – A Kind of Blankness* Phaidon Press, London.



Peter Doig, *Jetty*, 1994, oil on canvas, 200 x 248 cm

In *Swamped* 1990, Doig's unconscious encounters are referenced through the manipulations of the paint itself, the variety of handling and the quality of touches with which he has built up the image.



Peter Doig, *Swamped*, 1990, oil on canvas, 197 x 241 cm

Romanian artist, Adrian Ghenie, describes “an antagonism” within his mark-making between the synthesis of conscious knowledge of history and preconscious memory, with deeper levels of the unconscious from where he incites accident. His brushwork moves from abstraction to figuration. The illusion can be discerned amid blurry marks, scraped pigment, and exposed canvas which creates the emotional sense of loneliness, darkness, disillusionment and repression for example in *Duchamp's Funeral*, 2009.



Adrian Ghenie, *Duchamp's Funeral*, 2009, oil and acrylic on canvas, 200 x 300 cm

Ghenie speaks about his experience of painting as the 'upper level of the subconscious', contains images and offers situations familiar to many, while the deep subconscious, hold a person's darkest private fears.²⁸ For example *The Nightmare*, 1994, contains psychologically bleak elements.



Adrian Ghenie, *The Nightmare*, oil on canvas, 145 X 200 cm

The compositional arrangement appears pre-meditated, however the paint is applied freely with open-ended gestures, implying the unconscious phase in his process. This approach can be seen clearly in *Babe in the Woods*, 2008.

²⁸ http://www.haunchofvenison.com/en/index.php?page=home.artists.adrian_ghenie



Adrian Ghenie, *Babe in the Woods*, 2008, oil and acrylic on canvas, 193 X 194 cm

These accounts of the experience of the conscious and unconscious faculties combining during the creative process, encapsulates my experience in creating the research artwork. I have observed that external perceptions energize the process where conscious reflection on cognitive knowledge of form and space dissolves and integrates at a deeper level of the psyche with intuitive and emotional energies. These mental processes simultaneously interlink with the body and engage through manipulating materials in the search for underlying structural tension within the composition. In doing so, the coherent space of the pictorial image is disrupted. The constriction of materials into these tensions of the rhythmic structure of composition allows a palpable psychological resonance and intensified sensation to emerge. This exemplifies Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of embodiment in action.



Deborah Marks, *Unspoken Moment*, 2010, oil on canvas, 1.2 x 1 m

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