

Aspects of Theory relevant to the Practice Presentation

Within the practice examples under discussion, the 1st-person stance is adopted only in my video clips, in contrast to the 3rd-person approach that Safa Tharib takes of himself via his distanced positioning of a camera that records himself at work in a thumbnail screen. This section's title, 'The Work in Theory, and from a Theoretical Perspective', however, infers that the question of theory in relation to a work also inevitably distances the work from itself. In this case the theory, while philosophical, concerns the question of *duration*, time when it becomes more a matter of *space*, and how there is a particular way of looking at reality from the perspective of the human *subject*, as subject to their individual psyche, the latter question of which does manifest in and through both Tharib's and my own examples of practice.

Lacan 1

I might have suggested that we number the above theoretical references 1 to 3, but a philosophical question would be who is *we*, of whom I refer. Behind most people's creative work is either tangibly, or symbolically, an interlocutor. The question of interlocutor might be considered the difference between *showing* and *telling*, when one is inclined to show a need, and demand to be told. I'm suggesting that the appeal to another, as if to an interlocutor, to do the telling is one possible role of theory, even despite one's tendency to search for and interpret theory to suit one's own ends. Between each of the parameters however, of showing and telling, which I'm suggesting is a dialogue, there's a gap of transference. What *does* happen in the gap is an intriguing question concerning many kinds of gap. In the circumstances of the visual work presently in question, there are the physical and temporal gaps between stop- frame, the negating of otherwise reflective moments in fast-frame, and the gap between real and *Real*, the latter as a Lacanian psychic term of his conceptualised three psychic registers, Imaginary, Symbolic, Real, in what I've named *Real*- time in the research presentation's title.

The showing is in this instance the visual artwork, and the telling is in and through the theory. In the terms of the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan (1901-

81), the telling may be considered a kind of edict applied to oneself that's a demand of the superego, the latter of which does often tangibly feel that it's coming from some external source. Such a demand presupposes that one acknowledges such a phenomenon at work within oneself; an internal dialogue that may appear to be confirmed not only by external others, but as if such others were themselves imposing the demand. The demanding others, are arguably a necessary part of one's dialogue with oneself about one's work, but which appears to be necessitated by such others' questions. Can the others be collectivised and abstracted, to the extent that a singular phenomenon may inhabit infinitely variable people and even things, without ever being so deducible to them? In Lacanian theory the concept of the Other performs this purpose. In Lacan's terms, desire stems from an originary gap in the relationship between the post-natal infant's expression of *need* and its mother's interpretation of need as *demand*. Lacan (1999) states: 'That is why the unconscious was invented – so that we would realize that man's desire is the Other's desire, and that love, while it is a passion that involves ignorance of desire, nevertheless leaves desire its whole import' (p.4). The following quote from Bailly is useful on the question of the position of desire, if only for the fact that he introduces the question of *signified* and *signifier*, where in Lacanian theory the signifier – in very general terms the sensory-based component of linguistic and other semiotic meaning – is much more greatly prioritised than the conceptually-based signified. While Tharib's main video clip does convey a readable narrative, arguably my own clip may be said to either avoid signification, or is so fragmentary as to need my voice-over to provide clarification. If the following explanation of signified and signifier will suffice in a presentation that need not be overly theoretical, according to Bailly (2009):

From the very outset of acquiring language, the verbalisation of need elicits stuff (service, objects) predetermined by the relationship between signified and signifier, and these things are never quite what is wanted. It is in the space between demand and need that desire appears. This "desire gap" does not go away as the child's language becomes more sophisticated, because the child's needs become

increasingly complex too, and its ability to express them confounded by increasing internal conflicts. (p.113)

Ettinger

While Bailly suggests, through referring to language, that the beginning of the psychic process is post-natal, albeit at its earliest stages, the psychoanalyst and painter Bracha Ettinger (2020) takes her theory of the 'matrixial' back to the 'late prenatal period', when the foetus is already forming a relationship with its mother, with primitive sentient and psychic *tendrils* (my term) that spread to include influences of more external others (p.251).

Bergson 1

Of more pragmatic value regarding the contention that the two referenced practices, the philosopher Henri Bergson (1859-1941) offers the first of what I propose are three aspects of theory relevant to the research. Concerning the nature of *image*, which is of course a question implicit in many visual mediums, Bergson (2004) distinguishes between the '*representational* image' and the '*present* image', not so much as separate entities, as the latter as the basis of an image subject to time and movement:

That which distinguishes it as a present image, as an objective reality, from a represented image is the necessity which obliges it to act through every one of its points upon all the point of all other images... Representation is there, but always virtual—being neutralized, at the very moment when it might become actual, by the obligation to continue itself and to lose itself in something else'. (p.28)

The implication of the quote is that perceivable images are always subject to movement, either themselves as perceived, the perceiver as moving in relation to a still image, or both. Once an image is fixed on a page, however – bearing in mind that the reproduced videos of both practices are two-dimensional renditions – it cannot itself move. The question concerns the extent to which the 'present' character of the image is acknowledged and can be seen, and how, in the case of analogue drawing, the movement and

continual transformation of the image can be implied. While the drawing of a moving image to project a sense of itself moving is a cursory activity of the drawing medium, as analogous to how visually the image is scanned rather than completely taken into one's vision, the video recording of an image's development no matter whether as moving or fixed, in the later case becoming more of a representation, will show its evolution through movement and time.

Bergson 2

A second reference to Bergson concerns time. According to Bergson (2001), we tend to count in time rather than in space, but may in fact have counted by means of 'points in space'. (p. 78). Then, Bergson states that while we register time as successive moments, it is in space that they achieve their aggregate (p.79). This suggests a close cooperation between time and space, each as independently perceived and conceived. Duration, as the continuum of time, Bergson suggests, is a matter of consciousness, when he states: '...we shall see that all unity is the unity of a simple act of the mind, and that, as this is an act of unification, there must be some multiplicity for it to unify' (p.80).

The above Bergson quotes on time come from a chapter on number as analogous to how time is unitised as points in space. Bergson (2001) states:

The unit is irreducible while we are thinking it and number is discontinuous while we are building it up: but as soon as we consider number in its finished state, we objectify it, and it then appears to be divisible to an extent'. (p.83)

The first part of this statement, regarding the unit's irreducibility, may be common to both Tharib as the artist and his work's viewer as the animation is playing, but is less so on any subsequent viewing, when the parts may appear more divided and be potentially further divisible. In other terms, a reflexive or pre-reflective phenomenological stance may apply to the work in process and

its initial viewing, and a reflective stance to further viewings, of which this discussion of the work is an example in practice.

Bergson (2001) discusses time in relation to space in complex depth, and this fragmentary reference errs on the side of space rather than time for suggestion as to how Tharib's work progresses in a mode of stop- frame, through time. Bergson poses the question of whether the 'homogeneous medium' in which sensory elements – he refers to sound but it might just as well be short-duration successive visual elements – can be counted in space or time, concluding that it's only as space that such intervals can be counted, because '...a moment of time... cannot persist to be added to others' (p.87). The moment that time stops, it becomes space.

Bergson (2001) states of 'perceptions, sensations, emotions and ideas' that they may be divided into each of 'clear' and 'impersonal', and 'confused'. Importantly for the present research, the latter of the two divisions is '...inexpressible, because language cannot get hold of it without arresting its mobility or fit it into its common-place forms without making it into public property' (p.129). This quote in a sense sums up the problem for the artist who's intuitively immersed in the process of a practice that, in itself, does not require impersonal articulation, yet is all too often obligated to achieving a result that projects a degree of clarity. However, the suggestion of the role of language in the 'confused', that has at the same time *mobility*, anticipates Lacan's re-configuration of the signifier in Saussure's semiotics as running along in an incessant chain, each signifier engendering the next new signifier; the image basis of language structure that requires its oscillation with signified, or concept, to create meaning. The kind of meaning that psychoanalysis tries to tease out of the signifier premise almost alone, however, is that of the psychodynamic unconscious.

The video clip details of my own are of midway aspects of the process of making a drawing concerned with diagramming perception. The diagram that

is forming in and as the drawing is a visual conceptualisation of how Lacan suggests that the *scopic drive* works, vis-à-vis the Gaze, which is in effect the research presentation's third relevant theory.

Lacan 2

In Lacan's derivation, if the gaze is to have psychic import, it carries an element that is neither visible nor tangible but is somehow triggered by certain things uniquely relevant to the individual, which is the object *a*. The object *a* is the object cause of desire, something in the object more than the object itself (Žižek: 2006, p.17) that arouses a surrogate sense of one's originary yet forever unknown and unattainable desire. In Lacanian terms the psychic structure is comprised of the interrelationship of the three aforementioned registers, Imaginary, Symbolic and Real. The object *a*, in all its mysteriousness, is a psychic product in and of the Real, which is the register that concerns that which is simply beyond comprehension and understanding, yet no less, if not *more* important, because of its character of the ineffable. The gaze, also conveying the object *a*, projects towards the viewer from behind whatever is the perceivable object, as it were, which interacts with the latter's image basis as an obfuscating or blurring screen, the object *a* of which is in the form of a point. The last section of the four-sectioned chapter, 'OF THE GAZE AS *Objet Petit a*', in Lacan's Seminar XI, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, concerns the projected gaze from the perspective of the painter. Lacan states: '...in the scopic field, the gaze is outside, I am looked at, that is to say, I am a picture' (p.106). Lacan likens the projected gaze to a constellation of light that oscillates, and in a sense *obfuscates*, in the region of the image as a screen, which makes up the picture. Insofar as the picture reflects oneself back, it shows a 'semblance' or 'mask', the 'human subject' of whom is '...caught up in this imaginary capture. He maps himself in it. How? In so far as he isolates the function of the screen and plays with it' (p.107). This is all on the psychodynamic and therefore unconscious level of the unknown known. Playing with the conceptual explanation provided by Lacan is, in a sense, a means of willing its articulation as intuitive knowledge, even if it can never ultimately be seen.

Lacan firstly refers to the biology of the eye; that vision fans out to create one's perceptual field, but, as shown by the familiar triangle or side-turned pyramid of geometral optics, starts from a point that's the pupil of the eye. If one flips the triangle horizontally, the diagram shows the starting-point to be the gaze, which also in effect fans out, forming a screen that overlaps with the image as a flickering constellation of light. This is the contentious point of the theory, where such physiological factors of vision may also be considered metaphors for psychical factors:

'...there is something whose absence can always be observed in a picture. This is the central field, where the separating power of the eye is exercised to the maximum in vision. In every picture, this central field cannot but be absent, and replaced by a hole – a reflection, in short, of the pupil behind which is situated the gaze'. (p.108)

Lacan elucidates on the metaphorical potential of this analogy with geometral optics: '...in as much as the picture enters into a relation to desire...' (p.108).

The afore-referenced *playing* is also in the form of the self-activated challenge to oneself that the gaze sets up. Lacan has already referred to the analogy of the 'mask' as a 'shield' (p.107), as if one is entering into battle, and states: '...there is in painting a certain *dompte-regard*, a taming of the gaze, that is to say, that he who looks is always led by the painting to lay down his gaze' (p.109). This relationship to the canvas, or whatever is the representational medium's surface, is a performance – my own suggested term – of both confrontation, or even aggression, and submission to an ever-mysterious sense that something more is going on than meets the eye. Lacan likens the 'laying down of the gaze' to 'the rain of the brush', as natural to painting activity as a snake shedding its skin and trees dropping their leaves (p.114). One might add to this the dust of charcoal, or the drips and runs of ink, and then, on aggregate, the approaching of the surface plane is if it were the top of a table tipped vertically. Insofar as such a performance is with a mind to *show*, which relates to the compulsion not only of desire in the abstract but to return to its originary point – '...a question of a sort of desire *on the part of the Other* (p.115) – Lacan relates such desire to show to 'some appetite of

the eye on the part of the person looking' in the first place (p.115). This 'appetite' Lacan equates with '...voracity, the evil eye' (p.115), and with 'envy' (p.116), because whatever is intimated in and as the object *a* is forever the possession of the Other – 'the image of a completeness closed upon itself' – which, try as one may, is unobtainable, except, I would suggest, on the level of play.

References

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