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What do you want of me?

Abstract:

Taking the painter's studio as exemplar of a space for creative work, this paper asks is creative work determined by the structure of the space in which it is generated and if so in what way? To address this question I turn to the psychoanalytic encounter, the 'scene of address' (Butler 2005), and identify the *detail-without-model* – my designation for the smallest unrepeatable element, which supports the locus of an unsettling enigma. I make a link between the painter's studio (painting from observation) and the psychoanalytic 'scene of address' (Freud listening to the hysteric on the couch) at the level of structure. By examining another 'scene of address', this time my encounter with a recently found 35mm colour transparency of my father, I find a correspondence between the *detail-without-model* and the *punctum* (Barthes 1993). I read Roland Barthes through Eric Santner (Santner 2006) who also draws equivalence between the detail and the *punctum* in a poem by Rainer Maria Rilke. Following Santner, I then move to consider Jacques Lacan's formulation of the two modes of enjoyment determining the psychic structures of masculine and feminine sexuality within psychoanalysis. This allows me to link the *detail-without-model* to the structure of the feminine, giving me the theoretical tools by which to consider my question.

Biographical note:

Hepzibah Rendle-Short recently graduated from the Painting Department of the Royal College of Art, London, with a practice-led PhD (March 2012). As an artist she has exhibited widely bringing together visual art and writing. She has for many years also been a visiting lecturer in art schools across the UK. She is currently a trainee psychoanalyst at the Centre for Freudian Analysis and Research in London.

Keywords:

Detail – Painting – Psychoanalysis – Punctum – Sexuality

Scene of address

*What do you want of me?*ⁱ I wonder as I confront the anxiety-provoking abyss of the analyst's desire coming from the other side of the room. Here in the psychoanalytic clinic I accept the analyst's invitation to talk. I speak to please. I utter words in an attempt to narrate my thoughts, dreams and memories into the present. I speak my words from the place of my ego as I aim to construct a coherent story about myself, but I find I am inevitably thwarted because of contradictions, hesitations and slips of the tongue. In the end all I can recount is 'an interruption to narrative' (Butler 2005, 63). And yet this is precisely what the analyst pays attention to. For these lapses reveal the repressed material and as these are slowly uncovered fixations are loosened. By picking through these smallest elements, following threads of associations and noticing inconsistencies or denials, paths are travelled over and over leading eventually to expose hidden truth that shelters under my assumed knowledge (Zupančič 2008, 18). This long work of repetition is the process Sigmund Freud called 'working through'. It is a labour driven by desire, or more precisely, unconscious desire, which forms the 'the axis, the pivot, the handle, the hammer' of the psychoanalytic work (Lacan 1994, 235). Desire is the 'nodal phenomena' of our being (Lacan 1994, 231) which distinguishes us from our animal counterpartsⁱⁱ for humans are born into language – the 'treasure trove' of signifiers that make up the Other (of language) – and it is in this Other that 'desire crawls, slips, escapes, like the ferret' (Lacan 1994, 214). Thus desire positions sexuality as *the* fundamental mode in which our life takes shape and in which our existence comes to be registered. And my desire is implicated in the Other's desire, which is always radically unknown to me. My desire reaches toward the enigma of this Other's desire – the desire of the Other, desire for the Other, what the Other desires – which is never more palpable, *material* and present than in the psychoanalytic encounter, a scene called forth by desire, co-constituted: a 'scene of address' (Butler 2005, 50).

While my desire is directed toward my analyst, his desire, we are told, is directed elsewhere, opaque and enigmatic. The relationship is not equal. Jean Laplanche, who was Lacan's student, put this intricate economy to work. He elaborates this scene as a replay of the originary encounter that he describes as one of seduction, in which the infant is imposed upon by single words, touches, glances, looks – *details*. As enigmatic signifiers they leave their trace upon the infant's body as an 'echo'. They signify nothing *as such*, and in this 'nothing as such' their meaning is unstable and undecided, and *without model*. Laplanche tells us that through this replay transference love is engendered in the present, 'hollowed out' (Laplanche 1999, 214) by the analyst's *refusal* to collude with my demand for interpretation, my demand for fixed meaning, and by this *refusal* the enigma is safeguarded, and desire sustained (Laplanche 1999, 227).

Twin axis

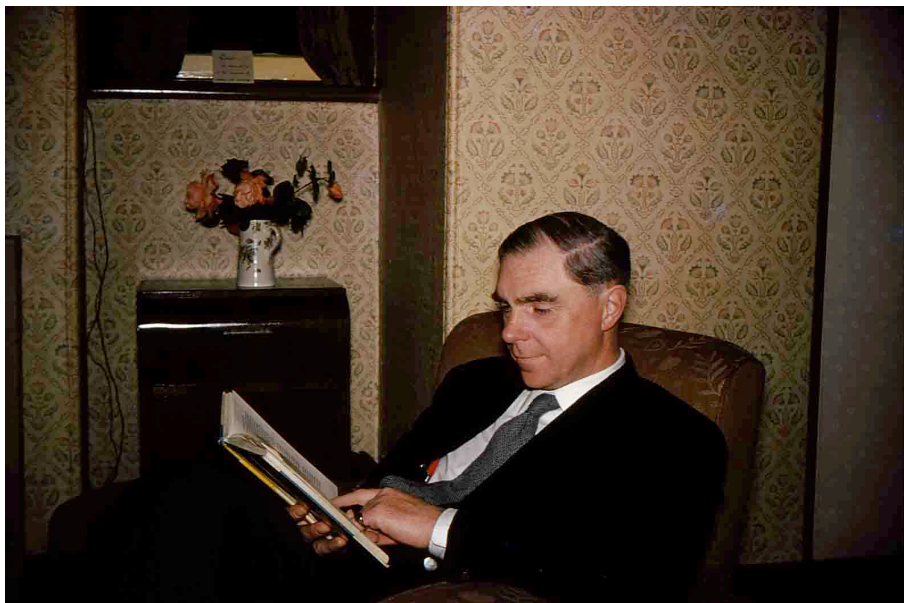
This scene of address was first framed by Freud. He discovered that by lying the analysand on the couch, orientated in a position turned away from the him, he was relieved of the work's continual hourly scrutiny and the analysand was able to say

anything that came to mind more freely. In this way the speech of the hysteric was isolated and Freud was able to listen to the signifiers with a *free hovering attention*.ⁱⁱⁱ His ear was linked to her mouth, as it were, horizontally along the axis of the couch. Encouraging the analysand to associate he aimed at the core of her sexuality, designated as the drive, which he claimed manifested itself partially either as the anal or as the oral drive. Following Freud, Lacan proposed an additional pair of partial drives, which he named the invocatory and the scopic. If psychoanalysis is staged within the invocatory register – with the ear as the erogenous zone and the voice as the object – I want to suggest that the painter’s studio has a reciprocal relation to it, for it is played out in the scopic register – the eyes are the erogenous zone and the gaze the object – which is particularly evident when painting from observation.

I stand upright behind my easel ... in silence ... I focus my look exclusively toward the object in front of me ... with a *hovering attention* I try to account for what is looking back at me ... I hold what I see, as an image in my mind and turn to the painting positioned on the easel ... I place pieces of paint on the surface striving at an faithful equivalence to the image in my mind ... *turning* again to scrutinise the object in the world. In this encounter my desire is called forth.

And so I propose twin axes. The first is runs along the horizontal – analysand, analyst and speech – and the second along the vertical – painter, object and paint. Both configure as triangular apparatus: psychoanalysis grounded in all-speaking and no- looking within the invocatory register and painting grounded in all-looking and no-speaking within the scopic register. With speech and paint as products both aim to render – in the sense of ‘to give back’ – a representation.

The image



Against the backdrop of these speculations, while I was for strange personal reasons sorting and splicing together two domestic spaces in my own life, I found by chance among a collection of family slides a 35mm colour transparency of my father who

died three years ago. Looking at the image, taken, I would say, in the late 1950s, sometime before I was born, made me pause. I look at the transparency in the hope of locating within it my father's manner of dying. Having a painter's eye, I first notice that the image has about it the air of having been constructed; reminding me of the way Cézanne, for example, might formally 'build' a painting according to artistic canon. I notice the vertical rhythms dividing up the frame from left to right: the corners, alcove and edges where different wallpapers meet. Then falling from top to bottom my eye cascades down the horizontals ... to a place where it slides diagonally across the open book and settles ... momentarily ... on the hand ... which points backwards against the trajectory of my eye, while linking to my father's tie which leads up to the head ... the head which appears to be the of focus of the image, at the *centre*. As I look, I notice that my father turns his cheek, deflecting my gaze; I follow his, which directs mine towards the open book.

The image itself speaks of a distinct historical moment through a seamless unifying concatenation of details. Is it I wonder the particular combination of patterns: two wallpapers – the dominant beige-cream with the stencilled thistle in a repeated diagonal-lozenge butted against the muted, indistinct dotted paper, in the shadows – or is it the brown-beige-flock upholstery of the armchair? Is it something about the jug of garden roses, placed slightly off centre on the highly polished surface of what seems to be a wood-veneer, freestanding gramophone cabinet in the alcove corner? Or perhaps the combed hair, pressed close to the head, crowning short back and sides?

Both the formality of the image, as *tableau vivant* – the absorption of my father in his book and the culturally specific indicators that situate the image historically and geographically – (are not the garden roses so English?) remind me of Roland Barthes' concept of *studium*. The signifiers, embedded in the image are in Barthes' words 'ultimately always coded' (Barthes 1993, 51) enabling me to read the specific time and place of the symbolic world in which it was taken. Cultural knowledge steeps the image; the overall warm light so peculiar to the technology of slide transparencies, for example, or the particular hairstyle that speaks not only of my father but more generally of all men of that era, with their social standing grounded in a masculine authority. Added to which is the open book, intimating that here is an intellectual, a man of letters.

And yet as I sit on the floor among the debris of my own decomposed life, looking through a viewfinder at the image, what draws me in is not its cultural legibility but something that exceeds it, an almost imperceptible restlessness across the surface; an 'intense immobility' (Barthes 1993, 49). It is something enigmatic, non-specific and while being mysteriously quite 'other' is at the same time immanent: 'it is what I add to the photograph and *what is nonetheless already there*' (Barthes 1993, 55). It expands to fill the entire space. It rises to meet me. It snags. It is what Barthes calls the *punctum*, which he tells us, is in the detail. I look at the image with *free hovering attention* to discern which kind of detail is affecting me by unsettling my equilibrium in front of it. My first thought is that it is the small puff of white handkerchief poking out from my father's jacket sleeve, handkerchiefs that even now some years after his death, I have a stash of in my top drawer in memory of him. And then I turn to the fall of his hands. Not only the gesture, with the right hand holding the open book – thumb

and little finger in front, three middle fingers behind and the left resting in the fold, the pointing finger indicating the words – but also their inclination. As my attention fades to ‘a certain latency’ (Barthes 1993, 53), I realise that parallel to the restless immobility across the film transparency is the tension on the turned cheek, a detail that disturbs the image for me, with the muscles pulling back the rather thin settling of the lips in the singular way that is my father.

Sitting on the floor I am seized by the ‘pure surplus’ of that muscular ripple as ‘the locus of a kind of wandering *punctum*’, to use the very words Eric Santner uses – drawn from Barthes – when he writes of the fragmentary sculpture in the poem ‘The archaic torso of Apollo’: ‘Rilke suggests that the object’s status as remainder allows him to experience its surface as a pure surplus over any possible *studium*, as the locus of a kind of wandering *punctum*’ (Santner 2006, 201). The muscular ripple makes a little hole in the unity of image. It punctures the *studium*, which Barthes reminds us ‘is that very wide field of unconcerned desire, of various interest, of inconsequential taste: *I like it/I don’t like it*’ (Barthes 1993, 27). This *unconcerned desire* has a binary, oppositional logic – absence/presence, either/or – that recalls the *phallogentric* structure of language. The *punctum* on the other hand, being representative of another register altogether, triggers my singular (unconscious) desire as a self-reflexive event. It ‘rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me’ (Barthes, 1993, 26). In being pierced by the arrow, my desire is called forth, a co-constituted scene is established parallel to the psychoanalytic scene of address. Both are governed by opacity; my desire as the analysand, seeking to fathom the desire of the Other – the enigma as a closed book – which the analyst guards; or a space suspended as if between the *punctum* lodged in the image, having been called forth by my desire, and me as the subject viewing the image.

Becoming parlêtre

Here I would like to pause a moment to reflect upon the operation of the *detail-without-model* so far, before taking a brief detour into psychoanalytic theory to propose the structure of the space it determines. The detail is the *punctum*. It is in me; it is more than me; it is ‘a subtle beyond’ (Barthes 1993, 59). The detail is a requisite of the scene of address. Passing through the primal, seductive, scene of address I lose my being. I give up my libidinally charged enjoyment, the limitless fusion with my mother, and the world: I am seduced by the Other. I am submitted to the imposition of enigmatic glances, strokes and words: the *detail-without-model*, the un-symbolised excess, the too much that which overwhelms. Through desire I am brought into the mode of sexuality and language and become a ‘speaking being’ – or to borrow Lacan’s word, a *parlêtre*. I enter the process of becoming sexual, a process that Lacan designates *sexuation* – defined we could say as the particular psychosexual position I take up as a subject and with it the modes of enjoyment I gain. Thus *sexuation* is structural irrespective of gender or biology.

However such investiture of the symbolic world is necessarily alien. It intrudes upon my being introducing a *cut* (joint) between what I immediately am and any function that I exercise (Žižek 2004, 87). Yet though I suffer I have an insatiable enjoyment

when using words, gaining knowledge and making sense. This enjoyment, mixed with both the pain *and* pleasure is what Lacan calls *jouissance*. In becoming *parlêtre* we all enjoy (both male and female) a *jouis-sens* of the *phallic* order, which according to Lacan constitutes the structure of male sexualisation.

Meaning is produced in language through the relation of one signifier to another. The signifier is not a signifier *of* something, but rather *to* another signifier, forming a closed circuit with ‘no other of the Other’ (Lacan 1998, 81). Even so we constantly confront a deficit at the limit of language: we experience it failing us for there *exists* something that language cannot name. And of course because there is nothing beyond, this failure is immanent producing another space, one that *ex-sists* in the interstices of language, hidden within the gaps where words fail us, in the fissures of non-sense. Where this space opens out *Other jouissance* is accessed pointing to the enigma of the Other, as if we might say a *closed* book (Fink 2002, 37).

With these two modes of *jouissance* in mind (*phallic jouissance* and *Other jouissance*), Lacan turns to set theory late in his work in Seminar XX to develop his elaboration of sexualisation. He looks to Freud’s myth of the ‘primal horde’ in *Totem and taboo*. In this the dead primal father is the exception that grounds the symbolic Law. He is the man outside upon which the ‘set’ of all men are predicated on. As *parlêtre* we are all subject to the Law, for we are all ‘caught’ in the phallic function, but under the banner of the masculine a subject ironically does not fully identify with the Law. He maintains a kind of distance through a belief of the fantasy of an exception as the limit. (Barnard 2002, 177). While the exception outside the set stands as guarantor, producing the fantasy of ‘oneness’ grounding male sexualisation, feminine sexualisation is profoundly different. *Other jouissance* of feminine sexualisation, *ex-ists* in the gaps of the symbolic’s ‘*phallicity*’ where language fails. *Other jouissance* is not complementary to its phallic counterpart but rather ‘de-completes’ it, leading to an uneasy misfit between the two structures. It has no beyond to haunt it. There is no external Woman outside to delimit the set. Under the feminine banner, there is no figure acting as a limit for the subject, thus they are ‘not-all’. There is no repeatability, they come one by one: each woman/subject is *without-model*.

Conclusion

It is through this sexualisation matrix that I now draw the two themes of this paper together in my return to the space of creativity. The elaboration of the *detail-without-model* was my first theme, which I deployed as a guide. I extracted it from the psychoanalytic clinic to re-find it in the ‘reading’ of an image – both photographic and literary – through the *punctum*. Not only is the *detail*, as the *punctum*, rendered as the ‘not-all’ of the feminine structure as Santner concludes (Santner 2006, 201) but also the *detail-without-model*, as I have shown, organises the encounter played out in the scene of address by calling forth my desire. If the *detail-without-model* is the element that governs the scene of address as the ‘not-all’, does it illuminate a possible structure for the creative scene? Tracking my second theme, I choose painting from observation as my example of the creative scene, not only due to my engagement with it but also because of the structural overlap I found it has with the psychoanalytic

clinic. Yet this presents another problem, for unlike psychoanalysis – and writing – where the *detail-without-model* takes shape in words, in the painter's studio it takes shape in paint.

Historically, I would argue, the creative scene adopts the male structure. Not, I reiterate that the creative field might or might not be dominated by men – male painters, male writers; this is not my point. I am interested rather in the way male sexualisation structures the creative space by prioritising the imperative of the *reader-interpreter* with a tendency towards aiming for fixed meaning, explanation and knowledge, passing over the *detail-without-model*, being blind to its singular capability and enigma. In terms of the painter's studio, we could think of the heroic painter (male or female) producing unified, sovereign works. The autonomy of this creative scene, one structured by the phallic, is underwritten by the fantasy of a 'genius' beyond, as the word 'author' within the literary field, undeniably bears witness: from c 1300, *autor* 'father,' from O Fr *auctor*, *acteor* 'author, originator, creator, instigator'. While this evokes the myth of the primal father I wonder in what way the 'not all' could offer an alternative structuring of the creative scene. Freud tells us the analytic labour is achieved by a working through, by attending to the lapsus rather than the 'whole' narrative, with the aim of psychoanalysis to disperse or depose the deposits of 'echoes' in the body. Following this model, perhaps we have a *choice*, an ethical choice, to opt for in Santner's words, 'an open and infinite field of encounter in which there is no "place", no detail, no aspect of the work to which we are not called upon to respond, though you are not thereby held responsible for a final and definitive meaning of the work as a whole' (Santner, 2006, 206).

While this proposition makes it clear that there is a way forward according to the feminine, I wonder if such working through is only possible within language, being the register in which desire manifests itself. Is it possible in the painter's studio – where the material of paint is deployed, and not words – for the *detail-without-model* to be mobilised to structure the space? Being an encounter of 'all-looking and no speaking', and in this sense *beside* language (not outside, for we must not forget that as *parlêtre* we are always marked by language), does it perhaps need writing/speaking to frame the space, to accompany it, to register it and make an account for what is *shown*? Or in the silent studio can I 'respond' to the *detail-without-model*, draw out the enigma, be puzzled by it, surprised, unnerved and safeguard it through the turn of its cheek?

Endnotes

- i. This is the ultimate question asked by Lacan's *Graph of desire*, translated from the Italian, *Chè vuoi?* Lacan, J (2006) *Écrits*, New York: W.W.Norton & Company, 690
- ii. The centrality of sexuality as the enveloping mode for human beings underpins Eric Santner's book *On creaturely life* which he finally summarises on page 196. Santner, E (2006) *On creaturely life: Rilke, Benjamin, Sebald*, London: The University of Chicago Press.

iii. Freud found that if he listened with *free hovering attention* he was able to hear the analysand's speech to catch each word as a signifier, or perhaps we could say detail, not necessarily attached to the narrative meaning.

iv. To think and speak in the mother tongue is the medium that Lacan calls the 'field of the Other' Lacan, J (1994) *The four fundamental concepts of psycho-analysis*, London, Penguin Books, 199. And this Other, while it might seem to be internal to me as part of my thoughts and my speech, is at the same time external to me, revealing the continuation between the inside and the outside, what Lacan termed 'extimacy'. Lacan, J (1999) *The ethics of psychoanalysis 1959-1960: the seminar of Jacques Lacan book VII*, London, Routledge, 139.

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