

The Suspension of Mastery and the Desire for the Imaginary:  
Applying Jacques Lacan's theory of the Imaginary to the beholder/image  
dialectic as realised in selected paintings by Lucy Cobern and Gerhard  
Richter.

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A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, Rhodes University,  
Grahamstown, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Fine Art.

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Grahamstown, November 2002.

## Abstract

This dissertation seeks to explore the nature of the self/other, subject/object dialectic that can be found in Jacques Lacan's theory of the Mirror Stage and his notion of Imaginary mastery, and how this relationship can be re-read in terms of a beholder/image relationship. What I seek to demonstrate in exploring the relationship between the beholder and the image is the staging of two opposing emotions, aggression and desire and the consequential tussle for mastery that arises from the self/other, and hence the beholder/image, dichotomy.

I seek to explore the reasons why such a beholder/image relationship becomes ambivalent, due to veiled, obscured and fragmented images. I discuss veiled, obscured, and fragmented images selected works by the German artist Gerhard Richter, with reference to some of my own practical work (both of which have been reproduced for illustration purposes after the bibliography). The possibility or impossibility of being able to totally grasp such veiled and obscured images, and the resultant tussle for mastery the beholder may experience, can be related to the self/other emotions of aggression and desire, which I discuss in reference to Richter's and my own paintings. The dichotomy of surface and depth along with the painting as object versus the painting as a representation is discussed in relation to the ambivalence of the self/other relationship.

## Declaration

I declare that this dissertation is my own (un)aided work. I am submitting it to Rhodes University, Grahamstown, for the degree of Master of Fine Arts. It has not been submitted previously for any degree or examination at another university.

Lucy Cobern, on this 4<sup>th</sup> day of November 2002

## Acknowledgements

No man is an island, I could not have achieved this without the support, guidance, direction and supervision from the following people. Along with acknowledging my indebtedness to the authors and texts cited in the bibliography, I would like to extend sincere thanks to – Dr. Michael Herbst, whose involvement in the dissertation proved invaluable, and Mr. Mark Hipper, for his persistent enthusiasm, encouragement and support, throughout my degree. Due thanks needs to be extended to Mr. Gerhard Schoeman and to the Head of the Fine Art Department, Prof. Brenda Schmahmann. Thanks to Assoc. Prof. Obie Oberholzer for undertaking the difficult task of photographing my paintings to reproduce them for this dissertation.

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## Introduction

Veiled and obscured images have always held something of an allure for me, especially in terms of the half-glimpsed impression of the familiar within the penumbra of the unfamiliar. It is this allure which I have located at the centre of my exploration in both this dissertation and my practical work. I will argue, in this dissertation, that the subject/self, object/other dialectic we find in Jacques Lacan's Mirror Stage can be re-read in terms of a beholder/image relationship. More specifically, I am concerned to demonstrate how the relationship between an image and a viewer might foreground the dialectic of aggression and desire and the subsequent tussle for mastery that Lacan sees as arising in the Imaginary relation between the self and the other. The nature of the relationship between the self and the other positions and depositions, constructs and deconstructs the self/beholder against the other/image, constituting a framework in which the relationship between an image and a beholder becomes ambiguous. My paintings have pristine, graphite-like surfaces that do not invite penetration, yet through a process and language of veiling I attempt to suggest a depth in which something incomplete is encountered. This very incompleteness – which is like a body in pieces - brings into tension both the surface of the work and the limits of the painting as object. What I try to stage is a tussle for mastery between object and representation, surface and depth, totality and fragmentation. When these tensions are brought into a delicate balance, into a synthesis with one another, I believe the result is an allusive blend of aesthetic dissociation and non-verbal allure.

I have noticed similar concerns with veiling and obfuscation in other artists' work, and I believe that by devoting some of my dissertation to the study of those works I will find a framework to contextualise my own interest in the veiled image – the image that is difficult to possess or master. For this reason, I have chosen to look briefly at the work of Gerhard Richter, which evinces some of the same interests in observation and occlusion that I have sought to explore in my own work. The obfuscation and veiling of imagery adds to the ambiguity in the beholder/image dialectic which I will argue is linked to the issue of positions of possession and mastery. In developing these ideas in a way that allows me to create a discourse around my work, I have found Jacques Lacan's theory of the Imaginary and Julia Kristeva's theory of the Semiotic invaluable. I will use these theories to substantiate my argument and the self/other dialectic, which underlies the beholder/image relationship, and to

explain more fully the connection to the incompleteness of a body in pieces, that I propose is experienced in veiled images, to the response and interaction of the beholder. It is through understanding these theories that the proposed dialectic of aggression and desire, that underlies the image/viewer relationship, can be convincingly demonstrated.

Thus, in Chapter One I focus on the work of Gerhard Richter and seek elements in his work that inform both my work and Lacanian and Kristevian theory. I explore those aspects in Richter's work that veil, obfuscate and stress the surface of the images, making for a more complex relationship between the viewer and the image, altering perceptions of reality. Once I have outlined and introduced these aspects I go on to discuss Lacanian and Kristevian theory in Chapter Two – introducing the Mirror Phase and Lacan's Imaginary order as well as Kristeva's Semiotic and the relation the Semiotic has with Lacan's theory and to argue how they both underlie the formation of the self and therefore add to the relationship between the image and the viewer, and the dialectics of aggression and desire that results. In Chapter Three, once the theory has been discussed, I re-introduce Richter and relate key issues of the theory to the tussle between surface and depth, the painting as object versus the painting as a representation, laying out a groundwork to introduce and discuss my own work in relation to Richter, Lacanian and Kristevian theory. I utilise Kristeva's theory to elucidate the 'Erotics of the flash' in relation to my own imagery. I discuss aspects of my work in relation to the theories that inform the argument around the dialectical relationship of desire and aggression and the subsequent imaginary mastery.

By understanding the connections I draw from Richter, and in discussing Lacan's and Kristeva's psychoanalytic concepts, what is made apparent is the dialectical nature of the self and the other and the ambivalent/ambiguous relationship in which the beholder/image relationship is played out. In writing this dissertation, I hope to stress the ambivalent/ambiguous relationship that veiled, obscured and obfuscated images have with a viewer and how responding to these images may alter viewer's perceptions of reality.

## Chapter One:

### On Influence: Fragmentation and the Threat of Dematerialization in Gerhard Richter's Photo-Paintings

Gerhard Richter questions reality; he questions the reality of images available in the form of photographs and the reality of the painted image he created from those photographs. In the current chapter, I will investigate the reasons why Richter used photographs and why he mistrusted them as he did. During an interview with Rolf Schon, in 1972, Richter was asked if he 'mistrust[ed] reality' because he based his pictures on photographs. Richter replied that he did not mistrust reality, of which he claimed to know next to nothing, but added that he did, "mistrust the picture of reality conveyed to us by our senses, which is imperfect and circumscribed"(1995:73). He claimed further that, "I can make no statement about reality clearer than my own relationship to reality; and this has a great deal to do with imprecision, uncertainty, transience, incompleteness, or whatever" (74). If photographs are understood as not being a true reflection of reality, it can be assumed that Richter's paintings would be untrue to reality, because he painted them from photographs. Richter claimed that it is the picture of reality, the photograph, which our eyes see that is the untrue, imperfect version of reality. Susan Sontag draws attention to photography's shortcomings in terms of representing reality in *On Photography* (1980):

Photographs cannot themselves explain anything, [and] are inexhaustible invitations to deduction, speculation, and fantasy. Photography implies that we know about the world if we accept it as the camera records it. But this is the opposite of understanding, which starts from not accepting the world as it looks. Strictly speaking, one never understands anything from a photograph...The very muteness of what is, hypothetically, comprehensible in photographs is what constitutes their attraction and provocativeness. The omnipresence of photographs has an incalculable effect on our ethical sensibility. By furnishing this already crowded world with a duplicate one of images, photography makes us feel that the world is more available than it really is (1980:23-24).

Sontag and Richter appear to agree with the view that a photograph is not a direct, unmediated depiction of reality, that we can conceive nothing from a photograph, and that, as Sontag says in her quote, photography creates another version of reality. It creates a

representational reality that abstracts us further from a concrete, visible reality while creating the illusion, through this false reality, that we are getting *closer* to reality. In fact we are getting closer to this representational reality, believing that it is a neutral and direct version of reality, while moving further away from visible reality. The photograph duplicates and confirms visible reality more exactly than anything else on earth, other than a mirror, but the photograph is not reality, it is another version of reality. One is thus led away from reality toward a representation of reality, the photograph, which conversely makes one feel that through it one can access the world more directly than ever before. But this is a primary illusion/fiction, because photographs are always already constructs of reality, and never offer 'truth', or easily translatable equivalents for reality. A photograph is always an abstraction, a removal, a distortion, and a re-translation of reality. Richter's paintings are seen as being examples of perception before being depictions of reality, as Michael Danoff, in Roland Nasgaard's book, *Gerhard Richter: Paintings* mentions: "Richter's paintings are primarily models of perception and secondarily depictions of reality...but...one cannot assume that the perception and the model used to convey it accurately depict reality"(1988:9). What has to be questioned is whether or not the means to convey reality accurately depict it or not. Consciously or not, Danoff is in agreement with Sontag on the allusive, non-concrete, wavering nature reality seems to occupy, and the forms in which it is depicted.

It is this that Richter seems so intensely aware of, especially in his photo-paintings, along with the mistrust of representations of reality, and it is this questioning of what the eyes represent to the brain, that helps us to understand the quality of obfuscation in so much of Richter's work.

One seldom questions what the eyes see; one takes what they see as truth, as an honest depiction of reality. With some of Richter's paintings what the eye sees is questioned and second-guessed so as to validate the truthfulness of what the eyes are actually seeing. Because of the obfuscation and blurring of Richter's paintings, what the viewer sees or does not see has to be questioned. What the viewer sees, in effect, are the varied visual models available for encoding Richter's perceptions of reality. Richter's pictures reproduce something that we can all see, and at the same time they convey to us an impression of the uncertainty of reality. Richter claims that, "We can't rely on the picture of reality that we see, because we see it mediated through the lens apparatus of the eye, and corrected in accordance with past experience. And because that is not enough for us – because we want to know whether it can

all be different – we paint” (in Obrist 1995:68). What Richter distrusts here is the idea of the eye as being honest, truthful, or a pure means to seeing and understanding an image. Seeing, after all, involves the memories of past experiences, which were seen and experienced through the same eye that is now seeing a new image. It is not enough, as Richter suggests, relying on the picture of reality because one sees it mediated through the eye and corrected in accordance with past experience. It is because Richter does not trust this picture of reality that he paints his own picture of reality, he paints to make it ‘different’. A mediated view of reality is not enough for Richter. He paints in order to achieve a less mediated, and therefore different, view. What Richter paints is a picture of a way of picturing reality, making the viewer aware of the error, the falsity in what is represented and how it is represented, blurred and obfuscated. Perhaps Richter paints to create a new image that can be viewed purely without any past experience or knowledge to plague the perception of seeing it. Although, what does become apparent is that Richter seems to be aware of the unrealisability of what he is suggesting. The notion of painting a new, different view is self-consciously idealistic, and could never materialise, as past experience and knowledge will always influence us when viewing images. What Richter makes the viewer aware of is the falsity of representations of reality of the limitations that photographs have in depicting or portraying anything substantial or complete. It is true of all seeing that past experiences and knowledge are brought to every image the eye sees and experiences, and this mnemonic ‘baggage’ plays a major role in our understanding of images. This is an important point for discussion in Chapter Three, where I will argue that the viewer’s past experiences and memories are a vital factor in viewing my works. My works rely on it. To a certain extent the success of Richter’s work depends on it.

The camera, which frames perception and supposedly authenticates reality, has played an essential role throughout Richter’s career. From his earliest important works, the Photo Paintings (1962-1967), Richter has suggested that reality is elusive, and that the photograph itself captures a fleeting moment, implying that reality is hard to hold onto. Moreover, because many of the photographs Richter paints are blurred, they reinforce the impression that time is fleeting and also emphasise that one’s grasp on even a particular moment is uncertain (Nasgaard 1988:9). In Richter’s photo-paintings, the overall impression is of a blurred, fragmented painted image, whose source is a photograph. In his writings of 1964 - 1965, Richter states that:

Life communicates itself to us through convention and through the parlour games and laws of social life. Photographs are ephemeral images of this communication as are the pictures that I paint from photographs. Being painted, they no longer tell of a specific situation, and the representation becomes absurd. As a painting, it changes both its meaning and its information content (in Obrist 1995:31).

Richter tells us here that once the photographic image has been painted and made into a painting it no longer has the same function as a photograph. The painted image does not record a specific situation, or moment in time as a photograph does. The painted image no longer records a fleeting moment, or a time-orientated event. Once the image is painted the viewer sees it differently; he/she is made aware that it is a painting and not a photograph, that the image is made of paint and there is a surface that has been manipulated: the paint has been blurred, obscuring the image. Roland Barthes makes a distinction between what he calls the photograph's *studium* (its dominant image and overall scope) and the photograph's *punctum* (the unique, even incidental detail that stops the eye, pricks the mind, and captures the imagination) (in Storr 2002:36). One could argue that Richter's brushy re-presentation of photographs tends to obscure the dominant characteristics of the image, the *studium*. In obscuring the dominant characteristics, Richter exaggerates existing irregularities, or the *puncta*, within the image. Those incidental details that stop the eye and prick the mind are made more prominent. One might draw the conclusion from this that Richter wanted to imitate photography, because he seemed to be copying photographs in such a fashion that one could assume this was the case. But this is evidently not so, as he explains that he turned to photography, "not to use it as a means to painting but [to] use painting as a means to photography" (36). Elsewhere he has claimed that:

I'm not trying to imitate a photograph. I'm trying to make one. And if I disregard the assumption that a photograph is a piece of paper exposed to light, then I am practising photography by other means: I'm not producing paintings that remind you of a photograph but producing photographs (in Obrist 1995:69).

In Richter's attempt to 'make' photographs, he creates paintings that exist as objects. The painting as object exists in its own reality. Richter states:

Only photographs can be objective, because they relate to an object without themselves being objects. However, I can also see them as objects and even make them into objects – by

painting them, for instance. From that point onwards they cannot be, and are not meant to be, objective any more – nor are they meant to document anything whatever, whether reality or a view of reality. They *are* reality, the view, [and] the object. They can only *be* documented (in Obrist 1995:73).

Richter, in painting a photograph, makes the image into an object. The photograph is a depiction of reality, but by turning the photograph into a painting Richter is making the image a part of the real. The painting is an object; the four-sided rectangle of the frame with the canvas stretched over the sides, and the paint on the surface, is an object. The image painted onto the surface of the object becomes a part of that object. Therefore, this object, the painting, is real – to the extent that it forms a part of visible reality. It is no longer as questionable a view of reality as the photograph was. This notion of painting as object becomes important for discussion later on as it develops an intricate relationship with the subject and/or the beholder. What I will seek to explore is the place of the object in the dialectic of possession, which is among the core interests of my study.

The images that Richter paints onto the canvas as object are those images of family life that recall private moments, charged with intimacy, images taken on vacation or portrait snapshots that get kept and hung on family room walls. Some of his images are routine photographs from newspapers and magazines. The images that make up his early photo-paintings constitute a rather everyday household iconography of the German petit bourgeoisie. Richter's imagery may seem vaguely familiar to the viewer and may arouse specific feelings of desire or loss, reverie or sadness. Despite any manipulations done to his image, they still retain a sense of familiarity to reality and to the original photograph. Because these images seem so familiar, past events and experiences comparable to our own are brought to light. The viewer may revisit emotions experienced in these past events, if Richter's quite generic imagery triggers such familiarity. The reason many of Richter's paintings seem so familiar is due to the fact that he often chooses images from everyday life that most viewers are accustomed to and can relate to. For example, *Toilet Paper*, 1965 {Fig.1} - Nothing could be more everyday than a roll of toilet paper. Richter has blurred this image, and painted it in grey tones, which could prevent a viewer from grasping the image. The blurred fragmented effects may frustrate viewers, because it creates a barrier between seeing and possessing – that is, the viewer can identify what the object is, but the lack of clarity makes it seem as if the image is withholding something, and thus cannot be closed and 'possessed' at the assimilative level.

The same veiled, obscured effect is happening in *Rosen*, 1994 {Fig. 2}. One can acknowledge seeing a bunch of orange roses or flowers in a glass vase, but there seems to be a frustrating sense of distance between the viewer and the image, preventing the viewer from being able to completely grasp a unified image. This interference in the field of vision can be compared to the static experienced through the telephone line, when trying to engage in conversation with someone on the other side. This experience, more often than not, leaves the listener frustrated and annoyed at not being able to clearly hear and understand what has been said to him or her. In the case of blurred, veiled images, the viewer, like the listener, may feel frustrated and annoyed at not being able to see clearly or completely grasp the image before him or her. The process of veiling and obfuscation seen in Richter's work leads to a spectatorial situation in which the viewer is implicated in a dialectic between positions of possession. This is central to my argument and will become a recurring issue in my dissertation.

The manipulation of images in Richter's paintings occurs mainly or most dominantly through his technique of blurring. Richter obscures his images by feathering the paint or by dragging a spatula or hard edge across the surface and smearing it while the paint is still wet. This technique can be illustrated by looking at *Tulip* 1995, {Fig. 3 & Fig. 4}. Richter has painted the same image, of a vase of yellow tulips, twice, one being blurred {Fig. 4}, but the other one {Fig. 3} is scraped, picking up the paint and scraping it across the surface while it was still wet. The blurring came to be his trademark - as much as he adamantly wanted to avoid having a specific character style or signature device. "I don't create blurs," Richter claims, "Blurring is not the most important thing, nor is it an identity tag for my pictures." (in Storr 2002:43) To be sure, Richter does not create blurs, he creates paintings, and he transforms images from mundane reality into beautiful, obscured paintings. Perhaps blurring is not the most important concern, but it makes for interesting paintings. A possible response that Richter's veiled and blurred images have is that they may invite viewers to attempt to grasp a whole, unified image, the images could possibly tease the viewer because a partial image is recognised and the viewer may desire to see a whole image. These effects that the image may have on the viewer enhances his/her reaction and response in the relationship that develops between the viewer and the image.

Richter's indirect way of working back into a partially painted picture serves to eliminate lesser detail, to elide forms and ease transitions, unifying the surface in a more-or-less even

spread of pigment, sealing the whole image under a skin that gives it the look of something “technological, smooth and perfect” (Richter in Storr 2002:43), something like a photograph:

When I dissolve demarcations and create transitions, this is not in order to destroy the representation, or to make it more artistic or less precise. The flowing transitions, the smooth, equalising surface, clarify the content and make the representation credible...I blur things to make everything equally important and equally unimportant. I blur things so that they do not look artistic or craftsmanlike but technological, smooth and perfect. I blur things to make all the parts a closer fit. Perhaps I also blur out of the excess of unimportant information (Obrist 1995:35-37).

Richter in effect blurs to unify his surface, he blurs the paint and threatens the image with dematerialization, obscuring parts and making the image less easily readable. The image becomes fragmented, because it is not totally recognisable. Richter smoothes visible recognisable parts of the painting into areas of non-differentiation, unifying every area into being equally important or equally unimportant. All areas of the picture *Woman Descending the Staircase*, 1965 {Fig. 5}, are treated equally, none has particular relevance over any other. The shiny quality of the woman’s dress merges with the stripes/shadows of the staircase, her arm almost disappears into the staircase, and her face almost becomes part of the background because its tone is so similar. Blurring the woman on the staircase, thus collapsing clear distinctions between figure and ground, unifies the surface, and makes the viewer aware that the image plays out on the surface, but could at a glance disappear behind it. The image then appears and disappears behind a glossy photographic-like surface.

Richter’s paintings, by posing as photographs with their photographic surfaces, arouse expectations of certainty in the viewer, as a photograph would do, but by being paintings they refuse these expectations again. The out-of-focus effect in *Helga Matura*, 1966 {Fig.6}, for example, disrupts expectations. The viewer expects to see a clear, ‘in focus’ image that is easily readable and understandable, like any ordinary photograph. But this image is blurred, making it difficult to see, understand or grasp, frustrating the expectation of seeing a clearly focused image. The out-of-focus effect dissolves the instantaneousness of the photograph in the fluidity of the paint and slows down the act of looking, drawing it out in time, making the viewer stay longer, look harder, making the photographic image conscious of itself, its inconclusiveness, and the persistence of a threshold of the unknowable within reality.

The ambiguity of Richter's work is that we can see and recognise partial images but we cannot grasp them as totalities. We understand the painting to be a depiction of visible reality, but this reality that is seen is (un)graspable and fragmentary. Are we meant to believe that our reality is as fragmented and unattainable as Richter is making it out to be? Richter's paintings test our experience and knowledge of reality through our capacity to see: "He unsettles our habits of seeing and knowing, in front of our very eyes as it were, by contrary actions of both giving and taking away, of simultaneously stating and denying" (Nasgaard 1988:33). Richter in fact obliterates his images, in an almost destructive rage, to rid his canvas of what has just been created. He often feels that what he does is destructive;

born out of the need and inability to construct. It is my wish to create a well-built, beautiful, constructive painting. And there are many moments when I plan to do just that, and then I realise that it looks terrible. Then I start to destroy it, piece by piece, and I arrive at something that I didn't want but that looks pretty good (in Storr 2002:297)<sup>1</sup>.

Richter's destructive tendencies can be seen in *S. with Child*, 1995 {**Fig. 7**}, where there are obvious scrape marks in five wide bands across the canvas and over the image. In obliterating this image, Richter has created a 'beautiful' painting. The image, still visible behind the scrape marks, is present in its absence.

Storr's explanation for Richter's erasure or obscuring of his images is that the image is not about the act of the destruction that left it in its ultimate state, but about loss (2002:297). What one sees in paintings such as Richter's photo-paintings is an absence, or perhaps what one is left with in the end is something irreducible and basic: "[r]ather than performing a symbolic act of destruction or painting loss," writes Storr, "one arrives at a distillation of the image's

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<sup>1</sup> In an interview with Richter in his book *Gerhard Richter: 40 years of Painting* (2002), Robert Storr raised the issue of destructiveness in relation to the canvases of Lucio Fontana, which in being cut, punctured and attacked became beautiful. Richter's erasure of his images can be linked to Fontana's practice, but Richter is of the view that Fontana was much more productive than he and that even though Fontana and Sigmar Polke "destroyed their work out of rage and anger, later on they were able to direct those actions" (2002:297). Richter feels that he has never been able to direct his actions: "I can't plan to make something look out of focus in a certain way. That doesn't work" (297). Destruction is said to be one of the major themes of twentieth-century art. Over and over again, in a multitude of ways, modern artists have drawn attention to the fact that the world in which we live is fragmented and riven by conflict. At the same time, however, they have continually proved that art, precisely by destroying the object, has the capacity to make the world anew, to "restore its wholeness" (Schmalenbach 1990:110).

essential qualities” (297). What one finally has is neither the depicted object itself nor a clear mirror image of the viewer struggling to perceive that object, but a strange in-between entity representing the exchange of appearance between the object painted and the subject looking at it, the thing and the viewer (298). Here an example Storr uses can bring to light what is being suggested:

[t]he book in front of me has its own reality, and I have mine. They are separate. But when I pick it up and look at it and I try to grasp an image on the page with my eyes, those realities overlap and are confounded. Visually, I step part way out of myself and part way into this other world, but I can also lose my bearings and be stranded between self-awareness and awareness of the things represented in the picture (298).

This quote by Storr is imperative to a discussion of the beholder/image dialectic. It emphasises the point made earlier that what the eye sees is understood only through past experiences and knowledge. When the eye tries to grasp an image on the page, past experience and reality overlap with the reality of the image. The understanding of that image for the beholder is an accumulation of the viewer’s past experiences, experienced initially by the eye, and the image’s own reality. The understanding is reached halfway between these two realities. When Storr speaks of stepping out of himself, he is stepping out of his reality and entering partly into the reality of the image, and in doing this he can lose his ‘bearings’. He can lose his grasp on his reality, because he is being faced with another: the reality of the image. So he is ‘stranded’ between being aware of his own existence and the reality he is familiar with as being his own, and his awareness of the reality and the things represented to him by the image.

Storr’s experience here is not dissimilar to that of the viewer or beholder when faced with one of Richter’s photo-paintings. What develops in Storr’s example between the reality of the image and his own reality is an either/or relationship, or more precisely a condition of confusion between the two, a neither/nor relationship - neither the image nor the self. The viewer cannot exist in both realities, that of the image or his own. He/she is stranded between a possible awareness of self and an awareness of the things represented in the picture. The viewer would then be stranded between being a beholder and being a part of the reality of the image. The viewer could possibly find him/herself in a condition of profound ambivalence between the two. One reality may be more dominant than the other, and the ambivalence that

exists cannot be remedied by acts of possession. The dialectics of mastery that brings about feelings and desires to possess, is ambiguous and uncertain because mastery can only be an illusion. The desire to feel or assume a position of mastery and/or possession over the image or feel possessed by the image, is an illusion in the mind of the beholder. The oscillation of positions of possession between the self and the image, may be realised in the imagination of the beholder. One may assume one possesses an image but one never actually does. Likewise, an image can never literally possess a viewer. In one moment the viewer is totally absorbed, encapsulated by and powerless under the hold of the image. In the next moment the beholder might have grasped enough visual information about the image to remain in control of his or her own reality and have enough of a grasp and understanding of the image to remain outside of it, and in control of it. It is this uncertainty between the image and the self that characterises Richter's paintings and the viewer/image dialectic.

This blurring effect functions as an irritant, a frustrating barrier to seeing and possessing. The viewer may not be able to grasp hold of the image because it is blurred. The viewer may become frustrated and annoyed at not being able to have a secure hold over this image, he or she cannot seem to get past the barrier that is preventing him or her from possessing this image, perhaps leaving the viewer feeling that the image has possession over him/her. These are the positions of possession that the viewer may be implicated in, with regard to the process of obfuscation of the image. The viewer may become involved in a dialectic between feeling the desire to have possession over the image, and thereby feeling that he/she occupies the position of mastery, and the desire to feel that he/she may not possess mastery over the image, and in fact may instead be the object of the image's mastery. The viewer may wish to feel possessed by the image and thereby permit the image to occupy the position of mastery.

The process of veiling and obfuscation of the image leads to a spectatorial situation where the viewer finds him/herself in a position where desiring to possess or be possessed oscillates, between the beholder and the image. These positions of possession felt within the viewer may ultimately end in a position of mastery. If the viewer feels that he/she has occupied a position of possession over the image, then he/she will also occupy the position of mastery. If the viewer feels that the image has assumed possession over him/her, then the image will have occupied the position of mastery. Ultimately what one strives for in any power struggle is to remain on top: to retain possession over the other and therefore acquire mastery of the situation. In his notes from 1964-1965, Richter writes:

[b]ecause I'm sorry for the photograph, because it has such a miserable existence even though it is such a perfect picture, I would like to make it valid, make it visible - just *make* it. And this making is something that I can't grasp, or figure out and plan. That is why I keep on and on painting from photographs, because I can't make it out, because the only thing to do with photographs is paint from them. Because it attracts me to be so much at the mercy of a thing, to be so far from mastering it (in Obrist 1995:33).

Richter not only gives us a reason for his decision to paint from photographs, but indicates that he tries to master those photographs. He tries to create mastery through the act of painting. He is suggesting that the act of painting be entangled with the efforts to achieve. He has taken photographs and painted them, made them into something, created them, in the hope that he might grasp, understand, control or desire to feel possession over the photograph. Yet, what he most emphasises in his statement is his attraction to being 'at the mercy of a thing'. Richter feels powerless and controlled by photographs, challenged by them to achieve that 'perfect picture'. And by painting them, again and again, over and over, he hopes to achieve mastery over the photograph. Yet he says 'so far from mastering it', suggesting that mastery is not really the issue, and perhaps he realises that mastery is not actually achievable. He seems to be attracted to the challenge of making mastery achievable, as he continues to paint, suggesting repetition as a way of striving for mastery. Repeat your actions until you achieve a semblance of mastery, or, indeed, repeat your actions to enjoy the pleasures of not being able to achieve mastery.

Sense data are always illusory, as has been mentioned earlier in relation to the eye that sees and how impure that vision is, once past experiences have been remembered. Storr writes:

We cannot be sure of anything we look at with the naked eye any more than we can be sure that the edited version of a thing reconstituted by art captures its essence; but we can learn about the limitations of our knowledge by repeated attempts at grasping the ungraspable (2002:85).

Here Storr mentions repetition as a means to obtain mastery, mastery of the desire to grasp the ungraspable. Richter's photo-paintings remain ungraspable, their imagery sits fragmented behind a smooth, slippery surface. Unrecognisable parts of images appear and disappear in

the blurred paint. The viewer at first glance may not be able to grasp anything of the image and remains at the mercy of it. But by repeated attempts at viewing and seeing and trying to understand and grasp bigger and bigger pieces of the image, the beholder may desire more to obtain a position of mastery over the image, and may realise through repeated attempts at looking and desiring that mastery is unachievable. The fragmentation and veiling of them makes mastery of an image impossible. The will and the desire to master an image remains just that, a desire. Mastery is placed in permanent suspension by the use of techniques such as veiling and scraping off of paint, which make the image ungraspable. In the act of viewing and the repeated attempts at looking at an image, one tends to find paintings interesting or appealing because one searches for something that looks familiar, as if the eye that sees only recognises parts that can be related back to past experiences and knowledge. This is why the imagery may seem familiar and it is the familiarity that is interesting and that is intriguing. As Richter himself claims:

I see something and in my head I compare it and try to find out what it relates to. And usually we do find those similarities and name them: table, blanket, and so on. When we don't find anything, we are frustrated and that keeps us excited and interested until we have to turn away because we are bored (Richter in Storr 2002:304).

According to Richter, the viewer, in the absence of finding anything familiar in the image, is frustrated: there seems to be a barrier between seeing and not seeing. This barrier of frustration, which is preventing the viewer from finding something familiar, keeps the viewer excited and interested in the image. This frustration may result in a desire within the viewer to look longer and harder, to find something familiar, in the image. Richter suggests here how a complicated relationship between the beholder and the image is more about desire than mastery. The frustrated viewer may feel the desire to master the image but at the same time, may feel that he/she does not know if he/she could allow the image to master him/her. The image may excite the viewer because he/she does not understand it. The viewer may wish to remain ambivalent, excited and frustrated about the veiled, fragmented image. The image may not have been that forthcoming with information and there might not have been anything 'to find' in the image. A continued or repeated search could have frustrated and excited the viewer more, eventually leaving the viewer no other option but to turn away from the image, bored.

For Storr it is important whether the artist gives the viewer an indication that there is an object in the painting or teases him/her with the possibility of there being one by hinting at some form in the painting; or whether the artist, in effect, lets the viewer know that there is not actually an image to be seen, only something that is not representational. I think what is important is that the artist does not acknowledge that something is there or not; if the image is of an ambiguous nature, this simply means that the viewer is expected to be puzzled and perturbed into wondering or questioning whether there is or is not something to recognise. I think what is important and provocative is that it is left to the viewer to make up his/her own mind about what he/she sees, if anything, and how he/she responds to what is perceived. By painting such ambiguous pictures, Richter plays on the viewer's conventional ways of seeing – as he puts it: “Basically we always try to identify a relation of a picture to some sort of appearance” (in Storr 2002:304). He states that it is “not about the recognition of a particular subject matter”(304), but about identifying with some part of the perceived image in relation to the viewer's own personal experiences and knowledge. Leonardo da Vinci talked about looking at patterns on the ceiling and finding faces, and maybe there is a basic human tendency to do this (304), but Storr seems to think that the issue is whether the artist encourages or discourages this tendency. In this way Richter's abstract pictures are related to his figurative ones, because as Storr mentions,

[I]n the figurative paintings people are reassured when they see a certain kind of image. They crave the verification of the object and long to see what they know about or bring to the object, and yet [Richter] create[s] a distance in which that object becomes ambiguous. People want a picture that adds up to their expectations, and [Richter does] things that remove qualities from the image or cancel it out. [Richter] make[s] paintings at the expense of pictures, or at least at the expense of the depicted object (2002:304).

Richter uses paintings in a way that makes it difficult for people to just read the image. The viewer is faced with an image that is fragmented, non-differentiated, vaguely familiar yet slightly alienating in its distance, and strangely comfortable in its closeness. Ambiguous as it has become, the viewer struggles to comprehend it.

Along with the obfuscation of the image, Richter makes his imagery even more difficult for comprehension through his use of grey. Richter's formal means, his use of grey in the paintings, contributes to the overall effect of erasure and complicated viewing. Grey for

Richter is “more than any other colour qualified not to represent anything at all” (Nasgaard 1988:12). He has used grey as a means to represent nothing:

Gray. It makes no statement whatever; it evokes neither feelings nor associations; it is really neither visible nor invisible. Its inconspicuousness gives it the capacity to mediate, to make visible, in a positively illusionistic way, like a photograph. It has the capacity that no other colour has, to make ‘nothing’ visible. To me, gray is the welcome and only possible equivalent for indifference, non-commitment, absence of opinion, absence of shape. But gray, like formlessness and the rest, can be real only as an idea, and so all I can do is create a colour nuance that means gray but is not it. The painting is then a mixture of gray as a fiction and gray as a visible, designated area of colour (in Obrist 1995:79).

Even in the colour Richter used for some of his paintings, for instance *S. with Child* 1995 {Fig. 8}, we find the artist heightening obscurity and opacity, and thus introducing grey spots, blurs, formlessness<sup>2</sup> and nothingness into the realm of representation. What more could one do to an image to obfuscate, frustrate, dematerialise and render it ungraspable, than to paint it in grey? Richter used grey because of its ungraspable quality; it is neither, visible, attainable nor invisible, unattainable. An image painted in grey would have the same characteristics, neither really visible nor invisible. Yet there is an image, as one can see an image painted on the surface in varied tones of grey. So, grey does have the capacity to make ‘nothing’ visible. A surface that looks predominantly grey, when looked at for longer is revealed as having lighter and darker areas; and when looked at deeper, one realises that there is an image that emerges out of this grey nothingness.

Grey used in this way, to veil images, to create images out of this void colour, emphasises the barrier that exists between the image and the beholder. Grey interferes with the viewing and perception of images. Like Richter’s process of blurring his images, the use of grey renders his images fragmented and unattainable, leaving a viewer possibly annoyed, frustrated and unsatisfied at not being able to grasp hold of anything substantial, but also feeling perhaps enticed, interested and excited about the challenge to try and find something graspable. The dialectical nature of the beholding experience involves both feelings of aggression and feelings of desire.

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<sup>2</sup> Formless as defined by George Bataille in *Formless: A Users Guide* (Bois & Krauss 1997).

Richter struggles with his own inability to produce a valid, true representation, what might be seen as being impossible; he doubts his own ability to ever achieve it:

Of course I constantly despair at my own incapacity, at the impossibility of ever accomplishing anything, of painting a valid, true picture or of even knowing what such a thing ought to look like. But then I always have the hope that, if I persevere, it might one day happen. And this hope is nurtured every time something appears, a scattered, partial, initial hint of something which reminds me of what I long for, or which conveys a hint of it - although often enough I have been fooled by a momentary glimpse that then vanishes, leaving behind only the usual thing (in Storr 2002:88).

Richter hits the nail on the head with this quote. He is describing everything that is of importance to my work, and yet he speaks of his own. If he perseveres, if he continues on and on painting, he hopes to eventually obtain that valid, true picture. This can be correlated to the point of repetition as a means to achieving mastery, which is in fact what Richter is suggesting. He suggests that through repeated attempts at painting, one tries to get closer and closer to a more satisfying feeling of desire for mastery over an image. The 'hope' of this happening, the hope of achieving mastery is reassured and nourished every time something appears in his painting that reminds him of something he longs for, that is, something he desires. There is hope and excitement in (re)finding an object of desire, by repeated attempts at painting. It might be a small, scattered, partial fragment of something that catches the eye and pierces the mind, that glimpse of something that reminds one of what one longs for. A glimpse of a fragmented body, perhaps, which awakens memories of past dreams or desires - a longing that has been awakened within one by the sight of these partial hints of something familiar. Because they are only partial and only hinted at, one cannot be sure that it is this familiar longing that has been triggered. One can, as Richter mentions, be fooled by a momentary glimpse, which vanishes. It was, after all, only a glimpse, which at a second glance may not be there, and one is left questioning what it is one actually saw, and whether what one now feels is a product of what one thought one saw? The partial nature of the glimpse, the hint of something familiar is what excites Richter's desire. It is almost as if he paints through his despair, chiefly in the hope of once again finding the hint, the glimpse, and the partial something that embodies his desire and his longing for something familiar. The glimpse happens within the parameters of the familiar, that brief moment when something

that seems familiar has vanished, all that remains is the 'usual thing', a more invalid, untrue representation.

The hints and flashes, momentary glimpses of familiar scenery can be affiliated to reflections in glass windowpanes or mirrors. One can sense the familiar in a shop window, when one passes by and catches a glimpse of oneself in the reflection: it is there for just a moment, and then vanishes as one walks on. Reflections in mirrors operate in much the same way. They are momentary glimpses that soon vanish. Richter created a few works of art addressing the idea of mirrors and glass sheets, dealing with the allusive nature of one's perception of reality and how reflections and glimpses of the familiar can alter one's perception of reality.

In 1967 Richter made *4 Panes of Glass* {**Fig. 9**}, a sculptural installation consisting of four vertical sheets of glass. This work seems to be a precursor of other paintings on glass or mirrors; it is a deft critique of the truthfulness of realist painting, in that what one sees behind the glass is not a representation but reality itself. The glass represents a surface, such as the surface of a painting. When the viewer stands before this surface, he/she almost expects to see an image or representation of some form, as is expected when viewing a painting. But instead the viewer sees through this glass surface to what lies on the other side of the glass, which would be there if one were to walk around to the other side of the glass. What the viewer sees then is visible reality, no representation, no false reality, and no deception. - Richter explains that, looking through the glass, the viewer is able to "see everything but grasp nothing"(2002:49). The viewer sees everything through the glass sheet, what lies beyond the surface of the glass, as well as the reflections on the surface, appearing and disappearing. The limits of the work, the framed piece of glass, puts a frame around the visible world, that which is seen on the other side of the glass, turning it into a representation. The viewer cannot grasp anything on the surface because the glimpses of reflections that are sometimes visible, do not stay long enough, are not permanent enough for the viewer to obtain a hold over. Richter's paintings hold the image so tenuously that in the end it escapes our grasp as well. As the sheets of glass prevent the viewer from grasping a hold on anything, Richter's paintings and use of grey complicate the process of desiring to achieve possession, for the beholder or the image, and therefore preventing a grasp on the represented image.

In his later mirrored paintings on glass, there is a twist: the subject of the image is a reflection of the subject who looks, and that subject is in a position to recompose the picture by moving

or by shifting the focus of his or her eyes. Richter has removed the depictive element, claims Storr, and therefore the obvious conflict between illusion and reality, leaving only the literal but contingent likeness of the person standing in front of the mirror (2002:49). The mirror works can be seen as a more literal version of the ungraspable qualities of the paintings. As the image, the representation, is always altering, it is in constant flux, which makes it impossible for any viewer to behold what is being represented, leaving the viewer at a loss; unsatisfied, at seeing himself/herself instead of a picture.

In *Gray Mirror* {**Fig. 10**} of 1992, the reflective surface of the tinted glass is split in two. The separate halves are hinged so that they can be rotated, creating a revolving-door effect in which the absence of the painted image one expects to see when approaching the work from a distance, perceptually and psychologically alternates with the narcissistic presence of a self-image. With a simple repositioning of the mirrors, this self-image may vanish. (in Storr 2002:50). The self/ beholder is stranded, alone and incomplete, and faces the threat of fragmentation, as the self cannot exist without the other. The implications of what I am suggesting here find a theoretical underpinning in the psychoanalytic theories I investigate in my next chapter.

The *Gray Mirror* plays with the idea of the relation between the architecturally- or structurally-implied figure and the actual perceiving body. All have a disquieting emptiness or a hidden quality; and all pose oblique unresolvable questions about the limits of human perception or apperception. Richter mentions that perhaps his *Panes of Glass*, *Doors* and *Surface Pictures*, are “metaphors of despair, prompted by the dilemma that our sense of sight causes us to apprehend things, but at the same time restricts and partly precludes our apprehension of reality”(in Storr 2002:50). This quote seems self-explanatory: it has been mentioned that we understand things through our sense of sight, that seeing gives us the proof and reassurance that what is seen is real. But at the same time, what we see is often questioned or needs verifying, especially when viewing Richter’s work. Our sense of reality, mediated through our sense of sight, is often precluded. The reality that we see might not be the same as the reality we experience, and what we experience is ultimately going to affect our apprehension of what we see<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> This can be understood more clearly if one reads Merleau-Ponty’s *Phenomenology of Perception* (1962) especially Part One: The Body.

When faced with a mirror, one's apprehension of reality becomes questionable once again, because although the mirror reflects reality, it is not true reality but a reflection of it. It was mentioned earlier that the mirror reflects the most accurate image of reality, and while this remains true, one has to understand that it is not true reality but a reflection of it. The accuracy of the reflection only misleads the viewer more. It is deceptive because the likeness seems so real. Our sense of sight perceives it as being real because it is so close to the true real. Richter's aim in the use of mirrors was not to eliminate distortions, as might be thought, but to draw attention to the distortions and to the discrepancy between what one sees firsthand and what happens to the image when it is re-created pictorially. This is not to say that Richter privileged the real over its representation, on the contrary, his whole enterprise is intended to undermine the belief that we have direct access to truth. Here one thinks again of the words I quoted earlier in the chapter: "I don't mistrust reality, of which I know next to nothing. I mistrust the picture of reality conveyed to us by our senses, which is imperfect and circumscribed" (in Storr 2002:49-50).

Hans-Ulrich Obrist, who interviewed Richter in 1993, mentioned that he saw the mirror as a metaphor for Richter's work as a whole. The mirror's reflective surface brings the viewer into the picture, and yet the viewer remains exterior to the picture simultaneously. Richter explains that his *Gray Mirror* pieces are in fact panes of glass with a layer of paint on the back. These painted planes of glass are acting like mirrors, they are doing the work that a mirror would do, but they are not real mirrors. Deceiving enough as it is, these 'mirrors' are not mirrors. Their reality is somewhere in-between, neither real mirrors nor monochrome paintings; and their pictorial spaces are more variable and more subject to chance than is the case in photography. Such pictures will always look different because they will reflect an image of the viewer and each time the viewer is going to be different, so the image is continually changing.

As Storr puts it: "[r]ather than gratify the viewer's desire to see something artful, fixed, and pictorially complete, [Richter] provided a void for the viewer to fill in however he or she could"(2002:49). In this reflective void, the viewer, or the subject, has the space to, in a sense, see what he/she wishes to. This is a key point in my discussion in Chapter Two, because what he/she sees in the mirror is a reflection of him/herself. In seeing this reflection, the relationship between the viewer and the image (the image now being an image of the self) becomes all the more important. There still exists the dialectic of positions of possession that was mentioned in regard to the beholder and the painted image. This time the tussle for

mastery and the desire it produces is between the self and the image of the self. What one may find in Richter's and my own work, is an appearance of a glimpse, a hint and the longing that results is the appearance of something familiar. A flash of a repressed experience results in a longing to be back in that space where the scene was first experienced. To explain the relationship between the self and the image of the self, along with the flash of a repressed experience and the longing that results further, it is imperative that I introduce and discuss Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic concepts of the Mirror Phase and the repression of the Imaginary. These theories will provide exactly what I need to interpret the plays on representation and reality that in Richter's work lead to such visually complicated relationships between the viewer (self) and the painting (other). It is the repression of the Imaginary, discussed in Chapter Two, that leads us to respond with such alienated desire to the fragments we glimpse within the blurring and veiling of Richter's work. Moreover, Lacan's concept of the ambivalent relationship between the self and the other – first established in the Mirror Stage – will help us to elucidate the ambivalence in Richter's paintings, between surface and depth, representation and reality, clarity and obscurity, the graspable and the ungraspable, unity and fragmentation, and between the 'usual thing' and the desired glimpsed (non)object.

## Chapter Two: On Theory: Lacan's Mirror Stage and Imaginary Mastery

One of the key concepts in Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic vocabulary is the Imaginary. It is in this concept that I will find the basis for my argument that obfuscation and veiling of surfaces in my work and in some of Richter's works leads to a dialectical relationship between the art work and the viewer, turning on the issue of mastery and possession.

Lacan distinguishes three orders in the psychological development of the human individual. These three orders, similar to Freud's account of the id, the ego, and the super-ego, are the Real, the Imaginary and the Symbolic. It is the Imaginary order that is of importance to me here because it is the order of mirror images and their relations that will prove fundamental to my argument. The Imaginary is defined by Alan Sheridan in his translator's notes for *Ecrits* as "the world, the register, the dimension of images, conscious or unconscious, perceived or imagined" (1977:3). If the Imaginary is the order of images, which functions within the economy of desire, one can easily perceive its relevance to an argument that seeks to relate the structural dynamics in images to the relational dynamics that operate in the Imaginary at the level of subjectivity.

The Imaginary is constituted during a crucial period in human development that Lacan termed the Mirror Stage. The human subject, during this stage, which occurs usually between the age of six and eighteen months, when the infant begins to recognise his/her image in the mirror, differentiates two key terms for the first time: (1) subject and object, (2) self and other. These two terms map directly onto one another: subject/self and object/other. The Mirror Stage introduces this differentiation because it is through the reflection of itself in the mirror that the child/subject becomes aware for the first time of something other than itself, something outside of itself. This awareness is made possible because the child's perceptual apparatus has reached a certain stage of development allowing the infant to become aware of his or her own body as a totality or as a *Gestalt* (Lacan 1977:2).

Prior to this stage of the perception of bodily totality, the infant's sense of its own body is fragmented and in pieces. Viewing the body as a totality for the first time gives the

infant/subject an imaginary mastery over his/her body - as Lacan argues in his seminar paper, 'The Topic of the Imaginary', and in reference to his experiment of the Inverted Bouquet (1988:79)<sup>4</sup>. This mastery of the image fills the subject with triumph and joy. In Lacan's view, any future relation with reality will be marked by this imaginary anticipation of seeing him/herself reflected in the mirror, and of experiencing imaginary mastery over his/her body.

Brice Benvenuto explains that the subject's mastery of the image is of the mirror image (1986:55). The subject's realisation of him/herself and his/her image lie in another imaginary space, that is, in the space of the mirror, outside of him/herself. There is a sense of alienation in this action of mastery, because the subject only sees his/her form as more or less total and unified in an external image, the mirror image. He/she assumes mastery over an image that is in a virtual, alienated, ideal unity, which cannot actually be touched (55). Benvenuto goes on to say that this image seen in the mirror, this 'other' that exists outside the subject's own body, becomes vital for the infant's development because it becomes the basis for the formation of the ego. The formation of the ego happens at that point of alienation and fascination with one's own image seen in the mirror. This image is the first organised form, organised as one complete unfragmented whole, which the subject *identifies* with (55).

Given that Lacan himself emphasised the role of identification in the Mirror Stage, I will pause a moment to develop this term further. For Lacan, identification is "the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image" (1977:2). Malcolm Bowie explains identification of oneself with another being as the very process by which a continuing sense of selfhood becomes possible and it is from successive assimilations of other people's attributes that the ego or the personality is constructed (1991:31). Bowie outlines Freudian identification as follows:

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<sup>4</sup> Lacan's experiment of the Inverted Bouquet is a schema he used to help illustrate in a simple way the process of viewing objects in mirrors. In this schema, a half-sphere polished on the inside, so as to act like a spherical mirror, is used to produce a real image. "To each point of a light ray emanating from any point on an object placed at a certain distance, preferably in the plane of the sphere's centre, there corresponds, in the same plane, through the convergence of the rays reflected on the surface of the sphere, another luminous point - which yields a real image of the object." (1988:77) In the experiment a box, hollow on the inside, is placed on a stand at the centre of the half-sphere. On the box is placed a real vase. Beneath it is seen a bouquet of flowers. The bouquet is reflected in the spherical surface, meeting at the symmetrical point of luminosity. Through an elaborate process of converging and diverging rays according to particular fields of vision, you see the bouquet

Identification is the original form of the emotional tie with an object, and in a regressive way it becomes a substitute for libidinal object-tie, as it were by means of introjection of the object into the ego. It may also arise with any new perception of a common quality shared with some other person who is not an object of the sexual instinct (31).

Identification is dependent on the dialectic between the self and the other because identification with an image is reliant on the other. Identification arises when there is an emotional tie with an object, and even in the absence of any sexual energy being 'invested,' the subject may still identify with the object to the extent that they have some 'trait' or quality in common. In the case of the Mirror stage the subject will identify with the image of the object in the mirror, because there is an emotional tie and there is some trait in common. The subject identifies the object as being an image of the subject.

One of Lacan's basic points is that because the self is formed in relation to an other, there can never be a point at which one has a totally self-contained and self-referential sense of self: the self is always positioned and de-positioned, constructed and de-constructed, by the other. The self is only the self to the extent that it is not the other, but at the same time the self cannot be the self without acknowledging the role of the other in producing the self. The relationship between the self and the other is such that neither can exist without the influence of the other. The self cannot be the self without the other, and the other cannot be the other without the self. The self and other become difficult to separate out and the individual or the human subject becomes a mixture of both self and other. Identity constantly oscillates between the two, shifting between now recognising the one and now recognising the other - although that recognition can only ever occur through the other, because all recognition is only recognition when it is affirmed by the other. The dialectic of desire is thus a complex circuit between self and other, and it is desire that both joins and divides the self to and from the other. All of this can be summed up in a quote by Bowie, who explains the relationship of the Imaginary to the production of the self and the development of the ego:

The Imaginary is the order of mirror images, identifications and reciprocities. It is the dimension of experience in which the individual seeks not simply to placate the Other but to dissolve his otherness by becoming his counterpart. By way of the Imaginary, the original

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where it is not, which is what happens when looking at an image in the mirror, one sees the self where it is not – in the other (1988:78).

identificatory procedures that brought the ego into being are repeated and reinforced by the individual in his relationship with the external world of people and things. The Imaginary is the scene of a desperate delusional attempt to be and to remain 'what one is' by gathering to oneself ever more instances of sameness, resemblance and self-replication; it is the birthplace of the narcissistic 'ideal ego'. Lacan's Imaginary thus creates a bridge between inner-directed and outer-directed mental acts, and belongs as much to the objects of perception as to those internal objects for which the world is usually reserved in ordinary speech (1991:92).

The rivalry that develops between the self and the other involves two opposing emotions, those of desire and aggression. The other is desired because it represents for the self a quality of fullness, wholeness, completeness and plenitude - it has what the self does not have: unity. This unity is expressed through the total body image, which the other can (re)present in the mirror - a bodily totality that the self lacks, and can experience only in and through the other, but only to the extent that the other recognises that need for totality in the self<sup>5</sup>. "One can only feel whole and unified if the other, through taking one as the object of desire, confirms in its own totality the fullness that one lacks. The self can never experience totality except in the other, to the extent that the other reflects the desired unity back to the self" (Herbst, personal communication, August 2002).

As Lacan repeatedly claimed, "Man's desire is the desire of the other" (1988:177). In the human subject, desire is realised in the other, by the other. This is the moment when the subject has amalgamated the form of the ego. He/she is only capable of doing this after he/she has precisely exchanged his ego for the desire that he/she sees in the other. From then on, the desire of the other, which is 'man's' desire, enters into the mediation of language. It is in the other, by the other, that desire is named. It enters into the symbolic relation of *I* and *you*, in a relation of mutual recognition and transcendence (177)<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> And also to the extent that the self feels that the other is recognising that need for totality.

<sup>6</sup> The Symbolic connection is the fact that socially we define ourselves with the law as go-between. It is through the exchange of symbols that we locate our different selves in relation to one another. It is the Symbolic relation, says Lacan, which defines the position of the subject as seeing (1988:141). It is speech, the Symbolic relation, which determines the greater or lesser degree of perfection, of completeness, of approximation, of the Imaginary (1988:141). The Symbolic is deep-seatedly intersubjective and social, and does not allow any one of its members to be him/herself, keep him/herself to him/herself or recreate in his or her own image the things that lie beyond him or her. To some extent, the Symbolic and the Imaginary form a contrasting and interdependent pair. "Each is implicated in the redefinition of the other," says Bowie (1991:93).

The subject originally locates and recognises desire through the intermediary space, that of the mirror, between his/her own image and that of the body of others. It is exactly at that moment that the subject's consciousness, in the form of consciousness of self, distinguishes itself. Lacan states that it is in so far as he/she recognises his/her desire in the body of the other that the exchange takes place. It is only when his/her desire has gone over to the other side that he/she assimilates him/herself to the body of the other and recognises him/herself as body (147). Lacan describes the subject as becoming aware of his/her desire in the other, through the intermediary of the image of the other, which offers him/her the semblance of his/her own mastery (155).

What man recognises and fixes in the image of the other is in fact a fragmented desire, yet the apparent mastery of the mirror image is given to him, at least virtually, as complete. It is an ideal mastery. As for his desire, that, in contrast, is not constituted. What the subject finds in the other is a series of ambivalent alienations of desire - of a desire still in pieces. Fragmentation is projected on the side of the self and ideal self and perfect body are both projected on the side of the other (148). The subject sees the identity of the other as being a complete body image. The identity is one of fullness that the subject desires to have, because the desires of the subject are, at present in the Mirror Phase, fragmented and incomplete. The subject strives to have and possess a total unified body image; in achieving this, the subject needs to believe it has possession over the other's unified body image. The other compels in the self/subject, a desire for possession. Aggression arises in the relationship between the self and the other, in the struggled attempt of the subject to achieve that unified fullness of self. The identity of the other, its fullness and plenitude, is fundamental to understanding the aggression produced in the self/other dialectic along with the desire for possession that the other compels.

In his seminar on the 'See-saw of Desire', Lacan claims that the desire experienced in the self/other relationship exists in the Imaginary plane, projected, alienated in the other (1988:170). He goes on to explain that:

The tension [the desire] provokes is then deprived of an outcome. That is to say that it has no other outcome... than the destruction of the other. The subject's desire can only be confirmed in this relation through a competition, through an absolute rivalry with the other, in view of the object towards which it is directed. And each time we get close, in a given subject, to this

primitive alienation, the most radical aggression arises - the desire for the disappearance of the other in so far as he advocates the subject's desire (170).

In this quote Lacan is suggesting that the only way to overcome the tension and the aggression between the self and the other is for the other to disappear. If the other remains, the self will continue to desire it and the aggression will remain. If the other were to disappear the aggression would disappear, and the self would feel unified, but this could never happen, as the self needs the other to exist. The self needs to desire the other's fullness, to feel aggression, and the need to possess the other, in order to feel unified in some sort of way. As much as each would like the other to disappear, the self and the other cannot be separated out.

Narcissism comes into play here, in that the self desires itself, self-love. The self desires the other, but if the other is an image of the self, the self in fact desires itself. Lacan regards narcissism as the central Imaginary relation of inter-human relationships. It is in fact an erotic relationship, as he describes it in his seminar on 'Imaginary Dissolution': "an all erotic identification, all seizing of the other in an image in a relationship of erotic captivation, occurring by way of the narcissistic relation, which is the basis of the aggressive tension" (1993:93). Lacan sees this narcissistic relation as the basis of the aggressive tension between the self and the other (93). Ultimately, the self will feel aggression toward the other because the other has what the self does not have and what the self desires. The other is perceived as having a whole, unified body image, which is something the self desires, as the self is perceived as having an incomplete, fragmented body image, a body in pieces. The other appears to have mastery in the relationship between self and other, because the other appears to have a more unified body image.

Destruction of the other by the self is impossible because the self cannot be the other and because the self cannot be without the other. Lacan describes a reaction between the self and the other, one of 'either him or me,' which is precipitated by the narcissistic self and the aggression it experiences in its desire to possess the other. In any event there will be a temporary and provisional exclusion of the other. In his 'Imaginary Dissolution' seminar Lacan explains that in every relationship with the other, even an erotic one, there is some echo of this relation of exclusion: "*it's either him or me*" (93). With the provisional exclusion of the other in this *either him or me* polarity there is a decision that has to be made as to whether it is the self or the other that temporarily gets excluded. This decision depends on who is

occupying the position of mastery, the self or the other, as is demonstrated in this quote by Lacan:

On the Imaginary plane, the human subject is so constituted that the other is always on the point of re-adopting the place of mastery in relation to him, because there is an ego in him that is always in part foreign to him, a master implanted in him over and above his set of tendencies, conduct, instincts, and drives...the drives and the ego are in conflict [because] there is a choice that has to be made (1993:93).

Ambivalence exists in any tussle for mastery and possession. Self and other quiver and oscillate between the two positions, not always sure of each other's position. What I have been discussing so far is the formation of the self in relation to the other, through the mirror in the Imaginary phase, and the dialectical relationship that the self and the other develop. What seems evident here is that the self is not perceived as having a whole, unified body image. It is only in the realisation and formation of the other in the mirror that the self can experience a totality, because the other is perceived as having that whole unified body image. What needs to be discussed now is the nature of the subject/self before it experienced a total uniform body image through the other. We need to explore the nature of the self before the other, when the self is experienced as fragmented and in pieces. Once we understand where the self is coming from, once we understand the pre-Imaginary phase, we are better equipped to deal with the implications this phase has on the subject/self, which will inform my argument and clarify concepts I will venture to discuss in Chapter Three.

Prior to the phase of differentiation – the Mirror Phase - between the self and the other is a phase of total non-differentiation, where the subject/self cannot in any sense determine the limits of its environment. Everything is one; there is no self and other, no subject and object, just an oceanic oneness with the environment. After the mirror phase produces differentiation, the subject enters the Symbolic phase, and the pre-Symbolic and pre-Imaginary phases are repressed. In becoming unconscious, they start to feature chiefly in dreams. When they do so they appear in the form of fragmented, scrambled, chaotic, images, which become representative of the psychical confusion that characterises the pre-Mirror phase experiences of the child. The body at this stage is fragmented, in bits and pieces in a matrix of space and libidinal drive, and is not experienced as whole or unified (Herbst, personal communication, September 2002). Because the subject is now invested in the orderly world of the Symbolic,

such fragmentation causes anxiety, a fear of dismemberment and dispersal, and this fuels the individual's desire to be the possessor and the resident of a secure bodily 'I'. Bowie explains that, for Lacan, the pre-Symbolic 'fragmented body' has nowhere been more memorably represented than in the paintings of Hieronymus Bosch, and in Lacan's own verbal accounts of the bodily catastrophes by which the human imagination is haunted "images of castration, emasculation, mutilation, dismemberment, dislocation, evisceration, devouring, bursting open of the body" (Lacan in Bowie 1991:27). Benvenuto argues that, although the subject identifies with the visual *Gestalt* of his own body, the body is invested with all the distress and fragmentation from earlier months prior to the Mirror Stage (1986:57). As the individual is interpolated into the Symbolic, he/she represses this distress and fragmentation. Thereafter it appears in consciousness in the form of flashes of libidinal pulsations, similar, I now want to argue, to the undifferentiated *chora* that Kristeva speaks about, in relation to her Semiotic phase.

Julia Kristeva's account of the Semiotic is useful in informing Lacan's notion of the pre-Symbolic Phase as fragmentary, as Kristeva in part transforms Lacan's distinction between the Imaginary and the Symbolic order into a distinction between the Semiotic and the Symbolic<sup>7</sup>.

The interaction between the Semiotic and the Symbolic constitutes the signifying process. The speaking subject is engendered as belonging to both the Semiotic *chora* and the Symbolic, and that accounts for its split nature (Kristeva 1980:7). The Semiotic phase is linked to the pre-Oedipal primary processes, the basic pulsions of which Kristeva sees as predominantly anal and oral, and as simultaneously dichotomous (life/death, introjection/expulsion) and heterogeneous (Moi 1986:12). Kristeva uses a Platonic term, *chora*, in her account of the Semiotic, where the endless flow of libidinal pulsions is gathered. The *chora*, for Kristeva, is an invisible and formless receptacle, a kind of psychical enclosure

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<sup>7</sup> Kristeva's account of the Symbolic process refers to the establishment of sign and syntax, paternal function, grammatical and social constraints, ie., symbolic law and production of language (1991:92). Bowie explains the Symbolic order as the realm of movement rather than fixity and of heterogeneity rather than similarity. He goes on to say that it is the realm of language, the unconscious and an otherness that remains other. It is in this order that the subject as distinct from the ego comes into being, a manner of being that is always disjointed and intermittent. Bowie goes on to say that in the Symbolic order "nothing exists except on an assumed foundation of absence. Nothing exists except in so far as it does not exist" (1991:92).

or space, an environment, which receives all things and in some mysterious way partakes of the intelligible, and is most incomprehensible (Kristeva 1982:14).

Toril Moi, in *The Kristeva Reader* (1986), describes Kristeva's *chora* as "a non-expressive totality formed by the drives and their stases in a motility that is as full of movement as it is regulated" (1986:93). The 'non-expressive totality' described by Moi is exactly the invisible, formless receptacle mentioned prior to this quote. "Neither model nor copy, the *chora* precedes and underlies figuration." (13) The *chora* is a psychical enclosure, a unique environment that prevails before any notion of figuration is experienced: what the self feels and experiences before the Mirror Phase produces figuration. Although the *chora* can be defined and controlled, it can never be definitely posited: as a result, one can situate the *chora*, but one can never give it absolute form (94). Like Lacan, Kristeva sees the Mirror Phase as the period of differentiation between the Semiotic and the Symbolic.

The Semiotic Phase precedes the formation of language, and the experience of any notion of differentiated space. It is an economy of primary processes, articulated by Freud's instinctual drives through condensation and displacement (Kristeva 1980:6). The *chora* precedes and underlies figuration; it and the Semiotic are formless and undifferentiated. The Semiotic only becomes understood as fragmented when it is re-experienced after the Mirror Phase. It is the shift into language that makes one's experience seem fragmented. Once the subject has moved into the Symbolic Phase, the subject's experiences are understood as fragmented. Only once the subject has gone through the Imaginary, the Mirror Phase and the Semiotic, and enters into the Symbolic, do his/her experiences seem fragmented.

Because of the *chora's* undifferentiated nature there is a potential for anything suggestive of the formless to evoke the Semiotic. Hence, there is an extent to which blurred and veiled forms can begin to be read as Semiotic, rather than Symbolic, articulations, drawing us into a relationship that, like much of the Imaginary, is erotic in the sense that it is libidinally invested. That is, what is spoken to through such ambiguous forms seems to be a pre-Symbolic economy of desire where the drives are already seeking to master an object – the object/other that is ultimately mastered in the Mirror Phase.

The reason I have diverged into a discussion of Kristeva's Semiotic and the *chora* is precisely because of the issues of non-differentiation and fragmentation suggested in the *chora* as being

essential to understanding what underlies the Mirror Phase. In particular we needed to understand the Semiotic and the *chora* because it underlies the dialectic between the self and the other. What needs to be clear is that the relationship between the self and the other can never be a clear-cut one. The relationship can never be clear-cut because desire arises out of the Semiotic period, a phase of non-differentiation, and despite the effects of repression, remains throughout the subject's Symbolically-invested life drawn to the undifferentiated, the ambiguous, unclear and veiled states. This is because desire was first experienced in relation to such formless states. This becomes an element in the whole self/other dialectic because the subject's desire can never be fully realised in the self or the other, and is always drawn to what preceded both: Semiotic selflessness and otherlessness. What I am trying to explain is that when the self perceives the other to be veiled, obscured, not whole, when the other is perceived as being closer to a formless, undifferentiated state than to total unity, the self responds to the formlessness. The subject desires the other's formlessness because it recalls the repressed Semiotic Stage, yet at the same time the subject feels threatened by the other's formlessness and is consequently placed in an ambiguous, uncertain state. This uncertain state arises because the formlessness of the other threatens the form the subject feels as an entity within an orderly Symbolic field of relations.

Having outlined Lacan's theory of the Imaginary and Kristeva's theory of the Semiotic, what connections can one make to the work of Richter and, indeed, to my own work? Because the Imaginary consists of images, perceived or imagined, all images are implicated in Imaginary relations. What we have when dealing with Richter's and my own paintings is quite clearly images. The fragmentary, non-differentiated condition associated with the pre-Symbolic Phase and with Kristeva's Semiotic Phase, I would like to propose, is evoked in my paintings as well as in some of Richter's paintings.

The self/other relationship discussed in Lacan's account of the Mirror Phase can be transformed into a beholder/image relationship. Once this translation has been made, one can see the relationship between Lacan's theory and what I am advocating in my work and Richter's work. The self-other relationship, now read as a beholder-image relationship, involves a tussle for mastery and thus an oscillation between desiring positions of possession. The struggle for mastery between the subject and object and between the beholder and the image arouses in the beholder/subject at least two potential responses: (1) an aggressive need to possess the image/object, or (2) a desire to surrender aggression in the narcissistic

identification with the image. The aggressive reaction manifests itself in some subjects as an act to destroy, or possess the other. The subject, for instance, an iconoclast, wishes to destroy the image, to gain mastery over the image, and destroy the mastery perceived to be held by the image over the self, by defacement and desecration. Just as the image, or should I say the 'other,' is perceived to have a possessive desire and the capacity to possess and have mastery over the subject, so the subject desires mastery/possession over the other. The beholder desires possession over the image and the image is perceived as desiring mastery/possession over the beholder. The iconoclast's effort to control this tussle for mastery, at least to some degree, is by destroying the images by defacing them in some way so as to break the possessive hold he/she feels the image has over him/her. Destroying images or defacing them can be seen as the iconoclast's, and in some instances the beholders, way of securing his/her mastery over the image, over the 'other'. The desire to surrender aggression in the narcissistic identification with the image is an identification that leads to a situation in which the self seems to be possessed by the image/other and enjoys feeling that the image has possession over him/her. The self might experience pleasure out of feeling that they are being possessed by the image, feeling that they are, to recall Richter, at 'the mercy of a thing'. What is going on in Richter's and my paintings is a bit of both these responses, the aggressive need to possess and the desire to surrender aggression, resulting in a duality that at least in part accounts for the ambiguity in Richter's and my paintings. The overall impression is one of ambivalence, of an incapacity to bring any decisive fixity to the possession/non-possession dichotomy.

Richter's paintings have been suggested to frustrate and entice, which suggests that they could both elicit the desire for mastery and frustrate it, but in such a way that one could find pleasure in the lack of mastery. One could draw pleasure from finding oneself in the ambiguous, in-between zone between form and formlessness. The Imaginary, where this self/other relationship plays out, can never be overcome because none of its terms, self/other, fragmented/totally, can ever be conclusively mastered. This inability to master is an aspect of psychical constitution brought about by the passage from the Semiotic to the Symbolic: it is this that helps explain the allure of ambiguous images. I wish to argue that the ambiguous images of Richter and myself conjure up what has been repressed, the fragmented, pulsional drives of the body, which seem, even if only vaguely, to connect us with a former, now lost, self.

Kristeva explains that during the Semiotic Stage the drives of the body are discrete quantities of energy that move through the body of the subject. The subject's body is not yet constituted as a whole body, and in the course of his/her development, the drives are utilised according to the various constraints imposed on this body (Moi 1986:63). In order to make a connection between Kristeva's drives of the body and flashes, glimpses and repressed memories, needed for further discussion, I need to familiarise you with the concept of cathexis. According to Laplanche and Pontalis (1983), the term cathexis is defined as being an economic concept in which a certain amount of psychical energy is attached to an idea or to a group of ideas. Psychical energy that can be attached to a part of the body, such is our case, or to an object (1983:62)<sup>8</sup>. Laplanche and Pontalis extend their discussion of cathexis as in the most part, taken in a metaphorical sense, which means that it solely expresses an analogy in terms of energy between psychical operations and the working of a nervous system (63). Cathexis is a term that I will use to connect two entities together, it is a situation where energy is transferred between these entities. The flashes of recognisable bits and pieces in my work and to a lesser extent in Richter's – the one entity - could potentially be argued to cathect with the drives at the level of a libidinal connection that memory can only associate and then only vaguely and randomly, thanks to repression, with pre-Symbolic, Semiotic drives – the other entity. In other words, the unfamiliarity of the seen thing – both familiar and unfamiliar and therefore quite uncanny – is of such a nature that the libido cannot be cathected with the object rationally or in an orderly fashion, that is, desire it symbolically, because it is not recognisable. Thus, the drives of the libido may go by way of another route, finding a different level of desire, one of Imaginary or Semiotic desire, which can cathect with the indeterminate object by way of subliminal associations at the level of the ego. As mediator between super-ego and id, the ego is responsible for the cathecting of desire/libido/drive with objects, and in the interests of protecting the self against dissolution, the ego may sometimes cathect with what is potentially a major threat to the orderly, coherent, integrated self. What threatens the self are repressed memories, such as those that attend former states of human development, like the Semiotic.

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<sup>8</sup> In Laplanche and Pontalis, Freud speaks of cathected energy as the "instinctual energy which originates from internal sources, exerting a continual pressure and obliging the psychical apparatus to take on the job of transforming it...libidinal cathexis means cathexis by the energy of the sexual instinct" (1983:63). Laplanche and Pontalis go on to say that in Freud's second theory of the psychical apparatus, "it is the id, as the instinctual pole of the personality, which is seen as the origin of all cathexes" (63).

What I would like to suggest/argue is that the glimpses of the known/unknown trigger the ego to make such associations and thereby could potentially collapse – even if only briefly, in a flash – the barriers between terrains such as the Symbolic and the Imaginary. It is exactly the jouissance of (re)connecting with the repressed that keeps the ego from collapsing. The glimpse or the flash may be seen, metaphorically, as an equivalent for the pulsations of the drive, which constitutes the erotics of the flash, to be further discussed in Chapter Three. What is advocated in my paintings and Richter's is that they become a re-embodiment of, or a re-staging of, the context for the pre-Symbolic Semiotic drive, where repressed desires are re-experienced through discrete quantities of energy, flashes of a fragmented body, glimpses.

The imagery seen in my paintings, which will be discussed in the next chapter, is suggestive of the repressed fragmented body in pieces associated with the pre-Symbolic/Semiotic Phase, which occurs after differentiation once one is in the Symbolic Phase. Flashes, erotic glimpses of dismembered body parts, are brought into play to be (re)constituted and recognised partially. The viewer may wish to identify with the image if he/she senses something familiar in it. I am suggesting that the viewer may find familiar traces of something once experienced or once known, but now almost unrecognisable, because what seems familiar is repressed. The viewer will be able to sense a familiarity but will not be able to complete the image, to reconstitute it as whole, to bring it to consciousness. Nevertheless, the identification with the image, however *unheimlich*, might afford the viewer a mysterious, deep and potentially melancholic pleasure: a satisfaction that is almost unexpected, a feeling of secure comfort in the strange but familiar imagery that lies before him/her.

## Chapter Three:

### On My Own Work: The Dialectic of Possession and the 'Erotics of the Flash'

Roland Barthes asks:

Is not the most erotic portion of a body where the garment gapes? ... it is intermittence, as psychoanalysis has so rightly stated, which is erotic: the intermittence of skin flashing between two articles of clothing (trousers and sweater), between two edges (the open-necked shirt, the glove and the sleeve); it is this flash itself which seduces, or rather: the staging of an appearance-as-disappearance (1975:9/10).

Having examined Lacan's theory of the Imaginary and Kristeva's concept of the Semiotic, we are now in a position to better understand or at least to elucidate the condition of appearance-as-disappearance which Barthes describes above. I would like to propose that my images, which I will be referring to in this discussion, engage the viewer/ beholder as they echo the pre-Imaginary phase, because they are intended as evocations of a non-differentiated state in which the body is experienced as fragmented. They have the potential to echo in the memory of the beholder, and thus to compel identification with the image by triggering subliminal connections with what has been repressed. It is this that can be used to elucidate the erotics of the flash. My own paintings and those of Richter, I would like to argue, stage the possibility of a re-embodiment of the pre-Symbolic, Semiotic phase, where repressed desires are re-experienced through discrete quantities of drive energy cathected with, flashes of a fragmented body.

Lacan's concept of the ambivalent relationship between the self and the other, discussed in Chapter Two, can now help us to explore the ambivalence in Richter's paintings between surface and depth, representation and reality, clarity and obscurity, the graspable and the ungraspable, and unity and fragmentation.

Richter's images give and take, they state and deny information to and from the viewer, leaving the viewer puzzled and perhaps at a loss as to what they are supposed to be experiencing. The result is that the viewer will never find in the image all the information required for him/her to (re)constitute it as a totality. Richter, in consciously veiling his

imagery, draws the viewer into a complicated experience, a tussle for mastery. This tussle for mastery is dependent on the ambiguous relationship between the self and the other, which involves situations of desiring to possess and to be possessed, along with a stating and denying of information that results in the appearance and disappearance of images. The image tempts, teases and provokes the beholder into at least two positions: contending for the position of mastery, or surrendering to the feeling of possession, mystified and compelled by what he or she is seeing. Richter obscures his images, fragmenting them and making it harder for the viewer to digest or recognise what they are seeing; thereby prolonging the time of engagement with the image. In the process he questions the viewer's relation to the image and/or position of possession. The viewer's relationship to or with the image is constituted by the obscured image, by his/her feeling of desire for the image, by his/her curiosity about the image. The viewer's relationship with the image may also be constituted by how deeply he/she feels captivated by the obscured image.

By blurring the images in his photo-paintings, Richter makes the viewer aware of the painting's surface, yet there is an image in the background, in the depth of the painting, beyond the surface, blurred as it may be; looking through the surface, one recognises it as an image. It is fragmented because it is not clearly perceivable. A tussle exists between the totality of the surface and the painting as object, and the lack of totality and articulation in the painted image, which is blurred and veiled.

In mentioning these terms, surface and depth, one asks the question: What is a surface and what is depth? With the actual physicality of the canvas, the painting as object, the top of the object, the flat side that is painted on, is usually termed the surface. The surface is understood as a predominantly two-dimensional field. Textures and colour placed onto the painting emphasises this surface. The surface also emphasises the painting's depth, by creating a disjunction between an obvious tactile surface and a more suppressed, quiet surface, which reads as behind the more emphatic surface. Surfaces themselves define the depths of a painting. The depth of the painting is in a sense an illusion because depth as an actual space cannot literally exist on a surface. Depth in a painting is an illusion of three-dimensions.

Viewing Richter's photo-paintings, his blurred images, the beholder may struggle to constitute a total body image. The image, in the mind of the viewer, fluctuates between wanting to be a total, uniform body image and being a fragmented body image. In Richter's

painting *S. with Child*, 1995 {Fig. 11}, the surface of the painting has been emphasised by the scraping of paint over the image, obscuring and stressing the image beneath the surface. The scratches or lines over the image fragment and de-constitute it, making it difficult for the viewer to perceive the whole uniform image. Richter has left us with enough information to determine that the image is of a woman holding a baby. Her hand is the most visible part of the body, and it suggestively holds up some form; with the help of the title, we can identify this form as a child, even though his/her face is the most obliterated area in the painting.

Richter paints images onto objects, creating a dialectic between the painting as object and the painting as a representation. This dialectic is reaffirmed by Storr, who has said of Richter's work: "[it is the] forthright assertion of the image as object, versus [the] mistrust of the image as [a] representation" (2002:17). The dialectic of the image as object and the image as representation, mystifies one's perception of what one is supposed to be experiencing, questioning the one against the other. Richter insists on making a photograph an object existing as real because it is an object; but the object is simultaneously a representation of the photograph it was painted from. The dialectic continues, between whether the actual painting is an object, a tactile object, or whether it is a representation. Ultimately the painting is both simultaneously, and cannot exist without the other: as is the relationship between the self and the other in the Imaginary. The tussle for mastery continues, for a painting cannot be a painting without also being an object, and a painting cannot be an object without also being a representation. This is true of my own work as well; my works are both objects and images. They are objects by the way the surface calls attention to their bounded nature and they are simultaneously images in that there is something beyond, beneath, behind the surface, 'within' the object.

Thomas Puttfarcken in his book on Roger de Piles, as mentioned by Freedberg in *The Power of Images*, claims that one of the fundamental problems of depiction, and of the specifically visual effectiveness of representational paintings was, for Piles, that of "distinguishing between the way we perceive pictures (and the effect they have on us) and the way we perceive and are affected by the real world around us" (1989:436). What is of relevance here is how representations can alter the perception of reality, since this is what Richter's paintings are doing and, I want to argue, my own. Richter, for example, paints a representation and not the real, yet because his imagery comprises depictions from every-day life, it has a sense of familiarity about it. The beholder's reality and his/her relationship to reality is questioned as

he/she is seeing something which he/she might have experienced as reality, but at the same time he/she knows that it is not reality because it is a depiction, a representation, an image, an imaginary other.

Richter's *Gray Mirror* { **Fig. 10** } was made to reflect directly whatever body image stood before it. In discussing my work, I would like to argue that my paintings confound the ability to reflect directly. Further, I want to suggest that they do not reflect a total body image, but instead the opposite: a body in pieces, fragmented and veiled. Images that echo the pre-Imaginary body, may be experienced as fragmentary by subjects that are interpolated in the Symbolic. For this reason, I am suggesting that the beholder might have trouble trying to reconstitute the whole image. As with Richter's work, the tussle for mastery, shifting between totality and fragmentation, will continue until the viewer consolidates his/her attitude toward the image: by attaining a level of mastery over it, by surrendering to it, in the sense of being incorporated into it, or even by turning away from it.

What we have after connecting Richter's motives for his work to the discussion of Lacanian concepts of the mirror stage and Imaginary mastery, is a basis to link the dichotomy of subject/self and object/other to a beholder/image relation. In Lacan's Mirror Phase, subject and object, self and other, are in constant oscillation for mastery over the perceived unified self image, the *either her (other) or me (self)* polarity. This aggressive assertion of the self conceals the reality of the situation, which is more a neither/nor than an either/or. It is not a question of one or the other, but rather the fluctuation and ambiguity between being neither, and being suspended between the two, not knowing which way to sway. When faced with one of my paintings, with their dark graphite-like surfaces, in which an image emerges and submerges in the fluid space between surface and ground, the beholder may experience a similar *either it (other) or me (self)* scenario. In realising the either it or me, either the other/painting or the self, the beholder may realise that it is actually neither; neither the self nor the other, neither the beholder nor the image. As was mentioned earlier, the self cannot exist without the other and the other cannot exist without the self. Neither position, then, can be absolute, and the beholder is left floating ambivalently in the in-between zone, perhaps experiencing feelings of aggression and frustration, along with desire. That is, both desire for the image and for the undifferentiated pleasures of the ambivalent in-between zone.

If an element of aggression arises here, it owes its existence to the fact that the self desires the other so much. If the beholder feels desire before one of my images, it could be because the image comes to represent the other and to partake in the other's duality: its presence and plenitude side-by-side with its absence and emptiness. Both the illusion of fullness and totality offered by the painted object and its integrated surface, and the frustration it creates through withholding the object, concealing it in the indeterminate depths, may lead the viewer to experience aggression in his/her encounter with the image. The self (beholder) may feel this aggression because the other appears to have mastery in the relationship between self (beholder) and other (image), and therefore the beholder may constantly feel threatened by the image. This aggression will arise the more the viewer feels a need to affirm his/her ego unity by detaching from the object/image that threatens him/her with dissolution into a state of formlessness. However, I would argue that a more likely response on the viewer's part is one of complicity with the image, allowing for both distance from it and proximity to it, for both denial and acceptance.

Now we come to a more specific discussion of my works in relation to the psychological concepts of Lacan, Kristeva and Freud. My work this year can be divided into two types or groups of paintings distinguished by their size. I have a body of work that is 122cm/122cm, referred to as the larger pieces, and another body of work consisting of 30cm/30cm sized paintings, referred to as the smaller works<sup>9</sup>. The paintings that will comprise most of the discussion will be the larger pieces. These paintings vary between a dark graphite colour veil and a lighter, more pencil-colour grey veil, under which is painted an image in white.

I am focussing on making images that start breaking up, oscillating, and quivering at the threshold of recognition. Known and recognisable imagery becomes disturbed, out of focus, by being veiled over, and painted over to make the image ambiguous and fragmented. I am dealing with images that border on being there but not being there; being fragmented/obfuscated, they do not deliver enough information to enable the viewer to decipher immediately what the image is {Fig. 12}. I try to engage viewers in a search for the

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<sup>9</sup> The smaller paintings, deal with obscure and veiled images of sexualised body parts, and/or images suggestive of sexualised body parts, such as sexy-looking plants, parts of plants {Fig. 20} and objects or images of objects that can be taken as the object of a fetish. Colour has been introduced into these smaller works, the surfaces are more teased and frustrated and manipulated than in the larger works, making it, in some cases, harder to perceive an image behind the stressed surface.

figure veiled behind dark provocative surfaces. I choose to paint images of the naked body, or parts of the naked body, male or female or a combination {Fig. 13}. I prefer sexually provocative, sexually suggestive figures which engage the viewer's attention long enough for him or her to realise what he or she is being faced with. I am not averse to the idea that some viewers may experience discomfort in the face of the suggestive eroticism of the image, which implicates his/her own sexual experiences and knowledge. Sexually-suggestive imagery invokes that side of humanity/society that is private, hidden, not talked about all that much in the public sphere, that which in some instances is censored. Being faced with sexually 'censored' images, one is forced to confront one's own sexuality and deal, in a public space (such as a gallery), with private feelings, and the associations one might make with what is being hidden and veiled over.

The dialectic I expect to happen between my work and the beholder involves the gaze, and the desires it produces. I would like to propose that my works elicit a fetishistic type of gaze, along with voyeuristic tendencies. In the self/other dialectic and the mastery suggested by it, the gaze of the self upon the other elicits the desire mentioned earlier in discussion. The gaze may be seen as fetishistic if the object gazed upon with such desire becomes the fetish. The gaze may be seen as voyeuristic if the beholder feels that he/she gazes upon the sexualised body image in the painting uninvitingly, and feels that he/she should not be viewing or gazing at such imagery.

As mentioned by Angela Richards (1977), Freud defines fetishism as occurring when the normal sexual object, a sexual partner or their sexual organ, is replaced by a nother object which bears some relation to the original sexual object. This object chosen to 'take the place of' the sexual object, is entirely unsuited to serve the normal sexual aim. What is substituted for the sexual object is usually some part of the body, such as a foot or hair. The foot or the hair then becomes that subject's fetish. This fetishistic object becomes inappropriate for sexual purposes; even more so when an inanimate object is chosen as the fetish. The inanimate object, in becoming the fetish, will need to bear an assignable relation to the person or body part it replaces and preferably to that person's sexuality (Freud in Richards 1977:65). Such objects might include underwear or often items of clothing belonging to the sexual subject.

Fetishism can become pathological, Freud mentions, when the subject's longing for the fetish, the replaced sexual object, passes beyond the point of being a necessary condition attached to the sexual object, and in effect takes the place of the normal sexual subject. Such pathological substitution is even more exacerbated when the fetish no longer resembles any part of the original sexual subject and becomes the sole sexual object (67).

Those things taken as objects of a fetish, the things that become the replaced sexual object, are described in the following quote by Freedberg as being the parts of the body that are the most 'realistic' aspects of that person's sexuality.

When we cover or remove, or when we cover the breast that nourishes or the parts of the body that excrete, or even when we cover feet or other physical features regarded as sexual, we take away the profoundest marks and criteria of realism. It reveals to the gaze that which, were it real, would be the most realistic proof of its sexuality (Freedberg 1989:354).

The parts of the body that are suggested as being covered or veiled in Freedberg's quote are those aspects in my paintings that I tend to leave more visible and recognisable to the viewer. I do this to allow the viewer to recognise and identify with those parts of the body that relate to his/her own sexuality and thereby provoke subliminal libidinal associations.

The gaze fetishizes, comments Freedberg. In a sense perhaps the gaze becomes the fetish, the gaze becomes the replacement of the sexual object. In a less abstract sense, what the gaze looks at, what the gaze sees, becomes the fetish, or is desired as the fetish. In this case, what the gaze sees is the image or, more precisely, the painting as object, and in that object the gaze falls upon an image, fragmented and undifferentiated. The gaze, in desiring the painting, may create a fetish out of the painting. Kristeva, in *The Kristeva Reader*, describes her understanding of fetishism as that which is a displacement of the *thetic* on to the domain of the drives. The *thetic* permits the constitution of the Symbolic; it originates in Lacan's concept of the Mirror Phase, and is completed through the phallic stage, by the re-activation of the Oedipus complex in puberty (Moi 1986:113). Kristeva comments that no signifying practice can exist or come into being without the *thetic*. The *thetic*, she claims, is not absolute; as the Semiotic, which precedes it, constantly tears it open. The inundation of the Semiotic is what remodels the Symbolic order. This, Kristeva goes on to explain, is particularly evident in

poetic language, since for there to be an infringement of the Symbolic, there must be an irruption of the drives in the universal signifying order (113).

Disorders can occur in the Mirror Phase, which become marked scopophilia<sup>10</sup>. These problems and resistances obstruct the *thetic* phase of the signifying process. This obstruction of the *thetic* phase negates or denies the completion of the *thetic* phase, which leads the subject to shift the *thetic* on to one of the places that the signifying process must cross on its way to fulfilment (114). Moi goes on to explain Kristeva's account of the *thetic*, claiming that there can be no signifying practice without a *thetic* phase. The *thetic* that does not manage to advance into the Symbolic order, places itself in the objects surrounding the body (114).

Kristeva explains that in negating or denying the Symbolic, the subject may imagine the *thetic* at the place of an object or a partner (1986:114). Kristeva mentions further that fetishism is a compromise with the *thetic* (115). This can be connected to Freud's account of fetishism. Imagining the *thetic* at the place of an object or sexual partner, is comparable to Freud's subject taking an object as his/her replacement for the original sexual subject. This object that replaces the sexual partner is in both cases the fetish. This fetishistic mechanism consists in denying the mother's castration and perhaps, going further back, in the difficulty of separating an image of the ego in the mirror from the bodily organs invested with semiotic motility (114). What Kristeva is suggesting is that at the formation of the ego in the Mirror Phase there can occur a kind of delay, where the drives are cathected with the bodily organs perceived in the mirror, but are recognised at another level as being denied in or by the *thetic*, so that a fetish is taken to change the site at which drive is being fixed: now it is fixed on a fetish. In fetishism a splitting of the ego occurs when the ego is faced with the necessity of constructing a defence. It is this defence that causes the subject to alter the site of fixing in terms of drive energy.

Locating the *thetic* at the place of an object relates to the beholder/image relationship, in that if the *thetic*, which, it has been suggested, might become associated with the fetish, the object of fetishism, assumes the position of the object, it can further be assumed that it occupies the space of the image, and therefore that the image can be assumed to be the fetish. The image becomes the replaced sexual object. The relationship experienced between the beholder and the image, has now also become a relationship between the beholder/self and the fetish, the

image. How the beholder relates to his/her fetish can be assumed to be implicated in how the beholder relates to the image, if in an actual sense the beholder has taken the image/object as his/her fetish - that is, if the beholder has imagined the *thetic* at the place of an object or partner.

My work is about the impossibility of reconstitution, the denial of total possession, and the partiality of understanding, because the part cannot be totally understood or wholly possessed. As was mentioned in Chapter Two, the terms of the Imaginary phase, the self/other, fragmented/totality, can never be mastered. The allure of ambiguous images is that they both elicit the desire for mastery and frustrate it. The viewer may find him/herself in the in-between zone between form and formlessness, feeling frustration at the inability to control things, the incompleteness of his/her sense of self. The feeling of the power of frustration is more primary than any fiction of a kind of conscious, deliberate possession; these feelings are always-already inscribed in any attempt to control or possess a person or a thing.

In responding to my images, I propose that the viewer may position and de-position, construct and deconstruct the image in his or her mind, in a way that is similar to what the self experiences in its relationship with the other. The viewer, I propose will try to construct the image as whole and unified, but may end up de-constructing it as fragmented and in pieces; because the image is veiled over, making it impossible for the viewer to constitute a whole unified body image. The viewer's response to the image is therefore ambiguous. The image can be positioned and de-positioned in its appearance and disappearance out of and behind the veiled surface. This duality of the image appearing and disappearing in the mind of the beholder, could create, a dialectic of desire: a desire for mastery of the image when it appears, a desire for the other, desire for the painted image, to be the painted image, to be in the painted image. This desire for mastery becomes a complex circuit between self and other, between the beholder and the image. The desire for mastery oscillates between feelings of wanting to possess and feelings of wanting to be possessed. The beholder may desire to occupy the space of the other, that of the painted image, in order to feel possessed. The beholder may wish to feel fragmented, as the image is, and to exist in the Imaginary fantasy phase the image is perceived to be in.

The 'Erotics of the Flash', as coined by Barthes in the opening quote to this chapter, is what I am going to use to emphasise the provocative and perhaps 'erotic' nature of my paintings.

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<sup>10</sup> The need for a mirror or an identifying addressee (1986:114).

The flash that Barthes refers to here is the flash of the camera as it takes a shot/picture: a picture of a glimpse of the body, a glimpse of someone else's body as a spy would take shots of people without them knowing it. It is the glimpse into someone else's life, a glimpse of someone's body, a forbidden glimpse, which is erotic. Flashes or glimpses of fantasy dreams and desires may come to the viewer's mind and conscience, fragmented and then internalised in a way that may trigger subliminal messages and associations arousing and eliciting a response. What I am proposing is that my imagery awakens in the viewer flashbacks to the fragmented body in pieces, the pre-Symbolic, Semiotic Phase of development. It is the intermittence that excites, of clothing against skin, says Barthes. I propose that it is an intermittence of a moment recognised that pauses the viewer and perhaps invites him/her to look longer and look harder, for something familiar. What may be recognised is a flash of a memory that permeates the conscious from the repressed mind of the viewer. It is this flash, realised in the mind of the viewer, hinted at by the painting, which might excite the viewer. It may be a flash of a recognised moment seen in my paintings, which might have the potential to engulf the viewer and suspend his or her gaze. This momentary flash may hold the viewer in suspense of another glimpse, and may stimulate a desire to experience another moment of ecstatic excitement at a possible seductive image. The possibly seductive images in my paintings appear and disappear, flashing before the viewer's eyes. These images are unconstituted, undifferentiated and fragmented, yet something appearing out of them is recognisable: something strange, because it is not whole, something appealing because it seems vaguely familiar, something disturbing because it is constantly disappearing. The viewer could possibly become excited, in anticipation of the image's re-emergence, in anticipation of another glimpse, another fix, another erotic seduction.

I would like to propose that an erotic tension exists in my paintings, a tension between the sexualised quality of the body parts visible in my images and the libidinal experiences of the viewer, which may well be undefined and explorative, experienced in bits and pieces, and may have been triggered by the sexual quality in my images. Fragments of past sexual encounters that may have been experienced by him or her may trigger libidinal desires in the viewer. Erotic tension would persist between the beholder and the image if the image suggests or invokes those early fragmented investments of the body in pieces which may well exist in libidinal desires and fantasies experienced by the viewer: dreams, flashes of scenes remembered.

The beholder may start to identify with these glimpses of fragmented images, provoked by viewing my paintings, as they may have 'some trait' in common with them, they may experience and see something familiar in the images. Connecting the discussion to Lacan's definition of identification discussed in Chapter Two, 'the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image' (1977:2), one might claim that the viewer is identifying with my images and these glimpses and flashes because he/she has assumed the position of the image. The viewer may assume the place of the image and see him/herself in the place/position of the image in the glimpse and in the erotic flashes. The viewer could possibly relate to the familiar parts of the image because he/she identifies with those parts. The viewer may find that the images in my paintings may relate closely or be suggestive of those images in the viewer's dreams that constitute their remembrance. The images in my paintings may be suggestive of the repressed fragments or scenes remembered that have been associated, in Chapter Two, with the repressed pre-Symbolic phase.

Here Kristeva's Semiotic is useful to us because the issues of non-differentiation and fragmentation are essential in understanding what underlies Lacan's Mirror Phase and the dialectic between the self and the other that institutes the Imaginary. The relationship between the self and the other can never be a clear-cut one, because desire arises out of the Semiotic period, the period of non-differentiation, and, despite the effects of repression, remains throughout the subject's symbolically-invested life drawn to the undifferentiated, the ambiguous, the unclear, the mixed and the veiled, because desire was first experienced in relation to such formless states. This becomes an element in the whole self/other relationship because the subject's desire can never be fully realised in the self or the other and is always drawn to what preceded both: the Semiotic, selflessness and otherlessness. This is why the self/beholder may in looking at my images experience partial recollection of the Semiotic, of selflessness and otherlessness, of that which draws the self away from a whole, uniform self towards that non-differentiated state that precedes the self and the other.

When it comes to relating the erotics of the flash to Kristeva's account of the drives, what we have is a situation where the flashes of recognisable bits and pieces in my work - and to a lesser extent in Richter's work - could, I would like to propose, be argued to cathect with the drives at the level of a libidinal connection that the memory of the beholder can only associate with pre-Symbolic and Semiotic drives, vaguely and randomly because it has been repressed. Once we (re)familiarise ourselves with the concept of cathexis, as defined in Chapter Two, it

can be related here as psychical energy being attached to those flashes of recognisable bits and pieces in my paintings.

What I am suggesting is that energy, in the form of libidinal drives experienced in early development prior to Lacan's Mirror Phase, reappears in the viewer's consciousness through viewing the parts of a body portrayed in my imagery, and is in effect projected onto the object, the painting. The subliminal messages or glimpses associated with viewing my paintings, may trigger these libidinal drive 'energies' which may be 'transferred' onto the painting.

The unfamiliarity the viewer experiences in relation to the image, or pieces thereof, is of such a nature that the libido cannot be cathected with the object rationally or in an orderly fashion; the viewer cannot desire it symbolically, because it is not recognisable. The seen thing, the fragmented image, is both familiar and unfamiliar to the viewer, and therefore quite uncanny. The drives of the libido may go by way of another route, finding a different level of desire, not Symbolically, but instead desire through the Imaginary or the Semiotic. The drives of the libido only go a different route because the Symbolic is not equal to the task of explaining or identifying the image. In going this other route, the libido can find that level of desire which can cathect with the indeterminate object by way of subliminal associations at the level of the ego.

I would like to suggest that my paintings, in their fragmented state, evoke the pre-Symbolic or the Semiotic Phase. They are fragments of images which haunt the viewer/holder as he/she may struggle with his/her ego to keep it from reverting to the pre-Symbolic fragmented state where non-differentiation was dominant. Our ego is pledged first and foremost against the return of this body in pieces, which if it were to occur one might find pleasure in. The threat that the ego experiences is one of fragmentation; the ego, feeling whole and constituted, is attracted to the body in pieces, but feels threatened by it because it threatens the ego's unity. There are some forces that the subject most fears: sexuality and the unconscious, desire and the drives, the jouissance which shatters the subject and surrenders it to the fragmentary and the fluid; but in fearing these forces the subject may also powerfully desire them. The beholder may struggle and fight for a feeling of mastery, power/possession, over the fragmented image so as to avoid slipping back into what the image comes to embody: the repressed fantasy and the unconscious remembrances of the body in pieces, which lie before

the viewer, teasing, provoking him or her, causing aggression along with desire. At one level the viewer may exhibit a desire to have control over, to possess the image, the other, so as to prevent the image from possessing the beholder. Yet at another level this desire is inseparable from another: the desire to be in that state of non-differentiation that the image teases the viewer with. Desire is not solely for control, one may not always desire to possess: one could desire submission to the image and the fragmentary, non-differentiated, quasi-Semiotic environment the image evokes. The subject may well desire to remain ambivalent and may enjoy neither feeling possession nor possessed by the image, but might take pleasure from being tempted and teased by either possibility. Ultimately, the viewer remains lost in-between feeling either, or perhaps feeling neither.

In the surface and depth dichotomy, the either/or or neither/nor self/other struggle may be mapped directly. Neither depth nor surface will ultimately have mastery, possession, and dominance over the other. One or the other may dominate at different times during the viewer's act of looking, but what intrigues and invites the viewer, what keeps the viewer interested and looking, is the ambivalence between the surface and the depth. The viewer may find pleasure in the dichotomy between surface and depth. Like the self/other relationship, neither exists here without the other, they exist because of each other. The beholder is strongly alerted to the surfaces of my paintings by the fact that there are painted colour pieces, blatantly on the surface, covering, veiling, obscuring the image that lies behind the surface, in the depth of the painting. For example in {Fig. 14} the surface makes the viewer more aware of the depth to the painting and that there is imbedded within it some sort of fragmented body, a vague representation behind the surface. Both surface and depth oscillate in the viewer's/ beholder's mind, appearing and disappearing in importance. Surface and depth is so intertwined that it becomes difficult to separate them out {Fig. 15 & Fig. 16}. They oscillate between presence and absence. Both are always there, and in viewing them the viewer may oscillate between focussing on one and then the other. While focussing on one, the other may disappear for a while, and return once the viewer has shifted focus. The appearing and disappearing of the image may play on the emotions of the viewer, as some may be aggravated at the wavering nature of the image and at not being able to grasp it in its entirety. Or the viewer may enjoy and desire the ambivalence and wavering nature of the image. The viewer may feel excited about not being able to grasp the whole image, which may cause him or her to desire that image even more.

When looking at painting No. 17 {**Fig. 17**} the dichotomy between surface and depth can be seen. Initially what one sees is a predominantly graphite-like surface, but as one moves visually from side to side over the painting, one comes to notice that behind this dark surface is an image, in the depth of the painting. The image is fragmented, in bits and pieces, emerging in and out of darkness in the depths of the painting.

What my paintings do is engage the viewer in this ambiguous relationship between the surface and the depth, mentioned earlier in this chapter in relation to Richter. The image or pieces of an image seen in 'front' of the picture can be seen as being on the surface of the painting, and what lies 'behind' can be seen as being in the depth of the painting. As with most of my larger works, the painted image exists in the background, in that it was painted first, and the dark provocative veil, fragmented over the image, is on top of the painted image. Surface and depth become so entangled that it becomes difficult to clearly separate them out. A notable aspect of the veiling over of images in my paintings is that it does not read as purely on the surface, it amalgamates with the background and brings to the foreground some aspects of the painted image that lay in the background. It is the inability to separate the surface from the depths {**Fig. 18**} that creates the ambiguity and the ambivalence between them. It becomes a sense of neither/nor, not the one nor the other but a curious blend of the two. The surface becomes as deep as the depths and the depths as shallow as the surface. It is this that creates a tussle, the oscillation and the enmeshing, for the beholder. The veil that obscures the image is in some areas broken to make pieces and/or areas of the background image visible, to bring them nearer to the surface, confusing the boundaries between surface and depth and the distinction between them. The confusion between the boundaries of surface and depth adds to the ambiguity of the viewer's relationship to the image as well as to the viewer's desire to grasp and understand, and perhaps gain possession, over the image. The relationship between the surface and the depth and the ambiguous nature they have is what constitutes who or what they are.

In the smaller perspex works {**Fig. 19**} the surface is transparent, thereby enhancing the ambiguity between the surface and the depth. The 4mm thickness of the Perspex, which is the surface, literally adds depth to the painting. The surface has become the depth in a sense, and the depth has become the surface. There is an image on the surface of the perspex, fragmented and obliterated in areas to make the viewer aware of the transparent nature of the background, which is not the actual background because there is some other form or texture appearing on

the other side of the perspex, behind the image, so to speak. The transparent surface brings into play these different layers of imagery and the ambiguity in trying to constitute the surface or the depth or an image. It is this ambiguity that is of importance here, the confusion and inability to comprehend the distinctions between such aspects as surface and depth, painting as object and painting as representation. The boundaries of such relationships as the self and the other and the beholder and the image are confused and hence experienced in such ambiguous states that the viewer may never achieve confirmation of anything substantial.

As much as one may wish to achieve mastery over the other/image, possession will remain dialectical. I have argued that the ambivalent, ambiguous relationships between the beholder and the image, between surface and depth, between the painting as object and the painting as representation, in respect to Gerhard Richter's work and my own work, have all arisen out of the dialectic between the self and the other. Most, if not all, human experiences and identifications are reaffirmed by the other, to the other. It is because of the unclear partnership of the self and the other, and the ambiguous dimensional space between them, that my paintings have found a continuum to play out in. It is this space, this arena of impossible autonomy, that I would like to invite the viewer into, or, as Storr did, I would like to open a book and invite the viewer to 'step part way out of [him/herself] and part way into this other world'( 2002:298).

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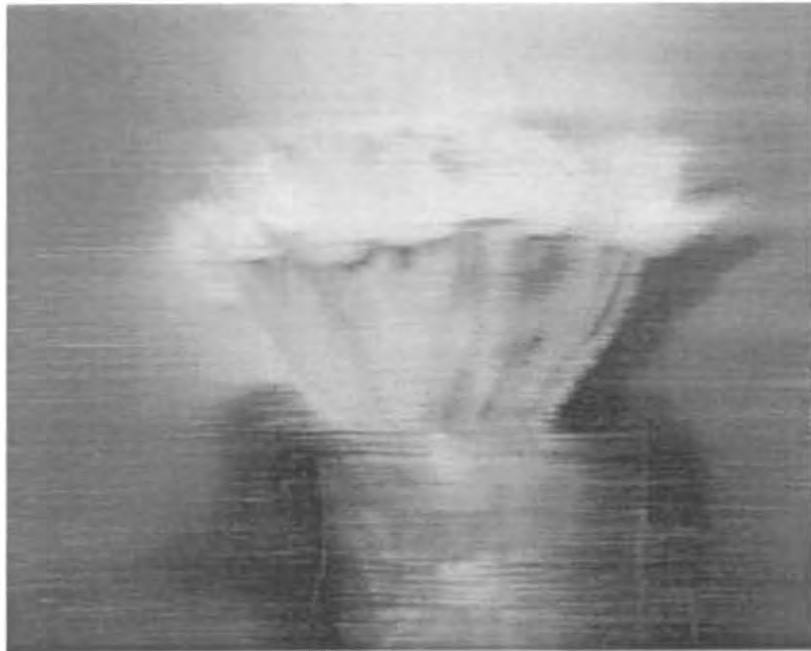




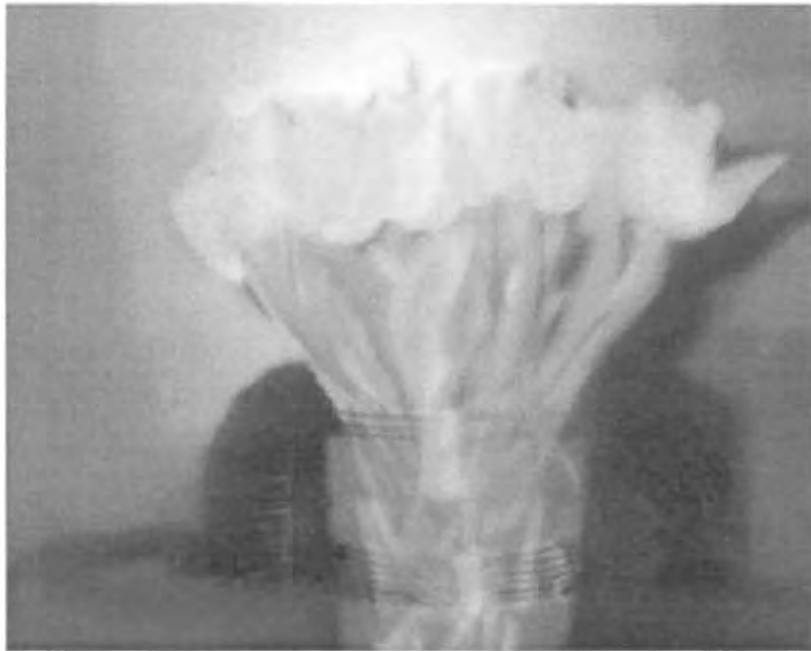
{Fig. 1} Gerhard Richter, *Toilet Paper*, 1965, Oil on Canvas, 70 cm x 65 cm, (Storr 2002:113)



{Fig. 2} Gerhard Richter, *Rose*, 1994, Oil on Canvas, 46 cm x 51 cm, (Obrist 1996)



{Fig. 3} Gerhard Richter, *Tulip*, 1995, Oil on Canvas, 36 cm x 41 cm, (Obrist 1996)



{Fig. 4} Gerhard Richter, *Tulip*, 1995, Oil on Canvas, 36 cm x 41 cm, (Obrist 1996)

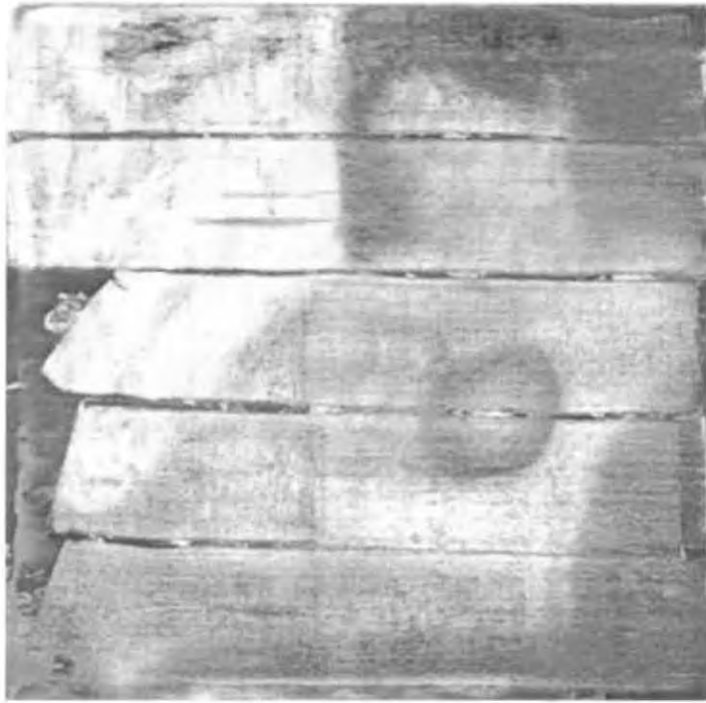


{Fig. 5} Gerhard Richter, *Woman Descending the Staircase*, 1965, Oil on canvas, 200.7 cm x 129.5 cm (Storr 2002:129)

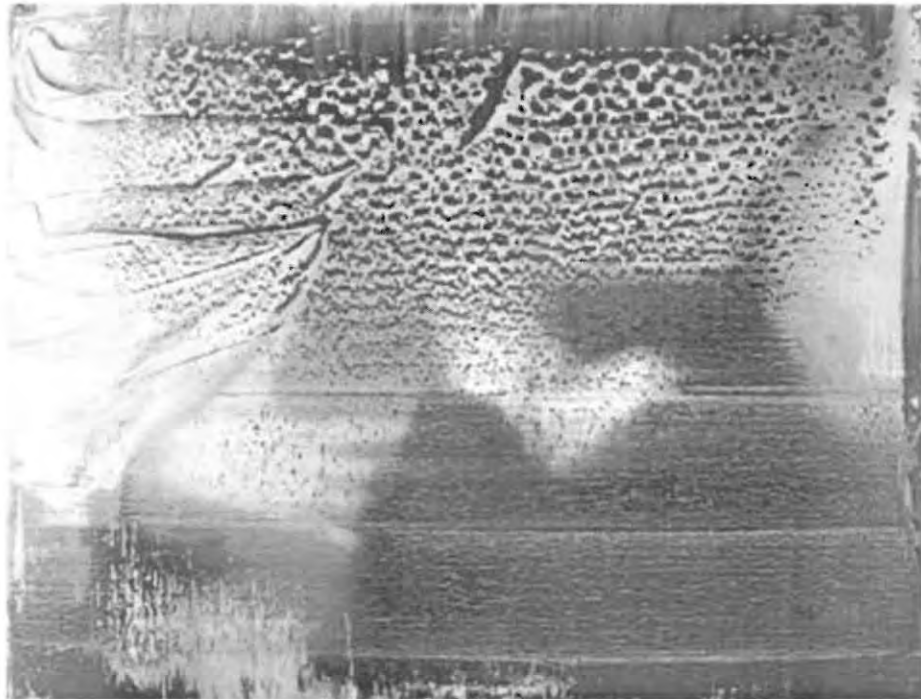


*Helga Matura*

{Fig. 6} Gerhard Richter, *Helga Matura*, 1966, Oil on canvas, 178.5 cm x 109.7 cm  
(Storr 2002:133)



{Fig. 7} Gerhard Richter, *S. with Child*, 1995, Oil on Canvas, 52 cm x 56 cm, (Obrist 1996)



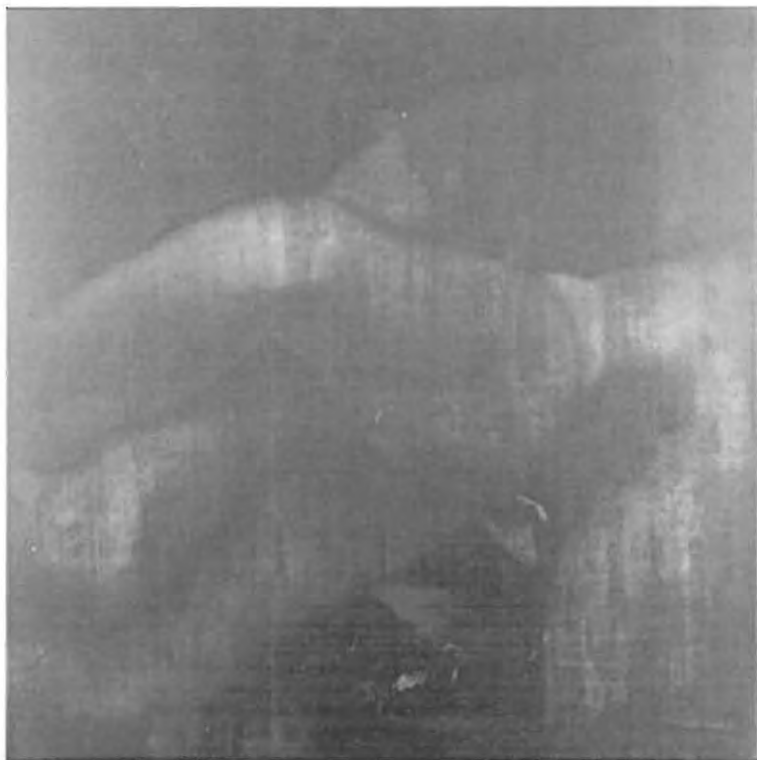
{Fig. 8} Gerhard Richter, *S. with Child*, 1995, Oil on Canvas, 52 cm x 62 cm, (Obrist 1996)



{Fig. 11} Gerhard Richter, *S. with Child*, 1995, Oil on Canvas, 36 cm x 41 cm,  
(Obrist 1996)



{Fig. 12} Lucy Cobern, *Untitled*, 2002, Oil & acrylic on board, 122 cm x 122 cm



{Fig. 13} Lucy Cobern, *Untitled*, 2002, Oil & acrylic on board, 122 cm x 122 cm



{Fig. 14} Lucy Cobern, *Untitled*, 2002, Oil & acrylic on board, 122 cm x 122 cm



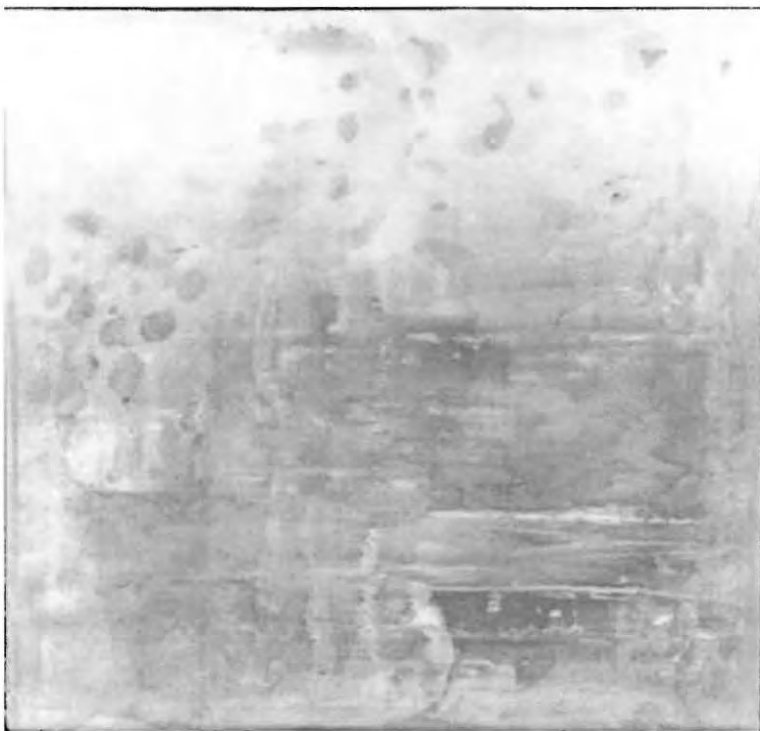
{Fig. 15} Lucy Cobern, *Untitled*, 2002, Oil & resin on board, 30 cm x 30 cm



{Fig. 16} Lucy Cobern, *Untitled*, 2002, Oil & resin on board, 30 cm x 30 cm



{Fig. 17} Lucy Cobern, *Untitled*, 2002, Oil & acrylic on board, 122 cm x 122 cm



{Fig. 18} Lucy Cobern, *Untitled*, 2002, Oil, enamel & resin on board, 30 cm x 30 cm



{Fig. 19} Lucy Cobern, *Untitled*, 2002, Oil & resin on perspex, 30 cm x 30 cm



{Fig. 20} Lucy Cobern, *Untitled*, 2002, Oil & enamel on board, 30 cm x 30 cm

