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## Revelation and Concealment: A story of personal and cultural displacement

### Introduction

*“You’d better come clean,” Frank said to me, “You’d better tell them I’m not really the creative colleague of this character you’re calling R-K, or the buddy of this guy Richard; just that I’m standing in for you, an apparently seamless version of you, like the mirror you stick your face into each morning!”*

What story begins by betraying its artifice!

I should clarify to you the reader that Frank is a textual character whose presence gives a semblance of scholarship to opinions that are otherwise likely to be projections of my own situation onto others’. The believability of the interpretation is somehow to do with the empathy suggested by the text towards the story’s ostensible subject. The character Frank pulls the observational aspect out of the interpretation and makes it possible for you the reader to add *idea* of your own. I may gamble that my own locus of desire has, if the internal relationship that Lacan tells us we have with language is correct [1], also placed me as subject within the text’s midst. You the reader will obviously not have this

internal relationship with the story's characters but are more likely, perhaps, to gain an affective relationship with me through my own presence within the text.

Frank is part of a quartet comprising the subject of the story, R-K and his textual adjunct, Richard; the story's reader; author as reflexive; and the selfsame who stands apart as the progenitor of an interaction between factual recall and imagination played out by the other three parties. The first of the quartet, the *subject*, is an Asian painter resident in London and his adjunct an HIV sufferer who was to die of AIDS in 1993. The character R-K's feelings of displacement as manifest in his work are explored in the story and the character Richard's presence implicates a baser surrounding milieu. Frank, therefore, is in a sense a disclaimer: I would wish you the reader to situate this human composition somewhere between interpretative observation and fiction.

The hypothesis is that R-K and Richard's details coalesce around the idea of concealment and revelation of identity that is determined by factors of personal and cultural displacement. What I share with the story's subject may concern a certain elliptical experience as a Western ex-patriot living in Asia. Such insights reflect a sense of self as *other* projected into the story through the examples of artwork and illness [2]. According to Lacan, the otherness of one's ego, or self, would seem to be founded on its original alienation imposed and endorsed by the mother as *Other*, the sense of identity projected onto others being a repetition of this original specular or mirrored scene.

## **Observation**

We learn from Frank that R-K lives in a two-storey narrow building. Downstairs is rented out and he has the floor above, which he uses as a studio room for painting, cooking, socializing and sleeping. Frank claims that he would be invited to sit on a single bed that doubles as a sofa with a vista firstly of a small dining room table, then a sideways-placed easel usually with an unfinished painting on it that faces the window to the left, indicating that R-K paints in his own shadow. Behind that is a kitchen unit with cooker, fridge,

drainer and dishes. To the right, a couple of wardrobes either side of a small chest of drawers. Frank often finds R-K relieved to have a visitor. As he descends the narrow stairs to the porch he will be vigorously wiping the muddied colour from his hands while possibly already processing in his mind the frustration relating to a bout of painting—of which contact sport may be a good analogy—which he intends to offload onto the human presence silhouetted against the glass.

Frank's descriptions of the paintings suggest that the knife will stutter and splatter across the canvas tooth and the artist will notice with a hiss of dissatisfaction where the paint flicks itself towards parts of the small room not apportioned to painting. It will be as though the tool has its own life and works variously with and against the artist. According to Frank it is not unusual for R-K to huff and puff, scratch his neck, and battle with physical fatigue. Frank pictures him throwing the knife onto the drainer and allowing it to mingle antagonistically with domestic utensils. The flatness of the tool's action and the clarity of shape concomitant with its sharpness will satisfactorily harness the artist' anger, but occasionally R-K will wipe across the knifed skeins with the more melding gesture of a brush. This action of the brush may both *negate* and *add*, in a kind of paradox with which perhaps only the creative individual can work. Frank's sitting there in a position of subservience towards his host is analogous to that maintained by R-K in relation to his work. While R-K is the master of his own place, it is as if the language of his work (insofar as there are structural parallels between language and painting) is master of him [3]. Frank picks up on the aggression implied by the mess, a brush having been flung to the drainer, the artist forgetting that the mixture of turpentine and oil leaves vestiges that adhere far less to the bristles than to a knife, the displaced paint journeying everywhere. To the extent that one can apply the idea of autonomy to this repetitive scene, Frank imagines that the cleaning of this area provides the painter both with respite from his self-imprisoning arena and the humorous, at times pathetic admission to himself that despite his determination, he cannot succeed. Jars of paint stripper and solid brushes stand alongside washing-up liquid and dishwashing items, and it is not inconceivable that hardened oil paint would emerge at the dinner table as part of a sauce.

Frank, also a painter but with, dare he admit, an acquaintance with *theory*, claims that he is frightened of colour. The measure of a very good painter, he would be likely to think, may be through his or her absorption in the challenge that colour represents [4]. Form has tendency perhaps towards moral mimicry, whereas colour discovered as form may represent the objectification of more instinctual drives [5]. It could be gambled that turned away from the painting the issue for R-K also concerns only colour. Frank could spirit himself into a scene whereby R-K, relieved of his cast shadow into which he again casts himself, his senses heightened by the raking light, will mix colour fastidiously and delight in its gluey tactility as sheer stuff and glow, and this on a clean plate acquisitioned from the drainer. How to *place* the colour is another issue: try as he may to use colour as volume, colour as form, R-K is tethered by the colour's matter, which all too often dissipates itself in relation to its pigmentation when it serves to model one's commitment to the *sign*. The boxer, for example, the nude, the near abstracted buttocks that hold just the vaguest consolation of the erotic that achieves more puerile expression in pornography.

In seventies' London, homosexual pornography existed in Soho and other less familiar districts and was displayed in windows the anticipation of which, on turning the corner, Frank recalls had the propensity to thrill. The clandestine nature of such expeditions, companioned by loneliness, would in all likelihood have been Richard's experience too. The temptation to simply *tell*, while not feeling able, and then a deeper inclination that this was not in any case necessary, would feel unbearable. How many times, said Frank, would one walk back and forth past a shop, each time piecing together more of the scene, while hoping not to be noticed by people.

By 1990, AZT was being used extensively in London to treat HIV, and the London Lighthouse, an AIDS hospice, was full. Frank recalled Richard having raised the subject of AIDS only once by seeking confirmation, mistakenly, that there was not necessarily a correlation between that and HIV. The question came innocuously enough, and it did not occur to Frank that his friend may be 'positive'. Richard was ambiguous too as to why he attended hospital regularly for check-ups. Much later, when the news was that he was

dying, Frank wondered if he had absorbed his friend's own position on the matter by blocking the realisation of his friend's status from his mind. AIDS was of course a spectre cast over the entire gay community in London and people armed themselves against it in various ways, the strategy for some being to move with great caution through their sexuality and hardly breathe the word. Richard may have been in denial of equating his medical condition with its prospective development, the same denial driving the solace he sought in watching the TV and in his likely nocturnal jaunts.

While Richard was not shy to admit to friends that he enjoyed the sight of bodily contact in the Saturday wrestling, Frank could only piece together from vague references and the application of a good deal of his own fantasy, what he got up to on the personal level. Frank recalls that Richard once told him that he was too "slim and clean" for him; that he preferred the opposite in worker types. The compulsion and repulsion of toilets—if that was it—had dank connotations of sub-terrain, with row-standing blokes prompting one another's glance amidst the stench of urine and bleach.

Frank often finds strewn on R-K's floor the sketches that the painter makes of a black model that he employs. As Frank knows from his own experience, men who are prepared to do this often also enjoy the subservience of such a role. R-K, with his likely feelings of difference as an Asian in the UK, may have been reversing roles in this context. Similarly, according to Frank, Richard's lovers were simply understood from his perspective as lower class; by this means different in relation to him; stalked by him, and not vice versa.

R-K studied art in Paris before moving to London. From what Frank had seen of R-K's student paintings in a few catalogues and cuttings, in Paris the Asian painter may have been influenced by artists from the group *Art Informel*, which included a style of painting similar to American Abstract Expressionism. Frank feels that there are elements of Nicholas De Stael in R-K's work that have stayed with him throughout his career. Expressionism, however, is all about unconscious desire and its release through impulsive brushwork. A battle gets fought on the canvas, and it is perhaps the only

painting style where one may be forgiven for sometimes not getting all of it right. Rather like the pianist who palpably embodies the music's strains and chords, colour, surface and gesture only in R-K's student works are the perceptual, viscose and tactile residue of an intensely physical engagement, the purpose of which is to heighten the assumed ability of the medium to convey human feeling.

From Frank's descriptions it sounds as though R-K never took this manner of painting fully on board and was sidetracked by the assault of normality on post-student life. Two of his three genres are possibly partly contrived for a local domestic market. Frank refers to the occasional changes to the display of such paintings and framed works in the porch of R-K's house that opens out onto a busy suburban street, serving as an impromptu gallery of interest to passers-by.

A defining event in R-K's career, synonymous with where Richard's story ends, was for him to have a retrospective exhibition in his home country. Although this exposure was initially less successful than he had hoped, a year or so later Asian art reviews heralded him as a significant painter, his works selling for a reasonable price. While it was likely that the evolution of R-K's work during his years abroad surprised his friends at home, Richard's family had known nothing of his sexuality. As close relatives gathered around his hospital bed it must have crossed the man's mind that almost before his blood had cooled, the doors of his flat would open into a life revealed.

### **Interpretation**

*"I'll talk again, if you like, said Frank, instead of having to be written in all the time, and you and your readers can interpret. If you want to know about the paintings, a few of them come to mind. R-K's work falls into three categories roughly anyway, the kind of London studies done early on, soon after he came from Paris, the Oriental-looking ones where he's been travelling a bit and then the more erotically charged abstractions. The early ones are small and murky, getting a bit excitable when water's involved."*

Having the London paintings referred to as “study” relegates them to immaturity, although they anticipate, in a way, what Frank describes as the artist’s complaining a decade or so later of the UK’s coldness, grey skies, drab people and selfish government. When water’s involved and the brushwork frees itself, its murky appearance is perhaps indicative of the artist’s emergent state of mind. This would be tantamount to looking into the *gaps*, as it were, in the works’ obvious formal structure. Their earnestness, however, bodes hope.

The interlaced brushstrokes and accents of heightened colour are more instinctively joyous than whatever their matrix represents. These works may concern R-K’s attempts at assimilation into a culture not automatically his own. In a Japanese context, but in the introduction suggested to include people in general from the Far East, the Japanese novelist Shusaku Endo describes the problems facing his own country’s students who chose to study in France in the 1960s [6]. The short story *And You, Too* uses illness, specifically tuberculosis, as a metaphor for the difficulties facing such Japanese students. What is described as the weight of European history born in every “stone” of the “houses, streets and churches” thus imposes a “pressure and burden” that translates into “physical and mental anguish.” That author explains in his introduction that he doubts that any visitor from the Far East could ever truly comprehend France, and of himself when he was first confronted by the “rich cultural heritage and confidence of Europe,” that he experienced a sense of “unfathomable distance.”

Such argument comes not from a European but an Asian speaking of his own experience of Paris. In fairness, however, Endo is commenting as a Japanese Christian. Our friend R-K has no such unitary motive for affiliation with Europe and so his ambivalence perhaps comes through much more in terms of identification with his self-chosen displacement by another culture.

The character Richard flips the metaphor of illness for the sheer weight of European culture in Endo's novel; paradoxically it is in a cultural sense too, and as a European, that Richard succumbs and dies.

*“A lot of R-K.’s early works, a few later ones too, have an oblique angle that spans between left and right of the composition, kind of indicating an abstract plane.”*

In a sense, a veil has been mostly drawn open to reveal a picture, the veil's remainder in the bottom left of the composition suggesting that the artist's complete authority over the scene was not possible. The tension between veiled and unveiled is that both represent revelation; disclosure of the extent of assimilation of the cityscape represented in the form of a gradual opening, still aligned with hope, and evidence, in the form of what remains of the veil obscuring the same scene, that the artist still maintains a degree of difference from that with which he attempts to identify through the painting.

*“The interest in Art Informel of his student days will have mapped favourably with any likely Chinese calligraphic influence of his youth.”*

These early influences may also have been displaced. In detail only, perhaps, the works allude to a time when R-K aligned himself with no apparent inner tension to an acknowledged artistic style in the manner of research. For example, the ground that is allowed to come through these moments of disinherited brushwork tenuously signifying water, sand and sky is like sexual release, with any naïve impulsiveness that may have characterised the student work now replaced by a perhaps somewhat troubled spirit. The semiotic revaluation of language, which attempts to position the agent as *subject* within its midst, may provide the most likely validation of such a reading of visual language. One sometimes reads of the lack of intentionality as being a characteristic within language of a certain “*excess*” which alludes to the presence of the subject [7]. Conversely, such excess might be described as accident, inflection, incongruity, that exists in the “spaces”—almost as though escaping suture—in the work's formal structure [8]. However, these indications are subtle enough not to disturb the paintings' mundane,



albeit loosely gestured realism. The difficulty of assimilating oneself into another's culture and the perpetual ambivalence between self and other (referenced above), has been given over to questions of finance. In a sense R-K, via the threshold of his house, is saying to a British public that the more they buy his work, the more he may feel that he too belongs in the UK.

*“R-K makes allegiance to another genre from time to time and becomes a kind of Orientalist, almost, making sketching trips to Asia and the Middle East. The confecting of the scenes is as suggestive as anything of the idea.”*

The works in this genre are an act of will, perhaps; a strategy for R-K to displace his identity back onto peoples on a par with the Western colonial stereotypes associated with his own culture, through an exchange of roles that places him symbolically in the midst of the impulse that fuelled certain artists of the Victorian era in the UK. Some of these works are incongruously De Stael, and the scenes' walled streets give picture to the paintings' surface as metaphor for the battle with self. It is as though R-K dons the role of a representative of Western civilisation and takes off to Third and Fourth World communities only to return to face himself, in the guise of an aesthetic issue through the picture's surface as wall, with the betrayal of his own illusion.

These, like all of R-K's paintings, falter on failure. The movement is *towards* resolution—hence perspective that attempts to push surface as wall back into its pictured space, or the yellow angled block characteristic of sun-drenched stone, whose contrary effort may seem to be to unveil what looks like a benign face made out of it—rather than any real determination to achieve wall. These paintings are done from memory rather than from the motif, although Frank maintains that there are observational sketches, and so for all their effort to provide escape they merely re-confirm R-K's position as *other* in others' midst.

Richard's likely sexual assignations would have promised well until afterwards, when he might imagine having been caught by the police, or robbed if he had brought someone

home. He would have bartered with these and other risks, and in so doing perhaps merely shored up his feelings of anxiety.

*“Funny, actually, but I remember sitting with Richard outside a late-night café on a small Paris street when an Oriental strode back and forth in front of us in a soliciting manner. Richard egged me on with the guy, and I felt that he was forcing me to choose between a complexity of emotions that he himself may have had surrounding such things as sexual anticipation, flirting with danger, the unknown, that would have broken the stasis that holds one safe.”*

Frank’s anecdote that includes the phrase “the stasis that holds one safe,” suggests the necessity of constraint in relation to sexuality. Richard, he suggests, may have experimented in ways that put his health at risk. The fact that the incident involves an Oriental, an *other* in a European city, alludes to a particular East/West sexual polemic, a consequence of which is the exclusion of people from one’s own culture. This may be an underlying motive of the striving of some people towards cultural exile.

R-K’s life choices may have involved certain costs on a personal level that are displaced onto the battle with his work, with the inevitable attendance of failure. Similarly, Richard displaced himself in his apparent refusal to acknowledge his illness, which would have opened up questions of generation and culture surrounding sexual behaviour in the early years of HIV. To stumble unwittingly into the problem is, in analytical terms, likely to be read as unconsciously ensuring that one will not *see* the problem coming. Feelings of anxiety, however, are perhaps around one to *suggest*, if not to tell. The anxiety of both R-K and Richard may share the same root cause.

*“There’s one work that was begun as a cityscape but was finally turned upside down because I persuaded him that from this view the resulting image looked more like a male back. R-K liked the idea enough to settle for the upturned view, although the viewer is steered away from this reading via the title, which I think is Bathing, towards the more innocuous idea of the ablutions of a figure of indeterminate gender.”*

The idea of back, the stalwart corporeal weight-bearer, is more likely to be a convenient effect, in a sense a *metonym* [12], for that which R-K unconsciously wants his work to convey. Back, that is, for the convenience of its relationship to *surface*. In this respect the human back is an iconic form that helps to convey not surface as a concept, which would turn the image into a metaphor, but the *effect* of surface. More specifically, the effect of the struggle with painting as a surface has been displaced onto the representation of a characteristic of the human form as the effect of the struggle with surface. Then, perhaps due to that sense of disappointment or futility that often accompanies the sexual act, such a form is offered as metonym by R-K of his struggle with his personal self [13]. If one deduces from this description a sense of abstraction of the human form, in this respect the churned brushstrokes of R-K's earlier paintings, allied to water, sand or sky, are a move towards the unconsciously referenced meaning that the human form was now to hold for him.

*“I too, have a painting like this, called Reverse Order [Illus]. But I’ve maybe been a little clearer with the reference you’re making by first painting a figure with his back turned to the viewer, then imposing a black screen or surface over the whole image and wiping it away to allow the figurative image to emerge through it. You’re therefore looking at a strong-looking male, back turned, reversing out of a black screen which both represents and is the surface of the picture. But if you decode this a step further, the black screen has given way, through erasure, to another and equally imposing surface, a male back, which logically stands in front of the screen anyway. You can only play with this paradox in painting. Taking all the personal stuff away from painting, although of course this formal dynamic may also be bound up with the personal, which is what you’re suggesting of R-K’s painting, is what painting’s good for. Then there’s the aggression, the violence implied by erasure, by the pummelling of the canvas which stands for a male back, to get it to do what you want. I like the suggestion of submissiveness in this too, born by the iconography and by the painting itself. The title alludes to a militaristic idea and to the imposition of will....”*

R-K's interest in painting is possibly held unconsciously by what this medium that he encounters on and *as* the surface has come to mimic: carnal proximity between people that blurs the sense of human scale. The imperative of much twentieth-century painting seems to have been to render ambivalent many artists' understanding of the difference between space and surface. R-K, by choosing to paint increasingly the human body, endorsed also by his stylistic affinities to certain schools and painters, comes out in favour of surface, and the imagery of his work is increasingly less inclined to be used to create pictorial depth. R-K may wrestle with being consumed by the sense of otherness that drives him; the unconscious *cause* of his desire [14]. It is not just for convenience that R-K works against the draining board, therefore bringing noxious substances into close proximity with the food he eats. That relationship is perhaps telling him that apart from the food that nourishes him, there may be other more destructive aspects of his appetite.

Lacan's *mirror-stage* in human development posits the infant at six to eighteen months obtaining from its own mirror image an alienated idea of self, hence generating the idea of *other* of the self or ego, in which desire is rooted [15]. In other words, the unitarily reflected self-as-other, freed from the debilitating effects of one's own uncoordinated motor movements at such early age, might be said to bear the signs of a false promise concerning the likelihood of attainment of desire. Through allusion to myriad criteria informed by the diverse precedent of their medium, painters' efforts shine out like glass but in so doing send back the impossibility of their project, although no less incredible for that. R-K distorts any easy naturalism through a kind of over-striving that appears to be to achieve one thing but posits an effect that may allude unconsciously to something going on that is more deeply hidden. We may sense from Frank's observations that R-K is also perhaps cautious of disclosing his sexuality. It may be that the male body, through which R-K fuses his sexual preference with his creative striving, is felt to be forever in danger of betraying him, and for that reason he allies the compulsion to iconic form with a painting style that acts as a convenient mask—a wilful perversion of language.

If the wilful perversion of language as used by psychotics is known as *delire* [9]; and “getting off” on psychologically symptomatic pleasure in pain or its opposite, *jouissance*

[10], here expressed through the potential of a medium, and these are features of “the dark side of all language” [11]—this allied to the sheer oddness of twentieth-century stylistic precedents—then it is unlikely that artwork will solely concern obvious iconic meaning.

R-K’s mature works confirm the by-now-familiar ambiguous relationship between space and surface. While a male figure may be approximately visible but well camouflaged by the composition’s division of shapes and the painting’s monochrome, a lower left-orientated diagonal giving the already-mentioned effect in R-K’s work of less-than-total disclosure, the figure’s apparent passivity starts to betray a somewhat deeper secret. If R-K projects himself onto his model, and *into* his painting as other, then this other appears to be of passive disposition. To return to the idea of the painting as surface, of itself as human back, as the metonymic effect of R-K’s struggle with self, then the hacked, scratched and scoured paint may reflect a masochistic inclination.

*“Sometimes when I’m together with a few artist friends, I find myself drawing from a model who always keeps his socks on. If I think it through; the deflected sexual intention between such guys and me comes out in my drawings as a kind of aggression. I think I’ve noticed that if this guy sees that I’m drawing his socked feet he gets aroused, so I tease him with this but not overtly enough to let on to him that I know. Meanwhile I just pummel into drawings of him with a whole range of materials. He once asked why I didn’t draw more clearly. But sometimes it’s a psychological imperative to penetrate through or puncture the otherwise graphic distance that any obligation to verisimilitude sets up. Part of this more personal imperative may be sadistic, but one knows as an artist that the object, in this instance the human form, kind of into which one is conveying one’s intention, is merely a surrogate for oneself. It is ultimately a self-abusive relationship between artist and work.”*

The idea of masochism endorsed through psychological role-reversal: a black with his otherness *flooring* a white, to use a verb that one may associate with boxing. The effectiveness of his displacement of feelings of other in the community of London onto the *otherness of Afro-Caribbean* that does not then include himself, means that R-K can

view the models whose forms he both constructs and attempts to dismember as himself; as *one* rather than other. One work in particular alludes not to a single but a double reversal. R-K has firstly displaced himself onto a black boxer in terms of a culturally stereotypical idea of black as other. This perhaps equals a typical Caucasian form of displacement; the desire for dominance projected into desire's other and returned to one as dominance. In terms of this reversal, R-K posits his own propensity to be other to a Caucasian viewer. Then through another reversal R-K puts himself in the floored loser's position, which is the submissive masochistic scenario he plays out in his paintings. R-K scores, lacerates and futilely battles with canvas as back, canvas as body. The floored figure is an iconic representation of R-K's displacement from his own culture, such a culture personified by that which has displaced him; also himself.

Ultimately, R-K's paintings triumph over their iconic idea in terms of their material ambivalence: painting as at once space and surface. Yellow ochre scored over burnt sienna, and the same hue modified with vermilion given emphasis as gloves; the downward thrust of the palette knife making a box of the background that then comes forward and bears down as if it were some heavy object, an iconic inscription, perhaps, of the impact of a punch flooring the second character as victim. Red as laceration and blood scores both the figurative imagery and the painted surface through its propensity also to be corporeal; for example, the plane of a back. What, after choice, become polarities are locked in speculation, like the sense of R-K as Asian or R-K as naturalised UK citizen: the two *can* survive and even flourish in a sense as a conjoined question. Whether one achieves citizenship of another culture or not, there is connected with the move away from one's generic culture always the question of identity. R-K works creatively with his feelings of displacement, and as metaphor for this uses the ambivalence of space and surface in his paintings. More deeply, he may explore the sense of displacement that emerges from questions to himself of his sexuality, by using his own back scratched and scoured as a metonymical image for that with which his own unconscious dynamics is battling.

## Closing

It was of some surprise to Frank, who had Richard marked as a loner, that his funeral was attended by a diversity of people. He had evidently had some women friends and there were people of other nationality too. The occasion's pathos would have laid-to-rest any division of issues that may have haunted him through life, not least his sexuality, and everybody at the ceremony melded over this.

This may tie in with the question of interpretation underlying the opinions in the story. Both the creative individual and the academic writer venture opinions, and these usually corroborate or dispute existing knowledge in selective fields of interest. The field of psychoanalysis makes more use than many, however, of individual interpretation [16]. The correctness of the analyst's interpretations is reliant on an in-depth understanding of his/her own mental health, whereas other professionals may not have this and yet still exert sound academic or scientific judgment [17]. The structure of the psychoanalytical contract is in a sense triangular; analyst, analysand and interpretation. In an interpretative academic context, however, the relationship as mentioned in the story's opening paragraphs could be seen to be fourfold: subject and how this is split; the format in which the argument is couched (that includes author as subject); author as progenitor of the interaction between all involved parties; reader. The fusion of understanding between author and reader, therefore, can as likely meld as increase any apparent inconsistencies in the presented argument.

According to Lacan: "Even if it communicates nothing... speech constitutes truth... the discourse speculates on faith in testimony"[18]. If, also from Lacan, speech implicitly "calls for a reply," then insofar as text, when it is a formal re-phrasing of speech, can as well be "truth," perhaps this is also what Ernst Gombrich in the context of visual language refers to as the "beholder's share"[19]. The notion that the *voice*—also as the element of speech that, as it were, lies buried—may exist within the semiotic basis of language is posited in relation to the story and to the language of painting there discussed. Unlike the hermetic relationship that exists in the analyst's consulting room, you the

reader in relation to this particular investigation constitute another dynamic, whereby your interpretations also help to bring to the surface the underlying meanings. Via the character R-K and what he is doing with his work, circumstances pertaining to Richard, the structuring of the story to include the reflexive position of the author and the question of interpretation by you the reader, the attempt is to make manifest the idea of the restless semiotic of language as posited by analytical theory.

## Notes

1. “[Lacan] emphasizes the fact that patients’ lives are determined by their “purloined letters”—the snatches of their parents’ conversation (that is, of the Other’s discourse), often not intended for their ears, that were indelibly etched in their memories and sealed their fate. Patients bring those letters to analysis, and analysts attempt to render them legible to their patients, to uncover the hidden determinants of their desire.” Bruce Fink, *A Clinical Introduction to Lacanian Psychoanalysis* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, [1997] 1999), 205-6.
2. “*counterpart (semblable)* ...The image of another person’s body can only be identified with insofar as it is perceived as similar to one’s own body, and conversely the counterpart is only recognized as a separate, identifiable ego by projecting one’s own ego onto him.” Dylan Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, [1996] 1997), 28-9.
3. Language, nonsense, desire: *delire* accounts for the relations between these three terms. “...In other words, language becomes tainted with desire, by the actions and passions of our body, by its instinctual drives. Language loses its capacity to communicate. But it can also, at the same time, increase its power: it ceases to be controlled by the subject but on the contrary rules over him. Instead of truth, we have fiction; instead of sense, nonsense or absurdity; instead of abstraction, desire. Instead of method, we have the madness of *delire*.” Jean-Jacques Lecercle, *Philosophy Through the Looking-Glass: Language, Nonsense, Desire* (London: Hutchinson, 1985), 6-7.
4. “Matisse alludes to color having... a basis in instinctual drives when he speaks of a ‘*retinal sensation* [that] destroys the calm of the surface and the contour’...” Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* ([Paris, 1979] Oxford: Blackwell, 1984), 219.
5. Kristeva attributes three values to the pictorial use of colour, one of which is: “...the psychology of color perception and, especially, the psychology of each perception’s instinctual cathexis, depending on the phases the concrete subject goes through with reference to its own history and within the more general process of imposing repression...” Ibid.
6. Shusaku Endo, *Foreign Studies*, Part Three: “And You, Too” (London: Sceptre, 1990).
7. “... a philosophical tradition which attempts to articulate linguistics with psychoanalysis. For this tradition, the central characteristics of language are not those which are purified and built on in logic (language as unequivocal) but the infelicities of linguistic usage which are inseparable from concrete utterances or texts. The main characteristic of language is therefore *excess*: more meaning creeps into the sentence than the author intended, echoes and involuntary repetitions disturb the careful ordering of linguistic units...” Lecercle, 80.
8. Language becomes the means by which repression is achieved by driving our unconscious desire underground into the spaces between words and using its energy to propel us from one meaning to another. Rosalind Minsky, *Psychoanalysis and Gender* (London: Routledge, 1996), 140.
9. “a *delire* which has nothing to do with delirium; risks, which in [Louis] Wolfson’s [*Le Schizo et les Langues*, 1970] case are imposed by his illness rather than taken; a threatening disorder and a struggle to restore order. But the configuration is inverted. Disorder is not where we are used to expect it, in incoherence, in the dissolution of social ties. It is within, in the heart of the family, in the author’s head. His mother is the embodiment of this disorder, the mother tongue its carrier. Order, as consequence, lies without, in the escape from mother and the family, in the destruction of the mother tongue. [Wolfson plays



with the structure of English language by seeking its closest derivations across three other languages in order to transgress it as the language of his mother tongue.]” Lecercle, 30.

10. “We all know people who are ever complaining of their lack of satisfaction in life, but who never seek therapy. This is because they obtain a certain satisfaction from their very dissatisfaction, and from complaining; from blaming others for their lack of satisfaction. So, too, certain people derive a great deal of pleasure from torturing themselves, from subjecting themselves to painful experiences, and so on. The French have a fine word for this kind of pleasure in pain; *jouissance*. It qualifies the kind of ‘kick’ someone may get out of punishment, doing something that is so pleasurable it hurts (sexual climax, for example), or doing something that is so painful it becomes pleasurable. Most people deny getting pleasure or satisfaction from their symptoms, but the outside observer can usually see that they enjoy their symptoms, that they ‘get off’ on their symptoms in a way that is too roundabout, ‘dirty,’ or ‘filthy’ to be described as pleasurable or satisfying. The term ‘jouissance’ nicely captures the notion of getting off by any means necessary, however clean or dirty.” Fink, 8-9.

11. “The schizophrenic stands in a peculiar relation to the sign: for him, the only source of ‘meaning’ is in the meaningless signifiers of his mother’s discourse.... We have here the...structure of a central absence (the lack of meaning) compensated for by an excess, the excess of signifiers which, through repetition, transformation or derivation, forever try to reconstruct the absent meaning.... And with this comes a disquieting conviction: this type of language may not be exclusive to the schizophrenic; it may be the dark side of all language, ignored and denied by the speaker but nevertheless virtually present in every utterance. One cannot escape one’s mother tongue.” Lecercle, 57.

12. “...*metonymy* is a function which involves using one signified to stand for another signified which is *directly related* to it or *closely associated* with it in some way. Metonyms are based on various indexical relationships between signifieds, notably the substitution of effect for cause.” Daniel Chandler, *Semiotics for Beginners*: “Rhetorical Tropes” [www.aber.ac.uk/media/Documents/S4B/sem07.html](http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Documents/S4B/sem07.html) (accessed 16.09.06).

13. “Lacan distinguished metaphor from metonymy as the two sides of the signifier, positioning desire on the side of metonymy. Desire is defined as a metonymical process, more precisely as the metonymy of the lack of being.... The relation between two signifiers installs this lack of being, which in turn installs a human being’s desire as always being a desire for something else (the metonymical dimension).” Dany Nobus, ed., *Key Concepts of Lacanian Psychoanalysis* (London: Rebus Press, 1998), 85.

14. “There is only one object of desire, *objet petit a*.... The *objet petit a* is not the object towards which desire tends, but the cause of desire. Desire is not a relation to an object, but a relation to a lack.” Evans, 37.

15. “The fact is that the total form of the body by which the subject anticipates in a mirage the maturation of his power is given to him only as *Gestalt*, that is to say, in an exteriority in which this form is certainly more constituent than constituted, but in which it appears to him above all in a contrasting size... that fixes it and in a symmetry that inverts it, in contrast with the turbulent movements that the subject feels are animating him. ...these two aspects of its appearance, symbolizes the mental permanence of the I, at the same time as it prefigures its alienating destination....

“This moment in which the mirror stage comes to an end inaugurates, by the identification with the imago of the counterpart and the drama of primordial jealousy...the dialectic that will henceforth link the I to socially elaborated situations.

“It is this moment that tips the whole of human knowledge into mediatization through the desire of the other....” Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits: a selection* (London: Routledge, [1966] 2004), 3, 6.

16. “‘Interpret!’ A nasty word! I dislike the sound of it; it robs me of all certainty. If everything depends on my interpretation who can guarantee that I interpret right? So after all everything *is* left to my caprice.’

“Just a moment! Things are not quite as bad as that. Why do you choose to except your own mental processes from the rule of law which you recognize in other people’s? When you have attained some degree of self-discipline and have certain knowledge at our disposal, your interpretations will be independent of your personal characteristics and will hit the mark.” Sigmund Freud, *The Essentials of Psycho-Analysis* (1991, 38).

17. “And here, above all, we are brought to the analyst’s obligation to make himself capable, by a deep-going analysis of his own, of the unprejudiced reception of the analytic material. Something, it is true, still remains over: something comparable to the ‘personal equation’ in astronomical observations. This individual factor will always play a larger part in psycho-analysis than elsewhere. An abnormal person can

become an accurate physicist; as an analyst will be hampered by his own abnormality from seeing the pictures of mental life undistorted.” Freud, 38-9.

18. Lacan, 48.

19. “It is the point of impressionist painting that the direction of the brushstroke is no longer an aid to the reading of forms. It is without any support from structure that the beholder must mobilize his memory of the visible world and project it into the mosaic of strokes and dabs on the canvas before him. It is here, therefore, that the principle of guided projection reaches its climax. The image, it might be said, has no firm anchorage left on the canvas—it is only ‘conjured up’ in our minds. The willing beholder responds to the artist’s suggestion because he enjoys the transformation that occurs in front of his eyes. .... The artist gives the beholder increasingly ‘more to do,’ he draws him to the magic circle of creation and allows him to experience something of the thrill of ‘making’ which had once been the privilege of the artist. It is the turning point which leads to those visual conundrums of twentieth-century art that challenge our ingenuity and make us search our own minds for the unexpressed and inarticulate.” Ernst Gombrich, *Art and Illusion* (London: Phaidon, [1960] 1977), 169.



“Reverse Order”  
Acrylic and Oil on Canvas  
6ft x 5ft  
Circa 1990