

**THE VIOLENT BRUSHSTROKE: CONTRIBUTIONS
FROM THE INDEPENDENT SCHOOL OF BRITISH
PSYCHOANALYSIS TO THE ART OF WILLEM DE
KOONING**

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Declaration

This dissertation is the unaided work of the candidate. It has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.

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Abstract

This thesis begins with a consideration of the contributions of modern and contemporary ideas to the field of aesthetics. Out of these contributions, selected theorists from the Independent School of British Psychoanalysis are applied as a contemporary understanding of the practice and intent of Modernist art as seen in the work of the New York School of painters and specifically to the paintings 'On the Theme of Woman' by Willem de Kooning exhibited in 1953. More recent psychoanalytic formulations of aggression, self and subjectivity are put forward as a reinterpretation of the issues surrounding these selected works. The main focus here is on the role of aggression which is reformulated as a search for subjectivity and separateness. In offering these reinterpretations, this thesis draws on the theories of Donald Winnicott and Christopher Bollas. Bollas' notion of the 'transformational object', the work of the unconscious, which he terms 'cracking up' and the idiom of the self in process, is used as a basis for a newer understanding of Modernist art's methodology and interest in the unconscious and self. The final chapter applies Winnicott's concepts of maternal functions and 'object usage' to de Kooning's 1953 Woman paintings. This reinterpretation is offered as an alternative to the more negative interpretations that prevailed at the time of this exhibition which emphasised a negative approach to the female as subject. Instead, it is argued that these works offered the artist a creative arena in which to explore psychological struggles involving self and other in a safe and adaptive way.

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Introduction

The moment in the dialogue at which their contributions were made have passed, all that can be alive is our own capacity for interpretation. (Ogden 1990 : 3)

More than half a century has passed since Willem de Kooning's exhibition of paintings 'On the Theme of Woman' opened at the Sidney Janis Gallery in New York on the 16th of March, 1953. At the time of that exhibition, and since, much has been written about these works. The controversies have essentially revolved around two issues: firstly his betrayal of pure, nonrepresentational abstract art seen in his return to the figure, and secondly, with regard to his treatment of woman as subject matter. Celebrations, interpretations and accusations came from popular critics, curators, art historians, academic observers and later, in the 1960's, feminist writers.

Concentrating primarily on the concepts of self, subjectivity and unconscious functioning, this thesis attempts to revisit and reinterpret these issues using post Freudian and contemporary psychoanalytic ideas. Where classical Freudian and Modern interpretations of these concepts centred around an inner search for a *discoverable* self through its manifestation in symbol, imagery and *contents* of the unconscious, more contemporary views advance a decentred subjectivity exercised within a dynamic concept of a self *in action*. It will be argued that these developments in psychoanalysis are better equipped to interpret the technical changes and artistic intent that characterised the New York School of painters and Willem de Kooning's work in particular.

These developments in psychoanalytic thinking are accompanied by a radical reconceptualisation of the role of aggression in mental functioning which is best represented in the work of the Independent School of British Psychoanalysis and recently in what has been called the 'Middle' school of American psychoanalysis. In addition to a reformulation of self-in-action, the ideas of selected theorists from the Independent School will be used to provide a reinterpretation of the themes

of the female and destruction in de Kooning's 1953 series of Woman paintings.

Chapter one considers contributions from classical psychoanalysis to the field of aesthetics, outlining Freud's neurotic model of the mind and his 'pathographic' approach to works of art. Here art is seen as a function of repression and conflict adhering, in the form of the Death Instinct, to a Hobbesian belief in the destructive potential of humankind. Creative and artistic activity is considered a manifestation of conflict and drive providing the viewer with a safe arena within which to access forbidden areas of the psyche. Although psychoanalytic metatheory has changed and evolved since Freud's time, it still retains, as its bedrock, the primacy of unconscious processes in the interpretation and understanding of human subjectivity, motivation and action. This commitment runs through all psychoanalytic paradigms - these being, drive psychology, ego psychology, self psychology, objects relations psychology and the more recent school of Relational Psychoanalysis and Intersubjectivity. These movements sometimes, but not always, follow the history of splits within the psychoanalytic community.

Chapter two follows these developments in the form of Kleinian psychoanalysis which still holds the Death Instinct as primary and where culture and art become an atonement for destructive acts on the maternal body. Kleinian and post Kleinian thinking will be considered alongside the contributions from both practising clinicians and non clinicians who incorporate this line of thinking into the field of aesthetics and culture. With these developments, intrapsychic processes and their relation to *other* began to provide psychoanalysis with an opportunity to contribute more meaningfully to wider issues in aesthetics. With these theoretical advances, artists as subjects in relation to the *otherness* of their medium becomes central to understanding the formal aspects of art.

In Chapter three the theoretical developments of the Independent Group of British Psychoanalysis and, to a lesser extent, the American 'Middle' group will be discussed. In addition to their reconceptualisation of the role of aggression, the related concepts of creative illusion, aesthetic fusion, symbol formation and subjectivity will also be considered. Within this body of ideas, Donald

Winnicott's theory of 'object usage' and Christopher Bollas' concepts of transformational objects, the 'unthought known' and the work of the unconscious will be introduced as central to the later reinterpretation of de Kooning's 1953 Woman series.

Chapters four and five take up these developments as they apply to notions of subjectivity and self in action and considers them in relation to the Modernist discourse that informed the New York School and Harold Rosenberg's concept of Action Painting. In addition, the issues around definition and identity of the New York painters and their commitment to the legacy of European Surrealism and the philosophical influences of existentialism is also addressed.

How these contemporary ideas enable a new interpretation of de Kooning's 1953 Women paintings and his status as an action painter is the focus of Chapter six. His technical innovations and subject matter will be reconsidered in the light of these developments in psychoanalytic theory namely how , together with Winnicott's theory of 'object usage', the shift from the Freudian unconscious to the relationally unformulated 'unconscious in action' provides a novel and more contemporary interpretation of these controversial paintings. A psychoanalytic 'act' of interpretation is ventured as to the unconscious processes at work in their production. This psychoanalytic commentary could be applied to de Kooning's Women and equally to the artistic treatment of women as subject matter in other works of art. Although a fair amount has been written about de Kooning's Women, this section offers an interpretation other than that of overt hostility, misogyny and ambivalence towards his female subject. Instead, destruction is conceptualised in terms of the establishment of subjectivity, psychic reality and the capacity to use other. It is this reformulation of the role of destruction that forms the backbone of this thesis asserting, in part, that the process of art making involves the attempt to negotiate the difficult arena between self and other, subjectivity and reality, as it is mediated in the creative space.

Although the title of this thesis centralises de Kooning's 1953 exhibition, these ideas will mainly be applied to his work in the final chapter. The preceding chapters serve to outline the development of Freudian and post Freudian

psychoanalytic ideas as they apply to the field of aesthetics as a preparation for this interpretation.

Chapter one

Art as a Shared Dream: Id Psychology and Ego Psychology

Before the problem of the creative artist, analysis must, alas, lay
down its arms. (Freud 1928 : 177)

The contribution that psychoanalysis has made to the arts concerns the interplay between conscious and unconscious processes, most specifically the role of unconscious processes in creativity and aesthetic appreciation. What follows are some of the main concepts in psychoanalytic theory that are relevant to this dialogue.

Freud, with his positivistic background, attempted to develop a scientific model of psychic functioning. He took, as his starting point, the instinctual needs of the body hoping to derive a working model of the mind located primarily in biological principles. His dynamic understanding of the mind encompassed the interplay between instinctual drives and their interaction with the demands of external reality and societal pressures. In this model the concept of drives essentially connote pressure which is connected to the experience of both pleasure and pain. This continually difficult negotiation is mediated by a psychic apparatus which he termed the 'ego' which controls, mediates and provides workable compromises to this dilemma. The struggle becomes one between the 'reality principle' represented by external reality and civilisation and the 'pleasure principle' which is located in the needs of the body (Freud 1920). What is known as Freud's neurotic model of the mind sees humankind as perpetually torn between the demands of instinctual satisfaction and the demands of society. In *Totem and Taboo* he writes: 'The law only forbids men to do what their instincts incline them to do (Freud 1950:123)'. In this way his theory remains essentially a psychosomatic one.

These negotiations centre around designated metaphorical systems of the mind, that of conscious and unconscious. The system conscious, which is available to awareness, is seen to include the perceptual system that connects and receives

the impact of the external world. The unconscious, in conflict with this, contains instinctual drives with their dynamic representations.

The unconscious system is governed by what Freud calls 'Primary Process' and the conscious system by 'Secondary Process'. Primary Process is seen to be under the influence of the Pleasure Principle and is an activity characteristic of unconscious mental functioning. Ontologically, therefore, this was considered earlier than that of the more conscious, logical and organising Secondary Process which is governed by the Reality Principle. Primary Process can be understood as the psychic energy of drives as they bind with memory traces, continually changing and merging in a system with no logic or causality. These dynamic inner representations are attached to emotions that have been relegated, due to their unacceptability, to the unconscious region of the mind. Its direct knowledge can never be known other than through representations in dreams, parapraxes or free association (Greenson 1967 : 26).

The spatial metaphor of 'Id' becomes the repository of instinctual drives out of which Freud's other two metaphors derive, namely the 'ego' and the 'superego', the latter being the internalisation of parental and societal norms. These agencies reach their maturation through the negotiation of the Oedipus Complex, a triad consolidating both gender identity and conscience. It follows therefore, that dynamically, Freud's theory rests on the mechanisms of psychic submerging and psychic battles - that of repression and conflict. The forces in continual opposition were considered to be the Death Instinct and the Life Instinct.

In the development of Freud's theory, the Death Instinct was introduced after the Life instinct and what he theorised was that a passion for life was equally balanced with a passion for death. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* he states:

On the ground of a far reaching consideration of the processes which go to make up life and which lead to death, it becomes probable that we should recognise the existence of two classes of instincts, corresponding to the contrary processes of construction and dissolution in the organism. (Freud 1920 : 258).

The Death Instinct is channelled towards the external world in the form of aggression and destructiveness, and in his attempt to find a system that would function with two contradictory forces, Freud postulated that the Death Instinct, instead of turning against the self, becomes externalised and used in the service of the Life Instinct. That Freud with his Darwinian paradigm would postulate an organism that would seek its own death, is a paradox in itself. Adam Phillips in his book *Darwin's Worms*, a consideration of Freud and Darwin's ideas on the Death Instinct writes: 'Like Freud, Darwin is interested in how destruction conserves life; and in the kind of life destruction makes possible (2000:63)', and quotes Kierkegaard: '...the thought of death is a good dancing partner (2000:65).' It is Freud's exploration of these dualities, their conflicts and compromises, that have relevance for an exploration with the arts.

Although myth would have it that Freud was the first psychological pioneer in the discovery of the unconscious, ideas about such phenomena were actively in circulation around the time he began to develop his theories (Whyte, 1960). Frank Sulloway (1980) in his book *Freud, Biologist of the mind* also makes this point, that the concept of a repository of the mind unknown to conscious awareness had been part of philosophical discourse from the time of Plato, and with its entry into European philosophy, was being actively discussed by the eighteenth century. He writes of the myths attributed to Freud: 'The first is that Freud discovered the unconscious.. (1980:468)'.

However, being a biologist of the mind and a neurologist, what Freud attempted was to bring the concept of the unconscious out of its philosophical discourse into his biological and scientific hopes for a science of the mind. His development of spatial metaphors and their dynamic relationships still persist today in the language of psychoanalysis and are also applied to the understanding of culture and cultural products (Kuhns 1983; Bell 2001).

With the developments of Freudian theory located in a positivistic scientific paradigm, psychoanalysis was launched into its first and lasting paradox: trying to know the unknown. Freud's Id psychology or theory of psychic determinism,

that the impetus for all life lies in instinctual drives, was a Modern, logical, positivistic stance that was to become the albatross in psychoanalysis that eventually had to be thrown off. However, in holding to the scientific consensus of his time, Freud was adhering to ‘..those restrictions, born from confidence in a paradigm...which turn out to be essential to the development of science (Kuhn 1962:24)’.

Freud’s dual instinct theory provided the dynamic beginning to psychoanalysis and although this aspect of his theory has undergone much revision, Eros and Thanatos - love and destruction, is still the riddle that pervades psychoanalytic discourse. While theorists of the Independent School of British Psychoanalysis believe we can love and hate at the same time and Winnicott (1969a) goes as far as to assert that love and destruction are part of the same impulse, classical psychoanalysis based its fundamental mechanisms of the psyche on the issue of their separation (Freud 1915). Since Freud, psychoanalysis in all its forms has always been, and still is, located in the paradox of the dynamic interplay between conscious and unconscious and what was a paradox to be solved for classical psychoanalysis is now tolerated, held and celebrated as the very essence of creativity and meaning. Chapter three introduces the impact of these post Freudian shifts and their implications for art, creativity and aesthetics.

When Freud attempted to apply his theory to the arts he did not deviate from his ambivalence regarding the capacity for psychoanalysis to contribute significantly to the area of aesthetics. His papers, *The Moses of Michaelangelo*, (Freud 1911), *Creative Writers and Daydreaming* (Freud 1908) and his work on Leonardo da Vinci, (Freud 1910) incorporate similar disclaimers. However, although psychoanalysis may not be able to address all the complex issues that make up aesthetics, namely, the creative process, aesthetic value and aesthetic experience, it offers a sophisticated theory of unconscious motivation and symbolism. It is at this very juncture that a partnership between psychoanalytic inquiry and aesthetics has been particularly fruitful.

Freud essentially related art to the dream and the product of neurosis. Dreams have a primary place in Freud’s theory of the psyche since they are considered the

foremost avenue to the mechanisms governing unconscious functioning. Being governed by Primary Process in the form of images, dreams enable disguised unconscious processes to bypass the ego and superego. In his seminal book *The Interpretation of Dreams* he writes:

Now that the old antithesis between conscious life and dream life has been reduced to its proper proportions by the establishment of unconscious psychical reality, a number of dream-problems with which earlier writers were deeply concerned have lost their significance. Thus some of the activities whose successful performance in dreams excited astonishment are now no longer to be attributed to dreams but to unconscious thinking... (Freud 1900 : 773).

In dream work Freud emphasised the necessity of disguised expression through the Primary Process mechanisms of displacement, condensation and symbolisation. By the process of making one thing stand for another and collapsing more than one experience and memory into another, the wish fulfilling forces of the instincts result in the formation of a dream. Representations resulting from this unconscious work, like the art object, may also be independent of the dreamer, having their source in cultural symbols. The work of the dream transforms what Freud calls 'latent', unconscious content into a manifest form which is available to conscious awareness. This product can be reached by a process of breaking up and unfettered free association. An art work, like a dream can be used to tap into the unconscious processes of the artist and lead to the analysis of artists themselves. The pictorial and metaphorical aspect of the dream becomes the psyche's aesthetic product. 'The dream is the quintessence of narrative, cast in the artistic and awesome arrangement of a linear, plot-oriented, sequential story... (Grotstein 2000 : 11).'

In his first attempt to apply psychoanalysis to art, Freud focussed on the life and work of Leonardo de Vinci (Freud 1910). In this treatise he chose, as part of his analysis, the themes of narcissism, homosexuality and the defence mechanism

of sublimation (Blum 2003). It is also in this paper that he uses the term 'pathography' and distinguishes it from biography: 'Pathography does not in the least aim at making the great man's achievements intelligible (Freud 1910 :130)'. Here he makes the point that biographers are concerned with idealisation of their subject, sacrificing, 'the truth to an illusion, and for the sake of their infantile phantasies abandon the opportunity of penetrating the most fascinating secrets of human nature (Freud : 1910 :130)'. For Freud, neurotic symptoms provide deep, more meaningful clues. In this sense, pathography differs from biography in that it has its origins in a neurotic model connoting the selective reconstruction of a pattern of symptoms. This approach tends to inherit the Romantic notion of the artist as intensely emotional and in psychological conflict (Spitz, 1985). For Freud:

An artist is once more in rudiments an introvert, not far removed from neurosis. He is oppressed by excessively powerful instinctual needs, he desires to win honour, power, love, wealth, fame and the love of women; but he lacks the means of achieving these satisfactions (Freud 1916 : 376).

In the classical model, using the pathographic approach, art is seen as a neurotic manifestation where the analyst becomes, without a patient, more of a detective uncovering wish fulfilment, conflicts, and repressions. For the artist and the viewer the art object serves to assuage ungratified wishes. There is little explanation here of the creative process or formal aspects of art - there are many neurotics, but much less are there 'good' artists. Spitz (op.cit.) finds that pathography does not ultimately succeed in informing us as to how the artistic transformation occurs in the mind of the artist favouring instead, unconscious iconography over formal qualities. Art, in the pathographic approach becomes biographical evidence rather than a consideration of the object as art.

Perhaps Freud's most accepted view of art can be found in his paper *Creative Writers and Daydreaming* (Freud 1908). He reinforces the view that

artists provide themselves and their spectators with the opportunity to dream without shame - a pleasurable, blissful escape from reality. In his *New Introductory Lectures* he writes: 'Art is almost always harmless and beneficent; it does not seek to be anything but an illusion (Freud 1932 :195)'. Dreams and art have in common the task of representing the unconscious in disguised form - both attempt to transform the unacceptable unconscious into symbols and meanings that are tolerable. The artist will therefore utilise the mechanisms of disguise used in dreams, one of which is *condensation* and Freud speculates that the Mona Lisa's smile condenses two conflictual aspects of Leonardo's biological mother - her tenderness and her seduction, her safety alongside her capacity for destruction (Freud 1910:108). The analysis of the mechanisms of condensation, displacement and symbolisation open a pathway beneath the manifest to the underlying communication of the unconscious and symbolism becomes the ego's ability to deal with unfulfilled wishes. This notion of symbol formation is also carried through in Kleinian theory which will be discussed in the next chapter.

The first opposition to Freud's notion of art as neurosis came from the field of Ego psychology. Theorists such as Heinz Hartmann and Ernst Kris realigned the focus of psychoanalytic theory to emphasise the adaptive role of the ego. Where the classical conceptualisation of ego functions were considered to be located fundamentally in psychic conflict, these theorists, while retaining the notion that ego functions are synthetic in nature, saw language, perception and thinking as conflict free functions as well (Blanck and Blanck 1974). By bringing ego functions out of their conflictual embeddness, Hartmann and Kris provided psychoanalysis with a basis for a departure from the Freudian notion that the origin of art is the neurotic infantile wish. Instead, art could now be seen as an activity in itself.

Kris (1952) retained the notion of art as regression to Primary Process, but stressed that it was *controlled regression*. In this sense he remains essentially classically Freudian in his assumption that art and creativity involve the management of drive. For Kris there were basically two forms of regression - that which overwhelms the ego and that which is in the service of the ego. It is

in the latter that he locates the artist's practice where ego functions regulate and control Primary Process. The aesthetic creation involves the ego's attempt to hold and use its boundaries over the unconscious. While Freud considered regression to Primary Process essential for art, it was Kris who answered the obvious question as to how the artist 'gets back' from this arena. For Kris, artists enter this place *already in control*. Instead of primary process having a one way influence on secondary process, the latter acts upon the former, creating a different relationship between the dream and art. This aspect of creativity is taken up later by Hannah Segal, a student of Klein, in her article *Delusion and Artistic Creativity* (Segal 1974). In Kris' account the artist needs an integrated ego that can have control over instinctual drives. Here art is *not* conceptualised as neurosis but as an adaptive process.

Kris retained Freud's parallel of art and dreams, but instead of an unconscious wish seeking expression, the emphasis was placed on how unconscious wishes were used and accommodated by the functions of the ego. For Kris a multiplicity of meanings are created by the ego, which like the dream, are overdetermined. It is here that he makes a significant comment on the form and content of art - that meanings are made up of associations with culture and symbolism. Art is seen as a process of communication and recreation in which ambiguity, which is seen as a circular process, facilitates a relationship between artistic production and the viewer. In the end, both become co-creators within the arena of the art object through the loosening of ego functions. This process is mediated by the role of symbols which stimulate Primary Process. 'Good art' persists if it has a high level of ambiguity and therefore, interpretability (Spitz, 1985). In line with Freud, Kris' theory adhered to the assumption that metaphorical thinking was fundamentally primitive and regressive, but added that when under the control of the ego, served adaptive and creative functions.

Alongside Kris, art historian Ernst Gombrich (1968) considered Freud's ideas on the joke mechanism to be his most fertile contribution to the problem of aesthetics in that, like the dream, it is the form of the joke (condensation, contradiction) rather than the content which provides aesthetic satisfaction. This

is also taken up by Anton Ehrenzweig (1967) in his book *The Hidden Order of Art*. In the joke, like the dream, an ambiguous word functions to encapsulate more than one communication. The rational associations with words are disrupted, changing word as thing into word as symbol. Displacement, one of the mechanisms of dreamwork, was considered to have a link with the mechanisms of the joke by switching contexts with verbal ambiguity.

Both classical psychoanalysis and Ego Psychology emphasised the role of regression and primary process in the production of art, but for Freud it involved wish fulfilment and a neurotic expression of the mechanisms of defence. The artist's inner life was privileged over the artistic product, the artist being seen as someone who has not come to terms with instinctual satisfaction but who has the capacity for the expression of erotic ambitions and wish fulfilment. Instinctual content was seen as the core of the artistic product, but its expansion into form remained unexplained and left to the particular talent of the artist. Pathography takes the work of art and combines it with whatever is known of the artist's life, using as its interpretive basis, the model of neurotic conflict. In this sense Freud's view of the artist remains within the Romantic, critical tradition. In many ways, his view of art was limited to his own artistic preferences and scientific milieu and used as an extension to his clinical theory (Khuns 1983). Freud was aware that art was the outcome of a certain practice but never went on to develop this theoretically.

Freud's concept of the Death Instinct, although also used to preserve life, remained a fundamentally destructive force. Unlike later theorists, it had no role in the establishment of subjectivity. Art, as an illusion, functioned to harness its unacceptability in the form of a waking version of dreaming. Kris, while keeping in line with Id psychology and the notion of instinctual drive, moved away from the notion of art as neurotic to that of unconscious processes under the control of the ego. This began to address the formal aspects of art by considering the diversity of ambiguity rather than simply content. Like Ehrenzweig, he realised the potential of the joke mechanism in extending the limitations of the pathographic approach.

What is characteristic of both the ego psychology and classical, Id psychology is that they are located within the recesses of the psyche. They are solely *intrapsychic*. However, in addition to unconscious meaning, art has a history and a tradition. Being both intersubjective and public, it is more than merely a shared dream. The next chapter deals with developments in psychoanalysis that extend the intrapsychic to the interpersonal by the necessary entry of 'other' into psychoanalytic theory and specifically into the dialogue with the arts.

Chapter two

Restoration of the Maternal Body: Kleinian Aesthetics

It is obvious that the desire to make reparation, to make good the injury psychologically done to the mother and also to restore herself was at the bottom of the compelling urge to paint (Klein 1929:235).

Where classical psychoanalysis saw the art object as a collection of symbols that represented the artist's conflicts and wishes, Kleinian psychoanalysis sees art as a representation and process having its roots in the early mother/infant dyad. Klein's reorientation of the Death Instinct, her concepts of unconscious phantasy, psychological positions and Projective Identification are discussed below. These concepts are intrinsic to the development of Kleinian aesthetics.

When Melanie Klein entered the psychoanalytic forum she changed many things. Amongst others, she changed the understanding of the content of the unconscious and introduced the possibility that, not only do psychic processes pass from m/other to infant, but that infants, in phantasy, place their primitive contents into the psyche of the m/other. The management of the Death Instinct, therefore, began to change with its modification lying in the earliest relationship with m/other. These new formulations began to introduce a theory of 'objects' into psychoanalysis, broadly named 'Object Relations Theory' (Greenberg and Mitchell 1983). With these developments, the first significant move away from a purely drive, Id related model of the mind to that of the importance of the interpersonal influence of other or 'object' was brought about.

The previous section introduced the concept of Ego in relation to Kris' view of the artistic process. The relationship between ego, self and subjectivity will be returned to again in a later chapter, but another important psychoanalytic concept needs to be considered here - that of the *object*. This term has a particular history in psychoanalysis and has its origins in Freud's early work on the aims of instincts (Mitchell and Black 1995:13). In keeping with a positivistic paradigm and the vision of a scientifically acceptable model of the mind, the term *object* is put

forward as the entity that satisfies an instinctual aim. An object therefore does not only designate the *person* who satisfies an instinctual urge, but can also refer to a thing, a material recipient, an idea or an ideology. However, an object is not just *any thing*, it is something invested with emotion and psychic energy - the object of cathexis. 'The object means a loved or hated person, place, thing or fantasy (Hamilton 1992 : 5)'. Here, what is being referred to is an *external object*. This term has particular significance in later psychoanalytic theories where art, and the materials of art making, are considered cathected objects.

Despite the depersonalised terminology, the word 'object' is still vigorously retained in psychoanalysis and is sometimes used interchangeably with 'other'. Freud wrote of memory traces, introjections and identifications but he did not develop a theory of internal objects beyond its designation as an external entity that answered to an instinctual aim. With the contribution of Klein's concept of the transfer of psychic contents into another, which she named Projective Identification, came the possibility that the other, or the object, had more than just the function of instinctual satisfaction. Instead, the object had a job of work to do that was fundamentally more complex and reciprocal. The term object is retained but now, more particularly, it is human in the form of a m/other who receives psychic content and actively changes it (Grotstein 1981). Where ego psychology concerned itself with the mediation of unconscious impulses, object relations theorists established, as their focus, the relationship of the ego or self to the external world of other. In this way Kleinian theory made a new contribution to psychoanalysis and aesthetics in that the theory of self and object could now be applied to artistic activity and appreciation.

Essential to this formulation is another important development in Kleinian thinking - the concept of *unconscious phantasy*. Although Klein saw her theoretical contributions as remaining faithful to basic Freudian concepts, especially in her solid retention of the Death Instinct, the notion of unconscious phantasy radically changed the concept of the *content* of the unconscious. In addition to external objects, she introduced the notion of *internal objects*. While retaining Freud's concept of instinctual drive, she postulated that internal objects

are a product of the mental manifestation of drive (Greenberg and Mitchell 1983 : 131). This is possibly the most contentious aspect of her theory - one that imputes to the infant a primitive capacity to mentate. Ogden (1990 : 13-14) attempts a solution to this issue by drawing a similarity between the concept of inherited internal objects and Chomsky's theory of language acquisition. Internal objects are of the same order - phylogenetically inherited potentials that achieve realisation by interaction with an outside other. Internal objects can be seen, therefore, as another inherited developmental template.

In Kleinian theory these internal objects are also referred to as 'part objects' - fragmented bits and pieces, essentially of the maternal body and of parental intercourse. Where Klein departs from Freud is by postulating an early, given, embryonic ego - a presymbolic, prelinguistic mental organisation that is capable of a number of strategies to protect the infant psyche from the destructive internal attacks deriving from the Death Instinct. The infant achieves this by placing these psychic fragments, in phantasy, into another for safekeeping. This form of psychic hide and seek is achieved through a phantasy version of cutting up, throwing out and taking back - what Klein termed Splitting, Projective Identification and Introjection. All of these manoeuvres centre around the early threat of destruction that originates in the Death Instinct.

Where objects start out as external for Freud, Klein sees their origins in the psyche of the infant. These objects are the mental representations of instincts and do not have the status of thought. Instead, they are conceptualised as psychosomatic phenomena that accompany psychic and bodily urges awaiting a relationship with another to coax them into the world of cognition. Although Klein postulated a nascent ego, she did not develop a theory of the self, nor did she typically use this term, but her early theory of mental functioning is built around internal and external psychic forces that impinge on *something*, and for this she used the term 'ego' (Grosskurth 1986 : 32).

When Klein introduced the concept of 'unconscious phantasy' to the British Society, the use of 'ph' instead of the commonplace use of 'f'/antasy, became the spelling of choice when referring to her theory of unconscious functioning.

Kleinians still use this spelling today, but it was never taken up by American Psychoanalysts who still employ the spelling 'fantasy' (Kohon 1986). The choice of which form of the word to use is not an easy one since the Kleinian use of 'ph' clearly indicates that one is in the realm of unconscious functioning, whereas the use of f/fantasy does not. This thesis will employ both spellings, making use of the form of the word that is taken up by the particular theorist being discussed. In the same way object and other, self and ego, Freudian, Id and Classical psychoanalysis will be used interchangeably.

For Kleinian psychoanalysis, unconscious phantasy is about both content and process. Inherited internal objects constitute unconscious phantasy as does the process of believing that these internal part objects can be disowned. What underpins unconscious phantasy and part object relating is the necessary unknowness of the separate existence of other. For this early form of mental functioning, which matures later on to incorporate this knowledge, Klein used the term 'position'. Rather than developmental phases, these represent ways of organizing internal and external experience - one 'position' being characteristic of early primitive mental functioning and a second characterised by more mature mental functioning (Klein 1935 : 289-290). These two positions are implicated in the Kleinian theory of aesthetics and are taken up by later writers in this field both clinical and non clinical.

The earlier position, which Klein named 'Paranoid-schizoid' sees the psychic task as protecting the nascent ego from destructive attacks perceived as both internal and external. The management of 'paranoid anxiety' becomes the unconscious phantasy of 'riddance' (Bollas 1995 : 59). Where paranoid refers to the fear of annihilation, schizoid becomes the mechanism of dealing with this by splitting off the nascent ego from danger. Defence mechanisms of splitting, Projective Identification, idealisation and denial become the crude but omnipotent and uncompromising army of the psyche. In this position there is no awareness of other as separate from self - the world, both externally and internally, is omnipotently created and can be destroyed, recreated and divided according to psychic will. During this phase there is no subjectivity, no sense of "I-ness".

Rather, subjectivity is the experience of self as the *object* of external forces. Psychic events simply happen to 'it'. This is a cosmic landscape, dotted with malevolent meteorites that can, at any moment, destroy the infant unit. Although the infant can employ omnipotent defence mechanisms to dodge danger, this is essentially a closed system. There is no learning from experience.

If all goes well and the nascent ego is kept viable and if the m/other accepts and processes these psychic contents, maturation and the dominance of the life force over destruction delivers the infant into a maturer form of psychic functioning - that of the 'Depressive Position'. Before going on to outline the management of depressive anxiety, it should be noted that Kleinian theory retains Freud's dual instinct theory and the psychic imperative of keeping life and death forces separate. However, a new emphasis begins to emerge - the death instinct and its vicissitudes become primary. 'For Klein, the death instinct exerts a far more powerful influence on the way the infant organises experience (Ogden 1990: 32)'. All mental functioning is now seen as being harnessed in the service of its management.

So, after good triumphs over bad, and the nascent ego is protected from destructive attacks, the infant is ready to negotiate the formidable task of otherness. Klein does not elaborate on the mechanisms of transition to the next phase of psychological functioning and cites the primacy of organic maturation and the object's capacity to provide a dominance of good experience over bad (Klein 1935:284). What delivers the infant from this closed system are the processes generated by the mother/infant unit and it is with the concept of Projective Identification that Klein launches psychoanalysis into the world of both internal and external objects and their interplay. It is the external object, the m/other, that processes the infant's experience 'in a way that differs qualitatively from anything that has been possible for the infant on his own (Ogden op.cit. : 35)'. The concept of Projective Identification connects the Freudian psyche with the interpersonal.

Even though the ego acquires a conviction that the ideal object (since omnipotence demands perfection) dominates over dangerous objects and

therefore the Life Instinct eclipses the Death Instinct, the problem of aggression does not go away. Whereas in the Paranoid schizoid position there is a fear of the destruction of self as object, the entry into the Depressive Position confronts the infant with the fear that its destruction will destroy the other. In 1935, Klein presented her seminal paper *A Contribution to the Psychogenesis of Manic Depressive States* to the British Society outlining this aspect of her theory:

I have already stated that my experience has led me to conclude that the loss of the love object takes place during the phase of development in which the ego makes the transition from partial to total incorporation of the object (1935 : 45) *and goes on to state...* the ego comes to the realisation of its love for the good object, a whole object and in addition, a real object, together with an overwhelming feeling of guilt towards it (Klein 1935 : 290).

Although the Depressive position is ontologically later than that of the Paranoid Schizoid Position, Klein developed this aspect of her theory first. These ideas were further elaborated in her paper *Mourning and its Relation to the Manic Depressive states* written in 1940.

The entry of the individual into the Depressive Position heralds the beginning of true subjectivity. With this transition there is a reduction in the omnipotence of the Paranoid Schizoid phase and the realisation of otherness. Separateness brings with it a new set of anxieties regarding aggression and the Death Instinct - if the object is separate from self, then it can be destroyed by self. For Klein the management of Depressive anxiety is the hallmark of psychic maturation. There is no progression out of this into another stage of functioning and although both forms of psychic functioning exist in relation to each other throughout life, the predominance of Depressive functioning over Paranoid Schizoid functioning presents the psychic optimum.

The object in its otherness, with both goodness and badness, now has to be negotiated and the success of this phase hinges on the infant's capacity to repair its damage and to mourn that which has been lost. What the infant is now able to

experience is an awareness of the impact of its destruction on other which is accompanied by guilt and a desire to make amends. For Klein, this is the best we can do. Intrinsic to the problem of a separate other is the additional burden of loss and it is here that Klein indirectly contributes to the theory of symbolism that is taken up by later writers in this tradition, amongst others, Segal (1952) and Bion (1961).

Where classical psychoanalysis viewed art as a unique way of achieving instinctual gratification, Kleinian object relations aesthetics sees art as a particular way of relating to an object. The artist and spectator are involved in a continual cycle of appreciation and reparation, a restitution of the original fear of the destruction of the maternal body and the goodness of her otherness.

Klein contributed three papers on the theme of art and creativity: *Infantile Anxiety Situations Reflected in a work of Art and the Creative Impulse* (Klein 1929); *On Identification* (Klein 1955), and *Some Reflections on Oresteia* (Klein 1963). These papers provided the foundation for a Kleinian aesthetic which now rests on the view that the aesthetic interaction lies in the relationship of artists to their medium and subject matter and spectators to their art objects. These experiences derive from the unconscious meeting between infant and mother. The creative act can now be seen as functioning from either of these two positions depending on the artists level of psychic functioning in relation to the externality of his or her materials. The unconscious phantasy of one or either of these positions informs the use of materials and symbols.

The ideas put forward in Klein's three papers were taken up by Segal and in her article *Notes on Symbol Formation*, she writes: 'The object of desire which had to be given up can be replaced by a symbol (Segal 1957:162)'. Symbols function as substitute representations for conflictual external relationships. The individual's healthy relationship to outside reality has its foundation in the capacity to develop symbols. In Segal's formulations of creativity and art this was to have important implications. Symbols have the capacity to lessen Depressive anxiety where they are projected onto the external world, endowing it with new symbolic meaning derived from early experiences with objects. Through this process a form of

unconscious freedom is achieved: "The wish to recreate the object gives the individual the unconscious freedom in the use of symbols" (Segal 1957:167). Artists, through symbolic means, recreate a new world restoring their internal world and their internal objects. In distinguishing the artist from the psychotic, she postulates that an illusion is created by the artist that is akin to delusion, but unlike the psychotic there is a *real* creation that functions as a separate object. Ultimately, the artist has a clear sense of phantasy and reality. Segal remained true to the view that the Depressive position is the heart of the creative process. What is created therefore has to be mourned and symbolised. Lost, dead objects are made into art. She uses this distinction to highlight 'good' art from 'bad', seeing unsuccessful art as the operation of phantasy of the Paranoid Schizoid position combined with an unsuccessfully worked through Depressive position.

Klein retained Freud's notion of the Death Instinct in her concept of the Paranoid Schizoid position where attacks generated by this drive became the basis of envy, hate and sadism. Envy, a malfunction of the Paranoid Schizoid position, develops out of the failure of the object to mitigate the destructive world of the infant. Envy, a derivative of the Death Instinct, destroys the good, and in so doing, destroys all creativity. This mechanism is seen to be involved in both artistic inhibition and appreciation. Theorists such as Money-Kyrle (1961) and Wollheim (1987) draw on Klein's concept of envy for the understanding of the phenomenon of artistic rivalry. Here, the envy of other artists' work destroys creativity resulting in a shutting down of the creative process.

Both Segal and Jacques (1965) see the nature of creativity changing during midlife. Following the pattern of Paranoid Schizoid functioning, creativity of the early twenties and thirties is seen to be intense, spontaneous, 'ready made' with Jacques naming this 'precipitate creativity'. In later life with the capacity to tolerate more depressive anxiety, creativity becomes more 'sculpted' - where there is found, 'a considered perception of the externally emergent creation and the reaction to it (op.cit. : 288)'. In this period there is an appropriate contemplative pessimism. Jacques observes that little is known of Michaelangelo's work between the ages of forty two and sixty five and that typically, in many artists,

there is either a period of arrest in artistic production or an evident change in the quality of work. Often one sees a constructive resignation - a capacity for artists to acknowledge their own shortcomings in what becomes a later reworking through of the Depressive Position, 'A quality of depth in mature creativity which stems from constructive resignation and detachment (Jacques 1965:246)'.

These speculations follow a typically Kleinian perspective that creativity is linked to the artist's capacity to respect and react to the otherness of their materials. More pre-midlife art will harness Paranoid Schizoid phantasies of perfection and omnipotent control over artistic materials. Overall, the Kleinian world remains essentially a pessimistic Freudian one, believing in our fundamental destructiveness but soothing this inevitability with a belief in the capacity for reparation. This particular maturity eventually finds its way into cultural pursuits.

The work of art historian and critic Adrian Stokes, who underwent analysis with Klein, built on the importance of the Paranoid Schizoid and Depressive positions. Depending on how the materials are connected to the artist's phantasy, Stokes makes the distinction between 'carving' and 'modelling'. Artistic production involves the interplay of these two Kleinian positions (Stokes 1963 :217- 221). With 'carving' comes 'polishing' which draws on Depressive functioning where the life inherent in the material is brought out. Here there is a continual responding to the integrity and separateness of art materials. With 'modelling', the otherness of the material is not acknowledged and uncovered, but rather, is created as matter for the artist's imagination, desires and phantasies essentially involving the part-object relations of the uncohered ego. Little communing with the independent qualities of the material is involved. These two positions co-exist within one artist and may have dominance at particular points in the history of art.

In his book *Invitation in Art*, Stokes (1965:273) deviates somewhat from traditional Kleinian aesthetics by postulating, in the 'modelling' mode, an undifferentiated state of merger. Here he makes a distinction between the modeller's tendency to create a manic unity with subject matter with an ability for a harmonious integration. For Kleinians, fusion tends to be seen as a regressive

pull towards the omnipotent phantasies of the Paranoid Schizoid phase and therefore not part of true Depressive creativity. Stokes adheres to this but makes a place for another facet of the creative process which involves a merging or surrender. In traditional Kleinian aesthetics there is no place for this phenomenon in mature creativity and products which emanate from Paranoid Schizoid functioning are relegated to regressive productions.

What Wilfred Bion introduces is the importance for creativity of a middle level, that which is held *between* the two positions. For Bion creativity involves the toleration of a state of uncertainty. Like Segal, his theory of creativity, and that of thinking in particular, develops from his work with schizophrenics. His understanding of creativity is intrinsically linked to his theory of thinking where creative dissolution involves an interdependence of fragmentation and integration of Paranoid and Depressive functioning (O'Shaugnessy 1981). The artist has to withstand fragmentation, anxiety and doubt. Where the maternal object is the container for raw, unmetabolized mental phenomena in her capacity to function as a container, artists have to be able to perform these oscillations themselves.

For traditional Kleinians, the individual remains in a Depressive struggle with, ideally, containable guilt, and a belief in reparation and the comfort of symbols. Bion takes this further in his assertion of the existence of a fundamental truth. He calls this the "ultimate reality" which he terms "O" (Grotstein 2000 : xxxi). The artistic product is implicated here in that it can capture meaning which lies outside its own terms of reference. Forms from another realm of reality are conveyed beyond the phenomena of which it composed, making known the unknowable. The experience of this ultimate truth depends on a particular emotional link with the observer. By supplementing Freud's instinct theory with Plato's theory of inherent forms, which are 'pure thoughts', Bion aligns his theory with Kant's preconceptualised 'things in themselves'. Mental space becomes 'a thing in itself', where ultimate reality lies - the mystical state of 'O'. This is where his view of the function of art is located. Likewise, the capacity for aesthetic experience is inseparable from truth and is not the result of the outcome of successful Depressive functioning. Grotstein extends the mystical element of Bion's theory by

reformulating a fundamental question about the unconscious and instead of asking, 'what is the unconscious?' he asks: 'who is the unconscious' and states as one of his aims: 'to restore the unconscious to its former conception before Freud, that of a mystical, preternatural, numinous second self (Grotstein 2000 : xvi)'.

Stern, a theorist in the Relational tradition, draws on Bion's work stating: 'Chaos, subjectivity and disorder are more than the absence of communicability and mutuality - they are also the source of novelty (Stern 1983 : 93).' He cites the work of Arieti another theorist, like Bion and Segal, whose work evolved from experience with Schizophrenics. Arieti used the terms 'amorphous cognition' and 'endoception' to describe this particular creative process. He moved beyond Kris' theory of regression and like Stokes and Ehrenzweig, postulated a process which integrates both Primary and Secondary process. Drive theory and regression as the primary principles in the creative process take a lesser role (Arieti, in Stern 1983 : 95).

Ehrenzweig's view of art also argued for a revision of the distinction between Primary and Secondary Process . He questioned the classical distinction of two separate antithetical forms of functioning as being exclusively either conscious or unconscious. Like Stokes, he drew on Object Relations Theory for the understanding and criticism of art, focussing on the relationship between artists and their use of materials and to cultural objects in general. In his book *The Hidden Order of Art* (Ehrenzweig 1967) he attempts to reformulate traditional psychoanalytic concepts emphasising both conscious chaos and unconscious transitions. What traditional Psychoanalytic theory omitted to accept was that the imagery of the Primary Process has it's own substructure (1967 : 279). He differs from Kris who he feels does not acknowledge the constructive role of the unconscious in the creative process. Rather than secondary process of the conscious ego, it is the underlying substructure of the unconscious that holds the true aesthetic order.

Ehrenzweig outlined three phases in the creative process (1967:111-124). The first stage involves an initial projection of fragmented parts of the self into the art work where unknown, split-off aspects of the self appear accidental and

fragmented. This is followed by an unconscious scanning that integrates and brings into play the artist's unconscious substructure. Finally, there is a reintroduction of this hidden substructure into a higher level of ego functioning. One can see here how Ehrenzweig brings into play the navigation of both Paranoid and Depressive functioning in the creative process, seeing the deepest unconscious level as responsible for truly meaningful symbolism. This would involve a '...tentative gradual descent into the oceanic depth...an oceanic-manic image that can hardly be visualised in its extreme undifferentiation (1967 : 199-200)'.

For Ehrenzweig, the Life Instinct and the Death Instinct, operating at the level of both unconscious creation and formal properties, create a cycle of disintegration and integration in this creative rhythm. An initial fragmentation of reality is followed by an undifferentiated state of 'manic oceanic' fusion. This, in turn, is followed by a process of reintegration into conscious structures that may or may not result in the production of an art object. What is important in his reformulation is a move away from traditional Kleinian formulations by an insistence on a creative and essential state of fusion. As mentioned previously, for Kleinians this would constitute a purely manic phenomenon which is considered regressive and not characteristic of the mature creative process. For Ehrenzweig, like Bion, and to some extent Stokes, this state of courageous lack of differentiation becomes the nexus of the creative process.

Locating much of his theory in Gestalt psychology, Ehrenzweig postulated a tension between a surface gestalt that is conscious and a deeper order that is unconscious. This 'surface and depth' functioning can be seen in Modern non-representational art, which he considered a serious exploration into unconscious phenomena. This is where the tension is at its most extreme. Like Pollock's drip paintings, Gestalt free forms relax conscious control increasing the level of toleration for both surface and depth qualities at the same time (1967 : 76). The artist, unlike the schizophrenic is able to inhabit these tensions without destructive fragmentation and perhaps, unlike the classical psychoanalytic view, the artist is seen as a competent schizophrenic rather than a gifted neurotic.

Ghent in his consideration of masochism as a distortion of the wish to

surrender, sees the creative process as the act of “taking in” (1990 : 231). The individual has to surrender the ‘surface mind’ of the manifest to allow the form free ‘depth mind’ to dominate. Here, unlike Kleinian theory, surrender is not seen as a form of defeat but a quality of freedom.

Peter Fuller (1980) drawing from both psychoanalysis and Marxism concurs with the importance of a state of fusion and uses the work of Mark Rothko to illustrate this. Rothko’s large and absorbing canvases invite the viewer into the vast silence of Bion’s notion of mental space, which is uncontained or ‘unmentalized’ (Grotstein 2000 : 87). Both Fuller and Wollheim (1974) extend the aesthetic developments of the British school of psychoanalysis and while it is beyond the scope of this work to enter into their ideas in any length, both develop a bodily account of aesthetics where Wollheim bases his theory on the experience of the corporeal and Fuller provides an account more in line with Bion’s theories of thinking and mental space. Glover (1998) provides a comprehensive account of their contributions to the field of psychoanalytic aesthetics.

Psychoanalytic thought first conceptualised artistic creativity and aesthetics as neurosis and dream work, the artistic product being a conflict free privilege, a temporary way out of the vicissitudes of the instincts and the demands of the Id. This formulation was challenged by ego psychologists who included the notion of controlled regression in the service of the ego, modifying Freud’s emphasis on repression and defence. With the developments of Kleinian psychoanalysis, the Death Instinct still remained primary with creativity being located in an uneasy truce between life and death in the form of symbolic restoration of the maternal body. Essentially, these theories hinge on the management of the separation of life giving and destructive forces. With the development of post Kleinian ideas, and the work of analysts in the Independent tradition, the role of the Death Instinct underwent revision as did the role of illusion in the creative process. The next chapter discusses how theorists of the Independent School brought the process of creative fusion into focus, decentering the twin poles of consciousness and unconscious into a theory and celebration of paradox.

Chapter three

Creativity and Illusion: The Independent School

We recognise two basic instincts and give each of them its own aim. How the two of them are mingled in the process of living, how the death instinct is made to serve the purposes of Eros, especially by being turned outwards as aggressiveness - these are tasks which are left to future investigation (Freud 1932 : 141).

The previous chapter outlined the development in psychoanalytic thinking from a primarily intrapsychic view of mental functioning to one that stressed the primacy of the maternal infant dyad with its implications for psychoanalytic aesthetics. This was given impetus by Klein's theory of early object relations and the importance of defence mechanisms such as Projective Identification in the management of the Death Instinct. In many ways it was Klein's theory and practice that became the main catalyst for the divisions in British psychoanalysis leading to the emergence of the Independent group.

Ernest Jones founded the British Psychoanalytic society in 1919 and one of the many issues that concerned the organisation in the 1930's was that of lay analysis (Baudrey 1994). At the centre of the controversy regarding the acceptance of non medically trained analysts was the matter of child analysis which at that time was associated with nonprofessional work. The perception existed that this form of treatment was easier than adult analysis (Kohon 1986).

In the same way that the New York School of painters was influenced by European emigres fleeing Nazi Germany, the history of British Psychoanalysis has its most important roots in the same influx. Before arriving in Britain, both Melanie Klein and Anna Freud were conducting child analysis in Germany, one in Berlin and the other in Vienna. The history of British Psychoanalysis is inseparable from the influence of these two leading child analysts who differed significantly on major tenets of Psychoanalytic theory and technique. Klein established her unique position when she delivered her paper *A contribution to the*

Psychogenesis of Manic Depressive States in 1935 where she introduced her key concept of the 'Depressive Position' to the Society (King 1994).

Between 1943 and 1944 the Society met in what has come to be known as the Controversial Discussions in order to clarify a number of issues including Klein's particular position with regard to the accepted principles of Freudian theory. Although Klein probably did not consider her theory a radical departure from Freud, there was little doubt that her theory of 'positions' and specific forms of object relating was directing psychoanalysis on a very different route. In a rather patronising statement regarding the outcome of Anna Freud and Klein's controversy, Kohon concludes: 'What started as a war between two woman ended up with a 'gentleman's agreement'.... (1986:44)'. The society resolved the situation by making provision for all approaches to exist. Finally there were three groups: the A group which was Kleinian; the B group which included followers of Anna Freud and the C group which included analysts that were not aligned to either of these two groups which came to be known as the Independent Group. The independent position could be understood as a reluctance to be bound by theoretical dogma or hierarchy (Kohon op. cit.:49)

Most text books would group these analysts under the title "Object Relations Theorists" (Greenberg and Mitchell 1983). Many of them, like Winnicott would have resisted labelling of any sort and the Independent group consisted of many influential people amongst whom were Donald Winnicott, Michael Balint, Christopher Bollas, Masud Khan, Ronald Fairbairn and Marion Milner. Although these theorists vary in important ways they all hold the importance of the relationship to 'other' and maternal provision over the primacy of instinctual drives. Unconscious fantasy is privileged as is the central notion that the psyche is made up of, or populated with, internal representations of external relationships - what Fairbairn referred to as the 'endopsychic situation' (Hamilton 1992). These internal agencies were seen to be arranged and sorted by defence mechanisms fuelled by unconscious fantasy. The Independents who will be considered in this thesis will be Donald Winnicott, Christopher Bollas and to a lesser extent Marion Milner.

For these theorists the aesthetic experience resides in the young child's relationship to its mother and the illusion of merger. For both Winnicott (1951) and Bollas (1986) this concept is central for the understanding of creativity, self formation, symbol formation and aesthetic appreciation.

For Winnicott, living creatively was not the same as the creation of objects of art. Although not everyone can be an artist, everyone has the potential to live creatively. Unlike Freud who conceptualised creativity as sublimation and Klein who linked it with reparation, Winnicott locates creativity within the mother/infant dyad and at the very beginning of life. He called this 'primary creativity', (Winnicott 1969a:67) and considered it almost as an innate drive towards mental health and aliveness.

Primary creativity is held within the cocoon of what Winnicott terms 'maternal pre-occupation'. In *Psychoses and Child Care* he writes: 'The mental health of each child is laid down by the mother during her preoccupation with the care of her infant (Winnicott 1952 : 220)'. It is this preoccupation, and the foundation it provides, that is essential for the development of subsequent psychic tasks. The mother's readiness to respond to the infant's need, as it is manifested spontaneously, produces the 'readiness for an hallucination' (op.cit.: 223). The mother presents the breast just when the infant is ready to create it. In other words, the infant must, for a while, be protected from desire. This is what Winnicott means by 'primary creativity' - in the infants hallucinatory omnipotence s/he has created the world by simply needing it. This concept is not unlike what Bion refers to as the 'maternal reverie' (Anderson 1992), which connotes the necessary psychic attitude for the development of symbolic functions and the formation of thought. This state is also implicated in Bollas' (1986) concept of the maternal transformational object.

Central to the concept of 'illusion' is that of the 'spontaneous gesture'. In the infants state of 'going on being', which essentially refers to a total psychic permission to exercise all life processes without impingement, all gestures need to be protected in their spontaneity by maternal facilitation. The 'spontaneous gesture' represents the manifestation and the origins of what Winnicott terms the

“True Self”. (Self, spontaneity and its link to creativity will be carried further in later chapters in the context of Action painting). This original self emerges through facilitation and protection within the mother/infant unit by the illusion that the infant’s spontaneous gesture creates the world. The infant gestures and the mother responds as if there is no gap between what has been imagined and what has been presented.

It is in this phase of development that Winnicott postulated the phenomenon of a primitive ruthless self (1945) and it is within the safety of maternal preoccupation that this is exercised. He calls this ‘a ruthless object relationship’ (1945:154). At this time the infant is absolutely dependent and has no ability to know, consciously or unconsciously, this ruthless love for the mother. In this earliest phase where the infant and mother are psychically merged, the infant demonstrates this ruthlessness. Although there is the absence of intention, this early form of innate aggressive energy enables infants to mercilessly demand the conditions for their development. The healthy use of destruction in fantasy is dependent on the ruthless self having unbroken expression in early life. In his paper on *Primitive emotional Development* Winnicott writes:

The normal child enjoys a ruthless relation to his mother, only she can be expected to tolerate his ruthless relation to her mostly showing in play, and he needs his mother because only she can be expected to tolerate his ruthlessness in relation to her even in play, because this really hurts her and wears her out (1945:154).

Primary aggression, in the form of the infant’s ruthlessness, is without concern. Rather, it is ‘pre-concern’ and how this is responded to by the mother is of prime importance to mental health. In this phase, and later with the healthy use of other, the mother has to be able to tolerate her infant’s aggression. The failure of this creates a situation where aggression is split off and may become manifested in overt action.

Winnicott’s concept of aggression diverges significantly from that of Freud

and Klein and is seen as analogous to activity and motility. For Klein it is linked to envy, hate and sadism which Winnicott considers to emerge, not as the adjunct to an instinct, but as a result of environmental failure. With the concept of early primary aggression, Winnicott begins his radical reformulation of the role of infantile aggression. In answer to Freud's quote at the beginning of this chapter, Winnicott establishes infantile aggression as the appetite of instinctual love or the greed for life: 'It is convenient then to say that the primitive love impulse...has a destructive quality, though it is not the infant's aim to destroy.. (1939:10)'. Although the infant's behaviour can be seen by the observer or felt by the mother as cruel or hurting, this occurs without intention. For Freud, mental health and the capacity for socialised and civilised integration became the capacity for the psyche to control the Death Instinct, for Winnicott mental health involved the capacity to fuse this with love. He asserted that love and destruction are united and, more importantly, the capacity for one depends on the other.

On the safe platform of illusion comes the capacity to be disillusioned through the use of 'transitional objects'(Winnicott 1951 : 230). The transitional object is the first object that comes to stand for the mother and her functions and is the first use of a symbol in the act of play. It is the first instance of one thing standing for another and the beginning of separation of self from the mother/infant unit. In *Location of Cultural Experience* Winnicott writes: 'I have come to use the term cultural experience as an extension of the idea of transitional phenomena and of play... (Winnicott 1969a:99)'. It is here that the capacity for creative living is developed and becomes the continuation throughout life of the individual's ability to participate in culture. He makes clear the distinction between creative living and being artistically creative:

In a search for the self the person concerned may have produced something valuable in terms of art, but a successful artist may be universally acclaimed and yet have failed to find the self he or she is looking for. The self is not really to be found in what is made out of products or body or mind, however valuable these constructs may be in

terms of beauty, skill or impact. If the artist (in whatever medium) is searching for the self, then it can be said that in all probability there is already some failure for that artist in the field of general creative living. The finished creation never heals the underlying lack of a sense of self (Winnicott 1969 : 54-55).

It is interesting that Balint considers creativity as an activity where an external object is not present. The subject is on his or her own and the main issue is to produce something out of self. 'I propose to call this the level or area of creativity (1995:24)'. The creative act involves transforming internalised representations into some thing via an independent activity of self. Instead of creating with and through other, creativity becomes a self generated endeavour. He does not elaborate on this and it is unclear what the intrapsychic processes may be in relation to the early maternal relationship.

Winnicott sees the analytic setting with its formlessness of free association as providing the arena wherein the search for self can occur. Free association and surrender to uncertainty provides the individual with a place where the self can be found and exercised. Self, for Winnicott, is found within all areas of psychic development - in creative omnipotence, in the transitional space, in the holding environment, in the feeling of merger with the maternal figure and, most importantly, in the area of 'object usage'. In this sense the exercising of self is essentially a dialectical process. Winnicott's theory of 'object usage' will be elaborated below and forms the core of the reinterpretation of de Kooning's *Women* in the last chapter of this thesis.

Winnicott, and many of the other Independents, built on Klein's view of an infant primarily designed for human interaction but reconceptualised the role of overt aggression as being fundamentally connected to environmental failure. In this sense, their primary break was from the position of the Death Instinct and its aggressive derivatives as biologically given. Winnicott's concept of 'object usage' bears directly upon this reformulation where aggression is seen as fundamental to the establishment of self and subjectivity. For classical psychoanalysis aggression

deriving from the Death Instinct needs to be controlled and sublimated. During the Controversial Discussions, mentioned in the previous chapter, Winnicott encapsulated this shift by reminding the audience that the phenomenon of a bad mother really existed and that the roots of aggression may also reside in this failure (Kohon 1986). As his theory evolved, aggression became 'destruction' - a concept that came to perform a significant role in his work. If aggression is integrated into the personality it becomes the essential source of energy, play and creativity.

Following on from his earliest formulations concerning primary aggression, Winnicott worked and reworked the relationship between aggression and fantasy. The gradual use of the term 'destruction' incorporated the distinction between destroying in fantasy and destroying in reality. For Winnicott, destruction in *fantasy* became the heart of the discovery of other and subjectivity.

Developmentally, the healthy evolution of aggression, through omnipotence, illusion, ruthlessness and creative play comes to fruition, for Winnicott, at this crucial stage of 'object usage'. In his paper *Aggression in Relation to Emotional Development* he introduces this transition: '...the aggressive impulses do not give any satisfactory experience unless there is opposition (Winnicott 1950:215)'. What he previously calls 'primary aggression' and later 'life force' takes on an important role in the guise of destruction in fantasy. This primitive destructive urge, he stresses, belongs to the infant's early love. This, essentially, is Winnicott's revolutionary reformulation of Freud's early work on aggression and the Death Instinct. The love impulse is a fusion of love and destruction. In this vein, the paper *The Use of an Object and Relating Through Cross Identifications* (1968), which he works on almost until his death, became the cornerstone of his theory of healthy psychological development.

In a refinement of the notion of *The Use of an Object*, his paper published in the International Journal of Psychoanalysis in 1969b, he states: 'To use an object the subject must have developed a *capacity* to use objects...' He goes on: 'In the sequence one can say that first there is object relating, then in the end there is object usage (1969b:713) and we could add after this - the ability to use an object. The period of transitional phenomena heralds the emergence of the separate self

through the externalisation of other from the orbit of omnipotence. The infant's fantasies of destruction facilitate the ability to place the object outside of the self and enable the subject to apprehend an external world. This is considered to be the emergence of true subjectivity. In *The Use of an Object in the Context of Moses and Monotheism* Winnicott refers to this as 'the fate of the destructive drive (in Abrams 1996:24)'.

During the phase of 'object usage' the infant destroys the mother *in fantasy*. An object has to be acknowledged as external if it is not controlled or changed by the infant's fantasy. Unlike the period of object relating dominated by primary creativity and illusion, the maternal object now responds separately from the infant's fantasy. For an object to be external it has to survive the destruction of the infant and if the object survives then it is other - outside of the orbit of omnipotence. Winnicott writes: "In other words, he may well find that after 'subject relates to object' comes 'subject destroys object' (as it becomes external); and then may become *object survives* destruction by the subject (1969a:713)". And in fantasy, it becomes tearing, ripping and taking apart. Alongside Christopher Bollas' (1996) notion of 'cracking up', later chapters of this thesis utilise these ideas to interpret fracture in Modernist painting and de Kooning's approach to his six Women paintings exhibited in 1953.

Optimally, if successful object usage is negotiated, the mother remains the same - she survives and is granted her own autonomy and life. Her resources that were once created by the infant's illusion now belong 'outside' and can be used and appreciated as belonging to another. For Winnicott this is the true birth of subjectivity and a capacity to experience the world of reality and cultural objects.

American psychoanalysts in the mid 1990's extended the notion of the discovery of subjectivity through unconscious destruction. This tradition of thought has come to be called the Middle School of American psychoanalysis or the branch of Relational Psychoanalysis (Mitchell and Aron 1999: xviii). Drawing on later developments in Self psychology, intersubjectivity theory and hermeneutics, these ideas address the area between the intrapsychic and the interpersonal. Of importance here is the work of Jessica Benjamin and her consideration of how one

relates to another's independent consciousness. Like Winnicott, she recognises the role of destruction in the creation of a relationship between two subjectivities rather than only the separation of subject and object. Intersubjective theory postulates that the other must be recognized as another subject in order for the self to fully experience his or her subjectivity in the other's presence. (Benjamin 1999:186). Destruction, in this dialectical sense, is seen as the basis of true subjectivity. Unlike Freud's notion of instincts encountering the reality principle, aggression is the factor that *creates* externality. It is also beyond the integration of good and bad as theorised in the Kleinian concept of whole object relating. Benjamin sees this as the problem of the recognition of other and concludes: 'A relational psychoanalysis should leave room for the messy, intrapsychic side of creativity and aggression; it is the contribution of the intersubjective view that may give these elements a more hopeful cast, showing destruction to be the "other" of recognition (1999:199)'.

Christopher Bollas, another psychoanalytical thinker in the Independent tradition, and literary editor of the works of Winnicott, would take this further believing we have an obligation to consider life as an object in itself (Bollas 1995). Like Winnicott and Benjamin he explores the attainment of subjectivity and the creation of meaning through early relationships to objects. Amongst his theoretical contributions are those of the 'transformational object', the 'Unthought known' (Bollas 1986;1987) and his notion of the work of the unconscious which he terms 'cracking up.' (Bollas 1996). The concept of the 'transformational object' applies primarily to the field of aesthetic appreciation and complements Winnicott's notion of 'object usage' in the function of the canvas as a corporeal manifestation of the processing maternal other.

In his paper entitled *The Transformational Object* Bollas writes: through her own particular idiom of mothering, an aesthetic of being that becomes a feature of the infant's self...the mother's way of holding, responding, of selecting objects, of perceiving internal needs constitutes the culture that she creates for herself and her baby (1986: 83)'. The mother, as container of the infant's psychic contents, is the processor and transformer of the infant's internal and external world. This would

accord with Winnicott's notion of the Environmental mother who, through her maternal preoccupation, manages, coheres and brings into being the nascent self (1954-5:262-263). Bollas, however, stresses that more than an object, she is a process that becomes synonymous with internal and external gratifications. This is where Bollas differs from Winnicott - he takes the period of illusion, of object relating (in Winnicott's terms) and holds it out as something that is continually sought after in adult life. This period of relating becomes one that will *always* be identified with the alteration of self experience and one that is associated with aesthetic appreciation. It is the remnant of this early object relationship that lives on in adult life and forms the basis for the continuing search for objects that repeat this early phenomenon (Bollas 1986:87). Our appreciation of art in all its forms has its basis here. The quest is not about possessing the object but surrendering to it as a process.

Unlike Winnicott with his emphasis on illusion, Bollas sees the identification with a transformational object as *fact*: the mother does indeed transform the infant's world. In this sense the art object becomes what he terms a 'subjective object' - something outside of the self that is imbued with projected elements of this early relationship. The transitional object becomes displaced onto many subjective objects and what was an actual process 'can be displaced into symbolic equations (1986:85)'. Bollas sees this search in adult life as a quest for the metamorphosis of the self and the search for a 'preverbal ego memory'. When a deep subjective rapport with an art object is experienced, be it a painting or a poem, it is this ego experience that is being tapped: 'Never cognitively apprehended but existentially known. A psychosomatic fusion, an anticipation of being transformed (op.cit.: 90)'. This would include any designated sacred space or object, be it religion or an artifact. What he adds to Winnicott's theory is the notion that this early experience still remains one of the most important and is searched for throughout life and that the aesthetic space is an enactment of this particular form of relatedness. While we can never repeat this early relationship again, the arts offer us the space to reconnect with it. It is the phantom of this maternal idiom of care that is elaborated in his book *The Shadow of the Object*

(1987).

Bollas' reference to the "unthought known" refers to early preverbal experiences that are registered in the psyche but not available to conscious thinking. We relive through language, metaphor, symbol and art - that which is known but not yet thought about. This is not unlike Bion who sees the infant as starting out with pure thoughts, but without a mind to think them. These untransformed states are conserved by the individual awaiting the time when they can be thought about and then either transformed into symbolic derivatives or forgotten. The transformational object, like Winnicott's transitional object, has a reality that is never questioned. The aesthetic moment always comes as a revelation - as an instant moment of fit. In the spirit of the 'unthought known' it is a registration of an experience and not an active thought of the mind. These residues of the unthought known represent our deepest sense of self. In his book entitled *Being a Character* (1995) Bollas extends his theory that our sense of self or character resides in our historical experience of early relationships.

Like Freud's theory of the repressed unconscious and Winnicott's notion of the true self, for Bollas our personal idiom is located at a prelinguistic level - at the level of the 'unthought known'. This is in contrast to Lacanian Psychoanalysis which regards linguistic structures as forming the basis of self (in Ogden 1994:29). Bollas, stresses that it is only through our interaction with others and things that are subjective objects, in other words, that embody the fantasy and the fact, that the unthought known can become thought. In his book *Cracking up: the Work of Unconscious Experience* (1996) he expands on the notion of the 'unthought known' where 'cracking up' becomes a way of dismantling unconscious content. The technique of free association is one, dream association another and in the last section of his book he includes humour. In chapter five this concept will be extended to Modernist art's emphasis on fracture, collage and breaking up of the picture surface.

Kuhns (1983), like Winnicott, uses these extensions in psychoanalytic thinking regarding the capacity to use objects to the area of cultural objects. He utilises, as well, Freud's concept of transference in the formation and extension of his notion

of 'cultural transference'. Here cultural events and objects have the status of early objects where 'culture is a tradition of enactments'. (1983:55) Through these enactments the ego brings together and extends early experiences. Enactments function as transitional objects in the Winnicottian sense and are also lent dynamic force through the cycle of transference and countertransference.

In line with creativity and aesthetic experience residing in the dissolution of boundaries, Marion Milner (1957) reinforces this view emphasising a mental state where self and non self are not fully differentiated. It is only in such a state that creativity can fully be experienced. In a later publication she concludes: '...the unconscious mind, by the very fact of its not clinging to the distinction between self and other, seer and seen, can do things that the logical mind cannot do (Milner, 1987:214)'. The artist creates a dissolving of boundaries that becomes a two way journey between the art object and the spectator. Like Ehrenzweig's creative surrender, it is this interweaving third area that is essential to the making and appreciation of art. This is not akin to the handling of conflict and anxiety but a toleration of chaos that enables a reaching down into the source of creativity.

For Milner, classical psychoanalysis and ego psychology did not resonate with her own experiences of painting. Creativity as a defensive process postulated in Kleinian theory did not capture the deep state of creative subjectivity itself. Like Winnicott and Bollas, she saw the creative impulse as irreducible and that it goes back to a time before there was the awareness that there was any love to lose. (Milner 1957: 67). This illusion of oneness is essential to symbol formation rather than a result of renunciation of desire. In her book *The Hands of the Living God* (1969) she acknowledges Ehrenzweig's influence on her thinking:

When in 1956 I came to read Ehrenzweig's first book....I was to find the contention that there is an aspect of the feeling of inner chaos that must be distinguished from a state of pathological confusion because it is the way in which the conscious mind normally perceives the structurally different way of functioning of the primary process - which, he maintains, is not a chaos but

a different kind of order, one that is akin to a child's syncretistic vision (Milner 1969:52).

The centrality of infantile illusion and its function in creativity unites the work of Winnicott, Bollas and Milner. In order to create there has to have occurred an initial state of illusion and it is this insistence, in addition to the creative function of destruction, that distinguishes the work of the Independent School from both classical Freudian and Kleinian aesthetic theory. However, the adherence to the centrality of a meaningful subjectivity as located *within* the individual psyche connects both schools to an essentially Modern and humanist concept of self.

Chapter Four

The Search for Self: The Psychoanalytic Subject and Modernism

On March 22nd, 1997, three days after Willem de Kooning's death, Robert Fulford of the Globe and Mail, New York, ended his tribute by writing:

But if the praise was overly dramatized, it was nevertheless true that de Kooning and his generation worked with a seriousness that later vanished from painting. They made their mark before irony became painting's dominant mode, and before it splintered into more pieces - Minimalist, Op, Pop, etc. - than anyone could count. The moment of de Kooning & Co. was the last time in this century when people assumed that art has both a centre and a logical history. In truth, he was the end of something. He was the last great Modernist. (Globe and Mail, March, 22, 1997)

This chapter extends the previous discussion on creativity, illusion, self formation and subjectivity to a consideration of Modernist conceptualisations of self with its roots in a humanist tradition. It is argued that Post Freudian, contemporary theories regarding the *self in action* provide a more challenging way of looking at the practice of Modernist painting.

The term 'Modernism' has sometimes been used synonymously with 'avant-garde'. This was especially so around 1939 with the early publications of Clement Greenberg (Wood 2004a :3) . However, the history of the term 'avant-garde' follows a particularly varied and complex path. The term has not always only applied to the visual arts and has incorporated theatre, architecture, film and other creative pursuits. Day (2004:316) states: '....it is perhaps best not to think of the avant-garde as a clear cut entity that passes through time, simply changing its costumes through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries...' But more '...as a social process latent within the subculture of modern societies'. Nevertheless, what has always been associated with the term 'avant-garde' in Europe and the West,

although in differing strengths and identifications, is its critical position in relation to established political and societal norms.

This chapter does not offer an historical and theoretical examination of the 'avant-garde', instead it highlights those aspects of Modernism that have to do with subjectivity, self and humanism. In line with this, Taylor begins his chapter on 'Modernism and Subjectivity' by stating: 'I propose to begin my argument with a defence of the proposition that modernism in art, and subjectivity, are intimately connected (1987:16)'. By referring to the 'subjectivity of technique' in the making of Modernist art, the notion of self in action is implicit in Taylor's argument. This chapter builds on his exposition and extends it by linking subjectivity, Modernism, and the 'new surface' to incorporate the psychoanalytic ideas presented in the last chapter. As a foil to Modern concepts of self and subjectivity, the Postmodern use of the term 'schizophrenia' will also be considered.

With the emergence of Modernist art many of the traditional categories regarding aesthetics and art making were radically altered. By challenging the assumptions of harmony and balance in both form and content, conventional traditions were overturned. Modernist, non representational art challenged this even further - projecting fragments of unknown aspects of subjectivity into conglomerations that defied any notion of what was traditionally viable. Subjectivity was thrown into chaos challenging the concept of a unity of self and aesthetic response.

Nineteenth century notions of the self that are retained in the humanist element of Modernism are important precursors to Modernist art and Taylor quotes Vischer who, in the 1870's, spoke of 'a 'second self' which can be projected into objects and then recognised there, creating what he calls a 'remarkable unison of subject and object'(1987:19). Following on from the nineteenth century, Modernist and humanist thought considered the subject as central and, by virtue of self consciousness, humankind had freedom of choice. With its central concern being the issue of freedom, Existential philosophy exerted an important influence on the Modernist art reaction. Truth was seen as

essentially a personal realisation, unique and authentic for each individual that could not be reduced to dogma. It was this emphasis that challenged accepted values. The consciousness of the individual became the starting point which characterised the human subject and from which all freedom derived. This notion of the self as potentially unique and free was taken up alongside the image of the artist as somehow embodying a special separation from the norms of society.

Modernism in art can be seen as a cultural reaction to Modernity created by the political, economic and scientific ethos of the time. The links between the concepts of Modernity and Modernism (here modernity is seen as referring to the modern project of positivistic science, technology and industrialisation) are articulated by Greenberg (1962) who saw the Modernist reaction as attempting to bridge the separation of subject and object thereby reaffirming the place of meaning and existence. In the area of visual art, this reaction can be seen as a set of artistic beliefs that came to dominate thinking and practice during this period. Critiques of Modernism, however, have sometimes highlighted the issue of subjectivity seeing it as a form of extreme individualism where the art work has meaning only for the artist who produced it.

The techniques and the manipulation of medium that were characteristic of Modernist art defined its era, most importantly, the method of *fracture*. Fuller (1980) concurs that Modernism awakened a new potential in its emphasis on fragmentation rather than form and through this boundlessness and limitlessness, a particular experiential encounter could be found. Through the breaking up of an image new experiences of chaos and unpredictability enabled an entry into subjectivity and discovery. In this way, Modern abstract art could be seen as developing in tandem with psychoanalytic thinking - searching behind the facade, projecting unconscious fragments of the self onto the canvas and dissolving traditional form. At this juncture the Cubist method of collage would have a central place.

It was Cubism that especially declared the primacy of fracture in the making of the Modern image and art began to define the self through contrast and creative chaos. Edwards, examining the works of Picasso and Braque considers collage

to be the pasting together of any materials in the course of artmaking (2004:185). With this new freedom, a new form of modernist composition was established. With synthetic Cubism works were composed of fewer and simpler forms, moving away from the domination of realistic objects. In addition to fracture, collage was used to depart from the traditional concept of space, bringing with it a revolution in visual representation. Breaking up and fracture are taken up again in the following chapter extending the argument that a concept of a self in action provides a more challenging understanding of this phenomenon. Edwards (ibid) uses the terms 'adjacency' and 'juxtaposition' in describing the method of collage, where clues may be provided without the overt, ordinary representation of the object. (2004:192). There is a compelling parallel here in psychoanalytic theory regarding unconscious communication, especially dream imagery: clues are almost always delivered through the mechanisms of adjacency and juxtaposition. In this way, Cubist collage could be seen as the appropriate and inspired method by which self could be explored and exercised in the presence of an unconscious process. In Bollas' (1989) terms it is the ultimate form of 'cracking up' of the unconscious.

Modernism's new surface was also carried forward by artists such as Matisse and Kandinsky. Taylor (1987:27-34)) considers the work of Matisse in demonstrating the development of the modern style in his working through of chaos on the pictorial surface. Incompleteness, working without preliminaries, painting over, layering and error gradually became part of the painting's history. Techniques of fragmentation, collage and montage extended the experiential qualities of line, pattern and colour. Wood (2004b :235) reminds us that although abstraction could be seen as a twentieth century event, some of its origins can be traced to nineteenth century French Symbolist influences which contributed to the modernist trend of dissolving the link between recognizable objects and the art image. The symbolic characteristics of subject matter culminated, as well, in the Symbolist aesthetic which was seen as a means to a new liberation located in raw, unstructured experience.

The influence of Existentialism reinforced the conviction that Modernist art

reflected reality as being that which we experience, with meaning emerging essentially from the creations of self. Expressive Theory also favoured the emotional state of the artist over the faithful representation of outer reality and Denis comments: 'In summary, the expressive synthesis, the symbol of a feeling, must be an eloquent transcription of it and at the same time be an object composed for the pleasure of the eyes (1909:106)'. Modernist art arose alongside Expressive Theory which held that the artist's physical work was the defining characteristic of art. Although Expressionism is varied in its application and may represent a specific form of representation as opposed to work that is simply expressive and spontaneous, experiment and innovation constitutes a central theme (Gaiger 2004:56).

Many artists such as Gauguin attempted to facilitate a search for a meaningful self with a change in lifestyle and an immersion in the art of other cultures. It was thought that a renewed connection with other worlds contained the hope of finding lost parts of the human essence. With their rejection of representational and establishment art and their immersion in the 'primitive', these artists endeavoured to bridge the alienating separation between subject and object. With regard to 'primitivism' especially, it could be argued that these artists never overcame the dichotomy they sought to transcend since, in a reactionary and paternalistic way, 'other' cultures were seen just as that - 'other'. By keeping the notion of a discoverable self they remained essentially individualistic and ultimately most of their radical gestures were consumed into the very establishment they sought to resist.

Although recent ideas in psychoanalysis reflect the impact of Postmodern thinking, especially in the decentering of self, the British School has at the same time, and in the tradition of paradox, retained the Modernist assertion of the primacy of perceived meaning located in subjectivity. In this sense, these psychoanalysts retained a basis in humanism. While 'self' and 'subjectivity' may be used interchangeably, the term 'subjectivity' can be seen to have an important, though difficult to identify, quality - that of the *experience* of a unitary location of agency and historicity. The term 'self', on the other hand, may be considered as

having the status of a *thing* which carries the assumption that it can be an object of inquiry. These two phenomena and their concurrent difficulties continue to be debated in the discourse around self.

The term 'self' carries with it these very paradoxes: in Anglo-Saxon, or Old English, *self* means 'the same' and therefore carries with it the concept of an of identity. It also includes the personal pronoun "I", *ipse* in old Gothic - as agency, the same locus that engages with the world across time (in Levin 1993: 9-10). The humanist tradition, and the Modernist as well, although grappling with this, would probably agree that the concepts of 'self' and 'subjectivity' are, like the Holy Grail, still worth looking for. For writers like Bollas and Winnicott, *it is in the looking* that we exercise self and meaning. Although the self may be unknowable, it does not necessarily mean that there is not an arena in which it exists and is exercised.

The dilemma of 'self', therefore, presumes its corollary - that aspects of this phenomenon are unconscious. For Plato the concept of 'self' was dynamic, a battle with forces of disintegration and integration, and for Socrates, the 'self' was an unknown to be discovered by introspection and dialectic. Probably, the Modern debate on the dilemma of 'self' begins with Descartes who arrived at the premise that the only truth we can depend on is that we have consciousness and therefore exist subjectively (in Harre and Lamb 1983: 144-145). However, Descartes' 'self' is separate from the external world and has no guarantee of existence. He emphasised the importance of reason in the acquisition of knowledge of the self and as a rationalist, thinking and thought was at the centre of his system of knowledge. For Hume, self is illusory and although we have a sense of personal identity that comes from remembering that we exist, he doubted that there was any evidence of a substantive enduring self. For Kant the 'phenomenal self' exists in time and is in principle knowable, but the self-in-itself, the 'noumenal self', is not knowable and this aspect of 'self' can only be evidenced in practice and in the practice of living (Grotstein 2000:171).

Of importance to the post-Freudian notions of 'self' are the ideas of Hegel who both builds on and rejects Kant. In his early work he considers the 'self' as

a history of consciousness embedded in the productions of that consciousness, in other words, culture, art, and religion. He implies that the self can only be known through its products or objectifications - the *things* that are created. These creations, in turn, have to be reintegrated. We can only know ourselves through our acts, which subjectively created, can then become objects available for reincorporation. Hegel's dialectical self in action as opposed to self that is discoverable is the closest we can come to this quality of being (Ogden 1994: 56). The subjectively projected and disavowed becomes the object of introjection in psychoanalytic terms. It is this formulation of self that connects the work of Winnicott, Bollas and Milner. However, for Hegel the developmental 'self' is not a given and grows through conflict. For the above psychoanalytic theorists, a unique and noumenal self does have existence and is brought into the arena of experience through creative growth.

The post Freudian self can be seen as constituted by psychical acts, where, in the Hegelian tradition, each stage transforms, negates and preserves previous stages. It is essentially this process that provides a sense of continuity and subjectivity. For Hegel it is generated and given form through conflict whereas for the psychoanalytically decentred subject it is generated through the dynamic interplay of conscious and unconscious. In this sense, the psychoanalytically decentred subject is fundamentally different to the Lacanian subject which is essentially deconstructionist by virtue of the gap between signifier and signified. Lacan postulated a break in the signifying chain where *intervals* rather than *interplay* between systems is assumed (Ogden op.cit.:28-30). In the psychoanalytic tradition, especially that of post Kleinian and Independent psychoanalytic theorising, every part informs the other. Unlike the French semiotic tradition with its insistence on the arbitrariness of signs and the location of the subject within linguistic structure, these theorists place the unique self prehistorically, preverbally and even genetically.

In contrast to Existentialists like Sartre and Kierkegaard who see the self as condemned to its own despairing freedom, Bollas would see this as an unconscious freedom of a self that feels alive, purposeful and meaningful: 'Each

inherited disposition meets up with the actual world and one of the outcomes of this dialectic between personality idiom and human culture is psychic life (Bollas 1989:9)'.

For Postmodern thinkers, the very existence of 'self' becomes problematical, as does anything that assumes a temporal location in time and space. The Modern notion of a rational, stable, knowable and coherent self is challenged by Postmodern thinkers such as Lyotard for its maintenance of binaries. Lyotard (in Reading 2000:43) points out that to maintain these binaries, disorder has to exist and therefore has to be constructed as separate and opposite to order. In this way Modern societies are concerned with the illusion of stability and completeness of systems. Stability and order are seen to be maintained by 'grand narratives' - overarching stories that underpin all ideologies in the service of a belief in totality and stability. Postmodern thinking delivers its most radical action in its critique and rejection of 'grand narratives'. The grandest narrative of them all might be the notion of a self that is located in time and space - one that can discover truth. In the language of signs, this belief depends on the conviction that signifiers point to signifieds which have a basis in reality. If we use the word 'self' then it automatically has to exist as separate and knowable.

The use of the term 'schizophrenia' by some Postmodern thinkers to describe the Postmodern experience has particular bearing on the concept of self. For psychoanalysts the mystery of schizophrenia, by its nature as a disorder, holds the secret to the necessity of self and meaning. For Postmodern thinkers it provides the evidence for its absence. Psychiatrically and psychologically, schizophrenia is quintessentially a disorder of self formation. Jameson uses this term, not diagnostically, but in the sense of demonstrating what Lacan refers to as "a breakdown in the signifying chain" (Roberts 2000:26). Here schizophrenia is seen as a language disorder or rather, a failure to enter into the arena of speech and language. This puts schizophrenia at the breakdown of signifieds. For Lacan (in Ogden 1990:61) the experience of temporality, human time, past, present, memory and the persistence of personal identity over time is primarily an effect of language. Sentences, by the nature of their construction, move across time.

Without a meaning system of signifiers the individual is at the mercy of chaotic, unconnected material signifieds. Since the self is fundamentally an interpreting self it is essentially a failure in the acquisition of linguistic formation, symbol formation and the use of metaphor.

However, what is interesting for the Modern versus Postmodern debate on self and the use of the word schizophrenia is that this disorder could be considered, at its core, a failure in the capacity to develop binarisms. Some of these are: inner versus outer, self from other, creative from destructive- all being essential to mental health and the formation of self. According to the psychoanalytic metanarrative, a sense of self equals that of mental health. The individual's sense of self or 'I-ness' coheres around the ability to use metaphor and symbol and, without the ability for one thing to stand for another, we are hostage to the impact of a raw, concrete world. Without self formation individuals are disconnected and isolated. Experience becomes more intense, louder and overwhelming. The terror in schizophrenia that follows the sense of a greater proximity to every 'thing' is discussed by Jean Baudrillard (in Kellner 1989) another Postmodern theorist who makes use of this metaphor. Similar to Jameson (1998) he argues that in contemporary societies schizophrenia has replaced hysteria and paranoia as the pathology of the Postmodern era.

If schizophrenia can be seen as the Postmodern sign for the breakdown or non existence of a self that can search for truth then Postmodernism can be seen as the negation of any experience of an absolute. In his book 'Paths to the Absolute' (2000) Golding traces the historical discourse on how we apprehend the truly beautiful most commonly referred to in art history literature as the 'sublime'. This concept can be considered one of the most critical aspects of Modernist art and was favoured by Greenberg (1982). Although difficult to define, it can be seen as a combination of awe and aesthetic appreciation - a moment of pure perception unburdened by objective awareness. Modernist art's acceptance of the sublime could be considered its most humanist declaration.

This intangible aspect of experience can also be located in Bion's concept of 'O' - the ultimate reality - the essence of the spiritual, and in Bollas' work via the

experience of the transformational object. In this way Modernist art attempts to present the fact that the unrepresentable exists. For post Freudian psychoanalysis, on the other hand, the unrepresentable can be *experienced*. Postmodernism and Postmodern art places itself in diametric opposition to this. It avoids the need for totality by submerging itself in the everchanging nature of representation. Reading, applying Lyotard's Postmodern condition to Postmodern art, writes that art is 'not the invention of new, truer truths....but rather an invention that will *displace the rule of truth* (my italics) (Reading 2000:72)'. Postmodernism is the negation of the optimism of humanism - rather than the self being there to be liberated, it is constructed, not given. In his critique of Modernism and subjectivity, he reinterpreted the concept of the sublime in Modernist art to emphasise, rather than its glory, the way it challenges our abilities to integrate these works into existing knowledge. Perhaps Modernist abstract, non representational art, forces the viewer into a unity of subjective experience in its departure from any objective, realistic form.

None of these theorists use the term schizophrenia diagnostically but as a metaphor for the lived experience of Postmodern culture, just as hysteria was for the Victorian society that Freud lived in and as 'narcissism' is used by Christopher Lasch (1979) in his book *The Culture of Narcissism* as a label for late Modern society. The schizophrenic is the perfect Postmodernist - ahistorical, unselfed, in touch with no original source or essence. One thing could simply arbitrarily stand for another, nothing has meaning and time does not exist. The schizophrenic is without subjectivity. Segal (1974) uses schizophrenia as central in her understanding of the creative process, highlighting the difference between the schizophrenic and artists in their capacity for symbolisation. The artist can return to the world of signifieds and, in so doing, create an object that has a reality outside of psychosis. For Segal, Bion, Kris, Stokes and Ehrenzweig the capacity to enter the world of chaos and tolerate its timelessness and formlessness is fundamental to the artistic endeavour. However, the person with a sense of self or adequate ego functioning returns from this odyssey with an artistic product.

The concept of the decentred, dialectic psychoanalytic self, since it collapses

the binary of conscious and unconscious, may be seen to provide a bridge between the Modern and Postmodern. It tolerates the concept of a psychic centre that is both temporal yet continually shifting between multiple ongoing realities. The self holds no privileged place in either conscious or unconscious functioning and order and disorder coexist in a dialectical relationship. The theory of internal object relations, which includes the spatial metaphors of a myriad of self /other constellations, makes provision for a self that is constituted in multiple dimensions alongside a phenomenal subjectivity that is perceived as constant. Although Freud struggled with the constraints of a positivistic model of science that privileged linearity and causality, he contributed to the fundamental decentering of humankind, adding to the influence of the Darwinian and Copernican revolution by undermining the illusion of the identity of consciousness and mind (Phillips 2000).

The ideas of the Independent school of psychoanalysis, with their concept of a decentred self in action, provide an alternative view of the practice of Modernist art changing the focus of what was inspired by Romanticism, where art seeks for *truth* in feelings and experiences, to art becoming the arena for a self *in process*. This dynamic concept of self and subjectivity can incorporate writers such as Stokes, Segal, Milner, and Ehrenzweig who emphasise the continual flux of organisation and disorganisation in the artistic process. In Modernist art this is exercised in the phenomenon of the technique of fracture, risk and spontaneity as opposed to completion and realism. de Kooning and the New York School of painters, together with Rosenberg's formulation of 'action painting', is enhanced in this contemporary notion of self. Taylor concurs: 'to be modern is to find ourselves in an environment that promises us adventure, power, joy, growth, transformation of ourselves and the world (1987:34)'. The post Freudian decentred, psychoanalytic subject, with its emphasis on a self located in action articulates the struggle with subjectivity and self that characterised Modernist art.

Chapter five

Cracking up: The New York School and Subjectivity

The New York School took subjectivity as thematic in their work: - the 'subjects' of the artists were the artists as subject (Leja 1993:269).

This chapter extends the reformulation of Modernism, self and subjectivity of the last chapter and applies it to the New York School's aspiration to bring contemporary psychological and philosophical knowledge into visual representation. Included here would be the emerging scientific developments of the late 1900's and early 20th century, amongst others, the work of Charles Darwin, Freud, Jung and the advances in the field of psychology. By immersing themselves in the philosophical and intellectual discourse of their era, these artists were deeply influenced by prevailing psychoanalytic concepts of human subjectivity and mind.

These ideas were reinforced by the influx of European emigres fleeing Nazi Germany, most notably the Surrealists with their interest in automatism and the unconscious. Bollas' notion of the idiom of self and the work of the unconscious, which he termed 'cracking up', will be used to articulate the particular combination of Surrealism and technique that characterised this group of painters. 'If asked to name what psychoanalysis and Surrealism fundamentally had in common, one could say unhesitatingly that it was their firm belief in the existence of something called the unconscious (Lomas 2000:7)'.

The abstract painting that emerged in New York city in the mid 1940's became known as the first truly indigenous American painting in its gradual independence from accepted European styles (Polcari 1991). Amongst the artists who became nationally and internationally known were Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning, Philip Guston, Adolph Gottlieb, Franz Kline, Robert Motherwell, Lee Krasner, Mark Rothko and Clyfford Still. Various called 'abstract expressionists', 'action painters', or 'The New York School', their style still

resists categorisation today. Auping states: 'Abstract Expressionism has been a phenomenon shrouded in paradox (1987:11)'. Not unlike the British Independent group of psychoanalysts, these were a disparate group of artists who did not consider themselves part of a defined movement. Their styles differed, they were not exclusively non representational and were not united in a declaration of aesthetic direction. In an earlier publication Leja writes:

Under the old paradigm careful scrutiny of the New York School's identification caused the grouping to dissolve before our eyes. One possible approach to reconstructing it has been suggested above: retreating to the high ground and attending to the shared concern with adapting modernist artistic practice to notions of human nature and mind undergoing urgent revision in the culture (1987:30).

Leja (op cit) suggests, as well, that we link these artists by geographical location and use the term "New York School" rather than Abstract Expressionism or the more popular "Action Painters" of Harold Rosenberg (1952). While this group can be seen to be united in their extension of a Modernist tradition and fall within a Modern period, their work defies the Modern art historians prerequisite for an identifiable classification.

In many ways, the social grouping out of which the New York painters emerged had its origins in the friendships that were developed during the Depression era of the 1930's (Sandler 1970:3). This was bolstered by the proximity of their working environments, informal gathering places and group forums that they created together. For example, 'Studio 35', and later, the 'Club', were formed where lectures were given on the subject of art (Stevens and Swan 2004:286). de Kooning was amongst the early participants in these forums.

By the late 1940's this group of artists was characterised by a cohesive set of intellectual ideas, a body of mature work and venues for public display. Dealers such as Peggy Guggenheim, Charles Egan and Sidney Janis patronised and provided public locations for the presentation of their work (Arnason 1975:508).

Where Cubism provided the technique of fracture and breaking up necessary for self exploration, Surrealism provided the interest and methodology for access to the unconscious. The rise of Surrealism in France coincided with the dissemination of psychoanalytic ideas in Europe encouraging artists to explore the problem of the unconscious and its relation to the visual image and language. Their ideas soon spread to the rest of Europe, and then onto America and Latin America. Andre Breton, a French doctor who fought in the trenches in the first World War, like the rest of this group, was undertaking an interest in the unconscious and its representations in dreams, following Freud's famous dictum that the dream was 'the royal road to the unconscious' (Lomas 2000:2-6). Amongst those who could be counted as part of this movement were Salvador Dali, Paul Delvaux, Max Ernst, Joan Miro, Alberto Giacometti, Arshile Gorky, Frida Kahlo, Rene Magritte, Andre Masson, Man Ray, Paul Klee and Giorgio de Chirico. An account of the development of the New York School is closely connected with the arrival of some of these newcomers into the city. Whereas these painters never delivered a manifesto, Breton, a primary advocate of Surrealism did, and at its core was an attempt to connect with the unconscious through dreams and the techniques of automatism. In 1900 Freud published his most complete account of his theory of the mind and the unconscious in his book *The Interpretation of Dreams* and out the accumulation of all of his theoretical contributions it was the topic of dreams and the meaning of dreams that caught the attention of the public and the French Surrealists in particular (Waldman 1988:48).

The late 1930's saw several major exhibitions that established the understanding of surrealist art in the United States for the next decade. In early 1936 the Museum of Modern Art in New York opened an exhibition 'Cubism and Abstract art' which included artists already part of the official Surrealist movement. In the catalogue accompanying the exhibition the museum's director Alfred Barr (1938) broke down Surrealism into abstract and veristic styles. The automatic drawing techniques of Andre Masson and Miro typified the first and was termed 'illusionistic' whereas the works of artists like Dali fell within the 'veristic' category. Reviews of Peggy Guggenheim's 'art of this century' gallery established

the critical reception of the movement in the early 1940's, and although it was recognised that this was a European export, the United States had become, by 1942, a viable location for the exhibition of this new art.

Automatism for the Surrealists focussed on meaning and advocated the free flow of automatic, unconscious images. They were intolerant of form which they considered to have dominated the history of art contributing to inhibitions stemming from academic influences (Waldman 1988). With the emphasis on the free emergence of unconscious material, images surfaced undisturbed making them available for deciphering or simply for depiction. The objects that emerged were considered a symbol of inner reality, seeing the language of the unconscious, not unlike Klein, as made up of images. Having an interest in the formation of dreams, their subject matter would sometimes be real and recognisable, although distorted or exaggerated. Another important characteristic was that of 'assemblage' which emphasised juxtaposition and dislocation.

The methods advanced and employed by the Surrealists were all committed to bypassing conscious thinking. '*Écriture automatique*' was developed from Surrealism's emphasis on psychic automatism. Techniques used would include automatic script and scribbling, hypnosis, controlled dreaming and the use of hallucinogens. In Europe artists such as Max Ernst, Salvador Dali, de Chirico, and Joan Miro all cite experiences in connection with altered states of consciousness. In New York, experiments were initiated by Robert Matta who came into contact with Breton in Paris in 1923. Most of the experiments took place in 1941 and included artists like William Baziotes, Robert Motherwell, Arshile Gorky and Mark Rothko. Pollock and de Kooning were peripherally involved (Ollner 1998: 2). Interestingly, these altered states of consciousness, especially drug induced, would yield particular visual phenomena - geometrisation, segmentation, fragmentation, biomorphic figures, absurd composites, figure ground changes, flatness, which would then be used in artistic compositions making up the very stuff of the new American art.

Altered states of consciousness would have broken up the normal principles of Gestalt laws of organisation for conscious perception. Deriving from the work

of Max Wertheimer, the basic principle is that the brain will always produce organised perception due to the nature of its neuronal activity. Figure/ground, proximity, closure, completion are all features that would foster these organised perceptions. Ollner (1998) points out that art and science have always had a mutual relationship. Her thesis is that a cross scientific outlook on art provides a broader understanding of artistic creativity and more especially the radical changes represented in Modernist art. In line with science influencing art, it is of interest that, for some time, the Bahaus art school was located in Dessau, near Berlin which was also the main site of the early Gestalt psychologists. Tauber, 1976 (cited in Ollner, op.cit) notes that Paul Klee was a keen student of Gestalt psychology, lending credence to the observation that the world of science and art indeed influence each other.

The influence of Surrealism brought to the New York painters the freedom to explore chance and accident. This method of psychically connecting with the art process heralded a new and innovative two dimensional imagery. The New York School extended these influences by accentuating the qualities of brushstroke and texture, increasing the attention to surface qualities. Using very large formats, all parts of the paint surface were given equal importance. This served to unite the group through their common approach to art making and although stylistically diverse, consolidated their rejection of social realism and geometric abstraction which were the most prevalent influences in American art during the 1930's (Sandler 1970:1).

In Bollas' terms, the Surrealists and their experimental techniques that filtered into American art were processes of 'cracking up'. However, instead of hypnosis, free association, controlled daydreaming, it became accident, chance and the random brushstroke. For Bollas these would constitute a form of creative destruction and through this revolution in technique:

the simultaneous oscillation between psychic cohesions and their fragmentation would become the living action between conscious and unconscious life....the urge to free associate and to disseminate one's

wishes and needs through a chain of ideas with no terminal point but with aesthetic intelligence... chains of ideas (that) lead to continuous subdivisions, an infinity of devolutions from the original psychic intensity....which articulates and elaborates the idiom of the self that we are and its destiny (Bollas 1996: 63-64).

Alongside the emergence of the New York School were an important group of critics and writers, most notably, Clement Greenberg, Thomas Hess and Harold Rosenberg. These individuals approached these painters in different ways and served to articulate the significance of their work. Two labels materialised for this new American art - Robert Rosenblum's 'abstract sublime' and Harold Rosenberg's 'action painting' (Sylvester 1994:28). Harold Rosenberg was considered one of the most important art critics during this period and he and Clement Greenberg, who was equally influential, came to represent two contrary attitudes to the work of these painters.

Greenberg (1982) was one of the earliest supporters of this group giving a basically Modernist account of these artists by categorising them on formalist grounds and thereby uniting them aesthetically. The emphasis on formal analysis of abstract art characterised his writing and he urged a self contained and critical practice. He aligned himself with Kant's ideas of critical detachment as an insurance against the inherent limitations of cultural processes. For Greenberg, the true expression of Modernism lay in this critical independence from society and its consequent self reflexivity. The aesthetic value of Modernist art resided in the autonomy of the art object.

Rosenberg's theoretical interests in Marxism and Existentialism came together in his famous article published in *Artnews* in 1952 entitled *The American Action Painters*. This article is probably the most widely quoted and is as close to a manifesto that the New York artists would have. Rosenberg considered these painters as constituting the most exuberant and original art movement in American history. He was a close friend of Willem de Kooning and his wife Elaine (Stevens and Swan 2004) and believed de Kooning to be the quintessence of what this group

stood for. In 1959 a selection of his essays was published in a book called *The Tradition of the New* that spread to a much wider audience than his magazine articles.

For Rosenberg the act, the struggle itself, became the revolutionary focus. Like Bolas, the act of dissemination became art as a life process. Subjectivity was inherent in the commitment to texture, brushstroke and fracture. The use of huge canvasses invited the artist bodily into the work where all parts of the canvas were equally considered. 'At a certain moment the canvas began to appear to one American painter after another as an arena in which to act - rather than as a space in which to reproduce, redesign, analyse or 'express' an object, actual or imagined. What was to go on the canvas was not a picture but an event (Rosenberg 1952: 25).' The experience was being processed by the act and in line with his nonformalist approach Rosenberg writes:

In this gesturing with materials the aesthetic, too, has been subordinated. Form, color, composition, drawing, are auxiliaries, any one of which - or practically all, as has been attempted logically, with unpainted canvases - can be dispensed with. What matters always is the revelation contained in the *act* (my italics) (1952:26-27).

Inherent in the above statement is creativity and self in action, at play in an unstructured and unconsciously free arena. Francis Bacon's words: 'If anything ever does work in my case it works from that moment when consciously I don't know what I am doing (in Sylvester 1994:29)'. Bolas echoes this: 'It is important to keep in mind when considering the nature of an individual's unconscious and his unconscious communication, because when it works it is beyond our consciousness (1996:43).'

In the process of action painting, like the dreamer who associates freely to the images of the dream, the artist unwittingly experiences the cracking up of his or her narrative. Collage, abstraction, brushstroke, accident, tearing up, reassembling is the creative giving up of form and an exercise in the experience of self. For

Rosenberg, this involved the search for individual identity and his description of art as life attempted to introduce a resolution to the issue of how art can have meaning with no subject matter. The result for these painters was the development of private styles based on the unconscious reached through dreams and mythic images.

The concept of a decentred subject, a self alive within an intersubjective field, provides an alternative account of action painting and the technical developments of the New York School. The Modern notion of a self to be discovered as a finite proposition, falls short of articulating the paradoxical and continuous nature of the activity of these painters. For Bolas the self is an idiom that requires continual rediscovery - the process is forever unfinished. It is in the very practice of Modernist art, namely: fracture, collage, juxtaposition, exploring accident and the unknown, that the self becomes a continual, dialectical and non finite phenomenon. The experience of self becomes exercised in the intermediate space between the actions of the artist in the transforming presence of medium and canvas.

Chapter Six

Getting Beyond the Image: De Kooning's Women

Facing the image and getting beyond it, perhaps, was one of the reasons that it took so many months to finish *Woman I* (De Kooning, in Hess 1968:75-76).

In applying the ideas of the Independent school of British psychoanalysis to de Kooning's 1953 exhibition and to the two issues outlined in the introduction, namely, his betrayal of non representational abstract art and his controversial treatment of the female figure, it would seem that there are three interdependent considerations: how de Kooning painted, what he painted and what he said about how and what he painted. With regard to the last point, some psychoanalytic license will be taken in this chapter. Reminiscent of the 'pathographic' approach outlined in chapter one, de Kooning's words will be drawn upon as 'paraprexes' or, in his own word, a 'glimpse' (de Kooning 1963:82), into their possible unconscious meanings.

It could be said, from this interpretive approach, that it does not matter what this artist consciously thought he was doing in the execution of his art, but rather how the universal unconscious speaks to us from his work. Consequently, there is no need to establish whether this process indeed took place as part of the artist's conscious motivation since, in psychoanalytic thinking, it is held that, however we might differ in psychic maturity, nothing is ever left behind and nothing is ever fully achieved. If, as Winnicott theorises, the capacity for transitional relating has occurred, the individual will continue to rework, in the form of culture and symbol, all psychic injuries, conflicts and challenges from all stages of development. In addition, because psychoanalysis holds that all unconscious communication is overdetermined - one gesture, symbol, line or shape may have many levels of meaning. All imagery, therefore, is likely to carry layers of unconscious material making it available for continual reinterpretation.

Out of these multiple unconscious possibilities, this chapter takes as its entry

point the following questions: what may it mean that an image of a female figure, that is larger than life, appears distorted, mangled, and dismembered? Is it the same as a child tearing its mother's body to pieces in fantasy? Could it be an act of aggression in the service of love and subjectivity? It is with these questions in mind that a post-Freudian, psychoanalytic interpretation is offered regarding the unconscious struggle that may have been taking place at the root of de Kooning's images of women in his 1953 exhibition.

In 1963, Winnicott wrote in relation to the True Self: '...it is a joy to be hidden but a disaster not to be found (1963:186)'. When this statement was written, he was attempting to communicate that, in his view, it is an essential part of emotional health that the self remains inviolate. Winnicott's notion of the True Self was mentioned in an earlier chapter along with Bion and Bollas who all see, though articulate in different ways, an individual, inherited potential that is the locus of the self or self experience. These concepts or, indeed, beliefs, tie these thinkers to a humanist approach and, in some ways, a Modernist one. They all allude to an essence, a truth, that lies within the psyche rather than within language or discourse. Although these writers postulate this noumenal entity, it is not articulated as a static and ultimately discoverable phenomenon in the Modernist sense, rather it is seen as located within the sphere of action, gesture and relating. For Bion, the ultimate reality of truth is symbolised by the letter "O", for Bollas it is the truth and realisation of idiomatic expression and for Winnicott it is the expressed, but forever hidden, True Self. This phenomenon is seen as located within the individual, an entity that is exercised and recreated within the space of creative living. These arenas are the location of the development of symbol formation leading to the capacity to engage with cultural objects and culture in general.

Winnicott, is singular, however, in his emphasis on the importance of the self as isolate. This aspect of his theory is taken up by Masud Khan in his book *The Privacy of the Self* (1995). The paradox of relating and remaining separate is captured in the above quotation - the True Self needs to be hidden yet continually connected to other. Winnicott's capacity for paradox and enigma provides an

interesting avenue into the work of Willem de Kooning because it seems, that when one opens the books and peruses his interviews, we still don't know what he really meant. It is compelling, as well, to see that like the texts written about the work of Winnicott, those about de Kooning are prefaced in a similar way - that they speak in a unique style, seemingly free to discover themselves in paradox.

In his forward to Jan Abrams book *The language of Winnicott* Pedder writes: 'If one reads Winnicott carelessly, one may see him as being too simplistic or too complex (or both at the same time); even the most experienced Winnicottians may at times need a road map to find their way around his thought (in Abrams 1996:xix). In a similar vein, Richard Shiff writes: 'Visually and verbally, de Kooning's intellect jumps, creating odd linkages. Even his most factual statements can be confusing because elements appear to originate through spontaneous association, with plays on sound or semantic context...Such involution of image and idea makes it especially hard to evaluate de Kooning's recorded interviews as well as the remarks his friends and acquaintances recall (Shiff 1994:50)'.

The paradoxes inherent in de Kooning's work and words, like Winnicott, contribute to his status as an 'independent', and as a representative of American painters in the late 1940's and 1950's, adds to the dilemma of defining and categorising his contribution to art and the New York School in particular. Merkert (1983) seems to draw on this parallel in his celebration of de Kooning's 'stylessness' even using the term 'a third quantity' almost to name de Kooning's commitment to a transitional space or in Ogden's terms an 'intersubjective third', where something is neither one thing nor the other. De Kooning's style is '...never pure or unalloyed but shot through with impurities - inconsistencies, breaks, ambiguities... His system was, and is, not to fit into any system' (Merkert op.cit.:116). In de Kooning's own words delivered at a talk entitled *The Subjects of the Artist: A New School* in 1949: 'Artists should not have to be a certain way. It is no use worrying about being related to something it is impossible not to be related to. Style is a fraud...' and then paradoxically ends his talk with: '...you are with a group or movement because you cannot help it (de Kooning 1949:14)'. Although he quickly became representative of Abstract American painting,

especially after the exhibition of his black and white paintings in 1948 and the impact of *Excavation*, 1950, he never considered himself to be doing something 'American': '... and I feel much more in common with artists in London or Paris. It is a certain burden, this Americaness. If you come from a small nation you don't have that (de Kooning 1963:75)'.

De Kooning, like Winnicott, was an independent. Both eschewed movements and both invite us to continue to create meaning through paradox. Both infused their work with creative enigma and as Winnicott once communicated to Marion Milner - what she got from him would have to be 'picked out of chaos' (in Grolnick 1996:122) .

Thomas Hess reports that de Kooning once said to him of the art critics: 'They treat the artist like a sausage....tie him up at both ends, and stamp on the centre- "Museum of Modern Art", as if you are dead and they own you' (in Hess 1969:11). In a similar fashion, it appears that, in line with Winnicott's notion of 'object usage', it is the brutal and ruthless privilege of the viewer and commentator on the art object to wrest these emissions from the artist's hands and appropriate it with the vicissitudes of their own inner worlds - to use it, in turn, as an object within which to find themselves, and with any luck, the evidence of others as well.

The issue of de Kooning's return to the figure at the time of his 1953 exhibition will not be a primary focus of this thesis, but some mention of it will be made before proceeding. While this may have been a major concern for abstract artists at the time who were committed to non representational art, psychoanalysis could dispense with this dilemma quite quickly. Taking a Kleinian view of unconscious phantasy, all images, all shapes are essentially part objects and all part objects have their origin in the unconscious knowledge of parental intercourse and the mother's body. Hannah Segal in her paper *Notes on Symbol Formation* quotes Ernst Jones' (1916) statement about unconscious symbolism: 'All symbols represent ideas of the self and of immediate blood relations and of the phenomenon of birth, life and death' (in Segal 1957:162). The origins of these would lie within the inherited unconscious representations of maternal body parts. These unconscious imagos of internal objects are the manifestation of the instincts and

all internal objects, in the realm and under the influence of unconscious phantasy, are about the human body and its functions. In other words, there is nothing else that we draw on in our subsequent creation of the world. De Kooning could be said to have been quintessentially aware of this in his term 'intimate proportions' (Hess 1969:77). Hess quotes Clement Greenberg once saying to de Kooning: 'It is impossible today to paint a face' and de Kooning's reply was 'That's right, and it's impossible not to' (in Hess 1969:74). In this sense what is realistic and what is non objective perhaps loses its meaning. De Kooning committed himself neither to non representational art nor to realism. Instead he 'followed his desires'. He said in an interview with David Sylvester for the BBC:

Certain artists and critics attack me for painting the Women, but I felt that this was their problem not mine. I don't really feel like a non objective painter at all. Today, some artists feel that they have to go back to the figure and that word 'figure' becomes such a ridiculous omen - if you pick up paint with your brush and make somebody's nose with it, this is rather ridiculous when you think of it, theoretically or philosophically, it's really absurd to make an image, like a human image with paint. Today when you think about it, since we have this problem of doing it or not doing it. But then it was even more absurd not to do it. So I felt I have to follow my desires (de Kooning 1963:77).

Waldman considers De Kooning's 'synthesis of figuration and abstraction' to be one of his most important accomplishments (Waldman 1988:27). Polcarì (1991) contends that with de Kooning's awareness of artists such as Mondrian and Miro, together with the pure abstract work of his 1948 exhibition, he was in a position to lead a new Modernist style. However, his move away from pure abstraction to the figure established him, instead, as the figure painter of Abstract Expressionism. De Kooning had no problem alternating during the 1950's between Woman and abstraction: 'I can change overnight' he once reported (in Shiff 1994:200). In remaining 'independent' perhaps all formalist principles needed to be backgrounded in order to free him from Secondary Process

functioning and to enable a 'creative surrender', the dissolution necessary to access the hidden order of art (Ehrenzweig 1967). This is what could be said to be his fundamental commitment.

Of more significance for this thesis is the second issue: that of de Kooning's 'treatment' of his subject matter and this is intimately linked with his technique. The traditional links that inform his approach are numerous, but the influence of Cubism and Surrealism are of particular importance. Cubism provided the infrastructure for the fragmentation of the human form into anatomically segmented planes. It influenced de Kooning's notion of 'no environment' in its tradition of merging the figure with background thereby changing the image into a shifting ambiguity of interchangeable shapes. It was these influences that moved de Kooning towards abstraction and the increasing dislocation of the figure. He demonstrated, as well, especially in his early work, a preference for the grid which is inherited from Cubist painting as a method of ordering and disordering form. This can be seen in his biomorphic shapes and increasingly undetectable figure ground relationships deriving from both Braque and Picasso who had fragmented the figure and rearranged it on the picture surface (Sandler 1970).

Picasso's work also inspired and influenced de Kooning by providing the key to formal relationships underlying representational imagery. In the same way, de Kooning kept his images on a single plane but perhaps with more randomness and abstraction (Merkert 1983:119). It was during the 1930's and early 1940's that de Kooning began flattening his figures and his abstractions, *Painting*, 1948 (fig.4) and *Dark Pond*, 1948 (fig.5), both black and white enamel works exhibited in 1948, show evidence of the freeing up of bodily parts from all identifiable contexts. Earlier, in the 1930's, his paintings of men and women demonstrate the use of shallow Cubist space which shows, not only an evolving pictorial method, but more significantly, a mode for communicating intense and raw emotion. The interlocking planes of Cubist space enabled de Kooning to set the stage for a meld of images with neither beginning or end. Sandler considers de Kooning's relationship to Cubism as presenting an inherent problem - as an artist he developed within its tradition, yet at the same time desired a form that could be

fashioned to his own more ambiguous, energetic and spontaneous style. He summarizes: 'Much as the planes in Picasso's and Braque's canvasses of 1909 to 1912 are shuffled, they are composed along horizontal and vertical axes into measured scaffolds. De Kooning's organic areas are, by contrast, ceaselessly shifting; images and backgrounds interchange (Sandler 1970:128)'. The total image becomes dominant over recognisable, individual parts. However, it is the Cubist infrastructure that serves to stabilize his ever increasing painterly and energetic approach.

Cubism, with its infrastructure and grids can be likened to Kris' (1952) notion of the anchoring functions of secondary processes, enabling a safe and controlled regression into the freedom of unconscious processes. More importantly, in terms of Bollas's concept of 'dissemination', it is primarily the influence of Cubism that, like the pictorial version of 'free association', led to 'Mental freedom - the urge to free associate and to disseminate one's wishes and needs through a chain of ideas with no terminal point but with aesthetic intelligence (Bollas 1995:63)'. Dissemination becomes the elaboration of the idiomatic expression of the True Self.

Clement Greenberg, who unlike Harold Rosenberg, kept his focus on formalist principles, identified de Kooning as one of the New York group who maintained the compositional structure of Cubism and continued to extend its pictorial tradition (in Shiff 2002). Greenberg's attempt to demonstrate to the public that de Kooning's apparently brutal attack on the human figure had its roots in a recognisable artistic tradition is an important context that is often overlooked in the interpretation of his 1953 Women paintings. Rosenberg's Existentialist and exuberant account of Action Painting and Greenberg's more formalist position can be seen as constituting a creative tension in understanding de Kooning's work.

Out of these influences came de Kooning's increasing use of collage. Parts of paintings were cut up and superimposed on other areas; tracings and sketches were made that would be pinned onto the canvas, removed and sometimes turned into yet other drawings (Hess 1969:47). Out of 'intimate proportions' and 'no environment' connections were made between disparate elements. In line with

Winnicott's theory of 'object usage', collage served to plunder the creative potential of destruction - and in Bollas' description of 'cracking up', the painting process and dislocation of images became an unconscious freedom, 'found in the necessary opposition between the part of us that finds truth by uniting disparate ideas (i.e. "condensation") and the part of us that finds truth by breaking up those unities (Bollas 1995:3)'. Scraping, repainting, revealing the history of surfaces creating ever increasing labyrinths of self discovery, de Kooning worked fast, '...so fast, you couldn't think (Shiff 1994:50)'. The dissolution of form became the dissemination of one psychic intensity after another. As a balance to this, de Kooning also employed methods that delayed the painting process - using solvents that would retard the drying time of paint, scraping down and reviewing for long periods the evolution of his work. What may have appeared 'fast' was also considered and laboured over for months.

Being part of the New York milieu during the 1940's and 1950's, de Kooning, like his colleagues, was significantly influenced by European Surrealism. He would have connected with European emigres advocating and experimenting with this method and sometimes attended experiments being conducted in practices of bypassing conscious pathways (Ollner 1998). Through his friendship with Gorky who was an important influence, de Kooning came into contact with John D. Graham with his surrealist belief in the creativity of the unconscious and the method of automatism. Graham's influence on Gorky was significant during the 1930's and also cemented de Kooning's appreciation for the traditional and its combination of freedom, spontaneity and discovery (Waldman, 1988).

Unlike his contemporary Pollock, who underwent numerous Jungian analyses and referred directly to the importance of unconscious processes in his work (Polcari 1991), de Kooning hardly, if ever, refers to the unconscious or a search for its manifestations in his work and never encouraged these interpretations. However, his intuitive interest can be detected in his concept of the 'glimpse'. He said in an interview with David Sylvester for the BBC in 1963: 'Content is a glimpse of something, and encounter like a flash. It's very tiny - very tiny, content (de Kooning 1963:82-83)'. And in *what Abstract Art Means to Me* (de Kooning

1951): 'For me, only one point comes into my field of vision. This narrow, biassed point gets very clear sometimes. I didn't invent it. It was already here (de Kooning 1951:40)'. He makes similar comments about 'slippage', echoing Freud's dictum that the unconscious is an inference from the *gap* or omissions of conscious discourse which can only be accessed via slips of the tongue, free association and dream work.

Well into the 1960's, de Kooning would draw with his eyes closed, or with a piece of charcoal in both hands or drawing while watching television (Hess 1969:124). In line with the Surrealist's automatic techniques and Freud's method of free association he never moved away from attempts to 'trick' the unconscious into revealing itself. He would begin with a purely unconscious moment by scribbling a word at random onto the canvas calling forth a myriad of associations and paths, chains of significance and meaning, never closing off a new possibility. Although one can easily impute automatist influences to de Kooning's work because of his spontaneous style, in fact, he based his work on drawings which he executed in advance and often adjusted them to the canvas (Polcari 1991). One may well be reminded here of Masson's 1961 description of the procedure behind psychic automatism to understand Polcari's point. One would take: ... 'A little paper, a little ink. Psychically: make a void within oneself; the automatic drawing having its source in the unconscious, must appear like an unpredictable birth.....Once the image has appeared *one should stop* (my italics) (In Lomas 2000:33).'

Like his contemporaries, de Kooning extended the Surrealist interest in the unconscious to the activity of the brushstroke itself, retaining the commitment to accident and spontaneity, liberating his art out of its link to subject matter. The Surrealist method of dislocation and juxtaposition became a way out of realism into the workings of Primary Processes of the unconscious. Like the mechanisms of dream work it is primarily through juxtaposition, rather than logic or causality, that hidden meanings are communicated.

De Kooning always retained an interest in the relationship between figure and ground and by the end of the 1940's evidenced a strong commitment to the

integration of figuration and abstraction. Although he manifested many of the influences that informed the New York School, his particular history and knowledge of European art and his training in a traditional style perhaps made him least representative of this group. With his training in the old Master tradition, Shiff sees de Kooning as one of the most conservative of the New York group, always retaining the influence of Western figure tradition. In this way Shiff describes de Kooning as 'controlling de Kooning': 'On the one hand he strives for speed - painting 'fast'. On the other hand, he strives for a self induced lack of balance (Shiff 2002:157)', all within the context of maintaining his technical expertise. He was undoubtedly possessed of a superior knowledge of his materials and the technique of image formation.

Rosenberg's concept of Action Painting reached its widest audience and acceptance at the time of de Kooning's 1953 exhibition. Much of what he wrote was based on close consultation and observation of de Kooning in action at his studio. More than writing about de Kooning, he seemed to write *for* him. In his article entitled: *De Kooning Paints a Picture* for ArtNews in 1953 (in Schimmel 2002), he documented the process of his painting of *Woman I* (fig.9) and at the same time Rudolph Burkhardt was also brought in to take photographs of various stages of this work (fig.8). In this article de Kooning's act of painting was dramatically documented and was published just before the opening of his 1953 exhibition. The concept of Action Painting became the accepted interpretation of de Kooning's work for many years and served to typify the Modernist notion of the essential endeavour of the search for self.

But how much of an action painter was he in Rosenberg's terms? Schimmel (op.cit.) takes us into the layout of the Sidney Janis Gallery at the time of this exhibition. There were two rooms and the first, on entry, consisted of sixteen drawings, mainly double figure in composition, done in preparation for the six Women. These, in addition to the many others he did for *Woman I*, (fig.9) were utilised to work out his ideas, showing evidence that shapes and marks from these works were transferred to the final paintings. Drawing and pre experimentation was integral to the development of the 1953 Women series and De Kooning

executed at least one hundred that could be considered central. Perhaps in an effort to accommodate de Kooning's studies into his action painting paradigm, Rosenberg wrote in his 1952 article: 'If a painting is an action, the painting that follows it is another....There is no reason why an act cannot be prolonged from a piece of paper to a canvas. Or repeated on another scale and with more control. A sketch can have the function of a skirmish (Rosenberg 1952:26)'. De Kooning's first highly acclaimed non representational abstract piece *Excavation* 1950, took 15 years to complete and *Woman I*, two to three years. Can the act of painting, the psychological event be so prolonged? Perhaps the concept of Action Painting was Rosenberg's own Existentialist fantasy, and maybe none of the New York painters fulfilled his vision, but he captured the mood of the time: the act of painting and the corporeal relationship with medium and canvas. 'If I stretch my arms next to the rest of myself and wonder where my fingers are - that is all the space I need as a painter (de Kooning 1951:60)'. When asked about the essence of his struggle with *Woman I*, he performed a gesture, drawing his arms to his side, making his body rigid, 'making his body like paint' (Sylvester 1994:64). In this way he identified closely with the living entity of his materials and all the area he needed for the painting was the space of his bodily interaction with it.

It is these characteristics that can be seen to locate de Kooning's work in the 1950's as committed to a search for self and new meanings through openness to change and spontaneous gesture. The search did not end with discovery of self in unconscious symbols but became a continued and unfinished exercise. 'As to the painting being finished, I always have a miserable time over that (de Kooning 1963:97)'. The unfinished issue can be seen as inherent in his subjective approach where any closed system, which would be seen by Kleinian psychoanalysis as rooted in Paranoid Schizoid functioning, is given up for the more realistic negotiation of Depressive functioning. In Winnicottian terms, like a transitional object these works are never finished - just relegated to limbo. It is neither repressed, destroyed nor preserved, rather it is forgotten, for a while divested of psychic energy - one just moves on, and maybe returns. Hess (1969) mentions that paintings were only finished when someone removed them from de Kooning's

studio. These unfinished paintings created a reputation that adhered to de Kooning for a long time - with some saying: 'Gorky is brilliant, but completely derivative, and de Kooning is the genius who can never complete a picture (Hess 1969:22)'. De Kooning's statement: ' - to be painting at all, in fact - is a way of living today, a style of living so to speak. That is where the form lies (1951:25).' speaks directly to Bollas (1995) that creativity and self are a continuous process. Rather than the Surrealistic and Freudian derived search for truth and self in unconscious symbolism, it becomes a management of subjectivity in the ongoing negotiation of self and other. As mentioned earlier, relationally based psychoanalysts like Benjamin (1999) reformulate the Freudian search for the unconscious and the attainment of psychic reality to that of the search and attainment of subjectivity and the realisation of the subjectivity of others. Relational theorists see the human psyche as interactive rather than monadic. They use the term 'intersubjectivity', indicating that, unlike classical and Kleinian approaches which emphasise the meeting of subject and object, subjectivity involves the meeting of *subject and subject*. It is de Kooning's distrust of pictorial solutions and his commitment to the discovery of self through action that can be interpreted in this way. 'The only certainty today is to be self conscious (de Kooning 1951:63)'. We can see here a commitment to action, to the discovery of the self in action that is always out of reach but waiting to be discovered. Adam Phillips concludes in his accessible account of Winnicott's life and work:

Once again it is the figure of the artist who embodies the drive for authenticity that is for Winnicott exemplary for the integrity of being he values above all else..... In the artist of all kinds... one can detect an inherent dilemma which belongs to the co-existence of two trends, the urgent need to communicate and the still more urgent need not to be found. This might account for the fact that we cannot conceive of an artist coming to the end of the task that occupies his whole nature. The self is, by definition, elusive, the player of hide and seek (Phillips 1988:152).

Lee Krasner echoed this in her words about her own work, that the artist has the 'need to merge against the need to separate (In Polcari 1991:283). It is this very dialectical process, which is connected to but not the same as consciousness, which is intrinsically implicated in the creation of subjectivity '...the most subtle, unobtrusive sense of I-ness by which experience is subtly endowed with the quality that one is thinking one's own thoughts and feeling one's own feelings (Ogden 1990:137).'

For what might be seen as dissemination and 'cracking up' by Bollas can now be reinterpreted as 'object usage' by Winnicott. What has been seen as aggressive and misogynist could also be viewed as an unconscious attempt at destruction in fantasy of a mother who can continue to survive. The development of de Kooning's approach to the female figure demonstrates an increasing confidence in the fragmentation and experimentation necessary for his gradual emersion into a freedom to 'take them on'. The paintings of men and women in the 1930's reflect more directly his traditional training. They are carefully drawn, the men from a model he constructed in his studio, and the women guardedly executed and contoured. These women seem vulnerable in muted greens and greys, the lines slack and the absence of hands increasing their sense of vulnerability. These were not women that could be taken on, played with, or engaged with in a symbolic act of rough and tumble play. These works are a far cry from the abandoned attack and fragmentation that characterised his life sized women of the 1950's.

Seated Woman (fig.1) of 1940, although evidencing his traditional style, shows signs of his new approach. The body parts are disjointed and in *Pink Lady* 1944 (fig.2), he turns most notably to a Picasso- like dislocation. *Pink Angels* 1945 (fig.3) can be seen as directly foreshadowing *Woman I* (fig.9). Here he draws directly from Picasso's *Guernica*, rejecting any traditional modelling in favour of extreme dismemberment. In this sense, *Pink Angels* could be considered his most ambitious painting to date. De Kooning continues to draw on the influences of Gorky and Picasso from 1947-1950 (Sylvester 1994) using realistic images and combining them with Abstract Expressionist vitalism setting the stage for what was to be labelled by Rosenberg in 1952 as Action Painting.

From 1947 to 1950 he executed a second series of women. These included: *Woman*, 1948 (fig.6); *Two Women on a Wharf*, 1949; *Woman 1948 - 1950* (fig.7). They lack the sturdiness of *Woman I*, and although the fragmentation is increased, the splitting of the image accentuates fragility. However, they begin to fill the canvas, begin to grow and it is probably *Woman 1948-1950* (fig.7) that gives the strongest hint to the development of *Woman I* which he began towards the end of 1950.

The drawings of women in the late 1940's could also be seen to lead up to the 1953 *Women*. The incorporation of stark colour and the increasing use of collage adds to the increasing tension between flatness and illusion, ambiguity and biomorphism. Increasing distortion and ambiguity may be seen to have another function: it begins to separate the figure from objective reality relegating it now to the role of a subjective object - that which is part fantasy and part reality. The freedom to use the object in such a merciless way requires this reduction in symbolic equivalence. As mentioned in Chapter two, the formation of symbols involves the establishment of substitutes for reality. Symbols establish the 'non differentiation between the thing symbolised and the symbol (Segal 1957:165)'.

When a substitute in the external world is used as a symbol it may be used more freely since it is not fully identified with it. In so far, however, as it is distinguished from the original object it is also recognised as an object in itself. Its own properties are recognised, respected and used, because no confusion with the original object blurs the characteristics of the new object used as a symbol (Segal 1957:167).

The figure can then be attacked in fantasy, not in reality. Hess (1969) suggested that the increasing trend of ambiguity in de Kooning's work had its roots in the tension between his early guild and academic training, but one could also speculate that it originated out of the insistence of this psychological phenomenon. Also, by its very psychological nature, the subjective object has 'no environment' - there is no figure ground distinction - ground and mother are one. It is through the

eventual success of 'object usage' that the psychic reality of other is eventually developed where the maternal object is expelled from the orbit of omnipotence.

These developments in de Kooning's work are brought about, as well, by the declining distinction between figuration and abstraction and his increasing disregard for formal constraints. Between 1940 and 1953 he eliminates all distinction in his paintings between painting and drawing, increasing the capacity for the freedom of rough handling. Gradually, by the distancing from the reality of the image, he begins establishing the psychic freedom to engage in 'object usage' - the space to destroy the mother safely in fantasy. The canvasses and women become increasingly bigger, eventually being almost greater than life size. Now they have the presence to be taken on, freely fragmented, dislocated and reassembled. These women can withstand the attacks, they even grin back, display themselves and laugh with mock aggression. They refuse to be pitied remaining immovable on the canvas joking with the artist in this safe orbit. 'Maybe the grin - it's rather like the Mesopotamian idols, they always stand up straight, looking to the sky with this smile, like they are astonished about the forces of nature you feel... (de Kooning 1963: 85)' - but they remain safely on the canvas like perfect, soon to become, objective mothers. Neither do they retaliate or go away enabling de Kooning to endeavour to 'get beyond the image' to subjectivity and reality. In the spirit of an ongoing search for self in this activity, Hess writes: '...the difficulty, the 'impossible' element', is attacked within the context of a complete work, and when it is 'solved' or to put it more accurately (there are no solutions), when an answer suggests itself that permits the painting to continue, de Kooning moves on to the next picture, often abandoning or destroying the previous one.. (Hess 1969:21)', in the safe knowledge that he can simply recreate another. De Kooning's words: 'I refrain from "finishing" the painting. I paint myself out of the picture, and when I have done that, I either throw it away or keep it. I am always in the picture somewhere (1951:117).'

Discussion of the Women in de Kooning's 1953 exhibition will focus primarily on his first and most famous *Woman I* (fig.9). Most of the commentary would apply in equal share to the other five paintings (figs. 10-14). As mentioned

above, what begins to evolve in this painting is the 'no environment'. The figure floats ambiguously and straddles both figure and ground, the attack here is at its most bold and relentless. Cubist form is retained and *Woman I* is in the classical seated pose reminiscent of Picasso and Matisse. Vigorous brushwork covers and confuses the viewers ability to easily integrate the image. What de Kooning does is take what should remain *in fantasy*, and place it outside into the world of tangible reality *for the viewer*. This unconscious fantasy of destruction can be interpreted as being disconcerting in reality in that it involves the destruction of the maternal body - the source of life. One can easily, in this sense, understand the alarming reactions of spectators to these works, they are far too close to unconscious murder. De Kooning took something out of the safety of unconscious fantasy into the realm of reality. In line with the deep unconscious characteristic in the making of these works, de Kooning states:

I wasn't concerned to get a particular kind of feeling. I look at them now and they seem vociferous and ferocious (De Kooning 1963:84).

This interpretation based on 'object usage' and destruction in fantasy enables us to make some sense of why these images have been universally considered savage and aggressive and yet, as the above quote suggests: *the artist remained unaware of this*. The term 'aggressive' is singularly most utilised in commentary on de Kooning's *Women* in this exhibition. Nochlin asserts: 'Certainly, the subject 'woman' is approached aggressively in de Kooning's series, and, in some areas paint is applied violently as the most manifest form of the aggressive impulse (1998:1)'. Rosenblum (1985), like Nochlin, sees the *Women* series as an extension of Picasso's work, emphasising the tradition of the *femme fatale*. De Kooning became 'heir to Picasso's vision... like Dora Maar, ... who reigned like a cruel, demented queen from the throne of her armchair (p.100)'. Of the common psychological approach of both Picasso and de Kooning, the subject is treated '...as if it were the victim of physical or sexual assault (p.98)'. Hess (1969) uses the term

‘Black Goddess’ in his discussion of de Kooning’s Women. Polcari is also alarmed: ‘They are a seductive and fatal force, fecundity and aggression, indifference and amorality.....The primordial insect that kills after the sexual act (Polcari 1991:286).’ But for de Kooning this is a woman strong enough to confront her attacker. It is not by accident that he says he had Gertrude Stein in mind when he painted *Woman I*:

I was thinking about Gertrude Stein - as if one of them would say, “How do you like me?” Then I could sustain this thing all the time because it could change all the time; she could almost get upside down, or not be there, or come back again, she could be any size. *Because this content could take care of almost anything that could happen* (my italics) (de Kooning 1963:83).

Woman I looks out at the viewer, undaunted by what may be happening to her. The glaring teeth are evident. There are still no hands, but she sits with her legs astride clearly facing her attacker. This is the strong surviving mother. Hess tells us that ‘the public was scandalized’ (1969:74) by the exhibition of the 1953 Woman series, and quotes that in May 1955 ‘almost every newspaper in America carried as a full page advertisement a diatribe by millionaire Huntington Hartford titled “The Public be Damned”(1969:100)’. This directly referred to *Woman I*. Perhaps the words of Winnicott provides the key to this:

The central postulate in this thesis (about object usage) is that whereas the subject does not destroy the subjective object (projection material), destruction turns up and becomes a central feature in so far as the object is *objectively perceived, has autonomy and belongs to a ‘shared’ reality* (my italics)....This is the difficult part of my thesis, at least for me (Winnicott 1969:714).

When the fantasy of destruction is *not* kept within the realm of fantasy, the horror is unbearable. But de Kooning’s women, in fantasy, did survive. ‘The word

'destruction' is needed, not because of the child's impulse to destroy, but because of the object's ability to survive (Winnicott 1969b:715).' 'Say ta' says Winnicott - thank you for surviving. The mother has been destroyed but she has endured, she exists, therefore, so does the child. She has been there waiting to be discovered.

De Kooning was certainly, at the time of these works, influenced by the changing roles of women in America, post World War II. Women had been relegated men's jobs, they were entering a more empowered position, they were on Camel ads, smoking. In post war American Society, women were becoming more visible, stronger, were beginning to have a voice. He drew on these popular images, combining the influence of ancient Mesopotamian figures and mythic archaic fertility goddesses with a more modern pictorial tradition (Rosenblum 1985). De Kooning acknowledges these sources - advertisements, billboards, even women shopping in the Union Square. Confident smiles were cut from magazine advertisements for Camel cigarettes and pasted on. His Women slide between the past and the present, between ancient icons and modern day females.

Sidney Janis, awaiting de Kooning's work for the upcoming exhibition was aware of the struggle involved in *Woman I* and its subsequent five paintings, but anticipated that it was the artist who painted *Excavation, 1950* that would appear in his gallery. Janis was heedful that abstract art, desired by collectors, had emerged as important in the American scene and hoped that these Women would be worked through in some way and that de Kooning would return to his non figurative abstract work characteristic of his well received 1948 exhibition (Stevens and Swan 2004).

However, in making *Woman I* de Kooning challenged almost every standard. This painting could be seen as a record of a relationship. In his brushstroke and his attack on the canvas there is a suggestion of two individuals locked in a struggle. A compelling piece of biographical information about de Kooning's mother lends some confirmation to this (Stevens and Swan, op.cit.). His mother is described as unpredictable, prone to violent rages, someone who could not be depended on and someone who did not easily engage in physical contact. Perhaps it was the women in Union square who captured his early maternal experience. They could be both

quiescently elegant and unpredictably aggressive. De Kooning once suggested to a friend that he go to the bargain centre at Union Square in New York and witness how aggressive and greedy the women could be. The angelic could unpredictably become aggressive (Stevens and Swan 2004). If this were true, this kind of maternal object would not negotiate 'object usage' in a developmentally facilitating way. Unlike the safety of the canvas, she would be likely to retaliate and be psychologically injured by the child's aggression. But de Kooning's Women were different:

For many years I was not interested in making a good picture - as one might say, "Now this is a really good painting" or a "perfect work". I didn't want to pin it down at all. I was interested in that before, but I found out it was not in my nature. I didn't want to work with the idea of perfection, *but to see how far one could go.* (my italics) (De Kooning, in Stevens and Swan 2004: 432).

De Kooning's Women are paradoxes, both radical and conservative, there and not there. They are tough survivors. The essence of this psychoanalytic interpretation can be found in the following statement:

The Woman had to do with female painted through all the ages, all those idols....it did one thing for me: it eliminated composition, arrangement, relationships, light - all this silly talk about line, colour and form - *because that is the thing I wanted to get hold of.* (My italics). (de Kooning 1963:78)

'Getting hold of' the objective m/other through the freedom to destroy in fantasy and thereby establish a separate sense of self and subjectivity in a context devoid of symbolic equation becomes the psychological struggle in the safe arena of artistic creativity. Perhaps in doing these six paintings of Women in 1953, de Kooning was recreating the ideal unconscious scenario to exercise this task:

There is no better suggestion in art of a tantrum, no truer rendering of a child who knows only that he *wants* - and is desolate - as he hurls himself back and forth against an unyielding strength (Stevens and Swan 2004:339).

Conclusion

When, as a young neurologist, Freud attended Charcot's demonstrations on hypnosis at the Salpêtrière in Paris, he was mesmerised. Here was evidence that a portion of the mind, with its own agency and motivation, could be completely outside of conscious awareness. He spent the rest of his life theorising about what this compartment of the mind was made of and why we would need to work so hard to hide it. He concluded that humankind harboured powerful urges to conquer, kill and possess and, that if we were going to live together in reasonable harmony, a convincing system of self deception would have to be developed. For this he postulated the twin mechanisms of repression and defence. For Freud art, like any system of human endeavour, fell into this maze of compromises. The art product represented the unavoidable neurotic truce of a being torn between the acceptable and the unacceptable. What he fell short of explaining was the aesthetic quality of art and limited his observations to an extension of his clinical theory.

Melanie Klein extended Freud's view of a being designed for destruction, but instead of settling for a system of workable defences against this dilemma, she offered the possibility of redemption. We can repair that which we damage. For Kleinians, this is where art resides: it is our attempt at restoration and preservation of the maternal body - our first object of destruction and the source of our salvation.

Winnicott, in the spirit of reconciliation, invited destruction in and suggested that we fuse it with love. In this way, he suggested, we can be truly creative and enjoy the creations of others as separate from ourselves. For Winnicott and Bollas, our sense of self is exercised within a continual cycle of safe destruction and creation and art is seen as part of this rhythm. For psychoanalytic theorists of the Independent school, artists are always unconsciously engaged in the reproduction of early object relationships with all the injury, hope and gratitude that they once held. There is nothing else that we do in the world, whether it be the enactment with art, culture, ritual, marriage, children, or careers.

This thesis enters the tradition of mystery that once confronted Freud in Charcot's lecture theatre, that much of the time we do not know what we are

doing. By looking at de Kooning's work and his words, a post Freudian interpretation of the unconscious fantasy and struggle that may have informed his 1953 Women paintings is offered. Through the interaction between canvas and medium de Kooning established for himself a safe arena in which to destroy the mother in fantasy - a process that is necessary, creative and adaptive. Since this is held to be an unconscious process where fantasy does not equal reality, this may explain why de Kooning himself was unaware of the effect it may have on the viewer. All unconscious phenomena are considered overdetermined and hence, this interpretation may be one amongst many. Psychoanalysis, with its belief in the unconscious and its ability to layer multiple meanings has, inherent in its system of signifiers, an essential humility: interpretation is ongoing. It is never finished.

Finally, a comment made by Taylor regarding psychoanalytic interpretations of art is pertinent. In his footnote mentioning Fuller's work he seems to miss the point about a psychoanalytic interpretation of art and creativity. He writes:

The results of Fuller's account seems odd. It appears to validate such disparate works as those by Bonnard, Cézanne, Rothko and the little known American abstractionist Robert Natkin....which takes these artists out of the historical process and endows them with qualities which the artists did not know they had. (Taylor 1987:38)

While one could agree with the limitations of psychoanalysis in accounting for aspects of formalism, genre and the historical context of the artist, Taylor seems to misunderstand the contribution of psychoanalysis. It involves the act of interpretation of unconscious processes, and like etic research, does not assume empirical validity of its knowledge. Willem de Kooning would be very surprised if he would be required to *know* that in making his women, he was tearing and shredding them to pieces in order to validate his sense of separateness and subjectivity. Just like a patient in the process of psychoanalytic treatment wouldn't be expected to *know* that he wanted to kill his father and marry his mother. What has been offered in this thesis is simply an act of interpretation.

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Figure 1. De Kooning *Seated Woman* 1940

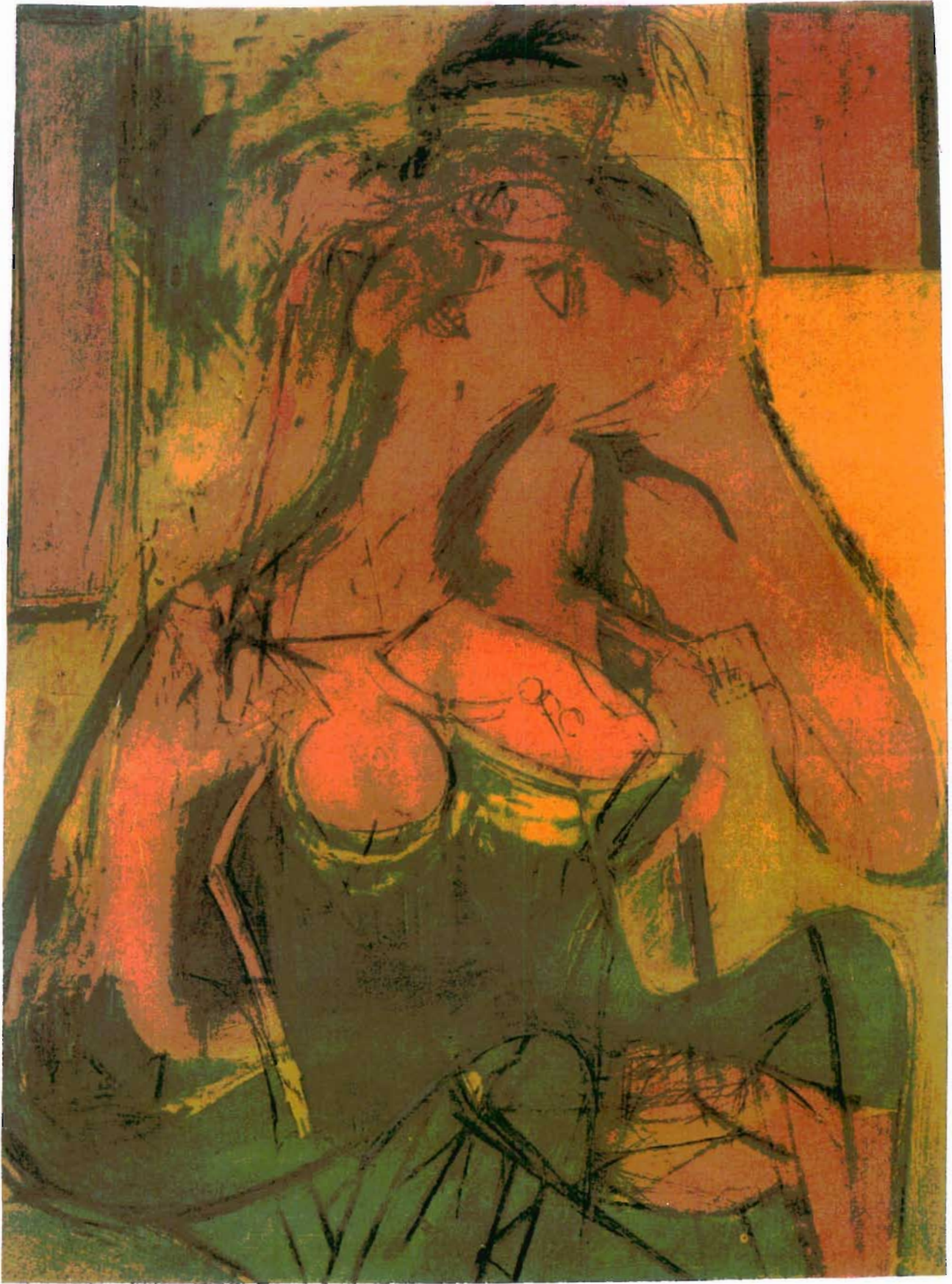


Figure 2. De Kooning *Pink Lady* 1944

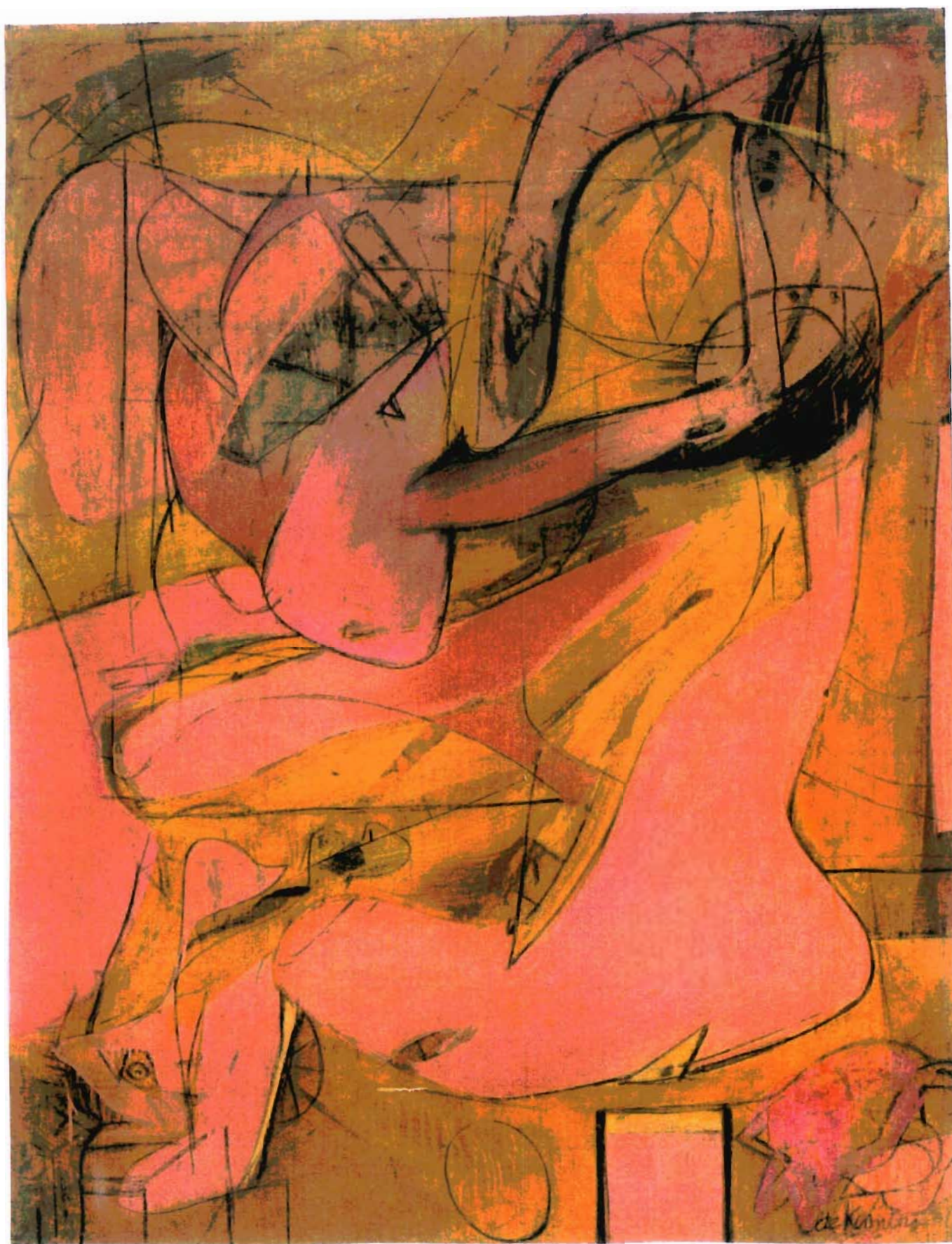


Figure 3. De Kooning *Pink Angels* c 1945



Figure 4. De Kooning *Painting* 1948

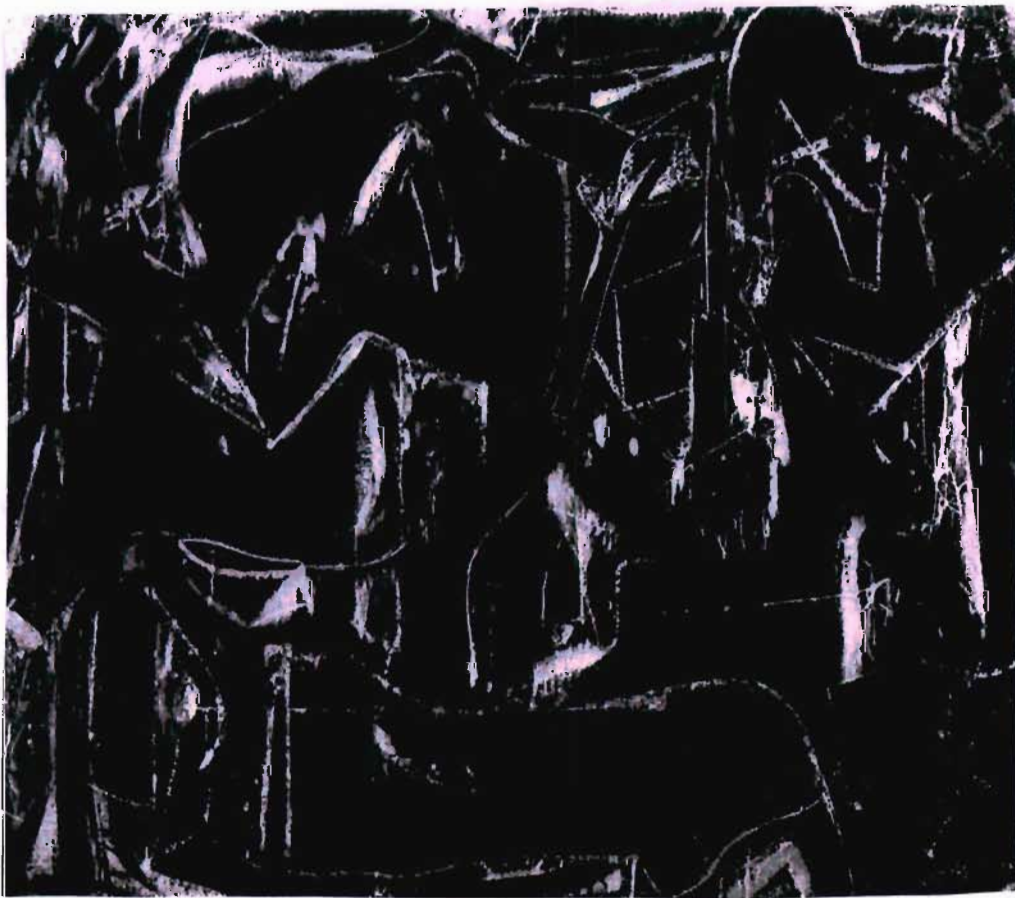


Figure 5. De Kooning *Dark Pond* 1948



Figure 6. De Kooning *Woman* 1948

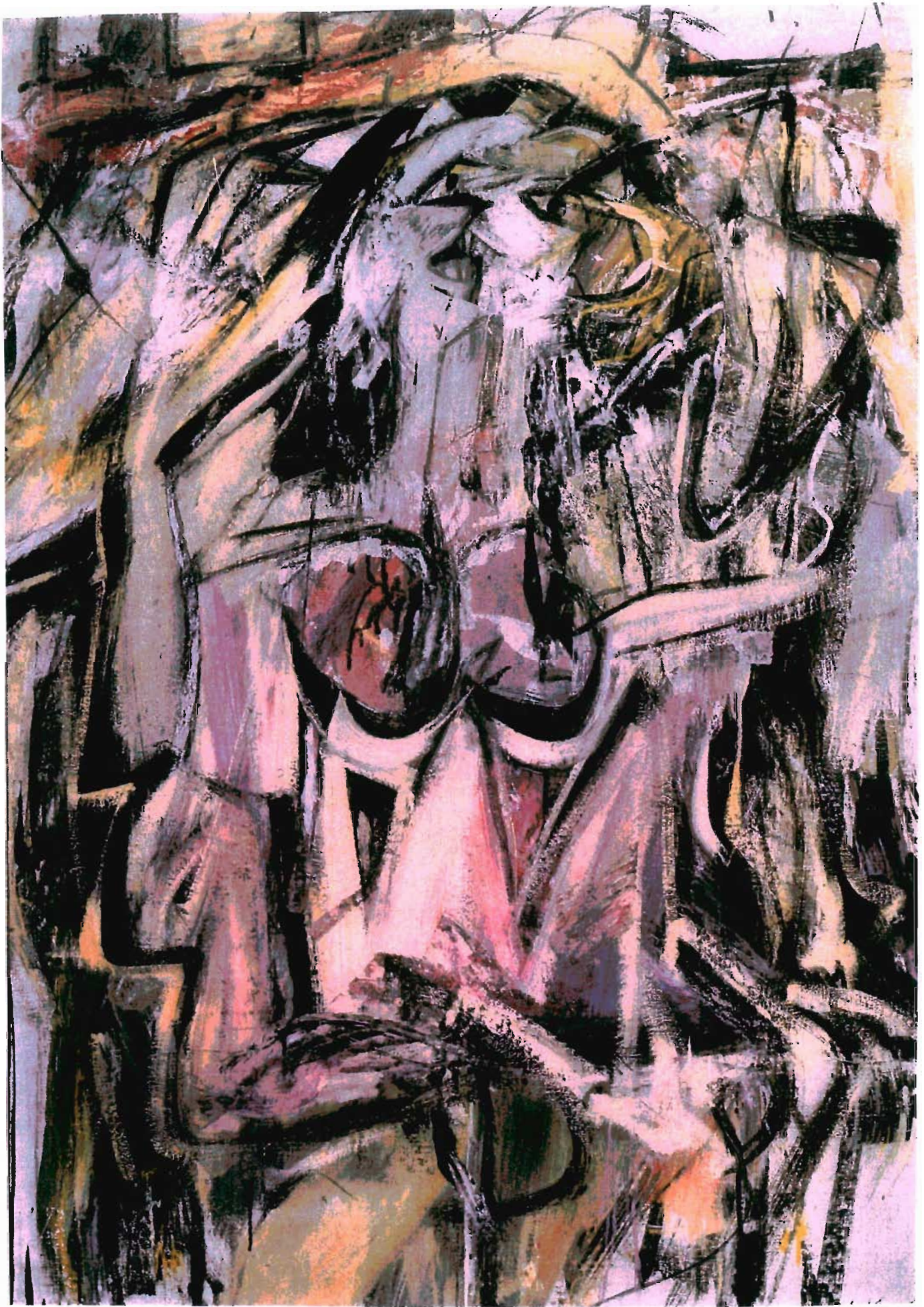


Figure 7. De Kooning *Woman* 1948-1950



Figure 8. De Kooning: Six Stages of Woman 1.

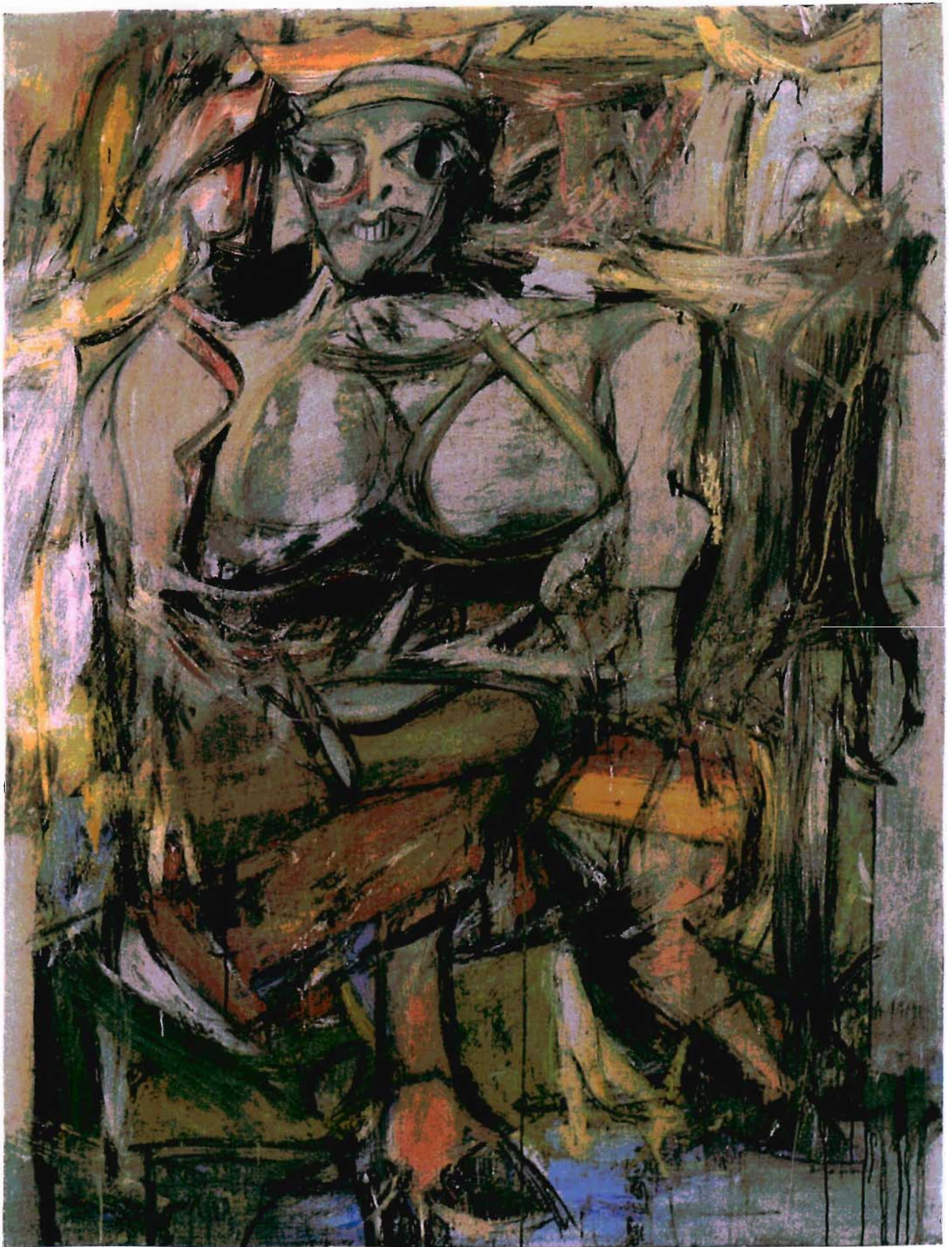


Figure 9. De Kooning *Woman I* 1950-1952

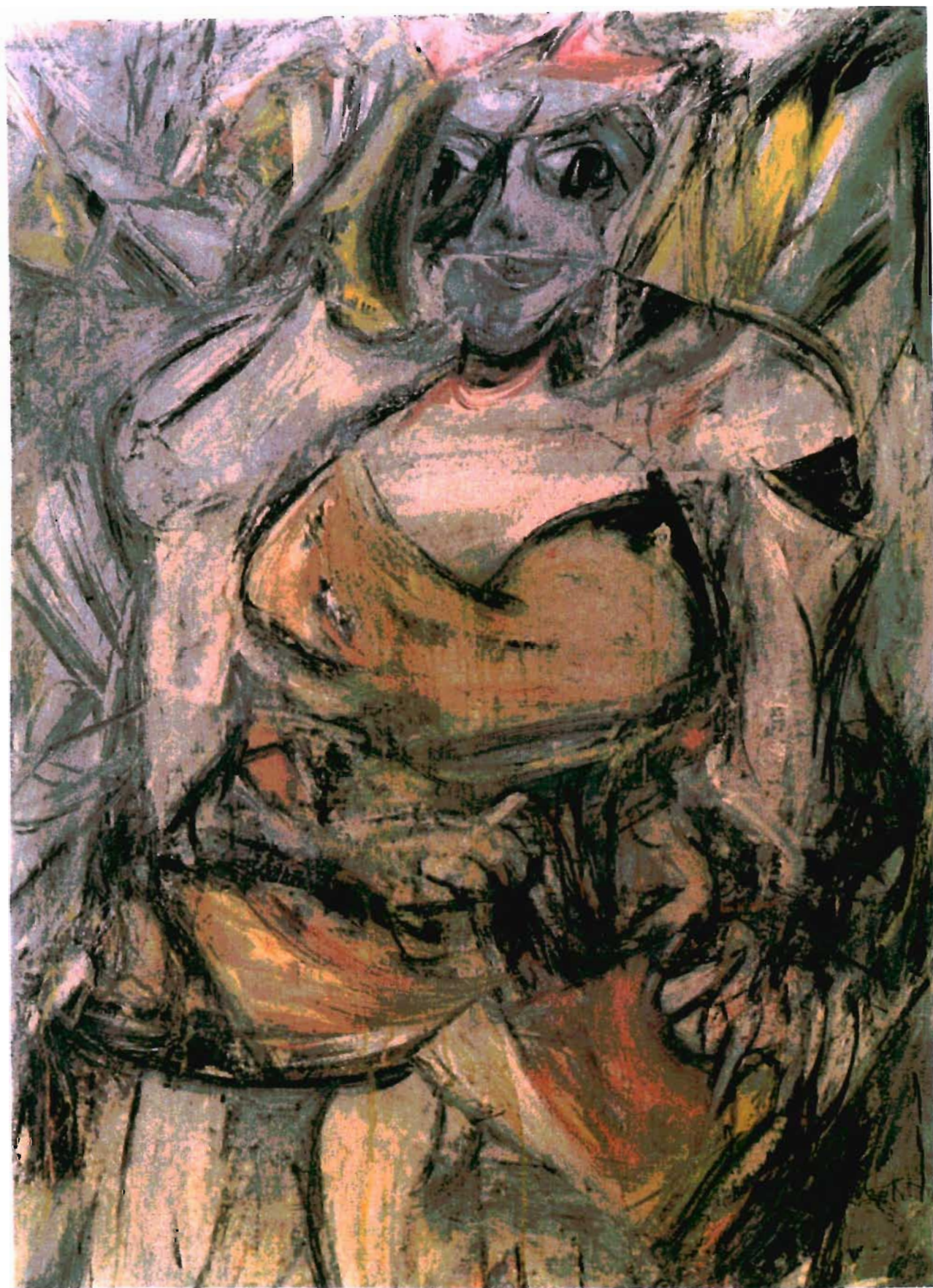


Figure 10. De Kooning *Woman II* 1952

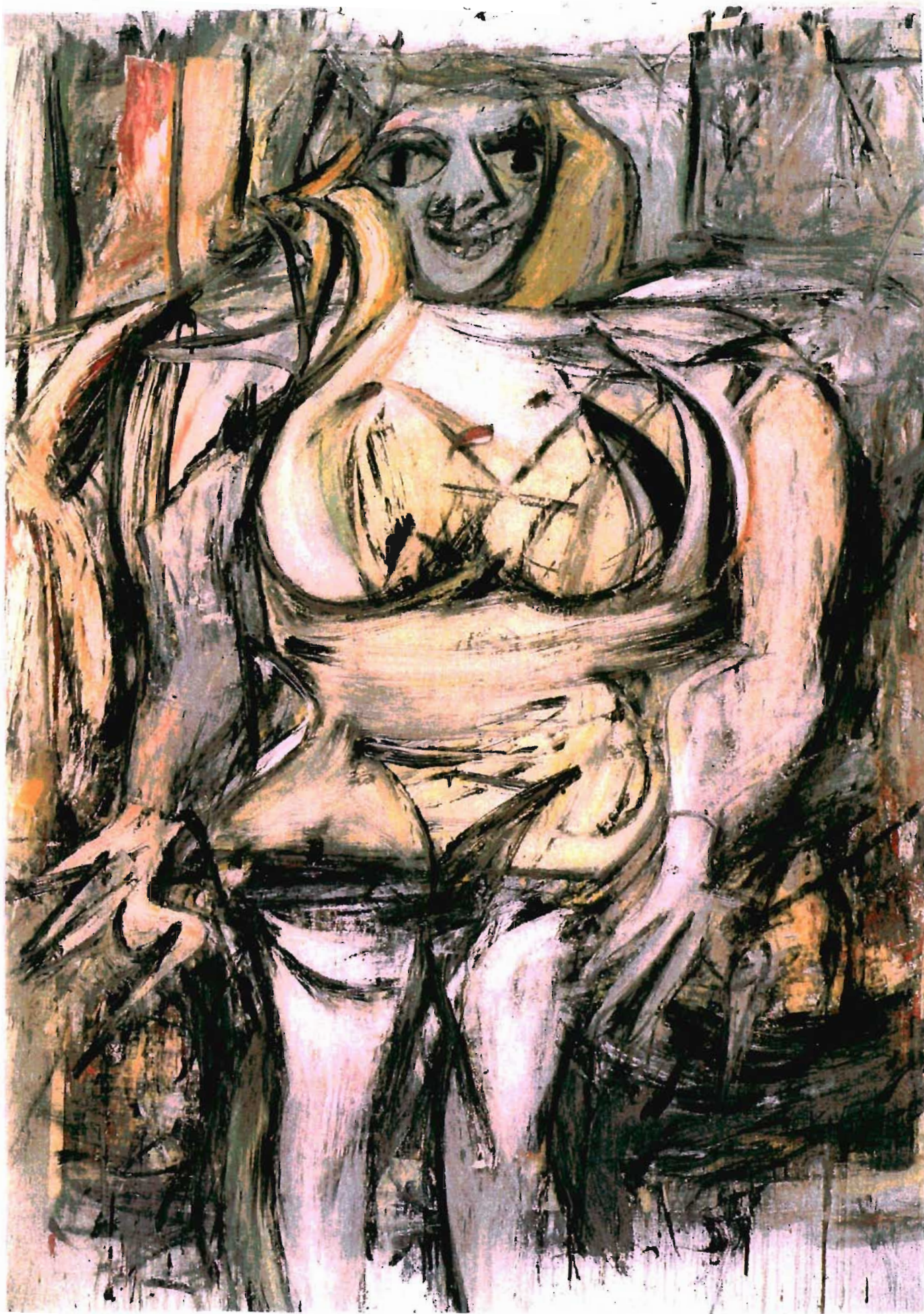


Figure 11. De Kooning *Woman 111* 1952-1953

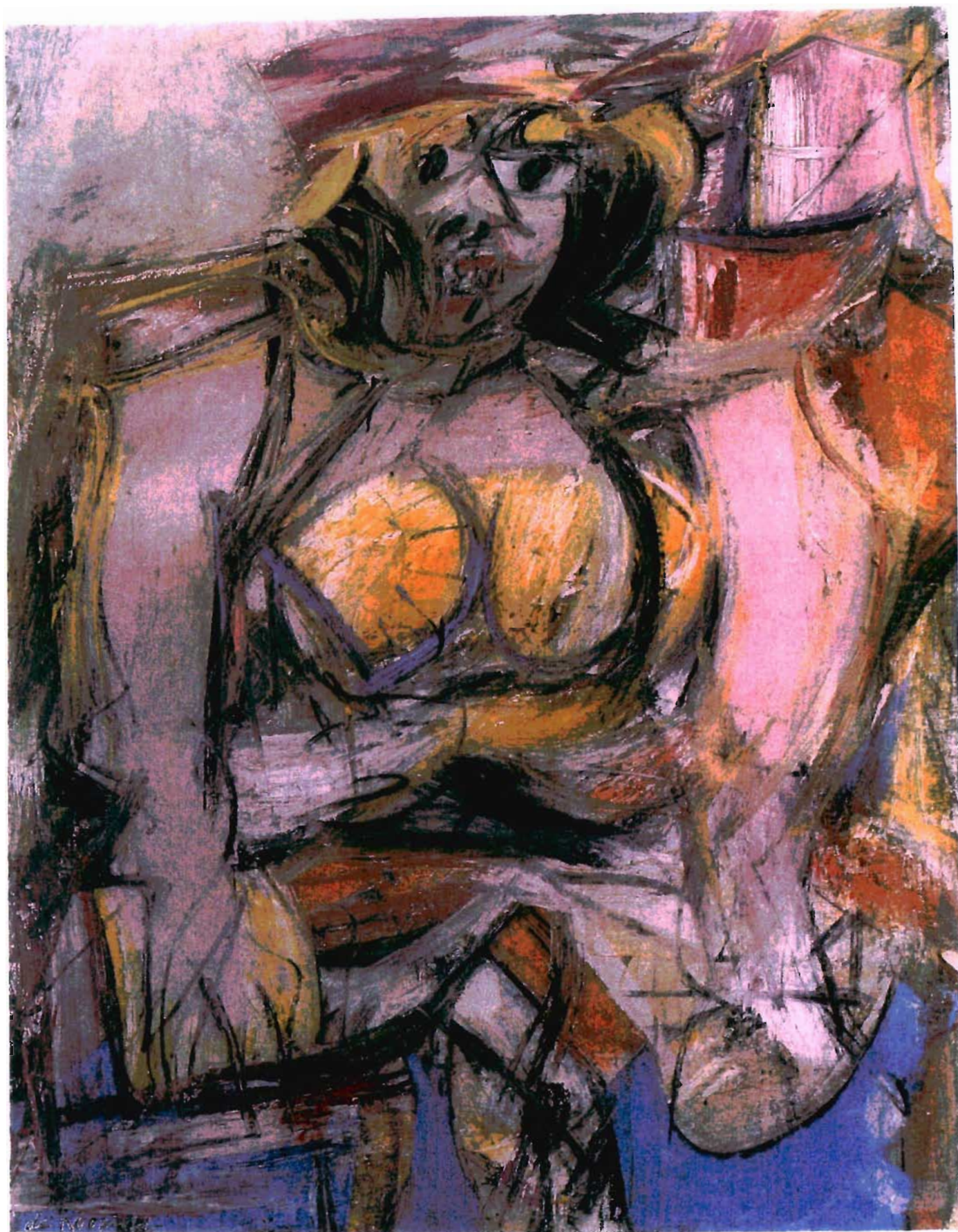


Figure 12. De Kooning *Woman IV* 1952-1953



Figure 13. De Kooning *Woman V* 1952-1953

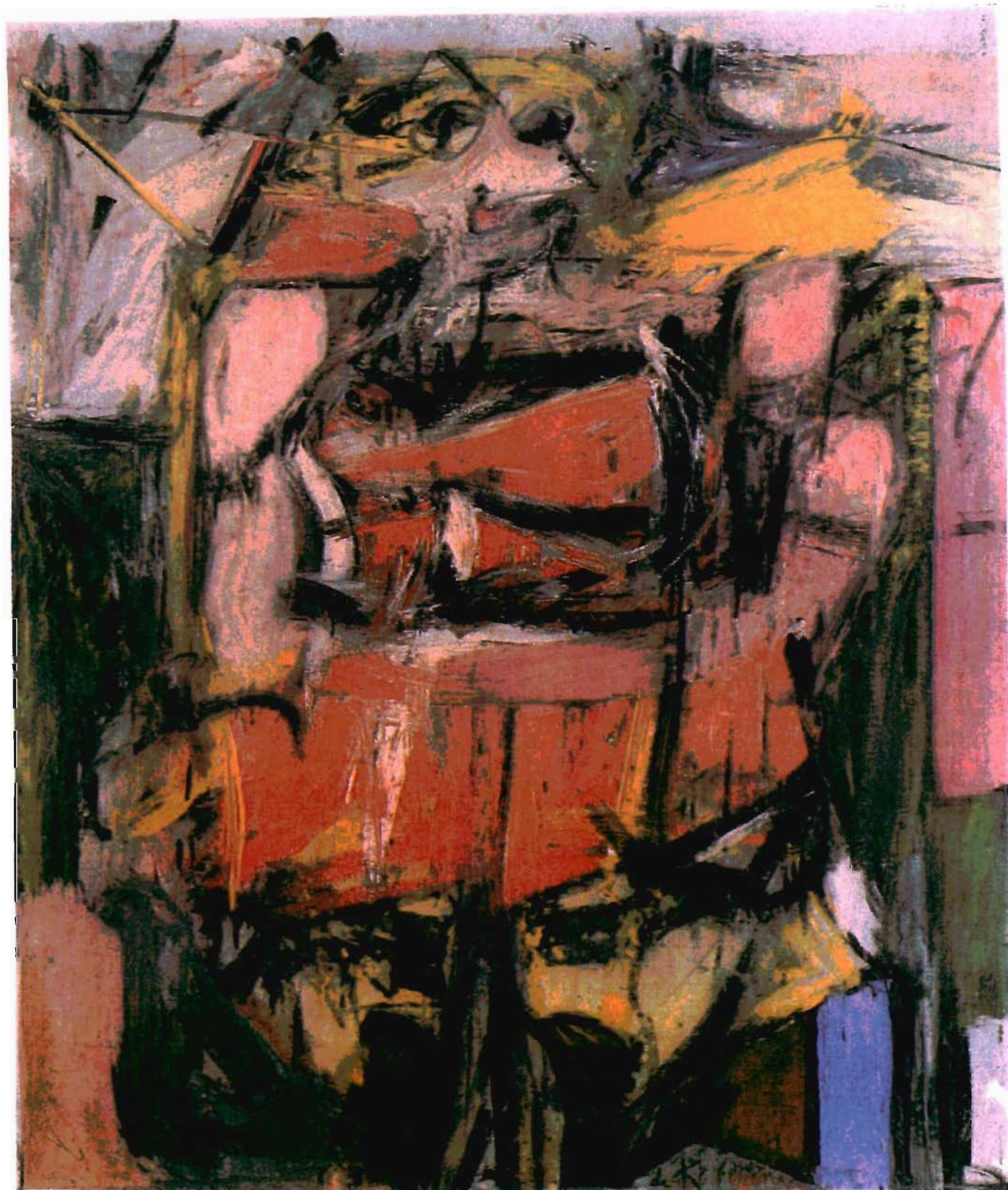


Figure 14. De Kooning *Woman VI* 1953