

The Spiritual in Contemporary Art;
Antoni Tàpies &
Cos de matèria y taques taronges (1968)

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Abstract

This thesis places the Catalan artist, Antoni Tàpies (b. 1923, Barcelona) and the painting Cos de matèria y taques taronges (1968) in critical debates on contemporary art in order to forge new languages and methods by which to discuss the spiritual. Notions of reconstructive postmodernism, particularly Paul Crowther's concept of the iterable, are employed to challenge the hegemony of deconstruction in current discourses on art.

Using an original interview with Tàpies in 1999 with the collection of his writings and those of his critics, the research makes comparison with some of his peers of the second half of the twentieth century (Lucio Fontana, Barnett Newman and Mark Rothko) and other notable artists (Marina Abramovic and Eva Hesse) of the period who are concerned with expression of the spiritual. In the 20th century, painters invented their own canon of spiritual painting, that had less religious impact than its antecedents; it is this tradition to which Tàpies is heir.

Tàpies' work verifies the contemplative potential and articulation of the sublime in painting that has been suggested, but rarely substantiated, by him as well as his critics. Meditation and contemplation in the non-denominational traditions of Buddhism and Christianity are reframed as contemporary manifestations of the spiritual through analysis of iconography in Cos de matèria y taques taronges. Further, Tàpies is situated amongst artists who articulate the sublime through expressions of corporeality and process.

Evaluation of date, subject and confrontational style of Tàpies' painting suggests that it should be considered as at the forefront of the avantgarde of the period, and ground-breaking in painting because of its disruption of modernism's pursuit of purity and expression of non-dualism through the juxtaposition of pictorial space with matter. Tàpies can be placed among a small number of 20th century European artists whose work is included in the broad tendency of Matter paintings; the thesis points to significant differences to many of his fellow painters, particularly in his working methods and use of materials. The thesis concludes that Tàpies' Cos de matèria y taques taronges is a unique example of painting of the time, and should be considered as representative of Matter painting of the period 1950-1970s.

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Preface

As an artist, I seek to emphasise an art practice not subsumed by theory; therefore, implicit to this thesis, is the notion that agency is crucial for the artist. Moreover, as someone deeply committed to the possibilities of affecting the social realm through art practice, I have been guided by the need to show that the individual has agency. Like many of my generation, I have been greatly affected by postmodernity, a lifestyle over four cities, numerous friends made and lost, a sense of fragmentation, as well as feelings of spiritual and cultural loss. I would venture that this is particularly true for many women of my generation whose roles have dramatically changed and diversified.

Moreover, in the time I have undertaken this research, I have become increasingly involved with Buddhism and meditation. Buddhism stresses that the experiential should take precedence over the theoretical; this has resulted in a commitment to looking at the spiritual as *active processes* for an individual. This has meant looking closely at Tàpies as a practitioner, and discussing specific art works through the experience of viewing them. I have, deliberately at times, therefore chosen theorists from outside academia who concentrate on the experiential. I have also wanted to articulate a language that eschews the lack of precision of the 'new age', but avoids verbose theory.

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Introduction: The Spiritual in Art in *Cos de matèria i taques taronges*¹

Yes, I believe it (the spiritual) is a constant in my work. It is like a scenery, a backdrop that I have in my studio when I am working. It represents this possibility for art. I have in my mind, a type of art that becomes a mechanism that changes the ordinary human conscience. It is in a way a technique to modify conscience. Some neuroscientists have a good knowledge about this topic. It is also well known that one can be transformed when one is under drugs. This vision of a deeper reality, this closeness to the ultimate mystery requires some effort on our side. It is not something we have by accident in our daily life (Tàpies Interview, 1999:235)².

The core questions considered in this thesis are; how can the spiritual in art be discussed today, and, what aspects of the spiritual have enduring relevance? The thesis' claim is that the spiritual has great relevance for contemporary art, as it is central to the human condition. Tàpies centrally, and other artists, are employed to demonstrate the place and presence of the spiritual in the art of the 20th century and its historical antecedents³.

The case for the spiritual in art is rarely made by historians and theorists of modern and contemporary art⁴. While a number of contemporary artists are concerned with existential issues, few are prepared to discuss the subject using religious or spiritual terminology. This reticence is less strong, but still evident, in art theory where few critics have suggested ways to progress the debate. Disinterest in spiritual expression has meant that little has been written on the topic in the last fifty years. Aesthetics and the spiritual in postmodern times, as in the past, are frequently regarded as being in opposition; while artists involved with challenging boundaries tend to regard religion with suspicion, as doctrinaire. Moreover, many proponents of religion and the spiritual regard contemporary art as secular (Laeuchli, 1980:1ff). Yet, for most of Western history, art has drawn on Christianity for its content, and has relied on ecclesiastical patronage.

¹ Hereafter this painting is referred to as Cos de matèria.

² See Appendix C for interview with Antoni Tàpies.

³ See Appendix A for brief biography of Antoni Tàpies.

⁴ In this thesis, the term 'contemporary art' is to be read as meaning the period from 1968 to the present. The term 'modern art' is to be taken to mean the period from 1900 to the present.

For the purposes of this thesis, the Oxford English Dictionary captures the following meaning of the term 'spiritual':

... values of or pertaining to, affecting or concerning the spirit or higher moral qualities of the mind, especially as regarded in a religious aspect, or, of or pertaining to or emanating from the intellect or higher faculties of the mind (Sykes, 1982).

While this term could refer broadly to moral qualities of the mind or intellect, here and throughout the thesis the focus is on the spiritual as experienced through the visual. My notion of the spiritual in the visual arts does not correspond entirely to the Absolute of Christianity, neither does it correspond to its cultural legacy in Europe⁵. While Buddhist and Christian traditions, for instance, have spiritual content, the dictionary definition given above makes clear a secular notion of the spiritual that may prove to be germane to postmodernity. However, the definition does not support the relativism and pluralism that tends to predominate in postmodernity. Relativism has arisen alongside the waning of the collective religious and social values of the postmodern period; and, where there is an absence of consensual criteria no ethical prerogatives are acknowledged in academic debate⁶. Pluralism accepts that differing, even contradictory, convictions can exist simultaneously; all views and values being potentially equal. Relativism and pluralism then are at odds with a traditional Western culture based on values that are often deemed hierarchical, dualistic and absolute⁷. In this thesis, except where otherwise indicated, dualism refers to a

⁵ The Absolute is the term used by idealists to describe the one independent reality of which all things are an expression. The term, initially a noun standing for the name of God, was introduced in the East by Gaudapada as early as the 6th century A.D., and in the West (some 800 years later) by Nicholas of Cusa. In Western philosophy, the term is much associated with the work of Hegel. For Hegel the term is the name for the capstone entity of his system, the absolute Spirit, which possesses dimensions of absolute truth and beauty. Hegel defined the Absolute as Spirit; the logical necessity that embodies itself in the world in order to achieve self-knowledge and freedom during the course of history. In this usage the term entered the vocabulary of 19th century idealism. Many prominent 19th century British and American idealists, including Bosanquet, Royce and Bradley, defended the existence of a quasi-Hegelian absolute. It has been used in the East in recent years as an alternative term for *brahman* (primarily by Sri Aurobindo). Kant used the adjective 'absolute' to characterise what is unconditionally valid. He claimed that pure reason searched for absolute grounds on the understanding that were ideals only, but that practical reason postulated the real existence of such grounds as necessary for morality. This apparent inconsistency led his successors to attempt to systematise his view of reason. To do this, Schelling introduced the term 'the Absolute' for the unconditioned ground (and hence identity) of subject and object (Hester Reeve, pers. comm., 2004, Reese, 1996:3).

⁶ The contemporary period has also witnessed a rise in the influence of absolutism; for example, seen in Christian and Moslem fundamentalism.

⁷ These kinds of value structures are even more evident in Islam and all undemocratic cultures; (for example, the Indian caste system) but the argument of this thesis focuses on the West and therefore

tendency in Western art to contrast space and its associated spiritual references with plastic form, as well as matter and its more everyday connotations⁸.

Before examining allegations for Tàpies' expression of non-dualism, I will introduce its salient theoretical points. The quest for wholeness is evident in the individual's need to deal with the contradictory experience of paradox that both provides enjoyment and overwhelms (Crowther, 1993:116-122). Dualism in a scientific world-view attributes the true existence of meaning to all ideas, while recognising that these have an inferior but opposing principle. Paradox as experienced in subject and object relations is the basis of dualism (Coleman, 1998: 36-39, 135, Collinson in Hanfling, 1992: 118-120, Macquet, 1986:50-58). Paradox is, moreover, an inevitable experience of the individual raised within the Western dualistic philosophical tradition. This is an issue of great importance to Tàpies and is referred to by the majority of his critics.

Theorists, such as Jean Baudrillard, cite problems of verifying the existence of an underlying level of reality and of intrinsic properties of disparate phenomena. He declares that all things are simulacra, that nothing distinguishes the authentic or

reference to the East and its traditions is made only insofar as it has affected Western values, for instance, Christianity and Buddhism are Eastern in origin but have become adjusted and adapted to the West (Prof. M. Smith, pers. comm., June 2003).

⁸ Dualism has many meanings that relate to God and creation and their relationship to matter and non-matter. Dualism within religion generally refers to the otherness and transcendence of God and in the Western context the spiritual and the material are generally regarded as being in opposition. In philosophy, dualism is the view that reality consists of two separate parts, a theory recognising two independent principles (mind and matter, cf. idealism, and materialism; good and evil in the universe; two personalities in Christ. Dualism has been an aspect of Western philosophy since the pre-Socratic division between appearance and reality; the earliest complete metaphysical dualism is noted in Plato. He attributed true existence to 'ideas', but recognised an inferior but opposing principle apart from the world of appearance. Plato's realm of Being contains eternal Ideas, and a realm of Becoming; the medieval division between finite man and infinite God. Descartes likewise held to a dualism and described mind and body as direct and complete opposites, a thinking mind (*res cogitans*) and extended matter (*res extensa*). Interpretations of dualism include Hume's separation of fact from value; Kant's division between empirical phenomena and transcendental noumena; the epistemological double-aspect theory of James and Russell, who postulate a neutral substance that can be understood in separate ways either as mind or brain. The doctrine of two truths, the sacred and the profane or the religious and the secular, is a dualistic response to the conflict between religion and science. Monistic alternatives to dualism include Hobbe's view that the mental is merely the epiphenomena of the material; Berkeley's view that material things are collections of mental ideas; and the contemporary materialist view of Smart, Armstrong and Churchland that the mind is the brain. Metaphysical dualism was present in the Eastern paired school of Sankhya-Yoga and Hinduism where mind, *purusa*, and matter, *prakrti*, are recognised as fundamental and ultimate. Other systems, for example, Advaita Vedanta and Zen claim to have overcome such dualisms (Reese, 1996:182-184).

the true from the surface appearance (Sarup, 1993:161ff). Further, he claims that attempts to approximate the authentic are suspect. Indeed, the existence of authentic reality is hard, even impossible, to prove. It may however be possible to demonstrate the potential for a painting to approximate authentic reality for the viewer, and to consider how artists seek to address this concept. In particular, Tàpies' art may demonstrate that all imagery and experience need not be reduced to simulacra:

Whether or not we believe that there is a place called the unconscious where modern artists can find inspiration for the 'authentic' art work, we are faced with an overwhelming number of artists who have held this view (Meecham & Sheldon, 2000:83).

Metaphysical philosophers from Socrates, through Kantian Idealism until late modernism, have espoused belief in a deeper authentic level of reality distinct from the surface appearance of existence. While authentic reality refers to the intrinsic and unchanging properties of existence, authenticity refers to the question of whether phenomena have intrinsic characteristics that can be experienced by the individual. Modernists drew on Plato and Kant to ascribe intrinsic meaning to art that could be conveyed to a viewer (Harrison & Wood, 1992:129). While possessing considerable currency, the concept of authenticity has been fundamentally contested within postmodern discourses, spectacle and the real cannot be distinguished (Sarup, 1993:165).

The concept of the individual's psyche as fragmented, yet having the potential for coherence and wholeness through the transcendence of paradox, has been posited from Romanticism onwards (McEvilley, 1993:11-12)⁹. The notion of a quest for wholeness assumed that a mediating God was distinct from the human realm (Beardsley, 1966: 89ff,105ff). Throughout Western thought until the modernist period, an individual was deemed able to approximate authentic reality

⁹ Connection between the quest for wholeness and the absolute is evident in that nineteenth and twentieth-century idealism interprets the absolute in its original Latin sense as 'posited wholeness'. Absolute idealism designated the mental or ideational as key to the nature of reality; it was a term first used by Hegel involving a synthesis between the subjective and objective idealism proffered by Schelling. Since Hegel a number of idealist philosophers have stressed the Absolute, most aptly summarised in its original Latin sense of 'wholeness, unity and completeness of reality, which yet somehow lies beyond the world of our experience' (Reese, 1996:3, 326-7).

through the quest for wholeness (Coleman, 1998:71ff)¹⁰. Termed 'ultimate reality' by Paul Tillich, he claimed that the individual wished to express wholeness, or essential unity, as a finite being through a heightened awareness of the infinite (Tillich, 1987:14-15). There is, however, no immediate relationship with God, as the individual is ontologically other to him; God is the creator and infinite, the individual is created by God and finite. Moreover, in theology there is no distinction in God between essence and existence, in identity and reality; Tillich refers to Christ as 'essential manhood' because the distinction between essence and existence is overcome in him. In contradistinction humans are regarded as fallen, our essence is different from our existence; we are therefore regarded as separated from God. Furthermore, the integrity of the individual and their uniqueness is predicated on the fact that we are made in the image of God; Christianity affirms the ontological integrity of our individuality. As finite beings in space and time we cannot merge with God in this life, but we can potentially be with God for eternity. The individual is left purely with the potential to develop a heightened sense or awareness of God or a feeling of wholeness through prayer and contemplation. As Christian metanarratives waned, the individual was deprived of the potential for wholeness through the mediation of God, while growing industrialisation saw man as removed from the natural. Hence nature became the conduit to sublime experience and wholeness (Honour, 1981:57ff). Romantic painting frequently employed tensions between the individual and nature to signal the unresolved paradox seeking resolution (Honour, 1981: 78, McEvelley, 1993:12).

The last movement in painting to claim spirituality occurred fifty years ago, with the metaphysical tendency of Abstract Expressionism¹¹. Today, artists embrace a plural approach to the spiritual, yet the art establishment is preoccupied with endgames. Art has become divorced from existential meaning, and while the

¹⁰ Relevant here is Heidegger's distinction between *dasein* (or being there), the kind of being ordinarily available to us, from *eksistenz* (once again, authentic being) and "transcending Being" which is akin to the holy (Reese, 1996:292).

¹¹ Distinction must be made between metaphysical tendency of the Abstract Expressionist movement (1946-70) and the Metaphysical painting of Giorgio de Chirico (1917) (Sproccati, 1992:196).

new age and counter-culture movements claim spirituality, unlike Tàpies they largely avoid engaging with the challenges of avantgarde art (Gablik in Griffin, 1990:177ff)¹². Testing claims for the spiritual by focusing on one artist, Antoni Tàpies, and one painting, Cos de matèria (Fig. 2), this thesis offers a way through the impasse that exists for recognition and analysis of the spiritual within contemporary art practice (Ward, 1997:45).

Antoni Tàpies was born into an educated upper-middle class family in Barcelona on 13 December 1923, and has been a practising artist since the late 1940s. After training as a lawyer, an extended period of illness precipitated his involvement with art. Studying for only two months in 1944 at a local academy of art, he established his first studio in the Gothic quarter of Barcelona in 1946 (Catoir, 1991:139). While known primarily as a painter, Tàpies has also worked prolifically in sculpture, assemblage, printmaking and drawing. He has exhibited worldwide since the mid-1950s, swiftly becoming an artist of international renown. In Barcelona in 1990 he opened a foundation in his name, with premises that could house a permanent collection of his work alongside temporary exhibitions by other artists. The 'Tàpies Foundation' displays permanent and temporary exhibitions of Tàpies' works, as well as containing the archives of his writings together with his exhibition catalogues.

Early in his career, Tàpies alternated between figuration and abstraction, while exploring a range of methods. Although showing affinities with such movements as Dada, Surrealism, Abstract Expressionism, Arte Povera and Art Brut, he adhered more broadly to the international Abstract Expressionist vanguard of post-war painting (Colombalia Dexeus, 1989:13,23). He was particularly attached to the Spanish branch, Informel, and its preoccupation with the unconscious and the irrational.

¹² Tàpies does not deal with deconstruction, but is aware of its historical precedents. He regards contemporary art as frequently subsumed to theories (Chapter 2).

Tàpies upholds the spiritual while claiming no adherence to a religious tradition. Despite his orthodox upbringing in the Roman Catholic Church in 1930s Barcelona, which fought to keep its cultural and religious heritage, at the age of nineteen he severed his ties with that church, rejecting its doctrines and all institutionalised faiths (Colombalia Dexeus, 1989:12). Nonetheless, Spanish Roman Catholicism has affected him since childhood and he has read widely on Christian mysticism, particularly the works of the 13th century Spanish mystic, Raymond Llull. At the same time, the influence of Zen Buddhism on Western art is to be noted in the visual art and texts of Tàpies, as well as in the Abstract Expressionist movement (McEvilley, 1996:75-80).

THE MATTER PAINTINGS AND COS DE MATÈRIA

Tàpies' declaration that his work conveys the spiritual is assessed through readings of Cos de matèria, one of his Matter paintings (Fig. 3 & 4). It is selected for its typical qualities, such as its juxtaposition of a coherent plane of pictorial space with a thick unified expanse of matter (Franzke, 1992:24, Wye, 1991:11)¹³. The Matter, or 'Wall', paintings (Fig.3 & 4) comprise the body of work for which Tàpies has achieved greatest renown¹⁴. Matter painting reflects a tendency in late 1940s and early 1950s Europe to use thick paint for two-dimensional work and for the reduction of depth in sculpture (Franzke, 1992:2,6, Moffitt, 1999:221-222). Walls have been used with numerous symbolic references in his art since 1953, when he invented his version of Matter painting (Chapter 5) (Ashton, 1995: 31). He was influenced by Dada after World War 1, the Cubist use of unconventional materials, Brassai's photographs of graffiti, and the atmosphere and architecture of Catalonia (Tàpies in Ashton: 1995:46, Catoir, 1991:30-31).

¹³ Plotinus held matter to be the final emanation in the series from the One, and approaching non-being. Aristotle thought prime matter to be a principle of indeterminacy awaiting determination. The Buddhist Nagarjuna, argued, as did many of his colleagues, for the unreality of matter. Aurobindo argues against Shankara that reality exists in a graded series, beginning in matter and rising to the Absolute (Reese, 1996:460-1).

¹⁴ Tàpies believes it is significant that his name translates as 'wall' in Catalan (Ashton, 1995:39).

Tàpies began his Matter painting at a time when large fields of contemplative space in metaphysical painting, understood in terms of layers of colour and characterised for instance by the work of Mark Rothko (1903-1970) and Barnett Newman (1905-1970), were regarded as the epitome of the spiritual. It is against this backdrop that Cos de matèria is examined (Chapter 1)¹⁵. Throughout the period in which the Matter paintings have been produced there has occurred a change in the way that the spiritual is construed (Borja-Villel, 1989:iv). This includes a growing belief in the importance of the physicality and immanence of the spiritual, most notably in terms of the sublime (Crowther, 1993:115ff)¹⁶. Indeed, matter and immanence have become crucial aspects of the sublime for many artists (Chapters 6 and 7). Tàpies' use of unvalued materials to convey the spiritual is construed as evidence of the value of matter and immanence. Tàpies' version of Matter paintings, more than for example in the case of Wols (1915-1951) and Jean Fautrier (1898-1964), involve a range of methods and the use of unconventional 'worthless' materials to compose 'worn surfaces' (Catoir, 1991:29-33, Franzke, 1992:1). His method is characterised by the juxtaposition of powerful symbols, such as the Christian cross, with mundane secular references that he has endowed with spiritual significance. Tàpies' Matter paintings draw on spiritual and religious beliefs, interweaving signs resonant with spiritual, biographic, societal, geographic and political meaning from diverse cultures. Their simplicity of means has evolved in inverse proportion to their sophistication of meaning.

This thesis locates the Matter paintings in general, and Tàpies' Cos de matèria in particular, within the context of Western European 20th century art in order to

¹⁵ See Appendix B for brief biography of Newman.

¹⁶ The term immanence is most often used in contrast to transcendence to express the way in which God is thought to be present in the world. The most extreme form of immanence is expressed in pantheism, which identifies God's substance either partly or wholly with the natural world. In contrast to pantheism and panentheism, Judaism and Christianity hold God to be a totally separate substance from the world. In Christianity, the separateness of God's substance from that of the world is guaranteed by the doctrine of creation ex nihilo. God may be viewed as wholly transcendent, partially transcendent and partially immanent, or wholly immanent. In the East, Indian philosophy especially shows this emphasis. Mysticism, both East and West, has held to the mutual immanence of humanity and God (Kim & Sosa, 1995:235-6, Reese, 1996:331-2).

show the singularity of their spiritual expression. Cos de matèria is a typical Tàpies for its size (162 x 130cm), an easel painting with such specific iconographic elements as its association with walls (Franzke, 1992:24). Further iconographic features comprise the use of diagonal crosses, and the predominance of earth colours with an occasional contrasting colour, in this case apparent in the use of intermittent orange marks (Ashton, 1995:37,41, Franzke, 1992:7, Kuspitt, 1996:245-7).

The thesis describes the historical precedents for Tàpies' paintings in the context of Spanish painting, the mystical tradition and Romanticism, and in a broader context it argues that the representation of the spiritual by visual art in the 20th century has much in common with what has been termed 'presenting the unpresentable' (Crowther, 1993:156). This historical view includes the formal and technical considerations of generations of artists, so as to provide a context for Cos de matèria and the Matter paintings within the abstract, spiritual canon of painting. By referencing other artists' paintings that engage with the spiritual, the research describes the concerns and values that Tàpies shares with his predecessors and contemporaries. Cos de matèria, a Matter painting that possesses typical attributes, is employed because those attributes locate it within a tradition of individual and shared meaning. Thus the Matter paintings form the backdrop to the research.

In interview, Tàpies claims for art a potential to facilitate spiritual experience. Although the ability to convey or experience the spiritual has been argued throughout art history, contemporary debate is muted (Ward, 1997:45). Thus, Tàpies' claim remains, in its art historical context, at the juncture between modernism (c.1860-1950s) and postmodernism (1960s-present) (Meecham & Sheldon, 2000:5-7, Ward, 1997:6-7)¹⁷. These two periods reflect distinctive art

¹⁷ It is a matter of debate whether postmodernism comprises a distinct period, or whether it describes a critical approach. Postmodernism has been traced back to the 1870s; in (John Watkins) Chapman's usage, postmodernism referred to 'new (post-Impressionist) art which went further than Impressionism's attempts to capture in paint the fleeting appearances of nature (Ward, 1997:6)'.

critical approaches (Chapter 1). This thesis considers the potential there might be for the expression of the spiritual in a postmodern era that has not only declared the 'death of art', but generally regards ideas of the spiritual as retrogressive, even obsolete (Chapter 2) (Crowther, 1993: viii-ix)¹⁸.

Cos de matèria was on display at the Picasso Museum, Antibes, France during the Summer of 2002, and is employed here as a case study that is representative of Tàpies' Matter paintings (early 1950s to the present). Despite its aspiritual title, it appears that Tàpies has imbued this painting with spiritual meaning. It was created in 1968 on the cusp of the modernist and postmodernist art periods, and at a time when theorists were claiming the 'death of art' (Ward, 1997:35). Its juxtaposition of space and material reflects the juncture of modernism and postmodernism and is typical of the Matter paintings. With its emphasis on matter as spiritual, Cos de matèria challenges deconstruction, a postmodern stance that calls into question ideas of the metaphysical (Sarup, 1993:54). Cos de matèria builds on the complex contemporary relationship between ideas and the spiritual. Its meaning is plural, challenging the essentialist view of the spiritual as formed by Christianity and modernism. Cos de matèria uses space as in metaphysical painting, yet it disrupts the notion of space as spiritual, that notion being derived as it is from Judeo-Christianity. Typically in Tàpies' work, space is juxtaposed with emphatic matter, as associated with both Buddhist-influenced and non-denominational perspectives (Chapters 3 to 7).

The thesis is divided into seven chapters. In Chapter 1, Painting: Quest for Purity, through comparison with Light Red over Black (1957) (Fig. 5) by Mark Rothko and Untitled – Spatial Concept Waiting (1960) (Fig. 6) by Lucio Fontana (1899-1968), Cos de matèria is placed in the tradition of modernist spiritual painting^{19 20}. In particular it focuses on its roots in Judeo-Christianity, with its

¹⁸ Tàpies forged a way for other artists, such as Ferrán Garcíá Sevilla (b. 1949) and Miquel Barceló (b. 1957), in his conviction of the possibility to approximate the spiritual in the mundane and to convey it (Moffitt, 1999, 228-230).

¹⁹ Fontana's painting; Untitled – Spatial Concept Waiting, hereafter referred to as Untitled - Spatial.

²⁰ See Appendix B for brief biography of Fontana and Rothko.

pursuit of independence and purity in painting. Chapter 2, The Death of Painting, addresses Cos de matèria in terms of the alleged impossibility of expressing the spiritual and meaning after the 'death of art'. Chapters 3 to 5 examine notions of contemplation in painting. In Chapter 3, Contemplation; Viewing Space, Cos de matèria is compared with Light Red over Black, so addressing the purpose of contemplation in modernism as the transcendence of subject and object, even overcoming dualism in a 'quest for wholeness'. Chapter 4, Contemplation; The Via Negativa, develops by putting forward contemplative space in Cos de matèria in the mystical tradition of the Via Negativa. The chapter focuses on Tàpies' Spanish and Catalan antecedents. Chapter 5, Meditation; Beyond Self, places notions of space in Cos de matèria in terms of Buddhist ideas of the void or emptiness²¹. By discussing the notion of dualism the chapter considers the potential of this painting to refine notions of the self. The final two chapters place Cos de matèria in the tradition of the sublime. In Chapter 6, The Romantic Sublime, Cos de matèria is compared to Journey above the Clouds by Caspar David Friedrich (1774-1840) in order to consider how the relationship of space to matter links the former painting to the historical tradition of the sublime²². Chapter 7, Sublime Process; The Artists' Body, develops by exploring the role of the corporeal and process in the sublime by comparing Cos de matèria with Rhythm O (1974) (Fig. 15) by Marina Abramovic (b. 1946)²³.

²¹ Emptiness translates in Sanskrit as *sunya*. Nagarjuna arrived at the concept of emptiness when he denied both actuality and its negation, thus focussing on the distinctive characteristic of Mahayana Buddhism. In this view, emptiness as non-dual locates transcendence and eternity in the immediate moment. It replaces God, provides the possibility of Egolessness and an ethic of selfless behaviour. It is the concept at the basis of Buddha's doctrine of 'dependent origination' and his teaching of the eight-fold path. Masao Abe has provided an interpretation of non-duality in Buddhism centring on the concept of emptiness which is central to Mahayana Buddhism, going back to Gautama Buddha (560-477 B.C.) (Reese, 1996:199).

²² See Appendix B for brief biography of Friedrich.

²³ See Appendix B for brief biography of Abramovic.

Literature Review

This Ph.D. examines the hypothesis that it is possible for art to enable the individual to experience the spiritual, indeed to approximate authentic reality in painting. In Western Europe, the spiritual in art is generally discussed with the presumption that there are historical connections between religion and art. Academic discussion of art, religion and the spiritual is most frequently found within the field of theological aesthetics. Theses that promote a spiritual perspective on aesthetics have tended to have been written by authors from a specific denominational perspective, usually Christian (Balthasar, 1983-1991, Belting, 1994, Burch Brown, 1989, Cope, 1964, Dillenberger, Jane, 1987, Dillenberger, John, 1986, Dillistone, 1976, Heyer, 1980, Nichols, 1980, O'Connell, 1978, Otto, 1969, Rookmaaker, 1982, Sherry, 1992, Tillich, 1987, Van der Leeuw, 1963, Whittle, 1966, Wolterstorff, 1980) and, less frequently, a Buddhist perspective (Coomaraswamy, 1956, Sangharakshita, 1982). Some sources include different religions, mainly Christianity and Buddhism, with brief inclusion of Islam (Apostolos-Cappadona, 1996, Coleman, 1998, Martin, 1990, Martland, 1981). The majority of these authors do not examine the art and ideas of the second half of the 20th Century, with exceptions (Dillenberger, Jane, 1987, Dillenberger, John, 1986, Pattison, 1998). Rowan Williams, by way of a further exception, offers an overview that brings a liberal theological stance to the broad arena of cultural iconography (Williams, 2000). Others address the disjunctures between religion and art from their Christian roots (Laeuchli, 1980). Others, while explicitly Christian, are neither academic nor discursive, revealing the idiosyncratic perspective on the spiritual of their authors (Beckett, 1992, Harries, 1993, Rookmaaker, 1973).

Overviews on the two major religions necessitate accounts of Christianity (McGrath, 1997), post-Christianity (Cupitt, 1985, 1997) and Buddhism (Sangharakshita, 1987). Other writings stress the experiential over the intellectual and academic such as an 'introduction to mysticism' (Johnston, 1996, Parrinder, 1995), and sources describing Buddhism and meditation

(Bodhipaksa, 2003, Paramananda, 1996, Sangharakshita, 1995, 1998). There are a number of overviews or academic books on Eastern art (Coomaraswamy, 1956, Fisher, 1993, Suzuki, 1959, Sangharakshita, 1980, Zwalf, 1985); the writing of Coomaraswamy on Eastern and Christian art (1956) is applicable to my research but out of date. A study of such writing is necessary to understand the Christian, Roman Catholic and Buddhist basis to Tàpies' work, but will not adequately make problematic the spiritual, in terms of Eastern religious or Western postmodern viewpoints. The thesis addresses the specificities of the Spanish Catholic tradition in art as it differs from other European traditions (Moffitt, 1999).

Writers on modernist art differ in their reading of a relationship between the spiritual and art. Both Clive Bell and Wassily Kandinsky claim that abstraction is synonymous with the spiritual (Bell, 1949, Kandinsky, 1947, 1982). While Bell is one of the first mainstream art historians to link what he terms the mystical with abstraction, Kandinsky is more idiosyncratic, drawing on Theosophy, synaesthesia and geometry. This thesis revisits the terms abstract and spiritual referring to a canon of 20th century art that began in 1910 with Kandinsky and is preoccupied with the pursuit of purity in painting, the increasing removal of reference to the material realm. For Bell, a modernist aesthetic is moral, more than spiritual (Bell, 1949); others propound aesthetics to be spiritual and either theistic (Ruskin, 1900) or mainly connected to beauty and the sublime (Adorno, 1965). The agnostic stance of Peter Fuller (1983, 1988) draws on John Ruskin's *theoria* (Ruskin, 1900) to argue for the spiritual based in secularisation, but in the canon of Western European religious art. While the atheist art historian Clement Greenberg promoted formalism largely as the antithesis of the spiritual in the middle decades of the 20th century (Greenberg, 1973), his claim has been countered by theorists who acknowledge links between the spiritual and formalist abstraction (Cheetham, 1996, McEvilley, 1993, Shapiro, 1995). Twentieth century overviews on art history barely mention the spiritual (Chipp, 1968, Gardner, 1970, Herbert, 1965). However, esoteric 'new age' perspectives

on the spiritual have emerged in the 20th century (Hinton, 1904, Leadbetter, 1903, Mookerjee, 1975, Ouspensky, 1938).

Some theorists argue for the continuation of the modernist view of the spiritual. Golding argues for the extension of the modernist project, linking the spiritual to the continuation of abstraction as the developmental path to a new ultimate pictorial truth, or visual absolute (Golding, 2000). In the 20th century the spiritual has most firmly been associated with metaphysical painting a tendency within Abstract Expressionism from the 1940's to 1970's (Haftmann, 1965, Honnelf, 1992, Lucie-Smith, 1995, Richter, 1965, Roditi 1990, Wheeler, 1993). In these accounts the spiritual is located predominantly in the pursuit of purity in painting and sculpture (Cheetham, 1996, McEvilley, 1993, Tuchman, 1981). The spiritual is addressed, in these cases, in the work of artists whose work has a long-established reputation as such, for instance in the work of Mark Rothko (Ashton, 1983, Chave, 1989) and Barnett Newman (Hess, 1971, O'Neill, 1992).

When this subject is addressed by contemporary authors, it is usually in subjective, descriptive and non-academic texts (Baynes, 1971, Beckett, 1992, Cook, 1974, Corlett, 1977, Harries, 1993). Typical of this is Roger Lipsey, who has made an inconsistent overview of the spiritual in 20th century art in *An Art of our Own - the Spiritual in Contemporary Art*. His selection is personal, while his opinions are largely unsubstantiated, with only a few works after the 1970's (1997). Others, while more accessible, have convincing academic foundations (Lippard, 1983, Tucker, 1992). A body of esoteric writing on the spiritual comes from practising artists and their critics in the late 20th century (Newman, 1952, Still, 1963, Tàpies, 1986). Apostolos-Cappadona's anthology (1996) and Lippard (1983) claim cross-cultural connections for the spiritual in art by combining ancient and contemporary imagery, but they do not address the issues of postmodernity in art. Linda Henderson, in her Ph.D. *The Artist, 'the Fourth Dimension' and Non-Euclidean Geometry 1900-1930; A Romance of Many Dimensions* (1975) and her book *The Fourth Dimension and Non-Euclidean*

Geometry in Art (1975) linked art with notions of space and a fourth dimension. However, she deals little with art after the 1950's. One idiosyncratic account links mental illness to the spiritual (Schildkraut, 1996), another offers a chronicle of *The Shamanic Spirit throughout Twentieth Century Art* (Tucker, 1992). However, these accounts and the practitioners they cite are mainly modernist, dealing little with the challenges presented by deconstruction.

The charting of literature on the spiritual in art becomes increasingly complex as the 20th century progresses, there being little systematic study of the spiritual in art after the 1950s. Philosophical aesthetics have been overtaken by the new art history (Rees, Borzello, 1986) that challenges modernism's examination of the constituent elements of an art object. The new art history supports the study of context as the notion of post-aesthetics (Osborne, 1991). History has repeated itself with declaration of the 'death of art' or the 'death of painting' that has called into question the idea that art can convey meaning. In doing so they challenge the notion that an art object is anything but a text, incapable of possessing intrinsic meaning (Crowther, 1993). For this reason, the new art history (Fennie, 1995:18-21) disputes the possibility of modernism's notion of a transcendental spirituality (Boyne & Rattansi, 1990, Politi, 1990, Wallis, 1984).

Countering the notion of the spiritual in art are the 1968 anti-aestheticisers (Burgin, 1986, Eagleton, 1990, 1984). Such theorists adopted a social, Socialist or Marxist stance regarding the history of art (Adorno, 1984, Clark, 1973, Osborne, 1991, Rees, Borzello, 1986). While Clark paved the way for a social history of art, Adorno drew on Marx to propose that the art object is an item of bourgeois determination, hence spiritual expression a modernist myth. The explosion of new media means art has been more concerned with questioning the very basis of art rather than spiritual issues. A number of authors propound the need for a spiritual imperative in contemporary art but proffer a largely early modernist perspective such as that from a Christian (Heyer, 1980, Martland, 1981) or a Buddhist (Sangharakshita, 1982). There are exceptions to the little

writing in postmodern discourses that examines contemporary art in terms of the spiritual (Berry & Wernick, 1992, Cheetham, 1996, Crowther, 1989, 1991, 1993a, 1993b, 1997, Griffin, 1990, Lyotard, 1984, McEvilley, 1993, 1996, Osborne, 1991). Others have argued for a postmodern spirituality but in the context of an art that assumes social and ethical responsibility (Gablik, 1991, Griffin, 1990). Suzi Gablik argues that deconstruction avoids addressing the spiritual, or the possibility of meaning, while espousing an art practice that assumes awareness of social and contextual issues.

Further authors argue for the continuation of the concept of the sublime, from the Romantic movement to the present (Rosenblum, 1998). They maintain that this addresses some of the postmodern counters to the issue of the spiritual (Crowther, 1997, Lyotard 1984). Within modernist theory the spiritual has been linked with the sublime (Hartley, 1994, Honour, 1981) and contemplation (Coleman, 1983, 1998, Shapiro in Tuchman, 1981:313ff). In terms of the sublime, Lyotard is one of a few authors who champions the continuation of the sublime project from the perspective of the postmodern. Lyotard argues that an absolute version of the spiritual cannot be represented as aspired to in the modernist period, but only demonstrate its existence through signifying its lack (Lyotard, 1984:77-79). Crowther draws on Kant and Lyotard to form the notion of an 'existential' sublime, one that addresses a common contemporary experience of alienation (Crowther, 1993). Drawing on phenomenology, he posits the notion of iterability, that an art work possesses essential meaning, regardless of the context in which it is viewed.

Thomas McEvilley also argues for an extension of the sublime project; in contradistinction to the hegemony of formalism, he conjectures that feelings and the primal can be conveyed and that there is a range of positions available between standardised modern and postmodern versions of comprehending the

art object (McEvilley, 1991, 1993, 1996)²⁴. Mark Cheetham argues that the artist, can either support or challenge the absolutism intrinsic to essentialist notions of the spiritual. He questions the Hegelian interpretation of history, challenging the quest for metaphysical purity undertaken by abstract painters throughout the 20th century. In so doing, he intervenes in modernism's unquestioned allegiance to a transcendental project, arguing that the pursuit of purity has continued throughout the 20th century (Cheetham, 1983, 1996).

Some authors put forward the idea that the spiritual can be most suitably discussed with reference to the corporeal and the immanent (Crowther, 1993, McEvilley, 1993), particularly through philosophies of mind and body and phenomenology (Kleinmann, 1986, Vesey, 1964), and non-dual perspectives (Buber, 1970, Chakraborty, 1997, Loy, 1987, 1994). Duality has been widely assumed within our culture, particularly in philosophy and religious studies. A number of artists, as well as Tàpies, have engaged with the spiritual and have to varying degrees challenged dualism. They have been used in comparison throughout the thesis and include; Lucio Fontana, Barnett Newman, Jackson Pollock (1912-1956), Mark Rothko, Barnett Newman, Eva Hesse (1936-1970), Frida Kahlo (1907-1954) and Marina Abramovic²⁵. This challenge to dualism has been found in their writings, and in their critics' writing, as well as in their work, and have included accounts of Rothko (Ashton, 1983, Chave, 1989) and Newman (Hess, 1971, Rosenberg, 1978). However this challenge has not been comprehensively assessed in academic terms.

An exception to the dearth of academic discussion on the spiritual in contemporary art is Michael Tuchman's five-hundred page anthology exhibition catalogue that accompanied 'The Spiritual in Art' at Los Angeles County Museum (Tuchman, 1981). This catalogue charts the history of the spiritual, largely abstract, painting in the 20th century. It is the only comprehensive

²⁴ Rather than a mechanical union of form and content, this suggests an art practice that works *from* the meaningful *to* form and technique (Pateman, 1991).

²⁵ See Appendix B for brief biographies of all these eight artists.

academic discursive, overview of Western art and the spiritual to be identified as written in the last twenty years about the 20th century. However, the author does not deal with issues of postmodernism. No other academic work of the late 20th century has been found that analyses and makes problematic an artist's work in terms of spiritual and contemporary debates.

My interview and research on Tàpies forms core research material for the thesis. Extracts from the interview are discussed in each chapter and generate its direction. The main authority on Tàpies' oeuvre is Miguel Borja-Villel, Director of the Tàpies foundation (opened in 1990) whose Ph.D. thesis on the Matter paintings (Fig. 3 & 4) offers a social and political analysis (Borja-Villel, 1989).

Examinations of Tàpies' life and work appear in *The Complete Works* (Augusti, Works vol. 1, 1943-1960 (1989), vol.2, 1961-1968 (1990), vol. 3, 1969-1975 (1992), vol. 4, 1976-1981 (1996), vol. 5, 1986-1990 (2001), interviews with the artist (Catoir, 1991), journals, exhibition catalogues and the comprehensive range of books on him and his work (Ashton, 1995, Colombalia Dexeus, 1989, Franzke, 1992, Gimferrer, 1986, Moure, 1998, Wye, 1991). The influence of Catholicism and Buddhism on Tàpies' life and work is described in a number of monographs (Ashton, 1995, Franzke, 1992, Gimferrer, 1986) on the artist and lesser texts and journals (Peppiat, 1988, Restany, 1994). Most of the literature on Tàpies consists of modernist interpretations of his life and *oeuvre* (Colombalia Dexeus, 1989, Franzke, 1992, Wye, 1991). However, the spiritual in Tàpies' *oeuvre* is assumed rather than widely debated in most catalogues and monographs of subjective opinion on his work. Claims are made for Tàpies' work as spiritual (Franzke, 1992, Wye, 1991), and spiritual and non-dual (Ashton, 1995). Tàpies' *oeuvre* has not been discussed academically, with few exceptions (Borja-Villel, 1989). While his Matter paintings express the spiritual, this has been reported by description rather than through academic argument (Ashton, 1995, Catoir, 1991, Franzke, 1992). Such discussion of his work has taken place in a modernist framework, while his importance to postmodernity

has yet to be established. There is no academic argument for his work as expressing the spiritual and the non-dual, as well as his importance for contemporary debate in art. Indeed, no in-depth studies appear on a current artist's work in terms of the spiritual and postmodernity. The work of Antoni Tàpies, and his Matter paintings, provides a means by which to address the problem of this lacuna.

Methodology

The primary methodologies consisted of the use of first-hand interviews with Tàpies (Tàpies Interview, 1999 [Appendix C], and 1995 [Appendix D]), exclusive texts, and the viewing of images of Tàpies' and other artists' works. A ninety-minute interview with Tàpies was conducted in June 1999, using a translator²⁶. Questions were prepared in advance with allowances for impromptu diversions, and extracts of the interview are used throughout the thesis. Portions of the interview have been selected to head each chapter in order to focus the discussion and analysis. It was not assumed that the interviews would fully represent the artist's views. For this reason, Tàpies' statements are considered alongside his own writings, and those of his critics.

The interviews were used to test notions of the sublime and contemplation in his work (see below). The terms *sublime* and *contemplation* were chosen because they have been most frequently used as synonyms for the spiritual in art in the 20th century, and are used in the literature on Tàpies. It also helps in tracing the lineage of the spiritual in art, and to place Tàpies and Cos de matèria (Fig. 2). The research presents criteria for testing the spiritual by looking at properties of art that have lasting relevance beyond the modernist period. Indeed, an examination of Cos de matèria could be regarded as typically postmodern in that it constitutes a review of traditional perspectives; reframing meditative traditions and concepts of contemplation and of the sublime after 'the death of God' (Crowther, 1993:115ff, Taylor in Berry, 1992: 19-20)²⁷.

Exclusive textual material mainly comprised exhibition catalogues of Tàpies' work and information on Spanish and Catalan art that had not reached a wide arena. These obscure texts were chosen because there is little in the English language on Spanish and Catalan art. Collectively these sources were used to

²⁶ Tàpies is Spain's most prominent living artist, yet little information has been gained first-hand by English speakers. The main exceptions are Dore Ashton and Barbara Catoir (Ashton, 1995, Catoir, 1991).

²⁷ The 'death of God' was a 19th century claim, offered first by Mainlander, then made popular to modern thought by Nietzsche and Sartre (McGrath, 1997:255-6, 530-1).

position Tàpies and his *oeuvre* in Spanish and Catalan art, as well as in relation to the international modernism that connects the practices of artists throughout the world to the current state of art. The Tàpies Foundation, Barcelona, was an important resource because it houses the largest collection of his work and related books, journals, slides, video and exhibition catalogues.

A further primary methodology consisted in applying the experience of viewing original art works to analysis of 20th century critical theory. In the study of Tàpies, seminal works were examined at the Antoni Tàpies Foundation; works that are exhibited according to his own specific directions. Works by Tàpies were also studied at MACBA, the gallery of contemporary art in Barcelona and throughout Spain, the Spanish and Catalan culture and ambience being essential to his thought and practice. Visits between 1993 and 2002 to the Reina Sofia Museum in Madrid, and a number of private galleries hosting exhibitions of his work, provided further context and comparison. The broad study of Tàpies' work having been made, a seminal work on which to focus was selected, Cos de matèria. It was selected because Cos de matèria is neither overtly spiritual as in the tradition of religious depiction, nor is it typical of modernist spirituality as in the paintings of Mark Rothko. However, Cos de matèria expresses the historical idea of space as spiritual, and is further relevant to the thesis because its making in 1968 marked a shift to include the material as locus for the spiritual. At the same time, it is crucial to this thesis because it includes the marks, media, iconography and concern with the non-dual that are typical of Tàpies' Matter paintings (Fig. 3 & 4) on the cusp between modernism and the current state of art.

Finally, a number of artists are cited for comparison, chosen because they have all been linked differently with the tradition of the sublime and contemplation. These paintings were selected to support the argument on the basis that they have already been established as expressing spiritual concerns by critics, and that they reflected the seminal issues and times for the spiritual in art in the 20th

century. A number of main areas demanded comparison. Light Red over Black (Fig. 5) by Mark Rothko and Be I (1970) (Fig. 14) by Barnett Newman express the spiritual in modernist painting. Further comparison with Be I by Barnett Newman demonstrates the beginnings of disruption to this 20th century canon. Comparisons are drawn between Cos de matèria and the work of Rothko in order to position Tàpies in terms of the Abstract Expressionist movement, and to highlight its metaphysical aspirations. Further comparison with Mark Rothko and Jackson Pollock (Fig. 16) provides historical reference to creativity and manual work in the Abstract Expressionist movement. Rothko and Pollock alongside Tàpies are distinguished for their methods within the Abstract Expressionist movement.

Barnett Newman and Lucio Fontana are cited as challenging the preoccupation with transcendental spirituality, and its Christian legacy. Comparison of Cos de matèria to Untitled - Spatial (Fig. 6) by Lucio Fontana is used to examine the break with the notion of pictorial space as the main marker of the spiritual in painting. Fontana was selected for his challenge to Cartesian dualism, frequent parallels having been drawn between his and Tàpies' material challenge to modernism. Tàpies' *oeuvre* is aligned to Informel, a sub-movement of Abstract Expressionism, and the thesis considers how he shared these artists' distinctive interest in conveying the non-dual. Such a comparison, used to show Tàpies' personal and cultural iconography, can be found across his use of matter from the 1950s to the present.

To verify the place of Cos de matèria in a lineage of the Romantic sublime in painting, an examination of Journey above the Clouds by Caspar David Friedrich provides historical context. Beautiful, four cheese, spicy, quattro, staggioni, florentine, michelangelo, venetian glass, pamplona (1997) (Fig. 7) by Damien Hirst (b. 1965) exemplifies the new art history with its disavowal of the

spiritual; comparison places Cos de matèria in context of the new art history^{28 29}. Crowther's notion of the existential sublime is selected as one of the few ways in which the spiritual is presented as relevant for postmodernity; its return to immanence provides a challenge to the dualism of modernism. The viewers' contemplative experiences of Cos de matèria are compared to those of viewing paintings by Spanish and Catalan artists, particularly those of Diego Rodriguez de Silva y Velázquez (1599-1660) and Francisco de Zurbarán (1598-1664), in order to position Cos de matèria in terms of the Christian mystical tradition³⁰. Comparison is made to Christ Crucified (c. 1630) (Fig. 10) by Velázquez to place Cos de matèria in the context of the Via Negativa, and to Untitled (1968) (Fig. 13) by Eva Hesse to place Cos de matèria in terms of its relationship to ideas of the void.

In terms of secondary sources, one of the first considerations was the language of the literature used. I wished to select literature that, while readily accessible, was intellectually and academically rigorous. This meant that much literature from the 'new age' and counterculture movement was eliminated. Secondary sources largely comprised literature on modernism in art, the new art history, reconstructive postmodernism, and texts on contexts for spirituality, mainly relating to Christianity and Buddhism. Concern focussed on bringing the discussion of art to bodies of esoteric literature on the spiritual.

A further significant methodological decision involved a discussion of Tàpies and Cos de matèria in terms of modernist and contemporary methods of discussing art. The dominant modernist method of formalism draws from the positivist essentialist philosophy from Socrates to Kantian Platonic Idealism, and from metaphysics in the 18th century (Meecham & Sheldon, 2000:10-12). A study of ways that formalism has been pursued offered some further opportunity for

²⁸ Hirst's painting; Beautiful, four cheese, spicy, quattro, staggioni, florentine, michelangelo, venetian glass, pamplona, hereafter referred to as Beautiful, four cheese.

²⁹ See Appendix B for brief biography of Hirst.

³⁰ See Appendix B for brief biographies of Velázquez and Zurbarán.

understanding how Tàpies has been critically perceived. For example, Tàpies has been assumed to fit modernist paradigms, thus modernism can claim contemporary relevance. Most notably Clement Greenberg, the dominant art historian of the 20th century, made clear the limitations of formalism (Greenberg, 1973, 1986, Osborne, 1991:66). A Marxist, he held that the limitations of the spiritual resulted from its roots in Christianity and essentialist philosophy.

Tàpies and Cos de matèria are examined in terms of the new art history that has produced detractors to the spiritual. Its central concerns have been with contexts rather than intrinsic meaning, so that poststructuralist theories challenge the whole of aesthetics in the Western philosophical tradition. I have selected from the new art history Derrida's concept of deconstruction, Baudrillard's theories of simulacra, and Marxism, as these methodologies of the new art history most deny art the possibility of spirituality and communicable meaning. While my research considers this stance, it finds that the new art history does not deal sufficiently with the specificity of an art work, nor does it offer a language with which to discuss the spiritual.

Thus, my methodological stance has derived from a combination of material, historical, theoretical and critical sources. I have actively sought to find a position that might offer a middle way between standard modernist and postmodernist discourses. I have looked to theorists who consider the possibility of intrinsic meaning in art but who have more complex notions of the spiritual than is generally found in modernism. These were used to show how Cos de matèria moves the expression of the spiritual beyond the bounds of modernism. This complex relationship to essentialism is provided by what Suzi Gablik and David Griffin have termed reconstructive postmodernism. Paul Crowther's concept of the iterable, drawn from Maurice Merleau-Ponty's (1908-1961) reciprocal tradition of phenomenology demonstrates that an object has inherent meaning, irrespective of context. Thus the concept of the iterable has been anticipated here as the basis for examining the relevance of contemplation

and the sublime as traditional terms for means and end in the quest for the spiritual.

Finally, the thesis is seminal in bringing together esoteric literature on religion and the spiritual to academic study of art and Tàpies. While there is a large body of writing about this artist and his work, much of the content is assumed rather than academically proven. The thesis aims to bring intellectual rigour not only to the study of Tàpies and his work, but also to the literature on spirituality, much of which remains on the margins of academia.

Chapter 1: Painting; Quest for Purity

.... modern life influences us in such a way that we tend to forget essential values. This is one of the most dangerous problems of our time. We are worried about secondary things such as comfort, being better off, having good cars, even having cats [Reference to earlier conversation]. But we forget what is important. This is a major problem nowadays and it is more than likely the product of the system operating in our society. Paradoxically, they mean wealth for some but discomfort for many (Tàpies Interview, 1999:221).

OVERVIEW

In the course of my interview conducted with Antoni Tàpies, he outlined his belief in essentialism, that phenomena hold inherent meaning (Tarnas, 191: 140)³¹. Tàpies' notion of essentialism echoes that of other advocates of the attribution of the spiritual to art within the modernist era. Pictorial space in painting was regarded by modernists as the epitome of essentialism, considered by them as even synonymous with the spiritual (Cheetham, 1996: 30, 141)³².

Tàpies' *oeuvre* has generally been discussed in modernist terms and in this chapter I locate Cos de matèria (Fig. 2) within 20th century discourses on art and the spiritual. The spiritual in painting is generally discussed in terms of prevalent modernist debate (Cheetham, 1996; Golding, 2000; Tuchman, 1981). A typical example being by Sandra Kraskin, Director of Baruch Gallery, New York, who states that 'Tàpies (and his contemporaries in Dau al Set) have continued the modernist tradition of Picasso, Miró and Dalí' (Kraskin, 1990:7)³³. I offer a comparison between Cos de matèria (1968) (Fig. 2) and Light Red over Black (1963) (Fig. 5), a Mark Rothko painting that conveys the spiritual through the

³¹ Essentialism is a metaphysical theory stating that objects have essences and that there is a distinction between the essential and non-essential or accidental. In Aristotle's thought, through essentialism, universals could be defined (Kim & Sosa, 1995:138-139).

³² While modernism was regarded as a loose historical period covering the 1870s - 1950s, it is used in this context as a collective term for the discourses on art during this period. Contemporary works of art were seen, by Vasari, as individual achievements of genius which could be compared on a timeless basis to the quality of the paintings of the earlier great masters. This led to a concentration on the lives of individual artists, their enrolment in the canon of great names, the identification of their contribution to the internal development of styles and movements. They were also discussed in terms of the general progress of modernism, as well as the search for sources and application of old polarities such as classical versus romantic. Iconographical analysis was used to explore the meaning of works, often with an added psychoanalytical dimension and empirical analysis in order to identify authorship and establish accurate stylistic relationships (Fennie, 1995: 16).

³³ Founded in 1948, Dau al Set (Seven Spot Die) in Catalan was a radical modernist group of Barcelona fuelled by foreign sources – poets and essayists in close contact with the French Surrealists (Catoir, 1991: 20).

deployment of space (Henderson in Tuchman, 1981:219ff). Cos de matèria is located in terms of formalism, being the modernist aesthetic most focussed on portrayal of the spiritual, particularly the absolute (Meecham, Sheldon, 2000:10-12).

Like Cos de matèria, Mark Rothko's Light Red over Black appeared on the cusp of the shift between modernism and postmodernism, and wrestles with the most important issues associated with this time. Comparison between these two paintings is significant in art historical terms, in that, if one applies standardised discourses on modernism and the spiritual to them, it is evident that space in Light Red over Black is portrayed in a typical manner for this period of Abstract Expressionism (Golding, 2000:99). Cos de matèria, however, presents a challenge; it disrupts some of the values upon which this movement was premised by its juxtaposition of pictorial space with matter (Ashton, 1995:31-32; Franzke, 1992:26). By focusing on abstraction and pictorial space, it can be understood how belief in the transcendental is derived from society's meta-narratives, and from philosophical thought through which arose belief in intrinsic meaning and the opposition between the spiritual and the material (Meecham, 2000:66-77; Tarnas, 1991:138-148).

Such a challenge based on the deployment of space in painting was not unique in 1968. Cos de matèria can also be compared with Untitled - Spatial (1968) (Fig. 6) by Lucio Fontana, a painting that presents a similar questioning of the orthodox notions of pictorial space through the addition or disruption of matter (Biscottini, 1992:73, Whitfield & Cotter, 2000:11ff). The mode of challenge by Tàpies and Fontana affirms that these two artists, by disrupting dualism, developed the modernist project to its zenith (Tàpies Interview, 1999:232-3). To this end, it is necessary to examine the exact nature of the painting's particularity, and how far Tàpies' Matter paintings (Fig. 3 & 4) defied this independence (Meecham, 2000:21-22; Ward, 1997:36-40). Furthermore, by challenging the boundaries between painting and sculpture, and by shifting focus from the

transcendental to the immanent, Tàpies disrupted Western assumptions of dualism (Tàpies in Ashton, 1995:54-58)³⁴. Thus, Tàpies' Matter paintings can be located not only in the sub-tendencies of Abstract Expressionism, Informel, Tachisme and Matter painting, in terms of their use of paint and matter, but also in the broader arenas of Catalan and European painting. Cos de matèria is placed in the context of European painting and post-war Spain, showing how involvement with matter shifted focus from the transcendental to the immanent, so challenging Cartesian dualism (Tàpies in Ashton, 1995:54-58).

THE FOURTH DIMENSION

From the 17th century until the late 19th century, the views of Isaac Newton, that absolute space and absolute time had mystical meanings, were dominant in science. He considered absolute space and time to be eternal, infinite, immobile and all-present, having no relation to anything external (Henderson in Tuchman, 1983:291). With the development of Quantum Theory, Albert Einstein in his *Special Theory of Relativity* (1905) contested the assumption of absoluteness, so revolutionising concepts of space and time (Henderson, 1983:xix, 353ff)³⁵. Space, one of the ultimate categories of natural philosophy, was no longer understood as the passive background against which events take place, but in Non-Euclidean geometry is understood to be curved by the matter and energy within it. It then becomes part of the dynamic of events that influence and are themselves influenced, and participates in the functioning of the universe (Tarnas, 1991:358). Space being traditionally regarded as three-dimensional, this new theory led to it being seen as having a fourth dimension (Henderson,

³⁴ 'Miró was indeed following this approach, this mixture between materialism and spiritualism. I venture to suggest that this is very Catalan due to the Franciscan influence. Franciscanism is very much this kind of belief. I think there are many Catholic peoples who say they believe the same. I have recently read a short text written by the Archbishop of Barcelona that said that, after all, Christianity was a religion of incarnation ('incarnated religion'). I do not know, but it seems to me that we are always embodied in something tangible, concrete. Things are not volatile; everything takes the form of something material (Tàpies Interview, 1999:216)'.

³⁵ Only the popularisation of Einstein's theory of Relativity, with its redefinition of the fourth dimension as time instead of space, brought an end to this era in which artists, writers and musicians believed they could express higher spatial dimensions (Henderson, 1983:33).

1983:238ff)³⁶. The fourth dimension has been attributed with a variety of artistic interpretations, ranging from time, through a geometric, mainly perceptual, concept offered by Raymond Poincaré, to a mystical vision in the hyperspace philosophy of Charles Hinton (Henderson, 1983: 25-31,37). Both the fourth dimension and Non-Euclidean geometry acted as symbols of liberation; they encouraged 20th century artists to desist from illusory depiction of the world and to convey the unknown space in a new manner. This was particularly evident in the first three decades of the 20th century through some of the major modernist art movements and artists (Henderson, 1983:xix-xxiii). These paradigm shifts within science encouraged artists from the Cubists onwards to discover new visual equivalents for pictorial space³⁷. The introduction of two and three point perspective encouraged experimentation with the depiction of four dimensional space; artists thus rejecting the single point perspective that for centuries since Brunelleschi had portrayed the world as three dimensional (Henderson, 1983:340ff). *Cos de matèria* has a connection with the fourth dimension, in that Tàpies portrays space that appears simultaneously either two or three dimensional, hence alluding to a space that is beyond recognition.

Pictorial space in *Cos de matèria* derives from modernism's deployment of space in two ways. Firstly, it continues the trend amongst 20th century artists of deploying perspective in this way. Secondly, it portrays contextual space in the

³⁶ The 'fourth dimension' according to Ouspensky should be 'at right angles to all our known dimensions and thus must open, as it were, in all directions' (McEvelley, 1993:20). McEvelley also provides readings of the 'zip' in Newman's painting revealing it as exemplifying the reciprocity between finite human reality and the unknown (McEvelley, 1996:72-75). 'The zip paintings, ... are meant to embody the principle of Zim-Zum - of continual uninterrupted flow from and to God, the zip emerging from the ground only to plunge into it at once ... (McEvelley, 1996 74)'.

³⁷ The need to convey 'abstract' space devoid of figurative signifiers was reinforced, further, by a cynicism with the material realm that derived from Kantian idealism but, was exacerbated throughout the 20th century onwards. A perceived opposition between the spiritual and the material world was reinforced by cynicism caused by the occurrence of events in Europe in the 20th century, these include two world wars and the stockpiling of nuclear weapons sufficient to destroy the planet - amongst other atrocities (Colombalia Dexeus, 1989:15).

'When the first atomic bomb exploded, it changed all our lives. Certainly, it changed the way I thought about the world and what I thought about the universe. At the time, it was a scourge. The whole of society was obsessed by the need to know what matter was and how this source of all energy was written into everything in the material world. I think it more than possible that my need to analyse the material elements in my work springs from the same curiosity. If an artist wants to penetrate to the heart of reality then he must understand science (Tàpies Interview, 1995:248)'.

same new way as the metaphysical painters, who, drawing on the Cubists, abandoned figurative elements (Henderson, 1983:56, McEvilley, 1996:63). Such use of space is adopted in both Cos de matèria and Light Red over Black. While disrupted on the surface, the image of the human body in Cos de matèria is based on a coherent area of unified pictorial space that fills the entire surface of the canvas. Moreover, it is similar to the space in Light Red over Black in that it is not confined to the perspectival approach. While the human body in Cos de matèria could be construed as being portrayed in two or three dimensions, its major relationship is with the area of space within which it is suspended.

Additionally, when one compares Cos de matèria to formalism's aesthetic model it is evident that, while not focused wholly on the pursuit of purity, it draws on what the Bauhaus termed 'truth to materials'; the idea that materials have some degree of intrinsic meaning and that their use corresponds to a sensual visual language (Ward, 1997:37-38). In Cos de matèria, Tàpies has concentrated on formal and visual qualities, prioritising compositional balance, colour, marks and materials. The figurative signifiers, scores and other marks allude not only to Tàpies, who made the painting, but also to the phenomena they signify. These signifiers of the individual referencing human presence, the architectural and the domestic, are signifiers that are removed in metaphysical painting. Tàpies' painting shows awareness of its viewer. In the Picasso Museum in Antibes it was hung at the height of the viewers' body, so facing and echoing the body portrayed in the work.

While pictorial space in Cos de matèria draws on the pursuit of purity that is central to the modernist movement, the addition of matter distinguishes it from modernism as typified by Light Red over Black. Tàpies' engagement with materials and use of tactics of disruption indicates a divergence from the use of the pictorial space typified by modernist painting. He challenges the concept of the pursuit of purity. Tàpies, alongside other leading artists of the time, such as Lucio Fontana and Barnett Newman, used visual strategies to question the

orthodoxy of modernism as a monolithic project based on progress and epitomised by expanses of pure pictorial space (Cheetham, 1996: 20, 38-39, Tàpies Interview, 1999:216, 232-3). This fundamental shift, expressed in Cos de matèria, poses the problem of whether or not the spiritual might be conveyed in matter.

LIGHT RED OVER BLACK AND THE PURSUIT OF PURITY

Light Red over Black is typical of standardised modernism in its expression of versions of the spiritual (Golding, 2000:195ff). Claims that an art object could convey essential or inherent meaning are derived from modernism's metanarratives (Greenberg in Harrison, 1996: 754-760). The modernist project was predicated on the dominant discourses of the period, or metanarratives, the belief that society is based on collective facts or essential truths (Tarnas, 1996:400). One dominant metanarrative was that all phenomena contain a core essence that possesses both trans-historical and trans-cultural meaning³⁸. This viewpoint was by no means held by all philosophers, the main detractors being Heidegger, Nietzsche and Sartre. However, for the purposes of this thesis, a significant number of the major art theorists of this time held firm to a belief in core meaning. The idea that an artwork contains core inherent meaning, deemed universal, offers the possibility that the work of art could be comprehended irrespective of background or experience (McEvelley, 1996:22, Meecham & Sheldon, 2000:12)³⁹. The real issue here is not core meaning per se, but whether core meaning is deposited by the artist or discovered by the viewer. What the main modernist critics tended to favour was the idea that core meaning was intrinsic to form and the formal properties of a painting. Thus core meaning would be developed throughout an artist's *oeuvre*, and from one generation to the next. The modernist project was based, therefore, on the conviction that history is progressive, movements in art unfolding in a logical and sequential way

³⁹ Latin; *essentia*, *esse* - to be, Greek; *ousia*; refers to a more permanent and fixed aspect of a thing in contrast to the variable, partial, or phenomenal. Plato finds the essence of a thing in its eternal idea (Reese, 1996:209).

(Barr in Fernie, 1995:179-180)⁴⁰. Consequently, attribution of meaning to an artwork was considered to be more precise in the knowledge of its aesthetic and historical antecedents (Fernie, 1995:17-18).

Kantian philosophy was employed in the development of notions of space and the outline of fine art that dominated the modernist project for the first half of the 20th century (Crowther, 1993:56ff). From his idea of the spheres of science, morality and art as autonomous, Kant derived the 'pure aesthetic' judgement (Crowther, 1993:59). This self-critical tendency stressed the unity and autonomy of a work of art, stating that it should be unaffected by other art forms. The effects of the Kantian aesthetic are most pronounced in the artistic formalism that prevailed in the first seven decades of the 20th century. Formalism stressed form over content, to express ideas of essence that draw from notions of Platonic form (Tarnas, 1996: 6-12). The aesthetic form that was seen as expressing the essential was termed 'significant form' by the art historian Clive Bell (Bell in Frascina, 1982:69)⁴¹. While never granted clear definition by Bell, significant form was understood to correlate to the qualities of the flat surface in painting (Bell,

⁴⁰ 'The essence of modernism lies in the use of the characteristic methods of a discipline to criticize the discipline itself – not in order to subvert it, but to entrench it more firmly in its area of competence. ... The task of self-criticism became to eliminate from the effects of each art any and every effect that might conceivably be borrowed from or by the medium of any other art. Thereby each art would be rendered 'pure' and in its 'purity' find the guarantee of its standards of quality as well as of its independence. Purity meant self-definition and the enterprise of self-definition and self-criticism in the arts became one of self-definition with a vengeance (Greenberg, in Berry, 1992: 12)'.

⁴¹ 'To appreciate a work of art, according to Clive Bell, we need bring with us nothing but a sense of form and colour and a knowledge of three dimensional space (Bell in Harrison & Wood, 1992:115).' Within modernism, aesthetic emotions were seen as categorically distinct from other kinds of experience and all modernist writers were united in the assumption of the unqualified quality or value of aesthetic experience available through the appreciation of significant form. They saw aesthetic experience, paradoxically perhaps as both instinctive and at the same time requiring a 'disinterestedness' of which the majority were incapable due to some deficiency. Both Bell, and Roger Fry, equated the 'disinterested' and therefore autonomous experience of art with religious experience - 'an expression of that emotion which is the vital force in every religion'. Both art and religion were manifestations of man's religious sense - of ultimate reality. The value of such experience was that it was free from those promptings of desire, greed and ambition which he saw as characterizing the commercial world and therefore cut off from the material world. Bell valued the aesthetic because it waged a war against naturalism and materialism as the materialistic conception of the universe could not explain that disinterestedness characteristic of aesthetic contemplation. This disinterested nature of aesthetic experience (which originated with Kant) had universal and trans-historical categories, across all ages and cultures. It was seen as a form of spiritual experience through what is known within aesthetics as idealism; a tendency to separate and autonomize the world of culture so that its connections with material existence will become untraceable and immune to criticism. Thus, modernist art was characterised by the notion of the autonomy and uniqueness of the artwork as well as the autonomy of the aesthetic experience (Bell, 1949, Bell in Harrison & Wood, 1992: 113- 116).

1949:68). In this Kantian system, art was regarded as elevated and separate from all human affairs, so forcing the conclusion that the aesthetic faculty was the highest, most innately spiritual and transcendent (McEvelley, 1993:2-4). Thus, the definitive criteria for aesthetic excellence and spiritual meaning in painting consisted in the flat surface that was held to denote purity (McEvelley, 1996:83-85).

Meanwhile, geometric abstraction, 'hard edge' minimalist and conceptual abstraction, a secular rather than spiritual tendency within formalism, reduced formal and visual elements to their minimum. Concentration was made on paint itself for its formal qualities, irrespective of its purity (Barr in Harrison & Wood, 1992:363, Osborne, 1991:63)⁴². Thus, a painting is held to be solely self-referential (Fried in Harrison, 1992:825). Minimalism was typified by Frank Stella's Untitled (1951) black painting, Stella (b. 1936) aimed to negate the transcendental aspirations of metaphysical painters, and he joined others in questioning whether painting might express the spiritual, or anything else (Osborne, 1991:64-67). Kasimir Malevich had caused similar upheaval in 1915 on presenting a painted Black Square at the '5x5=25 exhibition', declaring that it represented the 'death of art' (Chave, 1989:190).

The pursuit of purity reached its zenith in the formalism of metaphysical, or Colour Field, painting as exemplified by Mark Rothko's Light Red over Black (Golding, 2000:153ff, McEvelley, 1993:9ff). In this work, Rothko demonstrates his pursuit of purity by minimising formal elements. Colour, form, line and tone are reduced, so relieving the painting of obvious signifiers (Lipsey, 1990:316). The artist leaves no brush marks and little evidence of process (Breslin, in Adler, 1993:43ff). In Light Red over Black, all signs of the material have been minimised; a flat rectangle is divided horizontally into smaller rectangles whose

⁴² Artists such as Piet Mondrian (1872-1944), Frank Stella (b.1936), Kenneth Noland (b.1924) and Ellsworth Kelly (b.1923), while concerned with the aesthetic and visual components of painting were not concerned with expression of the spiritual. Rather, in their 'hard edge' formalism, paint is not used to construct specific meanings such as the spiritual that lie beyond the actual painting. Instead, paint is emphasised as inherently meaningful in the way it has been used to delineate space, in the distinctive layering and in contrasting colours and minimal composition (McEvelley, 1996:84-85).

surfaces are painted to appear stained into the canvas. Indeed, Light Red over Black typifies Abstract Expressionism's metaphysical tendency, a tendency that extended formalism's pursuit of purity by eliminating all signifiers⁴³. The aim being to reveal an essence or ground that would communicate the absolute, unchanging and universal (McEvilley, 1993:9ff). Matter and figurative signifiers are removed from Light Red over Black in order to express the transcendental as spiritual in opposition to the material (Tarnas, 1991:138-148)⁴⁴.

An initial comparison of Cos de matèria with Light Red over Black reveals no clear connection between the two paintings in terms of deployment of pictorial space. Some of the surface of Cos de matèria is densely covered in paint. The earth pigment ranges from a luminous raw umber tint through to a burnt umber tone. Areas of bright orange shine through the surface of matter to present an abstracted image of a human; marks and lines gouge the surface, some apparently random, while others reference the human body, buildings or architecture (Tàpies in Ashton, 1995:32-33, Wye, 1991:34). Graphite pencil and other means of inscription break the surface. In some areas the paint is thin, dribbled, blotchy or layered. Others areas are outlined and left unpainted. Depths vary, in some areas matter is dug out from the board itself. In other areas the sense of depth is illusionary, for instance surrounding the body, which then gives the impression of being in relief.

⁴³ Barnett Newman (1905-1970), Mark Rothko (1903-1970), Clyfford Still (1904-1980) and Mark Tobey (1890-1976) formed a loose tendency within American Abstract Expressionism of artists who were concerned with painting as a medium by which to search for what they believed was a lost absolute (Golding, 2000:195ff).

⁴⁴ Formalists used abstract pictorial space to convey notions of the Absolute, filtered through Cartesian dualism, Neo-Platonism and a Christian legacy (Cheetham, 1996:38). They proffered diverse spiritual meanings in response to a more secular age. The use of space is Judeo-Christian, part of its tradition being that it is only possible to convey God, or the spiritual, through the un-seeable. Paradoxically, this has allowed such space to hold plural meanings, both spiritual and non-spiritual (Tuchman, 1981: 313ff). Light Red over Black epitomises the pursuit of purity and self-definition as outlined by Greenberg, paint is emphasised for its formal qualities and space is a surface of visual impact as much as potential iconographic meaning.

COS DE MATÈRIA AND UNTITLED - SPATIAL

The implications of Tàpies's confrontation with the modernist project are illustrated when comparing Cos de matèria, with a painting Untitled - Spatial (1960) by the modernist Italian artist, Lucio Fontana⁴⁵. It has been asserted by Tàpies that he and Fontana drove the modernist project to its last stage:

Right, there is in his work some kind of aggression, if you like, to what the classic tradition represented. One can partly find the same in my work: attacking the canvas and altering the substances that were traditionally used in oil painting For a while I hated oil painting and normal canvases. Because of that I have worked in my own invented surfaces, or on supports like waste material. We call it 'materiales de rebuig' in Catalan. I do not know how to say it in Spanish. I think it is called waste material ('materiales de deshecho'), dirty or scrap paper or newspapers I think that behind this aggressive attitude, either in Fontana or in my work, there is a need to explain, or to get closer to this intuition of what I called before a new space as, for example, represented by quantum physics. It is so difficult, almost impossible to describe. However, Fontana talks about a kind of 'space-lism' (doctrine of the space). He pretended with his work to create his own sense of space. I also do it my own way. For example, the great amount of different materials in my paintings like grains of marble dust. Every grain of marble dust, for example, represents each of the atoms that make up this energy that moves within ourselves, in the whole nature. Summing up, Fontana and I shared a very similar attitude even if we are very different. He is one of my friends. This ball that is outside, for example, is a Fontana ... (Tàpies Interview, 1999:232).

Fontana's dissent from modernism, from the 1970s onwards, involved slashing lines; first into two-dimensional and three-dimensional clay for ceramics, then, later, into his canvases in varying lengths and combinations (Whitfield & Cotter, 1999:14). While the space of the canvas in Fontana's paintings could be described as typically modernist, the slashes represent a disruption to the pure surface deemed the epitome of painting by critics such as Greenberg. Conceptually, these marks are interpreted as a disruption of painting's transcendental ambitions, in particular the view of the transcendental as a separate, distinct, realm from the material world:

The hole then is not intended as a destructive gesture, but as a channel or bridge between the relative and the absolute, between something and nothing (Fontana describes the holes as "a bridge thrown toward nothingness"), between the finite space of the canvas surface and the infinite space "beyond" the canvas (McEvilley, 1996:32).

Fontana refuses then to convey the material and spiritual realms as discrete and distinct. His use of the slash acts as a bridge between the two; his 'Concetti Spaziali ... transfer into art a fraction of this cosmic space as palpable reality

⁴⁵ 'I am aware that there are some critics that say that Fontana and I are the artists who have driven painting to its last stage. They even say that after us it is impossible to paint or to do any kind of plastic art; that everything (to be art) has to be made with photographs, video, immaterial or perishable materials. I do not believe in the arguments I have just described. We are in a stage in which God, history and ideologies are dead. Everything is dead. But this is a very superficial way of explaining evolution. Fontana and I may have put an end to certain plastic art tendencies, but, on the other hand, we have opened the way for new tendencies (Tàpies Interview, 1999:233).'

(Billeter, 1977:16)'; modernism being based in Cartesian dualism, the assumption of dualism is indeed defined by his incisive marks into the surface of the canvas (Biscottini, 1999:73). Indeed, the slashing and gouging of marks into the surface of the canvas bring the transcendental associated with pictorial space into the realm of the immanent (McEvelley, 1993: 32). For this reason, Fontana's Untitled series act as a significant point of comparison for Cos de matèria.

It might appear overblown to construe one act of slashing a canvas as signifying a shift from the consideration of the spiritual as transcendental to its conception as immanent. In its historical context, the notion of space as spiritual evolved over fifty years, taking on iconic status. Indeed it came to demarcate painting from other art forms (Henderson in Tuchman, 1981:313ff). Fontana's act of disruption was construed not only as challenging, but even aggressive in its attack on the principles that modernism espoused, and to the independence of painting as signalled by its emphasis on flat surface: 'The perforation and the cutting of the canvas amounted to a revolutionary act when first performed' (Billeter, 1977:13)⁴⁶. A challenging of the flat surface of modernist painting, and a greater preoccupation with immanence, marks Fontana's painting as representative of a new concept of the spiritual in the second half of the 20th century (McEvelley, 1996:62-64). Fontana was typical of this time in disrupting the boundaries between the different genres; his painting signalled a new era of thinking about, and working with, space. In effect, the slicing of the pure surface of canvas, or the addition of matter, announced that the pursuit of purity had reached its end, hence the claim that he and Tàpies drove modernism to its zenith (McEvelley, 1993:31)⁴⁷.

⁴⁶ This act of disruption was pioneered by Barbara Hepworth in 1931 when she began to pierce holes through solid matter in sculpture. She later bridged the holes with wire (Prof. M Smith, pers. comm., October 2004).⁴⁷ Fontana stated; 'As a painter, while working on one of my perforated canvases, I do not want to make a painting: I want to open up space, create a new dimension for art, tie in with the cosmos as it endlessly expands beyond the confining plane of the picture' (Fontana in McEvelley, 1993: 31).

COS DE MATÈRIA AND MATTER

For Tàpies, matter comprises marble dust, straw, paint, gravel and other similar materials and objects (Tàpies in Ashton, 1995:23, Wye, 1991:11). He employs matter for its symbolism and allusions, and to convey palpable reality. It acts also as an arena within which Tàpies' process takes place (Tàpies in Ashton, 1995:45-49). Most famously, matter is a wall (Chapter 5) offered to stimulate the viewer to 'penetrate beneath their hermetic surface in search of the secret behind their aesthetic effect ...' (Franzke, 1992:24).

By the time Tàpies went to Paris in the 1950s, Matter painting was akin to the spontaneous, automatic writing that had become widespread. Inspired partly by exhibitions at the Galerie René Drouin and the work of Jean Fautrier, Jean Dubuffet and Wols, the painting that resulted was exhibited and promoted in Paris under such names as Lyrical Abstraction, Art Informel, Matter Painting and Tachisme (Franzke, 1992:5, Wye, 1991:11). These were groups who shared characteristics; an emphasis on impulsiveness and spontaneity that rejected predetermined composition and that frequently equated drawing with painting, a common notion of matter that generally refers to a concentration on the individual mark or *tache* as opposed to the straight line or carefully circumscribed shape, a regard for the expressive potential of paint and its textured or optical effect, and a sense of immediacy in the repetition.

Tàpies is not the only artist to use matter in the way that he does; rather he is one of a wave of artists across Europe who used matter to disrupt the modernist emphasis on space (Borja-Villel, 1989:iv). He was part of a trend in the early 1950s towards the manipulation of paint which gave rise to a style of painting that relied on the effect of multiple layers, an almost sculptural thickness that formed a relief (Ashton, 1995:28,38, Franzke, 1992:24, Wye, 1991:16). The Matter paintings that projected Tàpies into prominence in the European avantgarde during the late 1950s and early 1960s employed pictorial space juxtaposed with large areas of coherent unified matter. Many post-war artists found that the

geometric abstraction that had held sway, particularly in Paris in the 1940s, was too limiting to reflect psychological experience; so that in their search for a more immediate expression they turned to a gestural form of abstract painting (Pohribny, 1979:30, Sprocatti, 1992:77). A number of painters are deemed to have initiated what was known as 'Action Painting', 'Art Informel', 'Tachisme', 'Art Autre' and, in Japan, 'Gutai'⁴⁸. These were part of a larger movement that paralleled Abstract Expressionism in America, with artists such as Jackson Pollock (Wye, 1991:11). In order to understand how matter in Cos de matèria disrupts modernist notions of the spiritual it is necessary to examine the historical assumption that space and matter are polarised.

The polarisation of space and matter, fundamental to modernist notions of the spiritual, was derived from Western Christianity and Platonism. Western culture propounded that the concept of the spiritual differing from the material is not fully comprehensible. Indeed, in modernist painting, the notion of spiritual expression was regarded as an attempt to engage with the unknown, while pictorial space in the late modernist period has been construed as a presentation of 'the unrepresentable' (Crowther, 1993:155-156). This viewpoint derives from a dualistic notion of a God that exists in a realm wholly separate from that of the material (Crowther, 1993:156, Tarnas, 1996:114). From the modernist era onwards, as institutionalised Christianity waned, it was regarded as no longer avantgarde to make figurative art because figuration was deemed to express Christian notions of the Absolute. Additionally, a Cartesian viewpoint was responsible for consideration of pictorial space as representing the transcendental, and the view of space as progressively more spiritual according to the degree to which it had been purified of material signs (Cheetham, 1996:31-63; McEvilley, 1993:9ff,45). Polarisation of the material and spiritual realms, and belief in a spiritual hierarchy,

⁴⁸ The meaning of Tachisme and Informel are seldom kept distinct from each other, but are generally considered to consist in the Informel style in Europe, consisting of Jean-Paul Riopelle (b.1923), Wols (1915-1951) and Jean Dubuffet (1901-1985); the Tachists included Georges Mathieu (b. 1921), Hans Hartung (1904-1989) and Henri Michaux (1899-1984). Informel in Spain was associated with the sub-movement known as El Paso which consisted of the artists: Antonio Saura (b. 1930), Manuel Millares (1926-1972), Rafael Canogar (b. 1935) and Luis Feito (b. 1929) (Moffitt, 1999: 222).

characterised Neo-Platonism's 'principle of emanation'. All phenomena were held to derive from the One, or the Absolute (Tarnas, 1991:84-87)⁴⁹. However, some caution has to be maintained at this point over the conflation of God with the One or with the Absolute. Tarnas has used the terms interchangeably, perhaps as a philosopher and historian rather than as a theologian. In this sense, he reflects the influence of Neo-Platonic language on writing about Christianity, specifically that its influence has led to certain writers to describe God as 'the Absolute' or 'the One'. The Neo-Platonic system that placed God at the apex of a spiritual hierarchy was regarded, paradoxically, as at the ground of our being from which all else derived⁵⁰. Platonism, from which Christian theology drew ideas of essentialism, was organised around an hierarchical opposition between the notion of a divine transcendent realm and the corporeal world. This system reflected Christian belief in the possibility of experiencing the Absolute. Reality then being perceived to be constructed as a graded series from the divine to the material⁵¹. This qualification of notions of the spiritual was based on the assumption that the intellectual, spiritual and material realms form a hierarchy extending from a 'base' material level through to a peak spiritual ideal. God was associated with the notion of unity, the idea being that such a unity supposedly lay beneath the surface illusion of dualism. The individual was believed to possess some part of the divine within, and a longing for union with, the eternal that is considered as the source of all things (McEvelley, 1993:9ff). Descended

⁴⁹ For Plato, the One interpenetrates with Beauty, Truth, and the Good to make something close to a single eternal principle. Chu Hsi represents Neo-Confucianism in its developed form as a system balanced between the One and the many, with an interaction between principle and material force. In Neoplatonism, the One is the name of God who generates the entire universe by emanation from its superessential reality (Reese, 1996:534).

⁵⁰ Being translates in Greek; *ousia* and *ontos*, and in Latin; *esse*, *essentia* and *substantia*. A philosophical term used to refer to the ontological status of things and humans and their presence in the world. This term is used throughout Western philosophy, but with changing investigations and assumptions. Today, Heidegger is the philosopher most associated with the term and its importance to thought and existence. Plato associated being with changeless ideas, and contrasted being with becoming, relating the latter to the changing world. Aristotle chose *ousia* or 'substance' as his basic category, regarding 'being' as an analogical concept applying to different things in different ways. Heidegger distinguishes *dasein*, (or being there), the kind of being ordinarily available to us, from *eksistenz* (one again, authentic being) and 'transcending Being, which is akin to the holy (Hester Reeve, pers. comm., 2004, Kim & Sosa, 1995:69).

⁵¹ It could be argued that the 'invention' of Jesus Christ as God made human was non dual, as reflected in Renaissance humanism and painters since Giotto. The point though is that the history of the influence of Christianity on Western art has usually meant that the spiritual has been expressed through dualistic imagery (Prof. M. Smith, pers. comm., 2003).

from Christian notions of the spiritual, pictorial space was surmised to express ideas around the absolute and the transcendental, these attributes being regarded as intrinsic to an individual's quest for unity or wholeness (Parrinder, 1995:7ff, Tuchman, 1981:313ff).

SPANISH AND CATALAN ART

The Matter paintings and the spiritual are grounded in their relationship to Tàpies and Spanish, Catalan and European art. During the 1940s and much of the following decade, Spain lived through exceptional socio-political circumstances. The Civil War not only caused upheavals within Spanish cultural life, but also isolated Spain (Moffitt, 1999:220). Censorship and the closure of frontiers militated against achieving a modern society and against the fomenting of advance. Many artists and scholars who had fought for the acceptance of modern art in Spain were forced into exile. The situation in Catalonia was especially grave under threats of a new authoritarian and centralist regime that would tolerate no political or cultural difference (Moffitt, 1999:218-222). Despite this, some small avantgarde groups were formed in Madrid and Barcelona. The most notable to signal the end of cultural stagnation with its group and journal was *Dau al Set*, comprising; Joan-Josep Tharrats (b. 1918), Modest Cuixart (b. 1925), Joan Ponc (1927-1984).

European painting moved away from a preoccupation with purity, towards relief sculpture that symbolised both a period and culture as well as an artistic attitude (Borja-Villel, 1989:iv). The tensions created by enlisting the opposing forces of space and matter in Tàpies' Matter paintings is shared in the work of Spaniards Antonio Saura (b. 1930) and Manolo Millares (1926-1972)⁵².

Use of Matter was also evident in Spanish and particularly Catalan art. ... the land, which is always an historical land impregnated with very strong presences, leaves its mark on artistic creation. Catalans as a people have never had the chance to reach full historical development. ... Matter is loved because a land is loved which has never been possessed with sufficient title. And with such passion that when Tàpies gives a real boost to inFormalism (sic), soil appears literally in the painting. ...This insistence on placing the

⁵² '... Millares was the real pioneer of radical pictorial innovation. ... 'painting' made from ripped and crudely stitched burlap embellished with blotches of smeared, emblematically industrial, enamel paints. Employing the waste materials of industrial society, this rude image is both pessimistic and modern, and thus revisits the Tremendismo so critical of 'Black Spain' (Moffitt, 1999: 222).'

emphasis on matter is an identifying feature of Catalan Informalism, ... compared to the abstract expressionist/action painting of the Madrid area ... as Michel Tapié has pointed out (Corredor-Matheos, 1992: 11).

Matter paintings were, moreover, the culmination of fatigue brought on by a proliferation of what was then generally regarded at the time by Tachisme and Informel as facile (Tàpies in Ashton, 1995:48). This was echoed the world over, including in Spain, in reaction to what was regarded as an excessive concern with the academicism evident in the Madrid-based El Paso movement (1957 – 1970's)⁵³.

Viewing the debasement of Informel, Tàpies reasserted its tenets to escape what he construed as the excesses of the abstract and the pursuit of purity. He sought an art more concrete, with ever more early roots; 'the pure and essential elements of painting urged by masters of previous generations' (Tàpies in Ashton, 1995:48).

In the face of economic and political hardship, many Catalan artists who were against the orthodoxy of modernism sought to erode the boundary that had arisen between aesthetics and the mundane (Corredor-Matheos, 1992:11). Hence the early 1950s witnessed the emergence of a new school experimenting in the plastic arts with boldness; its rapid maturation profoundly transformed and expanded the Catalan art world (Corredor-Matheos, 1992:11); 'About 1956 the problem of axiomatic and concrete art arose, as a reaction to the individualistic and existentialist sense of Informalism, and as a basis for the insertion of art into contemporary life (Borras, 1990:6)'. As in Europe, particularly France, Catalans followed a tradition of using simple materials in abstract painting with figurative elements. Objects were used for their expressiveness of material; Tàpies, Brossa and other artists valued their meta-linguistic value (Ashton, 1995:38,

⁵³ 'Progressive European artists emerging in the post-war period conceived a common strategy of turning their backs upon a government-sponsored national Social Realism. For them, Spaniards included, the most obvious artistic tactic was a defiantly international, anti-social and anti-realistic style. The positive legacy of Franco's 'nationalist' art is essentially spiritual, although it is not the one intended by the now defunct Caudillo (little Chieftain); he gave maturing Spanish youth something concrete to revolt against (Moffitt, 1999:219).'

Wye, 1991:23-24). This aesthetic development led to the consolidation of Spanish and Catalan art in the European realm (Moffitt, 1999:222)⁵⁴.

Catalan art at this time was most noted in the movement, *Dau al Set*. Founded in Barcelona in 1948, it was a radical modernist movement fuelled by foreign poets and essayists in contact with the French Surrealists (Oliver in Canelias, 1993:8; Catoir, 1991:20-24, 100-102)⁵⁵. Though fluid in nature, its members included Joan Ponc (1927-1984), Modest Cuixart (b. 1925) and Joan-Josep Tharrats (b. 1918), while one of its leading theoreticians was Juan Eduardo Cirlot (1916 -1973), a parallel figure to Andre Breton (1896 -1966) in France. Its main inspiration was the poet Joan Brossa (1919-1998). The group was complemented by the theoretician Arnau Puig (b. 1929), art collector Joan Prats (1891-1970), and influenced by Surrealist poet Josep Vicens Foix (1894-1987) who was an inspiring figure to artists in Barcelona before and after the Civil War (Franzke, 1992:6; Wye, 1991:34).

Tàpies fits firmly within the second vanguard of Catalan painters and Sculptors that includes Modest Cuixart, Josep Guinovart (b. 1927), Joan Hernandez Pijuan (b. 1931), Joan Ponc, Albert Rafols-Casamada (b. 1923) and J.J. Tharrats (Canelias, 1993:7). These artists had endured economic hardship and a crisis of artistic stance in Catalunya, including the negation of the work of art and even of

⁵⁴ '... an 'anti-academic' and 'revolutionary-plastic' art given, ... to 'protests': because such painting was so 'abstract, due to its very hermeticism it could not propound any specifically revolutionary ideas. Even though informal art may have represented a shout of rebellion in the mind of its creators, it was unable to denounce any injustice. Because of its very abstraction, it could only express what the viewer wished to see in it. The government in Madrid understood that it was a waste of time to forbid it since, by its own definition, it was incapable of transmitting any subversive messages' (Moffitt, 1999: 225)'.

⁵⁵ *Dau al Set* marked the most important point in the history of post war Catalan art, as it demonstrated an end to Spain's exclusion from the world art scene (Moffitt: 1999:220). A magazine of the same name published fifty-eight issues between 1948 and 1956 with a circulation ranging from one hundred to five hundred (Oliver in Canelias, 1993:7). The group celebrated dream-states and psychic automatism as introduced by the Surrealist movement. Influenced by Brossa's ideas on the art of illusion, the journal addressed the works of Llull, Gaudí, Miró, Klee, Méliès; and such subjects as the Cabbala, magic and the art of the conjurer. Tàpies repeatedly returned to all these interests (Catoir, 1991: 21). The text to accompany Tàpies' first solo exhibition in Barcelona was written by Brossa in the form of an oracle. The dream world portrayed in the drawings he produced for *Dau al Set* predicted the direction of Tàpies' development for the first ten years of his career (Catoir, 1991: 22). This artistic and literary movement was the main generator of the new avantgarde consciousness in Catalunya, establishing a radical opposition to the prevailing cultural conformism (Moffitt, 1991: 222).

art itself (Corredor-Matheos, 1992:11). A characteristic of Catalan painting and sculpture is that the artists do not belong to schools, but are integrated into one tradition. Their use of simple three-dimensional materials applied within a flat surface reflected an expressionism marked by Mediterranean gesturalism and chromatic range. With their figurative elements and primitivism they were consciously following a cultural tradition marked by their outstanding predecessors, Pablo Picasso (1881-1973), Joan Miró (1893 -1983) and Salvador Dalí (1904-1989), in the Romanesque, modernist or Noucentist painting and sculpture (Corredor-Matheos,1992:7)⁵⁶.

The new Spanish painting of late modernism made its first major impact on international art late in 1957 at the prestigious São Paulo Biennial, and again the following year at the 19th Venice Biennale. European critics were impressed by what were called 'typically Iberian' characteristics of 'austerity' and 'violence' (Moffitt, 1999:224). With the consolidation of the reputations of Antonio Saura (b. 1930), Manolo Millares (1926-1972) and Tàpies, and the maturing of Catalan artists Albert Rafols-Casamada, Joan Hernandez Pijuan and Josep Guinovart, Spanish art acquired a reputation hitherto lacking and so became fully participant in international movements (Corredor-Matheos in Kraskin, 1990:8-11, Moffitt, 1999: 224-228). Growing public interest from 1970 was reflected in important Spanish exhibitions of contemporary art and tentative new museum projects, while the death of Franco in 1975 brought a renewed vitality to Spanish art that had been sought since the civil war.

In conclusion, Chapter 1 places Cos de matèria within the philosophical, historical and geographical debates that connect space to the spiritual in modernist art. Through comparison with Light Red over Black, the chapter demonstrates how Cos de matèria presents a tangent to the modernist project in

⁵⁶ Tàpies has antecedents in the historic painting of Zurbarán, Goya, Velázquez and Meléndez (Canelias, 1993:9). The new Spanish painting that included Tàpies has a 'flawless sense of reality accompanied by a formal expressiveness which can be traced from Velázquez, El Greco, Goya and up to Picasso' (Moffitt, 1999: 136ff,178ff,224).

painting by challenging the pursuit of purity. This issue is expanded in discussion of Cos de matèria and the contemplative tradition that focusses on the overcoming of subject and object dualism (Chapters 3, 4, 5). By comparison with Untitled - Spatial by Lucio Fontana, the evident limits of formalism in discussing this work were shown, in that a modernist consideration of painting can result in reduced readings. In particular the chapter shows challenges to Western Cartesian thought, indeed to the whole metanarrative of modernist philosophy. By examining the relationship of Cos de matèria to European and Spanish modernism, the chapter reveals the manner by which this painting disrupts dualism through the deployment of matter and space; bringing the spiritual into the realm of the mundane. By examining further the place of Cos de matèria in Spanish and Catalan art, the chapter reveals how Tàpies (and others) exemplify the avantgarde and the strength of the act of using matter as a counter to the banning of Catalan culture. The growth of ideas of materiality and corporeality were shown in terms of emphasis on mark, matter, gesturalism, figurative elements and bodily associations shown as typical for the cusp of modernism and the current state of painting. Such emphasis is also typical for the tendencies of Abstract Expressionism to which Cos de matèria is affiliated. It shows that this painting can be seen as exemplifying the collapse of boundaries between painting and sculpture. Having established the position of Cos de matèria in the canon of modernist painting, it is now apposite to show how the spiritual in this work might be construed in light of the new art history.

Chapter 2: After the Death of Painting

I also have a desire to restore the insignificant and the banal, the urge to show a chair or pair of scissors or shoes in a cosmic dimension. This is the way of showing the observer that an armpit can be as transcendental as an image of God. It is rather like what the Zen Buddhists say about there being a whole universe in a grain of sand (Tàpies Interview, 1995:249).

OVERVIEW

The intellectual foundations for discussion of the spiritual in art are minimal, and most contemporary critical theory militates against it. In this Chapter I will consider the problems that are entailed in discussing the spiritual in contemporary art in light of the assertion from the new art history that it is more pertinent to investigate art in terms of wider social structures than its specific material attributes (Witkin, 1995:6). Since the late 1960s, the idea that an artwork might express the transcendental, or contain meaning, was regarded in the new art history as highly problematic.

The question of whether or not a painting might carry spiritual values was challenged by postmodern announcements of the 'death of art' (Ward, 1997:35)⁵⁷. This declaration has been made at points throughout art history and refers to the assertion that not only are there no new issues to explore in art, but that there are no new ways in which to express established preoccupations (Ward, 1997:6-7). While Tàpies, in his work, asserts the presence of the spiritual in the seemingly insignificant and the banal, his apprehension of these concepts differs from their use in much postmodern art (Hernstein-Smith in Fekete, 1988:2).

The 'death of art', first proclaimed by Hegel, has been reasserted at a number of points in history alongside the introduction of the term postmodern (Morgan, 1998:3, Ward, 1997:4-8,35)⁵⁸. Full comprehension of the spiritual as conveyed

⁵⁷ The 'death of art' was also declared in the years: 1870s, 1917, 1947, 1957, 1964 and 1968.

⁵⁸ Art was ripe for reappraisal in a society where, by the beginning of the 20th century, a number of accepted beliefs had undergone attack. Darwin had postulated a natural rather than divine origin of the species, Nietzsche had rejected Christian morality in favour of a doctrine of the will and Marx had declared

in Cos de matèria (Fig. 2), requires an assessment of its relationship to the assertion that painting is dead, and how Western society's ideas about art and its discursive contexts have changed. Claims by the new art history for the 'death of art' challenged the modernist project, in particular its ideas of essence, originality and the pursuit of purity (Ward, 1997:32ff)⁵⁹. Modernist discourses came under attack from the new art history most acutely with the shift to postmodernism. Further, declarations of the death of the author and the 'death of God' have called into question the foundations of art history⁶⁰. Ultimately, a review of the modernist project has brought into question the whole history of thought (Sarup, 1993:145). Under the rubric of the new art history, Cos de matèria can be discussed in terms of three main detractors to the spiritual; Jacques Derrida's theory of deconstruction, Baudrillard's notion of simulacra and Marxism's theory of art (Sarup, 1993:32ff,101-102,161-168)⁶¹. Discussion centres on the manner in which modernist credence in essentialism, authenticity and notions of the absolute, are questioned by much postmodern art (Sarup, 1993:172-173, Ward, 1997:33-39)⁶². Postmodernity's apprehension of meaning has resulted in a loss of distinction between the real and the false, together with a shift from absolute values to relative values, from the transcendental to the material and the

religion the opiate of the people. In 1900, Freud had published an article analysing subconscious human sex drives that seemed for some to undermine the moral fibre of society as well as to reveal the importance of the subconscious in human behaviour. Developments were occurring in science and at a social level. As certain external structures began to collapse, disparate artists turned to Abstraction that relied less on the forms of an uncertain and changing world and more on so-called universal values that drew from philosophical or mystical doctrines. In renouncing what Kandinsky called the 'soulless materialism of the 19th century' they hoped to find spiritual focus for the future (McEvelley, 1991:112-114). It should be noted that Marx was not denying religion, rather he acknowledged people's need of it.

⁵⁹ In the late 1980s a number of painters employed ironic strategies of deconstruction to satirise highbrow claims for the spiritual content of the Colour Field painting of artists such as Barnett Newman and Mark Rothko. In his Op Art, Peter Halley (b.1953) parodied Rothko's painting by using banal imagery drawn from the technical base of postmodern culture. 'Deconstruction is present in all these works in so far as art's pretensions to elevation or improvement are called into question or shifted to the level of the humorous' (Crowther, 1997:193-4, Osborne, 1991: 51ff).

⁶⁰ The 'death of God' is a 19th century claim, offered first by Mainlander then by Nietzsche and Sartre. Radical theologians recently revived their claim; they propose to be religious without God while awaiting in a 'sacred void' some new world. Ethical nihilism is the doctrine that all value judgements have lost their validity. Theological nihilism is best represented by the 'death of God' movement in American theology; in which the concept of God has lost validity and they seek reorientation; thus continuing their worship although with a void where formerly they recognised God (McGrath, 1997: 254-256, 530-531).

⁶¹ '(Baudrillard) ... writes about a world constructed out of models which have no referent or ground in any (reality) except their own (Sarup, 1993:163).

⁶² This has resulted in a diminished concentration on the object and its formal qualities and greater attention to ideas of representation and the visual, the context of art and the experience of a viewer.

mundane (Ward, 1997:51). Further, the notion of the artist as a creative agent and the idea of art as a spiritual quest is deemed obsolete (Ferne, 1995:19-20, Ward, 1997:44-45).

Comparison of Cos de matèria to a typically postmodern painting; Beautiful, four cheese (Fig, 7) by Damien Hirst, exemplifies the manner in which the modernist project has been proclaimed redundant. Beautiful, four cheese, is one of a series of Hirst's Spiral paintings, and is selected here because his work is pronounced by himself and his critics to be spiritual, even sublime. For this reason, argument for the spiritual in Cos de matèria can be highlighted by its comparison with Beautiful, four cheese, since the latter painting holds attention to its surface and differs little from other paintings in the series⁶³. Finally in this chapter, the limitations of the new art history in detracting from the spiritual are assessed.

THE NEW ART HISTORY

The new art history, a term coined in the early 1980s, comprises a number of interlinking theories that challenged the entire field of art (Ferne, 1995:18-21). It shifts focus from essentialism and the analysis of the art object towards the study of social contexts and ideologies⁶⁴. The new art history has posited that, rather than a value-free subject, art history has been framed within social and economic power structures that are often oppressive, and so might better be understood through the prior scrutiny of political, critical and cultural context. Historical evidence is used to question enduring modernist ideologies, particularly claims for intrinsic meaning. Clark weakens the case for an idealist view, while asserting that the perceptions and interpretations which comprise an understanding of the history of the 20th century have been fundamentally altered by the cumulative effects of modernism (Ferne, 1995:19). With the dwindling

⁶³ Hirst's membership of the Young British Artists (YBA's) has guaranteed his status in the contemporary avantgarde and his work engages with issues raised by the declaration of the 'death of art'.

⁶⁴ The leading advocate of this position is Clark (1978), who advocates the assessment of art by first questioning the prevailing art theory in the light of social circumstance. Clark's social history of art is highly regarded by Eric Ferne (Ferne, 1995:19, 254ff) as being superior to the model produced by Arnold Hauser, (Hauser, 1959). However, he concedes that Hauser's work, based on Marxist theory, employed more complex economic models.

hegemony of Christianity, conviction in metanarratives has waned, and, with this, belief in the existence of absolutes, and that phenomena such as artworks may contain intrinsic meaning. As industrialisation gathered momentum, so credence in art history as a progressive, linear development has all but vanished (McEvilley, 1991:136, 1993:1ff).

Postmodern thought has shaken faith in the spiritual, a point typified by the way that modernism has been disputed by deconstruction (Sarup, 1993:32ff). Deconstruction, a dominant strand in the new art history, was introduced by Jacques Derrida in the late 1970s (Sarup, 1993:33). Contrary to modernism's certainty of communicable meaning, Derrida enlisted the central theory of structuralism; that an artwork cannot hold coherent, unified meaning. Hence, art historians have employed deconstruction for an analysis of artwork which denies meaning beyond a surface of shifting signs (Sarup, 1993:32ff,161ff). No demand is made for interpretation of the attributes of a painting or sculpture; rather the art object is referred to as text, while the elements of content are termed 'signs' (Sarup, 1993:34,162). Deconstruction postulates that meaning is not inherent in visual or linguistic signs, nor in that to which they refer, but results from the relationships between them⁶⁵. Thus, the artwork can be read in the same way as a passage of writing (Thompson, 1993: 285ff, 429ff). This stance draws from semiotics the potential to analyse and interpret all phenomena, and that artworks can only have meaning conferred upon them. This has led to art critics who work from a deconstructive conviction being concerned exclusively with discourse rather than the discovery of meaning (Baldwin in Fernie, 1995:352-4). Sarup, drawing on Derrida, states that the intention behind a work cannot be known, but that texts can be deconstructed with each reading. In deconstruction nothing is deemed to have value beyond interpretation; texts bear no relation to anything

⁶⁵ According to Saussure, a signified is the mental concept which, according to him, a word is designed to convey; a signifier is the sequence of sounds or letters by which we refer to that concept, whereas a sign is the union of signified and signifier in a act of understanding; united in the brain by an associative bond. The most important characteristic of the sign is that it is arbitrary (Hanfling, 1992: 406ff).

other than themselves and the deconstructive theories in terms of which they are discussed (Sarup, 1993:164).

Modernist discourses had been based on the conviction that art can be understood through logocentrism; 'the word by which the inward thought is expressed' or 'reason itself' (Sarup, 1993:37). While deconstruction deems the history of philosophy since Plato to be a logocentric quest, Derrida, in particular, criticises logocentrism's desire to produce a rational language that might represent the entire world (Sarup, 1993:34ff)⁶⁶. He employs deconstructive strategies in order to question the Western tradition of rationalist thought (Sarup, 1993:37). However, deconstruction is not comprehensive, rather it is a means to interrogate the previously established methods for discussing art. The foregoing suggests two related ways by which the spiritual may be contested. While deconstruction disputes essentialism, essentialism dissents from it; and further, the theories of Jean Baudrillard may be enlisted for disputing the absolute. Both of these approaches will be considered. Since deconstruction denies intrinsic meaning, the spirituality claimed by Tàpies to be inherent in Cos de matèria is brought into question. Modernists would address Tàpies' engagement with materials and would accept that they engender meaning, whereas deconstruction questions such assumptions. Tàpies' *oeuvre* is regarded by himself and his critics as typically modernist, and therefore it is held that his materials signify (Gombrich, 1995:326). Post-modernism would, however, deny the significance of Cos de matèria as contemporary art.

Tàpies' work needs to be examined in terms of how its formal qualities accord to the relevant theoretical contexts⁶⁷. The evident engagement with materials in his work, for instance the wrinkling and scoring of the paint surface in Cos de

⁶⁶ The basis of logocentrism as employed here is that history in art consists of a logical sequential development of ideas, with one following inevitably through to the next.

⁶⁷ Deconstruction demands that art no longer be considered out of its social context, but that it is understood as being embedded in a web of discourse and cognition, as well as in the audience's psychological processes. (Sarup, 1993:32ff). Today art is dominated by concepts, its materiality frequently being regarded as secondary.

matèria, suggest that it should be discussed within the modernist aesthetic model; formal qualities being seen by modernists as crucial to the reading of art. However, since modernist essentialism has been superceded, and in the light of claims for the transcendental in his oeuvre, Tàpies' work is now open to being read within postmodern discourses.

Deconstruction would question the association of space with the spiritual (Sarup, 1993:37). Drawing on structuralist theory, pictorial space is construed as a sign for the spiritual, rather than holding intrinsically spiritual properties. In stating that an artwork possesses no more than surface meaning, postmodern discourses contend that space, for instance, cannot portray the spiritual but may only convey it through association. The association of pictorial space with the spiritual in Cos de matèria can be construed as part of a modernist, and therefore retrogressive, discourse that is dependent on essentialist notions of meaning and universal truth. Further, in order to associate the pictorial space with the spiritual, the viewer might need knowledge of this tradition. A pivotal postmodern assertion; the end of painting, holds that its qualities of expression and visual exploration have become the uncritical mining of past styles. Deconstruction, on the other hand, contends that there are many equal and valid interpretations of any one art work, and that it becomes valuable and meaningful by association with past art works already affirmed (Crowther, 1997:192ff). Hence, given a background knowledge of Tàpies' preoccupation with the relationship between space and matter, the viewer's appreciation of his use of pictorial space to evoke the spiritual is enhanced. Moreover, the language of postmodern discourses, that of 'reading' a work, has tended to privilege a rational, even intellectual approach (Fernie, 1995:353). Such an interpretation would not, however, necessarily prioritise the experience of viewing pictorial space. While the apprehension of all visual art is predicated on the act of looking, the impact is intensified by scale, as in the great expanses of pictorial space in Cos de matèria. As visual silence for thought, for introspection, space has become associated with contemplation through art history, and therefore Cos de matèria relies on a viewer's

understanding of this concept. Its surface is to be contemplated, as well as being physically engaging (Chapter 3).

Up to this point in the thesis the use of pictorial space in Cos de matèria has been examined in the context of the second half of the 20th century. Further it has been located within the body of the movements from which it derives, particularly Abstract Expressionism due to the metaphysical influence of that movement; and it is likened to the sub-movements Informel and Tachisme. Such categorisation is in the tradition of art being best understood when seen in an art historical context. Postmodernity, however, has led to a loss of credence in art as a sequence of movements. However, Tàpies' Matter paintings (Fig. 3 & 4) have not always been seen in historical relationship, but have been subject to differing interpretations since the 1950s (Borja-Villel, 1989:iv)⁶⁸. Indeed, deconstruction could interpret Cos de matèria as consisting of a web of biographical, political and spiritual signs according to current social and cultural trends.

The complexity of this issue can be elucidated by considering the position of the Matter paintings in the context of the history of Spanish painting. During the reign of Franco, arguments emerged regarding the modernity of abstraction, and questions arose concerning support for the avantgarde (Moffitt, 1999: 222)⁶⁹.

As in the rest of the Free World, by the late 1960s a 'post-painterly' reaction had also become fashionable in Spain; it was known specifically as 'anti-formalismo': a return to empirically identifiable or readily legible imagery (Moffitt, 1999:225)⁷⁰.

68 In the 1950s, his Matter paintings projected Tàpies into prominence. They were understood in terms of Existentialism and the European avantgarde. However, by the 1970s they had come to be regarded as artworks of social protest (Borja-Villel, 1989:iv). Since the 1980s and under the influence of the new art history, they have been construed as a regressive version of modernism's concern with pictorial space. Thus while theorists dispute whether attributions are to be either modern or postmodern, interpretation remains open to wider discourse.

69 '..... post-Franco Spain, like all technologically advanced nations eagerly participating in the (sic) international capitalism, feels that progress, even in the visual arts, is usually best achieved by leaving behind a painful history. Particularly since the restoration of democracy in 1977, Spain has turned away from its tradition of introspection and is now determined to discover the novelties so eagerly consumed by the rest of the modern world (Moffitt, 1999: 228).'

70 '.... Postmodernismo was perhaps first coined in 1934 by Federico de Onis while discussing a backlash in Spanish poetry (Moffitt, 1999:227).'

Yet Miguel Barceló, probably the leading avantgarde painter in Spain and successor to Tàpies, is concerned with matter and composition in his figurative art; so was construed as a traditional painter:

His stratagem, also having its roots in pictorial *tradicionalismo*, is to create tension between a rigorously composed perspectival composition and a superimposed and almost impenetrable object. " this mutation of matter is what excites me in painting; that's my theme" (Moffitt, 1999:230).

James Moffitt discovers in Barceló's work the implicit basis of traditional Spanish imagery, and 'that same uneasy dialectic between the spirit and this world, between mind and matter, between utopian expectations and mundane straightforward reportage' (Moffitt, 1999:230). This brief mention of Barceló shows how the location of an artist can be dictated by shifting discourses and social contexts. In the same way, in Spain, Tàpies' use of matter initially marked him as avantgarde and a political dissenter. Later, when abstraction was no longer construed as a threat to the status quo, these kinds of techniques were seen as politically impotent:

... because such painting was so 'abstract, due to its very hermeticism it could not propound any specifically revolutionary ideas. Even though informal art may have represented a shout of rebellion in the minds of its creators, it was unable to denounce any injustice. Because of its very abstraction, it could only express what the viewer wished himself to see in it. The government in Madrid understood that it was a waste of time to forbid it since, by its own definition, it was incapable of transmitting any subversive messages' (Moffitt, 1991: 225).

This reflects claims, by such theorists as Thomas McEvelley, of swings between modernism and postmodernism, the absolute and the relative. Other theorists see postmodernism as either a continuation of the modernist project or a disruption of it, while yet others see periods of modernism as interspersed with the postmodern (McEvelley, 1996:11). This point can be elucidated through a comparison of Cos de matèria with Beautiful, four cheese.

COS DE MATÈRIA AND BEAUTIFUL, FOUR CHEESE

Deconstruction, according to Jean Baudrillard, asserts that the present is dominated by images and signs that form in an endless stream of appearances without meaning, referring only to themselves (Sarup, 1993:165). At the same time, simulacra denote the age of the 'hyper-real' (Sarup, 1993:161ff). Where

there is no means by which to distinguish the true from the false, simulacrum has replaced conventional reality (Sarup, 1993:164-167). Chapter 1 of this thesis examined the manner in which superficial appearance, or the false, had been distinguished from the true, or real, in modernist art history; which claimed the existence of the authentic or the real behind the surface of all phenomena. Opposed to this, postmodernism alleges that there are no intrinsic meanings and, in art, no authority of experience; and that there are no original images left to be produced. Rather than search for elusive meaning, many postmodern artists create work that reflects Baudrillard's dictum that art is simulacra and that nothing separates the essence of an artwork from its shifting, surface, meanings (Taylor in Berry, 1992:19). In supporting this, Baudrillard's assertion is that there is nothing left for contemporary art to do except react to the existing body of art⁷¹. Most importantly, the search for the absolute and the notion of form as the conveyor of truth have been undermined by postmodern discourse, and it is therefore appropriate to discuss Beautiful, four cheese, a painting that typifies Baudrillard's theories.

Baudrillard can be employed to illustrate the difference between on the one hand Hirst's preoccupation with the insignificant and the banal in Beautiful, four cheese, and on the other hand Tàpies' contrary aspirations. Firstly, Beautiful, four cheese makes evident its divergence from the modernist canon through its preoccupation with innovation and authenticity, and the expression of original meaning. Where the Matter paintings of Tàpies emphasise physical investment and concern with the search for new visual languages, Hirst presents the contrary by using mechanical processes⁷². More specifically, Cos de matèria is distinct from other Matter paintings, while Beautiful, four cheese belongs to a group of paintings that have been designed to have few differences

⁷¹ He states that, rather than remain preoccupied with originality or autonomy, art can only reflect the notion that there is nothing new to express (Sarup, 1993: 165). Artists can do no more than re-deploy existing modernist languages and express the difficulties of conveying meaning (Ward, 1997:44).

⁷² In *Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, Walter Benjamin states that the idea of originality is based on the autonomy of the artists process (Benjamin, 1970:219ff).

(Violette, 1997:166-167, 252-263)⁷³. Secondly, Beautiful, four cheese reflects Baudrillard's theories in its use of both materials and imagery. The circular paintings contain bursts of raw, even fluorescent, colours which Lynton described as possessing cosmic appearance (Lynton, 1997)⁷⁴.

The Kantian model of art, introduced in Chapter 1, upholds the pursuit of purity that is evident in modernism and based on a perceived gap between art and life⁷⁵. Currently there exists a diminution of that gap, sometimes even its collapse, as in Beautiful, four cheese. Here simulacrum is apparent through its banality, a banality that reflects the conflation of elite culture with popular culture⁷⁶. Further, while originality was deemed the pinnacle of modernist art, the appropriation of the mundane is accepted as part of the mainstream⁷⁷. Visual language, adopted from established modernist art, is reworked by artists in a sophisticated humorous way. In this painting, Hirst uses colour and style that draws from Pop art and art reproductions to act along with its title as ironic commentary. Returning to Hirst, art critic Robert Morgan, declares:

His works of art are meant to create a sort of environment for themselves which is nothing other than sensational. I think the content of actual thought in Damien Hirst's work is pretty close to zero (Asif Hashmi, Massacre of the Innocent, internet: <http://dh.vyoshuu.com/XGEN95.html>).

Taking a modernist stance, Hirst in this discussion, describes his spirals as beautiful, while not 'about anything'. He is adamant in denying metaphor, so paralleling Frank Stella's statement 'What you see is what you see' (Chapter 1) (Beazley, 2003:248). However, Hirst has also made claims for the spiritual in art, particularly through his use of cadavers.

⁷³ The Spin or Spiral or paintings are made of circular canvases up to seven feet in diameter made by pouring paint onto their surfaces as they rotate so that the paint could spread centrifugally (Violette, 1997:166-7, 252-263).

⁷⁴ The enamels and vivid colours arrest attention, and were in favour with the Pop Art movement (1952-1970s). Like much postmodern art, the Spiral paintings draw on Pop Art's concern to be almost indistinguishable from popular cultural artefacts (Violette, 1997:167).

⁷⁵ 'Postmodern preoccupation with impurity contrasts with the modernist preoccupation with purity. Klee destabilizes the vision of art as self-transcendent, holding to the positive view of postmodernism, a view the relentless discursiveness of which saves it from transcendence and grants it the ongoing potential for an important social and political critique (Cheetham, 1996: 140ff).'

⁷⁶ '(Baudrillard) writes about a world constructed out of models or simulacra which have no referent or ground in any (reality) except their own' (Sarup, 1993:163-165).

⁷⁷ Marcel Duchamp's (1887-1968) 'ready mades' introduced the notion of appropriation into the modernist canon (Sprocatti, 1992:204).

Hirst's view contrasts with those of Tàpies, who wishes to 'restore the insignificant and the banal', claiming that the spiritual may be found in commonplace objects (Franzke, 1992: 8). The insignificant and banal have gained importance in the mainstream of art in the late 20th century, contrasting with the formalism and essentialism of modernism (Meecham & Sheldon, 2000:10-12). Yet when Tàpies is compared with Hirst, their fundamental concepts differ. In contradistinction to modernism, charged with searching for the unknown or 'presenting the unrepresentable', Cos de matèria is concerned with immanence (Crowther, 1993:156). Postmodernism, on the other hand, does not accept the possibility of hidden essence, rather its lack of faith in certainties; significance being attributed to the material rather than searching for the purely transcendental (Sheldon & Meecham, 2000:67). Critic Andreas Franzke's reflection on Tàpies' work elucidates:

... a recognition of basic human needs, ... aims at a comprehensive understanding of the world that brooks no distinction between banal, everyday things on the one hand and universal ideals ... seeing both as part of an unbroken continuum (Franzke, 1992: 1).

While postmodernism has led to disjunctures with metanarratives, it has also heralded a drive to make the spiritual immanent, to connect it to the material realm. Superficially, this stance appears to be in sympathy with postmodern discourses, in that it stresses immanence and a return to the corporeal (Meecham, Sheldon, 2000:67). However, interpretation of material reality in much postmodern art differs from the immanent in Cos de matèria⁷⁸. Unlike Hirst's Beautiful, four cheese, Tàpies's work investigates materials in order to imbue them with qualities that surpass their totality. In order to understand the extent to which the new art history has been responsible for changing the art historian's notions of art and comprehension of the spiritual, the issue may be conveyed and clarified by revisiting the question of how the role of the artist has been defined⁷⁹.

78 'Life for Tàpies is constituted primarily by its materiality, its essential 'poverty' and 'thingness'. But this is not materialism. ... this mystical intent does not aim at some abstract pure idea, but at revealing how physical reality has hidden at its core another dimension (Morley, 1992:9-11).'

79 Alongside declarations of the 'death of painting', the 'death of the author' was pronounced by Roland Barthes (Barthes, 1977: 142-148):

'The removal of the author (one could talk here with Brecht of a veritable 'distancing', the Author diminishing like a figurine at the far end of the literary stage) is not merely an historical fact or an act of

Whilst it would be reductive to characterise modernism in terms of a formulaic reading of the artist, biographical details often entered into the understanding of an artwork. An awareness of the basic facts of an artist's biography was a significant means by which meaning in an artwork was located in modernism. Although a consideration of the work of art in the framework of the wider metanarratives is equally a component of modernist histories. Thus the way in which the artwork was discussed in discourses of modernity permits the identification of the artwork's contribution to the internal development of styles and movements and to the general progress of modernism. In practical terms this meant art critics were concerned with reading an artwork through formal means, iconographical and psychoanalytical analysis as well as the biographical details of the artist. So for example, Clement Greenberg (as we saw in Chapter 1) drew on the details of an artist's life and perceived personality (most famously with Jackson Pollock) to create another modernist metanarrative, specifically here in order to bolster the role of the artist in modernity.

In postmodernity the artist is not pivotal, and may even be irrelevant⁸⁰. Loss of confidence in metanarratives had led to theorists questioning the status of the artist and shattering the modernist notion of artist as hero. Yet while the hero may be erased by deconstructive theorists, commerce demands that some artists acquire celebrity status (Kuspitt, 1993a:71-72). While the postmodern artist may be construed as heroic, this status differs from that of the Romantic modernist model (Chapter 6). Although modernist art can be characterised by attempts to 'present the unrepresentable' through paint, many contemporary artists criticise the concept of paint as a medium and as a subject (Crowther, 1993:156). Artists and critics have proposed that art can only demonstrate the impossibility of the modernist project. It may even signal its own death. Postmodern artists such as Hirst are then limited in their interest in the aesthetic qualities of a material to which they deny the capacity to convey intrinsic meaning. Rather, they use

writing; it utterly transforms the modern text (or – which is the same thing – the text is henceforth made and read in such a way that at all its levels the author is absent) (Barthes, 1977:145).'

⁸⁰ Biographical readings of artworks have occurred since the Middle Ages (Vasari in Fernie, 1995:35).

media to challenge what are construed as traditional assumptions, particularly modernist aesthetics. In the opinion of Derrida, the pursuit of truth and wholeness, and the notion of an artist's or viewer's spiritual quest as wholly mystical and transcendental, is an obsolete idea (Ferne, 1995:353, Meecham & Sheldon, 2000:67). Resulting from this, a diminished credence in essentialism has led to artists and theorists minimising their focus on aesthetics⁸¹. Hirst's work typifies that of many celebrated contemporary artists who reject the specificity of art. Indeed, many devalue the visual and physical act of looking at art unless circumscribed by the viewer (Barthes in Harrison & Wood, 1992: 940ff). They regard the modernist notion of a more profound reality, or a universal truth, as romantic; and they regard the idea of a unified vision as a myth (Barthes in Harrison & Wood, 1992:687ff). Here, to offer art that does not question modes of representation, nor positions the viewer where deconstructive argument may develop, could be to collude in what they regard as an outmoded art hegemony.

Beautiful, four cheese is illustrative of a dwindling conviction in originality, as signalled by the assertion of the 'death of art' and the 'death of the author'. Deconstructive postmodern art such as this calls into question modernist notions of creativity and denies the autonomy of the artist. Accordingly, Hirst deploys chance and repetition. While many modernist artists have used these same elements, Hirst's process defies certain tenets. For example, in his Spiral paintings he shows no need for an artist's manual skills and, while the Spiral paintings differ, none demonstrates technical advance in aesthetic skills. They are finished at random, without heed to aesthetics, by machines made on behalf of Hirst (Violette, 1997:166-7). Hirst states:

I have no social conscience when I am working. It's out of my hands. The viewer may want to make that judgement. I'm not too concerned with interpretation. Neither can I allow myself to be bothered by taboo or even an idea of integrity. Integrity you either have or you don't. I couldn't make some kind of effort toward working at integrity. It would be nonsensical. I'm particularly battered or supersaturated with image-drift. No one meaning, no author, only multi-interpretation.

⁸¹ Postmodern discourses criticise the conviction that the spiritual exists other than as a rarified Western construct. Thus postmodern discourse is characterised by a shift from formal issues to concern with visual impact (Ward, 1997: 40ff).

I'm beginning to forget history. I mean the actual fact of history (Asif Hashmi, Massacre of the innocent, Internet: <http://dh.ryoshuu.com/XGEN95.html>).

In terms of his interrogation of the modernist canon, Hirst could be regarded as one of Duchamp's successors, Duchamp being cited as the first postmodern artist (Taylor, 1995:9,73)⁸². Beautiful, four cheese further illustrates that while the gap between art and the rest of society diverged in the modernist era, it rejoined in postmodernism. Indeed, rather than the pursuit of meaning, the postmodern artist is preoccupied with reflecting the *zeitgeist*, as is Hirst with endgames that are divorced from existential and spiritual considerations (Ward, 1997:44-48).

Tàpies does not appear to dispute the Romantic model of the artist's role, nor the modernist perception that the viewer might experience meaning or the spiritual through contemplating pictorial space⁸³. Yet it is pertinent to note that his continuation of a historical lineage does not necessitate a conservative position:

... more theories than works of art are getting hung in galleries these days. The idea of the death of art in which certain parties have extrapolated the absolute collapse of an entire historical process, has served the vested interests of this movement very well, and led it in other directions. ... Let's have action, if you please. ... The artist has always been the first to insist that art leads to direct action, as well as on the moral and political sense of his work. His aspiration is and has always been to make a contribution that will set things in motion to bring about upheaval and far-reaching change (Tàpies, 1986:65)⁸⁴.

The theories that Tàpies articulates have been seen particularly within art that derives from a Marxist viewpoint. Marxist theory is regarded within the new art history as one facet of deconstruction. Art history has been declared by Marxists to be a set of ideas that misrepresent the true nature of social, historical and material life (Fernie, 1995:347). Marxist adherents state that art has no

⁸² Marcel Duchamp's (1887-1968) "ready made" introduce the notion of appropriation into the modernist canon, most notably Fountain (1912) featured an upturned urinal signed R. Mutt (Sprocatti, 1992:203).

⁸³ 'No, no, I think I am a consequence of art history. I even advocate that. As I said before, I try to recover many elements from Ancient art. This is actually the role that many artists from this century want to play. We want to recover some arts that were despised by the classical tradition, classicism. We are really making an effort to popularise them. This is not obviously my own invention. This tendency comes from different artistic movements of the beginning of this century, especially Dada. It is thought to have been a very destructive movement, but in truth, it helped us to recover mad art, children's art, popular art, art from different cultural traditions other than European. In conclusion, I am very involved in art history, much more than people think. There is this idea that modern art has broken with the past, but this is completely false. Maybe some critics or historians ... But artists in general are very aware of this continuity. There has (sic) not been major breaches but a thread that links one thing with the other (Tàpies Interview, 1999:229-230)'.

⁸⁴ 'Tàpies satirizes the elementary destructive apocalypticism of those critics who simultaneously preach that art is dead and design its latest fashions. Though a 'paradise for theorists', contemporary art cannot be allowed to become their exclusive stamping-ground (Gimferrer, 1986: 63).'

possibility of autonomy; it merely reflects the political, material and economic conditions of its production (Sim in Hanfling, 1992:442). In evaluating art in its historical context, economic reductionism is clearly opposed to the spiritual (Sim in Hanfling, 1992:444). Like deconstructionists, they hold that ideologies shape values and modes of perception; individuals do not choose to view works in a certain manner, but are positioned by the work so that their perceptions are determined. Moreover, the artwork is like a text possessing plural interpretations. As such, its readings will vary, not only for each viewer, but every time it is viewed and its reading is bound by an economic system that cannot be avoided. Thus, a loss of modernism's ideal of the universal viewer is surpassed by the realisation that art engenders different responses according to nationality, religion, gender, class and other influences. Marxists consider as romantic the modernist notion of deeper reality or universal truth, and discuss a unified vision of the world as a myth divorced from social realities (Barthes in Harrison & Wood, 1992:687ff).

A deconstructive reading of Cos de matèria would consider Tàpies in terms of his social condition, as a European, Catalan, male artist from a privileged Roman Catholic background. The idea that he or the viewer might transcend their personal social position is regarded as naïve, and as embedded in class (Dreyfus, 1982:185ff). Further, it is denied that an artwork might convey the same meanings to a viewer regardless of place or time and specific conditions. Michel Foucault has stated that to have the conviction that it is possible to transcend one's social position is proffered by those with most privilege, and with most power interests, namely, white bourgeois males (Sarup, 1993:73). Foucault and other critics have adopted the concept of 'discourse analysis' to describe what he calls 'the fractured and multifarious character of power relations in society' (Ferne, 1995:20). He also states that painting can be seen as one point among an infinite number of discourses, to be used for identifying hidden agendas of power and control (Sarup, 1993:58ff). Thus the art of the past is seen as the tool of victors and their historians, and is conditioned by a web of

discourses. Such a view rejects the notion of totality as an essential unitary subject (Sarup, 1993:55). Conveying meaning in art is, therefore, not free of value or interest, but is determined by interest groups; neither viewer nor artist is free to pronounce disinterest, but both are entangled in a web of social, cultural, historical, political and economic influence. The assumption follows that, attached to Tàpies' social position is to be found the expression of the hegemonic, hierarchical values extant in the post World War II art avantgarde⁸⁵. The problem that arises from assessing Tàpies, or any artist and their *oeuvre* in this way, is its tendency to reduce them and the viewer to the power positions they occupy.

The new art history has called into question the viewer's position; Baudrillard questions how it is that the authentic can be experienced or even known, and who would be privileged with insight (Barthes in Harrison & Wood, 1992:945). Modernist discourse gave more credit to the artist than to the viewer in understanding art; the art object having been imbued by the artist with transhistorical and transcultural meaning (Chapter 1). Thus it could be comprehended by any viewer, irrespective of background. This is in keeping with the idea in Judeo-Christian legacy as evident in modernism, that the individual has an essential, coherent, self or soul unbounded by conditions. On the other hand, the postmodern notion of the artwork as text possessing plural readings has brought with it a recognition of individual difference. However, the spiritual is seen as being bound by society, and the transcendental results from the influence of dominant groups who wish their understanding to appear disinterested. Hence, pictorial space in painting being understood as other than material was based on a conviction that the viewer was unfettered by social positioning; nothing from experience being brought to the viewing of art (Hanfling,

⁸⁵ 'Oh, I am going to die! I have never been asked these kind of questions. These topics are very much related to our contemporary mentality. We tend to discuss more problems that women have been exposed to for so many centuries. We are in a crisis period. And, maybe, without being aware of it, I may have been working with this mentality of promoting women's rights, of showing that machismo could not but produce very undesirable results. I am aware of these issues. However, I do not belong to any group that defends or promotes women's issues. But, of course, I think that these type of attitudes must be protected (Tàpies Interview, 1999:238).'

1992:134-135). Arthur Danto has stated that all future art will have to adhere to the logical limits set out by late modernism; so operating within defined genres and categories (Danto, 1997:3ff). He affirms the neutrality of art and its political impotence, stating that modern art practice has been taken to its logical limit; what counts as art is determined by intention alone rather than by specifiable characteristics⁸⁶.

The 'death of God' challenges the idea that the artist could communicate with a universal or individual viewer irrespective of context. Historically, art and religion have waxed and waned in tandem and the 'death of God', like the 'death of art', announced since the 19th century, was re-stated in the late 1960s (Ward, 1997:254-256). This tradition is continued in postmodernism's retreat from reliance on metanarratives. By the time metaphysical painting emerged in the late 1940s, Western European society no longer shared a collective faith in the Judeo-Christian monotheism once regarded as the locus of the spiritual. As footnoted earlier, Tàpies states:

We are in a stage in which God, history and ideologies are dead. Everything is dead. But this is a very superficial way of explaining evolution (Tàpies Interview, 1999:233).

In this statement Tàpies reflects the recognition of a multi-cultural society and its range of religions and spiritual ideas (Griffin, 1990:1ff). The period of the last two hundred years has witnessed a progressive diminishing of Christianity as the dominant discourse in which art has been based throughout most of its history⁸⁷. Art is, however, much older than Christendom. Historically, Western art has been viewed within a Christian or Christian-influenced context, and it affects the contemporary viewers' perception of it.

The challenging of modernist metanarratives led to the portrayal of the absolute as no longer desirable, or even possible, but favoured relativism and pluralism.

⁸⁶ Society has reached a point beyond which there can be no new kinds of art; and postmodern art is no more than the product of market forces. The origins of such slackening can be traced to the progression of art towards its exhaustion at the end of the modernist era (Crowther, 1993:182).

⁸⁷ In North and South America, Africa and parts of Eastern Europe, Christianity and Christian art is growing. Even in Western Europe there is some of it around (Prof. M. Smith, pers. comm., July 2003).

Relativism and the decline of metanarratives in Western Europe refutes the once widely accepted hierarchy of values by which art is judged, while pluralism regards all art as having potential equal worth; there being no common values through which to evaluate it (Gablik in Griffin, 1990:182-3). A decreasing credence in metanarratives was the first sign of a waning modernist project, and in particular its claims for essentialism. Beautiful, four cheese expresses the relative in that it makes no distinction between an elite and a popular culture (Harrison & Wood, 1992:991). Cos de matèria on the other hand has a complex relationship with relativism, in that, while it eschews the absolute of high modernism, it advocates a degree of distinction.

The new art history, particularly Marxist theories of art, is limited in that distinct attributes reduce the artwork to an item of consumption to be discussed alongside other products. While this might be relevant for interpretation of Hirst, who aims his work at the market and popular culture, it does not distinguish between art for contemplation on the one hand and cultural artefacts on the other (Wheale, 1995:85)⁸⁸. However timely, the questioning of the hegemony of art in modernism has resulted in relativity and the loss of criteria by which to judge art or make decisions about its value.

Deconstruction doubts the capacity of art to reshape beliefs, and positive action is doomed to impotence or co-option by a seemingly uncontrollable economic system (Gablik, 1991:21). Deconstructive postmodernism in the artistic-literary world means resignation to the unredeemed world as irredeemable. This resignation translates to the artist's decision to attempt nothing more than to mirror the hollowness and inauthenticity of contemporary culture, in order to benefit personally from it.

⁸⁸ While there is ultimately no way in which art can be defined today, in this thesis, cultural artefact refers to the reworking of already existing signs, rather than the attempt to originate and author new ideas.

REENCHANTMENT OF THE SPIRITUAL

In the final analysis what drives an artist is a desire to know the truth, to want the freedom that only comes with perfect knowledge and then to be able to act upon that knowledge with wisdom. This is probably the great drive of man today. On the one hand we know so much and our knowledge of the universe is greater than ever and our achievement, our monuments to our courage and ingenuity. We have created democracies, enshrined human rights and managed to produce sublime works of art, but on the other hand, humanity is ever sliding backwards into the primitive darkness. Our human story is one of cruelty and tragedy, of suffering and sorrow, to search for a true equilibrium, to find a perfect balance between what a man knows and what he does seems to me to be one of the most beautiful ends to which an artist can direct himself and not only an artist, it should be the ambition of anyone who thinks seriously about the world (Tàpies Interview, 1995:250).

From the early 1990s on, a number of theorists have addressed the shortcomings of polarised modernist and postmodernist debates concerning the spiritual in art. The theoretical contexts for examining the spiritual in art in contemporary times involve the employment of aspects of modernist discourses that are relevant to the avantgarde. These question postmodernism's denial of the spiritual, in order to form a revised model for the spiritual in art. While the new art history aroused awareness that art is bound by economics and politics, it has not addressed its prevalent association with relativism and pluralism that contests the existence of the spiritual. There exists common ground or prerogatives that legitimate the spiritual and meaning in art.

Some most relevant theorists are seen outside the mainstream of art theory. For example, reconstruction finds antecedents in the work of Viktor Frankl (1905-1997), an Austrian psychiatrist. Frankl stresses the search for meaning. He holds that the collective 'will to meaning' is not a "secondary rationalization" of instinctual drives but the primary motivation in life (Frankl, 1984:121)⁸⁹. Similarly, the philosopher David Michael Levin identifies problems in the denial of meaning. Levin proposes a social model that focuses on collective and cultural needs, and

⁸⁹ Frankl invented Logotherapy from *Logos*, a Greek work which denotes 'meaning'. 'Logotherapy, or, as it has been called by some authors, "The Third Viennese School of Psychotherapy" focuses on the meaning of human existence as well as on man's search for such a meaning. According to logotherapy, this striving to find a meaning in one's life is the primary motivational force in man. That is why I speak of a *will to meaning* in contrast to the pleasure principle ... on which Freudian psychoanalysis is centred as well as in contrast to the *will to power* on which Adlerian psychology, using the term "striving for superiority," is focused (Frankl, 1984:121)'.

on the 'rooting of vision in ground of our needs for openness, contact and wholeness' (Gablik, 1991:176-7). He draws on Nietzsche and Heidegger, seeing in modernity a time endangered by a nihilism that he construes as the destruction of Being. Levin argues for a Heideggerian version of humanism, a postmodern situation where, individually and collectively, a recollection of Being must be achieved (Levin, 1998:5)⁹⁰.

Robert Morgan decries loss of meaning in contemporary art (Morgan, 1988:37). He criticises the kind of art commentary where the predominance of ideas refers to postmodernism and the future, while suggesting the past, including modernist art. By the 1990s, artists tended to choose between the predominance of conceptual and aesthetic stances⁹¹. Morgan most forcibly expresses the need to resist the dominance of discourse about art that prioritises endgames and commercialism. Rather, ethical prerogatives can be found by returning to seeing, thinking and feeling; 'to come back to art in a way that it might make a difference, that it might actually benefit our lives' (Beckley in Morgan, 1998:xvi). David Bohm contributes a theory of implicate order founded on a vision of wholeness, totality or 'quantum interconnectedness' in which matter and consciousness are united; '... we live in a universe in which matter and meaning are inseparable. Beyond the visible tangible world there lies a deeper, implicate order of undivided wholeness' (Bohm, 1993). Daniel Bell asserts that artists can be orchestrators of profound change in culture and consciousness, a shift of paradigm 'by reference

⁹⁰ 'The triumph of subjectivity is self-destructive, because it has inflated the human ego without developing self-respect, the true basis of agency, and the social character of human vision. Moreover, the triumph of 'Man' necessitated the "death of God". But, since God had been the sole source of our values and the origin of all meaningfulness, the death of God only accelerated the spread of a latent culture of nihilism, cancer of the spirit, contagion of despair (Levin, 1988: 4).'

⁹¹ 'I would argue that to be an artist in the most fundamental sense is ultimately a task of liberation. This is to suggest that to be an artist in the international sense is not simply about marketing one's logo, but is about maintaining a certain ethical relationship to art. It is about positioning oneself in opposition to the assumption that the information network carries its own "natural" momentum and will automatically improve life. It would seem that artists cannot escape the ethical responsibility to resist this omnipresent pressure, the wholesale seduction that the art world assumes in its drive for a revisionist informational environment. To be an artist – regardless of how one's success is measured – has always been a matter of intelligence, passion, constraint, shrewdness, and wit. This implies a position of resistance, but not one of denial. The power of art lies in its oblique angle to the accepted cultural norm. Artists define themselves as artists in terms of both their attraction and repulsion to this norm. The crucial issue here is in finding what sustains the necessity of one's liberation, because artists will move in relation to this necessity more than in the pursuit of ideas (Morgan, 1998: 8).'

to traditional, more spiritual, values' (Crowther, 1993:ix). Another concept of postmodern spirituality is also offered by Frederick Turner (Turner in Griffin, 1990:143ff). He too rejects dualistic supernaturalism along with atheistic nihilism in favour of a version of non-dualistic spirituality. Turner affirms that spiritual energy is believed to exist within and between nodes in the cosmic web of interconnections. Thus, it is dispersed throughout the universe, rather than being a concentrated transcendent source (Griffin, 1990:2).

Interconnectedness in art is claimed by Gablik in her revision of the artist's role⁹². The artist can play a part by setting social and moral precedents through 'art as social dreaming' (Gablik, 1991:141ff). The artist can reshape myth as a cultural template. The 'death of the Author' brings into question the artist's agency or potential to communicate meaning (Barthes in Harrison & Wood, 1992:940ff). Reconstructive models of postmodernism may reframe ideas of the artist as a response to their putative powerlessness in the light of deconstruction. Thus, for example, rather than the notion of art as a spectacle, the moral power of art and the wherewithal of artists to use that power may produce change. Suzi Gablik's social, interactive framework of the artist when applied to Tàpies will ascertain the relevance of reconstruction to his perception and the actuality of his role (Gablik in Griffin, 1990:184ff). It is also used to assess the contemporaneity of his practice. Tàpies' notion of art as a spiritual path will be examined in this context, and to demonstrate that such a pursuit might also have currency for postmodernity. The proposition is that Tàpies' preoccupation with non-dualism, when linked to the art, can shape the social realm in a state of world emergency.

⁹² 'For the visionary, however, committed to cultural transformation, there is hardly any point in making art just for the sake of making art, of writing just for the sake of writing. One has to want to do something important, to make something happen. We have made much of the idea of art as a mirror (reflecting the times); we have had art as a hammer (social protest); art as furniture (something to hang on the walls); and art as a search for the self. Perhaps we need another kind of art at this point as well – one that exercises its power to administer the social dreaming, through images which empower the collective unconscious. For me, this means art that speaks to the power of interconnectedness and establishes bonds, art that develops an active and practical dialogue with the environment, art that offers more dynamic and vivid ways of understanding the universe, and thus addresses our culture's failure to grasp what it means to be actively related to the cosmos (Gablik, in Griffin, 1990: 192).'

Thus the interconnectedness between artist and viewer might be used to bring art into society.

ITERABLE

Finally, and most importantly for this thesis, Paul Crowther's version of the iterable, that a sign can convey the same meaning in a number of contexts, proposes that transhistorical and transcultural meaning exists. These may be applied to Tàpies' Cos de matèria to demonstrate that there are prerogatives in the temporal aspects of spiritual experience that distinguish an art that engages with the spiritual from cultural artefacts, and distinguishes the spiritual from mundane experience⁹³.

While disputing a return to modernist values, Paul Crowther is critical of the loss of belief in communicable meaning now widespread in postmodernity, where art is reduced to an interplay of signs determined by a specific history and culture (Crowther, 1997:1)⁹⁴. He addresses semiotic idealism, formalism and phenomenology in criticising models of interpretation where meaning is dependent on context, but no criteria whereby art can be understood to retain enduring transhistorical and transcultural significance (Crowther, 1997:2)⁹⁵. In Crowther's view, for the artist to have the potential to convey meaning, the art object can be reinvested with all that it has lost under deconstruction:

The iterable reveals the capacity of a sign to be recognised and repeated across many different contexts of use and have a sense of intelligence which can be recognised independently of any specific context of application (Crowther, 1997: 10).

⁹³ The art museum as a place of spiritual experience has associations with ritual and liminal experience (Duncan, 1995:7ff). This is evident in the viewing of Cos de matèria in the large space of a modernist art gallery that engenders self-reflection and contemplation. The modernist gallery as a white cube provides a secular alternative to the established spiritual space and affirms the time needed to fully experience the work.

⁹⁴ Meaning in art is determined exclusively by its relation to specific contexts of production and reception and networks of 'discursive practices'. An artwork has meaning conferred on it because of contexts of origination and use. ... 'there's a specific dimension of meaning which is fundamental'. This is an unfashionable viewpoint now when meaning is seen as polyvalent, for instance, Norman Bryson, Griselda Pollock, Victor Burgin and Rosalind Krauss emphasise art not as an object but as a configuration of signs. 'The result is a colonisation of 20th century art ... Art historians, curators and theorists are now in effect the managers of meaning (Crowther, 1997:1-2).'

⁹⁵ '... essentialist aesthetics can be modified to find a role for socio-historical transformations; and by developing the latter, some of the potential disruptive complexities of Postmodern culture can be articulated in a unified and positive way. ... a theoretical standpoint from where some of the antagonistic positions in the modern and Postmodern culture debate can be overcome (Crowther, 1993:xii).'

En soi is a term, used by Merleau-Ponty, and originating from Hegel, that refers to the fact that an artwork comprises specific attributes that articulate meaning (Kim & Sosa, 1999:310, Reese, 1996:678). He holds that art is separate from the bulk of human artefacts by virtue of its 'semantic' qualities – it contains formal configurations which refer beyond themselves. ... The work of art is like an expressive body – it is impossible to distinguish the vehicle from its meaning; there is no idea 'behind' the work, but only 'in' and inseparable from it, that the viewer can experience (Crowther, 1993:41ff).

Interpretations of the reciprocity tradition by Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Ernst Cassirer are relevant. Crowther explains that whilst all cognition, indeed all human experience, involves historically specific acts of interpretation, these acts are influenced and made possible by more universal factors grounded in the reciprocity of 'body' and 'world' (Crowther, 1997:23ff). Crowther further draws on Derrida's notion of iterability, organised on the basis of the body's sensory and motor functions, its consciousness, operating reciprocally in a unified field. Iterability presupposes an interdependent relationship between sign and field of signification (Crowther, 1997:11). Reciprocity transforms the schema of the body and mind into a functional unity of self-consciousness. What is fundamental is not the specific moment of self-consciousness, but the urge to create or discover meaning that is embodied in every such moment. Hence the universality of the body and the world are correlated (Crowther, 1993:12). Cassirer's central theme is that there are constants in human experience around which art and philosophy constellate, these are historically mediated. Further, human experience is grounded in reciprocal relations, and it is art that expresses this in the fullest terms: '... myth, art, language and science appear as symbols ... in the sense of forces each of which produces and posits a world of its own' (Cassirer, 1946:8).

This dependency is one manifestation of a broader functional unity that stabilises human existence. Crowther's version of the views of Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, Bergson, Adorno and Gadamer is that language and other symbol systems are

the most complete expressions of the reciprocal field (Crowther, 1997:4). There is some shared understanding of meaning by virtue of 'knowing the language of which all signs are a part':

If signs were not iterable they would have no third-person force. They would not be shareable. ... Meaning would be locked into a putative wholly private space of personal intentions (Crowther, 1997; 11).

A summary of Crowther's analysis of the iterable of Newman's Onement (1949) (Fig. 8) helps to identify its salient points for Cos de matèria. Crowther addresses representations of space in 20th century art that use the same terms as those which describe the basic structures of perception and self-consciousness. The self-ascription of experiences presupposes that the subject can refer to things that are not immediately present. This requires the use of a stable system of signs for the ordering of space and time (Crowther, 1997:12). Any item experienced, be it by direct perception or by depiction, is only meaningful by its reciprocal relation with a broader field of such items or relationships (Crowther, 1993:24). In the description of a 20th century work of abstract art, reciprocity is involved. Crowther illustrates this point:

Onement is a canvas of some 27 x 16 inches consisting of an upright rectangle of differentiated brownish red, bisected by a narrow band of pinkish red (Crowther, 1997: 155).

The line, or zip, vertically divides the picture plane, either superimposed or as a gap. Generally speaking, the figure is construed as present to, whilst the ground is distant from or even absent from, the viewer. The opacity of the canvas renders the painted ground as a void or an unfathomable distance. The body and field relation here is, therefore, a matrix of visual possibilities of reciprocity; it presents variations of the reversibility of figure and ground (Crowther, 1997:155). Crowther describes the relationship of figure to ground as the reciprocal dualities of part to whole, figure to ground, actuality and possibility, real to ideal⁹⁶:

Consider the relation of figure and ground. An item can be recognized in perception by discriminating it in relation to a specific ground but, reciprocally, the ground can be characterized as ground only by orientating it in relation to an intended object (in spatial terms, a 'figure'). The point is, however, that we are customarily preoccupied only by the spatial wholes or figures which are immediately given in perception. We do not usually attend to the part relations or ground

96 With specific reference to painting, I use the term 'ground' to mean, and interchangeably with, what is also referred to as 'background' in that context. In terms of art practice, the term 'ground' can mean the physical substrate on which the painting is made; e.g., a canvas and its preparatory processes; in this thesis referred to as 'surface'.

relations which define them, let alone the reciprocal dependence of all these elements. ... What constitutes the figure/ground is always changing – transformed by the body's continuous realignment of position in relation to the overall perceptual field (Crowther, 1997:15).

COS DE MATÈRIA AND THE ITERABLE DIMENSION

The reciprocity principle is suited to the reading of Tàpies' work. His Matter paintings refer to the relationship of the body to the world as discussed by Merleau-Ponty, from whom Crowther draws. This relationship is relevant to Cos de matèria and to Tàpies' Matter paintings generally; because of the nature of the body image in Cos de matèria, its bodiliness, its relationship to the body of the artist and the viewer or corporeality in general. The body as a general concept forms the capacity to realise which kind of things are being depicted. Further, corporeality is physicality, matter or substance. The viewer's experience of the body in Cos de matèria is affected in that it is approximately twice life size. The body in Tàpies' painting achieves self-definition within the whole space by its accentuation of the colour field. The body can only be known through its relationship to the world. The iterable is suggested in a description of Tàpies' work:

... an object whose "natural" position would be on the floor is placed vertically. Leo Steinberg has rightly pointed out that western painting, down to and including Pollock, represents a space (abstract or concrete) corresponding to the erect human figure, with the upper edge at the height of a man's head and the lower one lying more or less where we put our feet. Steinberg detects a break with this principle ... in certain works by Dubuffet and Rauschenberg, in which this verticality is cancelled out. It is the transition, Steinberg rather exaggeratedly tells us, from nature (or from the visual act) to culture. To me this line of thought suggests that when Tàpies places his banal objects in an arrangement accentuating the verticality that characterises both the format of western painting and man himself, he is using this device to elevate or ennoble materials that are at ground level and human actions likewise associated with our most instinctive or physiological nature, such as sleeping, lying in bed after illness or procreating ... a classic arrangement is used for a change of content. ... it is interesting to observe that because of the heaviness of the material, the vast majority of these works are painted on the ground and afterwards placed on the wall (Colombalia Dexeus, 1989:4).

Cos de matèria does not demand that the viewer stand close. It is not a painting concerned with an experience of being submerged in its space, as is the case for Light Red over Black (Fig. 5). While the former is smaller than the latter, its size and the positioning of the canvas do reflect the viewer's and artist's body (Chapter 1). The act of viewing for Cos de matèria, as with Light Red over Black, is not only concerned with the visual and intellectual, but engages the body. At

the same time Cos de matèria appears to play with, and even subvert, the illusion of two dimensional and three dimensional space:

He speaks of walls, but his paintings are not inert and impenetrable as real walls are. They suggest ambiguities and inevitably play on illusion. Like Pollock, Tàpies worked from above with his surface resting on the floor, a process that naturally contravenes traditional perspective (Ashton, 1995:34).

Tàpies achieves the illusion of two and three-dimensional space by the lines that cut through the body image and into the surface of space and broken layers of cement that, themselves, distort the surface planes. Finally, debate continues over whether deconstructive postmodernism, including Baudrillard and Marxist theory, is critical or collusive. For example, Jameson believes that postmodernism has failed to provide insight that is any more sustainable than the illumination of problems contained in past assumptions and representation (Crowther, 1997:ixff,189ff, Jameson, 1991:84ff). Just as empiricism and an indicative method assured citizens in 19th century Europe of material certainties, so the current climate of relativity casts doubt on assumptions of the absolute. Jamieson believes, however, that deconstructive postmodernism fails to state what can be done to address problems. For instance, he sees postmodernism as politically impotent rather than oppositional, and is unable to envisage an alternative way forward. Moreover, he states that while postmodern theory holds to the possibility of deconstruction; the legitimising discourse and market will ultimately co-opt all dissenting strategies. Any art objects set forth with internal critical intent will be assimilated by the legitimising discourse and be redistributed in the form of a style. The deconstructive tendency is believed to succeed in fulfilling the legitimising discourse despite itself; this means that art is bound by history and cultures which it cannot surpass (Crowther, 1993:191-2). Postmodernism's rejection of the modernist alternative, to become an absolute, is a contradiction; to obsess with it is to become a repressed version of it. Finally, he states that a new puritanism is not needed, but rather a flexible continuum by means of which modernism and postmodernism may approach one another through compromise:

There are two different aspects to Deconstructive Postmodernism. In the late 1960s, artists were sceptical about the legitimizing discourse of art as a vehicle of elevation and improvement.

Radical modern movements redeployed traditional genres as a means of elevating subjectivity, Postmodernists radically question the affirmative discourse of high art, either by incorporating that which is most antithetical to high art – mechanically-produced imagery or thematizing (with work) the inadequacy of artistic categories and art's ability to express the complexities and catastrophes of concrete historical experience (Crowther, 1993:190-191, Jameson, 1991:16ff).

In conclusion, the chief objection to the spiritual in art in contemporary times lies in the assumption by critics that the spiritual referred to in the modernist canon is outmoded. Comparison of Cos de matèria to Beautiful, four cheese reveals the new art history's limitation for addressing the spiritual. This is due to its reliance on social contexts that deny the assimilation of the spiritual to the material world. Discussion of artist, viewer and art work in the context of the new art history reveals its tendency towards lack of engagement with the specific attributes of a painting; rather, prioritising its relationship to other art works and contexts. Tàpies' focus on the insignificant and banal is associated with an immanent sense of the spiritual, while the same focus incurs loss of meaning for a postmodern artist like Hirst in a material realm that is unassailable. Such loss of meaning and relativism militates against expression of essence, or expression of any deeper reality, unified vision or universal truth. This chapter showed the problems of modernist essentialism that can be limited by formalism, and its Judeo-Christian assumptions that tend to diminish context. The problems of both perspectives are that there is no possibility of communication beyond localised experience; the latter has a tendency to superficiality and relativism. Denial of the specificity of a work has repudiated the chief aspect of Tàpies' work, which is his emphasis on matter for its spiritual content. Insufficient distinction is made between the notion of immanence and materialism, in particular, the importance of matter for Spanish and Catalan art in entering the European scene and placing it in the avantgarde. Claims for 'the death of the author' and 'the death of God' have led to doubt in the ability of the individual to affect the social realm, and lack of belief in the notion of art as a potential spiritual path.

The chapter ends by examining routes beyond polarised discourses on the spiritual, reframing the notion of the art object and the artist in a manner that allows for expression of the spiritual that is fully contemporary. The iterable, the

most pertinent aspect of reconstructive postmodernism, allows one to reframe historical notions of the spiritual. Having established how Cos de matèria could be discussed within modernism and the new art history, it is now apposite to offer readings of the painting in terms of the contemplative tradition.

Chapter 3: Contemplation; Viewing Space

I do not practice any religion, not even Catholicism. My only religious practice is meditation in front of a picture. I invite the spectator to do the same: focus on the picture and let themselves flow away by what I try to point out in my work. But, this practice is nothing special... (Tàpies Interview, 1999:214).

With the images I create I try to stimulate people's imagination and channel it towards these paths in which one can perceive or have an intuition of the mystery, the ultimate mystery. But sometimes it is not even necessary to explain intellectually these images (Tàpies Interview, 1999: 227).

I think I can consider myself a materialist, despite the shades of meaning in this term. I want to understand the structure of the material. I want to imagine the light of actual knowledge, and to go from a particularized material to a generalized one. Thus I would like to change the global vision people have of the world: from the knowledge of material other levels can be achieved: social, political, ethical. To paint is a way of reflecting on life – and reflection is more active than simple contemplation, it is the manifestation of the will to discern reality, to probe and participate in its discovery and contemplating. Painting is also creating reality (Tàpies, 1986:22).

OVERVIEW

Tàpies' invitation to 'flow away' when looking at his work is rooted in the idea of surrender of the self in the contemplative mystical tradition (Coleman, 1998:71ff)⁹⁷. This chapter addresses contemplation in painting, the search for an authentic reality that has been a conscious quest since the Romantic period and which is a stated intention of Tàpies. For an artist preoccupied with the spiritual such as Tàpies, Cos de matèria (Fig. 2) is to be considered alongside a modernist prototype of contemplative space, a deep layered, pictorial space where figurative signifiers have been diminished. Such a comparison offers an assessment of its potential for enabling a viewer to approximate authentic reality. The association of space with contemplation in metaphysical painting followed from the final strands of essentialist thought of the late modernist period. An interrupted lineage of contemplative painting can be traced through the 20th century in the works of artists such as Giorgio de Chirico (1888-1978), Carlo Carrà (1881-1966) and Giorgio Morandi (1890-1964); and later Wassily Kandinsky (1866 -1944), Kasimir Malevich (1878 -1935), Piet Mondrian (1872-1944) to Mark Rothko and the metaphysical painters (Colpitt, 2002:29-30,51ff). It is therefore apposite to continue an analysis through comparison with Mark

⁹⁷ Mysticism in some form is common to all major religions, including Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam as well as the philosophical tradition of Neoplatonism (Parrinder, 1996:3-4).

Rothko's Light Red over Black (Fig. 5). Tàpies' stated aim is to inspire contemplation of his work, and this reflects his debt to Spanish and European art (Gimferrer, 1986:22,57,64-65, Tàpies in Ashton, 1995:53,65). The sub-movement, Informel, in particular, sought the formless and the power of the irrational, as inspired by Surrealism (Ashton, 1995:30).

THE CONTEMPLATIVE TRADITION

Notions of contemplation can be traced to early Greek philosophy; and while distinctive from the sublime, both have at their core the pursuit of wholeness as a counter to Cartesian dualism (Coleman, 1998:71ff, Macquet, 1986: 51ff, Parrinder, 1995:11ff)⁹⁸. Mysticism, in the traditions of both the East and the West, has stressed contemplation or meditation as the means to enlightenment⁹⁹. Whilst contemplation began as a religious term, and meditation was synonymous with thoughtfulness, some reversal of meaning has occurred in their current usage (Johnston, 1996:159ff)¹⁰⁰. However, a reading of Plotinus demonstrates that the purpose of contemplation was at once spiritual and intellectual; its goal was union with the divine, as well as primal unity (Parrinder, 1995:9,11-16)¹⁰¹. As we established in the Introduction the individual is removed from God, yet the mystical tradition is a branch of Christianity concerned with ideas of union with the divine. While the individual is wholly other to God, we can draw close to God through specific spiritual practices, such as prayer and contemplation. Although the distinction between contemplation and meditation is not of prime relevance here, reference to Plotinus demonstrates the secular contemplation upon which the Western tradition is based¹⁰². Whilst

⁹⁸ The idea of the sublime can be traced back to an unknown author of the first century (Reese, 1996: 138, 739).

⁹⁹ 'Enlightenment' translates as *moksha* in Sanskrit, and as *satori* in Japanese Buddhism.

¹⁰⁰ Western use of Christian meditation can be traced to prayer, through the Jesuit, St. Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1560, Teresa of Avila (1515-1582), St. John of the Cross (1542-1592), the Carmelites and Quietism. In terms of the issue of 'merging with the absolute' see p. 10.

¹⁰¹ In the East, meditation is mainly connected to early Taoism, Yoga, Hinduism, Tantrism and Jainism (Reese, 1996: 468).

¹⁰² In Latin, contemplation means 'to reflect'. For Plato, contemplation is of the true, the good, and beautiful in an "upward" movement towards theory. In Aristotle, contemplation relates to theory, and is differentiated from practical and poetic activity. Contemplation in man is, in effect, an imitation of the divine activity which can be described as a "thinking on thinking" (Collinson in Hanfling, 1992:117-125).

contemplation has been interpreted in differing ways by Plato, Aristotle and Plotinus amongst others, all involve the search for some type of 'unity' (Parrinder, 1995:7ff). 'Unity' referred to the belief of the self as fragmented, but possessing a wholeness at a deeper level, that of the soul (Collinson in Hanfling, 1992:167).

Painting has evolved largely within a figurative tradition predominantly used to communicate allegorical meanings to a viewer (Beazley, 2003:98). Since the Renaissance in Western art, pictorial space has been understood as a three-dimensional concept of what constituted background, generally considered less important than foreground (Dunning, 1991:83). For instance, a figurative, narrative image, such as Wanderer above the Sea of Fog (1818) (Fig. 9) by Caspar David Friedrich, illustrates such traditional interpretations of the relationship of figure to background¹⁰³. Here the viewer is deemed to be the reader of a specific narrative and the expression of meaning that has been expressed by the artist (Hartley, 1994:140). Yet, while depictions of space within the figurative tradition have been used for contemplation, the later and predominant use of pictorial space as a surface of contemplation is distinctive. It is the chief characteristic of the non-representational space as exemplified by metaphysical and monochrome painting (Kuspitt, in Tuchman, 1981:317). It has evolved over the 20th century through a process of refinement charged by philosophical and spiritual concepts of purity (Cheetham, 1996:67,139).

A modernist painter's use of contemplative pictorial space can be understood in two interlinking ways; according to how that space is deployed in general terms in 20th century abstraction, and depending on the viewers' potential response (Kuspitt in Tuchman, 1981:313ff). According to Meyer Shapiro, contemplation is linked to the search for pure abstraction (Shapiro in Tuchman, 1981:315). For example, specific attributes of pictorial space that are deemed to be

¹⁰³ Friedrich's painting hereafter referred to as Wanderer.

contemplative can be found in Rothko's Light Red over Black¹⁰⁴. Rothko's reputation is based on a form of abstraction that developed from a series of combined coloured bars set against a coloured ground, a process of scraping bare to allow the luminosity of the ground or support to be always apparent (Golding, 2000:178-181)¹⁰⁵. Rothko wrote to a critic at the *New York Times* in 1943:

We (Adolph Gottlieb, Barnett Newman and Mark Rothko) are for the large shape because it has the impact of the unequivocal. We are for flat forms because they destroy illusion and reveal truth ... (Golding, 2000:157).

Rothko's paintings, and metaphysical paintings in general, comprise flat forms on a luminous ground, or deep pictorial space. Contemplation of such space has been deemed to enable the approximation by the viewer of authentic reality, and to offer destruction of 'the illusion of the material world' (Golding, 2000:157):

Rothko's pictures are ... said to be comprised of (sic) "sheets" of color, a term suggesting flat and uniform surfaces, but closer study reveals modulations of color and a varied surface. More apt is the (also commonly used) terms (sic) *veils*, evoking a quality of transparency and a sense of things only partially apprehended through an intervening screen. The veil is an age-old metaphor used from Plato through Hegel and Heidegger for the concept of truth as *aletheia* or unveiling. Some Surrealist artists used the term veiled to describe what they regarded as a desirable pictorial attribute: that of the indistinct image, half-buried and half-dislodged from the unconscious mind ... The term *transparency* was also used to describe a Surrealist desideratum; transparency meant getting "beyond the surface [to] embrace the whole" (Chave, 1989:77).

The sub-movement, Informel, that influenced both Rothko and Tàpies, recognised Plato's notion of *eidos*, or forms, in that the most successful artworks would be the most stable, fully unified and integrated of their kind (Tarnas, 1991:6-12). Such ideals, according to Plato, are non-material, perfect, and unchanging and more real than the physical world (Collinson in Hanfling,

¹⁰⁴ Rothko's stacked or floating rectangular shapes are frayed or softened at the edges unlike those of Piet Mondrian, 'the first generation abstract artist, who was one of the first to develop a signature image characterized by a restricted formal language' (Chave, 1989:12).

¹⁰⁵ Albert Macquet explains how forms have meaning; he argues that an object reduced to its visible forms may offer delight but not meaning. He describes an experience of looking at Broadway Boogie Woogie (1942-3) by Piet Mondrian. On contemplating it he sees an intended order, a firm underlying scheme where actions and emotions are organised. At the point of contemplation there was no distinction between order as a concept and as conveyed by the painting. He describes how self-awareness receded and was replaced in the foreground of the mind by visual absorption. From this he deduces that meaning is conveyed by formal features even when they are abstract. Macquet discusses how the embodiment of painting reveals fragments of reality, and how fragments of the body reveal an eternal human condition. These represent the artists' immersion in the depth of his being, so giving shape to inner reality (Macquet, 1986:79ff).

1992:127). Platonic ideals can be seen in the way in which Tàpies attributes the spiritual to his *oeuvre*:

Every grain of sand, earth or marble dust packed and tamped (sic) on the surface of his canvases served Tàpies as an analogy to the ways of the world, seen at once in a state of transformation (... he suggested drifts of matter that reveal shadows and undercurrents, into which the artist incised his mark) and in a state of solidity, thingness, quiddity, eternal "thereness" (Borja-Villel, in Ashton, 1995:33).

Authentic reality is linked to ideas of pictorial space, as for instance in the way that the spiritual content of a Rothko painting becomes evident when it 'ceases to be a concrete thing' (Kozloff in Tuchman, 1982:317). Tàpies on the other hand, as this quotation shows, repeatedly states that his intent is to bring the expression of the transcendental into the immanent (Tàpies Interview, 1999:212). Moreover, his critics repeatedly refer to his paintings in terms of phenomena or actions and their opposing tendencies (Tàpies in Ashton, 1995:56,69ff, Franzke, 1992:10-11, Gimferrer, 1986:78). Andreas Franzke, alongside the other major critics of Tàpies' work, has pointed out his preoccupation with opposition, particularly dualism (Franzke, 1992:66,70)¹⁰⁶:

... while the formal vocabulary of Tàpies's style is conveyed by means of tactile materiality, its underlying artistic intention remains recognizably oriented to spiritual values. Each and every work reflects the contemplative meaning of artistic experiences and the inner energy invested in their expression, which takes on outward form in the process of making, in the gestures and calligraphic signs on, and incisions in, the otherwise homogeneous surface. The artist sees no difference between an instinctive action resulting from a meditative state of mind and an action that reflects thought on a more rational, abstract level. The intimate link between contemplation and practice, between thought and action, is expressly intended by Tàpies, and he achieves it through a creative act in which both poles are equally represented and mutually interdependent (Franzke, 1992: 10-11).

When Franzke draws attention to the contrast between the homogeneous surface of Tàpies' work and its incisive marks, comparison between Light Red over Black and Cos de matèria most clearly breaks down. Like Tàpies, a number

¹⁰⁶ 'Refusing to admit an antagonism between contemplation and action (a body conjured up by the persistence of the positivist mentality), he adduces, for what it contains of action in the truest sense, the contemplative function of the work of art; and he submits for discussion in order to redeem them, the values of the numinous, the sphere of sacredness and works sublimating function as a mystical object (Gimferrer, 1986: 64)'.

'... in the middle of the 1950s ... two tendencies - opposed but complementary - coexist alternatively. On the one hand we find a propensity to the contemplative observation of repose, inert stillness and absent majesty of a material paralysed in mortuary immobility. On the other, feverish and violent, the thirst for knowledge, riddles, tears and annihilates the material, which has become an object that is being asked to bear witness to a higher truth. But in vain: the more deeply it is wounded and humiliated, the further the lengths to which the material will take its superb reserve (Gimferrer, 1986: 78)'.

of theorists, including Dore Ashton, would regard this juxtaposition as two sides of a coin with no underlying difference (Tàpies in Ashton, 1995:66ff). Most pertinently, Ashton finds in it a connection between Tàpies' preoccupation with opposites, particularly the relationship of space to matter. She identifies Tàpies' interest in the 'primacy of the material surface' and the 'semblance of solid things' with his frequent allusions to the writings of Heraclitus (c.500BC) (Ashton, 1995:23)¹⁰⁷.

Whilst models of contemplative space draw on early mystical tradition, they may be relevant to a current preoccupation with notions of the self as an aspect of authentic reality in modernity and postmodernity. According to Coleman, contemplation requires transcendence of the ego or a loss of finite, bounded self¹⁰⁸. In this way, a genuine experience can occur (Coleman, 1998:71ff). Since Plotinus, the viewing of pictorial space has been asserted as crucial to contemplation and the loss of self, since it is where discourses on aesthetics and the spiritual overlap (Coleman, 1998:36-39). Claims for differences between aesthetic and spiritual contemplation are subjective. Coleman distinguishes between these types of contemplation. For Macquet, however, while aesthetic contemplation may have spiritual qualities, spiritual contemplation is about method rather than objects and their aesthetic worth (Macquet, 1986:52-53).

A modernist view of contemplation draws parallels between meditation and the aesthetic vision that 'apprehends its object in a contemplative mode of consciousness' (Maquet, 1986:56). Albert Macquet characterises the contemplative as akin to intuition, the removal of the individual from the cognitive, the verbal and the affective. Harold Osborne states that contemplation in

¹⁰⁷ Heraclitus regarded the universe as a ceaselessly changing conflict of opposites, all things being in a harmonious process of constant change, and held that fire, the basic constituent of the Universe, is their origin. He believed that the mind derives a false idea of the permanence of the external world from the passing impression of experience (Gimferrer, 1986:64, Reese, 1996:294).

¹⁰⁸ Ego translates in Latin as, 'I am'. It has been regarded in much Eastern thought as an illusion engendered by false seeing. In Yoga, the destruction of the sense of the ego reveals the self. The soul as an entity in its own right is the conception of all dualistic and idealistic Western views, the conception of most of the high religions including Hinduism, Jainism and the philosophies connected with these religions (Reese, 1996:192).

contemporary painting occurs when ‘we become identified with the aesthetic object by which our attention is gripped and held’ (Osborne in Macquet, 1986:53). Benedetto Croce holds that the aesthetic experience is a primitive type of cognition connected to intuition. Here, intuition is the awareness of an image as a non-conceptual form of knowledge; and art is the expression of emotion. The expression of emotion can produce cognitive awareness in that an image, once intuited, be it a universal, spiritual or religious experience, opens a perception of the universal human spirit. Croces' concept of the aesthetic coincides with Kant's idea of intuition. It also echoes Vido's concept of a primordial form of thought based in imagination (Ashton, 1995:31, Reese, 1996:150)¹⁰⁹.

However, for Diane Collinson ‘there is a particular kind of contemplation, a kind held to be the distinguishing mark of aesthetic experience’:

.... but it cannot of course be *the* distinguishing feature of aesthetic experience, for contemplation is also characteristic of much religious experience and is regarded as at least an element in such matters as solving mathematical and other problems ...’ (Collinson in Hanfling, 1992:118).

The philosophical roots for discussion concerning art and contemplation theory in the Western philosophical tradition can be traced back to Aristotle; who distinguishes between *stasis*, or still contemplative attention, and the contemplation of objects that may satisfy an appetite that:

... distinguishes between our responses to the sight of luxurious food and goods ..., which often stimulate intemperate appetites and desires, and the experiencing of a pleasure that is generated simply in the perception and contemplation of something, and that is quite different from the pleasure of satisfying an appetite (Collinson in Hanfling, 1992:119)’.

‘The Aristotelian thread of contemplation theory became incorporated into Western culture and Christian doctrine in the 13th century through the scholarship of Thomas Aquinas. ... characterizing aesthetic perception as contemplative ... as cognitive. The kind of logical distinction he makes between responding to good or desirable things by movement towards them and to beauty by an entranced contemplation has prevailed in much aesthetic theory (Collinson in Hanfling, 1992:120-121).

Art, as endorsed by Aristotle, is that which conveys tragic and dramatic emotion, and contemplation is evoked by the pity and fear aroused by tragic drama. Such

¹⁰⁹ ‘Artistic emotion has a deep similarity to mystical emotion. Bertrand Russell was of the opinion that there is a wisdom that is unattainable except through a certain mysticism (Tàpies, 1986: 24).’

emotions were to be known fully rather than to function as a spur to action. For Aristotle, the contemplative aspect of art derives from its wholeness. There is nothing to be done in regard to a work, but to contemplate its meaning and entirety. Aristotle, Aquinas and Schopenhauer ‘... refer in some way to a profoundly attentive contemplation, to the exclusion of everything save the object of that attention, to the vivid presence of what is perceived, to loss of will or desire, to the compelling nature of the experience and to the delight and knowledge attendant upon it’ (Collinson in Hanfling, 1992:127). Thus the properties that render it distanced also inspire profound contemplation, its richness and wholeness combining to arrest the spectator’s attention (Collinson in Hanfling, 1992:120). Similarly, Aquinas distinguishes between the stasis induced by beauty and the motivation to possession. Yet Aquinas also regarded contemplation as cognitive; ‘The kind of logical distinction he makes between responding to good or desirable things by movement towards them and to beauty by an entranced contemplation has prevailed in much aesthetic theory’ (Collinson in Hanfling, 1992:121).

Thus, static contemplation that does not encourage the spectator to desire something is opposed to kinetic contemplation that requires movement. Yet, static contemplation is not passive; ‘The inward feeling of contemplation can be one of abounding vitality and movement: one seems to be transported into the world of the work and then explores that world’ (Collinson in Hanfling, 1992:132):

A closer knowledge of nature (for the cubists) required new representational elements. It was this that led to an awareness of the arbitrary (and conventional) nature of traditional means of representation. We are not “immobile” in the presence of the objects of reality: we move in space, synthesizing the multiple images provided by the eye. Sight is anything but motionless; it is constantly shifting its range of vision, vibrating like a radar scanner able, through countless trials, to reconstruct distances, volumes, planes, cavities, projections and surfaces (Sproccati, 1992:158).

The potential to approximate authentic reality in Light Red over Black can be gauged by the viewer’s response. This metaphysical painting has expansive coherent surfaces of paint and an absence of figurative ciphers. As such it is not to be read as a narrative; it does not invite a logical, rational approach to

understanding. Meyer Shapiro, a prominent art historian engaged with abstraction in the modernist period, makes apparent a distinctive mode for the contemplation of non-representational painting:

Authentically spiritual abstract art does not so much “communicate” as “induce an attitude of communion and contemplation.” ... “an equivalent of what is regarded as part of religious life: a sincere and humble submission to a spiritual object, an experience which is not given automatically, but requires preparation and purity of spirit (Shapiro in Tuchman, 1981:314).

Relevant here is Shapiro’s notion of ‘authentically spiritual abstract art’, the prototype of which he cites from Kandinsky; ‘... an alchemical-spiritualizing process ... is a means, not of offering disguised imagistic support to religious dogmas, but of exploring the possibilities of “bringing together what has come apart” (Ceccobelli in Tuchman, 1981:315)’.

Shapiro suggests that the surface of abstract painting is as if in flux. What had ‘come apart’, according to Kuspitt, describes the viewer’s relationship to the large scale paintings of the New York School, whose painters set out to reduce the disparity between the scale of the work and that of the viewer’s body, so facilitating a close relationship between painting and viewer (Chave, 1989:7)¹¹⁰. Rothko discovered that a painting sufficiently large, so that when you stand close, the edges are greyed off to one’s peripheral vision. It takes on a kind of presence in its surface that renders internal relationships irrelevant. The moment colour and scale begin a dialogue, a close viewing range is like opening a door into an internal realm (Chave, 1989:172ff).

According to Golding, the juxtaposition of viewer and specific paint surface is the quality that leads to Rothko’s paintings being contemplative. Further, by stating that internal relationships are irrelevant Golding is noting that the viewer’s comprehension of the overall surface takes precedence over the rectangular forms depicted, so echoing Monroe Beardsley’s idea of coherent, unified, space (Hanfling, 1992:167¹¹¹. Light Red over Black was intended to be seen in a

¹¹⁰ ‘The painter-critic Andrew Forge was overwhelmed. “When I first saw Rothko’s work I felt I had fallen into a dream,” he said, adding that the imperative to go up close was compelling (Ashton, 1983:167).’

¹¹¹ While, by the mid-20th century, the influence of institutional Christianity was waning, its values in their Platonic and metaphysical precedents were still evident in the dominant form of viewing painting.

modernist art gallery, where the viewer may stand close to it. Such a gallery provides a space in which to dwell in unfocused contemplation in order to experience its unequivocal impact. Thus the viewer may experience the painting as if either daydreaming or momentarily absent-minded¹¹². The surface, being emptied of overt signifiers or narrative, the viewer becomes free to draw on their own resources, as in the Romantic period:

He teased his viewer into a state of receptivity and inquiry. Unaccustomed juxtapositions of huge areas of colour (or sometimes merely tone) challenged not only the eyes of the beholder but his entire psychological and motor being.

... in Rothko's work the spectator becomes an integral part of the painting. And I myself am seized with the strange and irrational but overpowering sense that a Rothko, when not being looked at, somehow ceases to exist (Golding, 2000: 220-222).

The link having been made between the waning of religion and the rise of contemplative abstract space corresponding with plural notions of the spiritual, we can note that Rothko's abstract paintings find their source in the perpetuating Romantic difficulty of providing religious experience in a modern world of doubt (Chave, 1989:44-46). Chapter 1 showed that the waning of belief in the Absolute has led to the growth of plural spiritual perspectives, reflected in the way that the ground in metaphysical painting came to engulf and predominate over figurative signifiers (McEvilley, 1993:9ff). In Rothko's work, a monochrome ground could now be a surface on to which spiritual and existential meaning might be projected. In this respect, it is relevant to note that Rothko's philosophical influences include Nietzsche and Existentialism; 'The expression of faith had to be a faith in the Existentialist idea of intersubjectivity – the only faith left to modern man' (Ashton, 1983:177):

Despite man's solitary situation, he only becomes aware of himself (becomes his essence) through the *cogito* that also perceives all others, and perceives them as a condition of his own existence. Here is the world of "intersubjectivity" which Rothko anticipated when he spoke repeatedly of the "others" who beheld his pictures, and their "human needs" (Ashton, 1983:177).

Intersubjectivity is relevant to Light Red over Black in that the contemplation of metaphysical painting is concerned with the confrontation between the self and

¹¹² Dore Ashton gives a glimpse into Rothko's working processes; 'There were times when Rothko sat for hours in his canvas chair, contemplating the shape and size of the empty stretchers' (Ashton, 1983: 172).

other. For Rothko, as with other Abstract Expressionists, intersubjectivity also involved subjection to diverse spiritual influences¹¹³:

Their spiritual sources drew from beliefs and practices associated with native and non-Western cultures: the art of Native Americans, Zen and Carl Gustav Jung's concepts of archetypal form, including his identification of the mandala in art ranging from that of the North American Indian to that of Asian cultures (Tuchman, 1981: 49).

The influence of Zen is clear in Light Red over Black, in its concern with simplicity. Zen philosophy had a powerful influence on Chinese and Japanese culture, reflected in sparseness of architecture and subtlety of painting. Jung's notion of archetypal form has also affected Light Red over Black, in that it presents the viewer with the self (Chave, 1989:93,208n.77)¹¹⁴. Jung spoke of the archetypal ideal of a developed personal nature, the self. The mandala in European art was employed to draw in spiritual forces. It conveys the integration of these forces and the increase of energy which can occur through religious conversion is seen as a sign that integration is possible. Tàpies' spiritual and religious beliefs were outlined briefly in the Introduction. Here it is useful to examine these beliefs in more depth in order to assess their relevance towards an understanding of his work.

COS DE MATÈRIA AND THE CONTEMPLATIVE TRADITION

Tàpies recognises his broad response to the spiritual as being drawn from Western and Eastern philosophical traditions. He and his critics declare that to recognise the distinction between surface reality and a deeper, authentic, level of apprehension is both possible and desirable when viewing painting (Franzke, 1992:15,24,26). Indeed, Tàpies expresses repeatedly that the activity of contemplating art is one way to approximate authentic reality:

Due to the excess of secularisation in our society, I think it cannot be better that some artist, including myself, stress the value of deeper things. I do not know, but sometimes I think that the mission of the artist is precisely to provide tools to keep humankind in a kind of trance or ecstasy,

¹¹³ 'Although Rothko rejected Orthodox Judaism it was a complementary and – even if only at a subconscious level – quite obviously a deep and central part of his cultural heritage, and one which, because of its edicts on certain forms of representation, helped propel him towards abstraction (Golding, 2000:160)'.

¹¹⁴ There is no absolute proof that Rothko was versed in the theories of Jung. Dan Rice, a studio assistant of Rothko's in the 1960s stated ' ... I'm sure that he knew Jung's writings quite accurately. ... Artists that Rothko knew early on were at least superficially familiar with and excited by the ideas of Freud and Jung; ... (Chave, 1989:208n.77)'.

to help humankind to get closer to the authentic reality. Yes, because in reality we are searching for who we are, what the world and things are like. Well, in this sense, artists may play a very interesting role (Tàpies Interview, 1999:231).

When Tàpies states that his 'only religious practice is meditation in front of a picture', he is continuing the notion of the painter's role as bound up with the search for authentic reality, typical of art up to the modernist period. This view is typical of the Abstract Expressionist movement and metaphysical painters. In that movement, the use of pictorial space was an important means by which the viewer might approximate authentic reality through its contemplation. Tàpies has formed his notion of authentic reality over the years of his practice, so to foster an apprehension of the spiritual in a largely secular age. But he emphasises that, equally, the individual may experience authentic reality through meditation. Tàpies, alongside a number of metaphysical painters, formed this conviction from essentialist philosophies, and an Occidental belief in the existence of the authentic that might be approximated in an artwork (Franzke, 1992:17,29). The subsequent waning of the metanarratives on which modernism was based rendered belief in essentialism problematic (Chapter 2) (McEvilley, 1996:75-6, Ward, 1997:63,103).

Although using Buddhist terms in discussion, Tàpies states that he does not adhere to a religion. He would, however, describe himself as a humanist:

I do not know exactly what humanism involves. If it means a search to improve humankind, then, I am, indeed, a humanist, of course. But this understanding does not exclude the so called spiritual or transcendental elements. I see them from a different perspective, not so much in the traditional meaning that has been attributed to transcendence or spirituality (Tàpies Interview, 1999:212-3).

F.C.S. Schiller and the philosopher, William James, take the view that humanism stands in contrast to philosophical absolutism. In contrast to theism, where human values are less central, humanism locates the source of goodness and creativity in humanity. It is defined against metaphysical rather than epistemological absolutes, against the totalised universe of absolute idealism¹¹⁵. The viewpoint opposed to humanism can be found in the structuralism of Derrida

¹¹⁵ *Metaphysical*, defined as the study of being, in the abstract; and *epistemological*, defined as theory of knowledge.

(Chapter 2). The humanism Tàpies is prepared to subscribe to is clearly one of his own defining, and is not to be understood in terms of the standard definition. He seems in effect to be calling into question the entire standard concept of humanism. Therefore, although it would be incorrect to describe Tàpies as a humanist in standard terms, it is clear that he would so think of himself in his own distinctive terms.

Tàpies is clear however that a spiritual direction is needed on which to base one's life:

For example, when it was thought a vast unanimity existed, that man's ultimate happiness only consisted in the contemplation of God. When, according to St. Thomas Aquinas, that seemed to be the unique goal of all human activities, in the same way that 'all results of art necessary for life are so directed'. It is known that man today generally lacks unifying principles which make sense of life (Tàpies, 1986: 51)¹¹⁶.

Using terms such as 'ground of being', 'unifying principle' and 'the primordial', Tàpies shows that for him, art and life as spiritual paths are inextricably linked (Catoir, 1991:96):

... I have never believed in the idea of art for art's sake. I've always thought of art as being utilitarian. Basically by stimulating introspection and profound contemplation. We are living in a world filled with distractions, a world in which the alienation of the individual is constant. In a situation like this it's vital that we learn to recognize ourselves and face up to our own nature. Before you can do this though, you have to be familiar with what has already been thought about humankind and life and even about art. I understand art as a compendium of human wisdom whose purpose would be similar to that of certain religious exercises in the past. But I don't think that an iconographic account of that wisdom would serve this purpose today. Art should incite people to achieve a real state of contemplation ... it's a way of producing experiences of absolute knowledge. That's what I am trying to do in my work and that's exactly why I think it has a useful dimension (Tàpies in Borja-Villel, 1995:8).

Having examined notions of contemplation and how Tàpies' spiritual beliefs relate to this, it is necessary to demand what it is that the viewer is required to contemplate. Most distinctly, Tàpies offers the viewer an incomplete body in Cos de matèria. In an interview with Barbara Catoir, he states that his attitude to human form is¹¹⁷:

¹¹⁶ In this last sentence Tàpies may be overstating the case. Spiritual unifying principles – at least in a religious establishment sense – may be lacking or in decline, but they are far from the only unifying principles to be found.

¹¹⁷ 'There is a strong connection between magic and art. You can see it very clearly in what we call primitive art, in Asiatic art, the way they bring magic and religion together. I have always wanted my

... nothing to do with considerations of aesthetic form. Initially, I felt an urge to attack and destroy man's exaggerated opinion of his own worth, to launch an assault on Western humanism as a whole. I wanted to show that man is not a privileged being but a part of the universe, that his nature is the same as that of the stars, or of a piece of paper or a leaf. ... although the human figure is absent, it is invoked by signs. ... this act of destruction is the expression of an idea which I've always tried to put across in art: the idea that what we call reality is not real at all. When I draw a head, for example, I immediately feel an urge to destroy it, to erase it, because the drawing only captures an outward appearance, and for me the vital issue is what lies behind the visible form of the head. ... Art, especially the art of the Romantic period, is full of ruins, evocations of mortality, of the transitoriness of life ... (Catoir, 1991: 76-79).

The discussion of what constitutes the real is also a major aspect of most philosophy and religion, including Buddhism (Chapter 5). Linda Henderson discusses how the artist, Max Weber drew connections between the real and the spiritual:

... The ideal dimension is dependent for its existence upon the three material dimensions, and is created entirely through plastic means, colored and constructed matter in space and light. Life and its visions can only be realized and made possible through matter ... The stronger or more forceful the form the more intense is the dream or vision. Only real dreams are built upon. Even thought is matter. It is all the matter of things, real things or earth or matter, ... (Henderson in Tuchman, 1981:224)¹¹⁸.

For Tàpies, authentic reality is caught up with the illusion of the real:

From the Altamira Caves to Picasso, and Velázquez in between, painting has always been an abstraction. In the face of the fanatics of Realism, I have reiterated that 'reality' has never existed in painting, that it is only to be found in the head of the observer. Art is a sign, an object, a suggestion of reality in our mind and spirit. Consequently, I see no antagonism between abstract and figurative art when one and the other suggest an idea of reality to us. Reality of the eyes is a poor shadow of reality. Art only makes sense if it can count on the collaboration of the observer; it rests always on the mind of he who contemplates it, as unpolished as that may be. A man who is void of ideas, without imagination, bereft of the necessary sensitivity to seam up an association of ideas, and emotions, will see nothing (Tàpies 1986:15).

Here the real can be understood in terms of Mircea Eliade's notion of the symbol (Mircea-Eliade, 1961:9ff). It was through his understanding of symbol that Eliade related his work as an historian of religions to his work as an artist. Eliade stated that symbols have a transconceptual dimension, expressing what he termed the 'lived' spiritual. For Eliade, symbols not only disclose a structure of the real, or simplify a dimension of being, but they also carry a significance for all human existence. Whatever the symbol strives to convey, it is the unity between the

paintings to have a direct physical impact, to make a dramatic personal contact with the viewer, that's why the images in which I present parts of the human body, feet or legs or arms can, in a sense be compared with 'ex-votos'. The wax effigies of human limbs and organs that the pious offer in church. They offer them in the hope that a prayer will be answered, a request granted or perhaps an illness cured. Sometimes they are offered, not in supplication but in gratitude (Tàpies Interview, 1995:249)'.

¹¹⁸ Henderson is quoting from Sixten Ringbom (1970:35-39).

different levels of the real. The cognitive function of the symbol is to reveal how differing objects and activities are equivalent and united. Eliade draws on Kant, who distinguished between phenomena, the basic materials of knowledge, and noumena, or things in themselves: 'From Tàpies's point of view, noumenal reality is not ideal or supernature but "the single, total, and genuine reality of which everything is composed"' (Ashton, 1995:41)¹¹⁹. Hegel described the unfolding of reality in mind and culture, so suggesting a distinction between essences and manifestations. In this he included those essences of art or religion and their manifestations in various periods and cultures (Kim & Sosa, 1999:200).

THE IRRATIONAL

Finally, the idea of the subconscious may be addressed as a means by which to approximate some notion of authentic reality in art. Contemplative pictorial, or pure, space, as deployed in metaphysical painting, has been construed as expressing pluralistic notions of the spiritual (Cheetham, 1996:67)¹²⁰. The waning of institutionalised Christianity, with its notions of an Absolute, created suitable conditions for making a connection between the abstract and the subconscious. This, with a growth in psychoanalytic thought, further removed the notion of truth from the realm of religion, the divine and the supernatural. These qualities broadened to become a more humanist version of the spiritual¹²¹. Thus the subconscious of viewer and the artist, rather than God, became the locus of the spiritual. Psychoanalysis held that the only repository for truth was one that was espoused in the individual subconscious (Newton, 2001:183ff). While this recourse to the psyche in order to understand art allowed for greater autonomy, it might also be construed as the denial of any shared societal or spiritual meaning.

¹¹⁹ Kant distinguished between phenomena, the basic materials of knowledge and noumena or things in themselves. Hegel went on to speak of the unfolding of conceptual reality in the phenomena of mind and culture ... suggesting thereby a distinction between 'essences' and their 'manifestations' including the essences of art or religion and their manifestations in various historical periods and cultural configurations (Kim & Sosa, 1999:258).

¹²⁰ Cheetham is discussing Mondrian and Kandinsky, but makes it evident that the universal in their work has different spiritual meanings.

¹²¹ This first happened in the Renaissance, and was revived in the 19th Century.

Contemplation may be understood through the historical link between ideas of the irrational and abstraction (Chave, 1989: 60–63). Historically, the spiritual has been linked to the irrational, both being linked to the idea of loss of control (Newton, 2001:99ff). A preoccupation with the irrational characterised the 20th century, particularly its latter half, when psychoanalysis opposed the notion of the individual as a *tabula rasa*. The connection of the irrational to contemplation is addressed by Stephen Newton, who claims that abstract visual language has parallels in the subconscious psyche. Newton cites Wilhelm Worringer in order to argue for the ‘intrinsic connection between abstraction in art and spirituality’, despite the opposition between the material and the spiritual in art as is evident in its use of pictorial space from pre-Christian times (Newton, 2001:120-121)¹²². For Newton, the contemplative potential of space was apparent in that it deals with the most fundamental psychic processes through which we exist in reality. Newton’s thesis is that symbols exist in the subconscious areas of the psyche which bear ‘direct correlation to the symbolism used in abstraction’:

... abstract painting isolates the psychic abstract template through which we locate our sense of external reality. In its distillation of that abstract psychic mirror, which offers the potential for oceanic envelopment and *ekstasis*, with its associated psychic ‘death’ and psychic ‘rebirth’, modern abstract art is fundamental to the human psyche. But it is also, as I have suggested, in its manipulation of psychic and perceptual repressions in an externalized reflection of innate unconscious processes that it offers access to another dimension and to a psychic regeneration (Newton, 2001: 239).

Newton considers the manic-oceanic level of deep unconsciousness to be where there is potential for momentary loss of consciousness. He links the *ekstasis* of traditional tribal cultures with trance-like states, as induced by ‘dynamic pictorial space’, ... ‘some abstract creative structures, which involve a fundamental

¹²² ‘The Renaissance period initiated a logical, scientific, and rational approach towards a *perspectival* painterly space, which would gradually eliminate the shallow, psychic, and spiritual *pictorial* space evident throughout the Byzantine period and in archaic and ancient cultures. The pictorial space had incorporated unconscious psychic processes in its very dynamics; the perspectival space relied exclusively on conscious and logical determinations ... To the untrained eye, or even to the trained eye, it might not always be obvious just how such a dynamic pictorial space differs from an illustrative, academic, Victorian mannerist painting, which is based on perspectival principles alone. Much depends on the receptivity of the viewer. ... To the receptive viewer, the difference between the dynamic, resonant pictorial space and the academic perspectival space may be a question of unconscious, intuitive response, which is not always quantifiable (Newton, 2001:120-1)’.

‘...Since the Renaissance, however the western (sic) scientific and conceptual project has progressively eroded the pictorial space with its real psychic connection, in favor of the perspectival space supposedly based on the ‘scientific laws’ of perspective’ (Newton, 2001:100).

transfiguration of psychic dissolution and rebirth appear not to be contained by cultural boundaries, but are universally evident throughout human culture' (Newton, 2000:121,233). In interview, Tàpies spoke of trance and ecstasy as being linked to a contemplative experience (Tàpies Interview, 1999:231). At the same time, and despite the idea of the universal being widely discredited, Newton asserts that shared abstract symbolism appears to exist across culture, time and place (Newton, 2001:15). This stance recalls the 'significant form' proffered by Clive Bell (Chapter 1). Bell insists; '.... that the aesthetic emotion is a response to form itself, not to the human circumstances or characters or events that form may be used to depict' (Collinson in Hanfling; 146). However, it is important to distinguish between the universal as interpreted by Newton and Bell. Bell's universal is that of modernism and its norm of a white Western bourgeois male, while Newton's universal correlates to Jung's archetypal images¹²³.

SURREALISM AND DAU AL SET

The contemplative potential of Cos de matèria can be assessed by examining the effect on Tàpies of Surrealism. The Surrealists drew on psychoanalysis and the subconscious; the latter being regarded as a rich source of suppressed imagery, '... such Surrealists as Andre Breton and Paul Eluard still believed in the miraculous, intuitive, irrational, and magical dimensions of art' (Ashton, 1995:25, Chave, 1989:65). Furthermore, the Surrealists believed that abstract pattern could reveal the subconscious mind of the artist. Ideas of this kind had impacted on abstraction, particularly that of Abstract Expressionism and its metaphysical tendency (Golding, 2000:155-163, McEvilley, 1996:57). Space in metaphysical paintings, such as Rothko's Light Red over Black, has been understood to express the unconscious psyche (Newton, 2001:99), while the image of the mind as container for diverse and spontaneous thoughts and feelings has been linked with the flat surface of a painting. The monochrome

¹²³ Jung had demonstrated how Eastern and Western cultures were infused with archetypal patterns. His 'archetypes' have a semi-autonomous life, the understanding of which is seminal to his therapeutic method (Newton, 2001:190-193).

- ground acts as a display of unity, the ground 'represents the one ground of being, or potentiality, which acts as support for the many different figures which rise from it, somehow, and dissolve into it, somehow, again' (McEvelley, 1993:10).

In the same way that figurative signifiers have been described as arising and dissolving on the surface of pictorial space, the mind has been construed as a space where thought and feeling are evoked, first appearing to the conscious mind then disappearing once more (McEvelley, 1993:10). Also, the result of deploying the irrational in art freed it from the restrictions of traditional means of visual communication. Thus, direct links are drawn between psychoanalysis and painting¹²⁴:

Although Freud was thinking of a much earlier and very different art, as Rothko's biographer James E.B. Breslin has suggested, a sentence of his seems startlingly relevant to Rothko's aims: 'We cannot do justice to the particular nature of the psyche by linear contours ... the diffuse colour fields of the modern painters would do better.' Through (Arshile) Gorky, Rothko was in turn absorbing from (Wassily) Kandinsky lessons in the abstract and emotive properties of colour divorced from the confines of lines or clearly delineated shapes (Golding, 2000:218).

Growth of interest and exploration about the human subconscious affected art and its methodology, with painting as automatic 'psychical improvisation' or 'surrational automatism'. This meant that a mode of composition arose in which one form gave rise to another in unplanned association until a perceived unity was achieved (Chave, 1989:66-67)¹²⁵. Conscious control was suppressed, so giving free rein to unconscious imagery and associations to express the artist's inner mental states (Chapter 7). 'Dau al Set ... was characterised by its oneiric inspiration as proposed by Surrealism (Catoir, 1991:22-23)':

The one principle he [Tàpies] has consistently defended is the possibility of respondents finding in his work the means of their own dreaming. On more than one occasion, he has referred to his paintings as "talismanic" (Ashton, 1995: 24).

¹²⁴ 'Some surrealist (sic) artists used the term *veiled* to describe what they regarded as a desirable pictorial attribute: that of the indistinct image, half-buried and half-dislodged from the unconscious mind The term *transparency* was also used to describe a surrealist desideratum; transparency meant getting "beyond the surface (to) embrace the whole."' (Onslow-Ford in Chave, 1989:77)'.

¹²⁵ Matter painting derived from automatism, was one manifestation of an art of spontaneous abstraction that was widespread in the 1950s. 'Informel', "Tachism", "Art Autre" and in Japan, "Gutai", these styles were an international phenomenon that paralleled Abstract Expressionism. Stressing individual exploration of the unconscious which was acted out with paint on canvas, it was linked to the philosophy of existentialism wherein responsibility for action resided with the individual. (Surrealist automatism led to the kind of statement by Tàpies such as); "I have to enter into a sort of trance that will give me that feeling that my work is being guided by a cosmic force" (Wye, 1991:11).

Tàpies's processes of perforating, peeling off, cracking, or otherwise working his final surfaces serve to reveal enigmatic depths. These procedures are not nearly as radical as appearances suggest. Tàpies is aware, as were the old Masters, of the illusionary effects of layers, glazes, and glimpses of suggestive underpainting. Hovering then between the illusionary and the real, art to Tàpies is a form of magic. Moreover, he associates the palette of sienas, brown-reds, ochers, oranges, and deep grays initiated in his magic-realist works – which recalls the coloring used by the *bodegonistas* – with dreams (Ashton, 1995: 34).

Tàpies is typical of those 20th century artists whose art is a process of creation and destruction; indeed, the idea of continuous flux has been central to Neo-Dada, Arte Povera and Process art (Hall, 1994:6). Earlier, Tàpies' part in Informel had been characterised by his desire to demonstrate a deeper unity at the juncture between form and formlessness (Ashton, 1995:30). The Surrealists had enshrined the idea of Informel, as 'unformed' or 'formless'. They cited the writer Arthur Rimbaud, who had followed Charles Baudelaire's imperative to 'plunge to the bottom of the abyss to the unknown' (Ashton, 1995:30). In 1871, Rimbaud had asserted that the work of the poet was to bring back form from below:

One of the tasks of art, as Theodor Adorno has said, is to express the inarticulate and inchoate – the insane and arbitrary from the perspective of the articulate and formed – without rationalizing it and socializing it. Tàpies has done that, and much more: he has made the maintenance of the sense of the inarticulate and inchoate the only goal worthy of art in this day and age of collectivization, mass identity. For him the task of art is not to give articulate form, but to reinvent inarticulate formlessness, the only (however ironical) means of individuation today. Only by "de-forming" or undoing the already collectively formed to achieve formlessness indirectly, or by having the strength of artistic will to bring the formless into direct being, can one realize a semblance of uniqueness, however abstractly (Borja-Villel, 1995:32).

In the Paris of the mid-1950s, Tàpies had been influenced by Dubuffet, his improvisation and his use of unusual materials (Ashton, 1995:30). Tàpies, in turn, went on to explore new materials as if they were living substances in flux. Borja-Villel, his key critic and the director of the Tàpies Foundation, described Tàpies as using 'objects as sources for poetic transformation' (Ashton, 1995:38).

According to Borja-Villel, Tàpies' Matter paintings (Fig. 3 & 4):

... reflect a world that is continually changing, a world whose objects appear to be in the process of being formed or unformed. It is as though the artist had plunged into this shifting world transforming it, giving shape to part of its inner flux (Borja-villel, 1995: 17).

Tàpies cautioned, however, against the excesses of the Surrealist vision:

Even though it (Surrealism) also had a great influence on me, it somehow struck me as insufficient. I am talking now about that branch of Surrealism which advocated absolute confusion and belittled any kind of rational control. I've always believed that any work of art

needs a structure, no matter how open it might be. It also needs to be rooted in a set of principles and inner convictions based upon the accumulated wisdom of our times (Tàpies in Borja-Villel, 1995:7).

The final point to note about Tàpies' process is the influence in terms of ideas of the irrational, drawn from Surrealism. Donald Kuspitt links Tàpies' wall paintings further to automatism:

Tàpies's automatism brings all his psychic energy to bear on symbols of Spanish tyranny in an effort to emotionally liberate himself from it. Spain became insular and self-suppressive under fascism; in contrast, Tàpies' automatism is expansive and self-expressive. His automatism is thus a form of psychopolitical resistance. It is not simply a gratuitous expulsive display of creative bravado, if with anti-bourgeois effrontery, as it implicitly was for many French surrealists. ... Tàpies's "regression" to automatism, such regression is the essence of so-called primitivism, or as I prefer to say primordialism, is a necessity of emotional survival. It is an assertion of radical individualism in an authoritarian and totalitarian society in which there is no chance for personal assertion. As such, paradoxically, it is a means of integration in a society that threatens to disintegrate the self (Kuspitt, 1996:242-243).

THE IRRATIONAL; SPAIN

Alongside political and historical trends, such as those represented in Spain's political climate in the 1950s, Tàpies was influenced by a turn to the irrational, the vestiges of which had impacted on Barcelona in the 1940s and 1950s:

Artists are magnetically attracted to the heretical aspects of religion, the rites and ceremonies, everything beyond the realm of the 'normal'. This fascination is also rooted in the history of art. Like all contemporary artists, I've been heavily influenced by Dada and Surrealism, which were based entirely on the abnormal, on diabolism, dreams and the whole ideology of Freudianism (Tàpies in Catoir, 1991:92-93).

Tàpies and fellow members of Dau al Set emerged as artists at this time; they formed a loose group of renegades against the dominant bourgeois ideology of Spain, epitomised by Franco and Fascism (Ashton, 1995:24-29). 'Prohibitions and isolation weighed heavily on Tàpies and his friends, nurturing in them a spirit of revolt that sent them back to one of the most radical of pre-war movements, Surrealism (Ashton, 1995:25).' As a teenager in the Second World War, Tàpies inhabited the political climate of Fascism. Under Franco's dictatorship, the Catalan language and culture were banned, as they had been at points in history over eight centuries (Ashton, 1995:24). Later, in the 1950s, Tàpies was imprisoned for a week for his part in a student demonstration against this ban. To Dau al Set, Franco's dictatorship, with its adherence to form and order, represented stultification and rigidity (Ashton, 1995:25,29).

One of Tàpies' key influences was Ramon Llull. As a 13th century Catalan philosopher (ca.1235-1316), Llull had pursued the irrational against political order, and as such, he was a pivotal influence on Tàpies (Ashton, 1995:28). Llull was the first major writer in Catalan, and although historically was active seven centuries prior, the ascription to him of modernity is based on his quest for what he termed a 'unifying principle' (Ashton, 1995:28). His unifying principle is relevant to modernism in that he attempted a form of integration of alphabets through the deployment of mysticism and science. He used mixed alphabets, diagrams of rings, numbers, occult signs, Sufism and Arab influences (Ashton, 1995:28). Likewise, Tàpies' signs of figuration in Cos de matèria draw on convictions of Raymond Llull and mystical Catalan symbolism to signal a resistance to Fascism¹²⁶. Contrary to the embargo on the Catalan language, the production of contemplative space gave reign to expression in a language that cannot so readily be forbidden. Artists used pictorial space and abstraction to act as a visual language possessing a freer reign. It is apparent then, that because Tàpies had been silenced in terms of both visual and cultural language, the undisrupted space of metaphysical painting would not be sufficient to express his opposition to Fascism. The attitude and policy of the Spanish government was self-contradicting in that, while abstract painting was oft-times banned, abstraction was not thought to be a threat¹²⁷.

It is evident from the literature on Tàpies that he and a wave of artists favoured the irrational as a signal of their opposition to Fascism:

Tàpies had already discovered that occultism, at least for the Surrealists, was a legitimate and intellectually respectable area of inquiry. The Surrealists had asserted the importance of the occult as a means of rejecting the suffocating middle class biases against the irrational. They had also deliberately cultivated an interest in German Romantic literature – another of Tàpies's early interests – partly to show their scorn for chauvinistic Gallic culture (Ashton, 1995:27).

¹²⁶ However, Fascism also had an interest in the new wave of spiritual movements that sprung up in the 1930s (Sheldon & Meecham, 2000:66).

¹²⁷ 'Even though informal art may have represented a shout of rebellion in the minds of its creators, it was unable to denounce any injustice. Because of its very abstraction, it could only express what the viewer wished himself to see in it. The government in Madrid understood that it was a waste of time to forbid it since, by its own definition, it was incapable of transmitting any subversive messages (Laurence Toussant, quoted in Moffitt, 1999: 225)'.

Tàpies asserts in interview, as quoted at the beginning of this chapter, that in the contemplative space of Cos de matèria the viewer is able to 'flow away' towards untrammelled thoughts and feelings. Such encouragement to abandon control would be a subversive act under Fascism. For Donald Kuspitt, the 'regression' to automatism in Tàpies' work has radical implications:

.... Tàpies's automatism is one individual's means of holding his own in a society in which individuals have no power. It is a means of alleviating feelings of helplessness and hopelessness – depression – induced by such a society. To put this another way, Tàpies' "regression" to automatism – such regression is the essence of so-called primitivism, or as I prefer to say primordialism – is a necessity of emotional survival. It is an assertion of radical individualism in an authoritarian and totalitarian society in which there is no chance for personal assertion (Kuspitt, 1989: 242-3).

To conclude, in comparison to Light Red over Black, this chapter shows how Tàpies' idea of 'flowing away' fits in with a modernist prototype of viewing space. While preoccupation with the formless was a specific aspect of Informel, interrogation of the rational has been shown to be part of specific historical and political circumstances to which artists felt bound to respond; the political situation, that is, concerning Spain during, and resulting from, World War II. While Cos de matèria has been discussed in the context of a new mode of viewing, established in the postwar period in metaphysical painting, this period in painting and its espoused form of viewing is particular to the contemporary period. However, Cos de matèria stands in opposition to much contemporary art in that it contests the predominance of current art and the overt appearance of ideas. It has been shown that preoccupation with the irrational continues to be part of a radical tradition that opposes authoritarian rule. Tàpies' deployment of matter establishes a precedent for the current contemplative tradition.

The projection, by viewers, of differing philosophical and spiritual interpretations on space, encourages their stronger identification with the art. Both Light Red over Black and Cos de matèria enable contemplation of authentic reality. For Tàpies it exists in the material, and has to be understood as part of non-dualism. The chapter showed that preoccupation with authentic reality, a pivotal aspect of contemplation, is contemporary, as is the project of the self being regarded as relevant to both modernity and postmodernity. In Rothko's and

Tàpies', work, the search for authentic reality still has validity, evident in the continuity of the project of the self and the individual's quest for wholeness. This form of authentic reality focuses on individual more than societal or shared ideas of the spiritual. Finally, the chapter shows the link between the subconscious, the flat space of painting, and psychoanalysis; particularly the unity suggested beneath the surface of a painting. Chapter 4 continues the debate on contemplation and authentic reality by providing readings of Cos de matèria through the tradition of the Via Negativa.

Chapter 4: Contemplation; the Via Negativa

Its origins (the Romantic legacy) are very remote, as remote as the Chinese humanism we were talking about before. I would say it was also developed by the pre-Socratics, especially Heraclitus and the neo-Platonics. One can find many mystical references in their philosophical interpretations. I really identify myself with the line this mysticism has taken in art history. I am also a firm follower of this line. I believe that it is like a thread that links many different artistic manifestations of different civilisations. Nowadays it is very important that we remark on this (Tàpies Interview, 1999:217).

OVERVIEW

The claim that Cos de matèria could aid the individual to approximate authentic reality may be more acutely examined by referencing the medieval Spanish and Catalan mystical tradition as antecedent to modernist contemplation; a major influence on Tàpies (Catoir, 1991:73, Gimferrer, 1986:22, 158, Wye, 1991:30-31). Tàpies states that one of his aims is to aid the transcendence of dualism (Tàpies Interview, 1999:212-3). Mystical tradition proffers the view that an experience of authentic reality occurs when the distance between the individual and God is transcended (Johnston, 1996:220-221)¹²⁸. To this end, religious symbolism may be used; and in order to pursue this idea in relation to Tàpies, Cos de matèria is compared with an overtly religious work, Christ Crucified (c.1630) (Fig. 10) by Diego Velázquez (1599-1660). The Western figurative tradition, in particular Spanish figurative painting and *bodegones* (still-life) of Spanish painters such as Francisco de Zurbarán (1598-1664) and Velázquez, are antecedents of Cos de matèria in their preoccupation with medieval mystical contemplation and the transcendence of dualism. This is evident in their deployment of pictorial space and in their use of the relationship between figure and ground. Comparative consideration of the painting Agnus Dei (1635-1640) (Fig. 11) by Zurbarán alongside Cos de matèria (Fig. 2) shows that both are in the Spanish tradition of the contemplation of objects. Indeed, in both paintings the figurative elements are presented in spartan spaces that resonate with a sense of interiority, so expressing the immanence of the spiritual. Also, Cos de matèria is compared to The Broken Column (1944) (Fig. 12) by another Roman

¹²⁸ This is termed the 'knowing by unknowing' (Johnston, 1996:220-221). In terms of the issue of 'merging with the absolute' see p. 10.

Catholic painter, the Mexican Frida Kahlo so as to pursue links with Christian symbolism.

THE MYSTICAL TRADITION; ANTONI TÀPIES

Mysticism can be understood as a spiritual, non-discursive, approach to the union of the soul with God, or with whatever is taken to be the central reality of such a unity (Parrinder, 1995:8-10). As we have seen there is no immediate relationship between the individual and God that would qualify Parrinder's claims for a union of the soul with God. At best, and to reiterate a point made earlier, we merely have the potential to develop a heightened sense of awareness of God through prayer and contemplation. However, the Christian mystic believed that the direct experience of the presence of God involves a consciousness of a Reality beyond immediate perception that is changeless and eternal, permeating and giving meaning to the world and to experiences of finite creation (Parrinder, 1995:11). Christian mysticism comprises two main contemplative traditions; the Cataphatic and the Negative Apathatic tradition¹²⁹. The latter is known as the Negative Way, or Via Negativa (Johnston, 1996:19-22, Parrinder, 1995:10).

¹²⁹ Both traditions maintain that God is unknowable, self sufficient and complete and that the individual is not able to express comprehension of God. No language, verbal or visual, is perceived adequate for expressing the power of God. God's difference from the known universe grants Him an actuality that cannot be expressed in human terms and is only indicated through absence (Johnston, 1996:21-22). The Cataphatic tradition assumes that one can gain knowledge of God in affirmative ways, such as in the recognition of qualities such as beauty, goodness and love in one another. The Via Negativa is interpreted in the mystical tradition as spiritual maturity acquired through poverty termed 'docta ignorantia' or 'learned ignorance' by Nicholas of Cusa. (Tàpies in Ashton, 1995: 61, Reese, 1996:520). Conviction that God's otherness from the universe could not be expressed in human terms meant that mystics believed union with God occurred solely through the transformation or transmutation of personal identity in submission to God's divine nature in what was termed 'negation' (Johnston, 1996:19). In the West, Philo Judaeus, the founder of Negative theology in 30B.C.-50A.D, holds God to be Being itself. His transcendence being so complex that the only available conceptual approach is to accept what God is not, through the denial of His predicates. A process of purification towards God, the One Truth, was believed to occur when the mystic undertook to lead a life of poverty based on the renunciation of worldly matters in the pursuit of simplicity, prayer and devotion (Johnston, 1996: 201-203). The use of painting to carry forward a tradition that upholds the impossibility of spiritual expression may appear anomalous. Yet, pictorial space has been associated with the Via Negativa since the eleventh century. Specifically, the Via Negativa is in evidence in traditions where non-representational space has been used to convey ideas of the mystical and the spiritual, even God, through space employed in a way that expresses or denotes absence (Johnston, 1996:23-24, Reese, 1996:616). In Maimonides and in Aquinas, the negative way leads to the discovery of God. In this method, God's otherness from the universe means that he can be approached by negating the world. The negation of these characteristics allows us to gain some understanding of the divine nature. It is the dominant path in Christian mysticism.

Tàpies is drawn to the mystical tradition both for its spiritual teachings and for the art it has inspired, particularly in the medieval period (Wye, 1991:30-31). Whilst no longer a practising Roman Catholic, Tàpies is conscious of the effect it has had on his life and outlook. Although he does not often deploy overt Christian symbolism in his work, it nonetheless is evident in his use of the body and its associations with the crucifixion (Tàpies in Ashton, 1995:66). Tàpies is drawn to the emphasis that mysticism places on contemplation, simplicity and the transforming of the self as both possible and desirable (Gimferrer, 1986:33).

In particular, for Tàpies, alchemy has long been associated with the mystical tradition and art (Gimferrer, 1986:33). Tàpies links mysticism to the 'quest for transcendency' in contemplative experience (Gimferrer, 1986:22):

The alchemist wants to make use of his state of enlightenment to bring about changes in the world around him; the mystic wishes to achieve an inward transformation of himself. The mystic ... practises an alchemy of the spirit (Gimferrer, 1986:33).

Painting transforms paint beyond its actual physical substance; while, according to Bell, that transformation is intensified in painting that expresses the mystical.

The influence of Catalan mysticism and medieval art that spanned eight centuries, from approximately 700 AD to the 15th century, has also been acknowledged by Tàpies:

Another source of inspiration has been my rediscovery of Catalan medieval painting. This has been both a return to my roots and at the same time a journey into the distant past to a culture so vibrant with its own certainties that it leaps across the centuries. It was one of the moments in history, I believe, when art played its most essential social role, when it was always relevant. In our world, in which religious imagery are (sic) loosing their meaning, in which our customs and rituals are becoming more and more secular, we are losing our sense of the eternal. I think it is a loss that has done a lot of damage to modern art (Tàpies Interview, 1995:249).

The Church, as the greatest patron of the arts from the 12th century onwards, brought painting into the social and natural realm (Moffitt, 1999:126ff)¹³⁰. Yet Tàpies shares in the current view that religious imagery is losing its import, and with it the sense of the eternal is being lost. Medieval art had a visionary role that has since waned, alongside the diminishing power of the Church and its message. Tàpies attempts to imbue his work with a sense of the eternal by use

¹³⁰ Painting has been a means of communication throughout human history.

of the diagonal, or St Andrew's, cross and his use of crucifixion imagery as symbols with spiritual meaning for differing cultures and times (Tàpies in Ashton, 1995:66-69)¹³¹.

Examination of Tàpies' mystical experience shows how it contrasts with his rigid early education. He recalls the following memory of his school days:

'The nuns made all the children walk in a religious procession. We had to pass a holy heart made of straw and pricked with thorns. Each child had to step forward and pluck out a thorn. We were children pulling thorns from Jesus Christ's heart. In our innocence we were alleviating the sufferings of Christ caused by humanity's sins. It was an amazing image, one that made a deep impression on me (Tàpies Interview 1995:250)'.

Critics have discussed how Tàpies' contradictory feelings about Roman Catholicism are expressed in his work through his repeated use of imagery with religious overtones (Kuspitt, 1996:244-5, Tàpies Interview, 1995:249-250). Tortured bodies, such as that portrayed in Cos de matèria, have evident associations with the image of a flayed, crucified, Christ. Also, a number of Tàpies' texts discuss his preoccupation with crosses and religious imagery¹³².

Most pertinently, he discusses his personal associations with the cross:

I myself have for half a century persisted in making crosses and crossings an essential part of my work, and I have even adopted the cross as the first letter of my name and almost as an emblem of my work (Tàpies in Ashton, 1995:67).

Such direct engagement with Christian imagery contrasts with a number of texts where Tàpies is critical of the church in Spain (Ashton, 1995:36-37). This began when he became ill as a young man, so causing Tàpies to re-examine his religious beliefs and renounce Roman Catholicism (Tàpies Interview, 1995:246). This renunciation was confirmed during the Second World War when he saw the church as shoring up political oppression, class privilege and the suffering of the majority in order to privilege a minority (Kuspitt, 1989:244-245):

Tàpies's wall (paintings) reflect the combat of the Spanish Civil War and, more particularly, the destructiveness of Spanish Catholicism. During the Inquisition it had "bodies drawn and

¹³¹ 'There is no neutral sign in Tàpies' art; every sign – be it an "X or a cross or a spiral" – is self-contradictory, that is, a sign of conflict, with Spain and himself. Tàpies has a contradictory, conflicted relationship to the T: it is a sign of himself, but also of psychic and social oppression. He appropriates it, but it also "appropriates" him. Primordializing the cross, Tàpies liberates it from its oppressive social meaning and restores it to emotional consequence (Kuspitt, 1996: 245-6).'

¹³² The most persistent of these is *Crosses, Exes, & other Contradictions* (Tàpies in Ashton, 1995:66-78).

quartered", imposing its authoritarian will on Spanish society as much as Franco's fascism, which was in alliance with it (Kuspitt, 1989: 244).

Yet Tàpies finds the mystical tradition of Spanish Catholicism to be based in freedom, unlike its institutionalised version associated with political and spiritual repression. Some of the artists influenced by this tradition are cited below.

THE MYSTICAL TRADITION; SPANISH PAINTING

Zurbarán, Velázquez and Alonso Cano (1601-1667) were great masters of the 'Golden 17th century' of Spanish painting (Moffitt, 1999:126ff)¹³³. Most Spanish painting of this era is religious and visionary:

All the writings of the great sixteenth-century Spanish mystics abound with references to the fundamental otherness of the Sacred, to the ontological rupture between the 'here' (quí) of the experience and the 'over there' (allí) of the vision. Despite this split, communication between mystical imagination and artistic imaginary remains permanent. There is a to-ing and fro-ing between vision and painting that can be found in the work of the great mystics as well as in popular mythology (Stoichita, 1995:48).

Termed Baroque art, it was perceived as classical, born of Imperial Rome (Moffitt, 1999:126). All the European Baroque arts shared in acknowledging a social and spiritual purpose (Moffitt, 1999:127ff). Meanwhile, the Spanish monarchy staunchly defended the Roman Catholic Counter-Reformation and figurative art, particularly painting, which was seen as an instrument of moral preaching (Moffitt, 1999:119). Art was designed to delight, instruct and move its audience by virtuoso performance. The artist was expected to instruct the intellect, thereby to move the audience toward moral purpose. Spanish artists subscribed to this didactic strategy more than their European contemporaries (Moffitt, 1999: 127). Paradoxically, while art was seen to aid visionary experience the artist remained an artisan dependent on the church¹³⁴. Today, Tàpies is involved with a contemporary version of the spiritual, free from ecclesiastical patronage. It has been with their spiritual and overtly religious

¹³³ *Siglo de Oro*.

¹³⁴ '.... until 1783, Spanish painters legally remained manual labourers, for they had to pay an onerous ten-percent retail tax, the alcabala, on their handiwork. The sole exceptions were paintings which depicted religious subjects. Mythological subjects (poesías), profane narratives (historias) and still-life compositions (bodegones) were taxed unless they could be shown to convey religious content by means of veiled subject matter (Moffitt, 1999:90)'.

meanings that Tàpies has been inspired. In interview, Tàpies stated that he had been influenced by painting from the 15th century to the 19th century¹³⁵. These include artists such as Zurbarán and Velázquez, who tended to employ the dark backgrounds thought to inspire contemplation.

Thus, while Tàpies may not have recognised the direct influence of Zurbarán's and Velázquez's paintings, all three share the qualities of realism and sombre colours, and critics have linked Tàpies' work to the Spanish classical tradition:

His use of worn-out and humble objects, his emphasis on matter and compositions for which he confers exquisiteness and beauty all have been considered as "a personalised form of abstraction and rooted in the Classic Spanish art tradition (universal humanitarianism and spiritual values a (sic) la Velázquez and Goya)" (Borja-Villel, 1989:43).

Here the universal humanitarianism and spiritual values of Velázquez and Goya (Francisco de Goya y Lucientes) (1746-1828) refer to the aim of 17th century art, as supported by the Church, to uplift the devout spectator and grant vivid and direct emotion through the humanisation of a depicted event. This is evident in the contrast between their realism and the idealism of classical portraiture (Moffit, 1991:154-156). In their paintings, intense realism is transfused with religious emotion, typical of much 17th century Spanish art. The humanism of 17th century painting is embodied in its realism, the strength of which is drawn from the country and its people (Matthews, 1985:6). Indeed, most Spanish art may be distinguished by its acute observation, its adherence to the concrete, and its opposition to speculation (Bicchi, 1963:1).

Velázquez's Christ Crucified was commissioned by Philip IV of Spain for the Benedictine convent of San Plácido in Madrid (Zorilla, 1999:28). The linking of Cos de matèria to such classical religious painting and the Via Negativa is evident in the manner in which Christ Crucified juxtaposes figure with space:

Velázquez's work reflects two ... ways of conceiving a scene ... there is the frontal position of the figure ... all (Velázquez's work) look straight out at us. Christ Crucified, the greatest symbol of Christianity, faces mankind, his eyes lowered, his countenance half-hidden in sweat-sodden hair, in a portrayal of God made man that was a religious and artistic landmark (Zorilla, 1999: 28).

¹³⁵ 'I think that an artist can be influenced by many things, maybe several specific pictures. I may have been influenced by this idea of provoking a certain state of mystical contemplation as represented by Zurbarán's monks. I do not know (Tàpies Interview, 1999:211)'.

The factuality of this image sets it apart from other crucifixion paintings of its era. Here, the viewer is confronted by the representation of the figure of God made human, with flesh and body rendered as natural and in detail. Thus the individual identifies with the image of Christ's suffering and degradation. Christ's expression is designed to evoke an emotional response, and, with the cross set against a dark background Velázquez proceeds to convey an immediate sense of the complete isolation of the crucified man at his death. Medieval art was renowned for its portrayal of naturalism, and suffering is central to the Spanish religious ethos (Matthews, 1985:8). Tàpies is drawn to Medieval art for this naturalism, and believes that the suffering in life should be conveyed in art (Tàpies Interview, 1995:246, 249).

Tàpies' work is noted for an anti-idealistic stance that confers dignity and awareness on mundane objects (Borja-Villel, 1989:140-141)¹³⁶. For him, the humble, rather than the idealised, qualities of objects are accentuated. This use of humble and worn-out objects belongs to the mid 20th century in movements such as Arte Povera that endow such objects with greater meaning (Franzke, 1992:9). Tàpies draws on the values from classical Spanish art:

Their (Zurbarán and Velázquez's) art employs an anti-idealistic emphasis on individual dignity and inner awareness, contemplative sobriety, meticulous craftsmanship and intense narrative focus (Moffitt, 1999: 147).

Like Velázquez, Tàpies challenges idealism by including the material world, concluding that all experience is filtered through a cognising mind. Intrinsic to such non-idealism is the mystical idea of the 'seeing body' (Stoichita, 1995:162). This refers to the experience of ecstasy as manifested in gesticulation, otherwise understood as the physical language of the body.

Such introspection is articulated in Velázquez's paintings, and while John Moffitt's quotation refers to 17th century visionary painters, it has parallels in descriptions of Tàpies' work. The contemplative sobriety and humbleness of content in Velázquez is achieved by the sombre weight of leaden colour, and the

¹³⁶ This was pioneered in 17th century Dutch genre painting.

depiction of human suffering (Moffitt, 1999:147). Thus, both Velázquez and Tàpies evidence the contemplative potential in ordinary phenomena in an indirect lineage that stretches from Velázquez through to Morandi. Yet the experience of viewing Christ Crucified and Cos de matèria is not only contemplative but fulfils the aim of uplifting, transcending and transformation:

.... a complementary kind of Spanish trait may be discerned, namely, a penchant for chromatic extremes that, on the one hand, may veer toward a dark, funereal palette of grays, browns, and blacks, intensified by sharp white light; and on the other, to fiesta colours of a riotous, folkloric variety, a duality, as it were, between the sacred and the secular ... a Zurbaránesque palette of earthly renunciation ... (Brown, 1996: 67).

However, there is less tonal contrast in Tàpies' work than in Velázquez's Christ Crucified. Tàpies does not indulge in chromatic extremes; he rarely uses bright colours, and when he does they are used sparingly. Small dashes of colour, such as the orange in Cos de matèria, contrast with the more typical dull areas. A cross and marks in orange echo a larger dark cross, a duality, as if between the sacred and profane. A lineage of painting that has connected sombre colours to the spiritual can be found across European, and particularly Spanish, art (Ashton, 1995:37) ¹³⁷. Thus, the relevance of this to Cos de matèria may be understood by taking Christ Crucified in the context of Spanish painting and in its association with mysticism and the transcendence of dualism.

CHRIST CRUCIFIED, COS DE MATÈRIA AND NON-DUALISM

The use of pictorial space in relationship to the figure in Christ Crucified, understood as the relationship of figure to ground, is of particular relevance to this thesis. In the Christian mystical tradition, the means to wholeness for the individual is through the transcendence of duality in subject and object, and in union with God (Coleman, 1998:71ff)¹³⁸. In Christ Crucified this is portrayed in the emotions conveyed by the body of Christ. The duality of physical and mental is bridged by the viewer through identification with the suffering of Christ. John

¹³⁷ 'The hard dryness of much of the landscape in Spain, its topography, the brittle brightness of the light, especially on the Castilian plateau where colour is eaten up and bleached by the intensity of the light, and which incidentally helps to account for the Spanish love of monochrome effects in black and ochre, the climate ... (Matthews: 1985: 3)'.

¹³⁸ Tillich, in Apostolos-Cappadona, 1990: 228ff.

Moffitt declares that in Velázquez's painting; '.... the physical and mental were indivisible, thereby creating a seamless duality within his art' (Moffitt, 1999:163). Velázquez has been described by José Zorilla as 'the painter of reality not the realist' (Zorilla, 1999:20). The distinction drawn is between the traditional art of representing what is seen, and representing with idealisation or interpretation. The former often implies an emphasis on detailed depiction without embellishment, rather than general impression (Zorilla, 1999:26)¹³⁹.

Non-dualism can be understood through Plotinus, who held that union with the One, or Absolute, was the most important goal (Reese, 1996:590-591)¹⁴⁰. In language drawn from Neo-Platonic, Plotinus describes God as 'the One' or 'the Absolute'. As stated in Chapter 1, while Christian belief drew on Neo-Platonic language for descriptive purposes rather than to conflate these terms with God. Plotinus claimed that the spiritual ascension of the individual occurred through a chain of becoming (Kim & Sosa, 1995:401-402)¹⁴¹. The Christian mystical tradition was based on a hierarchical apprehension of spiritual experience. Paintings were hung in churches, often high above the congregation in order to reinforce the sense of the viewer as subordinate to Christ, as well as to enable everyone to see them (Parrinder, 1995:141ff)¹⁴². Plotinus held that man could be reunited to the One through a process of purification, referred to as purgation, so to progress through the spiritual hierarchy (Inge, 1948:166-178). His assertion that the individual can achieve union with God by such an ascent is implicit in Christ Crucified, where, as is traditional in crucifixion paintings, the viewer is destined to draw closer to Christ through contemplation of his image¹⁴³. In such iconic painting, Absolute Truth is Christ as a spiritual ideal. Some theistic mysticism describes the experience as granted by God, and thus not subject to

¹³⁹ Note that this must be distinguished from Realism; a movement in 19th century Catalan art that was particularly preoccupied with idealised realism in portraiture (Doñate, 1996: 20).

¹⁴⁰ See p. 10 and p. 44, fn. 51.

¹⁴¹ In philosophy, becoming refers to the passage of events in time, including the coming into being and going out of being of phenomena. Process pertains to orderly change in contrast to changeless being (Kim & Sosa, 1995:46, Reese, 1996:69).

¹⁴² God was the highest spiritual truth, followed by the human intellect or *nous* and finally the soul or *psyche*.

¹⁴³ However, the viewer is limited to drawing nearer to, not becoming, Christ.

the control of the mystic (Johnston, 1996:178-180, Parrinder, 1995:89ff). When the God in question is thought to be transcendent, a typical path is inward, away from the world, toward union with the transcendent One (Parrinder, 1995:111ff). It is the quest for supreme and perfect knowledge, for the Ultimate Reality that philosophy calls Truth and which theology calls God¹⁴⁴. This contrasts with extraversive mysticism, where universal unity is sought, which in turn is often accompanied by a pantheistic version of God as all phenomena (Parrinder, 1995:13-16). Thus, knowledge of reality may be gained, a knowledge not otherwise available through sensory perception or rational thought (Johnston, 1996:44-57). So it is with Cos de matèria, which suggests spiritual prerogatives that need be neither religious nor institutionalised. Today there is no context in which Tàpies' painting may be hung and viewed where notions of prerogatives especially spiritual ones have currency. In particular, there is less context for its religious symbolism.

The figure in Cos de matèria is not crucified, yet it presents associations with such images:

... works from the period preceding Franco's death refer to the human figure in a way that inexorably suggests torture or mutilation. ... 1968 – that troubled year that saw political actions and punitive responses all over the world, including Spain – are deliberate, shocking reminders of Tàpies's implacable opposition to the static bourgeois aesthetics of Franco's Spain. They offend bourgeois sensibilities. At the same time, they extend familiar Spanish traditions of ex-votos and depictions of the Crucifixion that abound with nasty, realistic details like flayed and pierced skin and suppurating wounds. Tàpies's rejection of official Catholicism used by the State to repress free thinking is implicit in such visibly revolting imagery bathed in cruel, theatrical light. These works reiterate the stark palette of folk painters and Spanish Old Masters such as Jusepe de Ribera. Tàpies's allusions to religion and the myths of Christianity are always critical ... (Ashton, 1995:36-37).

The static bourgeois aesthetics of Franco's Spain was a manifestation of government sponsored Social Realism¹⁴⁵. For Spaniards, the most obvious artistic tactic was a defiantly international, anti-social and anti-realistic style (Moffitt, 1999:219). With pencil and line, Tàpies 'mutilates the human figure' in

¹⁴⁴ Here, meditative techniques are used to achieve an enlightened state.

¹⁴⁵ 'Regionalist, ... and symbolically 'American' iconography ideologically paralleled a similarly polemical art in Falangist Spain. As elsewhere, a localized *folklórico* imagery – with weathered peasants and heroic troopers inhabiting bleak, Castilian-heartland, pastoral landscapes – was favoured by the Franco government after the triumph of its 'Crusade' or 'National Uprising' (known to the rest of Europe as the Spanish Civil War) and well into the 1950s (Moffitt, 1999: 218-219)'.

order to highlight human repression, even torture, under Franco's fascism. It would appear, however, that he is critical of institutionalised forms of religion, rather than religious ideas (Ashton, 1995:36-37). Tàpies draws on mystical traditions while rejecting the bourgeois, institutionalised, form of Christianity espoused by the Roman Catholic Church (Ashton, 1995:36-37). Further, bourgeois sensibilities are challenged by his art referencing the social, everyday world denied by modernism (Gimferrer, 1986:23). Also, by using a stark palette he acknowledges the Spanish Old Masters who were supported by the Church; and he states the crucified body as the reality of life, suffering and death (Matthews, 1985:8).

One need not go too deeply into the elaborations of symbolists to understand that the contemplation of a naked man dying, nailed to a cross, his sex exposed, takes us to most mysterious limits of our condition – to love and death, to Eros and Thanatos – and that not even the crucifix can be the exclusive property of Christians (Tàpies in Ashton, 1995:67).

Colombalia Dexeus says of Tàpies that; 'Bodies in his work are usually shown lacerated. ... there is the desire to degrade the classical idealization of the naked human figure ... to break with an excessive realism' (Colombalia Dexeus, 1989:27-28). As in the case of Velázquez, Tàpies' work evidences strong links to Naturalism; explanations must reference objects and events, yet without appeal to a natural order.

Tàpies' use of the cross is diagonal to avoid a direct association with the Christ's crucifixion, while evoking other associations:

.... the sign of the cross represents very clearly the perfect communion of the totality of the states of being, and this is why all the traditional doctrines have adopted it as a symbol of Universal Man. ... we must speak less of a symbol than of a widespread "human reality". ... Mircea Eliade called this a "mythical geography" ... places the cross at the center of the world, along with a set of other symbols derived from it: the symbol of communication between heaven and earth, that of the ladder, that of the ascension, that of the return to paradise ...(Tàpies in Ashton, 1995:69).

Cos de matèria placed within the Christian mystical tradition also addresses the interpretation of pictorial space as void.

SPANISH PAINTING; THE VOID

The characteristic theme in Spanish art is the contemplation of near nothingness as representing certain qualities¹⁴⁶. Christ Crucified, while redolent with the weight of materials can also in some ways appear to be self-denying. Ideas of the void are important to Tàpies, yet his art work rarely deals with space alone. As in the classical tradition, dark, void-like pictorial spaces can be traced throughout his work (Moffitt, 1999:131,198)¹⁴⁷.

For Tàpies, the void is connected to the crucifixion:

.... it's often been said that my work reveals an obsession with death, sometimes this is said because many crosses appear in my paintings, but one should never forget that the sign of the cross, as those who study symbols know, is more than the sign of death or of Christianity, it is a sign that stands for many things, a universal symbol from the co-ordinates of space to the way we indicate territory, it's a mark of destruction or negation (Tàpies Interview, 1995:247)¹⁴⁸.

Mystics within the tradition of the Via Negativa consider that understanding is given through contemplation, and the closer the identification with the void the nearer they draw to being at one with God (Johnston, 1996:22). In the Via Negativa all is mystery rather than a problem that can be comprehended, and the Via Negativa must be penetrated to its centre in order to gain apophatic knowledge (Johnston, 1996:19-22).

Meyer Shapiro states that the viewer should undertake 'sincere and humble submission to a spiritual object' (Shapiro in Tuchman: 1981:313). This is applicable to mid 20th century metaphysical painting, where the 'authentically spiritual abstract art' demands 'poverty' or humility to apprehend a field of

¹⁴⁶ Neoplatonism interpreted the principle of matter as virtual non-being, in this sense following Aristotle. The tradition of mysticism in East and West has provided numerous approaches to non-being. In the mysticism of the Middle Ages, Bernard of Clairvaux and Meister Eckhart claim that the soul has to become as nothing, annihilated, in order for the being of God to enter. In Jacob Boehme, among others, non-being acquires a positive role in the dialectic and in the process of creation. Hegel speaks of the power of the negative, and deduces the idea of Becoming from the thesis of Being, and its antithesis, Nothing (Kim & Sosa, 1995:362).

¹⁴⁷ Most notably in relation to Tenebrism.

¹⁴⁸ 'This does not mean that only works of art that "represent the void" or only paintings in which nothing, or only a very little is depicted will necessarily be those which transmit this experience (of "pure and empty spontaneity") to us. ... the void cannot be depicted, nor is the aim of the experience to search for the void itself and settle there. An intended "depiction" of the void is one thing and finding a means ... is something else again. The idea is to know how to live with it, to have it in the background ... to discern it, thanks to the Knowledge-Innocence it involves (Tàpies in Ashton, 1995: 64)'.

pictorial space (Shapiro in Tuchman, 1981:314)¹⁴⁹. Thus, metaphysical painting post World War II promoted contemplation for the viewer. The putative emptiness of metaphysical painting demands that the viewer contributes as well as perceives. This is problematic in the 20th century where there is no evident mystical tradition. Here, the uses of space rather than figuration signalled the transcendent, removed from the material realm¹⁵⁰. According to T.H. Matthews, Spanish art is opposed to formal and spiritual extremes and is based on feeling rather than reason (Matthews: 1985:16). However, in 16th century Spain the intellect was not in conflict with religious faith. Such union between reason and feeling is claimed for Tàpies by Andreas Franzke:

By transcending the polarity of matter and mind in concentrated, concrete presence, Tàpies's imagery attains both personal and universal significance. Unadulterated material that is generally held in low aesthetic esteem occupies as central a place in his art as do sublime transfiguration and modes of creative energy that range from rational design to inspired hallucination (Franzke, 1992: 11).

Thus, Tàpies suggests that pictorial space can possess contemplative potential. The idea that space is nothing suggests that it has no meaning or possibility, is wanting. In the 1950s the theologian and writer on art, Paul Tillich, stated that 'Emptiness is not nothingness or nihilism' (Tillich, 1987:146). Tillich goes on to distinguish between 'sacred emptiness' and 'mere emptiness'. The 'new' physics (Chapter 2) asserts that phenomena, including humans, are not isolated, but are subliminally connected. To this Tàpies responds:

There is also some kind of nihilism in my paintings. However, it is not at all negative. After analysing things you get to the end and, then, you seem to find a complete emptiness. But I think that getting used to or adapting yourself to this sort of nihilism could be very interesting. It is not, in my opinion, a necessarily anti-spiritual attitude (Tàpies Interview, 1999:243)¹⁵¹.

¹⁴⁹ The term 'poverty' is drawn from Johnston (1996:201-203).

¹⁵⁰ Tàpies clearly wanted to express this, not only to undermine institutionalised Christianity, but also to further his desire to place the hope for meaning and the spiritual in the material (Tàpies Interview, 1999:212).

¹⁵¹ 'There are unquestionable moments of glory achieved by art and poetry, not only in their modern version but throughout time, when we become magically drawn, sometimes by the most unimaginable means, into that play of emptiness and fullness which composes everything and which reveals the meaning of Nature; when we know how to imbue all aspects of our daily life and conduct with that "stuff of dreams" made of black and white that constitutes what we call Reality, but which, viewed as a nondual void, brings everything into harmony.

There are those who believe that experiencing or "contemplating" this ultimate reality is no more than the whim of philosophers and the vagary of aesthetes who are ineffectual in society, but these people are mistaken. They confuse the dead and sterile void of false nihilistic mystics and the alienated passivity that leads to "nothingness" with the void that transforms something that is fundamental and decisive to our comportment: the basis of our entire learning process, that which reveals the true values of life to us

Two final comparisons elucidate the place of Cos de matèria in the Spanish tradition. The first is with Agnus Dei by Zurbarán. Here, an immanent version of the spiritual as expressed in Tàpies' work, and found in Cos de matèria, can be found in the history of Spanish painting. Zurbarán's concern for conflating the ordinary with the transcendent is explicit in Agnus Dei¹⁵². According to Portús, it is "divine still life" in which a lamb and the Son of God are one (Portús, 1995:62)¹⁵³.

.... the human world and the supernatural into a compositive and conceptual whole; and as a result he became the best translator of the religious feelings of a nation and an age in which miracles were an everyday occurrence and in no way incompatible with physical reality (Portús, 1995: 27).

Historiography has considered Zurbarán as 'the best interpreter of the religiousness of Spain in the first half of the XVIIth century' (Portús, 1995:4). The sobriety and severity of Zubaran's art has been said to transform the observed objects into a 'votive offering on an altar' (Matthews: 1985:15). His painterly austerity obliges the viewer to apprehend the intricacies of each form, to see them as a transfiguration of the commonplace (Matthews: 1985:15).

Secondly, like Tàpies, the Mexican artist Frida Kahlo deploys Christian imagery to bring secular and spiritual together in an expression of non-dualism. In The Broken Column (1944), Christian symbolism is both covertly and overtly deployed. It is a self-portrait, in which is conveyed the manner in which a broken body may be transcended. Masked and ornamented, it is twined and enmeshed with plants, life and growth. Kahlo's biographer, Hayden Herrera, describes The Broken Column thus:

without resorting to ancient Judeo-Christian mythologies which sometimes cause numerous separations and much violence (Tàpies in Ashton, 1995: 65)'.

¹⁵² However, the spiritual tradition from which this work derives, Spanish Catholicism, is steeped in suspended judgement. For example, as part of religious ritual a wafer is the body of Christ. The viewer of Catholic or Spanish descent readily accepts matter as the body or representation of the whole material world. Which relates to the major difference between Protestant Christianity on the one hand, in the doctrines of which, wine and bread for instance are representative of the body and blood of Christ, and on the other hand Roman Catholicism wherein wine and bread are the body and blood of Christ as understood through the doctrine of transubstantiation.

¹⁵³ Zurbarán's paintings are known to reference Quietism; a 17th century devotional and mystical movement within the Catholic church. The movement held that the path to the discovery of the divine required one to "sell or kill" one's self-conscious will; something that has evident associations with the Via Negativa (Moffit, 1999:138, Johnston, 1996:19).

With her hips wrapped in a cloth suggestive of Christ's winding sheet, Frida displays her wounds like a Christian martyr; a Mexican Saint Sebastian, she uses physical pain, nakedness, and sexuality to bring home the message of her spiritual suffering. Frida is no saint however. She appraises her situation with truculent secularism, and instead of beseeching the heavens for solace, she stares straight ahead as if to challenge both herself (in the mirror) and her audience to face her predicament without flinching. Tears dot her cheeks, as they do the cheeks of so many depictions of the Madonna in Mexico, but her features refuse to cry. They are as mask-like as those of an Indian idol (Herrera, 1998:77).

This is typical of Kahlo's narrative portraits, her figure fantastical and in pain while reminiscent of the *retablo*-like paintings of the early 1930s (Herrera, 1998:316-7)¹⁵⁴. Although she rejected religion, Christian imagery, especially that of bloody martyrdom as depicted in Mexican art, pervades her work; and in many self-portraits Kahlo amplifies personal misery by imbuing it with Christian significance. Here she is a martyr, whose blood is drawn by thorns. Such goryness and self-mortification belongs to Aztec tradition¹⁵⁵:

... it was Christianity that brought to colonial Mexico the depiction of pain in realistic and human terms, with the result that almost every Mexican church has a frighteningly veristic sculpture of Christ, either whipped at the post, dragging his cross, or dead, his body always full of bloody, suppurating wounds (Herrera, 1998:283).

Similarly, Kahlo uses realism to depict extreme pain. As in Christian rhetoric, the suffering in her paintings promises salvation. However, the *oeuvre* of Frida Kahlo is more obviously personal than that of Antoni Tàpies. For instance, Kahlo takes to herself qualities of religious figures, such as Christ. A number of commentators, for instance Hayden Herrera, have noted The Broken Column to be a reference to the crucifixion. By comparison the identity of the body in Tàpies' Cos de matèria is not given. It possesses corporeality but without distinction of gender; it is a general representation rather than a specific human. With Kahlo, by contrast, the body is that of an individual woman, but is used to convey the suffering human condition¹⁵⁶. Like Kahlo, Tàpies responds to the repression of the Roman Catholic Church; but Kahlo's physical agony is immediate, and with it the need for transfiguration and transcendence is the more

¹⁵⁴ *Retablo* refers to 'Small votive paintings offering thanks to a holy being, usually the Virgin, for misfortunes escaped. These works, which are also called ex-voto paintings, depict both the event and the holy agent of miraculous salvation' (Herrera, 1998:47).

¹⁵⁵ Aztecs practised human sacrifice; they also pricked their own skin and punctured their ears to draw blood so that crops would flourish (Herrera, 1998:283).

¹⁵⁶ She barely survived a tram accident; a piece of iron skewered her from one thigh through her body, emerging from her genitals.

pressing for her than for Tàpies. Looking straight out from the canvas, she confronts the viewer, and, unlike Christ Crucified, her stare requires the viewer to share her pain.

In summary, the chapter demonstrates that one version of authentic reality is the contemplation of negation and the transcendence of dualism. In this respect it has identified correspondences between Cos de matèria and the universal humanitarianism of Christ Crucified and The Broken Column. It has shown that Cos de matèria mainly has links with the Christian mystical tradition because of its use of space and expression of the non-dual. Cos de matèria is placed in the Spanish tradition, and the chapter found that Tàpies' painting drew on the 17th century Spanish painters Velázquez and Zurbarán for its immanent version of the spiritual, in that both these artists imbue the ordinary with spiritual significance. The use of space is one route to a deeper reality, such as the unknown of mysticism. The chapter showed that Cos de matèria cannot match the emotional potential of 17th century painting, such as Christ Crucified. The cross in Cos de matèria could be regarded as a contemporary expression of the dualism that is implied by the crucifix. However, Cos de matèria cannot match the draw, the desire to overcome dualism, engendered by the religious imagery of Christ Crucified. Paradox is a strong force in Tàpies' painting, because on the one hand, it disrupts modernism's conventions of space, while at the same time, the viewer is left unsure whether the figure and cross draw from or disrupt the tradition of crucifixion painting. Having examined Cos de matèria in the Christian mystical tradition, the thesis continues by assessing its place in the meditative traditions.

Chapter 5: Meditation; Beyond Self

The feeling of death is present in my works, as is the sense of pain. This is partly due to the influence of Eastern philosophy, particularly Buddhism which has compelled me to think about the problem of pain and why it is inseparable from living, not to luxuriate in sorrow or be morbid about suffering, but in an endeavour to understand and look for solutions, find ways to overcome pain. These thoughts have always troubled me and it's only in some small way I try and contribute to their acceptance (Tàpies Interview, 1995:249).

OVERVIEW

Tàpies' stated debt to Buddhist philosophy invites closer study. In particular, Buddhist meditative traditions might further comprehension of Tàpies' use of contemplative space in Cos de matèria (Fig. 2) in order to approximate authentic reality¹⁵⁷. While Tàpies does not claim to be a practising Buddhist, he has studied Eastern religion, Buddhist practices and philosophy (Catoir, 1991:81-84). Interest in Buddhism grew in the West in the early 20th century and has been gathering momentum to the present day (Kulananda, 1997:3). Its influence was apparent in the Abstract Expressionist movement, where artists were drawn to an Oriental philosophy that countered much of Western culture, particularly the concept of Cartesian dualism (McEvilley, 1996:75-81). Intrinsic to all religions is that religious beliefs be put into practice; accordingly, in Buddhism, individuals should compare their own experience to the Buddha's teachings (Sangharakshita, 1995a:18). In order to consider a link between the approximation of authentic reality and painting, we should note in particular; Barnett Newman (1905-1970), Mark Rothko (1903-1970), Robert Motherwell (1915-1991) and Clyfford Still (1904-1980). An ideal viewer for Cos de matèria might address conceptions of surpassing the notion of self. That Tàpies has been influenced by Buddhism's belief in the potential of the individual to transcend the duality of subject and object is well documented, and so invites comparison between Cos de matèria and Untitled (1969) (Fig. 13) by the German artist, Eva

¹⁵⁷ 'It's an entire cosmos, the whole universe turned presence, to be deposited sacramentally upon a sort of altar in isolation from everything. One must sit before it with devotion. It demands meditation. Bit by bit you must discover in it all the intimacies and grandeurs, all the sentiments and ideal that its maker has placed in it. And even its ephemeral fragility has great import as does the paper or silk of all oriental painting, or the art of flower arranging - urging us even more to bestow loving care and vigilant attention, to esteem things in their mortality, to understand that, unfailingly, everything must change (Tàpies, in Ashton, 1995: 53).'

Hesse (Catoir, 1991:81-84, Tàpies Interview, 1999:215). Although Hesse was an orthodox Jew she worked at a time when Buddhist ideas were infiltrating the West, and a number of ideas pivotal to her art practice are central to Buddhism. An engagement with self and identity were intrinsic to her art, as was the expression of non-dualism. Moreover, in her deployment of space in sculpture, drawings and paintings she addresses ideas of the void (Fer, 1997:109ff). As such, the connection between her use of pictorial space and abstraction with Tàpies and meditative traditions is warranted.

BUDDHISM, NON-DUALITY AND COS DE MATÈRIA

Chapter 2 discussed authentic reality as the interconnection of all phenomena. In a similar vein, the tradition of mysticism in both East and West has stressed contemplation or meditation as a way to overcome separation. Buddhism postulates that the individual can approximate authentic reality through the transcendence of duality by meditation (Sangharakshita, 2000:52-55). By contrast, in Western aesthetics the ego, or self, is considered to obstruct contemplation and apprehension of self and art; so requiring a kind of submission to the experience in order to refine our notions of self (Shapiro in Tuchman, 1981:314). While the individual is deemed able to transcend the ego in philosophical aesthetics through the contemplation of art, in Buddhism it is attained through the realisation of non-duality that leads to enlightenment¹⁵⁸. Buddhism encourages the contemplation of space, or the void, to transcend subject and object; to enable experience of the non-dual to occur. Transcendence of duality is but one of many issues in Christian and modernist aesthetics, while, in Buddhism, it is of great importance (Loy, 1999, 1988:3-4). Indeed, the main purpose of Buddhist meditative practice is to enable the

¹⁵⁸ The word, enlightenment is frequently used in Buddhism interchangeably with the word, Nirvana. The Sanskrit term, Nirvana, refers to the extinction of all worldly desires. Referring to the state of release, or salvation, the term is most often associated with Buddhism. In Theravada Buddhism, the term seems to be definitely equated with extinction. In Mahayana Buddhism, Nirvana is usually equated with a state of absolute bliss, although Nagarjuna of the Middle Doctrine School of Mahayana Buddhism holds that Nirvana is itself an illusion. Schopenhauer is one of the few Western philosophers to find a place for the concept in his philosophy (Reese, 1996:524-5).

individual to transcend duality as an illusion (Sumedho, 1991:115). There is no mediator as in the Christian understanding of Jesus as Saviour (McGrath, 1997:386ff). That all things are One means that any view to the contrary is conceived as an illusion proffered by dualist thought and an unenlightened mind (Vessantara, 1994:38). While the idea of the pursuit of wholeness may also be part of the Buddhist spiritual path, this pursuit focuses on the integration of the self in the transcendence of the ego. Christianity is more preoccupied with contemplation within its mystical tradition (Johnston, 1996:25-27)¹⁵⁹. Where once contemplation was a religious term and meditation was a synonym for thoughtfulness, these understandings have become reversed. Now, it is more usual to speak of philosophical contemplation and religious meditation while ascribing contemplation to the West and meditation to the East (Reese, 1996:468).

For the West, Buddhist art is mainly associated with the Zen tradition and it is this that has most influenced Tàpies¹⁶⁰. He has verified the influence of Zen sand and rock gardens on his Matter paintings (Fig. 3 & 4), some of which he has covered with furrows of sand (Tàpies in Ashton, 1995:48-49). In his Matter paintings, for instance, he references the sand furrows of the Zen temples and the Japanese Zen Garden (Tàpies in Ashton, 1995:49):

... the art of Zen emphasised portraits, austere ink paintings, calligraphy and direct aids to meditation, including the well-known sand and rock gardens. Their choice of subjects and emphasis upon intuition and direct learning resulted in a body of works different from those of other schools, although the goal of understanding, of liberation, remained consistent with Buddhist practice. Instead of the painting or sculpture having a special magic or embodying a cult force, Zen works functioned as a stimulant, an activator of one's spiritual growth. Zen objects generally rely on suggestion and intimation, demanding that the devotee should play a greater role in the search for personal enlightenment (Fisher, 1993: 162-163).

Tàpies' paintings can be understood through suggestion and intimation, unlike the narrative realism of figurative Buddhist art. He does not adhere to the Buddhist artistic tradition of idealised imagery, but is drawn to its human

¹⁵⁹ For Plotinus, contemplation was, at once, spiritual and intellectual, its goal being union with the divine and primal unity (Parrinder, 1995:9).

¹⁶⁰ He is influenced through reading 'Contemplation of the wall in Mahayana' by Bodhidharma (470-543), the founder of Zen (Tàpies in Ashton, 1995: 49).

dimension; its conflation of the transcendental with the immanent. It is not so much directly the Eastern Buddhist tradition that Cos de matèria draws on, but Abstract Expressionism that in its own turn gleaned from the East ideas of meditative pictorial space.

In other Matter paintings Tàpies uses Zen aesthetics of simplicity and understatement, of spontaneity and intuition in his arrangement of matter; and Zen architectural influence is clear in his use of space (Munsterberg, 1971:145-147)¹⁶¹. Furthermore, Zen restraint, plainness and severity of design is accompanied by closeness to nature. Certainly, harmonisation with the landscape and use of natural materials are practises that reflect Zen simplicity (Munsterberg, 1971:101). Understanding and liberation is intended to arise through contemplation of Matter paintings in the same way as occurs through Zen understanding. While Tàpies' working process balances immediacy with reflection, the idea that the devotee plays the greater role in search of personal enlightenment is central to Tàpies's understanding of art and the spiritual¹⁶². For Tàpies, the immanence in Buddhism has put his spiritual teachings into his life as well as into his work.

Buddhism came to the West less than a century ago, and, while its influence has spread quickly it has tended to remain marginalised by mainstream culture. Today, it is allegedly the fastest growing religion in the West (Kulananda, 1997:6). While some postmodern theorists have lately embraced religious and spiritual influence, most have taken a pluralist, rather than denominational,

¹⁶¹ Hui-nêng (637 to 713) is looked upon as the founder of what is called Ch'an, or Zen, Buddhism (Munsterberg, 1971: 14). His teaching consisted of individuals looking into their Buddha nature, enlightenment being a return to their true being. Zen exists outside the traditional Buddhist doctrines. It stands apart from other sects, being the experiences of mystics. Here, the Buddha is seen to inhabit the individual's heart and only by looking deep within the essential self can peace be found; can one 'become a Buddha' or realise Budda-Nature or Buddhahood (Munsterberg, 1971: 156, Sangharakshita, 1995b: 63ff). The unique feature of Ch'an Buddhism is its emphasis upon Satori, the immediate experience of ultimate truth, in which the duality of the world ceases to exist, even suddenly (Munsterberg, 1971:15-17).

¹⁶² The calligraphy used in some modernist painting is associated with the way in which Zen masters express the inner self (Munsterberg, 1971; 143). The painter Mark Tobey (1890-1976) claimed that the inner rather than the outer self is closer to the infinite. Munsterberg compares the spirit of Zen to that of much 20th Century contemporary painting where the 'technique thus evolved was a shorthand in which not only the subject matter but the very manner of the brush stroke came to be a most expressive vehicle of meaning', as for instance in action painting (Munsterberg, 1971; 145).

perspective (Griffin, 1990:4-8). In art, modernists have embraced fringe and esoteric beliefs, but little influence of the spirituality of Buddhism (Tuchman, 1981:11). The Abstract Expressionist movement, with its metaphysical tendency, is an exception (McEvelley, 1996:75-81). Buddhism was relevant to modernist and metaphysical painting in particular where attempting to 'present the unpresentable'; space in that context being regarded as beyond time or place (Crowther, 1993:155-156). That Eastern religion and philosophy influenced Abstract Expressionism and metaphysical painting is manifest through the absence of expressed marks of personality; indeed, the space in these paintings erased nearly all signs of the material world (Breslin in Adler, 1993:45). The Abstract Expressionists, particularly Rothko, were influenced by Buddhist ideas of space, the void and 'no-self' (Breslin in Adler, 1993:47, McEvelley, 1996:75-81)¹⁶³. While Tàpies' work is related to Abstract Expressionism, he stands apart in the second half of the 20th century through the degree to which he has discussed and drawn on Buddhist and Oriental ideas (Tàpies, 1986:67-70, Tàpies Interview, 1999:213-4, 218-9). This is evident from his writings as well as his specific deployment of space, his use of matter to express immanence, and his declared use of art as part of his spiritual path (Tàpies Interview, 1995:249) .

The strong influence that Eastern philosophies and religions, particularly Buddhism, have had on Tàpies is apparent when he states:

Well, I have always been interested in some aspects of Buddhism. This interest developed from my interest in contemporary science. I realised, after reading some popular scientific books, that almost all the recognised scientists of the 20th century, sometimes in their works, referred to this oriental wisdom. Some of them referred more explicitly to Buddhism. This led me to become interested in the main Buddhist teachings. There is a branch in Buddhism, this kind of mixture between Buddhism and Taoism, and somehow also the neo-Confucianism, that really interests me. What has been called Chan Buddhism in China and Zen Buddhism in Japan. It seemed to me that it was a very free branch, hardly submitted to any religious regulations or ecclesiastic hierarchies. It is more a wisdom of the human being on his own than a religion. The human being has to wake up on his own and stop thinking that solutions come from beyond. I believe this is a very modern attitude and because of that extremely interesting. In this sense, I am a bit of a Buddhist. Mind you, some Buddhists think that if you believe in some of the Buddhist

¹⁶³ Moreover, the working processes of the artists have been intentionally erased. This has however been true of much art, for example, Renaissance painters strove to eliminate all trace of human hand, it being a distraction from content. Also, all Muslim and much orthodox Jewish and Christian art (Prof. M. Smith, pers. comm., 2003).

precepts, then you are a Buddhist. What happens is that they do not give you any card or they do not write your name down in any statistics (Tàpies Interview, 1999:213-4)¹⁶⁴.

Buddhist precepts are guides by which Buddhists may assess the ethics of their actions (Sangharakshita, 1998:163ff). Tàpies is drawn to Buddhism because it offers openness; he objects to the institutionalisation of religions because of his experiences of the way in which the repression inflicted by Franco's government was supported by the Roman Catholic church (Kuspitt, 1996:244). Further, an open perspective on religion fits in with his support of his own particular kind of humanism (Tàpies Interview, 1999:212).

Tàpies, more than other artists, describes his preoccupation with the void in spiritual and philosophical terms; while he and his critics discuss the matter more than the space in his work (Tàpies in Ashton, 1995:60-65). As in other Informel work, the relationship between space and matter can be indistinct; areas of space are peppered with incident¹⁶⁵. In Cos de matèria a line encompasses the figure, drawing space and matter together. Here, pictorial space is actual, while the void is an interpretation. Tàpies' expression of the void is not immediately evident, rarely focusing on the pictorial space, but rather depicting it in a number of different ways. Borja-Villel describes Tàpies' methods:

The fact that Tàpies works towards the very edges of the canvas, frequently leaving a void in the centre reinforces the perception of horizontality (Borja-Villel, 1989:149-150).

The void features in all 20th century arts, while a rationalist functionalist aesthetic prevailed in architecture and other design, influenced by the clarity and serenity of their Japanese counterparts (Tàpies in Ashton, 1995:60). A minimalist aesthetic can contest commercialism with its emphasis on the material. Likewise in painting, Tàpies propounds his interest in Oriental ideas of the void:

For Westerners, the idea of acquiring knowledge and by extension all the values that derive therefrom is closely linked with the idea of struggle, of conquering Nature, of accumulating

¹⁶⁴ 'I became interested in Oriental philosophy and art because when I was very young, I heard scientists talk about them: Eisingborg, Shroedinger and Neusborde, all wrote about India, Vedanta and Buddhism (Tàpies Interview, 1995:248)'.

¹⁶⁵ Space in Informel was less focused on and prescribed than in metaphysical painting. Informel like Action painting sought to diversify space against what some felt was the repetitive use of space in purist strands of modernist painting (Sprocatti, 1992:224-8).

education, of both spiritual and material enrichment, and often involves making a pact with power. Virtually the opposite is true for followers of Mahaiana, who connect the idea of knowledge with innocence, ignorance and poverty. ... “the fundamental virtue is poverty ... ontologically speaking because it corresponds to the Void and psychologically speaking because it corresponds to absence of ego and to Innocence,” the other tenet of their faith (Tàpies in Ashton, 1995:62-63)¹⁶⁶.

Tàpies, like other artists in the Abstract Expressionist movement, built on the interpretation of pictorial space as void. For Tàpies, the Buddhist interpretation of space as void is relevant. While the idea of the void or emptiness may have negative associations in the West, it has a positive meaning in Buddhism (Sangharakshita, 2000:77ff). Here the void can be an aid to seeing beyond the surface, beyond the illusion of reality. Tàpies describes it as evoking ‘a feeling of separation – one that brings us face-to-face with what we really are’ (Tàpies, 1983:25). Although both Buddhism and modernist philosophical aesthetics distinguish between deep reality and surface appearance, Tàpies is most interested in *sunyata* in Zen Buddhism, where the void is the source from which ultimate knowledge and compassion will spring (Vessantara, 1993:224-228)^{167 168}.

In his exposition on *Çûnyatâ* he states that:

... the dissolution of the ancient idea of material substance that characterised classical mechanical physics and its correlation today to a sort of set of electrical whirlpools or force fields that originate in an ocean of potential quantum energy. ... with this notion, the scientists of this century have brought us close to the idea of active emptiness, to that *Çûnyatâ* at the origin of all things? (Tàpies in Ashton, 1995:72).

It is now relevant to this chapter to examine Hesse's specific use of the void.

¹⁶⁶ ‘... Suzuki said, the belief that “all moral values and all social practices emanate from the nonconditioned life that is the Void” is a belief that, though exceedingly difficult for us to understand, appears to be one of the most useful contributions the Orient can make towards overcoming the centuries-old hostility that pervades all levels of our society (Tàpies in Ashton, 1995: 62)’.

¹⁶⁷ ‘Ultimate knowledge’ translates as *Prajnaparamita*.

¹⁶⁸ The Sanskrit terms, *sunya*, *sunyam*, *sunyata* translate as void, the empty, the open, nothing, and emptiness. The number of the void is ‘zero’, a transition point between positive and negative. As ‘O’, *sunya* was carried to the West as Arabic notation, revolutionising European mathematics. The ‘emptiness’ of zero was simply one application of the *sunya* doctrine, providing the interpretation of all the key concepts of Mahayana Buddhism - enlightenment, Nirvana, Karma, the Buddha nature and bodhisattvahood. In the 2nd century A.D., Nagarjuna formalised the doctrine of the Madhyamika, or Middle Way, school with its non-dual approach to the ‘emptiness of emptiness’. A group of Shunyavadins taught that all distinctions, including that of Nirvana, should be viewed as empty. Otherwise even the striving for enlightenment creates new attachments. The attainment of enlightenment became ‘non-attainment’ (Reese, 1996:743-4).

EVA HESSE AND THE VOID

Eva Hesse was not attached to any movement. However, her work can be linked with Arte Povera and Minimalism and her painting Untitled (1969) serves to draw pertinent comparison with Tàpies' quest for authentic reality.

Hesse's importance for studying Buddhist ideas can be found in her concern with non-dualism and opposites:

Recalling Lacan's evocation of the fragmented body, her quest for something of her own involved a reconciliation of opposites, of conscious self and its elusive, non-identical but complementary "other": the unconscious (Cooper, 1992:78).

Lacan's idea of the fragmented body holds that the infant is caught between a symbiotic relationship with its mother, on whom survival depends, and an equally necessary but threatening process of severance. Yet, for the acquisition of language, which is a process of symbol-creation, the developing ego requires a narcissistic, fictive idea of wholeness. In this respect the ego itself is a work of fiction forever rooted in a structure of misapprehension. The essential dichotomy is invoked whenever extreme experiences assail one's false, and hence fragile, sense of wholeness. One could argue that in Hesse's case, the assault on her fictional notion of unity became the motive that drove her to create (Cooper, 1992:76-77). Hesse's work may bear the marks of the body, or have bodily connotations, without being of the body, without being symbols in the sense of individual forms representing parts of the body; 'In work such as Untitled (1969) she developed that vertical axis. As a thing, an object, it accedes to its non-logical self. It is something, it is nothing' (Fer in Nixon, 2002: 57).

The marks around the frame of Untitled frequently leave a void; they appear left clear or drawn or washed over. There is a sense of limbo, or of meaning about to be declared. The near blankness, the lack of visual incident, is itself vivid. 'The merest mark, for Greenberg, set up a spatial relationship on a canvas that created a dialectic between surface and depth (Fer, 1997:117)'. Rather than conceiving these effects as negativity, Hesse's 'big nothing' points to something

in the work that could be described as 'a kind of blankness' (Nordon in Cooper, 1992:65). Sometimes this is a literal blankness where most of the content is emptied out to the borders or frame of the work, as if the interest were all in the support, but sometimes the effects are less clear and more complex (Fer, 1997:111).

Loosely based on a window frame motif, but, characteristically, the incident around the 'frame' frequently leaves a void, the paper is left clean or drawn or washed over (Fer, 1997:114)¹⁶⁹. In all of them, the more or less blank screens, whether then covering traces or remaining unmarked, are animated by the extraordinary activity in the border or frame. There is a sense of limbo, or of meaning about to be declared. These are not only conceptual, pictureless, pictures; their near blankness is meaningful. It is not only a kind of opacity, but a kind of 'nothing', that Hesse was striving for. A nothing that could be meaningful and could hold our interest in an artwork. Her interest in the void is connected to the sublime, conveyed as a sense of boundless space and form. Briony Fer discusses how Hesse's later 'Woodstock' drawings play on the idea of emptying out a centre:

One characteristic feature is that works in which nothing much seems to be happening still have the capacity to hold a certain type of visual, and not only conceptual, interest (Fer, 1997:115).

The merest incident on the surface is dramatised. Although blankness is primarily a two-dimensional phenomenon referring to what does not happen on a surface, it has resonances in three dimensions¹⁷⁰. 'For modernism, the void is ideal, a pure geometric form without content or reference (Cooper, 1992: 63)':

To rid the art work of what conventionally counted as visual incident had been an achievement of the early abstract painters in the first part of the 20th century and was well established as part of

¹⁶⁹ She produced them when she was too ill to make sculpture.

¹⁷⁰ Hesse referred to the void as a personal issue: 'Total Zero featured a description of a hole or void – an image bearing multiple associations, though the sexual or biologic, and the emotional or psychological are what suggest themselves here. In 1960, Hesse had recorded experiencing "A vacant, absent feeling ... A void which ...(had) to be filled. In either case it is loneliness and emptiness which I constantly feel," ... For a while this sense of emptiness, "the feeling ... that I could do and be nothing," a zero, stymied her artistically. But by the end of the decade "a really big nothing" became to find "one of the things that I so much wanted to be able to do" (Cooper, 1992:102).'

a Modernist tradition by 1960. ... To leave an area of canvas blank is far from neutral but a choice that the artist makes, just as in a painting by Mondrian the decision to make the lines stop short half a centimeter from the edge matters (Fer, 1997:117-118).

What had started as a negative strategy, to refute the presence of figuration, had, as early as the late 1910s and early 1920s, become established in the repertoire of modern art as 'pure' painting. Greenberg rationalised this as flatness, which, far from negating the principles of picture making, came to embody and assert the conventions of art (Greenberg in Harrison & Wood, 1996:758).

BUDDHISM; THE SELF

That individuals generally have images of themselves distorted by delusion comprises one of what is termed, by Buddhism, the 'three fetters' or poisons (Sangharakshita, 1998:81-82). The individual is believed to be circumscribed by the three fetters of greed, hatred and delusion, and until they manage to free themselves of these will remain attached. Buddhism regards the self as an aggregate of physical, mental and volitional factors, or *skandhas*, that comprise the individual and are dissolved at death (Parrinder, 1995:57). In Buddhism there is no such thing as the self as it is commonly understood in Western culture; it is not the body nor feelings, perceptions, habits nor consciousness, but is construed as a perpetual flux devoid of underlying nature. Therefore, in contradistinction to modernism's essentialist view of the self, the Buddhist view is one that is based on the emptiness of all things. Buddhism maintains that what is regarded as personality is no more than adopted roles; such outer factors not constituting a self, since there is none that is permanent. The individual is presumed to build a sense of self from outer identities that are shifting and without substance. By being non-attached, the individual is believed to understand the emptiness of all things. According to Buddhism, by avoiding holding onto fixed views of self and other, the individual is able to experience

each moment anew (Sangharakshita, 2000:102). As such, it is founded on a recognition of impermanence¹⁷¹.

While modernism has not declared its Judeo-Christian roots, it has adhered to its heritage of esoteric beliefs; and art is interpreted within this tradition (Apostolos-Cappadona, 1996:xiii, Meecham & Sheldon, 2000:66-70). Tàpies does not conform, drawing as he does on Buddhism by becoming 'less certain of who we are'. He disputes the intellectual basis for painting and, by extension, all human activity by doubting the nature of self.

To ascertain how Buddhism construes pictorial space as contemplative, it is necessary to examine its construction of the self in relation to Western psychological models. Examination of notions of the self in Buddhism is appropriate because it promotes a knowledge of the self to a degree unseen within modernist aesthetics (Sangharakshita, 2000:74-75). Modernism's disinterested attitude required the individual to distance themselves from the social realm (Meecham & Sheldon, 2000:12). The individual was expected to bring nothing from life to the viewing of art (Bell in Harrison & Wood, 1996:115). Tàpies' reference to his work as a 'springboard, to help us attain knowledge' challenges the type of identification with the art object proffered by modernist aesthetics (Chapter 3) (Ashton, 1995:46, Macquet, 1986:165).

Contemporary psychology proffers a view of a mature self from a secular perspective exemplified by those defined by Freud (Sarup, 1993:14). Indeed, most psychotherapeutic schools in the West hold that a mature, integrated, individual will have a strong sense of self; however this is derived from a

¹⁷¹ The sole thing on which the individual can rely according to the *Dharma* is that nothing has fixed substance. According to the Buddhist lexicon, all things are empty in the sense that assumes that nothing possesses stable, permanent intrinsic substance (Sumedho, 1991:94-99). While Buddhism stresses the impermanence of all things, that everything is in a constant state of flux and change, it also offers possibilities for the transcultural and transhistorical. Enlightened Beings in Buddhism are deemed able in their minds to move through time and place. While most individuals are unlikely to become enlightened in their lifetime this notion has academic relevance in that it reveals that the impermanence exists alongside the essential (Sangharakshita, 1990:22-26).

psychological rather than a spiritual model. For instance, psychologist Albert Maslow asserts that in order for individuals to 'realise themselves' they need to transcend self-centredness (Maslow, 1970:199). Buddhism does not feel that individuals can relinquish themselves until a strong, integrated, self has been developed. In Eastern culture, particularly Buddhism, a person of spiritual maturity finds a sense of self in order to be able to lose it, to mature beyond it. This transcendence cannot be regarded as loss, because there has been no self to lose (Sangharakshita, 1996:81). However, Buddhism states that much of what is referred to in Western culture as the self is self-centred, a diminished notion frequently caught up with weakness and the grasping of the ego (Kulananda, 2000:17). Ajahn Sumedho draws attention to Buddhism's distinction between what is commonly regarded as the self, and the ego. Buddhism argues that the ego is an illusion that individuals hold, believing it to be the self. It is a perspective that enables the individual to 'die to the self' rather than reinforce an identity that is ego bound (Sangharakshita: 1998:44). For this reason, unless individuals are enlightened they will experience themselves as separate and distinct from all else.

Buddhism proposes the existence of authentic realities that can be approximated through meditation and other spiritual practices. Borja-Villel recognises that authentic reality for Tàpies is related to the fundamental teachings of Buddhism:

To me it is very important to show that it is possible to live with suffering. In fact, this is the first of Buddhism's Four Noble Truths: Dukkha, a concept that is difficult to translate but means that life is suffering. Remember that we are born crying and that the life cycle invariably ends in death. In Pali, Dukkha also means illness, anguish, dissatisfaction, fear, pain, misery. ... Recognizing Dukkha is the first step towards alleviating it. Buddhism shows us the Eightfold Path that allows us to understand, and thereby relieve this suffering (Borja-Villel, M, 1995:9).

While meditation aids the perception of authentic reality, it is believed that only when conjoined with Buddhist ethics, concentration and wisdom that enlightenment is reached¹⁷². Without all of the above, the ordinary state of mind is clouded by a continual flow of thoughts and feelings:

¹⁷² Wisdom, understood as: *Sila*, *samadhi*, and *prajna*.

One of the most important things to help the individual approximate authentic reality is the state or attitude of the viewer. Your view of authentic reality is formed by that perspective. If you change your mind – your view of world changes (Paramananda, 1999:1-4).

The optimum pure mind is one that has been arrived at through the challenging and removal therein of the origins and bases of evil. Non-duality is an aspect of authentic reality. The *Dharma* asserts that the human relationship with the world is bound by craving or aversion¹⁷³. To escape this, non-attachment is sought¹⁷⁴. Only when non-attached, can contemplation penetrate the illusion of separation (Kamalashila, 1996:221, Loy, 1999:17ff).

The prevalent confusion of the self with outer identities, for Western people, has specific relevance for artists and is addressed by Ajahn Sumedho:

So emptiness isn't getting rid of everything; it's not total blankness, but an infinite potential for creation to arise and to pass, without your being deluded by it. The idea of me as a creator, my artistic talents, expressing myself – it's an incredible egotistic trip, isn't it? "This is what I've done, this is mine." They say, "Oh, you're very skilled, aren't you? You're a genius!" Yet so much of creative art tends to be regurgitations of people's fears and desires. It's not really creative; it's just recreating things. It's not coming from an empty mind, but from an ego, which has no real message to give other than it's full of death and selfishness. On a universal level it has no real message other than "Look at me!" as a person, as an ego. Yet the empty mind has infinite potential for creation. One doesn't think of creating things but creation can be done with no self and nobody doing it – it happens. ... All we have to do now, all that's necessary for us – conventionally speaking, as human being as people – is to let go; or not attach (Sumedho, 1991:1).

Since the Renaissance, approaches to art have been based on a Western stance of acquiring knowledge or truth through effort. Indeed, much activity in Western culture tries to reinforce a sense of ego-bound self (Sangharakshita, 1990:33ff).

This issue has also been addressed by Tàpies. He discusses how, within the West, the general view of art has been based on an assumption that the viewer will acquire from it knowledge or experience (Ashton, 1995:62). For Westerners in particular, the notion of effort and acquisition is also present in work, education and, by extension, values. The idea of striving, of accumulating education and of material enrichment, is closely linked with the idea of 'making a pact with power'

¹⁷³ *Dharma*, meaning Buddhist teachings.

¹⁷⁴ Insight meditation, *Vipassana*, uses the term non-attachment to refer to an attitude of experiencing and valuing something for its own sake (Sangharakshita, 2000:46-7).

(Tàpies in Ashton, 1995:62). Much human activity, according to Buddhism, is guided by a desire to shore up ego (Sangharakshita, 1998:188). While Christianity states that the ego could hinder God's will, the latter in Buddhism does not require the suppressing of self-delusion. The notion of loss of confidence discussed below is a major tenet of Buddhism, differing from that of Western psychotherapy:

... I don't see any kind of barrier or boundary between subjectivity and objectivity: it's impossible to say where the one begins and the other ends. There are a lot of things which we think of as representing external reality, but ultimately they are figments of our own imagination: in other words, what we see as 'objective' is merely a mental construct. Ortega y Gasset once said: 'The word "I" means 'myself and my circumstances'. But if we were to pursue these questions any further, we'd get entangled in an endless philosophical debate. I think it's extremely important for us to reconsider our stock of knowledge from time to time and to reassess the values connected with it. My wish is that we might progressively lose our confidence in what we think we believe and the things we consider stable and secure, in order to remind ourselves of the infinite number of things still waiting to be discovered (Tàpies, in Catoir, 1991: 76).

Hence, Cos de matèria can be located in discourses of Buddhism, the void, notions of the self and non-dualism. Authentic reality in Buddhism is regarded as 'seeing things as they really are', and the transcendence of dualism is something that Tàpies states is crucial to his work.

In this chapter, discussion of notions of space and the non-dual shows, as in Chapters 3 and 4, that interpretation varies according to context. There exists the possibility of accessing authentic reality through viewing such space, but there is the potential for personal projection. The notion of authentic reality discussed in this chapter has similarities to that of the Via Negativa. Both eschew the figurative, while the meditative traditions have a more evident connection to the material world. Chapter 5 finds that one version of approximating authentic reality can be regarded in the Buddhist meditative traditions, as possible through contemplation of the void. It also finds that in comparison to Untitled (1969), Cos de matèria deals, if not overtly, with the void, more obviously expressing the non-dual; while Hesse more evidently deals with opposition. It is also apparent that an overlap exists between ideas of the non-dual, polarities and opposites. This theme is expanded in the succeeding two

chapters. Like Tàpies, Hesse deals with the relationship between marks and space; the use of erasure in her work conveys materials in flux. Ideas of loss of the self are then found to approximate the tradition of the Via Negativa. The contemplation of space can aid the viewer to achieve a sense of personal unity and experience its fragile nature. Both Tàpies' and Hesse's paintings possess a sense of meaning yet to be declared. The space in these paintings, as discussed alongside the Via Negativa, also suggest the Absolute. Having discussed contemplation in modernist art, the mystical tradition and the meditative traditions, the thesis now turns to a discussion of the sublime in art; the sublime being the second major theme through which the spiritual is discussed in this thesis.

Chapter 6: The Romantic Sublime; Cos de matèria and Non-dualism

I believe that it (Romanticism) is a like a thread that links many different artistic manifestations of different civilisations. Nowadays it is very important that we remark on this. This is very much what I was explaining to Mr Murphy about a book I am just about to give to the publisher. It deals with the influence of every civilisation on our twentieth century civilisation (Tàpies Interview, 1999:217).

... if the pain or terror are so modified as not to be actually noxious; if the pain is not carried to violence, and the terror is not conversant about the present destruction of the person, as these emotions clear the parts of a troublesome encumbrance, they are capable of producing delight; not pleasure, but a sort of delightful horror; a sort of tranquillity tinged with terror (Burke in Crowther, 1993:20).

OVERVIEW

The sublime is one way by which the spiritual in art has been expressed up to the present, and has been attributed to Tàpies' Matter paintings by all his major critics (Gimferrer, 1986: 18-23). Since Romanticism, sublime experience has involved the reconciliation of paradox and dealing with the emotional tension of living in a culture founded on Cartesian dualism (Crowther, 1993:125)¹⁷⁵. Tàpies intends that the viewer might experience such reconciliation of dualism when viewing his paintings. If the sublime can be expressed in painting it may engender an emotion, the experience of transcending paradox or the non-dual (Crowther, 1993:116ff). Thus the legacy of the Romantic sublime may be found in Cos de matèria (Fig. 2) by comparing it to typical Romantic paintings such as Wanderer by Friedrich, and Be I (1970) (Fig, 14) by Barnett Newman¹⁷⁶. This chapter examines Tàpies' process of transformation that renders mundane imagery and matter sublime. In his claim for practising Romanticism, Tàpies

¹⁷⁵ Crowther asserts that in contemporary times sublime emotion is more frequently evoked through shocks provided by the media (Crowther, 1993:25).

¹⁷⁶ Like Blake and many other Romantics, Newman sought mystical inspiration in a variety of religious sources that transcended the confines of a particular sect, for the doctrine of any individual religion was too limiting for his universal ambitions. In his question for new cosmogonies, he explored not only the question of myth-making among primitive peoples and among the Greeks, but a wide range of literature from the Judaeo-Christian tradition, from the Kabbalah and the Old Testament to the story of the Passion as represented in the traditional narrative sequence of the Stations of the Cross. Within this domain of comparative religion, however, Newman always pursued the sublime and the visionary dealing with the ultimate mysteries of creation, of divinity, of death and resurrection (Hess, 1971:34-53, O'Neill, 1990:170-173,189-190).

places the self firmly at the centre of sublime experience. In this respect, Cos de matèria can be established as having historical precedents that may be addressed through discussion of Wanderer.

The romantic sublime was dependent upon a fear of negation or death. It links to Edmund Burke's concept of the sublime seeking to resolve the split between the individual and the cosmos, or God. With the challenging of traditional concepts of God, there has occurred a corresponding growth of plural notions of the spiritual and the sublime. In the latter half of the 20th century Barnett Newman has been recognised as having set a precedent in painting by expressing the sublime and the non-dual in his painting. Meanwhile, Tàpies asserts that the transcendental can be rendered immanent, hence the claim by him and his critics for a conciliation of space and matter in Cos de matèria.

THE ROMANTIC SUBLIME

The Kantian project of modernism, particularly the idea of presenting the unrepresentable, claims that the sublime depends on a sense of limitlessness as evoked by the unimaginably vast, 'the mathematical sublime', and the overwhelmingly powerful, 'the dynamic sublime' (Crowther, 1993:134ff,156). The mathematical sublime, which is of relevance to understanding Be I, is concerned with vastness; the larger the object, the more difficult it is to comprehend. Striving for comprehension is instigated by the capacity for reason. Reason is exalted by the assumption that what is beyond the reach of imagination must be a totality; hence pain gives way to pleasure. The limits of sensibility reinforce our sense of awareness of what is ultimate and infinite. The infinitely powerful and great are hard to make visible, but can be suggested or be visibly alluded to: 'Kant himself shows the way when he names "formlessness, the absence of form" as a possible index to the unrepresentable' (Crowther, 1993: 155-156).

In his dynamic version of the sublime, Kant claims that nature can evoke the awareness of a supersensible self that is ultimately sublime. Mighty and

potentially destructive phenomena are reminders of the worth of moral beings as opposed to the weakness of empirical selves. In Kant's moral reflection on the sublime, the immensity and superiority of nature arouses a feeling of physical helplessness followed by exaltation. For example, to a secure observer the vision of a boundless ocean can evoke fear, yet retain a sense of humans as being more than nature. Thus self-consciousness redeems the individual human; existential acuteness traces the interplay between an awareness of finitude and the status of a rational being:

When I endow the commonplace with august significance, everyday realities with a mysterious aspect, familiar objects with the dignity of the unknown, finite beings with a reflection of the infinite, I am practising Romanticism (Tàpies in Gimferrer, 1986:18).

Customarily, considerations of the sublime have been preoccupied with imagery, such as an imposing landscape as depicted in Wanderer, that engenders awe in the viewer. As such, the imagery of Wanderer is removed from the commonplace and the familiar of Tàpies. The Romantics too sought to imbue the commonplace and familiar with sublime attributes. The difference being that the spiritual for Tàpies resides in urban detritus, collage and mark-making (Tàpies Interview, 1995:249). Tàpies declares the quest in his work for qualities that sum up the evolution of art since the Romantic movement¹⁷⁷. The issue of the mundane and the sublime is addressed later (Chapter 7), whereas the focus here is on how matter is deployed to express an immanent version of the sublime.

Friedrich imbued nature with metaphorical meaning, expressed through symbols such as the figure facing into the canvas, the clouds, mists, and horizon. The figure is placed pivotally in the canvas with his back to the viewer and facing in the same direction, so sharing the same vista of nature and the potential beyond the horizon. In Classical painting, landscape would be treated as a background over which the human figure would take precedence. It was the human, often in

¹⁷⁷ Tàpies has broad influences in terms of Romanticism; '... more nocturnal and metaphysical Romanticism ... we have the more enlightened western mystics, such as Eckhart or Jacob Boehme; there are certain philosophers (Hegel, Nietzsche, Heidegger); and, finally, numerous oriental texts, from the *Bahagavad-Gîtâ* to Japanese or Chinese poetry of the classical age, to which I already referred in the previous chapter' (Gimferrer, 1986:35).

the heroic form of a saint or martyr, who was attributed with religious properties, such as being the possessor of Absolute or Infinite Knowledge (Beazley, 2003:56-57, Honour, 1979:80-82). Edmund Burke defined the sublime as:

... a sort of delightful horror, a sort of tranquillity tinged with terror; which, as it belongs to self-preservation, is one of the strongest of all the passions (Burke in Crowther, 1997:150).

Burke's exposition of the sublime as an emotional paradox is based on his perception of typically Romantic subject matter when industrialisation caused people to be removed from nature (Hartley, 1994:140, Rosenblum, 1975:202). In the Romantic period, nature was deemed to be the locus of all things real and connate, and a conduit to sublime experience (Hartley, 1994:140). Paradoxically, there is a sense of unease attached to experience of nature that is shared by much painting of the sublime (Hartley, 1994:18,140). Wanderer conveys tension between the figure, a solitary man on a peak, against the great disordered cosmos in which he finds himself (Hartley, 1994:140)¹⁷⁸. The figure looks out towards an unattainable horizon, seeing not only a landscape but also a projection of himself (Hartley, 1994:139). His search for inner knowledge, his hopes, dreams and subconscious are projected onto nature (Hartley, 1994: 138ff).

In the last two hundred years, from Romanticism onwards, painting has become increasingly secular; expression of the absolute being gradually replaced by relativism. The locus for potential truth or the spiritual in painting is now established in both figure and ground, particularly the latter in metaphysical painting (McEvelley, 1993:10). In the Romantic period, the absolute or universal truth, previously located in God, became plural truths as in Wanderer, truths found within nature and the individual as well as largely in the infinite beyond (Beazley, 2003:169). The kind of experience of paradox described by Burke in the opening quotation to this chapter was exacerbated by the diminishing influence of institutionalised Christianity; a threat once believed to emanate from God is now identified with nature and the unknown. As belief in God changed, a schism was perceived between the individual and the cosmos. An attempt to

¹⁷⁸ In the Romantic period, it was generally a man depicted thus.

breach the schism is portrayed in Wanderer. Thus the sublime functions in Wanderer as a means to solve the paradox between an individual who both yearns to find truth in nature, yet is awed by its mysterious and threatening properties; so that the search is directed back to within himself.

Tàpies, has sympathy with the Romantic concept that art might be a response to nature; as having the potential for obtaining purchase on that now distanced authentic reality:

I want to understand the structure of reality ... Painting is also the creation of reality. Men must be shown that it is necessary to maintain a total communion with nature, with a certain mysticism ... The artistic sentiment bears a true resemblance to the mystic sentiment. An immanent mystique, in short; or, more exactly, the art of provoking the transcendence of Immanence (Gimferrer, 1986:57).

Tàpies asserts that reality is innate and awaiting discovery, and that it can also be constructed. Indeed, by contrast with the distancing, or removal, of man from nature that has resulted from the impact of the industrial revolution, Tàpies' claims that painting can act as a way to keep in touch with nature and the 'creation of reality' (Gimferrer, 1986:57). While culture and nature have been construed as opposites reflecting the polarisation of the rational and the irrational (Chapter 4); after the Romantic period, the natural as unmediated was called into question (Rosenblum, 1975:149ff).

Pere Gimferrer makes a similar claim for Tàpies' work to that made by Robert Rosenblum, for Wanderer:

The replacement of the spirit, of the Hegelian divine principle, by the notion – which partakes of the nature of occultism and oriental philosophy – of a higher wisdom or knowledge is the basis for the conception of the work of art in Tàpies's case. The transcendence sought is stripped – and is, therefore, though only in a particular sense, 'empty' – of any connotation regarding a personal divinity, and even of any connotation of spiritualistic pantheism. Its most characteristic feature is immediacy; its mission, to reconquer the world; – ie., to put an end to the schism between contemporary man and the universe around him (Gimferrer, 1986:21).

Cos de matèria does not appear to present the schism as is manifest in Wanderer. Yet claims that self-preservation is implied by the sublime might appear overstated, when considered in relation to the body depicted in Cos de

matèria as subjected to marks, scoring and tearing¹⁷⁹. Rather than the imposing landscape of Wanderer and the uneasy experience of nature, it would appear that Cos de matèria has metaphoric meaning. We are asked to identify with this body in the same way as we are invited to identify with the individual in Wanderer, but within a mundane, secular, context Cos de matèria may express an interior search, such as that of a map of the psyche or the body. Plural truths are suggested in the infinite beyond in Cos de matèria, while the transcendence of paradox and a quest for wholeness is conveyed in a similar way to Wanderer. Cos de matèria differs visually from Wanderer, and it is not its subject matter that reflects Romanticism; rather it is the link between figure and ground in Wanderer, matter and space in Cos de matèria. In the latter, space comprises a surface figure and graffiti vying with a deeper unified space of layered paint in a manner that has historical precedents in Romanticism, as in many of Friedrich's landscape paintings (McEvilley, 1993:24, Rosenblum, 1975:129ff). To understand this point, it is pertinent to discuss the work of Barnett Newman. Like Tàpies and Fontana, Barnett Newman is preoccupied with matter and the relationship of figure to ground. He has also been acclaimed as a leading 20th century painter of the sublime.

BE I AND THE SUBLIME

Newman variously described as an exemplar of high Modernism, a practitioner of the art of the sublime, a precursor of Minimalism, an existentialist, and a spiritual artist fascinated by Jewish mysticism. ... he declared in 1947, just as he arrived at his mature style, that any art worthy of its name should address 'life', 'man', 'nature', 'death' and 'tragedy' (Burton, 2003:1).

Newman's preoccupation with the sublime can be understood through discussion of Be I (1970), a painting on display during a Barnett Newman retrospective at the Tate Modern, London in 2002. Be I is a large rectangular canvas that measures 94" by 76". Its whole expanse is evenly covered with purple-red paint,

¹⁷⁹ '... Tàpies 's art is imbued with a permanent anxiety. ... his paintings and sculptures are objects of desire that never appear to be attained. They are constantly obliterated by a variety of marks on the surface of the canvas, among them crosses, graffiti, footprints and others which reveal the flatness of the canvas and in so doing, deny the quality of objects to the elements depicted there, many of which are significantly absent. Represent absence and negating all representation keep us from obtaining our desires, which can ultimately be satisfied only on a textual level, that is, through works of art as such (Borja-Villel, 1995:20)'.

which is applied densely and opaquely in regular strokes that barely reveal brush marks. The whole is bisected vertically by a narrow white line that Newman called a 'zip' (Chapter 3), a feature that is core to Newman's *oeuvre*; 'Many of Newman's paintings feature stripes or zips which can be read as rays of light piercing through the coloured grounds' (Golding, 2000:197). Flatness symmetry and spartan format create an unusually direct perceptual experience. The zip signals the overall impact of each work:

A brilliant red painting ..., Be I ... is bisected by one razor-sharp white line and so addresses the viewer like a piercing clarion call (Turner, 1996:28).

When viewing this painting it appears to provide a sense of visual illusion to the extent of seeming to function almost as a *trompe l'oeil*. The juxtaposition of the two rectangles of paint with only a small line of white between meant that as a viewer one experienced a sense of movement from the finite painting to the zip of white and the infinite space beyond that it declares. Experience of the non-dual is given through a viewing experience that borders on a visual illusion. It is described as 'a piercing clarion call', because with this movement it appears to vibrate (Turner, 1996:28)¹⁸⁰.

The non-dual is apparent in the relationship of the two rectangles of paint with the zip that declares that while the rectangles bear great similarity they are undeniably distinct. These produce a tension within the picture plane, as well as with the field of vision beyond. Here parallels may be drawn with the slash in Untitled – Spatial (Fig. 6), by Fontana, the zip being understood as representing the human and the space as the infinite. One writer has commented that Newman's 'stripes can also be perceived as figures, ravaged by space; their tremorous, eroded edges suggest vulnerable human touches, while their

¹⁸⁰ '... the revelation of the effect of a single stripe on a coloured ground was primarily a technical and visual one With regard to Newman's Onements: ... (when he is complete ... a man is called "one" ... when he is male together with female). The sixteenth century Rabbi Isaac Luria informs us that the genetic moment corresponded with the appearance of a divine ray of light ...the fullness of divine light was Adam Kadman, the primordial man. Adam Kadman is nothing but a first configuration of the divine light which flows from the essence of the Hidden God into the primeval space of the Tsim-Tsum (the vacuum essential to the true act of creativity) – not indeed from all sides, but like a beam, in one direction only. Many of Newman's paintings feature stripes or zips which can be read as rays of light piercing through the coloured grounds (Golding, 2000:197)'.

verticality evokes man's aspirations to the sublime ...' (Sandler, 1978:190). But more than the 'slash', the zip references the human and is a visual illusion. It is vertical, as is the viewer, yet, claims are made that it could represent either the self (the viewer), or the other; it has been suggested that Newman's zip may be a reduced indication for the human figure.

Newman's preoccupation with the self as core to an experience of the sublime is well noted and expressed thus:

The terror of it was intense ... I call it terror. It's more than anxiety ... Where do I get the nerve ... What's going to happen.' For Newman, the solitary position of the artist in the studio, utterly alone, in single confrontation with himself, generated emotions that were at the core of his work. 'The self, terrible and constant, is for me the subject matter of painting', he wrote (Rosenberg, 1978:7) (Burton, 2003:1)¹⁸¹.

Newman also stated: 'I hope that my painting has the impact of giving someone as it did me, the feeling of his own totality, of his own separateness, of his own individuality' (Burton, 2003:2). Newman's *oeuvre* has a number of philosophical associations and his views on the sublime in a number of epigrammatic writings have been recorded both by himself and his critics (Crowther, 1997:149ff, McEvilley, 1996:72-74)¹⁸². The dualities of these texts juxtapose life and death, order and chaos, man and nature. John Golding claims that in Newman's painting:

.... man's attempt to transcend his human limitations and hence his desire to act in a God-like way. ... (he) unites the dual principles of ... the human struggle towards an unattainable perfectibility and the abstract perfection, in Newman's case, of some unspecified divinity. (Golding, 2000:204-208).

The unpresentable (Chapter 1) as applied to God and religious truths assumes separation from the material, and so is portrayed 'absence'. Thus the washes of colour in metaphysical painting, such as Be I, allude to the transcendent as a separate realm. According to John Golding: 'In a very real sense Newman's

¹⁸¹ He remarks on the fact, deliberately ignored by the Surrealists, that so-called primitive art is often highly abstract in appearance, and he suggests that all its products are the result of terror of different forces. 'Modern man living in times of the greatest terror the world has known ... is his own terror' (Golding, 2000: 154).

¹⁸² '... Newman destroyed most of his basically realistic initial output and stopped painting by about 1939-40. He explained that the world historical crisis had rendered traditional subject-matter and styles invalid, necessitating the search for a new, awesome content appropriate to the moment. ... (He spoke of) the irrelevance of beauty in times of terror. Instead, he resurrected the venerable concept of the Sublime for a metaphysical "art which through symbols will catch the basic truth of life which is its sense of tragedy", ('The Plasmic Image', unpublished essay, c. 1943-5 (Anfam in Turner, 1996:27)).

'tabula rasa' was his absolute. The great European abstractionists had been imbued with the sense of art as the greater-than-the self, ...' (Golding, 2000: 194). Be I exemplifies the pursuit of the sublime in painting. It comprises a field of colour that while bounded by the size of its canvas, alludes to infinity:

... the sublime is to be found in an object even devoid of form, so far as it immediately involves, or else by its presence provokes a representation of limitlessness, yet with a super-added thought of its totality (Kant cited in Crowther, 1997:150).

Here, again, is Kant's concept, 'presenting the unrepresentable', where the 'unrepresentable' is to be understood as the sublime (Crowther, 1993:156). For Apollinaire 'it is space itself, the dimension of the infinite' (Henderson in Tuchman, 1981:220)¹⁸³. According to Bell, a leading proponent of the new formalism, the starting-point for all systems of aesthetics must be the personal experience of a peculiar emotion; objects that provoke this emotion are called works of art (Bell, 1949:6). For Newman, 'scale equals feeling' (Turner, 1996:27). Newman requested that visitors to his 1950 exhibition stand up close to the works, despite the paintings' imposing scale which would normally elicit a distanced viewing posture. At that proximity one would experience the painting as a surround – the viewer would feel enveloped by its colour field. It is reported that Newman himself visualised the wrap as curving away from him, as a convex wrapping back around the wall (Turner, 1996:27).

Wilhelm Worringer, proposed that hostile external circumstances, unlike the suggested benign Mediterranean world responsible for Greek Classicism, foster abstract, yet still highly emotive, visual forms (Anfam in Turner, 1996:27). In assessing the connection of Be I to the non-dual, differing responses convey both the relative and the absolute. Historically the One had been regarded as infinite; it rendered void all finite notions such as the self, interaction among

¹⁸³ Goethe claimed that when the viewer sees an unbroken expanse of a single colour, it awakens awareness of universality; has a 'tonic effect' on the mind and tends to harmonise the individual beholder with the basic unity of things (McEvilley, 1993: 49). Maurice Maeterlinck stated; "the Infinite refuses to be expressed in terms of the finite", and this dictum has been the case throughout much of modernism's history (Maeterlinck cited in Henderson in Tuchman, 1981: 219). The infinite is determined as that without boundary or limit or end. Early in Greek thought Anaximander (610-547 B.C.) conceived of the source of existence as *Apeiron* or the boundless, indeterminate and infinite from which all determinate being comes and into which it goes. In Plato, the forms together with the absolute God have the infinity of completeness and perfection forming a unity, a 'ground of being' (Tarnas, 1991:6-12).

selves or the existence of a material, social realm (Crowther, 1993:47). For Kant, such divinity is not transcendent, there being no transcendence. Thus Hegel's God could only be but a figure of speech, the immanent absolute risen to self-consciousness in a world which it posited (Knox, 1975:520-521). This debate leads to theories of non-dualism that see unity beyond both relative and absolute ideas. Hegel stressed the Absolute as 'beyond the world of our experience', suggesting a limit for the application of philosophy to art (Reese, 1996:290-291). To understand this point we should now briefly consider ideas of 'the one and the many'¹⁸⁴.

THE ONE AND THE MANY

The importance of the dissolution of figure into ground to achieve the sublime involves the philosophical notion of the 'one and the many' and its import concerning the non-dual (McEvilley, 1993:29, 1996:45-46)¹⁸⁵. The theme of the one and the many in art is not evident within a movement, but is represented by concerns with the relationship of fragments to the whole, as reflected in a struggle since Romanticism between the artist and the absolute (McEvilley, 1993:10-12)¹⁸⁶. Here, art urges an end to the schism between man and cosmos. The confrontation between an individual and the sublime, or infinite, was the

¹⁸⁴ The one-and-many refers to the question of whether all things are one or many. Greek metaphysics revolved around this problem. According to both Plato and Aristotle this was the central question for Pre-Socratic philosophers. The monists ascribe to the one the idea that all things have a single nature. The pluralists distinguished many principles, or many types of principles, though they maintain the unity of each principle. In the modern period the dispute between monists and pluralists centred on the question of whether mind and matter constitute one or two substances, and, if one, what its nature consists of (Reese, 1996:534).

¹⁸⁵ The One and the Many can be seen in art that deals with the relationship of parts or fragments to their whole. Synecdoche is a translation of metaphor where a part is regarded as standing for the whole or a whole for the part, the real to the ideal and actuality to possibility. Golding claims that Newman's paintings express this relationship:

'... mans attempt to transcend his human limitations and hence his desire to act in a God-like way. ... (he) unites the dual principles of ... the human struggle towards an unattainable perfectibility and the abstract perfection, in Newman's case, of some unspecified divinity (Golding, 2000:204-8)'.

Likewise, Paul Crowther claims that dualism is intrinsic to the reciprocal relationship between figure and ground (Crowther, 1997:4). Indeed, Newman argued for the reality of the forms he uses:

'...a shape was a living thing, a vehicle for an abstract thought-complex, a carrier of the awesome feelings (they) felt before the terror of the unknowable. The abstract shape was, therefore, real rather than a formal 'abstraction' of a visual fact ... (Newman in Chave, 1989: 103)'.

¹⁸⁶ The Romanian artist, Paul Neagu dealt explicitly with this issue in his works 'Anthropocosmos' (Sarah Kent (ed.) (1979) Paul Neagu's Sculpture, ICA, London, July-August. See also; Anastasia (1975-1976) in Matei Stircea-Craciun (2003) Paul Neagu – Catalytic Stations – a Study in Hylefic Symbolism, Sorin Dimitrescu, Romania.

climax of the Romantic heroic adventure, a glorious transfiguration into something greater. However, transfiguration could signal annihilation. As the figure shrinks on the canvas of Romantic painting, the surrounding universe reveals a Hegelian dread of culture as it dissolves into the irrational of nature (McEvelley, 1996:48). This coincided with the waning of Christianity, where the One Absolute Truth was subsumed to the many. Plural spiritual truths or knowledge replaced the monolithic universal truth (Cheetham, 1993:1-7, McEvelley, 1993:29,45-46)¹⁸⁷. In European art, the problem of the one and the many has resided primarily in the relationship between figure and ground in painting. The one has been characterised as sublime, and the many as the beautiful; whereas in Romantic discourse, the Sublime, the Infinite and the Absolute are loosely synonymous (McEvelley, 1993:11-12)¹⁸⁸. Tàpies can be located alongside artists of his time whose preoccupation with the one and many focused on ending the schism between individual and cosmos (Chapter 1). However the dissolution of figure into ground, or the inversion of figure and ground, does not apply in Cos de matèria. There is no inversion of the figure, yet the body is not conveyed conventionally.

Experience of the non-dual in Newman's work differs from that of Tàpies. While the viewer of Be I is transported beyond the picture frame, the viewers of Cos de matèria have their gaze returned resolutely to the image. This occurs because there is no sense of movement, nor is there illusion. It also happens because of the material qualities of the work. It has been claimed that Newman's painting enables the viewer to connect both with the self and the other (Golding, 2000:197ff). The relationship of figure to ground in Cos de matèria alludes to the non-dual, but this connectedness could be said of all paintings where there is a

¹⁸⁷ McEvelley refers to the effects of Buddhism on the 'monochrome' and 'metaphysical painters; Ad Reinhardt (1913-1967), Yves Klein (1928-1962) and Mark Rothko (1903-1970).

¹⁸⁸ Burke distinguished the sublime from the beautiful and included infinity in his catalogue of the sources of sublime passion "Infinity has a tendency to fill the mind with that sort of delightful horror which is the most genuine effect and truest test of the sublime. The fourth dimension through its connection to infinity became a 20th century code name for the sublime (Henderson in Tuchman, 1981: 221). Distinction is made by Burke, Kant and others between the beautiful and the sublime. ... beauty is not a necessary condition of art. According to Burke ... beauty and sublimity would be alternative qualities to which an artist might aspire, and a good work of art might be sublime without being beautiful (Hanfling, 1992: 50-53).

play between figure and ground. Distinctively however, in Cos de matèria they are physically connected. The differing levels confuse the viewer's sense of how foreground and background space can be differentiated, while lines and marks cut into the surface of the painting refuse distinction between established ideas of foreground and background space.

Further, Cos de matèria addresses the self and the non-dual, and the idea of contemplation (Chapter 3) as 'submission to a spiritual object that draws our attention to the assumption in Western thought of self and world as distinct' (Tarnas, 1991:44).

What is significant about spiritual movements such as theosophy (and the sway that they held over many modern artists) is that they were usually at odds with broader scientific trends in modern thinking. For example, mystics tended to renounce the subject-object division that distinguished between the thinker and the thought. They saw the philosophical fiction of the mind-body dualism as a damaging one which prevents the mind from recognising its essential 'oneness' with the world. Theosophists rejuvenated an age-old belief in the visibility of spiritual states. Theosophy is a doctrine of togetherness rather than of unitary selfhood; the 'higher self' or *atman* is collective rather than personal, and this sits uncomfortably with the ideas of individuality we outlined above ... (Meecham & Sheldon, 2000:68).

Comprehension of the sublime, then, entails a desire to overcome the distancing paradox of subject and object, and the need for a coherent self in relation to inherently changing nature. The modern sense of self as possessing individual identity, coherent and unified, has given way in postmodern times to a self devoid of 'essential substance' (Sarup, 1993:13). The body in Cos de matèria, if expressing the self, conveys a non-dual version of the sublime. The painting does not inspire awe or the delightful horror or pain of the sublime, but deals with the self and the non-dual in its correspondence between space and matter (Crowther, 1993:117). The conciliation of space and matter in Cos de matèria negates a split between the individual and the cosmos, and the painting disrupts transcendental modernism. Unlike archetypal transcendent notions of the sublime, Cos de matèria appears at once to be both mundane and immanent. Here the viewer is presented with signs of the self that, while not wholly unified, have more substance than the 'decentred self' of deconstructive postmodern discourses (Sarup, 1993:10-14). Barnett Newman, Lucio Fontana and Antoni

Tàpies address the limitations of transcendental modernism, both Fontana and Tàpies using matter for the purpose. All three have voiced their problems with a transcendent notion of the spiritual, as reinforcing the hegemony of Christianity and Cartesian dualism. They also criticise the spiritual as being derived from formalism, which they see as an outmoded notion of modernism. Of the three, Tàpies has been most vocal (Ashton, 1995:29-30):

For centuries now we have been inculcated with the idea of a "creator" who is separate from his "creatures", just as we have been taught that there is an I that is separate from the universe ... This has had a tremendous impact on our psyches, fostering feeling of antagonism, hostility and a desire to conquer Nature that are exactly the opposite of the feelings of identification and "collaboration" with Nature that are so much a part of the Oriental thought (Tàpies in Ashton, 1995:61).

The above quotation offers insight into Tàpies's theoretical interests that are not obviously expressed in his work. Also, despite Tàpies' stated interest in collaboration with nature, his *oeuvre* concerns urban imagery. In his writings he makes clear that he employs nature as symbolic of phenomena that disrupt the order, control and dualism associated with the urban.

Critics differ concerning Tàpies' specific deployment of matter. Most link his use of matter to an expression of an immanent concept of the spiritual. Some discuss matter as self-evident, while others regard it as a 'vehicle of transcendency' (Ashton, 1995:41,48, Gimferrer, 1986:24). The painting's strong physical character has suggested notions of human presence and the threat to self-preservation implicit in the sublime¹⁸⁹. Tàpies himself refers to 'primacy of surface', deliberately emphasising paint, matter, materials, process and bodily

¹⁸⁹ 'The abstract style that appeared to be the most vital international movement of the 1950s had by the end of the decade become formulaic and cliché-ridden. ... Its meaning, ... was enlarged by the development of a vocabulary of images that was tied to both the everyday world and the spiritual realms. ... Tàpies's work gave new attention to a human presence and included clear references to the world of everyday objects, both of which contrasted vividly with the relatively barren, gray, textured surfaces of his earlier paintings. ... In the United States there was assemblage and neo-Dada, which utilized common materials and imagery. The early work of Robert Rauschenberg and Jim Dine, for example, bears some resemblance to aestheticised treatment of mundane objects. ... In France artists such as Daniel Spoerri and Yves Klein of the Nouveau Réalisme group were similarly concerned with incorporating the everyday world and the human figure into their work, yet with different emphases. Later in Vienna, Arnulf Rainer imposed the human figure on an abstract vocabulary, and in Germany, Georg Baselitz reinterpreted the figure in a new expressionist idiom. By the late 1960s and early 1970s Arte Povera artists in Italy were employing "poor" materials in a variation of the language investigated by Tàpies, who incorporated straw, string, wire, gauze, and burlap (Wye, 1995:12-13)'.

presence (Ashton, 1995:23)¹⁹⁰. The qualities of materials are accentuated to provide haptic value rather than the expression of ideas or to signify meanings: 'I have chosen materials that are already expressive and used them in a way that capitalises on their inherent qualities' (Tàpies Interview, 1995:247)¹⁹¹. Jean-Paul Sartre distinguished the *en soi* from the *pour-soi*, 'the art object's very physical presence has a sense of being a "thing in itself"' (Reese, 1996:678)¹⁹². When Tàpies applies thick matter to the surface of Cos de matèria and leaves it to wrinkle, he does so with literal and metaphoric intent, to depict skin¹⁹³.

Ernst Cassirer held that metaphor, which is an essential part of religion and art, relies on a multiplicity of meanings (Reese, 1996:475-476). Whereas Bergson, by dividing types of expression into the intellectual and the intuitive suggests that the intellect requires literalness of expression. He adds that the natural language of intuition is metaphorical, a position backed up by theorists of aesthetic emotion such as Harold Osborne (Osborne, 1968:101). Metaphor can be discussed in four main ways, according to I. A. Richards, who proposed a theory of metaphor based on interacting contexts in which every metaphor has two parts; the tenor, or underlying ideas, and the vehicle, the idea under whose sign the first idea is apprehended. The vehicle is understood through the tenor; although there is dissimilarity, creating tension and interaction between the two (Reese, 1996:476).

¹⁹⁰ "Life" for Tàpies is constituted primarily by its materiality, by its essential 'poverty' and "thingness". But this is not materialism; this rendering of brute matter points to something hidden behind, something concealed. ... Tàpies is unashamedly mystical in intent but this mysticism does not aim at some abstract pure idea but rather at revealing how physical reality has hidden at its core another dimension (Morley, 1992:9-11)'.

¹⁹¹ Matter in contemporary times has generally been associated with the mundane, this has not always been the case. Aristotle claimed that prime matter is here a principle of indeterminacy awaiting determination, a passive potential capable of becoming all things. The modern doctrine of matter as extended and observable was finally introduced in the writings of Telesio (1509-1588) (Reese, 1996:461).

¹⁹² Sartre denied the existence of the transcendental; his anti-spiritual existentialism was developed by Maurice Merleau-Ponty, whose theories are connected below to non-dual experience in viewing art.

¹⁹³ Kurt Schwitters' (1887-1948) work is comparable; he and his fellow Dadaists introduced mundane objects into art. The literal intent of Tàpies's use of paint is, in turn, comparable to Schwitters' Merzbilden (1919 onwards), a body of work in which Schwitters applies everyday items, *Objets trouvés*, to surfaces, and sometimes paints on top of them. Thus, newspaper clippings and paint enter the same world, as art, while evoking associations primarily through their intrinsic qualities (Humphreys, 1986:13).

Pere Gimferrer alleges that the immanence of Tàpies' visual language derives from his bringing together of form and content (Gimferrer, 1986:19). After the 1950s, instead of illustrating themes he incarnated them. Tàpies' critics are united in stating that the force of his work derives from its material substance. Tàpies' process of transformation that renders ordinary imagery and matter sublime has been examined in this chapter and has shown that Tàpies can be located in the history of Romanticism due to his aspirations for art as well as for his achievements in the Matter paintings (Fig. 3 & 4). In his claim for practising Romanticism, Tàpies places the self firmly at the centre of sublime experience; and in this respect Cos de matèria is placed strongly within historical precedents and issues that can be addressed through discussion of Wanderer (Fig. 9).

In conclusion, Tàpies is located in the history of Romanticism due to his aspirations for art as well as his achievements in the Matter paintings. The sublime in Cos de matèria is evident in the conciliation of figure and ground that echoes the struggle to end the schism between the individual and the cosmos, as exemplified by Wanderer and Be I. It would be possible to state that the non-dual has been located in Cos de matèria in the conciliation of form and content, in as much as it represents the relationship of self and other (Chapters 3-5). The deployment of figure and ground in Cos de matèria is shown to have philosophical connections arising from the waning of religion. The philosophical background to non-dualism was examined in order to distinguish between the deployment of matter and immanent ideas of the spiritual. The application of theories of non-dualism identified a correlation between a viewer's emotion and the relationship of the body to the work of art. It was found that the deployment of matter can be distinguished when it is used for its innate qualities, as metaphor, for existential weight. It was evident that the sublime carries specific emotional weight that varies from an experience of paradox. The sublime in Cos de matèria, Be I, and Wanderer bears similarities in that all three deal with the proximate and the distant. This chapter located Tàpies' painting further in the tradition of the non-dual, particularly in the overcoming of subject and object

dualism. Chapter 7 develops the discussion of Romanticism and the sublime by considering notions of the body and the artists' process.

Chapter 7: Sublime Process; the Artists' Body.

In relation to the presence of the body in my work, I would say that, when I was young, I made use of it in a sort of pagan way, understanding it as linked to the material nature of our world. But, as I said before, I do not tend to separate the material from the spiritual. Therefore, the body, to me, is actually part of the ultimate cosmic energies. Divine energies, if you like, for those who believe in God. At the same time, this energy has become corporeal, become incarnated as something as material as our human body. I believe that it is good for people to meditate on this idea. We tend to understand the human body in a contemptuous way. Even sex is seen as something exclusively material and profane. This is specially evident in Spain due to a religious conservative way of thinking and interpreting reality. But, I firmly believe that this spirit, this mystery, as I like calling it, as we do not know how to classify it, exists everywhere. For example, even this glass is part of this divine spirit. And, if people were aware of the fact that the transcendental is in every single thing of this world, we would respect things much more and we would improve our relationships with each other (Tàpies Interview, 1999:226).

... Tàpies has succeeded in overcoming the false division of the world and life into two separate parts, one material and the other spiritual (Borja-Villel, 1995:19).

OVERVIEW

While dualism has led to a privileging of the mind over the body, Tàpies locates the transcendental 'in every single thing of this world'. For him, the body and the art process are deployed either to reinforce or to disrupt dualism. Notions of paradox and dualism are linked directly to the sublime. The manner in which corporeality is expressed through Cos de matèria (Fig. 2) reveals a shift in discourse in both modernity and postmodernity. The body in the painting can be seen in terms of social theory and the history of art, including the history of artists' use of the nude, process and the existential sublime. To assess the contemporaneity of Tàpies' expression of the body and method, and to contrast their specific expressions of the sublime, Tàpies' work can be compared to Rhythm O, (Fig. 15) a 1974 performance by Marina Abramovic that conciliates body and process and bears comparison with Cos de matèria (Fig. 2). The existential embeds the sublime within the immanent, and Tàpies' painting can be compared further to the work of the Abstract Expressionist painters, Mark Rothko and Jackson Pollock. These two artists approached painting, in terms of the relationship of their body to the canvas in organic abstraction, from opposite directions. While opinion is divided over the extent to which the body can be expressed in painting, Rothko and Pollock exemplify the extremes of Abstract Expressionist methods. Such a comparison enables an assessment of the

degree to which dualism is confronted in Tàpies' process and how this references the sublime.

THE EXISTENTIAL SUBLIME

In his late 18th century version of the sublime, Burke claimed that perception of the sublime may arise through the direct influence of objects or by the rational experiencing of objects conveying pain and danger but mediated by reason (Crowther, 1993:118)¹⁹⁴:

Anything which can cause Terror or the like is a potential source of sublime passion. ... This passion arises when the Terrible things which excite ideas of pain or danger in us are moderated, or beheld at a distance. In such cases, our state of terror is likewise moderated, and becomes, thereby, delightful (Crowther, 1993:117).

Burke's physiological sublime assumes a self-preservation instinct (Crowther, 1993:117). Human beings desire mental and physical stimulation, and moderated terror diminishes the boredom of inactivity. Moments of lived experience are 'subtended by the threat and ultimate eventuality of death' (Crowther, 1993:127). The kinds of activities traditionally associated with the sublime in the 18th and 19th centuries involved travel, work, or participation in collective rites of religion; encounters with the sublime, therefore, took on a privileged character. Two aspects of Paul Crowther's interpretation of the existential sublime are relevant; the contemplation of negation and the transcendence of paradox (Crowther, 1993:127-133). Drawing from Burke, Kant and Lyotard, Crowther states that the sublime is concerned with the experience of shock that disrupts the monotony of contemporary society (Crowther, 1993: 15-21). Crowther states that behind any depiction of existence there lies negation: some actual or represented negation of life will disrupt the normal monotonous tenor of our existence and make the present moment all the more conscious (Crowther, 1993:126-7). In the art of the postmodern era, the viewer is frequently invited to enjoy negation as a spectacle for contemplation (Crowther, 1993:127-128):

¹⁹⁴ '... pain or terror as long as they do not constitute a real threat to us, can be objects of aesthetic pleasure (Crowther, 1993:118-120)'.

... sublimity can contribute significantly to that enjoyed fullness of existence which is the goal of any civilized society. ... in order to cope with the complex problems of finite embodied existence, it is necessary, at some point, to look the negation of life, as it were, squarely in the face ... (Crowther, 1993:130)¹⁹⁵.

Generally averse to monotony, humans prefer complex and unusual stimuli alongside the comforting security of the familiar¹⁹⁶. Crowther further links the sublime to knowledge of mortality, giving recognition to the 'negation of life', from decay and impermanence to death¹⁹⁷. The contemporary sublime offers us the kind of jolts or shocks, particularly through the mass-media or sensational encounters which traditionally had to be 'more actively or more discriminatingly sought out' (Crowther, 1993:131)¹⁹⁸. Comparison with another artist for whom the body and process are irrevocably linked will help assess the place of Cos de matèria in contemporary art and its relationship to the sublime.

THE BODY

Marina Abramovic is a performance artist who experiences physical pain in order to explore the overlap and disjuncture between the body and the self:

¹⁹⁵ Crowther believes that life is more vividly and consciously lived in the knowledge of its impermanence (Crowther, 1993:130).

¹⁹⁶ Crowther maintains that, in state-capitalist societies, the monotony of work processes and the urban domestic environment is extreme. Societies founded on the division of labour mean that the individual's very sense of being alive is threatened. The means of compensation are stimuli and surprise provided by cultural outlets that rejuvenate a sense of life (Crowther, 1993:122ff). This would explain why the contemporary individual whose life is mired in monotony and powerlessness seeks frisson from newspapers and television. Paul Crowther's hypothesis of paradox in the existential sublime is relevant to the monotony of many jobs, commuting, social isolation and alienation in a technological society (Crowther, 1993:9ff). Alienation from the work place is relieved by soap operas, film and other visual arts. For Crowther, the most distasteful extreme of these phenomena is a prurient interest in, for instance, accidents and crimes of violence, and he regards postmodern society as characterised by endings and fragmentation on social, political, cultural and personal levels (Crowther, 1993:9ff). Lack of continuity obliges individuals to face negation to an unprecedented degree, having been left without a hegemonic religious framework.

¹⁹⁷ 'Life and death are very important topics for humankind. We should analyse them and try to unify these apparent opposite elements with everything we said before. I wish we were able to have such a clear mind that we would not be able to differentiate between life and death. But, anyway, this is very complicated, very difficult to talk about (Tàpies Interview, 1999:237)'.

¹⁹⁸ Burke's existential sublime requires an attraction to events to be enjoyed at the expense of those who are adversely affected by them. Crowther debates whether the existential sublime is reprehensible, claiming 'its cumulative empirical effects will tend to morally de-sensitise the observer, or at least help create an adverse societal climate' (Crowther, 1993:129). Thus repeated art that shocks also de-sensitises, so demanding its increase over time in order to achieve similar effects. However, Lyotard claims that the sublime exists without moral question: The admixture of fear and exaltation that constitutes sublime feeling is insoluble, irreducible to moral feeling (Lyotard, 1994:127). He claims that to do justice to the limits of thought, and to bring thought to its limits, sublime feeling must remain irresolvable.

In 1974, in Rhythm O, she permitted a roomful of spectators in a Naples gallery to abuse her at their will for six hours, using instruments of pain and pleasure that had been placed on a table for their convenience. By the third hour, her clothes had been cut from her body with razor blades, her skin slashed; a loaded gun held to her head finally caused a fight between her tormentors, bringing the proceeding to an unnerving halt. This passive aggression between individuals she continued to explore in later works executed with the artist Ulay, who became her collaborator in 1975. Together they explored the pain and endurance of relationships, between themselves, and between themselves and the public (Goldberg, 1990:165).

Goldberg describes how Viennese Actionism, in the form of Ancient Dionysian and Christian rites in a modern context, convey ritualised pain and abuse, illustrating Aristotle's notion of catharsis through fear, terror and compassion. Indeed, these form a background to the performances of Marina Abramovic, so her performances represent a re-enactment of a type of ritual (Goldberg, 1990:163-165). Abramovic claims:

I was never interested in shocking. What I was interested in was experiencing the physical and mental limits of the human body and mind. ... We in the Western society are so afraid. Performance was the form enabling me to jump to that other space and dimension (Abramovic in Pejic, 1993:29).

Abramovic pushes endurance to its limits in a situation of threat, and it is in transcending this threat that the sublime 'other space or dimension' is expressed. The work has religious, particularly Christian symbolism; Rhythm O expresses purification and redemption through suffering. Regarded as an extension of action painting, this work's derivation from Viennese actionism suggests action being understood as dramatic self-expression. Thus a stance is adopted, 'the intensity of which was reminiscent of the Viennese Expressionist painters of fifty years earlier' (Goldberg, 1990:164)¹⁹⁹. Abramovic addresses materiality and corporeality, yet with religious and sublime references. She draws on religious ritual where, through extreme pain, the body is transcended. Thus the artist is associated with the sublime through endurance and struggle, and this relates to the mutilation of the body in Cos de matèria. The importance of the body for contemporary art can be understood through examining discourses of the body.

¹⁹⁹ Viennese Expressionist painters included Egon Schiele (1890-1918) and Oskar Kokoschka (1886-1980).

PROCESS

Society's perception of the human body has been called into question over the last thirty years by new technologies (Featherstone et al, 1991:94)²⁰⁰. From the 1960s to 1980s, Performance and Live Art has grown, thus prioritising the body in art practice (Meecham & Sheldon, 2000:68ff)²⁰¹. Technology has ever militated against labour, while advancing social benefits in such areas as health and the extension of human life (Crowther, 1993:12-13). Technology has also been embraced by artists, at times replacing traditional manual skills. For this reason, painting, with its emphasis on individual human labour and craft, has been construed by some as retrogressive (Taylor, 1995:43ff). Now, the traditional use of the body in art is challenged, as are prior ideas about the relationship between artist and viewer (Taylor, 1995:158-161). The idea of the artist is now that of the author of a decentred text, to which viewers bring their own experience (Barthes, 1977:142ff). Phenomenology has introduced 'embodied seeing', as opposed to the previous perception of an art independent of context. Such a claim is made by Franzke for Tàpies' work:

... they trigger a physical reaction on the part of the viewer. One finds oneself physically identifying, as it were, with the physical body of the work, which is there to be touched, grasped (Franzke, 1992:10).

²⁰⁰ Conceptions of the body have changed with the gathering momentum of postmodernity. Historically, the body had been construed as the site of all that is sacred, natural, innate and real. However, changing attitudes and conceptions no longer regard the body as politically neutral. Rather it is the locus of debate around race, gender, class and other social and historical discourses (Mellor & Shilling, 1997:16, Turner, 1996:2ff). Chris Shilling, Anthony Giddens, Anthony Synott and others have argued that 'in contemporary societies the project of the self, as the principal legacy of individualism has been converted into the project of the body' as locus of societal change. Indeed, Bryan Turner declares the body to be the axis of sociological analysis (Turner, 1996:20ff). Meanwhile, Rowan Williams argues that systems of bodily convention are the substance of a culture, so that loss of shared language, bodily and other, means 'I have no reality as a subject that is not also a reality for and in another subject' (Williams, 2000:166): ... the body as a site for the will to impose what may be varied and transitory meanings takes over from the body as speaking a recognisable language (Williams, 2000:167). This connection of the body to language and meaning is echoed by Mark Johnson:

... (it) is not just that sensory impressions provide raw data necessary for thought and knowledge, which empiricists of all stripes would say. His central claim is that bodily states, processes, and perceptions continually supply the tacit basis for abstract mental operations and for the very meaningfulness of concepts and propositions (Johnson in Burch Brown, 1989:96).

Furthermore, in an increasingly secular society, Mellor and Shilling place the relationship between embodiment and the sacred at the crux of social theory (Mellor & Shilling, 1997:1ff).

²⁰¹ Avantgarde art is arguably now dominated by digital technology.

Accompanying all this is one's largely unconscious and global 'proprioceptive' sense of the overall coherence and felt unity of the body itself; of the togetherness of its parts, and of their belonging with and to oneself (Brown, 1989:94).

With its evident signs of fabrication and strongly worked surface, Cos de matèria conveys the embodied artist. The body is discerned by analogy, in urban and natural references. 'My aim is to invoke man indirectly through impressions or parts of the human body, (Tàpies in Ashton, 1985:77)':

Some of his most potent subjects surround the human presence In the Matter paintings ..., human references occur even among the seemingly inexplicable traces that give those paintings their enigmatic aura. ... they appear to be in a process of either becoming or disintegrating, a constant state of evolution is also conveyed. ... but instead emphasises the unpleasant aspects of physicality – its potential awkwardness or the unattractiveness of bodily function (Wye, 1991:35).

"Body parts" is the appropriate term for Tàpies's human fragments since it communicates their unidealised quality. He does not view the body as an expression of archetypal beauty or a standard of perfection Tàpies's pictorial world declares the inescapability of one's body, (Wye, 1991: 34-35).

To reiterate a point made earlier, the body in Cos de matèria, while not depicted realistically, is recognisably human yet without specific identity. While a concern with human presence had been topical with fellow artists, Tàpies possessed his own lexicon of imagery that conveyed human presence through religious and spiritual symbolism, and through political and social iconography. Understanding of ideas of the body and the sublime in Tàpies' work can be developed by the examination of his process.

PROCESS; ANTONI TÀPIES

In Selected Essays (1986), as well as a number of articles, Tàpies explains his ideas about art practice and reflects on the role of the artist in society:

Later came my "time of solitude", "And in my tiny bedroom-studio began those forty days in the desert that I am not sure have come to an end. With a desperate and feverish zeal I took formal experimentation to maniacal heights. Each canvas was a battlefield on which the wounds were to multiply over and over again, to infinity. All that frenetic movement, all that gesticulation, all the unending dynamism of those gashes, blows, scars, divisions and sub-divisions that I inflicted on every millimetre, on every hundredth of a millimetre of matter, suddenly took a qualitative lead. The eye could no longer perceive the differences. Everything came together in a uniform mass. What had been burning ebullition transformed itself on its own into static silence. It was like a great lesson in humility visited upon unbridled pride. ... And one day I tried to arrive at silence directly, more resignedly, offering myself up to the fate that governs all profound struggle. Those millions of furious clawings were transformed into millions of grains of dust, of sand ... A whole new landscape, as in the story of one who goes through the looking glass, opened before me as

if to communicate the most secret innerness of things. A whole new geography illumined me from surprise to surprise. A suggestion of rare combinations and molecular structures, of atomic phenomena from the world of the galaxies, or from microscopic images. The symbolism of dust – “to become one with dust, this is the deep identity, that is to say, the internal depth between man and nature” (Tao te King) – and of ash, of the earth whence we come and to which we return, of the solidarity that is born on realizing that the differences between us are not greater than those that exist between one grain of sand and another ... And the most sensational surprise was to discover one day, suddenly, that my paintings, for the first time in history, had turned into walls (Ashton, 1995:46-47).

Two main areas for discussion arise from this statement. First, the language is heroic; Tàpies describes his processes in physical terms, with phrases such as ‘battlefield wounds, blows, scars, gashes’. He draws on Romantic notions of the nobility of struggle, of progress arising from pushing oneself to the limit. This would appear to mark Tàpies out as modernist, through the idea of the work of the artist as laborious and involving emotional struggle. The expectation of progress and the putative agency of the artist are also modernist. Then there is his epic claim for his paintings becoming walls ‘for the first time in history’.

Secondly, Tàpies’ description of struggle is couched in religious terms; his words recall Jesus’ struggle to overcome temptation for forty days and nights in the wilderness. Hyperbolic terms, such as ‘desperate, feverish and maniacal’ suggest religious states of frenzy and ecstasy. The spiritual is addressed as the ‘innerness of things’ and ‘the symbolism of dust ... internal depth’. Further, these terms have their roots in the history of labour. The view of artist as artisan derives from the word, ‘ars’, and lasted from the Middle Ages through to the 18th century. Since then, artists have been regarded as distinct from manual workers and as possessing higher status²⁰². Plato had defined art as the act of making, controlled by ‘the movement “down” from theory to practice in contrast to the upward movement toward theory’ (Reese, 1996:43). Cartesian culture likewise considered the intellectual domain as representing superior value by comparison with physical work, labour being seen as a contaminant. With the rise of technology and waning of traditional manual trades further hierarchical distinction

²⁰² In Kantian Idealism, the body and the material world are seen as lesser than the intellect or the spiritual, hence manual work is seen as having ‘inferior’ value next to academic or intellectual pursuits (Turner, 1983:1).

between types of work was reinforced in the 20th century. Paul Crowther connects labour with the sublime:

One can find traces of the existential sublime in any society where the arduousness and monotony of labour is relieved by such things as, say, suspense-filled tales of battles and heroic deeds ... (Crowther, 1993:127).

Tàpies balances spontaneity with control, stating: 'I'm always experimenting with new ideas and techniques. I'm always trying to surprise myself' (Wye, 1991:15). While many artists may say they do this, the point here is that in the case of Tàpies we can see that he sets up his method to ensure that it is a likely outcome for him in terms of the balance that always exists between chance and intention in art (Tàpies in Wye, 1991:15)²⁰³:

He has sometimes said that he likes to make things hard for himself, erecting obstacles that prevent him from exercising an excess of rational control over his work or flaunting any sort of virtuosity or ostentatious technique. Tàpies's work has always been the deliberate result of happy accidents, and chance (Borja-Villel, 1991: 20).

In mixing materials he works with physical processes. A video of Tàpies at work on a painting shows him deliberating on each move before approaching and marking the canvas. He fixes his canvas to floor or wall and against its rigid surface he pours and drips paint from a can. He then manipulates the paint with tools such as sticks or knives. A heavy impasto may result from an admixture of sand, broken glass or other foreign matter (Tàpies in Ashton, 1995:41, Tàpies Interview, 1995:246):

The great thing about painting once you've begun is that one brushstroke leads to another. You either continue what you've done or amend it. In the end, the work itself takes over, and you don't even know you're working. Once one picture is under way, you see what you need to do. I often mix marble dust into the paint when I start – that makes the paint dry fast, so I have to get the picture quickly. I enjoy that kind of challenge. It means I have to get an image onto the canvas before it gets bogged down in thought (Tàpies in Peppiat, 1988:37-39).

This 'alla prima' method has been common since the 1950s. Tàpies eschews the traditional technique of building up an image using layers from underlay and layout drawing through increasing amounts of 'fat' paint laid over 'lean' (Franzke, 1992:56). As with other Informel artists, the canvas, or support, was an arena in which to experiment and take action. Commonplace and discarded materials

²⁰³ Tàpies' work is characterized by a relationship of tension between materials employed and the artist's reaction to them, his shaping urge (Wye, 1991:38ff)

were splashed in apparently haphazard blots and dribbles, so assuming the appearance of walls whose surfaces are decayed and scrawled with casual graffiti (Wye, 1991:11). Later, Tàpies reintroduced figurative elements, abstracted from the expressive character of his subject and transformed it into a symbol.

Tàpies is loosely considered to be part of the Abstract Expressionist movement, and while Abstract Expressionism spawned many modes of practice, only two predominate. The first is the Colour Field, or metaphysical painting, exemplified by Mark Rothko's method of floating paint onto canvas. The second, Action Painting, or Lyrical Abstraction includes artists such as Jackson Pollock and Clyfford Still who were preoccupied with painterly and gestural marks.

PROCESS; MARK ROTHKO

Colour Field painting was a term used to describe the staining method employed by artists such as Mark Rothko, Helen Frankenthaler (b.1928) Morris Louis (1912-1962) and Kenneth Noland. 'Floating on' was achieved by staining and by pouring paint. Thus colour was freed from 'the tactile associations of brushwork and modulated surface texture' (Osborne, 1988:199). Results rely on intensity and saturation of colour, of shape and drawing. No pictorial image is portrayed, the colour being independent, disembodied and non-tactile. In metaphysical painting, large canvases envelop the viewer, usurping the area of vision and introducing the impact of scale. Rothko's technique is summarised by his biographer James Breslin, thus:

... paint ... 'breathed' onto the canvas, as if oil paint were spirit – or as if his thin glazes could be applied without the contaminating mediation, the labour, of the body. Yet, Rothko's empty canvases do not exactly struggle for bodily absence – they are too sensuous for that; they seek, rather, to transcend that *specific, defined, bounded physical existence* with which he felt ill at ease (Rothko quoted by Breslin, in Adler & Pointon, 1993:45). (*Italics added*).

Rothko's idea of the contaminating body has evinced comment in terms of his own discomfort, even clumsiness:

Rothko did not feel "very securely at home in the interpreted world". He looked about him. He searched faces. He travelled. He married and had children. But he was never at ease (Ashton, 1983:3).

Rothko insisted that he was 'never able to forgive transplantation to a land where he never felt entirely at home' (Breslin in Adler & Pointon, 1993: 45-46). The Rothkos had fled Russia for America in 1913, when Mark was ten years old, to escape persecution and the pogroms (Breslin in Adler & Pointon, 1993:45-46). His early experience of Jewish oppression embedded a sense of dislocation in a world, where, 'to be embodied at all was to be dislocated' (Breslin in Adler & Pointon, 1993:46). A private man, he disliked being watched or photographed when working and was unable to paint the figure without distorting or mutilating it. He renounced line, which marks boundaries and defines discrete objects (Breslin in Adler & Pointon, 1993:48). Referring to his work as 'presences', his paintings seem as if idealised bodies, as opposed to his own 'large, awkward, restless, actual body' (Breslin in Adler & Pointon, 1993:47). Only in painting did he transcend flesh, declaring that, 'Paintings are skins that are shed and hung on a wall' (Rothko in Adler & Pointon, 1993:49). Rothko's methods support Breslin's reference to the 'contaminating mediation of labour'. He aims to minimise, if not exclude, signs of effort, as is typical in Monochrome or Colour Field painting. Light Red over Black (Fig. 5) avoids points of emphasis, so abandoning traditional composition. This tendency, the epitome of the spiritual in modernist painting, is based on the diminishment of the body, including minimalising evidence of process. Historically, formalism and Idealism have preferenced mind over material and inner experience over action in the world. Likewise, modernist painting eschews signs of the body, materials and method. Thus there is no sense of the artist or viewer as embodied. For example, Rothko reinforces Kantian dualism through the notion of the spiritual in painting as transcendent; divorced from the corporeal and the immanent. The minimalisation of the corporeal in metaphysical painting perpetuates Cartesian Dualism, where a mind-dominant culture favours suppression of the corporeal. Thus painting is held to deny corporeal expression. Mind-dominance as constituting the natural or 'how things are' becomes reinforced (Chakraborty, 1997:5ff).

PROCESS; JACKSON POLLOCK

Breslin states that by contrast with Rothko, Pollock demands that his labour be seen (Fig. 16). Jackson Pollock (1912-1956), whose work typifies Action Painting, was influenced by Mexican painting, Surrealism and Cubism. His works involved deliberately random impulse, the opposite of Rothko's meditative method:

Pollock struggles for bodily presence .. Pollock's desire to make painting record his physical movements ... Pollock's 'immediacy', literally pressing part of his body onto the canvas ... handprints expose Pollock's body as a fading image whose mark must be made again and again in a desperate and even 'bloody' struggle for presence (Breslin in Adler & Pointon, 1993:45). (Italics added).

Footage of him painting shows him pacing around his work, dipping paintbrushes into pots and flicking paint across large canvases on the floor in order to create spots and swirling lines of paint (Beazley, 2003:246, Breslin in Adler & Pointon, 1993:43). His 'bloody struggle for presence' is exemplified by Number 1, (1948), in which the artist has dipped his hand into red paint before making repeated images on canvas (Breslin in Adler & Pointon, 1993:45). Number 1, (1948) records Pollock's movements, he was too close to see all of it at once. While all painting might reflect the artists' relationships with their own bodies, this is made overt by Rothko and Pollock in terms of the connection of the body to the psyche:

Mark Rothko's painting, (where) the body figures as the return of the repressed: abstraction no more offered him a way to get his body out of painting than it offered Pollock a way to get in his (Breslin in Adler & Pointon, 1993:47).

Art Informel construed abstraction as unconscious calligraphy drawn directly from the artist's psyche (Sprocatti, 1992:226-7). Theories of Automatism held that painting was supposed to result in a direct expression or revelation of the unconscious of the artist. The individual exploration of the unconscious acted out with paint on canvas is linked further to Existentialism (Wye, 1991:11). Both Sartre's Existentialism and the phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty's 'art engagé' advocate that responsibility, or action rooted in intuition, reside with the individual (Wye, 1991:16). Both Rothko and Pollock eschew painting as wholly transcendental, seemingly untouched by human hand. Their evident engagement with their medium served to either diminish or reinforce a dichotomy of subject and object, and similar claims have been made by and for

Tàpies (Colombalia Dexeus, 1989:16, Gimferrer, 1986:19, Wye, 1991:40). Understanding how dualism can be transcended through process requires turning to its philosophical context.

Ideas of the body have changed most radically during the gathering momentum of modernity and postmodernity; and a number of theories of the body, from the 20th Century on, overcome dualism. In the West, notions of the non-dual are to be found in phenomenology and Existential philosophy, particularly in the work of Merleau-Ponty, Martin Heidegger (1884-1976) and Sartre. In 1952, Maurice Merleau-Ponty began to develop a philosophical trajectory confirming the impact of experience on the understanding of language and the body in his *Philosophy of Perception*. Merleau-Ponty, like Avenarius, connects body and experience; he writes about the relationship between the art object and the body (Merleau-Ponty, 1962:67ff).

Aiming to avoid bias in philosophy and art, his hypothesis is that the creation of both language and painting relies upon the primordial, expressive, potential of the human body. He proposes that to have primordial experience is to exist towards things through a 'living body' (Kim & Sosa, 1999:309). In the same way as meaning is conveyed through bodily gesture, Merleau-Ponty posits that art may be understood by 'lending our bodies' to it. Thus Merleau-Ponty contradicts Descartes, who separates the conceptual from the corporeal. By extension, thought and the mobilization of the body are linked in the apprehension of painting (Merleau-Ponty, 1968:1). Moreover, Merleau-Ponty claimed for painting a distinctive ontological function, holding that Being, in a Heideggerian sense, may be experienced through realisation of an interior sense; what Merleau-Ponty, drawing on Sartre, calls the phenomenological, the lived body for itself, *en soi* (Kim & Sosa, 1999:310).

Paradox in Cos de matèria may be compared most strongly to Heidegger's main paradox, where the individual is faced with being alive yet mortal, a 'being-

towards-death (Reese, 1996:292). Becoming is conveyed as a process; the idea is that we are in process as beings-towards-death, though this process per se need not necessarily be construed as spiritual. Tàpies, after Heidegger, shows in Cos de matèria the life and death process, and, in this respect, can be construed as postmodern.

The philosophers, Richard Avenarius (1843-1896) and William James (1842-1910), as well as Merleau-Ponty all avoid dualism while advocating 'pure experience', a doctrine that invalidates all but direct experience. Avenarius' phenomenological theory advises denial of assumptions in favour of corporeal experience²⁰⁴. His notion of introjection posits the error of attempting to escape experience; objects exist in opposition to the self and mind as opposed to body (Chakraborty, 1996:167ff). Since 'self' and 'environment', as well as mental and physical processes, can be viewed as contrasting values of one single experience, this acts as an avoidance of dualism²⁰⁵. The way that Tàpies writes about his process bears correlation with the idea of pure experience:

... in my work the idea is to evoke the real object ... I have an increasing urge to get right inside things. Sometimes I break the object up by including cryptic symbols and letters, so that the viewer can't grasp the object merely by looking at it (Ashton, 1985:125).

Overall, the philosophy of monism elucidates how Cos de matèria disrupts the dualistic and transcendental aspects of modernism. Wye claims that Tàpies conveys human presence; that he expresses the body both metaphorically and literally. He creates 'unidealized body parts' that distinguish the Matter paintings (Fig. 3 & 4) from their antecedents. Further, Tàpies remarks that they are in a process of becoming or disintegrating (Wye, 1991:35). In Cos de matèria, the space and figurative references allude to a paradoxical absence and presence of

²⁰⁴ James combatted monism with his doctrine of pluralism. Mind and matter are merely two of the different ways in which reality gets organised, the world is not absolutely unified. He could thus avoid the mind-body dualism; it is possible to understand how an object in one person's world could become an object in another's, and how our minds can meet in a world of objects which they share in common. One is not worth more than another (James, 1952:129, Reese, 1996:353).

²⁰⁵ '... elemental aesthetic qualities are integral to our immediate experience of form and color ... these incipiently 'expressive' qualities typically contribute to expression in a fuller sense, and so begin to engage what Tillich terms our 'whole being', this is in no small measure due to the fact that the very apprehension of such aesthetica already entails more of our being than sheer physiology (Burch Brown, 1989:93)'.

body. Finally, Tàpies writes about his experience of the world as non-dualistic. Here it is applied by Tàpies to the relationship of the individual body to the world:

I believe that in all the things we do or see or analyse, the outer and inner worlds are interconnected. So I don't see any kind of barrier ... between subjectivity and objectivity ... My wish is that we might progressively lose our confidence in what we think we believe and the things we consider stable and secure, in order to remind ourselves of the infinite number of things still waiting to be discovered (Tàpies in Catoir, 1991:76).

So, in comparing the processes of Tàpies, Rothko and Pollock, all three may be seen in their paintings to integrate the body by differing means.

Chapter 7 has examined the importance of the corporeal for the sublime and for expression of the non-dual. It is concerned with the necessity of dealing with process as pivotal to the artist's work. Tàpies' process expresses the sublime, and the concordance that is achieved through expression of the non-dual. It achieves this, as, for him, evidence of labour and the body are integral to the meaning. This is shown through comparison with two Abstract Expressionist painters who both, despite very different methods, use process as integral to the end result. Tàpies' evidence of process, of labour and the body, are key to the meaning of his work; they contribute to his idea of the spiritual arising from life and death as processes. While Tàpies has been linked to the modernist tradition, his treatment of the body also links his work to postmodernity. The contemplation of negation in Cos de matèria derives from historical notions of the sublime, and deals with the existential issue of life, death and the unknown. Theories of non-dualism examined the relationship of the body to the work of art. Tàpies was also discussed in terms of ideas of labour and its historical connection to the sublime. Comparison with Rhythm O showed that although Tàpies cannot match that level of ritualised pain of labour, his portrayal of the body, with its Spanish tradition, bears some correlation.

Conclusion: Tàpies and *Cos de Matèria*; A Case for the Spiritual in Contemporary Art

Despite the fact that claims of the 'death of art' have rendered engagement with the spiritual suspect, Tàpies' Matter paintings (Fig. 3 & 4) in general, and Cos de matèria (Fig. 2) in particular, demonstrate that the spiritual has currency for contemporary art. Focus is made on Tàpies, an exceptional contemporary artist, due to his specific intentions for the spiritual in terms of his art practice; this consideration is also evident in his perception of life as a spiritual path. Few major artists deal as overtly with the spiritual as Tàpies, and none are as prolific or consistent; in this respect his *oeuvre* appears unique.

The current hegemony of deconstructive postmodernism means the very discourses of art theory generally marginalise or even exclude discussion of the spiritual; it was crucial, therefore, to employ discourses by which to discuss the possibility of the art object conveying the spiritual, indeed the possibility of conveying meaning at all. Reconstruction, a lesser known body of postmodern theories, often marginal to mainstream art theory, enabled discussion of art beyond standardised discourses, demonstrating a more complex notion of inherent meaning and the spiritual than is generally evident within modernism. The thesis used reconstructive strategies to argue for qualitative distinctions in art through the formation of spiritual and ethical prerogatives that challenge the limitations caused by deconstruction's tendency towards relativism and pluralism.

Research established that Cos de matèria sets a marker for the spiritual through two interlinking traditions in painting. Firstly, the thesis argues that Cos de matèria is part of the broad movement termed Abstract Expressionism; its roots in Romanticism and the legacy of Judeo-Christianity provide the initial basis from which to understand Tàpies' practice as part of a broken lineage of sublime art from the Romantic period to contemporary times. Secondly, in seeking precedence for Cos de matèria as, in Tàpies' words, a 'surface of contemplation', the thesis suggests that this painting derives from a loose genre of spiritual art

that has been practiced in Europe since at least the 17th century. Historical correspondences were drawn between Cos de matèria and generations of paintings that draw from the Judeo-Christian tradition of the Via Negativa and meditative traditions in their construction of pictorial space as a surface for contemplation.

Initially, the descent of Cos de matèria from the Via Negativa was established through comparison with the 17th century painters, Diego Velázquez and Francisco de Zurbarán who represent the Spanish contemplative tradition. While it would possibly be overstating the case to claim that Cos de matèria could potentially enable experience of the transcendence of subject and object dualism – a key tenet of the mystical tradition – discussion of the relationship of figurative elements to pictorial space (the ground) in painting concludes that it could undoubtedly enable the viewer to approximate such an experience. Correspondences of space and matter are revealed as aiding the viewer to negotiate the dualism of subject and object that has historically reflected an individual's presumed relationship with God.

While Cos de matèria does not employ the epic subject matter of Romantic art, parallels drawn with Wanderer (Fig. 9) by Caspar David Friedrich show that both deal with the sublime in response to the waning of institutionalised Christianity. Comparative discussion traces the relationship of figure to ground progressively through to the late modernist period, culminating in comparison of Cos de matèria to Light Red over Black (Fig. 5), the latter being a metaphysical painting that typifies modernist conceptions of space. Contextualisation of Cos de matèria in terms of this lineage reveals that the growth of belief in truth as relative and plural has grown concomitantly with the development of abstraction in painting. Cos de matèria draws from the Judeo-Christian legacy; that it is not archetypally part of this tradition is apparent in that, as well as the traditional concerns with the relationship of space to the spiritual, it suggests complex correspondences between the transcendent and the immanent.

Following this initial discussion, the thesis describes how late 20th century artists grew increasingly weary of the hegemony of modernism evident from the late 1950s onwards in an observable shift in art. In order to comprehend how Tàpies does this, the research locates Tàpies' work within a period in the 1950s when new philosophical concepts of painting meant a shift away from preoccupation with the transcendental associated with space, towards location of the spiritual in the realm of the material and the known. The individual signature of Cos de matèria is most evidently seen when compared with the work of his most significant contemporaries, Barnett Newman and Lucio Fontana who are both acknowledged as contributing to challenging the modernist Christian-influenced notion of the spiritual in art. Tàpies, alongside artists such as Fontana and Newman, sought to challenge the transcendental notions of space that carried connotations of Judeo-Christianity through use of disruptive strategies to the flat surface of modernist painting. Philosophically and spiritually this disruption formed a landmark in the tradition of sublime art, in that these artists consciously challenged the dualism that was alluded to by the relationship of matter or line to the pictorial space of the canvas.

By examining both Tàpies' practice and his writings it became apparent that he is unusual amongst Abstract Expressionist painters – while many of these artists talked about Oriental thought they maintained the Christian legacy in their work. The individuality of Cos de matèria and Tàpies' Matter paintings are established by the fact that the conceptions of contemplation it offers, unusually for a Western artist, derive not only from the Via Negativa, but render the influence of Oriental philosophies more overt than in the work of any previous Western artist.

In his use of matter as the very essence rather than the technical means of painting, Tàpies' work mirrors broader movements in the arts in Europe in the 20th century. Through comparative discussion with parallel tendencies of Abstract Expressionism, the research concluded that, while Cos de matèria carries the cultural marks which establish its time of making, Tàpies is one of the

earliest and most innovative painters associated with European developments such as Art informel and Matter painting. Tàpies was particularly dedicated to exploration of materials within the general terms of Art informel. Avantgarde artists such as these have continued in the last fifty years to investigate matter and the nature of the material realm in the belief that abstraction is the medium by which to search for deeper authentic levels of reality. Comparison with Arte Povera showed that other artists interested in Matter painting had less of a spiritual relation with matter, moreover, that through his exploration of matter, Tàpies has invented a personal and cultural iconography that undoubtedly has widespread resonances.

It is noticeable that while Fontana and Newman were preoccupied with the project of abstraction per se, Tàpies demonstrates a strong individual focus on iconographic elements. Tàpies seems closest to sharing with Fontana a deeper concern with disrupting the legacy of modernism; indeed, these two artists have been credited with driving painting 'to its last stage'. The conclusion from this was that while his work was greatly influenced by shared values of his peers, it was directed more by a personal vision than by art movements of the time.

That Buddhism is thoroughly relevant to contemporary painting is shown through Tàpies' specific technique of transforming imagery into a cultural iconography. Tàpies' compositional order, reliance on a variety of techniques to obtain material density and coarseness, sparing use of colours, neutral hues, use of objects with anthropomorphic associations; together with his concern with relativism, non-duality, the self and the body, should contribute to any view of his work as wholly contemporary. In his Matter paintings Tàpies makes Buddhist notions of non-dualism evident.

It is in Tàpies' philosophical attitude to his work and his working processes that the influence of Oriental thought is most evident. He considers that his working methods comprise an alchemical process of transformation and deformation that

reflect a world that is continually changing. Tàpies' objects appear to be in process of being formed and unformed as though the artist has plunged into and enabled the transforming of this shifting world. Art as an unrelenting process of creation and destruction is, moreover, not only a central tenet of Neo Dada, Arte Povera and Process Art, but an idea that has informed Spanish culture more deeply and for longer than in any other European country.

That Cos de matèria sets a marker for the sublime was deduced through comparative discussion of an art work that typifies Crowther's most contemporary notion of the existential (or immanent) sublime. The research discusses the spiritual through prerogatives that establish specific temporal and spatial perspectives on the spiritual. Temporal perspectives focused on the complexity of the viewer's experience of the sublime. Rather than the type of rarified experience of paradoxical emotions traditionally associated with the sublime, the thesis argued that the term sublime is now attributed to a range of art that concerns emotions and experiences that are readily resolved. In this respect, the thesis establishes the Matter paintings as the main successor to metaphysical painting the last sub-movement in painting associated with the sublime.

Spatial perspectives were concerned with notions of the spiritual evident in the complex correspondences between space and matter in Cos de matèria; and the conceptions of transcendence and immanence these reflect. Discussion focussed on the concern of the sublime with the contemplation of negation in order to provide qualitative distinction between an art work that is preoccupied with the banal and those that express the immanent sublime.

Tàpies' concern with the sublime in 1968, when Cos de matèria was made, marked a significant period for Spanish history. Due to the Spanish Civil War, state censorship existed in artistic and cultural life up to 1975. The condition of Spanish society, economically and politically isolated in the last years of the Franco regime, meant that artists were concerned with the possibility of

constructing a new society rather than merely representing the current one. Cos de matèria was made in 1957 shortly after the founding of Dau al Set – the Spanish branch of Art Informel - demonstrating a consolidation of European Abstract Expressionism. Many artists were in exile in Paris and in contradistinction to the hegemony of Spanish academicism, artists on the fringes, such as Tàpies, were attempting to forge links with European avantgarde art. Tàpies' Matter paintings reflect that Spanish art had acquired an identity that had hitherto been lacking and could now be considered a full participant in international movements.

In their aspiration to realise personal truths through art, it is noted that the Romantic artists embraced values that were shared by Tàpies; it is relevant, therefore, to ask whether Cos de matèria is behind the times? Despite no discernible objective assessment for contemporary work, the thesis suggests that Cos de matèria is typical of Tàpies' Matter paintings during the period 1950-1980s and can be considered thoroughly contemporary with, and descriptive of, major shifts in art, such as its blurring of boundaries between painting and sculpture and its use of found and other materials and objects. It can also be considered contemporary for its intellectual preoccupations, concern with a non-denominational expression of spirituality, and plural philosophical and spiritual ideas.

Finally, Cos de matèria should be considered representative of Tàpies' spiritual contribution to art, and through the evidence of this work should include Tàpies among the most significant European artists of the contemporary period.

AFTERWORD

In terms of the importance of this thesis for my own research, as well as the wider research community, my interview with Tàpies could play an important role. As one of the few undertaken in the English language with this internationally renowned artist, it could enable his work to be viewed by a wider spectatorship. As Tàpies' place in 20th century art is assessed, possibly after his death, he may well be considered alongside his fellow artists from Barcelona, Mirò and Picasso. Although well-known mainly amongst artists and the Spanish public, Tàpies' reputation has yet to reach the wider public. I intend to pursue publication of this interview, in edited form, subject to the approval of Tàpies, in both art journals as well as inter-disciplinary journals, for instance the 'Buddhist/Christian Studies Journal'.

The debate on Buddhism and Christianity is an important part of the interview as Tapies is greatly knowledgeable of and expressive in his work of both of these religions. My research could form the basis of the way in which the Christian legacy is apparent in contemporary art and draw out more fully how Orientalism has influenced 20th century art. There are few consistent studies of either of these areas. Researchers might like to look at the contribution of Tàpies and Spanish and Catalan art to the wider European art world. There is little on Spanish and Catalan art in the English language and this thesis numbers among a few volumes that address this lacuna.

The breadth of the thesis's religious, philosophical and spiritual readings of art adds to the move towards inter-disciplinarity in academia. The spiritual atmosphere of late twentieth century Europe with its multi-denominational faiths and plural approaches to the spiritual means the research could be used by theorists as the basis of a rigorous and critical language in which to discuss the spiritual that bridges the academic and esoteric. The thesis is, further, part of a body of literature that draws from non-denominational religion but focusses on

aspects that can be developed or practised irrespective of religious affiliation. One of the benefits of New Age approaches to spirituality is the possibility of disseminating spiritual ideas and practices within the wider community; the thesis could act as a bridge between the art world and the public in this way.

The interview as well as the thesis could form the basis of research by other theorists, who refuse to be bound by an orthodoxy of deconstructive postmodernism. Tàpies might act as a pertinent example of an artist who cannot be readily discussed within these discourses. It could be used further, by theorists who attempt to revision modernism and interpretations of the relationship between modernism and postmodernism. In particular, it might be useful to theorists who refuse an outmoded version of modernism whilst seeing that certain aspects such as belief in the possibility of transhistorical and transcultural communication not only has credence but is crucial to developing meaning in a complex, multi-faceted postmodern society.

In terms of my own research the thesis could be developed by applying its findings to the work of some of the artists discussed. Useful for this purpose might be the work of Eva Hesse; the spiritual in her work has been claimed, but not substantiated in great depth. The contribution of Hesse's *oeuvre* to 20th century art has been reassessed in the last decade, but her importance for the canon of spiritual art has yet to be made. In this respect, it would be pertinent to examine further the nature of matter and the potential it has to express metaphor and carry existential and spiritual meaning. My thesis provides methods to discuss art that invites both discussion of materials, visual languages, process and iconography as well as the social and contemporary context for art. This could lead to a manifesto that finds a correlation between thinking and practice in painting.

Further, the work of Marina Abramovic, an avantgarde artist, is not readily assessed within deconstructive postmodernism; though attributed with the

spiritual, this has not been done consistently or with academic rigour. The thesis discussed her work in terms of the sublime and while much has been written on the sublime, it has largely focussed on nineteenth century art. The continuation of the sublime from the romantic movement to the contemporary period has meant a change in its spiritual meaning. In this respect, it would be pertinent to discuss Jean-Francois Lyotard's version of the sublime as a moral force in comparison with Crowther's version of the contemporary existential sublime. Given the sublime is now attributed to a range of art that concerns emotions and experiences that are readily resolved; there is a need to understand more deeply the emotions that spiritual experience draws on and Abramovic's work could act as a relevant exemplar.

The thesis also demands a greater examination of spiritual and ethical prerogatives and discussion of what these might consist of. This research has touched on the question of the components of art. If art presents an 'x' factor which is greater than the sum of its form plus content, the debate on the spiritual, ethics and meaning could be at the forefront of trying to deconstruct the constituent parts of this 'x' factor. The thesis discussed how Stephen Newton attributes shared meaning in the correspondences between psychic space and abstract pictorial space. This attribution could be used alongside research that uses psychoanalysis to find transhistorical, transcultural and existential meaning in art.

Another way in which to examine prerogatives would be to look further at issues of space and time and how they form a backdrop to the discussion of art. Time-based art is more readily considered avantgarde; for this reason a postmodern view of prerogatives could include an analysis of the way in which temporality in time-based media bears correlation to the spiritual effects of viewing pictorial space, particularly in the history of religious painting. This might well link in with research on Abramovic as time is a crucial component in an experience of the sublime.

The thesis references theorists who criticise the art world for its concern with commercial gain at the expense of expression of existential and spiritual meaning. It links with the broader historical debate on the relationship between art and life, that commanded greater prominence from the 1960s on. While much of the public appears interested in spirituality today, this interest is not reflected in the art world. Discussing art in terms of a spiritual path may appear outmoded in today's technological society, yet in the avantgarde art world, art more frequently reflects the *zeitgeist* rather than suggest potential ideals or models on which it could be discussed. Reflection on Tàpies' life and process provides a model of a largely self-educated person who follows a spiritual path at the same time as having an international exhibiting career.

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EXHIBITIONS: ANTONI TÀPIES

Serpentine Gallery, London (1993)

Annely Juda Fine Art, London (1994)

Fundació Antoni Tàpies, Barcelona (1998)

Waddington Gallery, London (2000)

Fundació Antoni Tàpies, Barcelona (2001)

Museo Reina Sofia, Madrid (2001)

Picasso Museum, Antibes (2003)

INTERVIEWS

Bulley, Emma (1999) Antoni Tàpies, Barcelona, 8th June, 90 minutes, translator; Richard Jacques.

Omnibus (1995) Antoni Tàpies, BBC, London, 60 minutes.

APPENDIX A**Biography: Antoni Tàpies (b.1923)**

Figure 1. Antoni Tàpies (1999) Barcelona, photograph by Emma Bulley

Antoni Tàpies was born in Barcelona and showed artistic talent from an early age. During the Spanish Civil War, Tàpies remained in Barcelona, witnessing terrible horrors and remaining deeply disturbed for the rest of his life by the suffering he witnessed. In 1942, having recovered from a serious illness, he started making copies in oils of works by Van Gogh and Picasso. A year later

Tàpies enrolled on a law course at the University of Barcelona but, in 1946, dropped out to pursue painting full-time.

His early works employed a variety of materials. They were inspired by Surrealism, and have been described as reflections on the primordial dilemmas of existence. Tàpies became a part of a group of young artists in Spain who, under the influence of Joan Miro, prompted a rebirth of modern art in the isolated and oppressed atmosphere of postwar Spain. In 1948, he helped found the group and magazine 'Dau al Set', which brought together the young Catalan vanguard of writers and painters. In this year, Tàpies had his first one-man exhibition and the reaction was one of anger and controversy.

With the help of a scholarship from the French government, Tàpies moved to Paris in 1950. He remained for a year after which time he based himself in Barcelona. By 1952, his style had taken on a more geometrical appearance and was more concerned with studies of pure colour, for example Scraping on Red (1952) and Grey Ochre (1953). His influences included the artists Joan Miro (1893-1983), Paul Klee (1879-1940), Max Ernst (1891-1976), as well as Oriental art and existentialist philosophy. In 1955 he gave a lecture at the Santander Summer University discussing his approach to art, making a case for the importance of spontaneity in art and the need to improvise outside of tradition.

In 1954, he was initiated into Informel, a tendency within the Abstract Expressionist movement of which he would soon become a protagonist. Tàpies began to use thickly textured impasto, and unusual materials such as clay, marble dust, newspaper, rope, earth and pigments in his work. These works have been interpreted on numerous occasions, especially by foreign critics, as a denunciation of the lack of freedom of expression, of the 'darkness' when the country was under the dictatorship of General Francisco Franco. His material work gave way, in the 1950s and 1960s, to structures that often recall lacerated walls, evoking spiritual and physical suffering; Tàpies' art is devoted to making the insignificant, significant.

In 1969, he published a number of polemical articles defending freedom in art and in his essay, Nothing is Mean, (1979), he defended his reasons for incorporating everyday items into his work. From 1970 onwards, Tàpies frequently incorporated real objects and pieces of furniture in his works. Throughout his career, Tàpies has theorised about his own practices and maintained a politically committed attitude. He has attained worldwide renown for his many collage works, graffiti-like paintings, sculpture and lithography.

APPENDIX B

Artists' Biographies

Abramovic, Marina (b.1946)

Since the beginning of her career in Belgrade during the early 1970s, Marina Abramovic has pioneered the use of Performance as a visual art form. The body has always been both her subject and medium. Exploring the physical and mental limits of her being, she has withstood pain, exhaustion, and danger in the quest for emotional and spiritual transformation. This particular blend of epic struggle and self-inflicted violence was born out of the contradictions of her childhood: both parents were high-ranking officials in the Socialist government, while her grandmother, with whom she had lived, was devout Serbian Russian Orthodox. Though personal in origin, the explosive force of Abramovic' art spoke to a generation in (the former) Yugoslavia undergoing the tightening control of Communist rule.

The tensions between abandonment and control lay at the heart of her series of performances known as Rhythms (1973-74). In Rhythm 5, Abramovic lay down inside the blazing frame of a wooden star. With her oxygen supply depleted by the fire, she lost consciousness and had to be rescued by concerned onlookers. In Rhythm 10, she plunged a knife between the spread fingers of one hand, stopping only after she had cut herself 20 times. Having made an audio recording of the action, she then played back the sound while repeating the movements – this time trying to coordinate the new gashes with the old. Using her dialogue with an audience as a source of energy, Abramovic created ritualistic performance pieces that were cathartic and liberating.

In Rhythm 0, she invited her audience to do whatever they wanted to her using any of the 72 items she provided: pen, scissors, chains, axe, loaded pistol, and others. This essay in submission was played out to chilling conclusions – the performance ceased when audience members grew too aggressive. Truly ephemeral, Abramovic' earliest performances were documented only by crude black-and-white photographs and descriptive texts, which she published as an edition years later – choosing the most iconic images to represent the essence of her actions. Since 1976 she has utilised video to capture the temporal nature of her art. Cleaning the Mirror #1 is composed of 5 stacked monitors playing videos of a haunting performance in which Abramovic scrubs a grime-covered human skeleton on her lap. Rich with metaphor, this 3-hour action recalls, among other things, Tibetan death rites that prepare disciples to become one with their own mortality.

Fontana, Lucio (1899-1968)

Italian painter, sculptor and ceramicist, Fontana was the founder of the *Spazialismo* Movement. He lived in Milan and studied sculpture at the Brera Academy from 1928 to 1930. He became, with Osvaldo Licini (1894-1958), Fausto Melotti (1901-1986) and others, a leading figure in the Italian abstract movement. Spending 1939-47 in the Argentine, he helped to found the avantgarde Altavira Academy in Buenos Aires. His ideas about the need for new art to express the modern world as revealed by science led to the publication of the 'Manifesto Bianco'. Fontana returned to Milan in 1947 and shortly afterwards issued the first Manifesto Spaziale. The *Spazialismo* movement was joined by Giuseppe Capogrossi (1900-1972), Roberto Crippa (1921-1972), Giovanni Dova (b. 1925), Cesare Peverelli (b. 1922) and other young artists.

Untitled - Spatial Concept, Waiting is one of a series of works Fontana made in Milan between 1958 and 1968. This represents Fontana's best known work that is characterised by his claim to have introduced elements of time and space into art by slashing the canvas with a razor blade. He first began puncturing the surface of paper or canvas in the late 1940s, blurring the distinction between two and three dimensionality. Recognising the importance of this innovation, he continued, through the 1950s and 1960s, to seek different ways of developing the hole, the first *tagli* (cuts), singly or multiply, as his signature gesture. These comprised small, often diagonal incisions, composed in groups over unprimed canvases.

During 1959 these tentative slits evolved into single, more decisive slashes, as in the present work. Each cut was made with a single gesture using a sharp blade, and the canvases were then backed with strong black gauze giving the appearance of a void behind. In 1968, Fontana told an interviewer that, 'my discovery was the hole and that's it. I am happy to go to the grave after such a discovery' (Whitfield & Cotter, 1999:12). Considered together, they are Fontana's most extensive and varied group of works and they have come to be seen as emblematic of his gestural aesthetic. Many of Fontana's marks - slashes, gouges, puncturings - evoke pain, and, in particular, suggest wounds to the skin.

Fontana experimented with both the size and shape of the *tagli* and painted a number of the canvases in bright monochrome colours. From the earliest works in the series, he wrote the word *Attesa*, meaning 'expectation' or 'hope', on the back of all the canvases with one cut, and *Attese* on all those with multiple cuts. This added a temporal dimension to the generic title, Spatial Concept, which he gave to all his works from the late 1940s. In 1966, Fontana presented an entire room of white *tagli* at the Venice Biennale, claiming that he had found a way of 'giving the spectator an impression of spatial calm, of cosmic rigour, of serenity in infinity' (Biscottini, 1999:38).

In the instances where Fontana slashed an unpainted canvas, as in the present work, there is a particular affinity between the rawness of the surface and the

primordial character of the gesture itself. Destruction and creation were bound together in these works. The same gesture that negated the canvas as a purely pictorial vehicle also opened up its sculptural possibilities. 'Art dies but is saved by gesture', Fontana wrote in 1948 (Billeter, 1977:19). Such rhetoric was characteristic of *Spazialismo*, the movement he founded.

Friedrich, Caspar David (1774-1840)

Friedrich was born in Greifswald and studied at the Copenhagen Academy. He was an outstanding 19th-century German painter, whose awesome landscapes and seascapes are not only meticulous observations of nature but also allegories. In 1798 he settled in Dresden, where he became a member of an artistic and literary circle imbued with the ideals of the Romantic movement. His early drawings, precisely outlined in pencil or sepia, explored motifs recurrent throughout his work; rocky beaches, flat, barren plains, infinite mountain ranges, and trees reaching toward the sky. Later, his work began to reflect more of his emotional response to natural scenery, and he began to paint in oils in 1807.

In 1808 he exhibited one of his most controversial paintings, The Cross in the Mountains (Kunstsammlung, Dresden), in which - for the first time in Christian art - an altarpiece was conceived in terms of a pure landscape. A bold break from traditional religious painting, this work is almost pure landscape and is representative of his mature style. The figure of the crucified Christ, seen from behind and silhouetted against a mountain sunset, is almost lost in the natural setting.

According to Friedrich's own writings, all the elements in the composition have symbolic meanings. The cross, viewed obliquely from behind, is an insignificant element in the composition. More important are the dominant rays of the evening sun, which the artist said depicted the setting of the old, pre-Christian world. The mountains are allegories of faith and the fir trees stand for hope. Friedrich painted several other important compositions in which crosses dominate a landscape. Friedrich's cold, acid colours, clear lighting, and sharp contours heighten the feeling of melancholy, isolation, and human powerlessness against the ominous forces of nature expressed in his paintings. Some of Friedrich's best-known paintings are expressions of a religious mysticism.

As a faculty member of the Dresden Academy, Friedrich influenced later German romantic painters. Although his reputation declined after his death, his work is still widely exhibited.

Hesse, Eva (1936-70)

Eva Hesse died of a brain tumour in 1970 at the age of thirty-four. Her brief life and exceptional work have given her an almost mythic status in the art world. She was born in Hamburg in 1936, and in 1938 her family escaped Nazi persecution by fleeing to Holland, eventually making their way to London, and later in 1939 to New York. She studied at the Pratt Institute of Design from 1952 to 1953 and Cooper Union from 1954 to 1957. From 1957 to 1959 she attended Yale School of Art and Architecture, where she received her BFA, studying under Josef Albers. She worked across the fields of sculpture, painting and drawing. Her work addresses emotional and corporeal experience, rendering otherwise private utterances, public. Using humble, non-traditional materials, her method was instinctual, expressive and could be humorous (Cooper, 1992:10). 'Hesse's career coincided with the incubation period of modern feminism, and her art is regarded as standing as a courageous and complex effort to articulate a female identity (Cooper, 1992: dust jacket)'.

Eva Hesse pushed the boundaries of painting and sculpture. She worked with a broad range of traditional and non-traditional media, and continually blurred the edges between her processes and materials, pushing both to their extremes. Her career as a sculptor developed during the 1960s and her work became known for its unusual materials including string, resin and latex which she used to make sculptures that explored the expressive possibilities of abstract form and themes of sexuality. In all of her works, the artist explored the tensions between order and chaos, rigidity and pliability, geometric and biometric form, series and singularity, continuity and change. Associated with both the conceptual and minimalist movements of the 1960s and 1970s, Hesse's primary interests lay in the organic, the absurd and the irrational. Among Hesse's early sculptures are Untitled or Not Yet, (1966) and Hang Up, (1966); they embody the essence of her oeuvre, the use of non-traditional materials and the exploration of the boundaries of sculpture and painting.

Since her first posthumous retrospective at the Guggenheim Museum, New York, in 1972, her work has been acquired by major museums and collections around the world.

Hirst, Damien (b.1965)

Damien Hirst has defined and drawn attention to a generation of young British artists. From the controversy of Separated from the flock (1994) (a lamb preserved in a glass tank), which was vandalised when included in the exhibition Hirst curated for the Serpentine Gallery in 1994 Some went mad, some ran away, to the political storm surrounding the arrival of 'Sensation' in Brooklyn, his work has redefined international expectations of British art.

Hirst, who grew up in Leeds, is also often credited with helping to refocus the London art world from West End Galleries to the industrial spaces of the city. This shift followed the success of Freeze, a 1988 Goldsmiths' College show he organised, which took place in a docklands warehouse.

The unavoidable part of Hirst's work is its unblinking confrontation with death, mortality and the brevity of life, whether it is in the form of a 14-foot long tiger shark in a tank of formaldehyde, The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living (1991) or the beauty of a disused shop full of butterfly pupae, hatching from white canvases, feeding on sugar syrup, mating, laying eggs and dying: In and Out of Love (1991). But there is another strategy where, through his titles and black humour, he collapses the formal clarity of the works and its apparently melancholy message, and makes the viewer reconsider the ambivalent creativity that is at work. 'I want to set up situations that make people try to find meaning. I don't think my interpretations are important on a large scale', he says.

Beyond the glass tank pieces of dead and often cut-open animals for which he is best known, Hirst's work includes photography, a series of cabinet sculptures and painting. The paintings allow room for both random and methodical practice: the spin paintings are produced on a rotating, uncontrollable table, while the spot paintings are created with geometrical precision, in 'angst-free' colours, and titled after pharmaceutical ingredients. But the relationship between sculptural and painterly practice is close for Hirst.

His work has, almost more than any other artist of the 1990s, become familiar via the media, particularly following his Turner Prize win in 1995. Hirst has, moreover, addressed the media in his own film-making, which confronts the relationship between art and advertising.

Kahlo, Frida (1907-1954)

Frida Kahlo, the wife of world-renowned Mexican muralist Diego Rivera (1886-1957), lived in a time of incredible worldwide movements and changes; the Mexican revolution occurred just three years after she was born. Kahlo was an active participant in the social, economic and political landscape that characterised the time; Kahlo was adamant in her commitment to ideals of revolution. She expressed her bond to the Mexican people in her art, in her dress, her behaviour and the decoration of her home. During this period *Mexicanismo*, the fervent embrace of pre-Hispanic Mexican history and culture, gave great currency to the notion of native roots. Through her friendship with Tina Modotti (1896-1942) Kahlo was introduced to an exciting new sphere of art and leftist politics and joined the Young Communist League.

At the age of seven, Kahlo was afflicted with polio, a disease that stunted the growth of her entire right leg. Kahlo suffered numerous miscarriages that caused her great grief. In addition, the injuries suffered in a streetcar accident continued to hound her, relegating her to her bed for months at a time and keeping her in a state of almost constant pain. She began to paint in 1925 while recovering from this accident that left her permanently disabled. She underwent more than thirty operations in the course of her life, and many of her approximately two hundred paintings directly relate to her experiences with physical pain. Kahlo rejected the Surrealist label, contending that her work dissolved the distinctions between reality and fantasy. In the 1940s Kahlo taught art. She painted alone, a practice that led some critics and friends to describe her paintings as a form of therapy.

Her paintings chronicle her turbulent relationship with Diego Rivera. Although initially a self-taught painter, she was, through her relationship with Rivera, soon travelling in the most sophisticated artistic circles. They served as the hub of an international intellectual circle, as both Kahlo and Rivera used their artistic talents to express their social and political views. Kahlo died at the age of 47.

Newman, Barnett (1905-1970)

One of the leaders of the group of American artists who became known as the Abstract Expressionists, or the New York School, and whose art swept the world in the 1950s and 1960s. Newman has been regarded variously as an exemplar of high modernism, a late romantic, a practitioner of the art of the sublime, a precursor of Minimalism, an existentialist and a spiritual artist obsessed with Judaism and the Kabbalah. Acutely aware of the tragedies of his times and a keen admirer of the art of indigenous and earlier cultures, Newman searched for a way in which to express the human predicament in a post-holocaust era.

Born in New York to Polish Jewish immigrants in 1905, Barnett Newman was obliged to work in his father's clothing factory before being able to embark on a career as an artist. In the 1930s he painted little but produced a series of writings on art and politics. In 1948 he made his breakthrough painting, Onement 1. From that point he more or less ceased to write, and concentrated full time on making art. Barnett Newman is best known for the monumental paintings in the late 1940s which incorporate unified fields of colour that have been demarcated into zones by one or more vertical, or occasionally, horizontal, stripes the artist called 'zips'. The zip was a compositional fulcrum, a source of movement, division, and measurement, as well as a carrier of, often metaphysical, meaning.

While believing that art must be abstract Newman also believed that subject matter was of crucial importance. His earliest extant works were abstract renderings of the Biblical theme of Creation and he is celebrated for his series The Stations of the Cross (1958-66), but in the aftermath of war the look of his

paintings changed to reflect what he called 'the tragedy of our times'. It was not unusual for Newman to use titles from the Bible or Greek mythology. A master of expansive spatial effects and evocative colour, he pioneered painting that was both uncompromisingly abstract and powerfully emotive.

Pollock, Jackson (1912-1956)

After a passing interest in sculpture in 1925, Pollock began to study painting in 1929 at the Art Students' League, New York, under the Regionalist painter Thomas Hart Benton. During the 1930s he worked in the manner of the Regionalists, being influenced also by the Mexican Muralist painters and by certain aspects of Surrealism. From 1938 to 1942 he worked for the Federal Arts Project. He first exhibited in 1940, at the McMillan Gallery together with Willem de Kooning (1904-1997) and Lee Krasner (b. 1911), and had his first one-man show in 1943 at the Art of the Century Gallery, where he soon became a star exhibitor. By the mid-1940s he was painting in two distinct styles, a linear style of somewhat mannered elegance and a more romantic style of rich impasto.

The 'drip and splash' style for which he is best known, which caused him to be recognised as the leader of the Abstract Expressionist movement and the most important innovative artist of his time, emerged with some abruptness about 1947. Instead of using the traditional easel he worked with his canvas on the floor or the wall and dripped paint from a can or with sticks and other implements, obtaining a heavy impasto with the addition of sand, broken glass, and other matter. This manner of painting had in common with Surrealist theories of Automatism that it was supposed to result in direct expression of the unconscious mood of the artist. For this reason it was referred to as Gestural painting, or Action painting in the USA.

Pollock's name is also associated with the all-over style of painting which avoids points of emphasis within the whole canvas and abandons the traditional idea of composition in terms of relations among parts. The design of his painting had no relation to the shape or size of the canvas – indeed in the finished work the canvas was sometimes trimmed to suit the image. Pollock also introduced a novel form of picture space, the calligraphic or scribbled paint marks seeming to lie a very little way behind the picture surface and movement being set up not into the canvas in depth but laterally across the canvas towards the centre.

All these characteristics were important for the new American painting which matured in the late 1940s and early 1950s. During the 1950s Pollock continued to produce figurative or quasi-figurative black and white works and delicately modulated paintings in rich impasto as well as the paintings in the new all-over style. He was strongly supported by critics, particularly Harold Rosenberg, but was also subject to much criticism as the leader of a still little-comprehended style. By the 1960s he was generally recognised as the most important figure in

the most important movement of this century in American painting, but a movement from which artists were already in reaction. He was perhaps the most often and most widely exhibited of all the members of the New York School. He had his first retrospectives at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, in 1956 and 1967.

Rothko, Mark (1903-1970)

Mark Rothko was born Marcus Rothkowitz on 1903, in Dvinsk, Russia. In 1913, he left Russia and settled with the rest of his family in Portland, Oregon. Rothko attended Yale University, New Haven, on a scholarship from 1921 to 1923. That year, he left Yale without receiving a degree and moved to New York. In 1925, he studied under Max Weber (1864-1920) at the Art Students League, but was essentially self-taught. He participated in his first group exhibition at the Opportunity Galleries, New York, in 1928.

Rothko's first solo exhibition in New York was held at the Contemporary Arts Gallery in 1933. In 1935, he was a founding member of the Ten, a group of artists sympathetic to abstraction and Expressionism. He executed easel paintings for the WPA Federal Art Project from 1936 to 1937. During the early 1930s, Rothko became a close friend of Milton Avery (1893-1965) and by 1936, Rothko had met Barnett Newman. Rothko also befriended painter Adolph Gottlieb (1903-1974), with whom he shared a passion for non-Western art, and later, an interest in lyrical abstraction. In the early 1940s he worked closely with Gottlieb, developing a painting style with mythological content, simple flat shapes, and imagery inspired by primitive art. By mid-decade, his work incorporated Surrealist techniques and images. Peggy Guggenheim gave Rothko a solo show at the 'Art of This Century' gallery in New York in 1945.

In 1947 and 1949, Rothko taught at the California School of Fine Arts, San Francisco, where Clyfford Still (1904-1980) was a fellow instructor. The late 1940s and early 1950s saw the emergence of Rothko's mature style, in which frontal, luminous rectangles seem to hover on the canvas surface. In 1958, the artist began his first commission, monumental paintings for the Four Seasons Restaurant in New York.

Rothko used colour to convey a range of emotion and what the artist described as 'religious experience'. Although celebrated as a keen investigator of colour, Rothko strongly objected to being called a colourist. He told critic Selden Rodman that he was interested only in expressing 'basic human emotions - ecstasy, tragedy, doom', and that to see his work only in terms of colour relationships "missed the point". Rothko's work of the 1930s, like that of many of his contemporaries, reflected the strains of life during the Great Depression. Rothko also took cues from the European Surrealist movement, which saw artistic creativity as a key to unlocking the unconscious. By the early 1940s,

Rothko had become interested in ancient myths and symbols. Rothko saw his paintings as vehicles for communicating a shared repertory of images that are reflective of the collective unconscious.

In addition, Rothko was significantly influenced by French painter Henri Matisse, whose works sacrificed line in favour of colour and were in many cases limited to two or three colours. Rothko pushed Matisse's innovations to the level of complete abstraction. By 1949 Rothko had developed his signature style: large rectangular areas of colour placed above one another atop a stained background. He is known for abstract paintings in which soft-edged rectangles of colour seem to float weightlessly against undefined backgrounds. With these works he became a major figure in Abstract Expressionism. In the 1960s Rothko received several major mural commissions, among these a series for a nondenominational chapel in Houston, Texas (1964-1966), which he painted in sombre shades of violet, maroon, and black. The building was re-dedicated as the Rothko Chapel after the artist's death by suicide in 1970.

Velázquez, Diego Rodriguez de Silva y (1599-1660)

Velázquez was a Spanish painter who is considered to have been the country's greatest baroque artist. He, with Francisco de Goya y Lucientes (1746-1828) and El Greco (1541-1614) form the great triumvirate of Spanish painting.

Velázquez was born in Seville the oldest of six children; both his parents were from the minor nobility. Between 1611 and 1617 the young Velázquez worked as an apprentice to Francisco Pacheco, a Sevillian Mannerist painter who was also the author of an important treatise, *El Arte de la Pintura* (1649) (The Art of Painting), and who became Velázquez's father-in-law. During his student years Velázquez absorbed the most popular contemporaneous styles of painting, derived, in part, from both Flemish and Italian realism.

Many of his earliest paintings show a strong naturalist bias, as does The Breakfast (1617-20). This painting belongs to the first of three categories - the *bodegon*, or kitchen piece, along with portraits and religious scenes. The masterly effects of light and shadow, as well as the direct observation of nature, make inevitable a comparison with the work of the Italian painter, Caravaggio. Velázquez's religious paintings, images of simple piety, portray models drawn from the streets of Seville, as Pacheco states in his biography of Velázquez. In Adoration of the Magi, for example, the artist painted his own family in the guise of biblical figures, including a self-portrait. Velázquez was also well acquainted with members of the intellectual circles of Seville. Such contact was important for Velázquez's later work on mythological and classical subjects.

In 1623, he was appointed official painter to Philip IV. Indeed, throughout the later 1620s, most of his efforts were dedicated to portraiture. Mythological

subjects would at times occupy his attention, as in Bacchus (1628-29), (The Topers), Prado. This scene of revelry in an open field, picturing the god of wine drinking with ruffian types, testifies to the artist's continued interest in realism.

In August 1629, Velázquez departed from Barcelona for Genoa and spent most of the next two years travelling in Italy, returning to Spain from Naples in January 1631. In the course of his journey he closely studied both the art of the Renaissance and contemporaneous painting. Several of the works executed during his travels attest to his absorption of these styles, which combine a Michelangelesque sculptural quality with the chiaroscuro of some Italian masters.

From the 1630s on, relatively few facts are known about the artist's personal life, although his rise to prominence in court circles is well documented. In 1634, Velázquez organised the decoration of the throne room in the new royal palace; this scheme consisted of twelve scenes of battles in which Spanish troops had been victorious, and royal equestrian portraits. The battle pictures included The Surrender of Breda (1634), Prado. The delicacy of handling and range of emotions captured in a single painting make this the most celebrated historical composition of the Spanish baroque.

The second major series of paintings of the 1630s by Velázquez was a group of hunting portraits of the royal family for the Torre de la Parada, a hunting lodge near Madrid. Dating from the late 1630s and early 1640s are the famous depictions of court dwarfs in which, unlike court-jester portraits by earlier artists, the sitters are treated with respect and sympathy. The key works of the painter's last two decades are Fable of Arachne (1644-48), Prado, an image of sophisticated mythological symbolism, and his masterwork, Las Meninas (1656), Prado, (The Maids of Honour), a stunning group portrait of the royal family and Velázquez himself in the act of painting. Velázquez painted few religious pictures after entering the king's employ. During the last 20 years of his life, Velázquez's work as court official and architect assumed prime importance. At this time he was also admitted to Rome's Academy of Saint Luke. Velázquez continued to serve Philip IV as painter, courtier, and faithful friend until the artist's death in Madrid on August 6, 1660. His work had a subtle impact a century later on his greatest successor, Francisco de Goya.

Zurbarán, Francisco de (1598-1664)

Spanish baroque painter Zurbarán was born of Basque ancestry in Fuente de Cantos, Badajoz Province in 1598. He was apprenticed to a minor Spanish painter in Seville but appears to have been influenced early in his career by Michelangelo. In 1629, he settled in Seville and spent the next 30 years there.

A painter of saints and churchmen, he worked at Llerena, Madrid, and Seville, mostly for ecclesiastical patrons. His early paintings often suggest the austere

simplicity of wooden sculpture. The figures, placed close to the picture surface, are strongly modelled in dramatic light against dark backgrounds, indicating the influence of Caravaggio. They were clearly painted as altarpieces or devotional objects.

In the 1630's his realistic style yielded to more mystical expression; in this decade he was influenced by Ribera's figural types and rapid brushwork. Zurbarán's art is best described as monastic; it employs Hispanic veracity and earnestness to provide documentary, almost eye-witness records of the solitude and inwardly directed spiritual passion of secluded monasteries. It is quietist, in as much as it relates to a contemporary religious culture dedicated to an abstraction from worldly interests and exalting passive but intense contemplations of divinity. His starkly sculptural renditions anticipate modern photography, light focussed on the canvas suggests spiritual illumination. He carried out commissions for many churches and for Philip IV, for whom he painted a series of mythological pictures.

His use of sharply defined, often brilliant, colours and minute detail in simple compositions, strong three-dimensional modelling of figures, and the shadowed light that brightly illuminates his subjects all give his paintings a solidity and dignity evocative of the solitude and solemnity of monastic life. His work at its best fuses two dominant tendencies in Spanish art, realism and mysticism. His uncompromising art was publicly acclaimed to be the perfect visual expression of the piety of Spanish culture of his day; the distinguishing features were uncompromising realism, religious intensity and material austerity.

The impact of Zurbarán's work lessened as the young Murillo gradually acquired a leading role in Seville. Zurbarán's reputation suffered a near eclipse until the nineteenth century when it was revived by modern art critics.

APPENDIX C

Antoni Tàpies (8th June 1999). Interview by Emma Bulley; Barcelona.
(Richard Jaques, interpreter)

TAPE 1. Side 1.

EB: ... to other particular painting 'Brown and Mason Smoother'.

RJ: 'Brown and Mason Smoother', this is one of his, yes?

EB: Yes in 1973.

RJ: This is about Zurbarán, yes? 32

RJ: Ok, this question is about Catalan painters ...
 (Bueno esta pregunta es sobre los pintores catalanes ...)

AT: Yes, you would better tell me, otherwise ...
 (Sí mejor que me lo diga porque ...)

RJ: She asks if some Catalan painters such as Zurbarán and Meléndez from the 15th century ...
 (Ella pregunta si algunos pintores catalanes como Zurbarán y Luis Meléndez entre el siglo 15 ...)

AT: You mean Spanish ...
 (Españoles tendría que decir ...)

RJ: Yes, Zurbarán is not Catalan ...
 (Sí, Zurbarán no es catalán ...)

AT: Nor Meléndez
 (Ni Meléndez tampoco.)

RJ: They are Spanish rather than Catalan painters.

EB: Right, sorry!

RJ: ... from the 15th to the 19th century made paintings which inspire contemplation with their dark backgrounds. She wants to talk about one of your pictures called 'Brown and Mason Smoother'. 'Brown and Mason', 'Brown and Mason Smoother'. It was made in 1973.
 (... entre el siglo 15 y 19 hacen cuadros que inspiran la contemplación con sus fondos oscuros. Entonces ella quiere hablar de un cuadro suyo específico que

se llama 'Brown and Mason Smoother'. 'Brown and Mason', 'Brown and Mason Smoother' Es un cuadro del 1973.)

AT: I do not exactly know which one it is ...
(No veo exactamente cuál es ...)

EB: OK, just generally the whole painting, yes ...

RJ: Then, the question is if you have been influenced by the artists of these previous eras.

(Entonces la pregunta es si usted ha sido influido por los artistas de estas épocas, las épocas anteriores.)

AT: I think that an artist can be influenced by many things, maybe several specific pictures. I may have been influenced by this idea of provoking a certain state of mystical contemplation as represented by Zurbarán's monks. I do not know. I do not know Meléndez so much, but, anyway. They may have influenced me in a general way, in the form of a human concern, if you like, but I have not been explicitly influenced by each author on his own.

(Yo creo que a un artista le pueden influir muchas cosas, un número de cuadros específicos, quizás. Pero la idea ésta de provocar un cierto estado de contemplación mística como son el caso de los monjes de Zurbarán, o no sé. Meléndez lo conozco menos, pero, en fin. Puede ser muy bien que me influyeran en un sentido general, como una preocupación humana, digamos, pero no específicamente cada autor.)

RJ: What would you like to move on to?

EB: Do you want just to give me a résumé? I will check it has been taped.

RJ: He says no, specifically not. In general, perhaps a little bit by Zurbarán, Meléndez (he hardly knows him). But possibly in some sort of the monks, the Zurbarán's monks. But he says not ..

AT: Yes, I think I have been really interested in those belonging to the Tenebrista school. Also Rivera.

(Lo que se han llamado los pintores tenebristas, yo creo que sí, que realmente me han interesado. Rivera también.)

RJ: Yes the 'tenebrista' school. Rivera.

EB: I will just check that this is OK. Right!

AT: I just want to make sure that everything has been understood. I have been interested in them but in a mere artistic attitude.

(Se ha entendido bien. En cierta manera como actitud artística sí que me interesa.)

EB: Let us think, number 3.

RJ: Question number 3. Your work has repeatedly been described as spiritual -would you describe it as spiritual and if so how, in what sense?

(Pregunta número tres. Bien, su obra ha sido descrita específicamente como espiritual. ¿Usted mismo la describiría como espiritual, y si es así, en qué sentido?)

AT: Yes, I think in the same way as I said before about the 'tenebristas'. There is an attitude that even could be called religious, but in a very down to earth/earthy way. I am very interested in works that show a transcendental meaning but understanding this transcendence in a human way, if you like. As I have said many times before the transcendental can also be found within the immanent. In this sense, I believe that my work is definitely spiritual. However, it is very difficult to separate concepts. I have always tended to the conciliation of both concepts, spiritual and material. I personally think that they are often confused and they are the same. Different points of view that are in essence the same. I do not know if I am answering ...

(Sí, yo creo, como decía antes de los tenebristas, una actitud incluso podríamos decir religiosa, pero, en un sentido muy terrenal. Me interesan las obras que tengan un sentido trascendente pero entendiendo la palabra trascendencia también en un sentido más humano, digamos, como a veces he dicho que la trascendencia puede encontrarse también dentro de la inmanencia, digamos. En este sentido yo creo que sí, que mi obra tiene bastante de espiritual. Lo que pasa también es que es muy difícil hacer separaciones. Siempre tiendo a la conciliación de los conceptos espiritual y material. Para mí, a veces se confunden y es lo mismo. Puntos de vista diferentes pero en el fondo es lo mismo. No sé si contesto)

RJ: Very briefly. He says that spiritual but rather in a human sense. It is not too happy about very clear distinctions between the spiritual and the material. Both things tend to overlap rather. Yes, in a sense, his work has a spiritual content but he is not quite so sure about the clear cuts or distinction between the two.

EB: So, does that mean that he is a humanist?

RJ: Would you describe yourself as a humanist?

(¿Usted se describiría como un humanista?)

AT: I do not know exactly what humanism involves. If it means a search to improve humankind, then, I am, indeed, a humanist. Of course. But this understanding does not exclude the so called spiritual or transcendental

elements. I see them from a different perspective, not so much in the traditional meaning that has been attributed to transcendence or spirituality.

(No sé exactamente todo lo que engloba el humanismo. En el sentido de buscar una mejora para el hombre, pues sí, soy humanista, claro. Sí. Pero esto no excluye los elementos que llamamos espirituales o trascendentes. Lo que pasa es que los veo de otra manera, digamos, no en el sentido tradicional de la palabra trascendencia o espiritualidad.)

RJ: He says that he is a humanist in the sense that he would like to improve life for human beings, but it certainly has a spiritual content, his work, but he is not too happy about this clear distinction between the spiritual and the material.

EB: Sure. This has to do with number six. I saw the BBC Omnibus programme where he sounds like a Buddhist, but he said that he is not a Buddhist yet he talks like one. So, the question is basically about his relationship between the established religion, Buddhism and Catholicism.

RJ: She refers now to an interview you gave to BBC (Omnibus). She says that when she saw the interview you sounded like a Buddhist ...

(Ella se refiere a una entrevista que usted hizo con la BBC para Omnibus. Ella dice que cuando vio el programa tenía la impresión de que usted hablaba como budista ...)

AT: Yes, like a Buddhist, exactly!

(¡Como budista, exactamente!)

RJ: She wants to know what your current relation is between Buddhism and Catholicism, the established religion

(Ella quiere saber cuál es su relación actual con el budismo, catolicismo, la religión establecida.)

AT: Well, I have been always interested in some aspects of Buddhism. This interest developed from my interest in contemporary science. I realised, after reading some popular scientific books, that almost all the recognised scientists of the 20th century sometime in their works referred to this oriental wisdom. Some of them referred more explicitly to Buddhism. This led me to become interested in the main Buddhist teachings. There is a branch in Buddhism, this kind of mixture between Buddhism and Taoism, and somehow also the neo-Confucianism, that really interests me. What has been called Chan Buddhism in China and Zen Buddhism in Japan. It seemed to me that it was a very free branch, hardly submitted to any religious regulations or ecclesiastic hierarchies. It is more a wisdom of the human being on his own than a religion. The human being has to wake up on his own and stop thinking that solutions come from beyond (he refers to a kind of divine activity in human life). I believe this is a very modern

attitude and because of that extremely interesting. In this sense, I am a bit of a Buddhist. Mind you, some Buddhists think that if you believe in some of the Buddhist precepts, then, you are a Buddhist. What happens is that they do not give you any card nor they do not write your name down in any statistics.

(Bueno sí, yo me he interesado siempre por algunos aspectos del budismo, pero esta afición me vino un poco a través de la ciencia contemporánea. Leyendo libros de divulgación científica me di cuenta de que casi todos los grandes científicos del siglo XX en algún momento han hecho alusiones a la sabiduría oriental y concretamente al budismo algunos. Y esto me indujo a estudiar un poco lo que el budismo dice. Hay una rama del budismo, esta especie de mezcla de budismo-taoísmo y en parte el neo-confucionismo también, que me ha interesado mucho. Entonces lo que se ha llamado el budismo Chan en China y el budismo Zen en el Japón. La doctrina de la diana porque me pareció una rama muy libre, muy poco sujeta a normas religiosas ni a jerarquías eclesiásticas. Es como una sabiduría, casi casi no se puede decir religión, del hombre solo. Tiene que espabilarse el hombre, él solo, sin pensar que las soluciones vienen de un más allá. Me parece una actitud muy moderna esto, por eso muy interesante. En este sentido soy algo budista, sí. Pero los budistas dicen si usted cree en algunas cosas del budismo es budista. Lo que pasa es que ellos no dan ningún carnet ni te apuntan en ninguna estadística, ni nada.)

RJ: More or less he says that he became interested first through science. He realised that a lot of great scientists of the century were interested in Buddhism or were Buddhist themselves. What interests him about Buddhism is like a prescriptiveness that it does not have hierarchies and dogmas. He thinks it is a very modern religion in the sense that it talks about man basically being is on his own. This is what really attracts him to it. And he says, well, in that sense, perhaps, he may be called a Buddhist, but he is not.

AT: I do not practice any religion, not even Catholicism. My only religious practice is meditation in front of a picture. I invite the spectator to do the same: focus on the picture and let themselves flow away by what I try to point out in my work. But, this practice is nothing special.

(Lo que pasa es que yo no practico nada. Tampoco el catolicismo. La única práctica que puedo hacer es meditar delante de algún cuadro e invito al espectador a que también se concentre y se deje llevar por lo que yo intento apuntar en mis obras. Pero no es un ejercicio especial.)

EB: This is a conglomeration of questions 9 and 10. He does not like the distinction between material and spiritual. In a sense our history has said that you can only portray things spiritual by their absence. Is he trying to do the impossible? Does it make sense?

RJ: We are coming back to what you said before that you did not like this clear cut difference between spiritual and material. Within art history, the spiritual realm has traditionally been transmitted as something separate from the known world. She wants to know if you are trying something impossible in the sense of transmitting the spiritual realm through something that it is, that exists.

(Volvemos un poco a lo que usted dijo antes de que no quiere esa diferencia tan clara entre lo espiritual y lo material. Tradicionalmente, en la historia del arte lo espiritual siempre se ha transmitido como algo aparte del mundo conocido y que solamente se puede indicar por su ausencia. Ella quiere saber si usted esta intentando lo imposible en el sentido de transmitir lo espiritual a través de algo que está, que existe.)

AT: There are indirect ways of inducing a, let us say, transcendental thought. I am very certain that it is impossible and has always been impossible to explain it with words, in a sort of intellectual way. It is something to be felt; it is a question of feelings. I believe that it must have been always like that, specially in the 20th century when even science is inviting us to consider issues so difficult to represent visually. Let us take the example of the curvature of space and time. It cannot take a visual form but it has instead to be represented with formula, mathematical formula. This is to say, in an indirect way. There are also other indirect ways of transmission towards this transcendental world in which words are not needed, nor even mentioned in an unexpected way. Buddhism, precisely, talks about how sometimes listening to a dog barking one may become enlightened. This enlightenment allows you to see deep things that you were not able to understand before. I do not know if I am answering properly the question ...

(Es que son formas indirectas de inducir a un pensamiento digamos trascendente para entendernos. Seguramente no se puede ni se ha podido nunca explicarlo con palabras de una manera intelectual. Es una cosa que hay que sentirlo, es una cuestión más bien de sentimientos. Creo que siempre habrá sido así, y especialmente en el siglo XX cuando la ciencia también nos invita a cosas tan difíciles de plasmarlas visualmente. La curvatura del espacio-tiempo no se puede plasmar visualmente sino que se tiene, en todo caso, que hacer con fórmulas, fórmulas matemáticas. Osea de una manera indirecta. Y también hay otras formas indirectas de transmisión hacia este mundo trascendental sin hablar, y sin ni siquiera hacer ninguna alusión, a lo mejor, de una manera imprevista. Precisamente, los budistas nos hablan a veces de que oyendo el ladrido de un perro tienes una iluminación que te hace ver cosas muy profundas que no habías podido alcanzar antes. No sé si contesto bien a la pregunta que me ha dicho ...)

RJ: He says that he has felt that the approach to the transcendental is indirect; it must be indirect. That you cannot express the curvature of space and time in visual terms.

AT: Yes, this is related to what she said about trying to achieve this 'impossible'.

(En el sentido que decía ella de lo imposible, que pretendo alcanzar)

RJ: If you are trying to paint what cannot be painted ...

(Si usted está intentando pintar lo que no se puede pintar ...)

AT: Yes, basically I am, but I try to do it in a kind of indirect way.

(Sí, en el fondo sí, lo que pasa es que se intenta por otros caminos indirectos.)

RJ: Yes, he says, in fact he is, but he tries to do it in a roundabout kind of way.

EB: I want to ask about question 11. The abstract, spiritual art from Kandinsky on leave out about the kinship. If he feels his work is part of that abstract/spiritual tradition like Rothko.

RJ: She is talking now about abstract/spiritual art from Kandinsky on. Abstract expressionist painters like Rothko or Barnett Newman. Do you feel part of this tradition, or do you have any sort of link with them?

(Ella está hablando del arte abstracto espiritual, digamos desde Kandinsky. Pintores del expresionismo abstracto como Rothko o Barnett Newman. Si usted se siente parte de esta tradición, si tiene algún vínculo con ello.)

AT: Yes, of course. I really admire these artists, specially Rothko. What other artists has she mentioned?

(Sí, sí, sí, incluso admiro mucho a estos artistas, sobre todo Rothko. ¿Qué otro artista mencionó?)

RJ: Barnett Newman.

AT: I do not know Barnett Newman so much. But I really like Rothko. I even have one of his paintings here at home. I am a collector of his work. Kandinsky, Paul Klee and also 'our' Miró (our Catalan colleague) express this mystical state we are talking about. Miró was indeed following this approach, this mixture between materialism and spiritualism. I venture to suggest that this is very Catalan due to the Franciscan influence. Franciscanism is very much this kind of belief. I think that there are many Catholic people who say they believe the same. I have recently read a short text written by the Archbishop of Barcelona that said that, after all, Christianity was a religion of incarnation ('incarnated religion'). I do not know, but it seems to me that we are always embodied in something tangible, concrete. Things are not volatile; everything takes the form of something material.

(Barnett Newman no lo conozco tanto. Pero Rothko, incluso tengo un cuadro suyo en mi casa. Lo he coleccionado y otros. Este sentido místico se encuentra muy bien en Kandinsky, pero también en Paul Klee, e incluso en Miró, nuestro

colega catalán. Miró era también de esta tendencia, esta mezcla de materialismo y espiritualidad. Creo que esto es bastante típico catalán, que quizá nos viene de la influencia franciscana. El franciscanismo es un poco esto también. Creo que hay muchos católicos que se confiesan también así. El otro día leí un pequeño texto del arzobispo de Barcelona que decía que al fin y al cabo el cristianismo es una religión de, como lo decía, de encarnación, no sé qué, estamos encanados siempre en alguna cosa, alguna cosa tangible. No es algo volátil, sino que todo se manifiesta como algo que se ha encarnado.)

RJ: He really extended as to say that he feels as a very much of the Catalan tradition, which includes Miró, for example, which has to do with a very strong Franciscan tradition here in Cataluña. Yes, indeed, he a great admirer of Rothko. He has a painting of his here, in fact.

EB: OK. Number 14 about the connection with the Romantic legacy.

RJ: This question is basically related to Romanticism. She wants to know if your work can be considered as descendent from the Romantic legacy as it puts its emphasis on feelings to express the infinite throughout the finite.

(Básicamente la pregunta es sobre el romanticismo y quiere saber si su obra también puede ser descendiente de la herencia romántica porque tiene mucho hincapié en los sentimientos de expresar el infinito a través de lo finito.)

AT: Yes, it could be considered along these lines. Its origins are very remote, as remote as the Chinese humanism we were talking about before. I would say it was also developed by the pre-Socratics, especially Heraclitus and the neo-Platonics. One can find many mystical references in their philosophical interpretations. I really identify myself with the line this mysticism has taken in art history. I am also a firm follower of this line. I believe that it is a like a thread that links many different artistic manifestations of different civilisations. Nowadays it is very important that we remark on this. This is very much what I was explaining to Mr Murphy about a book I am just about to give to the publisher. It deals with the influence of every civilisation on our 20th century civilisation. There are in all of them a few elements that link them all. This is to me the main principle in art history. The remaining elements such as art of social criticism, art of caricature and other arts are collateral branches. They can play a role but the main principle behind is this one, that attempts to link all of us to the ultimate reality, the basic nature of humankind.

(Sí yo creo que sí. Estoy un poco en esta línea. Seguramente viene de muy lejos, del humanismo chino que decíamos antes. Ha pasado por un pre-socrático, sobre todo Heráclito, por los neo-platónicos, por ejemplo, porque tienen mucho de misticismo. Ha tomado una línea en la historia del arte de la que posiblemente me siento muy identificado. Y como un seguidor de esta línea. Creo que es como un hilo que une muchas artes de diferentes civilizaciones y precisamente creo que es importante que hoy día lo

recalquemos esto. Un poco el tema que el otro día les explique al señor Murphy, de un libro que estoy acabando de dar al editor de la influencia de todas las civilizaciones sobre la nuestra del siglo XX. En todas ellas se encuentran unos elementos que parecen que las unen. Para mí es el tronco principal de la historia del arte. Todo lo demás son ramas colaterales que, pues, pueden estar muy bien: arte de crítica social, arte de caricatura, arte de muchas maneras. Pero el tronco principal, yo creo que siempre, es éste que intenta unirnos con la última realidad, con la naturaleza básica del hombre.)

RJ: OK. Very very briefly. He thinks it is something that goes way back beyond Romanticism. It links up with art in other places at the time. And he thinks that the main current in the history of art has always been the search for the basic human reality. And it is not confined to the Western traditional art. It can be found in Chinese art, in Oriental art and in other branches of art.

EB: I will just check if it is ...

(Break)

RJ: If you feel very much like a painter of your era, your time ...
(Si usted se siente mucho como un pintor de su época de sus tiempos ...)

AT: I encourage people to think through my work about current topics. After all, I have learnt many things from the most outstanding contemporary scientists. I still believe in the importance of science nowadays. In this sense, I try to study and I make an effort to stay updated with the latest scientific research, specially physics, biology, cosmology and so on. Please, tell her that I am not very inclined towards the idea that things are fashionable. I tend, by contrary, to concentrate on my work, no matter if it is fashionable or not.

(Yo intento inducir a pensar temas que son muy actuales. Al fin y al cabo, como les he dicho antes, muchas cosas las he aprendido de los científicos más recientes. Yo tengo todavía confianza en que la ciencia es algo importante, no. En este sentido yo procuro, incluso, estudiarlo y me esfuerzo para conocer las últimas investigaciones científicas, sobre todo en física, también en la nueva biología, la cosmología, muchas cosas. Dígale que yo no soy muy dado a esta idea de que las cosas son de moda o no son de moda, sino que voy intentando profundizar en mi trabajo y no me preocupo si paso de moda o no.)

RJ: Yes, he says that he is not very concerned about fashion. But he tries to pursue the line that he thinks is the most interesting even if it is anti-fashion.

EB: Fair enough.

AT: If you want me to be a bit more pedantic I would say that it is quite the opposite. I have sometimes noticed that some younger artists have continued doing things that I was doing twenty five years ago. It is very important to remember at this point that in order for new things to appear other things have to remain the same. This is the idea behind the book of Chinese mutations, the Yi Qing: some things must remain immutable for mutation to occur. I do my best not to look for perishable or transitory things. Instead I search for more solid things that last longer.

(Si tuviera que ser un poco más pedante le diría que es al revés, que muchas veces he notado que cosas que yo hacía, bastantes años después, ha habido artistas más jóvenes que han vuelto a lo que hacía yo veinticinco años. Es muy elástico, esto. Y sobre todo recordar siempre que para que las cosas se muevan siempre tiene que haber algo que no se mueva. La idea del libro de las mutaciones chinas, el Yi Qing, que decía esto: para que haya mutación tiene que haber cosas que sean inmutables. Siempre procuro buscar algo que no sea perecedero y transitorio, cosas un poco sólidas que duren tiempo.)

RJ: Yes, he is interested in things that last. He says that, in fact, in order for things to change other things have to remain the same. It comes from Chinese philosophy. And the other point he made was that a lot of young artists now are actually doing things that he was doing 25 years ago.

EB: This is a mixture of 15 and 25. Because of the atrocities of this century, like World War, nuclear war and so on, some people, some intellectuals would say that there are no essences like truth. How does he respond to that, that you cannot have a universal or an essence anymore?

RJ: There are many intellectuals nowadays that, after wars and other atrocities we have experienced, agree that there are no essences or absolute ideas. For example, they would say that there is not point in talking about truth nowadays. What do you think about that?

(Hay muchos intelectuales hoy en día, después de las guerras, las atrocidades que hemos vivido que no hay más esencias ni absolutos. Hablar ahora de la verdad, por ejemplo, no tiene sentido. ¿Cuál es su opinión de esto?)

AT: Well, this is related to what I answered before. I believe that there are many things that remain and that I have learnt from oriental wisdom. There is a sutra (I think it is called the diamond sutra) that explains how Buddha asks a monk if the sublime nature of a wise man lasts forever. And, suddenly, the disciple answers that surely everything can change and that after five hundred years there will be hardly anyone would know what all this was about. Buddha replies that he is partially right because concepts do not last, they separate or fall apart. I do not know. The nature of the sublime wisdom in truth does not exist. If one analyses it deeply, each of its components, tearing them apart, one can see that the nature of sublime wisdom is something, a human creation, a human concept. Then, Buddha concludes that because of that this thought is also called sublime thought.

At the beginning he says that this sublime thought does not exist, but in the end he ends up saying what I am telling you, that it falls apart and it does not exist. But, finally, he concludes that this is what we call sublime thought. And, being honest, I like this very much. It indicates that intellectuals are able to transform things after they happen. There is also this bit when they say that when you start studying Buddhism you see a mountain. But the more you reflect on it you realise that that the mountain is not a mountain anymore. It separates into its constituent parts and what is left is a whole emptiness. And if you go deeper into it again you come to the conclusion that the mountains are mountains again. This is very beautiful! It is like returning to reality after having experienced every possible intellectual process. I do not know if I am answering the question

...

(Bueno, un poco lo que he contestado antes. Yo creo que sí que hay cosas que quedan y creo que muchas cosas de éstas las he aprendido de sabidurías del este. Hay un sutra, que me parece que se llama el sutra del diamante, cuando Buda hace unas alusiones, por ejemplo, le pregunta a un monje si cree que perdura la naturaleza sublime de un sabio, por ejemplo. Y, de momento, el discípulo le dice que seguramente todo, pues, puede cambiar, y que al cabo de quinientos años, pues habrá mucha gente que ni hablará de esto ni sabrá qué es. Y dice, en parte es verdad, le contesta el Buda, en realidad las cosas conceptuales no duran, se descomponen. No sé, la naturaleza de la sabiduría sublime en realidad no existe. Si usted la analiza a fondo, analizándola por partes, descuartizándola, digamos, pues ve que no, que es una cosa, una creación humana, un concepto humano. Entonces acaba diciendo y por esto a este pensamiento lo llamamos pensamiento sublime. Al principio dice que el pensamiento sublime no existe, pero después acaba diciendo, esto que le estoy diciendo que se descompone y no existe, pero después acaba diciendo que resulta que lo llamamos pensamiento sublime. Esto me gusta mucho, es un indicativo de que estas cosas que pasan después los intelectuales lo transformamos. También aquello que dicen ellos mismos, que cuando empiezas a estudiar el budismo ves una montaña. Pero a medida que vas profundizando te das cuenta que aquella montaña no es una montaña, se va descomponiendo y al final queda un vacío total. Si profundizas más del budismo vuelves a ver que las montañas son montañas otra vez. Esto es muy bonito, como una especie de retorno a la realidad después de pasar todas las aventuras intelectuales posibles. No sé si contesto ...)

RJ: He says he quotes a sutra. Because of the length I am not going to go into it. Basically it says that it is reality that then decomposes and then it recomposes and it is reality again. The Buddhist idea that you see a mountain, then you realise that it is not a mountain and then you realise in fact that it is a mountain again. Then, that these things are cyclical.

EB: Sr Tàpies has talked about looking within for answers and in an age characterised by, I suppose, by quite a bit of selfishness. How do you ... is

there not a problem with that, how do you get shared values if you just rely on looking within?

RJ: She says, for example, that you tend to look for within for answers. She thinks that perhaps nowadays there is a tendency towards selfishness, that people are becoming everyday more selfish. Do you see this as a problem, the fact that we are losing our shared values?

(Ella dice por ejemplo, usted tiende a buscar cosas hacia dentro del propio ser, del yo. Ella piensa que hoy en día, tal vez, hay una tendencia al egoísmo, que la gente se está volviendo cada día más egoísta. ¿Usted lo siente como un problema que estamos perdiendo los valores compartidos?)

AT: I have not quite understood. What? If I think what ...
(No he entendido, cómo, si creo que)

RJ: If you think that there is a problem because we are losing some sort of our shared values, if we are changing too much ...

(Si cree que hay un problema que estamos perdiendo un poco los valores compartidos, si estamos cambiando demasiado.)

AT: Yes, modern life influences us in such a way that we tend to forget essential values. This is one of the most dangerous problems of our time. We are worried about secondary things such as comfort, being better off, having good cars, even having cats. But we forget what is important. This is a major problem nowadays and it is more than likely the product of the system operating in our society, societies of welfare. Paradoxically, they mean wealth for some but discomfort for many.

(Sí, sí, la vida moderna nos lleva al olvido de valores esenciales. Es uno de los grandes males de este tiempo. Estamos preocupados por cosas secundarias, por el confort, por vivir bien, por tener buenos automóviles, por tener gatos, y nos olvidamos de lo más importante. Esto es un gran mal de este siglo y es seguramente producto de todo el sistema que funciona en la sociedad, estas sociedades que se llaman del bienestar, pero que es un bienestar para algunos y bastante malestar para otros.)

RJ: Yes, absolutely, our society has lost sight of a lot of values that have to do with very much look outside yourself, not being very introspective. Do you want to pursue that further?

EB: This is not quite on the thing, but it leads to ... are there other artists that he feels are trying to go against such stream of superficial thoughts about?

RJ: She asks if you can think about other artists that are trying their best to go against this superficial tendency. Is there any particular one ?

(Ella pregunta si usted considera que hay otros artistas que estan intentando ir contra esta corriente de superficialidad. Hay alguno en especial que ...)

AT: Yes, I think so. Sometimes I listen to writers, musicians or painters declaring that society is not working well, that society is highly unequal, and that people are extremely inattentive. Mass media are also being accused of promoting this kind of anomia in society. During Franco's dictatorship we, intellectuals and artists, thought that the regime used to use football as a means to keep people distracted from real problems. In democratic times, paradoxically, we are witnessing the same situation. Football has become a major issue and people, ... Of course not everybody is interested in football. There are many different kind of people. I feel that little by little people are becoming a bit more conscious. However, problems such as our relationship with nature and ecology are still taken in a very superficial way. It will be good if we continue reflecting about these interesting issues.

(Sí, yo creo que sí. A veces oigo declaraciones de escritores, o incluso músicos, o pintores que consideran que la sociedad no funciona bien, que hay unas desigualdades terribles y que la gente está excesivamente distraída. Incluso se acusa a los mismos medios de comunicación de fomentar este atontamiento de la sociedad. Aquí, cuando teníamos la dictadura de Franco todos los intelectuales y artistas creíamos que el dictador fomentaba un exceso de información sobre el fútbol y que esto era un arma que tenía la dictadura para que la gente estuviese distraída. Pero ahora veo con la venida de la democracia que se hace igual o más que entonces, no. El fútbol ha devenido una cosa enorme y la gente, pues... Lo que pasa es que no es todo el mundo, claro. Hay gente de todas maneras y poco a poco yo creo que se va cogiendo un poco más de conciencia. Pero los problemas de nuestra relación con la naturaleza, la ecología, son cosas que quizá la gente lo toma un poco superficialmente, pero seguramente es bueno que se vaya pensando en temas de estos más interesantes.)

RJ: Is there any specific painter, artist that you can think of who is following this line?

(Hay algún pintor en especial, algún artista, que se le ocurre que está en esta línea.)

AT: Well, I do not have any names in my mind right now. But there have been some very committed artists in issues like ecology. Beuys is one example, but there are many more. My friends actually follow this line.

(Bueno, no me vienen nombres a la memoria. Pero ha habido artistas que han estado muy militantes en temas de ecología como Beuys. Pero hay muchos. Mis amigos generalmente piensan así.)

RJ: Yes, he thinks that there are plenty of people reacting against this current. He quoted something about football. Did you get it more or less? During Franco's dictatorship ... Franco used to use football a lot to distract people from real problems. And, at the time, they thought it was a product of the dictatorship, but nowadays in democracy it is exactly the same, right? Then, things do not really ever change..

EB: And he mentioned Beuys at all. Does he say Beuys?

AT: Yes, I mentioned Beuys but I could have mentioned ...
(Sí, he dicho Beuys, pero podría decir ...)

TAPE 1. Side 2

RJ: Rainer.

EB: Oh yes, Rainer. Let us look ... Yes, I want to ask 27.

RJ: OK, this question follows the same line. She says that nowadays esoteric beliefs have become very popular. She is thinking particularly about the 'new age' movement. (I do not know how to say that in Spanish).

(Bueno, esta pregunta sigue un poco en la misma línea. Ella dice que hoy en día las creencias esotéricas se han vuelto muy populares. Ella está pensando en el movimiento del new age (no sé cómo se dice esto en castellano) ...)

AT: New age (Nueva era.)

RJ: Yes, I think so ... (Sí, me parece que sí ...)

AT: I am not very familiar with it ... (No lo conozco muy bien, ...)

RJ: Then, the question is whether you are worried that, if your work does not have a specific religious basis, then, it could be thought of as a superficial understanding of ancient belief systems.

(Entonces la pregunta es si le preocupa que si su obra carece de una base religiosa específica pueda llegar a verse desde una comprensión superficial de sistemas de creencias antiguos.)

AT: I am sorry but I do not quite understand. Sorry, it may be because I am a bit deaf. I would be grateful if you can repeat it ...

(No he entendido muy bien. Perdona, puede ser que soy un poco sordo. Si puede repetirlo...)

RJ: It is simply about this tendency that she sees in our current society; people tending to join esoteric beliefs in a very superficial way. The new age movement, for example, is a very vague religious manifestation which is not based on any specific religion. In this sense, your work may be seen through this kind of superficial understanding as it is not based upon any specific belief either.

(Simplemente que esta tendencia que ella ve hoy en día, que la gente tiende a coger unas creencias esotéricas en una manera muy superficial. New age, más o menos es un sentimiento religioso muy vago que no se basa en ninguna religión en concreto. Entonces, porque su obra tampoco se basa en una creencia específica, si se podría ver también a través de este tipo de comprensión muy superficial, muy nebulosa.)

AT: I repeat, I am not very familiar with the new age movement. I do not know what to say. I have heard about it a few times and I know that there are different sects, but I cannot talk about it because I am not familiar with it.

(No conozco muy bien esto de la nueva era. Yo no sé que decirle. He oído hablar algunas veces y veo que hay diferentes sectas pero no puedo hablar de esto porque no lo conozco.)

RJ: He says that it is not really his area.

EB: Fair enough, OK.

AT: Could you give me an example of what you mean. It may help ...

(Por ejemplo, si me pusiera algún ejemplo, quizás.)

RJ: He is not quite sure you are relating this to his work specifically.

EB: More that. I suppose dipping into different religions like Buddhism and the esoteric is very fashionable. I am just thinking that people who have a superficial understanding of those, is he worried that, you know, they will bring it with work and not really understand it?

RJ: What she means is could someone interested in esoteric beliefs see in your work any kind of relation, or explanation? Are you worried about this kind of understanding of your work?

(Lo que más bien quiere preguntar es si el tipo de persona que se interesa por esos temas esotéricos podría ver en su obra una especie de relación, de explicación. ¿Le preocupa este tipo de apreciación de su obra?)

AT: OK, in every movement there are people who reflect on it well and people who do it in a superficial way. But sometimes these kind of snobbish attitudes, let us say, because they are fashionable or whatever, can be very interesting as they lead people to deeper thoughts. This may be a way of attracting people towards deeper ideas. But, as I said before, I cannot say much about it because I do not know about this very much.

(Bueno, siempre pasa que en todos movimientos hay personas que profundizan mejor y otras lo hacen superficialmente. Pero a veces las actitudes así un poco snobs, porque es moda o lo que sea, pueden ser interesantes porque conducen a la gente a otras cosas más profundas. Eso sería una forma de atraer a la

gente hacia ideas más profundas. Pero claro no sé qué decirle porque no lo conozco bien.)

RJ: No, he is not particularly concerned. He says that in any case, you know, if people see the work maybe they start to think a little more deeply and so on ... He does not sound very concerned.

AT: But now that you tell me that, I think that I talk a lot about Buddhism. I do not like it then if you tell me that it is a sort of superficial fashion. If my wife was here she would have told me off by now. 'You should not talk so much about Buddhism', she says.

(Pero ahora cuando me dicen esto, pienso que hablo demasiado del budismo, porque si resulta que es una moda superficial, no me gusta, entonces. Si mi mujer estuviera aquí ya me habría reñido. 'No tienes que hablar tanto del budismo', me dice ella.)

RJ: No, I guess that this is people's tendency to simplify things. To take just a few elements and simplify a lot ...

(No, supongo que es un poco la tendencia que tiene la gente de simplificar. Coger unos elementos y simplificar mucho ...)

RJ: He says, perhaps he talks to much about Buddhism.

AT: It seems to me that nowadays there is a reaction to go back to religion. I would say that people were not so religious before as result of the influence of mechanist materialism of the last century. Religion was very much put in the corner, but today people see things in a different way, as we said before, from a more spiritual approach. Surely this is good! But still I cannot say whether the new age movement is valid or not because I do not know it enough.

(Lo que veo que se dice que hay como una reacción a la vuelta de más religiosidad de la que se tenía como producto del materialismo mecanicista del siglo pasado. Esto sí que se ha arrinconado bastante y hay mucha gente que ve más las cosas de una forma, como decíamos al principio, más espiritual que antes. Seguramente está bien, pero yo no puedo decir si la 'nueva era' es válida o no porque no la conozco.)

RJ: He is not qualified to judge such 'new age'.

EB: Fair enough. Try number 30.

RJ: OK, this question has to do with what we were talking about in the last interview. So, firstly, how would you describe the presence of the body in its literal sense as well as the notion of physicality in your work? Secondly, is there anything specifically Spanish or Catalan about the fact that the body is so important in your work?

(Esta pregunta tiene más que ver con lo que estamos hablando en la última entrevista hecha. Entonces, cómo describiría usted la presencia del cuerpo en un sentido literal además de la noción de lo corporal o lo físico en su obra. Y la segunda parte es si eso tiene algo específico de español o catalán porque el cuerpo es muy importante en su obra.)

AT: Yes, indeed. I have never worked out these issues in a systematic way. I began my artistic career influenced by the worries and tragedies that derived from the Spanish Civil War. We said it before, that my inclination towards painting crosses was due to the fact that at this time I perceived Spanish land to be like a cemetery. I realised later on about the meaning of these symbols, like painting crosses or other religious symbols.

In relation to the presence of the body in my work, I would say that, when I was young, I made use of it in a sort of pagan way, understanding it as linked to the material nature of our world. But, as I said before, I do not tend to separate the material from the spiritual. Therefore, the body, to me, is actually part of the ultimate cosmic energies. Divine energies, if you like, for those who believe in G-d. At the same time, this energy has become corporeal, become incarnated as something as material as our human body. I believe that it is good for people to meditate on this idea. We tend to understand the human body in a contemptuous way. Even sex is seen as something exclusively material and profane. This is specially evident in Spain due to a religious conservative way of thinking and interpreting reality. But, I firmly believe that this spirit, this mystery, as I like calling it, as we do not know how to classify it, exists everywhere. For example, even this glass is part of this divine spirit. And, if people were aware of the fact that the transcendental is in every single thing of this world, we would respect things much more and we would improve our relationships with each other. But, I do not remember why I am saying that. What was the question ...?

(Sí, claro. Yo no lo he trabajado de una manera sistemática. Empecé a ser artista rodeado de las preocupaciones consecuencia de la Guerra Civil española, de las tragedias de la Guerra Civil. Aquel día ya lo dijimos, la misma afición que yo tenía de hacer cruces es porque toda la tierra española me parecía un cementerio en aquel momento. Ahora después, la idea del simbolismo de la cruz o muchas cosas de tipo religioso las he ido viendo más tarde. Y el cuerpo lo he utilizado de una forma, cuando era joven, un poco como más pagana, más involucrado en la materialidad de las cosas de nuestro mundo. Es lo que le decía un poco antes, como no separo materia y espíritu, pues el cuerpo para mí es realmente parte de unas energías últimas cósmicas o divinas, si usted quiere decir para los que creen en D-s, pues en algo divino. Y a la vez es una cosa que se ha corporizado, encarnado, en algo muy material que es nuestro cuerpo humano. Yo creo que es bueno también que la gente medite un poco sobre esto. A veces tratamos como consecuencia de maneras de pensar también religiosas, especialmente en España, con un cierto desprecio del tema del cuerpo humano, incluso del sexo, se ve como una cosa muy material y profana. Pero yo creo que el espíritu éste, el misterio, yo digo, porque

no sabemos como calificarlo, existe en todo. Aquí en este vaso es parte de este espíritu divino. Y si la gente tuviera esta visión de que lo trascendental está en todas las cosas de la vida, trataríamos con mucho más respeto todas las cosas y las propias relaciones entre los humanos, también serían mejores. Y esto no sé porque lo decía. La pregunta era)

RJ: Yeah, it was about the importance of the body in its literal sense in your work ...

(Era sobre la importancia literal del cuerpo en su obra ...)

AT: Yes, sometimes I really made an effort to dignify parts of the body that were despised: feet, toe nails, and I even made a picture, as I explained to Mr Murphy, of an armpit. Armpits are part of the body that people consider to smell bad. People even talk a lot about that. But I painted an armpit and it was very successful. It was a real success for me because Joan Miró fall in love with it. We did an exchange. I changed it for this picture I have got right here.

(Sí, yo a veces me he esforzado por dignificar partes del cuerpo humano que eran un poco despreciadas, los pies, las uñas de los pies, e incluso, una vez hice un cuadro, ya se lo expliqué al señor Murphy, que era una axila también. La axila es una parte del cuerpo que la gente cree que huele mal. Se habla mucho de esto. Pero yo hice un cuadro con una axila y tuvo mucho éxito. Para mí fue un gran éxito porque se enamoró de él Joan Miró. Hicimos un cambio. Este cuadro que tengo lo cambié por mi cuadro de la axila.)

RJ: Briefly. It is Spanish in the sense that during the Franco regime the body was taboo. In his very early painting days, this was a pagan concept (the body). But now it is a much more spiritual one. And again, he does not want to do the separation between the spiritual and the material. And, then, in his recent work he has often tried to dignify parts of the body like hands and feet. He did a painting ... do you know this one of an armpit? He gave it to Miró as an exchange for this other painting apparently.

EB: Just a question off the cuff. Say a painting like this behind you. Does he want his painting to be understood or just experienced?

RJ: Do you want your painting to be understood or just experienced?
(¿Quiere usted que su obra sea comprendida o simplemente vivida?)

AT: With the images I create I try to stimulate people's imagination and channel it towards these paths in which one can perceive or have an intuition of the mystery, the ultimate mystery. But sometimes it is not even necessary to explain intellectually these images. Mind you, you can do it, even I have done it in a few occasions. A poet friend of mine told me once: 'Please, make an effort and give us some clues to understand your work a bit better'. I did then a couple of essays explaining two of my paintings. But, of course, I have done more than 7000 paintings and it would be

horrible to try to explain them all. But I can see the point that you can explain paintings. However, there will be no end as words themselves are not enough in the end.

(Sí, para mí son imágenes con las que intento estimular la imaginación de la gente y llevarla por estos caminos en los que se perciba o se intuya un poco más el misterio, el misterio último. Pero no hace falta explicarlas de una manera intelectual. Se puede hacer, yo mismo lo he hecho algunas veces. Ha habido amigos, no sé estoy pensando en un poeta amigo mío, que una vez me dijo: 'haz un poco de esfuerzo para dar unas pistas al espectador para ver si puede entenderlo mejor'. E hice un par de ensayos explicando dos cuadros míos, pero claro he hecho más de 7000 obras y si tuviera que explicarlas todas sería horroroso. Pero veo que se puede explicar. Nunca se llega al final porque, al final las palabras ya no sirven.)

RJ: He cannot explain a visual art with words. But he did try in one occasion apparently. Did you read them? He wrote two explanations of his surface paintings. But he says that it is too exhausting to try to explain the whole 7000 pictures.

EB: Does he feel his role as an artist has changed since the last 1936. Has his role as an artist changed from when he first started out to the present day?

RJ: Do you think that your role as an artist has changed a lot from the time you started out to the present day?

(¿Piensa usted ahora que su papel como artista ha cambiado mucho desde sus principios hasta ahora?)

AT: My role? In what sense? The role I have as an artist in Spanish society? Do you mean that?

(Mi papel, en el sentido. ¿El papel que yo, como artista, tengo en la sociedad española, quiere decir?)

RJ: Do you mean his role in society as an artist, or ...?

EB: Either, I think more how he sees his work in society.

RJ: Yes, the way you see yourself as an artist in relation to society.

(Sí, como, por ejemplo, artista en la sociedad.)

AT: Yes, it has changed, indeed. After so many years I have become more known all across the world and I can see that there are many many people interested in my work in many different countries. Yes, at the beginning of my career I was a miserable and tormented young man trying to find a way of expressing myself. But, nowadays I am not so tormented. Well, this is true to a certain extent, because when you go to the studio every morning and you face these white canvases ... Sometimes it is even difficult to go

to the studio ... Anyway, I do not consider that artists are taking part in a cycling race or any other kind of competition. We do what we do. If it is good, fair enough and it is not, then, that is it!

(Sí, claro ha cambiado. Con los años me he hecho un poco más conocido en todo el mundo y veo que hay muchísima gente que se interesa por mi trabajo en muchísimos países. Si, cuando empecé era un joven desgraciado y atormentado por encontrar mi manera de expresarme y ahora no estoy tan atormentado. Hasta cierto punto, ¿no?, porque cuando vas al estudio cada mañana y te encuentras con unas telas blancas. Es difícil incluso ir. Pero vamos yo no considero que los artistas estamos haciendo una carrera de bicicletas o un campeonato ni otra cosa, vamos haciendo. Si sale bien, pues bien, y si no pues ya está.)

RJ: Well, he says that at the beginning of his career he was much more anguished in a way. But now, of course, he has become more established. But he does not have a very strong concept, a particular role that he has to have. He does, he thinks what he should.

EB: The things I read that he has written about his work. He talks more in the context of philosophy and spirituality rather than art history. This is quite unusual. Is there a reason for this?

RJ: Now, we are going to talk about your writings. She says that in the work she has read, you talk more of art in the context of philosophy rather than art history. Is there a special reason for that?

(Ahora pasamos un poco a sus escritos. Ella dice que lo que ha leído, usted habla mucho del arte en el contexto de la filosofía, por ejemplo, más que en la historia del arte. ¿Hay alguna razón especial para esto?)

AT: I am not very aware of that. Has she noticed that I write more about philosophy than art history?

(No soy muy consciente. ¿Ella ha notado que hablo más de filosofía que de historia del arte?)

RJ: Is he more concerned with philosophy than art history? He is a bit surprised that you think that.

EB: I mean, does he want to cut, to see himself as an outsider from art history?

RJ: Ah, do you wish to see yourself somehow as an outsider from art history, or ...

(Ah sí, quiere usted verse de alguna manera como fuera de la historia del arte o ...)

AT: No, no, I think I am a consequence of art history. I even advocate that. As I said before, I try to recover many elements from Ancient art. This is

actually the role that many artists from this century want to play. We want to recover some arts that were despised by the classical tradition, classicism. We are really making an effort to popularise them. This is not obviously my own invention. This tendency comes from different artistic movements of the beginning of this century, specially Dada. It is thought to have been a very destructive movement, but in truth, it helped us to recover mad art, children's art, popular art, art from different cultural traditions other than European. In conclusion, I am very involved in art history, much more than people think. There is this idea that modern art has broken with the past, but this is completely false. Maybe some critics or historians ... But artists in general are very aware of this continuity. There has not been major breaches but a thread that links one thing with the other.

(No, no, yo creo que soy consecuencia de la historia del arte. Incluso lo propugno esto. Lo que decíamos antes yo intento salvar muchas cosas del arte de la antigüedad y precisamente este es un rol que tenemos algunos artistas de este siglo que nos hemos propuesto recuperar algunas artes que estaban despreciadas por la tradición clásica, digamos, el clasicismo, y hemos hecho un esfuerzo para divulgar más. No me lo he inventado yo, desde luego. Esto viene de principios de siglo en diversos movimientos, sobre todo en el dadaísmo. La gente se cree que fue un movimiento muy destructor, pero en realidad nos ayudó a recuperar el arte de los locos, el arte de los niños, las artes populares, las artes de la sabiduría no de la tradición europea sino de otras tradiciones. Osea que estoy muy ... me concierne mucho todo el arte del pasado, mucho más de lo que la gente se cree. Hay un poco esta idea de que el arte moderno ha roto con el pasado y eso es completamente falso. Si acaso algún crítico o algún historiador. Yo creo que los artistas, en general, somos conscientes de que no ha habido grandes rupturas sino que hay un hilo, que una cosa va llevando la otra.)

RJ: No, on the contrary, he feels very much involved in art history. Particularly the part of modern art which has recovered things that were despised by Classicism, if you like, such as children's art, mad art, as he says, and other forms of art and other cultures other than Western culture. He says that especially he thinks that modern art is not what people think to be a complete break with the past. Not at all, it is, in fact, part of other thread that continues ... He was surprised

AT: African art, Pre-Colombian American art ... It is all these artists who have taken them back and made them relevant and fashionable again.
(Todo el arte africano, el arte pre-colombino americano. Han sido estos artistas los que lo han vuelto a poner de actualidad.)

RJ: This kind of artists have drawn people's attention to this kind of thing. He was very surprised initially that you thought that he was ignoring this side

EB: Oh, not ignoring, particularly prioritising.

RJ: Yes, yes.

EB: Tàpies has written about his art as being a surface for meditation. This is number 7. Meditation is usually about a religious or aesthetic contemplation, so what role does meditation have then in a secular society, apart from religion?

RJ: Well, now we would like to talk about questions related to meditation and spirituality. She says that you have written that your art could be a source, springboard for meditation. She is interested in getting to know what kind of purpose religious meditation can have in our largely secular society?

(Bueno, ahora vamos a hablar un poco de las cuestiones de la meditación, de la espiritualidad. Ella dice que usted ha escrito que su arte puede ser una fuente, (la palabra 'springboard'), un trampolín para la meditación. Pero lo que le preocupa es qué finalidad puede tener la meditación en una sociedad como ésta, que es básicamente secular.)

AT: Due to the excess of secularisation in our society, I think it cannot be better that some artist, including myself, stress the value of deeper things. I do not know, but sometimes I think that the mission of the artist is precisely to provide tools to keep humankind in a kind of trance or ecstasy, to help humankind to get closer to the authentic reality. Yes, because in reality we are searching for who we are, what the world and things are like. Well, in this sense, artists may play a very interesting role.

(Precisamente porque hay este exceso de secularización, creo que está bien que algunos artistas pongamos el acento en, al contrario, en las cosas más profundas. Si, no sé, creo que llego a pensar que la misión del artista es ésta precisamente, de mantener al hombre en este estado que a veces se ha llamado de trance o de éxtasis para profundizar más en la auténtica realidad porque en el fondo lo que buscamos es la realidad, seguimos buscando lo que somos, qué es el mundo, qué son las cosas. Bueno y en este sentido jugamos un cierto papel que puede ser interesante.)

RJ: Not, on the contrary, I mean, just because a society is like that, the more need for the artist to try. The mission of the artist perhaps may be precisely to inspire the search for a deeper reality, the ultimate reality.

EB: Sure. This is number 12.

RJ: She says that some artists such as Lucio Fontana (who slashes through canvases) deliberately wishes to disrupt the flat cohesive surface of modernism with all it implies in terms of hierarchy, order, authority. Are you doing the same kind of thing in your paintings?

(Ella dice que por ejemplo algunos artistas, y menciona a Lucio Fontana, que raja los lienzos deliberadamente trastorna la superficie plana y cohesiva del modernismo, con todo lo que ello implica en términos de jerarquía, orden, autoridad, ¿Es lo mismo que está usted haciendo en sus pinturas?)

AT: Right, there is in his work some kind of aggression, if you like, to what the classic tradition represented. One can partly find the same in my work: attacking the canvas and altering the substances that were traditionally used in oil painting ... For a while I hated oil painting and normal canvases. Because of that I have worked in my own invented surfaces, or on supports like waste material. We call it 'materiales de rebuig' in Catalan. I do not know how to say it in Spanish. I think it is called waste material ('materiales de deshecho'), dirty or scrap paper or newspapers ... Why were we talking about that?

(Bueno, puede haber una parte de agresión a todo lo que representaba la tradición clásica occidental. Esta parte existe también en mi obra, sí. Agredir la tela, agredir las sustancias que se utilizaban tradicionalmente para pintar la pintura al óleo. He pasado épocas en las que he detestado la pintura al óleo y he detestado las telas normales. Por eso he trabajado en superficies que yo me las inventaba un poco, o sobre soportes que eran de cosas que estaban despreciadas. En catalán decimos, materiales de rebuig. En castellano no sé cómo se dice. Materiales de deshecho creo, o papeles sucios o papeles de periódico. ¿Esto por qué lo decíamos?)

RJ: Well, if you are doing the same as ...
(No, si usted lo que esta haciendo como ...)

AT: Oh, yes, as Fontana ... Yes, but I think that behind this aggressive attitude, either in Fontana or in my work, there is a need to explain, or to get closer to this intuition of what I called before a new space as, for example, represented by quantum physics. It is so difficult, almost impossible to describe. However, Fontana talks about a kind of 'space-lism' (doctrine of the space). He pretended with his work to create his own sense of space. I also do it my own way. For example, the great amount of different materials in my paintings like grains of marble dust. Every grain of marble dust, for example, represents each of the atoms that make up this energy that moves within ourselves, in the whole nature. Summing up, Fontana and I shared a very similar attitude even if we are very different. He is one of my friends. This ball that is outside, for example, is a Fontana.
(Ah sí, como Fontana Sí, pero a parte de esta actitud más agresiva, yo creo que también, tanto en Fontana como en mí mismo hay también una necesidad de explicar, explicar no es la palabra, de llevarnos, de aproximarnos a la intuición de esto que decíamos antes del nuevo espacio que nos presenta la física cuántica, por ejemplo. Es una cosa tan difícil de describir, imposible. En cambio, Fontana, precisamente hablaba del espacialismo. Con su obra intentaba dar una sensación de espacio a su manera. Yo lo hago también a mi manera. Incluso la gran abundancia de materias de mis cuadros que están

hechos con granitos de polvo de mármol. Para mí cada granito de polvo de mármol es como si fuera un átomo que va constituyendo la energía que se mueve dentro de todos nosotros, de toda la naturaleza. Osea que hay una actitud bastante parecida a la de Fontana, siendo muy distintos, pero sí. Es uno de mis amigos. Esa bola que está ahí fuera es de Fontana por ejemplo.)

RJ: The ball is a Fontana. Yes, very briefly, originally it was a reaction against classical tradition. But now it has to do partly with an interest in physics and in quantum physics in an attempt to grasp a major space, if you like. He uses a great deal of marble dust in his own painting and he thinks that the grains of the marble are like atoms.

AT: I am aware that there are some critics that say that Fontana and I are the artists who have driven painting to its last stage. They even say that after us it is impossible to paint or to do any kind of plastic art; that everything (to be art) has to be made with photographs, video, immaterial or perishable materials. I do not believe in the arguments I have just described. We are in a stage in which G-d, history and ideologies are dead. Everything is dead. But this is a very superficial way of explaining evolution. Fontana and I may have put an end to certain plastic art tendencies, but, on the other hand, we have opened the way for new tendencies.

(Me consta que hay algún comentarista que ha dicho que Fontana y yo somos los artistas que hemos llevado también la pintura a su final. Que ahora ya no se puede pintar, o no se pueden hacer artes plásticas, que todo tiene que ser con fotografía, o videos, o cosas de estas inmateriales o perecederas. Yo no creo en estas líneas tan bien descritas ahora. Estamos en una etapa en que D-s ha muerto, la historia ha muerto, las ideologías han muerto. Todo se ha muerto. Todo esto es una manera muy artificial de explicar la evolución de las cosas y yo creo que tanto Fontana como yo quizás hemos hecho un final de unas ciertas artes plásticas, pero en cambio hemos abierto la puerta a otras tendencias también.)

RJ: More or less he says that he and Fontana have been accused of killing painting between them. But he thinks this is a slight exaggeration. Perhaps and they put an end to some tendencies and certainly they open the way for new ones.

EB: Absolutely.

RJ: There is a general tendency nowadays for people to say like G-d is dead, the world is finished. This is very superficial ... that History has ended ...

EB: Coming back to number 1.

RJ: This question has to do with your place in modern art history. You have been linked by several critics to Art Informel, Tachism, Abstract Expressionism. What do you think about that? How do you position yourself as an artist?

(Bueno, tiene que ver más con su lugar en la historia del arte moderno. Varios críticos, por ejemplo, le han vinculado al Art Informel, Tachism, expresionismo abstracto. Usted mismo qué piensa, dónde se situaría más bien.)

AT: I am not very fond of these labels used by some art historians, because, touch wood, I have been working for so many years. I think that I have been working everyday for 55 years and gone through many different movements. My changes are logically the result of the time in which I lived. There was a moment in which abstract geometric painting, socialising painting and the excessive symbolism of Surrealism reached a saturation point. Therefore, we disliked everything that was excessive. I was more into a freer degree of abstraction, not at all geometrical as it was the most fashionable tendency when I went to Paris. Yes, it was so fashionable when I first went to Paris. It was normal, then, that some artists, not just myself, reacted and looked for other abstract ways of expression. It was called lyric abstractionism, abstract expressionism in the United States. It was at this time when they labelled me an Informal painter. But I am not sure. I think I have evolved a lot.

(Yo siempre digo que soy muy poco partidario de las etiquetas estas que ponen algunos historiadores porque, claro, toco madera, pero he tenido una vida bastante larga de pintor. Me parece que son 55 años de trabajo diario y claro que he pasado por diversos momentos. He hecho cambios que son lógicos teniendo en cuenta el momento en que los hacía. Hubo un momento en que había una saturación de pintura abstracta geométrica, o de pintura socializante, o los excesos literarios del surrealismo. Entonces llegamos a coger manía a todo lo excesivo. Entonces yo me incliné más por un tipo de abstracción más libre, que no fuera geométrica, como estaba de moda en aquellos momentos cuando yo fui a París. Por ejemplo, mi primer viaje a París, estaba muy de moda y tenía una cierta lógica que algunos artistas, no sólo yo, reaccionamos y encontramos formas de arte abstracto más libres. Se llamaba la abstracción lírica y en los Estados Unidos fue el expresionismo abstracto. Y en aquel momento me pusieron la etiqueta de pintor informalista. Pero no sé. Yo creo que he ido evolucionando con los tiempos.)

RJ: He is not a great enthusiast of labels. He has been working for 55 years and he has gone through a lot of movements. But other things tend to reach a saturation point and when they do, you look elsewhere for inspiration. There is a lot more too that is very interesting.

EB: Well, I will get it later. Going back a bit, Señor Tàpies has talked a bit about the spiritual and (material), rather spiritual in the material. Obviously the spiritual is not something you can quantify or qualify, but does that

mean he sees all his whole oeuvre spiritual or just certain works? Has he got a sense in his head of what spiritual is in his work?

RJ: This question is again about spirituality and if you consider that the spiritual realm is a main part in all your work or just in some specific works.

(La pregunta es otra vez sobre lo espiritual y si usted considera básicamente que lo espiritual forma parte de toda su obra o solamente de obras en particular, de algunas obras.)

AT: Yes, I believe it is a constant in my work. It is like a scenery, a backdrop that I have in my studio when I am working. It represents this possibility for art I have in my mind, a type of art that becomes a mechanism that changes the ordinary human conscience. It is in a way a technique to modify conscience. Some neuroscientists have a good knowledge about this topic. It is also well known that one can be transformed when one is under drugs. This vision of a deeper reality, this closeness to the ultimate mystery requires some effort on our side. It is not something we have by accident in our daily life.

(Yo creo que es una constante en mi trabajo. Yo digo que es como un decorado, un telón de fondo que tengo cuando estoy en el estudio, donde siempre tengo presente esta posibilidad del arte, de ser como un mecanismo que cambia la conciencia corriente que tiene el hombre. Son técnicas de modificación de la conciencia. Esto se ve que hay estudiosos del cerebro humano que lo conchoen bien. Es muy sabido con drogas puedes trasformarte. Porque esta visión profunda de la realidad, esta aproximación al último misterio no es una cosa que se pueda hacer sin hacer ningún esfuerzo, ni es una conciencia que la tengamos en la vida corriente.)

TAPE 2. Side 1

RJ: There has been an interruption. You were talking about making efforts

...

(Ha habido una interrupción. Estaba hablando del esfuerzo ...)

AT: OK, but what was what she asked me? ...

(Sí, pero ella que me había preguntado ...)

RJ: If the spiritual is a part of your whole work or just certain works ...

(Si lo espiritual forma parte de toda su obra o sólo de unas obras determinadas.)

AT: Yes, it is basically a constant in my work. It does not refrain me from dealing with more circumstantial topics. If I am asked to do a poster, I try

to refer to the topic I have been asked for. If I like it, of course. I have the chance to choose what orders I want to do. Sometimes I refuse some orders because I do not like them. I try to adapt myself a bit. But apart from this circumstantial adaptation, there is a constant. This is, as I have already said, the search for these mechanisms that transform the conscience of the spectator (the person that contemplate my work).

(Si, es una constante que tengo en mi obra. Esto no quiere decir que a veces puedo tratar temas más circunstanciales. Si me encargan un cartel, intento hacer una alusión al tema que me encargan, si me gusta. Lo que hago es escoger los encargos que me hacen y algunos, muchos los rechazo, pero otros digo pues bueno. Procuro adaptarme un poco, pero aparte de esta adaptación circunstancial hay una constante que es la búsqueda de estos mecanismos que transforman la conciencia del contemplador.)

RJ: Yes there is a constant, basically. He is always searching for this constant and transformation of consciousness that he is interested in.

AT: It is fairly complicated. Artists have tricks. We are like magicians, jugglers. Tricks lose their effect when we know them. We have, then, to invent new tricks to impress our audience.

(Es bastante complicado esto. Los trucos que tenemos los artistas. Esto es como el que hace trucos de magia, un prestidigitador. Cuando se conocen los trucos ya no hace efecto. Tenemos que inventar nuevos trucos para impresionar a los espectadores.)

RJ: He says that artists have tricks like conjurors. And, if people find out what they are is a problem for them because they have to invent new ones.

AT: It is an attempt to be a constant. However, its form may change a lot.
(Es una constante como una intención, pero en la forma varía bastante.)

RJ: It is a constant presence but the form may change considerably from one work to the other.

EB: I have just been in the Ramblas watching people with They have bits of rope and they tie them up and

RJ: She is just talking about the magiciens in Las Ramblas and their ropes ...

(Ella está hablando justamente de los prestigitadores en las Ramblas que hacen trucos con cuerdas y tal ...)

EB: Is the sublime relevant to understanding, Señor Tàpies, his work?

RJ: Is the sublime relevant to understanding your work?
(Si lo sublime es relevante a la comprensión de su obra.)

AT: I do not know much about the idea of the sublime because I am partly a self-taught man and I have not studied in depth art history. I think Kant researched this topic thoroughly. I am not sure. But I am sure it may be relevant in my work. I do not know what to answer.

(La idea de lo sublime no lo conozco muy bien porque yo soy autodidacta y no he estudiado a fondo la historia del arte. El tema de lo sublime creo que fue tratado muy a fondo por Kant, creo, pero no lo conozco bien. Pero seguramente hay algo de esto por lo poco que sé. No sé qué decirle.)

RJ: He says that it is not something he knows a lot about it. He mentioned a particular person, Kant??, who talked about the subject. But he says that it is not really his field.

EB: Sorry about that. The sublime in contemporary times has been taught about in terms of a kind of manageable way of people coming to terms with mortality. That is really what it is and it seems to be a bit of that in his painting.

RJ: Nowadays there is a tendency to understand the sublime as a way of reconciling ourselves with death. Have you ever thought about it this way?
(En esta época lo sublime se trata un poco como una manera de reconciliarnos con la muerte. ¿Si lo ha pensado así en ese sentido?)

AT: Perhaps. Life and death are very important topics for humankind. We should analyse them and try to unify these apparent opposite elements with everything we said before. I wish we were able to have such a clear mind that we would not be able to differentiate between life and death. But, anyway, this is very complicated, very difficult to talk about.

(Puede ser, sí, también. Este tema de la vida y la muerte claro es muy importante para los hombres y está bien que lo analizemos un poco e intentemos también unificar los contrarios, con todo lo que hemos dicho antes. Quizá se puede llegar a tener una mente tan limpia que no veamos la diferencia entre vida y muerte. Pero, en fin, todo esto es muy complicado, muy difícil de hablar de ello.)

EB: Can I ask 28?

RJ: This is a bit different. 'Spiritual search' and 'art making' have traditionally been characterised by qualities that could be seen as masculine - heroism, strength, etc. She says that yet she does not feel excluded from your work as she had from work made from some other male artists. Have you intended somehow to undermine a traditional masculine art?

(Esto es un poco diferente. La búsqueda de lo espiritual y el mismo hacer arte han sido caracterizados tradicionalmente por cualidades que se pueden considerar masculinas, por ejemplo, el heroísmo, la fuerza ... Entonces ella dice, que ella no se siente en absoluto excluida de su obra, como le ha pasado

con la obra de otros artistas hombres. ¿Usted ha tenido alguna vez la intención de socavar el arte tradicional masculino?)

AT: Oh, I am going to die! I have never been asked these kind of questions. These topics are very much related to our contemporary mentality. We tend to discuss more problems that women have been exposed to for so many centuries. We are in a crisis period. And, maybe, without being aware of it, I may have been working with this mentality of promoting women's rights, of showing that machismo could not but produce very undesirable results. I am aware of these issues. However, I do not belong to any group that defends or promotes women's issues. But, of course, I think that these type of attitudes must be protected.

(¡Ay, me muero! Nunca me habían hecho esta pregunta. Son temas que están unidos a la mentalidad actual. Los problemas que han tenido las mujeres durante tantos siglos, ahora los discutimos más. Todo esto ha entrado en una crisis importante. Y, claro, sin darme cuenta, seguramente, yo también trabajo con esta mentalidad de conceder más derechos a las mujeres, que se vea que todo esto del machismo ha dado resultados bastante malos ... La mentalidad la tengo, lo que pasa es que no estoy afiliado a ninguna sociedad para defender a la mujer, ni cosas de éstas, pero en el fondo, sí, lo pienso que hay que defender este tipo de actitudes.)

RJ: He has not perhaps been conscious of this as a process in his work. But he realises. Now you say it, yes, an awareness of women's issues.

EB: They just feel accessible when they go beyond. Well, they are very much about Catalan issues, for instance, but they seem to go to something more universal, that includes people.

RJ: She says that your work goes beyond regionalism or nationalism. Your art is very universal, inclusive more than exclusive. There are some male artists that exclude women ...

(Lo que dice es que su obra va mucho más allá de los localismos. Su arte es muy universal, muy inclusivo, más bien que exclusivo. Hay ciertos artistas masculinos que como excluyen a la mujer ...)

AT: Not at all, I feel very close to my wife Teresa. I have her always in my mind. She is even helping me a lot with these oriental issues. She knows more than I do about Zen Buddhism ...)

(No, no, estoy muy ligado a Teresa, mi mujer. La tengo siempre presente. Incluso ella me ha ayudado mucho para estos temas orientalistas. Sabe mucho más ella que yo del budismo Zen.)

RJ: He says that he works very closely with his wife.

EB: I would like to ask about number 26.

RJ: Borja-Villel has described your paintings as objects of desire that never appear to be attained. Thus this desire can only be satisfied through the paintings. How do you respond to this?

(Bueno, Borje-Villel aparentemente ha descrito sus cuadros como objetos de deseo que nunca parecen ser conseguidos. Entonces, ese deseo sólo se puede satisfacer a través de los cuadros.)

AT: No, artists are not indispensable. We have a certain role in society but we should not look in art for anything else of what it is. Art is not mathematics, nor the solutions to transcendental or philosophical problems. Art is what it is. Why was I saying that ...?

(No, los artistas no somos tan imprescindibles. Tenemos una cierto papel en la sociedad, pero no hemos de buscar en el arte más de lo que es. No son matemáticas, ni soluciones a problemas trascendentales ni filosóficos. El arte es lo que es. ¿Esto por qué lo decíamos ...?)

RJ: I think, perhaps, that it not quite clear about the implications.

AT: Ha, object of desire. Well, it is definitely a way to express. But she should be more specific about what kind of desire she is referring to. There are so many types of desire.

(Ah, objeto de deseo. Bueno, es una manera de expresar seguramente. Pero tendría que concretarnos a qué deseo refiere. Pueden ser de muchas maneras los deseos.)

RJ: What is your opinion about Borja-Villel's declaration?

(¿Qué le parece la frase de Borja-Villel?)

AT: It is OK. It is, as is every human thing, limited, but in principle is OK. My highest desire might be to achieve everything I told you so far: human beings reaching a more correct vision of reality. In this sense, it is very difficult to make this will real.

(No, está bien. Sí, sí. Seguramente como todas las cosas humanas es limitada, pero en principio no está mal. Mi deseo quizá máximo sería todo lo que ya les he dicho: conseguir que los hombres alcancen una visión más correcta de la realidad. En este sentido es difícil llegar a realizar este deseo.)

RJ: His basic desire is perhaps that people do achieve something through the pictures.

AT: All these expressions and definitions should be well explained. It gets on my nerves when people ask me if I believe in G-d. Well, listen, I would say, you should firstly explain to me what you understand by G-d. The idea of G-d has changed so much historically. I cannot give a positive or a negative answer to something whose meaning has not been agreed. Critics and historians tend to do these kind of things. We should be a bit more precise in everything we say.

(Todas las expresiones y definiciones deberían explicárnoslas bien. A mí me enoja mucho cuando dicen 'usted cree en D-s'. Bueno, escuche, primero expliquemos lo que entiende usted por D-s. La idea de D-s ha cambiado muchísimo durante la historia. No puedo decir sí o no a una cosa si todavía no nos hemos puesto de acuerdo de qué hablamos. En estas frases que hacen algunos críticos o historiadores pasa un poco esto. Están bien en general, pero tendríamos que precisar un poco más.)

RJ: He says that some of these critical phrases are not very neat. In fact, what do they mean? What is exactly what a person mean?

EB: Nearly there. 35.

RJ: Rothko characterised his working process as meditative and Pollock as active. How would you characterise yours? Any of them, in between both ...?

(Bueno, volvemos a Rothko que caracterizó su proceso de trabajo como meditativo y Pollock que caracterizó al suyo como activo. ¿Y usted, alguno de los dos, entre alguno de los dos?)

AT: This is the same problem again. We should be more precise as this is another common misused topic. Mystic contemplation is not all static, quiet. If you take the most important mystics in literature or mysticism as examples you realise that they have been extremely active people. Ramon Llul, the Catalan philosopher of the 13th century, was apart from a philosopher, a mystic, a scientist and a poet (a very well-known one). He was the first Catalan poet writing in Catalan. He also created a foundation, travelled extensively to Africa and even wanted to reintroduce the Crusades to conquer Jerusalem! He was such an active man. A Spanish example is represented by Santa Teresa de Ávila, a kind of hyperactive nun. She founded I do not know how many foundations and convents. In conclusion, it is very difficult to say whether an artist is passive, quiet or active. I do not see many contradictions between Rothko and Pollock. They represent two ways of provoking a state of deep meditation, but they are not contradictory.

(Estamos como antes, deberíamos precisar un poco también porque esto también es un tópico que se dice mucho. La contemplación mística es algo estático, quieto, pero resulta que si usted analiza los místicos importantes que ha habido en la historia de la literatura o de la historia de la mística, han sido una gente activísima también. Yo siempre pongo el ejemplo de Ramón Llull, el filósofo catalán del siglo XIII, que además de filósofo era místico, científico, poeta (era un poeta bastante considerado). Es el primer poeta catalán que escribió en lengua catalana. Además creó una fundación, hacía viajes a África y quería renovar las Cruzadas para ir a conquistar Jerusalén. Era activísimo este catalán. Un ejemplo español es Santa Teresa de Ávila, por ejemplo, que también era una monja de una actividad increíble. Hizo varias fundaciones, fundó no sé cuántos conventos. Osea que es muy difícil decir que un artista es

pasivo, quieto, y este es activo. Yo no veo mucha contradicción entre Rothko y Pollock. Son dos formas de provocarnos un estado de meditación profunda, pero no son contradictorios.)

RJ: Again the reconciliation of opposites. In fact, people not very often consider the meditative figures like Ramon Llull and Santa Teresa. They were, in fact, hyperactive. It is not very sure that you can distinguish between one thing and the other.

EB: 13.

RJ: Your work, and now we are talking again about what people have written about it, has been characterised as High modernist ...

(Su obra, otra vez pasamos a lo que ha dicho la gente, lo que ha escrito. Su obra se ha utilizado como Alto Modernismo ...)

AT: Excuse me. How? (¿Cómo?)

RJ: As High Modernist. (Como Alto Modernismo.)

AT: High? (Alto.)

RJ: Yes, High modernist as it searches for spiritual truths, grand themes and its scale. Can you see these attributes in your paintings?

(Sí, High Modernism, aparentemente, por su búsqueda de las verdades espirituales, grandes temas y por su escala. ¿Usted también lo ve así?)

AT: It is very difficult to be judge and part at the same time. It depends on my state of mind. Sometimes I think I have to start studying again and restart everything from scratch because I do not like anything I do. Sometimes when I look at my catalogue I say to myself: 'Hey man, you have done something'. My catalogue is composed of six volumes so far. We still need to edit volumes number 7, 8 and 9. Surely I have done something. To a certain extent I may have even been useful for some younger artists. I do not know whether High Modernism or Little Modernism (meaning Low Modernism).

(Es muy difícil ser juez y parte a la vez. No sé, depende de mi estado de ánimo. Hay días que pienso que tengo que estudiar de nuevo y empezar de nuevo y no me gusta nada lo que hago. Otros días pienso. Hombre, algo has hecho y miro mi catálogo general, un catálogo razonado. Estamos en el sexto volumen y falta 7, 8 y 9. Algo he hecho y seguramente, para otros artistas más jóvenes puede que haya sido útil. No sé, si High Modernism or Little Modernism.)

RJ: He is not sure about the label ... When he looks back at his work ...

AT: Every artist looks at his/her work as something important. Otherwise s/he would not do anything. I have pessimistic moments, of course, but sometimes I also think that I am playing an important role.

(En el fondo cada artista piensa que es importante lo que hace, sino no lo haría, claro. Yo tengo momentos pesimistas, pero tengo momentos que creo que estoy haciendo un papel.)

RJ: I think, in terms of the value judgement, if you like, he is thinking of it more perhaps than of part of the movement. Sometimes he thinks that what he has done is not bad and sometimes he thinks that it has probably been not so good.

EB: Is he disappointed within contemporary art of the lack kind of spiritual art, for instance, particularly by artists my age under 40.

RJ: Are you disappointed by the lack of interest in spirituality in younger artists, particularly artists under 40 years old.

(Si le decepciona la falta de interés por lo espiritual de artistas más jóvenes, menores de 40 años.)

AT: Not all of them. Do you think that all of them are not interested?

(No todos. ¿Usted cree que son todos los jóvenes que no se interesan?)

RJ: Do you think that there are all or not all artists?

EB: A lot. I think the ones that are seen as good and often, well, there are not spiritual values.

RJ: She thinks that the most renowned belong to this sort of non spiritual category.

(Ella piensa que los que son muy considerados pertenecen más bien a esta categoría de no espiritual. Los que se valoran mucho.)

AT: To be able to have an opinion she should tell me names of people whose work I know. Otherwise I cannot judge.

(Tendría que decirme nombres y que yo conociera lo que hacen. No puedo juzgarlo.)

RJ: Anyone specific in mind.

EB: I was really thinking in England. I do not know how it is different here, but in England is very much the trend to be nihilistic. It is seen as great art.

RJ: She says that contemporary art in England is quite nihilistic. This is very fashionable and very well seen.

(Dice que el arte en Inglaterra, el arte contemporáneo, es muy nihilista y esto es una moda que está muy bien vista.)

AT: There is also some kind of nihilism in my paintings. However, it is not at all negative. After analysing things you get to the end and, then, you seem to find a complete emptiness. But I think that getting used or adapting yourself to this sort of nihilism could be very interesting. It is not, in my opinion, a necessarily anti-spiritual attitude.

(En mi arte hay algo de nihilismo también, pero es un nihilismo que no es negativo. Una forma de analizar las cosas para llegar al final y te das cuenta que todo es un vacío total. Pero adaptarse a este nihilismo puede ser también interesante, no es anti-espiritual esta actitud. Me parece a mí.)

RJ: He says that he does not see a nihilistic attitude as necessary being anti-spiritual. There is some nihilism in his own work.

EB: Right. But surely the spiritual must offer hope.

RJ: But she says that the spiritual must offer some sort of hope.

(Pero ella dice que no es verdad que lo espiritual tiene que ofrecer una esperanza.)

AT: Yes, indeed, hope. 'Symbols of new hope' is actually the title of the last chapter of the book I have just handed in to the publisher. Yes, I can tell you that there are artists that give us signs and ways to provoke vitality, a positive feeling towards life. We should, anyway, analyse case by case. It is very complicated to come to a conclusion as we cannot generalise.

(Una esperanza. Sí. El último capítulo de mi libro que he dado al editor se titula precisamente 'Símbolos de nuevas esperanzas'. Te digo que yo creo que sí, que hay artistas que nos dan unos signos y unas formas que provocan una vitalidad, un sentido positivo de la vida. Teníamos que analizar caso por caso. Es complicado porque no se puede generalizar mucho.)

RJ: He has just finishing a book and the last chapter is called 'New Hopes'.

EB: I would like to say more or less say that I am using this research for, just for my PhD. If I need it for anything else, I would ask for his permission first. I would not publish it without his permission.

RJ: She just wants to say that this interview is for her own research and that it will be used just for this purpose. She will not publish it without your permission.

(Quería explicar un poco que esto es para su investigación. Lo utilizará solamente para su investigación. No lo publicará sin su permiso.)

EB: If later I wanted to write for a magazine or something I would write him and see if this is acceptable.

RJ: If later on, for example, she wants to write an article for a magazine based on this interview, she would write you first to see if this is acceptable.

(Si después, por ejemplo, quiere hacer un artículo para una revista, escribiría antes para ver si es aceptable.)

AT: What do you think if we stop here? We have been here for quite a long time.

(¿Qué les parece si lo dejamos ya?. Hemos estado bastante tiempo).

EB: If you could say these things to him ...

RJ: Thank you very much for your time. She wants to thank you because your work and life have greatly influenced her. She admires the depth and integrity of your work as well as the honesty and clarity of your writings and conversations. She says that your oeuvre stands out amidst an increasingly superficial art world.

(Muchísimas gracias por su tiempo. Le quiere dar las gracias también porque su obra y su vida han sido una gran influencia para ella. Que admira muchísimo la profundidad y la integridad de su obra. Y también la honestidad y la claridad de sus escritos y las cosas que dice. Dice que su obra para ella destaca en el mundo de arte cada día más superficial.)

AT: Thank you very much. (Muchas gracias.)

EB: I am really a painter, not a researcher.

RJ: She is a real painter, research is secondary.

(Ella es pintora, la investigación es secundaria.)

EB: I have to do this to get a job, basically.

RJ: She is doing that to get a job, but her real interest is painting. She also wants to say that when she has finished her Ph.D thesis she will try to get funding to pay for a translation to be made into Catalan, for example, which she can donate to the Foundation.

(Está haciendo esto para conseguir un trabajo, pero el interés de su vida es la práctica. También cuando termine la tesis va a ver si encuentra fondos para pagar una traducción al catalán, por ejemplo, que después puede donar a la fundación.)

EB: If you would ask him would he rather it be Catalan or Spanish.

RJ: Would you prefer it to be in Catalan or in Spanish?
(¿Usted prefiere el catalán o el castellano?)

AT: It does not matter. If it is easier for you to do in Spanish, it is fine. Or even in English, if you like, we will manage. I can read English a little. I do not speak, but I can understand a lot.)

(Da igual. Si le es más fácil encontrar en castellano, da igual. O en inglés mismo ya nos arreglaremos. I can read English a little. I do not speak, pero puedo entender bastante.)

EB: Thank you very much. I will enjoy listening later when I can understand it all.

RJ: She will listen to it later. Thank you very much for your time.
(Lo escuchará después. Muchas gracias otra vez.)

AT: Tell her that I am very honoured by her interest in my work and that I will be willing to help whenever she needs so.

(Dígale que estoy a su disposición y que me ha honrado mucho con su interés por mi trabajo.)

RJ: That he is very honoured by your interest in his work. And if there is anything you need, please let him know.

EB: Thank you very much, thank you.

AT: How do you say 'thank you' or 'thank to you'?
(Se dice thank you to you, ¿no?)

EB: Thank you. My Spanish is

APPENDIX D

Antoni Tàpies (1995), Omnibus Programme, BBC (Transcribed and edited; Emma Bulley)

"For a painter, art can have more than one purpose. There are so many dimensions, so many different perspectives, for the true meaning of a work of art is its power to transform the individual consciousness, to carry us towards that state where for a moment, we are in touch with a higher reality. For me this is a thing that gives art its real value. It is a mechanism that helps us to interpret and understand the world. It has other values, of course, purely aesthetic ones, for example, as well as ethical ones and yet it deals in social criticism and political statement, but all are values that I would say all radiate from that original one controlling vision. At heart, my painting is a meditation on human nature, on what it is and why it is. It is an attempt to explain man to himself, to help him see the richness of his own resources and it must also be a reflection of our common destiny, on death itself. Perhaps, though, rather than helping people to reflect on death, what I'm really doing is helping them to think about the sorrow which must always be a part of our lives".

Tàpies has spent most of his life in Barcelona, it has provided him with much of his inspiration.

"It's said that a man's destiny is sometimes decided by his name. In my case, the name Tàpies, which in Catalan means wall, has greatly influenced my art. It's led me to explore all possibilities a vision of a wall suggests, the wall as barrier, as enclosure, as boundary to a prison, it's led me to contemplate what could be written on a wall, to examine graffiti on the streets".

Tàpies decided to become an artist when ill: "Days stood still and my mind accelerated". He re-examined his religious beliefs and renounced Catholicism.

Tàpies stays in an eleventh century farmhouse in Costa Brava which is very private.

His influence on other artists has been identified almost entirely with his original use of materials - paper, string, straw, and rags are most characteristic as well as varnish overlaid with marble dust.

"When you paint a kind of magic happens, the simple materials you paint with become something else, from earth and dust we extract an essence and dreams become concrete; the ordinary is made sublime, we turn the crude into the ideal. This is the act of transmutation, intensely experienced it can transform the spirit. In this sense, painting is the art of alchemy and I believe that once lent notions of alchemy see through into the modern world and they have had a special influence on modern painting".

"I have chosen materials that are already expressive and used them in a way that capitalises on their inherent qualities".

"In order to prevent techniques taking over, I have to set traps for myself, for example, I use materials that dry very fast which compel me to work at great speed, working very quickly and spontaneously, this is my way of keeping intellect on a short rein, of keeping reason in its place so the unconscious can run free. Painting has returned to its origins to an area beyond language, a mysterious world that can only be expressed in abstract symbols and images".

"It is generally accepted that a painting is composed of shapes and colours but I have a desire to experiment with a third element - texture. It seems to me that my using thick material that could be moved into violent shapes, cracks and scratches, I could find a way of expressing myself that could be different from academic painting".

"Finishing a piece of work has always been a problem for artists, knowing the perfect moment to stop and say 'that's it'. But it can be difficult to tell when that moment has come. It is a moment I always fear, but it is a fear that compels me to make the most of every brush stroke. and to ruthlessly limit my palette. It's as though there is a barrier I dare not pass and then my picture may be flawed not by excess but by understatement. I suffer, you could say, from the sins of austerity. This austerity comes from my fear I might overload the images".

Tàpies came from a well-to-do family, his father was at the centre of literary and political circles. He experience a political pendulum as a boy as his mother's family were slightly right wing and his father started a left wing political party. He was torn as boy between those two ways of looking at the world.

His grandparents lived in the Gothic quarters. He had to pass along tiny narrow streets whose walls bore the marks and scratches of the centuries.

"Another memory, obviously, was the great impact the walls had on me at the time of the Civil War. In many ways my work is a product of the Civil War. It was a time when I was at my most sensitive at the end of adolescence and first youth and I saw the terrible ravages of war, bombs falling, suffering from the great hunger and I began to understand how human nature reveals itself in the crucible of war. It brings out the best and the worst in people".

"It's often been said that my work reveals an obsession with death, sometimes this is said because many crosses appear in my paintings, but one should never forget that the sign of the cross, as those who study symbols know, is more than the sign of death or of Christianity, it is a sign that stands for many things, a universal symbol from the co-ordinates of space to the way we indicate territory, it's a mark of destruction or negation".

"I became interested in Oriental philosophy and art because when I was very young, I heard scientists talk about them: Eisingborg, Shroedinger and Neusborde, all wrote about India, Vedanta and Buddhism".

"When the first atomic bomb exploded, it changed all our lives. Certainly, it changed the way I thought about the world and what I thought about the universe. At the time, the whole of society was obsessed by the need to know what matter was and how this source of all energy was written into everything in the material world. I think it more than possible that my need to analyse the material elements in my work springs from the same curiosity. If an artist wants to penetrate to the heart of reality then he must understand science".

Tàpies is inspired by the local mountains.

"The landscape beyond my house at Campines especially the panorama, I see from my studio is part of the region known as the Vallées Royentale. At its centre is a small mountain called Mont Negre or Black Mountain. Perhaps because of its name and the name of the mountain we live on - Montsegny or 'mountain of wisdom', it has aspect of symbolism for me. Sometimes, it even makes me think of landscapes in the far east. The summit of Mont Negre covered in mist makes me think of emptiness, the idea of nothingness found in Zen Buddhism and depicted so well in Chinese drawings".

"Everywhere you look we are bombarded by primary colours, they are the attention-grabbing colours of the world, for example advertising, publicity. That which made me search for and internalise a colour scheme where the colours are ones that would match the philosophical and interior world".

"Another source of inspiration has been my rediscovery of Catalan medieval painting. This has been both a return to my roots and at the same time a journey into the distant past to a culture so vibrant with its own certainties that it leaps across the centuries. It was one of the moments in history, I believe when art played its most essential social role, when it was always relevant. In our world, in which religious images are losing their meaning, in which our customs and rituals are becoming more and more secular, we are losing our sense of the eternal. I think it is a loss that has done a lot of damage to modern art".

"Romanesque painting has a kind of magic for me, a way of almost terrifying the observer. Its images communicate with great power their mysterious and sacred quality that objects possess".

"I use a lot of symbols, images and analogies. They are simple signs but so loaded with coiled thoughts and ancestral symbolism that their positioning, even if it's at the corner of the painting can sometime communicate curious forces".

"The letters I use are special symbols, sometimes they are the key to esoteric words or magical incantations. Sometimes they are there because I wanted to

pass on a particular philosophical thought. At other times they represent the names of my loved ones, my wife and my children. Above all the linked A and T is a symbol that I use constantly and one that has a double meaning, it represents the initials of my name, Antoni Tàpies and the union between Antoni and Teresa".

"With her down to earth wisdom, Teresa has made me understand that the pursuit of the ideal, the quest for the spiritual truth has to begin with the commonplace, the ebb and flow of everyday life".

"I also have a desire to restore the insignificant and the banal, the urge to show a chair or pair of scissors or shoes in a cosmic dimension. This is the way of showing the observer that an armpit can be as transcendental as an image of God. It is rather like what the Zen Buddhists say about there being a whole universe in a grain of sand".

"The feeling of death is present in my works, as is the sense of pain. This is partly due to the influence of Eastern philosophy, particularly Buddhism which has compelled me to think about the problem of pain and why it is inseparable from living, not to luxuriate in sorrow or be morbid about suffering, but in an endeavour to understand and look for solutions, find ways to overcome pain. These thoughts have always troubled me and its only in some small way I try and contribute to their acceptance".

"There is a strong connection between magic and art. You can see it very clearly in what we call primitive art, in Asiatic art, the way they bring magic and religion together. I have always wanted my paintings to have a direct physical impact, to make a dramatic personal contact with the viewer, that's why the images in which I present parts of the human body, feet or legs or arms can, in a sense be compared with 'ex-votos'. The wax effigies of human limbs and organs that the pious offer in church. They offer them in the hope that a prayer will be answered, a request granted or perhaps an illness cured. Sometimes they are offered, not in supplication but in gratitude".

"I have always wanted my paintings to have that kind of power, to have a quality of magic so strong that just by touching one you can receive a jolt like an electric shock, or even better to have the power to cure. So by grasping a painting with magic you can apply it like a sacred talisman to the area of pain wherever it was so the pain would vanish. That would be my ideal painting".

"My concern with the texture of the materials I was using reached the point when the paintings began to turn into a 3D object. What's more the materials I was using closely resembled clay and earth, the very materials that potters use, so little by little I found myself immersed in the world of ceramics."

"I've been greatly effected by the geography of my personal circumstances and my family life and my life in the city of Barcelona and by the life in my country,

Catalonia. From an early age, I developed the habit of probing beneath the surface, of looking always for a deeper reality. I couldn't stop thinking about the moral dilemmas involved in the pursuit of such things as truth, justice, honesty".

"I can remember going to kindergarten in a school run by nuns in which I witnessed some curious scenes. Of course it should be said that religious education was rigid and severe and I was educated that way all my school years except during the civil war".

"The nuns made all the children walk in a religious procession, we had to pass a holy heart made of straw and pricked with thorns. Each child had to step forward and pluck out a thorn. We were children pulling thorns from Jesus Christ's heart. In our innocence were alleviating the sufferings of Christ's caused by humanities sins. It was an amazing image, one that made a deep impression on me".

"Rather than helping people to reflect in depth, I would prefer them to think about sorrow, the sorrow that comes from simply being alive, but influenced as I am by Buddhism, I would like there to be finally a message of hope, one that says that there are solutions to all sorrows, and there are ways of transcending sorrow, ways of releasing ourselves from lust, freeing ourselves from all desire and this hope can be a great comfort".

"In the final analysis what drives an artist is a desire to know the truth, to want the freedom that only comes with perfect knowledge and then to be able to act upon that knowledge with wisdom. This is probably the great drive of man today. On the one hand we know so much and our knowledge of the universe is greater than ever and our achievement, our monuments to our courage and ingenuity. We have created democracies, enshrined human rights and managed to produce sublime works of art, but on the other hand, humanity is ever sliding backwards into the primitive darkness. Our human story is one of cruelty and tragedy, of suffering and sorrow, to search for a true equilibrium, to find a perfect balance between what a man knows and what he does seems to me to be one of the most beautiful ends to which an artist can direct himself and not only an artist, it should be the ambition of anyone who thinks seriously about the world".

SOME PARTS
EXCLUDED
UNDER
INSTRUCTION
FROM THE
UNIVERSITY