‘Forget about pink’ – An interview with Ben McGill concerning art and psychoanalysis[1]

The interview begins mid-way into a preliminary discussion:

Interviewer: Tell me what you like about Bellmer’s writing, his art, I think you mentioned being particularly affected by his dolls. . .

Ben: You mentioned Francis Bacon just before. Bellmer’s work has that kind of physicality to it – a raw quality . . . but Bellmer's has a very ordered line within the same type of form.

Interviewer: Were they working at around the same time?

Ben: Bellmer was initially associated with the early surrealists, with Breton etc. He was accepted for his photographs of the doll. Which Breton saw as the ultimate receptacle of love or passion. Bellmer is perhaps less well known for his etchings which he took up after being asked to illustrate Bataille’s Story of the Eye. These in their explicitly erotic nature did not sit so well with Breton.

Interviewer: I’m thinking of Artaud . . .

I have read a transcript of one of the research experiments documented by the early group (with Breton, Aragon, Éluard, Prevert etc) – the idea was that they would speak openly about their sexual experiences and attitudes to sex in an uncensored way and record it. Curiously, Artaud is present at the first meeting, albeit silent. In the second discussion, when he speaks for the first time, Breton intervenes and Artaud makes an abrupt exit. It comes across as a quite pronounced statement, given he remains absent from the remainder of the discussions. Much has been made of Bretons’s disputes with Bataille.

Ben: I'm not surprised because I think Breton was very much against the explicit. Whilst Breton admired Bellmer, and the same might be said of his relationship with Bataille, there was something that was too much about him. Breton wanted to expel Dali from the group for having painted *The Lugubrious Game* depicting a guy who had shat himself.

Interviewer: An undercurrent of idealism perhaps?

Ben: Yes, I think that that’s what comes from him and that this permeated surrealism. There was a predominance of a type of devotion to ‘the one’ (except for those who ended up being outcast), which was seen as the way to express one’s desire . . . and insofar as it was ideal, it remained within the bounds of certain social conventions insofar as, within that, one was free to express as much as possible . . .

Interviewer: I wonder about that in terms of Breton's approach to woman, notwithstanding his written protests against social convention, his spirit of revolt, and his insistence on the primacy of desire.

Ben: You should have been recording that. . . .

Interviewer: Well, actually I am . . . I had the same idea . . .

Ben: I read a quote by Luis Bunuel, quoting Breton in saying that the act of love is something that should be conducted in the darkness of a cave; that it shouldn't be shown. This was gospel, according to Bunuel– and he says he fully agreed with it – he was someone also quite disturbed by pornography. I think he was saying in relation to pornography, that there should be no pornography.

Facilitator: What you say is interesting, because I think that Bunuel's films are very erotic. So given that, I wonder if what he was really objecting to was a type of explicit, non-erotic imagery . . .

Ben: That quote was interesting to me because it made me think of the difference between what should not be seen and what cannot be seen, and if we take pornography to be at the level of the 'should not be seen', it becomes a form of censorship. But there seems to be a presumption in Breton's statement that goes beyond that – a confusion between pornography and eroticism, which defines them as the same thing – that what you see in pornography is an act of love, which shouldn't be seen.

Interviewer: Would you say that some forms of censorship function to promote pornography (in the sense of a prohibition that incites), whereas the material that is more assertively censored – this stems from an objection to a showing what can*not* be shown?

Ben: Well, I suppose that if we consider what falls under censorship these days, there has been a proliferation – many people today consider themselves to be extremely liberated and its felt that you can show anything.

Interviewer: But there are things that you still can't show.

Ben: You can't show, well, you can't show sex and death – you can't have a pornographic film where people are killed.

Interviewer: There are also films and images that are cause for public outrage I think – a different form of censorship seems to operate there. I'm thinking of literature and artworks that elicit a real disturbance – I guess I'm suggesting this comes from an other place, which demands their exclusion from our view.

Ben: I have written about another type of exclusivity that's promoted in pornography, such that pornography is only open to a certain few; to the certain few that meet certain ideals. There's plenty of criticism of pornography from a feminist perspective – including the objection that pornography involves the objectification, and therefore, the degradation of women. But the fact is that in pornography many different types of women (in

terms of body shape, size, whatever . . .) are on show, but in terms of the men on display, it's very limited and confined to making them objects of derision. If you enter into the prospect that the outcome of sex is death, then no one's excluded.

Interviewer: I would like to take a detour here, if I may, which stems from my interests in the fact that you are someone who practices both psychoanalysis and the plastic arts. Perhaps I had the idea of speaking with you in the hope that it might dispel, if only for a moment, the notion of the psychoanalyst as one who practices on the peripheries of the arts, or excluded from them. In a recent publication that you released, *Sexual Fantasy 27: Histoires Erotiques*, you refer to film making as, 'a means to collage and montage in space and time, the arts of writing, performance, drawing, sculpture, photography, fashion'. Is the art of collage/ montage your preferred medium?

Ben: Well, certainly, when I wrote *Histoires Erotiques* – there was something about the primacy of the image obviously preoccupying me at the time; the way the image is in many respects collapsed by various modes of engagement with humanity, be it science or pornography or something else – it is the image that's being dealt with. Or the object is presented as something that can be seen and that has a predetermined coherence.

And so, we have this sort of common experience now of people speaking about body dysmorphia, which is generally considered, as you would know, as a certain type of pathology. And then, there's also something (I'm not sure if its listed in the DSM) – called synaesthesia, in which people with the condition talk about seeing a certain colour when they hear a certain note, such that different senses activate one another. When this is classified as something called synaesthesia, if one is so inclined, it categorises a cause and effect relation, such that A minor is said to bring about the sensation of green or D, a perception of the colour orange or something of that order; so that in doing so, the sensory experiences are then categorised as well.

But I think with an artistic form like film, and even with other mediums – but perhaps mostly with film, it is exploited in a similar way, with the utilisation of all of the different artistic mediums. In collaging those artistic mediums, there is something of human experience that I think psychoanalysis recognises, namely, the distortion of the body by language; that the body is taken up by language and becomes dysmorphosised. What one sees in the mirror is not as coherent as perhaps medicine, or pornography, would have us believe or would wish to portray.

With film, one is affected by various elements in the same way that music can evoke certain feelings, which in this case, enter through the ears and perhaps as vibrations on the body. The effects of painting and other visual arts enter through the eyes, but nevertheless can evoke sensations in various other parts of the body; whether it be a sensation of disgust, or whatever way one experiences it through the body. How it enters the body does not necessarily determine how one's senses become disorganised.

I think that apart from a few exceptions, film has been somewhat stuck with tyranny of a narrative, because it presents one frame after another and what this boils down to is the exploits of an ego or a hero going through a passage in time until he comes out the other side, somewhat whole: that's his heroic journey.

Interviewer: You have me thinking of Godard's work, which messes with that form . . .

Ben: Which is interesting because he's known for the sort of cut-up (jump-cut). It messes with the flow, however there's an heroic element in his use of character that comes through regardless. They are tossed and turned by ideas – a montaging of ideas and images, which Godard interestingly speaks of – his images have been paraphrased, and probably rather badly, as 'images of images', or as 'images of ideas'. So in a way, he's writing a visual essay, and perhaps somewhat playfully, referencing the characters or genres of Hollywood that are character-based, for example, with the character Lemmy Caution in his film, *Alphaville.* Yet they still come through it somewhat coherently rather than . . .

Interviewer: Synaesthesiacally incoherent?

Ben: I think that synaesthesia is interesting as an experience. I suppose that synthesis is something that Freud is not particularly fond of; the idea that one is a synthesiser. The idea that you can recognise – perhaps in the way Merleau-Ponty attempted to do in the endless documentation of a maelstrom of experiences and phenomena – the effort made to pull them all together into one gigantic whole; a whole with a capital 'w'.

Interviewer: The *Weltanschauung* that Freud wanted to distance psychoanalysis from?

Ben: Yes, in the sense that he witnessed something that is unable to be synthesised; a certain distortion that occurs – Lacan speaks of this in terms of the *objet a*.

Interviewer: You released two limited edition publications at successive exhibitions that were held at *Brunswick Gallery* recently. At a glance, the cover of *Sexual Fantasy 27: Histoires Erotiques* looks a lot like a pornographic magazine – the type that would have circulated during the 70s, but when one takes a closer look this comes across as a an ironic gesture. Your second publication, *Perceptions of Plastic*, has a similar aesthetic – the colour pink featuring strongly in both. You seem to have a strong predilection for the use of a very lurid, hot pink, which also appears in several of your other visual works. What do you call them, the ones that go on the wall?

Ben: Pictures.

Interviewer: Pictures. The text accompanying the images shown in these magazine-style catalogues, perhaps addresses something we were attempting to define earlier, – something of the distance between pornography and eroticism. In *Sexual Fantasy 27: Histoires Erotiques* one of the two interlocutors, Eva and Joey, poses the question, 'What is art to you?' And this 'to you' seems to mark something specific to your conceptualisation of the erotic as something

intensely intimate and disturbing. In the spoken piece a reference is made to 'secretions' – is this something that distinguishes the erotic for you?

Ben: Well, I guess, the secretion refers to something secret and something that is revealed in the process of making art. And of course, I've utilised, as you say, the form of a porn magazine, which I like to think of as coming from Soho – from Soho in London. I based it on the porn bookshops there that sell paraphernalia considered dirty and for reprobates. These are the sort of margins of society people that disappear into a cave like the one that Breton proposes, where porn should be, and ought to go – they shouldn't be seen.

Interviewer: What do you think Breton was really 'caving in' on, if we take Bunuel's word for it – when he said the act of love is something that shouldn't be shown?

Ben: Well, in a way what I was previously speaking to was a tendency to make of these two things a type of equation, although I think that Breton was most likely referring to pornography in the quote given by Bunuel.

Interviewer: So for Breton explicit sex – sexual practices exposed to the light of day – conforming to an image?

Ben: Well, yes, perhaps. With secretion, there's a bodily fluid that shows itself. It's an interesting phrase, isn't it? – 'the bodily fluid' or 'the body-as-fluid' – as something flowing; the body that speaks to an other body. Some of this saying hits its mark; some of it flows; some of it overflows . . . Or whether it hits its mark, whoever knows? But nevertheless, there's a physical aspect to it; as with a vibration in one's ears, which we know, is a description passed onto us from science.

So, there is a bodily fluidity that comes about through speaking, but there's the revealing of something that *cannot* be seen, as opposed to *should not* be seen. I wanted to write something that would speak to this in a playful way – also referencing porn in its clichéd form – portraits of people becoming over-awed by each other's body-parts as if it were an amazing satisfying experience. The two people in *Histoires Erotiques* are talking about something, wondering about something, having doubts and really recognising the holes that exist in one another, and this happens without any suggestion that these two can become one; there is a residue left over from their encounter.

Interviewer: Something comes across as unspoken, in – well, what do you call it – a dialogue? What is between the two? – because I could never quite tell. What is interesting is that reader can never quite know when he or she is speaking; they begin to blur beyond any relation; the common part taking of an exchange. . . a deliberate device?

Ben: Yes. Yes. Although I certainly wasn't thinking about Lacan's theory of 'the no sexual relation' – I didn't have that in mind when I was writing it. I'm also aware that with the distortion, I was not wanting to suggest in any way that this is something able to be overcome; that the two people are becoming a one, but that something is crossing over, that one does not know who enjoys, or who is enjoying what. Because I think, in a sense, the ideal other is something

that pornography, like so many romantic films, stories and narratives suggest: that in the heroic journey one finds 'the one' – the other that completes you. Then, some sort of altercation gets in the way, and this in turn is overcome, and in the end, the reunification.

Interviewer: This is interesting, because in your text she says something about love, which suggests that it is love that's the problem.

Ben: Yes.

Interviewer: She says something along the lines of: 'In sex you're just accepted for – you're accepted'.

Ben: There's no bad sex, there's only bad love.

Interviewer: There's no bad sex, that's right. And something further . . . there's no bad sex but something goes awry in the field of love.

Ben: That one is not loved in the way one wants.

Interviewer: Your work, and we've already touched on this a little, could be seen as influenced by not only surrealism, but also, perhaps, the painting of Francis Bacon. You may want to refute that vehemently. In any case, when Walter Benjamin spoke of the work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction this was prior to the age of technological production, which since Bacon's time, has well and truly taken effect. I'm thinking of your use of the camera in relation to this, the way you are deploying a variety of mixed mediums, but also of the fact that Bacon often used photographs to inform his paintings. Jean Baudrillard proposed around the turn of this century that our relation to sex was no longer mediated by desire – that no one could say whether sex had been liberated or not – the idea of progress in sexuality, and likewise in art, was absurd. This was to propose, I think, that the image doesn't partake of desire and that with the frenzied progress of a technological age and the proliferation of the image it was becoming our 'true' sex object.

I'm wondering if you would agree with this in any way?

Ben: Well, I guess - well, there's a lot in what you've said to respond to. But look, I don't necessarily agree with what he's saying.

Interviewer: Bacon and the surrealists were influenced by the age of mechanical reproduction but one might say we are now in the age of a technological frenzy. It seems to me that you are taking this in your stride and not necessarily pushing against it in the way you are deploying mixed mediums.

Ben: Yes. And what Baudrillard says about progress not partaking in the order of desire, I would agree with that . . .

Interviewer: Could we say that it participates in a type of pornography?

Ben: Well, there' all sorts of things we might call pornography in terms of images that attempt to satisfy, or we could say, stuff desire – the image as a satisfying object. You might think of objects of satisfaction as opposed to objects of desire. But I don't think that the images mediate one's desire at all any more now than ever. There's actually something deadening I think in those images that are proliferated; if that is what Baudrillard was proposing, then I agree with that. I certainly wouldn't like to think of this in terms of a reactionary position. One responds to what's in one's environment and what I have wanted to do is to make exciting something that has become rather dead. It ought to also be acknowledged here that there were certain artists who attempted to work with what we might call pornographic imagery – but only in the sense of it being explicit imagery – in the underground, adult world cinema and who were producing something else. These filmmakers were really exploring something that was attempting to liberate eroticism from the confusion between sex and pornography. It's certainly not the way that pornographic cinema has tended to go generally, which has been quite specific in its capacity for deadening desire rather than exciting it.

In his seminar, *The Four Fundamentals of Psychoanalysis* Lacan spoke of the picture as a *dompte-regard*. This refers to an image that placates the evil eye; produced as a kind of prophylactic, one might say, for the gaze and, thus I'm referring to this rather loosely as something which has the same deadening effect.

Going back to your earlier references to surrealism and Bacon, one could say that surrealism went down that same road in occluding certain people like Bacon from a surrealism exhibit for being insufficiently surreal. There are other artists who I certainly admire who were marginalised in this way.

Interviewer: Duchamp had the same experience with the Cubist movement and said he was thankful for it.

Ben: Yes. Yes. These artists really threw into question the place of the object and certainly the object of satisfaction. And I think this is why in my experience in the so-called art-world and let's say, the world of mental health, is that psychoanalysis, and particularly Lacan's work, is far more readily taken up and enthused about in the art world. It's not an object of derision – Lacan is not someone to be kept at bay. His ideas are at least taken up with great enthusiasm in the art world and I think it has something to do with how one positions the object, in that, in art and psychoanalysis, man is not able to be reduced to a predetermined form or a conformity – the work excites something.

I think that surrealism did start out that way, but became over time, another avenue of conformity. David Pereira said that surrealism died when Dali made a phone that worked. This speaks to the death of surrealism in the service of something. There was talk of surrealism in the service of revolution or communism. This diminished its manifesto to becoming a tool; ceasing to innovate or innervate.

Interviewer: I referenced Benjamin before, who spoke of the sacredness of the original art object. And I think what you say is interesting because it touches on something that doesn't necessarily correspond with an original and there has been much made about something essential to the object having become lost in the mass proliferation of reproduced objects, but then, it is the image itself that is in mass proliferation today.

Ben: Yes.

Interviewer: Baudrillard seems to contend that everything is being atomised via this profusion of the image to the point of a sort of, mass diffusion, in which the real is in danger of becoming eroded …

Ben: I think for something to become atomised or mechanically reproduced, if something is lost, it is insofar as this mechanisation becomes part of science. There is also something, not necessarily recognised, that science produces, which is, or can be taken up as art. Science has produced a lot of writing, which includes a particular way of forming the world as a knowledge, and I'm thinking here of a supposedly new knowledge that proposed to trump the kind of silly imaginings of primitive man or religion. Yet this becomes a sort of gospel truth itself, which imposes a certain form or image of the world.

Interviewer: I am wondering where you would situate seduction, if at all, in relation to the object we have been speaking of.

Ben: Well that's interesting. I hadn't really thought about in that way. I suppose, if an object had that quality, it would no doubt give an impression of being able to give you something; to satisfy; of drawing you in that way.

What interests me and what I attempt to do, I suppose, is to create something that's certainly not seductive; that's not proposing to satisfy something for you, but actually to stimulate or even, perhaps, to antagonise and not because I want to be hostile but to antagonise in the sense of energise.

I don't feel like I've said enough about Bacon or pink.

Interviewer: When were you first exposed to Bacon's work?

Ben: I saw images of Bacon's work, certainly when I was very young – there was a book that interested me – it certainly got me interested in art in terms of the visual art of drawing and painting. The name of the book was *The Art of the Holocaust*, and it contained mages by artists who painted what they had seen or knew was happening at the time of the Holocaust in Europe, as well as sketches by artists and people who depicted what they saw around them at the camps.

Around that time someone lent me a book called *The Art of Horror and Fantasy* or something like that, which had images of Bacon's work in it. But there were certainly works by other artists that really stood out to me just as much. I can certainly remember seeing Bacon's work in a gallery – the three

figures at the base of the Crucifixion in London, I believe at the Tate, which really exploded into life upon being seen in the flesh, so to speak.

I have never thought of Bacon as an influence. I didn't really take that much of an interest in his painting until I started to make pictures using new digital media, which in a way, had caught up to where I had been trying to go with films, collage and other forms previously. Digital media allows one to collage and bring together certain art forms in a way that was not so readily accessible beforehand without huge expense, time and effort.

So it was actually in creating these types of images in the sort of publications that you referred to earlier, that something Bacon said he wanted to produce in the onlooker felt more possible – to return the onlooker to life more violently with his art. So, in a way, it's been actually in the making of these types of pictures that has returned me to the work of Bacon more violently. It certainly wasn't a matter of thinking 'I want to make something that looks like a Francis Bacon' or even of having anything of his work in mind at all at the time. But certainly having made these particular pictures in the way that I have, and going back to his work, really ripped something open that was quite raw.

Interviewer: If I remember correctly, Bacon said to David Sylvester during an interview that he wanted his works to directly access the nervous system.

Ben: There was also reference to another artist, I don't recall exactly, possibly a painter or poet – who spoke of sensation without the boredom of its conveyance, which is fantastic. This certainly has me thinking of a lot of – again, coming back to film – of the narrative flow – that one has to have the time to pass through that story. I know that the modern man is criticised for having a short attention span, but I'm certainly aware of the boredom of conveyancing.

You know, I think that certain films, like *Un Chien Andalou* and *L'Age D'Or* by Bunuel, in a way, come close to something with the use of film that is able to convey without the boredom – to produce sensation without the boredom of its conveyance.

Interviewer: Two films, which I think have stood the test of time because despite their age they still pack a punch.

Ben: Yes, it's very exciting. And I think in some ways what I would consider as the boredom in many films is their reliance, not so much on time spent on a shot, but the time spent on a character and personality – the adventures of the ego.

Interviewer: Are you able to say something about that in relation to your psychoanalytic work?

Ben: I think so. I think that there is a sense of disturbance in the experience of speaking in an analysis that one can start to lose after a time – the sense that one is an ego, or a unique personality – the kind of tyrannical idea that one just needs to be who one is; as if that can be known, or even quantified, and then become adhered to. It's the sort of terrifying demand that one be something

one should be. In relation to this, I don't think that when Lacan speaks about a subject that he's talking about anything like that and his discourse is something quite disturbing to all sorts of fields of thought.

Interviewer: In Lacan's later seminars, I get the sense that he is beginning to yell at his audience.

Ben: Lacan?

Interviewer: One senses something like frustration in relation to what you referred to before – the boredom of a conveyance – a demand he possibly felt coming from his audience for this whereas what he was offering was only transmissible to those not deaf to it.

Ben: Yes. There are those who complain that his work is dense and difficult, though I don't – I certainly don't consider it boring. There are legends of personality concerning Lacan that really come from a certain type of bio-graphics.

Interviewer: In a later seminar, Lacan makes the outrageous claim that he had never repeated himself twice, something I initially read as a provocation given his insistence upon returning to particular themes and terms over and over, however, there is something in the returns of psychoanalysis, I think, which has nothing to do with a return that repeats as the same. I'm thinking of the return in psychoanalysis, as a form of repetition without the boredom of conveyance – as something that hammers away at it. I wonder if this difference can be thought of in relation to something you were speaking about before – to something that can't be seen.

Ben: Yes, because the notion of repetition, as conveying the same thing over and over really does reduce it to an image of the same, which doesn't account for a difference in the productive - that is in the actual production of speech, or in the function of language. So, it's very likely that one could go back and find several instances of Lacan using the same combination of words without the saying being in any way reducible to the same effect, or to a said.

Interviewer: Where would you situate language in relation to your art?

Ben: Well, I suppose in some ways, without wanting to sort of go too much into what my intentions are, there is the effects of language on the body, which is of particular interest to me and also, the effects of language in discourse – something that hopefully opens out the presentations of my work. It is the effects of language that interest me most of all – a certain distortion, let's say, of the original image in the way that it is taken up by different people and the dialogue or discourse that the onlooker has with the art.

Interviewer: When you say 'the original image', is that the material?

Ben: Yes, the material that's on the wall. Of course, that is never the same thing twice either really.

Interviewer: Given what we were discussing before, I'm interested in your point of view regarding the controversy – the discourse that was generated by an exhibition of Bill Henson's photography in 2008?

Ben: Well, I don't know, I suppose there could be viewers who would see them as pornographic if we were to define pornography as a way of seeing in which the object is made reducible to an image of satisfaction – it is possible to view a child or adolescent in this way. And really, there are many instances of people approaching the child as an object. For instance, there is a certain type of female pathology spoken about, in which a woman wants to have a child in order to be fulfilled. So in this case the image of the child, for her, could be seen as pornographic, in terms of the child functioning for her as an object that fills her up. So why wouldn't we say that that images of children are pornographic?

Interviewer: You're suggesting that this could apply to any image of a child.

Ben: To any image of a child, that's right. Or to any image of a child that one holds in which the child is seen as an object of satisfaction. Now obviously, this opens up the spectre of horror for some people – the idea that there could be others out there who are getting excited by images of children. I'm not actually familiar with Henson's show, so I'm not sure what images were in it that were considered so controversial. I would say that it's certainly the eyes of the beholder that determines whether an image is pornographic or not. It pertains to the outrage precipitated by the idea of Henson's pictures being pornographic for somebody else; it's not the image that is pornographic per se. There is a disturbance in the viewer: that's the outrage.

Interviewer: At this point, I would like to refer to another interview that has already taken place, namely, a written piece with that title, which accompanied your photographic works in your most recent exhibition at the Brunswick Street Gallery[2]. In *Interview* you propose something regarding the way in which a woman's enjoyment is often depicted in pornography:

> a woman who seemingly wants to be filled and nothing else, so full she overflows. We are presented with the ideal that there are ones who can satisfy and that there are those excluded from this economy in humiliation.

Further to this, you refer to 'the art of sharing shame' – notably, you name this as an art. Is this something you want your pictorial works to convey without boredom and where would you situate humiliation in relation to that?

Ben: In that particular reference to sharing shame, I think it referred to the experience of someone letting go and wetting the bed – something that can occur in sleep, when one has no control, no physical control – the person wakes up, experiencing a kind of shame and horror at what has occurred and is there for all to see. And in a certain sense, if one is going to go to the conclusion of a sexual encounter in the sense of having an orgasm, then one needs to let go of a certain control; of a certain physical integrity in order to

get there. There again, it's there for the other, or others, to see, whether there's one or many of them.

Interviewer: In a dark cave or not.

Ben: Yes, that's right. There's more ways to see, there's certainly more ways to sense an experience than just with the eye or in the biblical sense of knowing, which is carnal.

Interviewer: That's interesting because I wonder if you consider shame to be specifically related to the gaze, that is, not just related to the act of seeing, but the effect of being seen to be seen.

Ben: Well, I suppose that this is the kind of immediate or mediated consideration at hand – the question of how one is seen. Nevertheless, there are certainly other ways that one cannot be enough. People have all sorts of doubts: they question whether they're smart enough, whether they speak properly etc – there are several different ways that this can be experienced. When we are speaking of the gaze, however, we are literally speaking of an eye; an eyeball.

Interviewer: Can we go back to your notion of the art of sharing shame.

Ben: Yes. Well, I suppose in the context we were speaking of it, it is in the writing of the book, something of sex, of eroticism, which is not without sex, which lends itself to sex, but which is not to do with how one can be better or better one's self or get one over the other – the weakling, the outcast – that is an attempt to triumph by pitting oneself against others as the one who actually has it; the one that can give it. In sharing shame there is a type of recognition of something that is lacking; a certain sense of shame that comes with that.

Interviewer: In referring to 'lack', could you elaborate a little?

Ben: Well, I say lack in terms of what can manifest itself in the visual field as lacking; lacking being or even lacking in some way physically, however that might manifest for someone.

Interviewer: Is this where you would consider the imaginary, in terms of an ego, to make its claim upon the sexual?

Ben: Yes, because when you think of it, where does Lacan situate the body? Somewhere between that ratio; between the imaginary and the symbolic – time to show off my own lack here. Somewhere in the field of meaning, let's say.

Interviewer: The relationship between psychoanalysis and art could be seen as having a somewhat chequered history – beginning with Freud's analysis of Leonardo Da Vinci's *Two Madonnas* and later, Lacan's well known reference to Bernini's *Saint Teresa*, whom he said was 'coming' and everything in between. Under the auspices of the Oedipal some of this could be seen as having gone astray. In any case, in your estimation, would you say that for

many artists psychoanalysis comes with a disarticulated or even articulated caveat of sorts i.e. ‘don't go there’.

In the biography that Lou Andreas-Salome wrote about Rainer Maria Rilke she claims that Rilke declined the offer of an analysis with Freud for fear that it would sap him of his creativity. I'm interested in what you think about this, given that you both practice art and have been in analysis.

Ben: Well, yes – I think there’s definitely a fear, but it perhaps runs deep in everyone. I would say that there is a certain fear amongst certain artists of undergoing a psychoanalysis; a fear that what prompts them, inspires them, disturbs them to create would be taken away – made normal. And, who knows, I think its possible that this way of conceptualising an analysis might in some cases be true, as there are various modalities and approaches to psychoanalysis.

Its not uncommon for psychoanalysis to become mixed up with all sorts of things, including ideas held by psychiatry and psychology – it has been confused with other discourses, which can generate a fear that one would become just another cog in the wheel, mechanically reproduced if you like, as just a productive member of society – this is opposed to the real potential for psychoanalysis to act as something quite stimulating. Psychoanalysis stimulates desire and creativity in a way that can loosen the bonds of preconceived notions of the self or a conformity, which can get in the way of one’s creativity.

And certainly Freud is not disparaging of artists. In fact, his notion of the artist is quite extreme in terms of how romantic it is; the artist is the one who is able to successfully use his neurosis; he also is able to enjoy, including the benefits of success, such as the women et cetera. He's a very heroic figure. And I guess Freud doesn’t promote the idea of curing the artist, any more than he does for homosexuals.

Now Lacan is also rather enthusiastic about artists and writers and goes so far as to say that what Joyce did with his writing is what others access via an analysis. Joyce didn’t need an analysis per se because he was able to do with his art, his writing, something that psychoanalysis might aspire to.

Interviewer: Where would you situate interpretation?

Ben: I think interpretation is an opening up – perhaps here again, highlighting the difference between eroticism and pornography comes into it. Pornography would seek to fill a hole, stuff something large into it, fill it up, whereas eroticism presents something that can open up or keep something open. And I think that in a psychoanalysis, interpretation can intervene in a way that actually does stop the holes from being filled; from becoming so tight that one is strangled.

Interviewer: Or stuffed with meaning.

Ben: Yes – stuffed with meaning, which, as we have recognised, is in some way where the body is situated. The body can become less taut (taught) in both senses of the word.

Interviewer: We have already touched upon this, but is there is anything more you want to say with regard to any crossing points that you see existing in the aesthetics of the plastic arts and the theory and practice of psychoanalysis?

Ben: Given what we were speaking of before, I think it would be dangerous or a bit glib if we were to try to equate art with psychoanalysis. I certainly consider psychoanalysis to be situated more on the side of the arts than say, aligned with science. There's something specific to psychoanalysis, which we need to always consider and that is, that something occurs between two bodies, between two people there. We want to consider them, frame them, from the beginning.

There is something that is produced in an encounter, which might be thought of in psychoanalysis as touching upon art, and in art, as touching upon psychoanalysis; but there's something in the very physicality, the discursive secretions that flow between two bodies . . .

Interviewer: In speech?

Ben: In speech but particularly in the speaking that occurs in an analysis, which in some ways, is an encounter that art might only hope for. There's a certain idealising of art and the artist even by people like Freud. Correlatively, there is a type of denigration of the position of the analyst, which as you said, is the idea of the psychoanalyst as a failed artist. Nevertheless, the art of the analyst is to work the very material of human existence.

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[1] Ben McGill. Practicing psychoanalysis, artist and member of the Freudian School of Melbourne, School of Lacanian Psychoanalysis. Interviewed by Madeline Andrews.

[2] Perceptions of Plastic (POP) 23 January – 14 February 2015 Brunswick Street Gallery.

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