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PSYCHOANALYTICAL PLAYING: PSYCHOANALYSIS OF THE PROCESS OF ARTISTIC CREATION IN THE WORK OF PATRICK CORILLON¹

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Summary: The article presents the "psychoanalytical playing" method used as part of a project inspired by psychoanalysis set in place by the writer collaborating with the contemporary artist Patrick Corillon, for the purpose of clarifying the process of artistic creation in the artist's work. This method is based on the Winnicottian view of the psychoanalytical session as play, occurring in the overlap of two potential spaces of playing. While it is a part of the artist's creative process, "psychoanalytical playing" has certain features in common with conventional psychoanalysis, although it also differs in many other respects. The material provided by this methodological device, along with a study of Patrick Corillon's work, led the author to advance the hypothesis of a fantasy of immortality operating as the "driving force" of the artist's creative process, and to detect the traces of an unconscious immortal Ego, as formulated by André Green in his book *Life Narcissism Death Narcissism* (2001).

Key words: Patrick Corillon, Process of Artistic Creation, "Psychoanalytical Playing", Potential Space, Immortal Ego.

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"Right in the middle of the Rathausplatz, after leaving his flat to go to his father's bedside, Oskar Serti suddenly stops in mid-errand, paralyzed at the thought that he might have forgotten to turn off the gas under the casserole that Catherine de Séllys asked him to put on to simmer..." (Corillon, 2012a: XXVIII). This is how a story begins that could be read in a guide accompanying visitors to the exhibition "The Secret Life of Oskar Serti" by the contemporary artist Patrick Corillon at the GEM at The Hague (22/09-16/12/2012). Going down the stairs to the museum's cellar, you saw black silhouettes, like the uncanny shadows that dwell in our psyche, that scare us and make us want to run away. These silhouettes are a part of the work *In Vienna*, and they

1. This paper as the citations have been translated from French into English by John Lee.

recall the passing of the character Oskar Serti around the squares and along the streets of Vienna. In the journal, the viewer could read what happened to him on the way. There is a different story for each of these silhouettes. Facing up to the death of the father, ambivalence towards the love of one's life and the capricious nature of human desire are some of the themes. Reading the story, one may get the impression of reading a book by Freud, such as *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900a) or maybe *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (1901b). Thanks to Freud's literary talent, the patients in these case studies almost become characters in a novel walking around the streets of Vienna and, on account of their neurosis, experiencing all kinds of adventures there. The story of *In Vienna* predates the exhibition. It is part of a project carried out for the Austrian newspaper *Der Standard*, which serialised each week an episode in the life of Oskar Serti in Vienna (Corillon, 1993a, 1993b).

In Vienna (Corillon, 1993b, 2012b) belongs to a period in Patrick Corillon's work dating from the late 1980s and the 1990s, during which he produced installations all comprising written material, i.e., short tales about the biography of a fictitious writer, Oskar Serti. Most of these stories have the same structure, whereby Oskar Serti has a project, then an obstacle gets in the way, and finally this obstacle leads him to some un hoped-for discovery that he incorporates into his project. So these stories contain the word "unfortunately", marking the appearance of the obstacle. There are various kinds of obstacles: a rejection, a storm, an accident, a blunder, a misunderstanding, an overpowering emotion, a superstition, a parapraxis, an obsessive idea, a panic attack, etc. Freudian theory enables us to understand many of these otherwise unexplained phenomena. Freud teaches us that, with very few exceptions, we are all neurotic, and that "unfortunately" now and again this prevents us from achieving our goals. So Patrick Corillon's work would appear to be in sympathy with psychoanalysis, and more especially with the writings of Freud and Jung.

In July 2007, Patrick Corillon and I set up a joint project inspired by psychoanalysis as part of a thesis I am working on that looks into the process of artistic creation in the artist's work.² The aim of our collaboration is to shed light on this creative process, in its singularity. In the "psychoanalytical" work sessions, Patrick Corillon takes the

2. My warm thanks to Patrick Corillon for his generous contribution to this "psychoanalytical" collaboration project, and for his comments on this essay, which have enabled me to reformulate certain hypotheses.

place of the analysand, with me as the analyst. Our collaboration takes place in an extra-clinical setting and is substantially different from conventional psychoanalysis. It should further be made clear that my background is in the history of art, not psychoanalysis. Granted, our psychoanalytical conversations are also unlike traditional conversations between art historians and artists. The art historian in conversation with an artist is mostly interested in the artist's completed works, which she will have seen at an exhibition for instance. In the context of our psychoanalytical conversations on the other hand, Patrick Corillon talks mostly about his works in progress. This article will be examining the method implemented as part of this "psychoanalytical" collaboration.

"Psychoanalytical playing": a Winnicottian approach³

In what follows, I will explain this approach whereby a psychoanalytical method is used to study a process of artistic creation, in an extra-clinical setting. The field of psychoanalysis brings us writings that offer an insight into the processes of artistic creation, or at least certain aspects that are a part of these processes or closely connected to them, such as the vital need, the creative urge or inspiration for example. Doubtless the concept most readily used for this purpose is that of "sublimation", ever since Freud did so in an attempt to understand the processes of artistic creation in the work of Leonardo da Vinci, in "Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood" (1910c), although pointing out however that "instincts and their transformations are at the limit of what is discernible by psychoanalysis" (Freud, 1910c: 136). In Chapter 5 of his book *Playing and Reality*, Winnicott (2005) sets out a theory of creativity that is substantially different from Freud's. In the contemporary psychoanalytical literature, numerous writings have been devoted to the creative act, often with an underlying "singular encounter with the creator" (Chouvier & Brun, 2011: 8), in a clinical setting or otherwise (on this, see inter alia Brun & Chouvier, 2013; Chouvier & Brun,

3. This section of the essay follows on from the seminar "Rencontre du Centre d'Étude des Arts Contemporains" (University of Lille 3, France) of April 5th 2012, organized by Anne Boissière (professor of aesthetics and the philosophy of art at Lille 3 University) and Gilles Froger (lecturer in the Visual Arts department of Lille 3 University in Tourcoing), where Patrick Corillon and myself were invited to speak about "psychoanalytical playing". We extend our warm thanks to the organizers for the comments they made to us at this seminar and for providing us with some key elements for developing the argumentation in this section.

2011; Masson & Giot, 2011; Masson, 2008; Brun & Talpin, 2007; Masson & Chouvier, 2007; Chouvier, Green, Kristeva et al., 1998). Thus, recently, Filip Geerardyn, as analyst, and Mekhitar Garabedian, as artist, embarked on a psychoanalytical collaboration in order to gain a better insight into the process of artistic creation (on this, see Garabedian & Geerardyn, 2013; Geerardyn, 2013).

In psychoanalytical theory, the work of art is often viewed as a formation of the unconscious, like the dream, the witticism and the slip of the tongue, which does not thereby imply that the artwork is reducible to other formations of the unconscious. In an article in *Art et Psychanalyse*, a thematic issue of the journal *Savoirs et Clinique*, Anne Boissière, professor of aesthetics and the philosophy of art at Lille 3 University, making reference to *The Conflict of Interpretations* by Paul Ricoeur (2004), sums up very clearly the method of classical Freudian hermeneutics, which is "the regressive kind that goes from a manifest content to a latent content following a logic whose complexity would be that of desire" (Boissière, 2006: 40). What we are interested in here is not primarily understanding the artwork by analogy with the dream, but rather to understand how and to what extent the creative process allows the unconscious desire to emerge, the aim of the psychoanalytical collaboration then being to gain an insight into this phenomenon. In the conclusion to the article just quoted, Anne Boissière, citing the thought of both Freud and Theodor Reik, suggests the idea of a common core shared by art and psychoanalysis. She puts it that "this common core is to be found in playing, seen as an activity of control through which an unconscious, perceptual type of material is developed not only for representative and intellectual purposes, but also for constructing the emotional life" (*Ibid.*: 50).

We again find this notion of play in *Playing and Reality*, a book in which Winnicott does not just set out his theory of creativity, he also develops, particularly in Chapter 3 (Winnicott, 2005: 51-70), a theory of play and related issues in the context of psychotherapy and psychoanalysis, both with children and with adults. We shall be relying chiefly on this book in connection with this psychoanalytical collaboration with Patrick Corillon, for which we are proposing the term "psychoanalytical playing".⁴ Winnicott appears to view

4. We find this close relationship between art and *jeu* in ordinary French, where the word applies for instance to both the musician playing and the actor acting. In visual art, we may think of the Surrealists' experiments, like the game (*jeu*) of "*cadavre exquis*", adopting an

psychoanalysis as a game. At the beginning of Chapter 3, we read: "Psychotherapy takes place in the overlap of two areas of playing, that of the patient and that of the therapist" (*Ibid.*: 38). We may suppose that the "playing area" concept corresponds to that of the "potential space", in which Winnicott situates not only transitional objects and phenomena but also playing and other creative activities (*Ibid.*: 40-41). Both the children's clinic and the adults' clinic call upon the analyst's ability to play, as it may enable the analysand to develop his or her own ability to play. "Where playing is not possible then the work done by the therapist is directed towards bringing the patient from a state of not being able to play into a state of being able to play" (*Ibid.*: 38). Psychoanalysis would then be situated at the intersection of two potential spaces, that of the analyst and that of the analysand. This view of psychoanalysis as play has provided us with a theoretical basis for the practice of "psychoanalytical playing". In view of the specificity of the aims of this initiative – in an extra-clinical setting, remember – we had to stay away from the conventional psychoanalytical setting. In addition, one needs to know that Patrick Corillon is an artist who seems to bubble over with creativity and seems to find himself in a creative mood almost on a permanent basis (Corillon: November 26th 2012). Thus, from the outset of our collaboration, the artist seemed to take over the "psychoanalytical playing" sessions as part of his own artistic project. The specific dynamics of the "psychoanalytical playing" sessions thus encouraged me to develop this ability to play which Winnicott views as being so important in the context of the practice of psychoanalysis and to use to the full the creative possibilities afforded by this overlapping of two potential spaces, while constantly turning to improvisation. It so happens that the "psychoanalytical playing" sessions began to be a part of the creative process for Patrick Corillon, and the artist saw them as a workshop for developing his works in progress (Corillon: February 11th 2008), which in a way allowed me to study the creative process from the inside. Hence we link up not only with the Winnicottian theory of psychoanalysis as play but also with his theory of creativity. In a passage in Chapter 5 of *Playing and Reality*, in which he criticizes the method employed by Freud in "Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood" (1910c), Winnicott puts

approach similar to their artistic practice. We may further mention several essays on play and games, such as Johan Huizinga's *Homo Ludens* (1955), *Man, Play, and Games* by Roger Caillois (2001) and *Spiel als Weltsymbol* by Eugen Fink (1960).

forward the idea that the creation "stands between the observer and the artist's creativity" (Winnicott, 2005: 69). So maybe we could take the view that "psychoanalytical playing" is both a psychoanalytical method and an approach set within a creative process, and situate the space in which the sessions are played out within the overlap of two potential spaces, the artist's and my own.

This "psychoanalytical playing" approach ought to be placed beyond what is called "applied psychoanalysis". Certainly, it is true that I am applying a psychoanalytical method to art, more specifically in the context of a philosophy research project aimed at understanding the processes of artistic creation in the work of Patrick Corillon. In the book *Peut-on appliquer la littérature à la psychanalyse*, Pierre Bayard (2004) writes that the term "applied psychoanalysis" describes the way in which, since Freud, the relationship between art and psychoanalysis has most often been formed, and indicates in what direction it is played. "This relationship consists of an application, that is a conveyance of knowledge from theory to the work, the preposition 'to' marking the direction in which the passage is made from one discipline to the other" (Bayard, 2004: 35). On the other hand, in the context of "psychoanalytical playing", it is not for me to come up with interpretations; the artist himself is "his own interpreter" (*Ibid.*: 149), as Pierre Bayard puts it, in connection with conventional psychoanalysis of course.

*Description of the processes of artistic creation in the work of
Patrick Corillon*

Before coming to the workings of the "psychoanalytical playing" sessions, we need to describe the process of artistic creation for Patrick Corillon. As we now know, "psychoanalytical playing" is a part of this process, and we shall see later on how the way the artist proceeds during these sessions bears some striking similarities to the creative process as it takes place outside of the sessions. In the process of artistic creation for Patrick Corillon, we might distinguish six phases which in actual fact are not so separate. Here we find a dialectic of discovery and invention which, according to Corillon, is fundamental to the process of artistic creation in his work (Corillon: August 21st 2007). To each of these phases there corresponds a very specific space.

In Phase one, which might be called "the discovery phase", the artist sees himself as a "spectator of the world". At a given moment, a

specific experience will inspire him; it can happen anywhere (Corillon: November 26th 2012). He does not realise it at the time, only later on. A great lover of literature, Patrick Corillon is a real bookworm. These reading experiences are for him a gold mine of inspiration, but like the other experiences, they pass through a "filter", in such a way that there remains "a residue" or "an idea" that he goes on to develop (*Ibid.*). What happens in this first phase ties in with Winnicott's conception of creativity, namely to see it as "a colouring of the whole attitude to external reality" (Winnicott, 2005: 65). For Winnicott, "it is creative apperception more than anything else that makes the individual feel that life is worth living" (*Ibid.*: 65), and so creativity "belongs to being alive" (*Ibid.*: 67).

The next phases are more in the order of the invention. Phase two is "the incubation phase", in which the artist sits on his "ideas" as a bird sits on its eggs (Corillon: November 19th 2013). Phase three, "the development phase", takes place in Patrick Corillon's office in Liège (Belgium), which he sees as a "space of creation" (Corillon: November 26th 2012). The artist has deliberately surrounded himself with his favourite books, and the office resembles a library (Corillon: August 9th 2009). As Patrick Corillon listens to music while he works, we also find a music library in the office. The artist always keeps to the same routine. He settles into an armchair behind a work table, both designed by Serrurier-Bovy, a Liège-born designer from the Art Nouveau period (Corillon: October 29th 2007). He starts by tidying his work table and completely clearing it. He then places on it a notebook which he opens to begin developing "the ideas" that he has kept over from Phase one. Then he picks from his bookcase a book that will help him to elaborate further the work he is creating, then another book, and so on, so that his desk gradually becomes filled with books. There comes a moment when he starts putting all the books back in the bookcase, and his desk is cleared once more. Phase four, "the nocturnal phase", takes place at night when the artist is in bed. Being an insomniac, he views his bed as a second "space of creation" where he incorporates his sleepless moments into the creative process to imagine the stories and the forms of his works, without sketching or noting anything down. The sleep that follows these long wakeful moments helps him to filter his nocturnal output (Corillon: November 26th 2012). During Phase five, "the hatching phase", the work appears like a hatchling from its egg. Once the work has taken shape in the artist's head, it seems to come out on its own, effortlessly. Corillon types up on the computer the stories he has devised during the

nocturnal phase. He begins making some of the objects himself and calls on his assistants to produce the others. During this sixth phase, "the completion phase", the artist puts the finishing touches to the objects and stories.

The "psychoanalytical playing" sessions

In view of the specificity of the "psychoanalytical playing" approach, the technique deployed in this context is different from the one used in a classical psychoanalytical situation. Here to begin with are a few differences with regard to the setting. As I stated at the outset, I am the one who initiated this psychoanalysis of the process of artistic creation in the work of Patrick Corillon, and so the request did not come from the artist. Given this starting point, Patrick Corillon and I came to an agreement to devise an adequate setting. This setting is not that of the analyst seated in an armchair listening to an analysand lying on a couch in a psychoanalyst's consulting room. The sessions are held in Patrick Corillon's office, which for him is a "space of creation", as we saw earlier, in which a substantial part of the process of artistic creation takes place. We sit "face to face", each in an armchair, behind the work table designed by Serrurier-Bovy. Every now and then during the sessions, the artist gets up to take a book from his bookshelves, to show it to me or to look up a passage that struck him. These "psychoanalytical playing" sessions are scheduled roughly every two months, and not twice or three times a week as for conventional psychoanalysis. The "psychoanalytical playing" session lasts longer than in conventional psychoanalysis with the psychoanalyst typically ending the session after around forty-five minutes. We allow two hours for our "psychoanalytical playing" sessions, which in practice invariably continue until Patrick Corillon has finished talking. I record the sessions on a digital recorder, which is a major divergence from conventional psychoanalytical practice.

During what might be called the "preliminary talk", which took place on July 9th 2007, I proposed "the rules of the game" to Patrick Corillon, namely that the artist would speak as far as possible in free association, while I would follow as best I could the technical recommendation of "suspended attention". But we need to be careful when talking about "the rules of the game", for in the foreword to his translation of *Playing and Reality*, Pontalis notes how Winnicott uses three English words that all had to be translated with the French word "*jeu*": "game" (strictly defined by the rules that order its course);

"play" (the game freely deployed), and "playing" (with a creative connotation: in the process of becoming) (Pontalis, 1975: 8-10)⁵. Pontalis advances the idea that it is Winnicott's very personal experience of psychoanalysis that led him to devote the last book he published while still alive to "playing", and he goes on to write that "if psychoanalysis were no more than a game, Winnicott would not have been interested in it" (*Ibid.*: 9). So as far as our "psychoanalytical playing" is concerned, "the rules of the game" may be viewed as a starting-point from which we were free to wander.

As regards free association, we find the following explanation in the dictionary of psychoanalytical vocabulary by Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis: "Method according to which voice must be given to all thoughts without exception which enter the mind [of the analysand], whether such thoughts are based upon a specific element (word, number, dream-image, or any kind of idea at all), or produced spontaneously" (Laplanche & Pontalis, 2006: 169). By following this method, which the analyst imposes on the analysand as part of a conventional psychoanalysis, the analysand recounts the thoughts that come to mind during the session (*Einfälle*). In the context of "psychoanalytical playing", Patrick Corillon took these proposed "rules of the game" into account, but not without bending them somewhat. On the one hand, at times during a session, the artist allows himself to skip from one subject to another and set aside the demand for consistency with his own rhetoric. On the other, he himself sets limits to associative freedom, by talking mainly of his work and very little of his life. This "rule" has led Patrick Corillon to talk about his works in progress and about what inspires him to create them. Certainly, one needs to know that the artist dwells at length on certain works, while others he has very little to say about. The works on which he dwells at length, like *Le Diable Abandonné* (The Devil Abandoned, 2007-2012), *La Rivière Bien-Nommée* (The Aptly Named River, 2010), *Le Benshi d'Angers* (The Angers Benshi, 2011), *L'Ermite Ornemental* (The Ornamental Hermit, 2012) and *L'Appartement à Trous* (The Apartment with Holes, 2013), are performance art works, ones that he does first and foremost "for himself" rather than to order. These works that he does "for himself" he sees as the "driving force" of the process of artistic creation, a force

5. On this subject, see also note 21 in "Le conte et la zone d'endormissement", an essay by Pierre Fédida in the French psychoanalyst's book *Corps du vide et espace de séance* (Fédida, 1977: 165).

that then drives his commissioned work. This "driving force" may be seen as the artist's desire to create. Patrick Corillon also tells stories he has read in the books that line his office walls. Whenever he talks of a story that left a mark on him, he gets up, takes out the book in which he found the story, sets it on his work table and sits down again. In this way, his desk gradually fills up with books. So the procedure for the sessions turns out to be similar to what happens during Phase three of the process of artistic creation for Patrick Corillon, the one that is played out in this same space, namely the artist's office. I realized that, during the "psychoanalytical playing" sessions, I was recording the actual process of artistic creation itself, or something very similar. When Patrick Corillon retells the stories he has read, he does not tell the stories as they are written in the books, but turns them into new stories, themselves an intermediate stage in the process of artistic creation. During the "psychoanalytical playing" sessions, he also tells the stories that he made up overnight, during Phase four of the process of artistic creation. It is as if, during the sessions, Patrick Corillon were saying out loud what goes silently through his mind during Phases three and four of the creative process. Fresh ideas also occur to him (*Einfälle*), proving that the artist has well and truly taken over the "psychoanalytical playing" for the advancement of his own creative process.

I for my part followed the technical recommendation for suspended attention (*gleichschwebende Aufmerksamkeit*). In the Laplanche and Pontalis dictionary, we find the following definition for "(evenly-)suspended attention": "Manner in which, according to Sigmund Freud, the analyst should listen to the analysand: he must give no special, a priori importance to any aspect of the subject's discourse; this implies that he should allow his own unconscious activity to operate as freely as possible and suspend the motives which usually direct his attention. This technical recommendation to the analyst complements the rule of free association laid down for the subject being analysed" (Laplanche & Pontalis, 2006: 43). Since during the "psychoanalytical playing" sessions, Patrick Corillon talks of his works in progress that I have so far not had a chance to see, I sometimes have a hard time following him, and I lose track, which helps with suspended attention. The artist seems to put me in the position of the "subject supposed to know" with respect to his works in progress, which may be seen as a clue to the presence of transference (Evans, 2003: 197). During the sessions, I will occasionally have something to say, though taking care never to offer

any interpretations. In view of the special circumstances involved here, my contributions are also intended to spark creativity.

The "psychoanalytical playing" did not lead Patrick Corillon to carry out any serious working-through. Some artists are afraid that psychoanalysis might get in the way of the creative process. In the essay "Désir de créer, besoin de créer, contrainte à créer, capacité de créer", René Roussillon writes that a course of psychoanalysis can either fuel creativity, or cause inspiration to dry up by extinguishing the "need for creative output" (Roussillon, 1998: 166). The absence of any real working-through guards us against this risk. "Courses are few and far between in which artistic production and internal transformations accompany each other harmoniously and boost each other" (*Ibid.*: 166). Certainly, since Patrick Corillon considers "psychoanalytical playing" as a workshop for elaborating his works in progress, one may suppose that in this case the approach does indeed fuel creativity. And yet that does not prevent a degree of psychic work being done both during the "psychoanalytical playing" sessions and in the process of artistic creation. This psychic work relates to one aspect in particular, as I explain in what follows.

The "fantasy of immortality" as the driving force of artistic creation in the work of Patrick Corillon

I am now going to attempt to establish this hypothesis which results from psychic work in connection with one specific element, taking place in the context both of the "psychoanalytical playing" and the processes of artistic creation. After a certain number of sessions, I realised that Patrick Corillon talks rather often about death. Thus for example, on the subject of the Oskar Serti character, who featured in the stories for the installations of the eighties and nineties, Patrick Corillon was already pointing out to me in the "preliminary talk" in July 2007 that what counted especially for him was the fact that the character has a date of birth (1881) and a date of death (1959) (Corillon: July 9th 2007). Patrick Corillon views "a human life" as a story with a beginning (birth) and an end (death), a biography then being a story that "is woven around a main thread" (*Ibid.*). This opens up an existential reflection on "human life" and what Patrick Corillon calls "the measure of man". The year of Oskar Serti's death, 1959, is also the year of Patrick Corillon's birth. This brings us to another theme, that of handing down (Corillon: December 18th 2007). As far as the history of art is concerned, Patrick Corillon sees himself as an

heir to the modern art of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, most notably Redon, Malevich, the Russian Constructivists, the "De Stijl" artists (especially Mondriaan and Vantongerloo), Duchamp and the Surrealists.

May 8th 2009 saw the premiere of *L'Horizon Lent* (Slow Horizon), the third tableau of the stage triptych *Le Diable Abandonné* I mentioned in starting (Fig. 1).

In it, among other themes, Patrick Corillon himself proposes a reflection on literary creation, and more generally artistic creation. The story goes as follows. The protagonist, "the son", had started writing down his life story using a quill from a crow that had formerly been his faithful companion, until the devil killed it at the end of Tableau 2. The devil was jealous of the son and he "wanted to experience for himself this delight that had filled the son" while he was writing (Corillon, 2009a: 28). He wanted to steal his quill, and to do so, as an immortal being, he decided to enter the body of the son, who is a human being, and therefore mortal. He still could not achieve his goal and began to question himself: "Why would I need a quill? To write some stories? But all stories are for is to delay the hour of your death. I don't need that" (*Ibid.*: 41).⁶

Indeed, one can only become a writer on two conditions: one needs to be mortal, and to be cultured. Knowing that an existential reflection on human life, and hence also on man's mortal destiny, is one of the themes in the installations involving the character Oskar Serti, and that during the "psychoanalytical playing" sessions, Patrick Corillon very frequently talks about death, I became particularly interested in the sentence "all stories are for is to delay the hour of your death". I was especially interested in this phrase in the context of "the psychoanalysis of the process of artistic creation of Patrick Corillon".

The "psychoanalytical playing" sessions that preceded the creation of *L'Horizon Lent* contain material that can be linked to this sentence. In the session on May 12th 2008, Patrick Corillon speaks of the stakes for humanity involved in story-telling:

6. Original French text: "Pourquoi est-ce que j'aurais besoin d'une plume? Pour écrire des histoires? Les histoires, ça sert juste à reculer l'heure de sa mort. Moi, je n'en ai pas besoin" (Corillon, 2009a: 41).

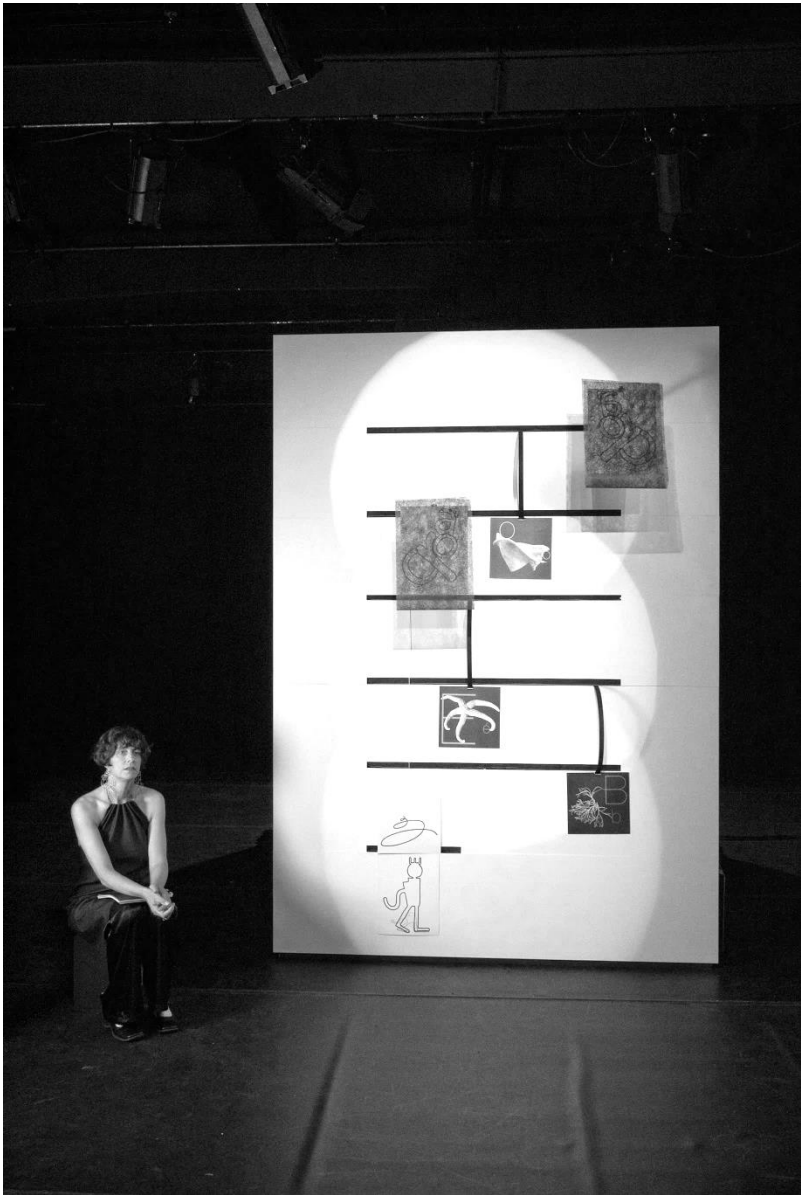


Fig. 1: Patrick Corillon and Dominique Roodthoof, Le Diable Abandonné III – L'Horizon Lent, 2009, performance, photograph courtesy Philippe De Gobert

"I am very fond of the great stories that – in my view – relate to the power of story-telling, such as *The Arabian Nights*, in which Scheherazade tells stories in order to put off her death. That is something I really like, knowing that a story can have a vital component. I think it is vital to live by being able to put oneself in perspective in a narrative form" (Corillon: May 12th 2008).⁷

So Patrick Corillon is referring to the tales in *The Thousand and One Nights* (1798) in which the sultan, disappointed at his wife's infidelity, condemns her to death, and to avoid being hurt again, decides to have the woman he married the day before executed each morning. Scheherazade, the last one, each night tells him a story to be continued the following day. So the sultan is unable to kill the young woman, and after a thousand and one nights, she contrives to win over her husband and the sultan decides against having her executed. So Scheherazade escapes death by telling stories.

In the session on July 7th 2008, Patrick Corillon told me the story of *L'Horizon Lent*, as he had it in his head at this early stage of the creative process. He spoke of the devil entering the son's body and then wanting to speak. As he has no breath, he is unable to pronounce the vowels. "The devil is in the son's body and has no breath. I would like to mention the absence of human life, but it also echoes an aspect in the order of the divine. Consonantal scripts like Hebrew or written Arabic have no vowels. This is why a sacred Hebrew text for instance is open to a variety of interpretations. You can play around putting in different vowels, to obtain different words" (Corillon: July 7th 2008).⁸

So Patrick Corillon seems to be contrasting here the speech and oral transmission of "mortals" with writing, which may be associated with sacred writings. Just afterwards, in the session, Patrick Corillon began telling *The Wonderful History of Peter Schlemihl* (1844) by Adelbert von Chamisso, a German short story he is very fond of from

7. The material borrowed from transcriptions of the "psychoanalytical playing" sessions has here been slightly adapted for improved readability. Original French text: "J'aime bien les grands récits qui portent – selon moi – sur la force des histoires, comme Mille et Une Nuits où Shéhérazade raconte des histoires pour reculer la mort. Cela, j'aime bien, de savoir qu'une histoire peut comporter un aspect vital. Je pense que c'est vital de vivre en parvenant à se mettre en perspective dans une forme de narration" (Corillon: May 12th 2008).

8. Original French text: "Le diable se trouve dans le corps du fils et il n'a pas de souffle. Je voudrais évoquer le manque de la vie humaine, mais cela fait écho aussi à un aspect d'ordre divin. Les écritures consonantiques, l'hébreu ou l'arabe écrit, ne comportent pas de voyelles. Raison pour laquelle un texte sacré en hébreu par exemple peut se prêter à des interprétations diverses. On peut, en jouant, en mettant d'autres voyelles, obtenir d'autres mots" (Corillon: July 7th 2008).

the Romantic period, and which, like von Goethe's *Faust* (1909-1914), influenced him during the creative process of the triptych *Le Diable Abandonné*. The protagonist, Peter Schlemihl, has made a pact with the devil whereby he gives away his shadow in exchange for eternal life.

In the "psychoanalytical playing" session of April 6th 2009, Patrick Corillon talked some more about the creative process in *L'Horizon Lent*. He spoke of the questions running through the devil's mind when he finds himself in the son's body: "Why does he want to write? As he is eternal, he has no past, he had no childhood, he is beyond culture, he needs no breath to speak. How can you write literary texts if you do not have all the weaknesses of men? Why tell stories when you are immortal? Stories do not help us to go beyond death, but if, by nature, you are not..."⁹ And so, the devil obtains an identity a contrario. He learns what this humanity is that he doesn't possess" (Corillon: April 6th 2009).¹⁰

In connection with *L'Horizon Lent*, we now find a few lines of explanation on Patrick Corillon's website, belatedly added by the artist: "The devil saw in his immortality the guarantee of infinite power. But there at the top of a tree, right in the middle of the forest, he discovers a son lost in the joy of writing down his childhood memories. The devil immediately notices a magnificent quill in the son's fingers. He is mortally jealous; his eternity has left him with no childhood and no memories. So he decides to abandon all his privileges in order to possess this quill and learn to write" (Corillon, 2009b).¹¹

9. During the "psychoanalytical playing" sessions, it is not uncommon for the artist to break off in mid-sentence. This is characteristic of spoken language. In this instance, we are talking about Belgian French. Having said that, not finishing a sentence may also be due to censorship. We might suggest the following end to the sentence: "Stories do not help us to go beyond death, but if, by nature, you are not mortal, what is the point of writing stories?"

10. Original French text: "Pourquoi est-ce qu'il veut écrire? Comme il est éternel, il n'a pas de passé, il n'a pas eu d'enfance, il est au-delà de la culture, il n'a pas besoin de souffle pour parler. Comment peut-on écrire des textes littéraires si on n'a pas toutes ces faiblesses des hommes? Pourquoi raconter des histoires si on est immortel? Les histoires ne nous aident pas à dépasser la mort, mais si, par nature, on n'est pas... Et donc, il obtient une identité a contrario, le diable. Il apprend ce que c'est l'humanité, qu'il n'a pas" (Corillon: April 6th 2009).

11. Original French text: "Le diable voyait dans son immortalité la garantie d'un pouvoir infini. Mais voilà qu'en haut d'un arbre, au beau milieu de la forêt, il découvre un fils perdu dans le bonheur d'écrire ses souvenirs d'enfance. Le diable repère aussitôt, entre les doigts du fils, une plume merveilleuse. Il est mort de jalousie; son éternité ne lui a donné ni enfance ni souvenirs. Il décide alors de renoncer à tous ses privilèges pour posséder cette plume et apprendre à écrire" (Corillon, 2009b).

Man's mortal destiny, as a prerequisite for literary creation, or artistic creation generally, thus seems to be the major theme of the play.

The next work we are going to take a close look at as part of the study of psychic work involved in the creative process is *Le Benshi d'Angers*, a performance shown for the first time in June 2011 and created by Patrick Corillon during a period when he was a guest artist-lecturer at Le Fresnoy, near Lille (Fig. 2).



Fig. 2: Patrick Corillon, Le Benshi d'Angers, 2011, performance, photograph courtesy Raoul Lhermitte

Le Benshi d'Angers is one of a set of performances, the first of which, *La Rivière Bien-Nommée*, was premiered in 2010. During these 60-minute performances, Patrick Corillon tells a story in the first person singular, a fictitious tale containing numerous autobiographical elements. The subject of *Le Benshi d'Angers* is our relationship with death, that is, both bereavement following the death of a loved one, and fear of our own death. The (autofictional) story told by Patrick Corillon begins with the death of his mother. As he tells it, he shows pictures that are in a book and which he projects onto a screen with an old-fashioned projector. The two brothers decide to clear out their mother's home and put it up for sale. They divide up the work, meaning that Patrick Corillon will look after the attics while his

brother deals with the cellars. Pushing open the door to the first garret, Patrick Corillon notices a small leaflet on the hanging of the Apocalypse of Angers. This brochure brings back a childhood memory. On the basis of this memory, he sets off on an "interior journey", or in other words, a daydream, of which the story in the performance is the narrative. It is not until the end of the performance that he reveals to the audience that they have actually been listening for an hour to the account of a daydream. While on this "interior journey", he visits Angers Castle to see the Apocalypse hanging, and there he meets a "benshi", i.e., "a Japanese silent film narrator" (Friends of Silent Film Association & Matsuda Film Productions, 2001). In the days of the silent film in Japan, the benshis commented and played the dialogues between the actors for a mostly illiterate audience (unable to read the subtitles). [...] There are still a very few benshis operating today" (Corillon, 2011: 9).

During the "psychoanalytical playing" session of April 5th 2010, Patrick Corillon spoke to me of his passion for story-tellers, like the "benshis", and storytelling practices the world over, throughout history. Some of these practices seem to be intended, among other things, to help the community face up to death. On this subject, he brings out several books from his bookcase, including the exhibition catalogue *Lanterne magique et film peint: 400 ans de cinema* (Mannoni & Pesenti Campagnoni, 2009), which he had seen only recently at the Cinémathèque française in Paris.

"The story-tellers came with their magic lanterns, they showed pictures with the magic lanterns and they told stories with their magic lanterns. And in the first stories that they told, they spoke of death, they spoke of the devil, ghosts... People were not used to seeing pictures. And so whenever a picture was projected for them, it was both a presence and an absence. Now we see pictures everywhere, but in the sixteenth century, books with pictures were not at all common. There were pictures in the churches. But to see a picture, that must have been something impressive. There must have been something magical about it. These magic lanterns resembled projectors. The people saw the images on the wall, as if there was someone there and at the same time not there. For them, they were spirits, they were ghosts. And so the magic lantern shows were to do with death, with ghosts, with the devil" (Corillon: April 5th 2010).¹²

12. Original French text: "Les conteurs venaient avec leur lanterne magique, ils montraient des images avec la lanterne magique et ils racontaient des histoires avec leur lanterne magique. Et

A second book that Patrick Corillon brought out from his bookcase bears the title *Manga Kamishibai* (Nash, 2009) and is about the Japanese story-tellers who used "kamishibai", small picture theatres. With the help of these "kamishibai", they would tell very popular stories, but they would also talk for instance about the horrors and taboos of the Second World War, and the atom bomb at Hiroshima.

During that same session, Patrick Corillon made reference to the work of Petrarch, and more specifically to *The Ascent of Mont Ventoux* (Petrarch, 1990 [1353]), which seems to evidence the invention of the modern conception of the landscape. "What is this idea of the landscape? For me, the landscape is also the relationship to oneself in the world. Petrarch was one of the first authors to write on the landscape. Before, man was so subject to divine laws that he was included in the world. He was subjected to God, to the divine system, and so he was never anything but a cog in the divine system's machinery. There then came a time when man began to look at the world, implying that he placed himself somewhat outside of the world. Before, in the Middle Ages, people thought that fate was at work, that they were subjected to all life's pains. Living just meant being subjected. They thought that they could not do anything to the world. You could not do anything about famine, you could not do anything about storms, you could not do anything about the darkness of the night, you could not do anything about death. Starting with the Renaissance, people began to look at the world as spectators. So we placed ourselves outside of the world. This is how the notion of the landscape came into being. I find this interesting" (Corillon: April 5th 2010).¹³

dans les premières histoires qu'ils racontaient, ils parlaient de la mort, ils parlaient du diable, des fantômes... Les gens n'étaient pas habitués à voir des images. Et donc, quand on leur projetait une image, c'était à la fois une présence et une absence. Maintenant on voit des images partout, mais au XVI^e siècle, des livres avec des images, ce n'était pas commun. Il y avait des images dans les églises. Mais voir une image, ça a du être quelque chose d'impressionnant. Il a du y avoir quelque chose de magique. Ces lanternes magiques ressemblaient à des projecteurs. Les gens voyaient des représentations sur le mur, comme si quelqu'un était là et pas là en même temps. Pour eux, c'était des esprits, c'était des fantômes. Et donc, les spectacles de lanternes magiques se rapportaient à la mort, aux fantômes, au diable" (Corillon: April 5th 2010).

13. Original French text: "C'est quoi, l'idée du paysage? Pour moi, le paysage, c'est aussi le rapport à soi dans le monde. Pétrarque était un des premiers auteurs à écrire sur le paysage. Avant, l'homme était tellement soumis aux lois divines qu'il était inclus dans le monde. Il était soumis à Dieu, au système divin, et donc il n'était jamais qu'un des rouages du système divin. À un moment donné, l'homme s'est mis à regarder le monde, ce qui implique qu'il s'est mis un peu en dehors du monde. Avant, au Moyen Age, on croyait qu'on avait la fatalité sur soi, qu'on était soumis à toutes les douleurs de la vie. Vivre, ce n'était qu'être soumis. On croyait qu'on ne pouvait pas intervenir sur le monde. On ne pouvait pas intervenir sur la famine, on ne pouvait

So what seems interesting to Patrick Corillon is that, starting in the Renaissance, man was no longer subjected to the forces of nature, to life's pains and to his mortal fate, and that he could find ways of facing up to this.

A little later during the same session, Patrick Corillon brought out from his bookcase a book called *Les Structures Anthropologiques de l'Imaginaire* by Gilbert Durand (1992), saying it was a book likely to be of interest to me in connection with my research project. He had read the book some fifteen years previously and told me what he remembered of it.

"How is the imaginary created? Why did men create the imaginary? To face up to death, man fought with the help of the imaginary". I interject: "Yes, it's like Scheherazade". "Right. You're right. Awareness of man's mortality seems to foster the development of the imaginary. One feature of man is his mortality. This gave rise to the imaginary. I think it is a part of the human being, from the outset, to be able to develop virtual worlds or to be symbolic. I get the feeling that the whole of man's symbolic side is part and parcel, along with death, along with birth, along with reproduction, of the idea of going beyond time... This idea also ties in with the creative process. It is giving birth to the imaginary. It is pretty interesting" (Corillon: April 5th 2010).¹⁴

In mentioning what he read in the book *Les Structures Anthropologiques de l'Imaginaire* (Durand, 1992), Patrick Corillon appears to connect with what I hold to be the main theme of *L'Horizon Lent*, namely the relationship between artistic creation and the human being's mortal destiny. One might even detect and influence of this book on the performance *Le Benshi d'Angers*. At the end of this "inner journey", or this daydream, another memory comes back to him. It is

pas intervenir sur les tempêtes, on ne pouvait pas intervenir sur la nuit, on ne pouvait pas intervenir sur la mort. À partir de la Renaissance, on s'est mis à regarder le monde en spectateur. On s'est donc mis en dehors du monde. C'est ainsi que la notion du paysage est né. Cela m'intéresse" (Corillon: April 5th 2010).

14. Original French text: "Comment l'imaginaire se crée? Pourquoi les hommes ont créé l'imaginaire? Pour faire face à la mort, l'homme s'est battu à l'aide de l'imaginaire". J'interviens brièvement: "Oui, c'est comme Shéhérazade". "Voilà. Voilà. La conscience de mortalité de l'homme semble favoriser le développement de l'imaginaire. Le propre de l'homme, c'est le fait d'être mortel. Cela a donné naissance à l'imaginaire. Je pense que cela fait partie de l'être humain, dès le départ, de pouvoir développer des mondes virtuels ou d'être symbolique. J'ai l'impression que toute la part symbolique de l'homme est totalement constitutive, au même titre que la mort, au même titre que la naissance, au même titre que la reproduction, de l'idée d'aller au-delà du temps... Cette idée se rapporte aussi au processus créatif. C'est donner naissance à l'imaginaire. C'est assez intéressant" (Corillon: April 5th 2010).

in connection with a picture that was in the kitchen. One day, Patrick Corillon's brother had removed it to revise a lesson with his friends. The father could not bear the empty space that appeared where the picture used to be and begged his sons to fill it with something, anything, a sheet of newspaper for example. Patrick Corillon and his brother picked at random a page from the newspaper and hung it on the wall where the picture had been, but they never read the article on that page. However, anyone coming into the kitchen for the first time would read the article and say, "Goodness me, how very interesting!". A few months later, the father died. While he is busy clearing out his parents' home, the narrator removes the newspaper page, which by now has faded in the light, to try and decipher the article after all this time. It was about a child who, a week after an earthquake, had found his family alive under the rubble of their home. The reporters had asked him how he had found his way around all the fallen stones and he had answered that, in his family, they used to go to sleep imagining all the forms the house might take after a series of disasters: a flood, a volcanic eruption, or an earthquake. Then the narrator wonders whether this article might have helped his father, who doubtless knew that he was going to die, "to imagine the unimaginable, to feel the life breath of the void that awaits us all" (Corillon, 2011: 20). So Patrick Corillon seems to take the view that imagination and storytelling practice enable mankind to face up to the fear of death.

Can psychoanalytical theory maybe help us understand this material from the "psychoanalytical playing" sessions? In the afterword "Le moi, mortel-immortel" (the mortal-immortal ego) to the book *Life Narcissism Death Narcissism*, André Green addresses what he terms the "fantasy of immortality" (Green, 2007: 285-314). According to him, this fantasy is present implicitly in the *Memoirs of President Schreber* which Freud had analysed in 1911 (Freud, 1911c [1910]). Green goes on to say that it is in "The 'Uncanny'", that Freud explicitly introduced for the first time the problematic of belief in the immortality of the Ego (Freud, 1919h). In it Freud analyses the tales of Hoffmann by asking himself the question what literary themes could provoke the feeling of uncanniness. He discerns the motif of the double and makes reference to the Otto Rank book called *Double: A Psychoanalytic Study* (1971 [1914]) to put forward the idea that "the 'double' was originally an insurance against the destruction of the ego, an 'energetic denial of the power of death', as Rank says; and probably the 'immortal' soul was the first 'double' of the body" (Freud, 1919h: 235). André Green goes into this hypothesis in greater detail.

According to him, the Ego is split into two parts, one of which recognizes external reality and is therefore conscious of the mortality of the Ego, while the other, unconscious, is connected with psychic reality though believing itself to be immortal. This belief can become conscious in delirium, but also under the guise of fiction. "The Ego, knowing it is mortal through its relation to external reality, carries in its folds a megalomaniac double, ready to swell up until it eclipses the other, sometimes for the innocent pleasure of fiction, at other times to back its faith" (Green, 2007: 296).

André Green's hypothesis approaches what Patrick Corillon is saying with regard to stories' life force. *Les Structures Anthropologiques de l'Imaginaire* by Gilbert Durand (1992), a book that Patrick Corillon himself recommended that I read, adds some further details. Gilbert Durand writes that the whole of representation rises up against the nothingness of time, and especially the fantastic function, that is, "representation in all its purity as an anti-destiny" (Durand, 1992: 468). "The mind's calling is insubordination to existence and to death, and the fantastic function is manifested as the pattern for that revolt" (*Ibid.*: 468). Further on, we read that "all those who have taken an anthropological look [...] at the field of the imaginary agree in acknowledging imagination in all its manifestations – religious and mythical, literary and aesthetic – as possessing the truly metaphysical power to set its works against 'the rottenness' of Death and Destiny" (*Ibid.*: 470). He makes reference to Malraux in defining visual art as an "Anti-Destiny" (*Ibid.*: 470). According to Gilbert Durand, Malraux shows "how the imaginary slowly emigrates from the depths of the sacred to the radiation of the divine, then is increasingly transformed, up to the coining of art for art's sake, and finally sets up the grand *musée imaginaire* of art in man's honour. It is chiefly in ethnology that we find a consensus seeing in the trajectory from sacred myth to profane art, via the magic ritual mask, the same impulse of the mind in opposition to the profaning dissolution of becoming and of death" (*Ibid.*: 470). This hypothesis put forward by Gilbert Durand in *Les Structures Anthropologiques de l'Imaginaire* sheds some light on the theme of Patrick Corillon's *L'Horizon Lent*, namely the inquiry into literary or artistic creativity itself, which supposes a writer or artist who is cultured and is mortal. The devil character, being immortal and therefore with no destiny to thwart, is incapable of literary creation, unlike the son character. Since Patrick Corillon told me about the Gilbert Durand book on April 5th 2010, and the first staging of the

performance *Le Benshi d'Angers* took place on June 14th 2011, one may suppose that the book had some impact on that work. Think of that newspaper article that may have helped the father to "imagine the unimaginable: the life breath of the void that awaits us all" (Corillon, 2011: 20), and which involved the story of a child who, following an earthquake, had managed to find his family members alive under the rubble. The explanation put this feat down to the imagination, namely that at the moment of falling asleep, the child had got into the habit of visualizing all the forms that his home could take following a whole series of disasters. So again we have the metaphysical power of the imagination.

To conclude this analysis of the material from the "psychoanalytical playing" sessions in connection with Patrick Corillon's work, one might postulate the existence of a psychic conflict within the Ego between on the one hand the awareness of death and on the other an unconscious fantasy of immortality, which can rise to consciousness when disguised as fiction. In the case of the processes of artistic creation in Patrick Corillon's work, one may advance that what is at issue is both creation, or story-writing, and the "re-creation" of the stories through narration. The expression of the unimaginable "life breath of the void that awaits us all" (*Ibid.*: 20) that we find at the end of the text of the performance *Le Benshi d'Angers* seems to convey this dual relationship with death. This fantasy of immortality would then contribute to the creative impulse.

Conclusion: A common core shared by art and psychoanalysis

In view of the above, we realise that this existential reflection upon the mortal destiny of the human being was already present in the themes of the Oskar Serti installations of the late eighties and the nineties, and that this thematic aspect manifested itself in more recent performance art works. So then we may ask the question whether the "psychoanalytical playing" has contributed to this thematic evolution in the work of Patrick Corillon or whether the approach simply gave me a better insight into the processes of artistic creation in his latest works, and hence also sheds light on how this evolution pans out, given that it would have happened anyway, even without the "psychoanalytical playing". Be that as it may, I have shown how both in the "psychoanalytical playing" and in the work of Patrick Corillon, some psychic work is going on, which bears resemblances to the one effected in a conventional psychoanalysis. My attempt to think

through what is going on in the "psychoanalytical playing" with Patrick Corillon has revealed even more commonalities between the process of artistic creation and psychoanalysis, which brings us back to the idea of a common core for art and psychoanalysis. Thus, in both psychoanalysis and artistic creation, the unconscious desire acts as a driving force driving the psychic mechanism of association, thereby bringing up sudden ideas (*Einfälle*). One concept that has proven crucial through this clarification of the "psychoanalytical playing" method is that of "potential space". According to Winnicott, psychoanalysis, play and artistic creation are all located in this mental space. I have envisaged "psychoanalytical playing" as taking place in the overlap of two potential spaces, that of Patrick Corillon, and my own. To do this, I referred to the Winnicottian conception of psychoanalysis, namely that it is played out in the overlap of two potential spaces, that of the psychoanalyst and that of the analysand. We have met the Winnicottian view of creation as a phenomenon occurring between the observer and the artist's creativity, the latter also being located in a potential space. So we might take this idea further by suggesting that creation may also take place in the overlap of two potential spaces, that of the artist and that of the observer, whose activity observing the creative process may also generate such a potential space. By way of a conclusion, we might then put forward the hypothesis that this common core between art and psychoanalysis, or between artistic creation and psychoanalysis, may also lie in this overlap of two potential spaces, opening up the path to playing and to creation.

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Conversations and "psychoanalytical playing" sessions with Patrick Corillon

Patrick Corillon, in a conversation with Sarah Willems:

2007: July 9th

Patrick Corillon, in a "psychoanalytical playing" session with Sarah Willems, Digital Wave Player recording:

2007: August 21st; October 29th; December 18th

2008: February 11th; May 12th; July 7th

2009: April 6th; August 9th

2010: April 5th

2012: November 26th

2013: November 19th

Performance art works by P. Corillon:

Le Diable Abandonné (2007-2012).

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L'Ermite Ornemental (2012).

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