

# The Notion of Desire

Paintings by Panos Passisis

# Panos Passisis



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## Artist's Statement

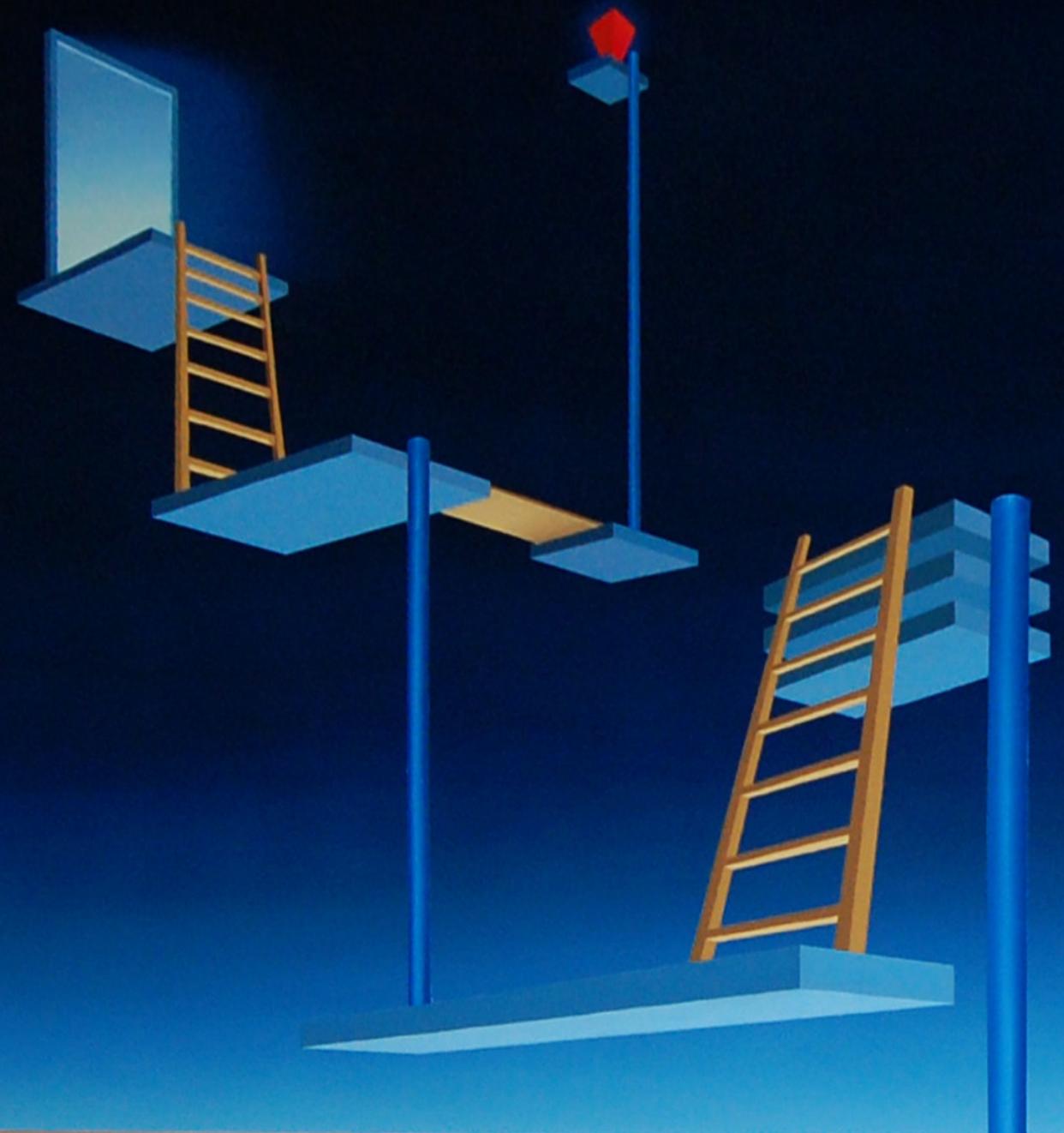
My practice aims to philosophically and visually explore the Notion of Desire; the path we need to follow, options, evolution, obstacles, escapism and the unachivable desire; and I attempt to depict this philosophical exploration while balancing my distilled symbolic landscape paintings between Surrealism, Abstract art, Illusion and Context.

**Restricted Options**

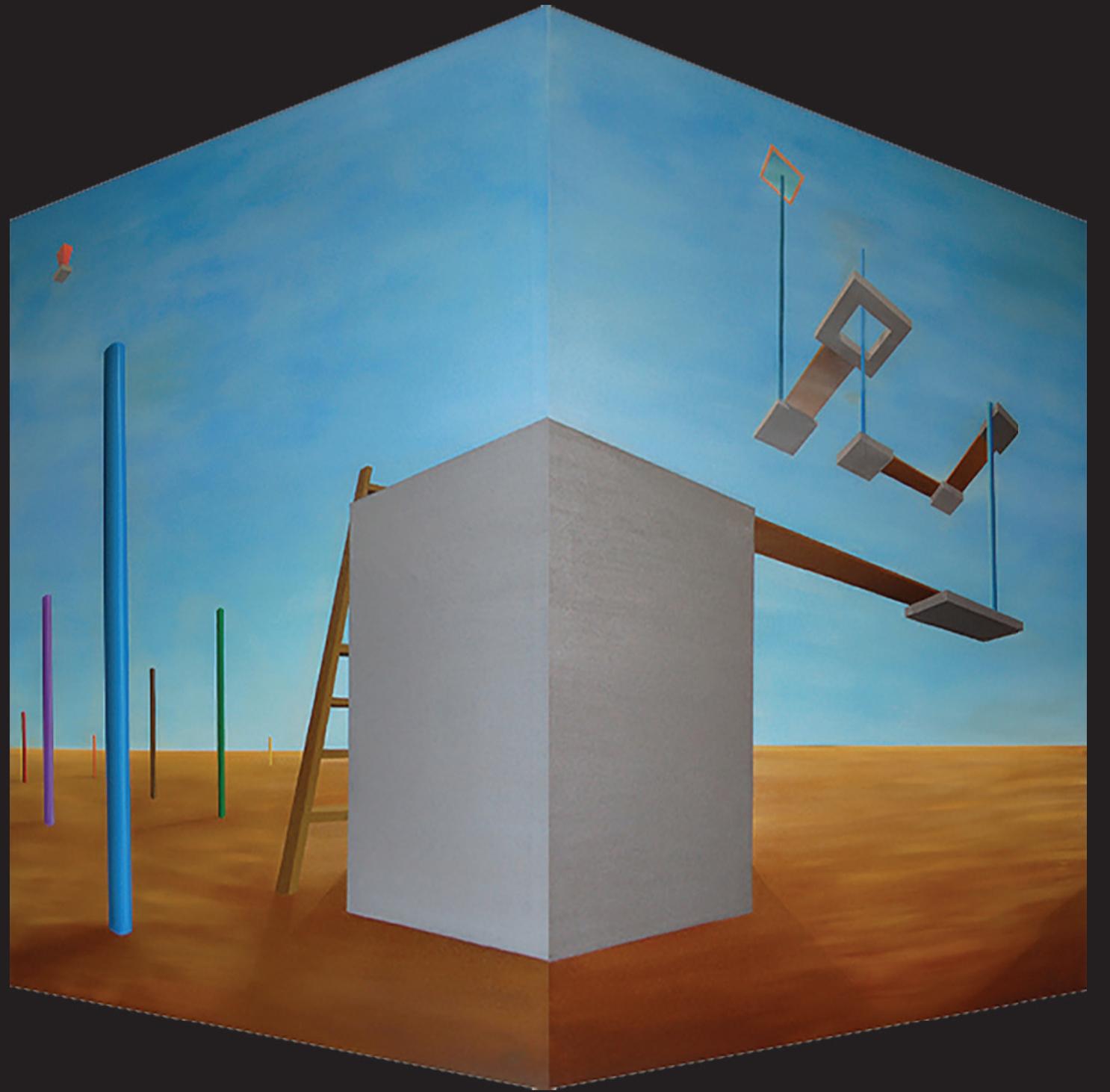
(Oil on Canvas, 160x230 cm) 2010



**Restricted Options**  
(Detail)



**Desire and Fight** "corner diptych"  
(Oil on Canvas, 160x115+160x115 cm) 2010





**A Fight Desired**



**A Desired Fight**

**Border Twisting**

(Oil on Canvas, 230x160 cm) 2010



**Dead-ending Flight**

(Oil on Canvas, 150x100 cm) 2010



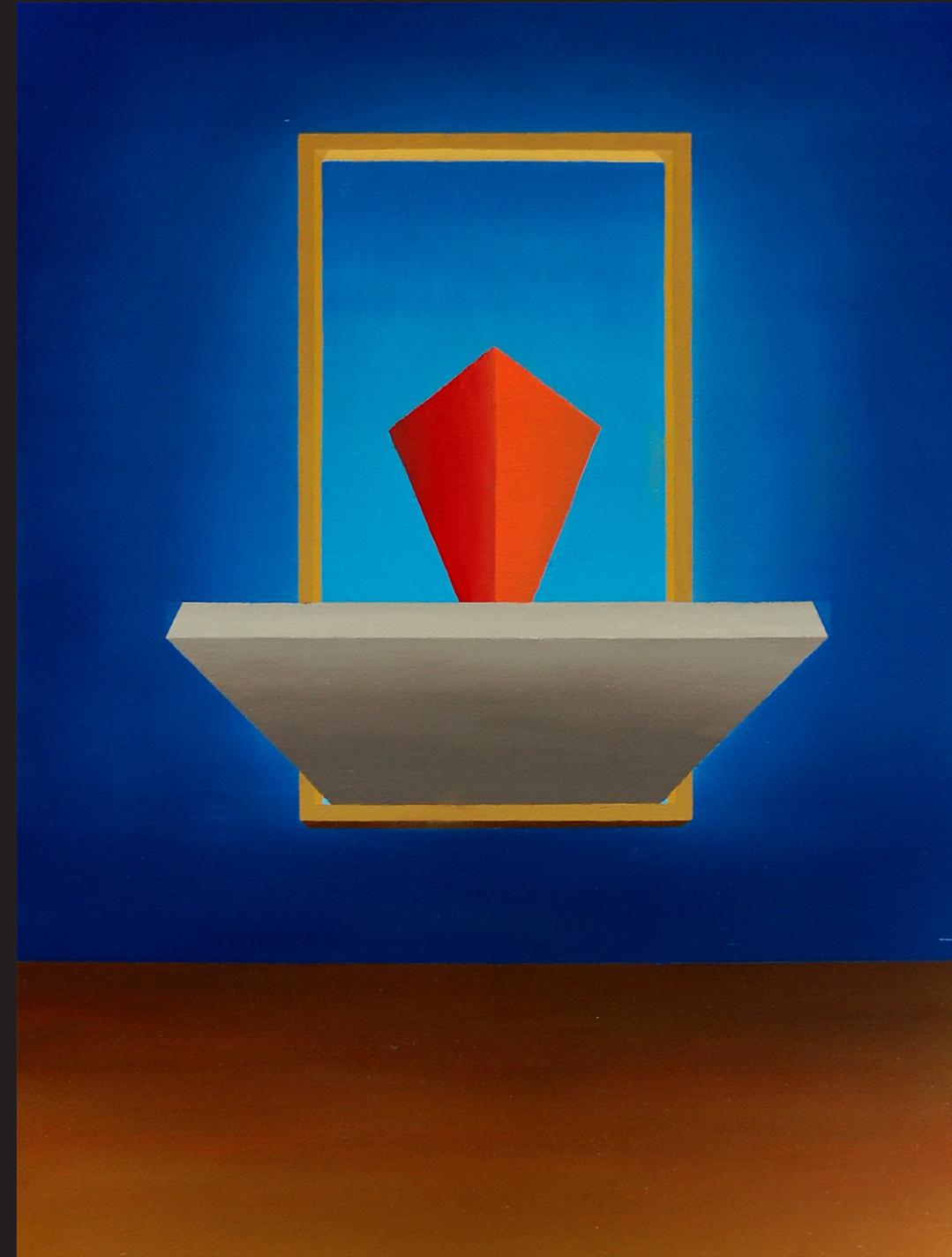
**2nd take on Aims**

(Oil on Canvas, 100x70 cm) 2009



**Little Anna**

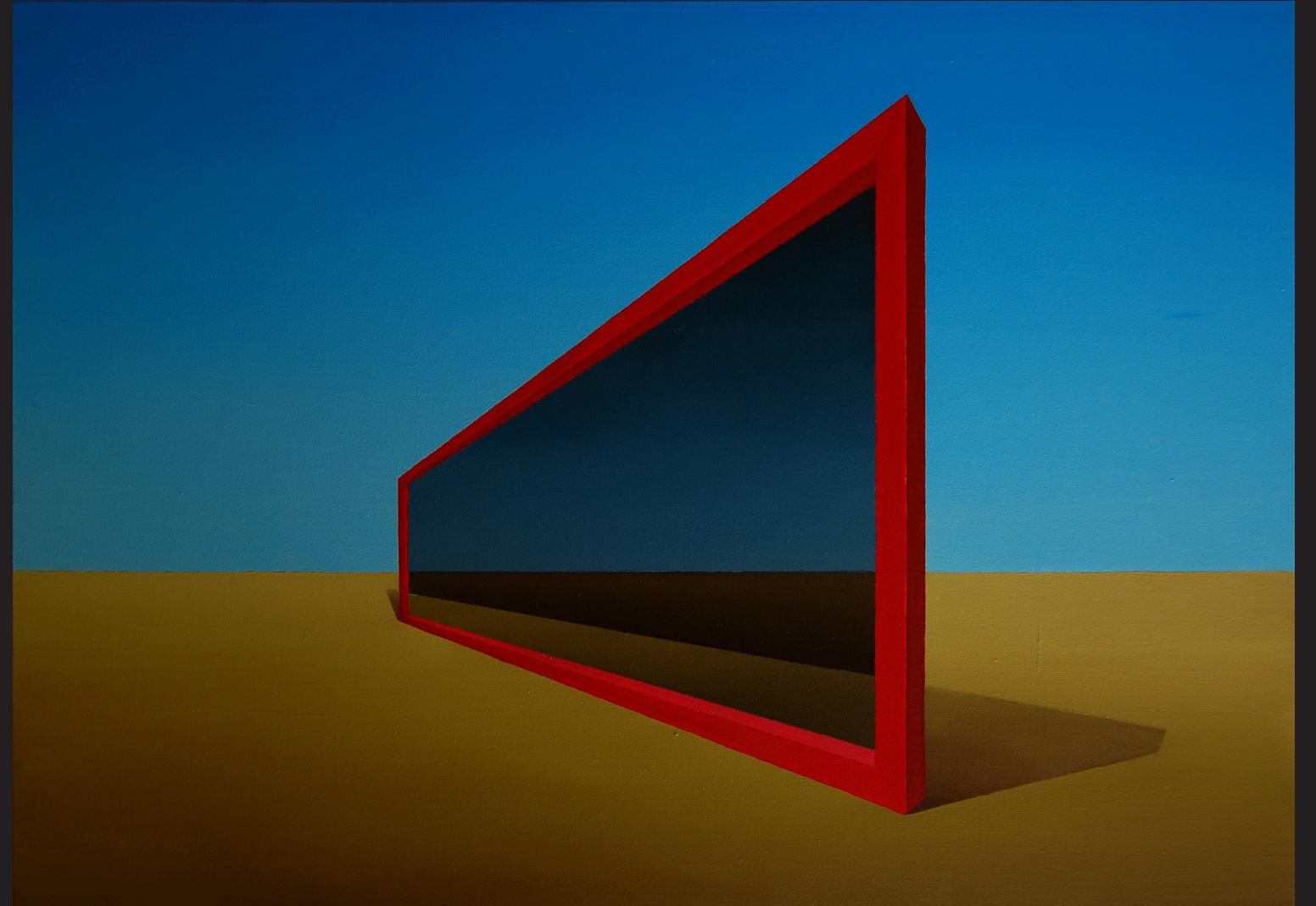
(Oil on Canvas, 70x50 cm) 2010

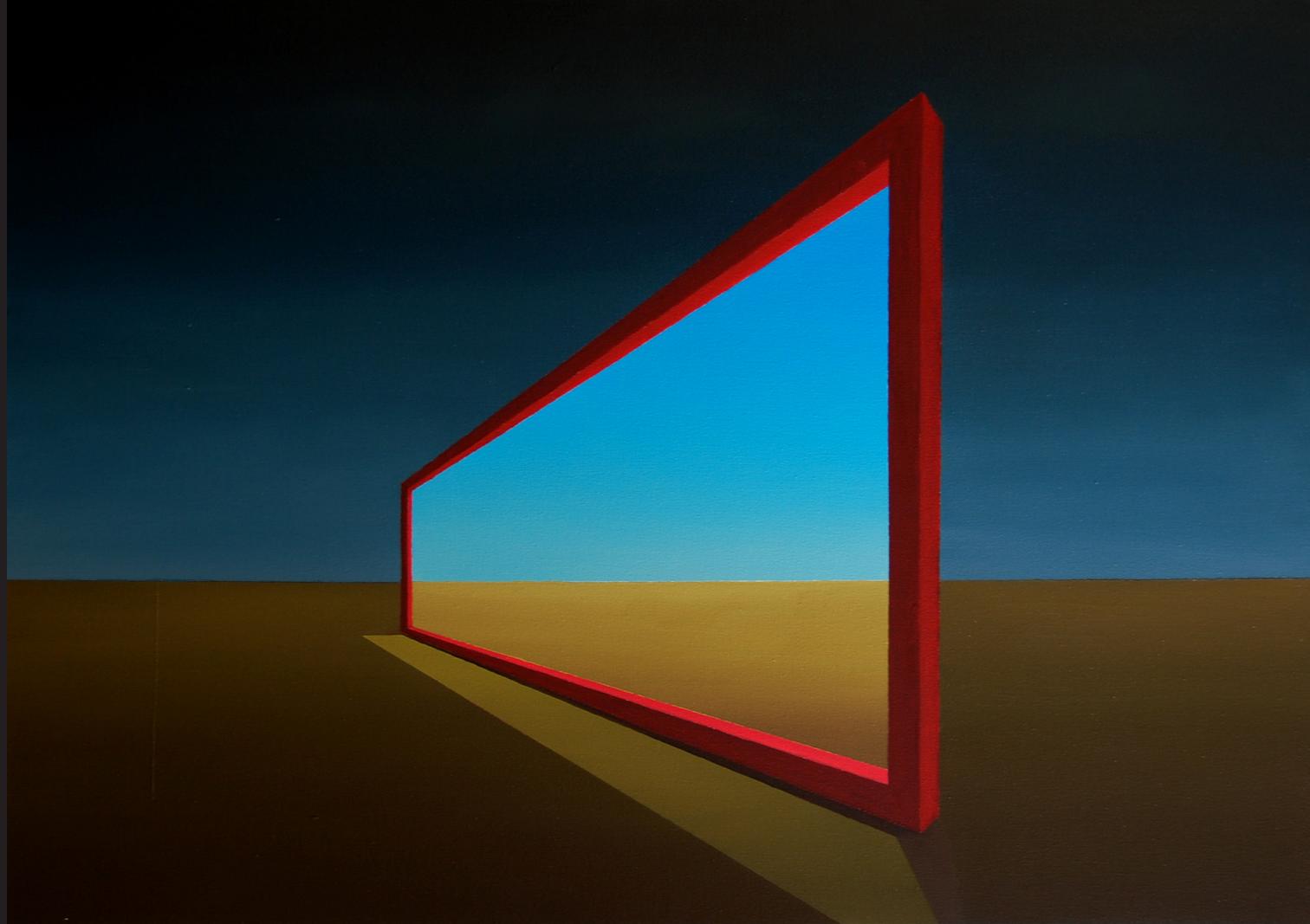


**Hole on the Ceiling** “ceiling painting”  
(Oil on Canvas, 50x50 cm) 2010



**Am I Through?** “double-faced painting”  
(Oil on Canvas, 70x100 cm) 2009





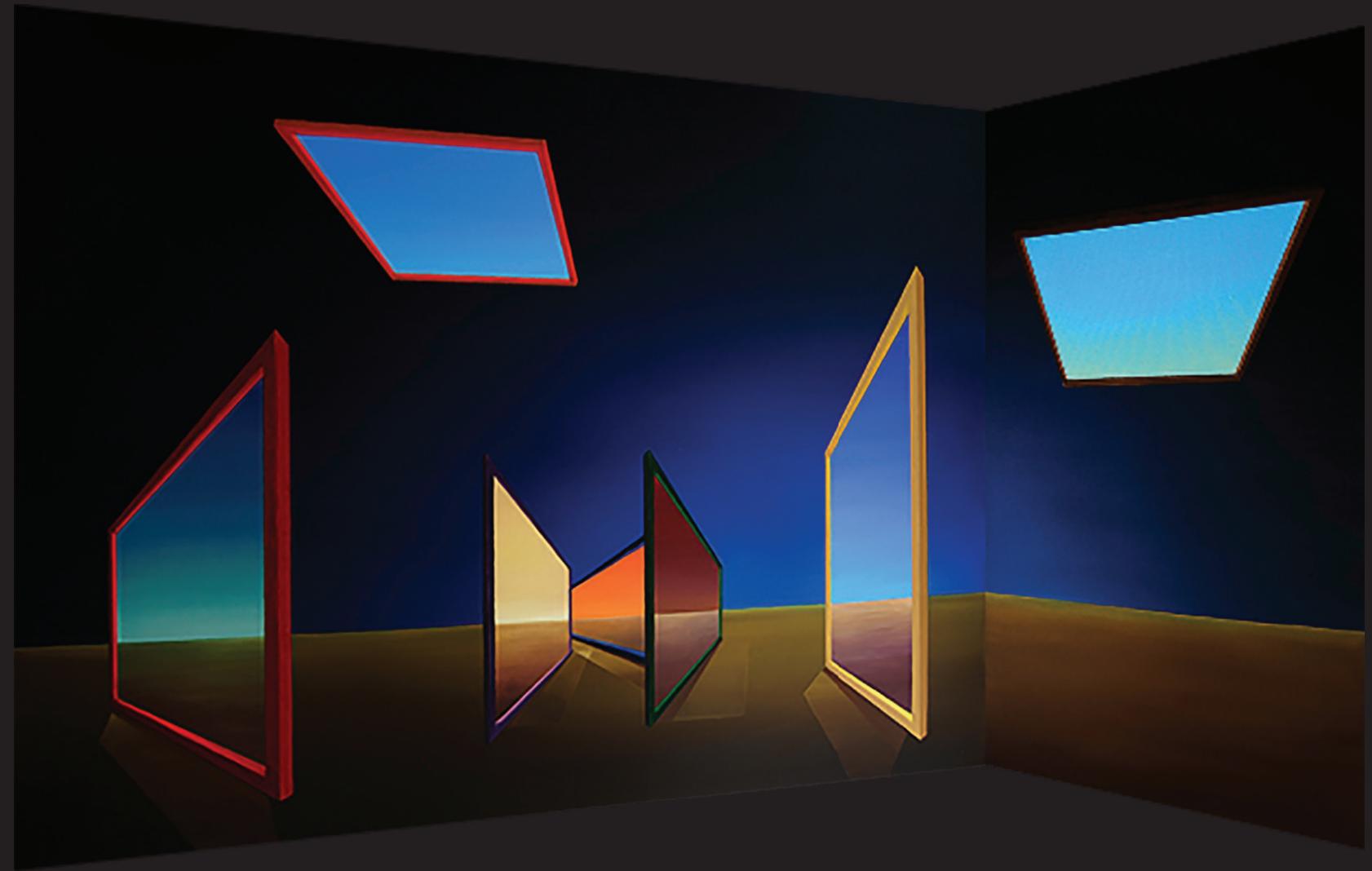
“double-faced painting” **Am I Through?**  
2009 (70x100 cm, Oil on Canvas)

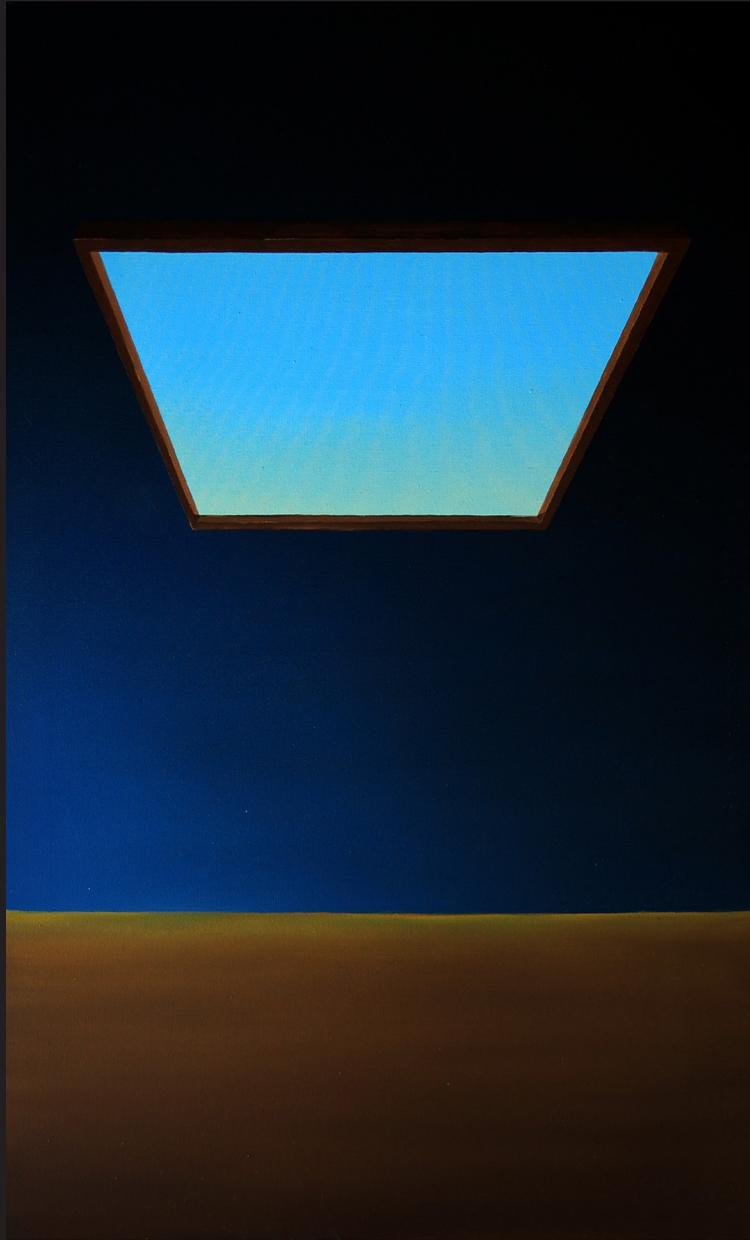
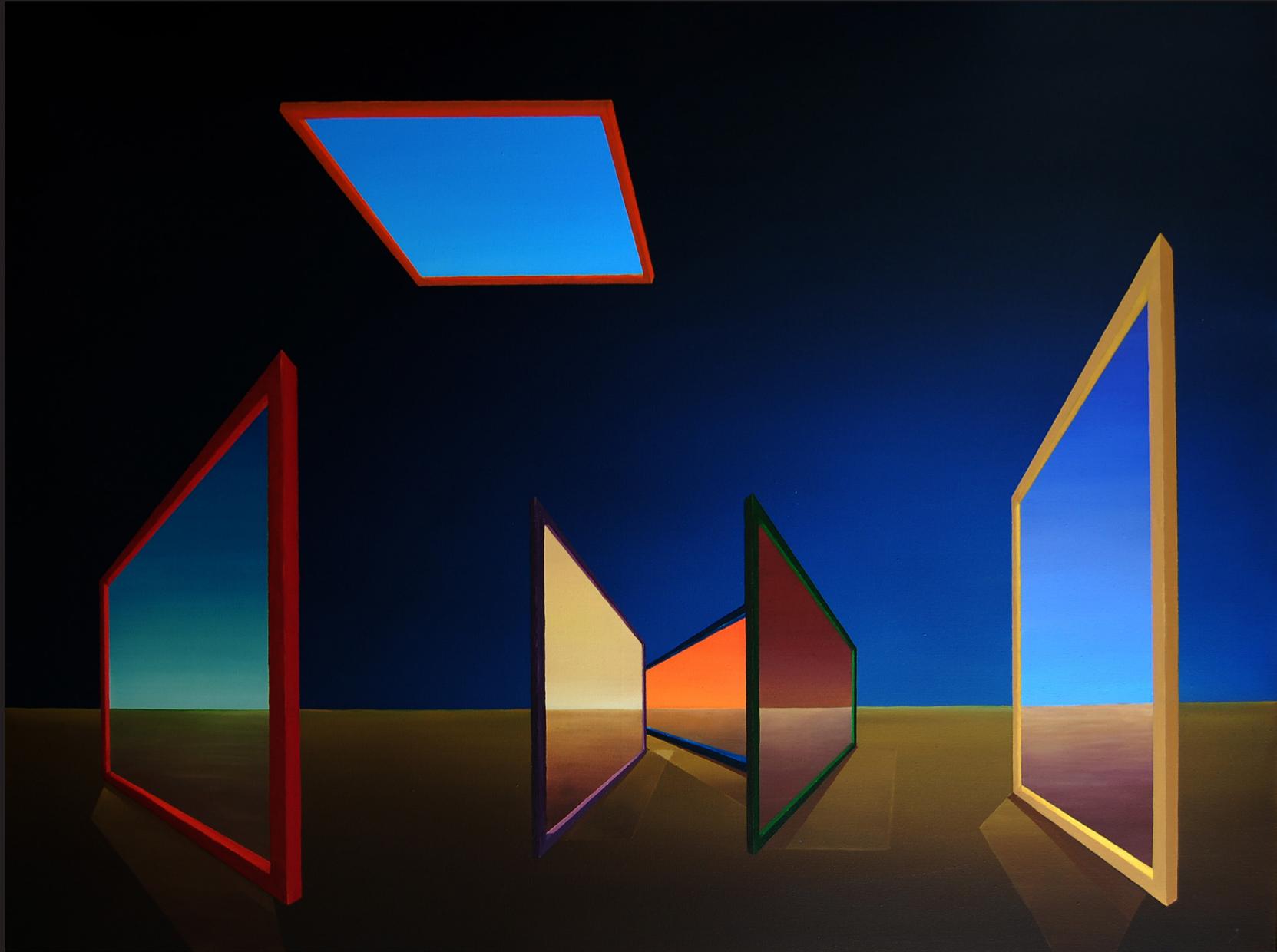
**Mntl Esc**

(Oil on Canvas, 75x100 cm) 2009



**CrtlAltDel+Esc** "corner diptych"  
(Oil on Canvas, 115x155+115x75 cm) 2009





**CrtlAltDel**

**Esc**

Special Thanks to Rebecca Partridge

## The Notion of Desire

by Panos Passisis

In the present essay, I am attempting to define desire as a notion. I am going to analyse this, passing through the relationships which desire as a notion has with memory, imagination, reason and passion. Combining these elements, I am going to separate the right desire from unsuitable ones and examine what is required from us to cover the distance in order to obtain the object of desire. Further on, I look at the types of desire and their strength, and how desire can be affected by the lack of the desired object. I am also examining the theoretical mechanisms, which individuals employ in order to decide upon the suitability of the objects desired. I hope that this essay will put in perspective the unconscious mechanisms which are hidden behind our way of acting, deciding or thinking.

It has been proven by scientific research that the brain categorises stimulus based on desire. The reasoning the brain uses, combined with desire, and by way of imagination, makes it possible for us to understand an object and see it as desirable. Every action anyone has ever taken is due to a specific state of mind we call desire. We are moving because muscles are doing so. Every move is orchestrated and finely tuned. Muscles are acting having received orders from the brain transmitted via 'motor' neurons. This process is initialised by the individual's desire to move. Our body and its muscles will perform the action of moving because we desired to do so. Desire dictates every single move, or thought, is the force behind our brains decision to act. It is the conductor of these finely tuned acts, but more importantly, the first step to our sociological, psychological, mental progression and development. It is this state of mind that is familiar to anyone who ever wanted to see a friend, have a coffee, drive a car or achieve a lifetime goal. As Hobbes has stated, desire is the fundamental motivation of all human action. It is the hidden mind within our mind that uses imagination to project to ourselves an alternative state of being.

### **Desire => Progression**

We desire the fantasy created through mnemonic images, stored in the unconscious. As desire remains in its imaginative state, memory is feeding desire with images, feelings and past experiences. Once desire gets fulfilled, then it alters its state, it becomes an experience. Experiences are recorded in our memory and finally memory by way of imagination is reseeded and reinitialising the whole process. Let us consider an example, Tom has heard from friends that driving a car is a great experience, this is stored in his unconscious, with the use of imagination he desires to drive, once he has done so, this desire becomes an experience, the experience of driving is going to unconsciously feed another desire, a desire possibly created when Tom sees a fast sports car. Desire and wish have a strong bond with memory and the mnemonic images. Those two elements together are enough to create experiences. The collection of experiences is constantly feeding us memories of a state (emotional, sociological, psychological, etc.).

## **Memory => Experience**

The link between memory and desire is imagination. This bond is strong as imagination is the missing link. If we exclude imagination from the above equation, then none of the other two states (memory and desire) make sense. Imagination has the impressive ability to both energise and glue together memory and desire. By way of imagination Tom fantasised that driving the fast sports car would be an experience worth having and, therefore, he created the desire to do so. Imagination and its projections for an alternative state create this driving force behind anything. Without experiences desire would feed through a hypothetical state of imagination, but without imagination desire would not exist. Problems can arise as imagination that initialises desire, must have a reference to reality through Mnemonic images and experiences. Freud has analysed patients with Hysteria and has found that they had separated their imagination from reality. The total separation of imagination and reality creates a false state of hysterical assumptions about a desire. In order for us to ground imagination and keep it within the realms of reality we must employ Reason.

**Imagination => Fantasy of the Desired**

**Memory + Imagination => Desire**

**Experience + Fantasy of the Desired => Desire**

The above view also agrees with the ancient Greek philosophers, who had all agreed that with reason as a catalyst, imagination creates and correctly determines the right desire. Although Plato, through 'The Republic', was seeing desire as an obstacle on the way to achieve a higher ideal, a higher state, he was referring to the uncontrollable part of desire, craving, which was not filtered through reason and thus remaining in its animalistic (pleasure based) state. The latter statement was also shared with Buddhism, although the Buddhist practice was using the practice of desire as an exercise to help the practitioner reach his higher state of being. Characterising craving as the enemy to defeat, rather than desire in general, Buddhism believes that once the individual is free from craving, by practising desire, he reaches enlightenment. Although the above sentences seem as an apathetic stance towards our inner most feelings and desires, in De Sade's view, apathy is opposing the impulsiveness of the result driven from desire and not desire itself. The balance between reason and desire has been justified since Aristotle, when all the philosophers since then have agreed that humans and our capacity to act consists of three faculties: reason, desire and soul. The progressive power of desire and its ability to help us progress and develop is just a wandering force. In order for the individual to realise the true potential of this, pure in its consistency force, a filtering layer of rational and reason has to be laid down. Going back to our example: Tom wants to drive the fast sports car; this is his pure desire, with reasoning Tom realises that he doesn't have the skills and the practical experience to do so; here Tom filtered his pure desire, through reason and determined that it's not the right desire for him. With reason being the main judge on the suitability of a desire, (as Kant was persuaded) our brain has the natural ability to keep reminding, through the desire faculty, to its self that is in possession of the faculty of reason.

**(Memory + Imagination) / Reason => Right Desire**

**Desire / Reason => Right Desire**

With Hume suggesting that reason is subject to passion and Socrates that passion in desire makes the movement towards the desirable possible, Blanchot combines the two. Blanchot writes, "For passion to become energy, it is necessary that it be constricted, that it be meditated by passing through a necessary moment of insensibility, then it will be the greatest passion possible". Thus, the movement towards the desirable is possible only when the suitability of the desirable has been filtered through reason, which is subject to passion and passion is the vehicle that carries the projection of mnemonic states by way of imagination and makes it possible for the individual to desire.

**Desire x Passion => Movement towards the Desired**

**(Desire x Passion) / Reason => Movement towards the Right Desire**

**((Memory + Imagination) x Passion) / Reason => Movement towards the right Desire**

Having examined the philosophical equations behind desire and separating it from the right desire and the movement towards the desired, we are left with one question. Which is the device that triggers this mechanism in the first place? The main element for this is the object of desire or to be a bit more accurate the 'lack' for the object desired. Many philosophical wars have been fought over the order in which desire and the lack of the object appear. Is it desire that makes it possible for us to see an object as desirable or the lack of the desired object that starts the whole process? This question seems to divide philosophers into two fields of thought.

Bergson and Deleuze agreed that desire, when it is strong, produces the lack for the object desired and uses this as a tool. Their rational behind this has to do with the creative, productive power of desire. Where desire by nature is fluid and ever-changing needs the lack for the object (or state), in order to help desire as a general force, set its focus to one desire. By doing so, these philosophers separated desire with the movement taken, towards the desired. Hegel stated that, the lack of the object desired is the necessary condition for the maintenance of desire. This school of thought separates the pure force and the actual, tangible movement towards the desired. On the other side of the field, we will find philosophers like Lacan and Sartre, who supported the idea that, the lack of the object triggers desire. Supporting this idea with the thinking that the object of desire is an alternative state to be, possibly an ideal state, than our current one and because we lack this object in our current state, we desire to get hold of it. Lacan calls the lack of the object desired, the impossible attainment of the object, the "want-to-be" state. Simmel states that we desire what we don't yet own or enjoy.

While I agree that desire is the wanting of an object, action or state, I dare not to narrow down the idea

of desire to just this. In my own personal view, restriction creates the distance between our current state and the alternative state (that which includes the desirable object), while this same lack for the object feeds our determination with the appropriate passion to drive us towards the desired.

### **Restriction + Current state => Alternative state**

The hypothetical distance an individual needs to overcome, in order to alter his state to the state that includes the object of desire, could also be characterised as the 'value' of desire. For Simmel, we desire objects that resist our desires or actions. He continues stating that the aesthetic value of desire is the most complete projection of the feelings that the subject has towards an object, while aesthetic value is driven from within the object. Kant separated desire and aesthetics once more, saying that the core of aesthetics is free from desire, while pleasure is driven from the aesthetics of the object desired. The more difficult it is for us to get hold of the desired, the bigger the enjoyment we receive once we have done so. As beauty is the promise of happiness, care has to be taken to correctly (with means of reasoning) determine the right object of desire. As we have mentioned earlier though, reason is subject to passion and passion is affected by the strength and value of the object desired.

The characterised strength of a specific desire is closely related and affected by the individuals desire to act upon this specific, primary desire. Here we will meet the secondary desires. These are separate from the primary ones but act upon them, either to assist them (so they will be realised) or to postpone or even stop primary desires from getting realised. Example, Tom desires to drive really fast (this is his primary desire), but he desires not to get a ticket or not to have an accident (these are secondary desires, that will act upon his primary one). The dilemma now for Tom is a simple choice between his options (primary versus secondary desire) strength. If or if not Tom chooses to act upon his primary desire depends on a set of preferences Tom has built up in his character. When the latter has been built upon our experiences and unconscious memories, Tom (as all of us) will be faced against, for example, his desire to be lawful, where his secondary desire will immediately act upon his primary one and stop it from getting fulfilled. Another view could say that Tom's secondary desire is acting as the filtering reason that helped him decide upon the suitability of his desire.

The strength of the individuals desire to act upon his primary desire is relevant to the hypothetical amount of satisfaction he is going to get from fulfilling his primary desire. This satisfaction can once more be biological satisfaction or relief; pleasures, practical gains, sociological gains, etc., or even a combination or average of the above. A small obstacle appears to arise as the momentary strength of the individuals desire to act upon his primary desire, seems to vary analogically to the individuals current state. If we consider our example, Tom would really enjoy driving fast, but today he feels tired and, therefore, he is postponing the completion of his primary desire. Impressively, Tom's decision to follow his mood and not to act upon his desire, at the moment, does not alter the value of his primary desire.

Having established that the strength of desire is also relevant to the value of it, it seems logical here to distinguish again between categories. Depending on the desire's value we get this separation into two categories. On one hand we have desires that are either long-term or they need a set of prerequisites in order to be satisfied, or they may as well be never completed. Long-term desires can include wishes like, I want to be a successful artist, or I desire for my parents health, or Tom desires to buy a new car. The difficulty of satisfying these desires is once more adding to the value of them.

The other category consists of short-term desires that are either low on value or they can be easily satisfied. This category could consist of desires like, I desire to drink coffee, or I desire to do nothing all day, or I desire to obtain a new piece of clothing. Interestingly, although short-term desires seem like a lesser kind, these can affect our everyday way of functioning. I desire to drink coffee, if I do not do so, then for the rest of the morning I will feel sleepy and as an effect, I will continue having in my mind the desire to drink coffee. Even more interesting is the fact that, long-term desires have the ability to create short-term ones. The latter effect is happening in order for the short-term ones to be used as tools on our way to satisfy the long-term desires. Without short-term desires it would be impossible to obtain long-term ones. The following two desires, I desire to visit a gallery to study the artwork and I desire to paint in order to develop my painting skills, although short-term desires, I am using them in order to cover a percentage of the distance between my current state, and my long-term desire to become a successful artist. Another example would be Tom desires to save some money. This will help him with his long-term desire to buy a new car. No matter though of the value or type of desire (primary, secondary, long-term, short-term, etc.), desire as a notion (when desire remains in its imaginative state) continues being the force behind us wanting, desiring or needing an object.

But what exactly are these objects of desire? It seems that anything that receives ones actions, in order to possess it, can be the object of desire. The receiver of our actions could be an action; an actual object; the absence of this object; the representation of an object; a being; the preservation of the distance between this being and the individual; an alternative state; or even the preservation of the current status quo. A view on the matter is that one desires just the object and does not think about the alternative state that comes with it by obtaining the object. This simple view focuses on the object alone. At this point I think it is safe to assume, that what is desired is the state of affairs that are following this object. This state could include a set of feelings; a physical effect; a mental state; psychological effects; experiences; or even the improvement of our sociological status, etcetera.

Exactly after we have decided (with means of reasoning) if the alternative state offered by our desires is suitable, we need to examine which exactly are the criteria with which we filter if or if not a set of desires are desired in the first place. In order to do so, we need to examine a set of theories. These theories will make it possible for us to understand why we see an object as desired, long before we decide if a specific desire is reasonable or not. Trying to do so is like trying to define the way of seeing and understanding everyday actions and the relations they

create between our decisions to act (upon our potential desires) and the actual states of affair offered by them. Observing desires, as a conceivable state of affairs, gives us the ability to see how there could be mechanical relations between ones character and our way of judging if a state or object is desired or not.

One of these theories, that mechanically create desire, is our generic tendency towards ‘good’. The basis of this theory relies upon the individual moving towards the object that is commonly held as being good, as it was believed by Socrates; therefore, the individual believes that the desired object is desired because the set of affairs it creates is inherently good. For example, the desire an individual has to donate to charity is because he believes that the state of affairs created by his decision, to act upon his desire, is good. Although this theory seems to combine desire and reason to determine the right desire, there is a problematic extension to this. This extension is put forward by theorists such as Dennis Stampe and Graham Oddie, to whom desire towards goodness is merely a matter of perception, and thus, an individual acts upon his desire to move towards the desired, not because the individual believes that the result of his actions will be good, but because he perceives it will be so.

Another theory related to the mechanics of desire, is considering the derivative pleasure experienced by the subject, by way of attainment of the desired object. The main difference between desiring a state of affairs, simply because this is good, and a person desiring an object in order to draw pleasure from it, has to do with the feelings experienced by the person who initialised the process of desire in the two different sets of affairs. In one hand, a person acting based upon the belief that the object of desire, once obtained, will be good, is relevant to perhaps a benefit experienced by the world at large. Whereas, in the other, a person moving towards the desired, purely for the experience of pleasure is more subjective; the results of this pleasurable experience may be felt by the individual alone, and/or a limited number of other receivers. As mentioned in the theory of desire based on the belief that this results to goodness, donating to charity may benefit, in say, the end of hunger in Third World countries. In the case of desire, purely for the sake of pleasure, an example may be enjoying a meal alone, or in the company of close family and friends. Although in the later example it may seem that the individual’s desire to be satisfied resulted in a selfish act of pleasure, in both theories (good-based and pleasure-based) the individual will draw satisfaction by obtaining the object of desire (or state of affairs). As already examined, the main key of what is considered desirable or not, rests upon the satisfaction that the individual will experience by obtaining the object of desire.

Thus far, it seems that desire has mainly had effects on our sociological, psychological and emotional condition; we dare not leave out the effect that desire has in our mental development. The way that Humans have developed mentally since the beginning of time is based on our desire to know, the desire to obtain knowledge. It seems that our capacity for knowledge passes through our desire to know. Essentially, every question, using the power of thought, hides the will to know; Kant has characterised this will as a moral form of desire, where the object of desire has been substituted by an alternative state of being, one that includes knowledge. For example

the question: ‘What is the meaning of life?’, is led by our desire to discover what is hidden behind our existence. It is the same type of question I asked myself a few months ago ‘What is desire?’, ‘What is the object of desire?’, ‘What are the relations between the subject and the object of desire?’. For philosophers, the desire to philosophise is the raw force that remains unfulfilled, in order to keep producing questions for science to examine.

To conclude, the creative, productive power of desire (when desire remains in its imaginative state), gives us the ability to develop and progress psychologically; sociologically; practically; emotionally or mentally. But, it is the instability of our human nature, by way of desire, which makes it nearly impossible for us to settle upon either an object of desire or a set of affairs. It seems that once the human animal has obtained what is thought to be desired, quickly shifts its focus to what is imagined to be the next object of desire.

In my view, this apparent instability is a defence mechanism created by us, following our realisation that we could never fulfil our ultimate desires. The latter is happening either due to our tendency never to be satisfied, as pleasure is relevant to time; or due to our inclination to set the impossible as the goal, in order to achieve the reality of the possible. In any case, the realisation that the ultimate goal cannot be achieved, is taking place following our realisation that our movement towards the ultimate does not bring the object of desire closer but changes our state, makes our human nature evolve, one that includes our experiences, makes us a different person in a different position in relation to the separately living goal.

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