

# Betwixt and Between: Exploring the Passage of Liminal Space

By

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## Abstract

The focus of this thesis is on the *liminal* space, *limen* being Latin for threshold. The liminal space is used as a means of figuring and reading artworks that appear to be in a process of becoming and disappearing. A dialectical and reciprocal reading is made of Bourgeois' "neo-Baroque" artwork *Spider* (1997) and Michelle Key's *Betwixt-in-Between* (2004).

*Liminality* here is discussed within the theoretical framework of several key conceptual concerns, including abjection (as examined principally by Julia Kristeva), Baroque thought (as discussed by Mieke Bal, Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Lacan and Slavoj Žižek) and allegory (as figured primarily by Walter Benjamin and commentators on Benjamin's writings). What links these concerns are their focus on indeterminacy, instability, and process as opposed to certitude and finitude.

The exploration of the inscription of time in space; that is the temporal process, which gives rise to, which produces, the spatial dimension, is attempted in order to make meaning, however provisionally, of what may be argued to destabilise meaning and to consider possibilities for both art-making and interpretation that would engage critically with this instability.

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## Introduction

The rite of passage is always an awesome experience because it is impossible to predict what its course will be. Although the initiate knows what he is losing, he has no idea what he is taking on (Girard, *Violence and the sacred*).

I am taking the 70:30 option of the MFA degree offered at Rhodes in which emphasis will be placed on the practical component. I plan to map out dialectically, both in theory and practice, the in-between or *liminal* space, *limen* being Latin for threshold. My intention in this thesis is to read my exhibition through Bourgeois's "neo-Baroque" artwork *Spider* (1997) (Fig. 1) that may be seen to be in a process of becoming and disappearing, playing, in the Derridian sense of the word, dialectically with aspects both macroscopic and microscopic. In doing so, I also intend to explore the inscription of time in space: that is the temporal process, which gives rise to, which produces, the spatial dimension.



Fig. 1: Louise Bourgeois, *Spider*, 1997. Steel, tapestry, wood, glass, fabric, rubber, silver, gold, bone, 444.5 x 518 cm. Serpentine Gallery, London. (Storr 2003: 43)

My discussion of liminality will be situated within the theoretical framework of several key conceptual concerns, including abjection (as examined principally by Julia Kristeva), Baroque thought (as discussed by Mieke Bal, Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Lacan and Slavoj Žižek) and allegory (as figured primarily by Walter Benjamin and commentators on Benjamin's writings). What links these concerns are their focus on indeterminacy, instability, and process as opposed to certitude and finitude.

I would like to explain, via anthropologist Victor Turner (1967: 94), some of the socio-cultural properties of the "*liminal period*". For Turner, the *liminal* period functions as the period of transition from "one type of stable or recurrent condition, that is culturally recognised" to another. During the *liminal* period, the state of the ritual subject/neophyte is ambiguous. He observes, in *The forest of symbols*, that "our basic model of society is that of a 'structure of position', we must regard the period of margin or '*liminality*' as an inter-structural situation." He goes on to say that "a state of transition, [could be seen as] a process, a becoming — here an apt analogy would be water in process of being heated to boiling point, or a pupa changing from grub to moth."

The instability associated with *liminality* can be further related to a state of uncleanness and, by extension, abjection. As Turner (1969:97) suggests, quoting from *Purity and danger* (1966) by British anthropologist Dr Mary Douglas: "[W]hat is unclear and contradictory (from the perspective of social definition) tends to be regarded as (ritually) unclean." In other words, as Julia Kristeva (1982: 4) argues, "when something does not respect borders, positions, and/or rules it is seen as unclean."

For Kristeva (1982: 4), who was directly influenced by Douglas's text, this "state of dissolution" may be termed as abject where it is "not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, [and] order". It is in this sense that something in a *liminal* state could be considered unclean/abject: both entail alteration of stasis and change. Furthermore, both abjection and *liminality*, as key concerns in this thesis, could be fruitfully linked to, firstly, the concept of Baroque thought (as elucidated by Mieke Bal *et al*) and, secondly, the notion of allegory (as elucidated by Walter Benjamin).

Following Kristeva's definitions of abjection, Baroque thought could be classified as abject. Mieke Bal (1999: 28) states in *Quoting Caravaggio*: "Baroque abandons the firm distinction between subject and object." To this Bal (1999: 28) adds Octavio Paz's suggestive remarks about the "...Baroque tendency to cherish transgression in reaction [to] classicist rigidity and normativity." She (1999: 7) goes on to point out that the "primary characteristic of a Baroque point of view is that the subject becomes vulnerable to the impact of the object." Bal (1999:28) explains that, the "...baroque point of view establishes a relationship between subject and object, and then goes back to the subject again, a subject that is changed by that movement. [Thus] subjectivity and the object become co-dependent, folded into one another, and this puts the subject at risk." It could be argued that the vacillation between subject and object, and the transgression of borders set down by tradition, are areas where abjection operates and it is for this reason that I propose to traverse them.

Lacan argues that a similar symbiotic relationship to the one operational in Baroque thought is at work in the creation of the ego. He proposes that the relationship between a child/subject and his/her reflection in the mirror/object distorts the subject eternally. Furthermore, Lacan states that the child enters into the Symbolic<sup>1</sup> stage when s/he learns to communicate. He maintains that to enter into language itself or to become a speaking subject one must submit to the laws and rules of language. In other words, to use Bal's terms, an identity is "enfolded", and "entangled" within language/culture.

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<sup>1</sup> French psychoanalyst, Jacques Lacan, talks of three fields in which humans develop: the Real, the Imaginary, and the Symbolic. For Lacan the Symbolic realm is the structure of language itself which we have to enter in order to become speaking subjects. This organising principle of the Symbolic, into which a child is born, is understood as a pre-existing social structure both cultural, and linguistic. In his essay on the Mirror Stage, Lacan shows how the infant forms an illusion of an ego as a unified conscious self that is identified by the word "I". In other words language brings the unconscious to consciousness; the unconscious is replaced by the "I", by consciousness and self-identity. (Klages: [www, Colorado, edu/English/Engl2012Klages/Lacan.html](http://www.Colorado.edu/English/Engl2012Klages/Lacan.html) )

The Symbolic arises through abjection (and vice versa) and maintains its existence only by defining itself repeatedly and compulsively against the abject. As Lacan argues, the Symbolic comes about during the process of differentiation between subject and object. It is through this process that an unbridgeable gap is produced between the poles of subject and object, which the abject – as with Baroque thought – perpetually destabilises. Furthermore, this gap allows signs/allegory to come into existence. Helga Geyer-Ryan (1994: 2,109) explains in *Fables of desire*:

Allegory exists because of the unbridgeable distance of the Other, the unknowable other, difference between being (presence) and sign (consciousness, thought, ego, language, representation)... The figure of allegory is reflexive, a display of all productions of meaning through arbitrary signs. Its revolting wound shamelessly proclaims that there is a gap within the sign, which cannot be concealed by a supposedly 'organic' rhetoric.

In other words, allegory comes into play precisely through the lack of a single stable platform. Moreover, allegory posits a meaning in process, hence in allegory meaning is always already unstable (this rhymes with Baroque thought which posits a subject that is mutable and always in process). Seen from the perspective of abjection as well as the neo-Baroque figure of allegory, the Symbolic is continuously destabilised (from within) by the becoming and dissolutions, appearances and disappearances of both meanings and meaning-makers (readers/writers).

Meaning-makers create history and vice versa; they are both enfolded with one another. Walter Benjamin, quoted by Richter (2000: 25), states: "To write history [...] means to quote history. But the concept of quotation implies that any given historical object must be ripped out of its context." Quoting, like allegory, could also be seen as a reworking and re-reading. In the introduction to *Benjamin's ghosts*, Gerhard Richter (2002: 2) writes: "The act of quoting [as in allegory] stages a simultaneous presentation and disappearance that has always presented both an opportunity and a predicament for [Walter Benjamin's] readers. Because or in spite of the threat of this double movement." Richter (2002: 2) notes astutely that Benjamin's enigmatic texts "work to withdraw from straightforward meaning and transparent expression. The enigmatic truths that they offer must always be sought elsewhere". In other words, the allegorical nature of Benjamin's texts, which works to destabilise fixed meaning,

brings them into meaningful proximity with *liminality*, which, as mentioned earlier, suggests “a process, a becoming”.

In my consideration of the above-mentioned concerns, I wish to formulate dialectically the *liminal* space or formless space as this may be seen to enable a dialectical and reciprocal reading of Bourgeois’ works as enfolded with my own work. In doing so, I hope to engage critically and self reflexively with the complexities of process, as this pertains to both the making and the seeing/reading of particular works of art. In other words, my intention is to attempt to make meaning, however provisionally, of what may be argued to destabilise meaning; and to consider possibilities for both art-making and interpretation that would engage critically with this instability.

My intended focus on the “in-between” spaces posited by *liminality*, abjection, Baroque thought and allegory — as a means of figuring and reading artworks that appear to be in a process of becoming and disappearing — necessitates the performativity of a comparable methodological approach. The perspective from which I will address these works, in other words, will be one that comments, self-reflexively, on my own processes of looking, reading and meaning-making, where these processes may themselves be seen as oscillating between presentation and disappearance. A useful strategy in this regard is Bal’s (2001: xiii) notion of looking with “pictorial intelligence”, which, she contends, “entails an inevitable revision, based on the work’s particularities, of our conceptions of how we look and of what matters in art based on the works.”

I will utilise a similar comprehensive semiotic technique of reading critically — entailing a reading based on reciprocity between reader and “object” and between past and present, but also of allegorical polysemy, to those evolved by Kristeva, Benjamin, and Bal. It is difficult to devise a solitary comprehensive theory that encapsulates the original ineffable experience of the artwork in the midst of the sublime sea of information available. Thus, I propose to break the experience into manageable if mobile and shifting areas that can be isolated and examined using various theories and allegories. These areas, of course, like partial theories, proffer to enable a certain limited class of observations, whilst by necessity neglecting the effects of others.

The observations that I do make will therefore function as a supplementation. In *Quoting Caravaggio*, Bal (1999: 9) convincingly argues that, the reader is dynamically entwined in the meaning and thus making of an artwork, which she calls — supplementation. According to Bal, supplementation does not *replace* the image it explains but *adds* to it. In *Louise Bourgeois' Spider*, Bal (2001: xii) elaborates further: “[W]riting *about* art is not a substitute *for* the art. Rather than standing in for the visual objects, texts about them ought, in the first place, lead the reader (back) to those objects. Instead of being a substitute, a good text about art is a *supplement* to it. If all goes well, it unpacks some — and only points to others — of the many facets of that visual work.”

This notion of supplementation may then be linked to the figure of allegory. For as Orton (1994: 115 qtd Schoeman 2001: 3) writes: “[A]llegory takes over a truth or meaning and adds to it not to replace it but to supplement it.” Bal’s notion of theory as supplementation — which enfolds reader and artwork and which, like allegory, posits meaning as relational rather than fixed and transparent frustrates any attempt to retrieve, uncritically, the author’s or artist’s “original” intentions. Rather, the “past” of authorial intention enters into a critical and meaningful reciprocity with what Homi Bhabha (1996: 15) refers to as “proxies from the present”.

Discourse will be in play precisely because the lost origin of intention restricts us from knowing what was intended by the artwork. Henri Lefebvre (1992: 7) argues in, *The production of space*: “A discourse on space, cannot ever give rise to a knowledge of space. And without such a *knowledge*, we are bound to transfer onto the level of discourse, of language *per se*.” Further on he (Lefebvre 1992: 37) suggests:

Theory reproduces the generative process — by means of a concatenation of concepts that is moving continually back and forth between past and present. The etymology of locations in the sense of what happened at a particular spot or place and there by changed it — all this becomes inscribed in space. The past always leaves its traces. Time has its own script. Yet, this space is always now and formerly, a present space. Given as an immediate whole, complete with its associations and connections in their actuality.

Bal (1999: 7) would call this oscillation between past and present, “a preposterous history” — similar to Richter’s observation of a double movement operating in Benjamin’s texts. I

will rely principally on the insights in *Quoting Caravaggio*. In this book, Bal (1999: 3) poses the question: “Who illuminates — helps us understand — whom?” She contends that this question was already present in Baroque art. Bal (1999: 7) puts forward the idea “that the current interest in the Baroque acts out what is itself a Baroque vision, a vision that can be characterised as a vacillation between the subject and object of that vision and which changes the status of both.” She (Bal 1999: 27) writes:

That a self-conscious historical re-vision of the Baroque as a historical epoch in which a particular style took hold and a set of motifs and figures came to represent a particular aesthetic will recognise that the “thing” we “see” as a remote historical object is moulded within our present being. That is not to say that it did not exist in the past. But, to use a Baroque conceptual metaphor, it only comes to life — or rather to light, to visibility — for us through our point of view, which itself is moulded by *it*, folded *in* it... It cannot exist outside of “us”, so we become, to some extent, Baroque people as a consequence.

If this reciprocity — between past and present, intention and interpretation, artwork and spectator — has application in my neo-Baroque reading of Bourgeois’ work, then it also has a bearing on my approach to my own art-making and on my reciprocal attempts to read my own work through the works of Bourgeois and vice versa. In assuming the position of both creator and spectator/critic, attempting to generate a perfect translation of my intention for how my artworks should be read is an im-possible dream. As readers bring their own specific cultural understandings of the artwork/text, they create yet other images, disturbing the one intended. Nevertheless, the attempt to read or interpret artworks or objects is precisely what makes artworks meaningful, as interpretations are not merely second order readings that belatedly elaborate on the artwork, but are what make the artworks grow: “[I]t is part of the process by which art comes to be *authorised* in the acts of spectatorship and interpretation,” to quote Homi Bhabha (1996:12).

As a means of enfolding the focal concerns of my thesis — namely *liminality*, abjection, allegory, reciprocity and Baroque thought — Let me end this introduction, as an epigraph to my thesis, by quoting Bhabha's thoughts on *The incredulity of St. Thomas* (1601), or as

commonly referred to as *Doubting Thomas* (Fig. 2) by the Baroque painter Caravaggio, in which a few disciples are shown gathered around the resurrected body of Christ. Bhabha (1998: 41,39) writes:

The lesson of void and the wound lies in putting us in the position of the question, that interrogative place which leaves us no option but to incorporate or identify with the object-ourselves through the passageway of what is out of balance, unthought, transitional [and] doubtful. ... The truly made work does not consist in the triumph of objecthood: it is only when the work enters that third space — 'a transitional space, an in-between space' — that the man-made and the self-made, the material and the non-material gather together and tangentially touch in the fevered movement — hither and thither, back and forth — of doubt. The artist's doubt is not about the surface of illusion or the veiled nature of reality. Art sows deep doubt [only] about the mastery of human historical time. In committing us to look again retroactively, repetitively ... we learn not to disavow the primordial or the primary, but to encircle it, touch it at one remove.

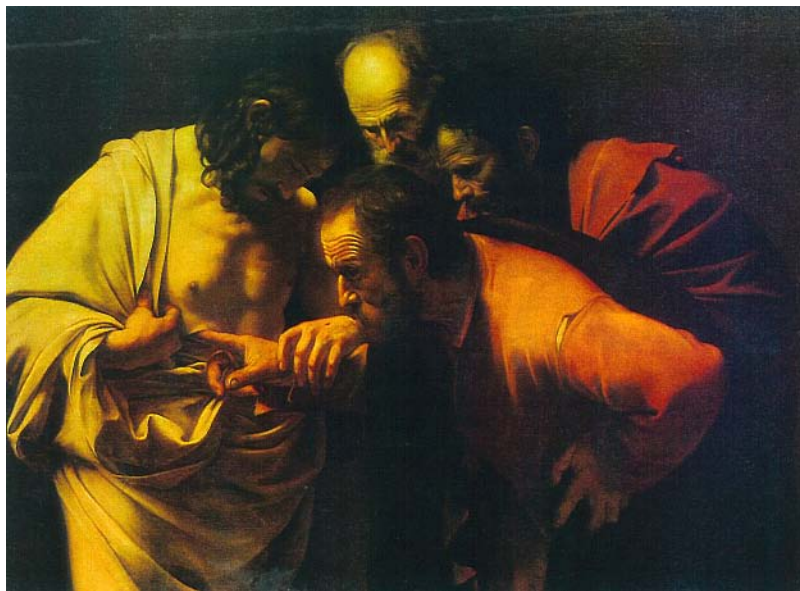


Fig. 2: Michelangelo Merisi da Carravaggio, *Incredulity of St Thomas*, (*Doubting Thomas*), 1600. Oil on canvas, 107 x 146 cm Schloß Sanssouci, Potsdam. (König 1998: 78)

## Liminality

The word *liminality* in discourse has been used very loosely. The term itself derives from the Latin word *limen*, meaning threshold, a term used in psychology to indicate the limit between the conscious and the *subliminal* (a level below where an awareness of something or a sensation of something ceases to be perceptible). It was first coined by Dutch anthropologist Arnold van Gennep in *Rights of passage* (1960), which described the middle of three stages of initiation ceremonies or “*rites de passage*” that are performed in archaic cultures.

Victor Turner (1967: 94) explains that “...Van Gennep defined ‘*rites de passage*’ as rites which accompany every change of place, state, social position and age.” The first stage being *separation* — this stage in a ritual serves to demarcate between sacred space and time and profane or ordinary space and time; the middle stage, *margin (liminality/transition)*. During this stage the ritual subject or *liminar* is stripped of the status and attributes characteristic of the *liminar’s* previous state; the final stage is re-aggregation (incorporation). At this stage the transformed ritual subject is returned to ordinary space.

Building on Mircea Eliade’s division of human experience into the sacred and the profane, Turner, (1974: 232) who advanced van Gennep’s concepts in *The forest of symbols*, regards “transition (the middle stage) as a process, a becoming, and in the case of rites de passage even a transformation.” Turner (1974: 232) suggests that “an apt analogy would be water in a process of being heated to boiling point, or a pupa changing from grub to moth ... during the intervening *liminal* period, the state of the ritual ‘passenger’ or [*liminar*] is ambiguous, neither here nor there, not described by the usual points of social classification, devoid of the status insignia of both the old state and the not yet-acquired new state.”

The concept of something being in a *liminal* state may not only be limited to societies that have initiation rituals that Turner and Van Gennep studied. The realm of being in “betwixt-and-between”, to use Turner’s term, could manifest in situations that suspend an identity of one form or another until a new identity status emerges. *Liminality* as a phenomenon and as a specific term not only pertains to the space between cultural communities but also between historical periods, and in aesthetics between theory and application. Thus *liminality* can be a property of any movement from any relatively fixed identity.

## Liminality as abjection

By being ambiguous, *liminality* is thus associated with instability, which may be further related to a state of uncleanness and by extension, abjection. As Turner suggests, quoting from *Purity and danger* (1966) by British anthropologist Dr. Mary Douglas: “[W]hat is unclear and contradictory (from the perspective of social definition) tends to be regarded as (ritually) unclean.” The object is located on the margins between two positions, and as such is often regarded as unclear and as disturbing to the system and its borders.

Julia Kristeva, (who, as mentioned in the introduction, was directly influenced by Douglas’s text, when she wrote one of the most comprehensive theories of the object and the experience of abjection, in her seminal text *Powers of horror*) explains that abjection is intimately tied to the construction of the speaking subject and his/her relationship to culture, specifically language. Kristeva (1982: 4) states: “[T]his ‘state of dissolution’ may be termed as ‘object’, where it is not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system [and] order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite”. That is, objects or spaces become object when they conflict with and threaten the system or order — when they transgress borders. Anything that introduces chaos into the Symbolic, threatening it with a collapse of meaning, system and order becomes object. Kristeva (1982: 69) explains that, “filth is not a quality in itself, but it applies only to what relates to a boundary and, more particularly, represents the object jettisoned out of the boundary, its other side, a margin.” It is in this sense that something in a *liminal* state could be considered unclean/object: both entail dissolution, process and disruption of stability and order.

In *Powers of horror* Kristeva (1982: 10) identifies that we first experience abjection at the moment when we separated ourselves from the mother, when we began to recognise a boundary between “self” and “(m)other”. This idea is drawn from Lacan's psychoanalytical theory, which underpins her theory of abjection. The physical divide between mother and child is characterised by a tremendous sense of loss and desire for the mythic oceanic mother, “the Real”<sup>2</sup>, and simultaneously by the intense dread and fear of losing self that that reunion means. This divide, the abyss, “the place where meaning collapses”, is where both the abject and the sublime reside. Imagination emerges out of this space to cover it up, and all that is repressed as cultural detritus/the abject is hidden there.

According to Aby Warburg (1986: 216), “[o]ur mind is in a constant state of readiness to take up a defensive position against the real or imagined causes of the threatening impressions, which assail us”. For example, when one confronts an uncategorised artwork, one that disturbs our sense of order, such as Louise Bourgeois’ *Spider*, it opens into an abyss of *liminality* and generates an urgent demand to understand the dynamics at work. It throws one into a desperate need to sort things out, to put things back in order, to name them. As Henry Lefebvre (1991: 37) notes in *The production of space*: “[W]hen matter is not in a secure place, naming is an act of managing it.”

Mieke Bal (2001: 1) asks of Louise Bourgeois’ *Spider*: “[A]re they sculptures? Installations? Buildings?” And responds: “All and none.” *Spider*, one of Bourgeois’ more famous pieces, is an installation work that is part of a series called *Cells*, which “comprise of 40 works that is best characterised as sculptural installation with a sense of *habitat* that makes them architectural” (Bal 2001: 4).

Bourgeois’ work is roughly about four meters high, comprised of a cylindrical steel-meshed cage, with a gate provocatively left slightly open, daring people to come inside and sit in the old worn tapestry-covered armchair placed in the middle of this

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<sup>2</sup> According to Lacan, the Real is a place (a psychic place, not a physical place) where there is the original unity between itself and the objects that satisfy its needs. In order for the infant to form a separate identity, in order to enter into civilisation the infant must separate from its mother. When it does so it loses that primal sense of unity that it originally had which entails some kind of loss. (Klages: [www, Colorado, edu/English/Engl2012Klages/Lacan.html](http://www.Colorado.edu/English/Engl2012Klages/Lacan.html)). According to Butler (1993: 195), “[t]he real is understood as the unsymbolizable threat of castration, the originary trauma.

structure. The sides of this womb-like enclosure are partially lined with fragments of similar antique tapestry material to the one draped over the armchair, creating a similar environment to a room. On top of this enclosure is what looks to be an enormous and grotesque spider with menacing legs possessively guarding, protecting the contents within. Bal (2002: 7) asks: “How can you see a big spider and not go back to childhood curiosity, comfort, or terror, indeed, to actively experiencing those[uncanny or abject] feelings?” To quote Kristeva (1982: 1), “[feelings of such a] massive emergence of uncanniness, which, familiar as it might have been in an opaque and forgotten life, now harries [the viewer] as radically separate, loathsome.”

For Kristeva (1982: 3), the abject refers to the human reaction (horror, vomit). The primary example for what causes such a reaction is the corpse (which traumatically reminds us of our own materiality)<sup>3</sup>. Death causes the body’s inside to come outside; it dissolves the boundaries and for this reason the corpse especially exemplifies Kristeva's concept of the abject since it literalises the breakdown of the division between subject and object that is fundamental for the establishment of identity and for our entrance into the Symbolic order. Death has a “location”, but that location lies below or above appropriated social space; death is relegated to the infinite real (Lefebvre 1991: 35). “The Real” is then the infinite realm where language, consciousness and the ego are not.

## The Law and the Symbolic

Bourgeois’ *Cell* sculptures in general, and her *Spider* in particular, transgress the boundary of cultural/traditional expectations about sculpture; her work floats ambiguously (in a *liminal* state), between thresholds, suspended, waiting for a new identity status/category to emerge. Slavoj Žižek<sup>4</sup> (2000: 25-26) notes:

Today, ... gone are the days when we had simple statues or framed paintings — what we get now are exhibitions of frames without paintings, dead cows and

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<sup>3</sup>And which Walter Benjamin regards as the emblem par excellence of allegory

<sup>4</sup>Žižek’s ideas which descend from Lacan’s theories, are not as difficult to formulate as Lacan’s, but also rely on movement as their life force.

their excrement, videos of the insides of the human body (gastroscopy and colonoscopy), the inclusion of olfactory effects, and so on. ... [T]he gap that separates the sacred space of sublime beauty from the excremental space of trash (leftover) is gradually narrowing, up to the paradoxical identity of opposites: are not modern art object more and more excremental objects, trash (often in a quite literal sense: faeces, rotting corpses...) displayed in — made to occupy, to fill in — the sacred place of the Thing? ... [W]ith the ever-present threat that the one will shift into the other, that the sublime Grail [the elusive sublime object and/or excremental trash] will reveal itself to be nothing but a piece of shit — is inscribed in the very kernel of the Lacanian *objet petit a*<sup>5</sup>.

The object categorised as an artwork/*objet petit a*, or what Lacan calls “the Thing”, and the decorum afforded to an artwork, is maintained by keeping a certain distance between the Symbolic order of representation and the forbidden, incestuous real beyond. “[Without this distance, the chaperone or obstacle], the whole economy of seduction would collapse” (Žižek 2000: 20).

The precariousness of art’s cultural position is continuously provoked and by extension so also the precariousness of the body in the Symbolic order. Avant-garde artists such as Duchamp constantly go to the extreme to transgress and relentlessly force the limits, provoking the establishment with subversive tactics such as placing something mass-produced and rebellious — one thinks of Duchamp’s *Fountain* 1917, a urinal — in an art gallery, thus proving that “anything even shit, can ‘be’ a work of art if it finds itself in the right place” (Žižek 2000: 33).

These boundaries between spectator/subject and the “unapproachable” object, as Walter Benjamin puts it, will be maintained as long as subject and object don’t coincide; as long as there is no direct access between the two, there will be a gap/sacred/excremental space that art can inhabit.

*Spider* itself inhabits a space within a building — a gallery, which serves as a facilitating environment or frame with its incumbent invisible force (and visible force) that echo metaphorically the legs of the spider. This ensures that the visitor approaches this ambiguous object with a “certain decorum,” to use Carol Duncan’s words, one that observes and respects the ritual boundaries and taboos set down by tradition. From a Turnerian perspective the

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<sup>5</sup> *Objet petit a*, exists (or, rather, persists) in a kind of curved space — the nearer you get to it, the more it eludes your grasp (or the more you possess it, the greater the lack) (Cf. Žižek 2000: 24).

building serves to form a distinction between *sacred* space and time and *profane* (ordinary) space and time.

However, Eliade argues that space in modernity is homogeneous (no distinction between the sacred and profane) and therefore relative. In profane space and time there is no fixed point, no centre from which one can gain orientation. Profane space is a formless homogenous expanse; it is a space devoid of creativity. It is a place where profane time runs its course and the associated deterioration occurs.

Eliade (1961: 221-22) nostalgically notes in his seminal work *The sacred and the profane*:

No *true* orientation is now possible, for the fixed point no longer enjoys a unique ontological status; it appears and disappears in accordance with the needs of the day. Properly speaking, there is no longer any world, there are only fragments of a shattered universe, an amorphous mass consisting of an infinite number of more or less neutral places in which man moves, governed and driven by the obligations of an existence incorporated into an industrial society

Eliade's assumption that affirmative heterogeneity is not available in an industrial society has been countered by Carol Duncan in *Civilizing rituals* (1995) wherein she argues there are indeed places left in the industrial/post-modern world that are available to get "*true* orientation". She argues for the general ritual features of art museums, firstly, by saying they achieve a marked off "*liminal*" zone of time and space in which visitors, removed from the concerns of their daily, practical lives, open themselves to a different quality of experience; and secondly, by characterising the organization of the museum setting as a kind of script or scenario within which visitors perform. She furthermore argues that western concepts of the aesthetic experience, generally taken as the art museum's *raison d'être*, match up closely to the kind of rationales often given for traditional rituals (enlightenment, revelation, spiritual equilibrium or rejuvenation).

What if the frame of the museum/gallery is broken and the boundary becomes too permeable, as in the case of installation art? What if the gap between the object and its place, the void/clearing disappears and the artwork is placed in a profane space where the exalted status

of art is undercut by quotidian-type experience with its sights, smells and generally ephemeral character — so central to installation art?

For example, what happens when the *Spider* in the gallery gathers up her home and strides outdoors descending to ground-level, which it has appeared to do in an installation piece *Maman* (1999) (Fig. 3) situated outside the St Petersburg Museum in Russia, leaving no boundary separating this art from its viewing context? In other words, what happens when the work and its space are melded together? Has the sphere of art effectively been compromised?



Fig. 3: Louise Bourgeois, *Maman*, 1999 (Foreground). Bronze, stainless steel, marble, h. 927cm. Installation, State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia. (Storr 2003: 4)

Though the work may not be extravagantly framed (albeit that it remains in such close proximity to such an imposing building) or literally placed on a pedestal — providing some physical boundary — and even though the gap between art and life is condensed, as both poles are now seemingly contained within itself, the borders between art/sacred and life/profane are still guarded and maintained through tradition, or in Lacanian terms, guarded by the big “Other”. The big Other operates here due to the codes and symbols which have developed in the steady equilibrium of unbroken customs for centuries.

However, if the borders (however mutable) that maintain the distinction between art/the big Other and viewer/meaning-maker were for some reason not maintained or were left “unstewarded”, and permeable, then, from a Turnerian perspective, the artworks would not be able to “hold” the intensity required to effect transformation. Art would not be able to open up the dimension of the sublime or, as Žižek (2000: 159) puts it, “the magic moment when *the Absolute appears* in all its fragility”; art would not be available to reposition the subject relative to the Symbolic, and thus would appear to lose its meaning.

Through tradition, western art has become distinguishable through signs that have been absorbed consciously or subliminally. In other words, the artwork in whatever form will be seen through knowledge (*savoir*)<sup>6</sup>— which is a mixture of understanding (*connaissance*) and ideology. Jung (1964: 257) points out in *Man and his symbols* that “human beings have a propensity to make signs and symbols, maintaining that they unconsciously transform objects or forms into symbols (thereby endowing them with great psychological importance) and express them in both their religion and their visual arts”.

The tradition of western art, which is made up of cultural symbols, tradition and culture, ironically implies something static, unchanging. But these symbols must always have been in dialogue as the tradition of art does not simply reject older artistic forms and strike out on its own; rather, it re-engages these forms in a new dialectic for the new historical situation which is always relative and in the process

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<sup>6</sup> *Savoir*— the will to know, *voir* — to see (Derrida 1993: 12).

of changing. As the neo-Baroque thinker Benjamin (1969: 234) puts it: “The tradition itself is thoroughly alive and extremely changeable.” Thus the tradition/Symbolic and by extension, the viewer, is continuously destabilised by the becoming and, dissolutions, appearances and disappearances of both meanings and meaning-makers. Both the Symbolic and the subject are always in process; the same could be said of Baroque thought.

### **The “horrible wound”, then and now**

Following Kristeva’s definitions of the abject, Baroque thought could be classified as abject. Bal (1999: 28) states in *Quoting Caravaggio*: “Baroque abandons the firm distinction between subject and object.” Bal (1999: 28) explains that, the “...Baroque point of view establishes a relationship between subject and object, and then goes back to the subject again, a subject that is changed by that movement. [Thus] subjectivity and the object become co-dependent, folded into one another and this puts the subject at risk.”

This oscillation between the subject and object is similar to the symbiosis at work in the creation of the ego where, if one follows Lacan's argument, the relationship between a child (subject) and his/her reflection in the mirror (object) distorts the subject eternally. It is the subject’s first look<sup>7</sup> in the mirror that creates the irreducible gap between subject and object, a gap that perpetually destabilises subject and object but also produces signs as *allegorical*.

The word allegory stems from the Greek *allegoria* with its root *allos* (other) and *agoreuein* (to speak). In other words, allegory means speaking other — by saying something obliquely *another* thing will be understood. “But this *discourse through the other* is also *discourse of the Other*, a vocalization and staging of an otherness which alludes to direct speech and presents itself as an elsewhere” (Buci-Glucksmann 1994: 139).

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<sup>7</sup> Merleau-Ponty’s also places “vision as a part of the self’s interaction with the world as a mode of being, rather than simply an instrument of visual mapping and categorising and control” (Potts 2000: 207).

Helga Geyer-Ryan (1994: 109) explains the concept of allegory in *Fables of desire*:

Allegory exists because of the unbridgeable distance of the Other, the unknowable other, difference between being (presence) and sign (consciousness, thought, ego, language, representation)... The figure of allegory is reflexive, a display of all productions of meaning through arbitrary signs. Its revolting wound shamelessly proclaims that there is a gap within the sign, which cannot be concealed by a supposedly 'organic' rhetoric.

## Mobile points of view

When confronted with artworks such as Caravaggio's Baroque painting, *Doubting Thomas* or Bourgeois's sculpture, *Spider* that appear to stage the "gap within the sign", a gap that may appear abject like a "revolting wound", viewers/meaning-makers become allegorists, who see and read between the lines, interpreting and negotiating the *liminal* space between body and sign, inside and outside, self and other. The gap between the appearance and ourselves is a space asking to be inhabited by remembrance. However, the nostalgic longing for wholeness remains eternally beyond our reach as "there is no way back to the mother", to quote Kristeva; the "revolting wound" never heals no matter how hard one tries to suture or cover it.

Allegory operates in the realm of mutilated fragments, or ruins and "[a]n attempt to rescue them for eternity is one of the strongest impulses of allegory" (Owens 1994: 56). Allegory is in play in the transformation from fragmented objects, to cultural artefact (an artefact may be read as a corpse<sup>8</sup>, the corpse being the emblem *per excellence* of allegory and abjection). Allegory in a sense tears the object or body apart and places the dismembered pieces or limbs on a Baroque stage. For example, the *objet trouvé* (found objects — a pocket watch, a broken locket, to name a few) that adorn the cell/womb/tomb in Bourgeois' *Spider* are incomplete and broken, salvaged from cultural detritus and recycled for use in the "present" artwork. This act of Bourgeois' — breaking and salvaging — is abundantly applicable to the practice of the allegorist who takes an element out of context and, by doing so, isolates it and deprives it of its original function and meaning. New meaning is created by the viewer of the

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<sup>8</sup> The corpse is the most sickening of waste — abject. It inhabits the space between life and death and as such violently upsets the viewer (Kristeva 1999: 3). It represents pollution. "[R]efuse, the corpses *show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live" (Kristeva 1999: 3).

object, thus altering it, and in a Baroque act of reciprocity both the subject and the object become co-dependent for meaning.

These nostalgic artefacts that adorn the interior of Bourgeois' *Spider's* womb- or tomb-like cage appear to have brought with them their own memories — “memories are themselves found objects” (Bal 2001: 27). Traces of body's past life are inscribed on the objects/corpses which carries meaning with them (like words in a Bakhtinian or Derridian signifying chain)<sup>9</sup>. In other words, the allegorist is already positioned in relation to the object and from this location the allegorist/meaning maker/subject cannot replace the object but merely repositions it in a new context — the “original” text is supplemented with the subsequent layers of meaning. (A point I shall return to later.)

These cultural artefacts are infused with traces of history that give them an aura (used in the Benjaminian sense of the word)<sup>10</sup>, which eludes any attempt by the viewer to firmly grasp it. Thus enfolded aura, history, and memory are always different from how they appear to be. These fragmentary artefacts tell a story, although the story is different for each viewer, as each viewer brings to it a personal archaeology. As Helga Geyer-Ryan (1994: 3) says:

Because the inner lives of individuals are constructed in different ways, the other always eludes the meanings with which I seek to fix it. The other [in this case the fragments and found objects] ... presents an excess of meaning, a secret, a thing-in-itself, in Kantian terms, which surpasses by power of exegesis.

In other words, these enigmatic, auratic objects that adorn the interior cell/womb/tomb of Bourgeois's *Spider*, are constantly shifting. As Bal (1999: 27) notes, “the thing we see, the remote historical object is moulded within our present being. ... [i]t only comes to life — or rather to light, to visibility — for us through our point of view [or perspective], which itself is molded by *it*, folded *in* it. ‘It’ cannot exist outside of ‘us’ so we become, to some extent,

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<sup>9</sup> Bal (1999: 11) notes: “For Bakhtin the word never forgets where it has been before it was quoted, for Derrida it never returns there without the burden of the excursion through the quotation.”

<sup>10</sup> Benjamin draws a distinction between aura and trace: aura is the appearance of distance no matter how close something may be; trace is the appearance of proximity no matter how far the thing that produced it. Here I am dialectically enfolded these two mobile concepts.

Benjamin says: To perceive the aura of an object we look at means to invest it with the ability to look at us in turn” (Geyer-Ryan 1994: 19). Cf. Elkins' *The object stares back*.

Baroque people as a consequence”. Correlatively, Frisby (1985: 22) quotes Anna Stüssi: “For Benjamin, the past never lies merely ‘behind’ — it has not been disposed of — but rather ‘below’ in the depths. In the present, it lies subliminally contemporaneous...” In other words, without the object’s past, the present would not appear as it is, but the past nevertheless assumes meaning only as reconfigured in the present, through allegory by the shifting Baroque point of view of the viewer.

As the viewer moves around Bourgeois’ *Spider* (i.e. the sculpture is seen from different standpoints) some parts come in to view (visibility) and others disappear (become invisible). In Merleau-Ponty’s posthumous publication *The visible and the invisible* (1968) “[he analyzes] vision as a part of the self’s interaction with the world, as a mode of being, rather than simply an instrument of visual mapping and categorising and control” (Potts 2003; 207). Different points of view are similarly allegorically represented in Caravaggio’s Baroque painting, *Doubting Thomas*<sup>11</sup> wherein one sees four sets of eyes, all from differing angles, focusing on one point — the revolting abject wound<sup>12</sup> in Christ’s body.

The revolting wound is made literal in *Doubting Thomas*. In this painting we see a few disciples gathered around the resurrected (*liminal*) body of Christ. Like the disciples, our eyes are drawn to the wound or space in Christ’s body. Phelan (1997: 32) notes that “the

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<sup>11</sup> In this painting Caravaggio illustrates the Biblical story of the Gospel according to St John where Christ is resurrected and one of Christ’s disciples Thomas vows that until he sees the living Christ with his stigmata and is able to “thrust his hands into his side, [he] will not believe” (John 20: 25). “Eight days later Jesus meets Thomas. Thomas now claims he believes in the resurrection since he can see the living Christ standing there before him. But Christ now doubts Thomas’s proclamation of his new found faith. ‘Reach hither thy finger and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand and thrust it into my side; and be not faithless but believing’ (John 20: 27).” (Phelan 1997: 28).

<sup>12</sup>For Benjamin allegory is rooted in the Baroque, whereas Geyer-Ryan (1994: 106-9) extends it to the abject. “The void which opens up in the realm of the Mothers is the emptiness of the abject. ... By turning away from the mother, the child rejects her and she becomes abject. In this first detachment of mother and child, a position is created for the later formation of the subject-object relationship, but the traumatic and fundamental loss of the first object is also introduced. The ambivalent nature of the archaic relationship with the mother again becomes apparent as an ambiguity, in the response of revulsion. Revulsion is a mixture of fear of losing one’s identity and a fascination with this loss, where the pleasure of fusion, the pleasure derived from the abandonment of identity ‘it’, the undifferentiated, becomes discoverable. ... The pleasure and fear of revulsion, the memory of the space of pre-Oedipal emptiness in the imaginary, resurfaces in the post-Oedipal symbolic space as the aesthetic experience of ‘sublimated’ revulsion, finds its sign in the trope of allegory. ... The figure of allegory is reflexive, a display of all productions of meaning through arbitrary signs. Its revolting wound shamelessly proclaims that there is a gap within the sign, which cannot be concealed by a supposedly ‘organic’ rhetoric. And yet due to precisely this breach between body and meaning, the body appears all the more naked.” It is then precisely the intention of this thesis to enfold Geyer-Ryan’s reading of the abject with Benjamin’s Baroque notion of allegory — as both figure around the naked body or liminal corpse.

hole in the body is the physical mark [the trace] of the separation between one and the Other,” and this sign exists because of that separation. Similarly, the abject is the symptom of the subject entering into the Symbolic system.

The revolting wound/corpse is seen as abject within the subject/object dichotomy and the abject (the wound) guarantees the subject a position against the object. As Phelan (1997: 28) argues, “by [o]pening his [Christ’s] body to the curious fingers of an incredulous man, yielding his body to Thomas’s [subject] quest for evidence and proof, Christ [object] is witnessed as the redeemer.” In other words, the wound positions the subject as much as it does the object. As Žižek (2000: 27) ... said about Lacan: “self-consciousness is the very opposite of self-transparency; I am aware of myself only insofar as outside of me a place exists where the truth about me is articulated.”

This abject wound or detail in this painting (*Doubting Thomas*) may also serve as an access point or *punctum* (to use Roland Barthes’ term) that pulls the viewer into the void/the Real, a place where there is no meaning at all — it is a point where the subject suspends its sense of self and identifies with the painting (object). This detail (which is part of the whole) in Caravaggio’s painting entombs the viewer’s gaze, pulling it in, like matter sucked into the black hole<sup>13</sup>, and whilst the subject teeters on the edge of the abyss, with a threatened loss of self, the promise of sublime happiness occurs. The viewer (like the liminar) returns changed/transformed by the experience.

The pleasure and fear of revulsion induced by the revolting wound or abject body is there because these objects cannot represent themselves by reflecting a fixed point — and by extension neither can the viewer. The subject’s longing for a fixed centre/the whole spawns the desire to fix *it* in time, rescue it for eternity (which is an utopian dream) and which would stabilize and centre them, rescuing them from the sublime unknown.

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<sup>13</sup> Hawkins’ (1998: 194) explanation of a black hole “is a region of space-time from which nothing, not even light, can escape, because gravity is so strong.” (Cf. Schoeman, “*Melancholy constellations*” 2004)

## Rapture, *jouissance*

Bal (2001: 239,241) writes: “Prior to engaging in any relationship, the subject must first determine his or her position in the world, [although this position or point of view is continuously altering]. The process of this positioning [is allegorically acted out in what] Lacan called the mirror stage. ... The quintessential story of mirroring belongs to the Baroque sensibility that so fascinates contemporary culture.”

The mirror stage may be seen to be allegorically portrayed in Caravaggio’s relatively small painting *Narcissus*<sup>14</sup> (1597/99) (Fig. 4). In the myth of Narcissus, the handsome youth “fell in love with his image reflected in the water and in an attempt to unite with his image fell into the water and drowned. For unlike Lacan’s child, “he did not recognize himself; nor did he see the mirror for what it really was; a boundary between reality and fiction” (Bal 2001: 240). Bal (2001: 246) notes,

[t]he line that separates Narcissus from his reflection, the dotted line that barely indicates the surface of the mirror, is permeable, so that the failure to distinguish self from other is also a lack of sense of self. The sense of self as a body must be extended in space in order to be.

Whilst in the moment of rapture the viewer gives up his or her image and identifies with the object of desire/*objet petit a*, he/she experiences *jouissance* (though knowing nothing of it) or *Urimpression*<sup>15</sup>. The moment is only experienced once it has passed at the moment the subject distances itself from the object. Meaning-making is in play because of distance temporality.<sup>16</sup> Emmanuel Lévinas (1987: 4) in *Time and other* notes: “The subject always only finds *itself*, its enjoyment, its knowledge, in the ecstatic movement [or *jouissance*], which seems to offer the promise of an escape outside of itself.” Kristeva (1982: 9) relates *jouissance* specifically to the abject and to violence. She writes:

<sup>14</sup> A paradox of proximity and distance — similar perhaps to the paradox between aura and trace elucidated earlier — is allegorised in the story of Narcissus, who is an intriguing mythological subject, taken from the famous *Metamorphoses* by the great Latin writer Ovid (42BCE - 18BC) (Ndalianis 2004: 84).

<sup>15</sup> Husserl calls *jouissance* — “*Urimpression*” (though he admits, names are lacking for it) — is an originary self sensing, where the sensing and the sensed are one and the same, yet are nonetheless, paradoxically, non-coincident.

<sup>16</sup>In other words, through space and time — “anything we become aware of has already slipped into the past, at the same time that this awareness is anchored in the immediate present” (Potts 2003: 218).

An abominable real<sup>17</sup>, [is] inaccessible except through *jouissance*. It follows that *jouissance* alone causes the object to exist as such. One does not know it, one does not desire it one joys in it [*on en jouit*]. Violently and painfully. A passion.

And Georges Bataille (1994: 115,119) implicitly enfolds *jouissance* with death:

[T]o speak of the sacred [the Object] I need to recognize that I am still in the arena of the profane [in other words that I am a subject]. ... I come from it at the moment of rupture.” For, “...only in complete consummation a man [subject] might make of himself would be death, which always remains the privileged sign of the sacred (that is to say, of life at its most intense and audacious): death, that leap of momentary and squandered splendour.



Fig. 4: Michelangelo Merisi da Carravaggio, *Narcissus*, 1597/99. Oil on canvas, 115.5 x 97.5 cm. Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Antica — Palazzo Barberini Rome. (König 1998: 33)

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<sup>17</sup> “The Real *par excellence* is *jouissance*”, to quote Žižek (1989: 164).

Thus *jouissance* may be seen as a form of “Symbolic suicide”,<sup>18</sup> which in turn may be related to “[t]he experience of the sublime, the experience of ‘sublimated’ revulsion, [which] finds its sign in the trope of allegory” (Geyer-Ryan 1994: 108). “The corpse [as the emblem *per excellence* of allegory] evokes infinite *jouissance* and thus defines the Baroque” (Buci-Glucksmann 1994: 139).

In the wall of the cage/womb/Baroque tomb, below the uncannily horrifying yet fascinating ‘spider’ in Bourgeois’s neo-Baroque sculpture, *Spider*, two bones obliquely mirror the revolting wound in Caravaggio’s *Doubting Thomas*. These bones too draw the viewer’s eye, if not his or her entire body, towards them. Here the bones literally traverse the threshold between outside and inside. The fragments of bone, with their marrows dissolved through time create a void and by being placed side-by-side, they fashion a kind of archaic binocular, into the interior, into the mother’s womb (an archaic space that Kristeva calls Khora).

Something happens whilst peering in the void and this something eludes our grasp. There is a shift in power from the dominating gaze to a sense of loss of control as the viewer’s embodied visual engagement moves from macroscopic to microscopic, whereby the viewer seems to momentarily lose his/her subjectivity. Through the bones, themselves signifiers of death, the viewer is, allegorically speaking, transported into the *Real* — a place before signification. And “in looking [or penetrating the] orifice, the viewer begins to sense what a body unbounded by skin might feel like”, to quote Phelan (1997: 35).

The movement through the bones into the interior, where transitory erasure of the self into the *Real*/void must be an imagined one — a Symbolic suicide as Žižek defines it. The loss of identity resurfaces in the Symbolic of “post-Oedipal” memory of that “pre-Oedipal” void in the imaginary. Ironically, what saves the subject in an actual encounter with the *Real* is abjection; abjection reaffirms the borders — one’s imagination takes over to stitch up the hole (the “horrible wound”). And it is this imagination that creates new rules, new relations and new meanings, and reasserts life.

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<sup>18</sup> Žižek (2000: 30) notes, Symbolic suicide “is ‘not dying really, just symbolically’, but in the more precise sense of the erasure of the symbolic network that defines the subject’s identity, of cutting off all the links that anchor the subject in the symbolic substance.”

How is the non-experience experienced in the rapturous moment between viewer and artwork known? Bhabha (1996: 12) explains:

For if rapture is to be communicated at all, then the ineffable experience has to be addressed from a perspective outside itself. [Because as soon as one speaks, he or she enters the medium of language, and loses that very singularity.] But this outsideness, paradoxically, is not external to the artwork; it is part of the process by which art comes to be *authorized* in the acts of spectatorship and interpretation. Interpretations are not second-order readings that belatedly elaborate some pure essence or expression that the work emanates *ab novo*, in a kind of sublime spontaneity. Interpretation, quite literally, turns the work inside out: it enunciates, even exacerbates the multiple fields [or folds] of visuality and surfaces of signification that are articulated in the work. By drawing out these elements, as one draws a thread from a piece of silk, the entire fabric is transformed, its structure laid threadbare and visible, its connections and causalities rendered contingent, its ‘totalities’ turned textural and tendentious. Interpretation is not so much an adjunct activity as it is a disjunctive process that questions the very presence or ‘being’ of the work of art as a *beginning, as an activity of authorship*.

The viewer/subject and artwork do not exist independently of one another. The interaction with one another is seen as a symbiosis, “not between someone seeing and something seen, but between inside and outside, the boundaries of which are constantly shifting” (Potts 2000: 222). Thus, works of art and viewers can be seen as mutable, constantly shifting through time in a wave action which puts them in a *liminal* state.

Interpretation (or reading allegorically between the lines) implies a dialogue, a precarious communication between self and other. For even in a monologue, according to French philosopher, Jacques Derrida (Kaumf 1990: 9,18), words can perform no function of indicating until the moment the voice is heard. Derrida writes:

Husserl says: This *Zwecklosigkeit* of inward communication is the nonalterity, the non-difference in the identity of the presence as self-presence. Of course this concept of *presence* not only involves the enigma of a being appearing in absolute proximity to itself; it also designates the temporal essence of this proximity — which does not serve to dispel the enigma. The self-presence of experience must be produced in the present taken as a now. ... If ‘mental acts’

are not announced to themselves through the intermediary of a '*Kundgabe*' [a manifestation], if they do not have to be informed about themselves through the intermediary of indications, it is because they are 'lived by us in the same instant.' The present of self-presence would be as indivisible as the *blink of an eye*.

But for Derrida, one is never aware of the present because as soon as you become aware you are always already engaged in the movement from inside to outside — the movement of temporalisation. (Lacan terms this movement from inside to outside — *après-coup*).

## Preposterous history

When viewing an artwork, time and place become co-mingled in a complex narrative. The past can only be examined through the looking-glass of history that is itself shaped by a particular point of view or point in time [this being a Baroque point of view, or a "preposterous history" (Bal 1999: 7) which, according to Bal, repeatedly draws attention to the Baroque preoccupation with point(s) of view]. This interdependency affects<sup>19</sup> both past and present; it is captured in Benjamin's famous definition of the "image" as "that in which what was comes together like a flash of lightening or [the moment of *jouissance*] in a constellation with the now, in other words, an image is dialectics at a standstill" (Stathausen 2000: 11).

Discourse is in play precisely because of the lost origin. Lefebvre (1991: 7) argues in *The production of space*: "A discourse on space, cannot ever give rise to a *knowledge* of space. And without such a knowledge, we are bound to transfer onto the level of discourse, of language *per se*." Further on Lefebvre (1991: 37) suggests: "Theory reproduces the generative process — by means of a concatenation of concepts that is moving continually back and forth between past and present." Bal (1999: 7) would call this oscillation between past and present, a "preposterous history". Bal (199: 6,7) explains:

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<sup>19</sup> "For Merleau-Ponty, the cognitive is neither engulfed in the psychic and the affective nor prior to it. They are fundamental to our being alive: 'One no longer has to ask why we have *affects* in addition to the 'representative sensation' because the representative sensation ... is affect, is the body's presence to the world and the world's presence to the body ... Reason also exists *within* this horizon — promiscuity with Being and with the world" (Potts 2000:223).

Such revisions of Baroque art neither collapse past and present, as in an ill-conceived presentism, nor objectify the past and bring within our grasp, as in a problematic positivist historicism. They do, however, demonstrate a possible way of dealing with “the past today.” This reversal, which puts what came chronologically first (“pre-“) as an after-effect behind (“post”) its later recycling, is what I would like to call a *preposterous history*.

Bal (1999: 9) convincingly argues that the reader is dynamically entwined in the meaning and thus the making of an artwork, which she calls *supplementation*. Supplementation does not replace the image it explains, but *adds* to it. This notion of supplementation may then be linked to the figure of allegory. For, as Orton (1994: 115 qtd Schoeman 2003: 81) writes: “[A]llegory takes over a truth or meaning and adds to it not to replace it but to supplement it.”

With the unstable communication between self and other, the viewer and artwork become “entangled”, to use Bal’s word. Because “in each case through supplementation, the outcome of the artwork, us, our view<sup>20</sup> — is different because we are differently entangled with it” (Bal 1999: 13), because “different viewers have responded to the work in varying ways” (Bal 2001: 3). This reciprocal gaze can be aligned with the Baroque way of thinking.

## Reciprocity of interpretation

The interpretive ground traversed thus far has been after an artwork comes into being, where the state of being is ‘completed’ by the viewer, “as a result of the artwork’s journey through time or even in its original context” (Bal 2001: 3). That is, interpretation<sup>21</sup> comes into play after the artwork is presented, as an object within its “frame” — in its ritual/therapeutic space.

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<sup>20</sup> Note my comments on points of view/perspective on page 15

<sup>21</sup> Buci-Glucksmann (1994: 66) writes: “Since interpretative truth is actually the ‘death of intention’, the philosophy of modern art, which began with seventeenth-century baroque drama (Trauerspiel) immediately, situates itself outside the space of the subject, consciousness and intention, outside a philosophy of language. . . . Interpretation grasps an enigmatic (familiar and alien) reality by building a concrete mass of constellations and significations, where ‘meaning’ is never more than the effect of a machinery which condenses time and reveals it by relating it to the present. This concretion defines what Benjamin calls *Jetztzeit* or ‘now-time’, in contrast to that simple present of presence, the instant as *term* or *passage*, which one finds in philosophies of empty chronology where events are ‘lodged’ in time.”

However, I submit that the precarious dialogue with an artwork begins before that. The dialogue commences with its inception, at the moment where the temporal concept of the artist is transformed into a spatial one, at the moment when the lightning flash of intuition/intention leaps from one side to the other, where the chaos of ideas are conceptualised, then interpreted, and translated into an artwork.

Dialogue between the artist and the artwork remains a continual negotiation between mind and material, continually shifting back and forth between the two — producing this oscillatory effect between two mobile positions changing with each epiphany. The communication between artwork and artist and artwork and viewer is based on reciprocity. Both artwork and artist/viewer are continually constructed by each other in a way that, according to Bal, makes them Baroque subjects/objects. According to Bal (1995: 113), “it is a dialogue between art and its history, crossed with that other dialogue between past and present.”

When set with the task of trying to write about one’s own artwork it can, as Bal (1999: 28) puts it, “easily become a narcissistic self-enclosure, a self-aggrandizing, myopic gaze.” The text on one’s own work seems to “bite its own tail”, it becomes “a point of view on point of view” (Bal 1999: 28). It is, in a sense, similar to writing an autobiography<sup>22</sup>.

“In Derrida’s ... recycling of Freud, the scene of writing, the site of graphic memory, allegorically represents Baroque matter — and vice versa” (Bal 1995: 130). With this in mind, assuming a Baroque position — the dynamic positions of both creator and critic/writer, attempting to generate a perfect translation of my intention for how my artwork should be read — is an im-possible dream. “The impossibility”, to quote Marin (1995: 85), “is a consequence of my being ... Someone else, then, must read what I have written while I become, for myself, an ‘it’, a non-person, something without a name in any language, the cadaver in the tomb.” At the time of reading/interpreting both the my text and I, like the dead body, are in a state of *liminality* — both dispersed and represented, waiting for the reader/meaning maker to resurrect my text/body (or patch the “horrible wound”) and give it a

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<sup>22</sup> To quote Louis Marin (1995: 87): “[T]he I that writes about itself is at once an I and a [s]he, I as [s]he and I as another. What is striking is that in these writings the identity of I and [s]he] is nonetheless pronounced across the rift of difference. The autobiographical I is thus permanently in a divided state as a result of writing. At the same time it is writing that constantly discloses *and* neutralizes this very division.”

new meaning — perhaps through allegory. Thus, the space between me and artwork, text and reader could operate as tomb as well as cradle.

However, the spectre<sup>23</sup> of my intention will always haunt the text (or artwork). For, as Derrida (1988: 18)<sup>24</sup> argues, “the category of intention will not disappear, it will have its place, but from that place it will no longer be able to govern the entire scene and system of utterance.” With the loss of origin, meaning is mutable, thus provisional, as each reader bring his/her own specific cultural understanding to the artwork/text, which creates yet another image disturbing the one intended<sup>25</sup>. Nevertheless, the attempt to read or interpret artworks or objects is precisely what makes artworks meaningful.

By using a similar Baroque strategy to Bal’s I will do a comparison/intertwinement of Bourgeois’s neo-Baroque work and my own exhibition *Betwixt-and-between* (2004) which, based on reciprocity would enfold the past with the present.

In *Louise Bourgeois’ Spider*, Bal (2001: xii) writes:

[W]riting *about* art is not a substitute *for* the art. Rather than standing in for the visual objects, texts about them ought, in the first place, lead the reader (back) to those objects. Instead of being a substitute, a good text about art is a supplement to it. If all goes well, it unpacks some — and only points to others — of the many facets of that visual work.

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<sup>23</sup> “The aura is an ephemeral spectre caught in the web of space and time. It does not refer to an independent, material thing, but describes a particular form of human experience” (Stathausen 2000: 5)

<sup>24</sup> Here I quote Bal, who quotes Judith Butler quoting Derrida. Perhaps this is what Derrida had in mind when he said, “performative utterances cannot succeed unless they repeat — hence quote — an already coded, iterable utterance.”

<sup>25</sup> “Semiosis as a process develops from sign to sign, folding each sign into the next and the previous one. *Difference* is Derrida’s term for this movement; the *chain of signifiers* is Lacan’s. The development of sign into interpretant, a new sign in the mind of the receiver, is the way Pierce reasoned semiosis into a temporal process” (Bal 1995: 129).

To supplement this van Alphen (1998: 16) notes that, “the attempt to write about this process will be caught in a paradox. For writing about art is also a representation of it”, and thus correlatively (Bal 1999: 39) marked and inscribed by im-possibility and self-reflexivity” (Schoeman 2004: 2).

With the above in mind, my discussion of my own work should not be seen as conclusive with regard to the work’s interpretation. Rather, the following discussion aims to elucidate some of the possibilities, in terms of viewer’s experience, that my work arguably opens up.

### **Betwixt-and-between**

The poem is lonely. It is lonely and underway. Whoever writes one stays mated with it. But in just this way doesn’t the poem stand, right here, in an encounter — *in the mystery of an encounter?* (Celan 2001: 401-414, here 409).

Creating something sacred — namely an artwork out of prime matter (or *materia prima* in the language of alchemy) — could allegorise alchemy, where not only the basic materials such as marble, resin and fibreglass tissue (as is the case in my artwork) are used to create an artwork; an artwork itself could be seen as the “magical ingredients” that effects the transformation. Bhabha writes:

Materials are there to make something else possible ... the non-physical things. The intellectual things, the possibilities that are available through material. Material, then, is like living tissue, a contingent and relational medium: its transitional powers reside in an on-going temporal process. The process does not stop with the manufacture of the object, for it is the ambition of the *homo faber* to make the work that is more than its moment and other than its maker. True making lives on in the invisible, unnameable energy that haunts the double life of the material itself enabling it to survive beyond ... the end of the process.

According to Mircea Eliade, who is a seminal figure in analysing ritual and the concept of sacred space, the mythic act of making art is ritualistic symbolically repeating the act of creation. Myth essentially relates to the force that created the world and that keeps the world alive through a continuous process of renewal. Kapoor (1999: xi) writes: “In Western culture, this force corresponds to the Word or the timeless mystical sound that created the universe”.

## **The sacred space that occurs at the confluence of two impulses**

My exhibition *Betwixt-and-between* is comprised of two components: One being a sculptural element, which is more tangibly material and has more of an empirical presence; and the other being a photographic element that involves representation.

The sculptural element of the exhibition is situated outside, at the bottom of an excavated area just outside the centre of town, which was once the quarry that provided the granite for the historical homes/monuments of Grahamstown. This site could remind one of a mundus of the town where the mundus, as Lefebvre (1991: 242) explains, is,

[a] sacred or accursed place in the middle of the Italiot township. A pit, originally — a dust hole, a public rubbish dump. Into it were cast trash and filth of every kind, along with those condemned to death, and any newborn baby whose father declined to ‘raise’ it (that is, an infant which he did not lift from the ground and hold up above his head so that it might be born a second time, born in a social as well as a biological sense). A pit, then, ‘deep’ above all in meaning. It connected the city, the space land-as-soil and land-as-territory, to hidden, clandestine, subterranean spaces which were those of fertility and death, of the beginning and the end, of birth and burial. (Later, in Christian times, the cemetery would have a comparable function.) The pit was also a passageway through which dead souls could return to the bosom of the earth and then re-emerge and be reborn. As locus of time, of births and tombs, vagina of the nurturing earth-as-mother, dark corridor emerging from the depths, cavern opening to the light, estuary of hidden forces and mouth of the realm of shadows, the greatest purity, life and death, fertility and destruction, horror and fascinating.

The other part of my exhibition resides in the bowels of an imposing building, a monument high on the hill that commemorates the arrival in Grahamstown of the European 1820 Settlers. Lefebvre (1991: 221) notes that, “[m]onuments are imposing in their durability. ... Monumentality transcends death, and hence also what is sometimes called the ‘death instinct’. ... Every bit as much as a poem or a tragedy, a monument transmutes the fear of the passage of time, and anxiety about death, into splendour.”

The proximity between the two aspects of the exhibition sets up a dialectical relation between them. As German sociologist and philosopher Georg Simmel (Leach 1997: 66) explains in his famous essay *Bridge and door*:

Only to humanity, in contrast to nature, has the right to connect and separate been granted. ... By choosing two items from the undisturbed store of ... things in order to designate them as 'separate', we have already related them to one another in our consciousness, we have emphasised these two together against whatever lies between them. And conversely, we can only sense those things to be related which we have previously somehow isolated from one another; things must first be separated from one another in order to be together. Practically as well as logically, it would be meaningless to connect that which was not separated, and indeed that which also remains separated in some sense.

The first component, located roughly in the centre of the disused circular quarry or "*mundus*", may at first sight appear to be some sort of mysterious ancient ceremonial burial site filled with phantom presences. The signs or traces are there that indicate that a sacred area has been cleared from the profane ground — an important procedure in rituals is to first "[establish] an orientation in the homogeneity of space. A sign [such as this] is asked, to put an end to the tension and anxiety caused by relativity and disorientation — in short, to reveal an absolute point of support" (Eliade 1961: 26-28).

The first allegorical *sign* or trace would then be the location of this "ceremonial area". Implicit in the quarry is that it speaks allegorically of the lost object — the uterus/mother earth. "The concept of *regressus ad uterum* is the recognized symbolism of initiation rituals — where the neophyte symbolically is returned to the womb, transformed into an embryo, thus placed in a *liminal* state and is then effectively reborn as a socially responsible and culturally awakened being" (Eliade 1963: 79-82).

Another sign would be the "well prepared" area of the "sacred ground" that clearly distinguishes it from the profane ground — in this case, it is a circular<sup>26</sup> area of about twenty meters in diameter of crushed stone. A circle demarcated with stones is one of the most ancient of known forms of man-made sanctuary (Eliade 1958: 369-371). I have "preposterously" supplemented this "sacred ground" by way of glowing obelisks or totems between three and four meters tall, each one situated on a large

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<sup>26</sup>Jung (1964: 266) notes in *Man and his symbols*: "Dr. von Franz explained the circle (or sphere) as a symbol of the Self. It expresses the totality of the psyche in all its aspects, including the relationship between man and the whole of nature. Whether the symbol of the circle appears in primitive sun worship or modern religion, in myths or dreams, in the mandalas drawn by Tibetan monks, in the ground plans of cities, or in the spherical concepts of early astronomers, it always points to the single most vital aspect of life — its ultimate wholeness".

rectangular granite platform. They are symmetrically arranged around the edge of the “sacred” enclosure. There are seven in total, endowed with all their funereal connotations, where mysterious initiations could be held to stage symbolic death and rebirth. The reality is that this is not an ancient burial site, but rather a staged spectacle — the discordant stage lights that line the perimeter would remind one of that.

This pseudo-ritual site merely *indicates* a ceremony,<sup>27</sup> and the space created here is perhaps more *liminiod* than *liminal* as it does not necessarily have the intensity required to affect the transformative process due to the lack of conscious intentionality on the part of its ritual elders or stewards. However, as this object has the intention of being an artwork, it may be seen as *liminal* because it is categorised as such. The ritually constructed boundaries (of the artwork) *have* been maintained (through tradition) and even though there are no visible ritual elders present, the orientation and structure available to the *liminar*/viewer may indeed allow for the temporary surrender of autonomy to effect a “Symbolic suicide”.

As the exhibition is yet to be held, and as I am yet to experience it, my writing about it can only proffer tentative suggestions as to what I would imagine that I, as a viewer, would be likely to experience. Thus, the discussion of my own work may itself be argued to inhabit a *liminal* zone, between intention and impending experience, which is congruent with the concerns that inform it. In many respects, it would be similar to writing a revue about a play that I have not yet seen. My actual experience of the artwork in that space on the evening of the exhibition would no doubt be different from what I imagine, as this is dependant on so many unforeseen contingencies. My first viewing would be entangled with the ideas of what I intended the work to do and what it actually does and would change with subsequent viewings. Similarly, each viewer, in each instance of viewing, would transform and be transformed by the artwork differently. Thus, the dialogue between my artwork and my discussion of it here is in progress.

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<sup>27</sup> For Turner, (1982: 80) it is the presence of *liminality* that clearly distinguishes ritual from ceremony. He notes: “Ceremony indicates, ritual *transforms*.”

Given this *liminal* space — where, as Bal (1999: 9) suggests, “[t]he undecidability of the visual is understood to be paradigmatic of the production of meaning” — the following reading of my work is largely anticipatory, and written from the perspective of myself as impending viewer/neophyte. It elucidates the complexities of a possible (though by no means inevitable) viewing experience, refracted through the tenuous and *liminal* lens of my own mutable intentions.

The exhibition is to be staged at the time of the month when the full moon is starting to wane, and at twilight, a *liminal* time when day becomes night. Once the viewer enters the quarry, his/her perspective would shift from being outside to being inside. The visitor/neophyte is in a sense withdrawn from his/her familiar surroundings, daily activities and structural positions and becomes engulfed in the cavernous space with the excavated walls forming a comforting boundary. This could equate to an experience of the *liminal* that prepares the viewer/neophyte for the ensuing, if unpredictable, transformation.

Walking around the partially enclosed void/gap as daylight drains, the awareness of the viewer’s body ought to become absorbing whilst at the same time the senses of the viewer’s material boundaries recede. From the recesses of this uterine space, although becoming less distinct in the fading light, the only visible building, high on the hill in the distance in line with the entrance/exit of the quarry, is the solid concrete monument that houses the second part of the artwork. The 1820 Settlers monument has a phallic aspect, as Lefebvre (1991: 49) says monuments like it would have, with its tall double cross-like masts, imbued historically with a sense of arrogant, bureaucratic and political authoritarianism.

But to return to the anti-monumental or “feminine” part of the exhibition. In the dark silence of this acoustically dead zone the viewer would hear his/her own movements, which would potentially remind him/her that he/she is actively contributing to the experience. The sounds of the crushed stones underfoot may be seen to denote the progression from profane into sacred space as the viewer/neophyte crosses the margin into the artwork. Unlike Bourgeois’ *Spider*, the viewer is “allowed” to physically enter the sacred area; however, this transgression is made with a little uncertainty. I imagine that once inside there will be a flipping over of sensations; where the viewer now feels protected in this outdoor “room” with

its elusive walls of light extending until it meets the shadows and silences that lurk on the outside.

From the centre of this empty, receptive interior, the glass-like granite slabs radiate out, traversing the perimeter of the gravelled area. At the furthest end of each of the granite slabs is a precariously balanced, mysteriously luminescent obelisk-like form that evokes a relationship similar to the one a gravestone has with its headstone. The horizontal line onto which the phantom-like vertical elements rest could be seen as a metaphor for the transition between two worlds.

The sheets of highly polished granite installed just above the ground would seem to float horizontally on a cushion of light, and have rough edges that recall the process that cleaved them from their archaic bedrock in order to bring them into culture. These marks/scars are also echoed on the walls of the quarry. Kristeva (1982: 102) would consider them abject because:

The body must bear no trace of its debt to nature: it must be clean and proper in order to be fully Symbolic. In order to confirm that, it should endure no gash other than that of circumcision, equivalent to sexual separation and/or separation from the mother. Any other mark would be the sign of belonging to the impure, the non-separate, the non-Symbolic, the non-holy.

If one were to read the horizontal granite slabs again through Kristeva's theory of abjection, which as mentioned above is concerned with figures that are in a state of transition or transformation, one could say that these sheets of rock could be considered to occupy a *liminal* zone. They transverse the margins between two positions, as they are neither fully inside the body of the artwork nor fully outside it in the world. Kristeva also associates the abject with the eruption of the Real (like the punctum/wound) into our lives — the granite slabs potentially do this by traumatically showing us or prefiguring our own death. Granite is an icon of death because of its association with graves. Furthermore, because of the shape and horizontal aspect of the slabs, the viewer is reminded of his/her own corporeal/base materiality (or our own future corpses). The transition from corporal to disembodied, from a positive to a negative presence is intimated in the granite's highly polished surfaces. These

reflect the erect vertical forms standing on top of them in their surfaces, whilst also mirroring the horizontal, abject or allegorical corpse in a dark pit or open-aired tomb, a trauma that is repeated seven times.

Another reading could consign phallic<sup>28</sup> verticality to the axis of transcendence, where transcendence refers to objectification, conceptualisation, representation, homogeneity, knowledge, history (as written or as narrative) and, more generally, to the domain of theory. Especially in the sense of *theoria*: meaning to see. Horizontality, on the other hand, could refer to immanence, and thus, secondarily, to ritual, difference, horror, silence, heterogeneity, abjection (in Kristeva's sense), the allegorical corpse (in Benjamin's sense) and, more generally, to the domain of the non-discursive, or practice (also history as practice, or fate) (Cf. Lechte 1990: 119).

All readings of an artwork require (poetic or violent, semiotic or allegorical) interpretations of "secret signs". These secret signs could be read as aura. Like aura, reading reveals and conceals, speaks and is silent, gazes and yet averts its eyes: "Language is veiled like the past; like silence it looks toward the future" (Benjamin 1996: 10-11).

### **Who's looking at whom?: The wound as eye that pierces the viewer's eye**

Putting oneself in the reverent position of looking at an artwork may set the stage for a life-altering event that cannot be explained, only described. Gilles Deleuze (1993: 76) writes: "[E]vents are produced in a chaos, in a chaotic multiplicity, but only under the condition that a sort of screen intervenes" — the screen of consciousness. However, in the context of my installation, this screen may be argued to reflect the act of looking back at the viewer. The glowing obelisks on the perimeter of the

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<sup>28</sup> "The Phallus" according to Lefebvre (1991: 263), is seen. The female genital organs, representing the world remain hidden. The prestigious Phallus, symbol of power and fecundity forces its way into view by becoming erect. In the space to come, where the eye would usurp so many privileges, it would fall to the Phallus to receive or produce them. The eye in question would be that of God, that of the Father or that of the Leader. A space in which this eye laid hold of whatever served its purposes would also be a space of force, of violence, of power restrained by nothing but the limitations of its means."

installation, bathed in a column of light, seem to be actively addressing the passive viewer standing in the middle of the artwork. The viewer may then get the feeling that it is not him/her doing the looking; rather, it is the viewer on display on centre stage, giving him/her the sense of being morally judged by the obelisks, in similar terms to Sartre's *regard*. For Sartre, the Other exists as an observant figure who threatens to know, all too well, the interiority of the subject. This dramatises the subject's doubt about his or her position within the Symbolic and mirrors the scene depicted in Caravaggio's painting *Doubting Thomas* where, as Phelan (1997: 28) notes, Christ (the Other), in an act of reciprocity, needs Thomas (the subject) to affirm who he is in relation to him<sup>29</sup>.

Theodor Adorno (1997: 275), a friend and peer of Benjamin, noted in his unfinished book *Aesthetic theory*:

The object must be entered and participated in – as Benjamin says, it is necessary “to breathe the aura.” But the medium of this relationship is what Hegel called freedom toward the object: The spectator must not project what transpires in himself onto the artwork in order to find himself confirmed, uplifted and satisfied in it, but must, on the contrary, relinquish himself to the artwork, assimilate himself to it, and fulfil the work in its own terms.

Adorno's above statement relates well to my earlier discussion of rapture, *jouissance*, Symbolic suicide and reciprocity, given that the relationship between artwork and viewer, as posited by Adorno, is itself a *liminal* one — irreducible to the certitude of binary positions such as subject/object or viewer/viewed.

Following Michael Fried's argument in *Absorption and theatricality* (1980), the forms may appear to be fully cognisant of their dramatic presence and are therefore “theatrical”, on the one hand. However, if the viewer changes his/her standpoint or point of view and moves from the centre to the sidelines the forms may become more contemplative, absorbed in their stage performance, “oblivious to everything but [the] operation they are intent upon performing” (Fried 1980: 47). Thus in Fried's terms the above forms may also be designated as “antitheatrical”.

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<sup>29</sup> “A psychoanalytical example of this process is provided by Lacan's account of subjectivity as a function of mutual recognition. I position myself as a result of the way I am already recognized by the other, while the other who recognizes me is himself in a position to do so because he is already recognised by me. On of Lacan's often repeated sayings, that ‘all desire is the desire of the Other’ (Kay 2003: 20).

From the position “off stage”, in the darkness of the wings, so to speak, the viewer/voyeur is likely to be lured into, and fascinated by, the intimate details of the forms. (Fig 5) From this position the active/passive roles of seeing and being seen are reversed, or, at least, complicated. In such intimate looking, the viewer — as voyeur — would become blind to the greater spectacle when absorbed in the hidden details. The viewer would therefore oscillate between the roles of seeing (active) and being seen (passive) both psychologically and physically. “This perception”, according to Bal (1999: 62), “then enfold[s] the viewer in the dialectic of macroscopic and microscopic which dominates human relations in a temporality that, in Kristeva’s terms, is historical and maternal at the same time [as well as typically Baroque]”.



Fig. 5: Michelle Key, *Betwixt-and-between*, 2004 Acetate, 900 x 3000 cm.  
Installation, Gallery-in-the-Round Grahamstown

During the spectator's encounter with the artwork he/she would pass from one vertical character to another, connecting one scene/sign to another, and negotiating the *liminal* space between them. This mirrors the viewer's movement from visible space to the invisible space created in the imagination through reciprocal if precarious dialogue. The entanglement between object and the viewer's process of understanding relies on perception of an empirical outer difference, and also on an inner concept of difference; the viewer's temporal passage through space becoming the very basis on which vision would be made possible. Yet, as Deleuze notes, "[e]very perception is hallucinatory because perception has no object. ... Hence, according to this view, perception is inappropriate as an instrument of empirical, positive knowledge, whereas it simultaneously represents the kind of knowledge that happens within Baroque point of view" (Bal 1999: 46). This ambiguous or paradoxical entanglement through vision could be seen as a semiotic process through space and time, which parallels the principles of epic theatre.

The quarry creates an amphitheatre in which the horizon completely both surrounds the artwork and the viewer, defining not only the spatial arena which the artworks/actors and viewers/audience inhabit. Moreover, this situates the viewer within that space allegorising "how we see things from within our own horizon of viewing," (Potts 2000:215) and, as with epic theatre, there is a symbiotic experience.

Bryant-Bertail (2000: 2) writes: "In the 1920s dialectical thinkers/Baroque thinkers Brecht and Piscator coined the term *epic theatre* to distinguish their practice from what they called the *dramatic theatre*, which replicated the view of a single individual at one point in time and space, a tradition that had dominated Western theatre since the Renaissance." The similarity between Baroque-like epic theatre and my own artwork is the representation of space and time and the journey towards meaning, "by critiquing their specific historical situation" (Bryant-Bertail 2000: 13).

Bryant-Bertail (2000: 7,13) notes:

For all theatre, spatio-temporality unfolds as a multi-dimensional event in each performance, concretely staging historical agency for that particular moment. This dynamic interweaving of space and time is the event of signification. Space is represented by temporal forms and time by spatial ones. Space and time are thus not pre-existing containers for the dramatic event but are themselves the event — a journey

towards meaning. Spatio-temporality is signified through a dialogue, stage directions, the unfolding scenic and lighting design, the movement and placement of actors and objects, the theatre's architecture and social function, and the historical context of the performance. ... Epic text and performances are ultimately concerned *with critiquing their specific historical situation*. ... Epic theatre demystifies the concept of an essential human nature living out its inevitable fate, by showing both human nature and fate as historical and thus changeable human constructs.

Epic theatre may thus be argued to put the subject at risk, in Baroque-like fashion, enfolding him or her with the event, which has an affinity to Merleau-Ponty's "exploration of how self-awareness and awareness of things were generated in interactions between a physical self and the material world of which it was part" (Potts 2000: 208).

As the light fades and darkness seems to dissolve space, the viewer would experience a growing, if *subliminal*, awareness of the passage of time. Furthermore, as the light shifts from light to dark the light inside the luminescent forms becomes more intense. Thus, the forms change subtly in the moonlight, never quite stabilising and by extension, neither does the viewer's position. This could allegorise the creation of the Baroque subject.

The uncertain and ambiguous forms "standing" on their pedestals may be argued to challenge the viewer's positivistic identification of what they represent. Whilst the sculptures could be categorised as abstract they "embody a stance echoed in the viewer's sense of his or her own body as he/she faces up to it and at the same time presenting itself as strangely other and distant" (Potts 2000: 208). As Elkins (1996: 202) points out in *The object stares back* (1996),

[m]any forms that the world presents can be comprehended only because they seem to have to do with bodies or faces, and a multitude of things remains incomprehensible because they do not draw near enough to bodies and faces. Those observations reveal a crucial quality of our failure to see: human sight is not merely partial blindness or selective seeing but a determinate trading of blindnesses and insights.

In order to find out (name them) or to see (or to gain knowledge of) exactly what these forms may be the viewer would be compelled to search his/her conscious and unconscious for references. James Elkins (1999: 1,6) writes in *Pictures of the body* (1999):

There must be a desire at work, perhaps among the most primal desires of all: we prefer to have bodies in front of us, ... and if we cannot have them, we continue to see them, as after-images or ghosts. ... In the absence of a body, I think we embark on a search for body metaphors — for bodily lengths, weights, colours, textures, shapes, and movements — and in that second search we tend to be easily satisfied and content with the most obvious choices.

The phallic forms or upright bodies standing on top of the granite sheets are considerably taller than the viewer's own body but still reference the body through anthropomorphic associations. However, as Elkins (1999: 6,7) points out, “[b]ody metaphors are evanescent in our consciousness and unconscious, and they dissolve under the slightest pressure of thought.” From a distance, each illuminated form seems to have its own character. Their translucent surfaces may remind the viewer of membranes, that “are skin like but also wet and private, and they have the appearance of being sensitive to the touch” (Elkins 1999: 38). However, as touching of an artwork is so very often forbidden only the gaze can slide over the fragile shiny surfaces. Elkins (1996: 235) writes, “[l]ooking at visual art, we see the product of blind touching and the memory of it.”

Filled with uncertainties and the desire to know, but given what Bal (1999: 9) refers to as “the undecidability of the visual”, the viewer may enter into a “state of intensified, unsatisfied looking”. To paraphrase Elkins (1999: 4), the viewer may move ever closer, microscopically examining the tiny details on the translucent surfaces for a complete comprehension, which brings with it its own kind of blindness. As the eye travels across the surface it encounters intertwined clear vein-like threads that create delicate webbing in areas and in others an abject mass reminiscent of churning viscera or translucent pubic hair. There appear to be lesions in the pale skin and sheaths of peeling membranes perhaps reminding one of the useless clinging placentas that Kristeva (1982: 101-2) writes about in *Powers of horror*.

In a similar scanning movement as when one views a Pollock drip painting, the eye moves from the outer surface to the space just inside, under the film of resin. In this in-between space air bubbles appear frozen in time like cryogenized cells that may be reminiscent of congealed mucous or saliva. In this space, there are small inclusions that found their way in during the making, which have imbedded themselves like tiny prehistoric insects in amber. This extreme close-up could potentially jeopardise the viewer's sense of place in the world, creating a feeling of vertigo<sup>30</sup>, perhaps similar to standing on the edge of an abyss. For a frozen moment, the enraptured viewer/subject may be at one with the artwork/object: here the entire universe is exposed. "For it is in this black (w)hole [or the real/sacred]" as Georg Simmel (Leach 1997: 66) points out, that "objects remain spellbound in the unmerciful separation of space, where no material part can commonly share its space with another, a real unity of diverse elements does not exist in [this absolute] space".

Whilst engaged/enraptured/enfolded with the artwork the *liminar* may be caught in a mythic timeless moment ("ecstatic time" as Lévinas calls it) and for that "time" *the liminar* will be transported into the *liminal* zone. Žižek says it is here that the subject finds itself "totally deprived of its Symbolic identity, thrown into the 'night of the world' in which its only correlative is minimum of excremental leftover, ...an *almost-nothing* that sustains the Place-Frame-Void," so that here, finally, "nothing but the place takes place" (Žižek 2000: 30). However, the viewer/*liminar* is always rescued from "ecstatic time", saved from falling into the Real, by interruptions from the profane world/reality such as may be signified by the shrill stage lights on the perimeter of the installation. "Ecstatic time" for the viewer is merely a *relative* escape from immanence rather than an *absolute* one. For Lévinas it is insufficiently other: it delays rather than disrupts the time of subjectivity; it is a postponement of immediacy rather than a deposition of immanence. However, the experience affects<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Bataille (1994: 125) explains that vertigo is experienced because what we simultaneously feel is the mortal effects of the fall and the preservation of consciousness. He writes: "Consciousness experiences what really slips away from consciousness, what really annihilates it, as a sorrow and an exaltation: the play of the imagination gives a (misleading) meaning to an impossible reconciliation; in point of fact the end of the world gains consciousness only on condition that it does not happen. If it did, then consciousness would no longer exist. But a falsehood ... *Contradiction* alone is its truth, and the impulse immediately reduces the *black* to the condition of the *pink*, the pink to the truth of the *black*. Everything is reconciled in the *instant*, which is the *instant* only on a black foundation."

<sup>31</sup> Schoeman (2003: 10) notes: "[The art work or experience] *affects* and *touches* (van Alphen 1998: 94) — our bodies as these belong, or are both placed and displaced, in history. As Richter (2000: 69) notes: 'the body belongs to history most fully when it is not embodied by it, when it is exiled from it, Our body, then, names our simultaneous inscription in, and exile from, history'".

us, changes us in an ambiguous way powerfully and dynamically, before words can intervene.

In the *liminal* zone — between viewer and artwork — the *liminar*/viewer/subject “is not merely enclosed within itself, encased within its sensations, in the self-movement of the sensuous instant, but extends out into the *horizons* of future and past horizons opened by the world and light” (Lévinas 1979: 7). It is in the *liminal* space that a transformation may occur, where the viewer/neophyte vacillates between inside and outside, between self and other, between permanence and decay, between past and present — both subject/viewer and object/artwork re-figuring each other. The transformation, however, does not erase what has gone before but adds to it — Bal (1999: 13) would say it is a supplementation of what was there before.

### **The uncanny inside/outside**

The dialectical or reciprocal interaction between artwork/viewer – whereby object is affected and subject is put at risk — may be reflected upon whilst the viewer makes his/her way to the second part of the exhibition, the memory of “the event” already fading and transforming. The movement from the external precarious part of the exhibition to the controlled environment inside the monument suggests a *liminal* space between the two, which the viewer literally if momentarily inhabits. The physical movement from the quarry to the monument also highlights the viewer’s collaboration in the meaning production of an artwork as it emphasises the experience of meaning production as process.

Upon entering the monument, the viewer descends to the second floor, to an obscure crypt-like space or Baroque-type tomb that lies beneath a revolving stage above. At the very threshold of the exhibition in the Gallery-in-the-Round there is a narrow entrance, which opens up into a circular chamber. This circular space creates an uncanny feeling, which is exacerbated by the floor covering of crushed stone similar to the stone in the quarry. The crushed stone connects the interior exhibition to the

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exterior one, a strategy indebted to Robert Smithson. In the 1960s Smithson established a similar dialectic between site/out door exhibition and non-site, which was usually a parallel representation in the gallery, using some of the material displaced in the creation of the outdoor site. In addition, this installation includes a series of elongated flimsy transparent photographic images that float just off the surface of the gallery wall and that recall, uncannily, the space between the ground and the granite sheets in the quarry outside.

Communicating with or interpreting an artwork, focusing moment by moment on a particular detail, gaining knowledge of it, takes time. As with Bourgeois' *Spider*, both contexts of *Betwixt-and-between* are round. Bal (2001: 28) notes, "the round form deploys time since you have to walk around it." Within the dialectic steeped in the act of walking-and-looking, perception in this instance no longer follows a stationary virtual journey, "it is a temporal kind, for that relation is subject to a movement in the time of now, a *Jetztzeit* according to Benjamin, in which the sculpture tells itself through me" (Bal 2001: 29). In his summary of Merleau-Ponty's model of visual apperception, Potts (2000: 222) writes:

In the process of seeing, what is outside enters inside, and what is inside projects itself to the outside, with inside and outside at any instant split apart at their point of contact. It is by virtue of straddling this constitutive gap or split between inside and outside that seeing ceases to be locked blindly within itself and can open onto the world.

Thus "[t]he journey [around the art works] looks at looking and this turns [the artwork] ... into a semiotic<sup>32</sup> event" (Bal 2001: 102).

The work of semiosis, as Bal (1995: 110) explains, is "the dynamics between sign and reader, our collusion in meaning-production." In the case of Bourgeois' *Spider*, this journey to circumnavigate the work echoes the narrative of viewing "as roundness that has no beginning and no end" (Bal 2001: 28). The beginning is enfolded with the end and the other way round.

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<sup>32</sup> Bal (1999: 105) writes, "Time and its diverse constructions, including the possibility of reversing it, may well be a primary characteristic of semiosis as a cultural process, the one that makes semiotics the theory of the presentness of the past. Lefebvre (1991: 138) elaborates on this by saying: "Semiotics, we are told, is concerned with the instinct of life and death, whereas the symbolic and semantic areas are the province of signs properly speaking.

One's present perception, in the here and now, is entangled with memories of the experience. Both the present and memories of the past are "preposterously" enfolded with one another – and thus both are transformed and constantly shifting.

The effect/affect that each part of the exhibition — one inside, the other outside — has on the viewer could be seen to allegorise Freud's notion of how the psyche operates. He notes that the psyche does not follow a linear development in which the present is heir to its past. Rather, since the subject revisits and reworks its past in response to its successive experiences, it is as apt to say that the past is heir to the present. "This is not to say that the past is merely a fabrication of the present; without its past, the present would not be as it is; but the past nevertheless assumes meaning only as reconfigured in the present" (Kay 2003: 18). This is the basis of Bal's concept of "preposterous history". She (1999: 70) uses Freud's term *Nachträglichkeit*<sup>33</sup> (which is similar to Lacan's *après-coup*) to describe this retroactive temporality — the analytic process of reconstruction, or a belated identification of both self and history in a dynamic movement from the present towards the past and *visa versa*. Similarly the viewer's reading and experience of the second installation site is refracted through — in as much as it refracts — the viewer's experience of the site.

### **"The *eidos* of the photograph is death"<sup>34</sup>**

In his melancholy book *Camera lucida*, Roland Barthes (2000: 13) reflects: "The photograph<sup>35</sup> transforms subject into object ... into a museum object." Each photograph displayed in the Gallery-in-the-Round presents, in rich detail, the idiosyncratic features of a

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<sup>33</sup> Freud called such a retrospective constitution, *Nachträglichkeit* — from a psychoanalytic point of view, the origin is the primal scene, which is the fantasy of parental intercourse in which each of us originates. Since the world as we know it begins for us with our consciousness, the primal scene becomes the primal fantasy of origination itself. In other words, we want to know what the situation was at the beginning.

<sup>34</sup> Barthes (2000: 11).

<sup>35</sup> According to Lefebvre (1991: 289) [t]he photograph merely *reflects*. "‘Behind the curtain there is nothing to see’, says Hegel ironically somewhere. Unless, of course, ‘we’ go behind the curtain ourselves, because someone has to be there to see, and for there to be something to see. In space, or behind it, there is no unknown substance, no mystery. And yet this transparency is deceptive, and everything is concealed. Space is illusory and the secret of the illusion lies in the transparency itself. The apparatus of power and knowledge that is revealed once we have ‘drawn the curtain’ has therefore nothing of smoke and mirrors about it”.

particular aspect of the sculptures in the quarry — thus extending our comprehension of them. Susan Sontag (1977: 92,93) notes that “the identification of the subject of a photograph always dominates our perception of it — as it does not, necessarily, in a painting ... a title is needed to identify it ... each photograph is a piece of the world ... we don’t know how to react to a photograph (if the image is visually ambiguous: say, too closely seen or too distant) until we know what piece of the world it is.”

The photographic images in the Gallery-in-the-Round record with crystalline clarity hidden microscopic details and textures found within the already familiar membranous surfaces of the sculptures outside in the quarry. As such, “[i]n every photograph [there is]: a return of the dead” (Barthes 2000: 9) — the return of a dead, frozen historical moment. These photographs or fragments of history, in the gallery, record as proof that the event or object existed; however, those objects in that moment of time no longer exist, they lie just outside the grasp of the spectator as they merely point to or index the objects/event in the quarry.

The ephemeral and transitory nature of the site-specific work in the quarry is highlighted in the static, immobile photographs of details from it exhibited in the controlled environment of the gallery. As Barthes (2000: 33) notes, “[a] photograph immobilises a rapid scene in its decisive moment.” The photographs seem to be able to freeze an instant in time and “reproduce [the moment] to infinity.” However, it is the viewer who, through melancholy allegory, animates the “dead” photographs or museum objects, bringing them back from the dead and thus allowing them, ironically, to carry on indefinitely — refigured by each successive viewer. We are no longer dealing with the past but with the present, or better we are dealing with the preposterous present points of view. To follow Marin (1995:83): “The mute cadaver [dead photograph or allegorical corpse] is given a voice through the present instant of discourse ... a discourse belonging *to* the image not *about* the image.”

Roland Barthes (2000: 5) notes:

As the photograph always carries its referent with itself, both are affected by the same amorous or funereal immobility, at the very heart of the moving world:

they are glued together, limb by limb, like the condemned man and the corpse in certain tortures ... it is not impossible to perceive the photographic signifier, but it requires a secondary action of knowledge or of reflection. [In other words] in observing these images the spectator assumes an intermediary role: [as there can be] no critique except among those who are already capable of criticism.

If the image/re-presentation affects the viewer only within the boundaries of knowledge or *connaissance*, where the image is consciously experienced and understood as opposed to unconsciously felt and unknown, it would remain in the cultural field, which Barthes (2000: 26) terms “*studium*” – the image thus remains at the limit and does not transgress it. The “*unary*” (in Barthes’ sense of the word) image would thus be seen as more *liminiod* than *liminal*. However, if the photograph has a “*punctum*” — “a detail that attracts me” (Barthes 2000: 42), “an element [that] breaks (or punctuates) the *studium*, [and] shoots out of it [the image] like an arrow, [that] pierces one, perforating the cultural field” (Barthes 2000: 26) — then it may be seen as *liminal*. This space created by the punctum is a place where the transformative process operates. It is a space where the viewer’s conscious and unconscious meets the work’s power in a past-ness of each viewer’s memories that comes after the encounter (an encounter with the Real<sup>36</sup>) — what Lacan calls *après-coup*. A punctum would then enable the image to have the power to create by *Nachträglichkeit*. The punctum, which pierces, touches and bruises the viewer in the act of viewing would prompt the viewer to reflect on the production of meaning — that is, allegorical meaning, as different from merely literal meanings. As such the punctum may be seen to destabilise hermeneutic closure inasmuch as it destabilises subject/object relations as well as the relationship of past and present.

The eight membranous, translucent images float just in front of the wall as a kind of *Tableau Vivant*, “a figuration of the motionless and made-up face beneath which we see the dead” (Barthes 2000: 32). The ultra-thin transparent films delimit a *liminal* space between themselves and the smooth opaque wall of the cavernous or Baroque tomb-like space of the Gallery-in-the-Round. These “curtains” onto which death-mask images (an evocation of the event) are silk-screened, function as an apparatus that casts shadows and simulacra of uncanny images onto the wall.

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<sup>36</sup> Barthes (2000: 4) supplements Žižek term — the Real with what Lacan’s calls the *Touché*.

Behind the veil, the cloudy rectangular shapes that are drawn onto the wall act like a doors or openings, which hint at secret places. For Simmel, the door<sup>37</sup>,

forms as it were, a linkage between the space of human beings and everything that remains outside it, it transcends the separation between inner and outer. Precisely because it can also be opened, its closure provides the feeling of a stronger isolation against everything outside this space than the mere unstructured wall. The latter is mute, but the door speaks (Leach 1997: 67).

If one follows Simmel's argument and extends the idea of the door to that of a membrane — that other “nonspatial division between two adjacent spaces (Elkins 1999: 36) — one could argue that the ultra-thin barrier (which is permeable in a sense as it allows light to pass from outside to inside) could allegorise the abject, as it connects two sides: on the one side the bonded and on the other the boundary-less.

The abject<sup>38</sup>, as mentioned before, both establishes and undermines the border between inside and outside, between subject and object, and, by extension, between representation and the Real. These tensions and complications arguably play themselves out in the abject space between the photographic film and the gallery wall. To supplement this, one could say that the photographic film possibly represents the conscious subject, and the shadow on the wall behind, the formless unconscious or the primordial totality/real. As Deleuze<sup>39</sup> (2001: 76)

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<sup>37</sup> Lefebvre (1991: 209) writes: “Consider a door. Is it simply an aperture in the wall? No. It is framed (in the broadest sense of the term). A door without a frame would fulfil one function and one function only, that of allowing passage. And would fulfil that function poorly, for something would be missing. ... Its surround makes a door into an object. In conjunction with their frames, doors attain the status of works, works of a kind not far removed from pictures and mirrors. Transitional symbolic and functional, the object ‘door’ serves to bring a space, the space of a ‘room’, say that or the street, to an end; and it heralds the reception to be expected in the neighbouring room, or in the house or interior that awaits.”

<sup>38</sup> As Kristeva (1982: 4) writes, “[t]he abject is not reducible to a particular object or body: the abject relates precisely to the border, which becomes the object.”

<sup>39</sup> Deleuze (2001: 76) explains: “A great screen has to be placed in between [the self and the primordial totality] ... Like a formless elastic membrane, ... the screen makes something else issue from chaos, and *even if this something differs only slightly*. [Without a screen] chaos would amount to depthless shadow.” Also according to Deleuze (2001: 76), “[c]haos does not exist; it is an abstraction because it is inseparable from a screen that makes something — something rather than nothing — emerge from it but the screen disengages its dark backdrop, the *‘fuscum subnigrum’* that, however little it differs from black, nonetheless contains all colour: the screen is like the infinitely refined machine that is the basis of Nature. From a psychic point of view, chaos would be a universal giddiness, the sum of all possible perceptions being infinitesimal or infinitely minute. But the screen would extract differentials that could be integrated in ordered perceptions. If chaos does not exist, it is because it is merely the bottom side of the great screen, and because the latter composes infinite series of wholes and parts, which appear chaotic to us (as aleatory developments) only because we are incapable of following them, or because of the insufficiency of our own screens. Even the cavern is not a chaos, but a series whose elements remain caverns filled with an increasingly rarefied matter each of which is extended over the followings ones.”

notes: “A great screen has to be placed in between [the self and the primordial totality] ... Like a formless elastic membrane, ... the screen makes something else issue from chaos, *even if this something differs only slightly*. [Without a screen] chaos would amount to depthless shadow.”

The surface image on the photographic screen alludes to “the device of anamorphous, whereby if we see ‘reality’ [in this case the photograph] the real object is reduced to a blot or stain (punctum); but if we focus instead on the uncanny primordial images, what recedes is our sense of ‘reality’. The price of everyday reality is that we don’t see the [anamorphic] blot, even though this is in fact what frames and gives definition to reality” (Kay 2003: 62). The blot, like the abject, defines the subject. Whether through a punctum or an “event”<sup>40</sup> the real/chaos resurfaces, it does so spontaneously — that is beyond human control, and only when the subject looks back from the safety of the putatively stable bank of consciousness (screen) does he/she becomes aware that the Real left its trace — the blot or stain. This blot or stain — this anamorphic eye — may then also be read allegorically as the “horrible wound” in Caravaggio’s painting *Doubting Thomas*.

Like the hollow bones in Bourgeois’s *Spider*, and the wound in Caravaggio’s *Doubting Thomas*, the uncanny landscapes of the transparent photographs (Fig. 5) lure the viewer to look closely — so closely that it confuses his/her sense of scale. In a sense, surface collapses the viewer’s previous point of reference, potentially drawing the viewer into an abyssal feeling of floating in space-time (into an absolute space out of which one has come, and unto which one will again be received). It is at this point of “blindness” that the viewer may be caught up in the rapturous, *liminal* moment — the me-yet-not-me moment in which self and object are *not* located in opposition to each other. Derrida (1991: 3) notes: “Blindness pierces through right at that point and thereby gains *in potential in potency*: the angle of a sight that is

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<sup>40</sup> Žižek notes “that Badiou sees the world of being (ontology) as periodically punctuated by what he calls ‘event’, which ‘belong to a wholly different dimension — that, precisely, of non-being’. What distinguishes this event is that it carries a shock of truth, it makes legible for the first time what was repressed or rendered invisible by the current order. However, the event and its truth are never recognizable within the order of knowledge that is sanctioned by the prevailing ontology; within that order, they are genuinely undecidable” (Kay 2003: 118).

threatened or promised, lost or restored, given.” It is also at this chiasmic crossing that Lacan’s concept of *passage à l’acte*<sup>41</sup> comes into play.

Similarly, the photographic images evoke a chiasmic crossing or in-between space, traversing and confusing the realms of birth and death. Displayed in the simultaneously womb-like or tomb-like gallery, they conjure up an Edenic primordial landscape on the one hand, and bodily fluids frozen in time on the other hand. Barthes (2000: 40) writes:

It is fantasmatic deriving from a kind of second sight which seems to bear me forward to a utopian time, or to carry me back to somewhere in myself: a double movement which Baudelaire celebrated in *Invitation au voyage* and *La vie antérieure*. ... Looking at these landscapes of predilection, it is as if *I were certain* of having been there or of going there. Now Freud says of the maternal body that ‘there is no other place of which one can say with so much certainty that one has already been there. ...’ Such then would be the essence of the landscape (chosen by desire): *heimlich*, awakening in me the Mother (and never the disturbing Mother).

It is precisely the uncanniness of these images, then, that — much like the punctum — disrupts their status as stable and unary. The images in the installation suggest a space beyond (or before) their boundaries as does Bourgeois’ neo-Baroque *Spider* or Caravaggio’s Baroque painting, *Doubting Thomas*.

Thus, the aesthetic experience of *Betwixt and between*, as I envisage it, has the potential to engage a number of shifting, mutable and precarious *liminalities*. These are figured within the photographic images (as screens or punctums), between the photographs and their uncanny reflections, between the two installations as material and ethereal doubles, and between the reciprocal subject/object relations of viewer and work. By extension, and as a further preposterous enfolding, this *liminal* space may be seen to open up in the interchange between practice and theory; between my intentions figured then and now, and my anticipation of my experience, now and in the future.

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<sup>41</sup> “*Passage à l’acte* is a psychotic action in which the subject *objectifies* herself, *suspends* the network of symbolic functions which serve as a support to his/her daily life and confronts again the radical negativity on which they are founded, at the moment of rupture. Žižek’s (2001: 85) ‘*act*’ or Lacan’s ‘*Passage à l’acte*’ or Barthes’ ‘*punctum*’ “is the capacity of the *act* on a moment of rupture and absolute freedom, to reposition the subject relative to the symbolic: the act proper is the only one which restructures the very symbolic co-ordinates of the agent’s situation: it is an intervention in the course of which the agent’s identity itself is radically changed” (Kay 2003: 158)

## Conclusion: Folding and unfolding, wrapping and unwrapping<sup>42</sup>

Adorno (1997: 274, 310) reminds us that “art is not transcendence but an artefact, something human.” It is because it exists within cultural structures, an artwork, like a ritual ceremony, could evoke a transformative event. Accordingly, both ritual and artworks may prepare the ground in which we may experience and affect the Other directly, if always already precariously, temporally and, in neo-Baroque vein, reciprocally.

Finally, as I contemplate my temporal meanderings in this thesis, I note again that there is an allegorical space/gap between inspiration/concepts of production and acts of producing. And as Lefebvre (1991: 37) explains, “[t]heory *reproduces* the generative process — by means of a concatenation of concepts, to be sure, but in a very strong sense of the word; from within, not just from without (descriptively), globally — that is, moving continually back and forth between past and present.” In other words, the “preposterous” precarious and mobile dialogue between creator and creation, between subject and object continually transforms over time. This transformation affects and touches both subject and object. To reiterate Bal’s (1999: 28) point: “Baroque point of view establishes a relationship between subject and object, and then goes back to the subject again, a subject that is changed by that movement. Scale is only one element in this transformation, albeit a very important one. Subjectivity and the object become co-dependent, folded into one another, and this puts the subject at risk.” Lefebvre (1991: 35) notes that the “act of creation is, in fact, a process” — which involves a “folding and unfolding, wrapping and unwrapping” (Deleuze 2001: 123), “which puts the subject at risk”. It is impossible to will either revelation or creativity but one can consciously offer oneself to the *liminal*, allegorical or abject encounter with intensity, dedication and purpose.

Acting as intermediary, my desire to reclaim my original idea for the artwork and my envisaged initial encounter with the artwork, and then to consciously interpret or reconstruct the web of communication retroactively by *Nachträglichkeit* — is similar to the desire to “preposterously” recover ones own lost origin. The desire to fulfil the idea’s/artwork’s/text’s

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<sup>42</sup> I am taking this heading from Deleuze (2001: 123) who writes: “Folding and unfolding, wrapping and unwrapping are [conceptual] constants ... as much now as in the period of the Baroque

potential seems as futile as the attempt to control the future or to guide a specific event which is obviously indeterminable. One has to be content that the idea has now come into, or has been enfolded with, the future and with all the subsequent layers or folds and supplementations that reasoning appended to it. The original idea and artwork and the text has metamorphosised, has folded and unfolded, into something different and will continue to do so. To cite Deleuze (2001: 6):

A fold is always folded within a fold, like a cavern in a cavern. ... Unfolding is thus not the contrary of folding, but follows the fold up to the following fold.

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