

Making Meaning Meaningful: An Intersection between the Creative Process and Psychoanalytic Experience

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Abstract

This paper is based upon both my psychotherapeutic experience and my work as a photography and video artist. My art work has been internationally recognized for its autobiographical content and surrealist aesthetic, acclaimed for its evocative dream-like atmosphere, which employs a highly-charged symbolic language. It is my belief that it is only through accessing the “underbelly” in my own psychotherapy experience that I’ve been able to bring this to bear in my art-making process and product.

Introduction

The process of writing this paper is a very different type of encounter for me. I’m used to addressing an audience of artists, art educators, and art professionals. I’m certainly not used to engaging with an audience of therapists. I find this both exhilarating and disquieting. Exhilarating, because this provides me with the opportunity to discuss a whole different range of ideas in relation to my work. Disquieting because many of the ideas I’ll be discussing fall into the psychoanalytic psychotherapeutic camp – not within the realm of my professional area of expertise but certainly within the realm of my professional interests.

In the art arena, what is often privileged is the demonstration of a certain kind of intellectual rigour that largely addresses one’s work in terms of contextualising it within contemporary art practice and current critical theory. While that is both necessary and important, it is also a distancing device. What excites me about this opportunity is the possibility of also including the personal because my work is deeply personal.

For over 25 years my art practice has been about encountering my selves. I give the post-modern part of me away with that statement but to my mind, it’s not as simple as that because while I believe that there is no one stable self I simultaneously believe that there is one constant underlying self... a conundrum my work has been addressing for a very long time. The vehicle that has driven this encounter has been an exploration of the interface between conscious and unconscious experience.

Christopher Bollas in his book, *The Shadow of the Object, Psychoanalysis of the Unthought Known*, talks about the “private language of the self”. He describes the psychoanalytic process as one in which the client gradually gets to “hear news of the self” through the experience of the Other (the analyst). Bollas (1987: 61-3) goes on to say:

In the revival of this lost discourse, first the analyst listens and then the patient is there to hear news from the self and its others...the analyst restores to the patient what I believe we can term genuine or true subjectivity: that understanding of oneself that permits us sentient knowledge of the originating activity behind our experiences of ourself and our objects.

My production of artwork is anchored in this desire to “hear news of the self” and has been concerned with creating the space for the communication of this “private language of the self”.

Alongside my art practice, the other enterprise that has preoccupied me with an equal degree of passion over the years has been my experiences in therapy. While my art practice and therapy have always been connected, it really has been in my latest therapy experience (going into my fifth year), that the two have become inextricably linked. This is the intersection the title refers to. This is “an intersection...”, one possible intersection, amongst many possible others that is specific to me. This paper is not an attempt to present a general theory on the subject but rather is about my experiences and current understandings of those experiences.

Turning attention to the first part of the title, *Making Meaning Meaningful*, addresses another facet of my work that involves the work’s reception. In “art speak” we talk about the intention-reception equation, that is the artist’s intention and the viewer’s reception of the work. The intersection between the creative process and psychoanalytic experience is related to my intentions. The reception has to do with another aspect of my art-making practice that preoccupies me greatly: the making of meaning. What I add to this part of the equation, is not just the viewer’s reception of the work, but my own response to it. These are the kinds of questions this issue raises:

- How do I make meaning of myself to myself?
- How do I make meaning of my analytic experience?
- How do I, as an artist, make meaning of the art I create?
- How do you, as the viewer, make meaning of the artwork?

Another point of intersection is modelled in Thomas Ogden's concept of the "analytic third" (1994). I became aware of a similarity of experience both as an artist and as an analytic client. What I noticed is that many of the feelings I experienced when I was at one of my openings were echoed in certain analytic sessions. Even more revealing was the recognition that many of the fantasies I had around an upcoming opening were similar to the fantasies I had between these sessions. These fantasies were focused on a quality of longing... a longing that was linked to a desire to be recognised in a particular way.

In this respect, Ogden's idea of the analytic third became useful to me in making sense of this echo. Ogden talks about three subjects in the analytic setting: the client, the therapist, and the subject that is created in the encounter between client and therapist. In the art arena, I came to understand that there is a parallel model that exists in the form of the artist, the viewer, and the meaning that the viewer makes of the work in their encounter with it. The *Fall From Grace* body of work is my first body of work that makes this encounter a feature, meaning that imbedded in the work is a strategy that positions the viewer in an active role, challenging them to actively make meaning of the work. I'll get into these different strategies in greater detail later on.

There is one further intersection between my creative process and analytic experience that needs to be addressed. I have noticed over the past five years that there is this exchange that takes place in terms of the origination of my ideas. There are moments when the ideas are driven by what is taking place in a session. More specifically, there are moments in sessions when I've ventured into a particularly evocative territory where certain images float up into consciousness and I recognise them as the basis for exploration in the studio. At other times, it's not an actual image but a word, or series of words, which triggers recognition of creative fodder. In either case – whether image or word – both are linked to a quality of feeling that I recognise as one that I want to work with. So, this is an exchange in which the therapy drives the creative process.

A reverse of this exchange also occurs when what is being communicated in the artwork fuels the analytic process. Periodically I bring work-in-progress into a session. It is interesting because very few words are exchanged about the work but an impact is felt. There is the sense that the images illuminate some aspects of what we are working on. There is another interesting aspect to this experience. Where the *Fall From Grace* work is concerned, these photographs are self-portraits. So, there is this interesting dynamic of me experiencing the gaze of the Other (and an Other whose response I have so much invested in)...not

in relation to my actual self but in relation to a representation of myself – a fascinating doubling of voyeurism.

Fall From Grace is a three-act body of work that I've been working on for the past five years. *Act 1: Describing Desire*, is made up of 10 photographic murals with 5-6 images per mural. The murals range between 2.5 and 3 metres long, and are just under 1 metre high. It was completed in 2001 and exhibited in 2001-02 in Auckland, Washington, D.C., and New York. Works from this act were acquired by the Corcoran Museum of Art in Washington, D.C. for their permanent collection and by the Bank of Brazil for their corporate collection. *Act 2: Shadow of Desire* is made up of 12 photographic murals with 6 images per mural. The dimensions of these are the same as *Act 1* with the exception of one work that's in the shape of a pyramid and is 3 metres long by 2.5 metres high. This act was completed and exhibited in 2003 again in Auckland and Washington, D.C. Works from this act were acquired by The National Museum of Women in the Arts for their permanent collection. *Act 3: Voices of Desire* is a video installation, which includes a 15 min video and 3 photographic columns, 3 metres high, that will stand at the entrance to the video screening room. *Acts 1 & 2* are intended to be in a space adjacent to the space that will screen the video from *Act 3*. *Acts 1 & 2* will not only include the photographic murals, but will also include a projection on the floor and audio that will intermingle with the audio coming from the soundtrack from *Act 3* in the next room.

Fall From Grace: Act 1 – Describing Desire

Fall From Grace is about desire, the template as it was established in early childhood through Oedipal and pre-Oedipal desire and then internalised and re-enacted over the years.

The Beauty Rots Trilogy: Part 1 - Precious Spoils. Another aspect is the symbolic vocabulary I build and establish over the entire body of work. You will note that there are significant objects that you sense are invested with meaning. These objects give visual expression to some of the internal objects that I carry in relation to desire. I refer to Bollas's comments on internalised objects as another point of intersection between analytic experience and the use I make of it in my creative process:

...we consecrate the world with our own subjectivity, investing people, places, things, and events with a kind of idiomatic significance. As we inhabit this world of ours, we amble about in a field of *pregnant objects* that contribute to

the dense psychic textures that constitute self-experience....Certain objects, like psychic 'keys,' open doors to unconsciously intense – and rich – experience in which we articulate the self. that we are through the elaborating character of our response. (1992: 3)

The Beauty Rots Trilogy: Part 2 - Serpent of Desire. My preoccupation with this subject was a result of the territory my therapy was venturing into at the time in which a certain quality of longing was making itself felt. As I am heterosexual, and I am seeing a male therapist, it makes sense to me that Oedipal desire occupied the territory I arrived at first. Even further, my choice to seek out a male therapist in the first place was entirely grounded in the overwhelming nature of my relationship with my father and my need to understand the ways in which this relationship had marked me. In my exploration of this terrain, I eventually arrived at an experience of Oedipal desire. This is the focus of *Act 1: Describing Desire* which records the traces of this early childhood experience not as a *description* of how it was then but as a *transcription* of how what was then becomes now.

The Beauty Rots Trilogy: Part 3 - Decomposing Dreams. One of the comments that is often made about my work has to do with its intense beauty. This is one of those strategies that is concerned with positioning the viewer. I have deliberately worked to make the images almost “too beautiful” – like a dessert that is too sweet. The intention here is to try to create a polarity, a push-pull between the beauty and the disturbing content that lies just beneath (the “underbelly”). From a content point-of-view, this push-pull characterizes my early childhood relationship with my father and the ambivalence around my own desire that this dynamic established for me. The beauty also acts as a kind of seduction. By and large, the viewer is first seduced into engaging with the work through its beauty. It's only after they spend some time with it that they realise there is something haunting and disturbing going on that they often cannot articulate. Again, seduction is part of the language of desire and I have sought to raise these ideas experientially.

Birth Of Desire. In my search for objects to work with I look for an object that evokes a certain kind of internal resonance. In *Act 1*, the most noticeable object is, of course, the apples. Certainly, the link between the apple and desire, the apple as symbol of temptation, needs no clarification. But the apple also acts as a code for several other ideas. One specifically has to do with my father and the childhood longing to be “the apple of his eye”, an entirely unpredictable and risky pursuit that as often as not ended in crushing disappointment. The other is an elaboration on the “apple of knowledge” idea. It is a comment on the

analytic process: that once we take a bite out of the apple of knowledge there is no turning back; once we develop a new awareness we can never not be aware in the same way again.

Slippery Slope Of Desire: Part 1 – Surrender The Child To Her Dreaming. Other props that appear in *Act 1*, male and female mannequin torsos, mannequin hands, an oversized engagement ring, a key and handcuffs, a bridal veil, male and female shoes, even a piece of banister, are all objects which elaborate on different aspects of Oedipal desire for me.

Fall From Grace was also the body of work that catapulted me into self-portrait. Though I initially did not understand why this felt so vitally important to me, on some deep level I knew it was imperative. As I started to work with myself, different awarenesses began to emerge. The first thing that struck me had to do with the subject–object issue. My preoccupations initially revolved around the very interesting paradox that in self-portrait there is, in a sense, neither a subject nor an object because when I am setting up the shot as the photographer, there is no object of my gaze, and when the shot is being taken and I am posing, I am the subject of no one's gaze.

This idea of the presence of an absence and the absence of a presence characterized some aspect of my experience of desire. Specifically, the idea that so often what I felt driving my desire was not entirely the product of something, or someone, who existed in the present but had roots in the past, felt as an absent presence. Also, the idea that the ambivalence I carried around my own desire resulted in a sense of loss at the moment my desire made itself felt – a kind of absence in the very moment that my desire was present.

James Grotstein (2000: xxiv) makes this comment: “In every absence, from infancy onward, there exists a felt presence (of the object) that either hounds or protects that absence but that certainly occupies it.”

Escape From Desire. *Fall From Grace* references cinema in its use of sequence amongst other things. In a sense, the works can be read as a type of storyboard. This is another strategy that relates to my intentions with regard to the viewing experience. A sequence of images suggests a type of narrative yet the story being told is by no means linear and is not readily accessible. The viewer, faced with a series of images, is forced to make connections between the images, to find links and construct a meaning, yet the meaning is highly oblique and can only be arrived at indirectly. The narrative impulse is confounded by the symbolic language employed. There is also a sense of narratives within narratives, meanings within meanings, which I sought to create by employing series of images *within*

each work and also *between* the works. There is a need to reference and cross-reference the images in order to make the links. These intertextual and intratextual readings require the viewer to enlarge their capacity to hold “the story” – indeed, for “the story” to go *beyond* their capacity to hold it – so that they are driven to tap into an unconscious encounter with the work and themselves. It is my hope that when the viewer leaves the exhibition, what is carried with them is something they cannot articulate but is akin to a powerful dream that lingers.

Herself In Passage. My decision to move to an even larger scale – up to 3 metres – amplified this aspect of the viewing experience. Because the works were now so long, it became difficult to “read” an entire piece in detail from one position. The viewer was required to move along each piece in their engagement with it, and furthermore to hold the memory of preceding images in their mind as they proceeded down its length. This seemed to me to be an effective strategy for evoking the interior kind of experience that the reading of texts is all about. For example, as we proceed through a book, we have to hold in our minds what has come before as we make our way through the narrative. Since my work is *about* interior experience I wanted the viewer to consume it in an interior manner.

Fall From Grace: Act 2 – Shadow of Desire

Trace Of The Lost Object. The transition from *Act 1: Describing Desire* to *Act 2: Shadow of Desire* is a descent into deeper psychic terrain as if spiralling down into the deepest part of a dream. It is a descent from Oedipal to pre-Oedipal desire, a shadowy, twilight terrain steeped in opacity, characterized by an amorphous and diffuse grieving. The symbolic vocabulary employed in this part is more refined as the clutter and excess of conscious description falls away. Whereas Act 1 can be seen as possessing *dream-like* language Act 2 employs the grammar and vocabulary of *dreaming*.

The decision to build a visual language that expressed the dream experience in this act felt appropriate in relation to my experience of pre-Oedipal desire. As Bollas puts it:

When I enter the world of dreams I am deconstructed, as I am transformed from the one who holds the internal world in my mind to the one who is experientially inside the dramaturgy of the other. Gathered and processed by the dream space and dream events, I live in a place where I seem to have been held before: inside the magical and erotic embrace of a forming intelligence that bears me. To be in a dream is thus a continuous reminiscence of being

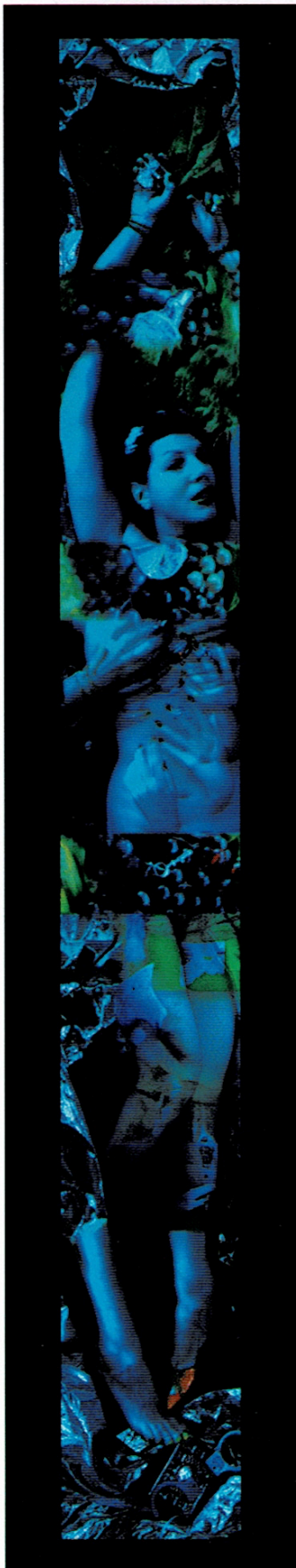
inside the maternal world when one was partly a receptive figure within a comprehending environment. Indeed, the productive intentionality that determines the dream we are in and that never reveals itself (i.e., 'where is the dreamer that dreams the dream?') uncannily recreates, in my view, the infant's relation to the mother's unconscious, which although it does not 'show itself,' nonetheless produces the process of maternal care. In this respect the dream seems to be a structural memory of the infant's unconscious, an object relation of one person inside the other's unconscious processing.... (1992: 14)

Allegory Of Desire And Dread. One of the most striking developments in *Act 2* is the introduction of exterior locations. Juxtaposing the black, blank slate of the studio to strange and unexpected locations enhances a sense of dramatic unfolding. The performative quality of the images is heightened by the inclusion of public locations in which these almost ritualistic and very private dramas appear to be both unfolding and well underway. The move between studio and location settings creates a tempo that is both driving and halting. There is the sense of going somewhere but also going nowhere at all – an inescapable quality of being rooted to the spot and forced to see what one never hoped to see but also pre-empting the anxiety and seeking out the unseeable.

The Inherited And The Acquired: Part 2 – Provocative Settlement. The works are fraught with the possibility of disintegration and fragmentation as a fractious conflict between the Self and its objects plays out with a highly uncertain outcome.

The Dream Seeks Its Journey: Part 1 – The Urgent Demands Of The Instincts. The alternation of subject within and subject without, objects within that find their way outside, is intended to further heighten the anxiety that underlines this act. Again a polarity is established between the clarity and precision of the images themselves and a blurriness and indistinction of identities. There is a sense of unstable identities, of a shifting picture as to who is whom and what belongs to whom. I am subject and object, Self and Other, the same and different.

The Dream Seeks Its Journey: Part 2 – Consecrated Objects. In the studio, the subject (myself) is more akin to an object – my face is never visible and though there is animated interaction with other objects, in a sense, it's as if the inanimate objects are deploying me for their own specific purpose. In addition, in the studio I am never clothed – an inherent contradiction is posed between being revealed (through nakedness) but remaining concealed (through lack of identity). On location, I am always dressed in the same ambiguous garment that hovers between lingerie and nightie, wardrobe that echoes desire and dreaming.



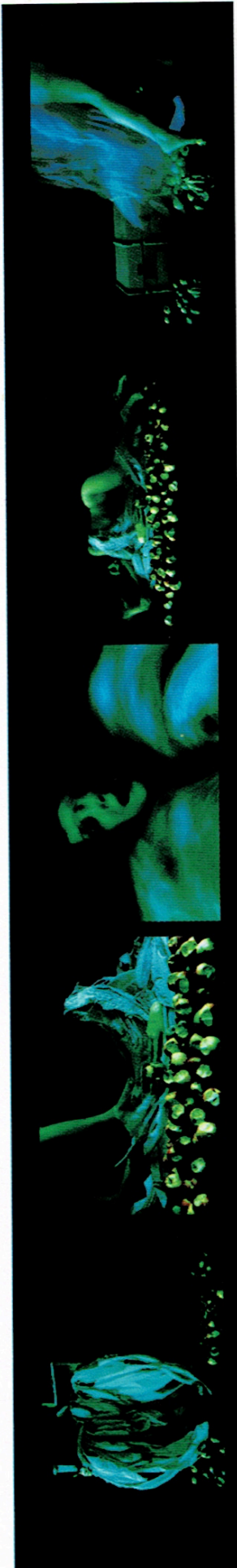
*The Beauty Rots
Trilogy: Part 1 -
Precious Spoils*



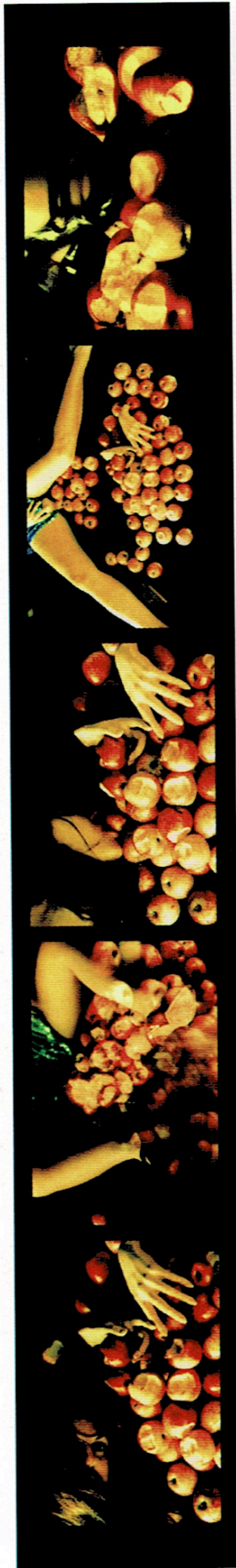
*The Beauty Rots Trilogy:
Part 2 -
Serpent of Desire*



*The Beauty Rot
Trilogy: Part 3 -
Decomposing Dreams*



Escape From Desire



Birth Of Desire



Herself In Passage



Slippery Slope of Desire: Part 1 - Surrender The Child To Her Dreaming



Allegory Of Desire And Dread



Trace Of The Lost Object



Tender Veils Unarticulated



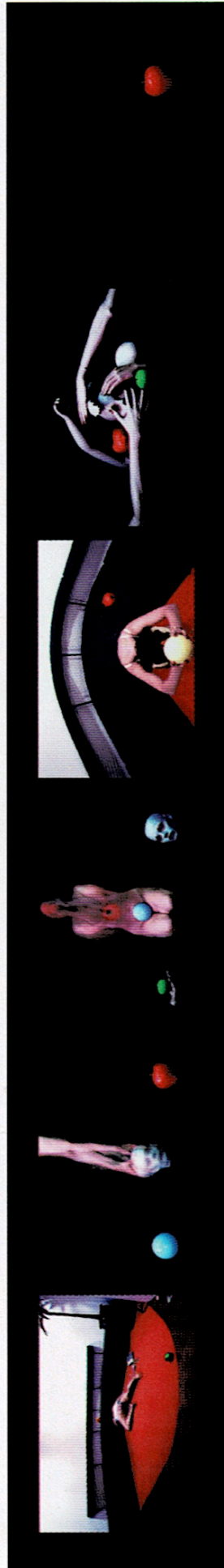
The Dream Seeks Its Journey: Part 1 - The Urgent Demands Of The Instincts



The Dream Seeks Its Journey: Part 2 - Consecrated Objects



The Grammar Of Desire: Part 1 - Without Language



The Grammar Of Desire: Part 2 - Utterance Performs Gesture



The Inherited And The Acquired: Part 2 - Provocative Settlement



Return To The Basic Faultline

There are further juxtapositions between the studio and location images that have to do with the dream structure. Bollas, Grotstein, and Ogden all discuss the dream enterprise as engaging multiple subjects. In Grotstein's (2000) frame there is the dreamer who dreams the dream, the dreamer who understands the dream, and the dreamer inside the dream. Bollas (1987) frames it as the immersive subject and the reflective subject. Ogden (2001) calls upon both Grotstein and Bollas in his discussion of dreaming. To my own way of thinking, I link it more directly to theatrical production (hence the three-act structure) in the sense that there is the actor (the dreamer inside the dream), the audience (the dreamer who the dream is for) and the producer of the dream drama.

Tender Veils Unarticulated. Act 2 uses as its structure this idea of multiple selves occupying various outposts of the dream territory. The self that appears on location is the immersed subject experiencing the dream and the self inside the studio is the reflective subject processing its objects. The third subject, the producer of the dream, is indicated by photography equipment left behind. These are subtle traces that reveal the photographic activity, the production work behind the staged drama suggesting a higher intelligence at work masterminding the entire enterprise for edifying purposes.

Relevant to this is Grotstein's discussion of the "Ineffable Subject of Being" and the "Supraordinate Subject of Being and Agency":

The stage of the dream can be likened to a container or ground, whereas the play itself constitutes the content or the contained or the figure (as contrasted to the 'ground'). In positing two dreamers – the creator/transmitter of dreams and the dream recipient – I am really proposing the existence of a profound preternatural presence whose other name is the Ineffable Subject of Being, which is itself part of a larger holographic entity, the Supraordinate Subject of Being or Agency. (2000: 4)

This third subject, at once another Self but a larger-than-Self entity, suggests yet another level of encounter with the work. It creates a certain type of rupture – which becomes a feature of *Act 3*, in that it breaches the seemingly hermetically sealed world of the dream environment. The constructed nature of this world is revealed and with this revelation, questions are posed.

The Grammar Of Desire: Part 1 – Without Language. Setting aside the mannequin parts, it is evident that in *Act 2* the props have been refined down to: the oversized red apple, the ostrich egg, and the green apple. Each of these props articulates a different aspect of desire in my pre-Oedipal world. The ostrich egg represents ambiguous desire. It speaks simultaneously of innocence and purity, new life, but also of sexuality.

The ostrich egg balances on that knife-edge of the drive for individuation but the longing to stay merged. The oversized red apple represents engorged desire, a desire that speaks of merging and consumption, a swollen desire that cannot be contained and breaches all defenses.

The Grammar Of Desire: Part 2 – Utterance Performs Gesture. The green apple represents envious desire, envy of both mother for father and perhaps even more strongly, of father for mother.

Return To The Basic Faultline. This particular work is the climax of *Act 2* and signals a descent into disintegration. Chaotic frenzy...desperate questing...abject despair...all are contained within these images. However, there is also an indication of redemption, of the phoenix rising from the ashes. A key seeks out its lock, the dreamer is still able to dream, and the figure at the apex is illuminated and gazing up and out from the depths. I chose the pyramid structure as a reference to the metaphor of the relationship between the conscious and unconscious mind...the conscious being the tip of the iceberg of the unconscious.

Fall From Grace: Act 3 – Voices of Desire

My decision to move into video for *Act 3: Voices of Desire* was motivated by a continuing preoccupation with devising a visual language that gets as close to my experience of that interface between conscious and unconscious experience as possible. The issue of framing became of paramount importance. I felt that in this act I wanted to move away from the strictly defined and tidily containing frames of *Act 2* and create a viewing experience that mirrored more closely aspects of the dreaming experience.

I also began to think in a new way about the nature of the media themselves, and the use to which they could be employed to further underscore my preoccupation with interior, psychological experience. There were two film theorists I came across at this time who sparked my interest in video: Vicky Lebeau and Andrea Sabbadini. Lebeau has this to say about the relationship between cinema and the mind and the privileged tie the medium has to our mental activities and emotional experiences:

...it [cinema] is a type of mime of both mind and world....Breaking from the confines of photography and theatre, it is unique in its representation of an abundant world in motion....There is a persistent sense that cinema imitates the movement of the mind, that there is a correspondence (however elusive) to be discovered between psyche and cinema. (2001: 3)

Sabidini elaborates on some of the specific qualities of the medium that tie it to the psychoanalytic enterprise:

...the psychoanalytic notion of *screen* memories might also be a suitable definition of films; the concept of projection is crucial to both cinema and psychoanalysis; *free associations*...have in both idioms the purpose of encouraging the exploration of deep emotional meanings and of the often uncertain boundaries between reality and fantasy... In a more general sense, cinema and psychoanalysis share an area that we can refer to by the term *insight*, meaning 'inner sight' or a kind of 'within-the-mind' seeing.... Filmmaking, film analysis and psychoanalytic work, then, operate in this area of insight and of the gradual releasing of awareness from unawareness, the sightings and findings on which the cinematic imagination and the psychoanalytic process continuously throw new light. (2003: 2-3)

In addition to the potential of the medium itself to elaborate in a new way on the territory *Fall From Grace* explores, I also felt there was significant potential in deepening and layering the viewer's position in relation to the work in their consideration of several different media. Specifically, the darkened screening room, in which the architecture of the space falls away leaving only the presence of the video image, creates an immersive experience. In addition, the scale of the video is larger-than-life so the viewer has the sense of being participant in the drama, the sense that they must make the video's dream their own, must stand as witness to the event.

The idea of immersion is also linked to the title of this act that suggests a certain agency on the part of the Self. It also suggests a Self that is able to articulate, to "voice" her desire, which presupposes some degree of individuation. Whereas in *Acts 1 & 2* there are multiple images that are constructed as sequences of differentiated images, in *Act 3*, the multiple images are held within a single frame as transparent layers. It has been suggested that this quality of the work, creates an experience of "conscious dreaming".

The video experience is intended to function on a subliminal level and within this body of work, is the ultimate seduction. The objective is to tap into the viewer's desire to be swept away. Choices need to be made by the viewer about questions or doubts that may arise in the viewing experience and whether these are to be set aside in order to fully give oneself over to the seduction. The video references Hollywood cinema in the seamless experience it seeks to create, but there are breaches in this seamlessness, ruptures that activate and interplay between conscious and unconscious experience. Examples of these are the beautiful

lighting but jerky camera moves, the sleeping figure with flickering eyes, myself appearing in the video videotaping, the suggestion of B-grade horror genre at the climax. In these and other instances, the viewer has to choose to make these issues less important than being sutured into the fabric of the narrative. Likewise, the very fact of the narrative-less narrative also raises the same issue.

The video in relation to the photos, invests the photos with new meaning. A reconsideration of the still images in relation to the video deepens the requirement that the viewer engage with the entire body of work in order to make sense of the different components. Subsequent to the video screening, the photos take on a different meaning as they memorialize and enshrine particular moments in the video. On the other hand, there are images that don't appear in the video and these, too, take on a different reading.

There are also paradoxes that are set up between the photos and the video. Whereas the photographs have an aesthetic of precision and clarity, their meaning remains highly mysterious. The aesthetic of the video is one of veiling; there are shifts in balance between transparency and opacity resulting in the video's aesthetic being less accessible but its meaning more readable as narrative.

Taken as a whole, *Fall From Grace* is a body of work that puts forward the following proposition: if, in the creation of a body of work, the artist's journey has been a sincere exploration of making meaning of oneself, can this process be communicated to the viewer experientially? My experience has been "yes" ... that the viewer will strive to arrive at a meaningful meaning if they sense that the work has been invested with this purpose.

Conclusion

It has been my intention in this paper to provide a map of the navigation between how I create my art and the role my therapy has played in this endeavour. While I have spoken of these experiences as two distinct enterprises I would finally like to acknowledge a way in which they are both the same. This has to do with the quality of experience I have when I am either inside the creative process or inside the therapy experience. In either case, no matter how hard-going the process may seem at times, still, there is this absolute sense that I am occupying a sacred space within myself, a space where discord and dis-ease give way to a sense of peace and wonder... a space where my various fractious selves fall into alignment with my authentic self resulting in a blissful sense of wholeness, a space where doubt and uncertainty fall away as I choose to trust that our universe is a benevolent one. Artist and therapist share this experience in the work that we undertake.

There is a story about a young woman who is a cello virtuoso but has lost her gift through trauma. This passage characterizes, with a heartbreaking sensibility, that place we go to when all the selves are joined together for a higher purpose, a purpose such as creating art, practicing therapy, expressing our authentic selves:

Musicians are so often called 'masters', as if what they do is command, but what I remember was the erotic draw of sight reading, the tug in my gut as I opened a score, its difficult passages pulling my flesh towards desires I had not known I had, pulling me not towards mastery but submission. The giving myself over. I knew I had a piece when I could imagine destroying the score, could shut my eyes and imagine the composer sitting hidden in the audience, could imagine myself onstage, playing his desires as they came to his mind....From the first note, my body joined with the music in a way I could not have imagined. The contours of the Bach suite I'd been tracing since I was six became the curves of a flesh luminous from years of caressing. Then Debussy poured himself out through me like molten glass....I had ceased to work my limbs, ceased trying, ceased anticipating, ceased deciding and let the music take possession. There was no wood between my legs, no scroll aside my neck, no two bodies. Just one voice, pulling towards release. (Hackett: 2002:83)

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