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**National College of Art and Design**

Fine Art: Painting

**BOURGEOIS AND IRIGARAY:  
AN INCOMPATIBLE DIALOGUE ?**

by

Kate Byrne

Submitted to the  
Faculty of History of Art and Design and Complementary Studies  
in Candidacy for the  
Degree of Bachelor of Arts

1999

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## Introduction

As stated by Elizabeth Grosz in **Feminist Theory** Luce Irigaray's more explicit political aim is to provide a platform for a discursive and rational space allowing women to explore, investigate with, enhance, articulate from a speaking position, an intellectual frame of reference, and devices that are autonomously decided upon. However, Grosz does not see such a space as existing outside the patriarchal boundaries. Irigaray asserts that the possibility of its creation necessitates a liberation of the intellectual space of women which has been overtaken by men, who duly claim to be speaking a universal language: "the articulation of my sex is impossible in discourse, and for structural, eidetic reasons. My sex is removed, at least as the property of a subject, from the predicative mechanism that assures discursive coherence", (Irigaray, 1985, p.149). In the course of this thesis I would like to question whether or not Louise Bourgeois through her sculpture *La Fillette* and series of installation piece's known as the *Cells*, creates her own discursive arena which may, or may not, be related to Irigaray's theory in relation to a daughter's struggle for autonomy from a paralysing and life-denying mother.

Irigaray's principal objectives can be read as developing a discourse of subjectivity that facilitates the existence of two sexes, two bodies, two practices of understanding to be confirmed. This Irigarayan aim would supplant the phallogocentric embodiment of femininity within paradigms and conceptual structures rendered by and only for men. To diffuse sexual individuality is to obliterate the specific characteristics and associations, and self-determined attributes of femininity.

In Chapter One I will look at whether or not Bourgeois, in her 1972 piece *Fillette*, undermines the phallus, and if so whether this consequently ensures the annihilation of the phallic woman. For an alternative reading, I intend to look at





Mignon Nixon's essays **Bad Enough Mother** and **Pretty as a Picture** in which she analyses Bourgeois holding the latex sculpture in the Robert Mapplethorpe photograph and subsequently questions whether or not she is attempting to avoid the limitations of the castration and the Oedipus complexes as Irigarayan theory would suggest a daughter is obliged to do.

Chapters Two and Three are intrinsically interwoven in that both concentrate on an analysis of whether or not Bourgeois is complying with Irigarayan theory in relation to creating a defensive psychic or fantasy space that may, or may not, articulate the experience of loss or absence in relation to her mother by constructing the *Cell* series. Chapter Two primarily concentrates on Hilary Robinson's essay, **Louise Bourgeois's Cells : gesturing towards the mother**, due to her belief that Irigarayan understanding and analysis of the girl-mother relation, and the former's behaviour in the absence of the mother, to be helpful in her comprehension of the artist's work.

Chapter Three develops the specifics of two *Cell* installations and examines the metaphorical connotations within these pieces resulting from Robinson's analysis of Irigaray's interpretation on gesture. Considering Irigarayan theory discussed in Chapter Two, and the temptation to equate theory with art practice, the chapter culminates by emphasising certain difficulties that may be related to associating these theories with certain art practices, and more specifically with the work of Bourgeois. Ultimately, a question demanding an answer is whether or not a compatibility exists between the two.



signifier 'mother' - that is, 'mother' as a figure of which she  
analyses herself. Holding the two together in the Robert Mapplethorpe  
photograph and subsequently questions whether or not she is attempting to avoid the  
limitation of the canon and the Oedipal complex as human theory would  
suggest that she is obliged to do.

Chapter Two and Three are interestingly interwoven in that they  
concentrate on an analysis of whether or not Houghton is complicit with human  
theory in relation to creating a defensive psychic or fantasy space that may, or may  
not, entangle the experience of loss or absence in relation to her mother. In  
constructing the 'two' scenes Chapter Two primarily concentrates on Hilda  
Robinson's essay 'Louise Bourgeois + Cells: gesturing towards the mother, due  
to her belief that human understanding and analysis of the girl-mother relation and  
the father's absence in the absence of the mother, to be helpful in her  
comprehension of the artist's work.

Chapter Three develops the specifics of two CW installations and  
examines the psychological ramifications within these pieces. Resulting from  
Robinson's analysis of Houghton's interpretation on gesture (considering human  
theory discussed in Chapter Two) and the temptation to equate theory with an  
practice, the chapter continues by emphasising certain difficulties that may be  
related to associating these theories with certain art practices and more specifically  
with the work in question. Ultimately, a question demanding an answer is whether  
or not a relationship exists between the two.

## CHAPTER 1

### An Alternative Reading of *Fillette*.

Irigarian theory suggests that the intellectual space of women has been usurped by men who she proposes claim to be speaking and in control of a universal language. In the context of this controlling of universal speech the theorist analyses the means at women's disposal to claim part of the intellectual and representational arena robbed from them. For Irigaray it is only by introducing the male body into the debate from which it has been abolished that women will be able to construct a discursive podium from which to articulate both their sexuality and their environment. This aim can be summarised as providing an arena for women as women, and in doing so, simultaneously introducing an authentic plurality into what she describes as a mono-sexual structure. Irigaray, in her attempt to promote the notion of the body into a discourse on masculinity and femininity literally contends that the oppression of women is a repercussion of the on-going disparagement of femininity.

In the course of this chapter I would like to question whether or not Bourgeois challenges the suggested state of oppression through her sculpture *La Fillette* (1968), (fig. 1). By creating an object which in itself refuses to be categorised as either male or female, another question which demands an answer is whether or not the artist contributes to the politics of the feminist debate by her apparent challenge to a distinctly laid landscape of subjectivity in which masculinity and its attributes are outlined. Her stance may best be summarised in the Robert Mapplethorpe portrait executed in 1982 (fig. 2). An investigation of Mignon Nixon's essays **Bad Enough Mother** and **Pretty as a Picture**, in which she presents an alternative reading of the artist holding the latex sculpture is relevant to the considerations presented. In view of Irigaray's belief that by incorporating the male body into the





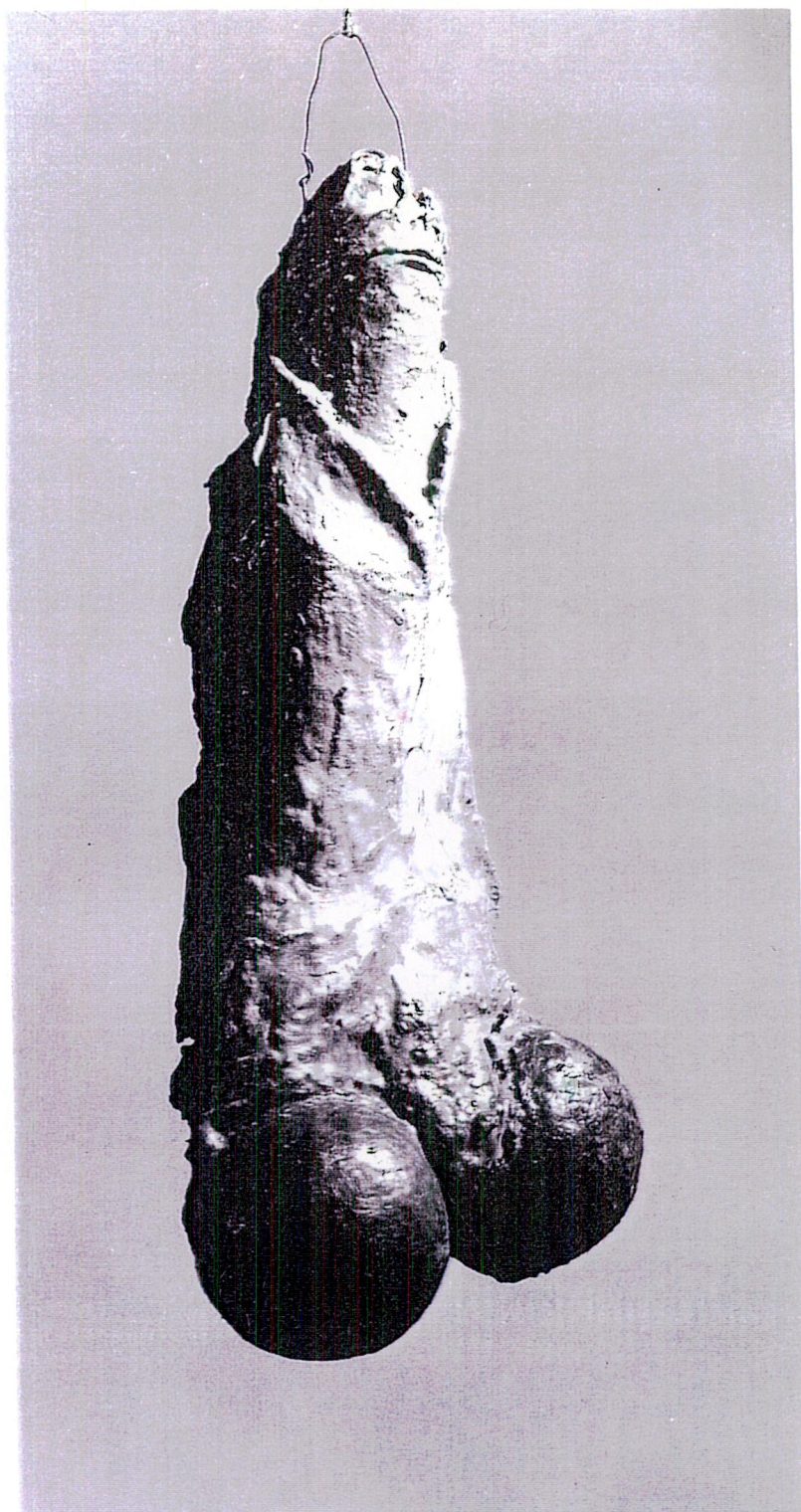


Figure 1.  
*Fillette* (1968)  
Latex







**Figure 2.**

Louise Bourgeois with *Fillette*, photographed by Robert Mapplethorpe, 1982.





discursive arena, women will be able to articulate both their sexuality and their world, an examination of both the sculpture and the photograph could introduce some interesting questions into the debate.

Nixon offers an incisive reading of Bourgeois's *La Fillette* and of the Robert Mapplethorpe photograph of the artist holding the latex sculpture of a "child self with a lost state of self love", (Deepwell: 1996, p44).<sup>1</sup> She records that Bourgeois has said of her smirking salute to the camera that it satirises an anticipated viewer reaction that everything the artist creates is erotic. For her, this element of the erotic is a projection of the spectator, a projection she admits she engages with, however subconsciously, and in the photograph parodies the very sexual charge she repudiates. If Bourgeois disavows the eroticism of *Fillette*, Nixon adds that she verifies her desire for the object she depicts so enthusiastically as a symbol, a talisman of surety and consolation. She suggests that the artist is indifferent to the viewer's pleasure or displeasure and does not consequently offer herself or the work as commodities for scrutiny. Instead the viewer is confronted with a display of her own desire expressed as cathexis. She clutches the object emphatically, and in doing so suggests that it is hers alone. The consequence is redolent of self-orchestrated and owned power. This summary could have relevant influence if aligned to the question as to whether or not Bourgeois, by this apparent act of control, creates her own discursive and rational space which duly allows her to investigate and articulate a frame of reference, or intellectual space, that in Irigarian theory had been taken over by men.

Nixon sees that this approach of cathexes enacted in the Mapplethorpe portrait does not necessarily symbolise an unparalleled association or link between the artist and *Fillette* as outlining the psychic requisites of production in which the artist functions: the object is designed for psychic purpose. For Bourgeois, cathexis is often aligned with self-portrayal, or more accurately, with a projection of the self onto the entity, which in turn becomes its substitute. The notion of the work as a substitute for the self, or for a part lost is declared quite simply by Bourgeois when she clarifies its representation as the artist as little girl, affiliating that child self with a mislaid state of self love.

The **Bad Girls** show staged in New York and Los Angeles dealt primarily with the mother/daughter relation of feminist artists. In writing about the show, Nixon suggests that, resulting from their relationship to determined individuated mothers, these daughters are capable of operating outside the structure



descriptive and a woman who is able to articulate both that sexuality and her world. An examination of both the sculpture and the photograph could introduce some interesting questions into the debate.

Wilson offers an accurate reading of Bourgeois's (in *Woman and of the* *Woman*) photograph: "photograph of the artist holding the black sculpture of a 'self' with a lost state of self-love" (Exposition, 1990, 1991). She records that Bourgeois has said on her smoking statue to the camera that it assumes an "erect" posture, "erect" being the artist's word for "erect". This element of the statue is a metaphor of the "erect" posture she adopts and engages with. However, subconsciously, and in the photograph parodies the very "erect" charge she repudiates. If Bourgeois, however, the eroticism of "Woman" is given that she creates her desire for the object she depicts so enthusiastically as a symbol of a woman of energy and consolation, she suggests that the artist is indifferent to the viewer's pleasure in the photograph and does not compensate of herself on the work as certain other female artists have. Instead the viewer is confronted with a display of her own desire, expressed in the statue. She creates the object, cynically, and in doing so suggests that the "erect" statue is a symbol of self-love, not a symbol of sexual power. The "erect" statue could have relevant influence if aligned to the question as to whether or not the statue is an apparent act of control, created for her pleasure and control, space which she allows her to investigate and analyze. The statue of a woman is an intellectual space that in addition to her body has been taken over by her.

Wilson notes that this approach of control, evident in the *Woman* photograph, is not necessarily symbolic of a patriarchal relationship or that between the artist and "Woman" in defining the psychic reality of production in which the artist's desire is the object is designed for psychic purpose. For Bourgeois, "Woman" is not a subject with self-control, or more accurately, not a projection of the self onto the object, which in turn becomes a subject. The object of the work is a subject for the self, or for a part that is desired and created by Bourgeois when she creates the representation as the artist in the end, and not the self with a nihilistic state of self-love.

The *Black Child* statue staged in New York and Los Angeles, which primarily with the mother-daughter relation of female artist in writing about the "erect" statue suggests that something from their relationship is described. Individualized mothers, these daughters are capable of creating outside the "erect"

of patriarchy, in order to avoid the limitations of the castration and the Oedipus complexes.

“The appeal of Louise Bourgeois’s work for feminism is obvious and sure...but writers have fallen into the habit of calling it abstract”, (Krauss,1989, p.215), assuming Krauss’s interpretation of abstract as referring to a rejection of representation and having no starting or finishing point in nature. To categorise the artist’s work merely due to the relationship to the body parts that are petitioned, in this case the penis, possibly guarantees robbing them of both their power and meaning. If Bourgeois had not attained formal mastery, her works would be as shallow as those of many of her followers.<sup>2</sup>

Jerry Gorovoy,<sup>3</sup> states that there is no effective value that can be deduced from abstraction; there are only what he proposes to be personal experiences that ultimately determine the meaning and value of the contingent properties of abstractness. He states that Bourgeois knew the dangers that the greater the abstraction, then the greater the possibility of the artificial that style connotes, and the greater the distance from her original concepts.

Bourgeois says, “I’m not particularly aware of, or interested in, the erotic in my work...I am exclusively concerned, at least consciously, with formal perfection”, (Bourgeois, 1994, p.57). While Lucy Lippard states that the artist is conscious of eroticism she emphasises Bourgeois’s own word’s: “I’m so inhibited at the reality level that the eroticism is completely unconscious. I find great pleasure and great ease in doing things that turn out to be erotic, but I do not plan them”, (Bourgeois, 1974, p.203). Bourgeois’s work has not generally been analysed within a realist frame of reference that would locate it within the political arena of criticism and ultimately domesticate it , and in doing so ensure its removal from the domain of the strange and the weird.

In assembling the matrilineage of contemporary bad-girls, *Fillette* was reproduced alone, hanging on a single hook as it would be if displayed in the gallery, rather than Bourgeois clutching the outsized latex phallus doll dressed in her fuzzy coat. The omission of the leering "phallus-toting Bourgeois" (Nixon, 1995, p.85) facilitated a subjugation of the impish, aggressive mother onto the very stage that was to envelop her laughter. The humour here is the transformation of trauma into amusement.

In positioning herself as the mother of the phallus-doll, Bourgeois creates, by her laughter, a displacement from the patriarchal mother to the gleeful

of pathology in order to avoid the limitations of the Cartesian and the Hegelian  
concepts.

"The appeal of Foucault's work for feminist is obvious and  
sure, but women have fallen into the habit of calling it feminist" (Foucault, 1980, p. 137). Foucault's intention of what is referred to as "feminist" is  
reconstruction and having no starting or finishing point in nature. The categories of  
sexuality are not due to the relationship to the body parts that are positioned in  
the body. The body is not a container of body parts, but a body that is  
reconstructed. If Foucault had not attained feminist mastery, her work would be an  
exercise in those of many of her followers.

John Gorton, states that there is no effective value that can be  
deduced from abstraction; there are only what he proposes to be personal, particular,  
that is, the personal, the meaning and value of the personal properties of  
abstraction. He states that Foucault knew the danger that the greater the  
abstraction, then the greater the possibility of the artificial that is the concept and  
the greater the distance from her original concepts.

Foucault says, "I'm not particularly aware of it, but in the  
course of my work, I am exclusively concerned with concepts, with forms,  
perfectly" (Foucault, 1994, p. 17). While I am a feminist, I am not a feminist  
because I am not a feminist. Foucault's work is not a feminist work. It is not a feminist  
theology, but the evidence is completely unambiguous. I find great evidence  
and great love in doing things that I do not want, but I do not want to  
(Foucault, 1994, p. 137). Foucault's work has not generally been read as a  
text of reference that would locate it within the political realm of feminism  
and the feminist movement, and in doing so, it is not a feminist work. It is not a  
theology, but the word.

In examining the authenticity of Foucault's work, Foucault  
represents himself as a single body, as a single body in the world.  
rather than as a body of a body. It is not a body of a body, but a body of a body.  
even "The concept of the body" (Foucault, 1994, p. 137).  
Foucault's definition of the body is not a body, but a body of a body.  
to myself, but I am not a body. The body is not a body, but a body of a body.  
movement.

In positioning herself as the author of the political, Foucault  
creates, by her laughter, a displacement from the political, and the political.



belligerent mother. By the enactment of an illusion of aggression toward both the phallus and the infant, the artist has illustrated how the artist/mother might be established as a subject through aggression. In the Mapplethorpe photograph, Bourgeois transforms herself into the "bad enough mother" (Nixon, 1995, p. 85) who sardonically laughs at the patriarchal exaggeration of the phallus, and caricatures the metaphor of infant and penis. It is through this manipulation that phallus becomes penis, and thus loses its position as powerful signifier to become yet another object of aggression and longing. Perhaps this can be interpreted as creating a fantasy of where psychoanalysis literally departs from itself. It is nevertheless through Bourgeois's play of introjections and projections that she develops a maternal subject created like the infant subject, and it is by orchestrating hostility between mother and infant, part object and phallus, humour and the fetish, or in other words, exploiting tensions between psychoanalytic models, that the artist creates the playful, aggressive mother.

With a male audience the image could be anticipated as provoking very fundamental anxieties, with female viewers exaltation, but from its original institutional audience in the museum of Modern Art for the 1982 Bourgeois retrospective, it exacted disavowal. In this scenario of repudiation, it is neither desire itself, nor the penis, that is rejected but the appropriation of desire by the female. All manifestations of self-satisfaction, of a pleasure enjoyed independent of the viewer or of a pleasure in deflecting audience aspirations are removed by the displacement of *Fillette*. Because the sculpture so indisputably replicates an unnaturally large penis, this displacement additionally obliterated the implication that the artist's desire and pleasure, being inflated, could be relished in a multiplicity of alignments.<sup>4</sup>

Irigarian theory proposes that it is not the annihilation of the father that both maintains and jeopardises the phallus, regardless of the allegations made by patriarchal tradition in a vague symbolic gesture of faith. Unless this destruction of the father does not denote an aspiration to acquire the father's position as opponent and adversary, but rather a desire to dispense with a male in anticipation of assuming control to create any world, notably a female one.

Irigaray sees that the phallus, as opposed to being completely potent and mighty, would be interpreted as a masculine variant of the umbilical cord. If the life of the mother, and the mother in all women, was appreciated by the phallus it would then relay the living link to the mother. Men would thus be executing a deed of expectant repetition, enabling them to return to the world that authorises them to





enter into sexual adulthood, where they may prove "capable of eroticism and reciprocity in the flesh", (Irigaray, 1993, p.17). On the other hand, a note of both protection and fear is evident in Bourgeois's comment,

The phallus is a subject of my tenderness. It's about vulnerability and protection. After all, I lived with four men, with my husband and three sons. I was the protector of my brother; he knew it, acknowledged it, and used it. Though I feel protective of the phallus, it does not mean I am not afraid of it... You negate the fear like a lion tamer. There is danger and the absence of fear. There is no danger and yet no thrill with women, (Bourgeois, 1998, p.223).

A similar return to the world is also visualised as being equally imperative for women. The return can only occur if woman is discharged from what Irigaray deems the primitive confines man places upon her. It assumes that an independent and concrete delineation of sexuality abides in the culture. As opposed to the realisation that two genders exist, and that discovery may originate from the other gender. The male professes to monopolise truth and the absolute right to administer over everything from politics to law, philosophy and science.<sup>5</sup>

The 'man-god', similar to the discourse of the male gender, is given birth to by woman, immaculately celebrated as such, even if sometimes attired in differing robes. According to Irigaray, man stands between the two. Even as he is split between his darkness and his light, between his night and radiance she is torn apart both by him and by his world, "between an unmarked primary matter on the one hand and the signs and emblems in which he cloaks her on the other", (Irigaray, 1993, p.115). In theory her wholeness has never been regained, though it cannot be ruled out in the future.

If the female gender does interrogate or challenge more often than not it is founded in on a demand for equal rights, and this bears the risk of resulting in the extermination of gender. Irigaray suggests the possibility that the tragicomedy being witnessed today functions as a style of warfare since war pertains to the gender that controls outrightly and since war can be deemed a symptom that the dilemma relating to the immediate remains unresolved. In the light of Bourgeois's work and her self analysis, it is interesting to note Irigaray's comment that "one part battles only with its ghosts, its shadows, its faults, its fears --- The insubstantiality of the enemy so exasperates it that it has to invent oppositions, incite them, intensify them, to the point of war", (Irigaray, 1993, p. 116).





Considering the various analysis of *Fillette* the crucial question remains as to whether or not Bourgeois, by her portrayal of the little girl both as phallus, and phallus tormentor, and her gleeful subversion of the phallus which duly destroys the concept of the phallic woman, and is mocking psychoanalytic theory. Alternatively, the question could be asked as to whether or not Bourgeois's actions could be equated to a structuring of her own Irigarian platform which possibly enables her to create and control the discursive arena alluded to earlier .

By her clutching and veering of the sculpture, Bourgeois enacts not only attraction, fascination, possessiveness, and pride but also manipulation, control, discipline and power. The mother's double fantasy of seduction and dominance are duly embodied by her. However apparent the distinction between a depiction of mother and baby, which Bourgeois is not displaying, and the scenario she does enact between mother and doll, her representation not only as a fantasy, but as a strategy is defined. The artist herself affiliates the sculpture with anxiety and strategically engages it for self-protection. It is furthermore conceivable to see a strategy, or set of strategies, of creating and employing objects for specific psychic intentions as extensively operative in the artist's oeuvre.<sup>6</sup>

If Bourgeois is playing a joke on Irigarian psychology it is both blatant and subtle. Its blatancy can be witnessed in the works profusion, and smooth erotics, the word erotic being used as a "primary expressive mode of heterosexual neuroses" (Rifkin, 1996, p.36), which Bourgeois's work disguises with such precision, and which disguise is the work's subtle potency. If it were not blatant, her iconography could prove ridiculous, the associations being markedly obvious.

Considering Bourgeois's work and in the light of the sardonic stance she portrays in the Mapplethorpe photograph, it is worth noting her own comments that cannot but suggest a more serious underlying intention to her art. "My work is a very specific fight against specific fears, one at a time. It comes close to a defining, an understanding and accepting or fear", (Bourgeois, 1994, p.29). But is Bourgeois really conscious of warfare between the sexes? This comment in **Louise Bourgeois : Blue Days and Pink Days** is worth consideration. "I'm afraid of power, It makes me nervous, In real life, I identify with the victim, that is why I went into art", (Bourgeois, 1997, p.142).

The evolution, which Irigaray deems somewhat polemical between woman and mother, the conscious and the unconscious, the immediate and mediations, necessitates an openness and infiniteness for and within the female





gender. Woman has no reason to envy the penis or phallus. However, she interestingly stresses that by failing to decree a sexual identity for both genders, man has metamorphosed the male organ into a device of control with which to govern maternal power. What could be suggested in concluding this chapter is that Bourgeois's enactment in the Mapplethorpe photograph not only undermines the phallus but the consequence of this action could also be interpreted as bearing certain resonances of a self-orchestrated control.

Bourgeois's portrayal of the maternal representation establishes desire in the mother, a multiple desire incorporating protection, security, and mastery, satisfied not merely by the creation of an object, like that of a baby, but by the prospect of holding and controlling the sculpture and in the photographic setting, of holding and controlling it before an audience. The rotation and display of the object guarantees the performance of another operation, the oscillation of *Fillette's* classification, the manner in which the object apparently alters from penis to baby, phallus to doll, and regressing again with physical rotation. This skilful shifting which transforms one object into another, one sex into another, is possibly a strategy of the unconscious, as Bourgeois's comments relating to her mother's desire for the child would demonstrate: "It is comforting for the mother to have a baby. It makes her courageous. The child is not a liability, the child is a walking stick.... Well, let's not be phallic again", (Bourgeois, 1991, p51).

If the oscillation of the sculpture in the photograph was a strategy of the unconscious as the erotic in the work would also appear to be, then Bourgeois's intrinsic interest would apparently lie in unearthing her own foundations and subsequently dealing with the inherent memories involving pain and fear as opposed to warfare. "Sometimes a work is a journey with no destination in sight. Sometimes you arrive quickly. Sometimes when I finish a work, its meaning becomes apparent after the fact", (Bourgeois, Nov.18th, 1998).<sup>7</sup> Irigaray's strategy, on the other hand, can be perceived as much more concretely rooted in psychoanalytic theory and debate, which by its verbal nature involves certain difficulties in relating it to the visual. While the Mapplethorpe photograph may be indicative of a certain ascertaining of a discursive arena for Bourgeois's discourse, it is a private discourse. "By withdrawing, by recognizing you have no power, you become more than yourself. You get ideas which never would have occurred to you. In my art, I live in a world of my own making. I make decisions. I have power. In the real world, I don't have power", (Bourgeois, 1998, 227).





## CHAPTER 2

### Gestural Practices Relating to Bourgeois's *Cells*.

Resulting from her research project on Irigaray coupled with a life long interest in Bourgeois, I intend to concentrate on Hilary Robinson's essay **Louise Bourgeois's Cells: gesturing towards the mother** in the hope of analysing some of the metaphorical thought encapsulated within the work. Robinson has found Irigarayan analysis and understanding of the girl/mother relation, and more specifically her appreciation of a little girl's behaviour in the absence of her mother, helpful in her comprehension of the artist's work. Robinson argues that the gestural exercises which Irigaray has detected in the performance of the little girl may also be reflected in a section of Bourgeois's practices and particularly emphasised in the *Cell* series and related works. A categoric review of the concept of the *Cell* in relation to its incorporation into sculptural work will also prove helpful to the debate.

Rainer Crone and Petrus Graf Schaesberg in their 1998 publication **Louise Bourgeois: The Secret Of the Cells**, state that Bourgeois intentionally adopted a designation of *Cells* in view of their significant mode of construction. To understand the diversification of interpretations, and the evocations emanating from the complex meanings and ideas related to the *Cells*, a synopsis of the scientific background of the cell will aid our appreciation of the metaphorical thought within the artist's structures. The gamut of metaphorical affiliations elicited by Bourgeois's *Cells* vary from the simple or childlike impression of a friendly or antagonistic domain to profoundly psychological inferences, incorporating voyeurism, aggression and the intimately personal. The authors similarly state that both the reception and the perception of sculpture are open to comprehensive re-evaluation and redefinition

## CHAPTERS

### General Features Relating to Houghton's Work

There is a general agreement among the critics that the work of Houghton is of great importance in the history of English literature. His work is characterized by a certain originality and by a certain depth of thought. He is a man of letters, a man of the pen, a man of the book. He is a man of the world, a man of the age, a man of the time. He is a man of the spirit, a man of the soul, a man of the heart. He is a man of the mind, a man of the intellect, a man of the imagination. He is a man of the body, a man of the senses, a man of the flesh. He is a man of the blood, a man of the veins, a man of the arteries. He is a man of the nerves, a man of the sinews, a man of the tendons. He is a man of the bones, a man of the marrow, a man of the marrow-bones. He is a man of the marrow, a man of the marrow-bones, a man of the marrow-bones.

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through the medium of these spaces of what they deem “situative empathy” (Crone +Schaesberg, 1998, p.85), where time and place have succumbed to an entirely remodelled thematic and aesthetic location.

Crone and Schaesberg’s analysis suggests that while displaying fundamental affinities, the structure and function of all cells are interminably altered by evolution and may establish themselves as the most varied of life forms. A cell as a single unit, or with its isolated parts, can grow and reproduce as a result of the absorption of substances extracted from the environment. Biochemists have demonstrated that the structure of the cell, although reliant on its habitat, still displays its own life characteristics. However, a cell is not merely an independently functioning unit, whether a plant or individual, and comprises of much more than a conglomeration of disunited sections. Crone and Schaesberg suggest that this observation alone could be adopted almost literally as a depiction of Bourgeois’s own *Cells*, as will become clearer as the debate develops.

Bourgeois’s *Cells* offer a maze of metaphor and morphology interwoven together where the weave of affiliations create actual architectonic characteristics like prisons and cloisters. Simultaneously there are abstract images with biological and physical elements. It is only by studying the diverse implications of the term, and by the pursuit of its intriguing divisions portrayed together as a single idea, that one can possibly comprehend the psychic layers elicited in Bourgeois’s work.

The metaphorical connotations behind these pieces are analysed in Robinson’s essay on Bourgeois and Irigaray’s interpretation on gesture. Robinson suggests that a closure on a discussion of work by a woman artist would be implemented if one were to seriously consider Irigaray’s emphasis on locating visual pleasure within the domain of the masculine, while simultaneously establishing female gratification within the physique, or more definitely within touch. “This predominance of the visual is particularly foreign to female eroticism. Woman takes pleasure more from touching than from looking, and her entry into a dominant scopic economy signifies, again, her consignment to passivity, she is to be the beautiful object of contemplation”, (Irigaray, 1996, p.22). There is an argument that the attempt to transfer Irigaray’s female suppositions unequivocally into a formula for a visual aesthetic is clearly problematic for a number of reasons.<sup>8</sup> These are referred to in the third chapter.

It is not Irigaray’s discussion on the visual that can be most readily





distilled and developed upon, but more the passages from her theories which deal with sexuality, ethics, and criticism. Robinson records that her concentration on the theorist's essay **Gesture In Psychoanalysis** has aided her understanding, and subsequently clarification for particular practices involved in the *Cells*.

Two locations of gesture are investigated by Irigaray, gestures which are specific to the analytic scenario, and those with origins beyond it, but uncovered due to her involvement within it. An emphasis is placed upon the gender specific encounters of the classic analytic scenario as personified through physical gesture--the female lying in horizontal position, the invisibility of the male seated behind her. The subsequent analysis of gestures distanced from the analytic scenario but debated within it, is often communicated back to the original discourse to reimplement, from other perspectives, her original assertion that this is a gendered occurrence made comprehensible by physical expression. It is this aspect of the findings, although revealed during the analytical experience, but in essence is extra-analytical, that is deemed by Robinson to be of particular benefit to the debate.

Griselda Pollock,<sup>9</sup> likewise, considers Irigaray's exploration of gesture as an intricate frame of reference that involves both sexes in spaces and "intersubjective relations paralleling verbal communication" (Pollock, 1996, p.253). Irigaray questions the relevance of sexual difference and writes that although some analysts argue as to its irrelevance because the analytic scenario returns both sexes to a childlike state, and consequently introduces the question of whether or not the child is neuter. Pollock and Robinson both employ Irigaray's theory in their development on the mother/girl relation, which Robinson has found particularly beneficial in her transposing of the emphasis that Bourgeois's work is almost invariably generated from a dysfunctional father/daughter relationship, to questioning the almost total lack of discussion of Bourgeois's relation to her mother.

Robinson suggests that this dysfunctional relationship has functioned as a 'convenient' topic for critical analysis. Critics interested in Bourgeois's work have rarely explored beyond this Freudian concept of a traumatized childhood to question other possible inspirational factors, including the suggested acquisition of power to subvert a patriarchal society as referred to in the preceding chapter; or the possibility of petitioning viewer participation and the subsequent questioning and analysis of their scenario.

With reference to the suggested hypothesis surrounding her father, although reasonable in many respects, the story has also limited interpretation of the





work to restrictingly personal or archetypically Freudian origins. This is a point that would apparently appear to have been reinforced by the numerous reviews of Bourgeois's November 1998 show at the Serpentine Gallery, London. The story relating to the father and mistress, which now appears to have undertaken an aura of myth, could undoubtedly be deemed influential. The daughter's anger is blatantly demonstrated in works such as *The Destruction of the Father* (1974), and doubly enforced by her own autobiographical comments. "My father betrayed me by not being what he was supposed to be... It is just a matter of the rules of the game, and in a family the rules of the game are such that a minimum of conformity is expected," and "My father provoked in me a continual loss of self esteem", (Bourgeois, 1996, p.23).

What has most interested Robinson in her reading of literature on Bourgeois, was the almost total lack of discussion on any relationship to the mother. She freely quotes from Mira Schor's article **From liberation to lack** to further enhance this point. Schor sees Bourgeois as obsessively returning the critical audience of her work to its impelling origin which she sees as the devastating desolation of a daughter betrayed. Bourgeois's entry into the symbolic order has been overturned by an autocratic and philandering father whose mistress is not only the child's nanny, but has supplanted the mother's position in the marital home. She continues that Bourgeois's connection back to the 'Imaginary', or what she deems, completeness of relation to the Mother, is impaired by the mother's assumed complicity.

An argument has been made which relates to the relevance of Bourgeois's entanglement with the mother as clarifying the inner content of her work. "She has filled the void of mother/artist in spirit as well as substance, an Oedipus replacing the mother instead of the father, a sphinx whose secret is that a story about a relationship to a mother", (Kuspit, 1996, p.24). Robinson continues her debate by quoting again from Bourgeois whom she sees as instigating both audience and critics to take her relationship with her mother more seriously. "I had to be blind to the pain of my mother" and "When I was afraid of my mother dying, a challenge I could not meet, the warding off of her death, not to let her disappear, I made a vow. I swore to myself, if my mother survived that morning I would give up sex", (Robinson, 1996, p. 24).

What is of particular significance is that Bourgeois's comments have only surfaced in recent years and cannot thus be disassociated from a strand in her work, although evident years earlier. This strand has emerged more conspicuously





over the past decade in the *Cell* pieces. By the artist's particular manipulation of space through material, it is seen that the embodiment of her earlier interest in the spiral and circling movement is again evident in *Cells*. A blurring of subject/object relations is evident within the installations rendering them difficult to define as containable 'art objects'. Neither are the 'objects' comprising them distinct in their object status to both viewing subject and to Bourgeois herself. These are all aspects of the work that can perhaps be rendered more comprehensible if aided by Irigaray's theory on gesture.<sup>10</sup>

As indicated earlier, much Irigaray's theory is deduced from her analysis of the girl/mother relation, with particular reference to how this manifests itself through the gestural performance of the little girl. In reviewing these gestural processes, both Robinson and Pollock examine Irigaray's reference to Freud's observations of his grandson, Ernst, whom the psychoanalyst deemed to have invented certain games to master the absence of the mother. These studies were designed to develop an explanation of his theory relating to neurotic repetition and to the death drive. The sounds and movements analysed by Freud from a repetition of throwing a reel and subsequently retrieving it with a string were interpreted as the German words *fort* - gone, and *da* - here. The separation from the mother and the absence of her body are partially dealt with by reel and words, or alternatively by Ernst kneeling in front of a mirror making his image both appear and disappear.

Much analytical and theoretical literature has concentrated on the analysis of these games and to how the role of the absence of the maternal body is dramatised through them, along with the way the child is propelled towards the use of symbols. It is the disappearing and reappearing processes of representative replacement that will ultimately introduce him and his ambivalent relations to loss and fantasy supremacy into the signifying sequence of discourse and thus of culture.

Irigaray's observations register the gender specificity of this story, and in doing so, allows the feminine to have its own distinctive psychic development and history. The absence of the mother in relation to girls warrants independent consideration. When the girl misses her mother, she throws herself in distress and is lost. Her power is lost as is her will to live. She neither speaks nor eats and ends up in an anorexic state, and as Irigaray proposes,

She plays with a doll, lavishing maternal affection on a quasi-subject, and thus manages to organise a kind of symbolic space. Playing with dolls is not simply a game girls are forced to play; it signifies a difference in





subjective status in the separation from the mother. For the mother and daughter the mother is a subject that cannot be easily reduced to an object, and a doll is not an object in the way that a reel, a toy car, a gun are objects and tools used for symbolization, (Irigaray, 1993, p. 97).

Whether or not these statements can be seen as descriptions or attempts to draw our attention to the psychic implication of differences normally attributed to the social training of young children, Irigaray introduces new options of interpretation for structurally differentiating psychic processes. Irigaray's consciousness to space, rhythm and movement symbolically create the participation of both distance and proximity, relation and non-relation.<sup>11</sup>

What Robinson suggests Irigaray is offering in this image of the little girl and her dolls, is a technique where procedure can be underlined, where the significance of the art object as object is essentially compromised, along with the concept of mastery. This insight is derived by Irigaray from analysing a predominantly female experience, which Robinson deems is central to the engendering of the suitably feminine in girl's, and one which also mirrors and makes evident the girls psychic adjustment of the social non-existent mother. Through this Irigarayan argument, Robinson proposes that we can suggest a woman's affiliation to the work she is creating is both definitely female and yet diverse among women. Irigaray asserts that because of an affinity to an invented identity that is, nevertheless, spatially disconnected-the mother's departure and the need to leave her-a girl does not become proficient at the *fort-da* game: "The daughter has her mother under her skin, secreted in the deep damp intimacy of the body, in the mastery of her relation to gestation, birth and sexuality", (Irigaray, 1993, p. 98).

A third defence relating to a mother's absence outlined by Irigaray, is when the little girl "dances and thus forms a vital subjective space open to the cosmic maternal world, to the gods, to the present other", (Irigaray, 1993, p.97). The sexual motion characteristic of the girl is whirling round as opposed to throwing and pulling objects back as Freud noted in Ernst's actions. In attempting to re-create both around and with her, an animated circular movement that safeguards her from abandonment, from attack, depression and loss of self Irigaray calls upon the connection of body to territory: "in distinction from the mastery of space, through the relation of subject to object mediated by syntax and language", (Irigaray quoted by Pollock, 1996, p.256).

Robinson continues her Irigarayan debate by adding that the girl delineates a circle while seeking and denying access to her territory. She amuses





herself with this gestural space and its limitations where no object exists, or strictly speaking, none that has had to be incorporated or assimilated. In contrast, girls and women more often than not construct a defensive territory that can duly become creative, particularly in analysis. Robinson states that the manner in which Irigaray employs the word 'gesture' is crucial - her perpetual depiction of gestures as being in a certain way executed - is also suggestive that this is a definite view through which we can commence considering the physical gestures of the female artist in the studio, specific gestural formations incorporated into the work, her attitude to the space where the undertaking is rendered public, and the way in which it is made public. Robinson summarizes by saying that it is suggestive of a space for investigation of what, where and how the performative gestures of the female artist are in her normal routine.

Again Robinson quotes Irigaray on the behaviour of girls. "They enter language by producing a space, a path, a river, a dance, a rhythm, a song... girls describe a space around themselves rather than displacing a substitute object from one place to another or into various places, (Robinson, 1996, p. 27). If the relation with the mother guides girls towards a specific approach to defining a space, a space which she deems is both defensive and articulative of the experience of loss or absence, and if this relation is attained through specific gendered or sexualised actions which are gestural and attend to process as opposed to object, then a set of concepts facilitating a developing examination of aspects of Bourgeois's practice have been located. While Robinson's point is plausibly argued, and possibly elicits the temptation to equate Irigaray's inferences with the artist's constructions, it is worth emphasising that the theories under discussion should be interpreted merely as propositional as opposed to definitively outlining the motivations or artistic intentions of Bourgeois.

For Bourgeois the experience of loss in relation to her mother would have been greatly magnified by her mother's position being displaced within the family with the introduction of the father's mistress, who was ironically Bourgeois tutor, into the home. It is this displacement, and the subsequent pain, anger and anxiety expressed by Bourgeois towards the father that has been continually emphasised as the primary source instigating the work, but what is of paramount importance in Robinson's argument is the introduction of her feelings towards her mother for not being what Bourgeois would have wished her to be.

It is Bourgeois herself who has articulated the intensities and





complexities prevailing in her feelings towards her mother, and during the past decade she has been simultaneously articulating this relationship through her work. The *Cell* pieces are unusual “for making manifest a self-determined architectural, material description of the artist’s own psychic space, rather than the artist making manifest their psychic space within a given architectural space”, (Robinson, 1996, p.28).

Nancy Spector’s essay **The Locus Of Memory**, observes that the psychosexual drama of the home has been infused in Bourgeois’s work from the very outset. The home is portrayed as a female, the crevices of which encapsulate the pleasures and the pains of women’s experience. Women’s narratives are thus spatially determined and in Bourgeois’s case are reiterated over and over again in her sculptural nests, lairs and labyrinths. “You have to repeat and repeat to make your point”, (Bourgeois, Nov. 18th, 1998).<sup>12</sup>

Jessica Benjamin writes, “What is experientially female is the association of desire with space”, (Benjamin, 1994, p.81). Spector sees Bourgeois as having increasingly mapped her own chronicles in what she deems overtly spatial or architectural terms over the past few years.

As an area, Spector believes the cell implies confinement or a claustrophobic set for submission and solitude. However in biological language, the cell is also a living organism, that irrespective of however structurally minute, is able to sustain all independent functions. When Bourgeois demarcates space, both interpretations are recorded with its boundaries. As feminised arenas, the cells portray the social segregation that women have encountered, but they also unveil woman’s interior, the inner domain that can be understood in Benjamin’s words as “part of a continuum that includes the space between the I and the you”, (Benjamin, 1994, p. 81). Bourgeois’s architecture is rehearsed through this condition of the female in what Spector deems “intersubjectivity” in which the boundaries “between the inner psychic and the outer empirical realms collapse”, (Spector, 1994, p. 81).

A point I believe warranting further development is Robinson’s analysis of Bourgeois’s installations, challenging what she refers to as the well-established tradition of object making. She suggests that little in the work can be reduced to object-status, as the symbolic objects employed are never treated in a manner facilitating easy identification, and subsequently maintain an ambivalent status. Marble ‘sculptures’ are described as being located in spaces or juxtaposed amid other materials or objects in a process that she suggests clearly compromises the tradition of sculpture. Similarly, ‘found objects’ are not necessarily located to





accentuate their surreal character or their function as universal symbols nor to advocate interpretation as fetish objects. They are employed as visual aids with which she proposes an idiosyncratic narrative is being expressed, while simultaneously developing the notion of viewership and control in specific works. Gorovoy proposes that for Bourgeois it is the inherent psychological substance of the sculptural object which takes precedent over all other concerns. If precedence is given to Bourgeois's psychological preoccupations, then one would have to question the artist's recent comment "The finished form is everything" (Bourgeois, Nov. 18th, 1998).<sup>13</sup>

With their implications of a psychic or defensive space in rigid relation to body size, Robinson states that the generic labelling of the *Cells* recollects on the one hand units of confinement and meditation; and on the other hand, evocations of body cells, with their consequential implications of inclusion of experience. Through her engagement with the *Cells*, Robinson can visualize Bourgeois performing the Irigarayan dance, with arms outstretched, spinning around and searching for appropriate dimensions that she deems suitable. Bourgeois herself, has continually commented on the significance of spiralling, in a manner that again could possibly be aligned to the Irigarayan concept of spinning. "There are a lot of spirals....but they are not automatic. The spiral is a vacuum... It represents something ... the void, the anxiety void, the void of anxiety" (Robinson, 1996, p. 29) and "The spiral is the beginning of movement in space. As opposed to the rigidity of the monolith, the subject is exploring space", (Robinson, op.cit.p. 29). More recently she stated: "The spiral has a possibility of going in two connections- spiraling in and contracting, and spiraling out and opening up. Both directions interest me", (Bourgeois, Nov. 18th, 1998).<sup>14</sup>

"The psychoanalyst should direct his or her attention not only to the repetition of former images and their possible interpretation, but also to the subject's ability to paint, to make time simultaneous, to build bridges, to establish perspectives between present-past-future," (Irigaray, 1994, p.16). Irigaray distinguishes between imagination as the author of symptoms which can be impeded or enveloped in the past, or alternatively, the imagination as originator of identity, and creative accomplishment opening on to the future. "My work comes from dealing with the present moment, not the the past, There is an obvious connection between the problems of the here and today and the past. I am interested in tracing them", (Bourgeois, Nov. 18th, 1998).<sup>15</sup>





This statement is significant and considering Robert Storr's analysis of Bourgeois<sup>16</sup> when he refers to her as a spiral woman, constantly searching but never quite encountering the absolute core of her being, yet continually progressing even if she sometimes appears to be retracing steps, and always anxious as she has not attained her outer ultimations, it is crucial, as indicated by Robinson to introduce the mother/daughter relation to explore what has been up to now, a void or lack in the debate. A note of caution, is introduced by Whitford,<sup>17</sup> and one that may possibly be worth consideration in relation to Bourgeois's reminiscences of a childhood long past. She highlights two difficulties pertaining to psychoanalysis and motherhood. Firstly, motherhood is always viewed from the child's point of view whether current or recalled, even when paternalistic. Secondly, it is infrequently relieved from mother blaming. Where she is studied, her position of power is viewed through the retrospective interpretation of the child, rendering it difficult to include her political powerlessness or to take too seriously the logical and deliberate practices of motherhood.

Crone's and Schaesberg's analysis outlines a cell as not merely an independently functioning unit; it is comprised of much more than a conglomeration of disunited cells, where identification, union and collaboration is of paramount importance. Bourgeois's designation of *Cells* to her series cannot be dismissed in the light of her insatiable need for resolution. While Robinson stresses the importance of incorporating the mother/daughter relation into a dialogue that had largely omitted to do so, it is important to propose that to limit the argument to this one interpretation would be to eliminate all other potential influences from a patriarchal father to a challenging of the limitations of the Oedipus complexes as outlined in chapter one. An even greater difficulty in relating Irigaray to Bourgeois lies not alone in the incongruity of relating art practice to theory but also in the incongruity of Bourgeois's own conflicting comments. Relating to her mother she says, "All daughters hate their mothers. In Freudian terms the daughter blames the mother for the loss of the penis. They blame the castration on the mother. I am deeply grateful not to have gone through this ordeal. I would have been totally unable to deal with the criticism of a daughter," (Bourgeois, 1998, p.225). A point that would appear to challenge Robinson's debate is Bourgeois's comment relating to the father's mistress, "The story of Sadie is to me almost as important as the story of my mother in my life. The motivation for the work is a negative reaction against her," (Bourgeois, 1998, p.283).



### CHAPTER 3

#### Specific and Metaphorical Analysis of *Cell (You Better Grow Up)* and *Red Room*.

Having discussed the possibility of Bourgeois creating a fantasy or defensive space by constructing the *Cell* installation pieces in Chapter Two, I would like to develop the specifics of these installations, and the inherent metaphorical thought within the work by principally concentrating on two of these creations; *Cell (You Better Grow Up)* 1993, and *Red Room* 1994. I have also suggested the possibility that some Irigarian theory pertaining to the mother/daughter relationship may be helpful in our understanding of the artist's work. There are certain difficulties mentioned by Margaret Whitford involved in applying these theories to art practices which I will deal with.

Nixon's article **Bad Enough Mother**, which states that the area of infantile fantasy as a space in which to explore aggression within a feminist frame of reference has been amply enunciated in the work of Bourgeois. Nixon sees what she deems to be the artist's complex development, as a series of moves comprising of procedures of inside-out assemblage and of multiplication, separation and conflation that overturn the phallic reasoning of gender and render the Oedipal body incomprehensible.

These procedures of pouring, cutting, scratching and disintegrating are seen by Nixon as enacting the ruthlessness of the drives. Alternatively the procedures of stitching, wrapping and polishing are seen as repairing the damage perpetrated by aggression. The presenting of objects in installations or arrangements are designed as part-object fantasy spaces. According to Nixon these are all processes through which Bourgeois has established the subject of the drives and bodily fantasy. In doing so, she contradicts the Irigarian concept of the 'divine woman'.



### CHAPTER 3

#### Specular and Ideological Analysis of (Self) as Woman (Chris Low and Jay Johnson)

Having discussed the possibility of Bourgeois creating a feminist or lesbian space by constructing the (Self) installation pieces in Chapter 1, we would like to develop the specifics of these installations, and the inherent meanings, through an analysis of the work by primarily concentrating on two of these creations, *Self* (1993) and *Self* (1994). I have also suggested the possibility that some feminist theory pertaining to the mother/daughter relationship may be helpful in our understanding of the artist's work. There are certain differences mentioned by Whitford (1994) which are noted in applying these theories to art practices which I will deal with.

Johnson's article *Bad Enough Mother*, which states that the artist's installation function as a space in which to explore aggression within a feminist frame of reference, has been widely cited in the work of Bourgeois. Johnson says what she does is to use her work to explore a complex development in a series of moves: the moving of objects to a new space, the complex of manipulation, separation and recombination that overcomes the phallic reasoning of gender and render the (Self) body ideologically neutral.

I have put together a series of images, including and documenting the work by Johnson as creating the uniqueness of the artist. Alternatively, the process of making, wrapping and polishing has been seen as repeating the damage process as a sign of aggression. The destruction of objects in installations or artworks are designed to present a female space. According to Johnson there are all processes through which Bourgeois has established the subject of the body and body. Finally, in doing so she contradicts the inherent concept of the 'divine woman'.

Nixon believes that the Bourgeois series of works, *Cells* (1989-94), engineered the part-object reasoning of infantile fantasy as a play of position. She concludes that the combination of considerable emphasis on the substantiality of the objects, the physicality of the viewer and the six sided cube are together the indicators of real space. Bourgeois appears to have arranged chosen objects to which the past clings. Weathered architectural remnants, broken mirrors, schoolroom chairs and narrow beds, are among the items deployed in the construction of memory into the 'perpetual present'. Located in domestic spaces encaged by screens, doors, broken and soot-covered windows, these part-objects are used by the artist to materialise the concept of position as a place where one sometimes resides.

In **The Locus of Memory**, Terrie Sultan states that regardless of their materiality, Bourgeois views the works principally as metaphoric receptacles for memory. The memories confronted relate to pain. According to Sultan they echo many of the artist's personal fears which are deemed steadfastly lodged in her psyche, and specifically rooted in the particularities of her life. Each of her sculptures are seen by Sultan as a manifestation of a subjugated fear and present themselves as a statement of the artist's comprehension and awareness of herself. Through her work Bourgeois can be seen as enunciating identity on her own terms, and by doing so structures ambiguity as a means of yielding control.

While Bourgeois is distinctly ambivalent towards Freudian thinking, the theories of disappearing and returning coupled with the mirror as the principal metaphor for loss (intimating the discovery of the self and the parting from the mother) are suggestive of her own memories, which repeatedly concentrate on imminent or actual privation. "The truth is that Freud did nothing for artists, for the artist's problem, the artist's torment, to be an artist involves some suffering. That's why artists repeat themselves-because they have no access to a cure", (Bourgeois, 1994, p. 44).

As an artist Bourgeois does not work through a verbal psychological analysis that necessitates a step by step *modus operandi* as a consequence of clinical monitoring. Bourgeois has a preference for the pursuit of organic comprehension through practices of repetition that pivot around the body. Sultan writes that in her *Cells* she appears to be executing a commandeering of Freud's concepts for their inversion. The implication is that in robbing Freud of his context, Bourgeois appears free to substitute her own concepts in place of his.

Louise Neri's essay<sup>18</sup> suggests that if one were to concentrate on





certain psychoanalytical moulds one could almost conclusively deduce from her vivid narratives that Bourgeois is incessantly imbedded in the present of her unconscious childhood fantasies. If we acknowledge that memory is persistently subjective, fallible and discerning, that the most profound moments of perception are frequently mythologized by repetition into cogent episodes in the relating of a life, or in other words, that the memory becomes as much a work of fiction as the modern novel, then Bourgeois's extensive and irresolute oeuvre, could be viewed more as a memoir-in-progress of a life conjectured, lived and metamorphosed into a compelling aesthetic account through developed self-awareness and formal virtuosity. "For more than fifty years I've been talking about the same subject; so I have a consistency and what I'm interested in and ferociously jealous of is my image-my scribble, the way I see things", (Bourgeois, 1998, p.81).

Gorovoy reiterates that it is in this ascertaining or defining of the 'self', that memory performs a principal role. He suggests that for each new sensory image to be inserted, a closely affiliated impression from the past must be recognized and reclaimed, creating a coinciding montage of past and present. Gorovoy writes that the newly acquired information is fused with recollections through Bourgeois's use of symbols. Similar to the memories they represent, he suggests that by their nature symbols are associative as opposed to pertinent or traditionally narrative in their expansion. He describes them as insignia's of constraint, sublimation, retrogression, and transference to which the psyche is liable.

Carsten Aherns<sup>19</sup> believes that it is not coincidental that the house appears as a central metaphor of an *oeuvre* that explores memories. He quotes Bachelard from his **Poetics of Space** that when the house undertakes a more complicated structure by acquiring basement and attic, corners and corridors, our memories amass further and further sites of sanctuary in which we find "the beautiful fossils of permanence only with the help of space as the unconscious inhabits space. Memories are immobile and all the firmer, the more securely they have been placed in space", (Aherns, 1994, p. 3).

Aherns writes that Bourgeois's fragile constructions are works in which the atmospheres of our existence are to be found chronicled. The compact entirety of her sculptures, which inevitably depict a place independent of the spatial field, a place of refuge for introspection or reflection, or a dreamer's fantasy, transmit an impression that appeals to our memories and alters their laming energy into the spaciousness of the present. It is possible that Bourgeois through the creation of her





own psychic space, simultaneously entreats the viewer or onlooker to do likewise.

Bourgeois herself has referred to turning the passive into an active experience. Her work circumambulates memory, establishes it, and translates it into the locus of artistry, which stabilizes it in the openness of the creation as a moment of entity in the present time. She thus complies with the act of artistic production as Gertude Stein enunciated it for writers: "...when you remember it is never clear. This is what makes secondary writing, it is remembering, it is very curious you begin to write and suddenly you remember and if you continue to remember your writing gets very confused", (Stein, 1994, p.4). Perhaps Bourgeois's spaces of imagination are most appropriately summarised if equated to the writings of Bachelard. Bachelard wrote that when all the spaces of our loneliness have been relinquished behind us, the spaces of suffering, enjoyment, longing or betrayal abide inextinguishably within. He suggests that our innermost being has no desire to eradicate them, knowing instinctively that these spaces of loneliness are intrinsically affiliated to our quintessential being.

In their discussion of *Cell (You Better Grow Up)*, (fig.3), Crone and Schaesberg highlight that the rhythmic assemblages of three, the hands, the pierced glass vessel, the three perfume bottles, and the ceramic vase with three openings, are counterbalanced by three adaptable mirrors. Two tiny hands cut out of pink marble lie folded and composed as if mediating, and are set on a tray-like structure supported by two uprights. They generate no reference beyond themselves, while the large hand harbours these lesser presences by tenderly touching and protecting them. The three perfume bottles, almost engulfed by the glass tower that appears to strive upwards like an exotic plant, are discretely placed on a wooden structure in one corner of the installation. The delusions of desire are awoken within us as the scent unfolds to lure in the unwitting victim who perceives only the pure and allows himself to be drawn into the snare of sensual perplexity. Yet Crone and Schaesberg write that at the same time it remains locked and inaccessibly fastened like the transparent female torso that Bourgeois has secured in a glass vessel composed of three bulbous stacked shapes. This clearly methodical composition, which they suggest satisfies our ingrained craving for symmetry and harmony, turns out to be just as delusive as the ostensible insights in the mirror which unveil only what is hidden. The mirrors are set on the walls and ceiling and enlarge the encased space of the cell by affording visual escape. They generate a multi-layered, contradictory view of the world. A mirror is non-prejudicial, reflecting complacent self deliberation, is open without establishing







Figure 3.  
*Cell (You Better grow Up)*, 1993.





its own impressions, which according to the authors, renders it the parodistic opposite of selective consciousness. The closed extension of the spatial body is invited by the mirror to elongate itself limitlessly into the depths only to conceal its facade again by occupying as little space as possible itself. Crone and Schaesberg thus state that in the mirror the indiscernible, unperceivable present is super-imposed upon the sight of the self recognizing oneself.

Irigaray has written of mirrors also. The mirror serves to diminish us to a mere exteriority. It acts as a possible way to constitute screens between, "the other and myself", (Irigaray, 1993, p.65). Differing from the mucous membranes or the skin that function as living, porous, fluid media to attain communion as well as discrepancy, the mirror is a frigid and contentious weapon designed to separate. The mirror connotes the constitution of a devised female other that Irigaray puts forward as an implement of seduction in her place. She seeks to be seductive and content with images of which she theoretically remains the artist. She has yet to unveil, unmask, or veil herself for the purpose of accomplishing self-contemplation, giving the example, to allow her gaze to proceed over herself in order to control her exposure to the other and recontrol her own gestures and garments, thus nestling back into her vision and contemplation of herself.

As opposed to a cold narcissism, Irigaray deems this, as an adult, as facilitating a supplementation and supporting of the different houses, the different bodies that have borne her, wrapped her, embraced her, and rocked her. The mirror and the gaze are frequently employed as weapons or tools that prohibit touching and holding back of fluidity.

A human being can only experience the 'self' through a spiraling, unnoticeably gradual approach, through continual, inevitable struggle that endures in defiance of the surety of its own unproductiveness and failure to grasp any fleeting straw of revelatory vision. Meagrelly delicate interfaces contemplate our worlds, capturing and subsequently weaving around us an intriguing play of continual revelation and divulging of potential worlds, in which an awareness develops of shimmering aspects of our own endurance. These shimmering aspects recognize and appreciate intensely personal, intimate and private affiliations.

Bourgeois herself has commented on this Cell:

The tiny figure inside the stacked shapes is cut off the world. That's me. The little hands are mine. They are self-portraits. I identify with the dependent one. The world that is described and realized is the frightening





world of a child who doesn't like being dependent and who suffers from it. So the moral of this Cell, you better grow up, (Bourgeois, 1998, p.101).

Through the *Cells* Bourgeois reconstructs her past and as indicated by Nixon, in doing so, enacts the projection of the unconscious into real space and constructs what she herself has referred to as 'fantastic' reality.

Irigaray questions how is the placenta presented to our culture? It is described as the first home that envelops us and it's aura escorts our every step like an elemental safety sphere. No representation has been devised for the placenta resulting in the constant danger of recoiling into the original matrix, of "seeking refuge in any open body, and forever nestling into the body of other women", (Irigaray, 1993, p.15). In this manner the opening of the mother, and to the mother, emerge as warnings of contamination, sickness, senility and death. There is nothing available to allow women to move firmly forward without danger. There is no Jacob's ladder facilitating easy access back to the mother. Jacob's ladder only moves upwards to heaven, toward the father and his kingdom.

A problem is visualised when the father denies the mother her power of giving birth and seeks to be the exclusive creator, then as maintained by our culture he superimposes upon an archaic universe of flesh and blood, a world of language and symbols that have no origins in the flesh and pierces through the female womb and through the locus of female identity. A stake, an axis is forced through the ground to demarcate the boundaries of the "sacred place", (Irigaray, 1993, p.16). A meeting place is defined for the male that is structured upon an immolation or sacrifice. In the end women will only be allowed access, provided that they enter such a space as nonparticipants. Bourgeois, however, not only participates, she ensures total control by her juxtapositioning of entries and exits, and reinforces this controlling influence by her petitioning of viewer participation.

By her employment of folding metal screens, windows, chain link fence and wooden door to define fantasy spaces in which her narratives are engineered, a fantastic reality is materialized by Bourgeois in which the viewer's body is obliged to strain in order to acquire a viewing position. Nixon proposes that if Bourgeois's work has consistently summoned the body fantastically, the *Cells* appeal to the viewer's body unequivocally, calling upon it to meander through narrow passageway or encounter its contorted reflection over and over in an array of repeating mirrors.





The fantasy space of the *Cell*, which is vocalized by the engagement of repetition, deflection and distortion becomes the point of juncture between the viewer's body and other bodies that similarly propel themselves into what Nixon refers to 'fantastic reality'. This delineation of the *Cell* by screens, or cracked and dusty windows, obliges viewers to encounter or partially glimpse each other through the meshed wire or gloss of the dirt. When articulation of the space of the *Cell* is achieved through hinged mirrors purposely hung to disrupt and distort the field of vision, the viewer is lodged in a play of projections, gazing back at a face reflected behind the incarcerating trellis of the screen, or staring at the low lying magnified eyes invertingly returning our gaze. In the light of these descriptions, and what would appear to be spaces almost deliberately constructed to insist on the viewer's participation it is worth noting, and perhaps questioning, Bourgeois's recent comments relating to the *Cells*. "The viewer comes much later and has no relationship to the making of the work. I don't believe in audiences", (Bourgeois, Nov. 18th, 1998).<sup>20</sup>

In *Red Room (Parents)*, (fig.4) and *Red Room (Child)*, (fig.5) Crone and Schaesberg suggest that Bourgeois again unashamedly appeals to our channelled instincts, agonizing reminiscences and instinctive feelings that impede our minds and relegate life to separate emotional components. They perceive the red as not altogether convincing, due to its lack of meaningful connection with any object. Instead it encloses, envelopes and autonomously trails its sole goal of ensnaring viewers and imprisoning them through its surface semblance.

On the other hand, Bernadac believing red to be the colour of passion, states that when combined with black, it bears tragic connotations. She sees this synthesis of red and black that Bourgeois has orchestrated as comprising of two distinct cells, assembled by dark wooden doors amassed from theatre boxes or hotels, depicting a child's bedroom and that of its parents. A red double bed is featured in the latter bedroom on which allusions to children are symbolised by the placement of a child's train and a musical instrument. Two sculptures of veiled women stand on two small cabinets on either side. Opposite on a swivel base is an oval mirror. The order in the work reflects Bourgeois recent statement relating to the *Cells*, "the artist creates order out of chaos", (Bourgeois, Nov. 18th, 1998).<sup>21</sup> The space is sparse, ordered and symmetrical thus suggesting a compatibility between the couple, the artist's parents. However, two details cloud this perception and jeopardise the peaceful domesticity insinuated by the embroidered "Je t'aime" on the pillow. The



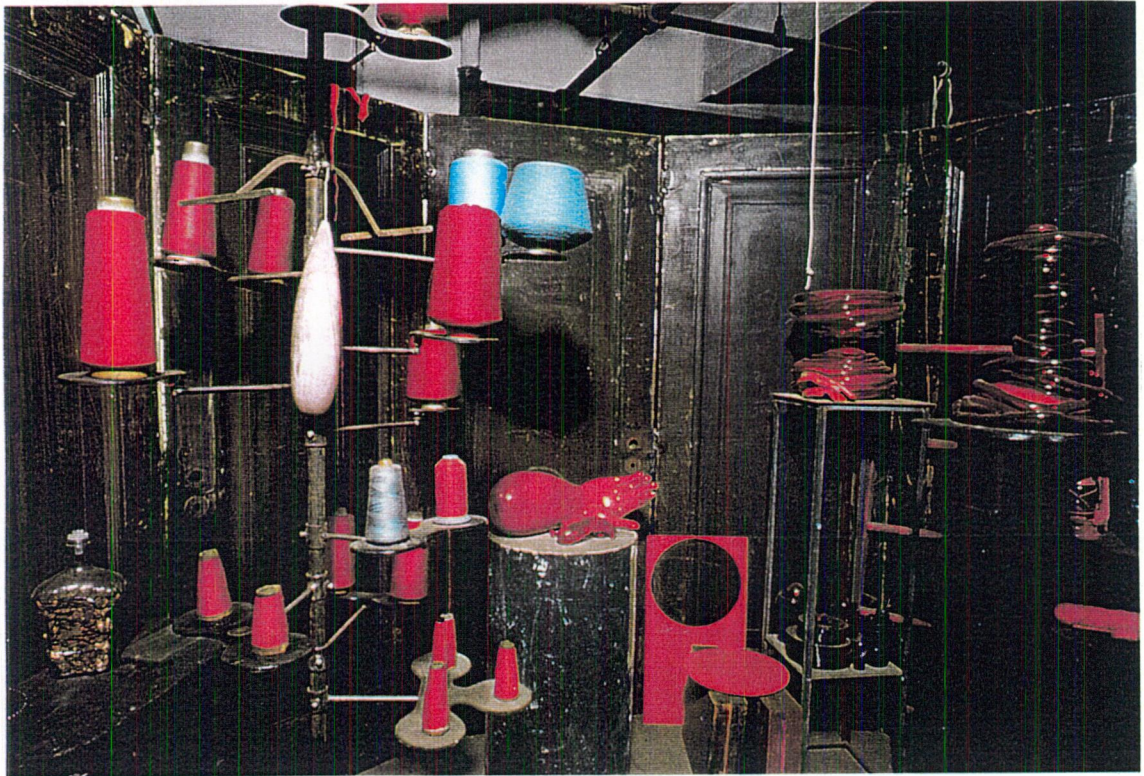




Figure 4.  
*Red Room (Parents)*, 1994.







**Figure 5.**  
*Red Room (Child), 1994.*





first is a soft, organic object hung over the bed, and the second is a rubber finger with embedded needle emerging from the bed. From these images Bernadac deduces that it is the demon of sex that may disturb the family composure.

Crone and Schaesberg describe the compactly interlocking weave of the couple's association as partners, which they suggest terminates in this resting place, as being expressed not only by the material of the sheets and the pillowcases, but quite categorically in the smoothly flowing furrows of the diminutive marble sculptures conforming to what they refer to as the "drapery of the two 'Biedermeier' chests of drawers", (Crone and Schaesberg, 1998, p.103). They suggest that these elementary objects of historical furniture placed against quasi-figurative visual works are evocative of a pleasant, organised, middle class world. The marble sculptures are illustrated as mere material shields for the figurative nudes, to be viewed only from the back. The flowing marble creases emerge as having been created as if to disguise nothing and to proclaim the unambiguous historicity of the former, thus highlighting them as archaic artifacts that once insinuated prestige but are now mere traces, and at best sentimental.

As with Bernadac, Crone and Schaesberg also see the glass 'Liar' as suspended like a species of forboding foreign matter in the space. They deem its arcane structure as being capable of facilitating every conceivable projection from desire, hope, concept, or pleasurable or disturbing fantasy. They suggest that this figuratively unclassifiable item, incubates unorthodox creative concepts and impressions. In the end, the mirror is revealed as a hollow, merely delineative, self-deluding view of life's drama, a feeble, simplistic and arbitrary replica of reality.

If the concrete warp and weft of collusion entangles this sheltered world of formal, established, tolerable sentiments, then the flimsy, fragile thread in the child's room discloses the incomplete procedure of creative formation and a flexibly arranged world of potential. They describe these fine threads, which they equate to the fragility of life, particularly the life of a child, as severing themselves from the over-sized spools to be sewn onto unorganized, immature, as yet unformed structures. However, they propose that each spool may yet play its role in the ceaseless operation of formation, thread and yarn having been long associated with one of the oldest analogies in Western civilization for the sequence of event's along life's path.

Bernadac describes a familiar spindle rack among a chaotic treasure-trove of heterogeneous items moulded of glass, cloth, rubber, some mass produced,





some found, the rack embracing spindles of essentially red thread as being apart from what she alludes to as three hopeful notes of blue which she suggests imply the three children of the Bourgeois parents or perhaps, the artist's own. The inevitable passage of time and the insecurity of our existence suggested by the thread are evoked by the excessive size of the sausage like hour-glasses.

Bernadac states that dramatic intensity is conferred on the work by the blood red colour of the two rooms. The weaving of both locations, the liaison between child and adult, adult and child, and the feeling of constraint poised over the conjugal bed as the locus of both sensual ritual and the enigma of conception, go to the very core of both the artists unconscious and a cumulative unconscious. In summing up Bourgeois's work, Bernadac suggests that it is by recreating the traumas of childhood through her work that has enabled the artist to give form to the inherent myths of the unconscious as well as the reproductive cycle of living and dying.

Recalling Irigaray's theory relating to the mother/daughter relationship and the suggestions implicated relating to the possibility of Bourgeois manifesting her own psychic space as a defensive area articulating, and protecting her, from abandonment, attack, depression and loss of self, I now propose to highlight some of the difficulties in connecting Irigaray to Bourgeois's art practices. Whitford<sup>22</sup> observes that when Irigaray alludes to art, which is rare, it is more often than not related to the portrayal of female genealogies or lineage of descent including frequent examples of the icon of Mary the Madonna, or those of mythical female goddesses. Whitford suggests that Irigaray is largely unsympathetic to much contemporary women's art, which she sees more as a representation of the absence of a female imaginary as opposed to drawing attention to it. According to Whitford, through the peculiar paradoxes of dissemination, whereby concepts procure an independent existence from their architect, Irigaray would appear unconcerned or even antagonistic to the energetic and successful expressions of women's artistic imagination.

In Whitford's interpretation of the Irigaray *oeuvre*, what she deems most crucial for an understanding of her ethical stance relating to art is her emphasis on the death drive. She outlines the death drive as having two aspects, the destructive and the creative. Alternatively aggressivity and sadism, or masochism and depression, which would appear to have undertaken an uneven distribution between the sexes, more as a function of the symbolic order as opposed to a fact of nature, which according to Whitford, could therefore be susceptible to some modification.

In Irigaray's analysis what was omitted from the symbolic order were

some idea of what the author's attitude of essentially not being apart from what she writes is to be seen in the preface to the book. The remarkable presence of the author's name in the title of the book is evidence of the fact that the author is not only a writer but also a person who is involved in the work.

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illustrations of women that would, "enable them to sublimate their own death drive and create, instead of functioning as a means of sublimation for the death drive of men, (the beautiful object of contemplation)", (Whitford, 1994, p.16). According to Irigaray's investigations, men's creativity thrives at the expense of women, while women have insufficient symbolic reserves for coping with life-threatening drives. Whitford observes that Irigaray has continually asserted that representations of the female sex are necessary for them to authenticate the maternal genealogy and the mother/daughter relationship, to facilitate the cultural representation of both sexes as opposed to the one and its 'other', the latter inevitably being the female.

Whitford's emphasis that Irigaray has now categorically veered away from representations of women's dereliction, the pain and madness they experience in a symbolic order that refuses to recognize their existence is particularly relevant to the works and words of Bourgeois. She has written that although the expression and illustration of pain may have at a certain point been deemed cathartic, she believes the price to have been somewhat high. They have been left bare and denuded by this representation of women's pain and more particularly by their fragmentation.

Irigaray deems these representations of women's dereliction as objectionable because of the perils of self-destruction, whether physical or spiritual. Irreparable fragmentation, paralysis and the loss of identity are believed to be fundamental dangers. In emphasising the beauty of female morphology, Irigaray's wish is that women be harboured from the devastation of a masculine culture which is detrimental to their identity. But she also cautions against the havoc of female partial drives in an economy that does not allow them to be readily sublimated. Whitford stresses that it is this fear of the devastation of unsublimated death drive, together with a firm ethical stance relating to female identity, that renders her conservative when it comes to her hypothesis on the female artist.

For Irigaray, creative production is quite categorically a means as opposed to the end result. The end result is a modernised and altered symbolic order symbolising the male/female couple and not merely male identity. "If art is a necessary condition for the establishment of a culture of affective and especially sexual relationships, then art is useful as a place where individual bodily matter can be transmuted and sublimated", (Irigaray, 1994, p. 16). Irigaray's wish is that art would anticipate a society that does not actually abide but has expectations that the artist will supply a misplaced transcendence, the divine woman, as opposed to highlighting their struggle with the incongruities of the present. Thus for Irigaray, the



illustration of the human form is of paramount importance. The artist has an ethical obligation to relate to woman an exemplary self, "discovering and displaying her own morphology", (Irigaray, 1994, p.16).

Whitford agrees with Irigaray's argument that if women challenge patriarchy the possibility that this could be destructive to women is a very real concern. In stressing the ideal harmony of depictions of women's identity, Irigaray's chosen vocabulary in which her ideal outlook for women's art is illustrated, is highlighted by Whitford: "repose, happiness, wholeness, beauty, unity, compensation, communion and so on", (Whitford, 1994, p.17). Whitford suggests that this Utopian outlook of repose and lack of struggle might equally be understood as the crippling of women by the patriarchal death drive, or a denial of the reality of strive as opposed to a creative confrontation and disintegrating of paralysing structures.

If Irigaray wishes for the 'divine woman' as opposed to a challenging , and a representation, of the struggles within, then Bourgeois, while possibly complying with Irigaray's concepts in relation to the construction of a defensive psychic space resulting from pain and loss, could be seen to have embarked on a more independent path. She would appear to have undertaken not only the paralysing moulds, but also those that she deems warrant the on going self analysis she appears to have subjected herself to in the hope of finding some degree of resolution. In the light of the arguments presented, particularly in relation to viewer participation, the possibility of encouraging the viewer towards similar questioning and analysis cannot be easily dismissed .

The violence in the work comes from frustration. Any kind of frustration will make an animal violent. Now, we are all frustrated to some degree, for some reason, and frustration and violence are like a pendulum, oscillating back and forth, back and forth---but violence can be replaced by restoration, (Bourgeois, 1998 , p.194).





## Conclusion

The difference between those critics of Irigaray who have argued that she is an idealist and essentialist, and those who argue for a more nuanced comprehension of her analysis, open the debate of whether or not her use of the body is taken to be strategic. Does she propose a return to the body as a 'solution' for the female, or as a strategic ploy to resist male myths and notions about the female body and psychic? Whitford's comment "what interests me is what Irigaray makes it possible for us to think", (Betterton, 1996, p.16) appears entirely in context here. The imaginative insight and intellectual analysis she offers are relevant for their account of women's subjectivity which are not constrained within the framework of male experience, and which are discouraging in their immutable ellipses and incongruities. While possibly aiding our thinking relating to the circumstances and mode of illustrating female difference in a new language, her writing does not propose a prescription for a feminine aesthetic.

What is crucial for Irigaray is that this representation of female difference entails a representation of what is subjugated within psychoanalytic parameters, namely the mother-daughter relationship.

We must also find, find anew, invent the words, the sentences, that speak the most archaic and the most contemporary relationship with the body of the mother, with our bodies, the sentences which translate the bond between her body, ours and that of our daughters. We have to discover a language which does not replace the bodily encounter-as patriarchal language attempts to do, but which can go along with it, words which do not bar the corporeal, but which speak corporeal, (Betterton quoting Irigaray, 1996, p.16).





While Irigaray's emphasis on gendered specific encounters within the classic analytic scenario, and subsequent analysis of gestures distanced from the analytic scenario have introduced the idea of Bourgeois possibly creating a psychic or fantasy space to protect her from abandonment and pain relating to the loss of a mother, she does not question power or suggest a means of achieving change in social existence and in material circumstances. She fails to offer Bourgeois a solution to her predicament: "In my art, I live in a world of my own making. I make decisions. I have power. In the real world, I don't have power", (Bourgeois, 1998, p.227).

If a power is evident in the work discussed it is most amply expressed in Bourgeois's petitioning of viewer participation by her juxtapositioning of entries and exits in the *Cell* series, and by her apparent seizure of control in the Mapplethorpe photograph. The consequences of both are redolent of an unconscious insistence that the viewer simultaneously subject themselves to personal analysis as intensely as Bourgeois does. This is where Leigh suggests her radicality lies. He observes that she reveals the responsibilities we must stand firm on and the choices we are obliged to make by first and foremost personalising them and subsequently universalising them.

"To explore the unconscious aspects of a work of art is not to deny the artistry of its maker nor to reduce him to a 'neurotic', but rather to enrich our understanding of the deepest ways in which certain works of art become extraordinarily important to us", (Spitz quoted by Collins, 1998, p.181). It is plausible that some connections exist between the artist's unconscious motives and audience reception. If an artist has expressed universal desires and conflicts, which contrary to Leigh's allusion, Bourgeois does not appear to do, then the artist's unconscious motivations and the viewer's unconscious response may mirror each other. In Bourgeois case, her unconscious motives are moulded by her unique personal experiences, as much in the viewer's unconscious will have been instructed by a singular life and personality. So an assumption cannot be deduced that an understanding of the artist's unconscious intentions will automatically reveal the viewer's unconscious reactions. In essence, the two may be widely divergent.

The differences between verbal and visual representation presents yet another problem in transposing Irigaray's concepts either accurately or precisely onto a visual art practice platform. Irigaray draws the distinction between *parler femme* (speaking woman) and the "male scopic economy", (Betterton, 1996, p.94) in a manner which appears to explicitly prohibit the feasibility of a female visual



language. "Within this logic, the predominance of the visual, and of discrimination and individualisation of form is particularly foreign to female eroticism", (Irigaray, 1985, pp.25-26).

Drawing from the psychoanalytic mode in which it is a visible 'sign' of difference, Irigaray creates an appraisal of the dominant visual economy in which the female is only able to operate as a mirror to echo masculinity, and is therefore undepicted in her own right. Within these parameters, a transposing of Irigaray's 'feminine speech' directly onto a visual art practice, particularly in the case of Bourgeois, is difficult.

Whitford suggests that Irigaray's fragmenting analysis may be a necessary stage, yet she believes that it is unable to extend much to a woman whose existence in a male symbolic order is already fragmented. "My interpretation is that, because women have not been allowed to keep their gestures, their imaginary, their symbols, these things become encysted in the verbal imaginary of men", (Irigaray quoted by Whitford, 1994, p.16).

While psychoanalytic concepts freely intersect debates and dialogues on cultural politics, a stubborn resistance prevails to the acknowledgement or appreciation of unconscious fantasy as a developing axiom of our social, emotional and political existence. In the context of this unconscious fantasy, Irigaray's and Bourgeois's paths separate. Bourgeois's *Fillette* and the *Cells* could be seen as structuring the inter connections between the social, emotional and the political through the materialisation of fantasy, if we interpret fantasy as, "merely the way we organise, perceive, and give form to our feelings, which are always ambivalent and conflicted by the coexistence of love and hate", (Nixon quoting Klein, 1994, p.24).

Where Irigaray starts and finishes with theory, possibly the most apt quote to summarise Bourgeois's motivations is one already referred to in this study, "Sometimes a work is a journey with no destination in sight. Sometimes you arrive quickly. Sometimes when I finish a work, its meaning becomes apparent after the fact, (Bourgeois, Nov. 18th, 1998). <sup>23</sup> Does imagination transcend reality so far that it does not need realistic support any more?





## Endnotes

1. Nixon's essay interpreted by Katy Deepwell in "Feminist Readings of Louise Bourgeois or why Louise Bourgeois is a feminist Icon", From the Museum of Modern Art. Vol. One, 1996, p44.
2. Leigh, 1994, p.56.
3. Gorovoy, 1994, p12.
4. Nixon, 1991, p.50.
5. Irigaray, 1993, p.114.
6. Nixon, *ibid*, p.51.
7. All quotes by Louise Bourgeois on Nov.18th, 1998 are taken from a written interview with the artist conducted with the assistance of The Robert Miller Gallery, New York, pp.46-47.
8. Betterton, 1996, p.93.
9. Pollock, , 1996, p.24.
10. Robinson, 1996, p.24.
11. Pollock, *ibid*. p.255.
12. Bourgeois, *ibid*, p.47.
13. Bourgeois, *ibid*, p.47.
14. Bourgeois, *ibid*, p.47.
15. Bourgeois, *ibid*, p.47.

# Footnotes

1. Nixon's case, interpreted by Kate O'Connell in "Feminist Analysis of Nixon's Case," in *Women's Studies* (Vol. 1, No. 1, 1976), p. 44.
2. *Legal Times*, p. 20.
3. *Journal*, 1976, p. 12.
4. *Journal*, 1976, p. 20.
5. *Journal*, 1976, p. 14.
6. *Nixon*, 1976, p. 20.
7. All dates by Nixon-Bourgeois on Nov. 18th, 1978 are taken from a written report by the artist conducted with the assistance of the artist's attorney, New York, pp. 40-47.
8. *Bourgeois*, 1976, p. 20.
9. *Journal*, 1976, p. 14.
10. *Robinson*, 1976, p. 24.
11. *Pollock*, 1976, p. 25.
12. *Bourgeois*, 1976, p. 47.
13. *Bourgeois*, 1976, p. 45.
14. *Bourgeois*, 1976, p. 45.
15. *Bourgeois*, 1976, p. 45.



16. Robinson, 1996, p.23.
17. Whitford, 1992, p.267.
18. Neri, 1998, p.81.
19. Aherns, 1994, p. 3.
20. Bourgeois, ibid, p.47.
21. Bourgeois, ibid, p.47.
22. Whitford, 1994, p.15.
23. Bourgeois, ibid, p.47.

18. Robinson, 1904 p. 22

19. Robinson, 1904 p. 22

20. Robinson, 1904 p. 22

21. Robinson, 1904 p. 22

22. Robinson, 1904 p. 22

23. Robinson, 1904 p. 22

24. Robinson, 1904 p. 22

25. Robinson, 1904 p. 22

## Appendix



Appendix

## QUESTIONS FROM KATE BYRNE TO LOUISE BOURGEOIS.

1. You have commented that over interpretation is misinterpretation. Can you give an example of a work that has been over interpreted?
2. How important is the finished piece in relation to the initial concept?
3. How do you view sexuality in your work?
4. What are the most potent issues of the past that you are presently returning to in your work?
5. Through your combination of materials in the *Cells*, found objects with made sculptural elements, are you conscious of creating "order" ?
6. You have been quoted as saying that "each *Cell* deals with the pleasure of the voyeur, the thrill of looking and being looked at". How essential is the viewer's presence to the work's completion?
7. Spirally and circling movement appear to be a reoccurring theme in your work. In your own terms, what do these motifs symbolise?
8. You appear to have engaged in a process of repetition for many years. Does repetition continue to benefit the work today?

## QUESTIONS FROM KATE BARNETT FOR USE BY READER

You have commented that over the past few years, your perception of the world has changed. Can you give an example of a work that has been a catalyst for this change?

How important is the finished piece in relation to the work?

Why?

How do you view sculpture in your work?

What are the most potent issues of the past that you are presently

confronting in your work?

Through your combination of materials in the 1970s, found objects

with more sculptural elements, are you conscious of creating

sculpture?

You have been quoted as saying that "each of my works is a

place and on the surface the thrill of looking and being looked at."

How essential is the viewer's presence to the work's completion?

Typically and exciting movement appear to be a recurring theme in

your work. In your own terms, what do these motifs represent?

You appear to have engaged in a process of repetition for many

years. Does repetition continue to benefit the work today?

## Louise Bourgeois Studio

720 Greenwich Street, no. 9C, New York 10014

Jerry Gorovoy: 212 691 5749 (tel), 212 645 9010 (fax)

Wendy Williams: 212 924 4274 (tel), 691 2342 (fax), [wwilliams7@aol.com](mailto:wwilliams7@aol.com)

Date: November 18, 1998

To: Kate Byrne  
c/o Anna O'Sullivan  
Robert Miller Gallery

From: Louise Bourgeois

1.  
A piece can have many interpretations.

2.  
Sometimes a work is a journey with no destination in sight. Sometimes you arrive quickly. Sometimes when I finish a work, its meaning becomes apparent after the fact.

3.  
That's a matter of interpretation.

4.  
My work comes from dealing with the present moment, not the past. There is an obvious connection between the problems of the here and today and the past. I am interested in tracing them.

5.  
The artist creates order out of chaos. The finished form is everything.

6.  
The viewer comes much later and has no relationship to the making of a work. I don't believe in audiences.

7.  
The spiral has a possibility of going in two connections – spiraling in and contracting, and spiraling out and opening up. Both directions interest me.

8.  
You have to repeat and repeat to make your point.





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