

***Dislodge*, Angus Taylor and Rina Stutzer**

In a way art is always on a threshold. Shifting from what was to what can be; from stasis to transfer, interchange and passage. The threshold is the liminal, the juncture where the known and the unknown meet in unexplored territories and novel spaces.

The artworks of Angus Taylor and Rina Stutzer on this exhibition entitled *Dislodge* depict such journeying and transferral into the unfamiliar as a purposeful process of abandonment of the safety of acquaintance and the stagnant and an embrace with discomfort and uneasiness in the search for revitalization and renewal. Yet it is not only the very act of artistic creation that constantly lingers on the threshold; our times of globalisation is characterised by constant change and nomadic movement brought on by the ever-induced pace of new technological development and over-crowding in urban spaces. Contemporary globalised identity can be described as essentially liminal and continually hybridising. Flemish theorist Rik Pinxten (2006:81) maintains that cultures are forever voluntarily hybridising and continually adapting a part of their ownness to new circumstances and new offerings, which do come with losses. Of seminal importance to him (Pinxten 2006:82) is that the claiming of an identity should go hand-in-hand with the understanding that identity is synonymous with habitual change.

In the *Altermodern manifesto*, Nicolas Bourriaud (2009) describes how such new global identities call for new types of representation and how our daily lives have become dependent on transnational entities and journeys in a chaotic and teeming universe: as such “artists translate and transcode information from one format to another, and wander in geography as well as in history.” Zigmunt Bauman (2007:82) argues that “the real powers that shape the conditions under which we all act these days flow in *global* space, while our institutions of political action remain by and large tied to the ground; they are, as before, *local*.” The harsh realities of dystopian everyday life in South Africa are evident in conditions of people-on-the-move, homelessness, violence and xenophobia.¹ Such instability and restlessness especially in the urban environment have become synonymous with contemporary states of being that defy neatly packaged utopias that will ensure ultimate happiness and everlasting bliss. The liminal condition – both in being and the creative process

¹ During the 1960s, the afore-mentioned views have been prepared by anthropologist Victor Turner who developed the notion of liminality in structuralist manner through the study of rituals and rites of passage such as initiations – often violent in character - which illustrate the transitionality of the liminal state.

– is hence dystopian, entailing critical reflection on what is left behind as well as on the continually unfolding new universes, heterotopias or playing fields where established models are being substituted by fragments of data, information and experiences.

In order to obtain their own truth and comprehension of the world, the artists Taylor and Stutzer explore the fickle nature of reality, their own undisclosed rituals, nameless in-betweens and liminal spaces that Turner (1967) refers to. Various techniques and materials are investigated, tested and recodified in the search for comprehension and renewal. In the raw materiality of primeval soil and earth, Taylor finds personal metaphors of belonging, a cognitive home and a sense of been grounded in a world of alienation and constant defamiliarisation. Ironically, his methodology defies such belonging by embracing experimentation and renewal, as in the ramming of earth for plinths; the disembodiment of the human figure through the use of stacking and packing; and the dematerialisation of physical form through processes such as burning.

In a work such as *Die omdop van doodsekerheid* (2011), liminality is instituted in the displacement of earth from its natural habitat to the artificial gallery space, creating a void in the natural space and filling a void in the parameters of the non-natural space. The dislocation of earth generates a burial space without a corpse, deconstructive process of transition and resignification through the dis- and relocative actions. Using the metaphor of a coffin for *parergon*, Derrida (1987:195) maintains that there are certain imperturbable aspects which makes an artwork/text stand up to all manipulations of interpretation, “all assaults, ... all perspectives and all anamorphoses” (Derrida 1987:195), using the metaphor of an empty wooden coffin in upright position). In the signification process, this “paradigmatic coffin” of information is constantly vulnerable to being “multiplied, described, serialized, analyzed, detailed, displaced, turned about in all its states (or almost) and from all its angles (or almost)” (Derrida 1987:195). Taylor’s ‘taking’ of the earth creates a dystopian void and temporary losses that shatter wholeness. To Baudrillard (1996:61) the “Nothing, the Void, primal scene of the material illusion, and continuation of the Nothing as perpetuation of that state” enable the description of the real where ‘nothingness’ perpetually appear and disappear.

In the final stage of the ritualistic process of creation, Taylor’s sculptures occupy new spaces, self-assuredly creating affirmative stances of being and identity and high-point positions

suggesting surveillance and romanticism through the raised horizon and viewpoint. Immediately the idealistic outlook is counterposed by works articulating low vantage points. Such interaction of spatialities and vantage points raise questions of reciprocity and suggest continual shifts in positioning. Such conceptual and technical exploration of new territories is an exciting, adventurous journey; it is a course of action where there are moments of interchange and mostly a liminal confusion of boundaries of which Donna Haraway (Haraway 1991:29) pointed out its pleasurable dimensions. In her *Cyborg Manifesto* she argues that there is gratification to be found in the notion of connectivity, similar to Jean Baudrillard (1996:125) who in *The Perfect Crime* finds the pleasure principle in the simulation and fantasy possibilities of the narcissism located in the “inner mirror” or the self as “happy self-reference”.² Artistic practice might itself be understood as ‘at the edge’ and as being at an uncertain point between the real and ‘something else’, or at a point between the self and itself, not merely in the sense that the “things that it creates may themselves function as liminal points that move us between different forms of appearance, but also in the sense that it explores the very character of liminality including its own liminal status (Malpas 2007:2).”

Liminality in Stutzer’s paintings is evoked through transmutative materials such as rust and patina, and imagery such as the crow, seasonal landscapes and a caravan. The raven as found in the Edgar Allan Poe’s 1845 poem speaks of such liminality:

And the raven, never flitting, still is sitting, still is sitting
On the pallid bust of Pallas just above my chamber door;
And his eyes have all the seeming of a demon's that is dreaming,
And the lamp-light o'er him streaming throws his shadow on the floor ...

Similarly, Stutzer’s crow becomes a metaphor of the wish for transcendence and a Romantic symbol of movement. Yet her landscapes or mindscapes entail a kind of painting where the prospects of the genre and pictorial composition have been moved aside in favour of a Duchampian understanding of the representative value of materials and the tropes of process. Not only do her patinaed landscapes reflect time in the sense of changing seasons, they are *forever* changing due to the chemical impact of the patina on the bronze surfaces. Stutzer’s nomadic works constantly transform, maybe leaving only a simulacrum or a copy of the

² In this regard, Baudrillard (1996:126) refers to the rock singer, Madonna, who by virtue of artefacts and technology “lacks nothing”, constantly producing and reproducing herself in simulation of the perfect contemporary goddess.

original as a memory of the original which has disappeared. Her process reminds of Baudrillard (1996:38) who maintains:

But there is nothing of the death instinct here. It is the ruse of God. Eluding the question of his existence by vanishing beneath his images. It is the ruse of the original, vanishing beneath its many copies. By the very fact of existing, we are from the beginning in an impossible anthropological situation. We can nowhere test our existence or its authenticity. Existence, being and the real are, strictly speaking, impossible.

The instability of Stutzer's medium creates a radical position of indeterminacy, since not only is the detailed outcome of the final artwork unpredictable, but her very medium refers to the momentary and the transitory, being permanently in a state of liminality and 'on the way'. There is an element of blindness at stake here, some degree of the deconstruction of the greatness of the vision of the vanguard artist as established during the Romantic period. According to Derrida's idea of blindness we cannot 'see' beyond the personal point of view as frame and therefore cannot make any authoritative statements. All we have are our own memories and visions (Kelly 1991:102-104). The groping gesture of the blind person is metaphoric of the both the artist and the interpreter who feel around in the dark with faint ideas and partial notions of vision, accompanied by memories (Kelly 1991:103), thus fragments. As such the artist deconstructs notions of the Romantic genius and eternal truths through the creation of decaying dying artworks, time bombs that in sentimental way comment on the destruction of the natural environment through the harmful brunt of polluting technologies. Her works become a post-Romantic lament about the losses and voids created by such undesirable contemporary conditions.

The interrelation of idea, materials and aesthetics becomes in Haraway's (1991:28-29) words a condensation of *both* imagination *and* material realities. In connecting to the self through the self in the exploration of self-image and its relation to the world and others, The artworks of Taylor and Stutzer comment on self-referentiality as the most critical process and resource of the artist. The self becomes a nomadic being that constantly leaves things behind and venture into new domains; some memories linger on, others are distilled and fade. The artists push ahead, break taboos and transgress boundaries as a pleasurable in his/her nomadic condition:

The time and space of liminality is the time and space of the indeterminate and the opaque, the time and the space of possibility

and of the question. The liminal might thus be viewed as constituting both the *topic* and the *topos* of art – it is that which is the focus of artistic practice and also the place in which such practice is located. (Malpas 2007:2)

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