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**New Metaphors for the Body as Self in the
Art of Liz Magor and Jana Sterbak**

by

Jane McGregor, B.A. (Honours)

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of
Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
Institute of Canadian Studies

Carleton University

OTTAWA, Ontario

1 December 1990

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the Art of Liz Magor and Jana Sterbak"

submitted by Jane McGregor, Hons. B.A.
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts

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Abstract

In postmodern art and discourses references to the body have taken on a perplexing urgency. For Canadian installation artists Liz Magor and Jana Sterbak the body ultimately offers new metaphors for the redefinition of self. While Magor's primary focus is on self in the sense of the construction of personal identity, Sterbak concentrates on self as an investigation of autonomy or independence. Nonetheless, through a careful reading of selected works, it becomes clear that both artists address the postmodern dilemma of the fragmented, constructed, mutable and decentered self. At the heart of their respective motivations, strategies and obsessions with the body lies an intensely private search for self-knowledge, essence and wholeness. Each artist transforms her private struggle into a public or collective reconceptualization of the self that becomes, on the one hand, an investigation of the artist's function and metaphysics; and on the other, a strategy for subverting established myths and sociopolitical norms. Through their use of the body Magor and Sterbak propose new metaphors for the concept of self/identity and in doing so illuminate the condition of postmodern culture.

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Preface

Many different sources contributed to the formulation of the thesis, but most important was the awareness of an extraordinary and broadranging focus on the body which culminated in the late 1980s. What prompted such a focus? What did it signify?

In the course of research, it became clear that an enormous, historically based body of literature, coming from many disciplines and discourses, formed both a complex, inter-active network and a subtly variable basis for current somatic interest. After dealing with such material over an extended period of time, I began to feel as though I epitomized the effects of postmodern decentering, and thus weakened, was plagued by doubts along the way to completion. Among them, simply, how can one support such a thesis? And then there was the vocabulary. "Metaphor" can imply hierarchy by making its referent primary, and can, therefore, be viewed as a patriarchal tool. No such hierarchical relationship between body and self is intended to be conveyed in this paper. Rather, as used here, the body as a "metaphor" is testimony to the statement (made by feminist Joyce Nelson), that like it or not, "we live and die by metaphors", and to A.N. Whitehead's belief that the body is the "central ground underlying all symbolic reference".

Even the choice of "self", with its problematic modernist associations, was not made lightly. The decision was based on its pervasiveness in North American contemporary catalogues and discourse, and on the theoretical variability of the logical alternative, the "subject". Then the use of "repression" was questioned (although still used) given Michel Foucault's carefully considered preference for "production" (i.e. sexuality is produced not repressed by changing power configurations); as was the concept of metaphysics which can be said to reinforce binary oppositions.

Although I now feel strongly that the body's metaphoric application to the self is a claim that can be substantiated, I am still somewhat uncomfortable with the concept of "the struggle for wholeness", which threads the thesis together. How can one speak of wholeness in the face the overwhelming forces of fragmentation and decentering? Perhaps, it is precisely such forces which produce the need to struggle; for the desire seems to be undeniably present in the work itself. Although the attainment of wholeness may, in reality, remain imaginary, it is, however, a reality in the imagination or psyche; and the actual struggle for it is, it seems to me, necessary for survival - as a kind of secular-spiritual quest.

In spite of the rather weighty problematics, throughout the project my admiration for the work of two very distinctive artists, Liz Magor and Jana Sterbak, remained constant. Their art is rich and strong and important. It is magical and practical, and in this it inspires hope.

Biographical Notes

Born in Winnipeg, Manitoba in 1948, Liz Magor is presently living in Toronto, Ontario. After attending the University of British Columbia from 1966-68, Magor spent two years at the Parsons School of Design in New York. From 1970-71 she studied at the Vancouver School of Art.

Jana Sterbak was born in Prague, Czechoslovakia in 1955, and moved to Canada with her family in 1968. She now lives in Montreal. From 1973-74 she attended the Vancouver School of Art and from 1974-75, the University of British Columbia. In 1977 she received a B.F.A. from Concordia University, Montreal, and from 1980-82 studied at the University of Toronto.

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Introduction

Our bodies why doe we forbear?
We owe them thanks, because they thus,
Did us, to us, at first convey.¹

In recent art the body has become a central metaphor which ultimately speaks to the question of self or identity. As such it signifies not only a coming to terms with the self as anti-humanist, decentered, mutable, and fragmented; but also a concerted effort to reconstruct and redefine the self in an attempt to establish a meaningful and ethical base for existence. Drawing on the legacy of the modernist "search for self"² and its attendant crisis, "the loss of center"³, recent postmodernist art emphasizes the unstable and fragile condition of the self.⁴

Working within such a postmodern aesthetic both Liz Magor and Jana Sterbak address this condition through the body. This thesis will examine the ways in which each artist makes the body the primary vehicle for new metaphors expressing contemporary conceptions of the the self, and assess to what degree their independent responses reveal

¹ John Donne cited in André Brink States of Emergency (London: Faber, 1988), 17.

² Karyn Allen discusses psychologist Hans Neumayer's interpretation in The Winnipeg Perspective: Ritual (Winnipeg: The Winnipeg Art Gallery, 1981), 5-6.

³ Hans Sedlmayr, Art In Crisis: The Lost Center (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958).

⁴ Donald Kuspit, The New Subjectivism: Art in the the 1980's, Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1988), xvii.

affinities with the condition of contemporary postmodern culture. Finally, the thesis will consider how Magor and Sterbak reinvent and reconstruct the concept of the self through their use of bodily imagery to struggle with issues such as representation, replication, authenticity and autonomy.

In assessing each artist's basic understanding of the concept of self⁵ we see that in Magor's work the definition of self as "identity" is the primary and stated focus⁶, while in Sterbak's work self is defined as "individuality" in the sense of independence. Yet, at the root of their respective motivations, strategies and obsessions with the body lies an intensely private search for self-knowledge, essence and wholeness; each artist transforms her own search into a public or collective reconceptualization of the self.

The work of both artists must also be considered in the larger historical context of the meaning and use of the body in contemporary theory and art. As the basis of our knowledge of the world, "the first and most natural instrument of man"⁷, the body has

⁵ Sandy Nairne and Bruce Ferguson in The Impossible Self (Winnipeg: The Winnipeg Art Gallery, 1988, 11-12) are helpful in contextualizing the modernist concept of self which emerged at the end of the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century, and its various transitions within 'possibility' through to 'impossibility'.

⁶ It should be noted that "The question of identity, particularly, sexual identity, arises from the post-structuralist critique of humanism and Western metaphysics in which Michel Foucault has been instrumental. In current theory, identity, which includes individuality and subjecthood, parallels certain modes of restrictive logic." Shirley Madill, Identity/Identities (Winnipeg: Winnipeg Art Gallery, 1988), 6.

⁷ Anthropologist Marcel Mauss cited in Jonathan Benthall, "A Prospectus as Published in Studio International July 1972" in The Body as a Medium of Expression Jonathan Benthall and Ted Polhemus eds.(New York: Dutton, 1976), 5.

become an increasingly important index of a crisis not only with the self but within Western culture. References to the body, from the most esoteric to the most populist, permeate contemporary theory and criticism.⁸ Art critic Peter Fuller places the continuity of the "body" phenomenon within the broad art historical tradition:

From the Renaissance until the late nineteenth century the language of paintings was based primarily on the artist's grasp of perceived, or objective anatomy: the bodies of others....In the late nineteenth century the subject of the creative process, the artist, became increasingly the subject of the picture too. American abstract expressionism - especially Pollock - can be seen as an attempt to base a whole system of material expression entirely on the realization of the artist's 'life rhythms' in matter...the point...is that we have a continuity of expressive practice which is rooted in the human body, whether that is conceived predominately 'objectively' or 'subjectively'.⁹

Current interest in the body can therefore be viewed as an extension of this century's exploration of new and varied manifestations of subjective expression. The Abstract-Expressionists' use of the body's gestures as an active means of self-exploration and discovery, was only one of the many contemporary explorations of the body which remain part of the larger context for Magor and Sterbak. Throughout the following decades several inter-related movements such as Minimalism, Conceptualism, arte povera, Earth Works, Process Art, Body Art, Performance Art, the new German

⁸ Recent exhibitions such as the 1988 Utopia Post Utopia: Configurations of Nature and Culture in Recent Sculpture and Photography at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston and books such as Michel Feher's three volume Fragments for a History of the Human Body (New York: Zone, 1989) constitute just two of many examples of the broadranging discourses which center on the body.

⁹ Peter Fuller, Beyond the Crisis in Art (London: Writers and Readers, 1980), 35.

Expressionism and the Italian Trans-avantgarde have turned to openly personal, largely self-directed investigations of the body in some measure to pursue ideas concerning the physical, phenomenological and conceptual activation of the artspace. Each of these contemporary movements varied the means of exploring the body's potential as a metaphoric vehicle.¹⁰ Coming of age in the late 1970s, both Liz Magor and Jana Sterbak were most directly affected by Minimalism. Nonetheless, they were also inspired to varying degrees by the other movements (cited above), especially with respect to investigations of the body.

Contemporary theory and the seemingly sudden dominance of the body in theoretical discourses presents another means by which to contextualize the work of Magor and Sterbak. "A hybrid and highly charged polemic surrounding the body and representation has emerged in the late 1980s," notes Toronto critic Dot Tuer. "The phenomenon of the body has been dissected with arguments drawn from such diverse sources as feminism's

¹⁰ One clear example of an art form that affects both Magor and Sterbak is Body Art which and was developed in the early sixties' work of Piero Manzoni and Yves Klein. Lucy Lippard points out that as well as Klein who used nude women as "living brushes," "the Gutai Group in Japan also made similar events in the 1950s and that American feminist artist Carolyn Schncemann's Eye-Body (Nude in Environment) dates from 1963." Lucy Lippard, From the Center: Feminist Essays on Women's Art (New York: Dutton, 1976), 121. Art historian Lea Vergine contends that at the root of Body Art is "the need for primary love" which is transformed into a narcissistic expression and exploration of self. Lea Vergine, Il Corpo Como Linguaggio (Milan: Prearo, 1974), 9. This need for primary love can be reinterpreted in contemporary body/self terms into a desire for wholeness, to which artists like Magor and Sterbak have brought moral and social considerations. German artist Joseph Beuys, who in the seventies and early eighties based much of his work on an exploration of self through the body while advocating political and social responsibility, is a pivotal figure (bridging art movements) with respect to this development.

critique of patriarchy, the scientific aspirations of psychoanalysis and the philosophical project of deconstruction, finally to be reread as a mediated object that splinters under scrutiny into a thousand competing discourses."¹¹ The watershed for this contemporary fascination with the body might well be Michel Foucault's three volume History of Sexuality¹². In claiming the body as the basis for political critique, "the 'raw material' for social and cultural processes"¹³, Foucault has affected all manner of contemporary thought. His work has been used by various Canadian critics and theorists, among others, to justify opposing positions in the polemic of the body. For example, Arthur and Marilouise Kroker's adoption of the concept of Foucault's body as 'raw material' leads him to claim that the body no longer exists: "Indeed, why the concern over the body today if not to emphasize the fact that the (natural) body in the postmodern condition has already disappeared, and what we experience as the body is only a fantastic simulacra of body rhetorics."¹⁴ This concept of the body as pure construction,

¹¹ Dot Tuer, "The Embattled Body: AIDS and the Current Crisis of Representation" in Canadian Art (Summer, 1989): 23.

¹² Michel Foucault, History of Sexuality. 3 vols. Translated by R. Hurley. Volume 1 An Introduction. New York: Pantheon, 1978 (First published in Paris: Gallimard, 1976). Volume 2 The Use of Pleasure New York: Pantheon, 1985 (Paris: Gallimard, 1984). Volume 3 The Care of Self New York: Pantheon, 1987 (Paris: Gallimard, 1984).

¹³ Pasi Falk, "Corporeality and its Fate in History" Acta Sociologica 28, no.2 (1985): 125.

¹⁴ Arthur Kroker and Marilouise Kroker, "Theses on the Disappearing body in the Hyper-Modern Condition" in The Body Invaders: Panic Sex in America (Montreal: New World Perspectives, 1987), 21-22.

manifest in a play of corporal absence and presence, is one which both Magor and Sterbak will struggle with in their art. At the other end of the spectrum are critic Dot Tuer, curator Catherine Crowston and artist Andy Fabo¹⁵ among others, who, while recognizing the body as a constructed reality, still view it as based in nature and undergoing redefinition. They acknowledge a paradoxical position, "Although the body may have disappeared, a body still exists."¹⁶ As we shall see, the paradoxes and polemics of the debate about the body will be evidenced in the work of both Magor and Sterbak. Notwithstanding that the body as physical entity is often absent in their art, it is, nonetheless, made visible through materials implying bodily presence, and by each artist's unique analysis of the contemporary "technologies of power" which affect body and self.¹⁷ Thus, we shall see that Magor and Sterbak's work shares with such

¹⁵ Dot Tuer in the aforementioned "The Embattled Body", and Fabo in the exhibition he curated at Mercer Union, Toronto in 1988, Belief Structure.

¹⁶ Catherine Crowston in Diagnosis (Art Gallery of York University, Toronto 1990) n.p.

Indeed, while Foucault himself refers to the body as "a volume in disintegration" (cited in Greg Ostrander, "Foucault's Disappearing Body" in Arthur Kroker and Marilouise Kroker, eds., The Body Invaders: Panic Sex in America Montreal: New World Perspectives, 1987, 169) and it is, in his terms, an exploited object subjected to power relations, he still insists that: "far from the body having to be effaced, what is needed is to make it visible through an analysis in which the biological and the historical are not consecutive to one another...but are bound together in an increasingly complex fashion in accordance with the development of the modern technologies of power that take life as their objective." Michel Foucault History of Sexuality - Volume I: An Introduction] (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), 152.

¹⁷ "The situation therefore is one of permanent battle, with the body as the shifting field where new mechanisms of power constantly meet new techniques of resistance and escape. So the body is not a site of resistance to a power which exists outside it; within

contemporary critics as Tuer and Crowston an acknowledgement of co-existent tensions: one's refusal to despair despite the perceived fragmentation/dissolution of body/self, and one's recognition that deconstruction of body/self is necessary for the reconceptualization of wholeness. Implied in such a paradigm is a belief in the positive coherent interconnectedness of physicality, intellect and emotion; a union which will withstand the complexities and pressures of postmodern culture and, more importantly, actively subvert mechanisms of power to create new foundations for a non-patriarchal and non-hierarchical society. This thesis will examine to what extent Magor and Sterbak incorporate aspects of this body/self discourse in their production of "new metaphors... capable of creating new understandings and...new realities."¹⁸

The production of these "new metaphors" must, however, be further contextualized by focussing on theoreticians, most notably psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, who have concentrated on the concept of the self.¹⁹ Initially his theories impacted most strongly

the body there is constant tension between mechanisms of power and techniques of resistance." Michel Feher, "Of Bodies and Technology" pp. 159-165 in Hal Foster, ed. Discussions in Contemporary Culture (Seattle: Bay Press, 1983), 161.

¹⁸ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, Metaphors We Live By (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1980), 235.

¹⁹ In the 1988 exhibition catalogue The Impossible Self, curators Sandy Nairne and Bruce Ferguson summarize the treatment of postmodern manifestations of self in terms that directly echo those of the body discourses:

the concept of self is under greater pressure and may even have disappeared altogether. The idea of self, and a belief in subjectivity, may have been replaced by the view that a sense of self is derived from a series of imaginary identifications with an 'other' or 'others' (Jacques Lacan) and even by the possibility of a 'body without organs' (Gilles Deleuze and Félix Gu[ar]tteri [sic]). The self has become a

on French feminist discourse, then, the international Feminist movement, and eventually they took hold in other discourses such as art theory. Lacan's work offered "a model that conceives of a human subject in process, in perpetual formation...one that views the unconscious and sexuality as constructed through language, through modes of representation that characterize our relationships with others."²⁰ For Lacan, "the stable ego is illusory"²¹ and, although the need for wholeness is a fact of human existence, its realization is virtually impossible. In Lacanian terms, desire or the "struggle for wholeness" becomes "the revelation of an absence".²² Lacan's argument will have direct application to the struggle for wholeness and the absent body as manifest in the work of Sterbak and Magor.

Also relevant to their art are the writings of psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva, much

temporary site for competing ideologies, a fluid site for consumerist fantasy, a site of conflict for sexual identities, a switchpoint in the network of surface images and smiological fields. The self has become shifting and unstable, to be reinvented and reconstructed at will...an impossible self.

²⁰ Kate Linker, "Representation and Sexuality" in Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation edited by Brian Wallis pp. 391-415 (New York:New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984), 394.

It should be emphasized that Lacan has also had a profound impact on theories relating to the body, and, conversely, Foucault has theorized on the subject/self (body and self being so closely related), but for the sake of simplification I have chosen to focus on what I understand to be the most significant aspect of each writer's thought.

²¹ Madan Sarup, An Introductory Guide to Post-Structuralism and Postmodernism (Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 1989), 14.

²² Ibid, 19-20.

influenced by Lacan. Kristeva has stated, "A 'fixed identity': it's perhaps a fiction, an illusion - who among us has a 'fixed identity'? It is a phantasm; we do nevertheless arrive at a certain type of stability."²³ She further distinguishes between modern art where the accent is on "psychic unlinking, on the pulverizing of the image" and postmodernism, which she characterizes as "a moment of the psychic make-up when, under the influence of the erotic drive or of death anxiety, the subject attempts to unify the ego."²⁴ Thus, for Kristeva the urge to unify fragments of individual identity in constant flux is characteristic of the postmodern age. As this thesis will establish, it is within the broad framework of these discourses that the art of Magor and Sterbak can best be understood. Their creation of new bodily metaphors for self/identity will centre on the paradoxical situation in which the individual remains transfixed between the acknowledged reality of fragmentation and the psychic desire to be whole and stable.

By introducing such theoretical considerations I am not suggesting that Magor or Sterbak consciously adhere to a single paradigm based on the work of Foucault, Kristeva or Lacan; nor am I contending that these artists have been influenced directly by a specific line of thought. Nonetheless, it is undeniable that these thinkers have had a it is the foci and issues raised regarding the body/self that are critical to the argument of my thesis. These issues revolving around the decentered self, the social construction of

²³ Julia Kristeva, "A Question of Subjectivity" Women's Review no.12 (October, 1986): 20.

²⁴ Kristeva cited in Catherine Franchlin, "Interview with Julia Kristeva" Flash Art no. 126 (February - March 1985): 44.

the body/self, and the desire for wholeness are central issues in the work of Magor and Sterbak.

On the other hand, Magor and Sterbak invest their images of the body with layers of "feeling and meaning"²⁵ that go well beyond issues raised in theoretical discourse. As feminist Monique Wittig contends, "There is nothing abstract about the power that sciences and theories have to act materially and actually upon our bodies and our minds, even if the discourse that produced it is abstract."²⁶ Hence, it is critical to consider the material or concrete world in order to better understand the apparent urgency with which artists, such as Magor and Sterbak, have turned to the body.

They are not alone in their focus on body/self dichotomy. Canadian filmmaker Bruce Elder astutely notes the crucial link between body and self:

One of the most obvious means of expressing our beliefs about ourselves is to create imagery of the bodies we inhabit or, perhaps, are....After all we are given to thinking of the body as an instrument that expresses our deepest desires - indeed, it is sometimes even thought of as our desires made flesh. Creating images of the body is therefore a means of thinking about the self.²⁷

Thus, Magor and Sterbak clearly belong to a larger context of artists who are examining this body/self relationship anew: Europeans such as Anthony Gormley, Francesca Woodman, Mary Kelly, Miriam Cahn, Rebecca Horn, Avis Newman and Enzo Cucchi;

²⁵ "The concrete is readily imbued with feeling and meaning - more readily, perhaps, than any abstract conception." Oliver Sacks cited in The Impossible Self, 169.

²⁶ Monique Wittig, "The Straight Mind" Feminist Issues, (Summer, 1980): 106.

²⁷ Bruce Elder, The Body in Film (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 1989), 6.

and Americans such as Cindy Sherman, Jenny Holzer, Nancy Spero and Dorit Cypis. Like Magor and Sterbak, these artists are mapping out a territory in which a reconceptualized self is made possible through recontextualization of the body.²⁸

Magor and Sterbak were among the first Canadian artists to produce what now can be seen as radical reconceptualizations of the figure as body in work that preceded the theoretical tide of the late eighties.²⁹ Recent exhibitions in Canada, such as Enchantment/Disturbance (1988) at the Power Plant in Toronto; Diagnosis (1989) and Drawn On/Drawn Upon (1990) at York University; as well as the 1989 Public Access lecture series entitled "Countertalk: the Body", and its 1990 publication Carnal

²⁸ In spite of this common thread, fundamental differences in approach are discernible within significantly distinctive work. For example American photographer Cindy Sherman obsessively searches for her own identity through the assumption of other identities in photographic reconstructions of cultural stereotypes; British-American artist Mary Kelly deliberately uses psychoanalytic theory as a basis for deconstructing stereotypes of women; German artist Rebecca Horn investigates the psychic and physical roots of existence through a technological and alchemical eroticism; Swiss artist Miriam Cahn uses drawing as a technique that offers a direct, intuitive subjectivity. Underlying all of this work, as well as that of Magor and Sterbak, there is a generative convergence of sociopolitical and psychosomatic realities which both elucidate and call into question the contemporary constitution of body/self.

²⁹ Betty Goodwin might be regarded as leading the way in the return to the figurative in a more traditional sense. In her drawings the body's fragile presence is infused with political and emotional density. Similarly, in the gestural wall installations of Shelagh Keeley, we confront a disturbing viscosity that stems from the experience of the displaced and dislocated self. While Susan Beniston's haunting sculptures of body fragments reveal concerns that are explicitly spiritual, the photographs of Christine Davis present the body as surface and construction. Stephen Andrews, Marc de Guerre, Andy Fabo and Louise Noguchi are among the many other Canadian artists who have contributed to, or are concerned with, the redefinition of the self through the metaphoric vehicle of the body.

Knowledge are clear evidence of the strong continued focus on the body.

When reviewing exhibitions devoted specifically to Magor and Sterbak one discovers that the issue of identity in the work of both artists has been considered by several curators. Philip Monk did so in the 1986 Liz Magor retrospective at the Art Gallery of Ontario³⁰. And Shirley Madill in Identity/Identities (1988), and Sandy Nairne and Bruce Ferguson in The Impossible Self (1988)³¹ focussed on the identity/self dyad in Sterbak's art. Sterbak's work has been also been examined in terms of how the body is represented in two recent exhibition catalogues, entitled Jana Sterbak. One is by Ihor Holubizky (1988)³² and the other by Cindy Richmond (1989)³³. References to these and other pertinent exhibitions will be incorporated throughout the thesis.

Most importantly, however, no one has looked at either Magor's or Sterbak's work from the point of view of the body as a metaphor for self. I will argue that the body is used by Magor and Sterbak to create new metaphors for the postmodern self. While Sterbak has come to focus more clearly on the fate of individual autonomy in terms of complex psychological and global power relations; Magor has consistently sought

³⁰ Philip Monk, Liz Magor (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 1986).

³¹ Shirley Madill, Identity/Identities (Winnipeg: Winnipeg Art Gallery, 1988) and Bruce Ferguson and Sandy Nairne, The Impossible Self (Winnipeg: Winnipeg Art Gallery, 1986).

³² Ihor Holubizky, Jana Sterbak (Toronto: The Power Plant, 1988).

³³ Cindy Richmond, Jana Sterbak with essays by Cindy Richmond and Jessica Bradley. (Regina: Mackenzie Art Gallery, 1989).

stability of, and insight into, identity. For both artists, however, the body ultimately becomes the primary expressive vehicle for a private struggle for essence and wholeness. A final aspect of this thesis will be a discussion of how Magor and Sterbak transform private investigations of the artist's function and personal metaphysics into a public/collective reconceptualization of the self as a strategy for subverting established myths and sociocultural norms.³⁴

The choice of two woman artists is intentional since it is women artists who are currently introducing the most profound yet constructive social critiques into their work.³⁵ Furthermore, in feminist art, as one writer has noted, "relations between the personal and the political [are stressed] to explore issues of identity and experience...women artists [have] led the way in the exploration of the poetic and the subjective, and in the demand for a 'content' to art."³⁶ Magor and Sterbak share such feminist concerns, and have clearly been affected by the feminist focus on the body as

³⁴ Such subversion is achieved by using the body variously and simultaneously to bring to the surface a multiplicity of issues (repressed desires, impulses, emotions, histories) and questions of representation, social encoding, technology and reproduction. Paradoxically, the physical or reified body rarely appears in their respective works; instead, the body's presence is conveyed by fragments, and surrogate objects, such as clothing or machines, which are the traces or products of human existence. In these same works the body is implicitly present both as the record of the artist's activity and as the spatial and conceptual realization of the viewer's own somatic experience.

³⁵ Jo-Anne Isaak, "Seduction without Desire." Vanguard (Summer 1987): 14. Isaak writes "Today most of the socially critical responses to the oppressive power of unauthored ideological domination is [are] being made by women artists."

³⁶ Sandy Nairne, State of the Art: Ideas and Images in the 1980s (London: Chatto and Windus, 1987), 17.

a way of investigating issues of gender, sexuality, difference and representation: issues which have arisen largely in response to the systematic repression of women within patriarchal Western culture. In placing emphasis on the body as a metaphor for self, each artist achieves the reconstruction of femininity "in new ways"³⁷.

The first chapter of the thesis will focus on Liz Magor, whose earliest work was concerned with the constitution of physical identity. Initially drawn to the elusive signs and traces that revealed insights into individual existence, she has since become concerned with the sociocultural construction of self. Chapter Two will discuss the work of Jana Sterbak; in particular, her fascination with the interdependence of body and mind, the autonomy of the individual, and the effects of psychic and sociocultural phenomena on the self. Chronology of works will be maintained in order to examine and assess the range of their respective thematic, formal and iconographic approaches to the body as self. Due to the complexity and quantity of their artistic output, I will limit discussion to select works which most prominently address the body as a metaphor for self. A final conclusion will contrast and compare the respective strategies and motivations of Magor and Sterbak to test the validity of the thesis. The methodology will necessarily make use of a variety of sources: contemporary critical theory, artists' statements, biographical information, formal analysis of works and appropriate critical

³⁷ Rosemary Betterton, Looking On: Images of Femininity in the Visual Arts and Media (London: Pandora, 1987), 10. "By looking at those areas where struggles over representation are taking place...by seeing what is denied or outlawed by dominant ideology, we can find the fragments to reconstruct femininity in new ways."

writings. The consideration of these various resources serves to underscore the very eclectic nature of contemporary postmodern artwork which offers the viewer and critic no fixed readings. Nonetheless, I will argue that in the work of Jana Sterbak and Liz Magor we are offered a means to understand the significance of the creation of "images of the body"³⁹ that establish new metaphors for the decentered, fragmented postmodern self.

³⁹ As previously cited. Bruce Elder, The Body in Film (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 1989), 6.

Chapter One

Liz Magor: The Construction of Identity

I am always looking for comfort in a world that is disturbingly subject to change. Sometimes I find it in work, as a recording of my activity. Sometimes I find it in objects, things that sit for awhile and slowly gather, then release, their history. I wanted to do work that would objectify some history of a life, or at least the life of a body and the process of change that affects that body.¹

In examining the art of Liz Magor the relationship between the body and the theme of personal identity or self will be considered foremost. At the same time, the roles of technology, industry and mass production as they represent, reflect or interact with the body as a metaphor for identity/self; and the relationship of self to culture or society will be discussed in a careful reading of selected works.

Written a decade ago Liz Magor's statement (cited above) remains an effective guide to the issues addressed in her work and its fundamental character. Her fascination with the bodily hinges on its relation to the nature of "personal identity"² and is linked to a search for stability or constancy. In Magor's investigation into the constitution of identity, the body is often used as a metaphorical vehicle for the concept of self. In contrast to performance art and body art where the artist's own body is the primary

¹ Liz Magor in Lorna Farrell-Ward, Production/Reproduction. (Vancouver: The Vancouver Art Gallery) n.p.

² Philip Monk, Liz Magor (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 1986), 9.

ocus, Magor uses the bodies of others - members of her family, animals, acquaintances - as metaphors for identity/self in a way that reveals her singular dedication "to the precise depiction of ordinary human life and living, in all its pleasures, penuries and dimensions"³. Through direct allusions to the body, her narratives, enacted in matter, place an emphasis on mortality, fragility and vulnerability.

A review of the assessment of Magor's work by critics and curators offers a variety of interpretations. According to critic John Bentley Mays, Magor "has consistently dealt with personal, bodily identity and how it is produced in the actual toil of life, and by the systems of power we inhabit."⁴ Similarly, curator Jessica Bradley has said of Magor's work of the late seventies, early eighties, "She examines conventional systems of identification and comparison as well as repetition in the natural world, using these ironically in works that affirm the persistence of individual identity despite generalizing forces."⁵ In the view of curator Philip Monk, Magor's art "poses both general and specific questions of identity through different material, conceptual and structural means."⁶ Although the means often appear to shift abruptly, thematic continuity, or

³ John Bentley Mays, "Installation art wise choice for Venice." The Globe and Mail, Toronto, January 28, 1984.

⁴ John Bentley Mays, "Canadian art set to stir up international storm." The Globe and Mail, Toronto, May 30, 1987.

⁵ Jessica Bradley, Ian Carr-Harris/Liz Magor: Canada XLI Biennale di Venezia. (Ottawa, National Gallery of Canada, 1984), 5.

⁶ Monk, 9.

circularity, is characteristic of Magor's art. Underlying all of these critical insights is the recognition of her preoccupation with the absent/present body as a metaphor for how identity is constructed or constructs itself.⁷

In a 1987 statement Magor asserted: "My concern has to do with what constitutes someone's identity, not what makes someone an individual, because I'm not sure individuality is anything more than a myth...My work deals with what makes me, me: what makes me like you; and what constitutes the person that I am."⁸ Her understanding of identity or self has evolved from earlier attempts to encapsulate the history of "a body" into a fullscale questioning of the nature of stability, separateness and independence implied by personal individuality. One source for this obsessive questioning can be found in a letter of 1977:

If I imagine that when we are born we are given the pieces of our personal psychological jigsaw puzzles and we spend our lives putting the pieces together, then it is with some dismay that I realize I have found very few pieces in my own puzzle that do fit, or those that I have managed to jam together have somehow come apart when I wasn't looking.⁹

In a very fundamental sense, it is Magor's sense of fragmentation, of lack of wholeness, which has informed her ongoing process of self-exploration using the body as

⁷ Magor has recently stated that her subject is "identity and how it constructs itself," in Gillian MacKay, "Liz Magor" Canadian Art (Fall 1990): 78

⁸ Donald Campbell, "Exhibit distracts artists from work," Winnipeg Free Press 19 June 1987.

⁹ Liz Magor, letter written 21 January 1977 cited in Vancouver Art Gallery Four Places (Vancouver, 1977) n.p.

metaphorical vehicle.

Integral to this concern with the constitution of identity is a concern with the role of the artist. Magor has said that all her work sets up situations analogous to art-making in an attempt to understand the artist's motivation and function:

As an artist you are a person who is making a thing that is not useful in the way that other things are useful. So then you have to ask yourself why it is necessary. That becomes part of your identity, finding out what the motivation is about.¹⁰

The emphasis Magor places on social responsibility and the role of the artist within society prevents her work from lapsing into solipsism or narcissism. Her regular re-evaluation of "how" identity is constructed has contributed to the radical formal variations evident in her work. In her early work she deals with the "inevitability of natural forces that govern existence"¹¹, while in the work of the eighties she focuses on the complex cultural and social pressures that shape identity. Such shifts in focus have often been paralleled, even occasioned by changes in Magor's immediate geographical environment - the stimulus of a new physical environment offering psychological, social as well as theoretical stimuli. These theoretical elements are, however, secondary to the intense physicality of Magor's engagement with the materials of her artmaking: "I'm concerned with the physical aspect of making something, making a relationship to a

¹⁰ Carole Corbeil, "Magor wrestles with the motives of art-making" The Globe and Mail 8 May 1986.

¹¹ National Gallery Curatorial Files. Canada House, London, England. "Artnews", Fall 1984.

human in a physical way. It usually has to do with response to physical scale, making a relationship to a human in a physical way."¹² In her art she uses her own body both as tool and as scale, and so invests her materials with subjective meaning. Magor has always placed a great emphasis on integrating the act or process of making into her work either by the tangible physical evidence of making or the use of conceptual analogues for her involvement as maker.

Ritual, Process and the Body

Magor's emphasis on process is underlined by the importance of ritual in her art production.¹³ The physical engagement with material and the compulsive repetitive activity integral to her technique establishes a ritualistic dimension to her work which connects it with Process Art, where the art making (process) is as important as the end product ¹⁴. For Magor this allows the incorporation of the body's experience into her

¹² Avril Rosenberg, "Liz Magor Working Sculpture." Vanguard 9 (December 1980 - January 1981): 24.

¹³ Ian Carr-Harris, "Liz Magor: An Interview," C Magazine (September 1981): 67.

¹⁴ As a specific movement Process Art has been characterized as a "logical orderly hunt for chaos, for primal creative matter." by Corinne Robins The Pluralist Era: American Art, 1968-1981 (New York: Harper and Row, 1984),22. This search for primal creative matter strongly links Process Art to the Italian based arte povera movement or phenomenon, which evolved in the late sixties.

content or subject.¹⁵ While ritual can be defined as the "purposive manipulation of given forms towards regulating and sustaining order"¹⁶, the role of ritual can also be linked to the drive to understand self or identity: "There can be no coherent view of the self without personal ritual...not random, but coherent."¹⁷ Hence, Magor's ritualized artmaking can be directly related to her need to establish a unified, stable sense of self.

Magor's "coherent" incorporation of ritual as a "purposive" form of making is already clearly evident in her work of 1971 and 1972. During this time Magor and her husband were living in relative isolation on Hornby Island, British Columbia. Her art work consisted of ordering and classifying body fragments of animals - beaks, teeth, claws and bones - according to type and size. These were then divided and placed into compartments of leather or wood toolboxes, crafted by herself. Magor's meticulous care in ordering these animal body parts paralleled her ordered investigation into the function and identity of the artist as maker and the stability of physical identity over time. At the same time, the ritualistic repetition of the process carries with it an element of absurdity or irony, which becomes a facet of the artists's search for a "coherent view of the self".

¹⁵ Magor talks about the importance of considering the "body in the space of the work" and of folding the body's experience "into the subject of the work" in an interview with Jennifer Fisher, "Identification An Insider's View," Parachute 56 (October/November/December 1989): 38.

¹⁶ Sherry Ortner, "Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?" in L. Lampere and M. Rosaldo, eds., Women, Culture and Society (Stanford, Stanford University press, 1974), 72.

¹⁷ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, Metaphors We Live By (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1980), 235.

Magor called Hornby Island her "place of birth" precisely because it was where she "first saw bones"¹⁸, fragments of bodies, which signified decay, death and identity. In 1973, four months at Cape Dorset exposed her to the "realities of a hunting society"¹⁹, served to reinforce her fascination with the body, and the compulsion to order which became for her a means to understand the immediacy of death.²⁰

Back in British Columbia Magor would pursue this concept of 'death' imagery from 1975 to 1976. While the emphasis in The Hutch (1976) (figure 1) and her 'fur rugs' (1976) (figure 2), with their leather-cased skulls, may appear to parody museological and anthropological ordering, these remnants of the body also mark Magor's investigation into the constitution and elusiveness of bodily and personal identity which ultimately leads her to reflections on mortality. The body fragments clearly have a metaphorical as well as indexical function, testifying to her continuing interest in the fundamental forces in nature which affect the maintenance of identity; the inevitable changes wrought by time and the inherent order of natural processes.

Moving away from this skeletal imagery, Magor went on to "invent" imaginary personae, essentially variations of the naturalist-scientist, and suggest narratives by

¹⁸ Vancouver Art Gallery, Four Places (Vancouver, 1974) n.p.

¹⁹ Ibid. Magor and her husband were teaching animation techniques to the local Inuit for a National Film Board project.

²⁰ Art Perry, "Liz Magor," Artmagazine 10 nos.43/44 (May-June 1979): 75.

authoritatively rendering each persona's kits and workbenches.²¹ Pieces such as Sowing Weeds in Lanes and Ditches (1976) (figure 3) appear convincingly functional. On the one hand they underline the absurdity and futility of attempts to parallel nature's inherent order, and on the other, represent a continuing investigation into the constitution of identity. In these works, although the persona is absent in a traditional figural sense, her/his tools establish a bodily presence and identity through the references to activities and interests.

Time and Mrs. Tiber (1976) (figure 4) presents a departure from these works. The narrative is now based on a specific, not imagined, individual/body who has a history related to found objects²² with the absent body clearly functioning as a metaphor for

²¹ Andrew Scott, in "Compost Figures, Liz Magor's New Sculpture," Vanguard 8 (March 1979): 21, describes these works as,

eccentric charming combinations of natural materials to form outfits for strange occupations and bizarre hobbies. Birdnester, for instance: a little pull-along cart with trays of nests to aid an ornithological merchant in some quixotic world of the imagination. Beaverman: a similar paw-drawn arrangement with live-in facilities and all the necessary apparatus for beaver-dam building. Another set-up provided the complete set-up for a web-maker....One thing these sculptures all had in common, besides immaculate, elaborate craftsmanship, was the absence of their owners. Each piece was the imprint of some extraordinary creature, a lifestyle without a life, suggesting how little we know of one other.

²² With the death of one of Magor's brothers in 1976 she began to reflect more deeply on absence, presence and mortality; on what physical traces remains behind an individual's passage through life. "When people and animals are not around, I see the work they have done...it is what they made and what tools they used that I have left. That's what obsesses me." These traces, related to the body, are clues to personal identity. Greg Snider Liz Magor (Victoria: The Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, 1977) n.p.

"The body dies therefore each body is a history, a subject for narrative, and connected

identity. After finding Mrs. Tiber's jars of preserves in the latter's abandoned homestead on Cortes Island, British Columbia, Magor saw in them not only aspects of ritualistic process and ordering but also, most importantly, Mrs. Tiber's attempt to defy time. This corresponded to the artist's own attempts to defy the inevitability of time through work. As Magor noted, "Time had affected everything except the fruit that she had put in the jars...It was evidence of her previous existence...when I saw those I really felt her presence. This was what she had done, this was her work, her presence was all around..."²³ Magor establishes her own presence in the work by reordering the jars, adding Mrs. Tiber's recipes, jars of flowers and including literary excerpts dealing with life, death, and the passage of time.²⁴ In one of the several additional jars Magor inserted an excerpt from Thomas Mann's The Magic Mountain ²⁵ which underscored Magor's desire to distill and protect essence.

Attracted to the ordinary, everyday quality of the jars of preserves, Magor chose

narrative is perhaps the primary form of social understanding." Donald MacRae "The Body as Social Metaphor" in The Body as a Medium of Expression edited by Jonathan Benthall and Ted Polhemus. (New York: Dutton, 1976), 70.

²³ Vancouver Art Gallery, Four Places (Vancouver, 1977), n.p.

²⁴ National Gallery of Canada curatorial files. Unpublished "Transcript of parts of interview about Time and Mrs. Tiber: Liz Magor, 17 May 1977".

²⁵ Ibid. In the transcript Magor quotes Thomas Mann, "And Hans says 'Hermetics, hermetics! I really like that word, it reminds me of my grandmother's jams and jellies. I used to walk into her pantry and see all these beautiful jams and jellies and I thought, there they are, all sealed away, locked up forever, not changing.'"

to exalt their unassuming yet individual identities.²⁶ By arranging a pyramid of older, darker jars down the centre of the cabinet Magor achieves a quiet, symmetrical and solid composition, intensified by the apparent stability of the cabinet also constructed by the artist. However, underlying this apparent stability is a recognition of the true fragility of both jars and wood and by extension, human life. In making tangible the transformation of matter by the labour of both Mrs. Tiber and Magor, bodily presence is referenced and is used metaphorically to re-constitute an individual identity. The cabinet, human in scale, can also be read both as a surrogate for Mrs. Tiber and as evidence of the body of the artist-maker. Thus despite the absence of a figural body, a real "history" of the experience of two individuals becomes an integral part of the content and subject: how identity is constituted and survives.

In 1977, Magor travelled through Europe and Egypt. Upon her return to British Columbia, her work demonstrated appreciable differences. While former themes of the

²⁶ Magor was exposed to Claes Oldenburg's work while attending Parson's School of Design in New York from 1968-1970, and was particularly affected the way the he presented everyday, banal objects in an altered context, charging them with a quality of extraordinariness while they nonetheless retained their essential ordinariness. Most importantly Oldenburg's sculpture helped Magor to realize that her own inclination lay toward making art that was fundamentally concerned with the material versus the invisible world. (Ian Carr-Harris, "Liz Magor: An Interview" (C Magazine September 1984: 61)

Germano Celant, "Isolation Cells" in Individuals: A Selected History of Contemporary Art edited by Howard Singerman (New York: Abbeville Press, 1986) writes of how Oldenburg exalts a specific object "for its identity, for its fascination and distinctiveness, for what distinguishes it from other entities", how he "leans to the theatrical" and how he intensifies the object's "corporeality and its potential for gesture.", 224.

constitution of identity, its survival over time, and the inevitability of natural forces remained important; the exposure to new environments and ideas resulted in larger scale works, with greater physical presence or theatricality²⁷. The artist's own energy as well as that of the materials is made more tangible and concrete. Most importantly the representation of the body also altered; it now becomes figuratively realized, and through it Magor is able to present new aspects of identity in which traces of existence/being, subsume traces of activities. With A Concise History (1978) (figure 5) and the subsequent Compost Figures (1978) (figure 6) Magor conceives of "the body as a mold"²⁸ or a form that actively determines the shape of objects contiguous to it.

At first, the approximately forty-five assorted coats, jackets and suits placed on racks in A Concise History suggest the anonymity of the crowd. But the surrogate bodies of cloth act as equivalents or metaphors for personal identities. Molded by the bodies and characters of their previous owners, these unassuming, empty jackets, quietly but eloquently assert their individual histories, and in doing so make concrete the

²⁷ In 1977 Magor stated that she felt that a sense of theatre was coming into her art with these works. The theatrical dimension of Claes Oldenburg's work, in conjunction with the general tendency at that time towards performance art and her own interest in set design, seem to have had a combined impact on her. Inherent to a sense of theatre is the suggestion of drama, the 'total' environment of the set, audience interaction, narrative and an emphasis on bodily presence. Of further interest is the suggestion that Oldenburg's art "has shown us just how completely bodily a sculpture can be, and how emotional the bodily is." (Donald Kuspit, "Sculpture as Material Metaphor" in Individuals: A Selected History of Contemporary Art, ed. Howard Singerman (New York: Abbeville Press, 1986), 115). This aspect of his work may also have affected Magor's attitudes towards the way the body can be incorporated into sculpture.

²⁸ Lorna Farrell-Ward, n.p.

abstract conception of identity. Differences, usually imperceptible, unremarkable or taken for granted, have, in this work, been intensified: "Some of the coats work like drawings; the colour is chalky and light, and the shadows have been highlighted with graphite. Others are more heavily plastered and act like paintings."²⁹ Although Magor's involvement with material has become more explicitly physical in this work, she continues to make the ordinary traces of existence extraordinary. She intensifies the objecthood of the signs of personal identity, such as the clothing here; thus heightening our awareness that "life is a concise history".³⁰

The Compost Figures series (1978) (figure 6) again presents the body as perceived again in relation to a mold as a metaphorical equivalent for identity. There is a major difference: in A Concise History the artist's role as the real agent of change is hidden since it is the absent bodies which are the implied mold. In Compost Figures the material representation of bodies is clearly shaped by an actual mold and hence by the artist herself. The body, as metaphor for identity, is now a construction, acted upon by external forces, parallelling and simulating natural decay. "Clothing" (as compost) is now transformed and compressed to actually represent a figure - a body.³¹

²⁹ Andrew Scott, "Compost Figures, Liz Magor's New Sculpture" Vanguard 9 (December 1980 - January 1981): 24.

³⁰ Art Perry, "Liz Magor" Art Magazine 10.43/44 (May - June 1979): 78.

³¹ As Avis Rosenberg perceives, Magor "has found a bridge or intersection, where symbol and invention merge, where labour is purposive transformation." Avis Rosenberg "Liz Magor Working Sculpture" Vanguard 9 (December 1980 - January 1981): 22.

To form her Compost Figures Magor has concocted varying organic composites of grass, leaves, mulch, cloth, glue and water, pressing the mixtures to a depth of five or six inches into plywood and chicken wire molds, constructed from full-scale, photographically-derived outlines of human figures.³² Once again, attention is paid to subtle differences in texture and detail which appear to struggle against the imposition of anonymity emulated here by the artist's process. Magor's concern is with the actual creation of identity and essence. Inspired in part by the Egyptian image of death, "a striding silhouette, a continuation of life's process"³³, the horizontal orientation of these concrete shadows are also clearly readable as memento mori ³⁴, as images/symbols of death's finality as understood in Western terms. Magor herself has said, "I've finally got it down to the thing which interests me most with these, which is being dead."³⁵ The inescapable fact of mortality is now the ultimate measure of identity.

The imagery of death/birth, a theatricality, and emphasis on transformation persist in Four Boys and a Girl (1979) (figure 7), Schist (1979) (figure 8) and Double Scarp

³² Andrew Scott, 24. Some of these are then "wrapped with cotton cheesecloth and set to dry so that the cotton is stained by the organic matter. Some pieces are without cheese-cloth; an outer ribbon of pop-riveted sheet metal is filled with compost, rocks and a strand of old cloth, covered with pine needles, cones twigs, bits of wood, bark and moss, then sprayed into solidity with acrylic bond-fast - casting in compost." The various types of compost used result "in different coloured stains to the cotton."

³³ Art Perry (1979), 78.

³⁴ Greg Snider, n.p.

³⁵ Kitchener Waterloo Record, "Weeds, bones and compost fodder for B.C. artist's fertile imagination," 12 March 1979.

(1980) (figure 9). With clear associations to biological regeneration, these works present a "series of concentrated analogues to the general conditions that shape existence" which address the survival of "individual types within generic groups and conversely the conventions that operate to subsume individuality."³⁶ The sense of anonymity present in Compost Figures (figure 6) is intensified. On one level, the coffin-like slabs of Four Boys and a Girl may be seen as equivalents for Magor's own family and the half-open press/mold or machine³⁷, also coffin-like, as "the progenitor of the family"³⁸ an equivalent to her mother's womb. Associations of birth conflate with those of death. Each slab/body can be read as a metaphorical manifestation of the identity of its subject as subjected to external forces.

The incorporation of simple technology or mechanization also draws on Magor's interest in primary industry and reinforces ideas of process art-making as identity.³⁹ The

³⁶ Jessica Bradley, 31.

³⁷ Lorna Farrell Ward, 1980, n.p. Constructed of wood and steel the mold has a screw-down lid with handles.

³⁸ Karyn Allen, The Winnipeg Perspective 1981: Ritual, (Winnipeg: Winnipeg Art Gallery, 1981), 7.

³⁹ Carr-Harris, 61. Affected by Oldenburg's way of magnifying the significance of the everyday, Magor returned home to British Columbia from New York, to realize for the first time how significant aspects of the province's physical environment were for her - possessing "an ordinariness that I had overlooked before." The images of primary industry along the B.C. coast, notably fishing and logging, have remained important motifs or reference points in her art, particularly in the way that they maintain a close relationship between the transformation, or processing of material and the original form and source of that material. She has even collected photographs of such early operations. The photograph in her 1989 Mono Home is drawn from her own archive. These images,

images of primary industry along the B.C. coast, notably fishing and logging, have remained important "ordinary" motifs or reference points in her art, particularly in the way that they maintain a close relationship between the transformation, or processing of material and the original form and source of that material.

While the machine in Schist (figure 8) is a concrete representation of the transformative power or energy of the artist, in Double Scarp (figure 9) the physical and conceptual relationship between the machine and its product are more clearly established. The machine/press provides a means by which Magor can transform her energy and raw materials into reproducible, but not totally refined, units and "part of the process itself."⁴⁰ It functions as both tool and metaphor. Although the machine is itself a product of Magor's art-making, it is also a kind of alter-ego, making visible the artist's ritualized activity - her compulsive use of the body. It suggests a human presence and an investigation into the artist's own identity and motivations.

The layering of fabric, which was concealed in Four Boys and a Girl, is now evident in Schist and Double Scarp, "the sides have been exposed and trimmed" in a "graphic indication of force and time."⁴¹ As with The Compost Figures, the compressed cloth layers, parallel the effects of physical decay and recall the technique of Egyptian

as becomes clearer in her later work, contribute to the artist's own sense of roots and identity.

⁴⁰ Lorna Farrell-Ward, n.p.

⁴¹ Ibid.

mummification. "The implied notion of ritual entombment - or perhaps, more appropriately, ritual exhumation - is obviously not incidental....There is an obvious connection between the sculpture and the ancient ritual of burying a person's possessions with the body."⁴² Clothing is a sign for the body, and an outward symbol of the spirit or essence of an individual. Traditionally such inclusion in burial is a way of insuring a comfortable passage into the afterlife. Magor's archaeological references, however, are not simply representative of "mere mongering after the primitive....[Her] expedition is, in fact, a precise and present ontological exploration; it is a probing into existence, an attempt to come to terms with the unknown."⁴³

In these works thematic references to death, transformation and the passage of time converge with the stylized representation of the body and the question of the constitution and survival of identity. Through an intense physical engagement, the compulsive repetitive activity of ritualistic process Magor explores her own motivation, her identity and self. In these pieces Magor asks what is left of identity, of one's self, after death: these "open-handed allegories of the actual metamorphosis of the body - birth, aging, death" are resonant with "resolute bodily wisdom."⁴⁴

⁴² Allen, 7.

⁴³ Ibid, 6.

⁴⁴ John Bentley Mays, Installation art wise choice for Venice" Globe and Mail Toronto 28 January 1984.

Producer, Product and Identity

With Production (1980) (figure 10) Magor explores still further the connection between "producer, process, product and machine".⁴⁵ Art as work remains a major theme along with its relationship to the artist's motivation and identity.⁴⁶ "By unifying the work process and product, this piece tells its own story, and in the work involved in that process of change, the artist sees a means of defining her own input and herself."⁴⁷ Magor's early interest in the tools and work of animals has developed into a more direct analysis of her own motivation and a concrete expression of how her identity is contingent upon and affirmed by her choice of work. The artist is still seen as an agent of change; but, now, rather than effecting change by paralleling natural and biological forces, the emphasis has shifted to paralleling cultural forces, primarily those relating to mass production. Standardized units of reproducible newspaper bricks have

⁴⁵ Lorna Farrell-Ward, n.p.

⁴⁶ With each installation the positioning of elements for Production has varied. In one of the first, at Aurora Borealis in Montreal she constructed walls which screened the "artist-machine", figuratively expressing a straightforward narrative. In the sequential arrangement the product of the artist's labour obscures the artist, the walls forming a concrete barrier between artist and public. The viewer reverses the artist's process, first seeing the walls, then the bricks, and lastly, the artist-machine. As presently installed at the National Gallery of Canada the wall acts as a background to the mold/machine. Thus, beyond exploring the link between identity and work, Magor touches on the problem of communication which is to become a dominant theme in some of her Toronto work.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

replaced fragments of bones and mulch.

The slab-like bodies of Four Boys and a Girl (figure 7), Schist (figure 8) and Double Scarp (figure 9), the result of the artist's manipulation of decayed material, are one step removed from the bricks of Production, a "prolonged symbol...for the vulnerability of the human body."⁴⁸ Although the clear human references of the slab/bodies have been even further reduced, Magor still thinks of Production as a figurative work: "to me it's still figurative because the brick is hand-sized, something that you grab and use. And when you see the machine in there, I hope that the presence of a person working is implied."⁴⁹ The eight inch bricks have a further association with "human business", molded as they are out of a pulp of water and newspaper. Newspaper, although generally regarded as worthless and disposable, is a material with its own history. It has been processed from raw material and refined into a medium dense with information and facts in a way that parallels the refinements of socialization. Magor wants to emphasize the parallel: "Clay is just raw material without associations of human business or human life. I wanted those associations to be there in the material itself."⁵⁰ The simple manual technology used to transform material in Production again relates to the primary industries of the British Columbia coast, and so unites personal

⁴⁸ John Bentley Mays, "Installation art wise choice for Venice", Globe and Mail 28 January 1984.

⁴⁹ Avis Rosenberg, "Liz Magor Working Sculpture" Vanguard 9 (December 1980 - January 1981): 25.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 24.

and collective aspects of socialization.

Magor's manufacture of bricks, presenting an ironic parallel to mass production, requires the compulsive use of the body in a ritualistic repetitive activity, which is more pronounced and tangible here than previously.⁵¹ She has characterized her obsession with such activity in relation to Walter Benjamin's concept of boredom:

If sleep is the apogee of physical relaxation, boredom is the apogee of mental relaxation. Boredom is the dream bird that hatches the egg of experience. A rustling in the leaves drives [her] away.⁵²

Magor is consciously perpetuating, affirming the value of, the relaxed, intuitive state of mind linked to slow repetitive activity, a "boredom" connected with ritual (a boredom which is a rarity in Western society with its the emphasis on speed and high productivity). Her production of bricks over a period of two and a half months "", conducive to "slow rumination", helped her answer the question of why she was compelled to be an artist. "It has to do with this work allowing me to be involved, even in a very small way, with that very large process of change that occasionally just freezes me with how inexorable it is. It's as though I reaffirmed with the making of each brick,

⁵¹ Ibid, 27.

⁵² Magor cited in Rosenberg, 27. The source of her quote is Walter Benjamin, Illuminations, (New York: Schocken, 1989), 91. To contextualize Benjamin's statement, it is preceded by "This process of assimilation, which takes place in depth, requires a state of relaxation which is becoming rarer and rarer." and continues with "His nesting places - the activities that are intimately associated with boredom - are already extinct in the cities and are declining in the country as well."

⁵³ Rosenberg (1981), 25.

the value and necessity of this involvement."⁵⁴ The slow process of production/reproduction is time-defying, repetitive and ritualistic. And while tinged with absurdity, it is strangely and strongly affirmative: the bricks become a visible manifestation of the artist's energy and engagement, an affirmation of her identity.

Initially the walls appear as a cohesively uniform and non-descript front, but the bricks gently assert their individual textural variations and detail, their subtle differences, much as the materials do in A Concise History (figure 5) and the Compost Figures (figure 6). Underlying the associations of bricks with permanence and stability is the actuality of the paper's fragility and ephemerality. Again, the machine/mold maker is both an object made by the artist, and by operating as her tool it becomes in addition a subject, the artist herself: "The machine represented the manufactured products I had made in the past and the machine represented myself."⁵⁵ The installation can, therefore, be read as a self-portrait ⁵⁶ with the machine as a surrogate body representing the artist's active transformative function. The production of bricks parallels the consumption and materialization of her own energy: "gradually as I produced the bricks and saw them as an item being churned out then it seemed that part of the issue of the piece was that this

⁵⁴ Rosenberg, 27.

⁵⁵ Rosenberg (1981), 24.

⁵⁶ Magor herself says, "The machine is a protagonist. I identify with the machine" in Art Perry, "To make perchance to be" Vancouver Province 26 October 1980.

item was being reproduced and reproduced. So there had to be a substantial number."⁵⁷

Production also obliquely addresses the habitual, socially encoded invisibility of woman as producer in Western culture.⁵⁸ Here "she" is not defined by appearance, but by activity.

There may well be another personal reference in Production which has bearing on the search for wholeness, a search metaphorically implied by the quality of bodily absence. Confronted with the fragments of a jigsaw puzzle when a child, Magor first soaked the pieces in water, then mashed them together to form a ball of pulp - remaking or reconstructing the puzzle.⁵⁹ Her brick-making process is decidedly similar. Through it Magor may well be reliving or recuperating an aspect of her childhood identity and enacting a desire for unity and coherence.

With Production Magor hopes to take the viewer through an "active process of seeing where the material wasn't meaningful, and how it was processed into meaning;

⁵⁷ Ibid, 25. Magor's labour intensiveness can be compared to that of German artist Katharina Fritsch's who tried painting but needed something "in the way, something that gives me real trouble to make." Christoph Blase, "On Katharina Fritsch" Artscribe International (March-April 1988): 52. In addition Magor's tendency to think things through in her work is comparable to American artist Jenny Holzer's need to "worry about it out loud", 'it' being important or problematic issues. Steven Evans interview with Holzer in "Not All About Death" Artscribe International (Summer 1989): 59.

⁵⁸ Rosetta Brooks, "Woman Visible: Woman Invisible" Studio International 193.187 (March 1987): 209.

⁵⁹ Vancouver Art Gallery, Four Places (Vancouver, 1977)n.p.

so that the production of meaning is apparent in the work."⁶⁰ Here, the transformation of material by the artist finds analogies in industry. The linking of art to industry provided Magor not only with a new range of body imagery for dealing metaphorically with the question of the construction of identity, but also a stronger sense of her own identity.

Identity as Difference

In 1981, Magor moved to Toronto where exposure to a highly industrialized urban environment led to a marked shift in her art. A body of work from 1981 - 1984, encompassing Dorothy - A Resemblance (figure 11) and A Notable Difference, (figure 17) are linked by a consistent thematic and visual continuity, and a more structured narrative. Magor explores new techniques, such as the book format, xerox and narrative texts, found photographs and new materials such as lead. Process is now conceptually expressed in images relating to industry or mass production analogous to art-making, rather than physically realized as in Production. The artist pursues the fledgling theme of communication while continuing not only her investigation into culturally, psychologically and biologically determined aspects of identity via the absent/present body, but also the examination of art as work or industry. Yet, importantly, Magor's work continues to express a profound empathy for individual alienation and

⁶⁰ Carr-Harris, 61.

vulnerability, and an air of melancholy pervades these "resonant allegories of change and aging".⁶¹

The artist herself provides the best introduction to these works:

Sometimes I wonder how a sculpture would be if it had a very reduced physical presence - a work may be overlooked because it is small or low, obscured or inaccessible. Or, a work that appears to be an object so familiar that it has little claim to uniqueness and attention. Added to this is the understanding that while I initially identify an object by its physical appearance, however faint, a sense of that identity persists even when the object is not present or physically altered.⁶²

A narrative base for the investigation into the reduced presence of objects is offered by a story told to Magor by an elderly woman named Dorothy who led a reclusive life in coastal British Columbia. Dorothy's simple story is about how her body weight - 98 lbs - was directly related to her sense of identity. In Magor's earlier work identity was the result of, or definable by, the concrete products or tools of one's labour, such as Mrs. Tiber's preserves (Time and Mrs. Tiber figure 4) or weed sowing paraphernalia (Sowing Weeds in Lanes and Ditches figure 3); or by other remnants of existence, affected by natural decay over time, such as bones or coats. Now identity is considered in terms of an individual's personal/internal sense of self as well as its external definition by standardized weights and measures - culturally defined and encoded. Rather

⁶¹ John Bentley Mays, "Magor survey errs by omission" The Globe and Mail 13 September 1986.

⁶² Liz Magor, "The Most She Weighed: A Catalogue of Works by Liz Magor" in Mayo Graham, 1 x 2 Liz Magor and John McEwen (Calgary: Glenbow Museum, 1983), 13.

than addressing the persistence of identity over time, Magor is more concerned with how identity is affected by social and cultural factors: "In the end, this art is as much about difference as it is about identity, and in that difference that work find its identity."⁶³ This shift to identity as difference and as culturally determined reflects Magor's recognition of the concept of the postmodern decentered subject, "produced as such by and in relation to imaginary, historical, material practices. 'There is [therefore]...no 'human essence'...[T]here is only the play of difference, and the multiplicity of mutually conditioning contradictions.'"⁶⁴ For Magor the body, in a play

⁶³ Monk, 9. Philip Monk curator of Magor's 1986 retrospective at the Art Gallery of Ontario views these works of the early 80s as addressing "identity as difference" - "not a search for a dictionary definition of identity as 'absolute sameness', or 'individuality'"; but as "more concerned with finding difference in what appears the same than in actually reproducing identity." (Ibid, 7) Such an approach is intimated in pieces such as Compost Figures and Production where the repetition of elements is a way to determine how identity is manifest. With the "Dorothy" pieces cultural conditions which affect the individual are considered in addition to physical/natural and biological influences. Monk's reading suggests a Derridean influence. "For Derrida signification is produced precisely through this kind of open play between the presence of one signifier and the absence of others...or [by] difference." According to Toril Moi in Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory (London: Methuen, 1985), 106, "The very repetition that permits a sign to be a sign - to be recognized as the same as what it signifies - also produces a difference...The temporal oscillation generated in this play between presence and absence is what Derrida terms differance, naming that which is opposed to the rigid first-second ordering between signifier and signified dictated by logocentric semiotics from Plato to Saussure."

⁶⁴ Rosalind Coward and John Ellis Language and Materialism: Developments in Semiology and the Theory of the Subject (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977), 20, cited in "Criminological Displacements: A Sociological Deconstruction" by Stephen Pfohl and Avery Gordon in The Body Invaders: Panic Sex in America, eds. Arthur

of absence and presence, will remain the fundamental ground for this investigation into difference and the decentered subject.

Dorothy - A Resemblance (1980-81) (figure 11) deals very specifically with the constitution of personal identity. Dorothy's few fluctuations in weight are linked in memory with particular events or stages in her life: "Of course, she was still herself when she weighed less or more, but not so completely herself. When she weighed 98 lbs, she more closely resembled the person she thought of as herself."⁶⁵ The literal and metaphorical narrative of the piece is told in Dorothy's own words:

I have always weighed 98 lbs. Once I weighed more. When I married my first husband I was up to 124 lbs. But that year we worked so hard taking those darn boats up and down that I lost some of that weight and went down to 98 lbs. And I stayed there 60 years until this trouble with my eyes. After my operation I was only 82 lbs. But I thought...this is no good. So I got myself back up to 98 lbs. And that is where I am now.⁶⁶

In the installation the narrative is divided into four segments, each stamped into selected objects on one of the four tables that comprise the work. These four different sets of lead objects literally constitute Dorothy's weight (hence representing her body) for each particular narrative segment, and metaphorically suggest the self's decentered multiplicity. The table tops are mounted on springs so that Dorothy's fluctuations in weight are clearly visible. The respective total weights - 124 lbs, 98 lbs, 82 lbs, 98 lbs -

Kroker and Marilouise Kroker (Montreal: New World Perspectives, 1987), 248.

⁶⁵ Liz Magor cited in Monk, 14.

⁶⁶ Monk, 13.

are comprised of everyday objects cast in lead, mechanically reproduced and in this sense, although similarly the product of an artisanal process, are distanced from the handmade quality or evidence of process in Production (figure 10).

The form and constitution of the weights vary from table to table to literally illustrate or emphasize a segment of the narrative. Table 4, for example, "But I thought...this is no good. So I got myself back up to 98 lbs. And that's where I am now", is laden with 38 irons and 29 fish weights or lead sinkers, reinforcing a sense of the passage of time through repetitive activity as well as of indomitable perseverance.⁶⁷ Magor's sculpture may be seen as "a meditation on mortality and the futility of attempting to measure or record those things which actually measure a life."⁶⁸ Although functioning as both literal equivalents for or indices of weight (weight being critical for Dorothy herself in terms of identity) and as symbols that encapsulate Dorothy's life, the

⁶⁷ National Gallery of Canada Curatorial Files, Dorothy - A Resemblance. Table 1 which corresponds to "But that year we worked so hard taking those darn boats up and down that I lost some of that weight and went down to 98 lbs.", is laden with four pie slices, four cheese slices, two piles of four slices of bread, two bottles, two fish and seven pears, and one slice of bread conjuring up associations with a healthy appetite. Table 2, with "And I stayed there 60 years until this trouble with my eyes. After my operation I was only 82 lbs." inscribed on a fish, has on it 6 fish, 13 boats and 14 fishing weights which together connote a way of life, work and survival; and Table 3, with "I have always weighed 98 lbs...." inscribed on the top of one of 5 books, also has 19 candles, 10 bells, 18 match packs, 21 light bulbs convey a sense of the passage of time.

⁶⁸ National Gallery Curatorial Files. Jessica Bradley, Justification letter, 22 November 1982.

presentation of these objects serves to express Magor's discovery that these are inadequate ways of distilling the elusive quality of Dorothy's identity. The artist asks fundamental questions - does essence exist, can it be measured or isolated? Or is identity constituted by the play between presence and absence, by the relativity, multiplicity and contradictions understandable only in terms of difference? In addition, through the use of mass production, the installation investigates how art objects assert their difference from other objects and, hence, "the operations involved in their existence, or identity."⁶⁹ Clearly, by doing so, Magor is drawing a parallel with the struggle of the decentered multiple subject to find coherence, to express individuality. In such work, she establishes a new means of communicating ideas and representations of identity.

In her work The Most She Weighed/The Least She Weighed (1982) (figure 12) Magor's focus shifts clearly to issues of scale, rather than weight. Used as an equivalent to body fluctuations, scale represents another attempt to define her subject's identity. Dorothy's extremes in weight are now transposed into lead cast objects displayed on two shelves, each shelf corresponding to the a different half of the title.⁷⁰ The same type of

⁶⁹ Art Gallery of Ontario Artists Files. "News Release" 18 August 1986.

⁷⁰ An earlier installation, Eighteen Books (1981-82), focuses on the failure of communication of signals during Dorothy's illness. While the emphasis appears to be on the problem of clear communication rather than on identity, the parallel drawn between Dorothy's flawed attempts at getting her message across and Magor's own difficulties as an artist trying to get her intentions across, and in dealing with the conditions of production and reception of art, comes back to an investigation of identity - of Magor's own function. Photocopied found photographs, an archetypal form of mass production, mark the introduction of a format to become important in future work.

objects are used on both shelves, but one group is significantly larger. The figure of the baby cat is the only object not replicated, the only object not yet fully subjected to the processes of homogenization characteristic of a society based on mass reproduction and commodity consumption.⁷¹ Like Dorothy - A Resemblance (figure 11), "this work plays upon an ambiguity of display that could be a museum or a boutique,"⁷² revealing the artist's growing interest in the conditions of art reception.

Magor's continued investigation into the constitution and problematic assertion of identity as difference is central to the bookwork Four Notable Bakers (1983) (figure 13).

Described by the artist it is

a sort of book of fears; a book of fears of reproduction, or fears of difference and fears of sameness. They are images of contradiction, social contradiction - of putting a high value on individuality while offering a very narrow range within which we can express our difference. In the book I use bread dough as a material that is valued for its ability to be consistently reproduced; while the people in the book are multiplied less successfully. They seem diminished by comparison to images of mass production; they seem devalued by the attempts to treat them as material. Pushing against this humanism are images of twins who make the notion of uniqueness seem vain.⁷³

As shown in a series of "quasi-didactic"⁷⁴ found photographs, the body and its analogous counterpart the bread dough become the vehicles for a concrete exploration of abstract

⁷¹ Monk, 24.

⁷² Ibid, 11.

⁷³ Carr-Harris, 64.

⁷⁴ Art Gallery of Ontario Artists Files. Art Gallery of Ontario Extension Services, Artists with their Work (Winter 1985-86) "Liz Magor" n.p.

fears about identity. The dough, worked, molded and baked - mass produced - becomes a metaphoric equivalent to the body. The body, in turn, is a metaphoric equivalent for a self/identity reduced by levelling sociocultural forces into a commodity.⁷⁵ In Dorothy: A Resemblance (figure 11) symbols and objects were shown to be inadequate in summing up an individual's essence; here Magor probes further into how identity struggles to assert itself in difference and against all odds.

Magor, in her five panel work, I Have Always Weighed 98 lbs (1983- 1984) (figures 14-16), pursues her fascination with the sameness imposed by "social encoding of roles and genetic programming"⁷⁶. By reusing the first part of Dorothy's story, the body is again clearly used by Magor as a way of dealing metaphorically with the concept of self/identity.⁷⁷ In A Notable Difference (1984) (figure 17) Magor extends her investigation of the legitimacy of 'fears of sameness and difference', of anonymity and distinction, by relating more directly to the contradictions and restraints imposed by

⁷⁵ Bruce Grenville, Active Surplus: The Economy of the Object (Toronto: The Power Plant, 1988), 18. Grenville views this work primarily in terms of industrial production, drawing parallels between "a recognizable process of display and fetishization, an accumulation of profit and loss, and the production of a surplus value."

⁷⁶ Bradley, 47.

⁷⁷ Jessica Bradley, 41. Both text and photographs (of children - sequentially as alone, twins, triplets and quadruplets - annotated with pictures of mountain goats, siamese twins and weight lifters) are set against a background of an army of male runners, all with heads shorn and clad only in fatigue pants. "The work's use of "individuals bearing the same genetic code both presents a parallel for the the multiple versions of the self that constitute singularity of character, and addresses the ways that important distinctions are overlooked in conventional systems of identification and classification."

artists upon themselves.^{7*} Magor's desire to be original or unique is constantly undermined by the awareness that the artist's work is open to misinterpretation and that originality is possible only at great risk.

Private Self; Public Self

Two 1985 works of a more intimate scale, Pregnancy After 35 (figure 18) and The Sleeping Artist, 1924 (figure 19), mark another stylistic and conceptual shift as Magor moves further towards dealing with private internal, psychic constraints. At this time,

^{7*} Carr-Harris, 65. Magor uses "the situation of identifying, choosing a fish at the market" and marries it to "the identification of a person". A chest of latex rubber fish is accompanied by a five-part text pertaining to fictitious twins, Kathleen and Madelaine. In the first four pieces of text the similarities between the two women are stressed: "that they wore the same dresses, that they had the same fears, the same disabilities, that they were proud of the same things, and so on." Then there is a deviation when difference is introduced:

The most notable difference is that Madelaine seems more affected in manner than Kathleen, she wears her hair in a fringe, and has long red fingernails." Magor has commented that "In her efforts to distinguish herself, I recognize in Madelaine a motivation similar to that of an artist - who is attempting to make a distinguishing statement, or a distinguished image. I recognize in that piece of text both the motivation to do it and the inability to really be original in that sense." Superficial changes to physical appearance indicate attempts to establish singularity. At the bottom left-hand corner of the chest is a photograph "of a man who has been salmon fishing...he's holding this beautiful salmon which has distinguished itself from the others. In his difference from the school the fish has landed himself into a predicament", the predicament of the artist herself, being recognized or set apart for the wrong reasons. Magor is also playing with the concept of Canadian identity in the person of the jolly fisherman, with his "two Canadian flags -one on his breast pocket and one on his hat.

she wrote of her work: "All images are identifiable and perform as voices in a conversation about what might constitute personal identity. By limiting this conversation to material considerations only, I hope, in serious jest, to reveal the dangers of the excessively literal."⁷⁹ These dangers are made manifest in Pregnancy After 35, a mixed media work with lead eggs, a pocket book from which the title comes, and a forties era magazine cover depicting a woman punching a time clock; imagery directly relating to woman's body as a biological clock. The absurdity of woman's identity being dependent on its reproductive function, on her body, becomes the subject. Using the body as a metaphor for woman's self/identity, Magor makes public a very personal issue.

In The Sleeping Artist, 1924 (figure 19), Magor deals specifically with the predicament of the artist in facing self-imposed, psychic constraints as well as the external constraints imposed by other artists and the public; or in being caught, like the fish of A Notable Difference (figure 17), between the fear of anonymity and the fear of distinction.⁸⁰ Aside from the humanizing impression left by Magor's fingers in the plaster, only a disembodied head, based on Brancusi's Sleeping Muse of 1910 (figure 20), refers to the body's presence.⁸¹ While the absence of the body metaphorically

⁷⁹ Art Gallery of Ontario Artists Files. Art Gallery of Ontario Extension Services "Artists with their Work" Winter 1985-86, "Liz Magor" n.p.

⁸⁰ Carr-Harris, 65.

⁸¹ Rosalind Krauss, The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1985). According to Rosalind Krauss Brancusi's radical abstraction of parts of the body "testifies to a loss of site, in this case the site of the rest of the body, the skeletal support that would give to one of the bronze or marble heads

suggests a latent desire for wholeness, Magor's use of Brancusi's sculpture as a model might be interpreted as the expression of a desire for essence. At the same time, however, the artist has remarked that she found the Sleeping Muse's extreme stylization, Brancusi's means of distilling essence, discomfoting. With the same empathy she felt towards Dorothy (in Dorothy - A Resemblance figure 11) and towards Mrs. Tiber (in Time and Mrs Tiber figure 4), Magor reinvests the muse with a concrete reality - with presence - choosing a particular identity for her, that of the woman in the appended photograph, an artist-model. Thus she constructs a narrative. Faced with the overwhelming odds against uniqueness, the artist-model faces the dilemma of choosing between copying what has already been made and deemed valuable or original, as Magor herself has copied the muse; or retreating to hibernate. Choosing the latter has led to the dissolution or stasis of the artist-model's identity. In another context Magor has said of the dilemma of the artist: "There is an anxious choice we have to make between being leaders of a society, and being reflectors of a society. Neither one of these ...can we accept comfortably. On the one hand we admit we are constructed

a home."(280) Yet as Krauss also points out, "the sculpture of our own time continues this project of decentering through a vocabulary of form that is radically abstract....Yet our bodies and our experience of our bodies continue to be the subject of this sculpture...."(279) Of further interest in relation to Magor's choice of Brancusi's work is Italian artist Giuseppe Penone's attraction to it. For Penone, whose work share affinities with Magor's, Brancusi's "vision was attuned to the realm of essences; he maintained that art should find inspiration in reality, not in the image." in Diane Waldman Italian Art Now (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 1982), 90.

within a society, while on the other - well, being a witness feels so passive."⁸² For Magor the artist, as private individual, has a public responsibility or accountability.

Regal Décor, (1986) (figures 21-22), like The Sleeping Artist, marks a break with narrative text of Dorothy works ⁸³, and addresses the contradictory position of the artist as someone with a private vision and public responsibility. To quote Magor: "Let's say I'm very, very exuberantly making art in a statement that very, very critically condemns art."⁸⁴ The artist's intense material engagement, relegated to the background with the 'Dorothy' works, makes a full theatrical "comeback", enabling her to deal with the external as well as the internal constraints of making art, its reception as well as its production. The installation consists of two parts; the first a linoleum press/machine, or place of production; the second, a wall-size magazine fold-out living room, or place of consumption. These are linked by a pathway defined by large columns of linoleum and cardboard.⁸⁵

⁸² Ibid, 64.

⁸³ Monk, 5.

⁸⁴ Carr-Harris, 67.

⁸⁵ The concept for Regal Décor developed from two contrasting photographs; one of a logging operation off the B.C. Coast; another, an image from House and Garden magazine. In the former "production constructs the image". (Carr-Harris, 62) A sense of the type of operation, historical period and of work is conveyed. In the latter there are no traces of production. The photography is made to seem as effortless as making having the financial means to have such a home. In the installation of Regal Décor the logging site becomes the linoleum plant, while the image in the magazine remains essentially the same.

Significantly, in continuing to deal with the function of art, the role of the artist, and hence her own identity, Magor addresses and partially absolves the personal guilt she connects with her profession, a guilt related to the artist's marginality and lack of clearly defined social function.⁸⁶ In Regal Décor she affirms the value of the artist within society (as member of the public), and asserts the critical function of art by using it to question prevalent artistic trends. Regal Décor then, like all her work, is also about the obsessive search for identity or self.

The photograph of the woman over the fireplace asserts an identity independent of her surroundings. In another version of The Sleeping Artist, the absent body metaphorically suggests a self's lack of wholeness. Described by Magor this female image is "a very sincere image of anxiety or anguish...in a situation that is very glib and cynical - in a frame over a fireplace....The sincerity or authenticity of the image struggles with a context which is very insincere, and I don't resolve that."⁸⁷ The image is both personal, corresponding to Magor's own anxiety, and representative of a theoretical position, that of hibernation or non-involvement, as realized in The Sleeping

⁸⁶ Carr-Harris, 64. To Carr-Harris Magor says that sometimes she can hardly stand being an artist because of the guilt she that perceives is connected to the profession. (Ibid, 58) An intimation of this feeling appears in an earlier statement in "A bone can be forever", a June 12, 1972 Vancouver Sun article by Nicole Strickland: "People are always asking me, 'When are you going to get a job?' They don't realize that to gather and create is my job - that is my profession and that I work at it every day."

⁸⁷ Carr-Harris, 66.

Artist, a position that enables the artist to deal with constraints and suppression. As was the case in Production "the presence of a person working is implied"; and the linoleum machine is surrogate body as well as the artist's tool. However, unlike Magor's previous self-constructed machines, the linoleum machine is non-functional. It is rather a sign both for the artist and for mass production. As an equivalent for the artist, the machine is invested with a positive function, its capacity to produce - to work. In contrast linoleum, presented as a synthetic mass produced material that simulates "original" or authentic parquet flooring, ceramic tile, marble etcetera is invested with more negative connotations. In simulating mass production, Magor warns of the potential danger of churning out apparently effortless or 'synthetic' art; and challenges our assumptions about the authenticity of artwork and the originality of the artist. The artist-machine is, therefore, paradoxically invested with both positive and negative values. For Magor, the desirable position for the artist, for her self, is that of creating images in which production is evident ⁸⁸, and in which inventiveness is attempted.

Once again, Magor employs the imagery and concept of mass production with the artist's personal touch discernible only in the papier-mâché fireplace. Industry is simulated, not enacted, to convey a sense of effortlessness, an effortlessness disrupted by both the fireplace and the anxious image over the mantel. These draw attention to the dangers of over-consumption, of overlooking the material conditions of existence. As the product of manual labour, the fireplace functions as a link between the fabricated world

⁸⁸ Ibid, 62.

of desires and material reality; between the private and the public.

The ostensible focus of Regal Décor is the analogy of art as industry, as the transformation of material, with the transformative activity expressed by signs or equivalents. However, the question of authenticity as it reflects on identity assumes greater centrality if the analogy of body as commodity or victim of capital (an analogy in which the public infringes on the private), operative in Four Notable Bakers (figure 13), is also understood to be in evidence here. A curious reading that lends credence to such an interpretation is offered by critic John Bentley Mays: "The woman in the large photograph is also mere product - a trophy installed over the fireplace - a woman being medicalized as well, produced - accorded importance as commodity - by the doctors. The logic of the piece - from the outer world, into the factory (site of linoleum production) - and through the photo over the mantelpiece, into the hospital bed (site of the body's production as commodity)." Mays also refers to the woman as "merely given to us, a passive product of the factories of decor, of theory, of linoleum - a figure in the fabric incessantly generated and reified as 'culture'."⁸⁹

Regal Décor is in addition both critique and investigation of the function and role of the museum or gallery as public institution. The anthropological and museological references, present even in Magor's earliest pieces, are used here to deconstruct socioculturally inscribed formalities, to analyze conditions of reception and production.

⁸⁹ John Bentley Mays, "Kassel 1987: So much to see and do" C Magazine 14 (June 1987): 21, 23.

Magor shows us that the museum "has become part of commodity production and thus moved closer to commercial cultural institutions such as television..."⁹⁰ In so doing, she is paralleling, or reinforcing, the idea of the commodification of the private/personal body, of identity, by public cultural institutions and structures as suggested by Mays.

In this installation, emphasis on sociocultural constraints and processes and the personal constraints of the artist have replaced the biological, natural and physical determinants of identity realized in the bodily metaphors of her earlier work (figures 2, 6 and 10). Magor's imaginative powers have achieved a balance between the critical and the affirmative, the private and the public, the conceptual and the concrete. Although addressing intensely private concerns, above all the question of the construction of personal identity, art for Magor is a public forum; "A place where I can exhibit the process of making and re-making."⁹¹

The Archaeology of Self

Returning to her investigations into the realm of anthropology/ethnology, evident in the natural history references of early work such as Hutch (figure 1), as well as in the oral history of the Dorothy narratives (figures 10, 12, 14-16), Magor has recently moved into the area of cross-cultural investigation. The move is a logical one given her

⁹⁰ Ann Kaplan Postmodernism and its Discontents (London: Verso, 1988), 4.

⁹¹ Carr-Harris, 67.

continuing interest in identity and cultural production, and the fusion of art, craft and work in native culture. At the same time, Magor has renegotiated and extended the defining boundaries of the concept of the other as individual, evident in Time and Mrs. Tiber (figure 4) and Dorothy: A Resemblance (figure 11), to encompass another culture altogether. For example, in Magor's eight page magazine project for Photo Communique's fall 1986 issue entitled "Survival of the Fittest", portions of a found photograph of an effortless middle class interior are juxtaposed with excerpts from standard texts on the Inuit carving industry, and pictures of Inuit artists.⁹² The references point back to Magor's own history - especially her Cape Dorset experience - anticipating the question of "doubleness"⁹³ and the "personal archaeology" of self we

⁹² A quote from artist Oorebecca Allurut on the last page (39) of this magazine work reveals how she took up carving for survival: "Having become a good carver, there's no problem when I want to carve, but I don't do much anymore. I try to help the carvers that are just beginning because I know they need the money to buy things at the Bay." Her statement indicates the extent to which carving has replaced hunting and gathering as the means of survival for the Inuit. Here the conjunction of art and craft is raised; to separate them is impossible. Magor identifies the artist/craftsperson, as one and the same, who has a productive, respected, and non-marginal role in Inuit society. Magor, who teaches art at the Ontario College of Art, also tries to prepare her students for surviving in the art market, and may see a parallel between her own position and Allurut's. For Magor the role of the teacher "In theory...is to stabilize the identity by unburdening the student of myths and misconceptions, while drawing out expressions of personal and public relevance." Liz Magor "Visual Arts" in Toronto: A Play of History (Jeu d'histoire) (Toronto: The Power Plant, 1987), 42-43, 42. In this work questions of survival, both psychological and physical, are foremost, and demonstrate Magor's examination of her own role as artist/teacher, and her attempt to stabilize her own identity.

⁹³ In a recent article Magor is quoted: "I am fascinated by doubleness, by the superimposition of one identity upon another." Gillian MacKay, "Liz Magor", Canadian Art (Fall 1990): 79.

find in the following installations.

Magor herself made the belts and beadwork of Chilcoltin Beadwork, circa 1970 (1989) (figure 23) and Chicoltin Belt, circa 1970 (1989) as an art student.⁹⁴ Set against blown up photographs, taken twenty years ago of Magor and her friends, they create a portrait of "her production" and "value system" at that time - a time when "back to the landers" or hippies emulated native values and culture.⁹⁵ Life-size, the photographs relate to the body and establish an interactive connection with the viewer's body. Magor notes that "While the pictures are relatively unaltered, how I regard them has shifted, and this becomes the subject of the work."⁹⁶ Magor's has herself altered, in a way that parallels the concretely rendered physical changes in Dorothy's body. In this work she explores a personal archaeology of self in which her past self is assessed with an objective distance that comes with the passing of time: she is not the same and yet she is the same. The belt and beadwork are concrete personal adornments suggestive of the displaced or absent body, or metaphorically the self in search of wholeness; the possibility of the recognition of a stable core to her identity is left open.⁹⁷ The

⁹⁴ In Nicole Strickland, "A bone can be forever" The Vancouver Sun 12 June 1972, Magor says that her beaded belts sold for \$75 in New York, and took 72 hours of labour.

⁹⁵ Jennifer Fisher, "Identification An Insider's View," Parachute 56 (October/November/December 1989): 37-38.

⁹⁶ Ibid, 37.

⁹⁷ Similarly, the explicit subject matter of Cabin at Tetlayoko, (1989) and the similar Mono Home (1989), is the material culture and values of the counterculture of the late

photographs, the beads and belt all function as artifacts, relics of Magor's past. These also raise associations with native culture, hence evoking on two levels, archaeological overtones of a lost and fragmented way of life. Looking at these artifacts through the veil of memory Magor discovers how her identity has altered, while, at the same time, she brings to the surface buried cultural memories of the Other.

Magor continues this personal archaeological exploration of self in Field Work (1989) (figures 24-25). Although based on the same group of photographs of Magor and her friends twenty years ago as the Chilcoltin pieces, here the photographs stand alone as artifacts. Each is titled after a specific photograph taken by early twentieth century American photographer Edward Curtis. The emphasis is on the overlay of Curtis' project within her own exploration of issues of authenticity and identity.⁹⁸

sixties, embodying a form of resistance to mainstream culture. Visible through simulated panes of glass set into a wall, is a distant cabin, representing an "attempt to take architecture back to its beginnings, to the fundamentals." (Fisher, 38) This kind of return to fundamentals, is also an attempt to return to self. "A retreat into the country becomes a spiritual retreat into oneself". (Michel Foucault "Technologies of Self" in Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault, eds. L. Martin et al (Amherst, Mass.: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 34) and hence it relates to the desire for essentializing or stabilizing identity.

⁹⁸ Curtis' project, to photograph existing native culture before it vanished, started in about 1910 and lasted for thirty years. Curtis was already about 75 years too late (as Magor pointed out in her talk at the National Gallery of Canada Biennial November 5, 1989) since the process of assimilation was well under way. Indeed Curtis' project should be seen in the context of early twentieth century ethnography's salvage paradigm. According to the salvage paradigm, primitive cultures were "not long for this earth" and had to be recorded for posterity. Examples of the salvage paradigm in operation are Bronislaw Malinowski's belief that the Trobriand Island culture saved in his texts was not long for this earth; and A.L.Kroeber's recording of the languages and lore of

For much of her previous work Magor had relied on found or published photographs, partly out of the desire to avoid adding to the world's "image bank". However, she became dissatisfied with this approach: "I began to see the necessity to issue new images in the world and the inability of existing photographs to represent the kind of detail that I was approaching in terms of how an identity is constructed."⁹⁹ Rediscovery of the negatives of pictures she had taken from 1965 to 1973 when she had been involved in the counterculture of the sixties, proved to be, at first, simply embarrassing reminders of adolescent immaturity but twenty years had provided enough time for her to objectify her response.¹⁰⁰ In earlier work such as The Sleeping Artist (figure 19) and I Have Always Weighed 98 lbs. (figures 14-16) Magor used other 'bodies' to investigate her self; now Magor's focus is squarely on her own experience. The body's presence in the photographs functions metaphorically to investigate identity in terms of authenticity and doubleness or layering.

As Magor wondered how she could "sort out the privacy of the photographs with the kind of public display that they were"¹⁰¹ (paralleling the dilemma of private versus

the "disappearing" Californian Indians. This salvage mentality reflected "a desire to rescue 'authenticity' out of destructive historical change" according to James Clifford in "Of Other Peoples: Beyond the 'Salvage' Paradigm" in Discussions in Contemporary Culture edited by Hal Foster (Seattle: Bay Press, 1987), 121.

⁹⁹ Liz Magor, Artist Talk given in conjunction with the Canadian Biennial of Contemporary Art, Ottawa, National Gallery of Canada, 5 November 1989.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

public identity), she saw that the work of Edward Curtis offered a means of understanding her own past. In the sixties and seventies she had collected books of his reissued images.¹⁰² By superimposing her photographs into Curtis' frames she realized that, rather than manipulating the images pictorially as Curtis did his, she and her friends had actually manipulated themselves to believe that their naive experiments in forging an alternative way of life, inspired by native/Indian values, would work.¹⁰³ She draws a direct parallel between the blindly romantic transformation of a living native culture into a culture "frozen in time", relegated to museums and ethnology, and the historicization of the counterculture of the hippies, the sepia toned photographs veiling, romanticizing, even distorting, that history too. The one photograph which Magor chose not to manipulate, to leave as a sharp image¹⁰⁴, is Piegan Encampment taken in the summer of 1988. For her it serves as evidence of the resurfacing desire, both

¹⁰² Ibid. Curtis' photographs underwent a popular revival in the sixties when interest was high in "other people who lived on the land". In order to create "authentic" pictures of "true" native life, Curtis resorted to the manipulation of his subjects and negatives. This practice was, however, intrinsic to the pictorialist aesthetic in which he worked, an aesthetic which depended on manipulation to obtain misty generalized effects evocative of paintings. Curtis reputedly paid Indians "to remove their suspenders and moustaches" and touched up the negatives to remove clocks, cars and even other photographers there to shoot the same staged dance or event, recreating ideal rather than actual images of native life.

¹⁰³ Ibid. Adopting ten of Curtis' titles most suited to her images, Magor then, emulating Curtis manipulated her negatives to achieve a generalized effect, "to push my contemporary stuff into the past through technical means".

¹⁰⁴ James Clifford. 123. "Sharp color photos, particularly, tend to break the mood, for they are coded as 'actual', 'real', whereas black-and-white, sepia or grainy images suggest the 'past', atmospheric memory or 'imagination'."

personal and collective, to eschew urban life and live in harmony with the land and nature. A realization of the significance of the meaning and effect of landscape on identity came to Magor as she was working on this piece. For her, references/signs of native culture in Field Work such as the canoe, the headband and the salmon, are "very superficial and very slight, place is very dominant and strong".¹⁰⁵ It is the land which had a reflexive relationship with its inhabitants; its own particular identity actively shaping theirs, individually and collectively. In this and other work, the land's constancy acts as a foil for the transience of human identity and life. Magor began to question, once again:

What is authenticity?...Should I think of my identity as something which has an essence, and then there's this polluted part that I'll spend the rest of my life trying to clarify until I become my clear and perfect self; or is my identity constantly shifting and changing, and being influenced, and misunderstood even by myself, and that is my identity in its most pure form - that it's a mixture of things.¹⁰⁶

In one sense Magor appears to be returning to the image of The Sleeping Artist (figure 19) whose authenticity struggles with her inauthentic environment. In another sense she is returning to Time and Mrs. Tiber (figure 4) where she sought to preserve identity against the effects of the passage of time; and to Dorothy - A Resemblance (figure 11) where she showed that physical objects/signs could be poignant but inadequate means to convey personal identity. Reflecting an ongoing struggle with the concept of a

¹⁰⁵ Liz Magor, National Gallery Talk.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

shifting, decentered subject, all her work has been an attempt to deal with a sense of fragmentation, a lack of wholeness.

Child's Sweater, circa 1970 (1989) (figure 26) further explores questions of identity and authenticity and reintroduces the absent body through the presence of the sweater.¹⁰⁷ Magor describes how she has made it clear that the hanging and bird's skull are not bona fide artifacts by not disguising the material and method of their simulation.¹⁰⁸ The brown paper of the hanging and its red stain are quite apparent, as are the corrugated cardboard and tape of the skull. But the unexpected inappropriateness, or inauthenticity, of these contextual materials casts doubt over the "truth" or authenticity of the Cowichan sweater as artifact, even though the title and material assert its veracity.

The sweater becomes the main subject, with the background skull and hanging pushing you towards uncertainty, but at the same time giving you something that's actually there. So it's a contradiction, or a paradox - that you're looking at a real piece of art but [at] its very fake artifacts....I think maybe this is an image more of...coming closer to a conclusion - of deciding that the word "authentic" - that I can't use it any more because it is so relative.¹⁰⁹

But, Magor's investigation into authenticity is equally one into the constitution of identity. If the word "identity" is substituted for "authentic" in the quotation above, it becomes clear that she has, at least intellectually, opted for a version of identity that is shifting and relative, even "misunderstood" by herself. Here, she is trying to resolve or

¹⁰⁷ Here Magor also resumes her arte povera-like use of clothing as a material with its own history, and as something which molds and which can itself be molded.

¹⁰⁸ Liz Magor. National Gallery Talk..

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

come to terms with the relativity of authenticity and identity beyond the personal and the immediate. The entire postmodern era has, in fact, been characterized as knowing no commitments, as an era in which authenticity has dissolved ¹¹⁰; and in which "the distinction between formalist-modernist and avant-gardist-postmodernist art" has been schematized as "'to compel conviction' versus 'to cast doubt'; 'to seek the essential' versus 'to reveal the conditional'".¹¹¹ Magor is thus being typically postmodern in revealing the conditional and casting doubt. The very nature of her perpetual questioning, of her ongoing investigation into identity, suggests a reluctance to surrender totally the formalist-modernist concept of essence, or the perpetual desire for wholeness. Authenticity may have dissolved but for Magor identity cannot.¹¹²

Magor's dilemma lies in her recognition that wholeness remains a figment and her inability to deny the desire for its existence. Such ambivalence bears a certain correspondence with Walter Benjamin's own ambivalence concerning the withering or

¹¹⁰ Peter Fuller, Theoria: Art and the Absence of Grace (London: Chatto and Windus, 1988), 213.

¹¹¹ Hal Foster cites Fredric Jameson's "'In the Destructive Element Immerse': Hans-Jurgen Syberberg and Cultural Revolution" October 17 (Summer 1981): 112, in "The Crux of Minimalism" in Individuals: A Selected History of Contemporary Art, ed. Howard Singerman (New York: Abbeville, 1986), 177.

¹¹² Indeed in MacKay's recent article Magor says: "I still have a sense that there is a part of me that is physical or natural or in some way not historically or socially determined...." MacKay, 83.

loss of aura ¹¹³, "the quality of presence', or the 'sensitive nucleus' of its authenticity"¹⁴, in the age of mechanical reproduction. While he views the withering of aura as the outcome of an aesthetics based on political necessity, he mourns the disappearance of social tradition and ritual that must ensue. Oral culture "is lost because there is no more weaving and spinning to go on while they are being listened to."¹⁵ In this context, Magor's own work can be seen as an attempt to revive the art of storytelling, a lament for its demise, and, most importantly, that of the social self. The loss of aura, the loss of authenticity and the loss of social fabric all conflate in Child's Sweater where these elements, in conjunction with the absent body, evoke the fragile condition of self. Held in the bird's beak the empty Cowichan sweater represents, on one level, a form of tourist art subtly attesting to the impact of assimilation and externally imposed cultural forces on the body/identity/self. On another metaphysical level, its form evoking that of an absent child, the sweater becomes a mysterious, poignant symbol of loss/desire. Playing on the studied techniques of museum display, the spotlight creates a mock aura, but the quality of pathos aroused by the sweater transforms it into a true aura - into an object which emanates the quality of a unique and

¹¹³ Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" in Illuminations (New York:Schocken Books, 1989), 221.

¹¹⁴ Peter Wollheim, "The Politics Of Memory: Re-Reading Walter Benjamin" Vanguard (February - March 1986): 22.

¹¹⁵ Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller" in Illuminations (New York:Schocken Books, 1989), 91. This is, as alluded to at an earlier point, also the source of Magor's concept of boredom as mental relaxation.

authentic, even spiritual, presence.¹¹⁶ The sweater is a found object as the skulls and bones and jars and suits and and beads were - and like them is imbued with its own history and identity. While the identity of the Other is manifestly represented here, Magor is ultimately searching for her self through the Other.¹¹⁷

In addition, Magor continues her interest in a social and cultural critique relating to the conditions of art display and reception.¹¹⁸ The museological, anthropological and ethnological references apparent in the installations of the late eighties such as "Survival of the Fittest" and Pulp Fiction Presents the Special Collection (1987)¹¹⁹, persist in Child's Sweater and serve to recontextualize the question of identity. Museum artifacts are understood to be authentic traces of existence, traces or clues to identity; hence, Magor's attraction to them. On yet another level, the sweater, mask and hanging as artifacts share affinities with the artist herself: "As artists are distinct from the general

¹¹⁶ Walter Benjamin discusses aura in terms of uniqueness, authenticity and its basis in ritual in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" in Illuminations (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 217-251.

¹¹⁷ "The objective search for another's identity is also a search for self." Carole Laing, "Memory Work" C Magazine 24 (Winter 1990): 49.

¹¹⁸ Here Magor is manipulating lighting and space, integrating them into the material aspects of the work itself, in order to affect the viewer's perception. Curator Diana Nemiroff discussed this aspect of Magor's work in her tour of the National Gallery's Biennial Exhibition, Fall 1989.

¹¹⁹ Pulp Fiction Presents the Special Collection (1987) was a group project in which Magor and her students copied artifacts from the collection of the Royal Ontario Museum.

public, so are artifacts separated from ordinary objects."¹²⁰ Finally Magor's fake artifacts, the mask and hanging, raise the complicated issue of replication ¹²¹, which intersects with the issues of authenticity and identity.

As in Time and Mrs Tiber (figure 4) and A Concise History (figure 5), where physical traces or products of individual histories comprise the subject matter, Magor's Child's Sweater evokes a simultaneous absence and presence of bodies, and consequently identities. The hollow sweater, the hanging and the mask are at once the products of corporeal labour and objects closely related to the body. In search of her own identity, Magor has again objectified "the history of a life, or at least of a body."¹²² As well, the work results from repetitive activity and the state of boredom/relaxation which has been a constant element of Magor's art, and thus identity. Magor is, in fact, continuing the concept of labour as purposive transformation: the tape and paper as signifiers of inauthenticity also draw attention to the process of transformation. Throughout the eighties ritual became somewhat secondary - even concealed - in Magor's work. Now, with the effective integration of ritual into Child's Sweater, Magor is returning to her

¹²⁰ Liz Magor, "Visual Arts" in Toronto: A Play of History (Jeu d'histoire) (Toronto: The Power Plant, 1987), 42.

¹²¹ Replicas have increasingly replaced original artifacts in museum displays, testing our assumptions of the ideals of the museum, and calling into question the authority of the interpretation of history it perpetuates. The recent controversies over the use of replicas by the Museum of Civilization in Ottawa is a case in point.

¹²² See introduction to chapter. Liz Magor in Lorna Farrell-Ward, Production/Reproduction. (Vancouver: The Vancouver Art Gallery) n.p.

roots, not only with the explicit engagement in ritual, but also in her use of craft techniques of the 1970s also incorporated into the Chilcoltin pieces (figure 23). As a result, the activity of art-making is integrated with the content of the work: producer merges with product, body with self.

The simulated cedar mat/hanging, in particular, but also the hand-knitted sweater and constructed bird's skull, represent continuity with earlier works such as Production (figure 10) and Time and Mrs. Tiber (figure 4) which simultaneously represented an individual's concentrated, time consuming and defying labour. The necessity of work (of making), as a means of understanding the construction and affirmation of self/identity remains fundamental as Magor continues to investigate her self in the role of artist, a marginal member of society, who participates in a form of cultural production with no obvious contributory function.

Having explored and criticized the overwhelming machinations of mass production in Regal Décor (figures 21-22 and Four Notable Bakers (figure 13). Magor is now clearly affirming the value of art, craft and her own work. Drawing a parallel between the labour involved in both fine art and craft, she alludes to the coherent integration of this type of labour with social function in native culture. Although her mat is a simulation, an obvious fake, the technique the artist has used is authentic and perpetuates traditional methods.¹²³ Clearly by her choice of materials and production Magor is

¹²³ Hilary Stewart, Cedar: Tree of Life to the Northwest Coast Indians (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1984), 141.

counteracting what she sees as the homogeneity and alienation characteristic of a culture based on mass production and consumption.¹²⁴ One way to reconcile her own marginality within such a culture is to seek to identify her 'self' with the native women of the Northwest Coast, whose "principal industrial occupation" was the weaving of robes, baskets and mats from cedar bark"¹²⁵ Magor not only portrays and identifies with the Other, she is directly including "this other within the self."¹²⁶

The references to native culture also deepen the ritualistic element of Child's Sweater.¹²⁷ Beyond the characteristic affirmative repetition there is a suggestion of

¹²⁴ Choosing to use the private photograph in Field Work is another example of such a strategic counteraction of mass production.

¹²⁵ Edward S. Curtis, The North American Indian vol. 10 (New York: Johnson Reprint Corp., 1970), 304.

¹²⁶ With regard to the concept of the salvage paradigm, or the compulsion to "rescue authenticity" for posterity (epitomized by the museum), anthropologist Virginia Dominguez asks if the answer to transcending this paradigm is to be found "in a shift away from the deliberate representation of others to an explicit emphasis on the representation of the self?"; that is, to stop the hierarchical objectifying of the Other, and instead to see oneself in terms of the Other. Virginia Dominguez "Of Other Peoples: Beyond the Salvage Paradigm" pp.131-137 in Discussions in Contemporary Culture edited by Hal Foster (Seattle: Bay Press, 1987), 136.

"Exploring oneself and one's culture in its interaction with other selves and other cultures remains a vital process when understanding is creating - is creation," says Filmmaker Trinh T. Minh-Ha in "Of Other Peoples: Beyond the Salvage Paradigm - Discussion" in Discussions in Contemporary Culture edited by Hal Foster (Seattle: Bay Press, 1987), 140. She also asks "Why not include this other within the self?" Ibid, 145.

¹²⁷ Although Magor has made it clear that she is speaking of native culture only in terms of superficial signs, or as filtered through her own "subjective grid" (Artist' Talk, National Gallery 1989) such references add a more complex dimension to the concept of identity, and its construction in socialization. The conjunction of red cedar with the

reconciliation, atonement or expiation of guilt, which relate more fundamentally to the original impetus of ritual as a healing process. Magor is bringing the repressed content of both the personal and collective unconsciousnesses to the surface, with the result that Child's Sweater is perhaps Magor's most overtly romantic, elegaic work. Its beauty and poetry, the sense of fragility and timelessness is, however, doubledged.

Curator Diana Nemiroff states that Magor's 1989 body of work, "constitutes a sort of personal archaeology expressing not so much a nostalgic desire to return to the past as an effort to resist the totalizing environment of the present through the recuperation

bird skull refers directly to the Tsetseka, or four month long winter ceremonial of the West Coast Kwakiutl, also known as 'Sacred-Red-Bark- Season'. Red cedar bark ornaments and cloaks were integral to the winter ceremonial (Curtis, 9) while the skull in Child's Sweater formally evokes the hokhokw mask worn in the hamatsa dance, the ritual of the ceremonial's highest order. In this ritual the taming of the Cannibal, the personification of the destructive forces of the universe, "is a metaphorical extension of child socialization" [Stanley Walens, Feasting with Cannibals: Metaphors and Morality in XIX Century Kwakiutl Culture (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1981), 15] and critical to the shaping of identity. For the Kwakiutl "Hunger is the energy, the force that motivates the world, but ultimately it is morality that is the source of power." (Walens, 124) "Morality, the force of controlled social action, the strength of ritual, can conquer even a Cannibal's hunger." (Walens, 162) As used in ritual and mythology, the body becomes a metaphor for the socialization of the individual. Identity, the production of a whole and unified being, is possible but contingent upon morality and sociocultural processes. The concept of a true self exists in Kwakiutl culture (Walens, 61); but so does the concept of identity as produced. The two concepts - that of self as natural but ultimately unknowable, and that of a self or identity as a construction - can coexist. Reflecting on the extent to which considerations of the social have entered her work, Magor is, carrying to yet another level, a concern with whether individuality, as an independent state, has become a myth. She referred to this possibility in Donald Campbell, "Exhibit distracts artist from work" Winnipeg Free Press 19 June 1987 already cited in this paper p.3.

of alternative values."¹²⁸ This recuperation is, however, a qualified one, since the artist's own past idealism is viewed with the benefit of hindsight and some cynicism. The significance of recent works such as Field Work and Child's Sweater by Magor are significant in their "recovery of a history hitherto either misrepresented or rendered invisible"¹²⁹. Most important, in light of this thesis, the recovery involves both Magor's own history and identity and that of a marginal people. As such, Magor in her search for self can be said to be restoring "the nonsequential energy of lived historical memory and subjectivity as fundamental components of meaning in representation"; and "opening the culture to experiences of the Other which have remained 'outside' (and have been repressed or framed in a context of confrontational hostility) the norms manufactured by 'insiders'".¹³⁰ Thus Magor's exploration of body/self/identity is expressed in profoundly subjective work, which ultimately serves to undermine dominant societal values by releasing repressed memories and histories not only of her personal past but also that of native culture. The recuperation of her own past and its values is recontextualized with those of native culture - or the Other - into an affirmative statement of identity, unity and resistance.

¹²⁸ Diana Nemiroff, Canadian Biennial of Contemporary Art (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1989), 56.

¹²⁹ Edward Said, "Opponents, Audiences, Constituencies and Community" in The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture edited by Hal Foster, 158.

¹³⁰ Ibid. Speaking of photo-essays by Susan Meisalas and Sarah Graham-Brown Said says that "these two concrete tasks" were adumbrated by John Berger in "Another Way of Telling," Journal of Social Reconstruction 1 (January-March 1980): 64.

The question of personal identity/self, both how it is constructed and how it constructs itself, is undoubtedly central to the work of Liz Magor. The body, in a variety of metamorphoses reflecting the contemporary decentered condition of self, is the foremost vehicle for her investigation. Magor has approached the construction of identity in terms of its physical traces in works such as Hutch (figure 1); natural processes in works such as Compost Figures (figure 6); mass production and industry in Production (figure 10) and Regal Decor (figures 21-22); difference in Dorothy: A Resemblance (figure 11); social encoding in Four Notable Bakers (figure 13); the role of the artist in The Sleeping Artist (figure 19); and the crosscultural in "Survival of the Fittest". In recent work such as Child's Sweater (figure 26), where the issue of authenticity intersects that of identity, Magor undertakes a personal archaeology in search of a natural (unconstructed) part of self. Yet, as in all her work, the realization of self as construction is an underlying theme, and the relationship of self to culture or society remains critical. Also critical has been the theme of technology/industry/mass production, representing, reflecting or interacting with, the body/self in terms of the artist's function, her relationship to her materials, as well as in terms of making manifest sociocultural encoding and the struggle for wholeness.

With the body - present even in absence - as a central metaphor Magor has consistently dealt with various aspects and combinations of time, work, narrative and above all identity in relation to the human condition, the artist's condition and ultimately her own anxieties. Her own self-proclaimed goal is to work personal issues or "things

back and forth" in the studio,

until they come to some place where I want them just to vibrate between true and untrue and certainty and doubt; and when they're staying there - just flickering - then I think that that's finished. And then there is a sort of inability to finally answer what this or what these are about.¹³¹

The inability to "finally answer" or to fix an interpretation is also characteristic of artist Jana Sterbak's work whose intensely psychological approach to materials, technology and technique is markedly different from Magor's. In the following chapter the question of the metaphorical relationship between body and self, the play of absence and presence, the desire for wholeness will be further explored in the work of an artist who is more reticent than Magor in identifying the personal as content.

¹³¹ Liz Magor, Artist's Talk, National Gallery of Canada, 1989.

Chapter Two

The Subliminal Self - Jana Sterbak

A work generally represents observations which are not particular to me...anyone could make them. It is only the form they take that says anything about me as producer of objects....my works express my sensibility but not my personality.¹

While both Magor and Sterbak address the issue of the decentered and constructed postmodern self metaphorically through the body, Jana Sterbak's approach to her art is, on the surface, more distanced than Magor's. She does not readily admit to the private or personal aspects of self which are revealed by, or go beyond, sensibility. In contrast to Magor's affirmation that the function of the artist is connected to physical engagement with material, Sterbak, in giving "form to...thought through physical means"², maintains a certain analytical or critical distance from her material.

Through a selective examination of Sterbak's work, we will discover her recurring concern with the interdependence of body and mind, the issue of individual autonomy, and the emotional, cultural and somatic effects of psychic phenomena and sociocultural inscription on the decentered self. A discussion of her art will, therefore, address not only the metaphorical relationship of body to self, but also the link between mind and

¹ Bruce Ferguson and Sandy Nairne, The Impossible Self (Winnipeg: Winnipeg Art Gallery, 1988), 65 and 67.

² Ibid, 67.

body. Other themes, such as the role of technology as it affects, or interacts with body and self; the fragmentation and construction of identity; the relationship of self to culture and the Other, all addressed in the previous chapter, will also be considered here.

A complex amalgamation of science, Minimalism, conceptualism, feminism and literature, Jana Sterbak's art is bound to the physical properties of materials and focuses clearly on the body. In her work the absence or presence of the body - the "site of a dense network of physical memories, psychological associations and cultural connotations..."³ - ultimately becomes a metaphor for self. Paradoxically, as we shall see, it is at the very point when the physical presence or the unity of the body is denied, that Sterbak is most successful in suggesting an aura or emanation of self.

When looked at as a whole Sterbak's art lingers like a bad dream resurfacing in our waking hours. Our deepest anxieties, guilt and fears assume concrete form, assault our senses, and in doing so probe the limits of what it is to be human. But within this essential 'humanness'⁴ Sterbak ultimately offers the viewer the potential for redemption within her incessantly stark, even sadistic images. Rooted in the socio-cultural, psychic and somatic reality of human experience, Sterbak's dream imagery uses the body, "the

³ Jessica Bradley, "Jana Sterbak: Objects as Sensations", in Cindy Richmond, Jana Sterbak (Regina:Mackenzie Art Gallery, 1989), 41.

⁴ Donald Kuspit uses the term "humanness" rather than "humanism" to avoid the latter's associations with the system of thought that focuses on the perfection of human ideals. Donald B. Kuspit, The New Subjectivism: Art in the 1980s (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1988), xix.

material basis for the constitution of the subject" ⁵, as the central metaphor - the site of investigations into identity and the constitution of the self.

Sterbak's own admission that,

I do not think of myself as a discrete entity. In fact I think there is no such thing, on the emotional, social, economic, even the atomic level. Only in the most narrow physical sense are we discrete entities. And this century, especially we are concentrating our energies to overcome the boundaries of the physical.⁶

establishes her acceptance and recognition of the multiplicity of the shifting, decentered self or subject. Like Magor then, Sterbak is responding to the fragmentation, the lost core, that is the inheritance of the postmodern subject. Her statement reflects a specific awareness of the theories of Jacques Lacan, echoing his "conviction that the human subject is never a discrete self, that it cannot be known outside of the terms of society...."⁷ At the same time, according to Lacanian theory, the subject is compelled to attempt to achieve stability and unity even if it is illusory; the individual is caught between the supposed reality of fragmentation and the psychic desire to be whole and stable.⁸ Sterbak's art expresses this contradictory situation, addressing a dilemma which

⁵ Toril Moi uses this phrase in relation to Julia Kristeva in The Kristeva Reader (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 166.

⁶ Ferguson and Nairne, 67.

⁷ Kate Linker, Difference: On Representation and Sexuality (New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1980), forward.

⁸ Madan Sarup, An Introductory Guide to Post-structuralism and Postmodernism (Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 1989), 18.

shares an affinity with Magor's desire for wholeness.

Sterbak's statement also clearly draws on her interest in physics, the science of the invisible forces of the universe, and a connection she makes between universal atomic fragmentation and the dispersed or decentered body and self. When Sterbak received a Canada Council grant to study physics in New York in 1984, it was above all British physicist Stephen Hawking's work on the origins of matter that fascinated her. Hawking's "theory of physics that would break down the hard and fast dualism of subject and object, substituting for it a participatory universe in which objective and subjective reality create each other"⁹, is a search for a unifying theory which raises provocative correspondences with Sterbak's belief that "we are concentrating our energies to overcome the boundaries of the physical". In addition, it offered Sterbak a model for a scientific and creative approach to addressing the fragmented, anxiety-afflicted postmodern era.

The Fragmented Body

Sterbak's earliest exhibited works can be likened to Minimalist exercises ¹⁰,

⁹ National Gallery of Canada Curatorial File - I Can Hear You Think (dedicated to Stephen Hawking). Diana Nemiroff, Justification "For the Collection of Canadian Contemporary Painting, Sculpture and Videotapes." n.d.

¹⁰ Minimalist art, a major influence during her art school years in the seventies, further contextualizes Sterbak's view of the individual as 'entity'. As one of principle art movements of the sixties, presenting a counterpoint to Pop Art's embrace of mass

investigating the properties of different and unusual materials as well as the role of artmaking: "I was educated at a time when minimalism was being expanded to include the psychological realm. I wanted to extend this discourse to include the specific properties of the material I was using, to the point where the physical properties of the material would inform the content of the work as much as the shape the material assumes."¹¹ Among these early works are plasticine shoes, cubes constructed from needles and threads and paper, a lead balloon, and measuring tapes fashioned into finger cones; pieces that express a playful sense of the absurd, while, in allusions to the interdependence of senses and psyche, they intimate the body's centrality within

culture, (Hal Foster, "The Crux of Minimalism" in Individuals: A Selected History of Contemporary Art 1945-1986, 178) Including artists such as Donald Judd, Eva Hesse, Toni Smith, Carl Andre, Sol Lewitt, and Robert Morris Minimalism expresses an art for art's sake philosophy, an aesthetic based on the properties of and the projection of objecthood. "The projection of objecthood as such means that the basic physical properties of the object impose their laws on the work of art instead of being subservient to it. The minimalists use only primary, that is, pure shapes... Thus the shape inspires the work; the physical world informs the aesthetic world." [Carla Gottlieb, Beyond Modern Art (New York: Dutton, 1976), 28] Its most significant achievement, however, is held to be its activation of, and stress on, the the object's interactive spatial relationship with the viewer; on "objects whose subject is the viewer." [Michael Craig-Martin, "The Art of Context" in Minimalism (Liverpool: Tate Gallery, 1989), 7.] While this development is critical to Sterbak's work, so too is the observation that for the Minimalist "no definitions of self or art are possible." [Minimalist artist Allan Leepa, "Minimalist Art and Primary Meanings" in Gregory Battcock Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology (New York: Dutton Press, 1968), 206.] "Like the mystic... these artists deny the ego and individual personality." [Barbara Rose wrote this regarding Donald Judd and Robert Morris in "ABC Art" in Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology ed. Gregory Battcock (New York: Dutton Press, 1968), 296.] Although the context for these statements is different from Sterbak's, the words, "my work expresses my sensibility but not my personality"⁸ suggest a clear link with such Minimalist positions.

¹¹ Sterbak cited in Ferguson and Nairne, 70.

Sterbak's work. The conic Measuring Tapes (1979-82) (figure 27), for example, can be worn on the fingers implying "that the fingertips are a kind of brain, a cool measuring brain, and that touch is intelligent, even critical."¹² For Sterbak, "The more of the sensory apparatus the object can engage the more affective it will be."¹³ In turn, the investigation of psychosomatic sensations develops into a means of investigating not only the relation of body to mind and subliminal or psychological aspects of self; but also the social and cultural processes that affect its constitution or construction.

Despite the tendency to simplified form, inherited from the Minimalists, Sterbak's work is deceptively complex. It is at once witty and guileless: "I want to be precise and succinct. I am interested in the interdependence of the sensible and the inert, the mental

¹² Marni Jackson "The Body Electric: The High Risk Art of Jana Sterbak" Canadian Art (Spring 1989): 68.

These finger cones evoke Rebecca Horn's 1972 Finger-Gloves which Horn describes as an "instrument to extend manual sensibility" while at the same time keeping objects at a distance in Lea Vergine's Il Corpo Como Linguaggio (Milan: Prearo, 1974)n.p. Indeed an affinity with Horn is apparent in much of Sterbak's work. This group of work can also be related to arte povera, with its rejection of precious materials and of art as a commodity. Both Jessica Bradley (48) and Cindy Richmond (8) allude to the influence of arte povera in Jana Sterbak (Regina: Mackenzie Art Gallery, 1989). Richmond also alludes to the body art expressionism of the Wiener Aktionismus as a point of reference, "For Nitsch and Rainer, the artist's own body became both subject and object of his art, a sort of topography of feelings and emotions related to the artist's own inner psychological states." As Richmond notes there is something of the "perverse sensuality" and of the way of communicating through very materiality of these expressionistic dimensions of Viennese 'body-art' in "Sterbak's interest in the body, and the body's relation to the self".(8) A certain remoteness in her aesthetic, however, avoids the emotional display inherent to the violent narcissism of Nitsch and Rainer. Both arte povera and the Wiener Aktionismus are themselves outgrowths of the minimalist aesthetic.

¹³ Ferguson and Nairne, 67.

and the physical, consciousness and matter. I want my objects to influence the way people apprehend reality."¹⁴ This 1985 statement represents a coherent, thoughtful fusion of Sterbak's predilections and formative influences which first becomes really apparent in Golem: Objects as Sensations (1982) (figure 28). Leading up to this installation her interest in the properties of materials, "heavy metals and those materials that have the ability to project their properties over and beyond the physical object"¹⁵, was realized in a series of dense, crudely formed replicas of parts of the human body modelled in clay and cast in lead. In these the body was dissolved into a fragmented set of discrete elements.

In Golem Sterbak brings a selection of these body parts, "icons of the vulnerability of the flesh"¹⁶, together with text and photographs into a narrative context confined within the enclosure of three walls. We are presented with a corps morcelé¹⁷, "a violated body and in turn one that threatens to violate."¹⁸ On one wall is a bronze ear;

¹⁴ Jessica Bradley and Diana Nemiroff, Songs of Experience (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1986), 138.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Jessica Bradley, "Jana Sterbak: Objects as Sensations" in Cindy Richmond, Jana Sterbak (Regina: Mackenzie Art Gallery, 1989), 42.

¹⁷ "The image of the body in bits and pieces - le corps morcelé - is one of the most common of dreams, fantasies....[and]occurs when the unified and transcendent ego is threatened with dissolution." Allon White, L'éclatement du sujet: The Theoretical Work of Julia Kristeva (Birmingham: University of Birmingham), 10.

¹⁸ Bradley in Richmond, 42.

opposite it, three photographs with texts. One photograph depicts a "malevolent heart" labelled as made of radioactive fermium, a self-destructive, environmentally threatening element.¹⁹ On the floor are body fragments cast out of suitably suggestive materials, such as a rubber stomach and a bronze spleen painted red. At one end are seven battered hearts of lead, clearly the worse for wear; at the other is a single "pure", undamaged heart. The dream-like quality of Golem brings to mind associations with Surrealism, but here ordinary objects are not so much raised to the level of art as the Surrealists did, but used to bring us back into the reality of our own existence, however grim or ironic. We are confronted with the stark, albeit fascinating evidence of our biological origins and our mortality.²⁰

In rough notes pertaining to this installation Sterbak wrote:

I AM THE GOLEM AND ITS MAKER AT ONCE - I CONSTITUTE/MAKE MYSELF THRU THE ORGANS - THE PARTS THAT MAKE ME UP /IN MAKING THE SENSATIONS I BUILD MY INSIDES/I MAKE MYSELF/I'M MADE OF METAL - MY FLESH IS LEAD/MY BLOOD RUNS MERCURY/MY EYES ARE IRON/MY SOUL'S A WIRE AND IT VIBRATES.²¹

We find not only a very clear identification of the artist herself with the discrete sculptural elements and with the actual construction or constitution of her body and self

¹⁹ Nairne and Ferguson, 70.

²⁰ Bradley in Richmond, 42. Bradley writes, "If the implications of this work are as repellant as they are compelling, it is perhaps because of its insistence upon what lies beneath the skin: the relentless and uncontrollable processes of our bodies, an inexorable progression of growth and decay; in short, our mortality...".

²¹ National Gallery of Canada Curatorial File - Golem: Object as Sensation.

(reinforced by the impression of her hands in the objects ²²); but also, an admission of the existence of the soul, the spiritual dimension of self. Furthermore, the constructed, fragmented body is not simply a metaphoric vehicle for self as subject and object of creation, but the subject and object of destruction. Indeed, the legend of the Golem is a medieval creation myth set in Prague, Sterbak's home until 1968.²³ In one version, Rabbi Loew created the Golem, or artificial man, out of clay, in order to protect Jews from the discriminative aggressions of the Gentile population. Once the persecution of Jews was forbidden, the rabbi destroyed the Golem whose remains are said to lie in the debris of the ancient synagogue of Prague.²⁴ The power to create and the power to destroy go hand in hand in the Golem:

All golem legends derive from the ancient Jewish belief that any righteous man could create the world by repeating, in an order prescribed by the Cabbala, the letters of the secret name of God....a golem was said to wear a slip of metal known as a 'sham' inscribed with the Hebrew word emeth or Truth of God either across its forehead or under its tongue. When a rabbi wanted to destroy the golem he had only to pluck out the 'e' so it now read 'meth' or death, and

²² National Gallery of Canada Curatorial File - I Can Hear You Think (Dedicated to Stephen Hawking). Diana Nemiroff, Justification "For the Collection of Contemporary Canadian Painting, Sculpture and Videotapes." n.d. Nemiroff compares this aspect of Golem to the later work named above.

²³ National Gallery of Canada Curatorial Files - Golem: Objects as Sensations. Diana Nemiroff, Justification "For The Collection of Contemporary Canadian Painting, Sculpture and Videotapes". 15 January 1986. "The word golem first appears in the Bible in the sense of unformed substance or embryo" According to The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia this usage was later extended to refer to unmarried women.

²⁴ National Gallery of Canada Curatorial Files - Golem: Objects as Sensations. Diana Nemiroff, Justification "For The Collection of Contemporary Canadian Painting, Sculpture and Videotapes". 15 January 1986.

the golem dissolved.²⁵

Thus the making of a golem, beyond serving as "a prototype of the robot" ²⁶, functions as a metaphor for the creative process and its darker counterpart, the capacity to destroy.²⁷ A golem's total dependency on the will of its maker parallels the art object's relationship to the artist. Magor, too, recognizes a kind of omnipotence, 'playing God', in her attempts to parallel natural forces (Compost Figures figure 6) and through her functioning machines (Four Boys and A Girl figure 7) which investigate how identity is molded and potentially eroded. In the end, however, for Magor production or 'creation' itself is in the end positive and identity affirming rather than potentially self-annihilating as it is for Sterbak. In Sterbak's work the destructive (thanatopic) self is inseparable from the creative (erotic) self.

While Sterbak's way of dealing with the content-relatedness of materials in Golem derives from Minimalism ²⁸, contemporary literature provides another personal reference point: "Much like the short stories of Italian novelist Primo Levi who takes physics as his starting point...I was fascinated by the fact that there exists so-called inert matter

²⁵ Bruce Chatwin Utz (London: Viking, 1988), 42 and 44.

²⁶ Ibid, 41.

²⁷ This concept is reinforced by the reference to self-destructive fermium in the accompanying photograph.

²⁸ Minimalist Allan Leepa writes "I want to deal only with objective sensations." "Minimal Art and Primary Meanings" in Battcock, 206.

which can be very dangerous for us."²⁹ The writings of Czech writer Karl Capek who coined the word "robot" from the Czech "robot" meaning servitude or forced labour (conceptually derived from the Prague Golem) are also important. The robot represents not only the power to free man from toil but "man himself dehumanized by his own technology."³⁰ Sterbak has alluded to both Franz Kafka and Capek as writers who "were perhaps the first to comment on the technocratic state,"³¹ and shares with them an ambivalence towards technology which is more marked in later work such as Seduction Couch (1987) (figure 35) and Remote Control (1989) (figure 48). The importance of technology for Kafka, Capek and Sterbak is not surprising given that the development of industrialization in Czechoslovakia preceded and surpassed its development in other Eastern Block countries.³² Indeed, it has been noted that "proletarian culture" informs Sterbak's "aesthetic, supplying her with industrial materials and technologies as well as a secularized spirituality."³³ While she responds deeply to technology, "the poetry of the

²⁹ Nairne and Ferguson, 70.

³⁰ William E. Harlans, Karl Capek (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), 85.

³¹ The Impossible Self, p.67.

³² Marc Mayer, "Jana Sterbakova: The Dress (I Want You To Feel The Way I Do) Unpublished paper. New York 1986. National Gallery Curatorial Files - The Dress (I Want You To Feel The Way I Do).

³³ Ibid.

modern age"³⁴, she is, nonetheless, also affected by its potential moral and spiritual bankruptcy. In later work such as I want you to feel the way I do... (The Dress) (1985) (figure 32) and Vanitas - Flesh Dress for an Albino Anorectic 1987) (figure 41), informed, in part, by the baroque religious relics of the Counter-Reformation which decorate her native Prague,³⁵ Sterbak pursues this dichotomy. She explores it further by alluding, in yet another aspect of Golem (figure 28) and other works, to a curious alliance between alchemy and technology. Alchemy, the "mystical exercise...to find the substance of immortality"³⁶, has links with the Golem who was himself the product of such an exercise. At the root of alchemy is the question:

How can man escape from the prison of his own imperfection? He who would find the answer...must begin by taking a long, hard, unblinking look at himself. He will, if honest, see that the root cause of all his troubles lies in his almost total ignorance of that which matters most: his true self.³⁷

³⁴ Jana Sterbak, Artist's Talk given in conjunction with the Canadian Biennial of Contemporary Art Ottawa, National Gallery of Canada, 5 November 1989.

³⁵ Mayer (1986).

³⁶ Chatwin, Utz, 109

³⁷ Roustayi cites Stanilas Klossowssi de Rola Alchemy:the Secret Art (London:Thames and Hudson, 1973), 13-14. The suggestion of alchemy here links Sterbak with the work of German artist Joseph Beuys who felt that art must be shown in its most concentrated form and saw "unmediated subjective meaning in objective properties..." Donald Kuspit, "Sculpture as Material Metaphor" in Individuals" A Select History of Contemporary Art 1945 - 1986, edited by Howard Singerman. (Los Angeles: The Museum of Contemporary Art, 1986), 109. Indeed the formal qualities Golem's "stuff of life, spread out in front of us, more bait-like than sculptural" offer an intriguing comparison with the "primordial animals" of German artist Joseph Beuys' Lightning with Stag in its Glare (1982-83) (figure no.29). Like the original Golem they are made from clay, "the substance of the earth, the substratum on which we stand and

Sterbak, by using the body as both a means of investigating the innate properties of materials and the object of alchemical transformation, allows it to become the metaphoric vehicle for self-knowledge.³⁸

Sterbak's investigation into these hidden forces of existence and creation which effect technological and spiritual transformations is also related to her study of physics. Searching for "a material analogy for poetic inspiration", she "thought she might find a key in the science whose investigation into the composition of matter and the invisible forces of the universe have determined our modern view of the world."³⁹ As a way of articulating this analogy Sterbak concentrated on electromagnetic fields, and produced the work I can hear you think (dedicated to Stephen Hawking) (1984), (figure 30) which exhibits the rudimentary technology hinted at as a theme in Golem (figure 28). Hawking's attempt to find a unifying theory to explain all material manifestations not

from which we will awaken the planet to life after the dreadful slavings"[Beuys cited in Heiner Bastian, Joseph Beuys: Blitzschlag Mit Lichtschein Auf Hirsch/Lightning with Stag in its Glare (Berlin: Benteli Verlag, 1986), 14] and then cast in bronze. In both works the molded objects evoke relics from another time. Both artists deal with creation and although their conceptions differ, affinities are discernible in their attitudes toward material and in the ambiguity or unfixed readings of their objects. One asks are they works of despair or of hope?

³⁸ For Rebecca Horn, with whom, as mentioned, Sterbak has strong affinities, "alchemy is a metaphor for gaining essential knowledge about life which begins with the self." Mina Roustayi, "Getting Under The Skin: Rebecca Horn's Sensibility Machines" Arts Magazine (May 1989): 56.

³⁹ National Gallery of Canada Curatorial File - I Can Hear You Think, (dedicated to Stephen Hawking). Diana Nemiroff, Justification "For the Collection of Contemporary Canadian painting Sculpture and Videotapes." n.d.

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only intrigued Sterbak, but also converged with her own investigations into the source of poetic inspiration and the artistic process. Crippled by a motorneuron disease from which he suffered for more than twenty years, Hawking "embodied the romantic type of poète maudit whose genius feeds on his physical destruction."⁴⁰

I can hear you think consists of two small iron heads, placed on the floor: one, representing Hawking, is wound with copper wire. It becomes in effect a transformer that emits an electromagnetic charge, warming itself at the same time as it exercises a magnetic pull on the other head, as well as on any adjacent metal: "Sheer mental energy defies the confines of the body."⁴¹. To analogize Hawking's condition Sterbak reduced the body to the point of absence: thus making palpable the emanation of active and creative intelligence.

In her notes for this work Sterbak sketched Rimbaud's head next to a quotation from his writings: "The poet's chief duty is not only to penetrate into the beyond but also to gather up ideas that the universal mind throws off at every age."⁴² There is more than a suggestion here that Sterbak identifies herself with such a task or duty and in doing so draws a link between her own invisible, logic-defying poetic inspiration and Hawking's creative mental capacities. Both share the ability "to penetrate into the beyond", "to expand the boundaries of the physical" and the power to transform.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Jessica Bradley in Richmond, 42.

⁴² Jana Sterbak, "Two 3-d Multisensory Projects" Rubicon 7 (Summer 1986), 109.

Sterbak, then, is continuing to explore the concept of technological and alchemical transformation which first appeared in Golem (figure 28).

In the same notes Sterbak also quotes Czech poet, Czeslaw Milosz: "Goethe had an intuition that something was pretty wrong, that science should not be separated from poetry and imagination, Blake also. Maybe we are going to return to a very rich era where poetry and imagination are once again along side science."⁴³ In citing Milosz, Sterbak once more stirs up connections with alchemy's blend of science and mysticism and its relationship to technology. Implicit in this piece "is the notion of mind over matter, the separation of the mental and the physical so deeply rooted in western thought and exemplified in post-industrial scientific ideology by artificial intelligence...."⁴⁴ Sterbak's attempt to bring together poetry and technology, art and science, is paralleled by a similar interest in the interrelationship between mind and body, and by a desire to see these two aspects of self reconciled in order to depolarize the Cartesian mind/body split. Alchemy, an alliance of magic and science which results in transformation, is the method through which such a reconciliation or unification can be achieved. In very different ways, both Magor and Sterbak seek wholeness, unification and reconciliation by addressing postmodern fragmentation and the decentered subject. Unlike Sterbak, Magor seems less overtly concerned with questions of the interdependence of mind and body which nonetheless are critical to how her work interacts with her audience. The

⁴³ Ibid. From an interview in The New York Review of Books 27 February 1986.

⁴⁴ Bradley in Richmond, 42-43.

construction of identity remains her primary focus. Sterbak, on the other hand, not only attempts to isolate and represent inspiration, but, at the same time, as the Symbolists did, searches for the unification of spirit and matter.

In 1984 Sterbak also exhibited a work called Spare Spine (Fear Stick) (figure 31) which has a clear relationship to the ever absent body.⁴⁵ As the central core, the transformer, of the nervous system, the spine links body with mind. Once again the artist is trying to image the concept of transformation; not only to analogize the invisible but also to distill or isolate it. The "spine's" stark, startling simplicity owes an obvious debt to Minimalism, while its cane-like appearance raises associations with German artist Joseph Beuys' personal symbol of the shepherd's crook, which "stands for the artist's ability to lend unity to the fragments, to give continuity to that which lies between them."⁴⁶ The subtitle, "fear stick", suggests that the 'spine' may be a weapon to ward off fear, or, alternatively, to entrap and charm its multivaried sources; while the "spare" form itself suggests the pathetic vulnerability induced by fear. Beyond making this intangible emotion concrete, the spine (by its reference to an incomplete body) has a metaphoric dimension suggesting a desired wholeness of body and self. Furthermore, the spine, by echoing the body's internal structure, initiates an immediate psychosomatic

⁴⁵ Spare Spine (Fear Stick) was exhibited in a group show, Canadian Paintings and Sculptures Selected by David Rabinowitch 49th Parallel Center for Contemporary Canadian Art, New York, 1984.

⁴⁶ Achille Bonito Oliva, "Long Live Joseph Beuys", Tema Celeste 9 (November 1986): 64. Oliva further describes Beuys' crook as "the potential of the artist to reunite elements that have been separated, to re-associate them with each other."

connection with the viewer's body. In Sterbak's early work a desire for wholeness of self lies behind the representation of the fragmented body.

The Body Electric

I want you to feel the way I do...(The Dress) (1985) (figure 32), often referred to simply as The Dress, similarly concretizes emotion, and plays with ideas of absence and presence. Consisting of a floorlength hollow dress made of chicken wire, with arms outstretched and a torso wrapped with glowing electric wire, the installation developed out of Sterbak's earlier work entitled Corona Laurea (noli me tangere) (1983-84) (figure 33) The latter, like I can hear you think (figure 30), attempts to analogize poetic inspiration and was partially inspired by Sterbak's reading of the French Symbolist poets. Their concept of "correspondence", the interconnective triggering of multisensory associations, is compatible with Sterbak's idea of the content-relatedness of material. However, the specific motivation for both Corona Laurea and The Dress stems from Euripides' Medea as filtered through a Martha Graham dance performance. Sterbak acknowledges that:

The Dress is related to Medea, one of the earliest strong women in fiction. In the play by Euripides, she is ditched by her husband for a richer bride and to take care of this problem Medea contrives to give the other woman [Glaucé] a tiara and a dress that consumes her in flames when she puts it on. My piece is a kind of contemporary retelling of this incident. I made the crown part first...After seeing a Martha Graham dance work and rereading the Euripides

play I made the electric dress.⁴⁷

In her technologically updated re-enactment of ancient mythology, the artist literally and metaphorically plays with fire. Associations with alchemical transformation and creation persist. For the alchemists fire was "the agent of transmutation" from which all things derived and to which all things returned. In another vein, Sterbak's absent body and "return to the mythical represents a nostalgic search for unity, a desire for essence, a striving for permanence."⁴⁸ Here, however, "implicit in the desire for plenitude" are "predatory motives and the risk of loss".⁴⁹ The absent body, mythologically rooted, represents, on one level, a metaphoric desire for continuity and wholeness and on another, an empty specter of the reality of postmodern culture. The wire dress, itself a surrogate body, subverts our notion of fabric, conveying pain and discomfort; sensations which can again be related to the general postmodern situation as well as to private emotional or psychological states. These physical and emotional sensations are reinforced or extended by the electrical nichrome wire wrapped around the torso of the "dress", which visibly and sensibly radiates heat at cyclic intervals.

⁴⁷ Nairne and Ferguson, 65.

⁴⁸ J.E. Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols (New York: Philosophical Library, 1962), 100.

⁴⁹ Used in reference to Northrop Frye's work in John Fekete, ed. The Critical Twilight: Exploration in the Ideology of Anglo-American Literary Theory from Eliot to McLuhan (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), 122.

⁵⁰ Bradley in Richmond, 45.

Sterbak's text for The Dress, projected on an adjacent wall, adds to the affective complexity of the work.⁵¹ Expanding on the use of words in Golem (figure 28), this text represents a further investigation into the properties and power of language. Like the glowing wire the harsh heartfelt words express both pain and passion:

I want you to feel the way I do: there's barbed wire wrapped all around my head and my skin grates on my flesh from the inside. How can you be so comfortable only 5" to the left of me? I don't want to hear myself t'ink, feel myself move. It's not that I want to be numb, I want to slip under your skin, feed on your thought, wear your clothes.

Now I have your attitude and you're not comfortable anymore. Making them yours you relieved me of my opinions, habits, impulses. I should be grateful but instead...you're beginning to irritate me: I am not going to live with myself inside your body, and I would rather practice being new on somebody else.

The ambiguity and use of metaphor offers multiple readings. Curator Jessica Bradley gives a feminist reading of The Dress: "We may take the story as an allegory of the perilous positioning of femininity in a patriarchal order" with Medea as "the defiant woman, the one who refuses the law of the father. She is a sorceress...Like the hysteric, whose body speaks for the unconscious denied voice, she symbolizes the repressed."⁵² Basing her interpretation in part on The Newly Born Woman (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1986) by Helene Cixous and Catherine Clément, Bradley suggests, "that because they touched the roots of a certain symbolic structure, these women are

⁵¹ The text can also be displayed as a separate work.

⁵² Bradley in Richmond, 44.

so threatened that they have to disappear."⁵³ Sterbak's hollow dress is understood to communicate the repressed in the same way that the "disappeared" and bodiless archetypal women do. Although "strong" women such as Medea who present a challenge to the patriarchy have been forced to disappear, their repressed presence emanates from the electrified "dress".

Bradley also writes of the character of the The Dress seeking "to colonize her partner" as a response to her refusal to surrender to his/her demands on her identity, but resolving instead "to move on, reinvent herself, find another mirror."⁵⁴ Similarly, another curator, Cindy Richmond, views the "dress" as desiring "an ideal kind of unity: a physical, emotional and intellectual union of self and other....[with Medea as] the flip side of this desire for total union with the other. Spurned, her desire for union is transformed into a desire for vengeance..."⁵⁵ Hence like American photographer Cindy Sherman's "paranoid depressive fantasies" Sterbak's "dress" reveals "the anxiety aroused by fear of the destruction of the self by the other, and the anxiety aroused by the self's

⁵³ Ibid. In this conjunction Bradley cites Cixous and Clément, 5. "The hysteric whose body transformed into a theatre of forgotten scenes relives the past, bearing witness to a lost childhood that survives in suffering...these roles [of archetypal women] are conservative because every sorceress ends up being destroyed, and nothing is registered of her but mythical traces. Every hysteric ends up inuring others to her symptoms, and the family closes around her again, whether she is curable or incurable."

⁵⁴ Bradley, 45.

⁵⁵ Cindy Richmond, "On the Surface of the Self" in Jana Sterbak (Regina: Norman Mackenzie Gallery, 1989), 10.

desire to destroy the other."⁵⁶ Sterbak herself has said that the reaction of the viewer "depends on whether you see yourself inside the dress or outside it,"⁵⁷ as she/he who threatens or who is threatened, as active or passive, victim or aggressor.

Although Sterbak is wary of language, it provides a further medium through which communication with the viewer is made possible.⁵⁸ This use of text suggests her awareness of work by artists such as Jenny Holzer or Mary Kelly. For Kelly text is important in order "to invoke a sense of listening to rather than looking at the woman [as subject]."⁵⁹ Another affinity with Kelly is Sterbak's deliberate omission of a physical representation of the female body. In this respect, one can, for the first time, clearly associate Sterbak's work with an anti-essentialist feminist position which rejects the figurative representation the female body in order not to reinforce sexual difference. The artist's choice of materials for The Dress is based on how these materials will project

⁵⁶ Donald Kuspit, "Inside Cindy Sherman" in The New Subjectivism: Art in the 1980s (Ann Arbor: UMI Press, 1988), 395.

⁵⁷ Winnipeg Free Press, "Artist's inspiration 'comes in a flash'" 10 May 1986. As Diana Nemiroff and Jessica Bradley noted "The dress both protects and assaults whoever puts it on. It is therefore an analogue for the destructive desire of a woman's desire for intimacy..." Diana Nemiroff and Jessica Bradley, Songs of Experience (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1986): 44.

⁵⁸ National Gallery Curatorial File - I Want You to Feel the Way I Do...(The Dress). Diana Nemiroff, Justification "For the Collection of Contemporary Painting, Sculpture and Videotapes." 11 September 1986. Nemiroff writes, "Grudgingly she views it [language] as parallel to the object, another way of getting to the experience or feeling referred to materially in the piece."

⁵⁹ Sandy Nairne, State of the Art, 151.

particular properties in such a way as to analogize mental states or processes: to make visible the invisible.⁶⁰ Indeed Sterbak has a predilection for the word "emanate"⁶¹ which, scientific associations aside, suggests the extrasensory. Sterbak's sculptural objects can be read as "a projection of desire rather than a product of something wrought or [...] instakingly fashioned."⁶²

The absence of the body as the object of the gaze and the fascination with the ability of material to project relate to Sterbak's insistent desire to involve the viewer sensibly as well as visually. French feminist Luce Irigaray has written, "In our culture the predomination of look over smell, taste, touch, hearing, has brought about an impoverishment of bodily relations."⁶³ Sterbak deliberately addresses this impoverishment

⁶⁰ Campbell, 89. Sterbak likes "electricity because it is effective from a distance". And Jackson, 65, "She makes this chemistry visible, and slightly perilous in her work."

⁶¹ Peter Gzowzki, Radio Interview with Jana Sterbak on Morningside. Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. May 1989.

⁶² Rosalind Krauss uses this to describe Giacometti's sculpture. Rosalind Krauss, "A Game Plan: The Terms of Surrealism" in Passages in Modern Sculpture (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1987), 111. In this conjunction it is of interest to note that in Rubicon 7 (Summer 1986) [National Gallery of Canada Curatorial File - I Want You to Feel the WAY I Do (The Dress)]. Next to one of Sterbak's sketches for The Dress [in Jana Sterbak, "Two 3-d Multisensory Projects" Rubicon 7 (Summer 1986): 109] the artist wrote "Why can't I be Giacometti?" This question could have many possible interpretations and intentions including quite simply an explicit admiration for Giacometti's work. The Dress, however, can also be viewed as relating, more conceptually than formally, to his cage works of the early thirties. See Krauss, 112-14. There may also be implied an inability to deal with the figure, or the body, in terms of essential core, a goal towards which Giacometti strived.

⁶³ Irigaray cited in Craig Owens, "The Discourse of Others: Feminists and Postmodernism" in The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture, ed. Hal Foster

in her use of magnetic forces and electricity. In later installations such as Seduction Couch (1987) (figure 35) and Vanitas: Flesh Dress for an Albino Anorectic (1987) (figure 41), she will incorporate odour. Another statement by Irigaray, "The moment the look dominates, the body loses its materiality"⁶⁴, also has specific application to Sterbak's art where the body as singular entity is markedly absent. In doing so, Sterbak presents a body which cannot be passively subjected to, or appropriated by, the viewer's gaze, but at the same time retains an active presence. Similarly, in Magor's work, Time and Mrs. Tiber (figure 4) and Dorothy - A Resemblance (figure 11) both Mrs. Tiber and Dorothy assert presence, although absent as physical entities. Their presence is, however, most directly linked to individual emblems or signs of identity rather than the broader issue of representation.

While the metaphorical potential of absence, of the invisible, fascinates Sterbak, so too does the banal. "Exploiting the existing conventions, such as home furnishings or the dress allows me to imbue the everyday reality of the spectator with poetry, magic, humor or doubt."⁶⁵ Sterbak's statement suggests once again a connection with Franz Kafka, who reveals our deepest fears and anxieties residing behind the banal. Although Heinrich Böll, Max Frisch and Günther Grass have been cited as literary influences on

(Port Townsend, Wash.: Bay Press, 1983), 70

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Sterbak cited in Shirley Madill Identity/Identities (Winnipeg: Winnipeg Art Gallery, 1988), 21.

Sterbak ⁶⁶, Kafka's particular significance for her work lies in his ability to juxtapose "within one framework the recognizable and mysterious, extreme subjectivity of content with forms rigorously objective, a lovingly exact portrayal of the factual world with a dreamlike and magical dissolution of it."⁶⁷ Although Sterbak's work is not an exact portrayal of everyday life, she does use its conventions and like Kafka her tone is precise and objective. His compulsion to "arouse in us a sense of immediate relatedness, of strong even if uneasy identification", attributable to "the profound quality of his feelings for the experience of human loss, estrangement, guilt and anxiety "⁶⁸ shares deep affinities with Sterbak. This element of identification, noticeable first in Corona Laurea and The Dress becomes even more marked in the later "dresses" such as Flesh Dress (figure 42) and Remote Control (figure 48). As Jessica Bradley notes, "Despite the presence of a text it is our bodies that receive Sterbak's dress, then our minds."⁶⁹ Initially a strong physical identification takes place, then the 'dress' takes hold of our imaginations, offering a cathartic mirroring of our deepest and most painful emotions.

The hot coils of the "dress" set up an attraction - repulsion dichotomy - the viewer, intrigued by the vitality and passion of the piece, is repelled by implications of danger.

⁶⁶ Marni Jackson, "The Body Electric: The High Risk Art of Jana Sterbak" Canadian Art (Spring 1989): 70

⁶⁷ Philip Rahv, "Introduction", Selected Short Stories of Franz Kafka (New York: Modern Library, 1952), viii.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Bradley in Richmond, 45.

Suggestive of both menace and containment, The Dress marks the introduction of Sterbak's recurring cage imagery with all the implications of entrapment, lack of autonomy and isolation - of the individual or self suffering under both internally and externally inflicted constraints. Sterbak goes beyond "poetry, magic, humour and doubt", transforming the art object through technology into a potent interactive metaphor which ultimately refers to the self and the psychic desire for wholeness.

With its arms extended in supplication and its rudimentary technology, The Dress, like Golem (figure 28), conveys something of the quality of a relic; but at the same time (also like Golem) it is theatrical, evoking its inspirational origins, the Greek tragedy, and involving the viewer. Its theatricality relates it directly to the artist's performance work The Artist as a Combustible 1986 (figure 34). This performance represents the continuing pursuit of an analogy for poetic inspiration as well as the theme of creation/destruction. Sterbak lights a dish of gunpowder on her head: a flame shoots up, and she is metaphorically consumed by flames in an act that symbolizes phoenix-like rebirth and smacks of alchemy: "Lasting only seconds, the radiant explosion leaves an afterimage on the retina that hints at self-immolation."⁷⁰ This lightning flash not only stresses the brevity of creative inspiration, but also alludes to the belief prevalent in antiquity that fire liberated the divine element in man, and to the Christian belief "that

⁷⁰ Ibid.

flesh is an envelope for the spirit".⁷¹ Beyond investigating her own identity as an artist and the source of her artistic motivation, something she shares with Magor, Sterbak is seeking her soul, that insubstantial part of self. Consciously or unconsciously, she pursues connections with alchemy's concept of fire as both unifying and stabilizing " so that once again, we find an implicit desire/search for wholeness. Sterbak's spirit/soul, as symbolized by the fire, however, remains ultimately elusive and transitory.

The fact that Sterbak's own body is the ground of the work, and the sense of ritual is personalized offers a more direct connection with the tradition of body art. There is also a direct link to the heated passions of The Dress (figure 32), the word 'combustible' meaning 'easily excited, fiery' as well as 'capable of burning'.⁷² In both works an active/passive as well as creative/destructive duality conflate in the concept of fire/electricity which symbolizes "the basic dualism of the human predicament"⁷³ embracing vitality and conflagration. The use of fire/electricity also gives Sterbak a potent medium through which to explore issues of representation, the relationship of mind to body, and to search for wholeness.

⁷¹ National Gallery Curatorial Files - I Want You to Feel the Way I Do. (The Dress). Diana Nemiroff, Justification. It should be noted that Nemiroff does imply a connection with Christianity.

⁷² Cirlot, 101.

⁷³ Funk and Wagnall's Canadian College Dictionary (Toronto: Fitzhenry and Whiteside, 1989).

⁷⁴ Cirlot, 101.

Of Bodies and the Bedroom

In the installations which follow from 1987 through 1988 Sterbak increasingly focuses on the hidden control exercised over the individual by sociocultural institutions. Just as The Dress (figure 32) was seen to serve as a surrogate body, so now do the furnishings of the bedroom. By 1988 Sterbak had spent two years "concerned with the semantic, actual and art historical concept of the bedroom"⁷⁵, site of bodily intimacy. The first piece that relates to this research is the monumental Seduction Couch of 1986-87 (figure 35) in which Kafkaesque and theatrical qualities persist as the everyday reality of the viewer is transformed to reveal hidden dangers and associations.

As described by the artist Seduction Couch has a sensible or somatic effect as well as a psychosocial one:

I examine the 'recamier' as a base or a tray on which the female is offered in classical and neoclassical portraiture. The steel structure of the couch is in close proximity to a Van de Graaff generator which charges it with static electricity. The adventurous viewer who touches the couch will receive a small electric shock.⁷⁶

The sparks crackling in counterpoint to the hum of the generator emit the smell of ozone and leave an afterimage of blue light. Sterbak is expanding the affective possibilities of

⁷⁵ Madill, 21. For Seduction Couch Sterbak had been studying various installations "from the Roman couch at the Metropolitan Museum of Art to Claes Oldenburg's Bedroom Ensemble (1963)".

⁷⁶ Ibid.

art, going beyond the purely visible or physical by deliberately stimulating, activating, and, here, literally prodding the viewer's senses into a state of heightened awareness. As with Corona Laurea (figure 33) and The Dress (figure 32) an attraction-repulsion dichotomy is set up. One is drawn to the suggestion of danger, to the pattern made by the projection of light through the perforated steel, yet physically repulsed by the shocks, a danger more suggestive than real.⁷⁷ Associations with literary and Hollywood seductions as well as with laboratory experiments, the operating room and the psychiatrist's office deepen the resonance of the dichotomy.⁷⁸

While Seduction Couch "implies a calculated strategy for achieving a state of

⁷⁷ A passage co-written by Arthur and Marilouise Kroker aptly describes the scene. "With the body coded by the bleak...exchange process of host and parasite, postmodern consciousness, like a pulsar, also alternates between repulsion and seduction over the fate of the body as(both) a terrorist sign and a pleasurable scene of its own extermination." Arthur Kroker and Marilouise Kroker, eds., The Body Invaders: Panic Sex in America (Montreal: New World Perspectives, 1987), 16.

⁷⁸ Bradley in Richmond, (47) suggests Frankensteinian overtones and adds, "Indeed the chaise longue, reknowned centrepiece of Freud's study and site of the 'talking cure', is to this day the classic symbol of psychoanalysis. Once again, another female body rendered cultural sign is recalled, that of the hysteric whose silenced sexuality speaks a somatic language of desires denied and, above all, misread."

Seduction Couch also raises associations with Moholy-Nagy's Light Prop for a Ballet (also called Light Space Modulator) of 1923-30, a robotic creation of patterned light and shadow designed for the stage. "The Light Prop is a surrogate person, an actor in technological disguise" which not only functioned "as an on-stage projector, weaving around its turning centre, a widening fabric of light and shadow" but also conveyed a volitional human quality. [Rosalind Krauss Passages in Modern Sculpture (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1985), 206-207.] Similarly Sterbak's "robotic" body is emotionally as well as electrostatically charged, an angry seductress. Seduction Couch, Light Prop and, in retrospect, The Dress, can be perceived as skeletal structures.

desirability and attracting the object of desire"⁷⁹ it also targets the body politic by addressing the cultural construction of representation. As in the case of The Dress (figure 32), the actual body is absent and its presence must be supplied by the viewer's imagination. In doing so, Sterbak reminds us again that "no representation of the female body in our culture can be free from phallic prejudice"⁸⁰, the very act of looking, or the gaze, being associated with domination and control:

The chaise longue (with odalisque), is a classic symbol of female sexuality in the history of European art. Its usual manifestation recalls reclining, sensual, and most often passive women...women idealized as objects to be appropriated by an acquisitive male desire. Yet this particular 'seduction couch' is metallic and charged with an electric current...We see the 'seduction couch' from a different point of view, as a place of discomfort and even pain, where one sex is idealized in order to be dominated by another.⁸¹

The 'couch', "a passive image, wired for action...suggests the ability of the object perceived as unthreatening and inert...to fight back."⁸² The materials themselves, transformed and activated by the artist, embody the dangers inherent in technology. Sterbak's ambivalence in this regard is revealed; her affective poetic technology is simple and easily comprehensible, but at the same time its ability to threaten us, to reveal the darker side of psyche and society, is a potent factor. For although the artist

⁷⁹ Bradley in Richmond, 47.

⁸⁰ Craig Owens, "The discourse of Others: Feminists and Postmodernism" in Hal Foster ed., The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays in Postmodern Culture (Port Townsend, Wash.: Bay Press, 1983), 71.

⁸¹ Richmond, 8.

⁸² Jackson, 68.

capitalizes on the inherent properties of specific materials to activate, release and project their repressed qualities, thereby enabling them to "fight back", Sterbak wants us to recognize that these substances can themselves become dangerous: the fate of the Golem rested on the perceived danger he became. Here, evocations of the ominous, insidious tools and devices used as a mechanism of power by all - benevolent as well as malevolent, invisible as well as visible - sociocultural structures and institutions are clearly present. Behind the banal, the everyday, and by extension, even the most enlightened social systems, lies a repressive, even threatening, system of control which limits individual freedom and disciplines body and self.

The integration of the sociopolitical with psychosomatic experience is also primary in a group of works which evolved from Seduction Couch (figure 35). As a result of a commission in which several artists were each allotted three magazine pages for the project "How the Mental Determines the Physical: Woman's Space in Architecture" ⁸³, Sterbak explored and analyzed the etymology of the words "boudoir" and "drawing room" (figures 37 and 38) as well as the spaces they signified. Reproduced in a textual format, "embroidered on cloth like samplers, once a young girl's introduction to the elements of language and the manual skills appropriate to her sex"⁸⁴ these etymologies or deconstructions of language, serve as way of revealing society's construction of self.

⁸³ Bradley, 47. Sterbak created the first version of The Sulking Room as part of a series of advertisements created by artists in art magazines sponsored by Art Metropole in Toronto 1987.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

Derived from the French verb bouder to sulk, "boudoir" literally means sulking room, and "drawing room", shortened from "with drawing-room", refers to the place to which the ladies withdrew from the dining-room after dinner. Sterbak has selected these "woman's spaces" - 'rooms of one's own' - as places where traditionally women were able to assume control over over the demands and expectations placed on their bodies and ultimately selves.⁴⁵

Sterbak makes use of text which reflects on the body as self again in the installation Attitudes (figure 39). Here, she makes use of a king-size bed, "the centrepiece of suburban sex" ⁴⁶, covered "embroidered" pillows and pristine sheets. The body is absent from this starkly lit hygienic site which echoes the interior sterility of an absent self, a spiritual vacuum. Sterbak has clearly entered the realm of morality, warning and making us aware of our want of values in a work redolent with Faustian overtones of soul-

⁴⁵ Ibid, 48. "Interestingly, this space[the boudoir] in which she could temporarily escape her sexual possession was also at one time the place where female intellect reigned...the tradition of the salon began with eighteenth century French noblewomen holding court in the boudoir. It was an important 'behind the scenes' site of power in other ways too, for extra-marital liaisons were the vehicle through which the noblewoman exercised control beyond the domestic sphere, both in the affairs she engaged and the ones she arranged."

For the 1988 Identity/Identities exhibition at the Winnipeg Art Gallery in a deliberate attempt to reach beyond the inner sanctum of the gallery, Sterbak included two bus benches set outside the gallery; one backed with the etymology of The Boudoir and the other with that of The Drawing Room. In addition, located at the Winnipeg airport, was a billboard designed by Sterbak printed only with the words "Sexual Fantasy". She is, by using them, subverting the tools of advertising directed at mass consumption.

⁴⁶ Bradley in Richmond, 48.

selling. She is, moreover, addressing a prevalent lack of emotional depth, which itself signifies how out of touch we must be with our selves, with bodies and minds as a unity.

With words such as "Reputation/Virtue, Ethics/Aesthetics, Greed, Disease and **SEXUAL FANTASIES/Sexual Fantasies**" appliqued or embroidered in different typestyles and colours on the crisp white bed linen, the artist describes the "owners'" sexual preference.⁷⁷ As representations of Sterbak's response "to some of the reactionary sexual attitudes and loveless couplings" associated "with the 'new wealth'", these words become "as dense and volatile as certain metals."⁷⁸ The monograms for the words ordered readymade - as emblems of "consumable fake history"⁷⁹ reflect the pervasiveness of homogenizing cultural materialism. The empty "bodiless" bedroom nevertheless conveys a sense of bodily emanation, projection or presence. The body in absentia thus offers itself as a possible technique of resistance, representing a struggle of the self or individual against mechanisms of power. In retrospect, a similar strategy is discernible as an undercurrent in the artist's metaphoric use of the absent body within the active/passive duality of earlier work such as, The Dress (figure 32) and Seduction

⁷⁷ Madill, 21.

⁷⁸ Jackson, 70.

⁷⁹ Ibid. In spite of the suggestions of embroidery, Sterbak is at pains to make it clear that it is not "a female craft piece" but rather a simulation of a commercial product. Like German artist Rosemary Trockel, the references to craft are subversive and ironical. See Ken Johnson "Tales from the Dark Side" Art In America (December 1988): 141.

Couch (figure 35)

In House of Pain, A Relationship (1987-88) (figure 40), Sterbak has, as she did in Seduction Couch (figure 35) and Attitudes (figure 39), transformed a generally acknowledged place of sanctuary and comfort into an space that is redolent of systems of discipline and punishment inflicted on the body and metaphorically the self. Representing a continuation of Sterbak's investigation into architectural space⁹⁰, it is a diabolical blueprint of a house with a structured narrative that subjects the body to a series of physical trials such as a corridor of hot coals and a pool of glass shards. "In reading its legend, we confront a reality as physical as Flesh Dress [figure 41-42]."⁹¹ While it reveals the darker underside of the deceptively banal, House of Pain, like the earlier Spare Spine (figure 31), analogizes an inner psychological state. And although the material itself (simply paper) does not sensibly affect the viewer, the suggested content certainly does, resulting in a Kafkaesque "uneasy" psychosomatic identification.⁹² The body, in this "theatre of cruelty", acts as a metaphor for a self in crisis.

⁹⁰ House of Pain also suggests continuity with the artist's "cage" iconography in its suggestions of a prison cell, or place of confinement for the body.

⁹¹ Ihor Holubizky, Jana Sterbak (Toronto: The Power Plant), 7.

⁹² Ibid. "These rooms are not merely laid out as an articulation of our fears and phobias, but are suggested from real incidents in the sensationalist press. 'Wife crazy-glues husband's genitals'... 'AIDS victims walk across hot coals for cure'..." Ihor Holubizky, Jana Sterbak (Toronto: The Power Plant, 1988). Sado-masochistic examples of performance art also come to mind. One thinks of Chris Burden, in swimsuit, hands tied, crawling through fifty feet of broken glass in a Los Angeles parking lot and Gina Pane's self-inflicted violence.

The Body Sacred and Profane

Shifting from the familiar to the intensely unsettling with irony and a caustic wit, Sterbak provides us an easy entry through objects and situations that we know well....Our exit, however, is more complicated, for these works have a way of lingering in the memory like an irritant lodged in the skin.⁹³

Nowhere is this exit more complicated than with Vanitas - Flesh Dress for an Albino Anorexic (1987) (figure 41). Sterbak shows us literally what is under the skin. The body, as "mortality laid bare"⁹⁴, is represented in its rawest state. The artist, in using organic matter - raw meat - for the first time, pushes to the limits both her use of material to project innate properties, and her use of object as irritant with multisensory resonance. She wants to evoke not only a psychosocial response, but also a somatic and sensible one.⁹⁵

"As it [the Flesh Dress] rots, it shrinks, assuming a shape like medieval armor and

⁹³ Bradley in Richmond, 49.

⁹⁴ Bradley in Richmond, 46.

⁹⁵ An accompanying video, which factualizes in a Kafkaesque sense, "documents the preparation of the meat and the assembling of the dress. At one point, many hands stitch together the pieces as in a quilting bee, creating the patchwork effect of the final product....It is treated as fabric but is undeniably real flesh, the ultimate raw material....Sterbak reverses the practice of anatomical dissection. Nevertheless, this remains an act of preservation, conserving what is no longer alive, rather than an act of generation." Barbara McGill Balfour and Randy Hemminghaus, "Jana Sterbak" Vanguard 16.4 (September - October 1987): 38.

a color like blackened bronze" ultimately confronting "us with an accelerated image of dying."⁶⁶ In the initial stages, as documented in accompanying photographs (figure 42), the Flesh Dress is worn, raw and fresh, with languid elegance by a pale-skinned model. Sterbak then transfers it to a dressmaker's form, and as the exhibition continues the fat drips out, the dress gradually dessicates and darkens, becoming increasingly malodorous.⁶⁷ The introduction of the model is crucial to the establishment of viewer identification and the sense of human vulnerability. Although Sterbak used own her body as site in Artist as a Combustible (figure 44), here, she distances herself to more effectively generalize themes of autonomy, aging and mortality. Her use of the model facilitates the transformation of the private or the subjective into the public. The immediacy of her body also intensifies the physical and emotional response of the viewer when confronted by the reality of a carnality from which there is no escape. We are at once attracted by the dress's macabre beauty and repelled by the specter of our mortality.

As first installed in Galerie Rene Blouin, Flesh Dress was confined to "a small

⁶⁶ Jackson, 68.

⁶⁷ Allan Corbin, The Foul and the Fragrant: Odor and the French Social Imagination (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986), 231. "It is from the sense of smell, rather than from the other senses, that we gain the fullest picture of the great dream of disinfection and of the new intolerances, of the implacable return of excrement, the cesspool epic, the sacralization of woman, the system of vegetable symbols. It permits a new interpretation of the rise of narcissism, the retreat into private space, the destruction of primitive comfort, the intolerance of promiscuity."

windowless room of the gallery ...its torso level with that of spectator"⁹⁸, forcing a one to one confrontation. Once off the model, the "dress" becomes both "a manufactured garment" and "a substitute for the body wearing it."⁹⁹ In a now familiar active/passive dualism Sterbak presents the "dress" as both object and subject. Initially conforming to an idealized and generalized representation of a female form, "paradoxically in a more advanced state of rigor mortis...the dress gains a life of its own, eventually causing the form to collapse and bend to the pressure of the dessicated meat."¹⁰⁰ By actively refusing to conform to culturally defined ideals, the 'dress', surrogate for the absent body, is used by Sterbak more clearly and more effectively than in Attitudes (figure 39), as a technique of resistance and means of asserting a necessary individuality of self.

In all Sterbak's work the complex multiple levels of meaning include art historical, literary, private, social, moral and spiritual associations. As indicated by the term Vanitas in the full title of the work, Sterbak is clearly playing on the long art historical tradition of the memento mori, most specifically on sixteenth century Flemish paintings in which objects such as flowers candles and mirrors symbolize the ephemerality of existence, encouraging the cultivation of the spiritual over the vain and worldly.¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ Balfour and Hemminghaus, 38.

⁹⁹ Ibid, 39.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 39.

¹⁰¹ Bradley, p.46. In her radio interview with Peter Gzowzki Sterbak suggests that the first part of the title refers to Netherlands genre painting.

Sterbak views "the moral aspect of my work [as] rather quaint and anachronistic. But...think[s] morals are going to come back in a big way." Pared down to only the most essential element (a token of our limited common symbolic language), Sterbak's "Vanitas" imagery conjures up themes of the Dance of Death or Death and the Maiden associated most often with the art of Reformation Germany, as well as evokes the rawness and viscosity of the work of modern British painter Francis Bacon.¹⁰²

Sterbak exploits many other contemporary references from vegetarianism, animal rights, the fur industry¹⁰³ and our consumer society's fervent dedication to the religion of fitness. However, associations related to the representation of women predominate: "An emblem of a self-conscious preoccupation with the body as well as [signifying] an awareness of one's body on display"¹⁰⁴, the dress evokes associations of woman with meat or prey as well as with the condemnation of woman's aging body in contemporary society.¹⁰⁵ As "the repository of the social definitions of sexuality"¹⁰⁶ the body becomes a vehicle through which society exercises control over this very sexuality. Sterbak calls

¹⁰² It was, in fact, being "struck by the nakedness of sensations and animal reality" on a trip to Mexico that gave Sterbak the impetus for Flesh Dress. Peter Gzowski "Radio Interview with Jana Sterbak". The flayed skin worn by Aztec priests is also given by Sterbak as a point of reference in Balfour and Hemminghaus, 38.

¹⁰³ Balfour and Hemminghaus, 38.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Bradley in Richmond, 45.

¹⁰⁶ Rosalind Coward, Female Desire (London: Paladin, 1984), 30.

into question such socially encoded definitions or perceptions of the female body. In doing so, she deconstructs the mechanisms of patriarchal phallogentric culture and uncovers issues it has repressed.

One issue made explicit in the title is the subject of anorexia nervosa. Anorexia can be interpreted as a symbol for, or an expression of, spiritual emptiness or hunger. Traditionally, it is the "the starving women who embody the extremity of hunger that terrifies and fascinates us...who insist they are not hungry....who live through every implication of our consumption and our hunger, our guilt and ambiguity and our awful need for something real to fill us up."¹⁰⁷ Through self starvation spiritual sustenance can be both given and received without harm to "the food, feeder, or the eater"¹⁰⁸; three modes which metaphorically conflate in the image of the Flesh Dress.

Sterbak has said that she wanted to lay bare "the illusion of omnipotence"¹⁰⁹ sought by the anorectic. On the one hand, she continues to develop the theme of social encoding present in Attitudes (figure 38) and on the other, continues to recognize the illusory omnipotence of her own alchemical investigations. In anorexia autonomy is the primary issue: "Remaining naturally hungry (refusing power) and becoming [oneself]

¹⁰⁷ Maggie Helwig, "The Hunger of Anorexia: I will not consume." The Ottawa Citizen Saturday, 25 February 1989.

¹⁰⁸ Judith Van Herik, "Simone Weil's Religious Imagery: How Looking Becomes Eating." in Immaculate and Powerful: The Female in Sacred Image and Social Reality, eds. Cl. rissa Atkinson et al.(Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), 274.

¹⁰⁹ Nairne and Ferguson, 67.

spiritual food" becomes a "strenuous way to escape the realm of force."¹¹⁰ For the anorectic the body becomes "a synonym for 'the self'".¹¹¹ Manipulated as the only means of gaining autonomy and independence for self, the body is clearly and ultimately a site of struggle and of resistance. As the response of women in particular, to a culture that commodifies woman's body and subordinates reality to image, the anorectic's body "announces a self in mortal conflict."¹¹²

Thus Sterbak, by reinforcing the sense of the subject's or self's struggle for autonomy in Flesh Dress parallels the creative/destructive, birth/decay dichotomy inherent in the organic material itself and in the anorectic condition. An extension of such issues can be found in the cover photograph of Sterbak on the Spring 1989 issue of Canadian Art (figure 43). Conceived by the artist, she is presented hunched, kneeling and caged. While the image suggests entrapment or confinement either by social constraints, personal guilt or fears, or simply a lack of self-determination ¹¹³, most

¹¹⁰ Judith Van Herik, 276.

¹¹¹ Noelle Casky, "Interpreting Anorexia Nervosa" in The Female Body in Western Culture, ed. Susan Suleiman (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986), 184.

¹¹² Bradley in Richmond, 46.

¹¹³ On other levels the cage may be interpreted as having a protective function like German artist Rebecca Horn's contraptions which shield her body. Lucy Lippard speaks of Rebecca Horn's body being "protected by wierd contraptions", including cages, which combine "sadism and tenderness". Lucy Lippard, From the Centre: Feminist Essays on Women's Art (New York: Dutton, 1976), 135. Other possible points of reference are the 1931 cage sculptures of Giacometti. See Rosalind Krauss, "A Game Plan: The Terms of Surrealism" in Passages in Modern Sculpture (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1987), 112-14.

telling is the association with Kafka's hunger artist who lived caged, performing the 'art' of fasting for the crowd outside.¹¹⁴ Critic Donald Kuspit carries the analogy further still:

Sitting in his cage of art, the hunger artist - the Minimalist artist, the artist whose works are the products of fasting, as it were - presents himself, as antithetical to the crowd, and in so doing suggests an escape from it....By making oneself physically less than one can be in the world of a lonely crowd, which is what the Minimalist hunger artist does, one spiritually becomes more than it - transcends it.¹¹⁵

As early as 1985, American critic Carter Ratcliffe detected "an uneasiness about the flesh" in Sterbak's Corona Laurea (figure 33) which mixes "physical pain with spiritual extremity."¹¹⁶ In confronting that "uneasiness" here, a body and spirit dichotomy is again operative.¹¹⁷ As in The Dress (figure 32), Sterbak clearly draws on the relics of the Counter-Reformation of her native Prague, the "staged and gilded mortifications of Baroque saints".¹¹⁸ Indeed, Flesh Dress is the virtual embodiment of mortification, with its overtones of the penitent's hair shirt, religious relics and, ultimately, the

¹¹⁴ Franz Kafka, "The Hunger Artist" in Selected Stories of Franz Kafka (New York: Modern Library, 1952)

¹¹⁵ In this passage Donald Kuspit is referring to American artist Vito Acconci. Donald Kuspit, "Vito Acconci: The Hunger Artist in the Lonely Crowd", Artscribe International (Summer, 1988): 67.

¹¹⁶ Carter Ratcliffe "Ida Applebroog and Yana Sterbak", (Toronto: Glendon Gallery, 1985) n.p.

¹¹⁷ Bradley in Richmond, 46.

¹¹⁸ National Gallery of Canada Curatorial Files - I Want You to Feel the Way I Do (The Dress). Marc Mayer, (1986) n.p.

Crucifixion.¹¹⁹ Sterbak, in recalling a curious incident from the her childhood, speaks more directly to this parallel:

We had rented a summer cottage in the mountains. In my room hung a small naturalistic crucifix, something I had never seen before. I couldn't sleep. My parents, to whom a crucifix was commonplace, could not account for my distress and I could barely speak for the horror of it. I did not know what to make of such a perverse object...and the incident is still vivid in my memory.¹²⁰

Sterbak may well be confronting her own uneasiness about the flesh, and thus be exorcising her experience of the "perverse object". Flesh Dress represents a further attempt to explore the interdependence between body and mind; and to investigate and distill the elusive nature of poetic inspiration in relation to the spiritual self. By so doing, Sterbak reiterates her desire for the reconciliation of body and mind, and for wholeness of self.¹²¹

¹¹⁹ One thinks again of British artist Francis Bacon: "I've always been very moved by pictures about slaughterhouses and meat, and to me they belong very much to the whole thing of the Crucifixion...well of course, we are meat, we are potential carcasses." Gilles Deleuze "Interpretations of the Body: A New Power of Laughter for the Living" in Art International (Autumn 1989): 36.

¹²⁰ National Gallery of Canada Curatorial Files - I Want You to Feel the Way I Do (The Dress). Mayer, n.p.

¹²¹ This was also suggested by the Resurrection and alchemical transformation references in The Artist as Combustible. A recent work, Inside (1990) (figure no.44), consisting of a smaller mirrored coffin within a larger coffin, also uncompromisingly confronts death. "Sterbak's nesting of the opaque reflexive object within the transparent one suggests a core of denial within every body which retires with them to the grave." Katherine Hixon, "Chicago in Review" Arts Magazine 64.9 (March 1990): 120. On another level this mirrored reflective coffin suggests the precious inner core of an individual's elusive, inscrutable and illuminating spirit or soul - the source of the artist's inspiration.

The Resisting Body

Sterbak's work entitled Standard Lives (1988) (figure 45), an edition of thirty transparent measuring tapes, continues to explore the "demanding tension within the signs and symbols of the social"¹²² as did Flesh Dress. While the measuring tapes sustain the motif of dressmaking and craft through a direct reference to the body, they, also, metaphorically address "the symbolic power of the self's surfaces".¹²³ Each tape has been printed in a different sequence with stereotypic letraset figures reminiscent of 1950s school readers, representing different life stages of gendered roles. These are acted out a continuously repeating and reproducible narrative of social expectations within the measured framework the tape. In placing standardized expectations on the body's surface, the "self's surfaces", or the social inscription of self, metaphorically becomes integrated into the content.

Sterbak, as she did in Attitudes (figure 39), comments on "the erosion of subjective experience"¹²⁴ by the homogenizing sociocultural systems which penetrate all aspects of contemporary life. Her critique of technocratic materialism reveals an inherent and

¹²² Renee Baert, Enchantment/Disturbance. Exhibition leaflet. (Toronto: The Power Plant, 1988).

¹²³ Richmond, 10.

¹²⁴ Bradley in Richmond, 49.

fundamental humanness apparent also in Generic Man (1988) (figure 46) where again social conformity is a dominant theme. In one version on a billboard ¹²⁵ it appeared as "an anti-portrait"¹²⁶. Since only the back of the "generic man's" head is shown, with a product bar code imprinted on his neck, the body, and metaphorically the self, is thus reduced to a commodity. Presented with chilling clarity, like House of Pain (figure 40), Generic Man raises associations with the routine or institutionalized practice of torture. Sterbak has dehistoricized or rehistoricized Standard Lives (figure 45).

Here, the theme of colonization, implicit in The Dress (figure 32) where self desires to colonize other, is extended to refer to the larger forces of capital and culture.¹²⁷ Private and public dimensions intersect. While individual autonomy becomes a central issue, Sterbak points out that her work is "not just about personal politics, it is also about being a colonial subject. Canada is a colony. I grew up in a country surrounded by bigger countries. I know what being colonized feels like."¹²⁸ Indirectly acknowledging

¹²⁵ In conjunction with Sterbak's exhibition at the Norman MacKenzie Art Gallery in 1989 it was placed as a billboard at the intersection of Broad and Grand in Regina. The original version, subtitled (Memento), is a 4"x5" print in a sleek metal frame. (See Jackson, 71) By subverting the tools of commodification Sterbak is again infiltrating, revealing deployments of power as "connected directly to the body" [Michel Foucault, History of Sexuality vol. 1 An Introduction (New York: Vintage, 1980), 152], as well as taking her art beyond the gallery walls.

¹²⁶ Bradley in Richmond, 48.

¹²⁷ A theme which takes on broader implications when Sterbak's image is compared to an Hungarian Forum Party poster depicting a departing Soviet soldier (figure 47).

¹²⁸ Jackson, 67. Another photographic image by Sterbak which raises issues of

a personal dimension, Sterbak reveals that as socially inscribed beings the control we feel we have over our own lives is relative and largely illusory.

The theme of colonization is also central to one of her most recent works, Remote Control (1989) (figure 48). Building upon the active/passive dualism operative in the earlier I Want You To Feel The way I Do (the dress) (figure 32) and Vanitas: Flesh Dress for Albino Anorectic (figure 41), this robotic crinoline-like contraption has the potential for complex readings. These vary according to whether it is worn by a dancer/model; and if so, whether she actively controls the machine or is passively controlled by someone else; or whether the crinoline is motionless and empty, or empty and mobilized by remote control with only photographs showing the model in position.¹²⁹

Although the work can function with the body in absentia, the body's presence is, in fact, especially critical to the totality and psychology of the work. The hinge or crux of the work is, if not an immediate psychosomatic identification between the viewer and

homogenization and colonization, but places more stress on the question of dependency and lack of autonomy or control is the black and white Pasiphaë (1989) (figure 49) It was published as part of a magazine exhibition curated by Cindy Richmond of the Mackenzie Art Gallery, Regina. C Magazine 25 (March 1990) n.p.

¹²⁹ The first "crinoline" was shown at Galerie Rene Blouin in Montreal, but the space available at National Gallery of Canada allowed Sterbak to expand the concept. For variation she constructed two contrasting crinolines, one tall and narrow, one short and round. For the National Gallery of Canada's Canadian Biennial of Contemporary Art in the fall of 1989, an elaborate choreography was performed by two dancer/models in Sterbak's "motorized crinolines" along the long hallways.

the models ¹³⁰, then the interactive relationship that is established between viewer and model as distinct beings. Like the earlier "electric dress", the reading of Remote Control as both protective and threatening, compels an immediate psychosomatic response in the viewer. The actual physical discomfort of the model/dancer remote in the crinoline, her body visibly contrasting with its metal slats, reinforces a profound sense of isolation and human vulnerability. Above all, the pointed bare feet of the dancer/model, hanging in mid-air convey an essential, overriding fragility that rekindles the Crucifixion associations of Flesh Dress (figure 41). Myriad associations are raised with regard to the relationship between flesh and spirit, between body and self. Once again Sterbak, in the skeletal structure of the crinoline itself, refers to the underlying construction of the body, as she did with the use of meat in Flesh Dress and with the stick-like form in Spare Spine (figure 31). Revealing our basis in physicality - flesh and bone - Sterbak reminds us of the spiritual or intangible aspect of self and of the inseparability of mind and body.

The idea for a mechanical skirt or crinoline was based on German industrial robots ¹³¹, providing yet another link with the creation theme of her earlier Golem. Sterbak, however, has said her own motivation for Remote Control stemmed from her perception

¹³⁰ Jana Sterbak, Talk given in conjunction with Canadian Biennial of Contemporary Art National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. 5 November 1989. The models, according to Sterbak, act as substitutes for the viewer.

¹³¹ Jana Sterbak, Talk given in conjunction with Canadian Biennial of Contemporary Art National Gallery of Canada. 5 November 1989.

of the "dilemma of dependency"¹³² in which the individual is responsible for his/her actions, although "not a free and fully determined being".¹³³ Sterbak underscores this perception by making the crinoline form refer directly to walkers; thus evoking the two stages of life, old age and infancy, when humans are most dependent.¹³⁴ The diaper-like inner pant form, where the model sits also reinforces references to extremes of age, and the accompanying lack or loss of autonomy. But, as in Generic Man (figure 46), Sterbak desires to transcend the private and raise connections between "all dependencies of individuals, societies and peoples", and the boundaries of freedom as they are represented in "not just feminism but also colonialism, race, gender, economics".¹³⁵ In her terms, freedom is a construct just as conditions of class¹³⁶, the body and self are; and independence, like freedom, is a question of degree, of relativity. The individual can never be entirely independent of society - can never be a wholly discrete entity. As Sterbak points out, the freedom achieved in Remote Control is dependent on "the condition of many different variables any of which can cease to exist during the

¹³² Jana Sterbak. Video made of her Artist's Talk given in conjunction with the Canadian Biennial of Contemporary Art National Gallery of Canada, 5 November 1989.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid. Here there is also a conceptual link to her earlier work I can hear you think (figure no.30) where the body was powerless.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

performance." ¹³⁷ For example, the models are dependent on both other people (for assistance in getting in and out of the metal frame) and on the technology of the structure. Paradoxically, in spite of these dependencies, the model/dancer can (when manning the remote control device herself) also feel impregnable, empowered by the height and sense of autonomy, in a way that is not dissimilar to the illusory autonomy of the anorectic.

Sterbak's persistent obsession with the interdependence of body and mind (evident in Golem figure 28 and I can hear you think figure 30), is extended here to address other forms of dependency, which ultimately remain the basis for the theme of colonization. For this artist body and self form an interdependent but volatile system, dependent on and constructed by external sociocultural systems and techniques of control. She sees the individual internalizing these influences, in effect becoming a living colony. In this regard her theme of colonization can be extended further and refer to viral colonization:

Today, sex means danger, intimacy breeds disease and fear....When social relations are confined to the claustrophobic couple, and human intercourse becomes a dialectic of pleasure and pain, of seduction and betrayal, the only answer is remote control. Yet, as Sterbak reminds us with sardonic humour, to assume power by encasing oneself in the machine is simply to adopt another form of helplessness. ¹³⁸

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Diana Nemiroff, Canadian Biennial of Contemporary Art, (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1989), 198.

The "form of helplessness" and the theme of dependency or colonization is reinforced by the formal relationship of the walker or crinoline to a cage. The emptiness of the crinoline without the model is used by Sterbak to evoke an absent body and metaphorically an absent self, as we have seen in the cage-like form of I Want You to Feel the Way I Do...(the dress) (figure 32). The body, as self desiring wholeness, becomes the ground for the "constant tension between mechanisms of power and techniques of resistance."¹³⁹

Among the visible and invisible restrictions employed by mechanisms of power are those placed on women's bodies through fashions "that simultaneously define and repress"¹⁴⁰. The crinoline cage refers formally to both historical and contemporary dress. Historically the crinoline is paired with the corset, both of which entrap the female body manipulating it to meet a sociocultural ideal. A more recent reference for Sterbak's mechanical skirt is the crinoline of the "new look" of late eighties Paris haute couture:

The New Look...is coquettish, little-girl innocence for a generation of women who have everything to fear from the transmission of bodily fluids, and who can simultaneously resist and artistically parody the parasited body with all the excessive fashion signs of virginal sexuality...[It] is both an early warning system signalling a major shift in consumer subjectivity away from the serial sex of the late 20th century, and a master parody on the impossibility of the body immune in the age of lost innocence. Dior's new look is a cynical sign-play on our knowledge that we are trapped in bodies which are contamination

¹³⁹ Michel Feher, introduction, Fragments for A History of the Human Body vol.1 (New York: Zone, 1989), 4.

¹⁴⁰ Earl Miller, "First Canadian Biennial of Contemporary Canadian Art" C Magazine 24 (Winter 1990): 59.

chambers for all the invading antigens of hypermodern culture....¹⁴¹

The crinoline, in suggesting "a master parody on the impossibility of the body immune", reinforces allusions to AIDS within Sterbak's content.

A further way in which Sterbak uses the body, and specifically woman's body, as a site of resistance and struggle for self-determination is in her use of technology. "The poetry of the modern age" is equally a vehicle or tool contributing to alienation, dehumanization and the erosion of identity; and as professor/critic Alice Jardine states, "always has to do with the body and thus with gender and women in some form."¹⁴² Remote Control, with its depiction of physical isolation (although this isolation or independence is illusory in terms of the actuality of self-determination) could be read as a manifestation of what Jardine terms the body backlash, "a regime of total autonomy in which touch is all but prohibited".¹⁴³ Margaret Atwood's novel The Handmaid's Tale is cited as a literary example of such a regime in practice. At the same time, however,

¹⁴¹ Arthur and Marilouise Kroker, "Panic Sex in America" in Body Invaders: Panic Sex in America, 16. The Krokers discusses "fashion as a warning signal of major cultural transformation" citing the example of Christian Dior's full skirts as a prediction of the "postwar expansionary political economy of the 1950's."

¹⁴² Alice Jardine "Of Bodies and Technologies" in Discussions in Contemporary Culture, ed, Hal Foster Seattle: Bay Press, 1987) 172.

¹⁴³ Jardine, 156. The concept of the body backlash relates to Rosi Braidotti's position "that science and technology were in fact invented to liberate men from real women and that the reproductive technologies, for example, are simply the last desperate attempt, at the stage of nature's final exhaustion, to drain the female body of 'the feminine'."

Remote Control represents a subversion of such regimes through a "strategy of the flesh"¹⁴⁴, or through Sterbak's recourse to real human subjects or bodies. In creating an artwork in which we become hyperaware of flesh (as it contrasts with its metallic "clothing") Sterbak reveals the dangers implicit in the body backlash, a potential culmination of the Cartesian mind/body split.

Jardine views Pandora as "the capital myth for thinking about women and technology....the first 'auto-mate', the first machine, forged by Hephaestus, aided by Athena (the patroness of the mechanical arts), as a body to confound the boundaries between the animate and inanimate, the divine, the human and the bestial."¹⁴⁵ Remote Control might then be read as an incarnation of Pandora, and hence suggest a way of rethinking the loss of centre and the mind/body split through the deconstruction of the machine. As Jardine suggests one way to rethink the mind/body split "today might be to look at the history of the actual physicality of machines: first they have shapes that refer to the body; now with computers they relate to the mind."¹⁴⁶ Sterbak's fascination

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, 170. Jardine when asked "Have you come across any strategies of the flesh that have successfully controlled technology?" answers, "No. Maybe in art."

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, 156.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, 169. Rebecca Horn's use of mechanization provides an interesting point of comparison, especially her Overflowing Blood Machine (1970), Hydra Forest (1988) dedicated to Oscar Wilde and Lola (1987) (figure 50). In Lola a "stylized metal box holds a brush that flings red paint against the gallery wall, forcing the red to smatter a pair of red tap shoes on the floor. Because of the title, the female-recognizable shoes, and the color 'red', the piece suggests a form of violence specific to women." Laura Cottingham, "The Feminine De-mystique" Flash Art 147 (Summer 1989): 95.

with technology is cast in another light. The machine/body offers a metaphoric vehicle through which one can work toward wholeness of self.

Sterbak's recent work, Inside (1990) (figure 44), a mirrored coffin within a larger glass coffin, alludes directly to death and the body, flesh and spirit. The mirrored coffin might be read as an actual representation of core or centre, whereas elsewhere an auratic core has only been suggested (in The Dress figure 32 for example).¹⁴⁷ The reflective surface protects this core, functioning much as Sterbak's cages do, and in retrospect it becomes clearer that her body/cages may be intended protect the most vulnerable, secretive, precious - even darkest - realms of self. One might ask is Inside a self-portrait? If so, then Golem, The Dress, Flesh Dress and Remote Control (figures 28, 32, 42, 48) might also be read as metaphysical self-portraits.

In spite of the black humour and bleakness of Sterbak's vision, there is also a deep concern with how the social and the cultural affect us, and an awareness of the employment of the subjective as a strategy of resistance.¹⁴⁸ With the body as her central metaphor, questions of colonization, autonomy and dependency as they affect the individual, the self have taken precedence for Sterbak. Art historian and critic Peter Fuller says that today's artists "have been granted every freedom except the only one

¹⁴⁷ An allusion to the mirror stage where, according to Lacan, the subject erroneously but necessarily recognizes her/his self as a coherent unity might also be intended.

¹⁴⁸ Ingrid Sischy writes of this strategy, "This is not about the use of the word I, in an authoritarian way. But it is [about] the use of one's own self - in an increasingly corporatized world..." Sischy cited in Nairne and Ferguson, 90.

with which the others count as nothing: the freedom to act socially."¹⁴⁹ Sterbak addresses this want: "The Body, for Sterbak is the focus where all these manifestations of cultural and social contradictions are channelled."¹⁵⁰ But her work goes beyond social responsibility and critique, challenging our senses and our intellects by attempting to deal with the moral and spiritual crisis of modernism - with the loss of centre, core or self. Sterbak uses the body as a metaphor, in various guises and in various degrees of absence and presence, to affect us sensibly and emotionally as well as intellectually and aesthetically. We respond ideally as whole beings.

In Sterbak's work the relationship of body to self, mind to body is indeed central. The body is consistently used as a metaphor for a decentered constructed self engaged in a struggle for wholeness. Cognizant that we are not autonomous or discrete entities, she nonetheless attempts "to overcome the boundaries of the physical" in order to distill essence, isolate spirit or poetic inspiration, and to reconcile body and mind. The latter is achieved partially by the artist's relationship with her materials which maximizes the psychological and sensational impact of objects, as well as by her emphasis on establishing an active relationship with the viewer partially through appealing to multiple senses, and through the activation of space.

For Sterbak the role of technology as it affects, or interacts with, body and self is also a way of dealing with the mind/body split in a contemporary idiom. Furthermore,

¹⁴⁹ Peter Fuller, Beyond the Crisis in Art (London: Writers and Readers, 1980), 45.

¹⁵⁰ Ihor Holubizsky, Jana Sterbak (Toronto: The Power Plant, 1988), 8.

her ambivalence towards technology acts as a warning or cautionary device. Finally, Sterbak repeatedly makes us aware of both the relativity and extreme limitations of individual autonomy/freedom within society. As we shall see in the concluding chapter, for Magor the search for identity or self takes place on a clearly immediate and personal level, whereas Sterbak's private search is objectified and increasingly seen in more general terms of the plight of the individual within society.

Conclusion

We need to look again. With (our) others. For the body.
To take us into the twenty-first century.¹

In the commercialized, commodified postmodern world, where "nothing is original or authentic"², the self, as the nexus of subject, identity and individuality, is increasingly threatened by both fragmentation and homogeneity. Paradoxically, it is a time when artists, such as Magor and Sterbak, unconstrained by "a single and supposedly universal value system" are free "to explore and expose contradiction itself, to heighten the ironies, to work from the chaos and to address specific issues."³ And, while Magor and Sterbak use this freedom deliberately and positively to address specific sociocultural issues such as art reception, mass reproduction, colonization, and AIDS; the fundamental unifying theme in their work remains the postmodern fragmented, shifting concept of self and the desire for wholeness. Their art offers us a means by which to investigate and elucidate the complex metaphorical relationship between postmodernist concepts and contemporary art, between natural and constructed realities, and ultimately between body and self. In their art the body becomes the vehicle for new metaphors expressing both

¹ Alice Jardine, "Alice in Wonderland Looking/For the Body" in Utopia Post Utopia: Configurations in Nature and Culture in Recent Sculpture and Photography, Institute on Contemporary Art (Boston: MIT Press, 1988), 115.

² Sandy Nairne State of the Art: Ideas and Images in the 1980s (London: Chatto and Windus, 1987), 22.

³ Ibid.

a general theoretical concept and a personal psychological state. On first appraisal, because of the specific nature of their personal obsessions and independent responses Magor and Sterbak appear to have little in common. Magor most consistently addresses the self in terms of the construction of her personal identity; Sterbak's earlier emphasis on the interdependence of mind and body has more recently shifted to one on the self as individual within totalizing sociopolitical systems. But, as layers of meaning are uncovered, we find affinities, even similarities in their fundamental strategies and motivations.

Following a brief summation of some major differences between these two artists, I will focus on specific areas which illuminate the significance of their shared affinities. After reviewing each artists' attitude to their material, to the viewer and to ritual, I will summarize and compare how each artist incorporates repressed content into their work by discussing the issues and themes of representation, technology, social construction, marginalization and death.

As I have argued in this thesis, the focus on the body by Magor and Sterbak offers new metaphors for the contemporary reality of the decentered, constructed self: "a new self [which] is or becomes a series of roles within a series of social and psychological networks"⁴. The central issue becomes "the balance...between the social and the psychic

⁴ Nairne and Ferguson, 13.

levels of socially constructed subjects"⁵. Both artists use the tenuous yet resistant fragility of the body metaphorically to reveal a splintered, incomplete or mutable self. Despite this emphasis on the fragility of being, there is much in their work that speaks to a sense of being compelled to fill the void, to unify the fragments (even if such unity is imaginary and constructed). In penetrating and revealing their own vulnerabilities, and by implication ours too, both artists give us cause to reevaluate and rethink our bodies and our selves to better experience and understand the depth of our humanness. As Patrick Hutton notes, "the quest for such knowledge is itself a form of self-care...a quest...whose meaning is that our human nature is continually being reconstituted by the forms that we create along the way....it is through such creativity that our power is revealed, and it is in our capacity to use it well that our destiny lies."⁶ Magor and Sterbak understand that by fathoming what the past teaches us we do have individual and collective choices ⁷, no matter how limited (Remote Control figure 48), or naive (Field Work figures 24-25).

As we have seen, while Magor presents the self/identity dyad as an active and passive construction, she is reluctant to abandon the possible existence of a natural or

⁵ Griselda Pollock Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and Histories of Art (London: Routledge, 1988), 199.

⁶ Patrick Hutton, "Foucault, Freud and the Technologies of the Self" in Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman and Patrick Hutton, eds., Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault, (Amherst: The University of Massachussetts Press, 1988), 140.

⁷ Ibid.

unconstructed part of the self. Sterbak similarly views self/identity as a construction consisting of multiple, shifting elements. Nonetheless, her work, too, suggests both a lament and a desire for unity. Her fascination with the interdependence of body and mind, evidenced in the use of alchemical references and specific dichotomies such as spirit/flesh, passive/active, creation/destruction in conjunction with the play of absence/presence allows her to deconstruct binary oppositions in such a way as to offer a means of achieving wholeness. Similarly, Magor's integration of the process and concept within artmaking offers a way to rethink such oppositions.

Indeed, for Magor conceptualization/mind is inseparable from process/body; the creativity and physicality of artmaking combine in an attempt to actively parallel the construction of whole (internal/external) identity. Her motivation, directly connected to her personal obsession with the constitution of identity, is materially integrated into her work process. Furthermore, her labour as an artist connects her 'marginal' activity to the rest of society. Magor's physicality is stabilizing and essential to her identity. The artist is producer; the act of making/constructing critical. In contrast, the initial artistic inspiration or spark is what obsesses Sterbak. Her motivation in early work (up to Seduction Couch 1987 figure 35) stemmed from a desire to capture, to make visible, this elusive spark. Having learned, however, that the essence of creativity lies in its intangibility, her relation to actual making or producing has become primarily an analytical or intellectual one with others fabricating the objects she has designed.

Magor is a maker; Sterbak a designer. Sterbak's subliminal self, mediated and

generalized through the objective sources (including the mythological, art historical or literary) and media of her art is overlaid with the broader theme of the individual within society. And while Magor, too, mediates the question of the construction of identity through issues and material, the personal nature of her quest is more clearly articulated. Magor's search is local and personal; Sterbak's is oriented towards the intrigue of psychological and global power relations. Yet, in a very fundamental sense at the heart of their respective motivations, strategies and obsessions is an intensely private search, channeled through the body for self-knowledge, essence and wholeness.

Even in their earliest work, both artists display an intense engagement with the properties of materials which reflects on how they use the body as a metaphor for self. The key difference we have seen is that Magor's involvement is a direct and physical one; Sterbak's is more indirect even intellectual. Motivated by a search for personal identity, Magor's slow methodical approach to her materials establishes a point of "boredom" encouraging meditation and resolution, and, most importantly, allows her to enfold her own somatic activity and experience into the work. This "enfolding" deepens the body's metaphorical resonance and potential in work such as Four Boys and a Girl (figure 7). A fusion of body and mind occurs in the process of making that is self-affirming and stabilizing, and becomes a way of dealing with the experience of decentering. This psychosomatic fusion is reinforced by the artist's direct engagement of the viewer's intellectual, emotional and physical faculties as evidenced in Regal Décor (figures 21-22). Although Sterbak's actual involvement with materials is conceptual and

indirect, rather than actual (marked with the imprints of her hands, Golem figure 28 and I can hear you think figure 30, are exceptions), the intensity of the interaction is no less strongly communicated. Her strategy is to consciously maximize the physical potential of materials themselves to express simulate psychological and physical sensations and messages (see Artist as Combustible figure 34 and Attitudes figure 39). Her concerted multisensory use of materials results in more of an assault rather than direct engagement of the viewer's intellectual, emotional and physical faculties. Nonetheless it also entails a psychosomatic interaction with the viewer.

Thus, Minimalism's theatricality and its incorporation of the experience of the body (of both artist and viewer) experience into the work and its surrounding space has then clearly affected both artists.⁸ Human scale is critical in all of Sterbak's installations and her architectural investigation into women's spaces (Attitudes figure 39 and Seduction Couch figure 35) have further expanded her awareness of the Minimalist relationship between body and space. Magor also makes use of human scale and gesture, their physicality (Compost Figures figure 6 and Child's Sweater figure 26) and so, too, expands Minimalist concepts. Most importantly both artists understand that it is the body's implicit presence in the work which connects the viewer's own physicality as a

⁸ At the same time, simplicity, is critical to both artists who reduce their elements to essentials to convey meaning. In this respect and in their decision to transform everyday realities and to focus on objects and their properties, both artists have been substantially affected by Minimalism. In other ways too, their work, with its general lack of pretension, awareness of paradox, and use of underlying humour (from the blackest to the lightly ironic) can also be related to the Minimalist aesthetic.

dimension of the self.

Magor and Sterbak are also comparable in their use of the index of the body and/or gesture. Both incorporate ideas about process, ritual and the primitive. An overt ritualistic dimension is evident in Sterbak's performance pieces such as The Artist as Combustible (figure 34) and the sacrificial imagery of both Golem (figure 38) and Flesh Dress (figure 41). Orchestrated expressly for the public eye such works evoke communal religious rites, nevertheless they maintain a guarded sense of personal inscrutability. Conversely, Magor 'performs' her rituals, the process of making, in private, both as a way of giving coherence to her identity, and to give her a sense of contributing to an imagined/desired social fabric. The repetitive prescriptive aspect of ritual, denoting continuity, is physically integrated into Magor's work, as well as implicit in the references to native and oral history. It provides links not only with the perceived physicality of the primitive experience and the mediation of unconscious motives and desires, but also with complex sociocultural value structures. As critic, Peter Fuller notes, "In traditional aboriginal societies, we find the most rudimentary form of aesthetic activity - body painting and adornment - associated with ritual, rhythm and the affirmation of shared social beliefs."⁹ Both Magor and Sterbak affirm the unspoken desire for a collective value system (offering stability for the fragmented self) which underlies not only their recourse to ritual but also their focus on the body itself.

⁹ Peter Fuller Aesthetics After Modernism (London: Writers and Readers Press, 1983), 17.

A further affinity can be seen in both artists' desire to undertake and integrate into the content of their work what can only be termed an excavation of the individually and collectively repressed. This kind of "archaeologism"¹⁰ is evident even at the level of technique. For example in Field Work (figures 24-25) and Child's Sweater (figure 26), Magor effects a type of cultural excavation of repressed or lost techniques and in doing so revives the past traditions of pictorial photography and red-cedar matting while clearly demarcating her "artifacts" as simulations. On a deeper level, Magor is carrying out an excavation of her own past, reviewing it in terms of the present. In work such as Dorothy - A Resemblance (figure 11) by telling the story of a reclusive woman, and in Child's Sweater (figure 26) by bringing native history to the fore, Magor is uncovering and restoring to us repressed and/or untold histories. These anthropological cum museological references speak of personal strategies that reveal a different

¹⁰ American critic Donald Kuspit's concept of "archaeologism" is most useful in identifying such similarities in motivation and strategy. Relying on the methods of Sigmund Freud and Michel Foucault for the derivation of this concept, Kuspit contends that the most engaged contemporary art does not simply borrow from past styles, but deals fundamentally with both psychological and sociocultural content that has been individually and collectively repressed; and is now, through art, being brought to the surface. The experience of such art offers variously possibilities of healing, reconciliation or expiation; or in sum, ways to transform the present. Donald Kuspit, "Archaeologism: Postmodernism as Excavation" pp.531-537 in his book The New Subjectivism: Art in the 1980s (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1988). While Kuspit places more weight on the value of the psychic or Freudian possibilities of transformation, Foucault's so-called physical transformation offers the possibility of an equally profound reconceptualization of the present. Patrick Hutton makes the latter clear in his essay "Foucault, Freud and the Technologies of the Self" in Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault (Amherst, Mass.: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 140.

psychology from Sterbak's. Sterbak's mythological, literary, Christian and art historical references, delve not only into the collective (unconscious) past, but her own psyche. As we shall see, the interplay between internal/personal and external/sociocultural factors as determinants of identity, can be read in both Sterbak and Magor as not only a critique and/or questioning of sociocultural techniques such as representation and social encoding, but also as a revelation of hidden or suppressed aspects of self (and the Other) within culture.

Another example of their unburying of repressed content, is the strategic deconstruction and reconstruction of woman's presence/self through the body which allows both Magor and Sterbak to investigate not only how they (as individual selves) are affected by fragmentation and marginality, but also how collective female culture has been affected. Born between 1940 and 1955, they exemplify women "who came of age during the peak of feminist consciousness in the U.S. and Europe, and are now coming of age as artists [and who] were affected most by the dramatic reorientation of self feminism suggests."¹¹ At a most fundamental level their work like so many other contemporary women artists is centered on "critiques of male power and female powerlessness"¹². The representation of the body in such critiques as absent, immaterial, generalized, dismantled or fragmented, echoes the condition of the decentered self. Their

¹¹ Laura Cottingham "The Feminine Demystique" in Flash Art no.147 (Summer, 1989): 95

¹² Ibid.

emphasis on the ambiguous presence and, sometimes gender of the body, can be read as a strategy, which by focusing on absence rather than presence, is able to resist, reveal, and ultimately redefine the conditions under which women have been represented in patriarchal culture: "How to be fully present, which sometimes means how to articulate as fully as possible how fully absent we are...."¹³

Both Magor and Sterbak use clothing as a means of communicating, not only a constructed body/self, but also absence as presence. In pieces such as Magor's A Concise History (figure 5), Child's Sweater (figure 26), and Sterbak's I want you to feel the way I do (The Dress) (figure 32) and Flesh Dress for an Albino Anorectic (figure 41) the existence of self/identity is asserted through materials which, while lacking in bodily substance, convey a strong human presence. Magor's use of clothing in A Concise History addresses the general issue of identity, while Sterbak's specific use of women's clothing, is directly associated with women's identity and the creation of "an independent ontology".¹⁴ A further significant difference lies in Magor's critical involvement in the actual shaping of materials while Sterbak's role is that of the (god-like) designer, with others doing the actual fabrication. However, both Magor and

¹³ As editor and critic Ingrid Sischy points out in The Impossible Self, 87.

¹⁴ Laura Cottingham "The Feminine Demystique" in Flash Art no.147 (Summer, 1989): 92. The creation of a woman's ontology is characteristic of artists such as Rebecca Horn, Rosemary Trockel, Mary Kelly, Cindy Sherman and Katharina Fritsch, who use "gender-specific symbols and words". Trockel for example uses "kitchen appliances and fabrics"; Horn, eggs; Fritsch, Madonnas; and Sherman, "housewives and starlets".

Sterbak further compound the "femaleness" of their subjects ¹⁶ by allusions to activities/crafts primarily associated with women in the handsewn The Flesh Dress and the hand-knit Child's Sweater.¹⁶

Alice Jardine expands on such allusions to woman's craft: "it is clear that somewhere in the past tek - the etymological root of both technology and tecnology - had to do not only with fabricating and weaving but also with begetting and giving form."¹⁷ Technology then relates doubly to the female body, through process/gesture, and by inferences of birth or creation. Sterbak's focus on creation in Golem (figure 28) and Magor's inclusion of weaving and knitting in Child's Sweater (figure 26) allude to these different facets. Both artists keep their technology simple and comprehensible, its humanness, conveyed through a quality of homeliness, in evidence. Sterbak's more sophisticated technology (Seduction Couch figure 35 and Remote Control figure 48) derives from a fascination with invisible forces of physics; Magor's simpler technology originated from the desire to parallel the invisible forces of nature in order to investigate the stability of physical identity. Inspired by entirely different aspects of industrial technology (logging versus robotics), both artists, nevertheless, use technology, with all

Magor's subjects can be viewed as predominately female since they focus on her own identity. Furthermore when she uses a single protagonist, for example in Time and Mtrs. Tiber, Dorothy: A Resemblance, The Sleeping Artist, Regal Decor and Pregnancy Ater 35, 'she' is female.

¹⁶ Neither artist, however, actually manufactured these particular articles.

¹⁷ Alice Jardine, "Of Bodies and Technologies" in Hal Foster, Discussions in Contemporary Culture, 152.

its bodily implications, in their investigations of self to create new metaphors. As such both can be seen to reflect "the postmodern or cybernetic age [where] - it is not surprising, and equally significant, that the impact of technology on selfhood should become again such an urgent matter for contemporary thinkers and artists."¹⁸

As we have seen, even in works with more specific art historical references such as Sterbak's Seduction Couch (figure 35) and Flesh Dress (figure 41) technology is used to investigate conditions of representation in terms of absence as presence.¹⁹ For example, in Seduction Couch the absence of woman as a passive object, is replaced by a threatening projected technological presence. Similarly, the machine is used by Magor to redress the invisibility of the female subject. In Production (figure 10) the artist as producer is metaphorically represented by the machine/body. Both artists in effect create technological self-portraits. Other examples can be found in Sterbak's The Dress (figure 32) and Magor's Regal Décor (figures 21-22). There are differences, however in that Magor's works ultimately affirm the physical act of making or creation, whereas Sterbak's are more ambivalent, and acknowledge both the destructive as well as constructive side of creation, technology and her self.

While the absent/present body is used strategically if differently by Sterbak and

¹⁸ Bruce Ferguson and Sandy Nairne The Impossible Self (Winnipeg: The Winnipeg Art Gallery, 1988), 13.

¹⁹ Magor tends to use art historical references in a different way; for example, to illuminate conditions of art making and reception she revives the pictorial aesthetic in Field Work, and she borrows Brancusi's muse for Sleeping Artist, 1924.

Magor to deconstruct, directly or indirectly, modes and conventions of representation, it also provides another way of getting an "emotionally meaningful" ²⁰ aspect of the repressed: the violated, victimized, and commodified body, and hence self. The repressed self is figuratively excavated and integrated into content through the vehicle of new bodily metaphors. In Sterbak's work, from Golem (figure 28) to Remote Control (figure 48) and Pasiphaë (figure 49) the body resists dehumanization although subjected to painful or uncomfortable physical devices that are both the disciplining tools and products of sociocultural institutions. "We are" in her installations, "reminded of clinical situations in which the body is abstracted, the individual objectified."²¹ In Magor's Four Notable Bakers (figure 13) the body is presented similarly in a "quasi-scientific" way. The evocation of physical pain or suffering is not necessary to her art (as it is for Sterbak's), but the relentless, regulatory sociocultural processes that mold or victimize the body are. Thus, by addressing the way that sociocultural processes affect body and self, Sterbak and Magor allow the body itself to move beyond metaphor to become a focused site of resistance, asserting active struggle through its very absence. The act or praxis of resistance offers the possibility of the attainment of a desired, reconceptualized

²⁰ To draw a further connection between these artists and Beuys, it has been noted with regard to his work, that "It is the metaphor's absurdity or insanity - the way it seems to articulate integration and disintegration at the same time - that makes it psychologically effective or emotionally meaningful." Donald Kuspit, "Sculpture as Material Metaphor" in Individuals: A selected History of Contemporary Art 1945-1986 edited by Howard Singerman, 109.

²¹ Jessica Bradley, "Jana Sterbak: Objects as Sensations", 43.

wholeness.

Other examples of the constructed body as commodity, as victim and site of resistance are present in Magor's Dorothy: A Resemblance (figure 11), I Have Always Weighed 98 Lbs (figures 14-16), and Sterbak's Standard Lives (figure 45) and Generic Man (figure 46). While connected to issues of representation these works resonate with broader implications of individual freedom and expression. All of these works are comparable in that they deal with standards of measurement and conformity, and the erosion of individuality through socialization. Production (figure 10) and Regal Décor (figures 21-22) like Attitudes (figure 39) and Generic Man address issues of commodification and consumption, both generally and in terms of specific effects on the body. For each artist the constructed body/self is an absent but active presence. However, Magor's concern with the individual occurs not only on a more personal, empathetic level (the 'sleeping artist' suggests a personality as do the triplets in I Have Always Weighed 98 lbs figures 14-16) but also on a more local level (we have a sense of place for these individuals). In contrast, Sterbak's individuals, reduced to faceless or mask-like automatons by unspecified impersonal sociopolitical systems, reflect her interest in the configuration of past, present and future power relations.

These different orientations underlie the use of text in aforementioned works such as Magor's Four Notable Bakers (figure 13) and Sterbak's Attitudes (figure 39) and Pasiphaë (figure 49). While Sterbak has become increasingly interested in the latent psychological power and social inscription of words which affect the self at a subliminal

level, Magor's prose (not in evidence in recent work) generally has taken the form of a simple straightforward, ritualized narrative, thus connecting it to the collective continuity implicit in oral history and, hence, to Walter Benjamin's conception of 'story telling'. On the other hand, photographs function for both artists as documentary-like subversive images²², their cool objectivity casting a clear light on the lack of humaneness that is generated within their bodily metaphors. Sterbak's Generic Man (figure 46) and Magor's I Have Always Weighed 98 lbs. (figures 14-16) present clear examples of such a usage.

Specific contemporary issues such as AIDS, colonization, the role of the museum and marginality are also used as means of exploring the fundamental question of the constructed, decentered, shifting self. For both Sterbak and Magor marginality assumes a thematic centrality that directly relates to the position of the artist within society. We have seen how Magor's concern with the museum as social institution becomes a strategy for dealing with the constitution of body and self in terms of issues of appropriation and authenticity. The museum artifacts are not only anthropological/archaeological components but also serve as traces of existence. These traces offer Magor the means to investigate her own identity through the identity of the Other. Native elements in her work mark further concern with a marginal position equivalent to that of the artist's. Sterbak, too, in works such as Pasiphaë (figure 49) and

²² Photographs are also used by Sterbak to document, explain or contextualize pieces such as Flesh Dress and Remote Control, while they have functioned as found object for Magor.

Generic Man (figure 46), is concerned with the alien, the refugee, the displaced person, marginal Others with whom she identifies. For both Magor and Sterbak, the Other becomes not only a way of revealing truths about self, but also a recognition that analysis and deconstruction of political and sociocultural realities is required for creating foundations for a new non-patriarchal, non-hierarchical society. The concept of the Other, which has an unprecedented centrality in postmodern thought ²³, offers new metaphors and lies at the heart of Magor's and Sterbak's search for wholeness.

In Sterbak's Attitudes (figure 39) and Remote Control (figure 48) the Other, as alienated or victimized, is approached in terms of the theme of colonization directly related to the issue of AIDS, as well as its broader sense of the exercise of political control by one country/nation over another. In this context the metaphor of the body represents an objective, distanced conception of the self as individual within a larger sociopolitical context. In The Dress (figure 32), however, Sterbak focuses on personal colonization, something which happens between individuals, between aggressor and victim. At stake is more subliminal and fundamental aspect of self and Sterbak's later allusions to colonization (such as Pasiphaë figure 49 and Generic Man figure 46) are elucidated and deepened in these terms. In them colonization thus becomes a physical, psychological and emotional threat to the decentered self. Magor only indirectly addresses the theme of colonization in terms of museological and native references, and

²³ This tendency in their art connects up with developments in other artists work as evident in the recent "Re-Enactment Between Self and Other" (Spring 1990) exhibition at the Power Plant in Toronto.

socialization in works such as "Survival of the Fittest" and Field Work (figure 25), where it is incidental to the question of authenticity and identity.

The marginal role of the artist is also considered by both Magor and Sterbak. On one level Sterbak's cage imagery (figures 33, 43, 48) reflects on the freedom of the artist as well as the individual in general; on another, deeper level, although mediated and generalized, she is addressing her own subliminal, even repressed emotions and desires. Both self-repression and externally imposed limitations are analogized, and we see that beneath the public, political and social aspects of Sterbak's work always lies an intensely personal investigation into her self. Her fascination with artistic inspiration reveals a desire to legitimize the experience of the artist and her self. Magor, too, wants to legitimize her experience, but she openly states her own fears both as artist and individual when she takes as her subject internal, or psychological constraints, as she does in Sleeping Artist, 1924 (figure 19).²⁴ A sense of intimacy, not present in Sterbak's work, prevails even in the more monumental Regal Décor (figures 21-22).

But most importantly, when assessing their work, we find neither is self-indulgent or narcissistic in her respective investigation of self and identity. Both Sterbak's statement, "we need to talk to more people than just ourselves!"²⁵ and Magor's, "art to

²⁴ In Sleeping Artist, 1924 the photograph offers documentary validity, while in Regal Decor the photograph of the woman is subversive, undermining the "perfect" interior.

²⁵ Shirley Madill, Identity/Identities, 21.

me is a public place"²⁶, make this quite clear. As we have seen, political, social and moral concerns, also expressed metaphorically through the body, play too large a role. And while "metaphors [themselves] are social because speech is social, because all symbolism is social, because mind is social to an overwhelming degree"²⁷, it is the thematic content of the work that clearly represents a concerted cultural critique. Magor most overtly tackles conditions of art display and reception, but both artists offer an "immanent critique" of the rules of representation and an investigation into the role of the artist. In this regard their work is symptomatic of the postmodernist aesthetic where "the object of critical investigation becomes less the essence of a medium than 'the social effect (function) of a work'....the intent of artistic intervention becomes less to secure a transcendental 'conviction' in art and its institutions than to undertake an immanent critique of its rules and regulations ."²⁸ It is important to note that both Magor and Sterbak, however, clearly go beyond the social in fathoming both the depths of their own beings, and in confronting mortality itself.

Magor, in the Compost Figures (figure 6), and Sterbak, in Flesh Dress (figure 41),

²⁶ Ian Carr-Harris, 67.

²⁷ Donald G. MacRae, "The Body and Social Metaphor" pp.59-73 in Jonathan Benthall and Ted Polhemus, eds., The Body as a Medium of Expression (New York: Dutton, 1976), 59.

²⁸ Hal Foster, "The Crux of Minimalism" in Individuals: A Selected History of Contemporary Art 1945-1886 edited by Howard Singerman, 177 discussing Fredric Jameson, "In the Destructive Element Immerse: Hans-Jurgen Syberberg and Cultural Revolution" October 17 (Summer 1981): 112.

take as their focus the inevitable, natural process of decay - the organic body and the spiritual self.²⁹ The physical reality of the natural body, through which all experience is filtered, alone transcends total subjection to social construction and in addressing the finality of death a metaphysical dimension is clearly introduced. Both of these works ask the question: what is left when matter/body decomposes? As the subject of Sterbak's Inside (figure 44) and Magor's Schist (figure 8), death also presents the closest visual and conceptual link between these very different artists. Both address the sanctity of the individual, the unknowable quality or part of self that endures and defies understanding. While Sterbak's futuristic coffin/bodies suggest a precious, even hermetically sealed core preserving the privacy of the subliminal self, Magor's human-molded coffin-like body openly asserts the individual's physical identity although forcibly reduced to near anonymity. It is also in these constructions that the very different type of intense materiality used by each artist may best be seen; Sterbak's exploits the inherent qualities and psychological effects of the materials themselves, Magor's act of making is integrated into the material itself. This key difference offers a parallel to the way in which Sterbak tends to conceal or overlay her subliminal, or private self with sociopolitical issues, while Magor, although she, too, mediates the private through issues

²⁹ "There is today, largely because of AIDS, a general hypersensitivity to death....Deaths by AIDS or otherwise have come to have new meaning: they have become the visible reminder of our loss of faith, first in progress, then in technology and now in medicine."FILE Magazine, Editorial. "The Journal of the New Mortality" no.27 (Spring 1987): 6-7.

of authenticity and reproduction, makes her personal concerns more accessible, and expresses a desire to find an unconstructed part of self.

These works, too, underscore each artist's different approach to technology (Sterbak's more futuristic, Magor's more craft-like and labour intensive), and hence their respective 'philosophical/psychological' orientations. Magor looks to the past, not in a nostalgic sense, but to recuperate and perpetuate activities and values that can help us transform the present, whereas Sterbak's concern lies in using past and present constructs to warn us about the future. She, too, however, has societal transformation clearly in mind. Using the body as a metaphor both artists call into question our socioculturally inscribed assumptions and expectations so that we can effect a revision of the present that starts with our selves.

From another perspective, the context of contemporary spiritual dilemmas, the lack or loss of faith and of a coherent value system raised by work such as Flesh Dress (figure 41) and Schist (figure 8), suggest that the current focus on the body might be a necessary substitute for these very losses, simultaneously perpetuating and replacing religious iconography and themes. The theological debate which once centered on the existence of God has been translated into a struggle for the survival of wholeness of self metaphorically realized by the body in art. Such a struggle has become intensified by the tragedy of AIDS, which has enormously affected the immunity/immortality expectations of Magor's and Sterbak's generation, and, moreover, heightened our perceptions both of the body and mortality. As such this contemporary tragedy has made

more urgent the need for a redefinition and recuperation of a moral, ethical and spiritual base for human existence. Sterbak's Christ imagery, her investigations into poetic inspiration or the soul, and into the mind/body dichotomy; and Magor's traces of existence and auras in Time and Mrs. Tiber (figure 4) and Child's Sweater (figure 26) can be viewed as speaking to such contemporary spiritual dilemmas. The expressed desire for wholeness manifested in this work reaches beyond the private and the purely secular.

When Sterbak talks of emanations and projections; and Magor, of releasing the history of a body; they are indeed, on one level, entering the realm of the metaphysical, and on another, referring to freeing those aspects of human life which have been systematically repressed - marginal histories, desires, impulses, emotions, mortality - aspects which require physical and psychological excavation so that the present can be transformed both individually/privately and collectively/publicly. "We cannot re-vision the world with the tools we have been given. The unspoken and repressed must become part of our social discourse and social reality, or there will be no one left to speak at all."³⁰

A newly defined and increased subjectivity apparent in the personal archaeology of Magor's more recent pieces, notably Field Work (figures 29-30), is one way in which

³⁰ Many of today's artists "are allowing new levels of previously repressed content to seep into the continuing rigour of their recent work - work which some have been labelling a mourning for the death of modernism." Jane Flax, "Mother-Daughter Relationships: Psychodynamics, Politics and Philosophy", pp.20-40 in Hester Eisenstein and Alice Jardine, eds., The Future of Difference (Boston: Barnard College, 1980), 38.

the "unspoken" can become "part of our social discourse".³¹ While Sterbak's approach is, at least on the surface, more objective/intellectual than Magor's, she has consistently dealt with repressed content that is private, as in The Dress (figure 32) and Golem (figure 28) as well as public. A case can also be made for a new subjectivity in some of Sterbak's recent work in the way the body is used (Flesh Dress figure 42 and Remote Control figure 48); that is, the body's own crucial presence, functions as a surrogate not only for the artist herself but also for the viewer, and is critical for tapping his or her subjectivity. But Sterbak's subjectivity is more clearly articulated as filtered through a concern for the plight of the individual's potential fate as automaton or puppet of the state or media. She is not overtly excavating her personal past to reexamine the present as is Magor, but has her eye cast firmly towards the future. For both artists, whether they look to the past or to the future, the underlying motivation lies in a desired wholeness of self that can restore an ethical base to human existence.

This paper marks the first time these two major artists have been considered together with the result that important affinities between them such as the search for wholeness, the focus on repressed content, and the reconceptualization of body/self, have been identified. Previous assessments have tended to place Sterbak's work in the context of feminine identity (Shirley Madill), the "impossible self" (Nairne and

³¹ As Jane Gallop perceives in comparing her own transition from the seventies to the eighties to that of Roland Barthes, she has moved from "structuralism to something softer more subjective more bodily." Jane Gallop, Thinking through the Body (New York: Columbia University Press. 1988), 12.

Ferguson), or the body in absentia (Holubizky, Bradley and Richmond). And while Magor's work has been interpreted in terms of identity as difference (Monk) and personal identity (Bradley), neither artist's work has yet been discussed in terms of the body as a metaphor for self as done in this paper.

Their work offers insight not only into how the body acts as a record of the artist's activity and as the spatial and conceptual realization of the viewer's own somatic experience, but also, more importantly, into how the body is used metaphorically in contemporary art: as way of exploring the body/self as a construction, decentered and unstable; as a way of bringing the individual and collective repressed to the surface; as a strategy of resistance to fragmentation and homogenization; as a way of questioning and changing perceptions with regard to issues such as social encoding, representation, marginalization, the Other and technology; and as a means of establishing the basis of an ethical non-hierarchical society. This multiplicity of issues is, however, ultimately founded on the intensely private search for wholeness channeled through the body. Each artist transforms her private struggle into a public or collective reconceptualization of the self that becomes, on the one hand, an investigation of the artist's function and metaphysics; and on the other, a strategy for subverting established myths and sociopolitical norms.

By taking two artists whose work shows no immediate similarities, and applying to their work a specific thesis based on general observations of current expressions in the visual arts, definite affinities are revealed that elucidate not only our understanding of

the motivations and strategies of these artists but also our understanding of the complexities and truths of contemporary life. Through new metaphors of the body Sterbak and Magor mount a resistance to generalization and homogenization, demystify the subversive forces of contemporary society, and bring the systematically repressed to the surface to undertake a radical reconceptualization of the self. A thematic circularity in the work of both artists indicates a resurfacing desire for wholeness, for a "possible" self. "Selfhood is still the essential unit of each individual's existence and the understanding of that existence. It is the day-to-day assumption through which every person constitutes and reproduces the world."³² The current concentration on the body in the visual arts, while indicative, on the one hand, of continuity with the fine art tradition, is representative, on the other hand, of a working through of the Cartesian mind/body split and the concept of the decentered self; the end being a newly defined synthesis and wholeness of body and self. Through a continuing play of absence and presence this new body and self offer the hope of resistance, the possibility of wholeness and the promise of a profound and ethical humanness. Through the body "the end of art has found a new beginning."³³

³² Ferguson and Nairne, The Impossible Self, 16.

³³ Dot Tuer "The Embattled Body: AIDS and the Current Crisis of Representation" Canadian Art (Summer 1989): 24.

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Figure 1

Figure 2

Figure 3

Figure 4

Figure 5

Figure 6

Figure 7

3

of/de

3

Figure 11

Figure 12

Figure 13

Figure 14

Figure 15

Figure 16

Figure 17

Figure 18

Figure 19

Figure 20

Figure 21

Figure 22

Figure 23

Figure 24

Figure 25

Figure 20

Figure 27

Figure 28

Figure 29

Figure 30

Figure 31

↑ spine spine
(near side)
1947, 1948 (not solid)

Figure 32

Figure 33

Figure 34

Figure 35

Figure 36

Sulking room

bouder (1) 1 *vi* to sulk, have a sulk *ou* the sulks. (2) *vt personne* to refuse to talk to *ou* have anything to do with; *chose* to refuse to have anything to do with, keep away from.

bouderie *nf* (*etat*) sulkiness (*U*); (*action*) sulk.

boudeur, -euse *adj* sulky, sullen.

boudoir *n* [*F*, fr. *bouder* to pout]: a woman's dressing room, bedroom, or private sitting room.

Drawing room

[Shortened from WITHDRAWING-ROOM, which is found in 16th c. and is very common in 17th.]

orig. a room to withdraw to, a private chamber attached to a more public room; now, a room reserved for the reception of company, and to which the ladies withdraw from the dining-room after dinner.

Figure 39

HOUSE OF PAIN A RELATIONSHIP

Figure 40

Figure 41

Figure 42

CANADIAN ART

**THE
HIGH-RISK
ART OF
JANA STERBAK**

Figure 43

PLUS

The garden path
a photo portfolio
an anatomical
guide to chairs,
Stiller's
collaboration with
Gemma Cloutier,
art in the
audio-visual age,
Gerald Ferguson,
William Serrano,
Canadiana Centre,
Frank Gehry,
Jack and
Mark Shusterman,
Shelley MacFarlane
and much more

Figure 44

Figure 45

Figure 46

Figure 47

Figure 48

Figure 49

Figure 50

END

03-03-92

FIN