

Manifestations of the Absent Figure in Canadian Sculpture Since the Seventies

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Abstract

Manifestations of the Absent Figure in Canadian Sculpture Since the Seventies

John Latour

This thesis explores the absent figure in Canadian sculptural practices since the seventies. The absent figure is interpreted as a postmodern phenomenon. It calls into question the role of the figure in representational art as well as of those humanist values that have been expressed through the figure. Its emergence is traced to shifting social, political, and cultural forces from the sixties and seventies that challenged traditional concepts of representation and to critical approaches towards subjectivity. Manifestations of the absent figure in works of art from the seventies and onwards reflect a broader crisis of humanism.

Through the examination of six sculptures by four Canadian artists – Jamelie Hassan, Colette Whiten, Jana Sterbak, and Liz Magor – this thesis shows how the absent figure alludes to the ephemeral and elusive nature of the human subject. This analysis draws from the literature of art history and contemporary art theory. It also takes into consideration certain theories of signification and approaches that are critical of the notion of subjectivity. Manifestations of the absent figure in the selected works demonstrate a gradual and progressive move away from a humanist vision of a centred subject towards one that is ultimately decentred.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to Kristina Huneault, Pierre-François Ouellette, Barry Latour Sr., and to the loving memory of Theresa Latour Sr.

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Introduction

My thesis examines manifestations of the absent figure in Canadian sculpture produced since the seventies. In particular, I am interested in exploring how four artists – Jamelie Hassan, Colette Whiten, Jana Sterbak, and Liz Magor – use the absent figure in six works of art to explore the ephemeral and elusive nature of the human subject. The impetus for this thesis was a series of questions that pertain to the status of the figure in contemporary sculptural practices. Why is it that some of Canada's most prominent artists create works that are representational but not figurative? What is it about their sculptures that suggests that the figure is missing? Did something happen to the figure after abstraction? In my endeavour to answer these questions I formulated the notion that certain works use the absence of figures, or more precisely the absent figure, to allude to other issues.

From the outset of this thesis, I would like stress that the absent figure is a compound concept, which is to say that the word “absent” is more than just an adjective to the noun “figure.” If this were not the case, then “absent figure” would only imply instances of art without figures, and I contend that the breadth of its meaning stretches beyond this understanding. If the figure may be understood generally within the context of art as any representation of the human form or subject (no matter how realistic or distorted this representation may be) then the object of my investigation is *the perceived lack of a figure when viewers might reasonably expect to see one*. In this way, the absent figure is not an image or a form that may be observed directly. It is inferred by viewers. In some cases, the figure may be conspicuously absent, but other instances may require

some form of contextualization (either from within the work of art or as a supplement to it) in order for the absent figure to be recognized.

The absent figure may be manifest in any art form that purports to represent figures, but I have decided to focus my analysis of this concept with respect to the medium of sculpture for several reasons. The history of sculpture is linked intimately with the figure, from the hand-held Venus representations of the Paleolithic Age to the life-like creations of our own time by artists such as Australian-born Ron Mueck. The primacy of sculpture's connection to the human form is understandable if one takes into consideration that both exist in the three-dimensional world. As such, life-size figurative sculptures have comparable mass and weight to the human form, and both have a tangible presence. These qualities set sculpture apart from painting, drawing, and other traditional media in the visual arts that render the human form in two dimensions. It is because of these shared characteristics that I refine my definition of the absent figure as it pertains to the medium of sculpture as the perceived lack of a *three-dimensional* figure in a work of art when viewers might reasonably expect to see one.

As indicated in the title of my thesis, I am looking at manifestations of the absent figure in Canadian sculpture since the seventies. By narrowing the scope of my inquiry to these parameters, I hope to focus on a particular aesthetic context in which the conditions for experiencing an absent figure are optimal: the return to representational art in Canada after a period dominated by abstraction. I also wish to capitalize on the history of sculptural subject matter in Canada, which was almost exclusively figurative up until the second half of the twentieth-century. Before I suggest possible reasons for the emergence of this phenomenon in the seventies, I will outline briefly the underlying

historical context of its manifestation. This summary takes into account certain extenuating circumstances that help to explain why the absent figure was never formally recognized within art-critical readings of contemporary sculpture.

Examples of abstract painting in Canada can be traced to the late twenties and early thirties through the work of artists such as Betram Brooker and Kathleen Munn,¹ although instances of sculptural abstraction appeared only in the fifties. Paul-Émile Borduas, Eli Bornstein, Gerald Gladstone, Robert Murray, Michael Snow, Armand Vaillancourt, and members of the Association des artistes non-figuratifs de Montréal including Guido Molinari and Ulysse Comtois were among the earliest artists in Canada to produce abstract or non-figurative sculptures.² By the sixties and early seventies, many of these artists were joined by others who also explored abstraction such as David and Royden Rabinowitch, Henry Saxe, and Françoise Sullivan (to mention only a few). The zenith of modern sculpture in Canada came in 1967 when two major artistic events took place: Sculpture '67 in Toronto and Expo '67 in Montreal.

Sculpture '67 was an ambitious and impressive exhibition of large-scale sculpture that was commissioned by the National Gallery of Canada. It was organized by Dorothy Cameron to coincide with the nation's centennial celebrations.³ This outdoor display included fifty-four artists from Canada and abroad. Montreal was the site of the 1967 World's Fair, which included national and international artists whose works were exhibited in various locations at the St. Helen's Island fair grounds. The Canadian

¹ Denise Leclerc, The Crisis of Abstraction in Canada: The 1950s (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1992) 40-42.

² Some of these artists produced abstract or non-figurative art in more than one medium.

³ Sculpture '67 ran for over a year. For more details about this exhibition see: Dorothy Cameron, Sculpture '67 (Ottawa: Queen's Printer and Controller of Stationery, 1968).

Government Pavilion paid tribute to the role of architecture and sculpture in Canada in and around this venue.⁴ A great number of the works presented in these exhibitions were abstract or non-figurative.

The eventual reaction against the dominance of sculptural abstraction in Canada was two-fold. First, early practitioners of “environment art” in the sixties, such as Iain Baxter and the N.E. Thing Co., produced works that can be regarded more accurately as art spaces than as art objects per se. Their departure from object-based sculpture signalled a movement towards installation art in the decade to follow. Secondly, the seventies witnessed a renewed interest in figurative sculpture by such artists as Evan Penny, Mark Prent, and Joe Fafard. Early sculptures by Richard Prince and Colette Whiten represented the human form through fragmented figures that were created directly from body moulds. Representational pieces (without figures) were also being produced at this time by artists such as Murray Favro and Robin Collyer. In some instances, these artists created works of installation art and sculpture.

Although installation art draws from various disciplines and media including architecture, painting, drawing, sound, and theatre, its connection to sculpture is so pronounced that the two media seem indistinguishable at times. Nevertheless, the distinction between installation and sculpture is worth pausing on. Three criteria help to differentiate the two practices, and all of them turn on how meaning is produced differently, rather than on any perceived variance of materials or technique. Firstly, installation art is often more site-specific or influenced by its immediate surroundings

⁴ For more details regarding this event, see: Hugo McPherson, Architecture and Sculpture in Canada, Canadian Government Pavilion, Expo '67 Montreal (Ottawa: Roger Duhamel, Queen's Printer, 1967).

than sculpture. Secondly, an installation tends to exist as a work of art only while it is “installed” in a particular setting, whereas sculpture is not usually tied to a set period of duration. And finally, the viewer of installation art is typically invited to project himself or herself into, interact with, navigate through, or otherwise become aware of his or her own role in the process of the work of art in order to complete it.⁵ In this way, installation art explicitly acknowledges the meaningful presence of the spectator and his or her body. The integration of the viewer is considered to be a part of the formal construction of this medium. In contrast, a viewer may relate his or her body to a traditional figurative sculpture, but the meaning of this sculpture is not inherently tied to this relationship.

The last of the three criterion stated above is particularly relevant for my project since one might suppose that the absent figure is actually a physical or conceptual space reserved for the viewer of installation art. In the sculptures I will address in this thesis, however, a quite different space is created for the absent figure – a space not nearly so contingent on the integration of the viewer that installation offers, but, rather, at once more discrete, tangible, and self-sufficient. In other words, the absent figure operates in addition to any space reserved for the spectator.

The ascent of installation art in Canada took place in the late seventies and early eighties, when it was regarded as being on the cutting edge of artistic practices in the visual arts. In his essay for the catalogue that accompanied the landmark 1985 exhibition Aurora Borealis, curator René Blouin argues that installation art “was the strong point of

⁵ Lesley Johnstone, “Installation: Theory and History,” diss., Université de Montréal, 1987, i-10. I paraphrase the key arguments that the author raises at the start of her text. Johnstone also looks at installation art in relation to Canadian art.

Canadian art in the 1970s; and because, in view of the questions it provokes, installation touches the very heart of cultural production in the 1980s.”⁶ Installation art drew critical attention away from the medium of sculpture as it rose in status, and any manifestation of the absent figure in Canadian sculpture passed by unnoticed during this time.

The concept of the absent figure may be interpreted in the sculptures of several Canadian artists who came to prominence after the sixties and whose art fell somewhere outside of installation and new figurative practices. Marilyn Levine and Gathie Falk, for example, made sculptures in the seventies inspired by ordinary articles of clothing. Levine created clay police boots, as well as gender-specific jackets, gloves, and other apparel that seemed to be made from worn leather. Her works remind viewers how everyday objects are socially inscribed according to perceived differences of gender. They also demonstrate how sculptures based on empty garments can suggest masculine or feminine absent figures. Similarly, Falk produced Single Right Men’s Shoes (1971) (Department of External Affairs, Ottawa), a work that consists of a series of ceramic shoes housed inside special wall cases. The individual pieces were based on footwear belonging to her friends. It has been suggested that the artist’s treatment of these shoes invests them with the aura of sacred relics.⁷ Unlike true relics that call to mind a person through his or her bodily remains, Falk’s shoes are representational sculptures that draw attention to the absence of corresponding (representational) figures. In this instance, the artist’s sculpture alludes to the absent figures of her friends.

⁶ René Blouin, Lesley Johnstone, and Normand Thériault, Aurora Borealis (Montréal: Le Centre international d’art contemporain, 1985) 165. Aurora Borealis took place in Montreal. It was organized by René Blouin, Claude Gosselin, and Normand Thériault, and it included installations by thirty artists.

⁷ Scott Watson, and Sandra Martin, “Gathie Falk,” Canadian Art (fall 1985): 56.

Near the beginning of the eighties, Renée van Halm produced sculptures that were influenced by the depiction of architectural spaces in early Italian Renaissance paintings. Though her later works included fragmented, figurative elements, these initial pieces appeared vacant and yet seemed to “anticipate the presence of figures.”⁸ The human figure is itself displaced (and therefore made absent) by the furniture-based pieces of Michel Goulet. Of the various works that comprise Goulet’s œuvre, it is his chair sculptures of the eighties (and onwards) that evoke the strongest impression of the absent figure. Goulet gives each one its own unique character, and his art privileges associations between chairs, the human form, and personal items.⁹ In the eighties, Roland Poulin introduced representational objects into his formerly abstract practice. Towards the end of this decade, he began to produce massive coffin-like boxes that alluded to inaccessible, interior spaces. Poulin subsequently added the cross motif to his sculptural vocabulary, but in keeping with his earlier work, the figure always remained out of sight. Its absence can be read as an allusion to issues of mortality and spirituality.

In the nineties, absent figures were manifested in specific works by Philippine-born artist Lani Maestro and Steven Shearer – both of whom made use of enclosed spaces. Maestro’s Cradle (1996) (Collection of the artist) is an ethereal piece that consists of a roomful of palm mats and empty tents made from transparent mosquito netting. Cradle recalls the sleeping enclosures of Maestro’s childhood before immigrating to Canada, as well as the absent mother figure of her nanay (“heart mother”).

⁸ David Burnett, and Marilyn Schiff, Contemporary Canadian Art (Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers Ltd. in cooperation with the Art Gallery of Ontario, 1983) 233.

⁹ The chair and the human figure are connected by the terminology used to describe their component pieces. Each form consists of a back, arms, legs, and feet. Goulet often combines sculptural chairs with recognizable objects such as puzzles or books in such a way as to raise questions about the nature of representation and the production of meaning.

Shearer produced Activity Cell with Warlock Bass Guitar (1997) (National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa), a capsule-like piece of furniture based on a sixties' design for a modular recreation centre for teenagers. Shearer often calls up conflicting images of seventies' youth culture in his art, and the presence of an electric guitar in this work "could stand as a figure of youth whose rebellious spirit resists the behaviour modification of the cell and defeats it – or is defeated by it."¹⁰ Towards the end of the nineties, Rick Burns used articles of clothing and modified furniture to draw attention to the dehumanizing effects of institutional forces upon the body. The presence of "real" articles of clothing in these works (as opposed to representations of garments) tends to suggest that *someone* was missing, rather than a figure per se. In more recent sculptures, Burns has exhibited altered pieces of furniture without garments. His use of the chair motif in these instances is not unlike Michel Goulet's practice of employing chairs as substitutes for figures. For example, a steel table and chair are physically merged in Engaged (2001) (Private Collection) as if to suggest how the individual and the institution can become one and the same. In Link (2001) (Private Collection), two chairs lie sideways on the floor as if they had been toppled over. Though physically set apart, they are tied to each other like inmates through lengths of chains attached to their feet. Burns's exploration of the chair motif in these newer works points to figures that have become displaced by institutional forces.

These examples demonstrate how the absent figure has manifested in Canadian sculptural practices since the seventies. Although all of the sculptures that I have mentioned so far evoke absent figures, there are several reasons why I have decided to

¹⁰ Roy Arden, "Steven Shearer," Canadian Art (fall 2001): 46.

explore this phenomenon in specific works by Hassan, Whiten, Sterbak, and Magor. Each of the six chosen sculptures have been included in major exhibitions in Canada. They all have been documented and reproduced widely in various publications over the years, and as such, they are well-known works of art. More importantly, these sculptures demonstrate the diversity with which absent figures are able to point to individuals, groups of persons, and even forms of subjectivity. As I will discuss shortly, the manifestation of absent figures in these works of art approaches the complexity of the human subject in ways that reflect broader social, political, and cultural issues. Even though I look at the work of four women artists in this thesis, it was never my intention to write about the absent figure in relation to the artists' gender. Issues of gender and representation will play, however, prominent roles in my analysis of factors leading to the emergence of this phenomenon in the seventies and in regard to the concept of margins in the second chapter.

The fact that the absent figure has never been addressed in a concerted fashion by critics of these works is explained in part by the discreet nature of this phenomenon. As well, it may have been overlooked because of the special attention that was paid to the concept of "the body," particularly in the last decade of the twentieth-century. Artistic production around the body in the nineties finds its immediate precursors in the Body Art movement of the sixties and seventies, as well as in Performance Art and photographic practices in the eighties. Gabriele Brandstetter regards the subject of the body as "a theme which at the end of the century is present more than ever in the discourses of art, the sciences, and the media."¹¹ Moreover, the "absent body" is a concept derived from

¹¹ Gabriele Brandstetter, and Hortensia Völckers, ed. ReMembering the Body (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2000) 14.

the body which has drawn considerable interest in recent years. Tracey Warr argues that “the absence of the body is a poignant reminder of the transience of life. Artists have registered the body’s absence in different ways – as casts, imprints, photographs or traces – and for different reasons.”¹²

One of the first exhibitions of contemporary Canadian art devoted to this particular subject was Afterimages: Representing the Absent Body. In the catalogue essay that accompanied this 1996 exhibition, artist and curator Gil McElroy states that Afterimages “seeks to address some of the issues that have accumulated around representing the distant figure of the absented body.”¹³ The author questions various assertions (derived from Protagoras) that posit “Man” as the model upon which all else is measured by arguing that the body often failed to conform to abstract ideals of Western thought. He further contends that the ideological struggles between the body and modernism can be discerned in major shifts throughout twentieth-century art – culminating in the repression and ultimate removal of the body from sight. The author looks at aspects of the absent body in the works exhibited in Afterimages and relates them to issues of architectural expression, identity, and individualism, but he never looks at the broader implications of this phenomenon in terms of subjectivity. In contrast to the number of art-critical writings on the absent body, such as McElroy’s text, the absent figure has only been addressed in a sporadic and oblique way. There are however several

¹² Tracey Warr, ed. The Artist’s Body (London: Phaidon, 2000) 275.

¹³ Gil McElroy, Afterimages: Representing the Absent Body (Halifax: TUNS Press, 1996) 3. This exhibition was held at the TUNS Exhibitions and Resource Centre from January 12-February 11, 1996. It included the work of three women artists and three women architects.

key texts that signal issues of concern for the representation of the figures in art practices. These in turn help to elucidate the manifestation of the absent figure.

In his cogent and influential essay “Sculpture of Our Time” Clement Greenberg eschewed illusion, explicit subject matter, and figuration, arguing that “the arts are to achieve concreteness, ‘purity,’ by dealing solely with their respective selves – that is, by becoming ‘abstract’ or nonfigurative.”¹⁴ The critic noted that sculpture is permitted more latitude towards figurative allusiveness than painting (because it is less illusionistic than painting) but he had the following stipulation: “yet sculpture can continue to suggest recognizable images, at least schematically, if only it refrain from imitating organic substance.”¹⁵ Greenberg’s objective to distinguish sculpture from the figure was an articulation of artistic strategies from the earlier part of the century, having been drawn from Cubist painting and collage, as well as the Constructivist use of modern industrial materials.¹⁶ Texts such as “Sculpture of Our Time” and his earlier “The New Sculpture”¹⁷ made a long-lasting impression on the art-making practices of many artists in the United States and Canada. As Greenberg’s essay was written well in advance of the time period that I examine in my thesis, it is necessary to look at more recent texts that are concerned with issues of figurative representation.

In “The Millennial Body” art critic Thomas McEvelley describes a Postmodern scepticism of the traditional figure’s ability to portray the human subject. He contends

¹⁴ Clement Greenberg, “Sculpture of Our Time,” *Arts* (June 1958): 22.

¹⁵ Greenberg 23.

¹⁶ Andrew Causey, *Sculpture Since 1945* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998) 62.

¹⁷ Clement Greenberg, “The New Sculpture,” *Partisan Review* (June 1949): 637-642. “Sculpture of Our Time” is a substantially revised edition of this article, although the author’s dismissal of figurative art is most clearly defined in the later text.

that Western sculptors from the Classical period to the nineteenth-century endeavoured to represent the human soul within the figurative tradition in what he refers to as the “sculpture of presence.”¹⁸ Though the soul was believed to be immaterial and thus impossible to represent directly, sculptors strove to express something of it implicitly through the figure. The sculptural portrait could be regarded as a container in a way that was analogous to the role of the body as a receptacle of the soul. McEvelley notes that certain examples of twentieth-century sculpture suggest a kind of departure of the soul from sculpture, most notably in the figures of Alberto Giacometti and the body casts of Yves Klein. The complete divestiture of the soul from the figure was found to be exemplary in the empty garment works of Joseph Beuys and Marcel Broodthaers where sculptures metaphorically became empty vessels. The author identifies this turn towards “anti-soulist” tendencies in the art practices of artists from the seventies as follows:

It is one of the clearest signs of transition from Modernism to Post-modernism that recent art of the figure has portrayed the body not as a presence but as absence. Either the figure has been vacated by the soul due to surrounding circumstances or it is inherently inimical to the idea of the soul.¹⁹

McEvelley argues that the role of the figure underwent a period of significant change in the twentieth century. This change signalled both a shift from Modernism to Postmodernism and a redefinition of the human soul as the humanist subject – a subject that was remorselessly criticized over the course of the twentieth century, most notably by Marxism, psychoanalysis, and linguistics:

¹⁸ Thomas McEvelley, “The Millennial Body: the Art of the Figure at the End of Humanity,” *Sculpture* (Oct. 1997): 28.

¹⁹ McEvelley 29.

The Marxist tradition sees the human self as a byproduct of impersonal economic factors which are the actual reality; the Freudian tradition sees it as an artificial construct resulting from the unconscious interplay of instinctual forces which are essentially impersonal and soul-less; modern linguistics has tended toward the view that the individual self, far from being a crystalline droplet of spiritual perfection, is the off-scouring of language, a vast impersonal communal mistake.²⁰

The absent figure may be interpreted as a radical extension of what the author refers to as the postmodern "sculpture of absence." Since the concept of a coherent self has been called into question, its representation through the sculptural figure has been cast into doubt. It is possible that the withdrawal of the figure from the visual field is an indicator of this uncertainty.

A third explanatory factor for the absent figure is posed in feminist art and criticism. In the introductory chapter of Body Art: Performing the Subject, Amelia Jones traces some of the views towards the representation of gender, the body, and subjectivity that were held by women artists of the sixties and seventies and the subsequent critique of these perspectives by feminist artists and theorists of the eighties.²¹ Jones contends that early body art projects of the sixties and seventies (Judy Chicago is paradigmatic here) came under intense scrutiny and were generally dismissed by certain feminists such as artist Mary Kelly and theorist Griselda Pollock. Their critiques rejected the seemingly idealistic and essentialist claims upon which the earlier works were based, and they asserted that women's use of the female body in contemporary art practices tended to reinforce the traditional objectification of the female body for the pleasure of the male gaze. As the eroticised idealization of the female body was found to undermine women's

²⁰ McEvelley 29.

²¹ Amelia Jones, "Postmodernism, Subjectivity, and Body Art: A Trajectory" Body Art: Performing the Subject (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998) 21-52.

expression of their own subjectivity, some women artists effectively use the absence of their bodies in such a way as to cause the viewer to reconsider his or her expectations of gender representation. It could be argued then, that the removal of the figure from sight functions as an artistic strategy in order to challenge the objectification of women.

The various texts by Greenberg, McEvilley, and Jones offer three possible explanations for the manifestation of the absent figure. It might be the result of a modernist mandate to dismiss the figure from the visual field of sculpture (Greenberg), it may reflect changing perceptions towards the humanist subject, whose nature as a coherent being has been cast into doubt (McEvilley), or it could challenge expectations of representation along lines of gender and subjectivity (Jones). In presenting these theories, I hope to show how the absent figure may be understood either as a rejection or a questioning of the role of representation in artistic practices. I do not think it is possible to look at the concept of the absent figure without taking any one of these explanations into consideration, but I see the Greenbergian rationale in a different light than the other two. In the first instance, the figure is seen as an obstacle that must be removed or overcome in order to advance the ultimate goal of abstraction. In the subsequent theories, the figure or the absent body is linked to the broader notion of subjectivity. Also, in Greenberg the absence of the figure is valued for itself – a positive embodiment, as it were, of what art should be, whereas absence functions as a critique in the latter theories.

The difference between Greenberg's text and those by McEvilley and Jones reflects a divide between modernist and postmodernist views of representation. On the one hand, modern abstraction rejects the subordinate role of art as a reflection of reality. To this end, it strives to eliminate all external allusions (natural, social, cultural, political,

psychological, and historical) from the visual field. On the other hand, Postmodernism reintroduces these various elements into art-making practices. The return to representation in the seventies was not a wholesale endorsement of the realism that was rejected by modernist abstraction. The various hallmarks of Postmodernism (such as citation, eclecticism, parody, and pastiche) revisit realism from a critical distance. Representation itself became a contentious issue for Postmodernism because of important transitions that took place in the second half of the twentieth century. What follows is a cursory overview of some of the key conditions that led to a broadly-based questioning of representation as this term is conceived both politically and conceptually. This discussion leads directly into my central argument regarding the absent figure.

The sixties were marked by social, political, and cultural upheaval, most notably in the United States, but also in the rest of the Americas, and in Europe and parts of Asia. The civil rights movement in the United States inspired various minority groups (such as Native and Latin Americans) and marginalized persons (including women) to demand equal rights as citizens under the Constitution. Race- and gender-based communities sought recognition of their own collective identities within the political and cultural discourses of society. This period also saw politically active environmentalist, worker, and student movements emerge in force both in the United States and abroad. The growing counter-culture was vocal in its criticism of U.S. domestic and foreign policies (including the government's involvement in the Vietnam War). At the heart of these groups and movements was a fundamental loss of faith in the power of representative democracy and a profound scepticism towards the supposed universality of "Man." In

order to effect political change, these diverse groups and movements turned to participatory democracy.

The seventies witnessed the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Vietnam and some gains by the civil rights movement. Despite the fact that social protest became an even greater part of the fabric of American culture than before, there were still substantial economic and social disparities along lines of race and gender. The public's confidence in the moral authority of its leaders eroded in part because of the Vietnam War and in part by the number of high-profile political scandals that shook the U.S. government at its highest levels (such as Watergate). The demand for equal representation of minorities and marginalized groups in all facets of society carried on from the sixties into the seventies, but fractures within these communities became more profound than in the previous decade. The critical theories of the New Left that served to galvanize the various groups and movements in the sixties were not able to address the increasing complexity of their experiences in the seventies.

The established social order of the West was contested on numerous fronts throughout this time period. In the midst of the ensuing political and cultural upset between the state and various communities, certain critical approaches towards humanist ideas were taking hold on theoretical levels. As McEvelley argues, the seventies were marked by Marxist, psychoanalytic, and linguistic challenges to the very notion of the humanist subject as a rational, coherent, and self-determined entity. Although the basis of these critical approaches can be traced to earlier parts of the twentieth century, they took on special significance in the seventies as they became part of the intellectual and creative mainstream. Both McEvelley and Jones refer to the important roles that

representation, subjectivity, and absence play in the work of artists from the seventies and onwards, and their arguments allude to a wider theme that is crucial to my investigation.

I contend that the emergence of the absent figure in the art of the seventies and onwards reflects a postmodern questioning of the notion of representation as well as of those humanist values that have been expressed through the figure. My analysis of the sculptures of Hassan, Whiten, Sterbak, and Magor will show how the absent figure points to a broader crisis of humanism, one that leaves the humanist subject decentred. With this in mind, my objective for the following three chapters is to discuss the manifestation of the absent figure as it relates to the themes of presence and absence, margins, and the elusive subject. In each chapter, I will look at two sculptures in detail both individually and comparatively in relation to one of these themes. Throughout my thesis, I will refer to literature from the disciplines of art history and contemporary theory. I will also draw upon structuralist and poststructuralist theories of signification as well as psychoanalytic theories and feminist criticisms of subjectivity. My goal is not to propose a chronology of artistic development of the absent figure, but to present works that demonstrate the progressive decentring of the humanist subject. This order exemplifies a certain logic of absence that points to its logical conclusions. In the process, absent figures in the works of Hassan, Whiten, Sterbak, and Magor will draw attention to a rich diversity of social, political, and cultural issues.

Chapter I: Presence and absence

By its very nature, absence is a mercurial notion. It is an acknowledgment of the spaces that exist between ideas, words and things, the past and the present. As a concept, absence is perhaps best introduced through its relation to presence. This chapter will look at how two sculptures play on the edge of presence and absence. They evoke absent figures that point to specific persons and groups of persons. Jamelie Hassan's Los Desaparecidos (1981) (National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa) is a fragile yet powerful work that calls to mind the ephemeral nature of life in the face of violence. Colette Whiten's September 1975 (1975) (National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa) is a portrait of human relationships, but it also marks a transition between the figure and the absent figure. The two sculptures address very distinct cultural and aesthetic concerns. One raises issues that are politically charged while the other focuses on subject matter of a more personal order. By bringing them together in this chapter I hope to draw attention to significant points of commonality. I will demonstrate how metaphor is used in each work to convey the presence and absence of figures and how loss becomes an integral element of this process. The absence of figures in each of their works will be interpreted within the context of the crisis of humanism.

I

From a distance, Jamelie Hassan's Los Desaparecidos appears to be a collection of some fifty cloth kerchiefs spread across a floor in a loosely defined triangular pattern (see fig. 1). The grouping is arranged near one corner of a room, although none of the

individual headscarves comes into contact with the nearby walls. Each piece of fabric is folded, twisted, or creased in ways that suggest it was allowed to drop to the ground and retain whatever shape it took upon landing. Even from afar, however, there are a number of visual clues that might lead viewers to suspect that there is more to this collection than meets the eye. No two kerchiefs overlap, as viewers might expect if the individual pieces were dropped to the floor in a haphazard way. Some of the fabric appears oddly torn, and there are small scraps carefully interspersed between the kerchiefs. As well, text appears on many of them, hand-written with blue ink. Lastly, a black dossier accompanies the scarves. It also rests on the floor, set directly in front of this collection.

Upon closer inspection, a number of early assumptions regarding this work prove to be false (see fig. 2). The kerchiefs are made from porcelain instead of fabric. Some of them are cracked, while the small scraps are really ceramic fragments. Their brittleness only highlights the fragility of the collection as a whole. As well, the individual texts that have been inscribed on the headscarves have not been written in ink; rather, they have been carefully painted on with blue glaze. Not all of the kerchiefs are legible due to their folds, their fragmentation, or the fading of their text. Those that may be read include several lines of text in Spanish such as “Desaparecidos, Nora Susanna La Spina y su hijo nacido en cantiveria, 1-11-1976, Argentina” (“Disappeared one, Nora Susanna La Spina and her son born in captivity, 1-11-1976, Argentina”).

In total, thirty-nine full or partial names appear on the ceramic scarves with similar references to Argentina. The dossier contains photocopied pages of texts in Spanish drawn from various sources. It includes missing persons files, newspaper ads pleading for information regarding kidnapped children, eyewitness accounts of

abductions, and photographs of mothers with their children. Reading through the dossier, viewers discover that La Spina and the others were victims of politically-motivated kidnappings that took place in Argentina during a period of time from 1976 to 1983 known as “The Dirty War.”

Hassan titled Los Desaparecidos after an expression that was popularized in Argentina during the seventies. “The disappeared ones” were Argentinian citizens who were abducted throughout the course of several brutal military dictatorships. During this time, three consecutive juntas sponsored the covert kidnapping and extermination of thousands of political dissidents. Hassan became aware of the plight of the desaparecidos in 1980, when she was given an embroidered kerchief belonging to one of the mothers of the kidnapped victims. This woman was a member of an association of grandmothers referred to as the Abuelas de la Plaza de Mayo (“Grandmothers of May Square”). This association was actually a subgroup of the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo (“Mothers of May Square”), mothers of missing children who banded together to protest the state-sponsored kidnappings. When the mothers founded their association in 1977 their membership consisted of thirteen persons, but hundreds of women would join their ranks over time.

During the course of “The Dirty War” the mothers and grandmothers were the most defiant critics of the state. They were known for the silent protests they orchestrated in a public square facing Argentina’s Presidential Palace. One of their most recognizable strategies of protest was to embroider the names of their children and the dates of their abduction onto scarves and diapers, which they then wore on their heads. The Abuelas were especially concerned with the fate of their grandchildren who had been

abducted or who would have been born in any one of the hundreds of secret detention centres spread across Argentina. The mothers' association estimates that 30,000 citizens were kidnapped during "The Dirty War."²² Thirty per cent of the victims were female, and three per cent of the women were believed to be pregnant at the time of their abduction.²³

The mothers and grandmothers endeavoured to garner support for their cause outside of Argentina, but their pleas met with apathy from much of the international community.²⁴ The United States was particularly unresponsive to their appeals for help in the seventies and early eighties because the successive military governments in Argentina were vehemently anti-Communist. The grandmothers did travel extensively throughout Canada and Europe on numerous tours, and they distributed documentation pertaining to their missing children and grandchildren wherever they went.

Hassan was given an embroidered kerchief when three grandmothers passed through London, Ontario on a tour sponsored by Amnesty International. The artist subsequently photocopied a dossier that had been smuggled out of Argentina by these women, and used it as source material for her sculpture. Although the majority of the

²² Patricia Marchak and William Marchak, God's Assassins: State Terrorism in Argentina in the 1970s (Montreal: McGill-Queen's Press, 1999) 154.

²³ Jo Fisher, Mothers of the Disappeared (London: Zen Books; Boston: South End Press, 1989) 107.

²⁴ Great Britain would eventually challenge the Argentine government led by General Leopoldo Galtieri, but for reasons other than human rights violations. Argentina tried unsuccessfully to claim sovereignty over the British-held Falkland Islands in 1982. The ensuing Falklands War led to the downfall of Galtieri's regime and signalled an end to "The Dirty War."

kidnappings that took place in Argentina were of young men, all of the named victims in this sculpture are abducted mothers and their unnamed children.²⁵

Los Desaparecidos evokes the absent figures of thirty-nine women whose names appear on the scarves, as well as their unidentified children.²⁶ The artist could have represented these victims through the use of sculptural figures based on available photographs and files, but the very absence of three-dimensional figures is itself a powerful allusion to their kidnapped status. On a formal level, absence is suggested by the dispersed nature of the kerchiefs and by the empty spaces between each porcelain fragment. The fact that some of the inscribed names are incomplete or illegible due to the folds and breaks in the porcelain only compounds the sense of loss that permeates this work.

In a text accompanying a 1983 exhibition that included Hassan's sculpture, curators Jessica Bradley and Diana Nemiroff eloquently demonstrated how the clay kerchiefs lend themselves to metaphorical interpretation: "each one represents an individual life, now a shard cast upon the ground. Collectively they resemble a shattered vessel, the families and communities of a society fragmented by political strife."²⁷ Their words call up a poignant image of Argentine society as a broken and dispersed vessel. This allusion directly evokes the devastating effects of "The Dirty War" on both

²⁵ Sociologist Patricia Marchak reports that seventy per cent of the kidnapped victims were males. Anyone suspected of subversive activities against the state could be targeted for abduction including union leaders, blue-collar workers, teachers, students, journalists, and artists. These details are drawn from the state-sponsored CONADEP report that identified 8,960 missing persons cases. The Mothers' estimation of 30,000 missing persons cases was based on the CONADEP findings plus information from external sources such as Le Monde and Amnesty International. See Marchak and Marchak 154-155.

²⁶ The kerchiefs make reference to approximately thirty children.

Argentina's individuals and its communities, but in a less direct way it touches upon a form of loss that transcends specific historical boundaries. The metaphor of the shattered cultural vessel is itself a lamentation for an idealized state of culture, one that was once whole but which has been lost.

As is the case with all metaphors, two distinct concepts or things are brought together to produce new meaning, but something from the original components must be sacrificed so that the joining may take place.²⁸ Cloth is replaced by clay in Los Desaparecidos, thus enabling the kerchiefs to be seen as fragments. Bradley and Nemiroff's reading of Hassan's work shows the sculpture's potential for other metaphorical interpretations. For instance, the triangular composition of the sculpture calls to mind one large kerchief, while its blue and white colouring recalls the Argentine national flag (although both emblems lie in tatters on the floor).

Hassan's production of ceramic headscarves reflects a long tradition in her artistic practice that dates back to the seventies. The artist often made fibreglass and clay versions of readily available objects. She referred to these constructions as "actualizations."²⁹ In writing about this tradition, art historian Monika Kin Gagnon makes special reference to Los Desaparecidos:

Hassan's uncompromised transmission of knowledge about the "disappeared" and her meditation of the ritual scarves as constructed porcelain objects (rather than the scarves themselves, or photographic documentation), broaches the impossible reconciliation between empathetic affinity with the Desaparecidos or their

²⁷ Jessica Bradley and Diana Nemiroff, Songs of Experience (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada; Montréal: Artex, 1986) 21. This exhibition took place at the National Gallery of Canada from May 2 to September 1, 1986.

²⁸ In this way, the notion of loss is an inherent element of metaphor.

²⁹ Christopher Dewdney, Jamelie Hassan: Material Knowledge: a Moral Art of Crisis (London: London Regional Art Gallery, 1984) 5.

relatives and the horrific political realities of Argentina's torture camps.³⁰

Despite Gagnon's statement that Hassan's art is an "uncompromised transmission of knowledge" I believe that her actualizations are as much a product of an interpretive process as they are attempts at direct representation. This process suggests that a negotiation takes place between the artist, the materials at hand, the conceptual object to represent, and the difficult narratives that the artist addresses. In the following excerpt of an interview between Nemiroff and Hassan, the artist elaborates upon the actualization process with specific reference to Los Desaparecidos:

In the act of making something, a transfer of emotion occurs. I think that I approach my work in the same spirit as people who make things with their hands, and of course many of my travels have been in non-industrialized countries where manual work is an integral part of the culture. Objects that are made are then passed on as an exchange of gifts, for example. The act of making is a very intimate process and a form of communication in itself. In my own work, it is as if I have a dialogue with the object as I form it and then it speaks in turn to those who encounter it. [...] The issues themselves determine the form and resolution of my work. For example, in Los Desaparecidos (1981) it was very clear to me that I wanted to allow the suffering of the victims of repression in Argentina to speak without any mediation.³¹

I quote this statement at length because it helps to shed light on some of the complexity behind Hassan's actualization in relation to the narratives of the victims, the embroidered kerchief, and her own role in the process. When the artist states that it is as if she has a "dialogue with the object" which then "speaks in turn to those who encounter it" it is likely that the reader will interpret such suppositions figuratively rather than

³⁰ Monika Kin Gagnon, "Al Fannanah 'I Rassamah: Jamelie Hassan," 1988, Sightlines, ed. Jessica Bradley and Lesley Johnstone (Montreal: Artexte, 1994) 403.

³¹ Bradley and Nemiroff 100-101. This quote is from an edited interview dated 15 September 1985.

literally. It is assumed that she imbues the embroidered scarf with a level of subjectivity (not normally attributed to inanimate objects) for poetic ends, or else she emphatically projects her own thoughts about the victims' suffering into the porcelain objects.

Through their various statements, Gagnon and Hassan interpret the actualizations as a form of communication without mediation, but the artist is somehow integral to both the "transmission of knowledge" and the "transfer of emotion."

A complex process does take place between the narratives of the victims, the object of contemplation, and the artist. Hassan endeavours to bridge the gaps that separate these outside elements from her own subject position. She interiorizes the stories of abduction and violence along with the meaning of the kerchief. She transforms them and eventually sets them outside of herself by expressing them as Los Desaparecidos. In effect, these elements are mediated through the artist and the language of art. Hassan's personal involvement in the actualization process is a form of "subjective presence."³² The individual ceramic kerchiefs are made by the artist's own hand, as she states, "in the same spirit as people who make things with their hands" from non-industrialized countries. Hassan also writes the names of the missing women on the kerchiefs, thus creating a symbolic link to the desaparecidos. By investing herself in the process in these ways, she endeavours to give access to the subjective presence of those who have been lost. She provides a voice to the silent victims of "The Dirty War."

II

The concepts of subjective presence and the absent figure are common to both Hassan's and Whiten's sculptures, and these ideas will be explored in the remaining

sections of this chapter. Colette Whiten's September 1975 is the earliest of the six works to be discussed in this thesis. It is the sculpture that comes the closest to representing the human figure, but it is also the work in which the absence of the figure is most evident (see fig. 3). September 1975 consists of three large, plaster moulds encased within pod-like frames. The artist used these fibreglass and wood structures to take life-size, plaster impressions of the unclothed bodies of one female and two male models. The three frames are bisected into front and back parts, and each pair of sections is joined together with hinges. The cases are mounted on low platforms, and all three units stand upright. Even though the frames could be closed in order to conceal their interior spaces, they are most often displayed in an open position.

In total, September 1975 presents the viewer with six half-portraits. The impressions of the backs of the three models are disposed consistently to the left, and their front impressions are shown to the right. The level of detail of these moulds is quite remarkable as every minute angle and curve of the models' bodies has been faithfully imprinted into the plaster. The mould of the female model is the smallest of the three. Viewers will note that her hair was tied into a pony-tail that neatly ran down her back at the time her impression was taken. One of the men also kept his hair tied back. He was of a stocky build, while the other one was lanky in comparison. The empty spaces left by models are so life-like that from afar, a startling optical effect occurs. Viewers may misinterpret the recesses in the plaster as convex shapes rather than as concave ones, and the empty spaces of the models appear to protrude as three-dimensional forms. The negative spaces resemble six pale, ghost-like figures.

³² I use this term to refer to the artist's *presence as a subject*.

Three of the six apparitions have their backs turned towards the viewers, while the remaining three are seen from the front. The tallest male model had shifted his weight to one side during the plastering phase of production, so the contrapposto of his impressions is clearly defined. Their asymmetrical stances imply a movement that contrast with the static pose of the other figures. It is as if Whiten's sculpture captures a moment in time when two identical persons pass by each other while moving in opposite directions. Despite the close proximity of each figure to its counterpart, a general sense of isolation permeates Whiten's work. All of the figures that face the viewer have their eyes closed and this only enhances their individual isolation. They appear to be oblivious to everything around them, and they seem to be held in a perpetual state of suspended animation.

Viewers who are drawn to inspect this work more closely may note that the feet of those figures facing the viewer are oddly inverted. Instead of appearing like solid forms, they recede into the frame. The heavy shadows that fill these cavities contrast with the otherwise airy whiteness of the figures. An awareness of these recesses is enough to disrupt the visual effect of protruding figures, but it is not an illusion that can be dispelled easily by viewers. September 1975 evokes six figures that seem to flicker between presence and absence. Writing about this phenomenon, author David Burnett notes that,

From any distance, it seems that we are looking at the figure in relief. As we move closer, we see that the image is deeply recessed. It is an ambiguity between an impression and an expression – a strong sense of human presence, though we know that the figure is absent.³³

³³ David Burnett, Masterpieces of Canadian Art from the National Gallery of Canada (Edmonton: Hurtig, 1990) 214.

Observers of September 1975 may wonder about the persons who served as models for this work, or why the artist chose to present them in this way. The sculpture itself provides no clues that might otherwise help to answer these questions, but in a review of an exhibition in which this sculpture was presented, art critic Gary Michael Dault informs readers that the models were in fact the artist and two of her close friends, Gernot Dick and Stephen Hutchings.³⁴ Knowing this, then, one may interpret this sculpture as a portrait of three friends.³⁵

September 1975 was not the first instance in which Dick and Hutchings served as models for Whiten, but it does represent a significant break from her earlier endeavours, which had centred on the production of cast figures. In a previous sculpture, entitled Structure No. 7 (1972) (Art Gallery of Hamilton, Hamilton), the artist had Dick construct an elaborate scaffolding structure in which both he and Hutchings were tied and then plastered from head to foot. The moulds that were produced in this process were later used to cast fibreglass figures. This project was followed by Structure No. 8 (1972) (Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto) in which the artist strapped four construction workers into wooden frames in order to take plaster impressions of their limbs. These moulds were then used to create fibreglass appendages. Whiten employed moulds to cast fragmented figures based on the human form throughout the seventies, and this practice may be traced back to her student years at the Ontario College of Art. Critics often compared these early endeavours to the plaster-based figures of George Segal, though as Burnett

³⁴ Gary Michael Dault, "Air-Sculptor Colette Whiten Has Arrived," Toronto Star 3 Oct. 1975: E6. The exhibition Colette Whiten at Carmen Lamanna was held at the Carmen Lamanna Gallery in Toronto from September 27 to October 10, 1975.

³⁵ Whiten used friends and family members as models for her sculptures throughout the seventies and eighties. As David Burnett and Marilyn Schiff contend, the thrust of these works lies in their expression of these relationships. See Burnett and Schiff 234.

noted, such comparisons were generally unfair as Whiten never inserted her figures into narrative scenarios, as did the American sculptor.³⁶ Dault argued that Whiten's sculptures prior to September 1975 were generally less interesting to behold than the processes and the apparatus that she employed in the production stages.³⁷ September 1975 marks a turning point for the artist not only because of the transparency of the processes she used, but for her decision not to cast three-dimensional figures as final products. These two reasons operate hand in hand. The processes and apparatus used to make the moulds are not withdrawn from sight; rather, they become the final work in lieu of figures.

The inspiration for Whiten's novel approach did not come to her in the studio, but on a winter camping trip in northern Ontario that she took with Dick and Hutchings. As art critic Adele Freedman explains, Whiten's sculptural innovation was the result of a capricious moment of play:

While Gernot stood upright in the middle of a frozen lake, Colette piled snow – nature's own plaster – up his sides, over his shoulders and head, until a huge triumphal snow arch towered over the lake. Gernot walked away but his outline remained: he had left his impression [...]. Whiten had discovered the potency and eloquence of negative space.³⁸

Whiten was able to distinguish her sculptures from works by artists such as Segal through her use of negative space, and to effectively respond to criticisms of the denouement that

³⁶ Burnett 18.

³⁷ Dault E6.

³⁸ Adele Freedman, Toronto Life (April 1978): 163.

reportedly followed the production stages of her work. September 1975 represents an important transition in her art from three-dimensional figures to the absent figure.³⁹

Like all of the sculptures that I discuss in this thesis, Whiten's work may be regarded in semiotic terms as a signifier that points to the concept of the absent figure. September 1975 is distinguished from the other five works by two important points. The various components that comprise it may be thought of as indexical signs as well as signifiers. The plaster impressions were created after having been in direct contact with Whiten, Dick, and Hutchings, and so they point to the three models in indexical ways.⁴⁰ Like footprints in the sand, the impressions are traces that draw attention to the physical absence of those who made them. In this way, September 1975 points to the absent bodies of the three models.⁴¹ As such, it documents an event in which the three individuals absented themselves from the work of art. This piece is also the only sculpture in the thesis that is a self-portrait and it may be regarded therefore as a form of subjective presence. It also marks the close relationship that the artist shared with two friends, and in this sense Whiten's sculpture evokes the subjective presence of all three persons.

This reading of September 1975 focuses on the plaster impressions as allusions to three specific individuals, but Whiten's sculpture is also rich in other possible meanings

³⁹ Whiten continued to produce sculptures that manifest the absent figure until the late eighties. At the end of this decade she turned to making embroidered works based on images taken from the media.

⁴⁰ The concept of the indexical sign is derived from the writings of the American philosopher Charles S. Peirce. See: Charles S. Peirce, Writings of Charles S. Peirce ed. Christian J.W. Kloesel (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1982) 163.

⁴¹ In this instance, I defer to a Peircean model of signification rather than a Saussurean one. Saussure's understanding of a sign consisting of a signifier and signified has no direct relationship to the referent. For Saussure, signs exist in the closed system of language that is distinct from the physical world. In contrast, Peirce's notion of the indexical sign allows for such contact.

that refer beyond the artist and her collaborators. Dault offers numerous examples of less literal interpretations of the components that comprise September 1975:

They are womb-like, moulds for producing bodies (they even recall that the human embryo develops in halves which if all goes well join perfectly down the middle of the body), or sarcophagus-like, vehicles for housing the end of man. The feeling of claustrophobia it produces in the spectator when one of these cases is closed is extraordinary. There is a strong sense of there being a person-shaped space in them.⁴²

Dault's reference to sarcophagi reminds his readers of the long and intimate relationship between the history of sculpture and the concept of death. Effigies, funerary statuary, and death masks are just some examples of traditions that link sculptural figures to the deceased. The viewer's apprehension at the sight of the closed cases, this "feeling of claustrophobia," is not unrelated to the discussion of death in Whiten's work. The fear of confined spaces is essentially a morbid one, an intuitive and primal dread of the thought of being buried alive. In this way, the impressions of the models may suggest one's own entombment. Freedman also touches upon similar aspects of Whiten's sculpture when she writes, "The mummies are wonderfully paradoxical, welding deathly incarceration and a sense of escape – the tomb and the womb – into a single powerful image."⁴³

Dault and Freedman both illustrate the potential to interpret September 1975 metaphorically: the sculpture is a tomb, the tomb is a womb, the body is a tomb. Following these examples, one could argue that the absent figures in this work evoke the theme of death. As the two critics note, however, Whiten's work also points to the theme of life: the sculptures are wombs, and moulds to create new bodies. Freedman's

⁴² Dault, "Colette Whiten," Artscanada (Winter 1975-76): 48.

⁴³ Freedman 164.

reference to “incarceration and a sense of escape” could suggest either birth or rebirth. Taken in relation to the escape from entombment, it could be also interpreted as a reference to resurrection, if viewed from a Christian perspective. The two critics demonstrate the potential of September 1975 to be read in terms other than (or in addition to) a portrait of three friends.

September 1975 combines the concepts of the portrait and the mould, but something is lost in this metaphorical reading: the uniqueness of the subject. The ghostly figures that seem to emerge from the negative spaces of the sculpture are inanimate, silent, and without any trace of selfhood. Numerous figures could have been produced with these moulds, but the artist stopped short of doing so as if to draw attention to the act of casting. Dault suggests that the three cases are “moulds for producing bodies” but they may also be seen as moulds for producing subjects. This particular interpretation of September 1975 runs counter to certain humanist views of subjectivity. Chris Weedon summarizes many of these precepts in the following statement:

Humanist ideas about subjectivity privilege the individual, consciousness and lived experience over theories which ground human nature either in biology or social structures. In liberal-humanist thought the subject and subjectivity are assumed to be unified and rational. Governed by reason and free will, the subject is given agency.⁴⁴

The absent figures evoked in Whiten’s sculpture do not point to individual, unified, or autonomous subjects. They suggest instead that subjectivity is the result of a casting process. This implies that the self is a construction shaped by external forces rather than conscious thoughts and experiences.

⁴⁴ Chris Weedon, “Subjects,” A Concise Companion to Feminist Theory, ed. Mary Eagleton (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003) 113.

September 1975 evokes figures that alternate between presence and absence, and in effect they offer two diametrically opposite views of subjectivity. From one perspective, they may be seen as portraits that trace the subjective presence of three close friends at a certain time in their lives. This view is supported by an underlying belief in a human essence that may be represented implicitly through the figure. From another perspective, Whiten's work may be regarded as moulds for creating subjects. This metaphorical reading undermines the notion of a self-determined subject. In the final section of this chapter, I will examine more closely how Hassan's and Whiten's sculptures point to conflicted notions of subjectivity.

III

Absent figures in Los Desaparecidos and September 1975 are evoked in different ways. Jamelie Hassan's work is much less based on the human form than Colette Whiten's sculpture, and it therefore calls for a greater rhetorical force on the viewer's part to recognize the absent figures of the missing victims. The viewer must piece together the meaning of Los Desaparecidos in an almost archaeological fashion based on the kerchiefs and accompanying documentation. In contrast, the overall shape of Whiten's sculpture is closer to the human form than Hassan's work, and so the recognition of absent figures is immediate. Unlike Los Desaparecidos, there are no clues to be found in September 1975 (other than the detailed impressions) that would help to identify these absent figures. The viewer must look outside the work of art (or have some prior knowledge of the artist's appearance) in order to see it as a self-portrait and a portrait of personal friendships.

The notions of presence and absence in Los Desaparecidos and September 1975 each turn on the mediating role of the artist. Hassan invests herself into her work through the actualization process. By internalizing the violent narratives and the meaning of the embroidered scarf, she discreetly evokes her subjective presence and provides some access to the subjective presence of the victims. Whiten is able to evoke the subjective presence of both herself and her friends in a very direct way. Despite the sculpture's high level of detail, the presence of the three models rests on a purely formal level. The viewer does not learn much of the artist and her friends other than how they appeared at a certain time in their lives.

Both Los Desaparecidos and September 1975 allude to outside forces that either threaten or shape the subject. In doing so, each one undermines certain humanist views which in turn points to a broader crisis of humanism. Los Desaparecidos demonstrates the failure of democratic rhetoric when state-sponsored kidnappings, torture, and killings are brought to light and are met with apathy by the international community. It challenges the humanist vision of a world that exalts the freedom, well-being, and universal rights of the subject. In this instance, the subject is defined in opposition to external forces (by virtue of its coherent nature in the face of different, outside positions). Humanism also places special value on the uniqueness, autonomy, and self-determination of the subject. In contrast to these qualities, September 1975 suggests that human beings are the products of complex social processes. The subject that is alluded to in this work is riven by external forces.

On a fundamental level, Los Desaparecidos and September 1975 are divided works. They signal a loss in confidence in humanism, but they maintain an attachment to

it. Hassan draws upon subjective presence in order to mediate external forces, thus effecting agency in an anti-humanist world. Whiten endeavours to assert the appearance of a coherent subject through portraiture, but the portrait mould metaphor suggests that the subject is not a self-determined entity. The manifestation of absent figures will continue to question certain tenets of humanism in the chapter to follow, and it will show how the notion of the subject becomes progressively decentred in relation to outside positions.

Chapter II: Margins

The absent figures of the previous chapter evoke subjects that are either threatened or shaped by external forces. Despite the tenuous relationship between the subject and those forces outside of it, each work maintains some connection to the concept of a centred subject. In this chapter, the focus of my discussion will shift from such centred subjects to the formation of subjectivity in the margins. Absent figures in the work of Jana Sterbak and Liz Magor allude to marginalized persons. In these instances, the distinctions between the subject and external forces begin to blur as certain forms of subjectivity are linked to the notion of the Other.

I

In 1989, Jana Sterbak constructed two garment-based sculptures entitled Remote Control I (Collection of the artist) and Remote Control II (Collection of the artist). Each work consists of an aluminium frame resembling the skeletal under-structure of a crinoline dress. The two sculptures are similar in design, but not exactly identical. Remote Control I is dome-like in shape and it comprises eight undulating horizontal bands that intersect twelve vertical spokes. Remote Control II is slightly taller and more bell-like than its predecessor. It consists of eleven flat, horizontal bands that intersect ten vertical spokes.⁴⁵ Remote Control is a freestanding form supported by three motorized wheels affixed to the base of the dress at three different points (see fig. 4). The garment

⁴⁵ To avoid confusion between the two versions of Remote Control, I will refer to these works collectively, without any reference to a numerical designation. This usage is consistent with published literature regarding these works.

is powered by battery packs located inside the frame, and its movements are controlled by a hand-held device connected to the dress by generous lengths of wire. With the exception of a canvas seat attached to the inside opening at the top of the frame, Remote Control is a dress without fabric. In fact, Remote Control functions more like a vehicle than a garment. The motorized crinoline is sturdy enough to support the weight of a slender person, who may sit suspended within the structure. It is also powerful enough to advance, turn, or move in circles without the need for the rider to ever touch the ground.

Sterbak has presented Remote Control in three distinct, but related ways in the past: as a component in various performances employing models, by itself as a performing object, and on its own as a stationary sculpture. Each version raises issues of independence and gender, albeit it in different ways. In the first two instances, the concept of the absent figure seems distant or temporarily suspended due to the animation of the dress, but they help to adumbrate the relationship between the absent figure and the theme of margins in the third instance.

During a performance organized by the artist at the 1990 Venice Biennale, a young woman passed through a public space while inside the motorized crinoline. Spectators noted that she was followed by a man who operated the dress's control unit from a few paces behind the vehicle. This event was preceded a year earlier in a similar performance at Galerie René Blouin that involved two men who directed the female passenger while she sat suspended in the dress.⁴⁶ After having demonstrated their authority over the model, control of the dress was relinquished to the woman. While under the direction of its rider, Remote Control offered the appearance of comfort and

⁴⁶ This performance took place as part of the artist's solo exhibition at Galerie René Blouin in Montreal that ran from February 18 to March 18, 1989.

freedom. The model glided across the floor effortlessly like women in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries who seemed to float in their petticoat crinolines.

For all the freedom Remote Control promises, it is ironically more limiting to the model than the dresses upon which it was designed. As previous performances have shown, she must be lifted in and out of the crinoline with the assistance of others (well-dressed gentlemen have engaged in this activity in the past). In addition, the model cannot climb stairs, navigate through narrow corridors, or travel well outdoors while in the vehicle. As a garment designed specifically for a woman, the crinoline circumscribes her on personal levels. It imposes gender-based values onto women and links femininity to beauty, delicacy and dependence. When the mechanical crinoline is operated by a male model, the female model assumes a passive role while he asserts one of control. Even when the model directs her own movements, there are considerable physical limits placed upon her mobility.

Remote Control may also be presented on its own in an animated mode. The artist can activate the dress and then set it to follow a circular pattern, as if of its own volition. Presented in this manner, the appearance of the machine's autonomy is striking, but ultimately fleeting as the dress is unable to operate on its own outside of this programmed setting. Aside from the initial questioning of the autonomic nature of Remote Control, viewers may see Sterbak's dress as a kind of feminine machine occupied with a meaningless and endlessly repetitive task. Whether Remote Control is exhibited in the company of models, or in an animated mode by itself, the issues of autonomy and gender are complicated by the presence of the artist who orchestrates each event. These two performance modes are, however, usually experienced as short-lived

events. When Remote Control is presented as a stationary work, the role of the artist is less apparent than in the performance modes. It is also in this state that the absence of the figure is most conspicuous.

Viewers of Remote Control may assume that the absent figure is female, but she does not refer to a specific person. She is similar to the female model who operated the motorized crinoline in that she relates to women in general, but she is also distinct from the model. While the presence of the model illustrated how women are controlled by men while in the public sphere, becoming objects of display, the absent figure remains out of sight. Her absence from the public sphere points to her existence in the margins of the private sphere. In order to explore this argument more closely, it is necessary to turn briefly to a discussion of traditional social and gendered boundaries.

The ideological division of society into private and public spheres (based upon perceived differences of gender) has its roots in modern Western thought with the Industrial Revolution, although as historian Linda K. Kerber notes, the use of the term “sphere” to designate these gendered domains may be traced to the nineteenth-century writings of Alexis de Tocqueville.⁴⁷ The author of the influential Democracy in America argued that women in the United States were “confined within the narrow circle of domestic life”⁴⁸ and that society itself was divided into the circle of public society and the private sphere.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Linda K. Kerber, “Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman’s Place: The Rhetoric of Women’s History,” Journal of American History 75.1 (1988): 9.

⁴⁸ Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America, 1840, trans. Henry Reeves, ed. Phillips Bradley, Vol. 2, bk. 3 (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1945) 214.

⁴⁹ Tocqueville 215-216.

One way to visualize metaphors of private and public spheres (such as Tocqueville's) is to represent them as two concentric circles (see fig. 5). In this instance, the nucleus is a feminine space surrounded by a public, masculine space. The private sphere is a domestic place, a shelter from the harsh realities of the outside world. The justification for the separation of society according to gender is based on both sexual difference and the division of labour. In other words, because women have the biological ability to bear children they are traditionally charged with those social responsibilities that pertain to child-rearing, care-giving, and domestic upkeep – all of which revolve around the home. Under this scheme, men are free to work, engage in politics, and travel freely in the public sphere. Men are free to move from the public sphere to the private one at will, but women do not enjoy the same freedom of movement between the two spheres.⁵⁰

This diagram is intended to provide a visual aid to interpret the division of private and public spheres, but its simple form also bears some resemblance to Sterbak's sculpture when seen from above. The line of the outer circle marks the diameter of the dress, and accordingly, the interior circle may be read as the hole in the garment through which the model is lowered. The model is situated in the centre of the crinoline, and her contact to the outside world is mediated through the garment. The dress simultaneously connects her to the public sphere and protects her from it.

In order to locate the absent figure in Remote Control in the private sphere *and* in relation to the margins of a dominant centre, it becomes necessary to reinterpret the

⁵⁰ This analysis does not take into consideration the issue of class, which would have some bearing on the movement of women between spheres. Women in the working classes, for instance, would have had more opportunity to engage in the public sphere out of necessity than their middle and upper class counterparts.

diagrammatic representation of spheres. Figure 6 presents these social areas as two concentric circles that share the same patriarchal centre, and in this instance, the positions of the gendered domains are reversed. The inner sphere is that of the public domain, and it is dominated by male authorities who endeavour to maintain its integrity through hegemonic cultural traditions that limit women's access to the social, political, religious, medical, and economic institutions that constitute it. Accordingly, the absent figure in Sterbak's work alludes to a woman who has been relegated to the outer and private sphere.

Male authorities from within the patriarchal centre justify women's marginalization based on the same notions of sexual difference and the division of labour outlined in my analysis of the earlier diagram. In each instance though, the gendered division of private and public spheres is characteristic of patriarchal societies, and it is something that is imposed upon women. The private/public dichotomy suggests the presence of a balance between genders, but in fact, authority is not shared equally within either scheme. Even in the private sphere, where women disproportionately outnumber men, women are subordinate to men – which is why it is important to see the private sphere as an inherently marginal space for women.

Both the model of Remote Control and the marginalized woman to whom the absent figure points, relate to the concept of "Woman" as proposed by the French philosopher Simone de Beauvoir in The Second Sex. In this work, the author discusses the subjugation of women in the history of patriarchal societies, and her use of the singular "Woman" refers to all women within this context. De Beauvoir traces the marginalization of women in a wide range of fields including biology, history, ethnology,

literature, politics, philosophy, and psychoanalysis. She argues against the belief that women are destined to assume a secondary role in society. She also contends that women must have access to meaningful projects in the public sphere in order to assert their subjectivity and to gain equal status to men.

According to de Beauvoir, women need to identify those obstacles that attempt to position them as objects (or otherwise impinge on their liberties) in order to emancipate themselves. In the following passage, the author provides concrete examples of the kinds of obstacles that impede women's freedom,

Costume and style are often devoted to cutting off the feminine body from any possible transcendence: Chinese women with bound feet could scarcely walk, the polished fingernails of the Hollywood star deprive her of her hands; high heels, corsets, panniers, farthingales, crinolines were intended less to accentuate the curves of the body than to augment its incapacity.⁵¹

All of these examples pertain to culturally mediated obstacles that physically affect women's bodies, and the reference to the crinoline has particular relevance to Sterbak's work. The motorized garment offers the illusion of elegance, femininity and freedom, but it dramatically incapacitates the wearer. The model cannot dress or undress herself without assistance. She is limited in public to those settings that objectify her. Her restricted movement is symbolic of her lack of liberty in the public sphere. She is not a free agent in this space, and she does not have access to those public institutions that endeavour to control her. The only instrument of self-determination within her grasp is the remote control unit. As Sterbak's performances reveal, the model is given the unit only after the male models have demonstrated their control over her movements. She conforms in manner and appearance to all of the demands that the patriarchy expects of

⁵¹ Simone de Beauvoir, The Second Sex, trans. H.M. Parshley (New York: Knopf, 1953) 158.

her: she is passive, dependent, and on display. In these ways, the female model relates to de Beauvoir's "Woman." She is a construction of the ideal woman in a patriarchal society.

Both Sterbak and de Beauvoir critique the values attributed to femininity in the nineteenth century, but their concerns regarding the construction of gender, mobility, and freedom transcend the particulars of that time period. Even as the twentieth century saw significant gains by women in terms of independence and access to the public sphere, new ways of restricting their mobility and freedom emerged such as the "glass ceiling." As well, the industries of fashion and advertising continue to tie women to unattainable standards of the perfect body.

Allusions to the extension of the body in space pervade The Second Sex, and de Beauvoir links this theme to gendered subjectivity. The following passage joins these ideas to the key concept of the Other:

He thinks of his body as a direct and normal connection with the world, which he believes he apprehends objectively, whereas he regards the body of woman as a hindrance, a prison, weighed down by everything peculiar to it. [...] She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute – she is the Other."⁵²

Men and women are considered to be free agents according to the author, but their access to the world and to the concrete projects that lead to self-fulfilment varies dramatically according to differences of gender. Men's bodies serve as conduits to the public sphere. Their bodies can be used to reach out beyond themselves to obtain other liberties. Free to pursue those projects that would broaden their horizons, men use their bodies as tools of

⁵² De Beauvoir xv-xvi.

liberation, as a means to transcend their own circumstances. In this way de Beauvoir argues that men are able to assert their subjectivity. Women's bodies, in contrast, are seen by men as prisons from which women are unable to extricate themselves. Confined to the private sphere of the home, without the opportunity to extend themselves into the world, women cannot attain those external liberties that would otherwise justify their existence. They give up personal freedom for lives of subservience and domestic routine. As a consequence, they are unable to transcend their own situation. Women are compelled to assume the role of the Other, trapped in a state of immanence, and thus prevented from asserting their own subjectivity.

De Beauvoir's notion of subjectivity is drawn in part from a humanist view of the term. In this context, subjectivity is seen as a conscious awareness of one's own existence, and in this respect, it is tied to identity and self-determination. As long as women are forced into the role of the Other, they will be unable to assert their own identities in meaningful ways. Despite the humanist foundation of de Beauvoir's theory, the author is highly critical of the universality given to the concept of "Man." In the humanist tradition, this term is intended to apply to both men and women, but de Beauvoir argues that "Woman" does not have the same status. The author's theory of subjectivity is also founded on the dichotomy of subject/Other, though she contends that the position of the subject is held exclusively by males in a patriarchal society. The subject/Other division finds its parallels in male/female and masculine/feminine dichotomies. In each instance, the secondary term is not so much an equal or unique thing in and of itself; rather, it serves as an inferior complement to the first term.

Concepts such as the Other, female, and feminine are regarded as social constructions that only hold meaning in the way they define the primary terms.

Remote Control presents a female model who, like de Beauvoir's "Woman as Other," is passive, dependent, and on display while in the public sphere. Her sculpture alludes to an absent figure who remains out of sight because she has been marginalized to the private sphere. Just as women are circumscribed to this domestic space, women's subjectivity is marginalized to the role of the Other. Sterbak's work demonstrates how subjectivity is divided along lines of gender in a patriarchal society, and that in this cultural context, women are not even recognized as subjects. The "subject as Other" is an important theme that runs through Sterbak's work, and it is something that also emerges in the next sculpture to be addressed in this chapter.

II

From afar, Liz Magor's Hollow (1998-1999) (National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa) could easily be mistaken for the trunk section of an enormous dark grey cedar recovered from any one of British Columbia's coniferous forests. Even upon closer inspection, the rough texture and detail of its bark would not lead viewers to assume that it is anything other than a tree. It is only when walking around the cedar's base that the plastic nature of the object is revealed. What seems like a dense and impenetrable organic form from the side is actually an artificial shell, no more than a few centimetres thick (see fig. 7). Hollow is a polymerized alpha gypsum cast made from a mould taken from an actual cedar on Cortes Island, British Columbia, and it is the first in a series of

three representational sculptures that resemble fallen trees.⁵³ The interior of this curious tree is lined with a thin and speckled foam material, and the structure is large enough to accommodate a human form. There is nothing inside this stump except for an empty blue sleeping bag.

When seen on its own, neither the purpose of this shelter nor the identity of the absent figure it evokes is immediately evident. Magor first presented Hollow at the Equinox Gallery in Vancouver during the 1999 exhibition Sleeping Rough.⁵⁴ Looking at her sculpture in relation to the title of this exhibition may lead some viewers to see it as a refuge for the figure of a homeless person, although such a shelter would seem impractical and incongruous in an urban environment. It was originally presented alongside photographs of abandoned forest dwellings and the remnants of pioneer cabins, and so it might seem more suited to an outdoor setting than a gallery space.⁵⁵ As a camouflage shelter, the tree sculpture might serve as a blind for either a hunter or a wildlife researcher, but it lacks any other visible openings that would facilitate observation. Moreover, the structure appears to be too fragile to be used in this way.

Each possible explanation seems to refute itself. Hollow is a work that plays on first impressions and misinterpretations. It appears to be made from natural materials but it proves to be artificial; it seems to be solid and yet it is hollow. The following artist's statement issued in conjunction with Sleeping Rough reveals something of Magor's

⁵³ The other two sculptures from the series are Burrow (1999) (Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver) and Keep (2000) (Art Gallery of York University, Toronto).

⁵⁴ The exhibition ran from April 29 to May 29, 1999.

⁵⁵ The photographs from Sleeping Rough are entitled Deep Woods Portfolio (1999) and they consist of eight toned silver prints.

intention, but closer examination of its content leads viewers to other possible readings and misreadings,

These new sculptures exploit the belief that nature is the source of our most ideal and authentic refuge. Taking the form of hollow logs and tree trunks – the child’s dream of perfect shelter – they offer the image of a natural hideout. But they also suggest the condition of last resort: for the fugitive, the misanthropist and the disenfranchised ...⁵⁶

Hollow does not so much advocate the belief that nature is an ideal and authentic refuge, as it endeavours to (in Magor’s terms) “exploit” this belief. Her work touches upon romantic visions of a benevolent nature to which one may return. Philip Monk makes the connection between Magor’s work and this theme in a review of Sleeping Rough: “the return to nature is an idealistic impulse, whether it occurs in the myth of Rousseauism, the fantasy of children, or the whole earth, back-to-the-land ideology of hippies (to which Magor, by the way, is no stranger).”⁵⁷

Viewers familiar with Magor’s career would probably be aware that this theme is explored elsewhere in a series of ten photographs produced a decade earlier, entitled Field Work (1989). The photographs were actually taken by the artist in the sixties when she and a group of friends were attempting to “get back to nature.” These include portraits of friends camping, canoeing, and fishing – all in clothing inspired by pioneers and First Nations people. Magor’s approach to reproducing these images from her own past demonstrates a critical distancing at work in this project. The soft focus of her black and white images recalls a style of photographic reproduction that was popular at the turn of the century, one that infuses her photographs with an air of nostalgia. Several of the

⁵⁶ Liz Magor, Liz Magor – Sleeping Rough, ([Vancouver]: [Equinox Gallery], [1999]).

⁵⁷ Philip Monk, “Liz Magor,” C Magazine (Sept./Nov. 1999): 33.

titles of the individual portraits, such as Cheyenne Type, make reference to Edward Curtis's staged photographic portraits of early twentieth-century Amerindians. As such, the photographic series highlights the constructed aspects of her original portraits and the simulated authenticity of her own return to nature.⁵⁸ Observers of Magor's sculpture may assume that the artificial tree is the work of a figure not unlike those appearing in Field Work. Conversely, viewers of Hollow might suspect that the synthetic materials were used to establish a critical distance from the romantic ideals it exploits.

In the following excerpt from an interview between author Nancy Tousley and Liz Magor, the artist discusses the inspiration of her tree series, and helps to clarify the identity of the absent figure of Hollow,

They come from seeing a wanted poster for a guy named Kevin Vermette, who was suspected of killing three young men in Kitimat, B.C., in 1997. He disappeared into the woods and he's still at large, or dead, we don't know. For me, it's counter-intuitive to feel safe in the woods. A human in the woods is a very anomalous thing, so to hide there seems bizarre. The tree pieces come from thinking about how he disappeared, how he might be hiding.⁵⁹

Kevin Louis Vermette is accused of the murders of Mark Teves, David Nunes and Mark Munto, and for the non-lethal shooting of Donny Oliveira. Although the reasons for the killing spree remain unclear, it may be that Vermette suspected the young men of vandalising his car earlier in the day. He managed to elude the police on the day of the murders, and in the extensive hunt that ensued. The violent nature of the shootings coupled with the suspect's disappearance into the woods around Kitimat have earned

⁵⁸ For an analysis of Field Work that explores these ideas in greater depth, see Grant Arnold, et al. Liz Magor (Toronto: The Power Plant; Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery, 2002) 27-31.

⁵⁹ Nancy Tousley, "Liz Magor: Interview," Canadian Art (Spring 2000) 73.

Vermette a place of notoriety in the province. Magor's interest in this person and his subsequent flight led her to research his case in some depth. This in turn led her to investigate the stories of other well-known fugitives in the province's history including Albert Johnson – “the Mad Trapper of Rat River” – and Michael Oros. These men were also wanted by either local or federal authorities, and like Vermette, each found temporary refuge in the woods. Of the three men, Vermette is the only one whose current whereabouts remain a mystery. Albert Johnson was killed in an exchange of gunfire with police in 1932, and Michael Oros met a similar fate in 1985.

Magor's original plan was to create an individual sculptural dwelling for each of the three men based on her research, but she eventually abandoned this objective. As she admitted, “it seemed like more information than I needed.”⁶⁰ As a result, she shifted the identity of the absent figure in Hollow from that of Kevin Vermette to different groups of persons: fugitives, misanthropists, and the disenfranchised. Magor subsequently stated that “I am looking for images that suit the misanthrope, the person who finds society painful, a failure. Wherever there is a city, there are citizens who want out, who dream of a solitary, independent life.”⁶¹

The absent figure to which Magor's sculpture points seems to exist both in the margins of civilization *and* in the wilderness of nature. Hollow serves as a hideout and a shelter, and in this respect, the artificial tree becomes a home. In order to locate the absent figure, it becomes necessary to identify a place that takes into consideration the concept of margins, a distinction between nature and society, and the idea of “home.”

⁶⁰ Tousley 73.

⁶¹ Tousley 74.

One way to reconcile these notions is to represent society and nature graphically as two concentric circles. By modifying the second diagram used earlier in this chapter, a space may be found for the absent figure who refers to a fugitive, a misanthrope, or a disenfranchised person. By adding a third concentric circle to the original model, nature may be viewed as that place beyond both the public and private spheres. In other words, nature exists outside of society (see fig. 8). As a rudimentary home, Hollow is situated on the border between the private sphere and the sphere of nature. If one were to view the absent figure in Magor's sculpture as a misanthrope or as a disenfranchised person, then the reason for the individual's self-exile might be in reaction to society as a whole. However, if one were to interpret the absent figure as a fugitive like Vermette, then it alludes to someone who seeks to avoid the dominant centre of the Law.⁶²

The Law endeavours to establish order in society through its various institutions, governing agencies, and legal systems. It is responsible for maintaining the well-being of its citizens, even at the expense of their individual rights and freedoms. The Law is a social order that is based on repression and the threat of punishment. It limits, defines, and controls its citizens through rules of membership, appropriate behaviour, and misconduct. To break the law is to risk facing penalties, loss of personal freedom, or loss of one's own well-being. Depending on the severity of the crime, those who break the law may be subject to financial penalties, incarceration, or even capital punishment. The fugitive absent figure in Hollow lives in the margins of society in order to escape capture, punishment, and imprisonment. This individual does so because of some transgression

⁶² Looking at this diagram in another way, one could say that it resembles the concentric pattern of a felled tree. Like the rings that emanate from the centre of a tree, the fugitive's flight away from the Law is tracked as a progressive and outward reaching movement from the centre to the margins.

against the Law. The fugitive's freedom is an affront to the authority of the dominant centre.

As Magor argued earlier though, "a human in the woods is a very anomalous thing." Nature is not an inherently benevolent place, nor is it an idealized refuge. On the contrary, it is a hostile environment made even more dangerous with the threat of a violent fugitive at large. On one level, the absent figure in Hollow refers to Vermette, whose unrestrained movement and potential for violence instills fear in the general public. On another level, the fugitive absent figure alludes to any number of criminal types: the suspected murderer at large; the escaped convict; the unknown assailant; the stalker; the serial killer. Having escaped into the wilderness, the fugitive becomes an outlaw: one who lives outside of society and outside of the Law. This individual moves geographically from the familiar world of everyday life into the unfamiliar world of nature, and enters into the imagination of the general public. The fugitive absent figure is nowhere to be found and yet could be anywhere, able to strike without warning at anytime – becoming part fact and part fiction.

In her analysis of Magor's research into the stories of Vermette, Johnson, and Oros, Nancy Tousley finds that they all have some element in common: "they linger in the image background, contemporary manifestations of the figure of the wild man, a mythic, dialectical trope that has been associated with the idea of the wilderness from biblical times to the present."⁶³ Tousley makes a connection between their stories and legends of this archetypal figure. The Wild Man is traditionally viewed as a solitary, primitive, anti-social being who lives in trees, in caves, and under rocks – anywhere away

⁶³ Lucy Hogg, Reid Shier, and Nancy Tousley, Liz Magor (Toronto: Art Gallery of York University; Vancouver: Contemporary Art Gallery, 2000) 39.

from civilization. Tousley notes that this figure appears throughout recorded history, but flourished in Medieval art and literature, where he was portrayed both as a protector of the forest and as a danger to anyone who entered it. Though the Wild Man resembles a human, he is naked (thus signalling his uncivilized state) and covered with hair (to reflect his bestial aspects). He is physically stronger than any human, but he is driven only by animal impulses. The Wild Man is manifested in numerous forms, from sightings of forest monsters such as the sasquatch, to legendary stories of fugitive outlaws such as The Mad Trapper of Rat River (Albert Johnson). Tousley sees the Wild Man and his various manifestations as a repository of society's fears projected onto notions of the wilderness; he is the "hirsute other."⁶⁴ The Wild Man may also be interpreted as a reflection of civilization's anxiety about a world without laws.

In one respect, the Wild Man and his various incarnations are examples of the Other. They represent facets of an earlier or somehow inferior form of humankind: the missing link, the Noble Savage, or some allegedly "primitive" culture. Countless groups of persons and societies have employed the Other (as part of the subject/Other dichotomy) throughout history to distinguish themselves from those perceived as different. Ultimately, the inferiority of the Other is used to demonstrate the superiority of those occupying the position of the subject.⁶⁵ In another respect, stories of the Wild Man and his ilk point to a lingering fear regarding the fragility of civilization. These narratives question the stability of individuals who are removed from society, left alone

⁶⁴ Hogg, Shier, and Tousley 39.

⁶⁵ Tousley's use of the "Wild Man as Other" is not altogether unlike de Beauvoir's own theory of "Woman as Other." De Beauvoir was careful to indicate that the Other is a fundamental category of human thought, and that it was not originally associated with the division of sexes. See de Beauvoir xvi.

in the wilderness without the rules of civilization to govern them.⁶⁶ Would such persons continue to act in a social manner, or would they begin to slowly lose themselves with the passage of time until they regress into a more primitive state?

The fugitive absent figure, like the Wild Man, is ubiquitous and absent, living in a state between fact and fiction on the edge of society's awareness. The freedom of this absent figure is an affront to the authority of the dominant centre. The absent figure occupies the subject position of marginalized Other in society and serves as a social caveat: without the rules of the dominant centre to bring order and to govern, there would be nothing to separate society from the wilderness. My discussion of marginalized absent figures in the final section of this chapter will lead to a questioning of the traditional boundaries that distinguish the subject from the Other.

III

Jana Sterbak's Remote Control and Liz Magor's Hollow both allude to absent figures that in turn point to subjects living in the margins of society. The identities of these absent figures, their place in the margins, and their relationship to a specific dominant centre distinguish one work from the other. Despite these differences, each of the sculptures points to common themes, such as the home as a marginalized space in society. The cage crinoline is a metaphorical prison and residence for Sterbak's absent figure. Hollow is a camouflage shelter and refuge for Magor's absent figure. Each one lives in or on the edge of the private sphere. Of the two homes, Hollow is furthest away

⁶⁶ These arguments are explored in detail in Hayden White, "The Forms of Wilderness," The Wild Man Within: an Image in Western Thought from the Renaissance to Romanticism, ed. Edward Dudley and Maximilian E. Novak (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1973) 3-38.

from the dominant centre because it borders the space between society and nature. A second theme that emerges in each of these works is that of confinement and freedom. The absent figure in Remote Control is imprisoned in the private sphere and trapped in the roles that she is obliged to assume. The fugitive absent figure in Hollow endeavours to escape society in order to avoid incarceration.

The issue of gender appears prominently in Sterbak's work in the form of the female absent figure who alludes to woman in general, but the gender of the fugitive absent figure of Magor's sculpture remains ambiguous. There is no clear indication that the absent figure in Hollow is male, but it was inspired by Kevin Vermette, and indirectly by Albert Johnson and Michael Oros. Contemporary stories of male fugitives, misanthropes, and the disenfranchised living in the wilderness tend to outnumber those of women. The same cultural bias that places men at the dominant centre of society would seem to have some difficulty imagining a woman alone in the wild. Traditionally, women are most often associated with the private sphere of the home, the family, or even communities in general.⁶⁷

In patriarchal societies, nature itself is often perceived in the feminine form, and the gendering of nature is significant. As de Beauvoir notes, "Man seeks as woman the Other as Nature and as his fellow being. But we know what ambivalent feelings Nature inspires in man. He exploits her, but she crushes him."⁶⁸ Following this argument, it can be said that patriarchal societies view nature as a feminine sphere in order to justify their

⁶⁷ There are of course stories of solitary women living in the wilderness, and as Richard Bernheimer notes, the mythic figure of the Wild Woman also appears in Medieval art and literature. See Richard Bernheimer, Wild Man in the Middle Ages, 1952 (New York: Octagon Books, 1970) 33-34.

⁶⁸ De Beauvoir 144.

conquest of it, or to express their repressed fear of it.⁶⁹ In order for society to be superior to nature, it must see itself overcoming the wilderness. Society's order is based on the establishment of human laws while society perceives nature as the absence of these laws.⁷⁰

The dominant centre views the margins as an ambiguous and ambivalent space, whether this centre is characterized as the patriarchy or the Law. Even though patriarchal societies regard women as inferior to men, they require women to be in the margins in order to maintain the integrity of both the public sphere and the centre. Similarly, the dominant centre which the fugitive criminal endeavours to escape is defined by those who transgress the Law. Criminals who break the law and who live outside of society only validate the need for order in the world. Though absent figures in both Remote Control and Hollow refer to different dominant centres, it may be possible to see the two as being related to one another. Perhaps the absent figures in both sculptures point to facets of a more complex centre, one in which the patriarchy and the Law are inextricably bound. Psychoanalysis offers some theories that interpret a paternal cultural order, and so I will look briefly at those links that connect patriarchy to the Law.

According to Freudian psychoanalysis, the Oedipus Complex is the most significant factor that determines gendered subjectivity.⁷¹ The complex is considered to

⁶⁹ The gendering of nature as feminine is not exclusive to patriarchal societies, and an opposing argument can be made that this gendering also serves to establish positive links between the life-giving forces of nature and the feminine.

⁷⁰ Society may recognize that nature has its own set of laws, but it is the absence of human laws that distinguishes society from nature.

⁷¹ Psychoanalysis contends that subjects are socially gendered beings. This represents a radical break from humanist views of subjectivity that privilege a human subject who is viewed as essentially masculine or feminine.

be properly resolved when a child rejects his or her desire for the mother and acknowledges the familial authority of the father. Through a process of conscious and unconscious identifications (spurred on by a castration anxiety), the son recognizes the superiority of the father within the hierarchy of the family. The son acquiesces to the father knowing that one day he will occupy a similar role of authority and benefit from it accordingly. The daughter rejects her mother because she believes that they have both been castrated. The daughter blames her mother for their condition and she subsequently acknowledges the superiority of the father.

The father's authority is based on repression and the perceived threat of punishment. His sovereignty in the nuclear family finds its expression in the public sphere through institutions in the dominant centre. These governing bodies include the political, educational, medical, religious, and legal systems. French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan articulates this cultural sovereignty as the Law of the Father. It is not something that is manifest in individuals per se as it is found in the traditions, doctrines, and laws of society. Lacan's understanding of the Oedipus Complex and the Law of the Father is informed by structuralist signification. Subjects occupy specific familial roles in the complex (e.g., father, mother, son or daughter) that may be interpreted as cultural signifiers. Even though the father (or paternal signifier) is the head of the family, others must fulfil their traditional roles in order for him to maintain his station. For instance, the female subject must dutifully occupy the role of the daughter and/or the mother.

The patriarchal order of society in general requires its subjects to adhere to specific cultural positions to maintain its integrity. In this context, women must be objectified or defined as Other so that they do not pose a threat to the dominant centre.

As Chris Weedon notes, “forms of subjectivity which challenge the powers of the dominant discourses at any particular time are carefully policed. Often they are marginalized as mad or criminal”⁷² This marginalization of certain forms of subjectivity towards Otherness is characteristic of patriarchal societies. In this way, it can be said that the whole notion of the human subject in the paternal cultural order is rooted in the dichotomy of the subject/Other. This dichotomy is supposed to define the subject through its difference to the Other, but writers such as de Beauvoir note that women are relegated to the role of the Other in a systemic way.

Inasmuch as de Beauvoir critiques the subject/Other model, her goal of having women gain access to the subject position reflects her overall belief in this dichotomy. More contemporary writers maintain that this model is flawed and argue that it is not based on difference at all. French psychoanalyst Luce Irigaray contends that the Other is really only a term for those qualities that are negative aspects of the subject, i.e., the subject/Other dichotomy is actually subject/not subject.⁷³ Parallels for this sameness can also be found in the male/female and masculine/feminine dichotomies (which may be read more accurately as male/not male and masculine/not masculine). Accordingly, the Other is neither different nor inferior to the subject, it is the absence of the subject.

In the previous chapter, the manifestation of absent figures questioned a humanist understanding of the world as government-sponsored human rights violations were met with international apathy. In this chapter, the absent figure in Sterbak’s and Magor’s sculptures allude to a patriarchal cultural order that systemically marginalizes some forms

⁷² Chris Weedon, Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987) 91. In this instance, the author refers to radicalist-feminist forms of subjectivity in contemporary Britain.

⁷³ Luce Irigaray, This Sex Which Is Not One (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985) 164.

of subjectivity. As such, their works undermine the notion of a universal humanist subject. The element of subjective presence that was discussed in the first chapter seems distant in the works of both Sterbak and Magor. The only form of subjective presence that appears at all in this chapter involves those models who operate *Remote Control* while it is in its performance mode. This evocation of subjective presence is limited because of the orchestrated nature of the performances. Even when the female model directs her own movements, it is clear that she remains objectified in public.

Marginalized subjects in both Remote Control and Hollow occupy the role of the Other, thus blurring the boundaries between the subject and that which is supposed to be external to it. The location of the absent figure in the margins of society reflects a significant move away from the notion of a centred subject. This shift may be represented schematically by revisiting two diagrams that were put forth earlier in this chapter. Figure 5 illustrates the division of private and public spheres, but a graphic representation of the subject/Other dichotomy may be arrived at by replacing the terms “private” and “public” with “subject” and “Other.” The Other is all that is external to the subject; and the subject is interpreted as an entity with a cohesive core. Absent figures in Sterbak’s and Magor’s works allude to persons who fall outside the subject centre of a patriarchal cultural order, and so a space must be found for them.

Figure 8 expresses a blurring of the subject/Other boundaries if one renames the innermost sphere “subject” and the outermost one as “Other.” The in-between space (formerly identified as the private sphere) is now a place that is reserved for those forms of subjectivity that are marginalized as Other. This transition from a cohesive subjective core to one that is more dispersed in nature reflects a gradual decentring of the humanist

subject. By questioning the validity of the subject/Other dichotomy at the end of this section, the very idea of a coherent subject is undermined. The distinctions between the self and those forces external to it are all but dispelled in the chapter to follow. An analysis of the two final works will bring the progressive decentring of the subject to its limits.

Chapter III: The elusive subject

The manifestation of absent figures in the sculptures of Jana Sterbak and Liz Magor led to a discussion of marginalized subjectivity in the previous chapter. My examination of two more works by these same artists will cast further doubt upon the belief in a coherent subjective core by focusing on the representation of subject positions and subjects through language. Absent figures in the art of Sterbak and Magor in this chapter point to the decentred and ultimately elusive nature of the human subject.

I

I Want You To Feel the Way I Do ... (The Dress) (National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa) is the first major sculpture that Jana Sterbak produced that employs the dress motif. This work was begun in 1984, but it was completed only in the following year (see fig. 9). The sculpture consists of two discrete but related parts: a free-standing and human-sized wire mesh dress and a textual component projected above and behind the garment. The grid-like structure of the grey mesh lends a rigid and sturdy quality to this hollow sculpture. Slightly conical in form, its circular base ensures that it rests firmly on the floor. Two lengths of black electrical cord are attached to two different points of the midriff section of the dress. They descend through the interior of the structure, snake along the floor, and connect to two nearby wall sockets. The long sleeves of the garment are outstretched on both sides and slightly bent at the elbows, as if to embrace the viewer. When exhibited, this work is typically presented in dimly lit conditions so that the white

lettering of the projected text can be read clearly on a nearby wall.⁷⁴ This two-paragraph monologue occupies a surface space comparable in height and width to the dress itself. It reads as follows,

I want you to feel the way I do: There's barbed wire wrapped 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 think, feel myself move. It's not that I want to be numb, I want to slip under your skin: I will listen for the sound you hear, 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 starting to irritate me: I am not going to live with myself inside your body, and I would rather practice being new on someone else.⁷⁵

The menacing tone of this narrative seems to contrast strangely with the welcoming stance of the dress. A remarkable change will take place, however, if viewers approach this work – one that will likely illicit a more ominous interpretation of the garment's nature. An electric eye located near the dress will detect the approach of viewers, thereby activating the piece. An electrical current will run through the black cords and cause uninsulated coils mounted on the wire dress to heat up. Indistinguishable from the fabric of the wire garment at first, they quickly become red-hot. The coils encircle the dress and form a spiral pattern from the garment's bust to the area just above its knees. They generate enough heat to warrant caution, and if viewers retreat from this piece, the dress will slowly return to its original state. Viewers may understandably respond to Sterbak's work with some ambivalence. The garment's outstretched arms

⁷⁴ The artist has also presented this work with the text printed on a small card which was mounted on the wall.

⁷⁵ Bradley and Nemiroff 143.

seem to invite an embrace, but by moving closer they may be repelled by the threat of bodily harm.

I Want You to Feel the Way I Do ... (The Dress) has a definite cage-like quality, but as Thomas McEvelley notes, “the garment is empty, the inhabitant has fled.”⁷⁶ The identity of this inhabitant is unclear. Viewers may presume that the wearer of the dress is a woman, but she remains an enigmatic, absent figure. Is she also the narrator or the narrator’s victim? Several authors, including Jennifer Oille, have linked this sculpture to the story of Medea as told by the Greek playwright Euripides in the fifth-century-B.C. drama of the same name.⁷⁷ With this knowledge in mind, viewers can discern relationships between this complex figure from Classical mythology and the absent figure alluded to in Sterbak’s work.

Medea’s history is entwined with the legend of Jason and the Argonauts. It was Medea who showed Jason how to steal the Golden Fleece from her father’s care. In doing so, she betrayed her father and subsequently killed her own brother to facilitate their escape. Medea would remain at Jason’s side for several years, and he benefited greatly from her considerable knowledge and arcane magic throughout their travels. In time, she also gave birth to two sons by him. Jason eventually left Medea in order to marry Glauce, the daughter of the King of Corinth. Feeling betrayed and embittered, Medea devised a plan to destroy everything that Jason held dear. She sent the bride a beautiful but cursed dress and golden crown as wedding gifts. As Euripides writes, the true nature of these offerings was revealed only after Glauce put them on,

⁷⁶ Thomas McEvelley, Sculpture in the Age of Doubt (New York: School of Visual Arts, 1999) 297.

⁷⁷ Jennifer Oille, “Inhabiting Persona: Subsuming Personality,” C Magazine (Winter 1985): 51-52.

Then wide her eyes she oped, and wildly, as she strove to rise, shrieked: for two diverse waves upon her rolled of stabbing death. The carcanet of gold that gripped her brow was molten in dire and wondrous river of devouring fire. And those fine robes, the gift thy children gave – God’s mercy! – everywhere did lap and lave the delicate flesh; till up she sprang, and fled, a fiery pillar.⁷⁸

The King attempted to rescue his daughter, but the two of them were immolated by the flames. Before Jason could confront Medea with her actions, she carried out the second phase of her revenge and killed their two children. After a vitriolic exchange of words, Medea left Jason and fled to Athens on a flying chariot.

Euripides’s play recounts the brief but violent climax of Medea’s long relationship with Jason, and one could argue that Sterbak’s burning dress refers to the most spectacular act of retribution in the play. By interpreting the artist’s work as a modern retelling of the story of Medea one could identify the wearer of the wire mesh dress as Glauce. Despite this similarity though, it is possible that Sterbak’s work is something other than a contemporary version of a Classical legend. I believe that it is an allegorical sculpture that incorporates the story of Medea into its narrative framework.

In referring to Sterbak’s work as an allegory, I do not mean to say that it evokes either Medea or Glauce through personification; instead, I contend that the story of Medea insinuates itself into the reading of I Want You To Feel the Way I Do ... (The Dress). In “The Allegorical Impulse” art historian Craig Owens notes that allegory layers past and present narratives, and the author finds significance in the way that “one text is *read through* another ” as it creates a new and supplementary meaning in the process.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Euripides, The Medea, trans. Gilbert Murray (London: Allen & Unwin, 1950) 66.

⁷⁹ Craig Owens, “The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism,” 1980, Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation ed. Brian Wallis (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art; Boston: David R. Godine, 1984) 204-205.

Allegory does not retell the earlier narrative, but fragments of the past influence the reading of the present narrative. Partial elements of The Medea rise to the surface of I Want You To Feel The Way I Do ... (The Dress), and in this way the absent figure may be interpreted as Glauce. The story of Medea's violent revenge accounts for only one of two narratives at work in this sculpture, and the presence of the second one may influence the viewer's interpretation of the absent figure.

The text that is projected above and behind the dress represents a distinct address, one that is neither Medea's nor Glauce's. It is the narrative of an aggressive and contemporary entity that defines itself through the assimilation of another. Diana Nemiroff describes it as "an angry and pathetic monologue of parasitical love and colonized identity," and she interprets the dress itself in Freudian terms as "an uncanny stand-in for a person."⁸⁰ In the latter case, the author makes an important allusion to the concept of the "double" as proposed by Freud in his text "The Uncanny." I propose that this reference may also be useful in understanding the nature of the unnamed entity itself.

Freud argues that the primal fear that the double instills upon the adult mind takes many forms and touches upon several themes. One manifestation in particular is reminiscent of the narrator of I Want You to Feel the Way I Do ... (The Dress): "it is marked by the fact that the subject identifies himself with someone else, so that he is in doubt as to which his self is, or substitutes the extraneous self for his own. In other words, there is a doubling, dividing and interchanging of the self."⁸¹ Freud cites Otto

⁸⁰ Diana Nemiroff, Jana Sterbak: States of Being (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1991) 27.

⁸¹ Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny," The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, trans. James Strachey, vol. 17 (London: Hogarth Press, 1955) 234.

Rank's argument that "the 'double' was originally an insurance against the destruction of the ego, an 'energetic denial of the power of death.'"⁸² Freud believes the double to be a narcissistic creation, the result of the child's limitless self-love that is later transformed into a fear of self-loss as he or she matures. If the narrator of I Want You to Feel the Way I Do ... (The Dress) is also the absent figure, then perhaps it is an evocation of the ego.

According to psychoanalytic theory, the ego arises from the id through a series of identifications with objects external to itself.⁸³ In a related way, the entity in Sterbak's work is engaged in a process of identification with others but there are substantial differences to be made between the ego and the entity. Whereas the ego is able to take in external ideas into itself, the entity appears capable of forcing itself onto others. The ego is motivated by the reality principle, but the entity appears to be driven by want. The entity claims to want "you" to feel the way it does, but the content of the monologue suggests a confusion between exactly who feels what. It is also unclear why the entity searches for identification in others. Perhaps it is moved by a fundamental deficiency that it perceives in itself.

Lacan reinterprets the Freudian usage of the term "want" as "desire" as the former concept is founded more upon biological needs than the latter term. The entity understands itself to be incomplete and so it desires that which it sees outside of itself that would make itself whole again. For Lacan, desire is based on the perception of one's

⁸² Freud 235.

⁸³ The ego is itself a mediating agency between the id and the superego, as well as the unconscious and the conscious. Freud's understanding of the subject as a partitioned being departs from the humanist view of a unitary subject.

own lack. The subject loves those things that it believes will complete it, and in this way desire is fundamentally rooted in narcissism.⁸⁴ A cursory overview of Lacan's theory of the subject in relation to lack helps to understand the dynamics of identification as they pertain to the entity in I Want You To Feel The Way I Do ... (The Dress).

The Lacanian subject is almost entirely constituted around the concept of absence or lack. Even before a child reaches the Mirror Phase, he or she has already experienced numerous instances of self-loss through the determination of sex, his or her separation from the mother's body at birth, and an awareness of his or her own physical finiteness. Until the Mirror Phase, the child's concept of self revolves around relationships of identification with various privileged objects external to itself. The child's desire for the objet petit a ("object of the small a") is a yearning for those things external to itself that would complement and complete him or her. During the Mirror Phase, however, a significant reversal takes place as the child perceives its own reflection as its coherent and ideal self. Because of this misrecognition, the child sees himself or herself as the incomplete Other to this ideal image. As a consequence, he or she then develops a relationship of love and hate towards the ideal reflection and this ambivalence affects all subsequent identifications.

The entity of I Want You To Feel The Way I Do ... (The Dress) is engaged in a narcissistic process of identification with "you" for as long as it perceives its Other as a meaningful complement. It manipulates subject positions so that "I" and "you" become almost indistinguishable from one another. During the course of the monologue it becomes disaffected with "you" and it seeks to disengage itself from this relationship. The coexistence of attraction and repulsion that is so prevalent in the contemporary text

⁸⁴ Kaja Silverman, The Subject of Semiotics (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983) 177.

echoes ambivalent sentiments that run through Euripides's play. Medea was filled with jealous rage when she learned of Jason's betrayal, and yet she could not bring herself to kill him outright. Despite the intensity of her hatred, it is likely that she still loved him. Is it possible that there is a narcissistic aspect to their relationship? Could Medea not kill Jason because she still considered him to be a part of her?

I Want You To Feel The Way I Do ... (The Dress) is a complex sculpture that raises more questions about the identity and intention of the absent figure it evokes than it seems prepared to answer. Is she the wearer of the dress and the narrator, the victim of violence, or the one who causes harm? Is she Glauce, a creation of the ego, or some other facet of the self? Sterbak's entity points to a breakdown in the traditional subject/Other dichotomy. Close examination of the projected narrative shows that the boundaries between the subject positions of "I" and "you" are almost entirely obscured. The absent figure of the entity has no fixed subject position. It appears to suffer a fundamental sense of lack, and it is engaged in narcissistic pursuits only to provide itself with a sense of wholeness. While the absent figure in this section begins to dispel those distinctions between the subject and those forces external to itself, the absent figure in the next section questions the very concept of a coherent subject.

II

Between 1980 and 1984, Liz Magor created a series of four works based on an elderly woman she once met. The first piece in the "Dorothy Story" series is a sculpture entitled Dorothy – A Resemblance (1980-81) (National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa) (see

fig. 10).⁸⁵ This work consists of four solid stands made of steel upon which various cast-lead objects lay. Each of the black, table-like structures has four legs with numerous crossbars in place for added support. The four tables are presented in a tight two by two grid pattern, and this arrangement draws attention to the slight differences in their sizes. Two of the tables are of the same height, while the remaining stands are either taller or shorter by comparison. They all have two rectangular table-tops, one mounted over the other, with varying spaces in between. An examination of the structures reveals that the table-tops are held in place through the use of springs.

Some of the lead pieces found on the metal stands are actual weights, but most of them resemble other things. Any one of the dull grey objects can be held in one hand. They all appear to have been arranged on the tables in a thoughtful and precise manner, suggesting that some kind of classification scheme was used by the artist. One table-top supports lead versions of everyday objects such as books, candles, bells, match books, and light bulbs. Another table comprises items that resemble food: wedges of pie, slices of bread, sections of Swiss cheese, and pears. The contents of a third stand call to mind fishing: miniature boats, fish, and fish weights. Miniature irons and fish weights are stacked on the fourth table, but the relationship between these two elements is not immediately forthcoming. It is possible that they are not related to each other at all, or that they fall outside the scheme operating in the other stands. It is also possible that the rationale behind the groupings has been entirely misconstrued.

⁸⁵ The other works in the series are *Eighteen Books* (1981-82) (Collection of the artist), *The Most She Weighed/The Least She Weighed* (1982) (Canada Council Art Bank, Ottawa), and *I Have Always Weighed 98 lbs.* (1983-84) (Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto).

Closer inspection of Dorothy – A Resemblance reveals that the artist has stamped messages directly onto the surface of at least one item from each table. The cover of a book on the first table states “I have always weighed 98 lbs. Once I weighed more. When I married my first husband I was up to 124 lbs.” A slice of bread on the second stand reads: “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.” Printed on the side of a fish on the third table-top are the sentences, “And I stayed there 60 years until this trouble with my eyes. After my operation I was only 82 lbs.” The following text is stamped on several miniature irons on the fourth stand: “But I thought ... this is no good. So I got myself back up to 98 lbs. And that’s where I am now.” The narratives that wind through the collections of objects were taken from a conversation that took place between the artist and the elderly woman. Dorothy recounted periods of her life in relation to how much she weighed at these times, and important events were marked by significant weight gain or weight loss.

The presence of biographical narratives, the inclusion of a personal name in the title of the piece, and the recurring use of the personal pronoun “I” in Dorothy – A Resemblance all evoke an absent figure. This absent figure is unlike the ones discussed previously in this thesis as Magor has provided enough mundane details about Dorothy’s life so that her identity may not seem very ambiguous or enigmatic in comparison to those alluded to elsewhere. Still, observers may have a number of questions to ask when presented with Magor’s piece. Who is Dorothy? Why did the artist choose not to create a life-like portrait of her? Where is the resemblance to which the title refers? Do the objects presented in the sculpture have some association with this person? The absence of the

figure in Dorothy – A Resemblance is made more conspicuous by the juxtaposition of biographic details and the lack of any clear object that might resemble her. Magor provides some partial answers to these questions in an interview with Meriké Weiler,

Dorothy was the first piece that dealt directly with this problem: how do you identify somebody? If you want to verify that identification, you're largely limited to measurement – weight for example. So I worked very literally. I couldn't do a verifiable resemblance image-wise, so I imagined her weight, using objects which weren't personal, but corresponded to her weight. Thus I had an image that conformed to verifiable information about her and in that way, is associated with her.⁸⁶

The events surrounding Magor's encounter with Dorothy and the entire content of their conversation remain fragmentary. Presumably, the artist could have produced a figurative likeness of Dorothy based on memory, but her words imply that it was unlikely that she would ever have the opportunity to verify any such likeness with the actual person. Instead, Magor turned to Dorothy's stories for quantifiable reference points.⁸⁷ Her statement also makes clear that there is a connection between the lead objects she assembled and the elderly woman, although this relationship is an unexpected one.

The lead pieces of food, everyday objects, and other items are not so important for what they resemble; rather, their significance lies in how much they weigh. The combined weight placed on any given table corresponds precisely to the body weight to which the particular narrative points. The items on the second and fourth tables, for instance, weigh 98 lbs. The artist's choice of materials in Dorothy – A Resemblance is

⁸⁶ Meriké Weiler, "Venice Times Two: An Interview with Liz Magor," The Art Post (June/July 1984): 26. This interview was originally conducted on May 7, 1984 at the Ydessa Gallery in Toronto, one month before the artist and Ian Carr-Harris would participate in the 41st Venice Biennale.

⁸⁷ The artist has indicated elsewhere that her interest in producing a weight-based sculpture actually preceded her encounter with Dorothy. This statement is taken from a taped conversation between the artist and Mayo Graham on Sept. 8, 1982. See Mayo Graham, 1x2: Liz Magor, John McEwen (Calgary: Glenbow Museum, 1983) 9.

not without its secondary associations, as lead weights may also be used as a counterbalance on a scale. To this end, the four stands may also be seen as scales that mark the changes in Dorothy's weight. The table with the heaviest load of objects, for instance, applies the most compression onto the springs, and it is therefore the shortest of the four stands.

By juxtaposing the contents of the four tables, Magor hopes to create a literal, material-based (albeit indirect) portrait of Dorothy. The artist purposefully cast lead objects based on banal objects as a way to avoid any metaphorical readings of her work.⁸⁸ Philip Monk identifies the literalness within Dorothy – A Resemblance as a break from the metaphorical tradition in Magor's earlier artistic practice and argues that her use of measurements of weight ultimately proves itself to be "inappropriate as a means of identifying the character of an individual and a lifetime of events."⁸⁹ He contends that "Magor never offers us a representation of this woman; the measures she makes us see are the discrimination of difference."⁹⁰ Monk is not so much questioning the successfulness of Magor's portrait of Dorothy as he is recognizing the limits of resemblance as a means of representation.

The resemblance between the sculpture and Dorothy is founded upon the measurement of weight. Monk notes that Dorothy – A Resemblance is a work about the identity of an individual, but this particular basis of resemblance is not sufficient to the task of either establishing or representing the breadth of a subject's identity. He argues

⁸⁸ Weiler 26.

⁸⁹ Philip Monk, Liz Magor (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 1986) 14-15.

⁹⁰ Monk Liz Magor 15.

that the sculpture never depicts Dorothy. Instead it points to those discrepancies and shifts of identity that are suggested by the subject's changes in weight. Monk's argument should be put into context with an earlier comment that was made by Magor in relation to Dorothy. According to the artist, Dorothy's body weight deviated only a few times from her 98 lbs. average as an adult, and "she identified with the body that weighed 98 lbs. Of course she was still herself when she weighed less or more, but not completely herself. When she weighed 98 lbs. she more closely resembled the person she thought of as herself."⁹¹

In the previous chapters, the concept of subjectivity was interpreted in humanist terms as a conscious awareness of one's own existence that is tied to the notion of identity. Identity may be regarded as how the subject defines himself or herself and this definition may be qualified, for instance, along lines of gender, race, class, religion, and experience. As well, a subject may be defined by how he or she is regarded by others. Viewers of Magor's work may believe they come to know something of Dorothy when in fact they see very few of these facets of her identity.

Despite Magor's intention to produce a resemblance of Dorothy through literal means, the artist's sculpture may be read in non-literal ways as well. In a statement made before her interview with Weiler, Magor indicated that Dorothy lived by herself in a cabin alongside a waterway.⁹² Viewers might well imagine that some kind of link exists between the various lead objects on the tables and the person known as Dorothy. The stacks of everyday objects may refer to the need for someone living in isolation to

⁹¹ Liz Magor, The Most She Weighed: the Least She Weighed: a Catalogue of Work by Liz Magor (Calgary: Glenbow Museum, 1983) 13.

⁹² Liz Magor, The Most She Weighed 13.

stockpile their supplies, and the miniature boats could allude to the ships that passed by her waterfront property on a regular basis. Some of the objects echo references made in the narratives presented in this sculpture, such as the boats. They might be read metaphorically as lead souvenirs that attest to the malleability or weight of memory. As it is known that the objects were not collected by Dorothy, then the integrity of any personal connection between them is called into question.

The title of Magor's work suggests that there is a likeness between Dorothy – A Resemblance and the person of Dorothy, but Magor and Monk both eschew a metaphorical reading of this piece. I believe that the relationship at work between the sculpture and the individual is based more upon contiguity than similarity, and by this I mean that there is a metonymic connection between the two. In instances of metonymy, some aspect associated with a concept, an adjunct or an attribute, comes to stand in for that concept. In Magor's work, Dorothy's weight is the attribute that is privileged above all others. Magor seems to recognize the underlying metonymic relationship between Dorothy's sense of identity and the changes in her physical weight, and she pursues this association to an extreme situation where changes in body weight replace her as a subject. Metonymic relationships operate in Dorothy – A Resemblance on various levels, and they have further implications around the constitution of this person as a subject.

In sculptural terms, the accumulated weight of the lead objects replaces Dorothy at different times of her life when she was (and was not always) completely herself. This juxtaposition signals shifts in identity that in turn question the notion of the subject as a stable entity. In textual terms, Dorothy is replaced by the presence of biographical narratives, by the reference of a personal name in the title of the sculpture, and by the use

of the personal pronoun “I.” Collectively, these three textual elements are supposed to stand in for Dorothy during her absence and advance the idea that she is a coherent and comprehensible entity. Further analysis of these elements questions their ability to act as adequate substitutes for this individual.

Dorothy’s life history was presented as a narrative produced during the course of an encounter with Magor. Even if this biographical narrative was detailed in its description, it could only account for those facts, events, periods, impressions, or interpretations that were considered relevant to the narrator’s telling of the story. Obviously, a much larger portion of her life story was censored, forgotten, or deemed unnecessary by the speaker (and also by Magor). These gaps reflect some of the limitations of any such biographical narrative.⁹³ Furthermore, a distinction may be made between Dorothy as a speaking subject and Dorothy as the subject of speech. French linguist Emile Benveniste addresses issues pertaining to these subjective positions in Problems in General Linguistics,⁹⁴ and Kaja Silverman concisely summarizes his distinction between the two when she writes,

The first of these subjects is the individual who participates in discourse, which in the case of language would be the speaker or writer. The second consists of the discursive elements with which that discoursing individual identifies, and in doing so finds his or her subjectivity.⁹⁵

⁹³ I purposely avoid the adjective “autobiographical” in my description of Dorothy’s narratives as they appear in Magor’s work. Although I do not doubt that Magor accurately transcribed these quotes, their selection reflects an active editorial role on the part of the artist that complicates the use of the expression “autobiographical narrative.”

⁹⁴ Emile Benveniste, Problems in General Linguistics, trans. Mary Elizabeth Meek (Coral Gables: University of Miami Press, 1971).

⁹⁵ Silverman 46.

When Dorothy recounted her life story to the artist, she was the speaking subject. The subject of speech is that part of the subject that is constituted around language and through the narrative that unfolds. The former subject should not be confused with the latter one. The implication for viewers of Dorothy – A Resemblance is that they encounter something of the subject of speech (through the fragmented narrative that is presented), but the speaking subject remains absent and unknown.

Dorothy is identified in the title of Magor's work by name. Like any personal name, hers is intended to serve many functions. A name helps to distinguish one individual from another both socially and historically, but it is rarely so original as to avoid instances of duplication or mistaken identity. The person to whom Magor's sculpture refers is known only by a common first name, one that could literally refer to an incalculable number of persons. Even if "Dorothy" were a unique name, a single word could not represent the complexity of a subject it could only stand in for this subject during her absence.

The "I" that appears in the biographical narratives of Dorothy – A Resemblance is also problematic as a means to represent the subject of Dorothy. It has already been noted that when Dorothy told the artist that: "I have always weighed 98 lbs. Once I weighed more. When I married my first husband I was up to 124 lbs." the speaking subject (the person who recounted the narrative) is distinct from the subject presented in the narrative. Even within the context of the transcribed sentences, the continuity of the subject of speech must be called into question. The "I" of "I always weighed 98 lbs." is distinguished from the "I" in the next sentence by virtue of the change of weight. The same subject of speech varies from one table to the next, and Magor says as much when

she writes, "Of course she was still herself when she weighed less or more, but not completely herself. When she weighed 98 lbs. she more closely resembled the person she thought of as herself." Textual elements such as the biographical narratives, a personal name, and the use of "I" give the impression that Dorothy is a coherent entity, but closer scrutiny undermines this assumption.

Dorothy – A Resemblance reveals the complexity with which sculptural and textual elements metonymically stand in for a subject. Magor's sculpture does not so much present a likeness of Dorothy as it evokes her absence. In doing so, it portrays identity as a shifting force that calls into question the stability and comprehensibility that is traditionally assigned to the subject. Absent figures in this chapter undermine the idea that the subject is a coherent entity, and I will discuss their implications for notions of subjectivity in the next section.

III

On a formal level, I Want You To Feel the Way I Do ... (The Dress) appears to share little in common with Dorothy – A Resemblance. Sterbak's work presents an upright wire dress with outstretched sleeves, and so the evocation of an absent figure is almost instantaneous. Magor's sculpture consists of small lead objects that lack any physical similarity to the human form. As such, the absent figure in this instance is recognized by viewers only after they have extrapolated the meaning of the various elements that make up this work. The two sculptures find common ground on a more conceptual level as each one calls to mind a female absent figure whose identity remains

a matter of some speculation. Questions surrounding their identities draw attention to the complexity of the human subject.

Narrative structures and linguistic operations form an integral aspect I Want You To Feel the Way I Do ... (The Dress) and Dorothy – A Resemblance. In Sterbak's work, the past narrative of The Medea emerges through to the surface of the contemporary monologue in an allegorical fashion, and it resonates in the reading of the projected text. Biographical narratives, a personal name, and the personal pronoun "I" metonymically stand in for (and therefore displace) the subject of Dorothy. The presence of language in each work plays a key role in the representation of subjectivity, but language actually decentres the subject in these instances.

In humanist thought, the subject expresses himself or herself through language. Language is viewed as a product of a coherent entity, and the cornerstone of humanist subjectivity is the personal pronoun "I". Post-structuralist theory regards this subject position as a linguistic point where the individual can insert himself or herself into language in order to maintain a sense of coherency. In Literary Theory, Terry Eagleton succinctly addresses the ramifications of this in reference to both the speaking subject and the subject of speech,

The actual speaking, writing human person, can never represent himself or herself fully in what is said: there is no sign which will, so to speak, sum up my entire being. I can only *designate* myself in language by a convenient pronoun. The pronoun "I" *stands in* for the ever-elusive subject, which will always slip through the nets of any particular piece of language ...⁹⁶

Absent figures in Sterbak's and Magor's sculptures challenge the convention that the subject expresses himself or herself through language. I Want You To Feel the Way I

⁹⁶ Terry Eagleton, Literary Theory (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983) 170.

Do ... (The Dress) and Dorothy – A Resemblance reveal how subjectivity is actually constructed around language. The sculptures of Sterbak and Magor point to a decentred subject dispersed throughout a vast signifying system that pre-exists it. The subject does not express itself through language; rather, it is an effect of language. In this way, absent figures in I Want You To Feel the Way I Do ... (The Dress) and Dorothy – A Resemblance reveal that the nature of the human subject is ultimately an elusive one.

Conclusion

Humanism regards the subject as a coherent entity with some form of rational nature. As such, the subject's view of the world (and his or her depiction of it) is thought to come from an authentic source. The whole notion of representation is therefore founded upon the belief in a fundamental truth based on this connection. Similarly, the figure is seen as a representation of the subject – one that serves to confirm the existence of a human essence. The unanticipated absence of the figure in a work of art is unsettling because it does not reconfirm these varied expectations for the viewer. Manifestations of the absent figure in the sculptures of Jamelie Hassan, Colette Whiten, Jana Sterbak, and Liz Magor call to mind aspects of the world that do not conform to humanist values such as the inherent freedom, well-being, and universality of “Man.” They undermine the privileged relationship between the subject and the figure by calling into question the idea of a coherent and fixed self.

My analysis of Los Desaparecidos, September 1975, Remote Control, Hollow, I Want You To Feel The Way I Do ... (The Dress), and Dorothy – A Resemblance demonstrates a progressive decentring of the human subject. The transition from a subjective core towards one of dissolution raises a number of implications for the humanist concept of self, the nature of representation, and possible roles for individuals as decentred subjects. If the subject is socially and linguistically formed, then he or she can no longer be regarded as an authentic source of meaning. As a result, the truth that humanism assigns to representation must also be called into question. Representation is viewed as a form of discourse rather than as an expression of some essential truth. As

subjects, individuals continuously participate in roles that play out in diverse social, political, and cultural discourses; however, these forms of understanding are historical in nature and are not immutable. These various implications may be viewed in conjunction with the concept of a decentred subject. Chris Weedon notes that “the political significance of decentring the subject and abandoning the belief in subjectivity is that it opens up subjectivity to change.”⁹⁷ Individuals are not limited to fixed subject positions and the notion of representation becomes a matter of active debate. The subject finds himself or herself engaged with multiple discourses issuing from various sources. These discourses differ from, compete with, and sometimes contradict each other. They serve to interrogate, to challenge, or to propose alternatives to hitherto dominant forms of discourse.

The absent figure is a signifier, a question mark, a device that draws attention to the presuppositions that viewers may have about traditional values and discourses expressed specifically through the figure. In a much broader sense, it alludes to a crisis of humanism precipitated by a widespread loss of faith in representative democracy and certain theoretical challenges towards subjectivity that rose to prominence in the later part of the second half of the twentieth century. Inasmuch as the absent figure undermines traditional depictions of subjectivity, it does so in a way that offers the possibility for subjects to renegotiate discourses of representation on diverse social, political, and cultural levels.

Although this thesis looks at the absent figure in relation to sculptural practices since the seventies, its implications for the medium of sculpture may be interpreted in

⁹⁷ Weedon, Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory 33.

historical terms well. As the history of Western sculpture is rooted firmly in figurative representation, it becomes important to re-examine earlier propositions set forth ostensibly through the figure as inherent truths. To this end, viewers should ask themselves a number of questions when confronted with traditional forms of sculptures. What values are conveyed through the presentation of figures? What assumptions are made about the subjects they claim to represent? Who is responsible for these works and to whom are they addressed? The thrust of this line of inquiry is not to dismiss figurative sculpture as mere expressions of doctrine, but to provide spectators with a critical distance from where they can better recognize the presence of discursive practices operating in the artwork before them.

The figure has been regarded as an enduring stand-in for the physical body and as an indirect indicator of the soul. The unexpected absence of the figure from more recent examples of sculpture may raise its own set of questions for viewers. Why is the figure absent? To whom does the absent figure refer? What did we expect to see? How does the artist convey the figure's absence? This last question draws attention to the various elements that contribute to the manifestation of this phenomenon. These include material-based and textual components in addition to any visual references that might be present in the work of art.

Since the seventies, artists have been producing sculptures from a wider range of materials and techniques than in previous decades of the twentieth century. This is explained by the legacy of modernist experimentation with media, the expanding definition of what constitutes sculpture as an art form, and by advancements in the technologies associated with sculptural production. Materials and processes take on

added significance for the evocation of the absent figure in the medium of sculpture. In these cases, artists must find ways of alluding to figures without relying on convention. If artists wish to convey some quality of the absent figure, its gender, or its identity, then they must employ innovative approaches to do so. Hassan's display of broken ceramics and Whiten's use of plaster moulds characterize the fragile or constructed nature of their subjects. Sterbak's cage-like dresses enforce the notion of entrapment and gender.

Kinetic or heat-based elements in her art suggest issues of mobility or allude to the absent figure's identity. Cast objects in Magor's sculptures operate either as a form of subterfuge or as measurements of weight. These in turn help to define her absent figures. The materials and techniques used by the artists in all of these instances are neither neutral nor incidental. They testify to a sophisticated material-based logic and a sensitivity that I believe is informed by Process Art. In a similar fashion, the inclusion of textual references in three of the selected sculptures in this thesis is used to delve into the complex links that exist between identity, subjectivity, and language. As such, the works of Hassan, Sterbak, and Magor demonstrate a theoretical inheritance from Conceptual Art and an appreciation for the important part that semiotics played within art discourses of the seventies and eighties.

The manifestation of absent figures in the sculptural practices of artists from the seventies and onwards may be a discreet phenomenon, but it is one that touches upon the multifaceted nature of the postmodern era. The absent figure has been shown to operate as an effective tool of social critique when applied to the discourses of the dominant cultural order. In this thesis, the absent figure has been aligned with political art, feminist art, performance, and issues of subjectivity. An exploration of this phenomenon has only

just begun, but some recent manifestations of the absent figure suggest that there is an important place for it in a form of sculpture that has not yet been discussed here: the monument.

Nef pour quatorze reines (“Nave for Fourteen Queens”) is a Montreal monument that was inaugurated in 1999 to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the massacre of thirteen female students and one female employee of the École Polytechnique of the Université de Montréal by a single gunman. Rose-Marie Goulet invokes the absent figures of these women by inscribing their names on granite bands set into the landscape of Place du 6-décembre-1989, a long and rectangular public park within view of the university campus.⁹⁸ The first letter of each victim’s name is a raised, three-dimensional metal object and the remaining letters are made of thin pieces of metal, but all the names are difficult to read at first glance. The artist produced her work using a stylized alphabet composed of the negative spaces surrounding each letter, thus calling attention to the void left by the deaths. The names are set inside a series of low, rising hillocks, and the undulating nature of these mounds simulates shockwaves that extend away from the university. Nef pour quatorze reines is unlike traditional monuments because of the absence of figures and the way that it favours a low, horizontal composition instead of an imposing vertical structure (this monument is almost undetectable during the winter months when snow blankets the park). Goulet’s public sculpture is related to Hassan’s Los Desaparecidos in that it gives a voice to the victims of violence. The manifestation of absent figures in this work may also be viewed in terms of other non-traditional monuments outside of Canada.

⁹⁸ Marie-Claude Robert was the consulting landscape architect for this monument. The site for Nef pour quatorze reines was a section of Parc Troie that was renamed Place du-6-décembre 1989.

Israeli-born Micha Ullman was commissioned by the City of Berlin to create a monument commemorating the Jewish victims of the Holocaust. Inaugurated in 1995, Empty Library exists below street level at Bebelplatz. It consists of a window that looks down into an underground space occupied by empty bookshelves. A nearby plaque informs viewers that Bebelplatz was the site of Nazis book burnings in 1933. The absence of books and the extermination of Jews (identified as “the people of the book”) are brought together in this work.⁹⁹ British artist Rachel Whiteread was commissioned in the mid-nineties to create a memorial at Judenplatz in Vienna, but because of a controversy concerning the proximity of the proposed Holocaust Memorial to the archaeological remains of a medieval synagogue, the work was not completed until 2000. This solid, block-like structure was produced from moulds taken of the empty spaces around an anonymous library collection. Whiteread’s haunting sculpture also employs the missing book motif to evoke the absent figures of murdered Jews, and it lists the names of various concentration camps to where Austrian Jews would have been sent during the War. These contemporary monuments by Goulet, Ullman, and Whiteread demonstrate how the absent figure can manifest itself in very poignant and public ways, how it can allude to the fragility of human life in the face of violence, and how it points to the collective will to remember.

⁹⁹ James E. Young, “Memory and Counter-Memory: the End of the Monument in Germany,” Harvard Design Magazine (Fall 1999): 10. The author discusses the works of both Ullman and Whiteread in relation to other recent monuments recalling the Holocaust through absence.

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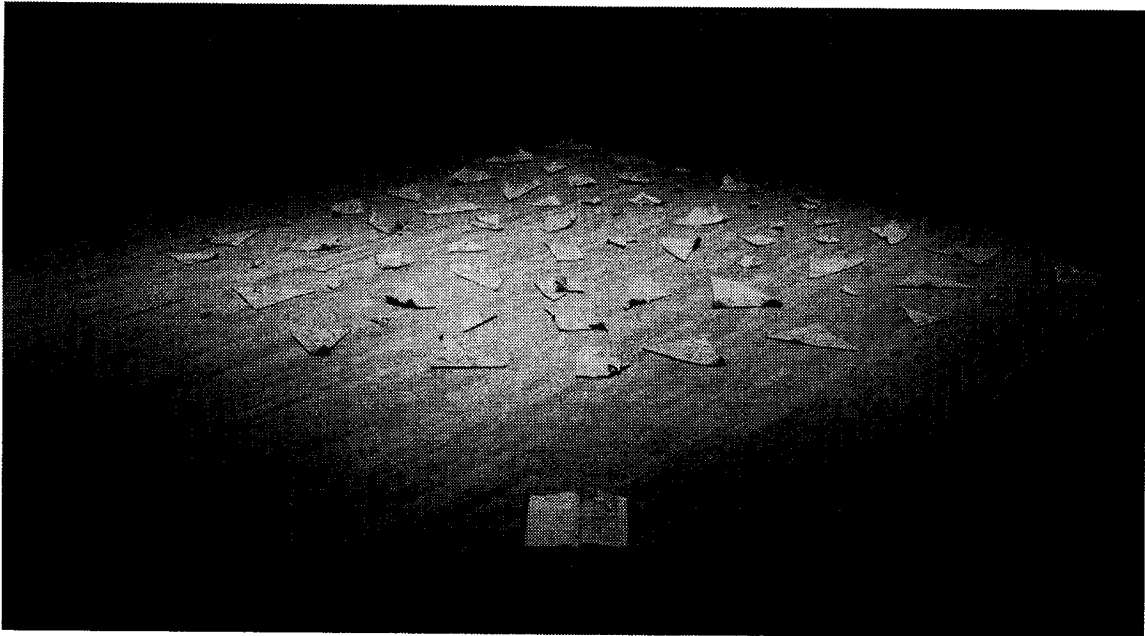


Fig. 1 Jamelie Hassan. Los Desaparecidos. 1981
Ceramic. Various sizes. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

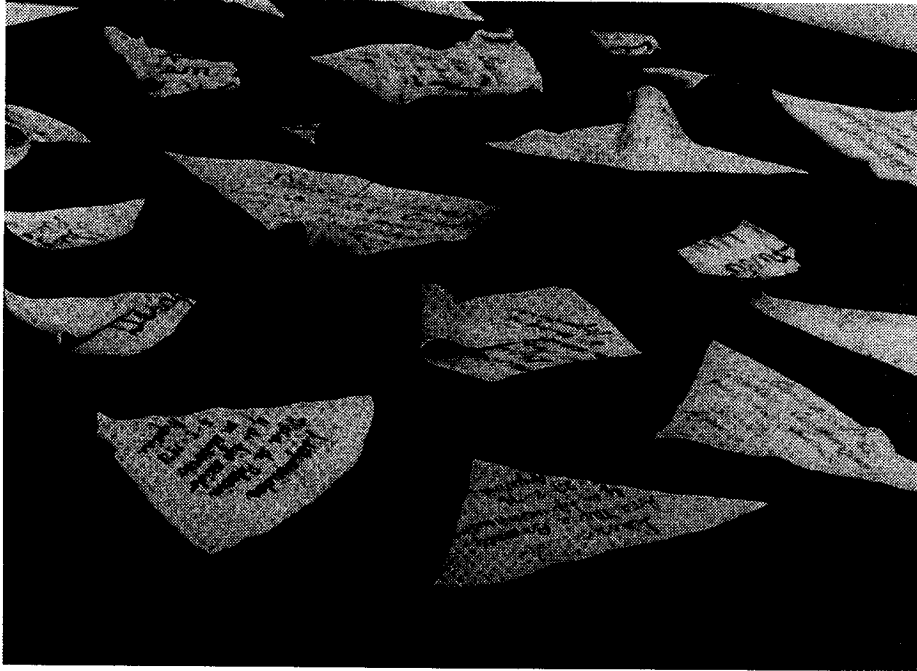


Fig. 2 Jamelie Hassan. Los Desaparecidos (detail). 1981
Ceramic. Various sizes. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

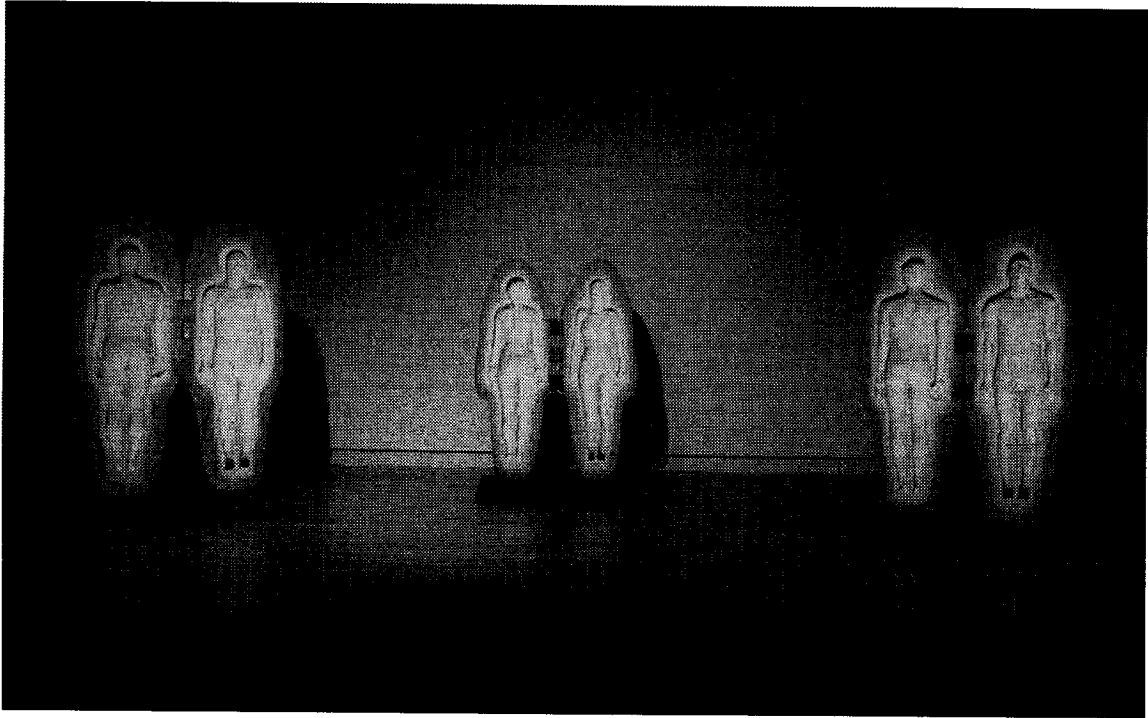


Fig. 3 Colette Whiten. September 1975. 1975
Plaster, burlap, wood, rope, fiberglass, metal and paint. Male: 232 x 152 x 85.5
cm; smaller male: 227.5 x 145 x 85 cm; female: 209 x 134.4 x 83 cm. National
Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

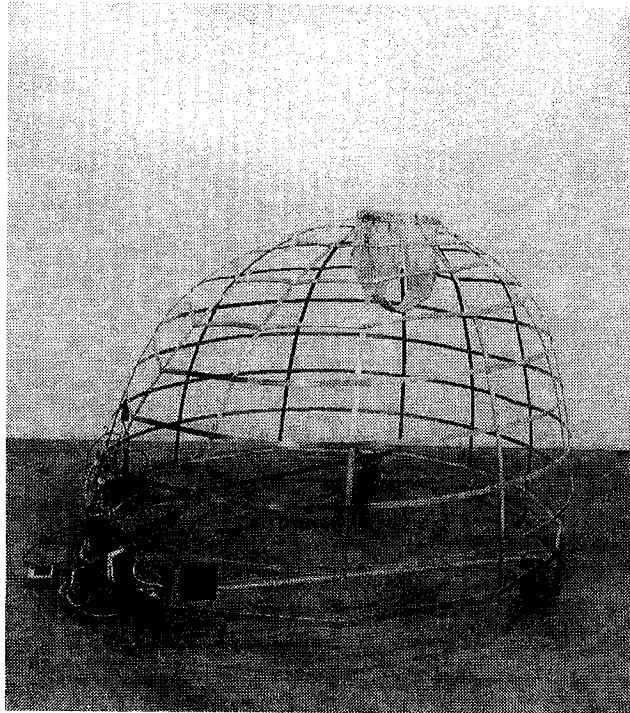


Fig. 4 Jana Sterbak. Remote Control 1. 1989.
Aluminum, with motorized wheels and batteries. 150 cm
(height) x 495 cm (circumference). Collection of the artist.

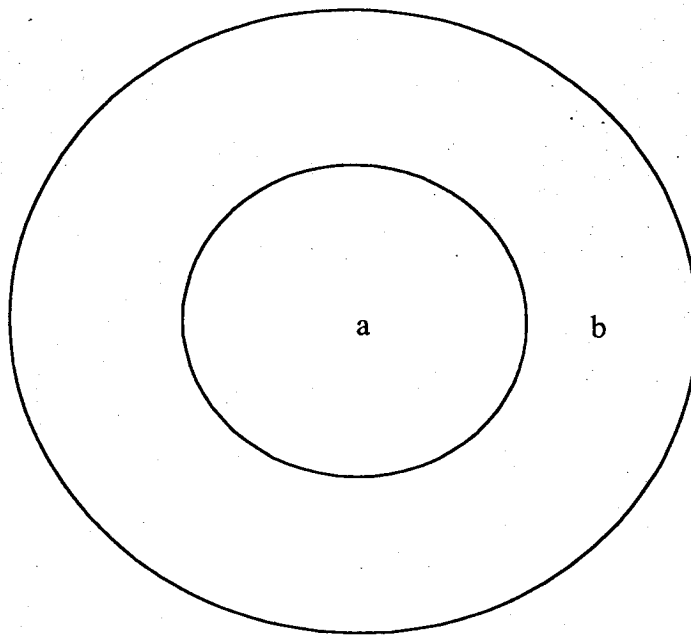


Fig. 5 The Division of Private and Public Spheres

- a) private sphere
- b) public sphere

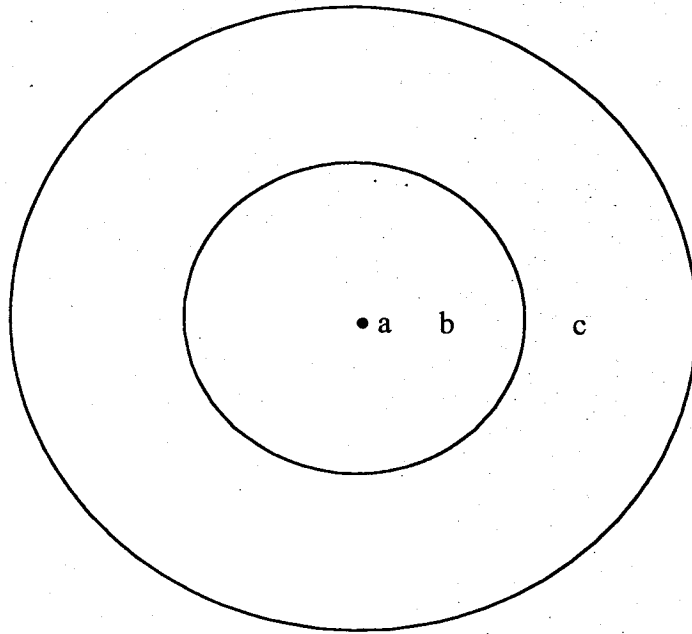


Fig. 6 The Division of Private and Public Spheres with Reference to the Dominant Centre

- a) dominant centre (patriarchy)
- b) public sphere
- c) private sphere

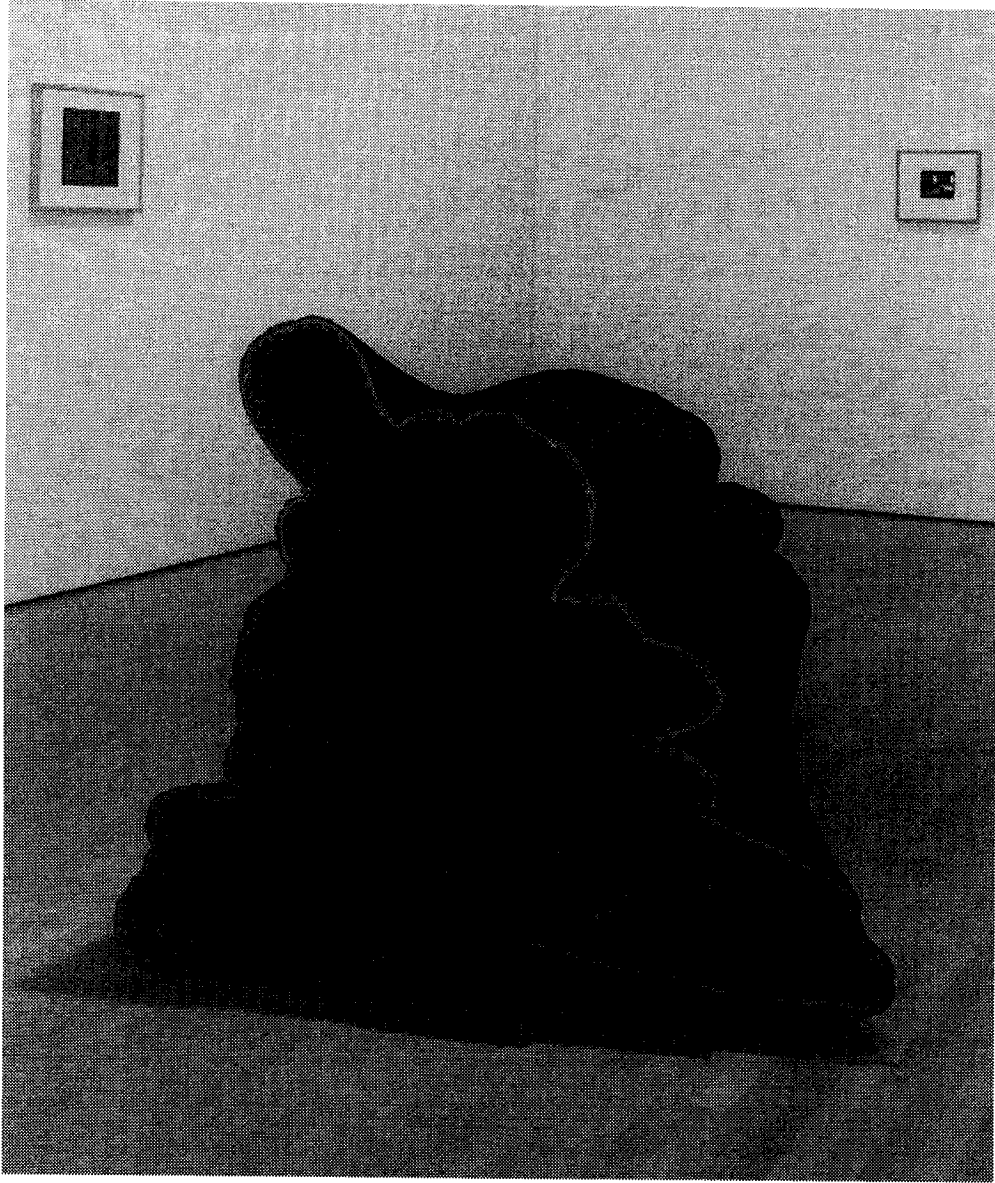


Fig. 7 Liz Magor. Hollow. 1998-1999.
Polymerized alpha gypsum, fabric, and foam. 182.8 x 106.7 x 121.9 cm.
National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

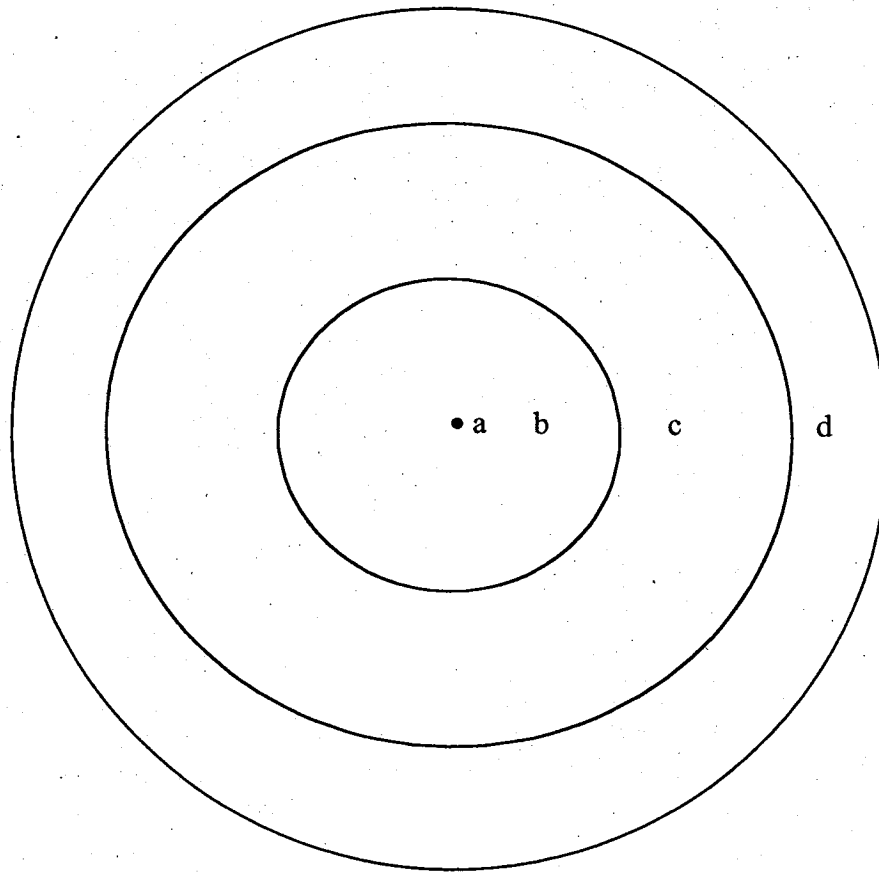


Fig. 8 The Division of Society (Including the Private and Public Spheres) and Nature, with Reference to the Dominant Centre

- a) dominant centre (the Law)
- b) public sphere
- c) private sphere
- d) Nature

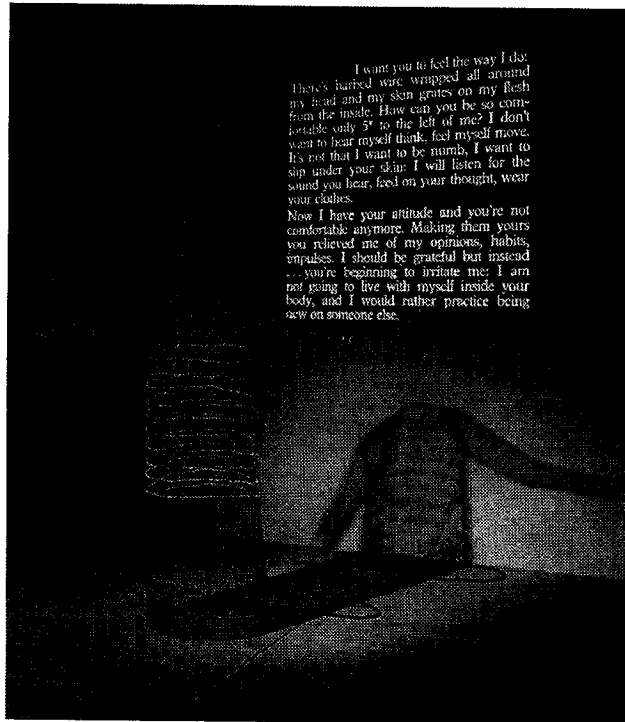


Fig. 9 Jana Sterbak. I Want You To Feel The Way I Do ... (The Dress). 1984-1985. Live uninsulated nickel-chrome wire mounted on wire mesh, electrical cord and power, with slide-projected text. 144.8 x 121.9 x 45.7 cm. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

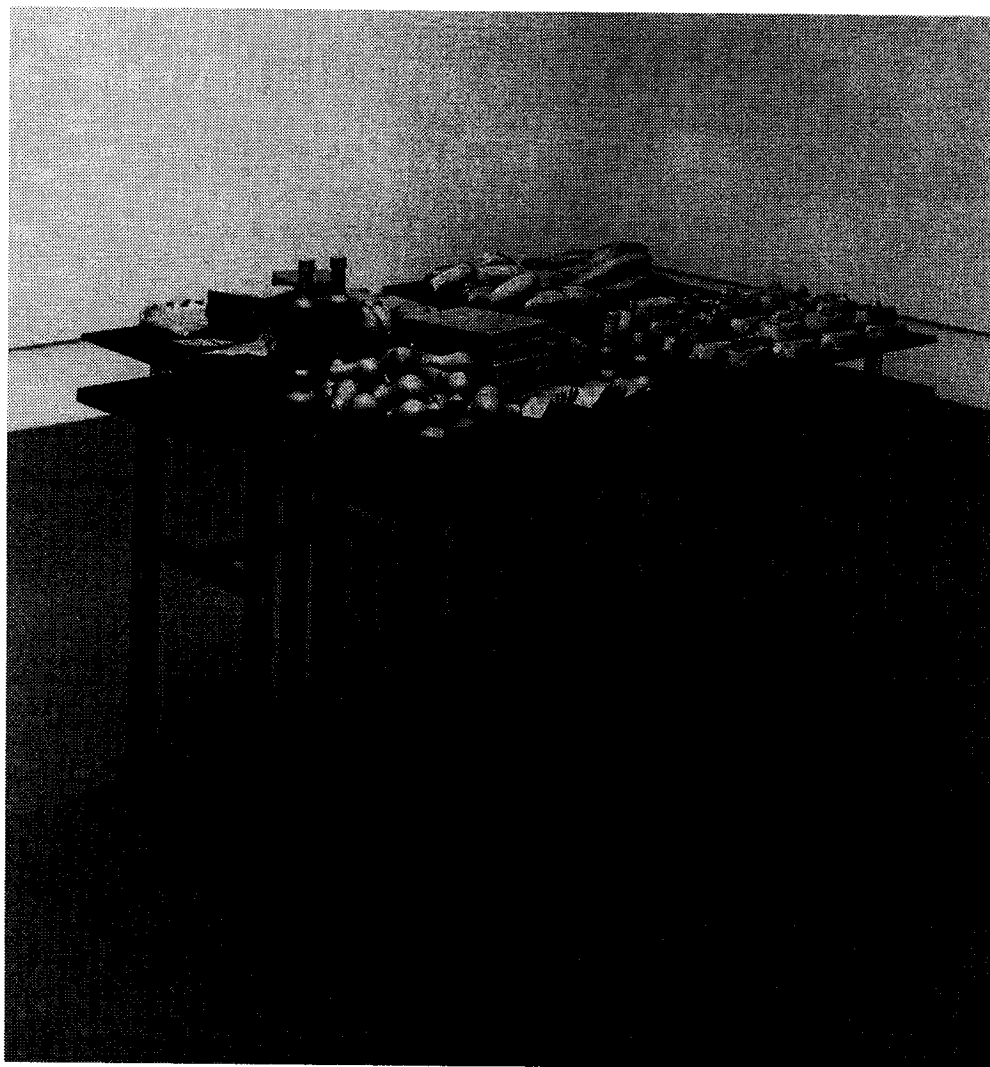


Fig. 10 Liz Magor. Dorothy – A Resemblance. 1981.
Lead and steel. 90 x 121.5 x 86 cm assembled. National Gallery of
Canada, Ottawa.