Refashioning and Reframing:
Gender, Agency, and the Body in Jana Sterbak's *Remote Control II*

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Abstract

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This thesis examines *Remote Control II* (1989), a wearable sculpture by multidisciplinary artist Jana Sterbak. The sculpture references cage crinoline, a popular garment in Europe that was a staple in women's wardrobes from 1856 until the late 1800s. Visually mimicking a birdcage, the sartorial style prioritized an idealized femininity, enforcing corporeal, cultural, and social control over the female body through immobilization, constriction, and threatening livelihoods. *Remote Control II* mimics this silhouette with added material and formal elements that highlight the crinoline's controlling intention. Informed by feminist and queer methodologies and design histories, this thesis argues that *Remote Control II* is subversive in reappropriating the cage crinoline and transforming the silhouette into one that may offer agency and autonomy. To demonstrate my argument, I analyze the cage crinoline's history, the broader cultural significance of clothing, and Sterbak's reinterpretation to highlight how *Remote Control II* is effective in subverting the cage crinoline's history through appropriation, material choices, and complicating gendered design elements. This thesis concludes by exploring *Remote Control II*'s relevance in our contemporary context at a time in which the dress no longer stands for singular femininity.

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Introduction

At multiple points during the late 1980s and early 1990s, in various art institutions across North America, a young woman and her companions performed a dance that flitted erratically between presenting ultimate autonomy and total dependency.[1] Central to this performance was a sculpture, wearable in form and familiar in silhouette, but with additional unconventional technological details that facilitated the frenzied dash between agency and reliance. Created by contemporary artist Jana Sterbak, the sculpture in question, *Remote Control II* (1989), references the historical cage crinoline and elucidates the precarity that clothing can hold, alluded to through the wearable sculpture's frame and silhouette.

Crafted from silver metal concentric hoops, *Remote Control II* forms a dome-like structure, expanding out from the waistline and creating voluminosity (figs. 1 and 2).[2] It is a minimalist work with clean lines and little adornment. In some ways, the concentric hoops suggest a skeleton—the bones for the fabric overlay that would complete the skirt. The sculpture has a crafted waist which allows entry for a potential wearer and the integrated fabric underwear helps the wearer don the sculpture and remain in it rather than slipping through the layered silver hoops (fig. 3). The modified hem that threatens this physical slippage is lifted inches off the floor, accessorized with wheels, and connected to the accompanying remote control technologies. The remote control manages the sculpture's mobility—a handheld device can give

[1] *Remote Control II* has exhibited extensively, including at the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa, ON; the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago; The New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York, and the Donald Young Gallery in Chicago. Documentation shows that the sculpture was performed in the latter two exhibitions. See Bruce Ferguson, *Works by Jana Sterbak*, (New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1990), 12, and Jennifer McLerran, "Disciplined Subjects and Docile Bodies in the Work of Contemporary Artist Jana Sterbak," *Feminist Studies* 24, no. 3 (1998): 541-545.

[2] Sterbak made *Remote Control I* and *II*, twin aluminum crinolines, however most documentation discusses and focuses on *Remote Control II.* While the two are similar in form and function, in this thesis, I focus solely on *Remote Control II*.

the wearer physical agency, or the control can also be passed onto another, who can gain total power over the wearer through this apparatus.[3]

Conceptually and through the silhouette and structure, *Remote Control II* references the cage crinoline, a popular yet suffocating garment worn by women that originated in 19th century Europe (fig. 4).[4] The crinoline created a silhouette meant to enhance the feminine form, constructing illusionary wide hips and tiny waistbands, while "effectively immobilizing" the wearer.[5] This thesis explores how Sterbak reappropriates this historical shape with *Remote Control II.* Focusing on the materiality and technological additions that Sterbak uses to create this sculpture, I argue that these elements ultimately craft a wearable object that can offer freedom, agency, and protection, while critically exemplifying how, to reference curator Nancy Spector, "social control has been enacted upon the body through fashionable clothing."[6]

Jana Sterbak (b. 1955) is a multidisciplinary artist, born in the Czech Republic, formerly known as Czechoslovakia, and currently based between Montreal and Barcelona.[7] Growing up in Prague, Sterbak moved to Edmonton, Alberta in 1968, and then lived for periods in Vancouver, BC, Montreal, QC, and Toronto, ON, for university.[8] Sterbak works in sculpture, installation, video, and photography, and her artwork explores themes centered on the human condition, such as power and pleasure, control, the private and the public, and the body.[9] She has defined her practice as being concerned with power dynamics, embracing complications and contradictions,

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[3] Nancy Spector, "Flesh and Bones," *Artforum* 30, no. 7 (March 1992): N.P., https://www.artforum.com/features/flesh-and-bones-jana-sterback-203615.
[4] Jennifer McLerran, "Disciplined Subjects and Docile Bodies in the Work of Contemporary Artist Jana Sterbak," *Feminist Studies* 24, no. 3 (1998): 543.
[5] McLerran, "Disciplined Subjects," 543.
[6] Nancy Spector, "Flesh and Bones," N.P.
[7] "Jana Sterbak," *Centre Vox*, accessed May 20, 2024, https://centrevox.ca/en/artists-and-researchers/jana-sterbak.
[8] "Jana Sterbak," *Art History Concordia,* accessed May 20, 2024, https://art-history.concordia.ca/eea/artists/sterbak.html.
[9] Jana Sterbak and Diana Nemiroff, *States of Being: Corps À Corps* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1991), 28.

requiring "one to decide whether [they are] the controlling agent, or [the one] being controlled, and to decide what the pros and cons are [in either situation]."[10]

Sterbak has frequently referenced clothing in her practice, particularly the dress silhouette which manifests in works including *Vanitas: Flesh Dress for an Albino Anorectic* (1987) (fig. 5)*, I Want You to Feel the Way I Do… (The Dress)* (1984/85) (fig. 6), and my case study: *Remote Control II*. Spector writes that Sterbak's work uses "the dress as a metaphor for the culturally inscribed body… by referencing the fashion world, Sterbak's 'garments' demonstrate that, at any historical moment, a 'look' represents… psychological, social, sexual, and economic discourses that circulate and delineate the body."[11] Indeed, *Remote Control II* provokes contemplation as to how clothing holds literal and symbolic power, as evidenced by the existing scholarly and curatorial writings on this particular artwork.

Since *Remote Control II*'s conception in the late 1980s, the sculpture has been exhibited frequently. While often exhibited without a body, the work has also been performed and animated, in which someone—typically a model or ballerina: feminine, slim-bodied, and white (as documentation indicates)—dons the sculpture, similar to a traditional dress. When performed, the model was helped into the crinoline construction by two male tuxedoed attendants (fig. 7).[12] With her feet inches above the ground, the model and the tuxedoed attendants demonstrated how the wearer could become helpless, in complete submission to whoever holds the controls, or, conversely, could seize complete power by maintaining the controls herself.

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[10] Jana Sterbak and Diana Nemiroff, *States of Being: Corps À Corps* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1991), 51.
[11] Nancy Spector, "Flesh and Bones," *Artforum* 30, no. 7 (March 1992), https://www.artforum.com/features/flesh-and-bones-jana-sterback-203615.
[12] Jennifer McLerran, "Disciplined Subjects and Docile Bodies in the Work of Contemporary Artist Jana Sterbak," *Feminist Studies* 24, no. 3 (1998): 541.

Throughout this thesis, I will consider how the work has been exhibited as a wearable sculpture with the body absent, and as a performance. I refer to the frame at points throughout this thesis, alluding to the physical form that *Remote Control II* takes (as a metallic, minimalist silhouette that is essentially an underlying frame for the absent textiles). I refer to the frame additionally in regards to how *Remote Control II* functions as a frame for the body, similarly to clothing, deploying design scholarship that identifies clothing as a "framing device,"[13] an "envelope for the body,"[14] and a crucial boundary between the self and the world.[15]

To analyze the performances and the sculpture on its own, I had to rely on visual and textual documentation having not personally interacted with nor witnessed the sculpture in performance. I relied particularly on different recounts from critics, scholars, and audience members,[16] who traced the movements and changes in the performances, as well as documented how the sculpture was exhibited unworn. These recounts provide insight into how the wearable sculpture was embodied and highlight what was implied through these performances. In relying solely on past documentation, certain contextual details are unfilled, however, I believe there is potential in this reality as well as within *Remote Control II's* performative element for possibility and expansive interpretations. The sculpture is a wearable object that has performance potential, which suggests new and expanded reinterpretations are possible—there is futurity built into the sculpture. Scholar Elin Diamond writes:

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[13] "Clothing's ambiguity is encapsulated by its ability to operate as a framing device and a cohesive structure at one and the same time," write Dani Cavallaro and Alexandra Warwick, in *Fashioning the Frame: Boundaries, Dress, and the Body* (Oxford, UK; New York: Berg, 1998), 60.
[14] Joanne Entwistle, "Fashion and the Fleshy Body: Dress as Embodied Practice," *Fashion Theory* 4, no. 3 (2000): 327.
[15] Entwistle, "Fashion and the Fleshy Body," 327.
[16] Nancy Spector, Clement Page, and Jennifer McLerran have all described and documented the performances, and their documentation has been consulted and referred to within this thesis. See: Jennifer McLerran, "Disciplined Subjects and Docile Bodies in the Work of Contemporary Artist Jana Sterbak," *Feminist Studies* 24, no. 3 (1998), 541-545, Clement Page, "Jana Sterbak: 'I Want You To Feel The Way I Do,'" *Third Text* 10 (1996): 65-66, and Nancy Spector, "Flesh and Bones," *Artforum* 30, no. 7 (March 1992): N.P., https://www.artforum.com/features/flesh-and-bones-jana-sterback-203615.

> Performance describes certain embodied acts, in specific sites, witnessed by others (and/or watching the self). On the other hand, it is the thing done, the completed event framed in time and space and remembered, misremembered, interpreted, and passionately revisited across a pre-existing discursive field.[17]

Diamond highlights the temporal expansiveness within performance. Noting this as a crucial feature in *Remote Control II* suggests the potential for different bodies and different positionalities to don *Remote Control II,* generating new implications and meanings and continuing to subvert the silhouette's original suppressive intention through reappropriation.

Literature Review

My research builds upon contemporary art history scholarship, particularly that which incorporates feminist methodologies. I refer to literature written in the late 20th century, reflecting the cultural, political, and artistic contexts in which Sterbak created and exhibited her wearable sculptures. Feminist art historians including Griselda Pollock, Rosemary Betterton, Christine Ross, and Amelia Jones have written texts that examine the crucial role that the body has played within contemporary art history.[18] As Ross argues, "There is no contemporary art without a fundamental concern for the body,"[19] and scholarship has underlined how central the body is within feminist art history specifically.[20] As *Remote Control II* is ultimately concerned with the body, and the female body in particular (presumed by who has worn and performed the work, and the intrinsic references to gender), this scholarship has been valuable in

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[17] Elin Diamond, *Performance and Cultural Politics* (London; New York: Routledge, 1996), 1.
[18] Key works include: Rosemary Betterton, *An Intimate Distance: Women, Artists, and the Body* (London: Routledge, 1996), 130-161, Amelia Jones, *Body Art/Performing the Subject* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 1-21, Griselda Pollock, *Generations & Geographies in the Visual Arts: Feminist Readings* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 3-24, and Christine Ross, "The Paradoxical Bodies of Contemporary Art," in *A Companion to Contemporary Art Since 1945*, ed. Amelia Jones (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2006), 378-400.
[19] Ross, "The Paradoxical Bodies," 378.
[20] Feminist art historian Rosemary Betterton argues: "'Reinstating corporeality' is an important but necessarily fraught and contradictory enterprise for women artists." See: Rosemary Betterton, *An Intimate Distance: Women, Artists, and the Body* (London: Routledge, 1996), 137.

contextualizing the wearable sculpture and highlighting the continued themes that flow through the work.

I supplement this scholarship with literature written specifically about Sterbak's practice—again, primarily from the 1990s, when *Remote Control II* was frequently exhibited. These texts memorialize how Sterbak's practice and particularly her wearable sculptures, have been received and perceived, fleshing out key themes that materialize within the works, which I build upon in the following sections. Curatorial texts by Diane Nemiroff,[21] and Amanda Cruz,[22] exhibition catalogues documenting Sterbak's various solo exhibitions, and critical texts by curators Jennifer McLerran, Nancy Spector, and Clement Page on Sterbak's practice have proved crucial to my research by providing the textual and visual documentation, including early critical analyses of Sterbak's practice.[23]

To expand upon the art historical context, and the particularities around *Remote Control II*, I incorporate design histories and scholarship to examine the wearable sculpture's key reference point—the cage crinoline—as well as turning to literature that explores the relationship between clothing and both physical and social bodies, and examines gender's implicit and important role in conjunction with design. Scholars including Carole Hunt, Alexandra Warwick, Dani Cavallaro, Louise Wallenberg, and Joanne Entwistle examine the intertwined and layered relationships between the body, clothing, subjectivity, and greater social and cultural contexts, respectively engaging with affect theory, queer theory, psychoanalysis, and phenomenology, to

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[21] Jana Sterbak and Diana Nemiroff, *States of Being: Corps À Corps* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1991), 1-96.
[22] Jana Sterbak and Amanda Cruz, *Jana Sterbak: Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago (October 10, 1998, Through January 3, 1999)*, ed. Amanda Cruz (Chicago: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1998), 1-68.
[23] Key works include: Jennifer McLerran, "Disciplined Subjects and Docile Bodies in the Work of Contemporary Artist Jana Sterbak," *Feminist Studies* 24, no. 3 (1998): 535-352, Clement Page, "Jana Sterbak: 'I Want You To Feel The Way I Do,'" *Third Text*, Vol 10 (1996): 59-68, and Nancy Spector, "Flesh and Bones," *Artforum* 30, no. 7 (March 1992): N.P., https://www.artforum.com/features/flesh-and-bones-jana-sterback-203615.

explore these interconnections.[24] Bradley Quinn's scholarship provides a deep and rigorous consideration into fashion's impact, particularly in conjunction with the built environment and spatial discourses,[25] which contributes to this thesis' conceptualization around the physical and social implications in *Remote Control II*, and the cage crinoline as reference for the sculpture. Additionally, to fully examine the power that garments can hold—given this is a crucial element in *Remote Control II*'s intention, as well as in this thesis—I turn to scholarship by Hunt, Megan Corbin, and Daniela Johannes, which examines how affect, memory, and power materialize within clothing, in both a physical and conceptual sense.[26]

Gender is another crucial element within *Remote Control II*. The sculpture has a heavily gendered reference point and asks for gender to be considered through utilizing a silhouette traditionally linked with femininity, only to be emphasized by the sculpture being modelled exclusively by women. This requests that gender's role be actively analyzed and contextualized, while also suggesting this might be a particular area for expansion and subversion. Clothing is additionally particularly intertwined with gender,[27] and "constantly shifts the boundary between the genders,"[28] as Entwistle argues in her text, "Fashion and the Fleshy Body: Dress as Embodied Practice" (2000), which has proved to be a valuable resource in this thesis. *Remote Control II* highlights gender's intrinsic role in clothing, and this shifting boundary that Entwistle refers to is central to my exploration of the value of returning to *Remote Control II* at the current moment.

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[24] Key texts include: Dani Cavallaro and Alexandra Warwick, *Fashioning the Frame: Boundaries, Dress, and the Body* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 1998), 1-70, Joanne Entwistle, "Fashion and the Fleshy Body: Dress as Embodied Practice," *Fashion Theory* 4, no. 3 (2000): 323-347, Carole Hunt, "Worn Clothes and Textiles as Archives of Memory," *Critical Studies in Fashion & Beauty* 5, no. 2 (2014): 207-232, and Louise Wallenberg, "Fashion and Feminism," in *The Routledge History of Fashion and Dress, 1800 to the Present*, eds. Veronique Pouillard and Vincent Dubé-Senécal (London: Routledge, 2023), 185-206.
[25] Bradley Quinn, *The Fashion of Architecture* (New York and Oxford: Berg, 2003), 1-254.
[26] This scholarship includes: Hunt, "Worn Clothes and Textiles," 2014; and Megan Corbin and Daniela Johannes, "Activating Affect Aura Through Art," *Angelaki* 27, no. 2 (2022): 44-56.
[27] Elizabeth Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity* (London: Virago, 1985), 117.
[28] Joanne Entwistle, "Fashion and the Fleshy Body," 329.

To negotiate the roles that gender plays within *Remote Control II,* I additionally pull from scholarship that employs queer theory, intersecting with feminist art and design histories. Art historians Julia Skelly, Erin Silver, and Amelia Jones take intersectional approaches to contemporary feminist art history, highlighting the intersections between this field and queer, trans, and race studies.[29] Scholars Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Sara Ahmed, and John Potvin's scholarship on queer theory, queer phenomenology, gendered design, and queering through appropriation have been particularly valuable for my arguing that Sterbak's sculpture is subversive and in examining the potential the sculpture has in our contemporary context to complicate traditional male/female binaries.

This is partially where my thesis provides new scholarship in reference to Sterbak's *Remote Control II*. Using past scholarship that underlines the ways in which the wearable sculpture references cage crinoline and suggests conversations around gender and bodily autonomy as a departure point to build upon, my approach to this artwork establishes how the sculpture is specifically subversive in reappropriating crinoline. By connecting *Remote Control II* to design scholarship that highlights the physical, affective, and social capacity that clothing can hold, I locate the wearable sculpture within a broader cultural context and underline how the sculpture can further facilitate (symbolic and physical) autonomy. Bringing in queer theory as an additional lens through which to attend to *Remote Control II* provides new viewpoints to analyzing and interpreting the sculpture. Approaching *Remote Control II* with these methodologies supports my resituating the sculpture in our contemporary context, thus

[29] Key texts include Julia Skelly, *Skin Crafts: Affect, Violence and Materiality in Global Contemporary Art* (London, UK, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2022), 1-317; and Erin Silver, and Amelia Jones, *Otherwise: Imagining Queer Feminist Art Histories* (Manchester University Press, 2016), 1-50.

contributing new scholarship in locating *Remote Control II*'s relevance (particularly regarding gender and autonomy, through complicating the male/female binary) today.

Objectives and Methodology

This thesis has three main objectives: to identify how *Remote Control II* is subversive in reappropriating the cage crinoline and thwarting the control the garment enforced on the gendered body physically and culturally; to investigate the impact clothing has within an expanded cultural, political, and social context, both as an object that imposes control and one that can provide transgressive agency; and to build upon contemporary feminist and queer scholarship to underline the impact and value in returning to this wearable sculpture in today's cultural context, 35 years after the artwork first exhibited, by examining how the sculpture's gendered context may be expanded.

My thesis attends to these objectives through my incorporation of design histories that employ feminist and queer methodologies. These methodologies reconsider what *Remote Control II* represents in referencing the cage crinoline and how this history implicates past and present gendered bodies. Using design histories to analyze R*emote Control II*'s reference to cage crinoline emphasizes how white patriarchal powers work as an oppressive and pervasive system; feminist (and queer) methodologies are effective in supporting this analysis.

My intentions within this thesis are in part motivated by what art historians Erin Silver and Amelia Jones describe as, "[the desire] to complicate feminism's tendency to assume we know what we mean when we say 'women;' 'the feminine;' or for that matter 'the male gaze.'"[30] Silver and Jones argue that it is important to expand feminist approaches by incorporating queer

[30] Erin Silver and Amelia Jones, *Otherwise: Imagining Queer Feminist Art Histories* (Manchester University Press, 2016), 40.

theory as the two areas relate and overlap with one another, given they are both ultimately concerned with gender and sexuality,[31] and that these areas have "crucial insights to offer the other."[32] Indeed, this thesis both benefits from, and contributes to, this expansion and the overlapping between these approaches, as Silver and Jones suggest.

By utilizing feminist and queer lenses in reading *Remote Control II*, I tease out these convergences to argue that the wearable sculpture can be interpreted as subversive on many levels, including in expanding past traditional male/female gender binaries. I employ design histories to analyze the gendered codifications within *Remote Control II,* as well as the sculpture's reference to crinoline, and how cage crinoline's form and structure enforced social and physical control upon the gendered body. Past scholarship on Sterbak's practice has examined gender's presence within her works—for as Nemiroff notes, "As a dress, a feminine garment, [*Remote Control II*] is subject to feminist readings, for woman, historically more closely associated than man with the body, has suffered more deeply."[33] By additionally turning to design scholarship and queer theory, I build and expand upon these past feminist readings.[34] The association between women, the body, and feminist perspectives informs approaches in my research, given that the body is a present component within *Remote Control II*, and the gendered body has been a particular point for contention and resistance in feminist art histories, this is an appropriate methodology to use in this context.[35]

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[31] Erin Silver, and Amelia Jones, *Otherwise: Imagining Queer Feminist Art Histories* (Manchester University Press, 2016), 40.
[32] Silver and Jones, *Otherwise,* 23.
[33] Jana Sterbak and Diana Nemiroff, *States of Being: Corps À Corps* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1991), 29-30.
[34] Sterbak has previously expressed that she does not view her own work as feminist, explaining: "It's not about personal politics," in *Canadian Art*'s 1989 Spring Issue. However, her works have been read extensively as feminist given her repeated reference to gender and the body. See: Marni Jackson, "The Body Electric," *Canadian Art* (Spring 1989): 67.
[35] These themes have been underlined in texts including: Rosemary Betterton, *An Intimate Distance: Women, Artists, and the Body*, (London: Routledge, 1996), 130-161, Amelia Jones, *Body Art/Performing the Subject*, (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 1-21, Griselda Pollock, *Generations & Geographies in the Visual Arts:*

I use queer methodologies to read the sculpture "against the grain,"[36] and to situate the concept of appropriation, which is central to my argument that Sterbak reappropriates the cage crinoline. Scholars including John Potvin have argued that appropriation is a critical element in queer and trans approaches.[37] Additionally, Jones suggests that body art, mainly created by women artists, can allow artists to "particularize their bodies/selves in order to expose and challenge the masculinism embedded in the... 'disinterestedness' behind conventional art history and criticism,"[38] thus using appropriation and subversion as an artistic method that offers reclamation. I use feminist and queer methodologies that highlight appropriation as an approach for subversion in order to analyze how *Remote Control II* utilizes this in ways that offer to reinstate agency for the wearer.

In the second half of this thesis, I build upon fashion and cultural studies scholar Joanne Entwistle's scholarship which draws on both structuralism and phenomenology to examine how dress is "a situated bodily practice,"[39] and "both a social and a personal experience."[40] I incorporate this scholarship as a way to analyze the power that clothing can hold. Expanding on the phenomenological approach that Entwistle invokes in her scholarship, I bring in Sara Ahmed's queer phenomenology to further think through the mobility elements within *Remote Control II,* through a lens that privileges orientation and the relationship between body and object. In applying these theories to *Remote Control II*, I explore how thinking through the

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Feminist Readings, (London and New York, Routledge, 1996), 3-24, and Julia Skelly, *Skin Crafts: Affect, Violence and Materiality in Global Contemporary Art*, (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2022), 1-30.

[36] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Tendencies*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), 4.

[37] John Potvin, "Destabilizing the Scenario of Design: Queer/Trans/Gender-Neutral," *A Companion to Contemporary Design since 1945*, ed. Anne Massey (Hoboken, NJ and Oxford, UK, John Wiley & Sons, 2019), 332.

[38] Amelia Jones, "Introduction," *Body Art/Performing the Subject* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 14-15.

[39] Joanne Entwistle, "Fashion and the Fleshy Body: Dress as Embodied Practice," *Fashion Theory* 4, no. 3 (2000): 325.

[40] Entwistle, "Fashion and the Fleshy Body," 325.

wearable sculpture in this way has the potential to facilitate more nuanced attention to different positionalities, and the relationships and implications between the garment and the body.

My thesis centres on aspects that are richly subversive in this wearable sculpture. However, this is not to overlook certain points for expansion, particularly in the intersections between race and gender. Sterbak's *Remote Control II* and her wearable sculptures more generally have only ever been worn by typically slim, white, cisgender women, as far as visual and textual documentation serves (fig. 8). In some ways, this reflects the cultural context at the time: "The most influential feminist initiatives in the US and British art worlds in the 1970s through at least the mid-1990s were clearly dominated by the concerns [for, and by] heterosexually identified, white, middle-class women mostly from urban areas."[41] Given the Western, North American context and the temporal correlation, this translates to *Remote Control II*. Certainly, having models with different and intersectional positionalities would shift what *Remote Control II* can signify or represent, and I broach this to postulate how returning to the sculpture today might offer many different possibilities. *Remote Control II*'s position as a wearable sculpture offers the speculative potential to be revisited, reworn, and brought to life once more—this time, with new, more intersectional reappropriations taking place. However, as art historian Catherine Grant suggests regarding forming feminist futures within art history, it is also valuable to rearticulate and resituate past contexts, as a way to learn and build.[42] Indeed, *Remote Control II* materializes Grant's suggestion, through reference to the past, and prospects for the future.

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[41] Erin Silver and Amelia Jones, *Otherwise: Imagining Queer Feminist Art Histories* (Manchester University Press, 2016), 25-26.
[42] Catherine Grant, *A Time of One's Own: Histories of Feminism in Contemporary Art*, (Duke University Press, 2022), 8.

Furthermore, *Remote Control II* exists upon and ultimately embodies certain dichotomies while never sinking into one nor the other fully. Fluctuating between autonomy and dependency, masculinity and femininity, and garment, object, or machine, the wearable sculpture does not offer easy or singular interpretation, which in turn makes it such an interesting and subversive site to explore. I mean to embrace the blurriness and contradictions that materialize in the artwork and approach it as both a garment and an object at different points. This is to not only attend to the nuances and complexities rich within *Remote Control II* but also to take a theoretical approach that is rooted in queer scholarship—one that is responsive and embracing towards the inevitable "possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, laps and excesses"[43] that emerge.

Outline of Chapters

My arguments begin in my first chapter, where I examine the social, cultural, and affective power that clothing and garments maintain, thus conceptualizing the significance in *Remote Control II*'s reference to cage crinoline and in using an identifiable dress silhouette. I examine how clothing effectively holds histories within silhouettes, styles, and cloth, as well as how clothing—and particularly cage crinoline—enforced societal norms upon bodies. My second chapter focuses on how Sterbak's reimagining, through *Remote Control II*, reappropriates and ultimately subverts crinoline's history and intention. In my third chapter, I additionally situate *Remote Control II* in proximity to two artworks that share similarities with the wearable sculpture to highlight the power and possibilities they can offer through referencing garments. I conclude my thesis by incorporating queer theory and scholarship to examine what the wearable

[43] Erin Silver and Amelia Jones, *Otherwise: Imagining Queer Feminist Art Histories*, (Manchester University Press, 2016), 31.

sculpture might represent today, and how—while it is inundated with gendered elements and implications—these details might be resituated so that the sculpture continues to work as a site that fosters agency and autonomy through not only physical means but also psychological armour. I return to the cultural and personal significance that clothing offers us, as well as integrating queer phenomenological approaches towards bodily orientations, in connection with objects. Building upon my exploration as to clothing's power to both culturally and individually shape and reflect norms and identities, as well as being something that we all come into contact with intimately and constantly, I underline why Sterbak's *Remote Control II* remains relevant to return to in our current moment in conjunction with the continued cultural and political attempts to control bodies. Finally, I connect this back to *Remote Control II*'s historical reference point and the complicated spectrums between oppression and agency that materialize throughout the past and present.

Chapter I: *Re*membering the Frame

Section I: Clothing's Cultural Power

At the sculpture's very core, *Remote Control II* references a garment. Clothing is an intimate component within our daily lives—objects we constantly come into contact with, that touch and cover our bodies, and that we leave traces and prints upon. Clothing is functional—it protects our fleshy bodies from the external world and environment, and can crucially help us define ourselves and others.[44] Scholars including Carole Hunt and Iris Marion Young have identified clothing as the "frontier between the self and the social,"[45] and as items that work in "simultaneously revealing and concealing our identities, [as well as] performing a fundamental role in negotiating the changing relationship between our inner selves and the outside world."[46] Through styles, silhouettes, and literal traces upon materials, clothing also works as an archive for different points in time—both on a personal and individual level and within the broader social and cultural context. Different garment styles and silhouettes are particularly telling regarding gender, materializing gendered roles and ideals at any given time. This is the case with *Remote Control II*.

In the 1987 text, "Setting Free the Frou Frou," authors Barbara Ehrenreich and Jane O'Reilly underline how the trends in popular clothing styles mirrored cultural shifts, particularly for women. The authors trace transferences in fashion and how they reflect changing discourses,

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[44] Bradley Quinn explains clothing's functionality, writing: "In the long history of human existence, clothing first provided the body with wearable shelter." He continues, explaining that: "Garments can be seen as more than mere clothing–they form part of a structure that negotiates the relationship between private spaces and public arenas, both defining our identity and place in society." See: Bradley Quinn, *The Fashion of Architecture* (New York and Oxford: Berg, 2003), 2, 5.

[45] Iris Marion Young, "Women Recovering Our Clothes," *On Fashion*, eds. Shari Bemstock and Suzanne Ferris (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994), 197.

[46] Carole Hunt, "Worn Clothes and Textiles as Archives of Memory," *Critical Studies in Fashion & Beauty* 5, no. 2 (2014): 208.

cultural and political perceptions, and movements. Relevant to *Remote Control II*'s stylistic reference, the authors note how 19th century fashion, with its constricting corsets, long heavy skirts, and cage crinoline fostered immobility, reflecting how domesticity was central to women's perceived place in society at the time.[47] The immobility effectuated through clothing styles gestured that a woman's place was not out in the world, but rather, in the home.[48] When the body's agency is impeded, being out in public and mobility is far less accessible, thus the contained and domestic interior becomes an ideal space to remain within.

Ehrenreich and O'Reilly's scholarship on the visible associations between fashion styles and trends and cultural and political shifts, underlines that this link does not exist solely in one set period but continues to materialize throughout the decades. Following the cultural and political shifts taking place in the United States and the United Kingdom, Ehrenreich and O'Reilly explain that "in the next epochal moment… from the 1890s to 1920s, breasts vanished, [and] skirts and hair were cut off defiantly as women got the vote and learned to smoke."[49] The authors trace the continued shifts—entering into the 60s and 70s, decades in which feminist movements emerged and gained significant traction, "women went further than ever before, flouting fashion itself."[50]

In the 1970s, women's fashion became less monolithic, and less centered around distinctly feminine styles, with jeans and t-shirts becoming equally popular and pushing out the previously privileged haute couture, thus reflecting the new rights and freedoms that feminisms offered.[51] At this point in time, the popular polylithic styles reflected recent diversity in women's

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[47] Barbara Ehrenreich and Jane O'Reilly, "Setting Free The Frou Frou," *Washington Post*, 1987, https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/magazine/1987/03/08/setting-free-the-froufrou/23b0356d-8878-4118-8b44-dd63458d72c1.
[48] Ehrenreich and O'Reilly, "Setting Free The Frou Frou,"1987.
[49] Ehrenreich and O'Reilly, 1987.
[50] Ehrenreich and O'Reilly, 1987.
[51] Ehrenreich and O'Reilly, 1987.

lives and the autonomy from being under one's husband's control, suggesting how clothing both mirrored this gained agency and additionally provided it, through more comfortable garments, and the ability to self-represent through individual preference.[52] Yet, as Bradley Quinn writes, these changes in fashions and women's roles continually shaped women in alignment with patriarchal societal standards, as crinoline did. Quinn writes:

> The traditional woman of fashion has always been 'added to,' padded and enhanced through layers of fabric and camouflaged by motifs. The body consciousness of the 1980s briefly stripped away the bulky opacity of fashion in favour of streamlined silhouettes, then quickly introduced shoulder pads and Wonderbras before flirting with corsetry and bustiers in the 1990s.[53]

Tracing these stylistic shifts highlights how cultural, political, and societal changes both influenced and were archived in clothing through aesthetic and formal adaptations.

However, clothing's capacity to memorialize and materialize cultural ongoings throughout history is not only through silhouettes and styles. Material culture scholarship has examined the ways in which objects—and particularly clothing—can hold both personal and collective memory, through physical traces such as smells and textures, as well as the "visual and emotional affectivity"[54] left upon objects. Carole Hunt, art history and visual culture scholar, suggests that: "The strains, stresses, stains and smells we impress upon [textiles and cloth],"[55] can turn these objects into an archive.[56]

Physical traces from bodies, places, and moments in time can become preserved in these materials—so the histories held within garments are not solely maintained, nor translated, through silhouette and style, but equally through imprints and both visible and invisible

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[52] Barbara Ehrenreich and Jane O'Reilly, "Setting Free The Frou Frou," *Washington Post*, 1987, https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/magazine/1987/03/08/setting-free-the-froufrou/23b0356d-8878-4118-8b44-dd63458d72c1.
[53] Bradley Quinn, *The Fashion of Architecture,* (New York and Oxford: Berg, 2003), 230.
[54] Rosemary Betterton, *An Intimate Distance: Women, Artists, and the Body* (London: Routledge, 1996), 217.
[55] Carole Hunt, "Worn Clothes and Textiles as Archives of Memory," *Critical Studies in Fashion & Beauty* 5, no. 2 (2014): 215.
[56] Hunt, "Worn Clothes," 215.

presences and traces. While textile and cloth are not the primary materials used to craft *Remote Control II*, the allusion to cloth through the dress silhouette connects it to this context. As Hunt explains, "[T]here are artists whose work might be understood as framing their interest in textiles as 'not textile' and 'not sewing,'"[57] within the "'expanded field' for textiles,"[58] which I suggest appropriately encapsulates *Remote Control II*'s slippery categorization, in that it accounts for the non-textile elements but holds shared characteristics with traditional textiles. The cage, as adjacent to textiles (through suggesting the absent cloth coverings) and the inherent reference to clothing (which is almost always made from textiles) positions *Remote Control II* in this expanded field for textiles. Underlining the physical and affective memory—and ultimate power—that garments and textiles can have, sets a basis for *Remote Control II*'s material and symbolic gravity, as I continue to argue throughout this thesis.

Concerning clothing's particular magnitude, scholars Megan Corbin and Daniela Johannes write, "Clothing as a witness… functions as a threshold, limiting our access, but bringing the past to our attention, activating its affective capacity and, in provoking us, exercising a memorial impact on the present."[59] Relevant to *Remote Control II*, the wearable sculpture works as material memory; remembering—and ultimately reimagining—how social control was enforced upon gendered bodies, through the cage crinoline.

Section II: *Remote Control II*'s Reference Point

Crinoline, as a material object and as a garment, enforced gender roles and ideals upon women (within all social classes),[60] by dominating their bodies and, by extension, their place in Western

[57] Carole Hunt, "Worn Clothes and Textiles as Archives of Memory," *Critical Studies in Fashion & Beauty* 5, no. 2 (2014): 209.
[58] Hunt, "Worn Clothes," 209.
[59] Megan Corbin and Daniela Johannes, "Activating Affect Aura Through Art," *Angelaki* 27, no.2 (2022): 51.
[60] "Understanding Underwear: The Victorian Crinoline," European Fashion Heritage Association, February 14, 2020,

society. In 1856 in Paris, the cage crinoline was patented by R.C. Milliet, and swiftly found popularity across Europe, followed by North America.[61] The dress structure was built from thin, concentric steel bands that were layered concurrently, crafting a frame similar to that of a birdcage.[62] The steel replaced the previous material norm, in which whalebone, horsehair, or cane were attached to petticoats to create this bulbous fashionable shape, as was used earlier in the 1850s. Crinoline followed the corsets and petticoats that were preferred earlier in the Victorian period.[63] The material shift to steel promised to preserve and maintain the ideal configuration, refusing to bend or give way to heavy petticoats. Rather, the steel's strength and lightness allowed for the extension of the skirts (fig. 9), "enabling [them] to reach their widest measurements in the early 1860s."[64]

This silhouette, while fashionable, was physically demanding—often immobilizing or causing physical pain and injury, even death in some cases, thus overriding women's safety, comfort, and mobility to prioritize fashion norms and idealized bodies.[65] Heavy winds often threatened to destabilize wearers and simple mobility such as walking or getting into a carriage was complicated by the style, as demonstrated in visual documentation from the time (fig. 10).[66] Passersby, or those near the individual who wore the cage crinoline, risked bruising their shins or receiving other ailments from the unforgiving frame.[67] The immobility and the size created by

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https://fashionheritage.eu/understanding-underwear-the-crinoline/#:~:text=Originally%20the%20crinoline%2C%20a%20stiff,illusion%20of%20a%20tiny%20waist.

[61] "Understanding Underwear: The Victorian Crinoline," European Fashion Heritage Association, February 14, 2020, https://fashionheritage.eu/understanding-underwear-the-crinoline/#:~:text=Originally%20the%20crinoline%2C%20a%20stiff,illusion%20of%20a%20tiny%20waist.

[62] Otto Charles Thieme, "The Art of Dress in the Victorian and Edwardian Eras," *The Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts* 10 (1988): 16.

[63] "Corsets, Crinolines and Bustles: Fashionable Victorian Underwear," The Victoria & Albert Museum, accessed May 20, 2024, https://www.vam.ac.uk/articles/corsets-crinolines-and-bustles-fashionable-victorian-underwear.

[64] Thieme, "The Art of Dress in the Victorian and Edwardian Eras," 16.

[65] "Understanding Underwear: The Victorian Crinoline," February 14, 2020.

[66] Thieme, "The Art of Dress," 16.

[67] Thieme, 16.

the skirt also proved dangerous, even deadly at times, as wearers could get stuck in machinery and carriage wheels, and frequently caught on fire as the garments were both large and highly flammable, reportedly causing the deaths of thousands of female wearers.[68] Thus, fashionable clothing styles aiming to present the female body in the idealized form consistently threatened the physical safety and lives of their female wearers.[69]

Crinoline additionally signifies the social skin of this particular time, memorializing the cultural, fashionable, and societal norms, as well as feminine beauty ideals.[70] The shape created an idealized silhouette that suggested the preferred anatomy for childbearing,[71] through shaping illusionary wide hips.[72] In tandem, the size and structure encumbered the wearer, thus enforcing social and cultural control upon the feminine body in maintaining the gendered roles and divisions. The cage crinoline's structure materializes and memorializes the central requirements placed upon women, such as equivocating idealized femininity with domesticity, thus influencing the spatial and social environments at the time.[73] As a garment, crinoline exemplifies how femininity is created and imposed through bodily and sartorial techniques.[74]

To further this, fashion and clothing have long been linked with femininity, in part due to garments working as "disciplinary forces that produce norms to which women constrain

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[68] Helene E. Roberts, "The Exquisite Slave: The Role of Clothes in the Making of the Victorian Woman," *Signs* 2, no. 3 (1977): 557.
[69] Louise Wallenberg, "Fashion and Feminism," *The Routledge History of Fashion and Dress, 1800 to the Present*, eds. Veronique Pouillard and Vincent Dubé-Senécal (London: Routledge, 2023), 187.
[70] Terence Turner, "The Social Skin," *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, 2:2 (2012): 503.
[71] Jennifer McLerran, "Disciplined Subjects and Docile Bodies in the Work of Contemporary Artist Jana Sterbak," *Feminist Studies* 24, no. 3 (1998): 545.
[72] McLerran, "Disciplined Subjects," 545.
[73] Quinn explains that garments–-crinoline specifically–-both helped shape and reflected the built and social environment, writing that architecture in the "1840s was dominated by blunted arches and rounded window frames, the same flattened curves conspicuous in the dress lines [at the time]." Bradley Quinn, *The Fashion of Architecture* (New York and Oxford: Berg, 2003), 2.
[74] Joanne Entwistle, "Fashion and the Fleshy Body: Dress as Embodied Practice," *Fashion Theory* 4, no. 3 (2000): 328.

themselves to conform,"[75] an element explicitly highlighted in *Remote Control II.* Fashion can work as a patriarchal and socially constructed "[mechanism] that serve[s] to keep women powerless and objectified in their ascribed role as the feminine other to the masculine self."[76] Cage crinoline works as this very mechanism, while *Remote Control II* exaggerates and illuminates the ways in which crinoline exemplifies this through physical and social control.

In *Remote Control II*, Sterbak highlights the cultural and stylistic norms from the period in which crinoline was popular, by replicating the steel structure and simultaneously remembering the systemic structures and values through the elements that further cage the wearer and remove agency and mobility. In Sterbak's reinterpretation, the wheels at the sculpture's base and the attached underwear that holds the body in place while preventing toes from being able to touch the ground, ultimately leaves the wearer powerless towards their corporeal movement—unless they possess the connected remote. Sterbak's rendering removes corporeal and physical agency to emphasize the crinoline's particular history, mimicking and exaggerating how the original dress immobilized the body. This worn sculpture also presents an additional visual suggestion—the attached underwear and lifted hem position the wearer as though they are in a baby walker apparatus (fig. 11).[77] Though offering protection and supported mobility through this analogy, this perceivable connection ultimately infantilizes the wearer, which I argue finds a direct link to domesticity and motherhood as assumed attributes for "proper" femininity, as well as suggesting the tensions between age(ing) and the female body.[78] I

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[75] Jennifer McLerran, "Disciplined Subjects and Docile Bodies in the Work of Contemporary Artist Jana Sterbak," *Feminist Studies* 24, no. 3 (1998): 538.
[76] Louise Wallenberg, "Fashion and Feminism," in *The Routledge History of Fashion and Dress, 1800 to the Present*, eds. Veronique Pouillard and Vincent Dubé-Senécal, (London: Routledge, 2023), 185.
[77] I would like to thank and acknowledge Dr. Joana Joachim for contributing her thoughts and perspectives on this element within *Remote Control II*, which occurred in person on March 20, 2024.
[78] Rosemary Betterton writes about the intersections between the female body, aging, fetishism, and disgust, utilizing abjection as a theoretical framework. Betterton references historical and religious evidence that privileges the "pure, sealed [virgin body]" and the Virgin Mary, with her "maternity and eternal life," thus connecting idealized

suggest that the infantilization insinuated through this reference alludes to how youth is revered for women in traditional and patriarchal contexts, in conjunction with the historical demands for women's "proper femininity" (such as docility, innocence, and motherhood)—which the crinoline's presence intended to enforce.[79]

In his 1996 text on Sterbak's practice, Clement Page reflects on the performance element in *Remote Control II*, writing: "The dialectic between autonomy and dependency thus played out can be related to… the child, [who] has just acquired motor coordination. Walking with its arms held on either side by each parent, the child simultaneously experiences… freedom and restraint."[80] Considering, in the performances, the wearer was always female and noting the gendered connotations written into the sculpture as a whole, this infantilization that is hinted at by *Remote Control II* further suggests ways in which cultural control is imposed upon the (feminine) body through strengthening the allusion to traditional feminine ideals (such as motherhood and childbearing), further removing agency and power from the wearer.

As such, *Remote Control II* remembers the cage crinoline's history and ultimate power over the feminine body, through replicating and literalizing the gendered implications, and through the formal elements that promised to contain and enforce social control upon the wearer. With this, the sculpture could be interpreted as reinforcing these elements by recrafting the crinoline and incorporating technological elements that have the potential to enforce further dependency and powerlessness upon the wearer. Yet, the sculpture does not solely exist as a simple recreation—it offers reinterpretations and possibilities that counter the crinoline's original purpose. I argue that we can read *Remote Control II* as reappropriating crinoline, calling attention

femininity with both youth and sexuality. Rosemary Betterton, *An Intimate Distance: Women, Artists, and the Body* (London: Routledge, 1996), 149.

[79] Rosemary Betterton, *An Intimate Distance,* 149.

[80] Clement Page, "Jana Sterbak: 'I Want You To Feel The Way I Do,'" *Third Text* 10 (1996): 65.

not only to this sartorial style's history and the implications within the garment but also to how the formal aspects of the cage frame can be revised, to subversively offer protection and agency.

Chapter II: *Re*fashioning the Frame

As examined in the previous section, traditional cage crinoline helped impose gender norms and roles upon the feminine body, by modifying and carving out the wearer's figure, and deterring mobility—thus, freedom—through the excessive form. However, garments hold the innate possibility to both oppress and offer autonomy. As such, I suggest *Remote Control II* moves towards liberation through reappropriation. As scholars Alexandra Warwick and Dani Cavallaro write: "If clothing represses by constructing the body and organizing desire, it also holds enabling potentialities centered on pleasure and affectivity in [creating] meanings and interpretations."[81]

In this chapter, I argue that *Remote Control II* effectively subverts the crinoline's historical dominance through the sculpture's materiality and the added technological elements. The subversion is particularly displayed through the sculpture being worn and performed, in the ways the sculpture grapples with autonomy and dependency, as well as through the material choices that suggest physical armour, and in the ways in which the sculpture's materiality subversively plays with traditional gender binaries and coding.

Section I: *Remote Control II*'s Reappropriation

Sterbak's interventions into crinoline's appropriation begin simply in how her sculpture is constructed—void from the textile layers and ornamentation that would have typically covered the cage crinoline, *Remote Control II*'s form is solely the minimal frame underlay. Sterbak highlights the crinoline structure by stripping the fabric overlays from the frame and emphasizing the hidden, less aesthetically pleasing, yet traditionally powerful form. The work's

[81] Dani Cavallaro and Alexandra Warwick, *Fashioning the Frame: Boundaries, Dress, and the Body* (Oxford, UK and New York: Berg, 1998), xxi.

title and the technological controls additionally underscore the power dynamics within the traditional cage crinoline: it makes visible the invisible control that the structure held. Going deeper than the layered textiles, ruffles, and petticoats that would have typically hidden the structure, the sculpture brings the crinoline to the forefront to spotlight the device responsible for carving the body and imposing control. Focusing solely on the crinoline, Sterbak additionally imbues corporeality into the garment, showing the structure's intimate and physical connection to the wearer's body.

By foregrounding the crinoline, Sterbak subverts the structure's conventional nature and intent. The traditionally concealed garment, made to contain, preserve, and shape the body, is reimagined into a form that is not only highlighted, but manipulated to offer expansive realities. *Remote Control II*'s reimagining can also be interpreted as offering a protective external covering, particularly through the sculpture's materiality. The sculpture is crafted primarily from aluminum, creating a hard exterior—while visually the body is still accessible (more than through the crinoline even, as *Remote Control II* refuses textile coverings and the gaps through the concentric hoops provide more direct visual contact with the body wearing the sculpture), the aluminum materiality and extended circumference maintain that physical access to the body is not readily available, thus 'shielding' in a physical sense. The concentric hoops, lacking the fabric that should adorn them, suggest a skeletal structure—an exoskeleton, in this case, that would protect the encapsulated body. While the form can imprison and contain the body, it also offers the potential to work as a protective barrier, thus, subversion materializes through transposing the crinoline's historical oppressiveness, into something that counteracts the structure's intention and might instead offer safety and preservation. The aluminum and its

metallic tone suggest an armour—an added strong, physical layer between the body and the world.[82]

In contrast to how the traditional cage crinoline imposed cultural and political expectations upon women's bodies, I read this material 'shield' as maintaining an exoskeletal boundary, which suggests the opportunity for freedom from these social expectations, and by extension, freedom from unbound access to the feminine body. As the traditional form attempts to cinch the feminine body into the idealized figure, sexualization and objectification are embedded and interwoven into the general crinoline structure.[83] However, the impenetrable materiality found in *Remote Control II*'s aluminum form—although not providing full opacity for the wearer and their body—fashions a hardened boundary. Additionally, this protective shell offers, more symbolically, a frontier between the self and the social, as Young suggests clothing aptly provides.[84] Sterbak's material choice positions *Remote Control II* to offer protection from the external world, therefore crafting subversion toward the physical, psychological, and cultural control the cage crinoline imposed.

Additionally, the frontier that Young suggests is further amplified through the sculpture's expanded size, which permits this more literal separation between body and world. Ultimately, the sculpture's expanded circumference prevents easy access to the wearer's body. The wearer becomes less accessible due to the unforgiving materiality and distended margins, which creates distance. I suggest that this prevented access can return the bodily agency to the wearer, as it becomes difficult for imposed exterior forces, therefore subverting the cage crinoline's implicit

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[82] Quinn writes about clothing's functionality in offering this layer. He writes: "A fabric surface constructs a second elastic skin to human scale that masks and conceals the body's frame. Body-conscious dresses are the equivalent of architecture intended to blur the boundaries between structure and landscape." See: Bradley Quinn, *The Fashion of Architecture,* (New York and Oxford: Berg, 2003), 234.

[83] Helene E. Roberts, "The Exquisite Slave: The Role of Clothes in the Making of the Victorian Woman." *Signs* 2, no. 3 (1977): 556.

[84] Iris Marion Young, "Women Recovering Our Clothes," in *On Fashion*, eds. Shari Bemstock and Suzanne Ferris, (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994), 197.

intent to command the feminine body. This agency effectively destabilizes the objectification that crinoline imposed, by presenting the body as idealized and primed for childbearing. This develops through the added remote control technology and motorized capacity which offers physical freedom through mobility.

Additionally, access to the body through visibility is played with through *Remote Control II*'s form and materiality: the cage crinoline made the wearer hypervisible as the body became so large that it would be impossible to miss visually, let alone physically. This reflects cultural studies scholar Balbir Singh's suggestion that, "Clothes [can attract] or [shield] another's gaze from us. Clothes… have the ability to empower us, to make us feel confident as we navigate different spaces in our daily lives."[85] *Remote Control II'*s physicality materializes this dichotomy between attracting and shielding, and Singh's argument identifies how this can craft autonomy in garments, and wearable objects, by extension.

Section II: Complication Through Materiality

In broadening the expanse upon which *Remote Control II* reappropriates the crinoline's power over the feminine body, I suggest that the materiality complicates the gendered elements within the sculpture and those supposed by crinoline's history. Rather than enforcing gender binaries, I suggest acknowledging the traditional elements that are indexed through gender and examining the ways that Sterbak complicates them reveals not only how this subversively reappropriates the cage crinoline by reimagining and dislodging the inherent femininity embedded in the structure, but can additionally work as an effective departure point to broaden the ways the wearable sculpture is read and engaged with, as I'll build upon in my next chapter.

[85] Balbir Singh, "Fashion as Armor," *The Fashion and Race Database* (2021): 1, https://fashionandrace.org/database/fashion-as-armor.

Lacking adornment, *Remote Control II*'s physicality is hard, solid, cold, and minimalist. Contrasting the traditional crinoline, which would be complemented with lavish layered textiles, *Remote Control II* eschews any embellishment—a formal choice that I suggest we can read as subversion. The sculpture's materiality and formal characteristics are rich in symbolic significance, particularly when considering the gender codes implicit in the material details, as informed by design histories.[86] *Remote Control II*'s physical hardness offers an entry point in considering how the sculpture plays with and complicates gendered design. Given the traditional gendering ingrained in the cage crinoline, this material detail suggests subversion.

In opposition to hardness, softness is culturally associated with femininity—both physically, and more symbolically or affectively. Sara Ahmed has examined how softness is a gendered attribute, suggesting that "softness is narrated as a proneness to injury,"[87] and softness is often viewed as connoting weakness and passivity, as well as an emotionality—all that are traditionally gendered feminine.[88] Sterbak's material choices oppose this softness, thus complicating the gendered allusion to femininity that is concurrently prevalent through the reference to cage crinoline as a dress and an explicitly feminine garment. *Remote Control II*'s reappropriation not only challenges the crinoline's implicit intention through offering agency but further complicates the idealized femininity that the sartorial style attempted to create—through privileging material and formal design elements more traditionally aligned with masculinity.

The key formal components to the work's concept are the wheels at the crinoline's base and remote control technology that moves the garment and the wearer. This also aligns with traditional notions of masculinity. Scholarship in design studies has underlined the connections

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[86] Juliet Kinchin, "Interiors: nineteenth-century essays on the 'masculine' and the 'feminine' room," *The Gendered Object*, ed. Pat Kirkham, (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1996), 18.
[87] Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, (UK, Routledge, 2015), 2-3.
[88] Helene E. Roberts, "The Exquisite Slave: The Role of Clothes in the Making of the Victorian Woman." *Signs* 2, no. 3 (1977): 555-556.

between technology and masculinity with "hi-fi hardware"[89] and gadgets working as "a convenient consumer product,"[90] particularly for men, from the 1960s onwards. Functionality goes hand in hand with technology and has equally been considered masculine.[91] This reflects the ways in which men, and masculinity, have traditionally been associated with mind and spirit, "interiority, agency, intellect and rich inner lives,"[92] as opposed to women, who have been perceived as kindred to the body, and nature.[93]

As such, reading these elements as gendered, based on existing design scholarship, highlights how traditional codes are played with and complicated through Sterbak's reimagining. Addressing these elements and identifying them as more masculine or more feminine is again not to reinforce the gender binary, but rather to critically acknowledge the "potentialities, dissonances and resonances "[94] as sites for possible resistance, agency, and expansion, thus attending to the tensions that *Remote Control II* presents.

Section III: Movement and Mobility Through *Remote Control II*

As well as suggesting gender codifications, the technological elements in *Remote Control II* provide additional areas for subversion. I argue that these elements allow the wearable sculpture to become a vessel for corporeal agency, particularly in how the structure moves the body, by making the body mechanical and able to move in alternative and advanced ways. Focusing particularly on the remote control element that is so central to this wearable sculpture, I analyze

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[89] Bill Osgerby, "The Bachelor Pad as Cultural Icon: Masculinity, Consumption and Interior Design in American Men's Magazines, 1930-65," *Journal of Design History* 18, no. 1 (2005): 108.
[90] Osgerby, "The Bachelor Pad," 109.
[91] Quinn explains that modernist fashions were concerned with functionality for menswear, to disassociate from the "excesses of women's fashion." See: Bradley Quinn, *The Fashion of Architecture,* (New York and Oxford: Berg, 2003), 3.
[92] Julia Skelly, *Skin Crafts: Affect, Violence and Materiality in Global Contemporary Art* (London and New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2022), 17.
[93] Skelly, *Skin Crafts*, 17.
[94] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Tendencies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), 6.

how it effectively subverts cage crinoline's historic immobilization, specifically activated through the performances that took place.

Remote Control II was embodied and performed in various exhibitions across North America, including at the MoMA in New York in 1993, and at the Donald Young Gallery in Chicago, in 1990.[95] In these performances, a ballerina wore *Remote Control II* and was helped into the wearable sculpture by two male tuxedoed attendants.[96] This mirrors the traditional cage crinoline, with archival documentation showing it was a communal activity to get dressed in the garment. The fact that the silhouette was so difficult to clothe oneself in that it required multiple other hands to help underlines how the garment removed agency from the wearer (fig. 12), emphasizing just how containing and implicating it was to the body, but also how the individual wearing it must be dependent on others. Additionally, the communal element in wearing crinoline ultimately highlights certain privileges and additional labour required to maintain these aesthetic standards—not just for the wearer, but for invisible hands and supports that aided in the dressing process. In *Remote Control II,* the need for supplemental help to wear the sculpture also highlights the dependency on others that the artwork can invoke.

This dependency, along with the possibility for agency, was depicted through the performers showing the different ways the wearable sculpture could become animated. With the model's feet inches above the ground, the participants demonstrated how the wearer could become helpless, body immobilized, and in complete submission to whoever holds the controls. Then, the controls were passed to the wearer, and erratic, ecstatic, ultimate freedom would be performed. Page writes about the performance and how this switch in power was presented. The

[95] The varied documentation that I consulted for this thesis did not identify how many times the sculpture was performed nor the last time it was performed.
[96] Jennifer McLerran, "Disciplined Subjects and Docile Bodies in the Work of Contemporary Artist Jana Sterbak," *Feminist Studies* 24, no. 3 (1998): 541.

author explains that first the attendants would take the remote control, demonstrating how they could command the wearer through her mobility. Then the remote would be passed to the model wearing the sculpture. Page writes, "Now in control, the model rushed at the audience in assertive movements, spinning the crowd around the space until she again relinquished control."[97] Each different presentation prompts interpretations as to where the sculpture falls on the spectrum between autonomy and dependency while underscoring the precarity between the two.

As the performances indicate, the remote control element can further allocate agency to the wearer when the controls are placed in the wearer's hand. This digitized ability to move opens up a whole new way to take up and exist within space and once again—work as protection for the wearer's body, by promising technological advances and the ability to sprint away from or toward whatever the wearer pleases. The remote control element alters the way the wearer navigates their environment, and when in the wearer's hands, is subversive in heightening the ability for mobile freedom—while still suggesting the instability in this power.

Given that cage crinoline infamously immobilized wearers, making it particularly difficult for them to walk around, exist outside the domestic realm, and use transportation and industrial and technological advances in mobility, *Remote Control II*'s wheels and modified mobility additions reference this history, yet promise to give these abilities back to the wearer while offering possibilities for further freedom and autonomy through movement. Additionally, when the wearer maintains the remote control, they can move in new ways, as the sculpture blends with their body in an automatronic fashion,[98] adding another layer to the ways in which *Remote Control II* offers new autonomy to the wearer. The way that *Remote Control II* binds to

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[97] Clement Page, "Jana Sterbak: 'I Want You To Feel The Way I Do,'" *Third Text*, Vol 10 (1996): 65.
[98] Nancy Spector, "Flesh and Bones," *Artforum* 30, no. 7 (March 1992): N.P., https://www.artforum.com/features/flesh-and-bones-jana-sterback-203615.

the wearer ultimately modifies the body; it is no longer simply a garment but becomes connected to the corporeality in a profound sense (fig. 13). The wearable sculpture fuses to the body in contrast to traditional clothing that is simply a separated layer that coats the anatomy. The body is no longer solely physically and culturally vulnerable flesh but now has additional connected manufactured and technological defenses, thus highlighting how clothing can work as protection, provide agency, and support in self-fashioning.

To build upon this, in my next section I turn to examine, in more depth, the psychological protections we might read into *Remote Control II*, in partnership with theorizing clothing's power and impact in aiding our abilities to self-fashion ourselves and find ourselves within objects. To think through this fully, I also re-situate the wearable sculpture in our current moment in the 21st century, to conceptualize the subversive offerings that *Remote Control II* might bring to discourse around gendered bodies, gender presentation, and destabilizing the gender dichotomy. I suggest it is pertinent to situate *Remote Control II* in an expanded context, particularly due to the singular positionality that historically embodied the wearable sculpture, and as a way to more broadly conceptualize the agency and resistance that can be fostered through *Remote Control II*, specifically and more symbolically through clothing.

Chapter III: *Re*visiting the Frame

Section I: Situating *Remote Control II*: Two Case Studies

In conceptualizing the possibilities through subversion that I suggest *Remote Control II* can offer, especially in our current contemporary moment, I believe it valuable to situate the wearable sculpture in an expanded context, in discourse with artworks that overlap in concept and subject matter. Sterbak's *Remote Control II* is certainly not the first work to reference crinoline or to create wearable sculptures that are embodied and performed, nor the first to incorporate technological elements, making dress/machine hybrids. To situate *Remote Control II* in the zeitgeist in which similar styles, methods, and intentions are utilized through referencing dresses, I here include two brief case studies: Atsuko Tanaka's *Denki Fuku (Electric Dress)* (1956), and Kara Walker's *Insurrection! (Our Tools Were Rudimentary, Yet We Pressed On)* (2000). While many other artworks use similar reference points or materials and forms, both Tanaka and Walker's works complement *Remote Control II* in situating the crinoline and the machine/dress fusion, and in presenting the capability for dress to be subversively manipulated.

In 1956, Japanese artist Atsuko Tanaka (1932–2005) presented her *Denki Fuku (Electric Dress)* (fig. 14) at the Second Gutai Art Exhibition in Tokyo, Japan.[99] The wearable sculpture was made from electric light bulbs, handpainted with synthetic resin enamel, and encapsulated the wearer so that only their face and hands were visible (fig. 15).[100] *Electric Dress* shares similarities with *Remote Control II* in referencing a garment, specifically the traditionally feminine dress, as well as through the technological elements that blur between dress and

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[99] Namiko Kunimoto, *The Stakes of Exposure: Anxious Bodies in Post-War Japanese Art* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 113.

[100] The dress was worn and performed: "... [A]s a performance piece worn by the artist, as a piece worn by male performers, as an unworn installation, as a reconstruction, and, as it is most widely seen, as a photographic record." Kunimoto, *The Stakes of Exposure,* 117.

machine, and juxtaposing the "cyborg spectacle and the vulnerable female body,"[101] as art historian Namiko Kunimoto suggests. *Electric Dress* was worn and performed by Tanaka herself, in contrast to *Remote Control II* where there is no obvious evidence that Sterbak herself ever wore or performed the sculpture. Documentation indicates that in different performances, *Electric Dress* was also worn by men,[102] therefore complicating an easy gendered reading, and welcoming additional possible interpretations.

As well as sharing elements such as technological additions and wearability in their sculptures, Tanaka's *Electric Dress*—like *Remote Control II*—borders and flunctuates between offering autonomy, or enforcing oppression. Kunimoto writes that, "Rather than seeking out fashionability, Tanaka instead exposed how [fashion] had become both cage and armour for the female form,"[103] referencing cultural changes in Japan at the time the work was created. The sculpture was physically demanding, weighing 110 pounds and hindering mobility, but also offered shielding, as it prevented access to the wearer, visually and physically—the sculpture both "illuminated and concealed the subject."[104]

Electric Dress has been read as reflecting the postwar climate in Japan, and the "unprecedented industrial developments,"[105] the changes to how women's bodies were commercialized in the media as well as transportation developments that were occurring in Osaka[106] where Tanaka resided. Like *Remote Control II, Electric Dress* highlights the ways

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[101] Namiko Kunimoto, "Tanaka Atsuko's *Electric Dress* and the Circuits of Subjectivity," *The Art Bulletin* 95, no. 3 (September 2013): 465.
[102] Kunimoto, "Tanaka Atsuko's *Electric Dress,"* 465.
[103] Kunimoto, 473.
[104] Kunimoto, 468.
[105] Kunimoto, 465.
[106] Tanaka describes her inspiration for this dress, expressing: "For a long time I tried to come up with an interesting idea…I was seated on a bench at the Osaka station, and I saw a billboard featuring a pharmaceutical advertisement, brightly lit by neon lights. This was it! I would make a neon dress!" Tanaka, quoted in Ming Tiampo and Kato Mizuho, *Electrifying Art: Atsuko Tanaka, 1954 - 1968* (New York: Grey Gallery; Vancouver: Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, 2004), 105.

cultural contexts are told through garments and design—materializing the central concerns and changes in postwar Japan—while also suggesting subversions that challenge cultural impact and allow the wearer to represent and self-fashion themselves appropriately.

Remote Control II effectively brings attention to the cage crinoline's power, however (as far as visual documentation indicates) the sculpture was only ever worn by a white model. Visual documentation depicting the cage crinoline being worn in the 19th century primarily shows white women in the structure—although archival sources do indicate that it was not solely white women wearing cage crinoline (fig. 16). With visual evidence acknowledging this truth, the different positionalities who would have worn the garment are somewhat erased in *Remote Control II*'s performances, as is their potential experience in undergoing additional enforced cultural, social, and political control over their bodies.

American multidisciplinary artist Kara Walker's (b. 1969) shadow works remember that cage crinoline was worn by Black women. Walker's detailed panoramic friezes feature black silhouettes imposed on white backgrounds, visualizing American slavery and racist realities around the American Civil War era.[107] A different medium from Sterbak's *Remote Control II*, but a shared silhouette, Walker's works bring into relief the bloated crinoline worn by Black women in contexts that were historically violent and controlling towards Black bodies.

Walker's installation, *Insurrection! (Our Tools Were Rudimentary, Yet We Pressed On)* (2000) was exhibited at the Guggenheim in New York City in 2002 (fig. 17). Using the black cutout silhouettes synonymous with Walker's practice, the installation included colourful projections to her silhouetted friezes for the first time,[108] an added detail that "disallows passive

[107] Selin Thomas, "Kara Walker's Nightmares Are Our Own," *The Paris Review*, 2017, https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2017/10/04/kara-walkers-nightmares.
[108] "Kara Walker: Insurrection! Our Tools Were Rudimentary, Yet We Pressed On," *Guggenheim*, https://www.guggenheim.org/artwork/9367.

voyeurism"[109] and activated the space further through inserting the viewer's physicality into the scene. Viewers' shadows and silhouettes are projected next to Walker's cutouts (fig. 18), thus implicating the viewer—differently, but not dissimilarly to *Remote Control II's* performances that factor in the audience's physical presence.[110]

Walker describes *Insurrection!*'s concept as depicting "a slave revolt in the antebellum South, where the house slaves got after their master with their instruments,"[111] and the artist highlights the body as a crucial thematic to the scene, in part due to this particular work finding inspiration from Thomas Eakins' surgical theatre paintings.[112] The crinoline's bulbous shape is identifiable upon several figures acting in revolt—an element that I suggest alludes to the slippery boundary between agency and oppression that clothing holds within it. Furthermore, Walker's silhouettes again remind us that it was not solely white women wearing the cage crinolines, and command an intersectional approach that recalls the additional enforced control imposed by political and cultural powers upon Black women,[113] whose gender and race led them to be more heavily policed, tying back to crinoline's role in enforcing social control. However, in this tableau, crinoline is worn by figures fighting for freedom in their revolt, adding another dimension that suggests power, and agency—not through the crinoline, per se, but perhaps in proximity to it, thus subverting or reimagining the garment's power in an adjacent way to *Remote Control II*'s imagining.

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[109] "Kara Walker: Insurrection!Our Tools Were Rudimentary, Yet We Pressed On," *Guggenheim*, https://www.guggenheim.org/artwork/9367.
[110] Clement Page, "Jana Sterbak: 'I Want You To Feel The Way I Do,'" *Third Text*, Vol 10 (1996): 65.
[111] "Projecting Fictions: 'Insurrection! Our Tools Were Rudimentary, Yet We Pressed On,'" *Art21,* 2011, https://art21.org/read/kara-walker-projecting-fictions-insurrection-our-tools-were-rudimentary-yet-we-pressed-on.
[112] "Projecting Fictions," 2011.
[113] Skye Marakis, "This Difficult-to-Wear Skirt Helped Break Down Class Barriers," *Racked*, December 7, 2017, https://www.racked.com/2017/12/7/16717206/cage-crinoline-feminism-class.

I bring Tanaka's *Electric Dress* and Walker's *Insurrection! (Our Tools Were Rudimentary, Yet We Pressed On)* into the conversation here to acknowledge that Sterbak is not the first nor only artist to engage with and reference garments in contemporary art, but rather, *Remote Control II* exists in a broader discourse. Situating *Remote Control II* in conversation with these other artists and artworks underlines how clothing is particularly rich as inspiration and form, especially in its ability to memorialize histories and contexts. These three works remember how clothing has reflected and enforced social control, as well as offering potentialities for subversion.

While further analyzing these artworks in this context goes beyond the scope of this thesis, speculating on how the wearable sculpture can be resituated to acknowledge different positionalities—both in gender and race—is where I suggest *Remote Control II*'s ultimate power lies, as it offers further ways to be reappropriated and used in creating agency, and as an effective tool for self-fashioning. To fully grapple with these possibilities, the wearer's complex positionalities and backgrounds need to be considered, which I address further in this chapter. To conceptualize this potential, I explore how our current cultural context connects with *Remote Control II*, particularly through gender, and turn to Sara Ahmed's queer phenomenological scholarship as a way to better attend to the complexities in how "bodies are gendered, sexualized, and raced."[114]

Section II: Fashioning Beyond Functionality

In building upon the potentialities that *Remote Control II* presents, as ways to subvert cage crinoline's context and original intention and offer agency, in this section I incorporate queer scholarship around fashion and phenomenology to further expand how we might approach this

[114] Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 5.

wearable sculpture in the present day. We are in a time in which cultural control is still enforced upon bodies, while simultaneously, gender expression (through clothing) is arguably less constrained by traditional categorizations regarding the male/female binary than it has been in previous eras.[115]

While *Remote Control II*'s crinoline context enforced traditional gender roles and ideals upon the feminine body, Sterbak's wearable sculpture offers subversive agency—directly in response to the gendered social control that crinoline maintained. How might *Remote Control II* remain relevant in this current moment and promise additional potentialities for autonomy and self-expression within this particular context? Negotiating the gendered elements implicit within the artwork, with resituated explorations directed towards the autonomy and mobility that *Remote Control II* can offer, I postulate that we might additionally read the sculpture in conjunction with queer theories and lenses, as a way to further conceptualize the potential autonomy promised by the artwork and to "disrupt the dominant, heterosexist universalism and gender normativity,"[116] thus subverting cage crinoline's historical intention.

As queer scholar Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick expressed in her 1993 text, *Tendencies*, "queer" can mean and refer to many different things and "seems to hinge much more radically and explicitly on a person's undertaking particular, performative acts [in] experimental self-perception and filiation."[117] In this particular context, referring to Sterbak's *Remote Control II*, I use queer in reference to the "possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses"[118] that I suggest exist within *Remote Control II*, which refuse "(or *can't be* made) to

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[115] Megan Wallace, "Capturing Style as Resistance for Non-Binary People," *The Face*, 2023, https://theface.com/style/saskavians-spring-capturing-style-as-resistance-for-non-binary-people.
[116] John Potvin, "Destabilizing the Scenarion of Design: Queer/Trans/Gender-Neutral," in *A Companion to Contemporary Design since 1945*, ed. Anne Massey (Hoboken, NJ and Oxford, UK, John Wiley & Sons, 2019), 328.
[117] Eve Sedgwick, *Tendencies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), 8.
[118] Sedgwick, *Tendencies,* 7.

signify [one's gender or sexuality] monolithically."[119] Because *Remote Control II* has such a gendered reference point and is ultimately subversive towards this through intention, material elements, and form, the monolithic codes in gender are complicated in appropriative ways.

Design and gender scholar John Potvin writes, "Appropriation is a strategy of inversion, and forms a critical aspect of queer and trans approaches; in short, a way of being and becoming that complicates and resists the norm."[120] I've argued throughout this thesis that *Remote Control II* can be interpreted as appropriating cage crinoline, and Potvin re-establishes that this method is intrinsically linked to queer and trans approaches. This connection, I suggest, underlines how Sterbak's wearable sculpture might be thought through in conjunction with queerness. Linking to queer approaches also suggests the potential to destabilize traditional gender binaries and embrace the nuances, dissonances, and points for departure, through engaging with historically gendered forms and subverting them. This in turn further highlights the dichotomies between autonomy and dependency, constraint and freedom, self-expression and oppression that materialize and are performed, in both *Remote Control II*, and through clothing more broadly.

Fashion scholar Louise Wallenberg writes: "Whether fashion is emphasizing or blurring gender differences, gender is fashion's unavoidable reference point."[121] I argue that this is especially true for *Remote Control II*, in the way that it references a silhouette that was not only explicitly crafted for women, but also helped patriarchal powers enforce traditional feminine ideals more socially and culturally. However, as I examined in my previous section, analyzing Sterbak's wearable sculpture in conjunction with design histories highlights the elements in the work that read as traditionally gendered as well as how the sculpture blurs and layers these

[119] Eve Sedgwick, *Tendencies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), 7.
[120] John Potvin, "Destabilizing the Scenarion of Design: Queer/Trans/Gender-Neutral," in *A Companion to Contemporary Design since 1945*, ed. Anne Massey, (Hoboken, NJ and Oxford, UK, John Wiley & Sons, 2019), 332.
[121] Louise Wallenberg, "Fashion and Feminism," in *The Routledge History of Fashion and Dress, 1800 to the Present*, eds. Veronique Pouillard and Vincent Dubé-Senécal, (London: Routledge, 2023), 185.

elements in a subversive way. I suggest the ways in which Sterbak utilizes these visual and material elements to complicate simple and traditional male/female binary separation can be read as queering the cage crinoline. Sociologist and queer theorist David Halperin writes that, "'Queer' does not name some natural kind or refer to some determinate object; it acquires its meaning from its oppositional relation to the norm. Queer is by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant."[122] *Remote Control II* subverts "the normal" by complicating crinoline's intention, as well as complicating the traditionally feminine design elements with choices historically coded as masculine. Additionally, through the significance and power that clothing has for gender expression and crafting identity—which I suggest is manifested through *Remote Control II*'s reappropriation—the wearable sculpture offers expanded possibilities for how gender and sexuality might be navigated through the artwork, both literally and symbolically.

Turning back to the basis I introduced early on in this thesis, I return to clothing's significant role within culture and everyday life, focusing on the safety that garments promise both our physical bodies and our inner selves. Clothing is both crucial and intimate to us in both a very physical sense and more conceptually, attending to both the body and the mind. Clothing's initial and traditional function is to protect the body, creating a physical boundary between the environment and the elements, encompassing the often fragile, vulnerable corporeality. Yet clothing also protects us psychologically, allowing us to define and represent ourselves, materializing our affective interiors into something visible and exterior. Entwistle explains that, "Dress form[s] the key link between individual identity and the body, providing the means, or

[122] David Halperin, *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography*, (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 62.

'raw material,' for performing identity."[123] Clothing, and self-fashioning through garments or adornments, promises the opportunity to represent our feelings, our personalities; our moods on any given day; our visibility to the world, or our opacity. It promises to help us translate our identities, our embodied genders, and our intentions, and it allows us to situate ourselves within the world, communicating with others, as "dress is fundamentally an inter-subjective and social phenomenon, [and] it is an important link between individual identity and social belonging."[124]

Thus, clothing goes far beyond simple functionality and beyond being intrinsically connected to cultural and political contexts in which it can be weaponized to enforce social control upon individuals and bodies. Both in partnership and in opposition—dually—with the power to enforce control, garments also offer the potential to craft symbolic freedom, in representing one's self authentically. As I have argued, *Remote Control II* richly reflects the ways that clothing has this ability to materialize the dichotomies between dependency and submission, and autonomy and power. Self-expression, particularly around gender presentation, becomes an area where clothing (and *Remote Control II*, symbolically and more literally) can craft autonomy and resist binaries and norms.

"[Style is most pertinently about] communicating thoughts, emotions, and feelings through a visual identity,"[125] writes Megan Wallace, in a 2023 profile on non-binary individuals' self-styling and personal style.[126] Clothing allows individuals to translate their interiority visually and materially, and self-fashioning is valuable for all, but particularly crucial for queer individuals regarding gender expression. In regards to "[honing personal style], for non-binary

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[123] Joanne Entwistle, "Fashion and the Fleshy Body: Dress as Embodied Practice," *Fashion Theory* 4, no. 3 (2000): 337.
[124] Joanne Entwistle, "Fashion and the Fleshy Body," 337.
[125] Megan Wallace, "Capturing Style as Resistance for Non-Binary People," *The Face*, 2023, https://theface.com/style/saskavians-spring-capturing-style-as-resistance-for-non-binary-people.
[126] Written by Wallace, the text profiles photography duo Sasakiavins, based in London, UK, whose photography project documents different non-binary individual's personal style and self-fashioning.

folk, it's particularly vital,"[127] Wallace explains, and "when identities outside… the male/female binary aren't yet properly recognized by our governments or institutions, choosing clothes that reflect your identity is both a gender-affirming process and an act of resistance."[128] Wallace underlines the power that clothing can hold, and how vital it is, particularly for efficaciously affirming gender.

I bring Wallace's arguments into conversation here to connect with the possibilities that I suggest lie within *Remote Control II*'s reappropriation. As *Remote Control II* is a wearable sculpture, I argue that it holds the potential that it might, or simply could, be reanimated and worn by individuals with different positionalities in the future, which can continue to subvert the categorized and enforced social control that the cage crinoline originally perpetuated. Clothing more generally offers this potentiality, through its instability and flexibility, to constantly be reinterpreted. As Quinn writes:

> Looks are created or reconfigured as individual social realities take on new contexts. But the fashioned identity is seldom a constant. It exists as a work in progress: unfinished, incomplete, mechanical, serviceable and renewable. It confronts the imagined with the real, affirming or negating the prevailing assumptions about individual social identity and relative positions in social space. Fashion space represents the means to affirm or deny these convictions through clothing alone, constantly tempering new versions of self-fashioning through other garments.[129]

This unfinishedness, renewability, and reconfiguration that clothing offers, in conjunction with different social identities, elicits the question: what might it look like to have other bodies, other identities, embody this sculpture? Although this is speculative, I believe that these possibilities could be realized through *Remote Control II*'s form as a wearable sculpture.

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[127] Megan Wallace, "Capturing Style as Resistance for Non-Binary People," *The Face*, 2023, https://theface.com/style/saskavians-spring-capturing-style-as-resistance-for-non-binary-people.
[128] Wallace, "Capturing Style," 2023.
[129] Bradley Quinn, *The Fashion of Architecture,* (New York and Oxford: Berg, 2003), 36.

Moreover, I suggest *Remote Control II* can also work more symbolically, representing how garments more broadly can fluctuate between autonomy and oppression—which does not need to refer solely to women and femininity. By revisiting *Remote Control II* in this 21st century context, the sculpture's reappropriation does not need to represent singular femininity but rather might reflect multiple gender identities. As Wallenberg argues, "Fashion… can be understood to be subversive: fashion is a practice that can serve to question, resist, and counter what is normative."[130] *Remote Control II* indicates how resistance towards imposed control upon gendered bodies can be ascertained, and this can continue to be revisited and reimagined in current and future cultural contexts. The sculpture mirrors a very intimate element within our lives; clothing is constantly in contact with our bodies, working as a border between ourselves and the world.[131] It can empower or encroach upon us, and *Remote Control II* effectively illuminates this precarity, as well as possibility for multiple outcomes.

Section III: Reorienting *Remote Control II*

Suffice to say, garments hold significant power in how we negotiate the world. Design scholar Joanne Entwistle underlines a connection between phenomenology and clothing, and how this materializes and impacts our respective understandings towards space and particular environments, writing:

> Dress is always located spatially and temporally: when getting dressed, one orientates oneself/body to the situation, acting in particular ways upon the surfaces of the body in ways that are likely to fit within the established norms of that situation. Thus the dressed body is not a passive object, acted upon by social forces, but actively produced through particular, routine, and mundane practices.[132]

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[130] Louise Wallenberg, "Fashion and Feminism," in *The Routledge History of Fashion and Dress, 1800 to the Present*, eds. Veronique Pouillard and Vincent Dubé-Senécal, (London: Routledge, 2023), 191.
[131] Dani Cavallaro and Alexandra Warwick, *Fashioning the Frame: Boundaries, Dress, and the Body,* (Oxford, UK and New York: Berg, 1998), xvii.
[132] Joanne Entwistle, "Fashion and the Fleshy Body: Dress as Embodied Practice," *Fashion Theory* 4, no. 3 (2000): 335.

Phenomenology highlights the importance in lived truths, in how objects and materials influence our respective and particular experiences. Entwistle highlights clothing's impact through a phenomenological lens, which can further be conceptualized by bringing Sara Ahmed's scholarship into conversation. Ahmed writes, "Phenomenology is often characterized as a 'turn toward' objects, which appear in their perceptual 'thereness' as objects given to consciousness."[133] From a phenomenological perspective, our bodies "give us our expression in the world,"[134] and clothing affects how our bodies exist, respond, or express themselves in any given environment. Ahmed's particular approach emphasizes how phenomenology and orientation can attempt to attend to the layered and intersectional nuances of different individuals, which is valuable to employ when thinking about *Remote Control II'*s resistive possibilities.

Expanding on the ways *Remote Control II* offers agency through subversive measures, the technological elements within the sculpture provide new freedoms for the wearer when they control the remote. They can move in ways that transcend the fleshy, natural human body, moving at heightened speeds, providing them the ability to get somewhere or get *away* from somewhere quickly. With this mobility and the ways that the wearable sculpture moves the body alternatively, I postulate that it also orients the body differently—in space more generally, and towards or away from certain people and places. Returning to the ways that *Remote Control II* was documented and performed, such as at the Donald Young Gallery in 1990,[135] when the model who wore the sculpture, and her accompanying tuxedo attendants "passed the controls

[133] Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham; London, UK: Duke University Press, 2006), 25.
[134] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception*, (USA: Northwestern University Press, 1976), 5.
[135] Clement Page, "Jana Sterbak: 'I Want You To Feel The Way I Do,'" *Third Text*, Vol 10 (1996): 65.

between them, moving the immobilized model this way and that before giving her the controls,"[136] the way and direction in which the wearer is oriented in space differs, depending on where they are currently located in the dialectic between freedom and constraint. By examining the mobility built in *Remote Control II* through Ahmed's queer phenomenological lens, I suggest this helps negotiate how the sculpture has the potential to better account for the nuances and specificities in any one wearer's identity.

Ahmed discusses how we move in space, what we brush against, what imprints on our skin, and how our orientations turn us toward certain things and objects and away from others. The scholar writes, "By bringing what is 'behind' to the front, we might queer phenomenology by creating a new angle… To queer phenomenology is to offer a different 'slant' to… orientation itself."[137] As *Remote Control II* is concerned with movement, and mobility, I suggest that we might read the sculpture as not only physicalizing agency in how the body moves when wearing the work, but also how it might orient—and how different bodies, genders, and identities might orient differently through the wearable sculpture thus materializing an acknowledgement and autonomy through this.

Ahmed explains:

> Using two strategies simultaneously—queering phenomenology and moving queer theory toward phenomenology— ... show[s] how bodies are gendered, sexualized, and raced by how they extend into space, as an extension that differentiates between 'left' and 'right,' 'front' and 'behind,' 'up' and 'down,' as well as 'near' and 'far.'[138]

Engaging with this scholarship lends itself to resituating *Remote Control II* from solely representing the feminine body to being worn or engaged with in subversive ways with all

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[136] Clement Page, "Jana Sterbak: 'I Want You To Feel The Way I Do,'" *Third Text*, Vol 10 (1996): 65.
[137] Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham; London, UK: Duke University Press, 2006), 4.
[138] Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 5.

gendered bodies, expanding the examinations as to how it interacts, protects, contains, and shapes the wearer, indeed, to how it might orient the body, queerly.

In thinking through our orientations in space and engaging with queer phenomenology by applying a different 'slant,' we can attend to backgrounds—both spatially and connected to individual positionality. Regarding where or what we turn towards, and thus what exists behind us, Ahmed writes, "A background can refer to the ground or parts situated in the rear' [or to] the picture represented at a distance, which in turn allows what is 'in' the foreground to acquire the shape that it does, as a figure or object."[139] Yet, this is not just a physical or literal understanding towards 'background' and how it might orient one in space, and towards certain objects while away from others—the background also takes on a temporal significance: "When we tell a story about someone, for instance, we might give information about their background: this meaning of 'background' would be about 'what is behind,' where 'what is behind' refers to what is in the past or what happened 'before.'"[140] Using Ahmed's phenomenological scholarship to think through *Remote Control II* provides more space for attending to the particularities in any individual's respective identity, and to challenge the monotony in both Sterbak's documented presentations—the wearable sculpture only being worn by white, cisgender women—and cage crinoline's approach to maintaining societal categorization.

Thus I suggest that the mobility intrinsic to *Remote Control II* offers the potential for Ahmed's orientations to be physicalized through the sculpture. By thinking through the way *Remote Control II* might orient the body differently—and orient *different* bodies, in different ways—can highlight and embrace "diverse and multifaceted identities," and celebrate "the

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[139] Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham; London, UK: Duke University Press, 2006), 38.
[140] Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology,* 38.

infinite nuances embedded within self-expression."[141] This in itself is subversive, as it challenges the singular image that cage crinoline crafted, while also transgressing the gender normativity and enforced gender roles upon the body—to approach *Remote Control II* as a vessel for (gender) expression and self-fashioning destabilizes cage crinoline's control. The sculpture can both literally and symbolically provide psychological protection, in supporting the unique and complex positionalities through presentation, and ultimately highlights clothing's implicit power to do the same in an everyday context. As photography duo Sasakiavins express in Wallace's text, "Our daily lives are surrounded by reminders that oversimplifying complex human identities can often reinforce stereotypes and perpetuate… prejudice."[142] By incorporating Ahmed's scholarship and attending to how "bodies are gendered, sexualized, and raced by how they extend into space," this offers ways to counteract and challenge "society's relationship with categorization and its limitations,"[143] which ultimately rejects nuances and perpetuates outdated ideas around monolithic and singular identities, and returns to my central argument, in that *Remote Control II*'s subversiveness crafts agency and autonomy—and perhaps, an ability for self-expression—for the potential wearer.

[141] Megan Wallace, "Capturing Style as Resistance for Non-Binary People," *The Face*, 2023, https://theface.com/style/saskavians-spring-capturing-style-as-resistance-for-non-binary-people
[142] Wallace, "Capturing Style," 2023.
[143] Wallace, "Capturing Style," 2023.

Conclusion

Remote Control II remembers the cage crinoline's history. Through the garment's past that the wearable sculpture refers to and finds inspiration from, and through the ways that the original intention to contain and control is reappropriated into something that can propose protection and autonomy, *Remote Control II* ultimately "demonstrate[s] fashion[‘s impact] beyond just aesthetic form and function."[144] *Remote Control II*'s contextual inspiration in cage crinoline critically exemplifies how clothing, "while often dismissed as superficial, hold[s] a weight that merits critical attention."[145] This is hugely amplified when contextualizing *Remote Control II* with contemporary scholarship examining expanded gender expression and dress's role in supporting realized identities—particularly those that exist beyond traditional male/female categorization. *Remote Control II* materializes clothing's power to both culturally and individually shape and reflect norms and identities as well as being something that we all come into contact with intimately and constantly, thus symbolically suggesting how subversion and reappropriation (employed through garments) can offer autonomy and freedom.

While the sculpture remembers the ways femininity has been constructed and thus conscripted for women throughout the centuries, I suggest that this history, encapsulated within the sculpture, equally provides a point for departure for subversion and for challenging the control that was once enforced by the dress form. As much as fashion and clothing can—and historically has—helped maintain and enforce cultural control, especially upon women, other marginalized positionalities, and queer individuals,[146] clothing also has the power to subvert and complicate, challenge cultural norms, and push back against constructs. Fashion can be utilized

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[144] Balbir Singh, "Fashion as Armor," *The Fashion and Race Database*, (2021): 6, https://fashionandrace.org/database/fashion-as-armor.
[145] Megan Corbin and Daniela Johannes, "Activating Affect Aura Through Art," *Angelaki*, 27:2 (2022): 44.
[146] Louise Wallenberg, "Fashion and Feminism," in *The Routledge History of Fashion and Dress, 1800 to the Present*, eds. Veronique Pouillard and Vincent Dubé-Senécal, (London: Routledge, 2023): 427.

as resistance against heteronormativity,[147] while also highlighting ways in which patriarchal structures are employed and maintained culturally and politically, as Sterbak does with *Remote Control II*.

The value lies in the possibilities that *Remote Control II* offers, in moving from a garment that enforced social, cultural, and political control upon the gendered body, to subverting this history and refashioning the garment to instead offering armour and agency, on multiple levels. By resituating the garment in the current context, in an expanded moment for gender expression and one very different from the cage crinoline's reference point, *Remote Control II* can continue to subvert the history it takes inspiration from, while also mobilizing as an object/garment that reorients, sometimes queerly.

Thus, the sculpture becomes a site for exploring possibilities beyond traditional binaries. By embracing the blurriness and contradictions inherent in the artwork, the door is opened to further subversive interpretations, particularly when applying queer theories that highlight the possibilities in appropriations and orientations. Revisiting *Remote Control II* highlights how the sculpture, while undeniably imbued with historically gendered elements, can be resituated to foster agency and autonomy—a shield not just for the physical body but also affectively and psychologically. *Remote Control II*'s richness is in how it challenges the past and offers subverted possibilities for freedom and agency, highlighting the ultimate liberatory power that clothing—particularly this wearable sculpture—can hold.

[147] Louise Wallenberg, "Fashion and Feminism," in *The Routledge History of Fashion and Dress, 1800 to the Present*, eds. Veronique Pouillard and Vincent Dubé-Senécal, (London: Routledge, 2023): 185.

Figures

Figure 1. Jana Sterbak, *Remote Control II*, 1989. Aluminum, motorized wheels, remote control device, cotton cloth. Installation view: "Works by Jana Sterbak," New Museum, New York, 1990. Photograph by Fred Scruton. Image source: The New Museum. Accessed May 24, 2024. https://archive.newmuseum.org/exhibitions/193.

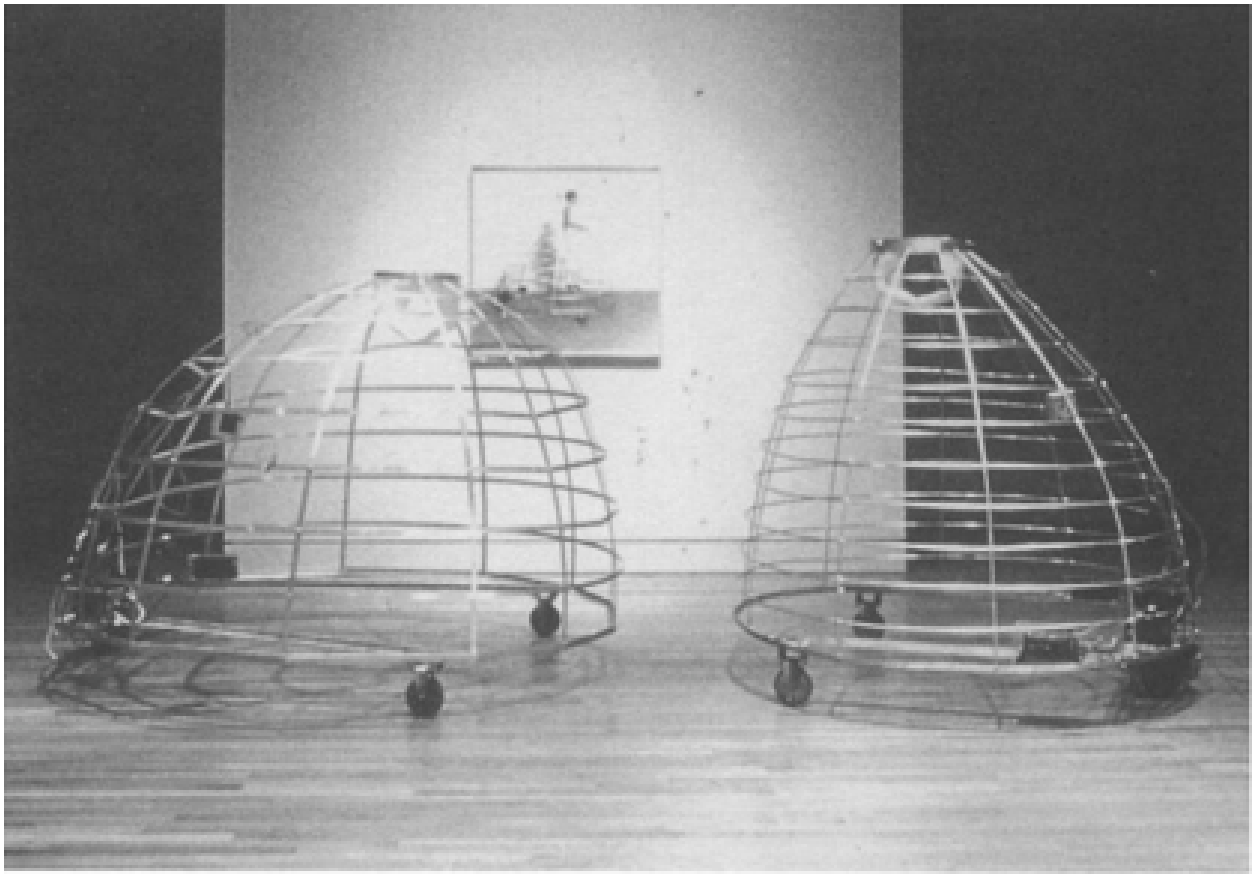

Figure 2. Jana Sterbak, *Remote Control I,* 1989, and *Remote Control II*, 1989. Aluminum, motorized wheels, remote control device, cotton cloth. Donald Young Gallery, Seattle, 1995. Image source: Jennifer McLerran, "Disciplined Subjects and Docile Bodies in the Work of Contemporary Artist Jana Sterbak," *Feminist Studies* 24, no. 3 (1998): 541.

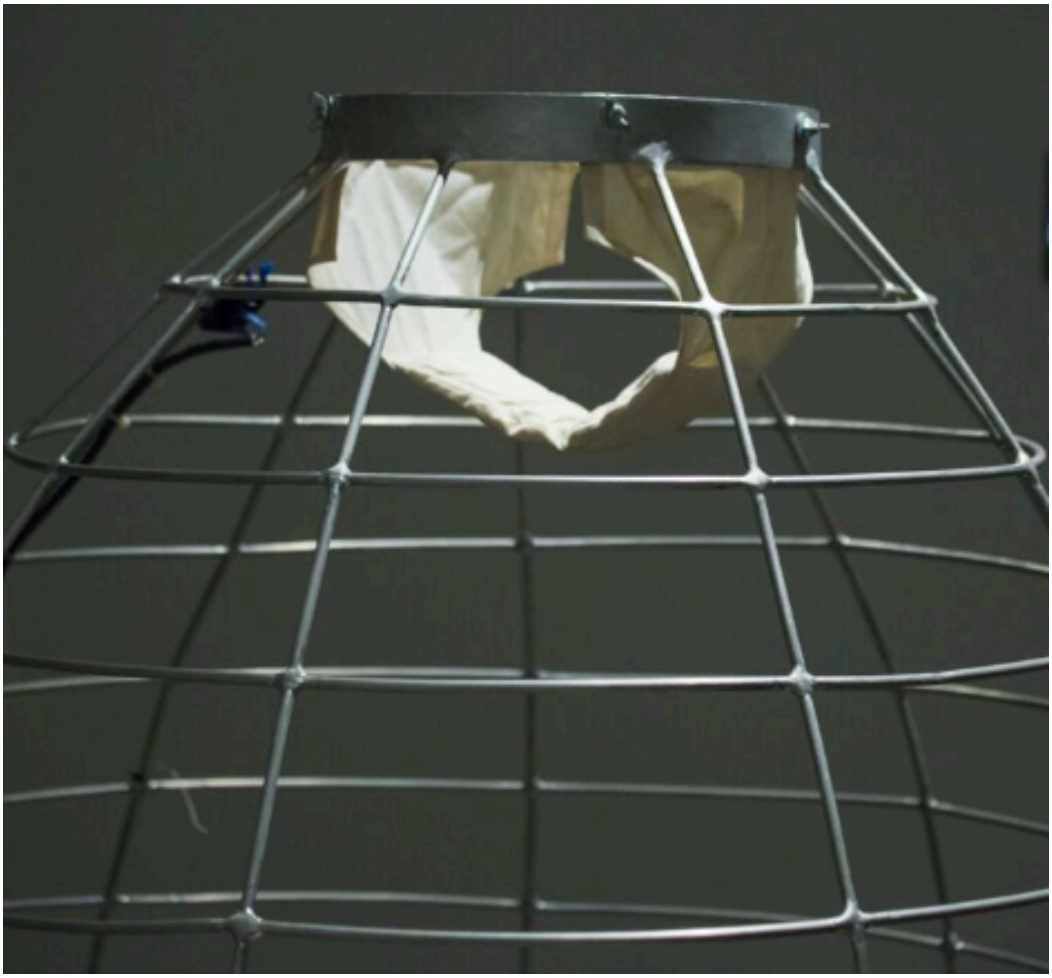

Figure 3. Jana Sterbak*, Remote Control II* (detail)*,* 1989. Aluminum with motorized wheels and batteries. MACBA Collection, MACBA Foundation, Barcelona. © Jana Sterbak. Image source: MACBA. Accessed March 10, 2024. https://www.macba.cat/en/obra/r0180-remote-control-ii.

Figure 4. *Women's Cage Crinoline*, circa 1865. Cotton-braid-covered steel, cotton twill and plain-weave double-cloth tape, cane, and metal, 36 ½ in. x 38 ½ in. LACMA Collections, purchased with funds provided by Suzanne A. Saperstein and Michael and Ellen Michelson, with additional funding from the Costume Council, the Edgerton Foundation, Gail and Gerald Oppenheimer, Maureen H. Shapiro, Grace Tsao, and Lenore and Richard Wayne. Image source: LACMA. Accessed May 20, 2024. https://collections.lacma.org/node/214126.

Figure 5. Jana Sterbak, *Vanitas: Flesh Dress for an Albino Anorectic*, 1987. Raw flank steak. Dimensions vary daily. Centre Pompidou, Paris, © Jana Sterbak. Image Source: Candice Nembhard, "Jana Sterbak and the Possibilities and Restrictions of Movement," *Sleek Magazine*, June 20, 2017. https://www.sleek-mag.com/article/jana-sterbak.

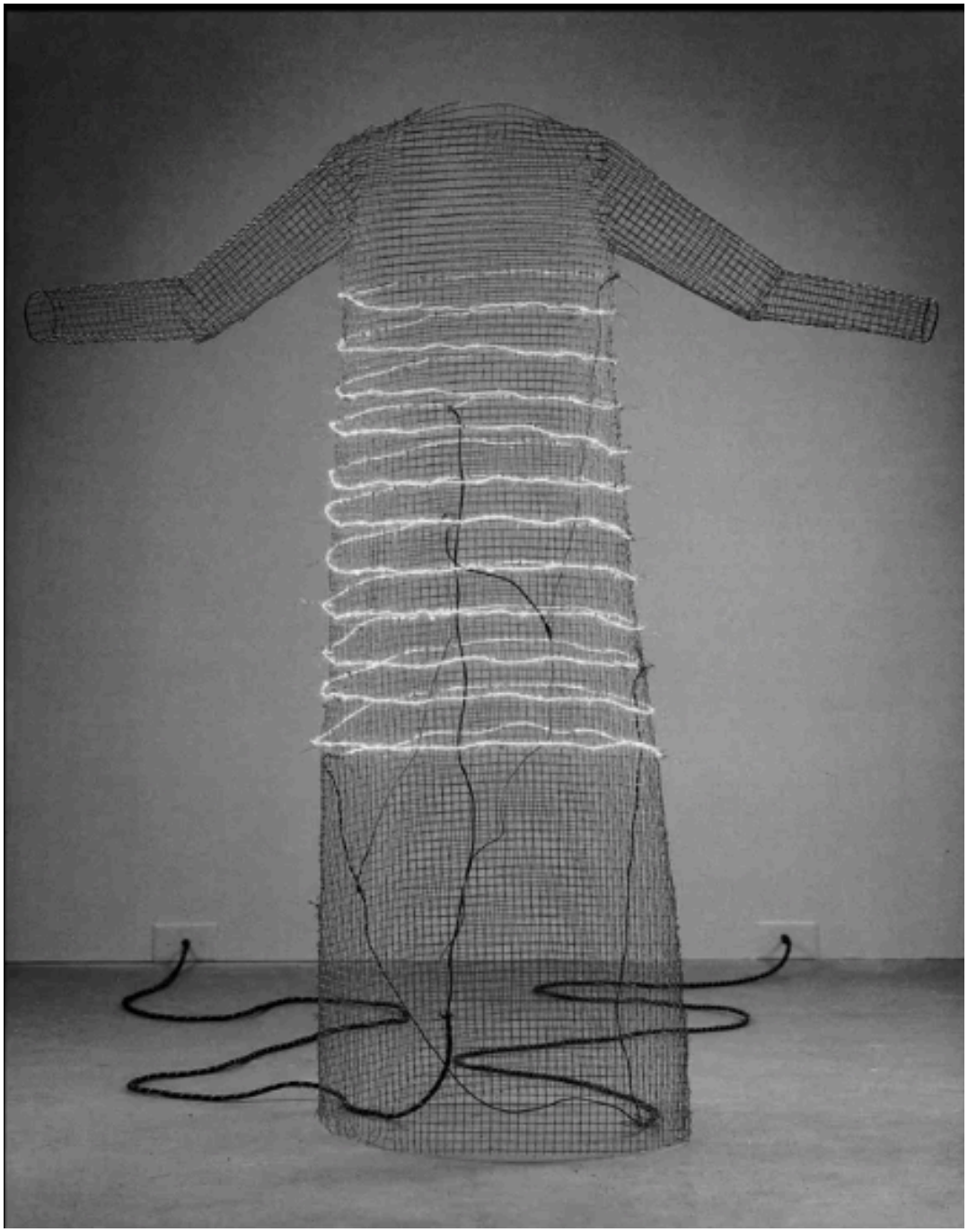

Figure 6. Jana Sterbak, *I Want You to Feel the Way I Do… The Dress*, 1984/5. Live uninsulated nickel-chrome wire mounted on wire mesh, electrical cord, and power, 144.8 x 121.9 x 45.7 cm. National Gallery of Canada Collection. Image source: Nancy Spector, "Flesh and Bones." *Artforum* 30, no. 7 (March 1992), N.P. https://www.artforum.com/features/flesh-and-bones-jana-sterback-203615.

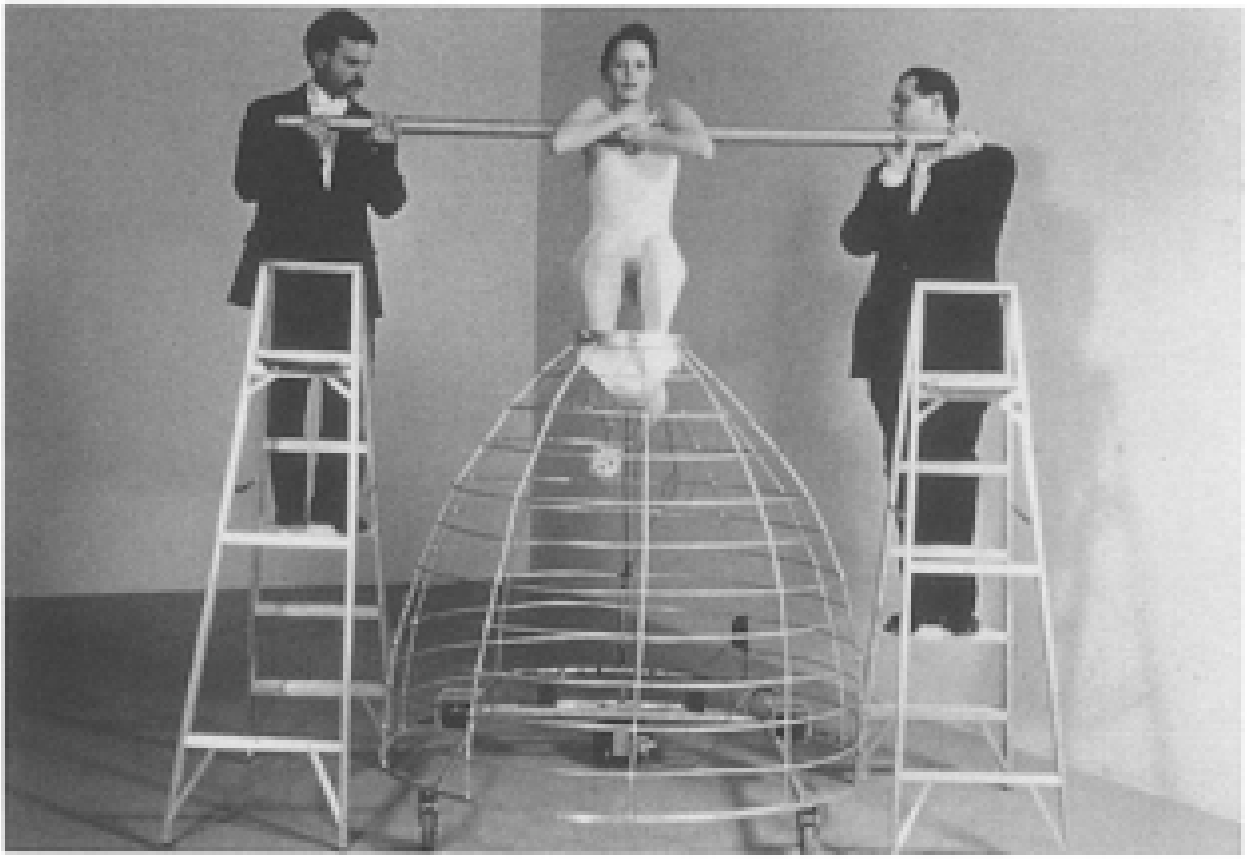

Figure 7. Jana Sterbak*, Remote Control II* (demonstration), 1989. Aluminum, motorized wheels, remote control device, cotton cloth. Donald Young Gallery, Seattle, 1995. Image source: Jennifer McLerran, "Disciplined Subjects and Docile Bodies in the Work of Contemporary Artist Jana Sterbak," *Feminist Studies* 24, no. 3 (1998): 541.

Figure 8. Jana Sterbak. *Remote Control II*, 1989. Aluminum, motorized wheels, remote control device, cotton cloth. Photography credit: Alison Rossiter, © MACBA Collection, Barcelona. Image source: Candice Nembhard, "Jana Sterbak and the Possibilities and Restrictions of Movement," *Sleek Magazine*, June 20, 2017. https://www.sleek-mag.com/article/jana-sterbak.

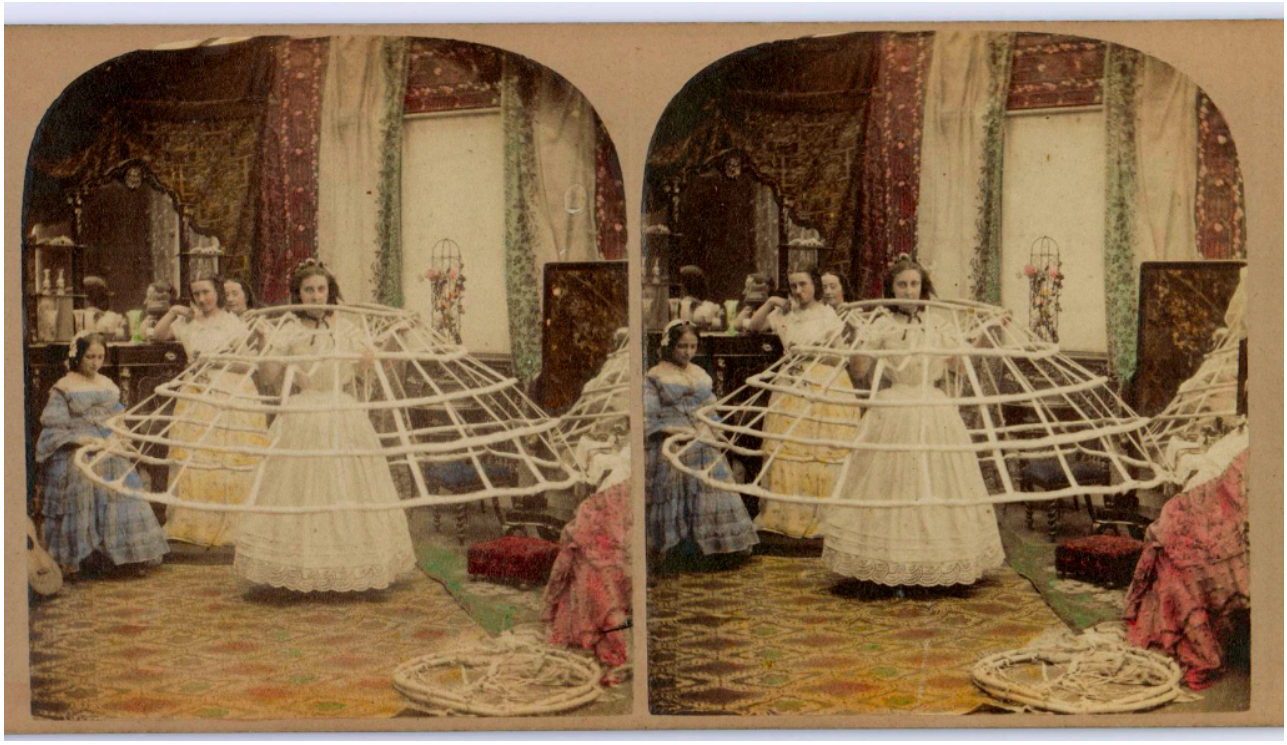

Figure 9. Coloured stereocard depicting woman being dressed in a crinoline, date unknown. Photographer unknown. London Stereoscopic Company & The Howarth-Loomes Collection, UK. © National Museums Scotland. Image source: National Museums Scotland. https://www.nms.ac.uk/explore-our-collections/collection-search-results/stereocard/20029239.

Figure 10. *Crinoline Difficulties,* date unknown. Coloured stereocard. Photographer unknown. London Stereoscopic Company & The Howarth-Loomes Collection, UK. © National Museums Scotland. Image source: National Museums Scotland. https://www.nms.ac.uk/explore-our-collections/collection-search-results/stereocard/20029246.

Figure 11. Jana Sterbak*, Remote Control II* (motion sequence)*,* 1989. Aluminum with motorized wheels and batteries. © Jana Sterbak. Image source: Jana Sterbak and Diana Nemiroff, *States of Being: Corps À Corps* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1991), 33.

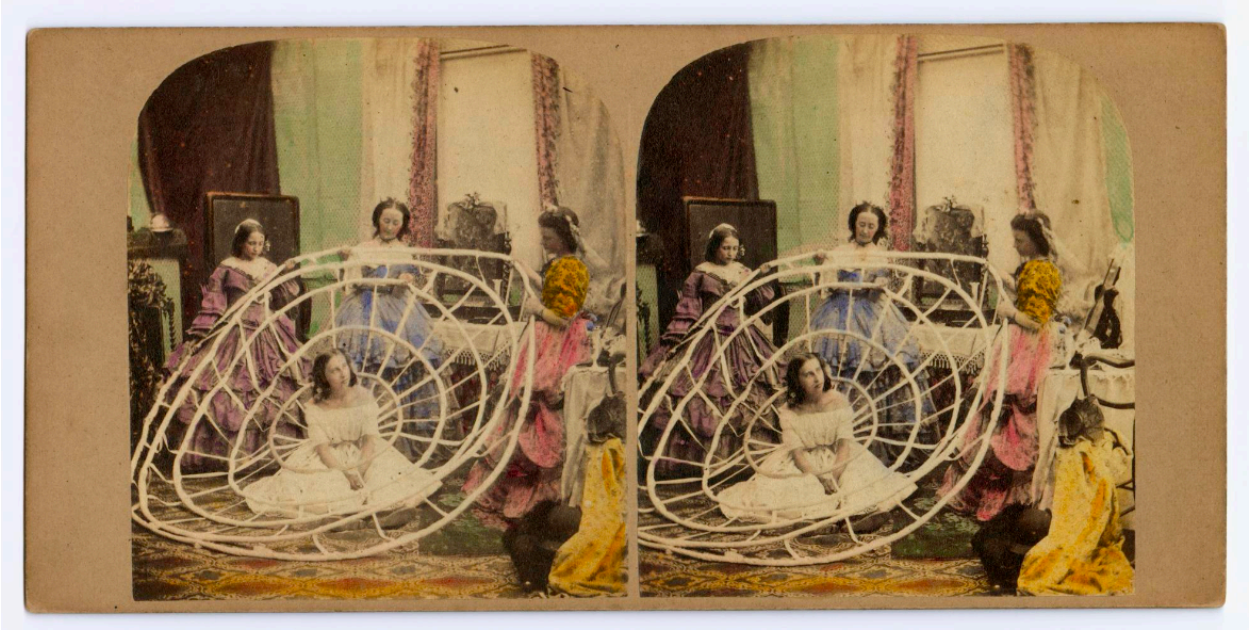

Figure 12. *Crinoline Made Useful,* date unknown. Coloured stereocard. Published by the London Stereoscopic Company, London, UK. The Howarth-Loomes Collection, © National Museums Scotland. Image source: National Museums Scotland. https://www.nms.ac.uk/explore-our-collections/collection-search-results/stereocard/20029233.

Figure 13. Jana Sterbak*, Remote Control I* (demonstration), 1989. Aluminum, motorized wheel, remote control device, batteries, and cotton cloth. Photo by Louis Lussier. Image source: Bruce Ferguson, *Works by Jana Sterbak* (New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1990), 12.

Figure 14. Atsuko Tanaka, *Electric Dress* (performance)*,* 1956. Enamel paint on lightbulbs, electric cords, and control console, 165 x 80 x 80 cm. Ohara Kaikan, Tokyo. Photograph © Ryoji Ito and the Gutai Art Association former members, by Museum of Osaka University, Osaka. Image source: Namiko Kunimoto, "Tanaka Atsuko's *Electric Dress* and the Circuits of Subjectivity," *The Art Bulletin* 95, no. 3 (September 2013): 466.

Figure 15. Atsuko Tanaka, *Electric Dress* (performance)*,* 1956. Enamel paint on lightbulbs, electric cords, and control console, 165 x 80 x 80 cm. Ohara Kaikan, Tokyo. Photograph © Ryoji Ito and the Gutai Art Association former members, by Museum of Osaka University, Osaka. Image source: Namiko Kunimoto, "Tanaka Atsuko's *Electric Dress* and the Circuits of Subjectivity," *The Art Bulletin* 95, no. 3 (September 2013): 467.

Figure 16. Sara Forbes Bonetta (Sara Davies), 1862. Photograph taken by Camille Silvy. Image source: “African princess and Queen Victoria’s goddaughter, Sara Forbes Bonetta (1843-1880).” Brighton and Hove Museums. Accessed May 28, 2024. https://brightonmuseums.org.uk/discovery/history-stories/african-princess-and-queen-victorias-goddaughter-sarah-forbes-bonetta-1843-1880/

Figure 17. Kara Walker, *Insurrection! (Our Tools Were Rudimentary, Yet We Pressed On),* 2002. Cut paper silhouettes and light projections, dimensions variable. Installation view at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, 2002. © Kara Walker. Image source: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York Collection. Accessed May 10, 2024. https://www.guggenheim.org/artwork/9367.

Figure 18. Kara Walker, *Insurrection! (Our Tools Were Rudimentary, Yet We Pressed On),* 2002. Cut paper silhouettes and light projections, dimensions variable. Installation view at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, 2002. © Kara Walker. Image source: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York Collection. Accessed May 10, 2024. https://www.guggenheim.org/artwork/9367.

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