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Re-Thinking Contemporary Aesthetic Spaces: Diana Thorneycroft and the Unacceptable Sublime

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ABSTRACT

Re-Thinking Contemporary Aesthetics Spaces:
Diana Thorneycroft and the Unacceptable Sublime

Angela Plohman

This thesis is a case study of human responses in the space of the museum. I examine issues concerning behaviour education and training within this space and suggest possibilities for a sort of cultural, theoretical emancipation of the visitor, participant, or "viewer". But by taking the case of Diana Thorneycroft and particularly her last installation *Monstrance*, I hope to demonstrate that there is still a need to evaluate and rethink the permitted and accepted norms of human response to art both in and out of the museum. By examining Thorneycroft's career and trajectory towards performative spaces and dynamic, sensual artworks, it will be possible to note the biases and hegemony of the cultural space in which artists present their work. And finally, by linking these spaces to an alternative aesthetic, a sublime that horrifies, disgusts and frightens, and is situated outside of the sublime defined by Immanuel Kant and Edmund Burke, I hope to promote a new space in which the human body and its training can be challenged. The museum and art gallery can serve as a liberating and emancipatory space in which to explore human response.

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INTRODUCTION: DEALING WITH *MONSTRANCE*

> Art is so essential and its ideas so potent that rumour and nuance alone are sufficient to unsettle and threaten an otherwise mute populace, to stir them to agitate and mill, collectively protesting material and ideas which they have not, in fact, received first hand. They want it to stop, whatever it is. To go away and leave them untroubled, undisturbed.[1]

Obscene, abject, inappropriate, unacceptable; these adjectives, moments, objects, artworks, spaces are those that challenge the visitor to an art gallery or museum, challenge the art critic and upset the rules governing the museum senses. To accept these alternative art spaces is to upset the monopoly of the controlled environment. To deny or revolt against them is to perpetuate a series of rules and systems within which the art viewer has had to function. The advent of the artist-run centre and the alternative gallery space has done much to challenge these systems. Contemporary artists and their predecessors from Marcel Duchamp to the Fluxus movement, from Joel Peter Witkin to Cindy Sherman, have consistently refused to conform to the regulations of the artistic "viewing space" and therefore have created a political context and atmosphere in which contemporary artists are still working. The idea of upsetting boundaries, confronting the visitor or stimulating non-visual senses is not new. However, and most importantly, artists continue to do this. The public is still reacting against these confrontations. Sensual spaces are becoming more and more common. And an alternative to eighteenth century aesthetics is being explored. The sublime as defined by Immanuel Kant and Edmund Burke is an alternative to the beautiful, but it has remained largely a

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[1] Meeka Walsh, "Bewilderbeests, Art Today," Border Crossings Volume 18, number 4 (Winter 1999): 2.

controlled alternative with borders and rules of engagement. But the unacceptable sublime: the disgusting, the putrid, the invasive and the obscene, has appeared as another alternative, an emancipatory alternative as defined by Lynda Nead and Julia Kristeva. This is the sublime explored by Diana Thorneycroft, a photographer and installation artist from Winnipeg, Manitoba. In her last two installations, *slytod* and *Monstrance*, she has provoked and frightened the visitor to her spaces and has demonstrated the power of sensual liberation and anti-beautiful spaces. To survive in her spaces is to succumb to the most base and instinctual emotions and reactions. To survive in her spaces is to examine and re-evaluate the cultural norms of conduct and propriety. To survive in her spaces is to assert one's body and its capacity for art reception, creation, appreciation, defamation.

This thesis is a case study of human response in the space of the museum. I examine issues of behaviour education and training within this space and suggest possibilities for a sort of cultural, theoretical emancipation of the visitor, participant, or "viewer". By taking the case of Diana Thorneycroft and particularly her last installation *Monstrance*, I hope to demonstrate that there is still a need to evaluate and rethink the permitted and accepted norms of human response to art both in and out of the museum. By examining her career and trajectory towards performative spaces and dynamic, sensual artworks, it will be possible to note the biases within and fundamental power of the cultural space in which artists present their work. And finally, by linking these spaces to an alternative aesthetic, a sublime that horrifies, disgusts and frightens, and is situated outside of the sublime defined by Immanuel Kant and Edmund Burke, I hope to promote a new space in which the human body and its training can be challenged. The museum

and art gallery can serve as a liberating and emancipatory space in which to explore human response.

Chapter One will examine the formation of the museum and its link to sanitary reform in the 19th century. It will explore the repression of the senses and the establishment of what I term the "museum senses". From this, it will be possible to recognize the sensual barriers put in place and maintained by the museum as an institution and what role this barrier plays in social spaces other than the museum. Feelings towards death, appropriate reactions and emotional restraint will be looked in the context of the formation of the museum in Tony Bennett's book *The Birth of the Museum*, and through the eyes of the cultural history of the senses. Most importantly it will underline the role that the body plays in the game of art reception and how this body has been trained to accept and refuse certain natural human responses in front of a defined work of art. In the context of Thorneycroft's installations, it will be possible to link these social, political and cultural formations to the reactions to *Monstrance*.

Chapter Two will explore the notion of the sublime, an aesthetic category officially defined in the 18th century and adopted by many contemporary critics and theorists. This alternative to the aesthetics of the beautiful offers many political promises for cultural change and offers a space in which the body is encouraged to react. Despite Immanuel Kant and Edmund Burke's very rigid notions of true sublimity, therein lies the possibility for a corporeal emancipation of sorts. Julia Kristeva and Lynda Nead offer up these possibilities for discussion in their own notions of the sublime space while dealing

with the "abject" and the "obscene" respectively.[2] Kant and Burke's sublime is accepted in the modern museum as an alternative to the beautiful. But one must be careful here. It is a certain kind of sublimity that is promoted and that is one of control and distance, regardless of the actual definition of the term. The excessive or impermissible sublime, one that promotes disgust and violent sensual awareness such as imposed by Thorneycroft in *Monstrance*, is systematically refused by the very structure of the museum system. The "lower senses", the "lower" bodily reactions and the "lower" classes have constantly been removed from the museum. What happens when they are reintroduced?

Chapter Three serves as an introduction to Diana Thorneycroft's early works in which she explored fantasy and disgust through the medium of photography. From photography, Thorneycroft forayed into the realm of performance and in these few works it will be possible to anticipate her move and evident need for a more visceral medium which she articulates in her most recent installations *slytod* (1997) and *Monstrance* (1999).

slytod, an installation presented at the University of Manitoba's Gallery 1.1.1. in 1997 is an example of how artists have been playing with the body inside the confines of the museum or gallery space. Not an artist-run gallery, Gallery 1.1.1. provided a particular forum for exploration and investigation into the reception of photography and how certain sensual stimuli can deeply affect interpretation and subjective response.

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[2] For the abject see Julia Kristeva, Powers of Horror (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982); for the obscene see: Lynda Nead, The Female Nude (London: Routledge, 1992).

Chapter Four will explore how Thorneycroft has consistently attempted to give the visitor a voice in her spaces. Through a discussion of my own experience in the space, it may be possible to illustrate this freedom despite my obvious biases and art historical background. I am not the average viewer or audience, but I do believe that my body has received the same "training" within the context of social spaces.

Diana Thorneycroft's installation *Monstrance* was received in a variety of different ways. All in all, most reactions loud enough to be heard were negative. In Canada, few art scandals have caused this same amount of anger, distrust in the system and moral objection. The purchase of Barnett Newman's *Voice of Fire* by The National Gallery of Canada in 1989 enraged some tax-payers who felt that their hard-earned tax dollars were being misused. Jana Sterbak's *Vanitas*, more commonly known as the "meat dress", also presented at The National Gallery of Canada, instigated a revolt by anti-poverty activists and animal rights activists for her apparent waste of perfectly good meat, or the perceived support of the killing of animals for food. Mainly though, disgust was the most common emotion felt by protesters in that case. In the case of Diana Thorneycroft, it seems amazing that such a large selection of people from diverse backgrounds could unite in a negative manner to protest against *Monstrance*. From coast to coast, in all media, Thorneycroft was blasted for this exhibition and it remains a sensitive subject, just as *Voice of Fire* still hits a nerve each time it is mentioned in the context of federal funding for the arts. But the protests against *Monstrance* did not stop at the $15,000.00 Canada Council grant she received to produce this work.[3] Catholics were

[3] She in fact received a grant of a year-long duration that was intended to support a whole year's worth of artistic production. To say that she was given $15,000 to produce *Monstrance* is (grossly) misleading.

upset at her use of the word "monstrance". Animal rights activists were outraged at her use of dead animals. Journalists continually printed stories discussing how "disgusting", "provocative" and "weird" the show was. Someone went so far as to completely desecrate the outdoor exhibition by throwing all twelve rabbits into the Lasalle River the night before the opening. The St. Norbert Arts and Cultural Center was forced to place security guards at the site to prevent further vandalism. Warning signs were put up outside the site to alert parents to the content of the exhibition. A health inspector was called in to assess the safety of the site. Basically, every attempt was made to close this show down but it opened anyway.

It is difficult to comprehend how this one exhibition was able to stimulate a normally very passive and quiet community into such a rage. The theoretical reasons that I will propose in the chapters to come somehow seem insufficient in front of such a beleaguered crowd. It would be very easy for me to accept the comments at face value and take the problems for what they are. But what all of the main complaints have in common is their difficulties in breaking with a given set of expectations. Things are expected to be a certain way and when they are not, even art can turn a sleepy city into a pack of wolves. These expectations are also what underlie my main theoretical points when discussing this exhibition. Death and its rituals for example, follow strict sets of rules. One is not supposed to mourn outrageously in public. A dead body is not supposed to be left out to be gloriously putrefied. Art is supposed to be beautiful and to make us feel good. Ugly, disgusting and horrifying objects or moments are not supposed to be in the gallery or museum space. All of these rules are extremely well kept and well

maintained, so much so that once an artwork such as Thorneycroft's breaks out of the borders of the museum space, the first and seemingly only responses to anticipate are anger, disgust, and outrage. And once it is over, the only thing the group can do communally is try to figure out where this deviant came from and why she was given a Canada Council grant.[4]

It was difficult to ignore the winds of hostility blowing over the St. Norbert Arts and Cultural Centre in mid-September 1999. Before I had even arrived in Winnipeg, I had heard whisperings of controversy. Once SNACC had released the press release into the hands of the media, various groups latched on to the installation as their *cause du jour*. Morley Walker, one of the more controversial "art critics" for *The Winnipeg Free Press,* published an article before the opening of the show entitled "Winnipeg artist's hare-raising show would have Bugs diving for cover".[5] On September 12th, five days before the exhibition's opening, the city of Winnipeg prepared itself for a battle - over contemporary art of all things. In this article, Walker proclaimed that the "controversial artist-photographer"[6] had received Canada Council money for this exhibition, and repeated this at length throughout the article. By doing so, he was presumably hoping to enrage the taxpayer and cause a major uproar surrounding the funding of art in Canada. He also went on to say that "Thorneycroft's work has long contained disturbing images

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[4] See Morley Walker's article entitled "Outrage Redux," Winnipeg Free Press (Sunday, 9 January 2000): D1&D5. This article details Thorneycroft's life in much detail, pointing out that she was abused as a child, that she does aerobics to keep fit for her photographs, and that she is not regretful about not having children. This public attempt at group therapy is all that is left for the province of Manitoba to read. After the anger of the first articles during the fall of 1999, it seems natural that Walker would "wrap it up" and try to offer proof as to why this "madwoman" would create art so shocking. However, Thorneycroft offered this information and it remains to be seen whether her best judgment is also to blame for the propagation of this controversy.

[5] Morley Walker, "Winnipeg artist's hare-raising show would have Bugs diving for cover," Winnipeg Free Press (12 September 1999): A1-A2.

[6] Ibid. A1.

of nudity, sex and death".[7] This "disturbing" nature of Thorneycroft's previous work immediately justified an outcry rarely heard of in the prairie city, save for the public reaction to a 1990 performance by local artist Sharon Alward, that used blood and semen in a critical look at women and AIDS[8], and the reaction to the Plug-In Gallery's decision To exhibit artworks by convicted serial killer, John Wayne Gacy.[9] It would seem that Morley Walker consciously tried to prevent any kind of liberal reconsideration of the place of art in society by branding the exhibition a controversy before it had even opened. Any possible unregimented response by a generally conservative population was consequently squashed.

Basically there were three different protest groups. The first to criticize were the animal rights activists. Their main complaint was that Thorneycroft had demonstrated a lack of respect for the animals by displaying their dead bodies. Interestingly enough, they did back down in the end. However, Thorneycroft's response to the animal rights activists was quite revealing of the care she did take to raise issues. Thorneycroft, in Walker's same article, was quoted as saying that

> If I had strung up chickens, it wouldn't have been the same thing. If I had strung up cats, I just couldn't. The rabbit is in the middle of those two things, being something that's raised for food and also a pet. Because it can be both, it has a poignancy that's pretty powerful.[10]

Thorneycroft's fascination with dead animals is not new. They have shown up most

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[7] Ibid. A2.
[8] See Randall McIlroy, "Fluids-on-the-floor event not all that shocking," Winnipeg Free Press (29 November 29 1990): 45; Kevin Prokosh, "But is it Art?" Winnipeg Free Press (8 December 1990): 25, 30; and Kevin Rollason, "'Trash' art makes Norrie's blood boil," Winnipeg Free Press (15 December 1990).
[9] Gacy's work was shown as a part of a group show at Plug In entitled *The Moral Imagination* (26 October - 30 Nov 1996).
[10] Ibid.

markedly in many of her *slytod* series photographs and have been a constant in her photography since 1989. As well, artists have been using animals, and often especially the rabbit, as a fixture in performance and more traditional arts for many years. One only has to think of Joseph Beuys' famous performance entitled *How to explain pictures to a dead hare*, from 1965.[11] In fact, the one new photograph in the *Monstrance* exhibition is extremely similar to a photograph taken of Beuys with the dead hare during the performance. (Fig. 1) One has to wonder why this particular use of dead animals caused such a response while certain previous exhibitions have employed this "medium" without so much as a whisper of controversy. It seems most likely that the public's reaction to the use of dead rabbits was directly linked to the decay and rot propagated by Thorneycroft. Animal rights activists stated that Thorneycroft had no respect for the animal body and soul, and this sentiment was echoed in editorials in national and local newspapers. Respect for the dead in a Western society, as has been discussed by Philippe Ariès, means removal from view.[12] The difficulties with seeing, smelling and breathing death are evident when one scans the printed public reactions to this installation.

Secondly, there were the Catholics who were upset with Thorneycroft's use of the word "monstrance." They believed that it belonged to them and that she was abusing its significance and religious meaning.[13] One local woman in particular named Rosemarie

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[11] One of Joseph Beuys' most well-known 'actions' is this one, where he painted his body with honey and gold leaf and proceeded to 'explain' pictures to an actual dead hare. The photograph by Thorneycroft is on the cover of the *Monstrance* exhibition pamphlet and is entitled *Untitled (Self-portrait with rabbit)*, 1999.

[12] See Chapter 5 of this thesis.

[13] Thorneycroft explained this to me in an interview in Winnipeg on September 19, 1999. The Catholic protesters literally claimed that the word belonged to them and that she could not use it without their permission.

Kennedy, became the spokesperson for the Catholic protest. Calling Thorneycroft "messed up"[14], she led the fight against the use of the word. The Catholic Church is a very extreme example of social control, especially concerning matters of death. Many Western religions offer comforting and safe ways to deal with death, in that they mask and shelter the mourners from the actual process of decay. In the case of the Catholic Church, Thorneycroft's use of an actual monstrance, which is ironically used to carry "the body of Christ" or saint relics, as a container for real, visceral death, could only yield outrageous responses.

Thirdly, and perhaps the most boisterous of the three, was the anti-contemporary art – "I payed for this with my tax dollars" – community. Most of this culminated on the day I arrived. I saw the newscast which unfortunately scarred my visual experience; I read the extremely hostile articles stating: "With $15,000.00 from the Canada Council, the controversial artist-photographer has suspended the carcasses of 12 dead rabbits in the St. Norbert woods, where they are being infested by maggots and allowed to rot."[15] Or "I'm celebrating the gloriousness of putrefaction, Thorneycroft said yesterday while providing a tour of the exhibit area, which resembles a scene from the horror movie *The Blair Witch Project* and a Roman crucifixion site".[16] This negativity and exaggeration is what set the tone for the exhibition.

Thorneycroft has proven that there is something very potent in "sense awareness"

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[14] Walker, "Outrage Redux": D1.
[15] Walker, "Winnipeg artist's hare-raising show would have Bugs diving for cover" : A1.
[16] Ibid.

in that it traces the outlines of socially constructed borders that are often internalised to the point where an individual (or group of individuals) can be incited to revolt publicly against any transcendence of these boundaries. The realisation that something can offer us pleasures or even relief, while it still repels and disgusts is a powerful one. This is the aesthetic space Thorneycroft is cultivating and this is where she can instigate change in the norms established in the definition of taste.

CHAPTER 1: DISGUSTING SPACES

Since its official, documented formation in the nineteenth century, the modern museum has righteously played a role as a sanctuary for taste, the beautiful and order, among many other roles. Art historians, critics, and the academic community have perpetuated this role, and although frequently questioned, the museum has remained unchanged in its mission to house cultural stability and to regulate human, pleasurable responses. The regulatory nature of the museum has been a driving force in the formation of taste systems, and it has also been, with the help of many more institutions, a dictator of human behaviour within a high culture setting. In order to maintain these systems, the museum's character has been spread by its inhabitants, its architecture and most importantly, its contents. In addition, the tendency for human beings – the audience – to mimic the characteristics of the architecture of the museum itself, quiet, clean, austere, and reserved, has sincerely affected the manner in which contemporary art today is received. Although artists have progressed beyond classical painting, sculpture, or even modernist art production, the audience still tends to expect it. This communal craving for stability and contemplation within the museum has resulted in some very violent outbursts against art that flatly mocks the serenity of the occasion. One of the most interesting and provocative ways that artists have done this is through the stirring of the emotion of disgust. Disgust, in all of its forms and definitions, is a major threat to the museum and its role. Because of its associations with senses that have been systematically banned from the white cube, such as smell or touch, it continues to present itself as one of the most exciting instigators of change. What follows is an examination of

the formation of the museum and its relation to the emotion of disgust and the often-ignored spectrum of the senses. Artist Diana Thorneycroft's last two installations, dealing with the primacy of sex and the visceral nature of death, offer many prospects in the context of this discussion and what follows is a prelude to a more refined discussion of Thorneycroft's own role in the disruption of the "museum senses".

In Tony Bennett's book *The Birth of the Museum*, he looks at the cultivation of art manners in the museum and notes that,

> detaching the display of power - the power to command and arrange objects for display - from the risk of disorder, it [the museum] also provided a mechanism for the transformation of the crowd into an ordered and ideally, self-regulating public.[17]

Bennett provides an outline of the birth of the museum in a piece that works as a useful reference when discussing the formation of taste. He most importantly questions "the dissonance between, on the one hand, the democratic rhetoric governing the conception of public museums as vehicles for popular education and, on the other hand, their actual functioning as instruments for the reform of public manners".[18] This idea of the museum as a place for etiquette reform can help to explain the difficulties felt now in front of art works that question the rules established in the nineteenth century. Although Bennett's analysis is contained within a very foucauldian framework, it does outline several useful guidelines set during this time period. Firstly, "the practices of the museum served to drive a wedge between the publics it attracted and that recalcitrant portion of the

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[17] Tony Bennett, The Birth of the Museum (London and New York: Routledge, 1995): 99.
[18] Ibid 90.

population whose manners remained those of the tavern and the fair".[19] These "manners" consisted not only of actual behaviour but of hygiene, moral standards and composure. All of these very important aspects of good and bad manners highlighted in the 19th century serve to illuminate what, in general terms, is feared by the general public with respect to contemporary art. Good composure does not include sensually inhaling a work of art and deriving pleasure from that very intimate moment. Good composure does not involve having a violent reaction to the proximity of decay.

Secondly, in an interesting twist, Bennett notes that during the late nineteenth century, "museums were envisaged as a means of exposing the working classes to the improving mental influence of middle-class culture".[20] Both this claim to improve lower class cultural values, and that indicating the museum's responsibility to ensure standard, good manners, attest to a desire for regulation of experience. This very regulation founded during the museum's early development forms the basis for the standards of taste against which aesthetic experiences other than the beautiful continually come up.

In tandem with the formation of the museum was the advancement of sanitary reform. This unlikely pairing clearly illustrates the relationship between the museum and the senses, "the tavern" and "the fair". While classification systems were being implemented within the walls of the cultural institution, reformers were vigorously lobbying for sewage systems, cleaner streets and personal hygiene. In their book *Aroma*,

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[19] Ibid. 99.
[20] Ibid. 100.

Constance Classen, David Howes and Anthony Synnott remark that in the hopes of strengthening their case, reformers were classifying things themselves, and denoting what kind of human activity was dangerous and what kind was appropriate. In the case of odours, the authors note that

> as the upper and middle classes, at first reluctantly, began to purify their bodies, their homes and their streets of dirt, they grew more and more conscious of the malodours of the working classes which did not. Among many in this latter group, the old standards and methods of personal cleanliness held good until the end of the nineteenth century.[21]

The realisation of (and very smelly) distinction between classes, in my opinion directly affected the space of the museum. The act of ordering space, ordering objects and eventually ordering people, has a direct relationship to the body and its place and general function within the world. Control of this body in a space such as the museum implies control of its behaviours, appearance and placement. If the museum was to do one thing, it was to help purify the body and sanitise human reactions to art that had throughout art history never been so incredibly censored and regulated. By introducing the lower classes and the upper bourgeoisie into a public space together for the first time, the museum acted as a testing ground for sensual hegemony. Science and culture affected the strength and use of particular senses, but this proposed link to sanitary reform in the nineteenth century helps to underline this fact. Classen et al state that "the olfactory reform of the poor was thus intimately linked with their moral reform".[22] This moral reform was linked to the body. And this body was being taught how to behave in the museum, to learn to cultivate taste, and to mimic the upper classes that had suddenly begun to embrace purity, cleanliness, silence and sanitation. Smelling, touching (which also was at that time linked

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[21] Ibid. 81.
[22] Ibid. 82.

to the spreading of germs), tasting, and any kind of inappropriate oral behaviour, were outlawed in the museum space, and the eye and the scope of its capabilities became the safest, most objective, and most sanitary way to nurture aesthetic appreciation.

Once it was established that the sense of sight was paramount, and at least permissible within the museum space, any kind of refusal of the prescribed distance from other people and artworks could cause revolt. One type of revolt is disgust. William Ian Miller's book *The Anatomy of Disgust* is a fine discussion of how this emotion is not based in nausea but in our own personal, cultural history of beauty, right, wrong and the way our senses have been trained, so to speak. "With guilt, indignation, and shame, disgust also helps sustain the higher and less corporeal moral order".[23] Miller notes that

> culture, independent of its precise content, strikes us as inconceivable without disgust playing some role in its construction. But it would hardly be surprising that different ways of conceptualising disgust might push it more in the direction of fear in one culture and more in the direction of hate in another. Different ways of talking about the disgusting will mean that different senses will play the key role in processing the disgusting. We shall see that in the West taste does not become central to our conception of disgust until taste becomes a metaphor for an aesthetic and social sense of discernment.[24]

Obviously, different conceptions of the criteria for aesthetic judgment play a role in how one deals with the emotions related to sensual upset or even pleasure. But it is noted that the system of taste largely frames our notions of disgust, at least in the West.

Disgust is an important emotion because it causes very violent physical reactions. "The idiom of disgust consistently invokes the sensory experience of what it feels like to be put in danger by the disgusting, of what it feels like to be too close to it, to have to

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[23] Ibid. 117.
[24] Ibid. 11.

smell it, see it, touch it".[25] If it is impossible to escape it, one must therefore deal with it. But normally, people spend copious amounts of time energy to stay away from the disgusting. Hygiene, the establishment of norms with regards to proper behaviour, the regulation of public displays of emotion, and common relationships to food and sex, are all ways in which society has managed to prevent disgust from infiltrating daily life. Art, on the other hand, does not necessarily live up to those same standards.

Miller alludes to two types of disgust in his book. One is related to Freud's notion of disgust as a defense mechanism.[26] This type of disgust "acts as a barrier to satisfying unconscious desire".[27] This would be moral disgust, or the opposition to the destruction of moral boundaries, as in the case of art reception. The second type of disgust is related to surfeit.[28] This entails an overindulgence of some sort, be it of food, sex, drink, etc. This kind of disgust often involves "nausea and sickness of surfeit".[29] Miller almost reduces these two types of disgust to that of the body and of the mind: moral versus corporeal. However, one has to be careful when examining these two types of disgust. They both can have mental and corporeal reactions and they are not limited to the categories in which Miller has placed them. I believe that both of these types are very much a part of art reception. The first is as I have discussed above, being the reaction against taste violations. The second can be as base as the reaction against a rotting carcass, bodily

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[25] Ibid. 9.
[26] Ibid. 109.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid. 110.
[29] Ibid.

fluids[30], meat[31], or displaced solids and liquids. But they are both interrelated. Excess, surfeit or displacement is undoubtedly related to the moral types of disgust. Both types illustrate the cultural definitions of taste and the beautiful. These are not terms that simply float around without a root. Disgust and various aesthetic categories are all culturally learned.

> Disgust must always repel in some sense or it is not disgust. Repulsion however, might bring in its train affects that work to move one closer again to what one just backed away from. These affects could range from curiosity, to fascination, to a desire to mingle. Repulsion can also raise resentment for having been repelled and a consequent desire to reclaim lost territory. And that too draws one forward again.[32]

This attraction is where the problem lies and also from where all possibility stems. People have been taught to fight this attraction, to be horrified by it and to react against it. The act of stopping one's conscious analysis at the moment of disgust is extremely limiting. The emotional and physical sensation offered by disgusting objects or events can be quite revelatory. Being attracted to the disgusting and to the emotional and sensual reactions that accompany it should not be taboo. Unfortunately, in the formation of the unconscious and conscious mind, in Freud's terms, this act of recoiling from the disgusting is necessary. Otherwise, the individual would be completely out of control and unable to regulate his or her desires. However, as Miller notes, there is another aspect to the relationship between desire and disgust.

> Disgust and the other reaction formations were not just there to prevent pleasure but to heighten it, even to create the conditions for it. The damlike barrier, in other

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[30] In Winnipeg, strong and violent reactions were made against a performance by Sharon Alward that involved blood and semen in a discussion of women and AIDS, entitled *Totentanz* (1991).
[31] One only has to think of the reaction to Jana Sterbak's meat dress, *Vanitas*, that was displayed at the National Gallery of Canada in 1990.
[32] Miller 111.

> words, works both to obstruct access to the desired object and to provide the means for storing quantities of desire sufficient to overcome the barrier".[33]

Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu too recognises this relationship.

> Disgust is the ambivalent experience of the horrible seduction of the disgusting and of enjoyment, which performs a sort of reduction to animality, corporeality, the belly and sex, that is, to what is common and therefore vulgar, removing any difference between those who resist with all their might and those who wallow in pleasure, who enjoy enjoyment".[34]

This citation is innovative in that it proposes a link between pleasure and disgust that implies an enjoyment that is forbidden or discouraged. There has to be recognition of the desire or pleasure inherent in beholding an object or moment that repels or challenges us. Works that incite such strong reactions often invade the body or assault one's personal space, which is an active revolt against the sterility of the space in which the artwork is being received. Certain histories of art have failed the art receiving experience by denying these non-visual or multi-sensory works of art a strong and welcome place in the gallery space. These kinds of works or sensual aesthetics barely even have a language. In addition, as noted by Miller, disgust is perhaps one of few moral judgements that rely heavily on the senses. He states that "the grammar, lexicon, and particular quality of disgust varies with the sense via which the disgusting was perceived".[35] The museum has effectively trained the senses and therefore when disgust comes into play within the four walls of the museum or gallery, it is particularly violent because it is too sensual.

> The "other" four senses, touch, smell, taste and hearing, have not been

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[33] Ibid. 113.
[34] Pierre Bourdieu, Distinction, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984): 489.
[35] Miller 107.

absent from the history of art. But there have been few elaborate discussions of receiving these aspects of an artistic moment, although hearing, or audio art forms have obviously been discussed more than the rest. These senses imply that there may not even be the need for an art object, which would manifestly upset the whole system of art reception. But even for those works that employ the visual in a secondary manner, there is still a lack of education where the reception of these works is concerned. In Constance Classen's book, *The Color of Angels*, she actively discusses these possibilities with regard to odours. She states that

> Odours defy Western conceptions of art in that they are immaterial. An odour cannot be hung on the wall as a visual image can, or placed on the floor like a sculpture. Furthermore, the fact that odours do not confine themselves to discrete areas, but spread and merge, means that the scent of one olfactory work would mingle with that of another. In visual terms it would be as though the colours of one painting were to run across the wall and blend into those of the painting next to it.[36]

Disgust in the case of non-traditional sensual artworks is very interesting to examine. The idea of space invasion is the major underlying factor in this kind of repulsion. Classen gives the example of smells running into each other in a gallery. Many people still have problems dealing with sound pieces from one exhibition infiltrating the space of another exhibition. In any case, disgust plays on the body's proximity to corporeal danger, whether it be moral or physical. As was illustrated above, the museum was formed during a time where these moral and physical dangers were being regulated. And personal space, i.e. distance, which also encompasses personal hygiene and propriety on a moral level, is the prime component of a traditional art receiving experience.

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[36] Constance Classen, The Color of Angels. Cosmology, gender and the aesthetic imagination (London: Routledge, 1998): 152.

Not only smell can make its way inside the body. Temperature, light and other proprioceptive triggers are also being dramatically controlled within the museum space. The sensations caused by alterations to standard and expected ranges of temperature and light can also lead to feelings of disgust. These sensations, which are linked to the sense of touch, can alter the overall state of the body by making it physically uncomfortable, removing its balance, or causing a host of other emotions like fear or desire. Lack of light, for example, can cause disorientation, and this is certainly not the norm within the gallery or museum, save for video art viewing or cinematic experiences that are confined to dark spaces. But without the glow of a monitor or projection to orient our perception of a visual experience, darkness can incite fear and trigger many memories of past associations with lack of light. Temperature is also something that is very much controlled within the museum, for conservation purposes and for comfort levels of the museum or gallery visitors. Few exhibitions to my knowledge have played with notions of climate within the exhibition space. The ones that have are anomalies, but interesting ones that demonstrate the potential for proprioceptive change.[37] Evidently, by going outside of the museum, into off-site venues, things such as temperature cannot be controlled, and there have been many artists and curators who have worked with this potential.

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[37] One particular exhibition in Germany played with temperature. *Dis.Location* was an exhibition of 16 artists in 4 exhibitions within a period of 2 weeks, held in Dortmund, Germany from September 14th to 23rd, and organised by hARTware Projekte (Dortmund) in association with MonteVideo/TBA (Amsterdam). The exhibition confronted the visitor immediately at the entrance with a room infused with a sub-tropical climate, butterflies and rotting fruit. Primarily a video art exhibition, this was one of the most innovative ways I have seen of questioning the media art exhibition format. See <http://www.montevideo.nl/dis_location>.

Touch or the idea of touching something is also discouraged within the museum. This sense is one of the most prone to instigating feelings of disgust. Getting too close to a disgusting object, or even visually sensing the possibilities for contact, can initiate repulsion. The museum's possible link to sanitary reform can perhaps explain the stifling of this sense. Contamination, germ spreading and of course the idea of proper interaction between museum visitors, are all ideas that have the possibility to regulate the sense of touch. However touch does not only have to imply literal physical contact. The idea of coming into contact makes us very aware of our personal space and of "comfort zones".[38] This personal space or the issue of distance is the number one rule in art reception. If the audience comes too close to an artwork, objectivity is compromised and perspective is diminished. If an artwork invades personal space to a point where there is threat of contact, the construction of the art receiving experience is severely injured.

Taste is the sense the most clearly linked to disgust. Julia Kristeva relies heavily on this point in *Powers of Horror*, and Miller clearly alludes to this in his book on disgust. The link between disgust and the sense of taste is most commonly attributed to non-Freudian psychologists and psychoanalysts who see this invasion of a major orifice to be the basis for constructions of disgust. Freud, who alludes to many other sources of disgust perception in childhood, such as fascination with bodily excretions, has expanded the notion of disgust to include the other four senses. However, taste does seem to be the most vulnerable sense, due to its direct link to the inside of the body, as well as the fact that disgust is very much linked to the ingestion of putrid or revolting foods, textures,

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[38] Miller 64.

liquids and even bodily fluids. Although, as Miller notes, disgust in the context of taste is not so much a revolt against foods or things that can be put in one's mouth, as a violation of a bodily orifice, of which there are several besides the mouth.[39] Once again, I would contend that taste and the literal ingestion of disgusting things could be a threat before anything is actually ingested. The perception that the body could be harmed in some way by something that is still at a distance, is a major point when discussing the space of the museum. The fact that vision is the most celebrated sense in this space indicates that if art should pose a threat, we will see it before we encounter it and therefore it can remain safe. The sorts of artworks that do not afford this kind of visual pre-planning are the most "dangerous" and do not conform to trusted systems of art reception. The visual is therefore the safety barrier that permits objectivity, good taste (in an aesthetic sense) and corporeal disassociation on many levels. If the sense of sight is compromised while other senses are given the chance to thrive, it is imaginable that the audience would vigorously protest against the artwork, and oftentimes against the artist, who instigated such a violation of safety.

In Bourdieu's *Distinction*, he spends a great deal of time establishing class links to tastes and distastes and eventually ends up discussing the facile, the impure, the vulgar, that is that which is most commonly linked to the lower, uncultured classes. Echoing Tony Bennett's discussion of the manner reform linked to the development of the museum space, it is easy to see that taste is also something that was and is cultivated within that space. The lower classes were to be taught, encouraged almost, to conform to

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[39] Ibid. 88.

the ideals of the upper class systems of taste and the museum was certainly a prime location to implement these changes. In front of classified objects and within the context of a system of aesthetic classification (not only physical), the uncultured classes were to learn the systems that found the basis of art reception. The space in which this taste was affirmed was most apparently the museum. Pure taste, according to Bourdieu, is that which conforms to the norms established within the cultured population.[40] Bourdieu then states that "what pure taste refuses is indeed the violence to which the popular spectator consents (one thinks of Adorno's description of popular music and its effects); it demands respect, the distance which allows it to keep its distance".[41] The popular spectator is, for Bourdieu, linked to instant gratification. He also states that

> At the risk of seeming to indulge in the facile effects which pure taste stigmatizes, it could be shown that the whole language of aesthetics is contained in a fundamental refusal of the facile, in all the meanings which bourgeois ethics and aesthetics give to the word; that pure taste, purely negative in its essence, is based on the disgust that is often called the visceral (it makes one sick or makes one vomit) for everything that is facile – facile music, or a facile stylistic effect, but also easy virtue or an easy lay. The refusal of what is easy in the sense of simple and therefore shallow and cheap, because it is easily decoded and culturally undemanding, naturally leads to the refusal of what is facile in the ethical or aesthetic sense, of everything which offers pleasures that are too immediately accessible and so discredited as childish or primitive (as opposed to the deferred pleasures of legitimate art).[42]

Pleasure is often immediate and uncontrollable, and often undeniable. Corporeal enjoyment is linked to animals, a lack of control, desire, longing, urges and physical reactions such as vomiting, fear, nervousness, sweating or crying. When beholders are in front of a work of art, they have been conditioned to contemplate and search for some

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[40] See Bourdieu's discussion of this subject in the section entitled "The Aristocracy of Culture" in his book *Distinction*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984).
[41] Bourdieu 488.
[42] Ibid. 486.

sort of universal truth that can supposedly be found in front of this material object. What has been dismissed is a reaction of the body in front of such a work without first contemplating in a detached and cold manner. Personal space, as well as space in general between the visitor and the artwork, is necessary in the determination of aesthetic response. No touching, no smelling, not even really close looking are mantras that the experienced visitor need not be reminded of. Once distance collapses and there is a more invested 'viewer' in the museum, the whole system of manner reform and taste education cannot be upheld. What then ensues is a critique of the individual who broke the rules of art reception, or an outright refusal of the artwork itself, since it drove the normally reserved art receiver to act out in an "uncontrollable" manner. The viewer is now ingesting the artwork in a physical manner and is mentally linked to the "taste container" which is the body.

In using the example of smell, David Howes, Anthony Synnott and Constance Classen propound that

> Contemporary society demands that we distance ourselves from the emotions, that social structures and divisions be seen to be objective or rational and not emotional, and that personal boundaries be respected. Thus, while olfactory codes continue to be allowed to reinforce social hierarchies at a semi- or subconscious level, sight, as the most detached sense (by Western standards), provides the model for modern bureaucratic society".[43]

Once again, this idea of distance comes up as the major inhibitor of experience. We must remain distanced from one another at a cultural and social level and distanced from art that questions these boundaries. However, touch, smell and taste cannot usually be

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[43] David Howes, Anthony Synnott and Constance Classen, Aroma - The Cultural History of Smell (London and New York: Routledge, 1994): 5.

experienced at a distance. (Although there are examples of occasions where they can, such as the feel of the sun on one's skin, or the smell of food cooking from very far away). But generally speaking, the integration of these senses into the museum means that comfort borders will be broken and that the body, including all of its capacities, will be given an unregimented space in which to express itself. It is possible to regain this space that was rightfully the audience's space to begin with, but if we as 'viewers' remain detached and unwilling to question the basic functions and sensations within our own bodies, then the aesthetic moment will remain cold and quiet.

Hans Robert Jauss, a German theorist, offered the term "horizon of expectation".[44] This horizon is a range of preconceived ideas about a work and about one's expected reactions towards it. It is firmly rooted in the systems of taste, at a given historical moment and in a given context, and in the propagated role of the museum. I believe that it is there in this horizon that the audience can permit itself to transform notions of propriety, or right and wrong . Jauss claims that,

> Reconstructed in this way, the horizon of expectations of a work allows one to determine its artistic character by the kind and the degree of its influence on a presupposed audience. If one characterises as aesthetic distance the disparity between the given horizons of expectations and the appearance of a new work, whose reception can result in a change of horizons through negation of familiar experiences or through raising newly articulated experiences to the level of consciousness, then this aesthetic distance can be objectified historically along the spectrum of the audience's reactions and criticism's judgment (spontaneous success, rejection or shock, scattered approval, gradual or belated understanding).[45]

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[44] Hans Robert Jauss, Toward an Aesthetic of Reception, trans. Timothy Bahti (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982): 23. Jauss uses this term throughout the book along with several other "horizons" such as the horizon of experience, for example.
[45] Ibid. 25.

Evidently, this idea is not perfect, as Jauss is very much concerned with the history of aesthetic experience in a particularly structuralist manner, but it does offer the thought that works can alter the horizon of expectations. The problem is that it takes something very powerful to question familiar perceptions and horizons of expectations. The artwork that does shake up the horizon must forcefully upset the audience and the critic, and must challenge fixed ideals surrounding behaviour and emotions. In times of horizon upset, audiences can be in a position to become more aware of their role in pre-defined spaces and how that role affects their concepts of art and the art receiving experience. One very compelling emotion that these artworks can promote is disgust. Disgust, as illustrated previously, is an emotion that can violently affect the body and the mind, and make the individual aware of his or her own self-imposed and culturally defined limitations. If an artwork can make its way inside the body, through the senses and to the mind, it has the possibility to sensitise the visitor to his or her own body and to how this body is being stifled during times of controlled art reception within the museum or gallery.

The interest in studying art that violates borders and transgresses convention becomes evident when one takes into account just how much potential these works afford the stifled "viewer" or participant. Art that prompts feelings of disgust is even more enticing because in many cases, the documented public outcries against these kinds of works clearly illustrate the potential for change. Disgust can be an emotion without limits, or without controllable borders. Disgust is an immediate reaction in most cases because of the latent corporeal danger it presents. The fact that disgust is tied into many bodily sensations and emotional responses or memories, promises that art works that

purposefully employ the disgust tactic will transform the body in the museum space. If the audience becomes more sensitive to the reactions put forth by their bodies, and consequently their emotions, it may be possible to frequently and forcefully alter the horizon of expectation suggested by Jauss.

The senses' place in the museum is at this moment questionable. Besides a few exhibitions that unsuccessfully play with the idea of exhibiting the marginalised senses, such as *Vital Signs*, presented at Concordia University in Montréal in April 2000, few exhibitions subtly and dynamically question the role of the body and its behaviours in that space.[46] The tendency to treat sensual artworks as amusement park attractions severely compromises the natural integration of the banned senses and their promising possibilities for corporeal freedom. However, instead of separating the senses, such as in the *Vital Signs* exhibition, some artists are creating environments in which the visitor is immersed in sensation.[47] All of the difficulties intrinsic to exhibiting the senses, so to speak, and most of my existing personal biases, are based in the fact that sensual exhibitions that truly push the limits of art receiving knowledge are very rare. When confronted with an exhibition that offers more than visual or audio pleasure, I am always intensely shocked by responses that seem incredibly foreign to me. I am thrown off balance and genuinely surprised by the sensations coursing through my body. What this indicates to me is that I have no language to deal with these sensations. The language of the museum, and the existence of "museum senses", sight, sound and sterility, have

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[46] *Vital Signs* was curated by Display Cult (Jim Drobnick, Jennifer Fisher, Colette Tougas) and was presented from March 30th to May 20th, 2000 at the Leonard and Ellen Bina Art Gallery at Concordia University, Montréal, Canada.

[47] I think of new media, interactive spaces, by artists such as Char Davies or Vibeke Sorenson.

compromised my visceral enjoyment of even purely visual works. When I come into contact with exhibitions such as the ones by Diana Thorneycroft that I will discuss in the following chapters, I am excited and moved by the fact that an artist could transform my perception of how I should or could be experiencing an installation. In Thorneycroft's case, she enthusiastically examines standard reception of photography by integrating very disgusting and visceral bodies into her photographic installations. By integrating smells, textures, sounds, and less than optimal lighting, Thorneycroft successfully transforms the exhibition space into a place in which I can be free to question my personal place in the gallery and how I have been taught to use it and feel it. Through disgust and boundary threats, Thorneycroft willingly questions the way "the viewer" has been culturally taught to express him or herself.

The notion of taste, as suggested by Bourdieu, Miller, Classen and Bennett, is extremely complex and rigorous. Pure, good, aesthetic taste is a privilege and often understood as a marker of status and intelligence. Most importantly, Bourdieu's main contention, although rigidly dichotomous, is that all tastes are based in distastes.[48] These distastes have a root in 18th century philosophy, in the exploratory definitions of aesthetic categories by philosophers such as Edmond Burke and Immanuel Kant. By mapping out a concise definition of the beautiful, these thinkers have helped to perpetuate the practice of exclusionary rituals within a high art context. However, amidst their aesthetics, it is also possible to locate an agent for change; an aesthetic category that challenges the beautiful and its rules, and offers a possibility for audience redefinition. The sublime, as defined by

[48] Bourdieu 56.

Kant and Burke, is an aesthetic category that counters the beautiful and deals with the emotions and passions encountered in front of dangerous moments, frightful spectacles, or awe-inspiring instances. Based heavily in the notion of self-preservation, the sublime has much in common with notions of disgust and illustrates on several levels, the range of possible positive and negative responses the audience could perhaps experience in front of such artworks or manifestations. However, the most important thing I hope to illustrate in the next chapter is the relative instability of these aesthetic categories and how their promoted, fixed existences can be questioned in order to welcome more unrestrained human responses within the museum or gallery.

CHAPTER 2: UNDERSTANDING THE SUBLIME

The sublime, by definition, is hard to identify. By Immanuel Kant's definition, it is limitless and without form. It is not specifically tied to an object. Rather it is linked to feelings and sensations in the body and the mind, related to how the mind digests the information offered by the sublime spectacle and how it is processed through the faculties of imagination and reason. Many different theorists have taken on the sublime and used some of its properties and characteristics to initiate theories and problematics of their own, such as Julia Kristeva's "abject"[49] and Lynda Nead's "obscene"[50]. Jean-François Lyotard and others such as W.J.T. Mitchell, have discussed its problems and relevance in various ways, and many other art critics have used its characteristics to examine contemporary art. Most importantly, there exists within these theories many possibilities when faced with the borders and structures encountered by the average art viewer or participant in the museum or gallery. As discussed in the previous chapter, that space has been controlled and manipulated for various reasons, not the least of which is the establishment of rules of conduct and moral order. Artworks that resist these rules are often very confrontational for the audience that generally has a fairly arduous time reconciling emotional and physical responses with the norms of the establishment. In terms of disgust or repulsion, as I have demonstrated, these responses can become even more challenging. Burke and Kant's explorations into the sublime help to elucidate the possible responses when faced with art that breaks boundaries, but they also provide an opportunity for alternative art reception. By examining their definitions of the beautiful

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[49] Julia Kristeva, Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).
[50] Lynda Nead, The Female Nude. Art, Obscenity and Sexuality (London and New York: Routledge, 1992).

and their counterbalancing of this aesthetic category with the sublime, it will be possible to understand why art that repels or traumatises is so difficult for the audience to contend with, and how there lies among these definitions a vehicle for change within the systems that uphold them.

In 1759, Edmond Burke published *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful.* In Section Two of this book, Burke defines very clearly what he sees as sublime. This is a systematic guide to the sublime, with a very strict and obsessively classified series of investigations into terror, obscurity, power, privation, vastness, infinity, succession and uniformity, magnitude, infinity, difficulty, magnificence, light, colour, sound, smell and taste, and feeling. All of these qualities have the potential to instigate feelings of the sublime. However, Burke makes a clear remark on what he considers to be the most dynamic passion to prompt the sublime. "Indeed terror is in all cases whatsoever, either more openly or latently the ruling principle of the sublime".[51] Subsequently, Burke reminds the reader of the importance of terror in his deliberations, and notes the significance of "that sort of delightful horror, which is the most genuine effect, and truest test of the sublime".[52] The link between terror and delight is fundamental to Burke's definition of the sublime, and raises the issue of control. The feeling of delightful horror is an apparent oxymoron, but after having encountered Bourdieu's and Miller's thoughts on disgust, it does not seem that difficult to imagine. The sensation of bodily jeopardy and imminent danger can illicit

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[51] Edmond Burke, A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful, ed. James T. Boulton (Notre-Dame: University of Notre-Dame Press, 1987): 58.
[52] Ibid. 73.

feelings of delight in that one is driven to investigate, be curious, or rejoice in the distance between him or herself and the object of disgust or terror.

Amidst these definitions, Burke also embarks on a rather rigorous debate about the sublimity of image and word, painting and poetry. For him, poetry is sublime and painting is beautiful, because of poetry's ability to be ungrounded and at times limitless in its representation. W.J.T. Mitchell examines this issue in great depth in a chapter of *Iconology*, called "Eye and Ear: Edmond Burke and the Politics of Sensibility".[53] He notes that Burke makes this distinction and creates one of the many binary oppositions in his text, based on what is beautiful and what is sublime. Mitchell writes, "for Burke, words are the sublime medium precisely because they cannot provide clear images".[54] Burke's generally questionable assertion as noted by Mitchell is still maintained in art reception today through something as basic as "taste". As noted in the previous chapter, to see something is to have a reasonable amount of distance from it. Vision permits the evaluation of danger, and allows for the objectivity required in pure taste judgment. If one is too close or unable to see clearly, the object of admiration cannot be appropriately judged. A clear image is one that is image based, vision based, and Burke's contention that words are sublime reinforces this belief. Mitchell underlines one example, that "obscurity is sublime, for Burke, precisely because it is a frustration of the power of vision".[55] This is a clear denotation of the value of vision for Burke and of the relegation

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[53] W.J.T. Mitchell, Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1986): 116-149.
[54] Ibid. 125.
[55] Ibid. 126.

of most of the other senses to the category of the sublime. However, for the purposes of this discussion, this categorisation is not necessarily a negative occurrence.

As for the other senses, Burke briefly discusses them as somewhat inadequate producers of grand sensations, unless they are extremely exaggerated or particularly foul. With regards to sound, Burke claims that "excessive loudness alone is sufficient to overpower the soul, to suspend its action, and to fill it with terror".[56] As for aromas and tastes, "no smells or tastes can produce a grand sensation, except excessive bitters, and intolerable stenches".[57] He notes that there is no delight when confronted with these more or less disgusting smells and tastes, but that when moderated by text, through a narrative or through poetry, it is then possible for them to be sources of the sublime.[58] Generally speaking however, as noted by Mitchell, most of the sources of the sublime imply the privation or excessive aggravation of the sense of sight. Despite Burke's insistence on the overwhelming nature of the sublime and on its main characteristic, which is a certain momentary, enjoyable, loss of control, the body seems to play a particular and very well defined role in this potential experience. The eyes and the mind are those human "devices" that are primarily affected by the sublime while the rest of the body is but a container for the experience. The implication of a loss of a sensual control is not particularly felt in Burke's text. However, it is possible to adopt Burke's philosophy of the sublime in a less limited sensual context and promote this aesthetic category based on its possibilities with regard to control issues. The lack of boundaries for Burke is a

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[56] Burke 82.
[57] Ibid. 85.
[58] Ibid.

positive quality of the sublime in that it incites delight and pleasure. This aesthetic principle of the sublime can be applied to the sensation of unorthodox art reception and its possibilities within the gallery or museum.

For Burke, "the sublime is an idea belonging to self-preservation".[59] This arises out of a series of responses within the body and the mind once confronted by the sublime. Basically when confronted by terror, pain or excess, Burke claims that the human being is so bombarded by emotion and feeling that the mind is confused and oftentimes fearful. Once the mind reasons the parts to make a coherent whole, a sense of relief, delight or pleasure arises. The pleasure evolves out of a sense that there is a danger present and then out of the realisation that it will be possible to overcome it. The intense terror that is evoked by the lack of light, feeling of pain, or sense of infinity, is alleviated by an eventual awareness that it cannot directly be a potential cause of one's own possible demise. For Burke, self-preservation is "one of the most affecting [ideas] we have. That its strongest emotion is an emotion of distress, and that no pleasure from a positive cause belongs to it".[60] Here, Burke implies the existence of another sort of pleasure, a negative one.

Immanuel Kant is another proponent of the sublime and offers a more elaborate series of discussions in two texts he published concerning the aesthetic categories of the beautiful and the sublime. Kant did write a very Burke-inspired text entitled *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime,* which is less recognised in current

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[59] Ibid. 86.
[60] Ibid.

critical literature on Kant's aesthetics and which appeared before the *Critique of Judgement.* The existence of the *Observations* is integral to one's reading of the *Analytic of the Sublime.* Similar to Burke's bold classifications of what is sublime and what is not, Kant's *Observations* illustrate the desire to create an excessive opposite of the beautiful, to have an alternative aesthetic experience to that which is regulated by pure taste. Yet the sublime for Kant is not completely outside of the realm of "high" art. It is a controlled "out of control" experience that resolves itself and becomes pleasurable, in a negative sense. Elaborated in the *Critique of Judgement*, these polar oppositions become problematic in their dichotomous nature, but useful when examining the rigid system of control within the museum. The idea that something can be negatively or positively pleasurable without being beautiful is vitally important to the destabilisation of current art reception. This is illustrated throughout the history of art in the twentieth century in abstract expressionism, minimalism, performance art, etc. Although there are inherent problems in the binaries, as with Burke, the sublime as defined by Kant is rich with hope that the beautiful and what it symbolises in terms of regulation and universality, may not remain the most important qualifier in the practice of 'art receiving'.

In the first book of the *Critique of Judgement*, "The Analytic of the Beautiful", Kant proclaims that "Taste is the faculty of judging of an object or a method of representing it by an entirely disinterested satisfaction or dissatisfaction. The object of such satisfaction is called beautiful".[61] The idea of disinterestedness is increasingly relevant to the interest invested in the sublime. For Kant, by seeing something and

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[61] Immanuel Kant, Critique of Judgment, trans. J.H. Bernard (New York: Haffner Press: 1951): 45.

affirming in his judgement it is beautiful, "I am concerned, not with that in which I depend on the existence of the object, but with that which I make out of this representation in myself".[62] This representation, Kant goes on to say, is a judgment of taste that the beholder/feeler believes that "everyone ought to give his approval to the object in question and also describe it as beautiful".[63] This perception of universality is therefore what makes the judgment of the beautiful so potent. Taste is incredibly subjective, as Kant points out time and time again, but there is the implication that the beautiful should be universal, objective. This is how an entire community can somehow revolt against an artwork that they have never seen before. Pierre Bourdieu goes on to say that Kant emphasizes the existence of a certain dissimilarity between pleasure and enjoyment, the latter of which is thought by Kant to be gratification, or base pleasure; that which is "reduced to a pleasure of the senses, as in what Kant calls 'the taste of the tongue, the palate and the throat, a surrender to immediate sensation which in another order looks like imprudence".[64] This distinction is particularly important in the definition of what is purported to be a proper art receiving experience, or accepted pleasure.

The beautiful's main attributes, according to Kant, are disinterestedness, lack of concept, and perceived universality. But the notion of pleasure is also central to Kant and Burke's debates. Jean–François Lyotard, in his *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime*, states most clearly that

> Pleasure in the beautiful occurs when the powers of imagination and understanding engage with each other, according to a suitable 'ratio' in a kind of play. A play because they compete with each other, one with forms, the other with

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[62] Ibid. 39.
[63] Ibid. 74.
[64] Pierre Bourdieu, Distinction (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984): 486.

> concepts, in an effort to grasp the object. But it is also play because they are accomplices in not determining the object, that is, in not grasping it by form and concept as they do in objective knowledge. The result is that the ratio suited to procuring the delight that is called pleasure in the beautiful is not itself determined; delight signals it. The tension between the two powers is also necessarily unstable.[65]

This reading is extremely important when discussing Kant's notion of perceived universality. When Lyotard speaks of instability, he is discerning the volatility of the aesthetic categories and the dynamic nature of the act of passing aesthetic judgment. For me, the realisation of this dynamism in the beautiful necessarily brings it closer to the sublime. In a discussion of the feeling of the sublime, Lynda Nead observes that "the experience of the sublime is thus seen to be kinetic, in contrast to the experience of the beautiful which is always contemplative".[66] However, this contemplation is equally dynamic, according to Lyotard's reading of Kant and Burke. Therefore, it is fundamental when Lyotard states that "sublime feeling can be thought of as an extreme case of the beautiful. Thus it is through the faculty of concepts that the aesthetic feeling becomes unbound".[67] The perception of universality is therefore just that – a perception rather than a reality. To become aware of the intense subjectivity of the beautiful is an empowering recognition. The experience of the viewer that seems dependent upon the universality proclaimed by Kant could in fact be free from the restraints of collective appreciation.

In the *Analytic of the Sublime*, Kant states that,

> For the beautiful is directly attended with a feeling of the furtherance of life, and is thus compatible with charms and a playful imagination. On the other hand, the feeling of the sublime is a pleasure that only arises indirectly, being brought about

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[65] Jean-François Lyotard, Lessons of the Analytic of the Sublime (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994): 73.
[66] Nead 26.
[67] Lyotard 75.

> by the feeling of a momentary check to the vital forces followed at once by a discharge all the more powerful, and so it is an emotion that seems to be no sport, but dead earnest in the affairs of the imagination. Hence charms are repugnant to it; and, since the mind is not simply attracted by the object, but is also alternately repelled thereby, the delight in the sublime does not so much involve positive pleasure as admiration or respect, i.e. merits the name of a negative pleasure.[68]

It is important once again to recall Bourdieu's observation that Kant's notion of pleasure is in direct opposition to enjoyment, or as Kant denotes it in this paragraph, charms. The pleasure of which Kant speaks is not "facile" and although he distinguishes two distinct kinds of pleasure, neither is completely body-bound. However, the idea of a negative pleasure that integrates repulsion is an attractive concept. The idea of a pleasure that relies on overwhelming feelings and the realization that reason can be overtaken by such a spectacle or emotion, is promising for the contemporary art audience. It does not seem likely that a feeling of self-preservation is the only source of such a negative pleasure. If one is willing, an examination of what is happening inside of the body while it is experiencing this rush of feelings and thoughts, is also possible. If the visitor reenacts the experience of beholding the sublime artwork, it may be possible for him or her to recognize a particular moment where his or her inherent displeasure, or initial counter-reaction, transforms itself into the above-mentioned negative pleasure. I would suggest that this pleasure comes not only from a feeling of self-preservation, but also from a recognition that the body is present and active within the museum space, in front of an artwork that cannot be contained. It is rare that a work will intervene into one's corporeal system. When it does in such a violent manner, one often dismisses the feeling as disgust. But as I have mentioned in the previous chapter, disgust could be considered a legitimate

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[68] Immanuel Kant, The Critique of Judgement, trans. James Creed Meredith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969): 91.

and promising sentiment to experience in the art institution. If one is willing to reconsider the aesthetic experience in terms of an involved and invested experience, it is possible to acknowledge a certain pleasure in having overcome the self-prescribed distance involved in beholding a work of art. The fact that an artwork is able to affect the body and the mind on such a profoundly disturbing level could be considered the embodiment of the negative pleasure itself.

Julia Kristeva has also examined these dramatic and disturbing responses to art or to experiences that defy control or borders. Her book *Powers of Horror*, in which she explores what she terms the abject, is very much related to Burke and Kant's sublime. In fact, the abject is the epitome of border abolishment. Although not directly in line with Kant's belief system, the sublime and the abject are indeed similar in that they both question limits. The abject addresses the negative pleasure introduced by Burke and Kant, to a limited degree. In an interview from 1980, Kristeva explained the abject to be,

> an extremely strong feeling which is at once somatic and symbolic, and which is above all a revolt of the person against an external menace from which one wants to keep oneself at a distance, but of which one has the impression that it is not only an external menace but that it may menace us from the inside. So it is a desire for separation, from becoming autonomous and also the feeling of an impossibility of doing so - whence the element of crisis which the notion of abjection carries with it. Taken to its logical consequences, it is an impossible assemblage of elements, with a connotation of a "fragile limit".[69]

Although when Kristeva speaks of separation, she is necessarily also speaking of the psychoanalytic separation of the child from the maternal body, it is possible to take the definition further, out of the realm of psychoanalytic discourse. This separation and autonomy could also be considered to be the distance or separation from the work of art.

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[69] Cited in Gail Weiss, Body Images: Embodiment as Intercorporeality (London: Routledge, 1999): 93.

Works that invade personal space and on some level enter the body through the mediation of senses other than sight do not allow for the safe distance prescribed by the museum. This craving to distance oneself from the artwork that incites repulsion or extreme corporeal reactions is intense because of the impossibility of doing so.

This desire to be separated from the thing that disgusts, repels or repulses, is inevitable when faced with death, for example. Kristeva states that

> The corpse (or cadaver: *cadere*, to fall), that which has irremediably come a cropper, is cesspool, and death; it upsets even more violently the one who confronts it as fragile and fallacious chance. A wound with blood and pus, or the sickly, acrid smell of sweat, of decay, does not *signify* death. In the presence of signified death – a flat encephalograph, for instance – I would understand, react, or accept. No, as in true theatre, without makeup or masks, refuse and corpses *show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live.[70]

Kristeva illustrates an important similarity between Kant's sublime and the abject. She notes that in front of this corpse or bodily fluid, one is not able to understand, react or accept. There is only abjection, which, according to her definitions is a release, a spewing out of the confusion and fear or repulsion. Abjection is in one sense a loss of control and is distanced even further from reason and understanding than is the sublime. This is also what makes it difficult to deal with an artwork that causes such intense feelings of disgust and horror. For Kristeva, by abjecting oneself, by expelling oneself in the face of death or horror, one becomes oneself at the same time. The separation from the mother, in Kristeva's psychoanalytic terms, is a horrifically difficult experience of pain and abjection, but it results in the birth of the individual, and that same individual rejoices at the discovery of him/herself. This can be identified with Kant's negative pleasure.

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[70] Kristeva 3.

Kristeva's abject could also be seen as a reaction against the separation from the beautiful and from the comfort it provides. Dramatic and overwhelming, the abject is an extreme reaction to that which resists borders. Perhaps too dramatic and violent at times, Kristeva's abject leaves me questioning the realistic consequences of these reactions. How does the body deal with this expulsion? Does it have to be this violent? In an interview on Georges Bataille's *informe* and Julia Kristeva's abject, Hal Foster states that

> The problem may not be that this notion [the abject] is not structural enough, but that it is *too* structural, that is to say, too oppositional. It seems to pose an inside-outside model whereby the foundational act of the subject is, paradoxically, to get rid of that which it is not. This suggests that the originary state of the subject is *disgust*, which is thereby made natural, or again primordial. It is as if there is no way for any subject not to be phobic before figures of alterity – ethnic, sexual, whatever disgust may target.[71]

Perhaps the violence and vehemence with which the abject shapes the subject is too extreme. However, in Foster's criticism there lies an interesting comment on the issue of disgust. With the unconscious "originary state" being disgust, it leaves little room for the possibility of the social and cultural formation of this emotion. Rather than to fixate on an inherent "phobia before figures of alterity", which could encompass artworks that rebel against the "museum senses", it may be more interesting to examine the political and social foundations for this kind of reaction.

Lynda Nead, on the other hand, offers a more political view of the sublime. In the context of her book on the female nude, she alludes to the sublime because of its volatile nature. For her, the sublime

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[71] Hal Foster, Benjamin Bucholch, Rosalind Krauss, Yve-Alain Bois, "The Politics of the Signifier II: A Conversation on the *Informe* and the Abject" (October, No. 67, Winter 1994, 3-21): 6.

> cannot be framed and is therefore almost beyond presentation (in a quite literal sense, then, obscene). For Kant, the sublime is encountered more readily in raw nature than in art. If art is defined as the limiting or framing of formed matter, then the sublime must necessarily be beyond or outside the parameters of art".[72]

The obscene, for Nead, is literally "what is off, or to one side of the stage, beyond presentation".[73] For her, "the art/obscenity pairing represents the distinction between that which can be seen and that which is just beyond representation".[74] The use of the word "seen" is very relevant to this discussion in that Nead links the destabilisation of the monopoly of the sense of sight to the sublime and to the obscene. By doing so, another set of possibilities is brought forth. Nead makes a connection between the obscene and the body, and gratefully gives the body back its senses. Nead's view of the sublime as without borders and outside of representation is unabashedly subversive. Echoing Burke's discussion of poetry as sublime, Nead's dynamic space without fixed images or definable parameters, offers an enormous realm of possibilities to the art receiving audience. If this space could be incarnated in the museum, the visitor could be freer to explore his or her personal revelations and sensations without boundaries. The idea of an aesthetic category that disregards definitions is fundamentally important and incredibly exciting.

Nead most importantly discussed the sublime because of its political possibilities within a feminist context. "The sublime is not simply a site for the definition of masculinity but is also where a certain deviant or transgressive form of femininity is played out. It is where woman goes beyond her proper boundaries and gets out of

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[72] Nead 26.
[73] Ibid. 25.
[74] Ibid.

place."[75] This is quite positively subversive in that it takes a notion of femininity (or even "the beautiful") and completes turns it on itself to force it out of control. Kant and Burke associate the beautiful with ideas of femininity, although they do not completely consider the sublime to be masculine. Therefore the sublime, as Nead states above, can become a free zone where "woman" is released from convention and oppressive definitions. The culturally defined female cannot be controlled in the sublime space. Therefore, as a dynamic threat, the female body is set loose and can no longer be contemplated. The culturally defined art "viewer" can also potentially reclaim hir or her identity and body thanks to the sublime. If the sublime is without borders for the female, it can certainly be a political refuge for the oppressed museum or gallery goer. Lynda Nead's sublime space is filled with movement, disturbance and freedom, and for this reason, a champion for the demoralized, exploited art audience.

The sublime and its concentration on pleasure and "un" forms, allow for a very powerful aesthetic space to be developed in the face of works that challenge borders. Kristeva's abject inherently embraces the need to become aware of the body and its difficulties in breaking boundaries and in coming to terms with what is inside and what is outside. Nead examines this further by clearly stating that Kant's aesthetics are possibly beyond what current art reception can offer. The obscene has no limits, no boundaries and allows for a reconsideration of perceived freedoms and stereotypes on a political level. Aesthetic categories are founded on control and boundaries in order to establish polarities between proper and improper. But what the sublime offers is a space in which

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[75] Ibid. 29.

the monopoly of right and wrong can be temporarily discounted and even ignored. Diana Thorneycroft is an artist who is constantly questioning art spaces and the potential performative, sensual gestures within them. In the next four chapters, I will explore her use of the museum and gallery and illustrate how she is actively proposing change within the confines of those culturally domineering institutions. Her use of smells, proprioceptive landscapes, and her employment of the disgusting and shocking to rouse emotional and sensual response, inspire me to believe that Nead's space is not a fantasy. By becoming more aware of the repression of our bodies and senses within museological settings, by understanding this repression's roots, and by embracing the potential corporeal and mental freedom that art such as Thorneycroft's affords us, it may be possible to more forcefully alter the contemporary "horizon of expectations" that plagues the art receiver's individuality.

CHAPTER 3
THE WORK OF DIANA THORNEYCROFT 1989 - 1997

From her early days as a graphic artist to her most recent photographic work and installation, Diana Thorneycroft has been continually pushing the limits of art reception and "viewer" comfort. An artist whose concerns have ranged from the female body and its scope of roles and activities, to visceral death and decay, Thorneycroft has never ceased to seek loud and emotional responses to her work. Conscious of Lacanian psychoanalysis, in 1991 she presented *Touching: The Self*, an exploration of her body, of her relationship to her family and of the joy of props. Her interest in masks and "stages" or scenes for her photographs expanded out of this series and continued with *a slow remembering* in 1994, *On the Skin of a Doll* (1996) and finally in *slytod* (1997). During this time period, she also explored the media of performance and video in *Snare* (1996) and *I Will Refresh You* (1996). What began as psychoanalytic, staged auto-photography has progressed to performance and installation using dolls, animals and masks, as well as increased use of her own malleable body as a limitless stage for experimentation. Conscious of the possibilities intrinsic to the merging of photography and non-visual sensory stimuli, Thorneycroft has proven herself to be an artist uninhibitedly willing to question the distance between "viewer" and photographic image. Thorneycroft's work up until her latest installations *slytod* and *Monstrance,* is primarily photo-based and quite conventional in its presentation. However the content of the photographs has proven to be quite perplexing to some, offensive to others and quite cathartic to a few. Thorneycroft's explorations early on in her career have led her to a point where she needed to escape the frame of the photographs and eventually lead the visitor through a staged, sensual space

that had previously been reserved for the artist herself. Seen either as generous or sadistic, this act of sharing the performative aspects of her photography has its roots in the themes and difficulties she explored in the beginning of her career.

Thorneycroft began as a printmaker and although this seems to be an unlikely source for her most recent photographic work, it is simple to trace links and to foreshadow her obsession with darkness, the body and the animal world. A chance encounter with a Thanksgiving turkey in the early 1980s transformed her style on paper and from then on she continued to explore the visceral textural possibilities of chickens and other fowl, jars and windows.[76] Works such as *Suddenly Last Summer* (Fig. 2) and *It was good for me . . was it good for you?* (Fig. 3) illustrate her complex and often intimate relationship to detail and naked flesh. In a 1986 article, Thorneycroft stated that "nakedness and the sensuous treatment of flesh makes these drawings powerfully sexual. They become voyeuristic images of sleeping, intimate bodies".[77] This sexualized, headless Christmas fare instigated a desire to further delve into the realm of the body. The promise of the animal body and its skin, pores, senses, and responses that Thorneycroft obsessively detailed in her graphic work, drove her to examine the potent qualities of the human body. Remaining faithful to the magnetic relationship to discomfort and to public uneasiness vis-à-vis her work, Thorneycroft turned her attention towards her own body and its distinctive characteristics.[78] After preliminary self-portraits

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[76] Diana Thorneycroft Pura. "Fowl is Fair & Fair is Fowl. The Chicken Drawings of Diana Pura," Border Crossings Vol. 5, no. 2 (Spring 1986): 48.
[77] Ibid. 49.
[78] Thorneycroft claims that "the controversial reactions I have received from some work strengthens their existence for me". Ibid.

on paper and accompanied by the addition of dolls to her list of provocative props including toys, foliage, and guns, she chose to investigate the medium of photography. In 1989, she moved decisively to the camera and to its power to capture more starkly the nakedness and power of her subjects. Her favorite, most difficult and most enduring subject has remained herself.

Thorneycroft's first major exhibition entitled *Touching: The Self* (1991), is an illustration of her first forays into the world of photography. This very personal series of large black and white silver prints portrayed Thorneycroft's obsessive sensibility towards her body and the theatrical manipulations she was coming to use more and more. From earlier works such as *Self-portrait in Field of Dolls 1* from 1989 (Fig. 4), to later investigations into sexuality and gender issues seen through familial representations, Thorneycroft demonstrated her intense love of shadow and ambiguity and her mission to question recognition and comfort in the exhibition space.

Thorneycroft's staged scenes, in the beginning, were very loaded down with props. *Untitled (Family self-portrait)* (1990) (Fig. 5) is a good example of how she began almost too eagerly to use the objects that had fascinated her in her graphic career. Dolls - lots of dolls - masks, plastic appendages, toys and decadent backdrops are used incessantly in the centre of the photograph, whether to comfort the artist herself who had never before performed naked in her own artistic spaces, or to prematurely complicate the issues with which she was so concerned. The constant masking of her face and the continual and discomforting ambiguity of her sexuality and gender made for a ripe

critical meal. In an interview with the artist, she made note that the issue of her sexuality often overshadowed the content. Presuming lesbianism, many visitors and commentators focused on this misrepresentation and presumed this to be the basis for her investigation into fake penises. Unsettling in their indeterminate subject matter, the photographs portrayed a body adorned with memory and experience but restless in its representation. Covered in significant props, Thorneycroft continually investigated tactile histories of her childhood through layers of associations, from a gun that echoes a portrait of her brother as a small child, to air force paraphernalia that recalls her father's itinerant occupation.[79]

The discomfort felt by viewers in front of this series could be seen as a result of the sexualized, almost impermissible experience of beholding a body so used and rearranged for the purpose of voyeuristic pleasure. Looking at this woman, at times androgynous thanks to her infamous props, is uncomfortable. Reacting in a positively pleasurable way would be like admitting to seeking pleasure in the dark side. Freud's id would be set free and the ego would not be able to mediate. Reactions to the current retrospective exhibition presently on tour throughout Canada and Japan, titled *The Body, Its Lesson and Camouflage* illustrate the obvious difficulties with some of Thorneycroft's early work. These reactions extend further to the later series as well, but encompass an entire oeuvre of discomfort. "An area [Brandon, Manitoba] artist who visited the gallery summed up her disdain for Thorneycroft's creations this way: 'Until

[79] In every lecture that I have attended where Thorneycroft has spoken of this early series, she brings out an old photograph of her brother holding a toy gun in a similar way to how she herself is holding it in her photograph. She insists upon the fact that this resemblance is not only coincidental but unconsciously purposeful.

she stops abusing herself and abusing her audience, I'm just not interested'".[80] Most importantly, the idea of the audience being abused by Thorneycroft must be examined further. The space of the gallery, or museum, has traditionally been "safe" and once an artist violates the safety in looking, it would seem that the audience has no choice but to feel used and played with. The moral implications of looking, and of distance are indeed abused by Thorneycroft's naked bodies, in that she invites the viewer to keep looking but the subject matter is not such that the viewer feels comfortable. The need to identify with the subject and object of the photograph was continually made difficult and it would seem that the scopophilic response inherent in looking at powerfully erotic but restless images is at times almost forced upon the viewer. The general reaction was then to look away. Amy Karlinsky notes that

> the exhibition's locale, tucked away in an interior corridor at the WAG, reiterates the peep-show allusion. Consequently, the contextualized meaning that accrues to some of the photographs within the cloistered, claustrophobic viewing space compromises their original critical stance, as does their uncanny thrust into journalistic circulation.[81]

This "peep-show allusion" made the reception of these works even more difficult for the average museum visitor. Thorneycroft's own artistic space in which she created these works is left to chance, is free from constraints innate in art reception. Her accidental manner in working with the flashlight in a darkened and, granted, staged space contradicts the predetermined manner in which the work was taken in. The content, while trying to instigate random association, such as the automatic writing of the surrealists, appeared calculated; as a sort of Freudian theory or Lacanian concept waiting to be

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[80] Cited in Diane Nelson, "Exhibit deeply disturbing," The Brandon Sun, (August 1999): D3.
[81] Amy Karlinsky, "Diana Thorneycroft," C Magazine No. 31 (Fall 1991): 70.

figured out by the viewer. It is almost as though the extensive number of props were placed as clues in a scavenger hunt. The pieces were meant to be pieces of a puzzle and this is where the dreamscape of psychoanalysis went awry for Thorneycroft. Random association is not immediately supposed to make sense. It is difficult and oftentimes not so obvious. Thorneycroft's toy guns or plastic dolls were placed purposefully. The terrain for experimentation became something similar to Hans Bellmer's fetichized doll, a female object epitomizing "the surrealist concept of 'convulsive beauty' and the 'cult of excess'".[82] Thorneycroft somewhat disappeared in these earlier photographs and left the viewer to assemble the pieces of a puzzle waiting to happen. Thorneycroft's other fascination with the morbid photography of Joel Peter Witkin also helped to create a space that was less and less her own. Taking from so many sources and referring to so many concepts and theories in fact turned her early work into a theoretical text and reference guide that was difficult to grasp from any angle. Although innovative in her creative process and her desire to affect the viewer, I believe that the early work especially in *Touching: The Self* only illustrates the very beginnings of an artist experimenting with the power of performing her own image.

Thorneycroft's second major series came to be exhibited in 1994 at the Floating Gallery in Winnipeg. A creative collaboration with Di Brandt, poet and Sigrid Dahle, curator, *a slow remembering* was a very exciting and fluid movement away from the persistence of determined Freudian stages. As Alison Gillmor notes, Thorneycroft came to explore

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[82] Peter Webb with Robert Short, Hans Bellmer (London: Quartet Books Ltd., 1985): 62.

> how to deal actively with Freudian (and now neo- and even anti-Freudian) ideas without overdetermining the results; how to keep that curious, many-layered narrative of revelation and concealment, coyness and confession that makes the psychoanalytic process so voyeuristically pleasing and emotionally compelling; how to use symbols weighted with sexual meaning without sinking into literalism; how to balance the exhilarating, frightening play of the unconscious mind with the organizing, aestheticizing imperatives of the conscious mind.[83]

Thorneycroft confidently presents herself as the "exhilarating, frightening" player in this exhibition, and the viewers of her beautifully sensual photographs have a duty to aestheticize and rationalize the experience. This time, unlike in *Touching: The Self*, Thorneycroft does not parade her psychoanalytic symbols across the surface of her cibachromes. Instead, she layers her tools and subject matter in a luxuriant manner that beckons the viewer into her dreamy world. *Untitled (& if she wakes)* (1994) (Fig. 6), one of the photographs in the series, is a succulent example of how the staged scene can become a platform for the imagination. The image of a Sleeping Beauty surrounded by her childhood stuffed companions and translucent, draping bed covers alludes to the dream world while inviting the viewer into the very real space of the sleeping body. Once again, Thorneycroft's seemingly androgynous body is the object of voyeuristic desires, but she seems to be less overpowered by the props that surround her. Not so much an exploration into the theoretically defined psyche, this series of photographs accompanied by languid poetry, seems to offer the spectator/active participant an occasion to investigate their own unconscious worlds. Dahle writes that

> abstract thoughts are transposed into concrete visual images so that a broken toy can represent a broken marriage. Time can be translated into space: events that happened long ago might be pictured as being spatially distant. Every detail and nuance has significance: nothing is superfluous. There are no coincidences.[84]

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[83] Alison Gillmor. "When She Dread Awakens," Border Crossings Vol. 14, no. 1 (January 1995), 67-68: 67.

[84] Sigrid Dahle, a slow remembering (Winnipeg: The Floating Gallery, 1994) : 4.

No, there are no coincidences, but here the observer can appropriate his or her own images and investigate his or her own responses. Thorneycroft finally brought the public closer to the photograph. Gillmor insists that "she creates not just the objects of dreams, but something much more difficult - the feel of dreams".[85]

An intimate relationship between the art object and the viewer or participant is difficult to cultivate, but it would seem that, as I look back on Thorneycroft's photographic career over the last ten years, I can recognize that she has actively decided to pursue this vein of closeness. In the earlier series of photographs, Thorneycroft attempted to touch the viewer with her symbols and situations. At times left cold by the sterile secret, but in fact obvious, code, the viewer most commonly chose to revolt against the imagery in the photographs, needing to blame the difficulties on the artist's seemingly abusive childhood or homosexuality. As well, the attack on the audience, Thorneycroft's need to pummel the spectator with symbols and meaning, made it difficult for the audience to deal with the space on top of the images that they saw in that space. However, her move to more performative art forms while maintaining her self-photographic practice is evidence of a desire to touch the audience in a more subtly invasive and individual manner while at the same time exploring the same imagery of her photographic work.

In 1996, Thorneycroft and her partner Michael Boss installed a first performance using the dolls which have recurred in many if not most of her early photographs. *I will*

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[85] Gillmor 68.

refresh you was a first attempt to involve the viewer in a more physically active way.[86] In an interview with Robert Enright, Thorneycroft discusses the new exhibition,

> "On the skin" which includes over 80 feet of text written out of match heads that I did myself. You have to be somewhat obsessive to do that. And the 53 dolls in the show were covered with rice paper and then painted white and each one took I don't know how long. It was repeating a pattern over and over again.[87]

This pattern repeated itself across a long wall at Ace Art Gallery in Winnipeg. Once a day, Thorneycroft would light the matches which would ignite the text written in matches below the 53 dolls stuck in the wall above. During a lecture at the University of Manitoba in 1997, Thorneycroft insisted upon the particularly invasive yet beautiful smell of sulfur that would linger in the gallery after the performance.[88] This aroma deeply affected her and it easy to see how subsequent installations such as *slytod* and *Monstrance* have benefited from this sensual awakening. The introduction of soft smells into the gallery along with the charred dolls and burned walls indicates a desire to prolong the experience of the visual. Images, photographs, are paramount in Thorneycroft's work, but the subject matter lends itself well to multisensoriality. Thorneycroft eventually became, and is still becoming, more sensitive to these possibilities and by transforming the gallery space into an environment where the senses are subtly awakened, instead of a space where the eyes are violently attacked, the images that are so important to the artist have the chance to become more meaningful to the viewer. The interplay between image and sensation makes her spaces unique and quietly invasive in a way that contradicts the forcefulness of predetermined meaning in the early photographic exhibitions.

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[86] There are no visuals available for this installation.
[87] Diana Thorneycroft and Robert Enright, "Memory Feeder," Border Crossings Vol. 15 no. 3 (July 1996), 22-33: 28.
[88] Diana Thorneycroft, Public Lecture (University of Manitoba School of Art, November 25, 1997).

The dolls from *I will refresh you* were later photographed in sandboxes with the same match inscriptions underneath them. The plastic, vulnerable entities were often burned and this smoky scarring added another dimension to her photographs. Gone was Thorneycroft's body; instead, the dolls were able to succumb to various degrees of manipulation and often physical torture, although this word is so loaded it may not be appropriate. *On the skin of a doll* (1996), a series of photographs emanating from *I will refresh you* with Michael Boss, allowed her to manipulate physically these plastic landscapes and to experiment with bondage and care she was unable or unwilling to do to herself in previous works (Fig. 7). In an article that appeared in *Canadian Art*, John Kissick notes that

> Thorneycroft's embellishments, ranging from delicate pencil drawings on plastic skin to fur and rope, bones and charcoal, have a fetichistic quality that is at one and the same time disturbing and compelling. But ultimately, it is how the artist has constructed (one almost hesitates to use the more formal term, composed) the pictorial arena to engage the content that makes them resonate with, well, mystery.[89]

The dolls that I later saw in her studio as relics, hanging scarred and affected from her wall, provoked an interesting inquiry into the limits of what Thorneycroft was doing within her staged explorations of the self / herself. Similar to Cindy Sherman's physical self-removal from her photographs as her imagery and thematics became more "disgusting" or difficult for the body, Thorneycroft also removed herself from the space that she had once occupied in her photographs (Fig. 8).[90] Perhaps she was testing the limits of her participation, but inevitably she would return to the stage. The next work

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[89] John Kissick, "Cries and Whispers," Canadian Art (Spring 1997): p. 80.

[90] Cindy Sherman's latest work incorporates dolls, candy, masks and various prosthetics for her own body and as they are some of the most disgusting pieces of her oeuvre, it is interesting to note that she is distancing herself from the actual manipulations that have to be made to the body in order to create the image.

would this time incorporate a test of her own limitations when faced with the boundaries of the body.

Snare is a photograph that Thorneycroft created in 1994 (Fig. 9). It depicts the artist in a square, electric chair type contraption that could elicit varying degrees of discomfort from the viewer. Although extremely staged, this space was in fact literally dangerous and Thorneycroft's risks with her own safety are translated onto the paper. Thorneycroft was tied to the chair with copper wire and had a clear plastic bag placed over her head. In a setting similar to a natural forest, she sat in a torturous position with various animal parts and restrictive gear regulating her movement and freedom.

> Actually, before the fourth shoot I had decided that was going to be it. Because I came pretty close to hurting myself. I never was in danger, but wrapping copper wire around my legs and my neck and placing a plastic bag over my head wasn't very smart. Although I thought, God if I die doing this at least I'll go out with a great photograph.[91]

Thorneycroft was fascinated with the danger and darkness inherent in this kind of performance, not only privately but publicly. She then performed *Snare* in 1996, although it has not been critically documented. Eventually, this experience became a video and was shown at *Show Girls: A Festival of Women's Performance* in Winnipeg in 1997. The extremely theatrical and distanced nature of the events of the photograph was impossible to maintain in person.

The video itself is quite sensual in that it transforms the photograph into a living, breathing, visceral expanse of time. The performance, seen by few people and,

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[91] Thorneycroft and Enright 32.

undocumented to date, was ephemeral while the video has become something of a record of Thorneycroft's personal space. The exaggerated audio component of the piece, being the intense crackling of leaves in the forest and mysterious animal like sounds, brought a new dimension to the photographic work. The video documents the sounds and sensual features of the photograph and personal struggle faced by the artist, and presented a much more invasive sense of the moment of the image. This dimension can be seen in subsequent works such as *slytod* (1997) and *Monstrance* (1999). It seems natural that Thorneycroft would continue to work with installation, as the performative aspect of her photographs and artistic process seems to be such an important part of the final result.

"Thorneycroft notes the emotional proximity of arousal and anger responses: the images probe the psychological space of the viewer and much of their power lies in their ability to destabilize the sexual identity of the viewer by provoking unacceptable desire."[92] From the catalogue *The Female Imaginary*, an exhibition held at the Agnes Etherington Gallery in Kingston, this observation succeeds in recording the invasive nature of Thorneycroft's work. While referring to the ambiguous nature of gender and sexuality in the early photographs, this statement can be very useful when examining her oeuvre as a whole. This invasiveness perceived even in the earlier works seems to become more and more overwhelming as her work expands and matures. There is most definitely an inherent willingness and desire to get under the skin of the viewer/participant which can be exceptionally difficult in photography. When it comes to purely visual works of art, such as painting or photography, or at least visual in the

[92] The Female Imaginary (Kingston: Agnes Etherington Art Centre, 1994): 14.

traditional sense of receiving these works, it is difficult to invest oneself on a physical level. Thorneycroft can arouse emotional responses but in the beginning, it was difficult to elicit the physical responses that are so integral to the performative photography that goes on in her studio and on her sets. Gradually, it is possible to see her work becoming more and more physically invasive. This is where it starts to become more interesting. In *I will refresh you*, the artist plays with aromas in space. In *Snare*, Thorneycroft attempts to make public the audio and proprioceptive components that she is so accustomed to while working on a photograph. In *slytod*, she continues to affect our sense of smell. s*lytod*, an installation presented at Gallery 1.1.1. of the University of Manitoba's School of Fine Art, took Thorneycroft's willingness to allow access to the sensuality of her photographs on a more corporeal level, to a greater extreme. The individuality of the *Snare* performance was no longer good enough, and this time Thorneycroft would implicate the viewer to a greater degree, requiring investment, intimacy and engagement. At this point, it is impossible to use even the term 'viewer' anymore. The people implicated in Thorneycroft's most recent spaces are left literally to ingest her process, digest it, and take it home with them. The museum or gallery experience can no longer be contained or regulated as the artist continues to displace the body, awaken it and question its role in front of the photograph.

CHAPTER 4: *SLYTOD*

> It could be said that Thorneycroft's method of display merely exaggerates the normal state of reception that is autonomous and arbitrary, but her isolation of the spectator in *slytod* is an extreme case. Neither the artist, nor I, could say what you, or any other person should, or might have seen at Gallery 1.1.1. What can be considered is the material legacy of this performative project, its lasting inscription as photographic art.[93]

To be destabilised is a sensation that can cause great emotion and intense panic. Within the museum, or white cube, this phenomenon is rare. The museum has become somewhat comforting in a conventional manner, granted to a very select group of people, and remains comforting due to many factors, such as light, distance, order, propriety, silence. Light obviously facilitates a clear view of artworks, which in turn makes distance possible. From a distance, one can create order. Propriety and silence perpetuate contemplation and regulation of experience and the experience can almost always remain predetermined and shared. All of these things assist in the assertion of taste. Robert Romanyshyn, in a book on technology, states that

> In the space of the world opened up by linear perspective vision, there is reason and motive to abandon the body. A spectator self esconced behind its window has no need for the body, and indeed, in dispersing with the body the spectator with his or her eye upon the world can rid himself or herself of all those extraneous enticing odours and sounds, textures and tastes, temperatures and rhythms which compose the world. In leaving the body behind, the self behind the window can better realise its vision of the world, a vision purified of the flesh, sterilised, if you will, a vision, we might say, without taste.[94]

Inherent in this process of ordering the world, comes taste, in the aesthetic sense. Linear

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[93] Martha Langford, "The Origins of Diana," slytod (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1999): 15.
[94] Robert D. Romanyshyn, Technology as Symptom and Dream, (New York: Routledge, 1989): 114.

Perspective and its implications for the history of art and art reception have in a sense completely regulated the visual and have reinforced the idea of having to find the truth or the right answer in an artwork. The destabilisation of order, the annihilation of distance, or even the removal of light, can all lead to a confused or seemingly "wrong" art viewing experience. Diana Thorneycroft had previously only created works that catered to this distance. Although difficult photographs to look at, they were nevertheless photographs that remained uninvasive. Even her performances were like cinematic moments, to be watched, contemplated and left in the space where they were found. However, with *slytod*, an installation presented at the University of Manitoba's Gallery 1.1.1. during the Fall of 1997, Thorneycroft suddenly mapped out a different path for the visitor to her show. Light was removed, distance was made impossible and order could only be recognised once outside of the gallery space and away from the sensations that it inevitably evoked in the participating bodies.

The exhibit, which was created specifically for the 30 by 40 feet room of the University of Manitoba's Gallery 1.1.1., was, for the most part contained within the actual square gallery space. (Fig. 10) However, before actually entering the gallery, the "viewer" was able to investigate select items that the artist had chosen to put on display in glass cases near the entrance. The specimens ranged from air force paraphernalia, reminiscent of Thorneycroft's father's days in the military, to hanged stuffed rabbits that dangled morbidly from a string above the bottom of the case. The flashlights that were to be offered to the visitors, were also encased as kinds of objects on display, to be looked at and examined. Masks, grenades and other military items laced the cases and became

museological or anthropological articles that gave no clues as to what one was about to encounter within the gallery space. These classified anomalies were samples of what was to found in the photographs and in the various crevices of the exhibition space. As a guide, I would hold on to the memory of these objects, as they were all I could take with me into the gallery space.

I travelled through the gallery alone. Perhaps had there been more visitors in the room, the experience would have been different, but as it was, I was unbalanced by the darkness and a little afraid. Armed with a flashlight and a plan of the installation on a flimsy piece of paper, I entered the space.[95] I stepped cautiously through a black curtain, a device used to block out whatever shred of light would be able to fight its way into the blackened space of the gallery. I moved into the room while I clutched the flashlight. Suddenly a photograph revealed itself to me on the left, looming in the glow of the flashlight, while the sound of crackling leaves alerted me to their presence. I stumbled forward, suddenly aware of the soft smell of baby powder while I absorbed the odour of a forest I could not possibly have entered. The smells converged and I was somewhat overtaken by the confusion of memories that these aromas evoked in me. Without warning, a row of motionless baby dolls barely attached to oxygen masks spread across the floor on the right and I traced their existence with my flashlight (Fig. 11). In the light of Thorneycroft's studio, I have seen these dolls, hanging, lying down, missing limbs, burned or physically manipulated in some way. They were unsettling in that context, however, here they took on an entirely new dimension. 30 dolls lay in the

[95] See Appendix 2.

sandbox, covered in baby powder and plaster. Female genitalia had been crudely sketched onto them, their arms missing and their lips blood red. Above each doll was an oxygen mask, suspended teasingly above each little face, close enough to touch, but far enough away so that the doll could never breathe that precious air. (Fig. 12) There they lay, eerily motionless.

As the seconds ticked by, I became more and more anxious and excited, as I had never before been so physically affected by an installation. My movements were chaotic and I was unable to create order in my mind nor in the space itself. The small paper guide was no longer any help as I could not see the entrance. Everything that was occurring inside of me reflected not only the darkness of the gallery but also the smells and sounds that I encountered randomly. The photographs, the sounds, the row of dolls in the sandbox and even the bench in the centre of the room all collided together into one confusing experience. However, this confusion is what made the installation so powerful. Instead of being led around the gallery in a predetermined order, my entire body was reacting randomly and trying to make sense of everything at once.

The insufficient glow of the light was frustrating. I swirled my arm around trying unsuccessfully to illuminate the area so as I could understand the forms that were invading my field of vision. Almost imperceptibly, I began to trace the outline of a body on the wall, and I realised that I had awakened a twisted corpse frozen in a photograph. Back arched, the figure clutched on to a tree branch, or was it a snake? Rope and twine, tangled in branch after branch, ensnared the victim. I was afraid to displace the flashlight.

However, my morbid curiosity led me to the right of the photograph and I saw the body violently swallowing its air supply, choking on plastic and rigid with terror (Fig. 13). The lights and shapes of the photograph integrated themselves into my situation and it was as though I had stumbled across a macabre fairytale torture scene, reminiscent of the vicious capture of a sleeping beauty destined for erotic misfortune; the psychoanalysed version of a pleasurable childhood story, full of sexual awakening and threatening discoveries[96].

I quickly released my flashlight from its captive position and destabilized by the darkness, I crept forward. In and out, I steadied my breathing, treading on a crunchy ground, my nose quivering from the smell. I had lived my life near a dark and haunting family of trees and had always been slightly afraid of what might have been hiding around their legs or clutched in their spindly, rough arms. Never brave enough to enter this place of mystery, I had kept my distance; never lured by friends or family, never taunted. The forest remained for me a mystery, not to be questioned nor feared, simply left alone. Suddenly here I was, in a place I vowed never to explore, and the reality of it had become so much more lurid and visceral, that I felt as if I would not make it out.

As I stood still and quiet, I began to feel an intense compulsion to succumb to the sensations in my body. Although tied closely to my thinking, working, living mind, the sensorial sentiments pulsing through my flesh and cavities incited a sort of craving for sensual abandon. Every unknown crevice of the seemingly wooded area in which I was

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[96] Suddenly, I cannot help but think of Anne Rice's collection of erotic stories of Sleeping Beauty, entrenched in sado-masochistic sexual ritual and torture. See: Anne Rice writing as Anne Roquelare, The Erotic Adventures of Sleeping Beauty. The Claiming of Sleeping Beauty (New York: Plume, 1983).

happily and frustratingly trapped, offered me a moment in which I could greedily treat myself to myself, and recognise my memories. This Black Forest specific to Diana Thorneycroft had not only encapsulated her moments and accidents (either artistically or not), but had made my own palpable[97].

I quickly and randomly swept my light across the room, crashing into the glimmer of another visitor's light, creating shadows that leapt from photograph to photograph. I moved towards the sandbox and turned right, eventually encountering one last photograph, featuring the artist herself being orally violated by a plastic trachea (Fig. 14). This image seemed to be the culmination of the imagery found throughout the exhibit. The visual juxtapositioning of beauty and horror, presence and absence, light and darkness gave this photograph and the exhibition its complexity and its power. Further right, I disturbed a wall of masks, some of which I recognized from my encounters with specific photographs (Fig. 15). Animal parts and dangling wreckage from authentic military masks collided together and offered a new vision of reality, as the images I had been witness to became as vivid as my particular experience in the space. I recalled the objects I had seen before entering this dark place, and recognized their presence. After a while in the space, I decided to leave, and as my feet crushed the leaves underneath my shoes, I carefully made my way to the curtain. I was greeted by a rush of light and was hocked to realise how displaced I had been. I was astounded to find myself outside of a gallery in the middle of a university.

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[97] *slytod* was a game played by Thorneycroft as a child in the Black Forest of Germany. "The viewer, whose own restrictions will be felt by the limitations of the flashlight's beam and the level of his anxiety, willingly or not, participates in the game of *slytod* the moment he steps into the darkened space of the gallery", says Diana in the exhibition pamphlet accompanying *slytod*.

In the light of day, as I examine the photographs as they appear in the catalogue, it is still difficult (visually and emotionally) to identify many scenes found in the staged pictures. If the photographs are difficult to visually grasp in the light, the obscurity of the darkened gallery made them almost impossible to read. Moments of stretched and manipulated bodies dotted with cadaverous chickens or rabbits became shadows. As the flashlight "flashed" by the photographs, crippling images reminiscent of bad dreams and horror films engraved themselves on my body. Years later, as I relate my experience, I have come to the realization that no one will ever truly know my experience. I can only translate it prosaically to an audience that will never have the opportunity to live the moment of *slytod.*

Taking these experiences with me, I left the University of Manitoba that day. Critic Alison Gillmor compares those experiences to precious moments of revelation that we possess seconds after we wake from an exquisite dream.[98] The fog is lifted for seconds before it washes over us and obliterates the clearest moments of the slumber world. The photographs have marked me, but in an incredibly ambiguous manner. However, it is the installation itself that caresses my curiosity and incites me to believe that there can be a new sort of audience that doesn't have to necessarily see the whole to experience it. The aesthetics, and inexorably the content, of the *slytod* photographs inevitably blurred and eventually became secondary to the *slytod* installation.

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[98] Gillmor 68.

Yet it is impossible to ignore the actual content of the photographs. If the flashlight were to hit one of the photographs, even for a fleeting moment, it would be impossible not to react in a very marked way. The entire *slytod* series, which includes photographs that were not hung in the *slytod* installation, is a work in itself (Figs. 16-17). Outside of the context of the installation, the group of photographs can be analysed on their own terms and even explored on psychoanalytic levels, and/or in a feminist context. However, within the actual installation, one has to be quite realistic in coming to terms with how much the viewer was actually able to see and understand in the space itself. I have intense memories of the installation, and of the images that were hung on the walls, but the most marking remembrances are almost uniquely physical and sensorial memories. I can remember pieces of photographs and one in its entirety, but I cannot clearly remember more than that. If the installation is to be studied in a conventionally art historical way, it is of course necessary to explore the specific content of the photographs. On the other hand, it may not be realistic to spend so much time on the visual content while so much happened to the body in front of that content and despite that content. In *slytod*, the sensual context, being the tactile qualities of the leaves underfoot, the intermingled smells of baby powder and rotting leaves, and the intense lack of light in the space, strongly promotes a new examination of the gallery environment and its possibilities. Diana Thorneycroft purposefully removed all but a scarce line of light from that gallery. If she did not expect the narrative content of the photographs to be compromised, she was in fact fooling herself. If the art critic who examines this installation pretends to only see the photographs, and place the leaves, sand, baby powder and darkness second, that is irresponsible. It is devoid of reality and does not do justice to

the actual sensation of going to see that exhibition. If one were willing to look at the fragments retained from the photographs, which would be different for every viewer, one might get closer to the actuality of the experience. But this is the difficulty of discussing installations that work on a sensory level. If there is no light, no distance and no order, it is impossible to see objectively. If the viewer can't see anything, or can only see fragments and pieces, what are they left with? In the canon of art reception, and art history for that matter, if you can't see it, is it art?

The images in the photographs are in fact graphically violent and difficult to look at. The visitor witnessed horrific scenes of torture, animal carcasses, physical, violent restraint and masked, nude bodies being twisted and arched in various manners. The photographs are extremely violent in the sense that they are dealing with many types of physical, and ultimately psychological, violations. Medical torture is evoked, along with intense reminders of death and suffering. Thorneycroft used models for the first time in her career, and manipulated their bodies, as well as hers in front of the camera on elaborately staged sets. Most of the photographs in the installation featured the masks that were hanging on one inside wall of the gallery. The majority were set in a sort of wooded scene that makes one think of a creepy forest in which Hansel and Gretel would have been lost. Far more experimental in their "boundary pushing", these photographs are less purposeful than the *Touching: the Self* series and certainly more challenging than *a slow remembering.* They are staged, but also random. The forms of the bodies and how they twist in incredibly confrontational positions depended on the model or on Thorneycroft herself. Unable to control her models as she did herself, she left these photographs to

chance in a more vulnerable way than before. Psychoanalytic props disappeared, darker imagery emerged, and harsher light and dark contrasts appeared in the photographs. This last difference may not seem like a major factor in the reception or understanding of the photographs. But because these photographs are filled with more shadows, and darker shadows, even in the light it becomes difficult to distinguish the specificity of what is going on. In the *Touching: the Self* photographs, it was apparent that 'this is a gun' and 'this is what it is supposed to refer to'. Things were clearer. As if trying to reenact a Freudian dream analysis on photographic paper, Thorneycroft clung steadfast to the determined images in her photographs. Now blurred by shadow, the *slytod* photographs are not meant to be understood in the same way. Thorneycroft has always claimed that her photographs can be interpreted in any which way the viewer would like.[99] However, this is the first time that she has actually practiced this in her art.

This blurring of the visual content is amplified when the photographs are examined under the fleeting light of a dime store flashlight. The shadows become darker and the greys become more distorted. Almost purposefully, Thorneycroft decided to give the viewer pieces. Now sincerely a psychoanalytic playground, pieces of the photographs mingled with the powerful stimulants in the room had the power to evoke very specific and very detailed memories and thoughts in the mind of the participant. As if in a dream where nothing seems related, but everything is in fact completely linked to desires or fears repressed in the waking hours, Thorneycroft's photographs played with the environment and did not seem out of place amidst the smells, sounds and oddities

[99] Thorneycroft has stated this in several lectures and interviews.

hanging off the walls. In a discussion of Freud in her book *Volatile Bodies*, Elizabeth Grosz suggests that

> no person lives his or her own body merely as a functional instrument or a means to an end. Its value is never simply or solely functional, for it has a (libidinal) value in itself. The subject is capable of suicide, of anorexia (which may in some cases amount to the same thing), because the body is meaningful, has significance.[100]

This citation, taken for its obviousness, reminds the visitor to *slytod* that the body is not a vehicle for art reception. One can use it to separate our inside from the art on the outside. One can evaluate distance with the body on many visual and proprioceptive levels. It carries the mind that evaluates taste and beauty. But it can do more than that. If it could not, the mind/body split championed by Descartes would be the end of the story. But it is all linked. The mind is very much a part of the body as the body is a part of the mind. Therefore, it is impossible to separate them in the context of art reception. Why then, is it often implied that the critic must ignore and often discount the sensual reactions to installations while the visual components are exalted and viewed as windows into the mind of society or of the artist? Why is it not valid to center a discussion around the sensual components of a piece if a visual component exists? Thorneycroft makes it difficult even for the readers of the *slytod* catalogue. Martha Langford, at the beginning of this chapter, was quoted as saying that all that is left "is the material legacy of this performative project, its lasting inscription as photographic art".[101] The space of the museum, and the space of the gallery is not conducive to remembering the body. As demonstrated by Tony Bennett, it was created as a space for manner reform, for

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[100] Elizabeth Grosz, Volatile Bodies. Towards a Corporeal Feminism (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994): 32.
[101] Langford 15.

behaviour control and for moral education. The body, its responses and functions have continually been harnessed and trained in this space. Visual artworks that can be appreciated at a distance are validated for their safety and contemplative qualities. If these artworks are denied light, denied adequate viewing distance or even an environment with clean, pure air, it is difficult to analyse them.[102] It is arduous for the audience, because all frames of reference are rejected. If the artist adds smells and sounds, or removes balance and order, it becomes imperative for the audience to employ other faculties literally in order to survive within the space. The record then of this installation cannot only be the catalogue. The individual's memory of an installation or artwork must be examined and validated, and Thorneycroft's space in *slytod* forcefully begs the critic to do so.

[102] The exhibition was closed early due to complaints of the smell by a professor working in the University's School of Art.

CHAPTER 5
MONSTRANCE: CELEBRATING THE GLORIOUSNESS OF PUTREFACTION[103]

A monstrance is a transparent reliquary used in the Catholic religion to display and contain the remains of saints and at times they were also used to carry the host in the traditional Catholic church service. Monstrances come in all sorts of shapes and sizes, from the ornate to the modest, but have always been revered as sacred conatiners of the sacred. At the St. Norbert Arts and Cultural Centre just outside of Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, a group of montrances were being prepared for display during the Fall of 1999.[104] Diana Thorneycroft had taken the experience of *slytod* and had brought it into a real rather than an artificial forest. Instead of the photographs that had adorned the walls of Gallery 1.1.1., the objects of contemplation were now a series of dead and decaying rabbits, along with a host of stuffed bunnies filled with internal rabbit organs. *Monstrance*, an indoor and outdoor installation that became a self-proclaimed tribute to putrefaction, became and is still a contemporary art drama that Thorneycroft is still attempting to deal with in Winnipeg and throughout North America.

Seperated into two linked parts, *Monstrance* had an indoor and outdoor component. One could choose to visit the outdoor portion first or second. However, once the visitor entered the Cultural Centre, it was impossible to ignore the seemingly inviting exhibition in the main gallery space. From a distance, all the visitor could see was rows of glaringly white stuffed bunny rabbits dangling off the walls of the gallery in an

[103] Based upon a quote by Diana Thorneycroft that was used incessantly by the Canadian press, taken from the press release distributed by the St. Norbert Arts and Cultural Centre.

incredibly playful and almost goofy manner. The interior exhibition had as its subject stuffed, plush, squeezable, cute and cuddly rabbits, reminiscent of many a childhood. Fur shaven, bodies left starkly white, suspended from the gallery walls, these toy rabbits were sanitised and inviting symbols of happiness and comfort. However, once the visitor came within a few feet of an individual bunny, it became apparent that something was very wrong with these playmates. Immediately after entering the gallery space the participant was confronted by three rabbits in particular whose stomachs, upon closer examination, acted as receptacles, monstrances for real, still-born rabbit fetuses. (Fig. 18 - Fig. 19) Each chemically treated in a different manner, the three fetuses were shellacked, left to rot and covered in Tremclad. Symbols of safety and comfort, memory and happiness, suddenly became receptacles of a reality normally unseen. Death, pieces of death, pieces of bodies, internal organs, carefully placed, pinned down onto a clean background, were violating in their blatancy and all ideas of comfort and hope the participant was to have in the face of death and decay were rendered a mockery. Michael Boss notes that,

> the toy bunnies are annoyingly cheerful even as they are contorted and strung up in a way that would be torturous for a living creature. They do not respond like live animals do to pain and death. These animals were made for a narrow purpose – to be cuddled – and this is a function that almost no amount of alteration would subvert, save for chopping them into tiny bits of fluff. They are annoying in their distance from the actuality they seek to imitate.[105]

Cute in their own sanitised way, these bunnies frustrated and horrified me. They made me want to ignore their plight. Receptacles for death and decay, in a most literal way, these white, synthetic objects emitted a sense of reality that I was not fully prepared for. It was

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[104] The exhibition was held from September 17th to October 24th, 1999. There were night viewings with flashlights every Friday night during the course of the exhibition.
[105] Michael Boss. "The Bloody Theatre: Giving Death its Due". Monstrance (Winnipeg: SNACC, 1999): n.p.n..

difficult for me to rationalise the fact that these mementos of my childhood could relate in any way to the "gloriousness of putrefaction" I was to encounter in the woods behind the gallery. As each stuffed rabbit carried a small testament to the inner workings of life, a heart, a liver, feces, or an actual still-born rabbit fetus, I was more and more inclined to step back and keep my distance. Too confronting in their corporeality, these poofy friends taunted my stability in front of the realities of death and the forgotten innards that would eventually begin to rot inside my own body. Michael Boss claims that the bunnies

> can be understood as metaphors for the illusions we invest in regarding death. These illusions are manifested, burlesqued, in the form of bunny/reliquaries. The silliness of the "messenger" parallels the folly of clinging to vacuous and misleading attitudes that divert us from accepting our physical nature and inevitable deaths".[106]

Yes, of course they can. But there lies another more complicated relationship between the disgusting and beautiful that was only to become more complicated once the visitor trod through the outdoor component of the exhibition.

The public had the option to visit the outdoor installation during the day or at special night viewings organised by the gallery. At night, visitors were provided with flashlights to guide them down the very dark trail that led to the banks of the Lasalle River. I visited the site at night two different times. Once, at the opening, I was surrounded by people, light, laughter and voices. The exhibition was very well attended on this first night and therefore it was a friendly atmosphere that somehow downplayed the extremity of the situation. The second time I visited the site at night, only one friend accompanied me, and suddenly I was terrified in an incredibly irrational way. Left to rely

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[106] Ibid.

on my flashlight and unsure footing, I wandered slowly into a forest I knew somewhat, but did not want to experience alone. The night was strangely quiet and there was a very cold breeze blowing through the tress that amplified the sensation that I was about to enter a haunted environment. We both stopped in our tracks as we heard strange animal noises coming from the blackness that lay ahead of us and we laughed at the irrationality of our fears. The ground was soft but slippery as it had rained a few nights before and the instability of my feet caused me to walk much more carefully and awkwardly then I normally do. As I approached the forested area, a large wooden doorway beckoned me through. (Fig. 20) I had remembered that it would be a short walk into the exhibition site, but it turned out to be quite long, quite dark and quite infested with unidentified sounds. Greeted first by a security guard camped out in front of the site, I was put somewhat at ease. The security guard was there to guard the site, as the night before the opening someone deeply disturbed by the installation had decided to break onto the property of SNACC and vandalise the exhibition.[107]

I moved along the trail after having smiled nervously at the guards and passed under several suspended rabbit skins. Down a few steep steps, I came across a clearing, or so it seemed. Covered with hay, the ground was slippery and I had to force myself to

[107] The night before the exhibition opening, someone entered the grounds of the SNACC and systematically tore the rabbits down from their copper hangers, and threw them into the Lasalle River, which was just on the edge of the exhibition site. Thorneycroft discovered this the next morning and was forced to wade into the river to rescue the rabbits, which, miraculously enough, were all retrieved. The rabbits did lose much of their decaying smell due to being immersed in water. From that night on, Thorneycroft was forced to hire security guards to camp out on site and monitor audience participation during the course of the entire exhibition. As well, Global television in Winnipeg also trespassed onto the site and filmed the exhibition at night without permission. This was a gross violation of Thorneycroft's wishes. She allowed no one to film or photograph at night due to the fact that she was preparing to create a series of photographs of the outdoor rabbits, photographed at night with flashlights. In addition, Global television broadcast this footage before the opening of the exhibition and therefore helped to create more controversy and ruin the notion of surprise or suspense that was so integral to the show.

tread even more carefully. Pitch dark and slightly terrifying, the space around me swallowed me up in an instant. I randomly swung my flashlight from tree to tree in order to identify 12 rabbit corpses dangling precariously from copper wire. I could smell fires lit in the fields in the distance, and I could hear and smell the river, as it swelled, almost to the point of flooding out the exhibition space. (Fig. 21) Despite their desecration a few nights before, some of the rabbits did smell. I was surprised by their odour as I had not been given a warning of their aromatic existence. As I shone my flashlight on one of them, I was scared and disgusted so much by the maggots and stench that I jumped back and slid on the hay underfoot. The more repulsive they were, the more alive they seemed, the more grotesque they became. As with *slytod*, I was forced to take in the whole; this whole that overwhelms and destabilises. Without clear sight and pure vision, I was deprived of the joy of compartmentalising and rationalising. All I could do was take in the multiple sensual happenings around me and inside of me, and work with the flashlight to regain my bearings.

The rabbits themselves were left literally to rot in the woods for approximately three weeks before the opening of the exhibition.[108] Inside the carcasses, Thorneycroft placed colour photocopies of some of her past photographic work along with one new photograph created especially for the exhibition (Fig. 22). Behind the suspended rabbits were larger photocopies of the same photographs to be found inside the bodies. Some of the carcasses were adorned with stuffed toy heads or clothing, while some of them still had the fur of their feet poofing off of their leathery bodies. As the rabbits rotted, the

[108] Eleven rabbits were purchased from a grocer and one was road kill, according to a conversation I had with the artist the day of the opening.

photographs would make themselves visible. Thus, once again, the idea of a monstrance, in its most simple of terms, a transparent reliquary used to hold a sacred body part, real or imagined, or something that has been in contact with a holy body: sacred art, sacred images, sacred sacrilege, according to some.

Basically, two main difficulties arise when trying to come to terms with this exhibition. The first is the human relationship to death. Since the late eighteenth century, human beings have learned to repress and often romanticise the realities of death, being the corporeality of it as well as its disgusting nature. Death has become a sort of ideal. Whether one is religious or not, in most cases the dead body is unseen in its most putrefied state. Embalming, burial, cremation and other rituals of death have helped to mask the physical reality of the event. Mourning is regulated, as is most extreme emotional expression, and often, people are taught to revere the dead and the memory of the living. Once confronted by the reality and the difficulty of death, it becomes more and more difficult to deal with what will happen to our own bodies once we are put ten feet under ground or burned to ashes.

In a sensitive and much criticized work on the history of Western attitudes towards death, Philippe Ariès notes that in the 18th century, after a period where death was celebrated and often desired, "death was no longer desirable, as in the macabre novels, but it was admirable in its beauty".[109] Death was romanticised and the reality of it eventually became invisible. However, Ariès does not take into account the very visible,

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[109] Philippe Ariès, Western Attitudes Toward Death: From the Middle Ages to the Present, trans. Patricia M. Ranum (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974): 58.

day to day role of death and decay on 18th and 19th century streets, bfore the advent of sanitary reform. Much art and literature did turn death into a beautiful transition from life to the divine space of heaven. Ariès also notes that the way death is dealt with also changes during this period. This is increasingly visible in the 20th century where death in the Western world is often moved to the hospital or other establishment for the sick and dying.

> An acceptable death is a death which can be accepted or tolerated by the survivors. It has its antithesis: "the embarassingly graceless dying", which embarasses the survivors because it causes too strong an emotion to burst forth; and emotions must be avoided both in the hospital and everywhere in society. One does not have the right to become emotional other than in private, that is to say, secretly.[110]

This idea of an impermissible emotional reaction to death is very pertinent when discussing Thorneycroft's installations (interior and exterior). The museum space, as I have demonstrated, has been a location devoid of extreme emotional outbursts and improper behaviour. Although Thorneycroft purposefully placed one half of *Monstrance* outdoors, the interior installation, as well as the outdoor installation's relation to the interior gallery, both make the visitor more aware of his or her own limits with regard to emotional and physical expression in the context of the art viewing experience. The laws of the museum still seemed to apply outside and this becomes evident in the reactions of the general public.

Death is not meant to be seen. Putrefaction, decay and the consumption of flesh by maggots are especially denied in the ritual of death and mourning. In order to preserve the sanctity of life, the unseen must remain unseen. Thorneycroft burst rabbit bodies, our

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[110] Ariès 89.

bodies open in this exhibition and lifted the ban on visceral public dealings with death. Although contemporary media continually bombards the public with images of death through news reporting, cinematic representations of dramatic deaths and detailed descriptions of suffering and trauma, it is extremely rare to have to be confronted with the actual sight, smell and texture of death. Dead bodies are hidden underground, burned to ashes and beautified for viewings. Religious and non-religious painting and sculpture have continuously dealt with the dead body and its sanctity or representation. But the actual reality of death cannot be set at a distance. Philippe Ariès goes so far as to proclaim that we need "the interdiction of death in order to preserve happiness".[111] I would add that we need the interdiction of death to also preserve notions of purity and the beautiful. The disgusting and the difficult, and especially the visceral, are not meant to infiltrate daily life, and especially not the museum experience.

Thorneycroft actively plays with this idea in having both components of *Monstrance* interact with each other. The interior component actively questions the outdoor component and vice versa. *slytod* could only work within the gallery space, which in my opinion it did successfully. It tested the limits of the visitor's museum senses and actively encouraged experimentation in front of an exhibition of photographs that barely anyone could actually see properly. It was a catalyst for *Monstrance*, which more blatantly played on the public's relationship to art, and the expectations and corporeal reactions that we as the audience actively perpetuate. By having both the contained and the uncontainable within the same exhibition, Thorneycroft questioned the place of the

[111] Ariès 94.

body and the stereotypical conduct that is inflicted upon this body in front of art. The reactions to *Monstrance* illustrate the power of these stereotypes and expectations.

The second difficulty confronted by *Monstrance* is related to the aesthetic category of the beautiful and its relationship to the disgusting or ugly. Thorneycroft's installations obtrusively complicate categorizations and question conventions. The interior installation displays beautiful receptacles of the disgusting. The outdoor installation confronts the visitor with disgusting receptacles of the disgusting. The indoor rotting is contained and plays with the whole idea of the role of the museum or gallery space. The outdoor putrefaction is outside of the gallery, uncontainable and undeniable. If this "art" is unconfined and uncontainable is it even art? The public already tended to reject the images in Thorneycroft's photographic work. The decaying rabbits carry these images and slowly reveal them through a process that is awfully visceral and unbearable at times. In an article in *The Globe and Mail*, art critic Robert Enright states that "it was Picasso who said his job was to make things ugly; then it was someone else's job to make them beautiful. In the dark woods, Thorneycroft has got both halves of Picasso's aesthetic progression".[112] The question then becomes, why does the installation have to be made beautiful? This exhibition most certainly deals with an alternative aesthetic, one that shocks, disgusts, horrifies. This installation cannot easily be categorized. *Monstrance* is not beautiful and as long as critics and artists continue to desire this sort of safe categorization, the art viewer will have a more difficult time invesigating, recognizing or exploring the liberating space of the unacceptable, the sublime or the "obscene."

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[112] Robert Enright, "Pulling questions out of a rabbit," The Globe and Mail (September 22, 1999): C1.

As long as order, distance, and the perpetuation of sensual repression is maintained, it is easy to encounter difficulties with the way in which one is supposed to deal with the disgusting, decay and death. It is evident that enjoying an installation primarily composed of dead, insect ravaged, road kill is not something that can be conventionally defined as normal, moral behaviour. *Monstrance* raised many, many issues in the mind of the public and in the minds of art critics. It has attested to the very strict regulation of art reception that art historians or critics may not always wish to underline. It demonstrated that the sensual is for the most part uncontainable, even in a context of containers, monstrances, receptacles. It has also illustrated that there is a public out there ready to respond to artworks that break barriers. There were reactions to *Monstrance* on many levels and the difficulties mentioned above can be traced through the reactions of the public: be it through the disgruntled tax-payer, the infuriated Catholic, or the animal rights activist.

CONCLUSIONS

Notions of body and sense regulation have dominated this thesis. The idea of re-claiming one's own corporeal existence in front of the disgusting or unacceptable is also a major focus of my paper. But there are undoubtedly other social and political ramifications for this sort of spatial and corporeal liberation. The non-visual senses and experiences must be validated within the museum and gallery space. Rather than searching for a certain transcendental appreciation of art, one should examine lived experiences and the bodily traces these leave. Memory, corporeal recollections and visceral remembrances are key to overcoming the museum senses that directly encourage distance and propriety, order and repression.

> Knowledges are not purely conceptual nor merely intellectual; they are not governed by a love of truth or a will to comprehension. The self-images of knowledges have always been, and remain today, bereft of an understanding of their (own) corporeality. Knowledge is an activity; it is a *practice* and not a contemplative reflection. It *does things*. As product or thing, it denies its historicity and asserts its indifference to questions of politics in such a way that it functions as a tool directed to any particular purposes its user chooses.[113]

The notion of an "unacceptable" aesthetic can be considered to be an emancipatory example of how art and the visitor can unite to liberate the individual and re-introduce the impermissible within the institution of the museum. Lynda Nead's take on Kant's sublime, the obscene, is an encouraging, freeing space and aesthetic within which Diana Thorneycroft has worked and against which a group of people have revolted. The freeing of the disgusting, the integration of the denied into a public space is

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[113] Elizabeth Grosz, Space, Time, and Perversion: Essays on the Politics of Bodies (New York: Routledge, 1995): 37.

what has made for a lively debate surrounding the place of art in society. But in fact, this exhibition and its protesters have demonstrated that the problem in question is the role and behaviour of the oppressed individual, oppressed body and repressed thought in society, not the inquiry into art's validity.

Generally speaking, the necessity for social propriety has sanctioned the concealment of many defiant forms of expression, in culture and in daily life. It has forced the mass population to stifle very natural and common reactions to pleasurable and non-pleasurable situations. Sexual modesty, emotional control and hygienic perfection seem to be some of the most powerful incarnations of this conformity. When opposition to this emotional and physical monopoly enters the public sphere, such as a gallery or a museum, it becomes apparent just how conditioned we are to resisting change or alternative modes of articulation. The reactions of the general public in the face of Thorneycroft's *Monstrance* clearly illustrate this. Whether for religious, political, physical or moral reasons, all opponents of the installation symbolically united to proclaim their compliance with the unwritten rules of the high art experience.

Linking the senses to this experience, Jim Drobnik notes that

> the regulation of the senses experienced in the realm of art has offered a ready model and rationale for wider disciplinary efforts against not only one's own body but also the bodies of others. The "empyrean air" that one was alleged to breathe in the museum was, to commentators in the nineteenth century, subject to corruption by the exudations of less-privileged individuals.[114]

[114] Jim Drobnick, "Reveries, Assaults and Evaporating Presences: Olfactory Dimensions in Contemporary Art". Parachute No. 89 (January, February, March 1998): 12.

These less privileged individuals, these "deviants", "tavern", and "lower class", are who proponents of the museum were attempting to integrate, educate, moralize, and clean up in the 19th century. The body and its natural functions, desires and exclamations were methodically left out of the art receiving experience in order to create a sort of moral order in the public sphere. Art and its possibilities for inducing contemplative states, quiet reflection and distanced appreciation seems the perfect tool for societal regulation. Thus, the "other" senses were left out, pushed away and denied so that a controlled, ordered, generally clean eye could overtake the art object. However, once artists began to revolt against this idea of the object, of the contemplative state, of the clean and proper art gallery or museum space, a natural defense system was set into the already conditioned trained body that had been looking, perceiving, seeing paintings, sculptures, drawings and other non-threatening "things". Performance, installation, happenings, and a new kind of two-dimensional object challenged the idea of distance and therefore necessitated a re-thinking of the body and its relationship to art. Despite this art's history, the audience, the visitor, the public still refuses it, revolts against it, cries out in the face of it. Why?

Diana Thorneycroft began by using the two-dimensional surface as a canvas for sedition. Realizing that her body and her connection to her art making practice could not be translated on a flat plane, she moved to performative art forms. Although not a pioneer in this kind of upset-inducing art, she has chosen to challenge her audience in unique and invasive ways. The case of *Monstrance* is an example of the power of this kind of invasion. In relation to the body, Thorneycroft ensures that her audience cannot remain a

spectator. Although *Monstrance* does not transcend the Cartesian split, the duality of self and other, the distance between us and it, it does enforce the idea that the body is a receiver and an actor in the game of art reception. If one does not consider the body and its memories in front of the carcass, the decay, the abject, one perpetuates the control.

As stated by David Howes, Constance Classen and Anthony Synnott, sensual liberty in social spaces would substantially alter the way in which human beings interact with each other and with art. Using only the example of smell and its history of Western exclusion, they state that "smell has been marginalised because it is felt to threaten the abstract and impersonal regime of modernity by virtue of its radical interiority, its boundary-trangressing propensities and its emotional potency".[115] Encompassed in this statement are three compelling examples of how the institution has oppressed the individual. Going against what Kant and Bourdieu have underlined as paramount in any discussion of the beautiful, interiority and necessarily individuality compromise aesthetic judgment. If the consensus is that an artwork is not beautiful, it cannot be considered as such. Smell and the other repressed senses, including taste and touch, traverse boundaries and ignore borders. This is incredibly dangerous within the museum. To have an artwork infiltrate one's personal space is to be engulfed by something, which is a feeling rarely talked about outside of the circles of romantic love. And lastly, smells (and tastes, etc.) are emotionally potent. The infiltration of smells and sensual experiences into the museum would sacrifice the austerity with which aesthetic judgments need to be made. The power in owning one's body and allowing all of its potential reactions to be released

[115] Classen et al. 5.

can engender unconscious fears of loss of control or physical and emotional abandon. These irrational fears are being upheld every time someone whispers in an art gallery or complains about a sound from one installation penetrating the soundscape of another.

Having been taught to repress certain feelings or sensations, and especially, as demonstrated by Miller in his book on disgust, to classify certain things, events, or sensations as permissible or impermissible, good or bad, beautiful or ugly, right or wrong, is what drives the visitor to judge, to rely on established notions of good taste, as seen in Bourdieu. And this education of sorts is very visible in *Monstrance*. Despite the fact that Thorneycroft used rabbits rather than humans in her exploration of death and its place in society, the issue of decay, of death, the visceral implications of "eternity", or life after death for the human population came into play. Aries clearly demonstrated that the acceptable human relationship to death does not involve public displays of corpses, visible putrefaction, emotional outbursts, or rancid smells. Thorneycroft violated the rules of public propriety with respect to death, and this, in my opinion is the root of the public scandal. Thorneycroft's blatant questioning of what it means to recognize the natural, often sad, repressed reality of death, and her willingness to force it in the face of her audience upset the norms of the artistic experience. It upset the idea of the sacred, it upset the idea of the contained. Thorneycroft left our bodies out for us to see; the rabbits acted like mirrors into our denial, integrating their sinuous bodies into our bodily memories.

Lynda Nead's obscene, that which is outside, out of bounds, off stage, is the clearest, most emancipatory notion of an alternative aesthetic space, the space that

Thorneycroft cultivated. Nead's political space for the liberation of the female body, as I pointed out in Chapter Two, is also a possible space of liberation for the oppressed art viewer. If the conditioning of our bodies, just like the repression of women in society, can be articulated, fought against, questioned and made public, perhaps this obscene space, this alternative space, can be developped, challenged or explored. The "education" of the lower classes and the regulation of the senses, as was done for necessary reasons during the sanitary reform of the 19th century, was translated over into the museum space. The house of classification and order became a space for human experience regulation, and despite the efforts of artists, theorists, curators and critics since that time, the general public remains under a watchful, manipulative eye.

> Knowledges are a product of a bodily drive to live and conquer. They misrecognize themselves as interior, merely ideas, thoughts, and concepts, forgetting or repressing their own corporeal genealogies and processes of production. They are products of bodily impulses and forces that have mistaken themselves for products of mind.[116]

Diana Thorneycroft's monstrances forcefully deny the possibilities of transcendental experience, the beautiful and the idea of controlled, regulated museum senses. Considering the reactions of the public, it is evident that the controlled art receiving experience and the question of art's rightful place are still at play in contemporary society despite the inroads made by dozens of years of reactionary, defiant, and borderless art production. Many questions on how to deal with the reactions to *Monstrance* remain after my own study of the event. How does a critic deal with the fact that the loudest plaintiffs of an exhibition were people who had never seen the work? Do all of the philosophies and goings on proposed in this thesis actually serve the visitor that

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[116] Grosz 37.

will approach the work? Unfortunately, it is doubtful that the general public will much care whether or not Kant or Nead's theories of the sublime or obscene are pertinent to their daily lives. It is also doubtful that the public so angered by Thorneycroft's rabbits will endeavour to psychoanalyse their unconscious desires and disgusts. But for those who do care, Julia Kristeva, in an interview for the catalogue of the exhibition *Rites of Passage - Art for the End of the Century*, put forward the notion that

> they can react in two ways. There are those who repress this state of crisis, who refuse to acknowledge it, in which case they either don't come or they find the works disgusting, stupid, insipid, insignificant, and wonder why the curator even bothered. Others may be looking for a form of catharsis. When they look at these objects, their ugliness, and their strangeness, they see their own regressions, their own abjection, and at that moment what occurs is a veritable state of communion.[117]

Make a choice. What do you see, what do you feel, what do you want? This act of receiving requires investment. Engagement involves some sort of personal stake in the work of art and a conscious examination of what is going on inside of us, both intellectually and sensually. It seems as though that forest, with those smells, those sounds and those objects, could be a good place to begin.

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[117] Morgan, Stuart; Morris, Frances (eds.), Rites of Passage - Art for the End of the Century (London: Tate Gallery Publications, 1995): 23.

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APPENDIX 1

FIGURES
1-22

Figure 1

Diana Thorneycroft, *Untitled (Self-portrait with Rabbit)*, 1999.
Silver print.
Photo: Diana Thorneycroft.

Figure 2

Diana Thorneycroft, *Suddenly Last Summer*, 1986.
Colour pencil crayon, 14" x 17 ½".
Photo by Peter Tittenberger.

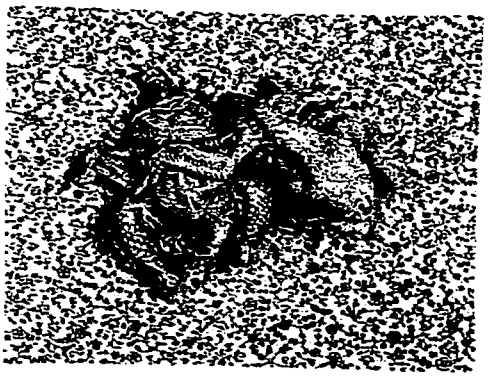


Figure 3

Diana Thorneycroft, *It was good for me...was it good for you?*, 1985.
Colour pencil crayon, 12" x 13".
Photo: Diana Thorneycroft.

Figure 4

Diana Thorneycroft, *Self-portrait in Field of Dolls I*, 1989.
Silver print, 11" x 14".
Photo: Diana Thorneycroft.

Figure 5

Diana Thorneycroft, *Untitled (Family Self-portrait)*, 1990.
Silver print, 32" x 32".
Photo: Diana Thorneycroft.

Figure 6

Diana Thorneycroft, *Untitled (& if she wakes)*, 1994.
Silver print, 24" x 30".
Photo: Diana Thorneycroft.

Figure 7

Diana Thorneycroft, *On the Skin of a Doll (Rena's Doll, Pigeon Head Doll)*, 1996.
Silver print, 40.6 x 50.8 cm.
Photo: Diana Thorneycroft.

Figure 8

Cindy Sherman, *Untitled #302*, 1994.

Figure 9

Diana Thorneycroft, *Untitled (Snare)*, 1994.
Silver print, 28" x 24".
Photo: Diana Thorneycroft.

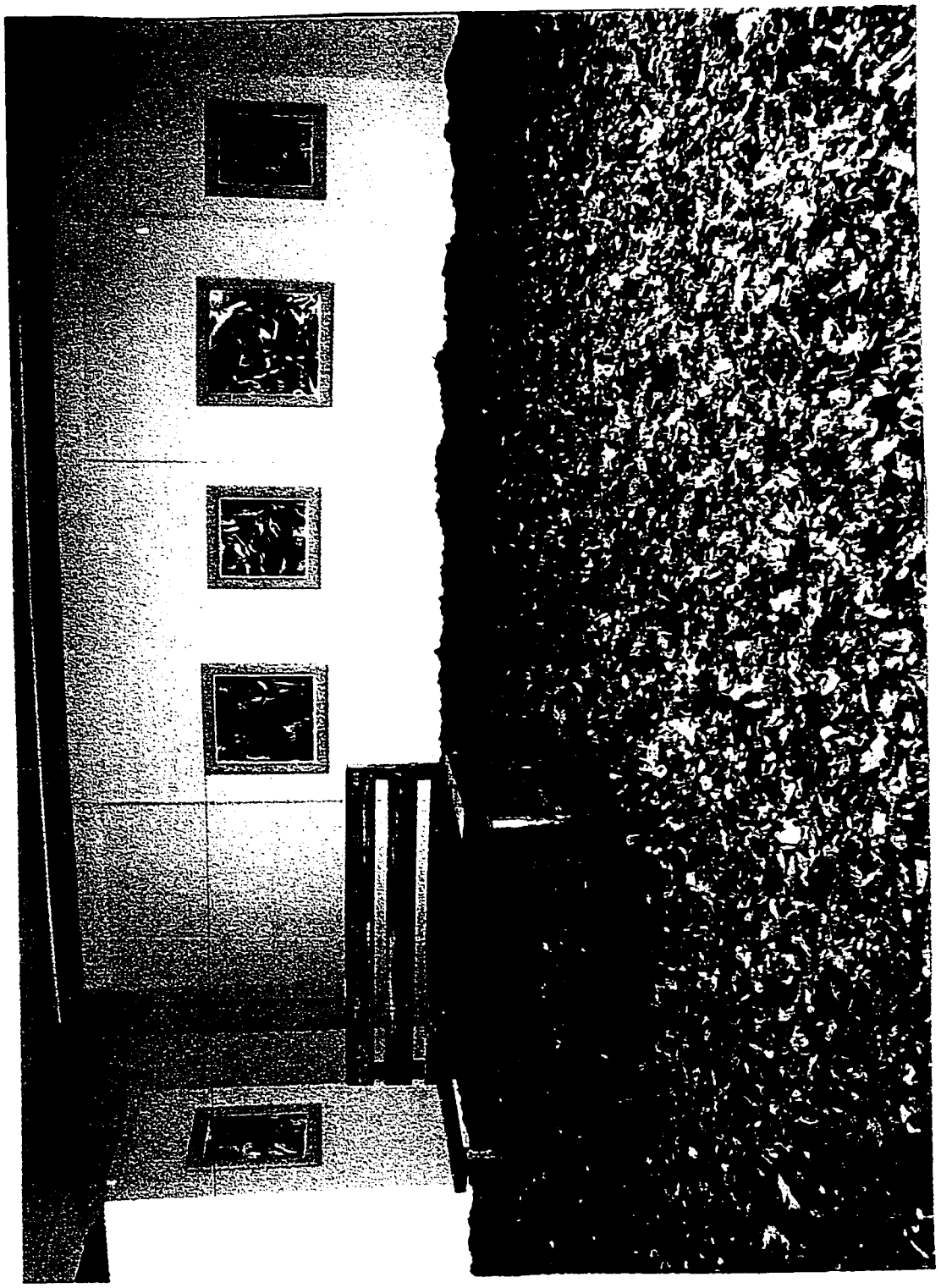


Figure 10

Diana Thorneycroft, *slytod*, 1997.
Detail of installation.
Interior of gallery (regular lighting), park bench, leaves, photographs.
Courtesy of Diana Thorneycroft.

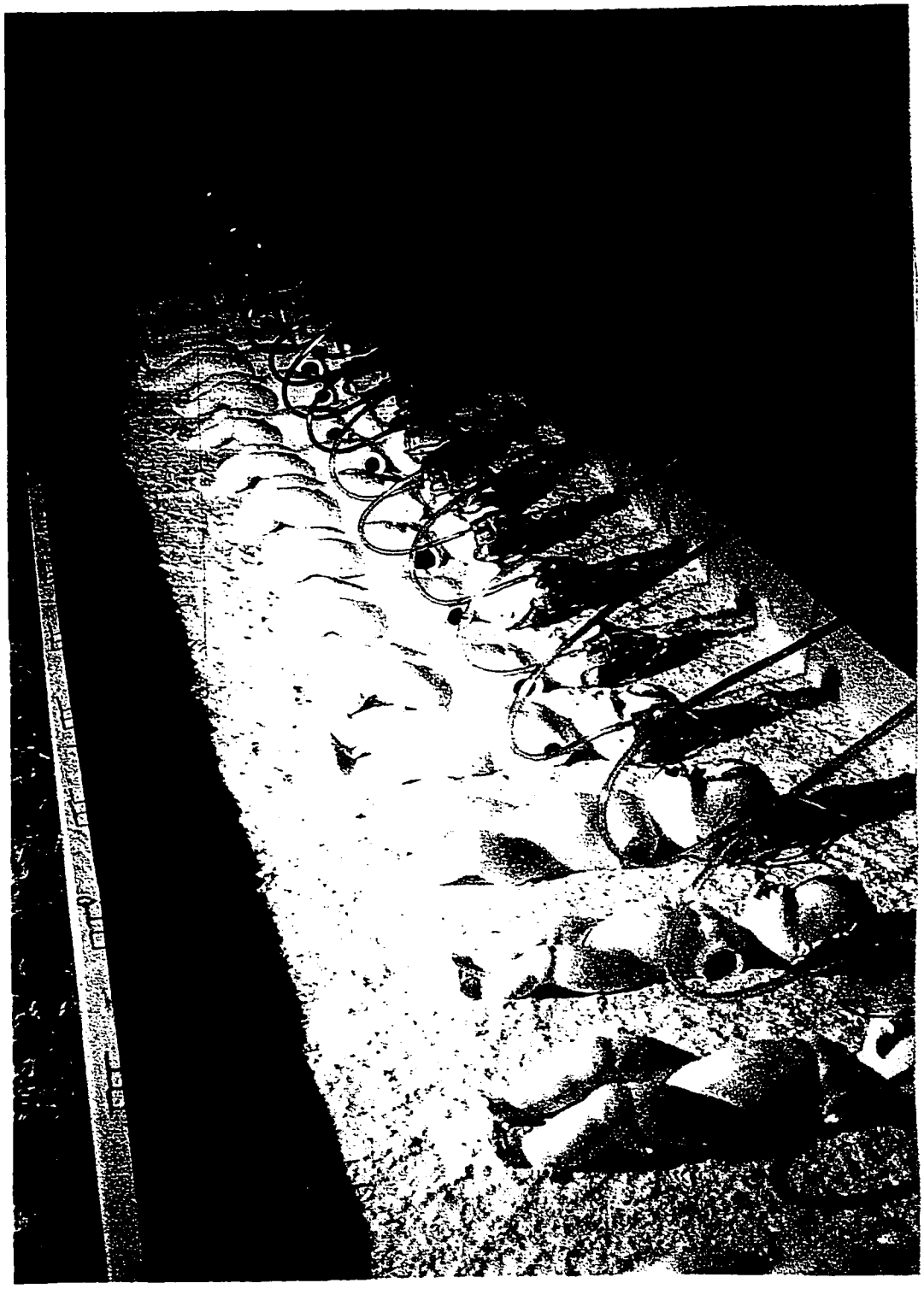


Figure 11

Diana Thorneycroft, *slytod*, 1997.
Detail of installation.
4' x 24' sandbox (regular lighting) filled with baby powder, 30 altered dolls wearing "oxygen" masks with tubes.
Courtesy of Diana Thorneycroft.

Figure 12

Diana Thorneycroft, *slytod*, 1997.
Detail of installation.
Sandbox detail – three dolls.
Courtesy of Diana Thorneycroft.

Figure 13

Diana Thorneycroft, *Untitled (Self-portrait with Trachea)*, 1997.
Silver print, 63.5 x 63.5 cm.
Courtesy of Diana Thorneycroft.

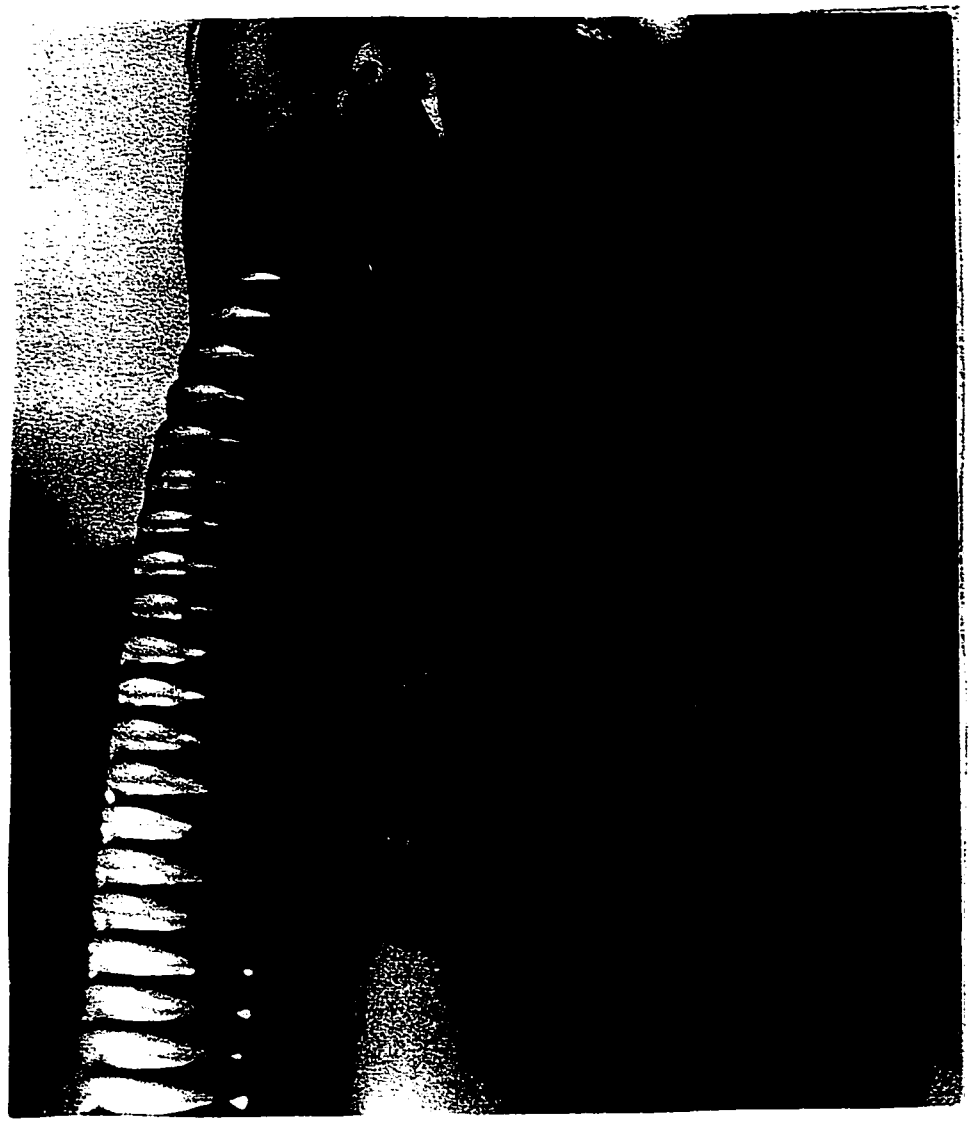


Figure 14

Diana Thorneycroft, *Untitled (Penetration Mask)*, 1997.
Silver print, 66 x 53 cm.
Courtesy of Diana Thorneycroft.

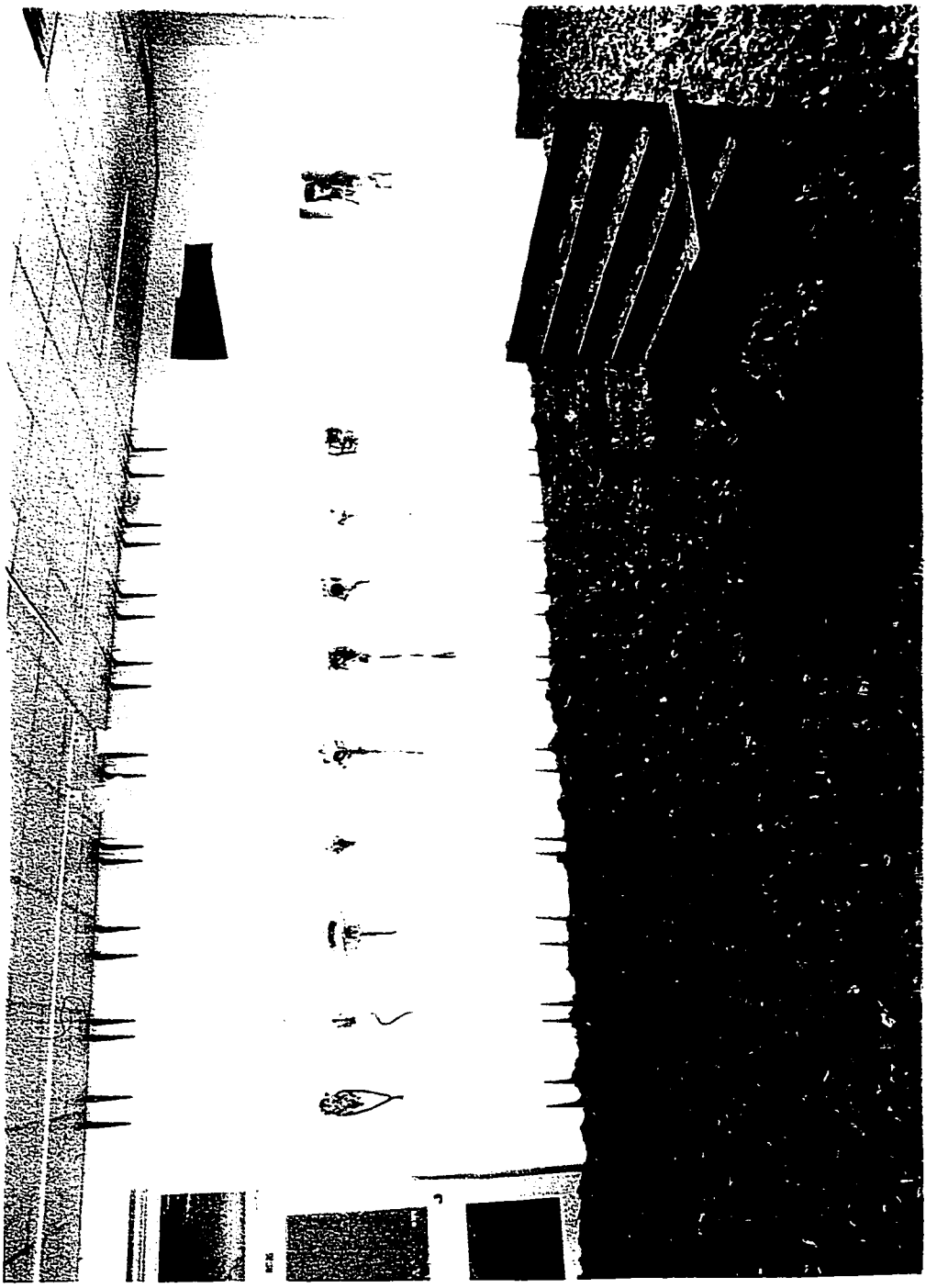


Figure 15

Diana Thorneycroft, slytod, 1997.
Detail of installation.
Interior of gallery (regular lighting), 9 masks, leaves, one photograph, park bench.
Courtesy of Diana Thorneycroft.

Figure 16

Diana Thorneycroft, *Untitled (Witness)*, 1998.
Silver print, 81 x 66 cm.
Courtesy of Diana Thorneycroft.

Figure 17

Diana Thorneycroft, *Untitled (Coma)*, 1998.
Silver print, 81 x 66 cm.
Courtesy of Diana Thorneycroft.

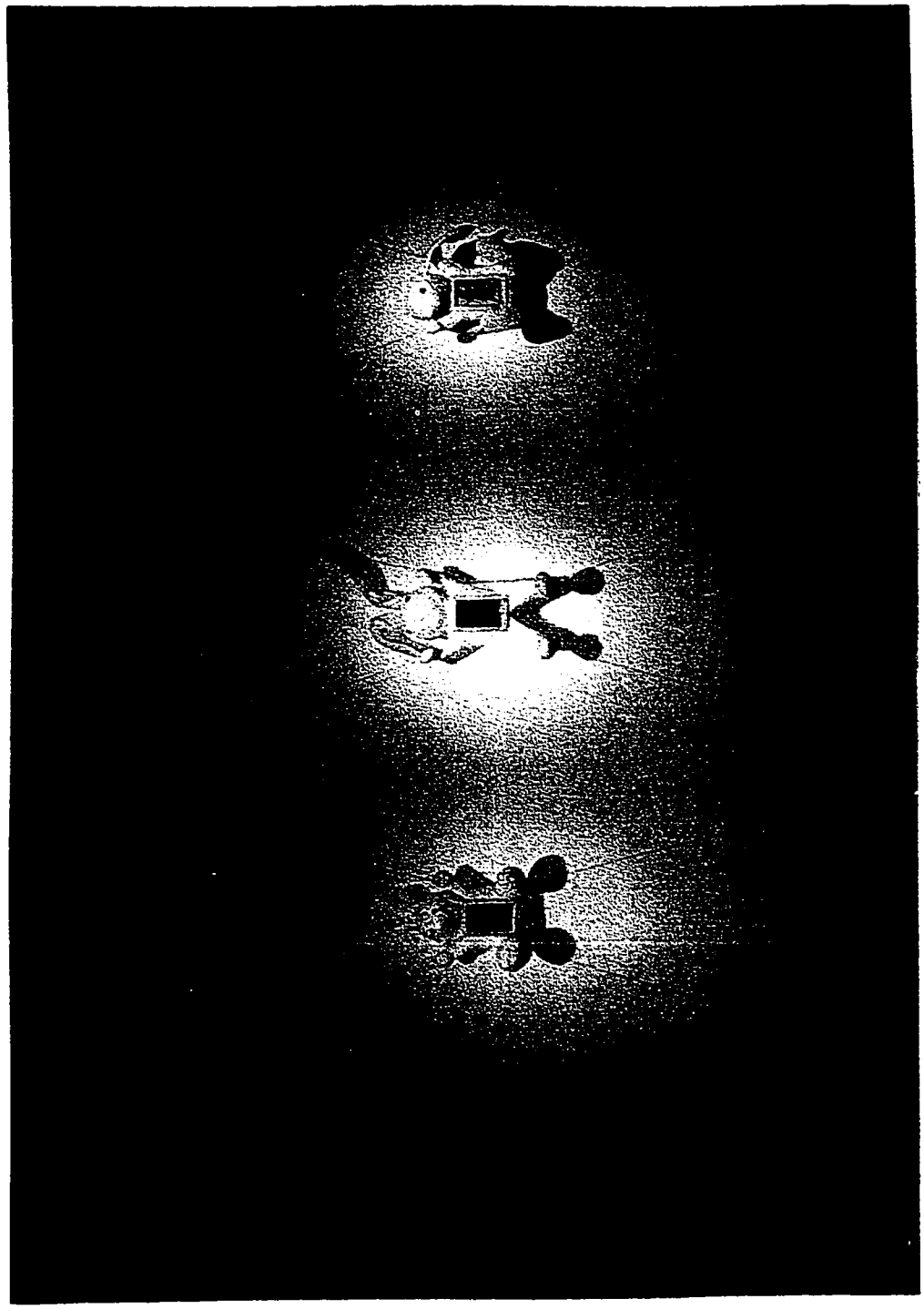


Figure 18

Diana Thorneycroft, *Monstrance*, 1999.
Detail of installation.
View inside the art gallery.
Photo: Angela Plohman.

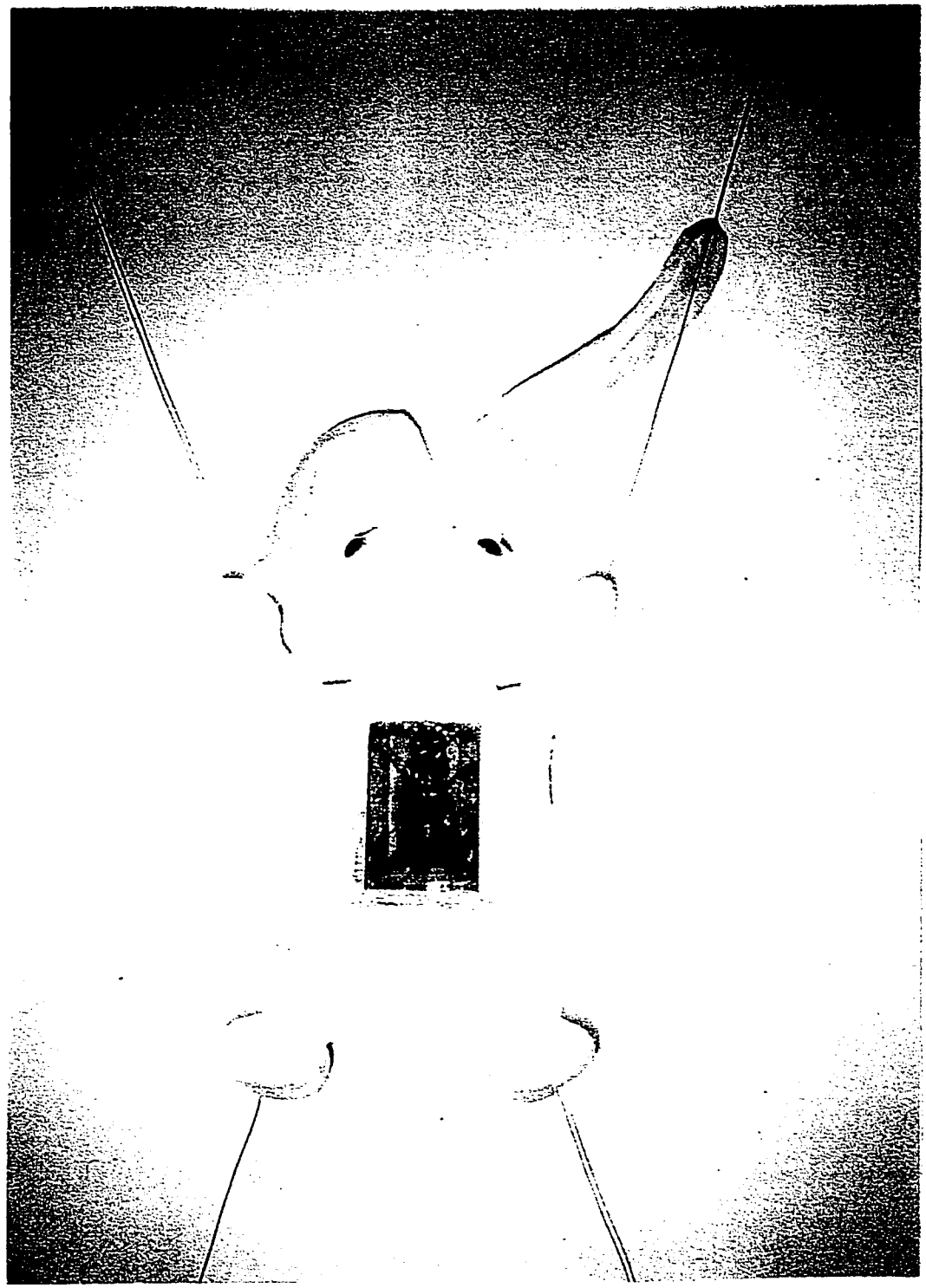


Figure 19

Diana Thorneycroft, *Monstrance*, 1999.
Detail of installation.
View inside the art gallery.
Photo: Angela Plohman.

Figure 20

Diana Thorneycroft, *Monstrance*, 1999.
Detail of installation.
View of outdoor installation site.
Photo: Angela Plohman.

Figure 21

Diana Thorneycroft, *Monstrance*, 1999.
Detail of installation.
View of outdoor installation site.
Photo: Angela Plohman.

Figure 22

Diana Thorneycroft, *Monstrance*, 1999.
Detail of installation.
View of outdoor installation site.
Photo: Angela Plohman.

APPENDIX 2

SLYTOD

MAP OF INSTALLATION

Artist's Statement:

The title "slytod" refers to a tag game that my siblings and I used to play at night when we were children living on a military base in the heart of the Black Forest in Germany. Years later, I learned that "Tod" means death in German, and it is the notion of playing tag with death that permeates the installation. Components in the exhibition, which include large-scale photographs and sculptural constructions, allude to stillness, restriction, and oral violation; the plastic corpse that feels no pain, the body that is denied movement, the mask that refuses breath. The viewer, whose own restrictions will be felt by the limitations of his flashlight's beam and the level of his anxiety, willingly or not, participates in the game of slytod the moment he steps into the darkened space of the gallery.

slytod

a mixed media installation by
Diana Thorneycroft

October 19 - November 14, 1997

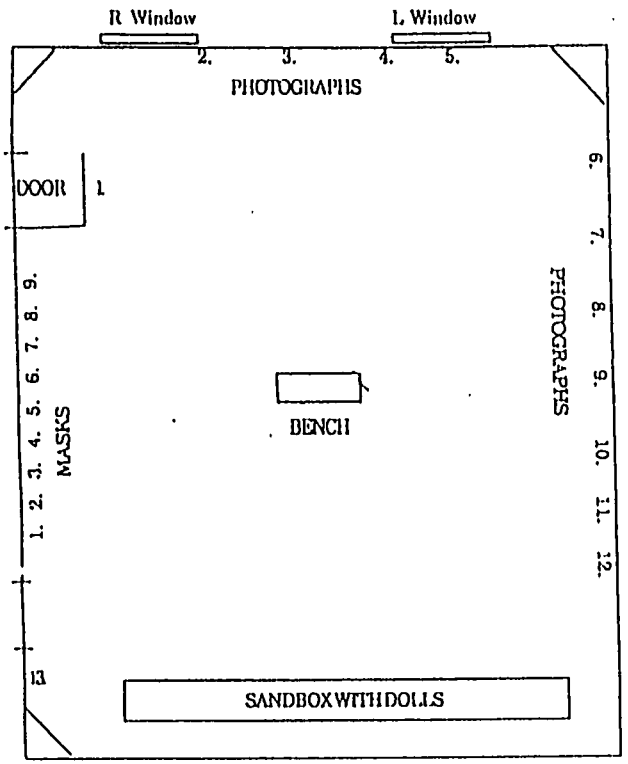
Gallery 1.1.1.
School of Art
Main Floor, FitzGerald Building
The University of Manitoba
Winnipeg, MB R3T 2N2
Ph: 474-9322 Fax: 474-7605

Hours: Monday - Saturday, noon to 4 pm -- Thursday, noon to 9 pm

Artist's Talk: Thursday, November 6, 7:00 pm

Produced by Gallery 1.1.1. and
sponsored by the UM Alumni Association,
Winnipeg Supply, and Ken and Joan Thorneycroft

Gallery Plan:



Left Window: Snare Performance Bunny Props

Right Window: Breast-Plate Bustier, Chastity-Cunt Belts,
Cod-Cock Piece and Deceased Infant Mask

Oak Cabinet: Grenades, Candles, Flashlights and Doll Hair

List of Works:

Photographs:

1. Untitled (F-18 Mask)
2. Untitled (Snared)
3. Untitled (Self Portrait with Trachea)
4. Untitled (Scull Lake)
5. Untitled (Cloven Hoof Mask)
6. Untitled (Iron Lung)
7. Untitled (Gurney)
8. Untitled (Turtle-back Mouth Mask)
9. Untitled (Gimli Chair)
10. Untitled (Slytod with Prisoner)
11. Untitled (Speculum)
12. Untitled (Deceased Infant Mask)
13. Untitled (Penetration Mask)

Masks:

1. Spider-mouth Mask with Stethoscope
2. Snake Mask
3. Turtle-back Mouth Mask
4. Skull Mask
5. Willow Mask with Pig Snout
6. Foliage Mask with Deer Bone
7. Cloven Hoof Mask
8. F-18 Mask
9. Goalie Mask with Feathers

Sandbox with 30 Dolls