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National College of Art and Design

Faculty of Fine Art, Painting.

*The Discipline and Punishment
of Jana Sterbak's Sisyphus.*

by
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Submitted to the Faculty of Fine Art and Design and
Complimentary studies, in candidacy for the Degree of
Bachelor of Arts and Fine Art Painting, February, 1998.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*I would like to thank Elaine Sisson for her
invaluable support and patience throughout the year.*

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“Of whom and of what can I say “I know that?” This heart within me I can feel, and I judge that it exists. (.....)There ends all my knowledge, and the rest is construction. (....) All the knowledge on earth will give me nothing to assure me that this world is mine. You describe it to me and you teach me to classify it. You enumerate its laws and in my thirst for knowledge I admit that they are true. You take apart its mechanisms and my hope increases. At the final stage you tell me that this wondrous and multi-coloured universe can be reduced to the atom and that the atom itself can be reduced to the electron. All this is good and I wait for you to continue. But you tell me of an invisible planetary system in which electrons gravitate around a nucleus. You explain this world to me with an image. I realise that you have been reduced to poetry: I shall never know. Have I time to become indignant ? You have already changed theories. So that science that was to teach me everything ends up in hypothesis, that lucidity founders in a metaphor, that uncertainty is resolved in a work of art. What need had I of so many efforts ?” *Albert Camus, ‘The Myth of Sisyphus’*¹

INTRODUCTION
Jana Sterbak and the Docile Body

It is in the realm of the uncertain and our endless endeavour to explain that Jana Sterbak's imagination dwells. Uncertainty and a certain absurdity lend a playful element to much of her work. She is not a comedian however and the manifest unruliness often conceals, quite a black humour. Jana Sterbak was born in Prague, then Czechoslovakia in 1955. She came to Canada with her parents in 1968, after the Prague Spring. Sterbak has described her initial experience of Canada as being dream-like or "unreal" (Nemiroff, 1991,p51). She expresses a sense of 'amusement' at finding in Canada a complete reversal of the beliefs and political systems to the Marxist-Leninist Czechoslovakia she had left behind. She often cites her birth place and her Czech literary influences - Franz Kafka, Karel Čapek, Milan Kundera and Jaroslav Hasek - as being, in part, responsible for her ironic outlook (Nemiroff, 1992, p15).

The dark irony and descriptions of surreal or absurd events intimated in the works of Sterbak's literary influence were often prompted by the corruption or incompetent workings of social institutions. They were or perhaps had to be, masters at the art of allusion and obliquity. Phillippi refers to them as works which "intimate a particular form of power both modern, in that it is technological and bureaucratic, and timeless in its arbitrariness and despotism." (Phillippi, 1996, p188). However, this observation could well be applied to the work of Jana Sterbak. In her first museum show she displayed a series of objects quite alien to the gallery space.² Girls shoes made from plasticine, measuring tapes coiled into cones, cubes fashioned out of thread, and a series of internal organs. These strange objects, some more



Figure 1
Measuring Tape Cones (1979)
from 'Velleitas' catalogue, 1995.



familiar to the sewing room then the gallery, imbued with a subtle feminist undercurrent, were as powerful as they were playful. Sensitivity to materials and celebration of the object connects Sterbak's early work with Minimalism, but also to sculptors such as Eva Hesse.³

The idea of constraint or the body under duress is a major preoccupation for Sterbak. This thesis investigates Sterbak's exploration of the body under constraint with particular reference to her work *Sisyphus* which is based on the Greek myth of the same name. The *Measuring tape cones* (1979)(Fig.1), worn on the hand or fingers and photographed directly refer to bodily constraint - conforming to the norms of size and measurement. In *Golem: Objects as Sensations* (1979-82)(Fig.2) Sterbak showed a number of internal organs on the gallery floor. Weighted, feeling the constraints of gravity, the heart, spleen, stomach, hand are all brought to the level of the foot - the most base of levels. It is however, the material that speaks the sensations; a red painted spleen, a lead heart, a twisted bronze stomach. The accompanying text reiterates notions of constraint ;

I'm retracting from the periphery of my body to the inside. I'm condensing my vitals: Soon they will be no more than a thin thread positioned in the centre.
(Velleitas, 1995, p42).

The legend of the 'Golem' in Czech history brings other elements to the work that Sterbak addresses again and again throughout later work. The idea of the creation - myth, that somehow through some mystical trick we could create the man who would live forever. 'Golem' was the Czech Frankenstein fashioned out of clay. The word 'Golem' has been recognised in Hebrew to mean 'embryo' or 'unformed' and man's desire



Figure 2
Lead Hearts from Golem: Objects as Sensations (1979-82)
from 'Velleitas' catalogue, 1995.

to play god and create a being who would defy mortality is a popular theme throughout historic legends.⁴ Sterbak, however, recognises the reality, and futility of such a project and insists upon the body's undeniable mortality. In this sense her work is unnervingly knowing.

"Sterbak's objects are combinations of power and futility; effective but marooned."(Curtis, 1996, p16). Indeed this is relevant to much of Sterbak's work. The inert objects in *Golem* refer to this ultimate doom and or impending failure that Curtis describes above. This in Sterbak's eyes is the nature of the human condition - we are trapped in our own mortal body. Being trapped, contained or enclosed is another preoccupation of Sterbak's. Irena Žantovska Murray discusses Sterbak's exploration of claustrophobic spaces in detail in her essay for the catalogue 'Velleitas'. She notes that :

Less frequently considered are her methods of grappling with space - cladding the body not just in a succession of membranes, and surface layers, but ultimately framing it in an array of exteriors and interiors.
(Žantovska Murray, 1995, p23).

The body is constantly being tested . In her conceptual project *House of Pain : a Relationship*(1987) the body comes under attack, trapped in the most unhomely of homes. If she is not attacking then maybe she is attaching - "bodies attached to machines" (Phillippi, 1996, p185), or contained within them or framed by them, have occurred in many more recent works. For example, *Sisyphus II* (1991)(Fig.3&4), *Remote Control* (1989)(Fig.5), a cage-like dress, and *Condition* (1995)(Fig.6), a tail-type prosthesis. The cage, the dress, the house are "all but a form of cladding, an envelope for the body - can be read as controlling or

confining, dominating or intimate, but ultimately as telling a sensual narrative.”(Žantovska Murray, 1995, p37).

The pieces involving the making of man or woman into machine employ a kind of discipline or control. This thesis examines Sterbak’s exploration of the myth of Sisyphus. The title of the work *Sisyphus* alludes to Camus’ famous essay on the absurd ‘*The Myth of Sisyphus*’ and through that it refers to Homer’s myth itself. There are three versions of *Sisyphus II* (Fig.3) all with the same components. The piece consists of a semi-circular cage of steel with aluminium ribs surrounding a small platform . The bottom of this cage is shaped like an egg which causes it to rock incessantly once touched. The sleek cage sits omnipotent on the gallery floor. Behind it is a film loop - a man inside the cage struggles, almost gracefully, to sustain his balance, the structure of the cage however makes this impossible (Fig.4).

It is in the context of the theoretical work of Michel Foucault’s Discipline and Punish that this thesis analyses Sterbak’s *Sisyphus II* piece. Foucault’s indepth investigations into systems of discipline and punishment offer a particular reading of Sterbak’s work which has not previously been examined. Foucault provides an analysis of the workings of disciplinary institutions which direct a particular form of control over the body. In section one I will endeavour to expose Sterbak’s *Sisyphus II* as a ‘docile body’ and investigate the elements of discipline in the work that produce such a body. The second section addresses Sterbak’s interest in the punitive process and the similarities that exist between *Sisyphus II* and Jeremy Bentham’s Panopticon, as discussed by Foucault.

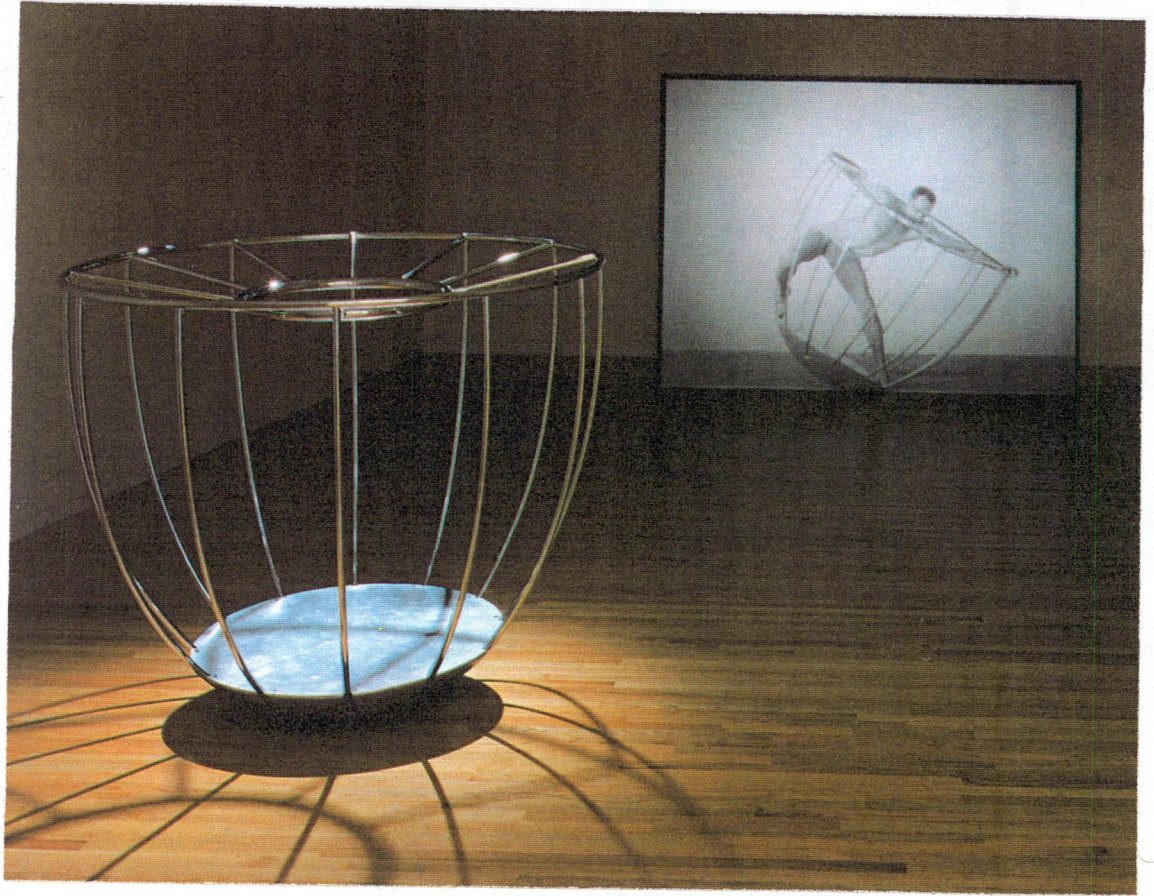


Figure 3
Sisyphus II (1991)
from 'Velleitas' catalogue, 1995.



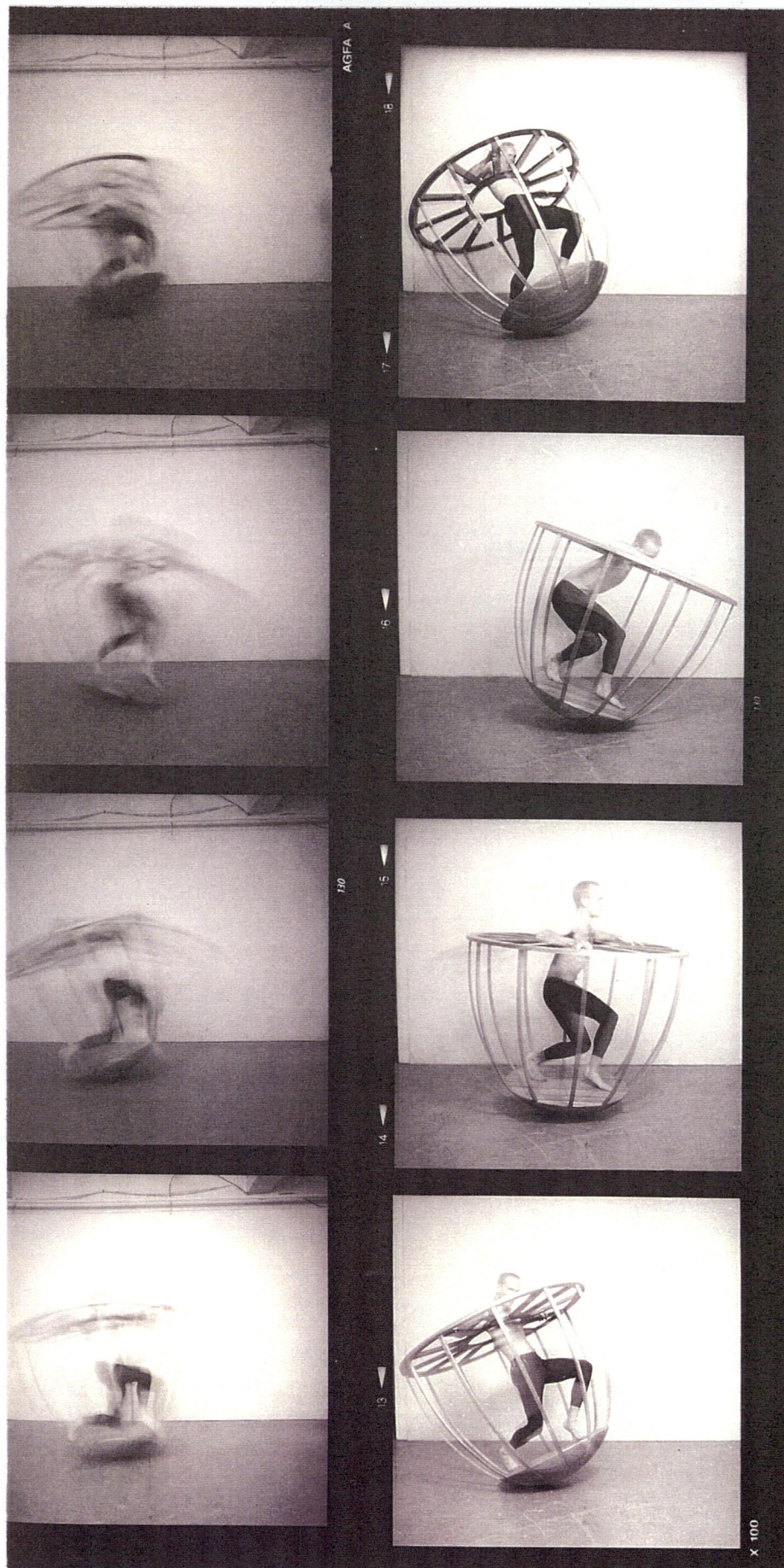


Figure 4
Sisyphus II - film loop (1991)
 from 'Velleitas' catalogue, 1995.



The story of Sisyphus in Homer's Odyssey is that of the roguish defiant hero who even manages to fool death itself. However as all rogues discover there is a price to pay in the next world. The gods punish Sisyphus for his villainous life, subjecting him to a life of endless toil, for it was thought that there is no stronger punishment than futile endless labour.

Then I witnessed the torture of Sisyphus, as he tackled his huge rock with both hands. Leaning against it with his arms and thrusting with his legs, he would contrive to push the boulder up-hill to the top. But every time, as he was going to send it toppling over the crest, it's sheer weight turned it back, and the misbegotten rock came bounding down to level ground. So once more he had to wrestle with the thing and push it up, while the sweat poured from his limbs and dust rose high above his head. (Homer, quoted in Guerber, 1987, p187).

The corporeal punishment Sisyphus suffers is minimal compared with the torture inflicted upon his soul. For Sisyphus it is knowing this rock must be faced for all eternity that is torturous.

The Sisyphus story is said to belong to a myriad of myths concerning the sun and dawn (Guerber, 1994, p353). Sisyphus' painful ascent, forcing the rock up a steep hill only to watch it roll back into the dark below is thought to represent the constant rising and setting of the sun, which "no sooner pushed up to the zenith, than it rolls down to the horizon." (Guerber, 1994, p353). This interpretation of the myth assures us of the cyclical eternity of Sisyphus' punishment. Albert Camus allows another reading of Sisyphus' fate. He represents Sisyphus to us as the 'absurd hero'; heroic because he is conscious of his suffering. He suggests that in his awareness of his fate he becomes dignified. He says;

I see that man going back down with a heavy yet measured step towards the torment of which he will never know the end. That hour like a breathing-space which returns as surely as his suffering, that is the hour of consciousness. At each of those moments when he leaves the heights and gradually sinks towards the lairs of the gods, he is superior to his fate. He is stronger than his rock. (Camus, 1975, p109)

This is the Sisyphus Sterbak reveals to us, an unfortunate ‘docile body’ yet tragically heroic. She presents to us a “subjected and practised body” (Foucault, 1991, p138) a body that is bound and limited by the restrictions of the cage, that performs repetitious action without question. In pushing against the restraints of the cage he ensures its perpetual rocking and also his own. The production of a “docile body” (Foucault, 1991, p138) requires discipline. Discipline is the controlling force. The kind of disciplining Sisyphus suffers is that of constant, fruitless, repetitious toil .

Foucault’s detailed account of systems of confinement in Discipline and Punish describes minutely the elements that produce a ‘docile body’. For Sisyphus his rock, or in Sterbak’s case, his cage, define him, they fix his space and limit his movement. Foucault recognised that space is a defining factor in the training of a docile body. In “The Art of Distributions” (Foucault, 1991, p138-162) he notes that enclosure is often necessary but enclosure alone is not sufficient, there must be a more detailed manipulation of space. For greater control and discipline of the body tighter, more specific enclosed areas should be allocated to each individual. Therefore some kind of ‘partitioning’ is necessary, each individual occupies his own cellular space.

The creation and development of the 'docile body' has a strong social history. The increasing reliance of Western bourgeois capitalists on a dependable workforce for example, necessitated further regulations and control of its subjects. In "The Control of Activity" (Foucault, 1991, p149) Foucault explains how the time of the individual is subdivided to ensure certain tasks are performed within an allotted time and that this assures less time is spent on leisure and waste. There are a number of ways in which production is subdivided. The timetable is the first, most obvious, example of the control time can have over an individual. It imposes a regular rhythm to each day where it is not necessary to think what task must be performed next. It imposes control and discipline rather than relying on the dependability or self-regulation of the individual. Secondly, is the control of gesture whereby the action carried out is honed down to a fine art of precise movements. "The Correlation of the Body and Gesture" (Foucault, 1991, p152) governs the best possible position of the body while performing the act and "body - object articulation" (Foucault, 1991, p152) controls the relationship between the object that the body is manipulating at any given time. Lastly "exhaustive use" or repetitious use, ensures that not for one second would any individual remain idle (Foucault, 1991, p154) . ".....We have passed from a form of injunction that measured or punctuated gestures to a web that constrains them or sustains them throughout their entire sucession."(Foucault, 1991, p152). Here Foucault draws attention to how a body may be precisely defined and regulated in a way which goes beyond how gestures are performed. It is the details of disciplinary control which are imposed upon each gesture that is restrictive rather than the gestures themselves. Foucault shows that

bodies can be regulated in a number of ways, through circular labour, self-regulation and repetition, when all of these become instilled as a natural act, through coercion or habit, the body is truly disciplined.

However the control of an individual can be and is, further subdivided. In "The Organization of Geneses"(Foucault, 1991, p156) Foucault further examines the production of the 'docile body' through the regulation of the relations of time, bodies and forces. He uses the example of the Goblines School set up in 1737. The school was one example of an emerging phenomenon of the classical period whereby the time of an individual was exploited and turned into ever increasing profit and use: "The disciplines, which analyse space, break up and rearrange activities, must also be understood as machinery for adding up and capitalizing time."(Foucault, 1991, p157).

All of the forces described above were most effective when practiced on a body of people. In "The Composition of Forces"(Foucault, 1991, p162) Foucault examines how the battalion or division became like a coordinated machine with each section "moving in relation to one another, in order to arrive at a configuration and obtain a specific result." (Foucault, 1991, p162) The body described above has been disciplined beyond its natural state with its inherent faults, it now functions due to the forces of discipline, like a machine.

Foucault's investigation into the manipulative effect of discipline on the body all point to one end - "ever increased profit or use" (Foucault, 1991, p157). The 'subjected and practised body' had a very specific purpose, it was a product of discipline which in turn provided power. It suited the needs of bourgeoisie capitalists to have a trained and docile body of people at their disposal to work in their

factories. The disciplining of the body, the creation of the 'docile body', heightened production in factories and produced skillful military forces.

Where then do we find similarities with Sterbak's *Sisyphus II*? The body she presents to us carries out a task that is neither profitable nor useful, but is a labour of kinds, and he must continue this toil for all eternity. He appears almost skillful but will never master this art. It is this fact, that all his efforts are in vain that makes the punishment all the more poignant and painful.

The gods had condemned Sisyphus to ceaselessly rolling a rock to the top of a mountain, whence the stone would fall back of its own weight. They had thought with some reason that there is no more dreadful punishment than futile and hopeless labour. (Camus, 1975, p107)

Here is where Sterbak sees the irony - discipline without purpose, punishment without end. Sterbak problematises the relationship between docility and usefulness - her 'docile body' achieves nothing. From this we can suggest that she adds another dimension to Foucault's minute detailing of the production of the 'docile body'. Her scepticism toward submission or docility as a useful force is immanent. Richard Noble notes: "indeed scepticism, particularly with regard to any and all forms of utopianism, is one of the central values of her work" (Noble, 1995, p55)

This thesis poses the questions whether Sterbak's *Sisyphus* is a 'subjected and practised body' and a 'docile body'? And if so, is the *Sisyphus II* piece a description of discipline and punishment or purposelessness or perhaps, and most probably, purposeless discipline and delusive punishment?

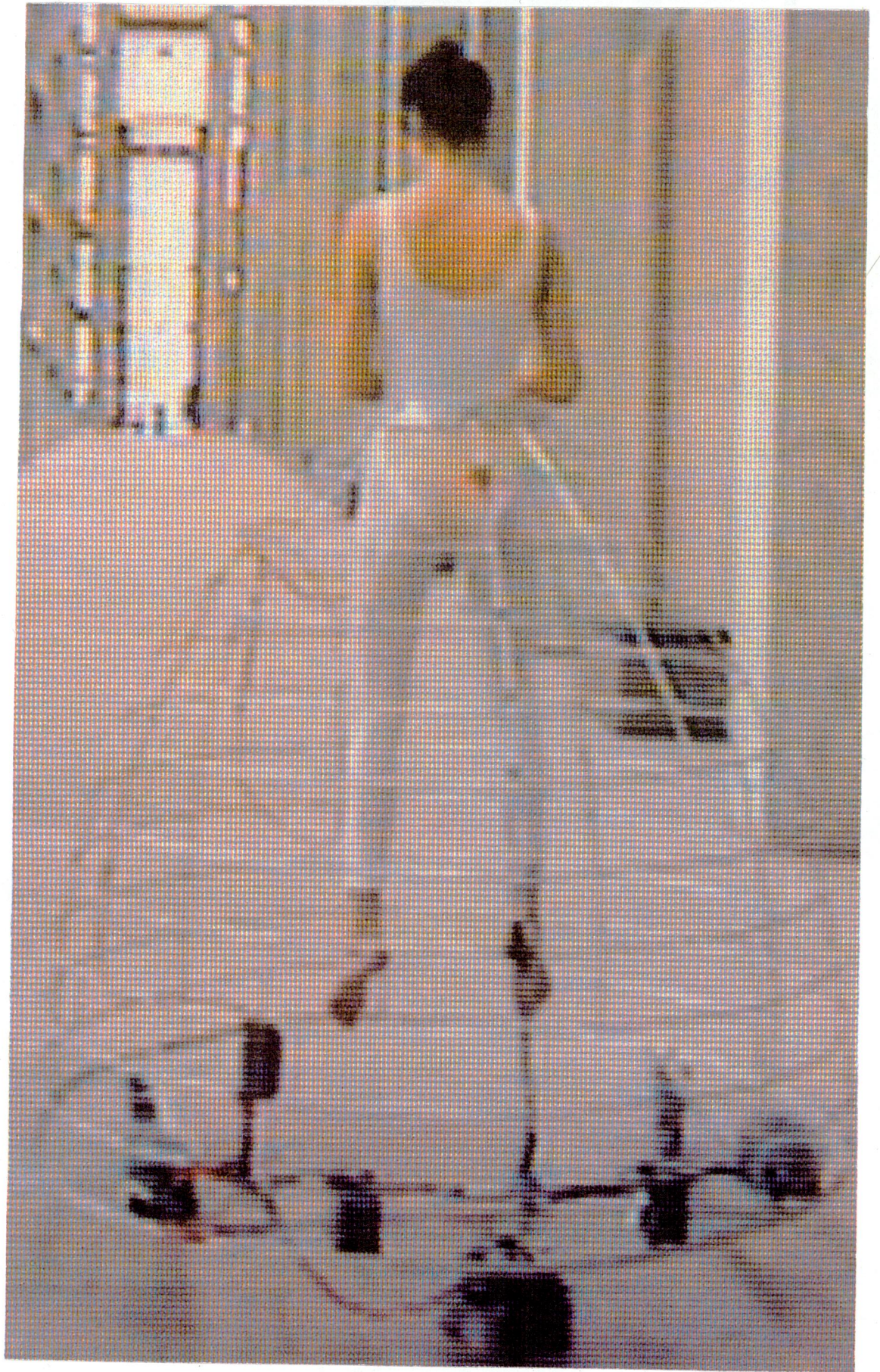


Figure 5
Remote Control (1989)
from 'Velleitas' catalogue, 1995.



SECTION ONE: DISCIPLINING SISYPHUS

“What was then being formed was a policy of coercions that act upon the body, a calculated manipulation of its elements, its gestures, its behaviour. The human body was entering a machinery of power that explores it, breaks it down and rearranges it. A ‘political anatomy’, which was also a ‘mechanics of power’, was being born: it defined how one may have hold over others’ bodies, not only so that they may do as one wishes, but so that they may operate as one wishes, with the techniques, the speed and the efficiency that one determines. Thus, discipline produces subjected and practised bodies, ‘docile bodies’.”(Foucault, 1991, p138)

The ‘docile body’ described above was a submissive yet trained and skillful body. Through tight control and strict discipline the human body was manipulated, like an object, and rendered almost mechanical. In the following section I wish to examine the production of a Foucauldian “docile body” in Sterbak’s *Sisyphus II*. To what purpose does she employ this “docile body”?

A film loop runs behind the chrome cage in *Sisyphus II*. In this loop we see the ever struggling figure of a man. It is of this body we are asking the question - is this a ‘docile body’ ? Is this body ‘subjected and practised’ ? Elizabeth Grosz in her essay ‘Bodies-Cities’ in a definition of the body, suggests that bodies

....require social triggering, ordering and long term ‘administration’ regulated in this culture and epoch by what Foucault has called ‘the micro-technologies of power’.(Grosz,1995,p104).

Training, disciplining and co-ordination of the body and its functions are necessary for social interaction and integration. The body, therefore *must*

experience some form of social disciplining. Sterbak recognises this, she has said:

I do not think of myself as a discrete entity. In fact, I think there is no such thing, on the emotional, social, economic even the atomic level. Only in the most narrow sense are we discrete entities (Morgan & Morris, 1995, p125).

What body then is presented to us in *Sisyphus II* ? To what extent is he disciplined ? It is a male figure: Žantovska Murray suggests an athlete, Sladen informs us that he is a Russian circus performer (Sladen, 1996, p24). Both practices require extreme training and discipline. Sterbak's cage necessitates such discipline merely to keep it balanced and the physical strains it places on the body are obvious. The cage, and therefore the *Sisyphus II* piece, is inexorably linked to discipline.

The body of the performer is incredibly majestic almost statuesque. He is also "very muscular and wearing only a g-string" and "has the body of a god" (Sladen, 1996, p24). It could be said then, that this is 'the classical body'.

The classical body has no orifices and engages in no base bodily functions. It is like a classical statue. It is opposed to the 'grotesque body' which has orifices, genitals, protuberances. (Wolff, 1990, p124) .

This 'classical body' became a role model for, primarily, the bourgeoisie society of seventeenth century Europe. It was reinvented in the seventeenth century as the 'positive body' (Wolff, 1990, p124). This 'positive body' did not appear to engage in earthly desires, it was almost holy - in appearance. Why then is this 'holy' body employed by Sterbak? I would suggest that by using this stereotyped 'statuesque' figure

Sterbak denies the figure any possible individuality, and also distances us from the performer. *Sisyphus II* -the figure in the cage- does not manage to assert his own personality throughout the piece; this repetitious action and the short film loop do not allow it. "In this case the crisis of spectacle does not give way to some form of personal triumph on the part of the performer." (Sladen, 1996, p24). We realise that the performer as an individual is not important to the piece. In fact her use of this 'generic' man is more significant. In an earlier piece *Generic Man* (1989)(Fig.7) Sterbak expresses, perhaps more blatantly, her interest in the fluidity of notions of difference and individuality. The piece is a large photograph (meant for billboards) of the back of a man's (or woman's) head with a barcode inscribed on his neck.⁵ Nemiroff suggests that the piece is an unsettling meditation on the "seductiveness of conformity" (Nemiroff, 1992, p38).

In *Sisyphus II* the body only becomes significant through the actions it performs, not in itself. He has been seduced by the cage, it is an extension of him (or perhaps he is an extension of it?). Nonetheless the cage insists upon conformity and due to this a certain erasure of identity. As with Foucault individuality is immaterial, difference is not signified.⁶

The action performed appears also as a struggle for equilibrium. Knowing the Sisyphus myth however, we interpret this action as a form of forced labour. On the other hand, perhaps we merely assume this action to be work due to our day to day consumption of the male through the spectacle of work and the working body. As Sladen points out the action is too fruitless or "cyclical" (Sladen, 1996, p24) to be legitimised as work. The Oxford Dictionary's definition of work as;

“the application of mental or physical effort *to a purpose*” does not apply. It would appear that there is no purpose to Sisyphus’ action.

In another more recent performance piece *Condition* (1995), Sterbak pursues the notion of meaningless labour and again this piece is performed by a man. Sterbak does not allow the notion of work to detract from the obvious fruitlessness of the action in either performances. In performing this notion of labour the men in *Sisyphus II* and *Condition* produce nothing, they are merely ‘going round in circles’ (the performer in *Condition* actually does repeatedly describe a circle). For Sterbak, the notion of work is employed as a front: it is a fallacy. By appearing busy, the men in both pieces create a reason for being and forestall accusations of uselessness. However Sterbak, by insisting upon the absurdity of the actions performed, uncovers this illusion. She exposes these attempts to construct meaning in our lives as mere creation-myths, work becomes role-play, a performance.

From this point of view, mobility (and actual movement in many of the works) is itself immobile, a movement that goes round in circles and folds back on itself.” (Phillippi, 1996, p185)

Although the action in *Sisyphus II* is circular it does imply discipline (disciplinary action is often repetitive). The body is subjected to a kind of control and repeats this action under the instruction of the cage. Perhaps it would now be useful to return to Foucault and examine Sterbak’s construction of Sisyphus as a ‘docile body’.

Discipline sometimes requires *enclosure*, the specification of a place heterogeneous to all others and closed in upon itself. (Foucault, 1991, p141).



Figure 6
Condition (1995)
from 'Velleitas' catalogue, 1995.



As mentioned earlier, enclosure and partitioning are essential to the production of the docile body. Sterbak creates a double enclosure. Firstly, through the cage which resembles a prison cell and secondly via the film screen. The performer is not physically present and so, he is denied any contact. To escape the confines of the cage he would need outside help - he is powerless. The more tightly the space is controlled the more discipline is enforced on the body. "Each individual has his own place; and each place its individual." (Foucault, 1991, p143). We know from Foucault that enclosure on a grand scale does not result in full control. Sterbak's cage is for one person, enforcing solitude - the perfect disciplinary space is always "cellular" (Foucault, 1991, p143). Foucault's explanation of the workings of the timetable and curricular labour suggest that their function is to "...establish rhythms, impose particular occupations, regulate the cycles of repetition....". In *Sisyphus II* the rhythmic movement of the struggling figure, the regulated repetition of the film loop and the imposition of this strange laborious task all comply with Foucault's above description. Each muscle is employed in the attempt to gain balance and so the body is subject to the workings and motions of the object. The cage controls more than this, it actually controls how the action is carried out, one wrong move and it will topple. Because of the structure of the cage the more regular and rhythmic the performer's movements are the higher chance he has of remaining upright. Therefore, there is a right and wrong way of moving within the confines of the cage and it is the cage that dictates the every move of the performer. Foucault calls this "the temporal elaboration of the act" (Foucault, 1991, p151) he gives the example of marching troops and how the width and time of their steps are regulated. So the

employment of regulated time not only measures minutes but goes further and attempts to control *how* exactly actions are carried out within that time frame. In *Sisyphus II* the cage places these impositions on the body and so the cage becomes the apparatus that produces the 'docile' body. Similarly Foucault notes the "coercive link with the apparatus of production" (Foucault, 1991, p153) when he describes the strict instructions given to a soldier when handling a gun. He also relates the impositions of the school desk on the pupil - as with Sterbak's cage the pupil's body is forced into a strict position.

The student must sit upright, feet upon the floor, head erect, he may not slouch or fidget; his animate body is brought into a fixed correlation with the inanimate desk. (Bartky, 1988, p62).

Watching the film loop in *Sisyphus II* it is as though the cage and the body become one - man becomes machine.

The mutation of man to machine, or machine as extension of man, realises the original modernist dream for the machine - to replace man. The ultimate goal was that bodily restrictions would no longer hold power over mankind, the mechanical extension becomes a transcendental experience allowing the body to perform acts above and beyond its natural limitations. In Karel Čapek's absurdist play 'R.U.R.'-Rossum's Universal Robot's- this was the dream Old Rossum held, that he could produce a robot stronger and more intelligent than humankind, he designed his robots as "ideal mechanical slaves, inexpensive, capable and obedient." (Wollen, 1993, p42). Through the use of robots he could reduce labour to a purely mechanical act. Old Rossum is for Čapek both a "scientist and a magus, a creator of golems" (Wollen, 1993, p43), therefore he feels elevated to the position of a god. Sterbak however

manages to subvert that experience. She does not replace man with machinery but intermingles the two, *Sisyphus* (1991), *Remote Control* (1989) and *Condition* (1995), all employ the use of some sort of machinery. The performers are all required by their mechanical extension to perform ridiculous futile acts. Thus, machine makes a fool of man and the creator has created no more than a farcical monster. As in 'R.U.R.' the machines take over, killing all humans: "Victorious the robots continue to work even harder in an orgy of senseless productivity." (Wollen, 1993, p43).

In *Remote Control* and *Condition* the machinery is somewhat contraption-like and appears unnecessarily complicated with wires and controls exposed. By using these obfuscatory mechanisms and often seemingly irrational performances her wo/man-machines recall notions of the absurd intimated and thematised by her Czech literary influences. Čapek's play 'R.U.R.' has further connections with these pieces through the idea of dehumanization expressed in the play. We can see this notion of dehumanization most obviously in the *Sisyphus II* piece .

Remote Control and *Sisyphus* both create a frame for the body - *Remote Control* is a crinoline with wheels in which a woman sits, her feet raised above the ground. In taking up their positions within these frames both of the performers become part of impressive omnipotent machines, as well as becoming slave to them. Neither the woman in *Remote Control* nor the man in *Sisyphus* can escape their confines without outside help. This is where the subversion occurs. While the mechanical extension allows the performers to move in ways that the body cannot it also disempowers the body. The body submits to the machine. The machine promises to free mankind from the "constraints of

physical weakness ...”and yet “..... can easily turn into its opposite the total loss or surrender of control....” (Nemiroff, 1992, p31).

At the same time the cage requires the body in order to be mobilised, in this way, the body and the machine are inextricably linked. In *Condition* (with video by Ana Torfs) the conclusion is slightly different - the machine appears as a tail-like prosthesis- the driving force behind the body. As with *Sisyphus II* and *Remote Control* “machine and body become dream-like extensions of each other” (Phillippi, 1996, p189). However in *Condition* the wire contraption does not frame the body and is easily abandoned by the performer. The performance in *Condition* requires the body repeatedly to describe a circle; as with *Sisyphus II* the idea of machine-like repetition is paramount: “the universal robot is increasingly hard to distinguish from the human and vice versa.” (Phillippi, 1996, p189)

The word robot, derived from the Czech word ‘robota’ meaning forced labour returns us to the *Sisyphus II* piece.⁷ Sisyphus becomes dehumanized through his imposed labourings which he performs as efficiently and repetitively as a robot. Cyclical labour, robotic work, the emphasis on repetition and “exhaustive use” (Foucault, 1991, p154) in Sterbak’s wo/man-machines cannot be avoided. Man, in becoming slave to his machine, becomes docile.

The perfectly disciplined body would obviously be the mechanical body, the body so subjected and practised it becomes machine responding only to commands. However in *Sisyphus II* the struggle with the cage is, apart from a struggle toward balance, a struggle for freedom. Bound up with the struggle the idea of the struggle for freedom is the notion that he wishes to once again assume a natural



body - one that does not submit to the workings of the machine. 'The natural body' becomes the absolute in disciplinary perfection. Foucault describes to us how it replaced the mechanical body as the new object of disciplinary control.

In becoming the target for new mechanisms of power, the body is offered up to new forms of knowledge. It is the body of exercise, rather than of speculative physics; a body manipulated by authority, than imbued with animal spirits; a body of useful training and not of rational mechanics, but one in which by virtue of that very fact, a number of natural requirements and functional constraints are beginning to emerge. (Foucault, 1991, p155).

Sterbak's *Sisyphus II* is a 'body of exercise', a body manipulated by the authority of the cage. However, is it a 'useful' body? Sterbak's refusal to accept utopian ideals - (Noble, 1995, p55) of which the perfectly disciplined body is one - leaves one suspicious. For Foucault the body is rendered docile to make it more useful and discipline achieves a purpose. *Sisyphus II* however, although docile as I have shown, achieves nothing. This is where Sterbak's ironic humour surfaces. Discipline becomes purposeless, docility achieves nothing but docility itself.

If Foucault's docile body sets out to "intensify the *use* of the slightest moment" (Foucault, 1991, p154) then Sterbak's sets out to subvert that. According to Foucault, discipline proposes the theory of "an ever-growing *use* of time: exhaustion rather than use; it is a question of extracting, from time, ever more available moments and, from each moment, ever more *useful* forces." (Foucault, 1991, p154). Sterbak's docile and disciplined body does not rest, he is not allowed, however, in

this 'exhaustive' action he achieves nothing. Therefore resisting the notion that disciplinary control is necessarily a useful force and suggesting quite the opposite. Discipline as a powerful force becomes another object of "power and futility" (Curtis, 1996, p16), and through that it becomes tragically comic. This ironic examination of power again refers to the legacy of her literary influences. Jaroslav Hasek's picaresque novel The Good Soldier Švejk presents a powerful satire on the military might of the disintegrating Austro-Hungarian Empire. It points to the absurdity and often incompetent workings of bureaucratic power. The novel is recognised as a comic masterpiece and by portraying power as humorous and absurd undermines the importance of that power. This notion of humour as a critical force is often employed by Sterbak, perhaps most subtly and effectively in *Sisyphus II*.

The fact that Sisyphus' actions are futile does make the cruelty all the more obvious and it also manages to problematise the usefulness of docility itself. What if the socio-political society that created the 'docile' body for their instruction created a useless body? The questions are speculative and perhaps have no answer but Sterbak confronts us with them anyway.

Adding to the notion of futility is the use of repetitious repetition. Sterbak's circumfluent film shows us cyclical labour/effort. This emphasis on repetition forces us to recognise the tragic infinity of Sisyphus' trial but also the tragedy of the purposeless action involved in discipline. Richard Noble notes;

As Camus would have it we are imprisoned in the meaningless repetitions and rhythms of daily life....
...caught up in a purposeless flux of events beyond our control. (Noble, 1995, p64).

Why perform disciplinary action that has no purpose? From Sterbak's point of view day to day rituals are a discipline of kinds such as working and dressing. Sterbak's work suggests that we employ such rituals to inject meaning into our lives (Noble, 1995, p61). As Kundera would suggest ritual or repetition "is the burden that brings meaning to human existence".(Nemiroff, 1992, p18).⁸

Returning then to *Sisyphus II* perhaps this ritualistic action becomes a little more heroic. His burden is this relentless repetition. As he faces his rock again, or in Sterbak's case, as he returns from one state of flux only to grapple with another, we realise it is this repetition that gives his life meaning, that constructs his identity. So then however absurd or inane these rituals may appear they are in fact heroic.

If this myth is tragic, that is because its hero is conscious. Where would his torture be, indeed, if at every step the hope of succeeding upheld him? The workman of today works every day in his life at the same tasks and this fate is no less absurd. But it is tragic only at the rare moments when it becomes conscious. Sisyphus, proletarian of the gods, powerless and rebellious, knows the whole extent of his wretched condition; it is what he thinks of during his descent. The lucidity that was to constitute his torture at the same time crowns his victory. There is no fate that cannot be surmounted by scorn. (Camus, 1975, p109)

The tragedy then of the 'docile' body is not poignant until one becomes conscious of it. Sterbak invites us to watch the tragedy of the 'subjected and practised' body. Foucault details how this subjection occurs: "My objective instead, has been to create a history of the different modes by which in our culture, human beings are made subjects." (quoted in Pollock, 1995, p5).

The true tragedy of purposeless discipline as described by Camus, is in a person's understanding of her/his fate. While we are given no prominent signals, we know that the struggle for balance in *Sisyphus II* produces strains on the body. Sterbak shows us that while the body, though in pain, may be resigned to docility the mind is still painfully aware of this endless struggle.

However as Camus suggests, in his awareness he overcomes the tragedy of his circumstances. Therefore although his awareness makes him all the more tragic it also liberates the confined *Sisyphus II*. This theme of liberation and constraint resounds throughout the *Sisyphus II* piece. The physical limitations of the cage and body can only be escaped through the mind and imagination.

We are to a greater or lesser extent trapped in our endeavours, and absurd as these may be, there is nonetheless something heroic in attempting to carry them through. (Noble, 1995, p64).

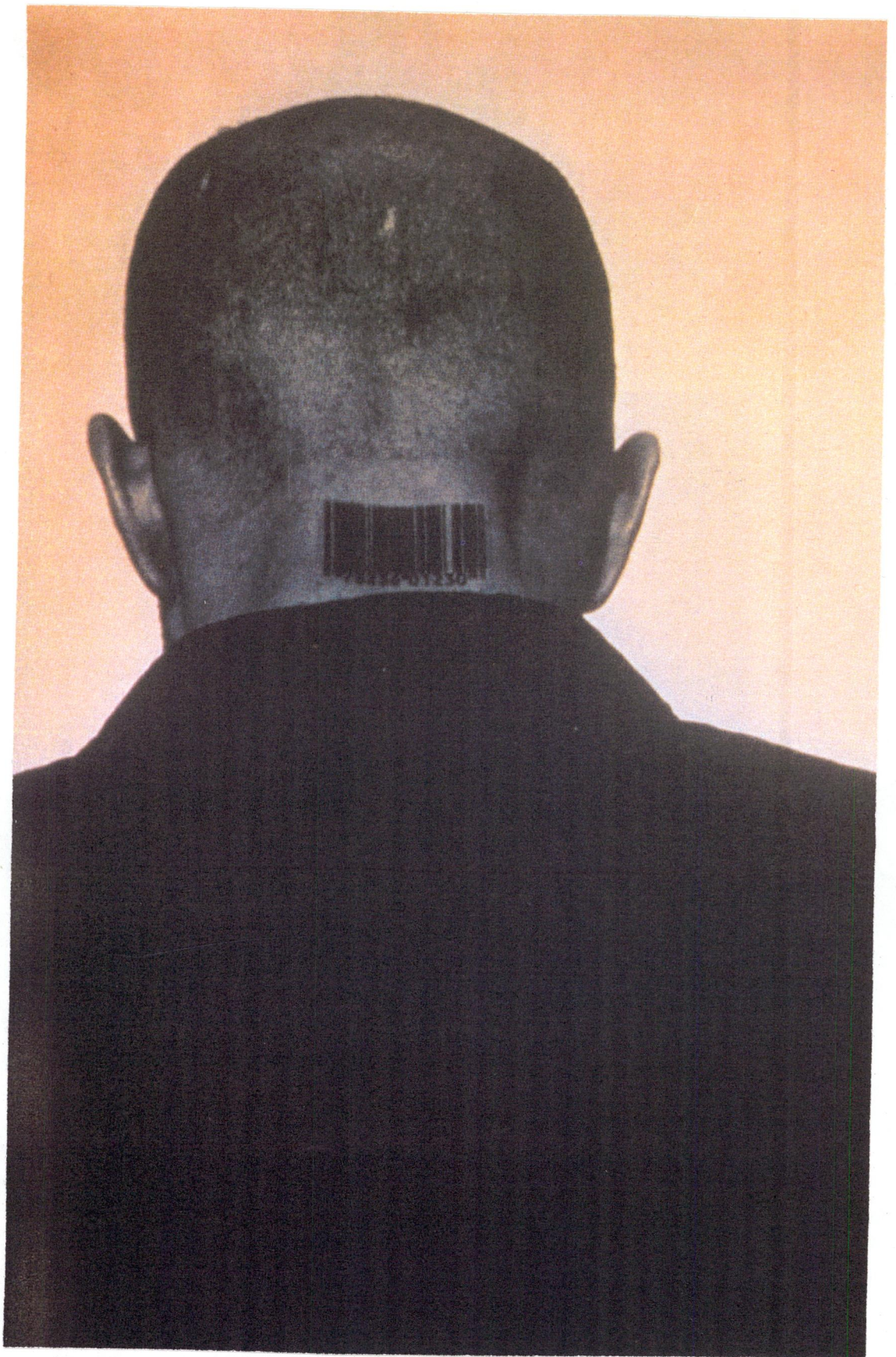


Figure 7
Generic Man (1987)
from 'Velleitas' catalogue, 1995.



SECTION TWO: PUNISHING SISYPHUS

You have already grasped that Sisyphus is the absurd hero. He *is*, as much through his passions as through his torture. His scorn of the gods, his hatred of death, and his passion for life won him that unspeakable penalty in which the whole being is exerted towards accomplishing nothing. This is the price that must be paid for the passions of this earth. (Camus, 1975, p108).

Why is the torture of Sisyphus so horrifying to Camus? After all there is no horrific bloodshed, no hanging or quartering, no hellish execution. In fact his body remains untouched. It is for Camus (and for most), 'unspeakable' because it attacks and deprives the soul.

In Discipline and Punish Foucault recounts the disappearance of bodily torture in the eighteenth century. Torture as a public spectacle disappeared, since the violent tortures were increasingly seen to be too close to the criminal acts themselves, and so punishment became "the most hidden part of the penal process." (Foucault, 1991, p9). Public hangings, 'chain-gangs', of convicts weighed down with irons and chains were no longer a common sight. Punishment became less theatrical and more inconspicuous. The kind of punishment that ensued was "... of a less immediately physical kind, a certain discretion in the art of inflicting pain, a combination of more subtle more subdued sufferings, deprived of their visible display....." (Foucault, 1991, p8). With the disappearance of the spectacle of punishment came a new target for punishment.

The 'body of the condemned' which had been the main target of the forces of the law previous, was now hardly touched. The new focus of penal repression was the soul; "The expiation that once rained down upon the body must be replaced by a punishment that acts in depth on the heart, the thoughts, the will, the inclinations." (Foucault, 1991, p16).



Again a certain erasure of the corporeal body occurs. The more the body disappeared from view the less control was exercised over the physical body. Foucault writes; "The disappearance of public executions marks the decline of the spectacle; but it also marks a slackening of the hold on the body." (Foucault, 1991, p10). How then does this relate to Sterbak's *Sisyphus II* body? Her figure is in full view, punishment on display; this kind of spectacle suggests certain medieval qualities in the piece. In medieval times the spectacle of punishment, public floggings, hangings, beheadings, were used as a cautionary warning to discourage crime. In other words it was used as a method of control. So Sterbak's film creates the spectacle of punishment which became so unfashionable in the early to mid 1880s, and it also reinforces the theme of control. We, the audience, are brought in as witness and spectator to consume the sufferings and struggles of the condemned Sisyphus. Desa Phillippi suggests that;

There is nothing medieval about the work of Jana Sterbak except perhaps the pleasure it exhibits in a certain unruliness; her art suggests a becoming, a taking form and transforming which if not timelessly of the world is not self-consciously modern either. (Phillippi, 1996, p185).

Phillippi's suggestion that 'unruliness' is the *only* medieval element in Sterbak's work is perhaps a little narrow. In *Sisyphus II* she delights in the blatant display of physical and mental torture. In *Condition* man mutates to animal by attaching a tail. This is a reminder of the descriptions from medieval travellers of their encounters with foreign lands and people;

You can see several bodies attached to one head, or, the other way round, many heads joined to one body. Here a serpent's tail is to be seen on a four-footed beast, there a fish with an animal's head.(St. Bernard in a letter to Abbot William of St. Thierry, 1135).
(quoted in Phillippi, 1996, p185).

Mutations are not the only visible medieval influences. In *Sisyphus II* we are presented with a tortured body - certainly the torture is discreet and no bodily harm is inflicted, nonetheless, the practice of torture is a medieval legacy. *Sisyphus II* is not the only representation of tortured bodies in Sterbak's work, as evidenced by the work which has already been discussed such as *Golem*. Another project *Tongue* (1990) documents an actual public execution that occurred in Prague in 1621. ".....Three men were hanged, the rest beheaded. Before the head of Dr.Jessenius, the rector of the University, was struck off, his tongue was cut out of his mouth.(J.Watson, Wallenstein)" (Nemiroff,1992). On a glass shelf beside the text sits the mute bronze tongue as a sad and abject reminder of that tragic figure from Czech history and also of the horror of medieval torture.

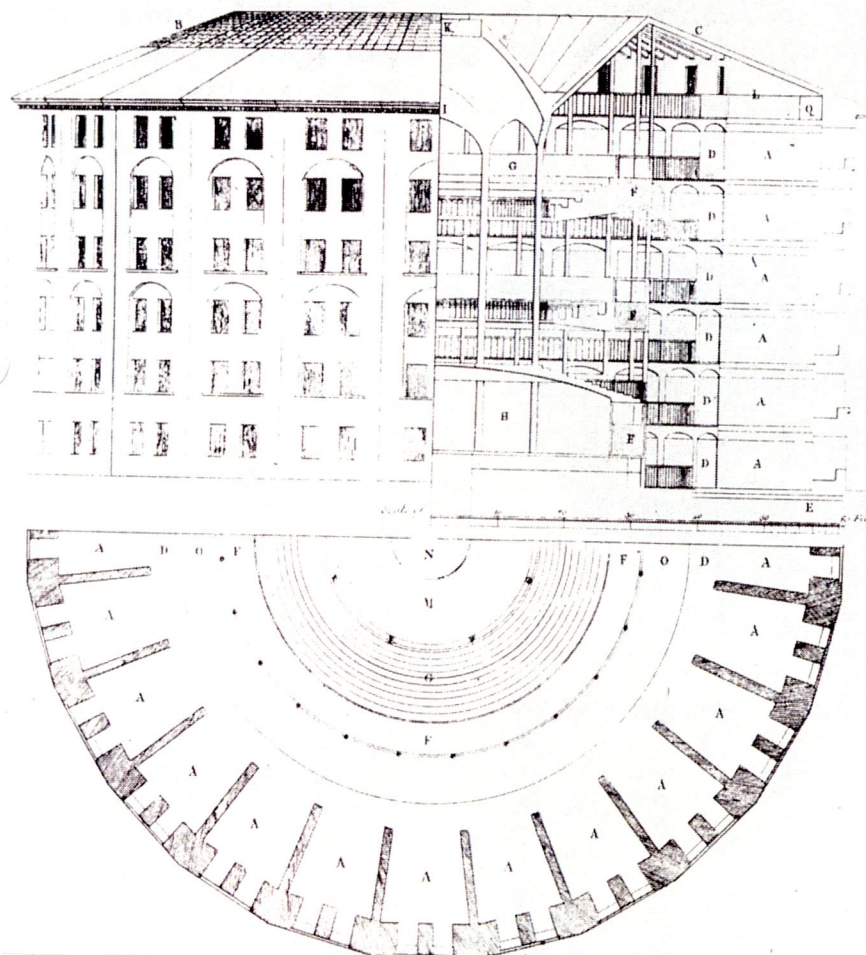
In *Sisyphus II* it is the *spectacle* of torture that refers to medieval times. The notion of the theatrical is perhaps the most 'unruly' element in the work. Here, the spectacle of punishment and torture becomes the theatre of control. Since the action of the cage is perpetual, this disciplinary punishment is not seen to be "corrective" (Foucault, 1991, p179), merely purposeless. It is in this purposeless action that Sterbak's ironic sense of humour is most obvious. In her project *Condition*, the notion of futile action again appears through performance.

The emphasis of the performance in *Sisyphus II* and *Remote Control* (Fig.5) is on control. The cage controls and restricts Sisyphus, the crinoline in *Remote Control*, cannot be escaped without outside help. In both performances the body does not perform any natural movement, rather the machines “work upon the body” (Foucault, 1991, p231) controlling and taking over. The dress/crinoline in *Remote Control* appears at first to empower the performer when she holds the remote, yet when she passes it to one of her attendants she is completely vulnerable, suspended by the crinoline in mid-air. She is stripped of all the privileges that freedom allows and becomes slave to her machine. As Phillippi points out; “The machine turns out to be a mobile prison.” (Phillippi, 1996, p190).

The labour that *Sisyphus II* performs, eventually due to continual repetition, appears as punishment. It is this that indicates he is imprisoned in the role he chose. Ultimately Sterbak reveals that any such roles are essentially limiting. Both performers are rendered docile, almost like puppets. However Sisyphus’s struggle is also a struggle *against* limitations and so, within Sterbak’s theatre he remains a kind of hero for his attempts.

The “theatrical representation of pain” (Foucault, 1991, p14) remains and through his struggles *Sisyphus II* continues to suffer. Foucault tells us that; “the disciplinary systems favour punishments that are exercise-intensified, multiplied forms of training, several times repeated.” (Foucault, 1991, p179). So to some extent perhaps *Sisyphus II* is the perfect disciplinary punishment model. Foucault however, uses Jeremy Bentham’s model of the Panopticon (Fig.8) prison as the ultimate in disciplinary punishment. (Foucault, 1991, p195-230)

*A General Idea of a PENITENTIARY PANOPTICON in an Improved, but as yet (Jan^r 23^d 1791), Unfinished State.
See Postscript References to Plan, Elevation, & Section (being Plates referred to us, N^o 1).*



EXPLANATION.

- A. Cells
- B. Wall round, to admit Sky Light
- D. Cell Galleries
- E. Entrances
- F. Inspection Galleries
- G. Chapel Galleries
- H. Inspection Lodges
- I. Doors of the Chapel
- K. Sky Light to D
- L. Stair, Windows, with their Galleries, immediately within the wall, all round place, for an audience when Q
- M. Floor of the Chapel
- N. Circular Opening in it (open or shut at Church times) to light the Inspection Lodges
- O. Windows Wall from top to bottom, for light, air, and separation.

Figure 8
Jeremy Bentham's 'Panopticon' (1791)
from *Discipline and Punish*, 1991.



The Panopticon designed by Bentham in 1791, was an architectural model for the perfect system of confinement, be it prison, hospital, asylum. Like *Sisyphus II* it is based on the principal of cellular cages; "As opposed to the ruined prisons littered with mechanisms of torture, to be seen in Piranese's engravings, the Panopticon presents a cruel, ingenious cage." (Foucault, 1991, p205).

The name Panopticon discloses it's most important feature- the power of surveillance - 'pan'; panoramic, 'optic'; visible. At any given time any one of the inmates could be seen by the prison's director. The design of the Panopticon was not important architecturally but as a "mechanism of power *reduced* to its ideal form" (Foucault, 1991, p205). The structure of the Panopticon like the *Sisyphus II* cage was minimalistic. However, it functioned more effectively than any other institution of confinement previous. It is structured in a circular fashion, like Sterbak's cage, and the inmates were housed in individual cells around the periphery. In the centre stood the ubiquitous tower, from this tower it was possible (due to lighting etc.) to see each inmate at all times.

The celebrated, transparent, circular cage with it's high tower, powerful and knowing may have been for Bentham a project of a perfect disciplinary instution; but he also set out to show how one may 'unlock' the disciplines and get them to function in a diffused multiple, polyvalent way throughout the whole social body. (Foucault, 1991, p208).

Foucault observes that "visibility is a trap" (Foucault, 1991, p200). The strength of the panopticon lay in its 'seeing' power. Each individual was made constantly visible to the director from his high



tower. But, the inmates were never aware of themselves being watched, therefore the awareness that their every move could be observed was enough to instil fear and discipline. Foucault maintains that the major effect of the Panopticon was “to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility”(Foucault, 1991, p201) which would assure the automatic functioning of power. The Panoptic gaze is a powerful one. The omnipresent director in his tower was all powerful, here the one who holds the gaze is very obviously the one in control. “The Panopticon is a machine for dissociating the see/being seen dyad: in the peripheric ring, one is totally seen, without ever seeing, in the central tower, one sees everything without ever being seen.” (Foucault, 1991, p202).

The notion of surveillance (or visibility) as a method of control also occurs quite clearly in Sterbak’s *Sisyphus II*. She too creates a ‘transparent, circular cage’ (Foucault, 1991, p208) in which the individual is constantly visible via the camera. The see/be seen juxtaposition is as separate (if not more so due to advanced technology), as Bentham’s. Sterbak objectifies the man in the cage and renders him powerless; firstly due to the control and power of the cage and secondly by placing him ‘on show’ for all to see. He must obviously be aware of the camera watching his every move and this kind of surveillance places pressures on him to perform. However with *Sisyphus II* there is a kind of double surveillance - that of the camera but also that of the audience. Like the cells of the Panopticon, the cage in *Sisyphus II* is “like so many cages, so many small theatres, in which each actor is alone, perfectly individualised and constantly visible.”(Foucault, 1991, p200). And so *Sisyphus II* is available to be scrutinised. The spectacle of torture

which once exercised control over its audience now becomes the gaze turned in on itself. Griselda Pollock calls this “the burden of scrutiny” (Pollock, 1995, p36-37) where once, representation and visibility (e.g. writing, drawing, photographs) was considered a privilege it became an intrusion, a means of objectification and surveillance.

In *Sisyphus II* the video screen replicates a kind of cellular structure, creating a space, like the cells of the Panopticon, for Sisyphus to be made visible. The cage is then seen as an illustration of the control of outside forces and how the power of surveillance manipulates our lives, makes a puppet of us. As with Bentham’s Panopticon, man becomes available to be analysed.

The Panopticon functions as a kind of laboratory power. Thanks to its mechanisms of observation, it gains in efficiency and in the ability to penetrate into men’s behaviour; knowledge follows the advances of power, discovering new objects of knowledge over all the surfaces on which power is exercised.
(Foucault, 1991, p204).

The analogy with the laboratory is very appropriate to *Sisyphus II*. Perhaps Sterbak created this space as a place for experimentation with mankind “and for analysing with complete certainty the transformations that may be obtained from them.” (Foucault, 1991, p204). Is it possible that she is conducting an experiment to see how much he can take? An analogy between *Sisyphus II* and science is not so strange due to Sterbak’s interest in the area. Diana Nemiroff recounts that in her notebook Sterbak has copied the following quote from poet Czeslaw Milosz;

Goethe had an intuition that something was going wrong, that science should not be separated

from poetry and imagination. Blake also. Maybe we are going to return to a very rich era where poetry and imagination are once again alongside science.”(Nemiroff, 1992,p23). 9

Sterbak's piece *I Can Hear You Think* (1984-85) dedicated to Stephen Hawking, the English physicist and cosmologist, shows the artist's strong affinity with science.¹⁰ Her use of magic and myths such as Sisyphus and Golem for example are both precursors to modern day science. A recent work *Perspiration; Olfactory portrait* (1995)(Fig.9) all show direct connections with the scientific process. Perspiration actually documents a scientific experiment in which Sterbak attempted to break down and chemically reconstruct the smell of her partner's perspiration. The project grew from the notion that smells have a direct link with desire. However science fails and the result is inconclusive. Another project connecting the artist and science was *Artist as Combustible* (1986). In this performance she attempted to enact (with a strong sense of humour) the idea of the 'flash of inspiration'. The room is in complete darkness until a dish of gunpowder is ignited on the artist's head. For a few seconds the room is illuminated showing the artist standing naked and still, and there it ends. The obvious humour in this and other pieces, constantly prompt the viewer to be suspicious of what we see. This is also true of *Sisyphus II*. If it is an experiment then there are no conclusions or results. If it is a form of disciplinary punishment or torture then it is not seen to be corrective.

Foucault notes also Bentham's anxiety about the fate of the Panopticon's director. Although he assumes a position of great power he too is enclosed in his tower and if he allows a mistake, he is the first victim. Bentham quotes the master of the Panopticon "By every tie I



Figure 9
Perspiration: Olfactory portrait (1995)
from 'Velleitas' catalogue, 1995.



could devise.....my own fate had been bound up by me with theirs.”
(quoted in Foucault, 1991, p204).

In *Sisyphus II* Sterbak allows us the privileged position of watching, however she leaves the cage sitting temptingly on the gallery floor. Perhaps it is an invitation? It certainly entices the viewer to take up this challenge and become the object, forsaking the power position. As Sladen notes the challenge “mocks us as we are not allowed to take it up.” (Sladen, 1996, p24). The temptation to ‘have a go’ plays upon the spectator. However the knowledge that if we accept this challenge we must surrender to the cage and become objects prevents the viewer from following this impulse through. We do not want to be identified with Sisyphus, we do not want to admit to the futility of our every day struggles. The tension remains in *Sisyphus II* between performance as a spectacle and performance as a kind of forced labour. The drudgery of the labour performed is a warning that perhaps there is no getting out.

This notion of attraction and aversion, though subtle, recurs throughout Sterbak’s work, more obviously in an earlier piece *Seduction Couch* (1986-87) (Fig.10). *Seduction Couch* is a chaise longue fashioned out of perforated steel and connected to a Van de Graff generator. It gives off a slight electric shock when touched, yet “one is drawn to it both by its beauty and it’s promise of pain.” (Noble, 1995, p59). In *Sisyphus II* then, the acknowledgement of our own wish to part take realises a frightening thought, that our fate and that of Sisyphus are one and the same. Just like the director we too are bound up in the Panoptic machine. Our bodies are also subject to subtle control and this process of control does not merely operate from the outside. In supressing our desire to take up the challenge the cage presents, or to touch the couch

we display a form of internalized control, self-surveillance. The effects of the Panopticon, the “state of conscious and permanent visibility” (Foucault, 1991, p201) has filtered down and exacts its control from within, “each becomes to himself his own jailer.” (Bartky, 1988, p63). Our understanding of boundaries and control concerning bodily behaviour is an effect of this self-surveillance. And so, Bentham’s wish for the Panopticon that one could “‘unlock’ the disciplines and get them to function in a diffused, multiple, polyvalent way throughout the whole social body” (Foucault, 1991, p209) has been realised. Not only do the disciplines imposed by social rules and hierarchies control society in general but they act “below the level of emergence” (Foucault, 1991, p223), at the level of the conscience.



Figure 10.
from 'Desordres' catalogue, 1992.

CONCLUSION

I have returned to my beginning. I realise that if through science I can seize phenomena and enumerate them, I cannot for all that apprehend the world. Were I to trace its entire relief with my finger, I should not know it anymore. And you give me the choice between a description that is but that teaches me nothing and hypotheses that claim to teach me but that are not sure. (Camus, 1975, p25)

Sterbak's refusal to show the *Sisyphus II* piece as having any corrective qualities assures us of her unwillingness to accept disciplinary punishment as useful. The endless rocking of the cage remains fruitless. The docile body of the performer achieves nothing but docility itself- it is not productive. In questioning the value of discipline and punishment she pushes Foucault's enquiry further. She highlights the ambiguities inherent in the institutions that exact precise forms of control over bodies of people, creating 'docile bodies', such as factories, prisons, schools. The cage becomes a reduced form of such an institution, carefully structured like the 'Panoptic' machine so that all is visible, a powerful device, yet it achieves nothing but purposeless motion. She reduces the movements of the docile body to a set of endless meaningless gestures within the fixed frame of the film. Therefore the omnipotent institution controls no more than a body of people in a state of meaningless flux.

For *Sisyphus II* labour does not equal productivity, it is useless toil. However, *Sisyphus II* does produce an artwork. Therefore his toil is not as futile as it first appears- in performing this action he is productive. In recognising this inherent ambiguity within the work we are forced to pose the question- how useful is art? It is obvious from the slick crafting of the chrome cage to the production of the film loop that art, certainly this particular artwork, is labour intensive. *Sisyphus II* therefore turns

the full circle and becomes a critique of itself, is the labour intensive process of creating an artwork a useless process? If so, then it suggests that Sisyphus' relatively futile struggle is comparable to Sterbak's struggle as an artist.

In the *Sisyphus II* piece we are confronted with the futile reality of the human condition. In *Sisyphus II*, and indeed throughout her work, Sterbak points to mankind's habitual performance of absurd rituals as an attempt to construct a meaningful existence. Her position as an artist is one of the many possibilities of self-creation, yet another attempt to propel ourselves beyond our physical determination. Therefore the constraints of the body are ever more restrictive than the cage in *Sisyphus II*. While with outside help we may escape the confines of the cage it is vain to imagine we might ever transcend the limits of the body, not through self-creation, role play, nor mechanical extensions. However, the implications of *Sisyphus II* are not without irony and perhaps not as bleak as it seems. I imagine it to be, as Camus suggests, "... a lucid invitation to live and to create, in the very midst of the desert." (Camus, 1975, p7).

"Myths are made for the imagination to breathe life into them." (Camus, 1975, p108). Although Sterbak presents a docile, unfortunate Sisyphus, forever confined and manipulated by the cage we are aware that through the imagination he can find release. Antonio Gramsci has suggested that industrial labour can be liberating. He suggested that while performing these meaningless gestures the mind is allowed to be free. He argued that the reduction of work (or workers) in Ford's car manufacturing factories to "a series of empty signifiers, made it possible to think about something else, left a space for other signifiers." (quoted

in Wollen, 1993, p52). Therefore in coercing the body into a docile state the only way out becomes the mind and imagination.

Sisyphus in his awareness of his fate becomes the “absurd hero” as Camus points out. In watching his struggle against the infernal rocking of the cage we realise that each gesture is heroic. Although he is aware there is no escape from this fated repetitious rocking he continues his struggle even in the face of such adversity. This battle against eternally banal and futile labour becomes more than a myth in Sterbak’s *Sisyphus II* - it is an everyday reality. “The workman of today works every day in his life at the same tasks and this fate is no less absurd.” (Camus, 1975, p109). Therefore the man/woman on the street, the labourer in the factory assembly line, become Sisyphus - the roguish hero who defied the gods. In pursuing his struggle he defies the institution that renders him docile.

I leave Sisyphus at the foot of the mountain! One always finds one’s burden again. But Sisyphus teaches the higher fidelity that negates the gods and raises the rocks. He, too, concludes that all is well. This universe henceforth without a master seems to him neither sterile nor futile. Each atom of that stone, each mineral flake of that night-filled mountain, in itself forms a world. The struggle itself towards the heights is enough to fill a man’s heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy.”
(Camus, 1975, p111).

ENDNOTES

1. Albert Camus, 'The Myth of Sisyphus', 1975, p24-25.
2. Jana Sterbak's first museum show was in 1982 at the Musee d'Art Contemporain in Montreal. The exhibition, called 'Menues manoeuvres', was organized by France Gascon and included work in small dimensions by Serge Murphy and Sylvain P. Cousineau. (Nemiroff, 1992, p40).
3. Nemiroff suggests other artists who affected Sterbak's work in this direction were; Lynda Benglis, Keith Sonnier and several European artists associated with 'Arte Povera'. (Nemiroff, 1992, p40).
4. 'Golem' meaning 'unformed' or 'embryo' in Hebrew. "Jewish mystical tradition has it that everything that is in a state of incompleteness, not fully-formed, is called 'golem'." (Nemiroff, 1992, p25). The most famous of the golem legends was of a sixteenth century rabbi, Judah Low ben Bezalel who fashioned his golem from clay intending it to be his slave. According to legend the rabbi brought it to life by inserting under its tongue the unutterable name of God. (Nemiroff, 1992, p25).
5. *Generic Man* began as a project to create posters for a show organized by Bruce Ferguson and Sandy Nairne called 'The Impossible Self' exhibited at the Winnipeg Art Gallery, 1988. (Nemiroff, 1992, p50).
6. See Sandra Lee Bartky's essay 'Foucault, Femininity and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power' for a discussion on Foucault and difference. She notes that "Foucault treats the body throughout as if it were one, as if the bodily experiences of men and women did not differ...." (Diamond & Quimby, 1988, p63).
7. Jana Sterbak in conversation with Milena Kalinovska notes that "...the origin of the word *robot* from the Czech word *robota* which means forced labour." (Nemiroff, 1992, p49). Karel Čapek's play 'R.U.R' (1920) is the source for the English word robot.
8. Milan Kundera 'The Unbearable lightness of Being' ".....life which disappears once and for all, which does not return, is like a shadow, without weight, dead in advance, and whether it was horrible, beautiful or sublime, its horror, sublimity and beauty mean nothing." (Kundera, 1987, p3)
9. Quote from Czeslaw Milosz in interview in *New York Review of Books*, 27 February 1986. This statement is also quoted in Jana Sterbak "Two 3-d multisensory projects/ Accompanying Texts and Drawings" 'Rubicon 7', Summer 1986, p122. (Nemiroff, 1992, p41).
10. For further discussion on Hawking in relation to Sterbak's work see Bradley and Nemiroff 'Songs of Experience' p35.

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