Introduction: Worrying the World of Things

Philip Monk

Artists' writing is a denomination that does not define a genre, or only very loosely. There is too much variety. So unless an artist is also a critic or writes expository or theoretical essays, there is no real context for her texts but her own work. This is the case for Liz Magor. Here we find traditional artist statements, catalogue essays on other artists, some of whom she curated, interviews and lectures on her own work, defenses, too, installation instructions, communications with dealers and writers, as well as unpublished writing, all of which we might plumb for her working process rather than take as explanations of a finished product. This was her purpose in writing: not to state an intention or meaning. "If I use language for posing questions, the sculpture has a chance to continue its search for what I don't yet know."[1] Unknowing would be a condition of being even if it unravelled identity.

1 Liz Magor, "Author's Note," this volume, …

Let alone the things of the world, writing was worrying for Liz Magor, right from the start. Of her first artist statement, she said she "was introduced to the fundamental condition of visual art wherein the possible and the probable, the latent and the obvious, the mistaken and the intended all assert themselves in rapid alternation."[2] Isn't "this slipperiness of meaning" an effect of simulacra where original and copy, authentic and inauthentic, true and false exist in unstable mixture? Yet sculpture needs be stable. Magor's choice of sculpture as her artistic discipline was a desire for things to be securely in their place. At first, she used writing to "hold things down," to get to the truth of things, to confirm their identity, because her identity, too, was at stake. But eventually, with the passage of time, she realized the "folly" of trying to constrain meaning. Maybe, after all, the vitality of creativity lay in what was aberrant, seeking expression in the possible, the latent, and the mistaken, not in anything certain. Magor always welcomed slippage in this certainty as much as it simultaneously worried her. Writing was a probe of the world, of things, and of her practice. Writing accompanied her studio practice as another tool, but not to guide it or explain it after the fact.

2 Magor, "Author's Note," this volume, …

Being an artist in Canada has few rewards. Yet Liz Magor has had her share: participating in major international art events (the Sydney Biennale in 1982, Documenta 8 in 1987, co-representing Canada at the Venice Biennale in 1984); a recipient of Canada's major visual art prizes (the Governor General's Award in the Visual and Media Arts in

2001, the Audain Prize in 2009, the Gershon Iskowitz Prize in 2014); collected by museums across Canada; and still, after five decades, having a robust international presence, rare but for the most select of Canadian artists. This is remarkable. But it was not always destined. Imagine growing up mid-century in Prince Rupert, a port city, really a town, on an island on the northwest coast of British Columbia, where fishing and forestry are the primary industries. This was hardly a conducive cultural environment for a would-be artist. Yet Magor migrated to Vancouver to study art, then to New York, and back again to Vancouver. Schooling was not a satisfactory experience. "I'd been to three different post-secondary institutions [between 1968 and 1971] and dropped out of all of them not knowing whether it was me or the school that was wrong."[3] Reading at one go Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch* in 1970 proved to her that she was not the problem. Feminism was "a credible framework for understanding the incoherent and incapacitating facets of my life."[4] By her admission, she was late to feminism (at twenty-two, she could be excused), but a feminist artist she would be.

3 Liz Magor and Lesley Johnstone, "A Conversation with Liz Magor," this volume, …

4 Liz Magor, "Home and Native Land," this volume, …

She was a sculptor in a man's field, but wasn't art and the art world, after all, a male thing, still then when she abandoned art school, finally, in 1971? She practiced as a sculptor, participating in group exhibitions from the early 1970s on, starting in British Columbia and moving eastward across the country. Her participation in the 1982 group exhibition *Mise en Scene* at the Vancouver Art Gallery reveals both her collegial context—showing with British Columbian sculptors and installation artists Kim Adams, Mowry Baden, Roland Brener, Al McWilliams, and Jerry Pethick—as well as the gender discrepancy, which was little different across the country: five men to one woman!

By then, Magor had already moved to Toronto (in 1980), at a time when Toronto was attracting artists from across the country as a burgeoning new art scene. She was immediately taken on by one of the city's prominent new galleries, the Ydessa Gallery, and in 1986 she had a solo exhibition at the Art Gallery of Ontario, a rare occurrence for a woman at that time. Having been attracted to a scene that had installation artists such as Ian Carr-Harris, John Massey, and John McEwen, whose work she had seen in a 1980 group exhibition at the Vancouver Art Gallery, she was later included in the major

Canadian exhibition of this new artistic phenomenon, *Aurora Borealis*, in Montreal in 1985. Yet, initially, Toronto was no stimulus to change her artistic practice developed on the West Coast.

Artist statements suffice to explain Magor's common interests between, for instance, *Four Boys and a Girl* made in Vancouver in 1979 and *The Most She Weighed / The Least She Weighed* made in Toronto in 1982. These first statements, such as "Production/Reproduction" (1980), set out a program for her work but admit what escapes it at the same time. Of works such as *Four Boys and a Girl*, which pressed out similar forms from its restraining apparatus, she claimed that she wanted "to objectify some history of a life or at least the life of a body and the process of change that affects that body." Her overarching need came from the fact that she was "always looking for comfort in a world disturbingly subject to change." She admits, "while I can only parallel the events of a natural history, there is modest consolation in effecting a real change in the material of the work; forcing it to form, to repeat, to reorder its appearance." Yet she found that she had "simultaneously manufactured my own competition as the pieces themselves take the opportunity to manifest *their* history, their own generation and transformation."[5] Replicants had a life of their own that evolved, or, rather, devolved over time. They were creatures of time. On the contrary, in *The Most She Weighed / The Least She Weighed* Magor cast her subject Dorothy's story in stable lead, as unvarying a substance as the control Dorothy wished over her own identity: that she only recognized herself at a certain weight, not with the other "Dorothys of aberrant weights."[6]

5 Liz Magor, "Production/Reproduction," this volume, …

6 Liz Magor, "Like a Tune," this volume, …

Identity and its variants, such were the subjects of Magor's art—their form, too. Her contrary emotions of comfort and worry sought singular form in sculpture, but only if sculpture itself could accommodate fugivity. In "An Artist's Thoughts on Conservation and Curatorial Issues" (1990), she says, "This desire to maintain the identity of form and subject, given that the subject itself is of the fugitive and unstable, appears to be inimical to the notion of preservation [she was speaking here of the actual preservation of artwork] …or would be if there were not found, alongside the artist's admission of vulnerability, a contributing *cause* of the vulnerability, which harbours a key to the preservation of an artist's intention."[7] No less strange is the artist's admission here of vulnerability, which Magor identifies, along with

7 Liz Magor, "An Artist's Thoughts on Conservation and Curatorial Issues," this volume, …

its cause, as key to the meaning of work. Could we read her writing for clues to the vulnerability she left exposed there?

Lecturing here to a group of conservators on the subject of the acquisition by the National Gallery of Canada of her 1976 work *Time and Mrs. Tiber*, Magor quipped that the sculpture suggested "a parallel career for me—the first half of my life creating work; the second half overseeing its disintegration." Immediately on purchase in 1977, *Time and Mrs. Tiber* was a conservator's nightmare, as it was a ready-made sculpture composed from jars of preserves from the distant past: "These provisions had been put up by a West Coast homesteader in the late 1940s and early 1950s, and it was my intention to honour and preserve the evidence of Mrs. Tiber's rescue of the crop of 1948."[8] In her own small way, Magor was preserving Mrs. Tiber's story in the jars she had laid up, a feminist gesture acknowledging women's unsung labour—or rural life and labour in general. Yet Magor herself wanted no feminist reading of any of her own work: "I think that a feminist reading of the work would be unfruitful, or at best, full of inconsistency. In fact, feminism has given me permission to be unsure, as well as digressive, unapologetic, and unauthoritative. It has helped me valorize detail, entertain the small stories and eschew the need to be at the front, or on top of, an art movement."[9]

8 Magor, "An Artist's Thoughts on Conservation and Curatorial Issues," this volume, …

9 Magor and Johnstone, "A Conversation with Liz Magor," this volume, …

When she was invited in 1987 to participate in the opening exhibition of The Power Plant, Toronto's new contemporary art gallery, portentously entitled *Toronto: A Play of History*, this valorizing, entertaining, and eschewing came into counter-play. Magor enlisted her students at the Ontario College of Art as a shield against "the exhibition's historicizing premise." Together, they collaboratively fabricated one of the highlights of the exhibition, *Pulp Fiction Presents the Special Collection*, replicating in cardboard precious objects from the collection of the Royal Ontario Museum. "They have to some degree revived these things," Magor writes in her catalogue submission, "by offering themselves as the medium through which the objects can be removed from the museum. It is only a cardboard life, but even the poverty of cardboard cannot silence communication between the original and its remake."[10] Her text is a remarkable meditation, not, you might think, on pedagogy per se, but on the "student body" as a medium, in the clairvoyant sense of what students constantly summon "from the other side." But actually, this medium is really a screen for Magor. Acting

10 Liz Magor, "Pulp Fiction Does the Special Collection," this volume, …

on her behalf, her students collectively devalued those ritually housed artifacts that she herself wished stripped of the "history and value" they accrue when placed in museums. These recalcitrant student *subjects*, who "have an amazing capacity to resist being taught," are really stand-ins for the recalcitrant *objects* that Magor had yet to make the subject of her practice.[11] Her students' vulnerability to failure foreshadowed the debasement of objects that would be fundamental to Magor's practice decades later when she had "a diminished need for those things to speak symbolically or profoundly."[12]

11
Magor, "Pulp Fiction Does the Special Collection," this volume, …

12
Magor and Johnstone, "A Conversation with Liz Magor," this volume, …

At the same moment in 1987, Magor similarly advocated for fellow women artists, curating simultaneous projects by Corrine Corry and Joey Morgan at the Toronto artist-run gallery Mercer Union, and publishing a joint catalogue on their exhibitions with the essay "On Mercer Union, Installation, Palaces, and Shelter" (1987). In spite of the fact that she mainly addressed issues of technology in their work, her own sculptural obsessions peaked through as she was really asking questions that would be pertinent to her own later work, even if expressed negatively: on our role in granting objects transcendence; on allure as "the lubricant of the commercial world, used to move into our lives goods and services of no inherent empathetic capability."[13]

13
Liz Magor, "On Mercer Union, Installation, Palaces, and Shelter," this volume, …

As a sculptor, Magor was interested in production, not consumption. Like Corry and Morgan, she was privileged as an artist. But what about other women traditionally relegated to passivity? How could they represent themselves and not be mere objects of consumption? Magor's "Auto Portrait" (1990), commissioned for the sixteenth anniversary publication of the Montreal feminist gallery La Centrale (Galerie Powerhouse), was her ambiguous answer. Ambiguous because the essay is not a self-portrait but an examination of subservience in portraiture, taking as a semiotic case study a series of women who had devoted their lives as accessories to men, modernist literary masters (Eliot, Joyce, Beckett), to whom they had served as secretaries and wives. Magor searched out the, at times rare, photographs of these women. Of Vivienne Eliot, pushed to the side in a photograph of T.S. Eliot and Virginia Woolf, Magor writes, "Her own body betrays her disguise and the carefully selected costume becomes a shroud for her dissolving self."[14] Nonetheless, Magor attempts to find some surreptitious agency in these women, and while she seems to parody

14
Liz Magor, "Auto Portrait," this volume, …

"codes of fashion" in describing what they wear, it is the details and accessories of their outfits that signal to her their quiet rebellion, a "critical alternative," even to the art world. "Fashion's qualities are best enumerated in a kind of inverted list of what modern art is: fashion is *not* private, it *is* substantial and representational, and its trajectory is *always* described in full public view."[15] Writing this in 1990, Magor didn't yet know how on public view, how exposed, she herself would soon become.

15
Magor, "Auto Portrait," this volume, …

On the surface, Magor's residence in Toronto seemed to be a success, but the art scene's developing intellectual milieu affected her deeply. She had moved to Toronto to escape the influence of the photo-conceptualism of the so-called Vancouver School. She hadn't realized arriving in Toronto "that a huge shift was under way as the influence of critical theory was about to overwhelm the city. It was an enormous force, like a big wave that washed over everything. Conventional art-making kind of stalled"—and eventually so did she.[16]

16
Magor and Johnstone, "A Conversation with Liz Magor," this volume, …

Her 1986 installation *Regal Décor* was doubt written large. It was a huge work that seemed to manifest the artist's interest in making production and consumption visible, but here only as a simulation. Its life-size faux printing press and fake columns of linoleum stood in stark contrast to the bourgeois living room mocked up in the blown-up prop of a photographic mural of a double spread from *House & Garden* magazine. The distressed figure of a sleeping woman has been collaged into the magazine image, within one of its picture frames, as if one of Charcot's photographs of hysterical sleep (actually it was an image of a woman in labour). A surrogate auto-portrait perhaps of Magor's own artistic dilemma? No text answered to this work, except for a long interview with fellow artist Ian Carr-Harris published in 1986. She takes Carr-Harris, a critic as well as a sculptor/installation artist, to task for his role in the new moralistic prescriptiveness of criticism. Her disquiet is evident throughout the interview, and we can read between the lines what else was bothering her: the return to a commodity-oriented sculpture often taking the form of commodities! Variously labelled Neo-Conceptualism, Simulationism, Neo Geo, Smart Art, or Cute Commodity, this was a New York phenomenon that also had a sales pavilion in Toronto at The Power Plant, in the form of the 1987 exhibition *Active Surplus*, in which Magor participated with her 1987 work *Baker's Showcase*, and which,

she notes, surprised her by its failure.[17] These sculptures were actually the lure she argued against:

17
Magor, "Home and Native Land," this volume, …

> I'm not talking about transcendental images or supercharged images. I'm actually talking about the very opposite: a place where the material world *isn't* charged with special significance; where it's almost a pre-commodity; where your production and consumption are happening at the same time. When they are separated, it seems to me we are then vulnerable to being attracted to objects that *have* been charged with significance, and perhaps not through our own means. So our only response is on a transcendental, an "auratic" level….That's why I think that critical prescription, in attempting to be "meaningful" and to be "communicative," is inappropriate or overstressed; because I'm not sure how communicable certain things are—or of the value of communicating at certain stages.[18]

18
"Liz Magor in Discussion with Ian Carr-Harris," this volume, …

Her answers to these issues that so vexed her would come much later in the work she made twenty years on, but in the meantime she felt alienated from the critical and aesthetic milieu. "Eventually I felt a need to remove myself from theoretical discussion, to retreat." Retreat meant moving back to Vancouver in 1993. "My move back to Vancouver was synonymous with dropping out of art," she said.[19] But before her move, her situation was compounded by a new crisis.

19
Magor and Johnstone, "A Conversation with Liz Magor," this volume, …

In searching for a way out of her artistic malaise of the late 1980s, Magor fell upon some photographs she had made as a student twenty years earlier of her and her hippie friends going "back to the land." She ironically *détourned* the photographs with captions lifted from Edward S. Curtis's monumental publication *The North American Indian*, allying Curtis, her friends, and herself in a critique of their collective romanticizing fiction of the past. The prints were then shown as *Field Work* in the Canadian Biennial of Contemporary Art at the National Gallery of Canada in 1989. "What I had intended as an exposure of a recurring and enduring folly, others saw as a case of cultural appropriation, and I was pulled up on the carpet and treated to a big correction."[20] Appropriation art's irony did not pass uncriticized in the appropriation of voice crisis starting that very year.

20
Magor and Johnstone, "A Conversation with Liz Magor," this volume, …

She was called out for *Field Work* and another piece she had exhibited with it, *Child's Sweater*, for stealing her material. According to various critics, she had "'poached on Native culture,' 'appropriated the pain of others,' 'effected a second erasure of the native presence,' and 'used the stories of others without permission.'"[21] She didn't try to duck the controversy but faced it head on, taking it seriously, as much as it was obviously debilitating for her. "Home and Native Land" (1992) was her public response. Since the essay originally was a panel presentation, she pointed out the irony of her context: "Answering to the designation 'privileged' is a new responsibility for me, since up to this time, my role on a panel addressing issues of contemporary art would be to represent the marginalized—in my case, women—and I would have found mine as the only female name on the roster." She didn't try to excuse her otherwise feminist strategies of appropriation, which she outlines here, but, long before others, considered what her white privilege meant—and what would need, in her practice, to change. "For me, these are the critical questions. It's not an issue of borrowing, or poaching, or appropriation, but a question of identifying, questioning, and re-ordering all the myth, fact, and fantasy that we are stuffed with." This deep personal excavation of her own possession by the national psyche would need to be "a project of relinquishment."[22] Stuff had to go.

21
Magor, "Home and Native Land," this volume, …

22
Magor, "Home and Native Land," this volume, …She revisited her settler predicament in "Maple Leaf Confectionary," this volume …

We think of Liz Magor as a sculptor, but this crisis led to a swerve that took her into photography for a decade. It also took her into a diversion through American history as if her project of relinquishment initially could only be pictured at a distance through another, more dominant culture that had more ready purchase on the ideological imagination.[23] Through the faux equivalence of silver-gelatin prints, she began to document the phenomenon of re-enactors, living history hobbyists who played out scenes from American Civil War battles and camp life. It's hard to know, following the crisis around *Field Work*, whether she took this quest as redemption or justification, but it issued in her thematically most sustained series of writing.

23
But consider *Siberian Husky* (1990) and *Boas and Others* (1991) as starting to engage this project through the theme of the North.

In the first of these, "February 20, 1864" (1992) and "Military through the Ages" (1994), she sketches the weekend warrior's pursuit of past glory. She ponders the motivations. Re-enactors aren't at all duplicitous. "Most of them don't assume that a costume is the same as a persona. In fact, their efforts lead more toward expression than

concealment."[24] Mainly, re-enactment satisfies a fetish for authenticity. "With a story of epic proportions provided, the participants are free to concentrate their attention on material details like clothing and equipment. Invariably, this concoction of the rhetorical and the literal serves to stimulate emotional response, sometimes to an extreme degree."[25] She probes participants' psychology, or is it a pathology, in order to answer the question of the emotional, not recreational, investment of "players in a game of hide-and-seek. They hide by living imaginatively in another era. I seek, looking for what drives them to escape their time."[26]

24 Liz Magor, "February 20, 1864," this volume, …

25 Magor, " February 20, 1864," this volume, …

26 Liz Magor, "The Forces of Wolfe and Montcalm," this volume, …

But for Magor, "it's something else that makes me uncomfortable." It is the worry what other, personal, histories might be disclosed—the way she sometime sees her gestures as uncanny mimicry of her parents. "The feelings that accompany this experience are disturbing, a mixture of awe and disgust." She is worried by re-enactors' devotion to repetition, what she herself had earlier played out in *Four Boys and a Girl*, in seeking to become their ancestors. Eventually, she dismisses the whole social enterprise of living history as a "folly," but wonders whether "the costumes, the buildings, the gear and all the retold tales are really part of an elaborate ruse." Does innocent escapism mask an unconscious delusion? "I get a little closer to the source of my discomfort, but I'm still left wondering what anxious psyche this stratagem is meant to conceal and whether or not it is confined to provincial parks and past events."[27]

27 Magor, "February 20, 1864," this volume, …

Don't confine the phenomenon to re-enacting, Magor then suggests; "render it domestic," include us all.[28] She began to look a bit closer to home—to the home, in fact—with her complementary texts "White House Paint" (1996) and "Messenger" (1996). Once a uniform's "bits of braids and baize that allow the player to toy with his vulnerability" provided the "protective exoskeleton for a tender organism."[29] But now, reflecting on a general consumer obsession epitomized for her by Ralph Lauren, Magor sought more secure shelter in her return to sculpture of sorts with the installations *Messenger* (1996) and *One Bedroom Apartment* (1996). "With the threat of invasion seeping through our walls, we dream of solid enclosures. Turning inward for comfort, we form a carapace to shield our soft centre."[30]

28 Liz Magor, "White House Paint," this volume, …

29 Liz Magor, "Military through the Ages," this volume, …

30 Liz Magor, "Messenger," this volume, … The relation between the re-enactor photographs and sculpture was already prefigured in that between *Field Work* (1989) and *Cabin in the Snow* (1989).

In case you are wondering what happened to the sculptor during this period of photography, Magor might as well have been talking here about the sculpture she would soon be making. "Whatever the cause, the instinct to pull into the shell is strong. Introversion seeks its form."[31] For already her re-enactment writing about authenticity displayed in details of costuming, about the discord between the assumption of the austere signifiers of the past and the realities of a flabby present was, in fact, setting out parameters for considering sculpture as a shell between "outside" and "inside." Here in writing one could derive new concepts for sculpture, as operations aligned to its material practice. As Magor said in a 2016 interview, "It's not about topics, it's about operations."[32]

31 Magor, "White House Paint," this volume, …

32 Magor and Johnstone, "A Conversation with Liz Magor," this volume, ...

Her re-enactor photographs were unlikely research in sculptural technique. "Great pains are taken with detail. But for all the attention, it is detail that ultimately undoes the illusion,"[33] Magor discloses of participants' uniforms and gear; and of her images themselves, she admits in an unpublished text, "A kind of ungluing of the parts of the image takes place showing a gap between authenticity and artifice."[34] Resemblance and dissemblance float confusedly, entwined together in the separating image, separation itself the flickering illusive moment of the simulacrum.

33 Magor, "Military through the Ages," this volume, …

34 Liz Magor, "House Plant," this volume, …

The turning in of retreat was really a turning inside out of a soldier's uniform. The inversion of its protective shell exposed a vulnerable interior. Here was a basis for sculpture as cast and mould intimately articulate this relationship. Sculpture turns inside out in the casting process. Both introversion *and* extroversion seek their form in the selfsame shell, the sustaining shape a hinge between dissemblance and resemblance, of concealing and revealing, an identity, too, between form and subject.

Magor soon developed a new casting technique with *Hollow* (1998–99). *Hollow* is a sculpture all about hiding in plain sight, about concealing oneself in the very conditions of exposure. This casting technique is uncannily like the photographic process of pulling a print from a negative. The inside-out world of the mould invites the world back in, not as an image as in photography, but as a "real" thing.[35] There is no costumed camaraderie of re-enactors, the outer envelope of costuming pretending association, but a mere mute thing clinging

35 The technique is Magor's invention. Since a silicone rubber mould carries static electricity, when Magor selectively brushes the interior of a mould with dry pigment, the colour holds in position and bonds to the casting medium, and thus a realistically coloured "object" appears as the ensuing cast.

to the world. It answered Magor's need, too, to cleave to the world while letting go securities.

Later, in 2002, in the catalogue essay "Faint," Magor wrote about a "heaved out" inversion that befalls an ordered and unquestioned storage system, where what upholds collapses: "when there is a shift, an emptying out, a move or a collapse, the layers [be it bookshelves or cabinet drawers or the house itself] move away from each other, revealing their insubstantiality, their provisional and pathetic identity."[36] There was a moment, it seems, when Magor welcomed this inversion, even provoked it perhaps. (*One Bedroom Apartment*, with its piled storage of such, was a way station.) There had been too much accumulation. Too many details, too many provisions had piled up during the re-enactor period. It was time to strip down to the basics, to the bare essentials, with nothing but an overcoat, so to speak, for protection.

36
Liz Magor, "Faint," this volume, … Also see "To Liz Mulholland," for Magor's discussion of her 1990s work in terms of this restrictive building up and liberating heaving out (as a loss of identity). The ultimate heaving out, of course, is death, "and in that file I would place the bulk of my work." Liz Magor, "To Liz Mulholland," this volume, …

Heaving out had a liberating effect. In the late 1990s, Magor began again, doubts dispensed; the long detour of the re-enactor period had served its purpose. She returned to sculpture once more. Her writing, too, consequently changed. It was no longer a worrying probe. A sense of calm descends; she writes with a knowing perspicuity. Several pieces are sympathetic catalogue essays on fellow artists, sympathetic in the sense of subtly mimicking in writing her colleagues' artistic processes. Writing again on the same artists, such as Corrine Corry ("The Lenticular," 2002), longstanding themes are revisited, such as "the impossibility of individuation combined with the inevitability of difference."[37] Writing on new artists, such as Rita McBride ("On Rita McBride," 2004), Magor sees how the artist "assembles us" in an "enforced passivity" akin not to retreat but, Magor writes, to Graham Greene using the upheaval of long-distance travel as a means of "escaping the gravity of his own identity through the promise of the unpredictable and the reorganization of his habitual character."[38] Or writing on the work of Rhonda Weppler ("Faint," 2002), Magor sounds out shared constructive—or deconstructive—concerns: "We slide from the melancholy of times past to the prevalent crappiness of contemporary consumerism." As if writing on her own current work or that to come, Magor says, "It's easy to project character—smart, stupid, sad—onto these sculptures; to see them as excerpts from a story of crisis or collapse. While there is an obvious danger of obscuring

37
Liz Magor, "The Lenticular," this volume, …

38
Liz Magor, "On Rita McBride," this volume, …

presence and formal ideas with this narrative drive, the value here is in the consideration of the mutability of the material world and the role it plays in our coming to know ourselves."[39] Coming to know ourselves might mean letting go narratives in order to let things stand bare, bereft of our projective needs.

39
Magor, "Faint," this volume, …

Then, in 2006, Magor writes "Ancient Affections," a remarkable catalogue essay on the ceramicist Paul Mathieu. His eccentric project consisted of taking a replica of a Matisse portrait bust to the Chinese ceramic city of Jingdezhen to be repeatedly recast and variously jobbed out for decoration as piece work in order to serve, upside down, on its return, as a vase. "Paul Mathieu hazarded a way to mingle this strange (in China) form with the most regular of the city's artistic production."[40] Magor knew the casting tricks Mathieu idiosyncratically trades on, and she knew what a spanner in the works his proposition might be for Chinese artisans whose "interest is not in process but in reliable repeatability and they know how to produce an object efficiently with very little variation or failure." Accordingly, "neither originality nor replication rules" these hybrid vessels. Magor wonders whether Mathieu's ceramics were designed to "mis-fit," and she imagines the social life of these things as they might circulate, even to the doorstep where she is writing this text from her then residence on the edge of Vancouver's Chinatown, to be reposed in the porcelain shops there. In themselves, these repositories might be pondered on.

40
Liz Magor, "Ancient Affections," this volume, …

> Forever, their shelves hold the same type and amount of material. If something leaves, it is replaced with something identical. This is a different kind of retail; something like an archive, or a museum.
>
> These stores resemble museums because they work with the classical and the traditional, but in contrast to museums they don't cherish and hold, nor do they worry about quality or provenance.[41]

41
Magor, "Ancient Affections," this volume, …

Replicas eschew their commodity status, void of anticipatory affect for their prospective buyers. Whereas if placed amongst them, Mathieu's porcelains might operate differently, she says, "Because as they slip from one category to another they leave a trace, an afterimage of our expectation of things."[42]

42 Magor, "Ancient Affections," this volume, …

The reversal of expectation as a re-evaluation of *things* is the issue here. To this end, Magor quotes cultural anthropologist Arjun Appadurai: "Thus, even though from a *theoretical* point of view human actors encode things with significance, from a *methodological* point of view it is the things-in-motion that illuminate their human and social context."[43] Magor's sculpture of the last twenty years, and the writing that accompanies it, posits this new object relation as things-in-motion between states of being.

43
Arjun Appadurai, "Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value," in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 5.

Objects serve our needs. Objects exist variously on a continuum of *our* desiring and having—and then discarding—which lends them value depending on our possession of them. Advocating for the lowly object in the *Capilano Review*, Magor argues that, just like human beings, objects belong to a class system stratified along the lines of privilege and servitude. "I look at objects in the world, noting that some enjoy privilege while others are made to serve."[44] The works she makes in 2007–08 are exemplars of this hierarchy and rude reversals at the same time, while those made in 2011 express her "below stairs" solidarity: "If I invent a class system for textile products," she writes, "I would probably put dresses at the top and towels at the bottom. Towels are like trays and dishes. Does that make dresses like cigarettes and candies? Dresses are princesses. Anyhow, I'm pretty sure that towels, sheets and blankets are like cutlery, dishes and trays; a kind of servant class."[45]

44
Liz Magor, "Statement for *Capilano Review*," this volume, …

45
Liz Magor, "About Blankets; Kings and Queens," this volume, …

Things, on the other hand, are the leftovers of objects. In her 2018 "Stonecroft Lecture," Magor acknowledges that she is interested in things that are "full and empty at the same time. Full, thanks to the relentless production of 'meaning' within a culture, and empty due to the persistent failure of things to hold on to those intentions."[46] She herself runs on empty. Articles at the end of their lifespan serve her sculptural purpose best, those whose affect is depleted and influence negated since we now treat them as garbage, as mere disposable things. Yet what remains as residue uncannily restores the thing to itself, as damaged as it might be. (Magor finds these no longer loved things abandoned in thrift stores: stuffed animals, clothing, crafts, etc.) Their mute uncanniness drew the artist's attention. She wanted to give back some love "to restore a range of emotion to these sad things, in order to ameliorate the passionless desire that created them in the first place."[47]

46
Liz Magor, "Stonecroft Lecture," this volume, …

47
Magor, "Stonecroft Lecture," this volume …

Rather than finding them rivals to her activity, as she said decades earlier of *Four Boys and a Girl*, Magor now negotiates with things. She lends their damaged forms a sculptural life as reward for their endurance. "In the studio I might rearrange the relationship between things in order to increase their power, or I make adjustments to restore their depleted importance. I always assume that material is co-operative, and process is the way to reach and understand the latent intelligence of things."[48] Rather than still worrying the world of things, she makes them accomplices to her task.

48
Magor, "Statement for *Capilano Review*," this volume, …

You can worry words, too. You can worry a word to let it go. What then would be analogous in Magor's writing to the letting go she has made of objects? Rather than worrying words to make sure they "cleave to intended meaning," she would let go their presumed grip to find other resources in language. As a young artist, she "used writing as a way to stop the confusion and hold things down." As an older artist, she says, "I see the folly of such control and I use writing as a way to accept it." Was writing not like casting? Taking advantage of double meaning of *to cleave*, we could say that her writing at one time cleaved to meaning whereas now it cleaves from it. "Writing helps me pry apart," she says, the very same way a cast cleaves from a mould with the same end of "submitting to the real."[49]

49
Magor, "Author's Note," this volume …