

Time Arrested and Time Passing (between emergent myth and historical possibility)
The Sculpture of Yves Louis-Seize

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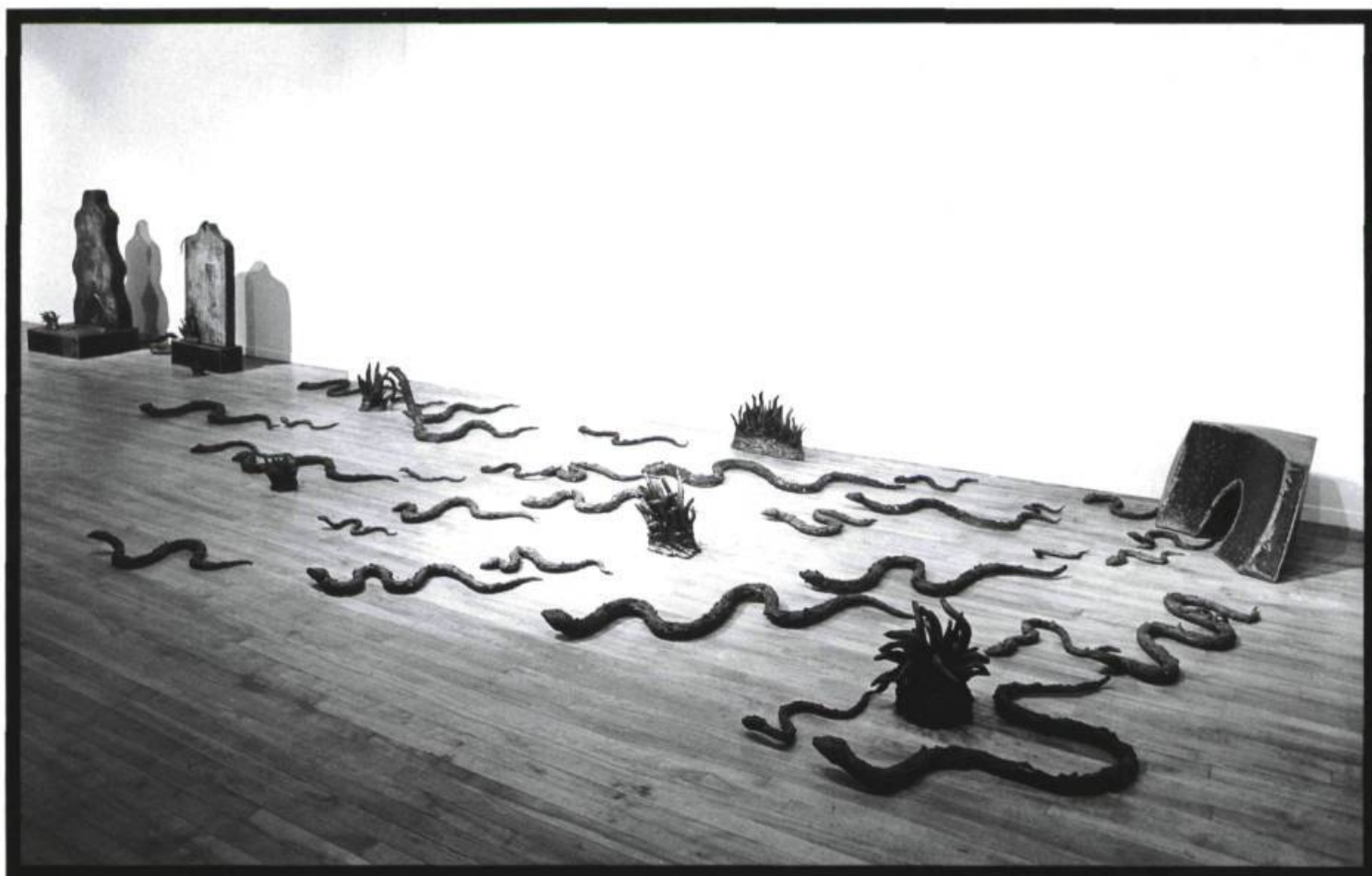
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*Time Arrested
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and historical possibility)

*The Sculpture of
Yves Louis - Seize*

Sara Amato



*Ab maudite!... Quels maux je souffre!
Toute ma Nature est un gouffre
Hélas! Entr'ouverte aux esprits,
J'ai perdu mon propre mystère
[...]*

*Tourne donc plutôt ta pensée
Vers la joie enfuie, et reviens
O mémoire, à cette magie
Qui ne tirait son énergie
D'autres arcanes que des tiennes!*

* * *

*Ab, accursed!... What ills I suffer!
My whole Nature is an abyss!
Alas! Opened to the spirits,
I have lost my own mystery!
[...]
Turn your thoughts rather
Towards the joy that has fled, and
return,
O memory to that magic
Which drew its energy from
No other secrets than its own!*

— PAUL VALÉRY *La Pythie / The Python*

Neo-avant-garde explorations in contemporary sculpture, sometimes termed *postmodern*, mark a re-focusing of concerns which explore the body and notions of sculpture's mediation of time and space. By incorporating myth into the syntax of the works, there is a reference to the past in order to situate a contemporary condition; an attempt to address the underlying experience and contradictions inherent in post-industrial society.

In grappling with a language that would reveal the emergence of a new perspective, contemporary sculpture seeks to give expression to what it terms: a *condition*, not a space or vantage point, but a "belief manifest in the intelligibility of surfaces which challenges the normative perspective of the self, situating the human subject within the temporal unfolding of the historical narrative in a manner which breaks with modernism."¹ What the postmodernist perspective offers, at best, is a necessary meditation

on the human condition, through an exploration of temporality as a subjective process — a passage — where the flow of time is apprehended as a project towards the future and towards the transformation of the self; a reflexive moment at the end of an era, in the course of our movement towards a new global culture; a vantage point, on the threshold of a new century.

Inherent Tragic Elements as well as Hopeful Possibilities

The recent works of Quebec sculptor Yves Louis-Seize explore this terrain. His representational style, which spans from earlier, more conventional, formalistic lines to the more allegorical and figurative forms of his later works, reveal an explicit preoccupation with temporality, expressed through a mythical consciousness and symbolism. Playing on paradoxical themes and elements, these works address the ongoing flux between subjective discourse and objective reality. We find here a peculiar characteristic of Postmodernism which embodies "a dual vision", one of "possibility and limitation"² While it "announces the liberating awareness" that comes from negation of an aesthetic form, it yields no concrete positive principle of creation and vision.³ Caught in this predicament, it is constrained to evoke the ephemeral. In the works of Louis-Seize this quality is apprehended as a vibrancy which situates our perspective in the temporal flux, somewhere between subjective experience and the external world beyond the self; a condition in which Art looks outward to a world beyond imagination which has no fixed form and returns on itself to a world of elusive truths where coherency is found in poetic vision.⁴

The symbology of myth in postmodern works provides an effective device in the treatment of the theme of *passage* through time or history and its connection to the changing evolving self which, in spite of a secular modernism, seeks a spiritual and moral resolution in human existence. In Louis-Seize's work one finds the ardour of a poetic vision that struggles for this resolution through the contradiction of incongruous elements, be they forms, materials or thematic subject-matter. Set in opposing relations, these elements mediate the notion of temporality as a process inextricably linked to a disclosure of the emergent self — the self which is ever in the process of becoming. It signals a romantic impulse; that which would reveal the mysteries of nature and of our existence more profoundly and thereby transcend the given contradictions and constraints of the age to achieve an ultimate harmony by a resolution of opposing forces. This search for unity is symptomatic of a post-modern sensibility which attempts to overcome modernity, "its basic dichotomies and divisions",⁵ but yields only intimations of a new language, apprehended through an *awareness*, containing at once inherent tragic elements as well as hopeful possibilities. Inherent in this movement is the desire to project the opening of a new historical space, a site which simultaneously encompasses the contradictory discourses of being by bringing to light dimensions which define both existence and finitude. It explores the notion of the human subject

as simultaneously finite and transcendent; as both an atemporal consciousness transcending history and as empirical subject caught in it.

This impulse is poignantly communicated in the works of *Passage II* which deals with death as an "affective site" — as Baudrillard puts it⁶ — suggesting an urgency to arrive at a synthesis that would reconcile opposing tendencies; affirmation and negation, optimism and fatality. It is not the artist's capacity to represent these themes in terms of their obvious duality, but rather his striving for a representation that would transcend their opposition and arrive at the site of their simultaneity that lends to these works their special quality. It takes the form of a peculiar capacity to express opposing tensions as inherently contained in the works; intrinsic and extrinsic qualities, at once intensely emotional and coldly rational — something between a meditative calm and devastating anguish.

From its earliest archaic beginnings, the symbology of myth in art has revealed the troubling ambiguities and paradoxes which mark historical transformation and corollary changes in the concept of the historical subject or the *self*. It has expressed human striving towards a deeper comprehension of the world, revealing the human condition as one of alienation from the true nature of self and the foundations of nature. This self-estrangement often finds eloquent and incisive expression in the articulation of human suffering and the consciousness of death and sorrow, as integral elements of human existence, where the loss of self is experienced in contradiction to the very essence of being.

Art Strives to Restore the Magic of Myth.

Through works which offer a simulation of excavated artifacts, Louis-Seize provides an archeology of references denoting ritual lore and an archaic mythology of the fertile soil with its concepts of a "hidden harmony... and of a consequent resonance conducive to magical effects".⁷ Art strives to restore the magic of myth, that is to say, to bestow the power to perceive the possibility which the actual moment possesses — mediating between the human subject which perceives the world and the external objective forces that shape it.

This succession of archival objects from a mythic past, (yet denoting no particular period), relate discontinuities as a method of reflexivity and deconstruction — intended to lead us to a new starting point once the foundations have been undermined, the method and object lost.⁸ Within this framework all references are ultimately about the self rather than others. By turning the gaze inward we proclaim little faith in our assumptions, self knowledge and perception of the external world, calling attention to the authority and legitimacy of what is known, and suggesting the necessity to question and re-evaluate the individual's relationship to society and culture. Such a perspective, characteristic of postmodernist aesthetics, discloses an alienated stance expressed from an introverted position rather than from a critical vantage point outside the social context. While the postmodern view expresses ambiguity in discerning significant forces of social change prevalent in our culture, it

Yves Louis-Seize, *Tel un noeud dans le temps*, 1989. Photo: Paul Emile Rioux.

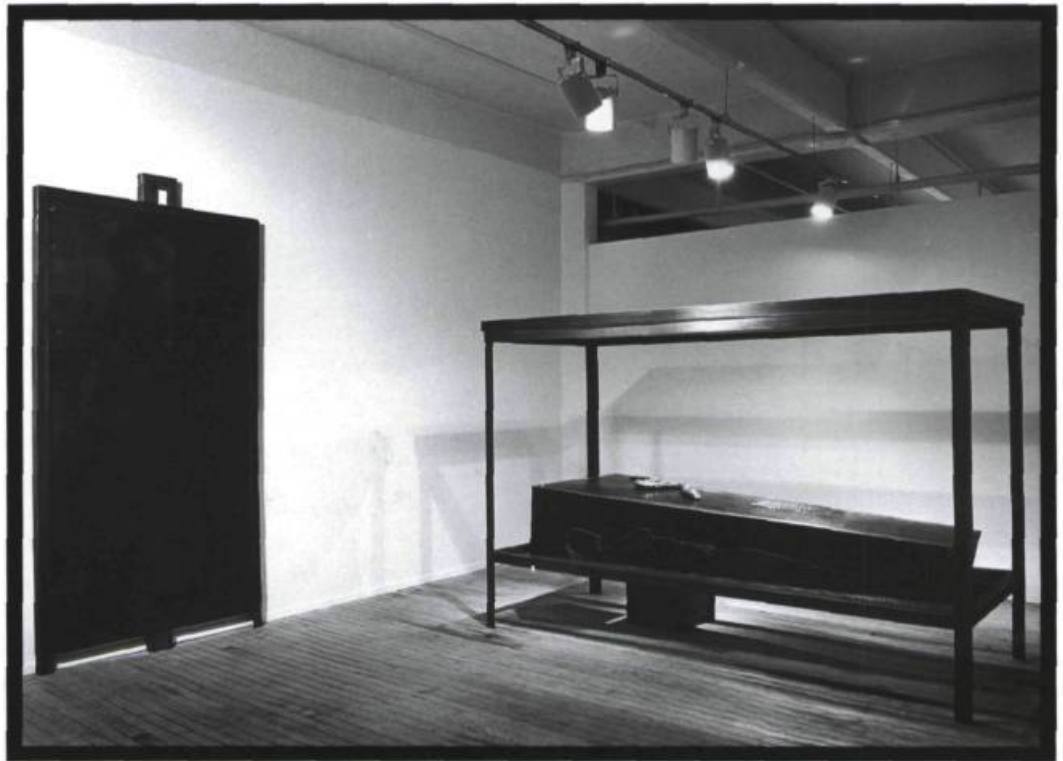
also reveals a drive to become conscious of itself and of the primacy of the social context which determines and shapes perception, cognition, action and articulation in which "the individual activist subjectivity, whether that of the person, voice or text, knows itself as a product of the inherent dynamics of established meaning systems", so that work is both a critique of the culture which it sets itself up against and simultaneously an expression of it.⁹

References to myth in art have traditionally expressed the desire to transcend conditions of human alienation, to reconcile contradictory social forces through a reconnection with nature, the world of dream, the realm of the sacred and the mysterious. In so doing, art engages its public in questions of moral and philosophical responsibility in the face of ongoing historical changes, and undertakes to present history as human self-realization, where the development of the self is integral to the collective consciousness. Within this context myth links the past to the present as a means of projecting historical possibility; providing a perspective that could potentially transform our vision of what is to what could be.

Between Stillness and Motion.

In attempting to explore the "general category of experience that sculpture occupies", Krauss points out that sculpture is "a medium peculiarly located at the juncture between stillness and motion...time arrested and time passing". From this tension which is the very condition of sculpture, comes its enormous expressive power.¹⁰ In contrast to other art forms whose medium is time, sculpture has traditionally been perceived to define spatial character in a way which is static. This notion has been put into question by contemporary sculpture which has re-examined the issue of a basic separation between "an art of time and an art of space" and re-assessed modern sculpture as the "conspicuous forging of a relationship between an inert material and the system of patterning imposed on it so that the static simultaneous space of the sculptural body is contrasted as two forms of stillness: the dense immobile substance of the object and a lucid system that had shaped it".¹¹ Thus, any discussion of modern sculpture is incomplete without a discussion of "the temporal consequences and of the nature of temporal experience", acknowledging it to be implicit in any spatial experience.¹²

The radical internal critiques which have marked the aesthetic movements in modern sculpture during the 1960's and 70's have led to its own deconstruction and provided the elements of a new postmodernist syntax. Postmodernism's attempt to break with modernist aesthetics and assumptions has allowed sculpture to "think the expanded field".¹³ Within this context, the space occupied by the sculpture has been expanded to occupy what Krauss terms the *complex* — a space defined to be "part of



the universe or culture in which sculpture is situated"; it stands as "only one term" of reference "at the periphery of a field in which there are other differently structured possibilities"¹⁴

A Secular Mythology.

Mythological structures underly all forms of contemporary relationships, and references to myth serve as a means of explaining the nature of lived experience within a determinate socio-historical structure in which the subject caught in the determining forces of history attempts to impose its will on historical conditions in order to transform them. In contemporary art, references to myth occur in the wider context of a secular mythology that modernism sought to create and are, as such, part of this redefinition in which we witness a rethinking of space, both private and public, and with it the possibility of reinterpreting the position of the self as historical subject. Its philosophical premise is the deconstruction of the metaphysical subject which views subjectivity as the "center of a world represented as fully rational".¹⁵ In its attempt to impose an alternative perception to the "image we have of how we know ourselves" the subject is no longer placed at the center of consciousness: In contemporary works of art the viewer is placed in an "eccentric position" in relation to the works, rendering it impossible to occupy the center of these works, thus negating the knowledge of ourselves that places us at the "absolute core" of our consciousness.¹⁶ This decentering of the self is achieved through a representation of the space of art object as something external; as installation or through fragmentation, thus representing the encroachment of the external world on the body's "internal being".¹⁷

The notion of "passage through space and time" and its incorporation of the language of myth into the space of the work allows art to become an

explicit site for the enactment of cultural mythology. Its symbology, intended to heighten perception, creates an image of "our psychological response to space and time" and in this relationship to the temporal carries out a classic function of myth, supplanting historical formulas by "the experience of moment-to-moment existence".¹⁸ It is this subjective "moment-to-moment passage" that "constitutes the transformation of sculpture from a static medium to a temporal one where the sculptural objects mediate the present by triggering an involuntary memory", arousing memory sensations by its forms and materials — sensations "beyond the intellect which lead to an unmistakable recognition, but which are impossible to identify in any definite sense".¹⁹

A Remembrance of Things Past Which Nonetheless Eludes Us.

Much of Louis-Seize's works are presented in a series of installations in which a succession of objects simulating artifacts from a varied repertoire of mythic archetypal forms recall the ruins of ancient ceremonial sites; age-old artifacts that could have been excavated from an archeological dig, with its

Yves Louis-Seize, *Une pure exigence d'exister*, et *Le grand passage à l'Autre* *rive I*, 1989. Photo: Paul-Émile Rioux.



remnants or debris denoting another time: amorphous objects that would relate a larger structure of thought; fragments intended to express some overall design, triggering sensations which arouse the memory to a remembrance of things past which nonetheless eludes us. The projection to a far-away time and place reveals a peculiar dichotomy within the temporal experience — often aroused in memory — between the immediacy of the moment and the distance spanned in time. It simulates a sensation much like one would expect to experience in the presence of ancient cultural artifacts at an excavation site or before memorial monuments, where objects are marked by and mark the passing of time. Caught between the stillness of the present and the flow of time there is a heightened awareness — a unity of movement, traversing the past to the point we occupy in the present, momentarily fusing time past and time present, whereby the works refer us to a simultaneity. This ephemeral space in human consciousness between the moment of existence which is always the present and the continuous movement of time passing becomes a site

for a redefinition of the self. The use of materials also serve to trigger memory-like sensations which refer us to the primordial place of the elements — earth, fire and water — in cultures of the past, at the opposite spectrum of our own technologically advanced society. The tension between the malleability of clay, and the rigidity of iron is another characteristic which supports the paradoxical play of the elements in the narrative structure of these works: stillness and motion, rigidity and movement. When tempered by the pure energy of fire, both clay and iron achieve a unity; the passion and pain of a process or passage through which human experience unfolds — through a trial of fire that makes things perfect or reduces something to nothing; existence to non-existence. This notion is clearly expressed in *Absence...après le grand passage à l'Autre rive*, shown in a recent solo exhibition at Galerie Trois Points, in Montreal. In this work a cage-like structure depicts the site of a funeral pyre. Inside on the bottom left-hand corner is the charred fire-wood that fuelled the fire. On the metal panel behind its horizontal bars a dark, thick, oblong stain marks the remnant trace of a departed human presence, engraved in a reddish colour stain around this oblong shape are the flickering flames. On the outside, on a black wooden beam platform which supports the structure, an empty urn is displayed in stark contrast to two bronze serpents depicted in a swift departure from the site of such intense despair: the human condition from which there was no other escape.

The rough surfaces and raw texture of the clay, with its unrefined casting depicts the process the materials have come through and bears witness to the external process of formation, and erosion. In making evident the “forces that condition the surface...the passages of the medium itself from one state to another” the viewer must “acknowledge the

work as a result of the process” This becomes a metaphor for the self, in which a “consciousness of the self occurs in the process of experience itself”.²⁰

Death, Life, Existence Shape Our Spatial Temporal Concepts

Passage II is distinguished by a single-minded preoccupation with the knowledge of sorrow, the inevitability of death, making no secret that a preoccupation with death underlies all human existence. It asserts, however, a paradoxical human struggle: the angst born of hopelessness that makes us question our existence, and the irrational impulse to keep living exerted against the fate of such a sorrowful existence and against finality. It offers a collection of separate installations which draws the viewer into a sort of necropolis, a landscape of burial grounds and abandoned grave sites where somber clay tombstones glazed slate grey and ashen brown, attesting to the total absence of sunlight, create a site where both present and

past are brought into question by the ubiquitous absence of the human experiential subject. “Without man there would be things in the dark... There would be neither meaning nor absence of meaning. There would be nothing missing or absent, no space with vacancies to be filled by things. With man things stand revealed but only in some finite, limited way.”²¹

The sculptural objects in these installations combine unrefined terra-cotta with burnished iron to conjure a silent somber space that leaves us adrift among ancient tombs, burial grounds, memorial shrines etched with only a shadowy image of the body's form to attest to the passage of human life. Empty coffins and solitary tomb stones, vestiges of a human presence which no longer inhabit this space, refer us to the incessant passage of time in which everything bears the mark of human suffering: It is the darker side of existence, revealing human passage caught in the flow of time in which all experience is acquainted with sorrow; evoking the words of Anais Nin: “I could not bear the passing of things. All flowing, all passing, all movement choked me with anguish.”²²

In *The Denial of Death*, Ernest Becker defines the human condition as essentially one of a constructed human illusion, in which all projections of reality are formed in response to conditions of suffering and the fear of death, which are themselves connected to a greater fear of meaninglessness and non-being. Death, life, existence are so fundamental a motive force that they shape our spatial temporal concepts: Death is even conceived of as “the termination of consciousness in space and time as we know them” — a “dissolution into space or perhaps the collapse of space by abrupt termination in time”.²³ It is life without illusion or metaphors, void of meaning.

Heidegger views existence in related terms, defining the human subject as an “openness within a

Yves Louis-Seize, *Une pure exigence d'exister*, et *Le grand passage à l'Autre rive II*, 1989. Photo : Paul Emile Rioux.

limited situation", arguing that only through a permanent awareness of being, and faced with the realization of mortality can the human subject come to terms with the validity and substance of each moment of life: "man [is] not a consciousness with an infinite receptivity for objects but a definite openness within a finite happening of lived time and possibility. Man [needs] to give up the illusion that he [is] an object with a sturdy nature...and embrace the intrinsic limitation of his mortality. Death does not close off an indefinitely open field of possibilities: it is the expression of limitation that opens a finite field. In place of grasping for the infinite and pretending to participate in something that grounded him man must attain authenticity in accepting the groundless, limited facticity of his birth, tradition and historical situation."²⁴

In the works of *Passage II* death is represented as something more than the marker of time and of the cycles in nature, it is at once complete loss and complete regeneration... an experience yielding a deeper significance and thereby bringing about a transformation in the identity of the old self. It represents the dissolution of the existing world and its reappearance as something new. In grappling with this tenuousness between being and non-being — "a constant presence and absence" —²⁵ the artist attempts to give expression to the enigma that is behind all manifestations, all things, in which being is both immanent and transcendent, neither is nor is not²⁶ — thus restoring a dimension of mystery to the notion of the self, to the secret of our own existence.

The Incessant Passage of Time

Among the installations of *Passage II*, two separate works entitled *Une pure exigence d'exister I* and *II* feature a variation on tombs; we experience the stillness of those ancient chambers where the dead inhabit that eternal sleep which beckons us all... deep, gloomy dismal, the mood is one of lack of vitality, an unawakened state — a place where we are dead to knowledge. *Une pure exigence d'exister I* presents an empty metal cage whereas in *Une pure exigence d'exister II* we find a metal tomb. Both these works relate the idea of a self in bondage to the body, to time, and would reconcile us to our transient existence. Time as a trajectory which mediates a movement towards the future, by its very nature undermines the present and proves all things to be temporary and final, linking life to death.

Tel un noeud dans le temps and *Après plus rien ne viendra de la terre* take a more ironical look at this dichotomy between being and non-being. Here, the cold, vacuous space that is evoked as an absence of life — that stillness that is a solitude pervading gravesites and all vestiges of cultures past — is shattered by the virile presence of clay serpents, depicted in furious movement away from the gaping hole of an empty sepulcher. These creatures emanating from the fertile soil affirm the mystery of life which continues to renew itself, in spite of death. We are left to experience the paradox: at once seized with the experience of an immense inconsolable finality, and that of a vibrant world teeming with enigmatic vitality.

The Search for a Space of Transcendence: A Unity of the Self

Temporality, says Sartre, is a "tool of vision" whereby objects are perceived transcendent to temporality, although revealed by it.²⁶ In revealing the continuous flow, the ever-in-passage aspect of existence — a space of potentiality — it shows everything to be caught in a movement between being and non being, and the human subject -ever in oscillation- as "an indeterminate entity, only a moment".²⁷ Here polar aspects of the same experience appear as an undifferentiated reality, alluding to an all-pervasive unity in which there is an unexplained connectedness between all things. This ever-in-flux of the moment-to-moment existence is engulfed by a larger context; a unity which Heidegger likens to "a condition ...the context of all contexts."²⁸ While our experience of finitude projects itself as finite possibility causing a turning inward towards the self, towards the mystery of being, a conscious awareness enables us to project outward towards possibility. This awareness, according to Heidegger, stems from the condition in which a human subject is an *openness* a "receptivity in lived time" where the subject "both receives and projects possibility that make the texture of the world."²⁹ Exploring the structure of historical experience in these terms constitutes a lateral movement — into a pure space that we first inhabit before encountering the definite possibilities that are open to us. It is in the way things are revealed that they will take on meaning, point to a historical direction.³⁰ In this space demarcations between birth and death, dream and waking state, time present and time past, presence and absence and other polarities one encounters in human experience are released for a moment from their dualistic bind and experienced in the simultaneity of the moment as different aspects of the same reality; amorphous categories which now permit a moment for fluid cross-references between the inner world of consciousness, the dream world and the world of external objective realities in a sort of Kantian moment that Heidegger refers to where the human subject discovers itself to be simultaneously finite and transcendent.³¹

Lukàcs points to the romantic impulse which underlies all references to myth, as desperately seeking a synthesis of widely differing ideas to a common thematic; an "aphorism producing the effect of homogeneity" a "final harmony", "the unity of all things". It symbolizes longing, a "passionate will for unity" which would reveal a new "myth engendering force" resolving all polarities — life and death, infinity and the finite, masculine and feminine — and provide the infrastructure necessary to bring forth, in "a new world-in-process", "human beings with new possibilities".³² In postmodern works this longing is a site for the problematic of subjectivity and is linked to new philosophical currents which see in this impulse a method whereby we may attempt to return to subjectivity in terms that are not entirely negative.³³ This longing for unity underlies a language of desire, necessarily linked to the desire to dismantle social mechanisms of power and to bring forth a re-emergence of a contemporary humanism with its play on the death of the subject and

its simultaneous return to the subject. The philosophical emergence of man and his disappearance marks an ongoing search for the authentic self: the human subject who is "not only one fact among others, one object of knowledge among others but also the condition of possibility for all knowledge"³⁴

A Reconciliation of Antagonistic Principles

De la passion et la raison de Gaïa, *Le grand passage à l'Autre rive II* as well as the more figurative panels of *Un grand passage à l'Autre rive II*, and *Une pure exigence d'exister I and II* — the latter depicting faded, full-bodied figures both male and female, stained or engraved onto iron panels — make reference to the polarity between feminine and masculine principles. In mythology this theme is conventionally invoked in references to transcendence, and often occurs in the context of the "raptures of love" whereby one is transported "beyond temporal laws" "to a realm which surpasses law and reason, — a site which is understood to represent the absence of conscious duality, marking a point where the infinite and the momentary are considered simultaneously."³⁵ In earlier works Louis-Seize has attempted to represent this longing for an all-pervasive unity by emphasizing feminine principles as encompassing contradictory elements. This theme often occurs in mythology in references to the mystery of birth and death in which the feminine represents life bringing us into the world of polarities. In *La transparence de la mort ritualisée* a stained iron panel depicts a female torso surrounded by clay tablets representing female forms. It recalls archaic figurines associated with fertility cults and mother-right.³⁶ In neolithic cultural ritual and myth the mother-goddess earth, nourisher of life, receiver of the dead for rebirth, is also considered "a metaphysical personification of Space, Time and Matter".³⁷ Old mythologies of the goddess are associated with rites and a symbology which contemplates the mystery "identified with the principle that is ever re-born... whereupon in the world where only sorrow and death had been seen, the rapture was recognised of an everlasting becoming."³⁸ Here the unity sought for

consists in some way in the containment of paradoxical elements — not an escape from the maelstrom of existence, but rather to be “cured of its irresolution by being fully participant in its passions and its sorrows.”³⁹ Examples of feminine cults and myths associated with both creative and destructive life forces, are to be found from Medusa to Kali.

In *Tel un noeud dans le temps* a serpentine coil evokes a non-linear time: In *L'un et l'autre* a sensuous serpentine shape is placed in front of an acid-stained iron panel, where its undulating shape, denoting a form which is both serpent and waters is etched on the surface. Mythology reveals a rich iconography of the life-giving powers of the waters, and their connection with serpents. Serpents represent life in all archaic mythology, sometimes they are an anthropomorphic representation for the self. They also represent temporality, a throwing off the past in the shedding of the skin, and are a positive symbol associated with the goddess and matriarchy. Symbolic of the life-force that motivates birth and rebirth, as well as “a blind will for life” serpents thus, relate “a reconciliation of antagonistic principles”⁴⁰

Rethinking the Historical Subject

Avant-garde aesthetics have been distinguished by the felt need to reject the past in the name of a new present, appealing to the future and its utopian possibilities. The eclectic direction taken by the neo-avant-garde or postmodernist view, however, is constrained to attempt its break with the past in a rather ambiguous and tentative manner.

It is a perspective which has roots in contemporary philosophical currents of thought, an outgrowth of 1960's political activism which, in its critique of modernism and technological society, has come to reject a humanism identified with bourgeois rationalism and its failed idealistic social projects. Inherent in its critique of modern rationality and its deconstruction of modernism as a failed model, is a rethink-

ing of the historical subject which marks a desire to return to a neo-humanism; a rediscovery of subjectivity — which as yet has yielded no definite form.

No Definite Vision

This emergent perspective finds expression in neo-avant-garde trends in art which adopt the familiar antagonistic posture of the avant-garde, exhibiting similar concerns about aesthetic innovation and political action and links historical possibility to art as an agent of transformative consciousness. In the post war era, however, our Western culture has undergone radical transformations, owing to significant changes within the power structure and ideology, which have accompanied the development of a monopoly economy and the introduction of new forms of technology. The ensuing changes to the daily life of contemporary society has reduced much of the critical significance of an aesthetic and politically-based opposition. While there is still a sense of opposition between aesthetic concerns and social values, postmodern aesthetics sensibilities are largely self-conscious and reflexive, raising the awareness of its audience, yet beset by a constant doubt about the nature of collectivity “to which the artist belongs”; as though it can only ask “whether social discourses are indicative of a growing collective consciousness in which it might be possible ... to act — to speak — together” or if we are simply exhibiting “signs of an increasingly corporate, bureaucratic, cybernetic control of collective experience and thought.” In his essay on postmodernism and the neo-avant-garde, Russel (1985), concludes that “perhaps more cannot be expected, at least not until the social and historical conditions respond to and are a condition of change.”⁴¹

Postmodernism is characterized by a transformation of reality into images of reality as though nothing new can be represented and a fragmentation of time into a series of perpetual presents;⁴² while it continues to express the fundamental alienation of the artist from the environment, it has yielded little by way of developing an art of change, responsive to socio-historical conditions, acting in concert with historically progressive movements and tendencies within the society. The failure to provide a clear conception of the nature of society, has created much confusion and unease surrounding postmodernism, revealing little assurance on the part of contemporary critics and artists on the significance of art in our society:

“In the absence of this clear conception of the nature of our society as a whole, and in spite of this, there is a shared perspective of inquiry into the struggles of an age apparently attempting to give birth to itself with no definite vision of what it might bring into existence, certainly no image or even faith in what the future might bring”.⁴³ Nonetheless, post-modernism marks a rethinking of the problematic relationship of the individual to modern society, torn by contradictory impulses, unable to find personal unity, to act in a manner that would change conditions. This failure signals the lack of vitality of the individual psyche, the spiritual death that occurs within the society in the absence of a necessary historical transformation.



Thus, while the desire for a reconciliation of polarities expresses a longing for a new perspective to emerge, such a perspective must challenge us to achieve a recognition of the true nature of our environment and inspire social action based on an awareness about the forces that influence us.⁴⁴ In the postmodern era this very project is complicated by the enormous pressure exerted by contemporary strategies of social and economic control. In striving to discern and represent the individual's relationship to modern society postmodernism may, however, be considered a necessary moment, reflecting a new thinking which can alter the normative pat-

Yves Louis-Seize, *Absence...après le grand passage à l'Autre rive*, 1991. Métal, bronze, bois et terre cuite. 297 x 228 x 124 cm. Photo : Yves Louis-Seize.

tern of experience and perception of conceptualizing the world may thus, enabling us to identify the basic elements which art shares with forces of significant historical change and whereby we consider a move towards an aesthetic activism and method appropriate to social action.

Postmodernism then, indicates a search for a representation that would address the dissolution of outmoded forms while attempting to demarcate new parameters; a lateral movement, in which we find ourselves in a postindustrial age, considering a movement beyond modernity. Invoking myths serves to give expression to emergent forms of knowledge that would yield a new historical vision.

The underlying issues and concerns, as Baudrillard has argued, have to do with arriving at strategies of resistance that can counter these contemporary strategies of control, which diffuse resistance by "absorbing and remolding desire and colonise our subjectivities".⁴⁵ The themes invoked in Baudrillard's work pointing to the affectivities and their relationship with subjectivity as a site for struggle, in which "a subject-in-process, a giddy, paroxysmic subject"⁴⁶ becomes a site for resistance strategies to develop.

The History We are in the Process of Inventing

The arena for this new myth is the mystery of existence and the responsibility of self-actualization. Postmodernism exhibits changing assumptions about "the nature and significance of individual identity and autonomy, specifically the value accorded to the individual to create new meaning in his or her world and to struggle against social determinism commonly found in early post-war elaborations of existential questions reflected in avant-garde modernist works". Instead it points to an art of intervention situated in a context where alienation pervades all aspects of human life from the structures of family to the state. Confronted with these complexities and limitations we are challenged to develop an art in which we must learn to critically perceive ourselves in relation to our own historical conditions and struggle to transform this experience to one of self-actualization:⁴⁷ In this rethinking of the humanist agenda a solution to human alienation is anticipated, through a historical progression which could lead to the repossession of social power by a human collectivity and subsequently find a reflection in political institutions and the state. The break with modernism occurs with the view that we no longer propose to do this through an individualistic agenda; there is a departure from the "egoism of man" in modern society, yet at this time only intimating, a new, emergent notion of the self.

The question then — to the extent that this evolving, changing self mirrors the historical process — becomes not so much what will the future bring, but rather what sort of future are we in the process of inventing?

A final consideration of Louis-Seize's work situates it as exemplary of the still human voice of the historical subject caught in the image of simultaneity of the moment and in the desire for unity, it seeks

a synthesis that would link social vision and poetic discovery: from this reconciliation of polarities a new perspective and behavior may emerge. ♦

- 1 Krauss, R., *Passages in Modern Sculpture*. (MIT Press: Cambridge, 1985), pp. 243-288.
- 2 Russell, C., *Poets, Prophets and Revolutionaries: The Literary Avant-garde From Rimbaud Through Postmodernism*. (Oxford University Press, New York, 1985), p. 247.
- 3 Russell, C., (1985), *Ibid.*, p. 247.
- 4 Russell, C., (1985), *Ibid.*, p. 39-61.
- 5 Kolb, D., *The Critique of Pure Modernity: Hegel, Heidegger and After*. (Univ. of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1986), pp. 172-3.
- 6 Poster, M. (Ed.), *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings*. (Stanford Univ. Press: California, 1988).
- 7 Campbell, J., *Oriental Mythology*. (Penguin: New York, 1962), p. 251.
- 8 Krauss, R., *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (MIT Press: Cambridge, 1988), p.150 (citing Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge*, Harper and Row, 1976, pp. 208-9).
- 9 Russell, C., (1985), *Ibid.*, pp. 246-7.
- 10 Krauss, R., (1985), *Ibid.*, p. 5.
- 11 Krauss, R., (1985), *Ibid.*, p. 3-4.
- 12 Krauss, R., (1985), *Ibid.*, p. 2-4.
- 13 Krauss, R., *Sculpture in the expanded field*. (In Hal Foster Ed. *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*. Bay Press: Washington, 1983), p. 38.
- 14 Krauss, R., (1983), *Ibid.*, p. 38.
- 15 Ferry, L., Renaut, A., *French Philosophy of the Sixties: An Essay on Antihumanism*. (1990), *Ibid.*, p. 212.
- 16 Krauss, R., (1985), *Ibid.*, p. 280.
- 17 Krauss, R., (1985), *Ibid.*, pp. 279, 282.
- 18 Krauss, R., (1985), *Ibid.*, p. 287.
- 19 Krauss, R., (1985), *Ibid.*, p. 283; Jung, C.G. *Man and his Symbols*. (Dell: New York, 1968), pp. 4-5.
- 20 Krauss, R., (1985), *Ibid.*, pp. 29-30.
- 21 Kolb, D., (1986), *Ibid.*, on Heidegger, p. 163.
- 22 Nin, A., *House of Incest*. (Swallow Press: Chicago, 1958), p. 72.
- 23 Jones, R.S., *Death and transfiguration*. (In Physics as Metaphor, Univ. of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, 1982), p. 183.
- 24 Kolb, D., (1986), *Ibid.*, p. 167.
- 25 Kolb, D., (1986), *Ibid.*, p. 160-1.
- 26 Sartre, J.P., *Being and Nothingness*. (Washington Square Press: New York, 1953), p. 281.
- 27 Ferry, L., Renaut, A., (1990), *Ibid.*, p. 99.
- 28 Kolb, D., (1986), *Ibid.*, p. 162.
- 29 Kolb, D., (1986), *Ibid.*, p. 161.
- 30 Kolb, D., (1986), *Ibid.*, p. 161.
- 31 Ferry, L., Renaut, A., (1990), *Ibid.*, p. 102.
- 32 Lukács, G., *Soul and Form*. (MIT Press: Cambridge, 1978), pp. 42-54.
- 33 Ferry, L., Renaut, A., (1990), *Ibid.*, pp. 70-71.
- 34 Ferry, L., Renaut, A., (1990), *Ibid.*, quoting Foucault, p. 103.
- 35 Campbell, J., *Myths to Live By*. (Viking Press: New York, 1972), p. 157.
- 36 Campbell, J., *Primitive Mythology*. (Penguin: New York, 1959), p. 43.
- 37 Campbell, J., (1959), *Ibid.*, p. 7.
- 38 Campbell, J., (1959), *Ibid.*, p. 7.
- 39 Campbell, J., (1959), *Ibid.*, p. 15.
- 40 Zimmer, H., *Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization* (Harper and Row: New York, 1946), pp. 60.
- 41 Russell, C., (1985), *Ibid.*, p. 270.
- 42 Jameson, F., *Postmodernism and consumer society*. (In Hal Foster Ed. *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*. Bay Press: Washington, 1983), p. 125.
- 43 Russell, C., (1985), *Ibid.*, p. 238.
- 44 Russell, C., (1985), *Ibid.*, p. 206-235.
- 46 Abbas, *Disappearance and fascination: The baudrillardian obscenarior*. (In J. Fekete, *The Structural Allegories: Reconstructive Encounters with New French Thought*. Univ. of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, 1984), pp. 72-3.
- 47 Abbas, (1984), *Ibid.*, p. 74.

Les expérimentations de la néo-avant-garde, appelées aussi postmodernes actualisent les notions relatives à l'exploration du corps et renvoient les notions de temps et d'espace. En incorporant le mythe dans le vocabulaire des œuvres, on réfère au passé pour faire état d'une situation contemporaine.

Par le biais d'un langage susceptible de révéler l'émergence d'une nouvelle perspective, la sculpture contemporaine cherche à donner une expression — une condition, non pas un espace ou une position avantageuse, mais une conviction manifeste en l'intelligibilité des surfaces — qui remet en question la perspective normative du moi, en situant le sujet humain à l'intérieur de l'éventail temporel du discours historique d'une manière qui rompt avec le modernisme.

Les œuvres récentes de Yves Louis-Seize explorent ce terrain. Son style de représentation, qui s'étend du formalisme plus conventionnel de ses débuts jusqu'aux représentations allégoriques et figuratives des pièces plus récentes, révèle une préoccupation évidente pour la notion de temporalité, exprimée à travers le symbolisme et la conscience mythique. En jouant sur des thèmes et des éléments paradoxaux, ces œuvres explorent le courant continu qui s'instaure entre le discours subjectif et la réalité objective dans laquelle nous trouvons une caractéristique du postmodernisme lequel renferme une double vision de l'éventualité et de la limitation. Pris dans cette fâcheuse conjoncture, nous nous voyons forcés d'évoquer l'éphémère. Dans les œuvres de Louis-Seize, cette qualité apparaît comme une vibration qui situe notre vision dans le courant temporel, quelque part entre l'expérience subjective et le monde extérieur situé au-delà du moi. À travers des pièces simulant une découverte d'artefacts anciens, Louis-Seize propose une archéologie de références s'appuyant sur une science des rituels et sur une mythologie archaïque relative à la fertilité. Nous y découvrons l'ardeur d'une vision poétique qui s'efforce de résoudre une contradiction inhérente à un ensemble d'éléments incongrus, qu'il s'agisse de volumes, de matériaux ou de thématiques se rapportant au sujet-objet. Placés dans un réseau d'oppositions interreliées, ces éléments établissent un lien avec la notion de temporalité en tant que processus inextricablement lié à la révélation du moi émergent — le moi qui se situe dans le processus du devenir.

Ces œuvres tentent de cerner les discours contradictoires de l'être en mettant en lumière des dimensions qui définissent à la fois l'existence et la finitude. Inhérente à une telle démarche demeure l'exploration de la notion du sujet humain comme étant simultanément fini et transcendant.