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DAMIEN HIRST, In Isolation, In Context  
by  
Paul Feidhlimidh Woods

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## INTRODUCTION

The general purpose of this thesis is to pursue an inquiry into the work of the artist Damien Hirst. In order to realistically attempt this, a structure must be adopted which can contain this inquiry. This introduction hopes to define what problems arise from structuring the said discourse on Damien Hirst, as well as discourse in general, and clarify how I envisage dealing with these problems.

The structure must attempt to contain the totality of the object, without reducing the meaning or intent of the object, which structure limitations inevitably do. The themes addressed by the work of Damien Hirst are not easily interpreted in terms of a causology (as with any art work), so my proposed structure must be able to cope with this.

The obvious method of inquiry is one of interpretation, where we read and discuss the signs manifested by the object, in order to define the concepts intended by the artist and develop them into a "Greater cover concept"<sub>1</sub> which satisfy the requirements of a thesis.

What this methodology traditionally hopes to achieve is to see through the "Manifest discourse" in order to grasp the "Latent discourse" which is always seen to be under or within the superficial exterior of the object<sub>2</sub>.



Baudrillard states how we try to eliminate the seductive qualities of the object under discussion, so that we can argue within the sphere of "serious problematics (problematics of the unconscious and problematics of interpretation)"<sub>3</sub>. More simply the purpose of these "serious problematics" can be seen as analyzing and interpreting the superficial (manifest discourse) in order to find the inevitable inner meaning (latent discourse). "Every interpretive discourse (discourse de sens) wants to get beyond appearances"<sub>4</sub>.

It is worth quoting in full Baudrillard's statement relating to the uncertainty of the interpretive discourse.

No one knows whether this strategy in which we have eliminated or sought to eliminate all reduction, is not itself a very fragile simulation model, one that only pretends to be an invulnerable structure in order to hide the effects of seduction which have begun to threaten it<sub>5</sub>.

This is apparently a form of impasse, where any structural form of enquiry seems to dissolve its intent within its own seduction. Adorno attempts to describe a model for a form of discourse which through preceding Baudrillard's text "On Seduction", perhaps identifies a way in which seduction is taken into account.

There is no step by step progression from the concepts to a more general cover concept. Instead the concepts enter into a constellation .... by gathering around the object of cognition, the concepts potentially determine the objects interior. They attain in thinking what was necessarily excised from thinkings<sub>6</sub>.



Adorno defines a more suitable methodology of enquiry, 'constellation' as such, is not a too rigorous structure, and Adorno only expects it to 'potentially' determine the interior of the object. This identifies his lack of faith in structures as being capable of viewing totality. Though I believe Adorno is, in this instance, prepossessed with the notion of interiority, which Baudrillard cast doubt upon, the term 'constellation' itself becomes a useful structural base. Though it is naive to expect an 'interior' to be exposed through a constellation of concepts, it is more viable to expect the complexity of your "Object of cognition", to be exposed through the structure of a constellation.

Terry Eagleton in the essay "Art after Auschwitz",<sup>7</sup> reintroduces Adorno in relation to this discussion, paraphrasing from Adorno's dialectic of enlightenment he says that;

A valid theory could only be one which thinking against itself, undoes its every act, achieves a frail evocation of that which discursivity denies.<sup>8</sup>

Eagleton also goes on to describe how he believes art practice to relate to this ongoing dilemma of structure/seduction and interpretation.

Art can only be authentic if it silently acknowledges how deeply it is compromised by what it opposes, but to press this logic too far, is precisely to undermine its authenticity.<sup>9</sup>



If we are now to expect the art works under examination / criticism to possess this "Silent acknowledgement", then the critical structure with which we discuss the art works must then also contain this knowledge of its own limitations, and how it is compromised. Let us now realign my intention for this thesis (which includes this introduction), in relation to the said argument. The aim of this critical discourse (thesis) is to pursue an inquiry into the art works of Damien Hirst, the structure of the criticism must be conscious of how it is compromised by any structure it uses, in order to address its "Object of cognition", it must be aware that it cannot fully address anything.

What I see this rather self conscious notion as doing is placing my work in relation to the struggle identified in "Writing and Difference" by Jacques Derrida<sub>10</sub>. It is impossible to synopsis how Derrida defines this struggle, but a brief explanation will help place this argument in context.

Through writing, speaking or communicating through any language, we create a difference. This difference is that between what meaning we want to project and what meaning the receiver understands. This difference is forced on us by the compromising nature of a structured language. This is identified by all the theorists I have previously mentioned, as well as a much earlier date by Saussure at the start of the twentieth century<sub>11</sub>, and to a lesser extent by Artaud and towards the end of the nineteenth century<sub>12</sub>.



To further identify the breadth of this discussion, I will again quote Adorno, Baudrillard and Derrida.

The pedantries of all systems ..... are the marks of an a priori inescapable failure.

T. Adorno<sub>13</sub>

Every discourse is complicit in this abduction of meaning, in this seductive manoeuvre of interpretation.

J. Baudrillard<sub>14</sub>

"The other choice\* ..... consists in conversing all these concepts within the domain of emperial discovery while here and there denouncing their limits, treating them as tools which can still be used. No longer is any truth value attributed"<sub>15</sub>.

"..... within them\* they must shelter a desire for full presence, non difference ....."<sub>16</sub>.

It is within these last remarks by Derrida that I see a departure point for the main body of the thesis. It is my intention to pursue "Non-difference" between my intended signification and the readers resulting interpretation. I cannot envisage this pursuit as been fruitful, but it is the only viable option. This all seems fairly obvious if not inevitable, but a self conscious approach to the dilemmas of destructive discourse is specifically relevant of the art works of Damien Hirst. I believe Hirst to be confronting this lack of faith in discourse/language, though not directly referring to the theorists I have discussed. Hirst has entered into this dilemma of the real and the proxy.

- \* i.e. other than "Stepping outside philosophical emperial discourse" which Derrida believes to be too difficult to realise.
- \* destructive discourses, which Derrida believes all discourse, especially critical, discourse to be.



For the moment we can take Hirst's art work as a series of actions, whose end results are objects designed for cognition. The objects contain a dialogue which repeatedly address a number of interrelating themes. This dialogue is structured on a tautological level, addressing the subjects under discussion in repeated spurts. Each art work, separate in itself, pushes at meaning, then stops as you (the viewer) move on to watch the next work reenact this pushing at meaning, only in the resulting gestalt formed by the separate pieces does the full complexity of the subject matter have a chance of being imagined by the viewer.

Resulting from this I believe the only viable way that I may signify, through text and thesis, what I believe to be any 'meaning' contained by Hirst's work is through a similar tautological structure. This structure can be imagined as the "Constellation of concepts" mentioned by Adorno, or more directly metaphorically the defining of the matrix\* which encloses the ineffable subject that we wish to expose.

A certain, rather poetic quotation by Artaud, illustrates his desire to stop the theft of meaning by language<sup>17</sup>, which I believe relates to this introduction's similar desire, to prevent the theft of meaning by structure.

\* Read matrix as a place or medium in which something is bred produced or developed, an embedding or enclosing mass. OED.



The whole thing lies in a certain flocculation of objects, the gathering of those mental gems about one as of yet undiscovered (a trouver) nucleus. Here then is what I think of thought/inspiration certainly exists<sub>18</sub>.

A final remark on this introduction will perhaps ellucidate how this relates to Damien Hirst and his intentions. The quotation is from an interview between Damien Hirst and the artist Sophie Calle\*.

I sometimes feel I have nothing to say, I often want to communicate this<sub>19</sub>.

\* The interview is actually false, invented by Hirst with the full compliance of Sophie Calle, and used in the ICA Catalogue.



NOTES TO INTRODUCTION

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9. Ibid, p. 49.
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12. Derrida, Jacques, **Writing and Difference**, p. 179.
13. Ibid, p. 321 (notes for Genesis and Structure).
14. Baudrillard, J., **Selected Writings**, p. 150.
15. Derrida, Jacques, **Writing and Difference**, p. 194.
16. Ibid, p 194.
17. Ibid, p. 178.
18. Ibid, p. 178.
19. Hirst, Damien, **Catalogue for ICA Show**, London, Jay Jopling/ICA, 1991.



## CHAPTER 1

### STILL PURSUING IMPOSSIBLE DESIRES<sub>1</sub>

The introduction outlined the structure for the main body of the thesis. It referred to a tautological structure intent on defining a constellation or matrix of ideas and concepts which through their presentation contain the possibility of guiding the reader to a fuller view of the object of cognition.

The particular concepts that I wish to bring together in this chapter are ones which are specifically instigated by the pieces and the views of Hirst. In order to develop and back up these concepts, certain critics, and contemporary critical theories which I believe to relate to Hirst, shall be introduced into the discussion.

The introduction of these theories does not intend to define any critical causology for Hirst's work, but more simply to elaborate on ideas in a tautological rather than ontological manner.

In order to discuss Hirst's ideas I have subdivided this chapter under specific headings. But these headings should not be read on a specific compartmentalisation of works and ideas. It is better that they are read as discussions of works under five thematic headings which, though relating to the works, should not be perceived as the sole signification of those works.



In fact it is possible to discuss some of the works under all of the themes.

1.    **DAMAGE/IMPOSSIBILITY/DEATH**

Death in the last analysis is the line of social demarcation which separates the dead from the living, and it affects each side equally<sub>2</sub>.

Hirst has expressed interest in the idea of "Taking things out of the world", and that "You kill things to look at them"<sub>3</sub>. This interest is obviously manifest in Hirst's recurring use of dead animals in his work (flies, butterflies, cows, sheep, fish). The most startling and obvious example of this is the installation piece "The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living".

The implications of this title, in relation to an eight foot long, preserved tiger shark in a white steel girdered glass tank are manifold. We as viewers are directed to an obvious impasse. The impasse being how we stand in relation to death as an object to be understood, and how we cannot contain the idea or 'reality' of death while still living. The word death becomes this "Line of social demarcation", which is less about signifying an object and more about defining a line or border which human understanding can never transgress no matter how obvious or visible the dead object/thing is.



Hirst is interested in letting things describe a feeling<sub>4</sub>. What this feeling or sensation could be is that which we feel when we confront this impasse, obviously represented by the dead shark. The 'Impossibility' of the title has become a thing represented, something produced and designed to cause a reaction. This feeling can become something almost tangible when you are confronted by the shark piece. Certain definable elements of the work can help elaborate on the notion of this impasse and its effects.

First, the shark is real and not a representation and suspended in a semi naturalistic setting (the blue dye of the formaldehyde solution lends a superficial underwater atmosphere to the piece). Hirst has stated that "Art tries to raise the dead"<sub>5</sub> and in the shark piece we can see a parody of art's desire to bring the dead back to life. The artificial preservation of the shark can serve to reinforce certain static qualities of the piece, by stopping the ongoing cyclic process of life from death through decay.

It is this numbing, stifling approach to the description of death that leaves us with an inaudible buzzing of incoherence and impotency in the face of the gap between our life, and its death. Is this the feeling of impossibility that the title hopes to lead us to?



Other elements of the piece introduce related concepts to this dialogue on our living relationship with death, notably that the animal preserved is a shark. Sharks in the popular imagination are strongly connected with death and our fear of death. The living presence of a shark implies an impending or potential death. Subsequently our reaction to its presentation in the cool white space of the Saatchi collection on Boundary road is transfigured and enhanced by our mythological preconception of the shark as a 'man-eating' carnivore.

The various possible intentions of this piece could in some ways be related to Jean Baudrillard essay 'Death as Abnormality'. In which he describes a history of society's relationship with the dead. Baudrillards outlines an ever increasing divide throughout history, where society once housed the dead within the social structure of the village, to present times where we bury our deceased in segregated, walled-in environments on the peripheries of our towns and cities.

The destruction of the symbolic modes of relating to death has meant that there is an unresolved problem of facing the dead in our societies just as their is in facing the ill, the disabled, the criminal. Contemporary societies cannot find a solution to the problems they themselves have created - that the dead are dead.

This synopsis of Baudrillard's essay points to a general symptom of contemporary life, I assert that Hirst is also dealing with this in conjunction with notions of art being dead. "The impossibility of death in the mind of someone living" could be



an attempt to define this divide, this "social demarcation" and place the viewer in a situation where this gap is starkly evident.

Another installation piece, "When Logics Die" (Fig. 1) again seems to drag the viewer into notions of impossibility and confusion. In it there are two enlarged photographs of grievous wounds, they are appropriated from medical records of suicides, beneath them is a white utilitarian table, on which lies the medical accoutrements designed to deal with such wounds, bandages, scissors, sutures and their packages. It could have been taken directly from an accident and emergency ward of a hospital. But is more likely to be a partial response to the time Hirst spent in a morgue<sub>8</sub>. The piece seems to physically re-enact the point at which human understanding begins to collapse or become aware of its inabilities. The aesthetic juxtapositions of the dried up wounds on yellowing skin, above the pristine medical products designed to deal with such wounds, murders logic. Especially when one realises that these people are cadavers, life is lost, logic is dead (if logic as a term can even relate to the act of suicide and our understanding of why other people commit that act). Michael Corris interpreted Hirst as an 'esthete' who wishes to loosen rationalities grip on sensual life<sub>9</sub>. That is, that Hirst is more concerned with indulging in the sensual and visceral aspects of image making in response to life and death, rather than a rational and



intellectual response. Another photographic based piece enters this realm of the irrational, where human response to human damage does not correspond.

"With Dead Head" (Fig. 2) was submitted to Creative Camera early on in Hirst's career<sub>10</sub>. His grinning youthful head alongside the grotesque, decapitated, bloated head of a cadaver is in a field of experience beyond trauma, it is out of the range of 'normal' human responses.





Fig. 1 - Damien Hirst  
**When Logics Die**, 1991,  
Emmanuel Perrotin, Paris.



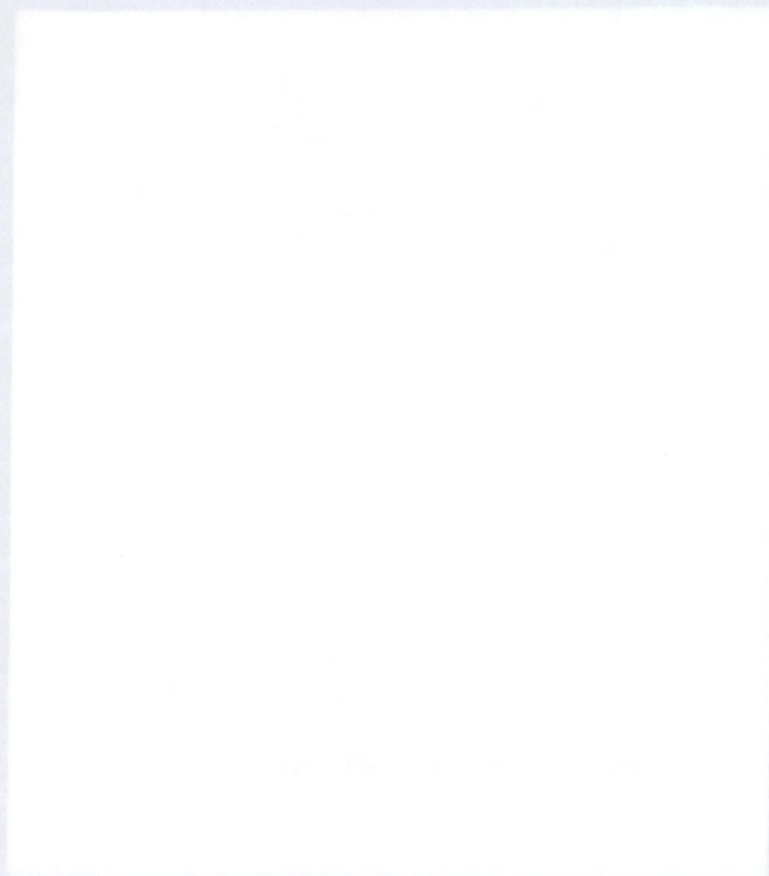
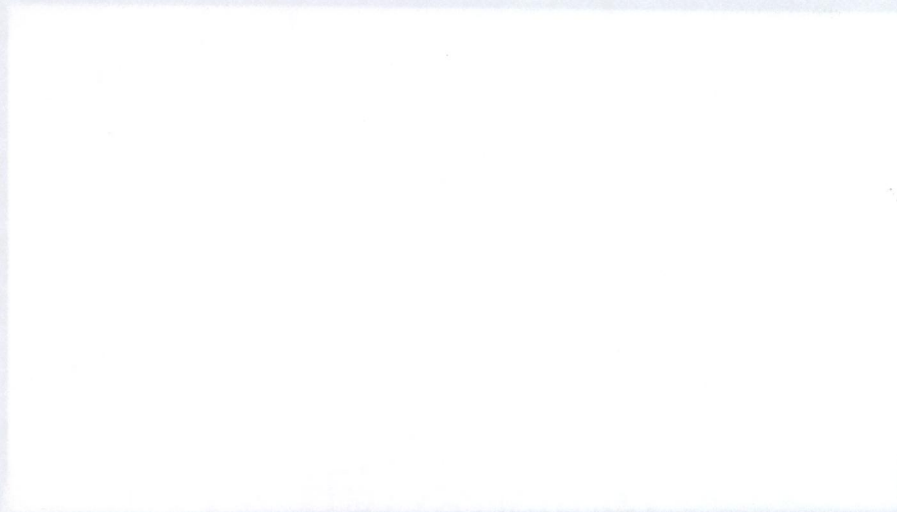






Fig. 2 - Damien Hirst  
With Dead Head, 1991





1991



Hirst's irreverent almost taunting pose has reduced any potential horror or trauma. Through his irreverence he has rendered death safe, almost banal, a joke in bad taste. Sue Hubbard referred to this photograph as presenting Hirst's "Necrophiliac obsessions"<sup>11</sup>, but this piece has been discussed and reproduced in so many different publications that one wonders whose necrophiliac obsessions are being presented. Hirst is working in a dubious area and in some ways could be interpreted as simply relying on sensationalist shocking methods in order to capture the public imagination. He has stated however, that he believes it impossible to be sensationalist anymore<sup>12</sup>. One supposes that he means that today's art audience has already been numbed to sensationalist effects through saturation of 'shocking images'. But there are certain elements of the 'Shock photo' which are perhaps less sensationalist than anti-sensationalist.

The shock photo is by structure insignificant, no value, no knowledge, at the limit no verbal categorisation can have a hold on<sup>13</sup>.

In the light of Barthe's statement the term anti-sensationalist becomes clearer. Hirst is taking the viewer into this structure where there is "No value; no knowledge", and in some ways no sensation, no true feelings and no sympathy for the deceased. In a way Hirst may be participating in his desire to enter this realm of 'no signification' where moral values of respect for the dead are parodied, and our own fragile corporality is exposed.



There is no confirmed causology or rationale for this 'desire'. Hirst has briefly mentioned this desire and its inherent ambiguities:

I mean like that accident out the window its sort of horrible, but its nice. And the piece I did in Paris "When Logics Die". Its a horrible image but its a beautiful photo, like something from a cookery book, perfect photos of perfectly unacceptable things and I like the contradiction of these two states<sup>14</sup>.

Hirst has a flippant almost camp attitude to what would be considered the 'deeply serious' or problematic areas of existence and morality. He has been termed 'nihilistic'<sup>15</sup> in his apparent rejection of certain moral principles. I believe, however, there to be a disquieting edge to this naming of Hirst as nihilistic. The term nihilistic conveys a sense of nothingness, of a general disbelief, of not caring. This attitude seems to connect with a 'theory of misunderstanding', mentioned by Eric Troncy in his general review of Hirst and his London contemporaries<sup>16</sup>. Belief systems begin to collapse around us in this realm of 'No signification' and misunderstanding can be the prevalent response to Hirst's work, and it is as if, often, there is no possible interpretation which has any more truth value than any other, logic has died.



## 2. IN AND OUT OF LOVE/SIMILITUDE/ISOLATION

Hirst installed "In and Out of Love" in Building One in London in 1991, in two rooms one above the other. The upstairs room (Fig. 3) has live butterflies flying freely within the space in a carefully controlled environment designed to maintain the life cycle of the butterflies, with flowers, heaters, humidifiers and bowls of sugared water. The butterflies hatch from pupae attached to stark white canvasses hung around the room. The flutterings and movements of the tropical Malaysian butterflies in the stark, but tropically atmospheric space has been said to be 'hypnotic'<sup>17</sup>, as opposed to the static, cold qualities of the room downstairs (Fig. 4). Where coloured glossy canvasses replace the white ones, and instead of pupae from which life originates, there are exquisite fully grown butterflies held in stasis, coldly placed in pseudo random patterns, frozen life but still beautiful. Replacing the sugar bowls are ashtrays, containing the recurring motif of Hirst, of stubbed out cigarette butts, one senses a grim parody of Hirst's desire for making art alive as in the previously mentioned shark piece, but the endless theme of love is more relevant here, and its inevitable associations with death.





Fig. 3 - Damien Hirst  
**In and Out of Love**, (White Paintings and Live Butterflies) 1991  
Upstairs Roo, Tamara Chodzko, London.



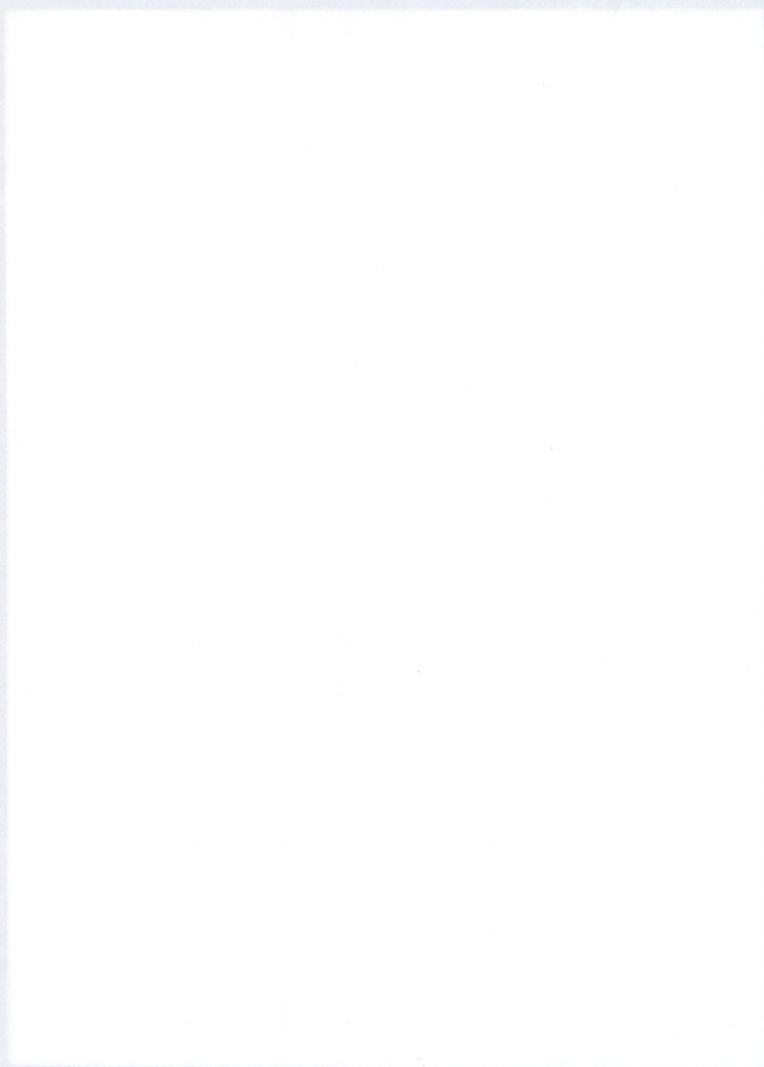
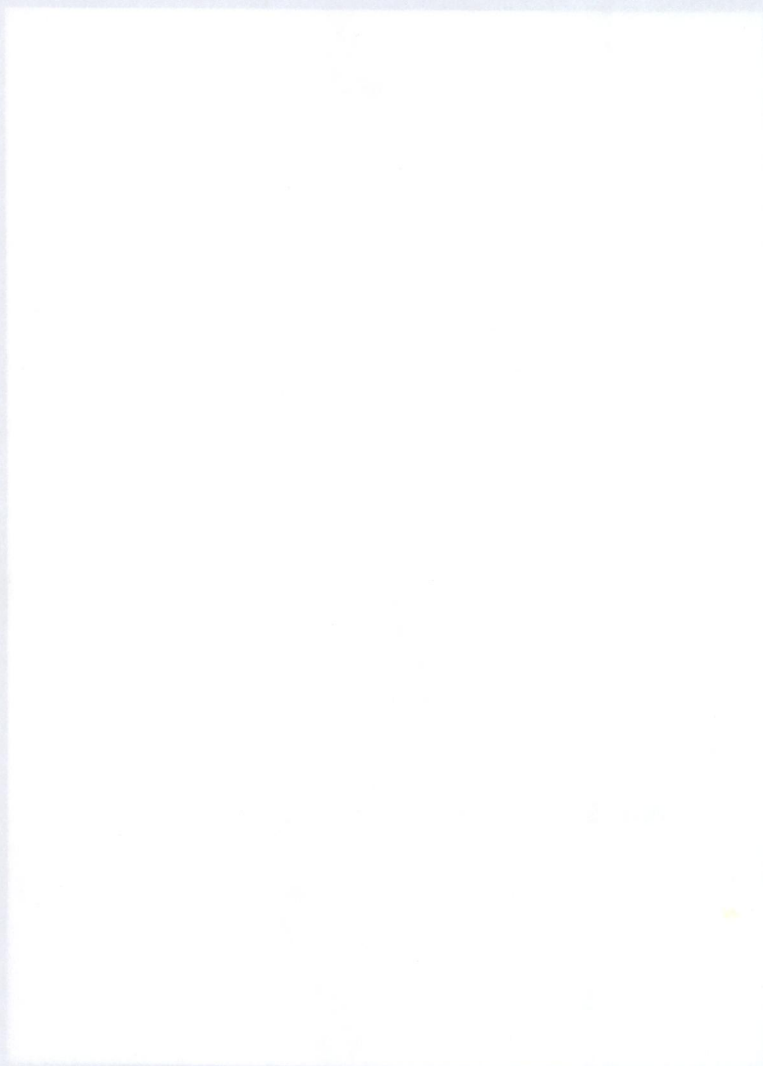






Fig. 4 - Damien Hirst  
**In and Out of Love**, (Butterfly Paintings and Ashtrays), 1991,  
Collection Richard Salmon, London.







Hirst has said that it is an attempt to make a comparison about art and life<sub>18</sub>. He has said that;

I make art, I try to make it alive. I know its impossible for me to not try and I enjoy this dilemma because it doesn't stop me<sub>19</sub>.

Hirst believes that art cannot live, but he is still inexorably drawn through the pursuit of trying to animate art, give it life. Is this unavoidable, paradoxical view being discussed by the exhibition of live and dead butterflies in their respective environments? Is this talking about being "In and Out of Love"?

On an immediate reading it seems patently obvious that one room is 'In Love' and the other 'Out of Love'. Since dead butterflies, ash, stubbed out butts emanate a sense of lost life, lost love, while the warm active environment is easily associated with being in love. But Hirst wonders at the notion that "Real butterflies are still being beautiful when dead", and that "Real butterflies can destroy the ideal (birthday card) kind of love"<sub>20</sub>.

There is an evident duality in the work and its obvious polarity is continuously being undermined. The duality becomes less and less apparent as its simple binary presentation of 'in love / out of love' is disturbed and diffused through the entry of confusing and contradictory concepts.



That is that, even though the butterflies are alive they transform through our perceptions of them as an art piece. They become symbols, representations, and our internal dialectic reduces them to text as we consider their implications and significance. Such is the inherent affect that the term / discourse, 'art', has on objects brought in from the outside world. That dead butterflies also become transformed through their presentation on broad colour fields in the gallery context. The coldness of the minor atrocity, that is art production dependent on dead butterflies, is dissolved in the seductive beauty of the static body of an animal whose beauty is not lost in its demise.

Hirst considers "In and Out of Love" the most complicated work he has done. "Its about love and realism, dreams, ideals, symbols life and death"<sup>21</sup>, it seems in some ways to be a dysfunctional approach to understanding love, wherein our dependency on solid notions of being 'in love' or 'out of love' no longer corresponds to the reality of relationships between people. The language within which we discuss love no longer functions. Does Hirst wish to broaden the spectrum of our understanding about what love is? or whether there is 'true love'?

There seems to be an evident desire in Hirst's work to transgress the limitations of the textual, to be free of the innate limitations of language (text) in the way he so self consciously attempts and fails to make his work live. This I



have termed as an attempt to achieve similitude, to have no difference, to be the same, which corresponds to certain suggestions made by Jacques Derrida in his reference to destructive discourse.

They (destructive discourses) must inhabit the structures they demolish and with them they must shelter an indestructible desire for full presence for non difference for simultaneously life and death<sup>22</sup>.

It is easy to discern Hirst as acting out this vain unavoidable desire for 'Full presence'. He seems fully conscious and acceptant of this situation, when he mentioned a title for a future work "Still pursuing impossible desires"<sup>23</sup>.

One piece in particular entertains the concept of impossible similitude more eloquently than any other of his works. "I want to spend the rest of my life everywhere, with everyone, one to one always forever now". The piece consists of two large panes of plate glass supporting each other forming a horizontal 'T'. At the intersection of the T there is an air nozzle over which floats a ping pong ball which quivers and spins but 'miraculously' remains in position. The piece is large, approx. 7 ft. x 4 ft. 6 in. Both the ping pong ball and our belief in it are suspended as one tentatively moves around the piece, in fear that this fragile simulation model for Hirst's desire will spin out of its controlling column of air.



There is an obvious divide suggested by this piece where our desires and reality do not meet. The imposing and fragile structure of the glass panes serves to distance the viewer from this desire and at the same time lends the work a fragile and dangerous air. Inevitably we are isolated from the notion of being "One to one forever always, now". It appears as if Hirst interprets isolation as being not an underlying result of 'unfulfilled desire', but a conscious aspect of the desire process.

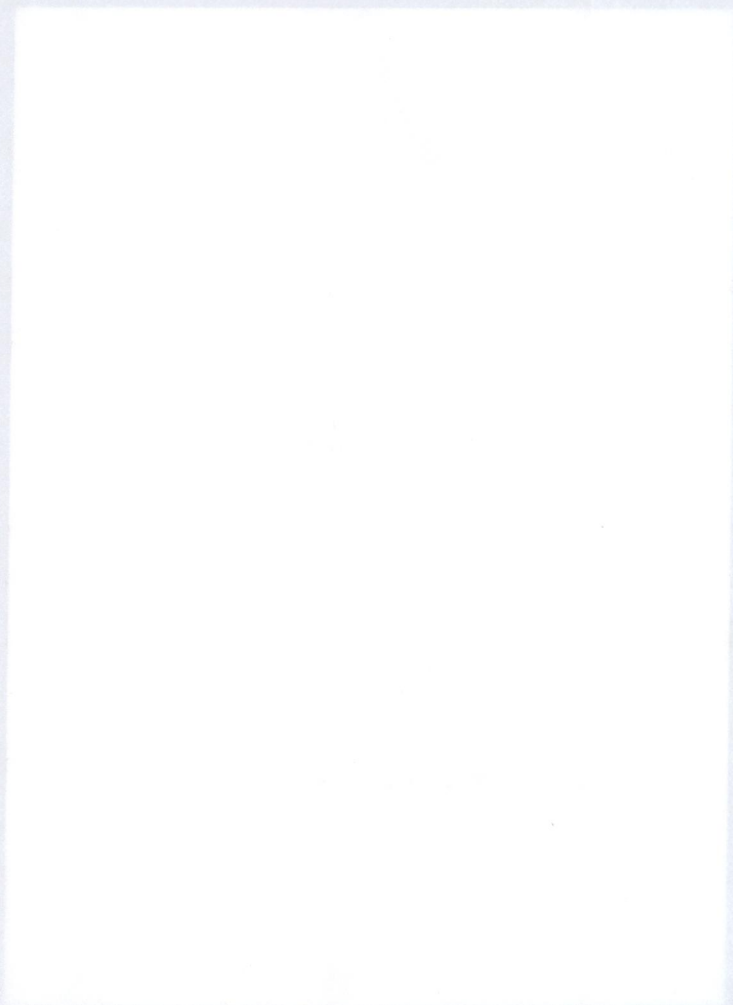
Isolation is another of Hirst's intertwining and recurring themes. Apparently Hirst does not necessarily see isolation as a negative aspect of unfulfilled desire, but a desire in itself as in "Sometimes I Avoid People" (Fig. 5). The piece appears to be a kafkaesque combination of an isolation tent and a life support system, determined not just to isolate the individual from the outside world, but also to segregate the body. The limbs are divided from each other, and the bodies needs contained in colour coded gas cylinders.





Fig. 5 - Damien Hirst  
**Sometimes I Avoid People**, 1991, (detail)  
Private Collection, London.







It is like a horrendous vision of future prisons, but to Hirst it is a prison of choice, it is his version of the sensory deprivation tanks now being used to 'get away from it all', a form of holiday from corporality.

Hirst sees isolation as a 'scientific technique'<sup>24</sup> which is starkly evident in "Sometimes I avoid people". In science isolation is the key to understanding. This notion is further discussed in the piece "Isolated elements swimming the same way for the purpose of understanding", (Fig. 6).

The various species of fish are presented like samples in vitrines or glass bottles on a laboratory shelf, and one reading could see the fish's isolated, but single minded pursuit of understanding as a parody of the scientific approach to understanding. It is also possible to interpret the fish as being people, different from each other in appearance and isolated through their bodies, but sharing a common pursuit of some unsaid ineffable understanding.

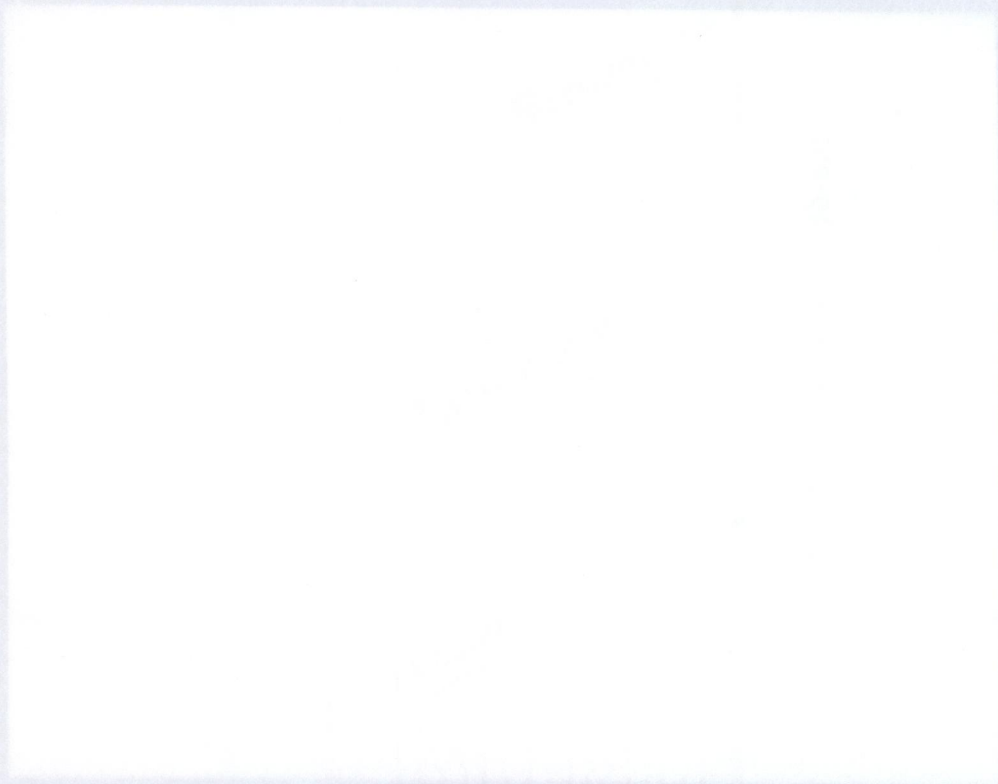
The piece and subsequent readings induce a state of flux between being alone and being the same. This flux is further identified in a more obvious way in the piece "Stimulants (and the way they effect the mind and body)" (Fig. 7).





Fig. 6 - Damien Hirst  
Isolated Elements Swimming the Same Way for  
the Purpose of Understanding, 1991  
Collection David Moynihan







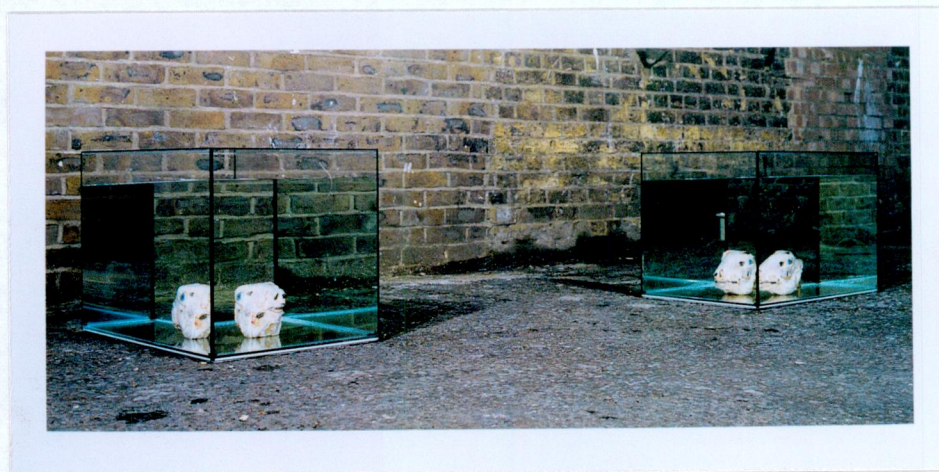


Fig. 7 - Damien Hirst  
Stimulants (and the way they affect the mind and body), 1991  
Jay Jopling, London.





BOND



Hirst in discussion of the piece prior to actually making it suggested that;

The two heads piece is so obvious it has to do with relationships between two people. Are people linked because of their similarity?<sup>25</sup>.

As with all Hirst pieces he cannot render his questions obsolete. The work continually addresses universal depersonalized questions about human perception and human relationships and Hirst though always aware of the futility of his work continues to ask questions through his work.

### 3. WORKING WITH CONFUSION

All the pieces discussed so far are part of an ongoing series of work called "Internal Affairs", named after the film starring Richard Gere in which the police set up an independent body to look into their own corruption. Hirst stated that;

I think its mad for me to think that I will discover anything through 'Internal Affairs', but I'm still making the series<sup>26</sup>.

This is definite momentum in Hirst's work which he has said, "I'm not moving forwards ..... just moving"<sup>27</sup>. He uses the words "Near-nonsense logic" to describe his intention to "Look into myself, to work out why my body is separated from my mind or if indeed it is"<sup>28</sup>. So his momentum is aimless, there is no end result, no 'insight' no new knowledge expected.



In the false interview with Sophie Calle, a Parisian based conceptual artist, he referred to a conversation with his grandmother. "I still feel as confused now, as I did when I was seven", and she said "So do I"<sub>29</sub>.

The realisation of the apparent generality of this confusion seems directly connected to Hirst's nihilistic stance, particularly in relation to how he sees his artistic intent as 'mad' in 'Internal Affairs'.

It could be that this self conscious awareness of the impotency of art production, combined with his much discussed ability to make striking images<sub>30</sub> has propelled him so rapidly into the limelight of the international art scene. To the extent that at least within his native Britain he is considered to be "..... undoubtedly the leading artist of his generation"<sub>31</sub>.

The multitude of reasons and causes which have put Hirst in this position are impossible to pin down. Amongst these must be included his agent Jay Jopling who promoted him to such an extent that his work was bought by the Saatchi's. Also his college, Goldsmiths, has enjoyed an excellent reputation over the past five years, which has given its students more coverage and attention than any other art college in Europe<sub>32</sub>.



Hirst has been seen as a central figure of this group of young 'tyros' as they are now being termed, which include Liam Gillick, Angela Bulloch, Gary Hume, Michael Landy, and Anya Gallacio. This is most obviously caused by his organisation and curatorship of two prominent and in some ways adventurous group shows, 'Modern Medicine' and 'Freeze'. These were adventurous in that they were self promoted without apparent gallery input and set in privately hired warehouses (no further details available).

Since there is so little information available about these shows it is not feasible to discuss them much further so the remaining section of this chapter will return to the original brief and discuss specific aspects of Hirst's work which I believe reflects why Hirst stands out so much from his contemporaries.

#### 4. **STYLE/REPRESENTATION**

There are certain qualities of Hirst's work which could perhaps be identified as a 'style'; it is a specific formal look that he continually gives to his work. This 'look' seems to be a conscious collaboration between minimalism and science.

Minimal like a "Judd filled with mouldy drugs"<sub>33</sub>. Hirst said in relation to one of his medicine cabinet pieces. This minimalism is further apparent in the simple, machine-made, steel girder format as well as the plain glass or perspex vitrines.



There are few extraneous elements. Liam Gillick asked Hirst if he thought people were bored with this type of "Quasi-minimalism". Hirst responded that he was reverting to a "Type"<sub>34</sub>. What this 'type' of image construction does for many people is make images as stark and memorable as Byzantine icons which show; "..... a frontal, Simplified image design or sign that has powerful cultural associations and that is placed on a neutral ground to emphasize its external presence"<sub>35</sub>.

Hirst's minimal, iconic, mode of presentation, enlarges his subject matter in the eye of the viewer. This method of presentation is congruent with his interest in the process of understanding used so often in medicine and science.

When they attempt to understand the world through medicine they try to isolate things and arrange them, and its impossible but still everyone does it<sub>36</sub>.

Hirst is trying to isolate and enlarge through pseudo-science, and in doing so defines where, but not how, our structures of understanding collapse. The objects/animals and subsequent significations that Hirst is trying to enlarge have been discussed so far in the text. One thing most of them share is the fact that they are 'real' objects taken, like ready-mades, from the everyday world. The importance of this 'appropriation of the real' is discussed more comprehensively in the next chapter.



In order to more fully comprehend Hirst specific use of the 'ready-made' in the context of this chapter a comparison between two related works seems particularly useful. "A Thousand Years" (Fig. 8) by Hirst, and "Life of Flies" by Ilya Kabakov. There is no recorded relationship between these two contemporary artists and they are separated by a continent and by different ideological background. But what is useful to this discussion, is that both have used flies on a grand scale in their work.

I hope a comparative discussion of these pieces will help identify difference, and perhaps if one wishes, meaning in relation to Hirst's use of the real over the proxy, and how Hirst's specific style of metaphor has its own dialogue of desires and intent.

Kabakov's installation has been described as a "Metaphysics of the Fly"<sup>37</sup> in which Jan Thorn Pikker says;

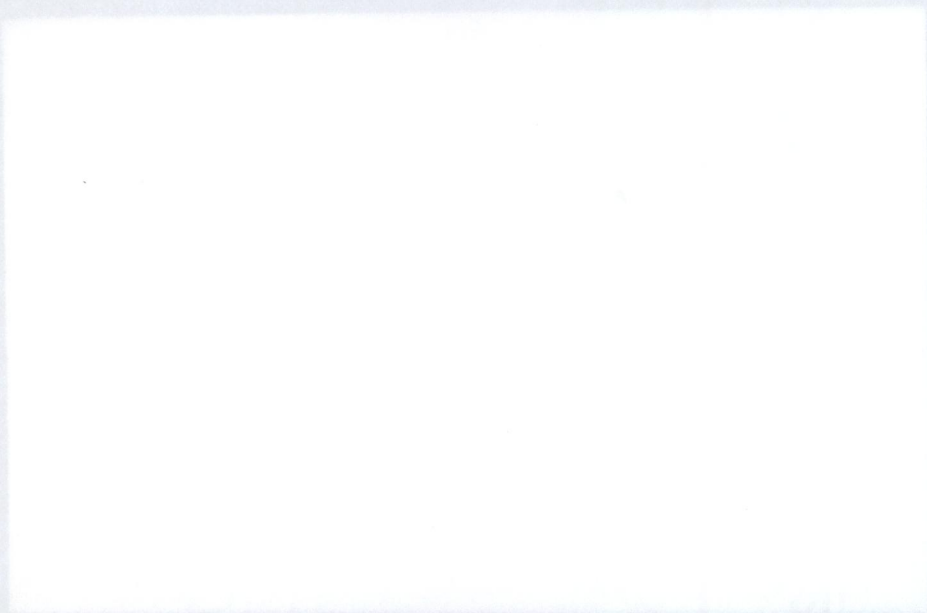
The paramount significance of the fly was expounded for my benefit in statistics, technical drawings, philosophical discussions and pseudo scientific explanations - all immaculately constructed. The fly became the centre of a scientific world view"<sup>38</sup>.





Fig. 8 - Damien Hirst  
**A Thousand Years**, 1990  
Saatchi Collection, London.





BOND



There are similar scientific references in Hirst's "A Thousand Years" but on a different level. "A Thousand Years" is like a colony, a miniature world, set up for observation, in which the flies are bred in the white box, then pursue their apparently random flight where they may pass from one section of the cube to the other through holes in the partition glass. They may breed and lay eggs in the skinned cows head, but they will die in that glass space, either by the Insect O'Cutor or from natural causes. Both pieces signify the random chaotic element of existence, and subsequently of meaning, defining the chaotic rather than the ordered.

The difference predominantly lies in the fact that the Kabakov pieces rely entirely on representations and definite textual intrusion by the hand of the artist, while Hirst's piece is dependant on the 'real' activity of living flies. Though both can be read as parodies of scientific interpretation and ordering processes, Kabakov's installation is like the academic result of studying the activity in Hirst's colony - the text in response to the experiment.

Hirst does not seem to want to enter the realm of the proxy, the replacement. He believes that "Art tries to resurrect the dead"<sup>39</sup>. Both 'real life' (the flies and butterflies) and actual death (fish, shark, cows heads) are in his art works. It could be said that this evident cycle of life and death is there to push further our demands of art towards the 'real' life experience, and at the same time induce a subsequent confusing flux between art and life.



Sometimes you're negative, sometimes you're positive. If you see people as flies you can see them as butterflies, small and disgusting, or fragile and beautiful. Something that intrigues me in all the work is the action of the world on things<sub>40</sub>.

Life and death as a sculpture is a surprise and the acceptable look of it is a bigger surprise<sub>41</sub>.

These last quotes bring me to the final section of this chapter. In the generality of this section there may be a pointer as to what is new in Hirst's work.

#### 5. ACCEPTANCE IN THE FACE OF IMPOTENCE

During the discussion of many of the works, I referred to Hirst's belief in his own failure to fully deal with the concepts and questions raised by his work. He is unable to define concrete truths except when that 'truth' is our own disability to attain full meaning or true presence.

Hirst's clinical forms and unromantic approach to art production has reduced the 'expressionistic' output of his work to a bare minimum. This reduction into the realm of the banal and pseudo-factual is opposed to world of angst and metaphysics.

He enjoys the dilemma of trying to make art alive, he thinks he is 'Mad' to try and discover anything through 'Internal Affairs'. He realises the impossibility of understanding through isolation, but is "Still pursuing impossible desires".



Hirst one said that "People want everything, the acceptance of an impossible situation is what is about"<sub>42</sub>. Is it this self conscious, acceptance of the irrational chaotic forces of desire that in some ways makes Hirst so appealing, and maybe different?

I want to do a piece called still pursuing impossible desires. I am aware of the mental contradictions in everything; like I am going to die and I want to live forever. I can't escape the fact and I can't let go of the desire<sub>42</sub>.

I have a statement that I'd like to end this conversation with, its one of yours ..... "I sometimes feel I have nothing to say I often want to communicate this"<sub>44</sub>.



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## CHAPTER 2

### IN CONTEXT, IN HISTORY?

Chapter 1 floated certain ideas and readings of Hirst's work, which may guide the reader towards a fuller grasp of the general discourse which is instigated solely by Hirst's work. The following chapter will broaden the scope of the discussion, bringing into play various individuals and ideas, which may provide an historical framework for Hirst's work. I see the construction of this historical framework as particularly suspect, in that it is easily interpreted as a form of myth making. But in order to represent Hirst as comprehensively as possible it seems useful to form connections between him and other artists and critics. These connections are not necessarily a causology in the traditional historical sense, they are more a series of considerations which may, or may not be directly related to Hirst, but will inform the reader about the potential relationships between Hirst and other artists in the twentieth century.

#### 1. A POST HUMAN REALITY?

(Post Modernism is,)

.... an ironic, parodic, reflexive fantastic awareness of the moment. A linguistic term, semiotic imperative in culture and society generally. The violence of local desires, diffused into a technology both of seduction and force. In short I see a pattern that many others have also seen. A vast revisionary will in the western world, unsettling/resetting codes, canons, procedures, beliefs - intimating a post-humanism?<sub>1</sub>.



Here in 1987 Ihab Hassan foresaw a potential dramatic change in the way our society perceives itself in the wake of Post-Modernism, he coins the phrase 'post humanism' to describe this change. This term is echoed in the exhibition 'Post Human' which was held in Lausanne, Rivoli, Athens and Hamburg in 1992 and 1993<sub>2</sub>. The term 'Post-Human' was used by the curator of the show Jeffery Deitch. It was Deitch who placed Hirst in this exhibition and it was Hirst's first chance to show with some of the most influential contemporary artists in the world today, notably Jeff Koons, Ashley Bicherton, Cindy Sherman, Martin Kippenberger, Charles Ray, Robert Gober, Mike Kelley, Matthew Barney and Thomas Ruff.

It is the influence of Jeffery Deitch both in his theories and business acumen that has given this large cosmopolitan group of artists a collective identity (It is important to note that Deitch is also a consultant to certain powerful art collectors<sub>3</sub>). This identity is encapsulated in the term 'Post-Human' and in the seductive polemic written by Deitch in the catalogue to the show. A previous exhibition also curated by Deitch, called "Artificial Nature", is helpful to consider in connection with 'Post-Human'. "Artificial Nature" preceded "Post Human" and could easily be interpreted as the forerunner to "Post Human".



In Deitch's essay in 'Artificial Nature' he outlines a dilemma in present western society. This dilemma relates to the confusion surrounding contemporary western societies preconceptions of nature and reality.

Artificial nature explores issues in contemporary culture through the medium of new art. It examines the changes in consciousness that are resulting from the transformation of our natural environment into an artificial environment by advances in biological and computer science and by the continued expansion of the global consumer culture<sub>4</sub>.

Deitch sees nature in general terms as the "Mysterious nourishing force that emerged with the birth of the universe" which the human race is in the continuous process of recreating in order to fulfil their specific needs. This idea is further developed in the Post Human show about which Deitch said;

The convergence of rapid advances in biotechnology and computer science with societies questioning of traditional social and sexual roles may be leading to nothing less than a redefinition of human life<sub>5</sub>.

What this 'redefinition' seems to be amounting to is, western society's general turning away from a notion of the 'natural' self towards a "Growing sense that it is normal to reinvent oneself"<sub>6</sub>. The ability to 'Reinvent oneself' is possible through plastic surgery, mind and body altering drugs, gene-splicing and computer chip brain implants<sub>6</sub>. These advances, he sees as coinciding with other changes in late twentieth century society which in turn affect this revolution in the way we will define



our identity. In particular he outlines the dissolution of the Freudian model of the self, "Into a new model that encourages individuals to dispense with the anguished analysis of how subconscious childhood experience moulded their behaviour"<sup>7</sup>.

Furthermore, the continued expansion of communication networks, particularly television with its, "Decentered reality ..... fragmentation, multiplicity and simultaneity is helping to deepen the sense that there is no absolutely "correct or "true" model of the self"<sup>8</sup>.

According to Deitch the artist is entering into this new world of changing values and belief systems where there is;

..... no longer one absolute reality, but the possibility of multiple realities, each one as "real" as artificial the others<sup>9</sup>.

and that;

The changes in our perception of reality resulting from these new technologies of synthesis and simulation are likely to lead to profound changes in the way artists and everyone else begin to interpret and understand the world<sup>10</sup>.

There is no mention in the Post Human catalogue as to how Deitch places Hirst specifically in this context. In relation to some of the other artists, however, he outlines a general revolution in the interpretation of the human figure. Charles Ray's outsized mannequin, (Fig. 9) for example he sees as "Intensified visions of post-human evolution"<sup>11</sup> and he interprets Jeff Koons



transformation of his body and his life with La Cicciolana as  
an "Embrace of fantasy and fiction"<sub>12</sub> (Fig. 10).





Fig. 9 - Charles Ray,  
Fall '91, 1991,  
Bernett Miller Gallery, Los Angeles.



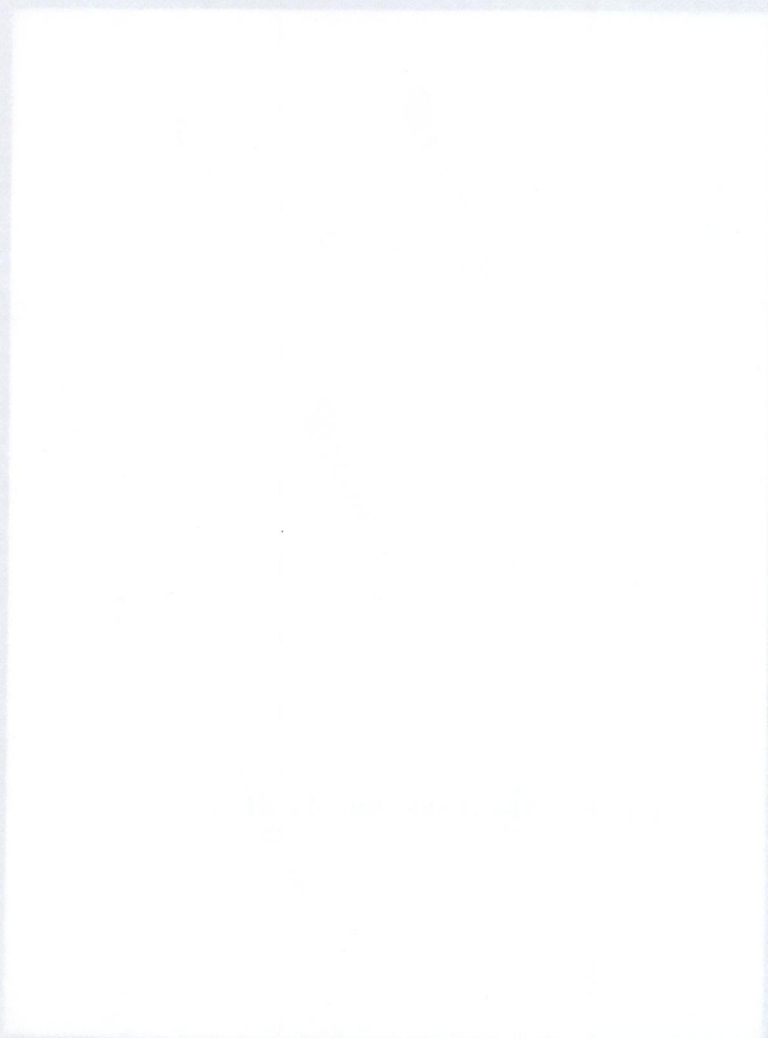




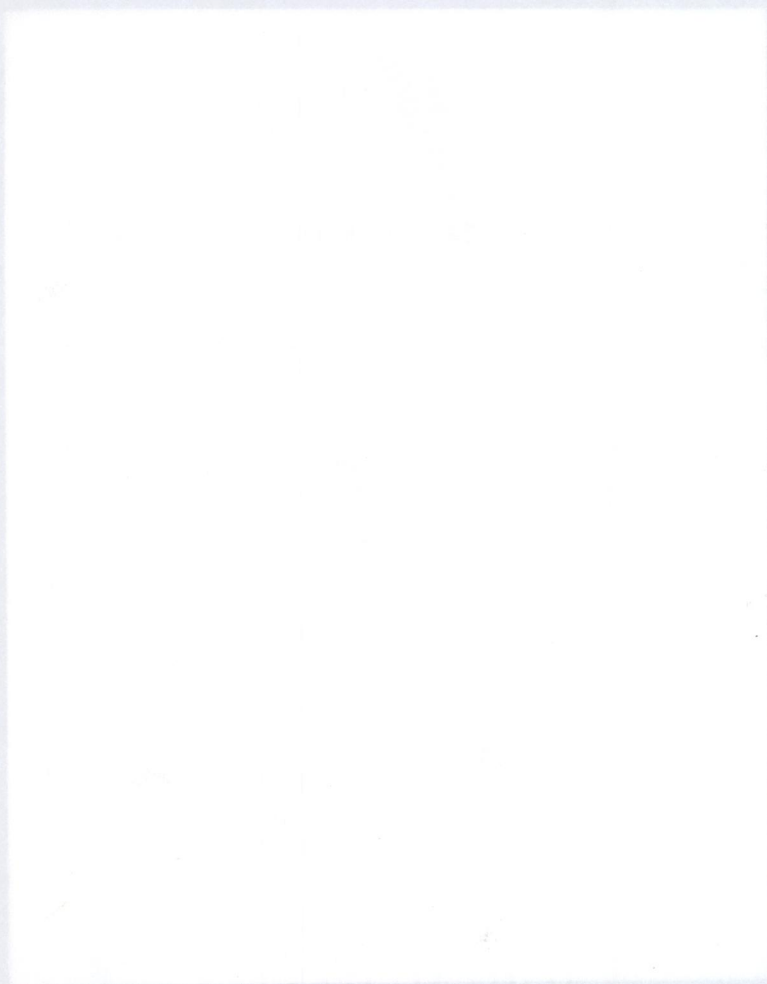


Fig. 10 - Jeff Koons

**Bourgeois Bust**, Jeff and Ilona, 1991, Marble

Collection Jakis Dannou Athens







These and other short interpretations of the artists in the show are for the most part only superficial projections of Deitch's ideas on artists works, but there is, in the catalogue essay, an underlying recognition of some ungraspable connection between these artists and Deitch's post-human theory. Certain terms used by Deitch are more interesting pointers as to what "Post-Human" is beginning to mean. In particular he mentions 'Dislocated' and "Disconnected emotions"<sup>13</sup> by which, I believe, he means an element of emotional content in the work which does not correspond to a 'natural' view of emotional responses. This he sees as caused by the gap between the artificial reality of our technological society with its overwhelming hypereality and our preconceived notions of natural self and identity. That is that these artists are finding it more and more difficult to have faith in emotional responses since so much, if not all, of the things we respond to are artificial constructs, and contemporary society is increasingly aware of the artificiality of these constructs. These constructs he outlines as the "Multiplicity of reality models"<sup>14</sup> in which television and the publishing and media industries subsume our psyches. These 'dislocated emotions' may, in Deitch's terms, lead to "a new moral vision"<sup>15</sup> which society needs to create in order to deal with a Post-Human society.



It is dubious to consider Hirst, among others, as intimating 'a new moral vision' but certainly Hirst's morality does not correspond with the commonly held edicts of right and wrong, he seems to reside more in a position of moral uncertainty, he is in a world where good/bad, right/wrong are interchangeable terms, where individuals cannot divide themselves up as good or bad. These dualistic terms do not correspond to the "Multiplicity of reality"<sup>15</sup> in which "Everything exists simultaneously"<sup>16</sup>.

## 2. TOWARDS A HISTORY

I am going to die and I want to live forever. I can't escape the fact and I can't let go of the desire, its probably caused by images ..... magazines, TV, advertising, shop windows, beautiful people, clothes. Images can live forever and we are constantly being convinced that they are real<sup>17</sup>.

This statement by Hirst relates clearly to ideas projected by Deitch, particularly corresponds to the multiple 'reality' of the media which saturates everyday life. We are repeatedly confronted by images of 'perfected' lifestyles and ideal role models, these images are reproduced in everlasting mediums, video, photography, they are a form of hyperreality which instigates desires which we cannot fulfil.



Another connection between Hirst and Deitch's ideas is seen in the series of medicine cabinet pieces. One of which was included in Post-Human. Each piece is the same size 54" x 40" x 9" and these can be grouped into two basic categories, containing old drugs or new drugs.

The drugs are arranged, according to Hirst, as they would be in a pharmacy. There are no specific interpretations possible for the pieces of course, and Hirst wants the viewers to 'implicate'<sup>18</sup> themselves when they read the pieces - Iwona Blazovich termed them 'a form of modern voodoo'<sup>19</sup>. Hirst maintained them as a metaphor for the human body, or power structure, or even a comment on capitalism or consumerism<sup>20</sup>. Either way the pieces remind one of our own chemical make up and how easily it is altered through modern medicine or narcotics. The medicine cabinet piece "I wanna be me" (Fig. 11) and its naive title reminds one of the disappearing notion of the 'true self' in this Post-Human society, and how we ourselves confuse and alter our identity through our consumption of everything from the media to pharmaceuticals to cosmetics etc.

Other works by Hirst enter directly into this Post-Human dialogue, specifically "Sometimes I avoid People". Its industrial qualities and proposed isolation techniques defines the body as chemical organism independent of nature.



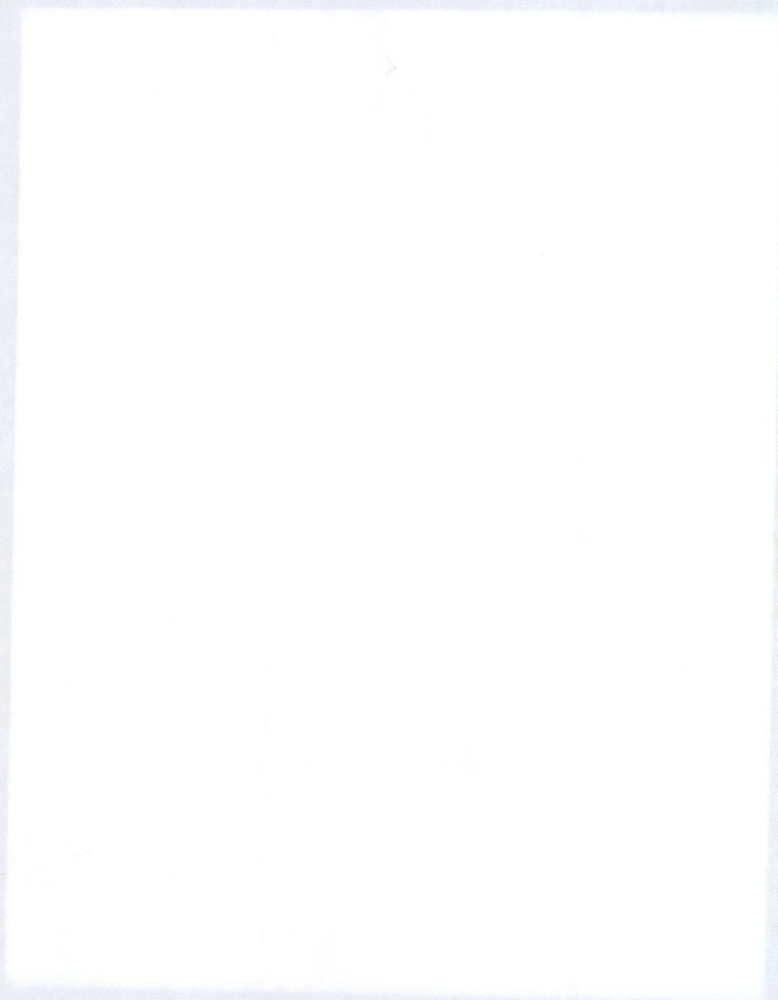
One installation piece not yet exhibited, although seen in the Channel 4 documentary, is, again easily connected to Deitch's ideas of an 'Artificial Nature'. "Lets eat out today" consists of a two cube steel and glass tank (very similar to the one used in "A Thousand Years"), on one side of the box there is a white plastic garden table and accompanying chains, the other side contains the accoutrements of the modern family barbecue set.





Fig. 11 - Damien Hirst  
**I Wanna Be Me**, 1990-1991,  
Private Collection.







The piece appears to locate the gap between a traditional family activity and the blatant artificiality of the products and manner in which we perform the act of the barbecue.

In some ways these ideas and interpretations are obvious connections to the generalities of the Post-Human discourse. It is when Deitch tries to identify a "New figurative art"<sub>21</sub> in this group of artists and very briefly hints at a potential historical background to this new 'movement' that we can envisage a more significant relationship between Hirst and this international group of artists.

In Post Human I try to identify a new type of figurative that is emerging in Europe, America and Japan<sub>22</sub>.

The new figurative art is emerging through the channel of conceptual, body and performance art of the late 60's and 70's rather than through the figurative painting tradition<sub>23</sub>.

Deitch particularly mentions Vito Acconci, Andy Warhol and Marcel Duchamp as being the precursors to this new aspect of conceptual art<sub>24</sub>. Concerning Vito Acconci, he states that Acconci; for example,

.... represents both ultimate fulfilment of modernist unrestrained individualism as well as the undermining of the Utopian modern dream. It is both the final phase of the progression of modern models of self construction and the beginnings of a search for a new postmodern construction of personality<sub>25</sub>.







### 3. DUCHAMP, ACCONCI AND HIRST, CORPORALITY AND DOUBT

Robert Pincus Witten defined Acconci's performances as a fusion of the minimalist position in sculpture, with the late sexual works of Duchamp, such as 'Etant Donnees', and 'Wedge of Chastity', (Fig. 12 and 13). What is particularly striking about Duchamp's later works is the dialogue between blatant sexuality and the viewers intellectual response<sup>27</sup>. Duchamp brought the body back into the conceptual discussion. Certainly the voyeuristic element of 'Etant Donnees' engages the viewer in a way that their response, to the prone female figure seen through a hole in an old wooden door, is strewn with questions about the artist/viewer relationship in the context of sexual representation.

It is in the same way that Acconci's introduces his body and his sexual desires into the formally gridlocked structure of minimalism. A tentative example of this is the installation "Levelling" (Sonnaberd Gallery, New York, January 1975).

The three rooms function as the three conventional kinds of words: a 'place' room ("roads have been made of wood rope and cable diagonally crossing the space) a 'thing' room (boxes hanging from dropped ceilings). A 'person' room (stalls allotting personal spaces along a wall). In each room coloured spotlights and slide projections range over constructions finding and making a person place. There's a four channel audio-tape; a control voice sets up a category of knowledge, a category of meaning-voice, then skips from room to room, taking on roles ..... each space in terms of the particular kind of knowledge. The control voice, in turn rejects each category and replaces it with another<sup>28</sup>.





Fig. 12 - Marcel Duchamp  
**Etant Donnees**, 1946-1966,  
Philadelphia Museum of Art.



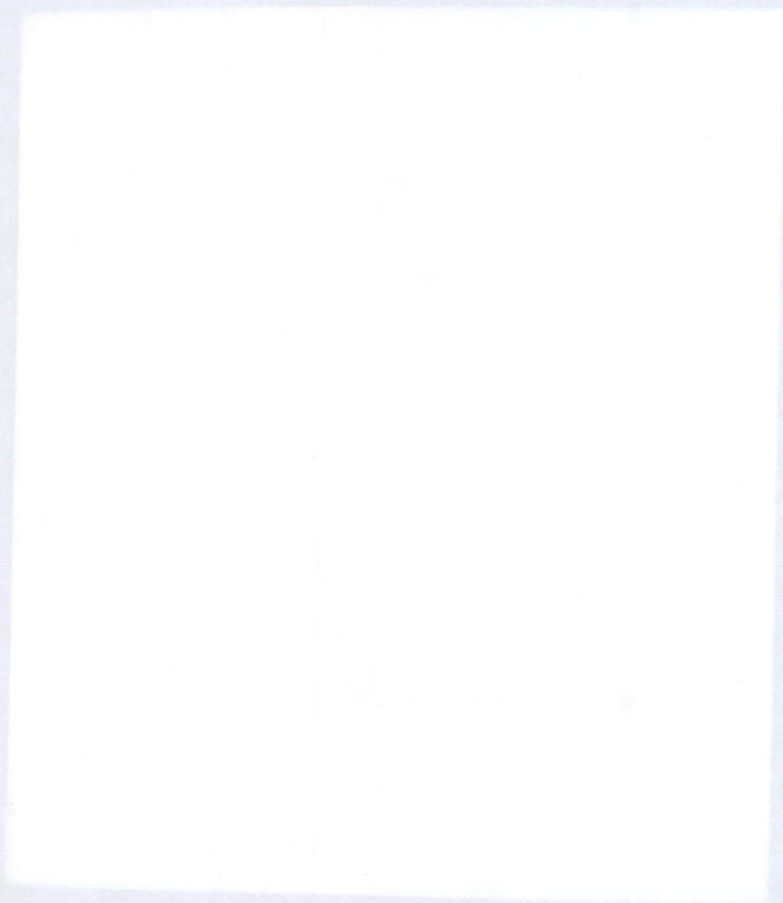






Fig. 13 - Marcel Duchamp  
**Wedge of Chastity**, 1954,  
Collection, Dieter & Miriam Keller, Bader-Bader.





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This minimal division of space overlayed with the whisperings and shadows of corporality emphasises Acconci's connection to minimalism as well as his desire to find the body amongst all this abstracted space and rigid form. Similarly Hirst places both live butterflies and flies, as well as preserved fish, in minimal Judd like structures. The striking images that result are the product of this juxtaposition of obvious visceral corporality in simple clear forms. This is only one obvious relationship between these artists. What is more interesting is the desire projected by these artists to implicate the viewer in the proceedings of the installation/performance. There is also the self conscious doubt ever present in these artists.

The way in which Acconci's involvement of the viewer/audience closely relates to Duchamp's 'Etant Donnees' is seen in the performance 'Seed Bed' (Sonnabend Gallery, New York June 1972). In this piece Acconci lay beneath a sloping platform at one end of the Gallery space, he invented sexual fantasies about the person walking above him while continuously masturbating, the person above him could listen to Acconci's fantasies as they were amplified from beneath the floor.

The viewer entering the gallery walks across the floor and almost without thinking about it up the ramp. The viewer hears my voice come up from below .... the person to my left I'm doing this to you now .... I'm touching your hair .... I'm running my hand down your back .... I'm touching your ass .....<sup>29</sup>



Here Acconci, though invisible from the audience, has dragged them into his fantasies his language of sexual desire, yet only manages to emphasise the distance between fantasy and reality. In a similar yet more subtle way, Hirst implicates the viewer, in "The Acquired Inability to Escape" (Fig. 14). The viewers of this piece almost compulsively imagines how they could fit themselves in the constricting glass tank, in the stale and repressive atmosphere of utilitarian furniture and full ashtrays. In both works there is a physical division between viewer and subject, but there are forces and devices - Acconci's voice, Hirst's furniture - which compel the viewer to attempt to enter the world of the artist, but this entry is refused, is perhaps impossible.

How is this connected to Deitch's notions of a "search for a new post-modern construction of personality"? Both artists through their work and related discussions have outlined how doubt and lack of solid belief systems are a conscious element of their art production. It is this aspect of their work that I believe addresses Deitch's theories, particularly in relation to his belief that;

Patterns of thinking are becoming less rational. With the collapse of the modern era's hierarchical belief systems and their replacement by multifaceted alternatives<sub>30</sub>.

Similarly Acconci asserts that for him the difference between art and politics (and other structured belief systems) is that;





Fig. 14 - Damien Hirst  
**The Acquired Inability to Escape, 1991**  
Jay Jopling, London.







Politics in order for it to sustain itself as a system is almost doomed to give answers; it has to keep itself going and what art can do is constantly be saying "well what if" ..... or "what if this" .....<sup>31</sup>.

Acconci's awareness of the questioning, supposing aspect of art can be seen as escalating through the 80's and 90's to the point where ideologies and belief systems have collapsed beneath the weight of their own structures, as is so clearly outlined in Deitch's Post-Human essay. This has left artists, like Hirst, in the position where they see art practise as an impossible pursuit to fulfil desires. It is naive to believe that Hirst or Acconci are dealing with anything startling or new when they confirm their lack of belief in the inability of language to communicate, or for people to become one, or for anyone to fully understand meaning. Duchamp while still involved with the "Dada" movement said that;

Each word I say is stupid and false<sup>32</sup>.

Duchamp's life's work continually revolved around rebellious irrationalities and absurdities. His work parodies art conventions and beliefs. His use of the ready made shocked the art establishment of the academy of his day, and has now infiltrated the contemporary art market. Hirst has placed himself in the 'popular' mainstream with his use of the ready-made, pre-fabricated object.



#### 4. THE READY-MADE, THROUGH TO WARHOL AND BACK AGAIN

That Mr. Mutt made the fountain with his own hands or not, is not important. He **CHOSE** it. He took a common object placed it so that its functional significance disappeared under the new title and the new point of view - he created for this object a new idea<sub>33</sub>.

Every ready-made object placed in a gallery has adopted this attitude since Duchamp's urinal first appeared in 1917. Carol P. James expands on the effect and role of the ready-made;

Its undeniably important role in the character of twentieth century art lies, or rather floats in the ready-made's, endless gaming on names on the text/object confrontation, on the clash of the literal and the metaphoric, on the irony of the artistic creation, through reiteration of the already used<sub>34</sub>.

James sees Duchamp's enterprise "As the attempt to bring the textual into the visual, to iterability or the delay"<sub>35</sub>. Correspondingly Duchamp did not see language as, "explaining subconscious thoughts", but rather creating, "thought by and after the word"<sub>36</sub>.

In line with this it is useful to consider the ready-made as a way of jumping one level of textual interpretation, which can avoid some of the subjective interference the hand of the artist inevitably makes. In this way elements of structural interpretation, which, through representation inevitably occur, will be reduced, though of course not obliterated. Since it is



impossible to say to what degree the structural limitations of the internal language which are responsible for making choices, distort any potential meaning.

Adding to these qualities of the ready-made and taking it into the contemporary scenario, a statement by the French critic Eric Troncy lends further relevant significance to the ready-made.

Objects taken from shops or everyday use are similarly transformed into art works at the cost of an eternal paralysis; they are only granted a place in the world of art on condition they remain implacably motionless on a shelf. The archaic quality of the work of art is all there; it is dead! all life has fled<sub>37</sub>.

Troncy, like Hirst, sees a primary condition of art to be the fact that it is intrinsically dead, and the ready-made acts as a pointer to this, emphasises this primary quality.

So much of twentieth century art practise can be seen as attempts to resuscitate art, to make art that is less about the reflection of life and closer to life, further from representation more in the 'real world'. If one wishes to enforce a history or tradition, on this aspect of art, you can trace a development throughout Europe and America which corresponds to this idea.

The Dadists first began to involve their bodies and objects from the real world into the art dialogue, when, on February 5, 1916 Hugo Ball, Jean Arp and others opened the doors to the Cabaret



Voltaire at No. 1 Spiegelgasse Zurich. It was a response to that most horrific manifestation of hierarchical belief systems, the World War<sub>37</sub>. The next major movement in this 'genre' can be seen as the Situationist International, formed in 1957 in Cosio d'Arroscia in northern Italy<sub>38</sub>. Their primary objectives concerned "The theory and or practical activity of constructing situations"<sub>39</sub>. The essay "Toward a Situationist International"<sub>40</sub> outlines Debord's proposal "To move in step with reality"<sub>41</sub> and the S.I.'s subsequent activities, pamphlets and slogans hoped to engage the public in their revolutionary spirit. Similar movements evolved across Europe and America, notably Fluxus and Arte Povera.

During the 60's and 70's Fluxus flourished in North America, predominantly New York. Large festivals were organized where the Fluxus trademark of the 'Happening' occurred, in which live, spontaneous acts involving 'body' and 'live' art attempted to bridge the gap between art and life<sub>42</sub>. The exhibitions of Arte Povera, though never quite as revolutionary or radical as S.I. or Fluxus, also perceived itself as taking art into the real world. This was neatly summed up by the predominant Arte Povera theorist Germano Celant, as "A movement along the parallel tracks of art and life in search of an intermediate valued"<sub>43</sub>. Joseph Beuys a figure involved in both Fluxus and Arte Povera, embodied the notion of art and life, his installations and performances, with their preoccupations with



intuitive processes hoped to evoke "Nature at its rawest .... to convey .... the fascinating aura of a new Being a new reality"<sup>44</sup>.

Predominantly this group of work has been termed Conceptual Art, because of its concerns with ideas and issues over beauty and aesthetics. There is nearly always a radical, revolutionary undertow to this work but each movement or individual has been subsumed in the commodity based art market, where Situationist postcards were bought at a vast rate at the ICA retrospective, and previously to that, appropriated by Malcolm McLaren for the purposes of the 'Cash from Chaos' credo of the punk movement in Britain<sup>45</sup>. Similarly small sketches from Beuys taken out of the context of his ideas and work were sold in the Anthony D'Offay gallery in London in 1989 for prices up to £5,500. The recent retrospective of Arte Povera has similarly turned their revolutionary stance into 'dead' art, as the Hayward Galleries museum like spaces take any life that was ever in them away and claims them as historical documents to the avant-garde.

In some ways Hirst's art, in his impotent attempts to "Make art alive" is recognizing the inevitable situation of the deadening effect of art production, and as he said he "enjoys" the fact that this does not stop him. It is plausible to connect Hirst with the summary history outlined above, specifically in line with his use of ready-made, live animals etc. but there is nothing of revolutionary political stance of Fluxus or S.I. in



Hirst's work. There is a common conceptual base however, in Hirst distrust of aesthetic choices<sup>46</sup>. His general attitude towards art production is more in line with Andy Warhol's conscious commodification of the art product and his camp nihilistic view to radicalism and politics.

In some ways Warhol's developments can actually be seen as a revision of experimental attempts to fuse art and life in that he relied almost solely on reproductive machine-based processes such as silk screens and film. But Warhol's revolution operated on an entirely different agenda, one of his few statements in relation to the upsurge of political activism of his age, was in response to the Vietnam war;

Well the reason I don't get involved in that is because I sort of believe in everything. One day I really believe in this, and the next day I believe in doing that. I believe in no war, and then I believe in war if you have to do it. I mean what can you do about it<sup>47</sup>.

Warhol's agenda is nihilistic, apolitical, similar in many ways to Hirst's refusal to accept dualities and his belief that "Everything exists simultaneously". Hirst's, like Warhol's, primary subject matter are things from the 'real world', appropriated and presented to "Create thought by and after the word". It is in a similar way that Jeff Koons presented his "New Hoover Convertible" (Fig. 15) and Haim Steinbach his "Supremely Black" (Fig. 16). These pieces have obvious relationships with Warhol's "Coca Cola Bottles" (Fig. 17).



Hirst seems less concerned directly with consumer culture, but employs the same methods to create discussion, and to make striking images.

This methodology is becoming increasingly international and popular. Its predecessors are not so easy to discern as its present day exponents emerge from such diverse backgrounds.

Perhaps the most effective way to describe or discuss this work is by letting it be seen. Michael Craig Martin a seminal figure in the British conceptual scene and Damien Hirst's tutor at Goldsmiths College in London and is now still promoting Hirst's work on his lecture tours<sup>48</sup>. Craig Martin sees much of this conceptual art work as a form of dialogue onto itself, independent of constructed critical histories, a discourse of visual/textual image making<sup>49</sup>. I do not fully agree with Michael Craig Martin's assertion that these artists are independent of any particular critical discourse such as Marxism, Post-Structuralism, Feminism, Semiology or Psychology. It is more reasonable to consider these artists as being influenced by these theories, though not necessarily within the same specific dialogue.



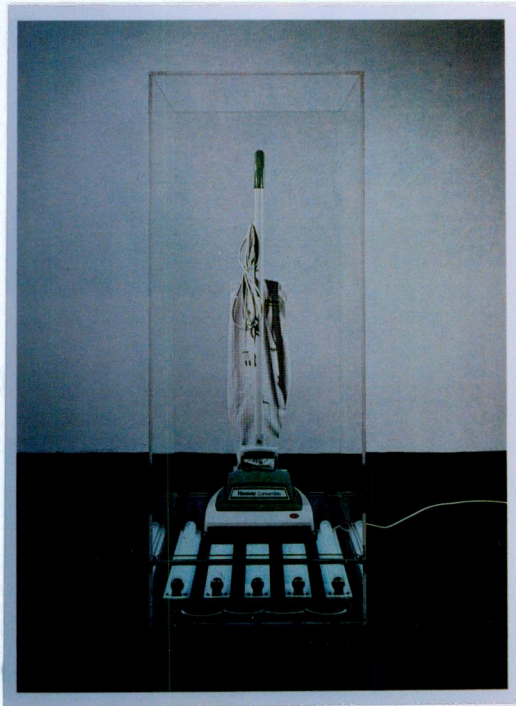
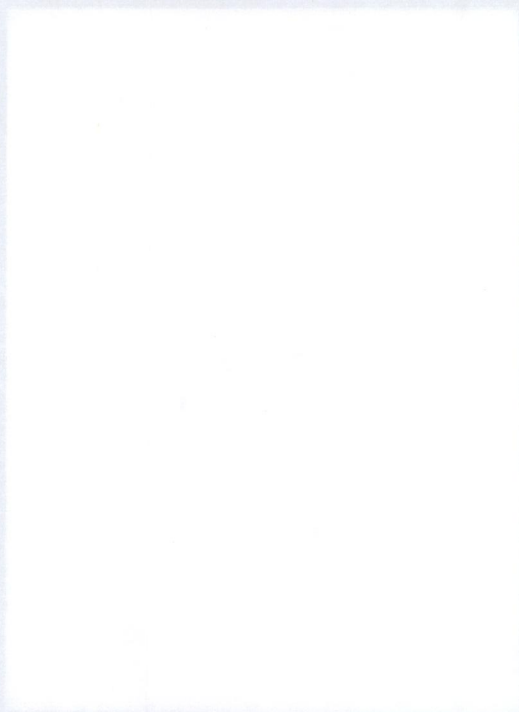


Fig. 15 - Jeff Koons  
**New Hoover Convertible**, 1980,  
Rubell Family Collections, New York.





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Fig. 16 - Haim Steinbach  
**Supremely Black #3**, 1985,  
Collection of the Artist.









Fig. 17 - Andy Warhol  
**Coca Cola Bottles, 1963**  
Sondheim Collection.







In response to this, the following pages will show a series of works which I believe to be part of this dialogue in a Post-Human world. Hopefully these images will help to identify this dialogue. Also I believe it is necessary to intercut the images with extracts from critical texts and discussions with artists in this area, or those who may be relevant to this dialogue. My intention is to induce an interplay between ideas presented in text, and certain conceptual visual images. I do not consider the possible ensuing connections to be the specific construction of a cause and effect relationship between the text and images, but, as is discussed in the introduction, it is simply the floating of ideas in a constellation, a matrix.



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### CHAPTER 3

#### FURTHER NON-CONCLUSIONS, END POINTS AND OPEN SPACES



The canvas is an everyday object on the same plane as this chair or this poster.

Andy Warhol (2, p. 109)

Reality has no need of an intermediary, it is necessary only to isolate it from the surroundings, transfer it to the canvas.

Andy Warhol (2, p. 110)



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SMITH BOOK



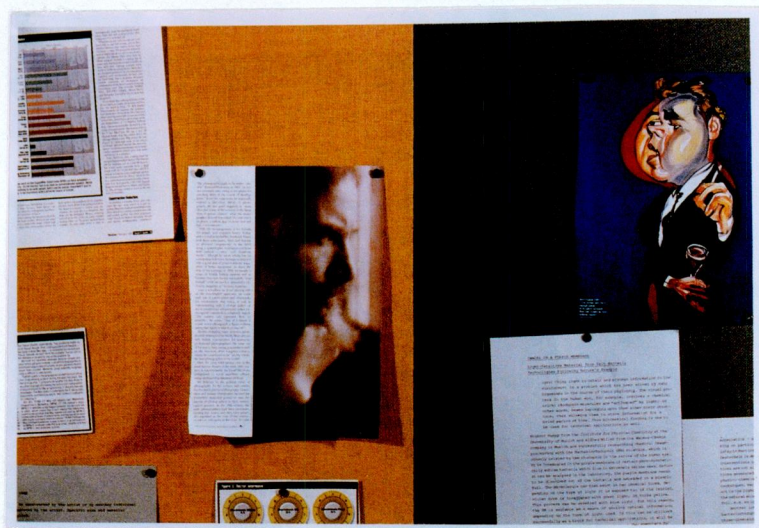


Fig. 18 - Liam Gillick  
Pinboard Project (detail), 1992.







And so art is everywhere, since artifice is at the heart of reality. And so art is dead, not only because reality itself, entirely impregnated by an aesthetic which is inseparable from its own structure, has been confused with its own image.

Jean Baudrillard (I, pp. 151-152).

"The truth of the matter is that social production is purely and simply desiring production itself under determinate conditions ..... There is only desire and the social, nothing else".

Gilles Deleuze & Felix Guattari, (10, pp. 26-29)





Fig. 19 - Robert Gober  
**Untitled**, 1991,  
Paula Copper Gallery, New York.







If totalization no longer has any meaning, it is not because the infiniteness of the field cannot be covered by a finite glance or a finite discourse, but because the nature of this field - that is language and a finite language - excludes totalization.

Jacques Derrida (4, p. 289)

..... order is never more than a particular state of disorder.

Lucrece (8, p. 87)

Didacticism, rhetoric, dogmatism of any kind no longer command attentions.

Julia Kristeva (9, p. 92)



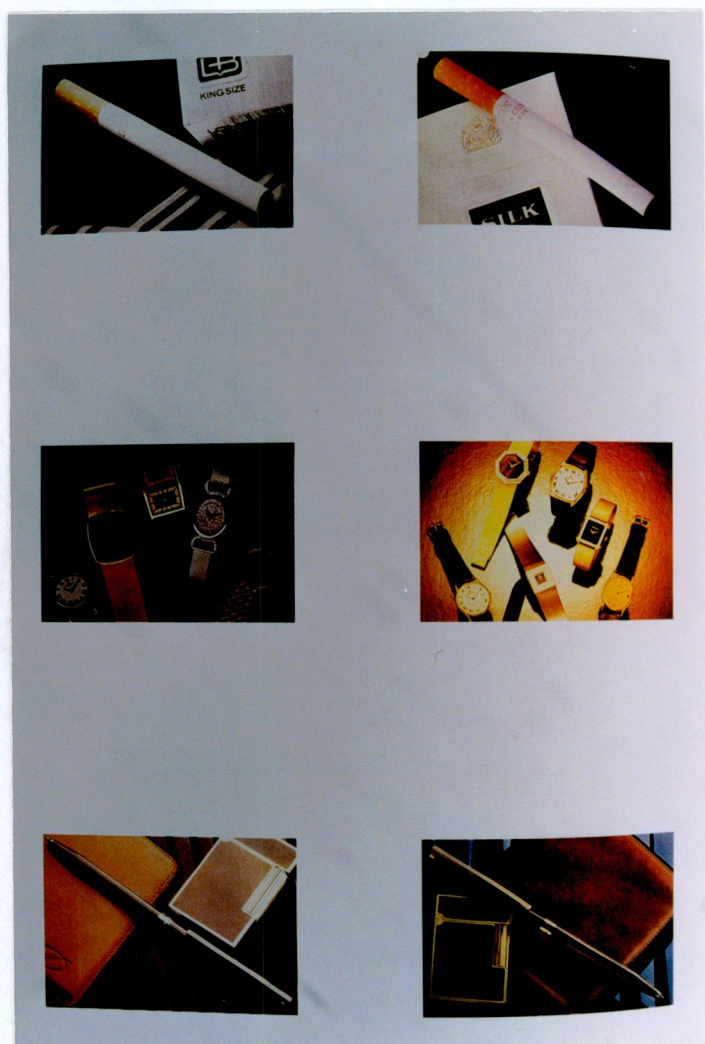
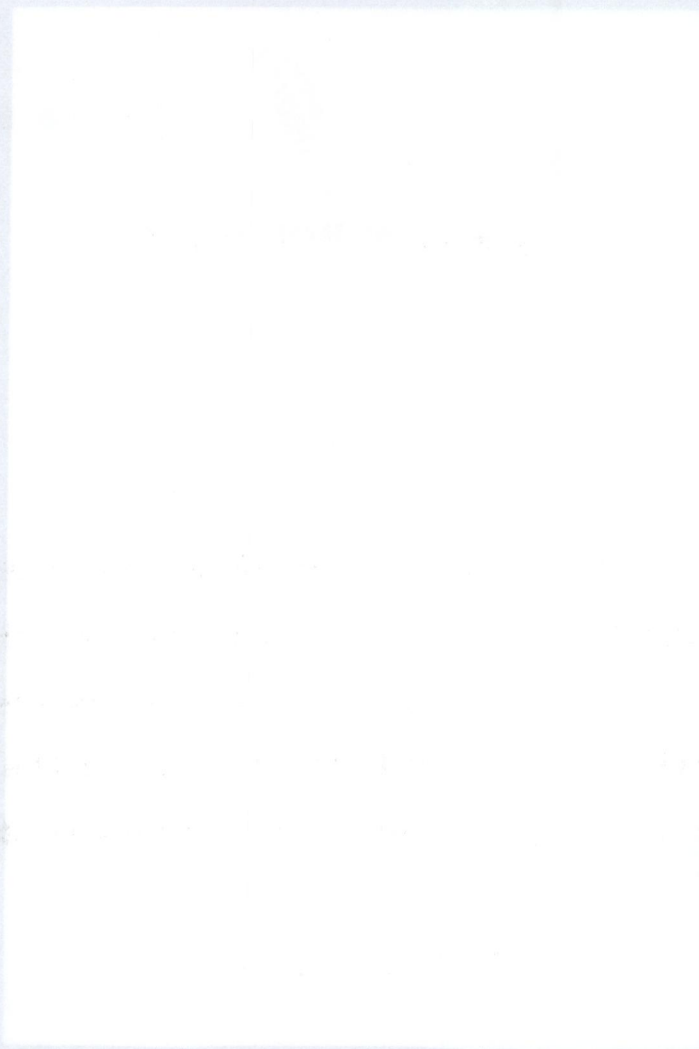


Fig. 20 - Richard Prince  
**Untitled (Cigarettes), 1991**  
**Untitled (Watches), 1978**  
**Untitled (Pens), 1978**







"Defeat is inevitable but at least you're absorbed".

Richard Prince (7, p. 135)

"We have no language - no syntax and no lexicon which is foreign to this history\*, we can pronounce not a single destructive proposition which has not already had to slip into the form, the logic, and the implicit postulations of precisely what it seeks to contend".

Jacques Derrida (4, pp. 280, 281)

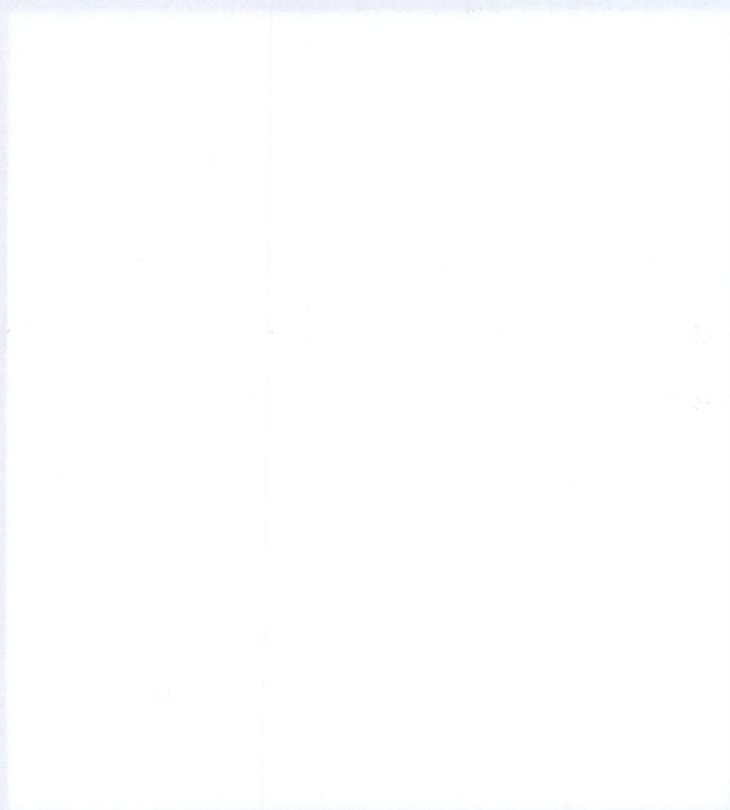
\* The history of metaphysics and the history of the deconstruction of metaphysics.





Fig. 21 - Richard Prince  
Untitled, (no further information available)







..... whatever way you turn, you have not even started thinking.

Antonin Artaud (4, p. 89)

It's always difficult especially at first, to disbelieve in what you do.

Richard Prince (5, p. 124)

The position of art is a denial of the position of discourse.

Jean Francois Lyotard (6, p. 13)





Fig. 22 - Marcel Duchamp  
**Fountain**, 1917, New York,  
Private Collection







..... it is not ideology itself which is untrue but rather it pretension to correspond with reality.

Theodore Adorno (3, p. 153)

..... if we could ever become reconciled to the idea that most of reality is indifferent to our description of it, and that the human self is created by the use of a vocabulary rather than being adequately or inadequately expressed in a vocabulary, then we should have at last assimilated what was true in the romantic idea that truth is made rather than found.

Richard Rorty (3, p. 7)





Fig. 23 - Andy Warhol  
**Ambulance Disaster, 1963**  
The Menil Collection, Houston.







We live less like users than readers and selectors, reading cells. But nevertheless by the same token you are constantly selected and tested by the medium itself.

Jean Baudrillard (1, p. 21)

..... reality no longer has the time, to take on the appearance of reality. It no longer even surpasses fiction: it captures every dream even before it takes on the appearance of a dream.

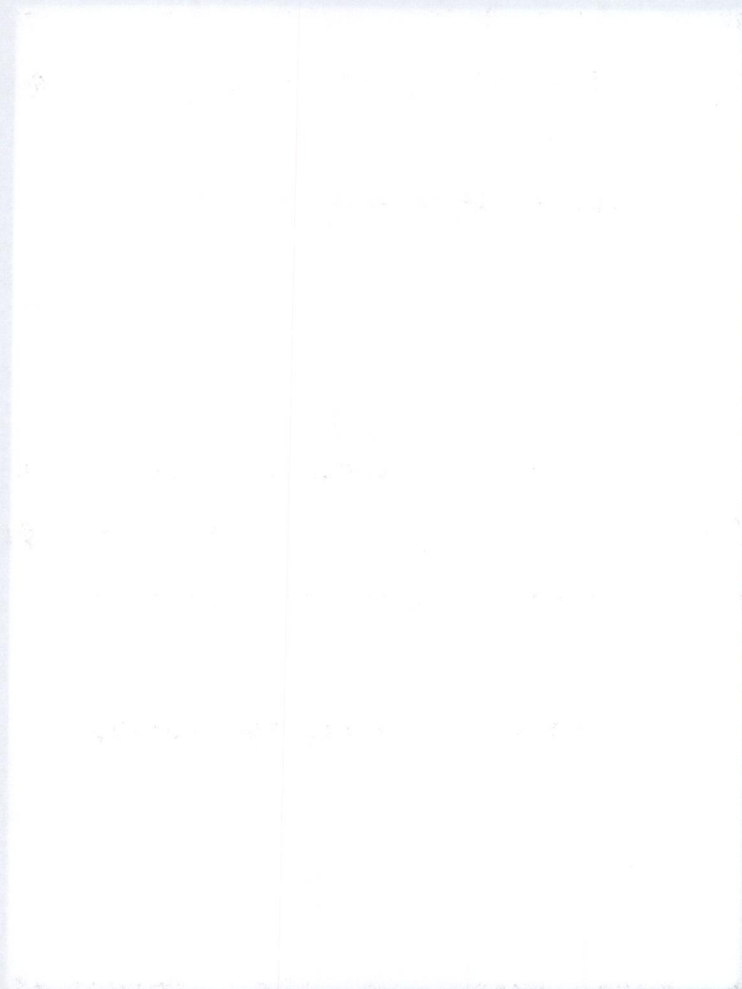
Jean Baudrillard (1, p. 152).





Fig. 24 - Karen Kilimnick  
Switzerland, The Pink Panther & Peter Sellers  
& Boris & Natasha in Siberia, 1991,  
FAE Musee d'Art Contemporain.







Any sentence is both syntax and non-sentence,  
normative unicity and disorderly multiplicity.

Roland Barthes (10, pp. 218-219)

We need a visible past, a visible continuum, a visible  
myth of origin to reassure us as to our ends, since  
ultimately we have never believed in them.

Jean Baudrillard (1, pp. 19-20)

Of the same order as the impossibility of  
rediscovering an absolute level of the real, is the  
impossibility of staging an illusion. Illusion is no  
longer possible because the real is no longer  
possible.

Jean Baudrillard (1, p. 38)





Fig. 25 - Thomas Ruff

**Portrait, 1988**

Galerie Johnen and Schottle, Cologne.







Speech is free perhaps, but I am less free than before. I no longer succeed in knowing what I want, the space is so saturated, the pressure so great from all who want to make themselves heard.

Jean Baudrillard (11, p. 132)



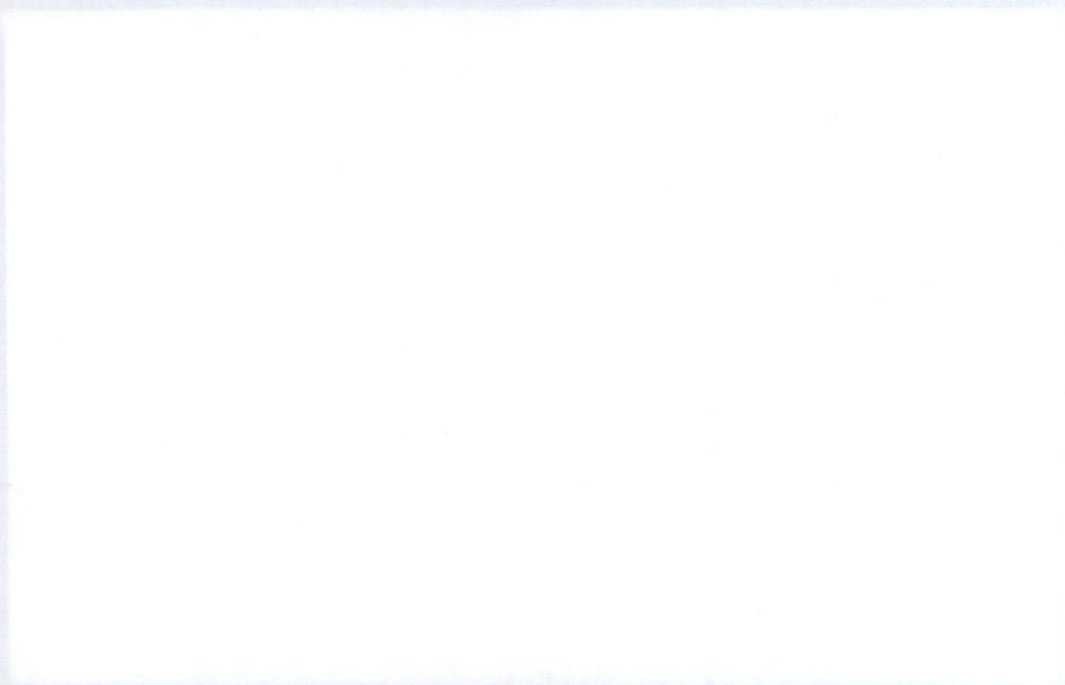
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Fig. 26 - Jeffery Deitch and Dan Friedman  
**Ivana Trump Before and After Plastic Surgery,**  
Part of Post-Human Catalogue.





SECRET

1. The purpose of this document is to provide information on the status of the project. The project is currently in the planning stage and is expected to be completed by the end of the year. The project is being managed by the Project Manager and is being funded by the Department of Defense.



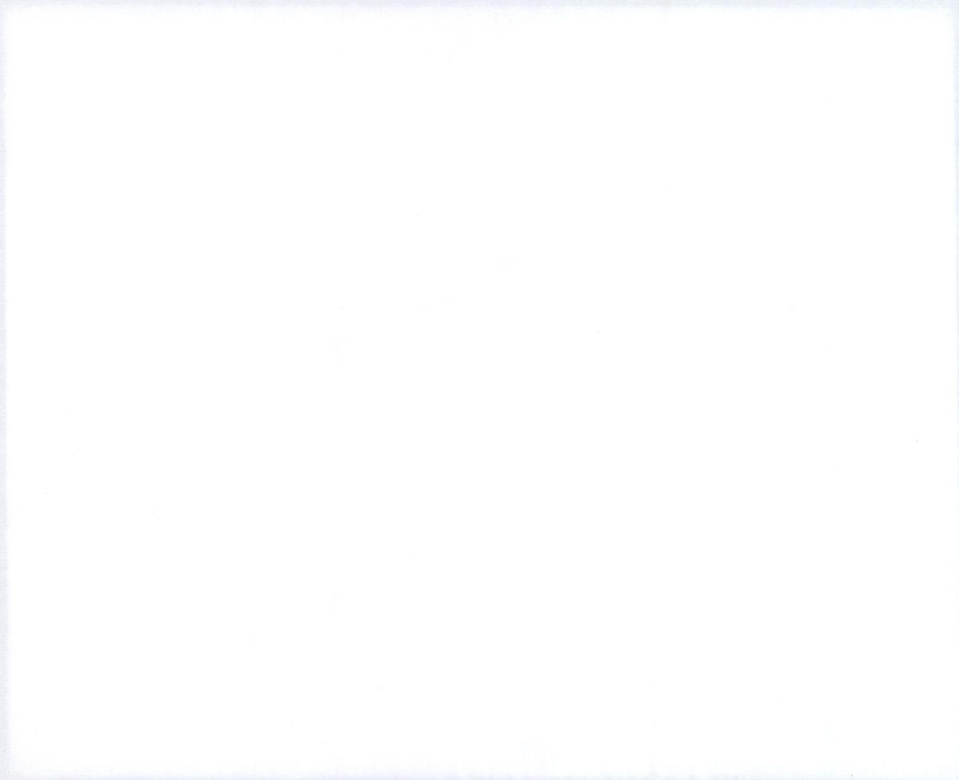


Fig. 27 - John M. Armleder

**Model 346, Brooks Brothers Three-Piece Suit, 1988**

John Gibson Gallery, New York.





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Fig. 28 - Mike Kelley, Installation View  
**Dialogue No. 4 (Written on the Wind)**, 1991  
Decke, Pluschtierre, Kasattenspider.







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