T 1528

NC 0020820 5

National College of Art and Design,
Faculty of Fine Art,
Department of Sculpture,

Christian Boltanski

by
Orna Bradshaw

Submitted to the Faculty of History of Art and Design
and Complimentary Studies in Candidacy
for the Degree of Bachelor of Fine Art, 1995

Acknowledgements: I would like to thank Naoimh O'Sullivan for her assistence while writing this thesis.

Table of Contents :

Introduction

Chapter One: A brief conventional history of photography

Chapter Two: A diverse history of photography

Chapter Three: The social content of Boltanski's archive

Chapter Four : Photgraphy and Eugenics

Chapter Five : The effect of Eugenic Theory.

Conclusion.

List of Plates:

Plate # 1 : *Research and presentation of everything that remains of my childhood 1944 -1950*

Plate # 2 : *Reconstruction of an accident that hasn't happened yet and in which I meet my death.*

Plate # 3 Francis Galton's " Composite Portraiture"

Plate # 4 Model Types

Plate # 5 *The sixty two members of the Mickey Mouse Club 1955*

Plate # 6 *Ten photographic images of Christian Boltanski 1946-1964*

Plate # 7 *Lessons in Darkness*

Introduction

To set the context for an inquiry into the work of Christian Boltanski I would like to give some background information on the artist. However, this is impossible as all traces of his identity have been obliterated within his work;

> A large part of my activity has to do with the idea of biography, but biography that is totally false.[1]
> (Fleischer,1988, pg.6)

Within this context, I could form an inquiry into the social and private identity of Christian Boltanski. But Boltanski has not constructed a 'false identity', he has eradicated his identity. He is a non-person;

> I destroyed myself and I killed myself and now I am only an artist. I am only an image.
> (Bradley, 1994, pg.1)

Therefore I could investigate the 'image' of Christian Boltanski, the 'persona'. But this would also be a pointless exercise as Boltanski does not have a 'persona'. He simply does not exist;

> You find this throughout my life : The non-existence of the person in question. The more people speak of Christian Boltanski, the less he exists.
> (Gumpart, 1994, pg.12)

So what can I say about a non-existing person? The more I say about Boltanski the less he exists. Hence the first tangible question must be how? This is the contradiction in Boltanski's work, the non-existence of the artist himself. How and in what sense does he cease to exist? How is this possible? And what is the reason for such activity?

---

[1] Boltanski's English is poor.

Although Boltanski's work suggests linking threads, as is the assumption of any art practice, they are more in the form of contradiction than causality. To classify and define a direct line between cause and effect, the how and the why, is troublesome. It is this procedure that Boltanski undermines. Whenever one attempts to address an issue within his work, it is contradicted. To approach his work in chronological order or under a given 'theme' or 'category' is impossible. According to Lynn Gumpart;

> Fact and fiction are further confused by his uncanny ability to repeat himself almost verbatim. In many interviews he has given over the last twenty years, he has repeated practically word for-word the same examples or metaphors to illustrate stories that have become almost legendary. Spinning an engaging tale out of facts, half-truths, and falsehoods he has created an "official" biography for himself.
> (Gumpart, 1994, pg. 6)

To understand this process, and the artist's motives, the obvious method of investigation is one of interpretation. This involves looking at the work of Boltanski, describing the contents and attempting to define the concepts intended by the artist. But to confront Christian Boltanski's work directly is misleading. The contents are deceptive, designed to give false interpretation. Instead, in order to investigate the content and meaning, of Christian Boltanskis work, I shall digress from the work of the artist.

In the nullification of ‘Christian Boltanski’, Boltanski uses one main device - the photograph. In an attempt to understand the processes at work within the artists work, and his motives I shall construct a view of photographic practices that are contained within his work. Boltanski’s work is an accumulation of photography that “encompasses an entire social terrain.” (Sekula, 1989, pg.327.)

In his earlier work Boltanski uses photography to record and document his own biography, acting as an archeologist, constructing an archive of his entire life. But within this archive he has appropriated photography from diverse sources. He makes no attempt to caption and identify these images. The same photograph often reappears within a different chronological or narrative context, often to illustrate stories from his past. In this way he manages to further confuse fact and fiction.

In an attempt to retrieve the photographic images from Boltanskis work and to assign a logical order to these images, I shall take them out of their established position, as works of art, to place them within a wider social context, to gain a larger narrative meaning;

> Boltanski pursues anti-logical methods in an attempt to dismantle the codifications of art. Believing in the continuum between diverse elements he chips away at, and attempts to destroyed, the separate structures of the context of "art", avoiding any orderly, schematic, reductive methods extolled by the artistic establishment.
> (Gumpart, 1994, pg.12)

The reason for Boltanski’s obliteration of self, with the use of photography, cannot be grasped within the conventions of artistic meaning, which rests on the image alone. For a clearer understanding we must look at the photographic image, outside the image itself. Our understanding must be a reflection on photography’s origin and historical context.

> Photographic meaning is always the result of socially and historically specific functions which the photograph serves in the course of its applications by the various institutions and practices which put it to use.
> (Green, 1985, pg .3)

I shall begin by outlining the history of photography as an art form, to demonstrate how the photograph has been detached from a larger meaning, offering only limited interpretation of its original historical funtions. In light of this the remaining three chapters shall be an attempt to retrieve and understand photographic meaning, and hence the reason for the attempted denial of photography's social functions within artistic practices. Ultimately, I hope to discover the reason for Boltanski's dissapearence.

Chapter One : A conventional history of photography.

The traditional history of photography involved photography's incorporation into the art museum and its approval by those whose profession it is to preserve art. Through this process it was endowed with the status of the art object and all that it conveyed. According to Walter Benjamin this was impossible as the very nature of the photograph was in opposition to that of traditional art;

> The theoreticians of photography sought to grapple for almost 100 years, without the smallest success, for they undertook tolegitimise the photograph before the very tribunal it was in he process of overturning (Benjamin, 1979, pg 62.)

Traditional art rested on its claims to authenticity, uniqueness and durability, where as photography was constituted by its transience and reproducibility;

> The stripping bare of the object, the destruction of the aura, is the mark of a perception whose sense of sameness of things has grown to the point where even the singular, the unique is divested of its uniqueness by its reproduction.
> (Benjamin,1979, pg 62)

The status of the art object in the aftermath of the industrial revolution, the age of mechanical reproduction, was under treat from both economic, political and philosophical forces which attacked the preservation of a traditional mode of artistic production. Photography, apart from being a treat to the unique virtue of traditional painting and other art forms, also played a crucial role within political and economic activity which art production resisted. In reaction to these various social forces, the art object became enclosed in a self-referential field of purely aesthetic vision, internalised within the art museum.

Photography's incorporation into the art museum involved resting it from its role within political and economic activity and investing it with an entirely new meaning. The emphises was on the expression of unique genius, in the individual artist, through the photographic medium. In order for photography to gain the status of art it had to be gradually reconstituted on this bases through the museum.

This took place in America. MoMA, New York, was the first museum ever to have a full time photography department. Beaumont Newhall, MoMA's first curator of photography, appointed in1940, was responsible for the assimilation of photography into the museum. This involved revamping older notions of print connoisseurship, transposing the ordering categories of art history to a new register and confirming the workaday photographer as a creative artist. Newhalls '*History of photography*', 1949, remains one of the most comprehensive, influential texts on photography today. But, according to Lewis Mumford, in a review on his text at the time of publication;

> What is lacking at present is a weighing and an assessment of photography in terms of pure aesthetic merit.
> (Mumford in Philips, 1982, pg.22)

It was John Szarkowski, who took over as curator of MoMA's department of photography in 1962, who contrived a fundamental modernist position for photography. By constructing it ontologically as a medium of subjectivity he duplicated in nearly every respect theories of modernist autonomy articulated in this century for painting;

> During photograph's first century it was generally understood that what photography did best was describe things: their shapes, textures, situations and relationships. The highest virtues of such photography were clarity of information.
> (Szarkowski in Philips, 1982, pg.35)

What Szarkowski is suggesting is the 'narrative poverty' of photography. He promotes the idea of self-sufficiency for the photograph, that the image does not need a supplement beyond the frame. In this way photography can be claimed to produce its own, inherently modernist "New pictorial vocabulary". The assumption is,

> Nobody is speaking, it is reality itself that speaks.
> (Szarkowski in Philips.1982, pg.39.)

In this way Szarkowski manages to define for the photograph its own language resting on its ability to reproduce an independent, image of reality. Hence, photography could be incorporated into the self-enclosed, self-referential field of pure aestheticism that defined modernism. The image of photography as an art practise was established. The photograph was divested of any larger social meaning or content and became an independent practise. This allowed the photograph to act with even more influence within a diverse range of social activity. Roland Barthes discusses the understanding of the photographic message within society in relation to its status as an art object, in terms of a "denoted" message;

> The photograph, professing to be a mechanical analogue of reality, its 'denoted' or first order message completely fills its substance and leaves no space for the development of a 'connoted' or second order message.
> (Barthes, 1982, pg 185.)

Barthes defines the photograph according to its ideological understanding. Although the image is not reality itself, it is a perfect analogical representation of reality. It is this analogical perfection which defines the photograph. This is the special status of the photographic message. It is a "message without a code". The message being denoted without connotation.

> The purely 'denotative' status of photography, the perfection and plenitude of its analogy, in short its 'objectivity' has every chance of being mythical.
> (Barthes, 1982, pg.189.)

Barthes definition of photography as distinguished from other structures of information is its inability to suggest anything beyond pure depiction, echoes Szarkowski's narrative poverty;

> As images, the photograph is shockingly direct and at the same time mysterious, elliptical and fragmentary, reproducing the texture of experience without meaning.
> (Szarkowski in Philips, 1982, pg.41)

It is the meaningless contents of the photograph that allow its manipulation. To summerize this history of photography, the photograph is an object that has been chosen by Beaumont Newhall, reconstructed as a medium of self-expression and treated to professional standards. It was then invested with aesthetic qualities by Szarkowski and defined according to ideological norms by Roland Barthes. All of which are so many factors of connotation. The photographic connotation is not immediately grashable at the level of the image, this is what Barthes terms the photographic paradox;

> The photographic paradox can be seen as the co-existence of two messages, the one without a code, the photographic analogue, the other with a code, the ‘art’ or the treatment or the writing, or the rhetoric of the photograph.
> (Barthes, 1982, pg 125)

Using the connotations invested within the discipline of modern art, Boltanski presents his work to an unexpecting audience. In his first biographical piece, *Research and presentation of Everything that remains from my childhood, 1944-1950'*, (1968), Plate # 1. Boltanski uses photography to document and illustrate a period of time from his youth. Assembled in book format and distributed as mail art are nine photographs. Interpretated as denoted messages, what we receive are clear depictions of the artist's childhood: pictures of Boltanski as a young boy playing with his toys, his family on holiday, a class portrait of Christian at school, remains of his clothes, and his childhood bedroom. With these photographs we gain an insight into Boltanski's childhood through, “The texture of experience” of the young artist. The truth or falsehood of Boltanski's work is connotated by his assertion : “I am a liar, I can tell you I am liar and I lie a lot”.

Thus, how we interpret these images is disturbed by the suggestion or connotation that they might not be true. This is an associated meaning. This proves the assumption that how we view a photograph is dependent upon, “The treatment of the photograph”.

This definition of photography, within the framework of modern art facilitates Boltanskis aims in producing a non-person. But by suggesting that his biography is false Boltanski disrupts the logic of the framework in which the photographic image has been signified in art history and hence in contemporary culture. What results is a lack of definition. Boltanski’s biography becomes confused in donated and conotated messages.

The reason for Boltanskis obliteration of self cannot be grasped within the convention of artistic meaning. It has been necessary for Boltanski to decentre the assumed status of the photograph as the ultimate advocate of meaning. This is part of strategies adopted by Boltanski in order to 'dismantle the codifications of art', to promote the continuum between diverse elements opposing 'the schematic, reductive methods extolled by the artistic establishment.'

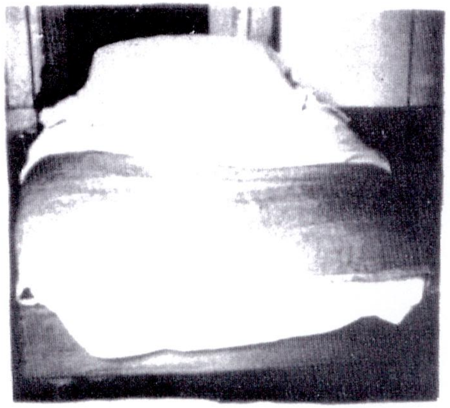
> Then, photographic images must be distinguished from the objects or the appearance of the objects to which they refer. Their comprehension as representations cannot be judged from the correlation with a reality of appearances but with regard to the functions they intended to facilitate and the objectives they serve in social activity.
> (Green, 1985, pg.6)

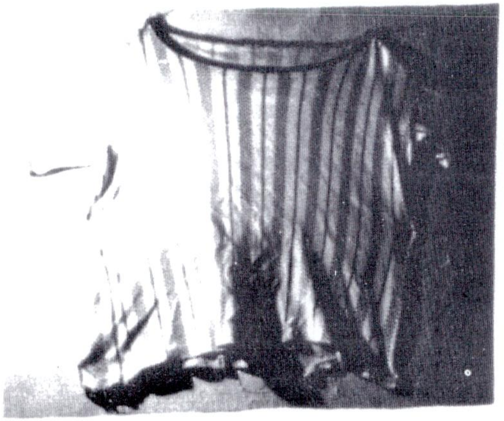
Within this context we gain a central motive of Boltanski's activity. He emphasises the limited interpretation available through categorisation. By determining a strict field of reference for an understanding, one gains only false interpretation. For a clearer understanding we must look at the various associated meanings of the photographic image, outside the image itself, and outside the strict discipline of art history. We must recover a non-traditional history of photography. To fully comprehend photographic representation and hence Boltanskis work .

> To understand the authority that began to accrue to photography it is essential to consider the functions which it came to serve across a range of scientific, academic and technical disciplines.
> (Green, 1985, pg.3)

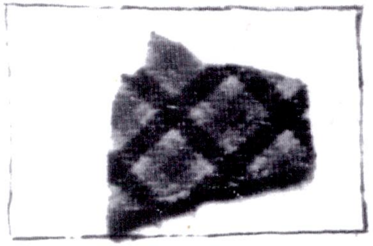
X Christian Boltanski

Christian Boltanski jouant aux cubes - 1946
Cubes de Christian Boltanski en 1949





Lit de Christian Boltanski - 1947-1950
Chemise de Christian Boltanski - Mars 1949



ristian oltanski-1949.

Morceau d'un pull-over porté par Christian Boltanski en 1949
Cheveux de Christian Boltanski - 1949

Chapter Two : A diverse history of photography.

The photograph is emblematic of the process of change. The history of photography is paralleled with the development of society throughout the last century. In his essay entitled "Veins of resemblance" (Green,1985,p.3), David Green traces the development of photography to its original production and usage in the nineteenth century, and draws comparisons with the development of capitalist commodity production. Green outlines the construction of a new social order, aimed at the advancement of society brought about by the Industrial Revolution, within which photography plays a crucial role.

> It is the onset of a series of developments in the economic, social and political configurations of nineteenth century capitalism which not only made possible, but brought into being cultural functions for the photograph.
> (Green, 1985, p.3)

These developments were a result of the extension of mass production methods to consumable goods such as photographic cameras. The factory system had previously been limited to the production of raw materials for larger manufacturing industries, by the 1880's a capitalist mode of production geared to the mass manufacturing of commodity goods had evolved. The problem became a way to control and regulate a market for those goods. The solution was advertising. Here, photography was appropiated in an attempt to control and regulate society to stabilize consumpion of these mass produced consumer goods.

> It was the systematic re-organisation of productive forces that occurred in the latter half of the nineteenth century that necessitated various technical

> means for standardising demand for mass produced consumer goods, in the increasingly affluent sectors of the lower middle classes.
> (Green, 1985, p.3)

The use of the photograph in the advertising industry was an essential component in the formation and subsequent stability of a new social order. The photograph's ability to portray the commodity with an exactitude never known before, enabled advertising to portray and connect commodities to a utopian vision of a bright and technological future. These images formed the subconscious of the new middle classes. But alongside the use of photography in advertising to regulate the markets within the new middle classes, photography was used in other fields of social control which I shall investigate.

The other half of nineteenth century society consisted of an ever increasing number of unemployed and destitute workers marginalised by this social order. This 'mass' posed a constant threat to the growth and development of an enlightened and progressive society. It was the need to control and eventually eliminate this 'degenerate' mass that brought into being a network of new photographic practices.

> On the one side we approach more closely what is good and what is beautiful; and on the other, vice and suffering, are shut up within narrower limits; and we have to dread these monstrosities, physical and moral, which have the power to throw perturbation into the social framework
> (Quetelet in Sekula, 1942, p.354)

To regulate the flow of market forces it became essential to social politics to regulate the urban population. Adolphe Quetelet, a Belgian astrologer, devised one of the first systems of regulation using statistical methods borrowed from astrology. He began gathering rates of birth, rates of death and crime rates within the urban centers to discover the fundamental laws of social phenomena. Using statistical modes, Quetelet defined the 'average man'. All others could be then be charted on a scale of comparison to this one mean type. The average man, though, was not a real individual, but a fictitious convergence of social data which constituted an ideal not only of social health but of social stability and of beauty; “the type of all, which is beautiful - all which is good”. The aim was the construction of a social norm, which would lead to a diminished number of defective types. This method, for Quetelet, constituted a process social progression.

> The greater the number of individuals observed the more do individual peculiarities, whether physical or moral, become effaced, and leave in a prominent point of view the general facts, by virtue of which society exists and is preserved.
> (Quetelet in Sekula, 1942, p.358)

The use of Quetelets statistical methods, along with photography, made a systematic recording and documentation of the urban population possible. Records could be kept pertaining to each individual and charted in relation to the ‘average man’, in zones of virtue and strength against zones of idiocy, vice, and weakness. The formation of an archival system which contained these records was central to the new social order.

> The general all-inclusive archive incompasses an entire social terrain while positioning individuals with in that terrain. Containing the traces of the visible bodies of heroes, moral exemplars, celebrities and on the other hand, those of the poor, the diseased, the insane, the criminal, the non-white, the female and all other embodiments of the unworthy.
> (Sekula, 1986, pg347.)

The use of photography was critical to the recording and documentation of this archive, relying on the gaining prestige of the 'science' of physiognomy. This provided proof of the moral defiency of the degenerate type positioned within the archive. Physiognomy was based on the belief that the inner character of human kind could be detected through outward physical appearence. Through the documentation of individual facial features, each portrait could be placed firmly in relation to a social and moral hierarchy.

> Certainly, physiognomy provided a discursive terrain upon which art and the emerging bio-social sciences meet during the middle of the 19th century. Visual empiricism retained its prestige in the face of a new object-society-that could no way be effectively or comprehensively visualized.
> (Sekula, 1986, pg 375.)

The initial premises of an empirical theory were based on the notion that there existed, within our world, pure fact, independent of the observer. The problem with these theories was that there had previously been no means to identify and verify these facts. Kant had recognised that our senses intervene with our perception of the external world, making all contact with the physical world relative to the observer. This is the potential 'subjectivism of theory';

> Pictorial representation became an adequate metaphor for an epistemology based on empircist methodologies.
> (Green, 1985, pg4.)

The initial premises of an empirical theory were based on the notion that there existed, within our world, pure fact, independent of the observer. The problem with these theories was that there had previously been no means to identify and verify these facts. Kant had recognised that our senses intervene with our perception of the external world, making all contact with the physical world relative to the observer.The potential 'subjectivism of theory';

> One persons perception of a given occurrence differs from anothers. Some of these differences are due to differences in the brain or mind of the observer, some to differences in there sense organs.
> (Russell,1925, pg 18.)

Therefore the problem became a way to distinguish between what belonged to the observer and what belonged to the occurrence being observered. Scientific analysis was concerned with the development of a means to test and measure external data to record and accumulate verifiable regularities;

> Scientists must be concerned with those features which the occurrence has in common to all observers... A scientific photographic plate may 'see' still more, and is then preferred to the eye.
> (Russell,1925,pg19.)

The technical and mechanical nature of the photographic processes was analogous with scientific procedure. This enhanced the belief in its objectivity. A standardized representation of reality became the objective equivalent of the real. Therefore, "the image could function for reality itself". (Green,1985,pg4.) Photography was then adopted into the prestigious field of science. Within this context it gained the status of a truth apparatus. It acted on social conscience to embed the notion that occurrences witnessed within a photograph were indisputable and were a central method for understanding our external existence.

Thus the photograph came to be recognised as an unadulterated, independent caption of reality. The photograph provided a verification of truth that aided our understanding of the world, through its role as scientific documentation of empirical knowledge for observation and categorisation, a photograph could substitute reality leading to a better understanding of reality;

> Every photograph is a means of testing, confirming and constructing a total view of reality.
> (Berger in Thachenberg,1980, pg294.)

The accumulation of photography became the accumulation of knowledge. With the formation of the archive, 'encompassing an entire social terrain' an 'effective comprehensive visualization of society', provided a nexus of social control and knowledge,

> The 'realistic' view of the world compatible with bureaucracy redefines knowledge as techniques of information. Photographs are valued because they give information . They tell one what there is; they make an inventory. To coroners, archeologists and other information professionals their value is inestimable.
> (Sontag, 1977, pg20.)

Chapter 3. The social content of Boltanski's archive.

Boltanski has formed his own archive through the gathering of documentation relating to all aspects of daily life. He constructs an archive, in which he subverts the rational order of history, and the logical categories of our knowledge, upon which our understanding of the world is built. He becomes an archeologist, constructing a total view of our society, resting upon social practices in their entirity. But his archive does not follow to any logical order, and this is his simple aim. For Boltanski's work achieves nothing and confirms nothing, it just parodies all attempts to achieve and to progress.

Boltanski began forming has archive in 1968. His chief access to the everyday has been via photography. He has gathered documentation relating to as many people as possible, 'encompassing an entire social terrain'. He has collected from magazines, newspapers, historical records and donations, over 5,000 images. No perceivable effort has been made to give these uncaptioned, unidentified, disjunctive images a chronological order. Instead he subverts the documenting of reality to acquire knowledge by using these images ad hoc throughout his work. The same images appear again and again within different contexts. He dismantles the photographic archive by re-appropiation thus overturning the "grand anthology of images". (Sontag, 1977, pg 22.)

In *Reconstruction of an accident that hasn't happened yet and in which I meet my death.* (1969.) Plate #2. Boltanski uses the metaphor of photographic truth to transcend its function in accumulating knowledge. The photograph, rather than representing reality, eradicates it. Challenging the mediums built-in claims to truth while simultaneously exploiting its documentary fashion. Again, presented in book format are four photographs. An identity portrait of the victim Boltanski, a photo of his emergency health card, Avenue Jean-Jaures, the scene of the accident and a photograph of the police outline of the body. Boltanski has seized upon the convention of photographic evidence and used it to decimate his own existence.

> Boltanski was attracted to the photograph, he has said, because they are, 'Perceived as truthful, as proof that the event they picture is real'. Part of that illusion comes from their role as forensic and scientific documentation.
> (Gumpart, 1994, pg 10.)

Boltanski uses photography as a means to both disrupt and identify the production of the current forms of knowledge. By producing falsified records using scientific procedure he mocks our faith in scientific investigation, the hope of defining and controlling our external environment. The contention is that the accumulation of knowledge is a futile activity. That there is no absolute truth and the activity of accumulating photography is meaningless. "All human activity is futile". What appears to be the essential connotation of Boltanski's work is the futility of life and human existence;

> What Boltanski seems not to have borrowed is a revolutionary ambition to change the everyday, to liberate men and women sentenced to the, 'imposition of consumption' by transforming society.
> (Marmer, 1989, pg.170.)

Through his work, Boltanski manages to disrupt logical procedures of analysis, disturb categorisation and defy attempts at understanding. But Boltanski's work remains installed within the art museum for preservation. He uses the art museum's function as a sacred, cultural, quasi-religious site and scientific arena for the exhibition of data (Harmer, 1989, p. 72) to preserve his documentation. He dismantles nothing. Artistic practice, in its most basic form, attempts to create. Boltanski creates an archive. He works within the confinements of current social production.

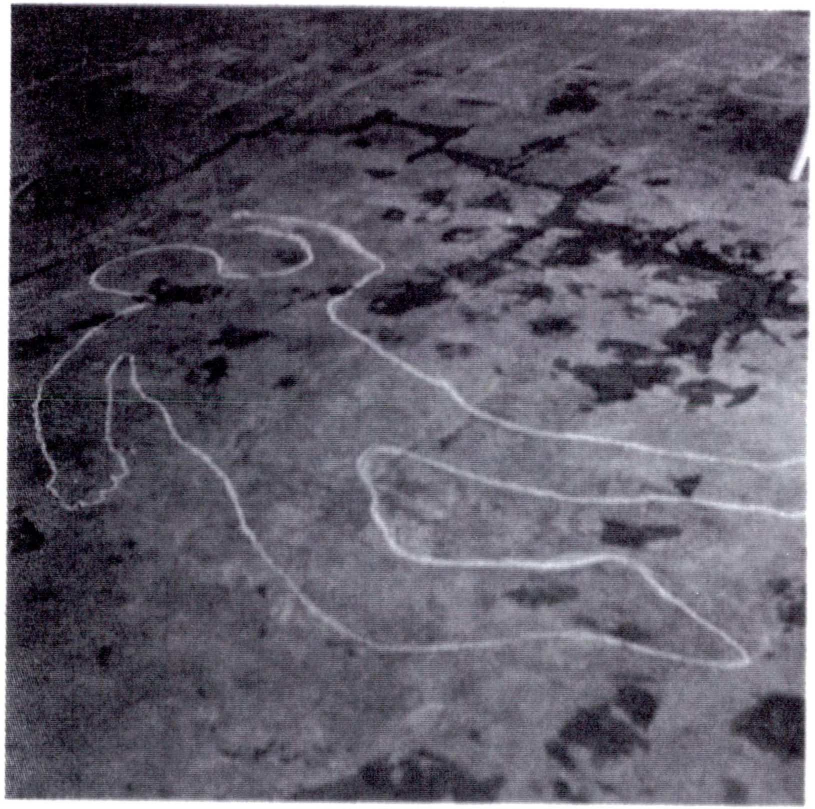
> It is not to change society but to make very small things. Because we know to try and change it is impossible and very dangerous.
> (Fleischer,1988,pg.8.)

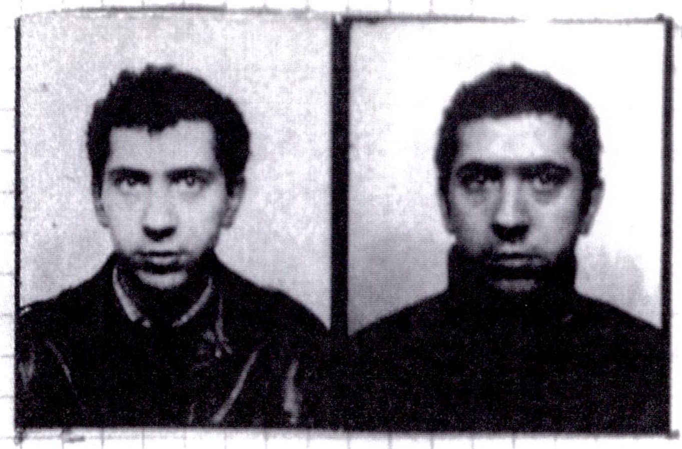
Riddled with contradiction, Boltanski's work by advocating the continium of societal change, disrupts it. But only in a small way, and only then in a way that is theoretical. In actuality there is constant change- summer, winter, birth, death. Our society however is based on a philosophy that conceives of change as a progression through knowledge. Our civilization works on the belief that man has the power to methodically change and radically, often drastically recreate the world around him. Boltanski uses the already existing photograph and preserves it in an unmethodical way in order to make an incremental change.

The formation of modern society, of the economic and social order, are dependent in part, on visionary thought stemming from the Enlightenment. The philosophy was that of a positive future oriented vision, which embodied the belief in the progression of science, and through its application, the eventual escape from the problems of daily life. Optimism about the improvement of social conditions were enhanced with the development of economic power and scientific discovery. A vision of a future Utopia was central to the regulation of the urban population. What this Utopian ideal suppressed or channelled were the emancipatory impulses of the working population

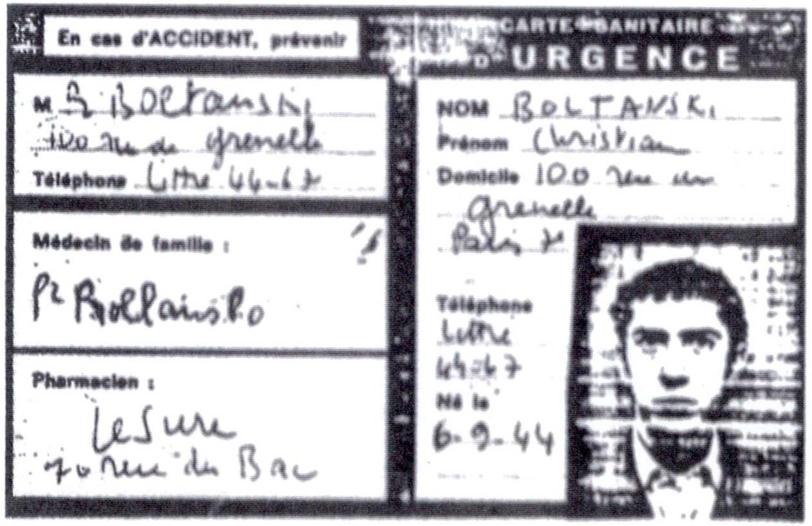
> ....culminating not in a new social order, but the reconstruction of the old order at a higher level of efficiency
> (Green, 1985, p15)

The photograph, through its use and development acts to feed us the idea of change and progress. But this is just an image. A well constructed illusion which works to control and stabilize society, photography is part of the development and establishment of a controlled social order, aimed towards the continual production and consumption of the image of change and progress. Boltanski's work freezes this image and demonstrates the impossibility of change.





CHRISTIAN BOLTANSKI A 5 ANS 3 MOIS DE DISTANCE.



CARTE SANITAIRE D'URGENCE

En cas d'ACCIDENT, prévenir

M. G. Boltanski
100 rue de Grenelle
Téléphone Littré 44-67

Médecin de famille :
Pr Boltanski

Pharmacien :
Lesure
70 rue du Bac

NOM BOLTANSKI
Prénom Christian
Domicile 100 rue de Grenelle Paris 7e

Téléphone Littré 44-67

Né le 6-9-44

Chapter Three. Photography and Eugenics.

Another aspect of Boltanski's work, which would serve to further highlight the illusion of progress connotated by the photograph, is an implied reference to the science of Eugenics. Eugenics stands at the intersection of studies in anthropology, sociology and theories of evolution. The theories of evolution developed by Darwin to explain the formation of the species were assimilated into social politics to explain the unequal distribution of power and wealth within society;

> Historical processes were thus reconceptualised within the framework of an evolutionary struggle for existence in which the fate of individuals, social groups or entire races could be reduced to the notion of the 'survival of the fittest'
> (Green, 1985, p.8)

Eugenics offered the ultimate solution to the economic and social disorder witnessed in the late nineteenth century and was the final element necessary for the formation of a totalitarian utopia. Taking the photographic archive and the sciences of physiognomy, Darwin's theories of evolution were adopted to prove that the 'other', the pauper, the unemployed, the criminal, the insane, were seen not as social categories but as entirely natural ones. An individuals position and character were transmitted through hereditary. This way the structure of society could be seen as entirely natural. Eugenics offered 'scientific', proof that social hierarchy was the result of predetermined differences in the innate qualities and character of the individual.

Furthermore, using the empirical model of knowledge, photography, the assumption was that visual differences between individuals were synomous with relative intellectual ability, moral qualities and psychological disposition. This way the 'image' of the ideal human form could be created and used as a role model, as an image to strive towards.

> Photography could sustain an imaginary mobility on this vertical scale, thus provoking both fear and ambition and interpellating in classic terms a characteristically 'petit bourgeois' subject.
> (Sekula, 1989, pg 347.)

Francis Galton was the first to introduce the term eugenics in his introduction to, *Inquiries into Human Faculty* 1883. Galton, (ironically a cousin, of Darwin's), aimed to locate and define the origins of social and cultural differences within the human population, and to identify the characteristics or typical features of a race or class. Many of Galtons early investigations were aimed at tracing heredary differences, identified in the outward physical character of the body to mental and psychological characteristics.

The problem was to find a method of extracting the typical physiognomic features from a specific group. Once these were measured they could be taken as representation of character, ie. physical similarities within a group of criminals could be taken as indicators to moral deficiency. Galton's solution was a simple one. He contrived the method of "composite portraiture", (plate#3), as a means of overcoming the difficulty of procuring truly representative faces. This process was done in five stages:

> 1.) I collected photographic portraits of different persons, all of whom had been photographed in the same aspect.
> 2.) I reduced their portraits photographically to the same size.
> 3.) I superimposed the portraits like successive leaves of a book so that the features of each portrait lay exactly as the case admitted, in front of those of the one behind it. Thus I obtained a book, each page of which

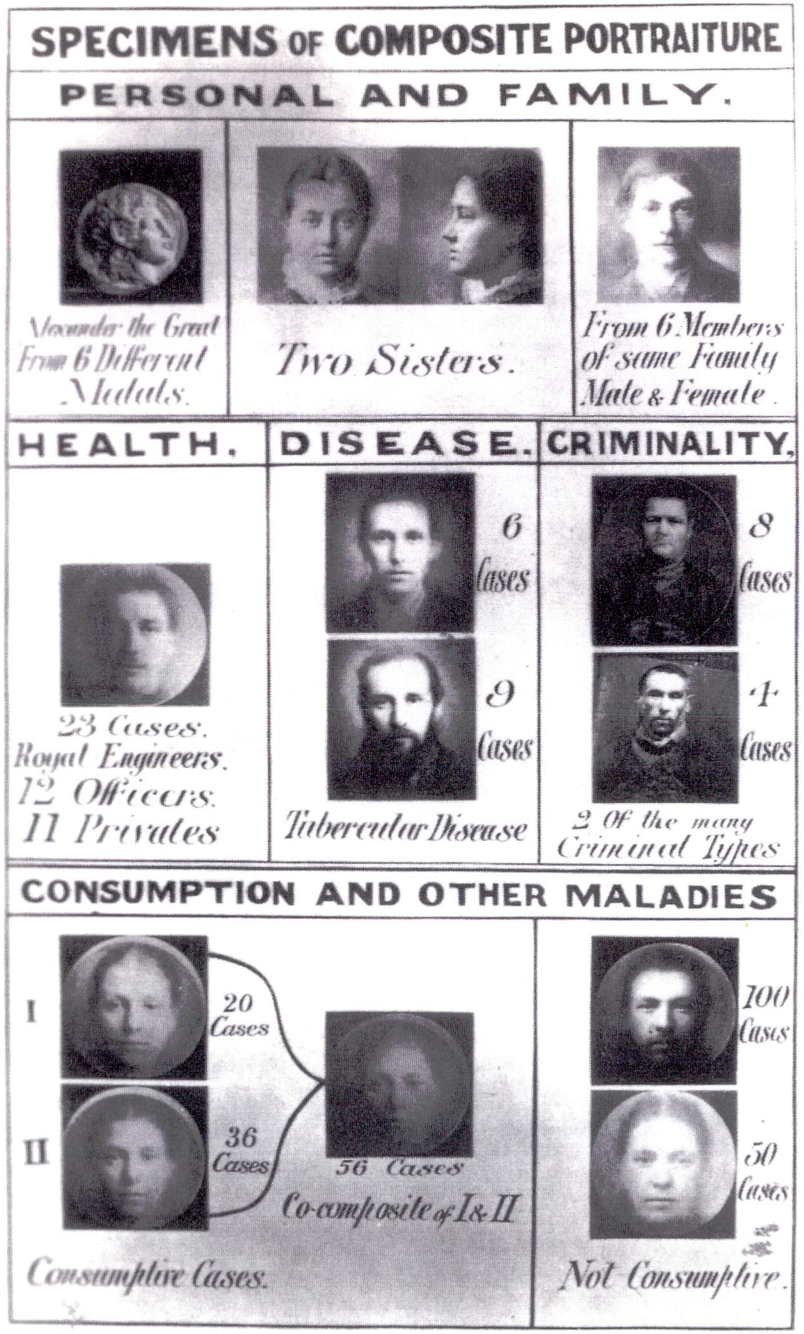
> contained a separate portrait, and all the portraits lay exactly in front of one another.
> 4.) I focused my camera on the book and began photographing one page after another in succession without moving the camera, so that an image of each of the portraits in succession was thrown on the same part of the sensitive plate.
> (Galton, 1978,pg.6.)

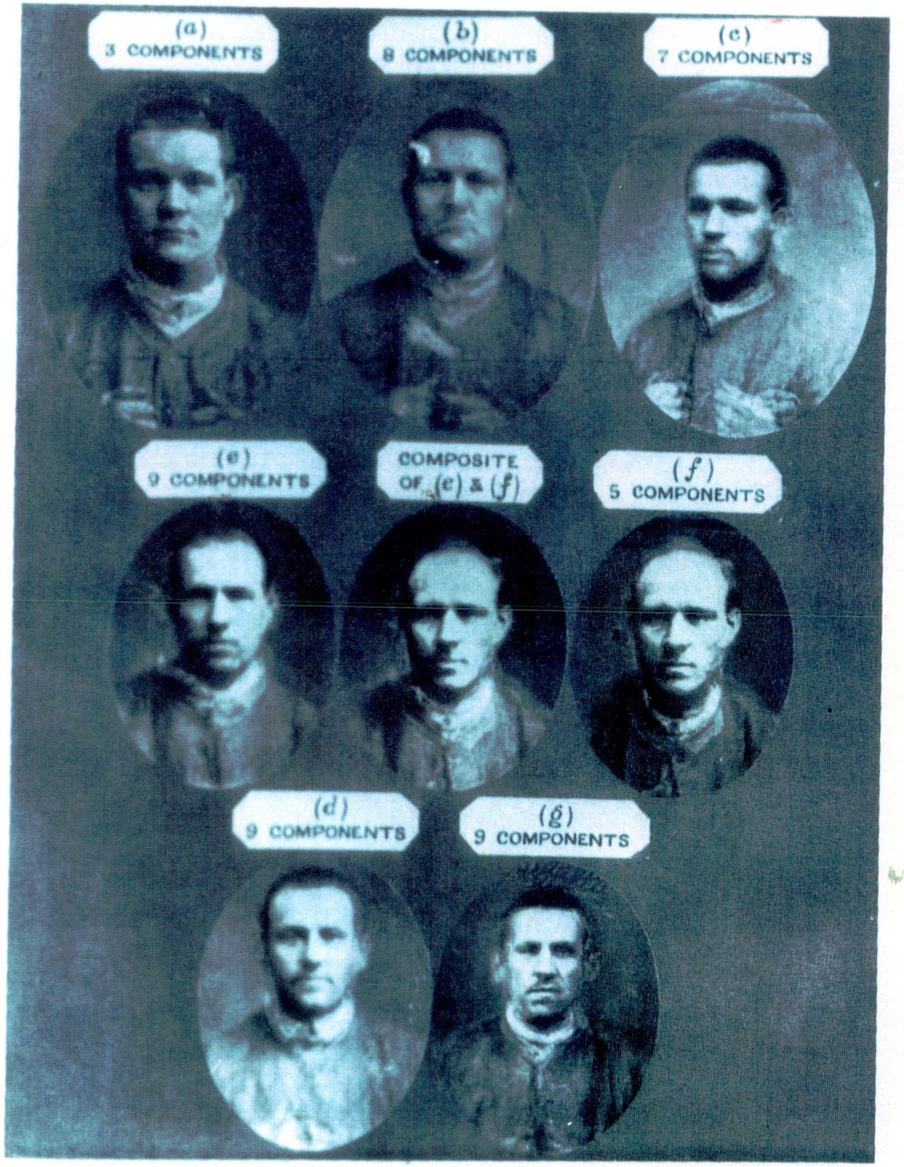
By re-photographing several of the portraits onto the same plate, giving each one a fraction of a normally adequate exposure it was possible to combine the separate individual elements into a single generic or 'composite' image. Since all peculiarities to be found in the individual photograph are lost within this process, all aspects which they have in common are emphasised, the resulting portrait contains only those physical features which can be considered typical of the group.

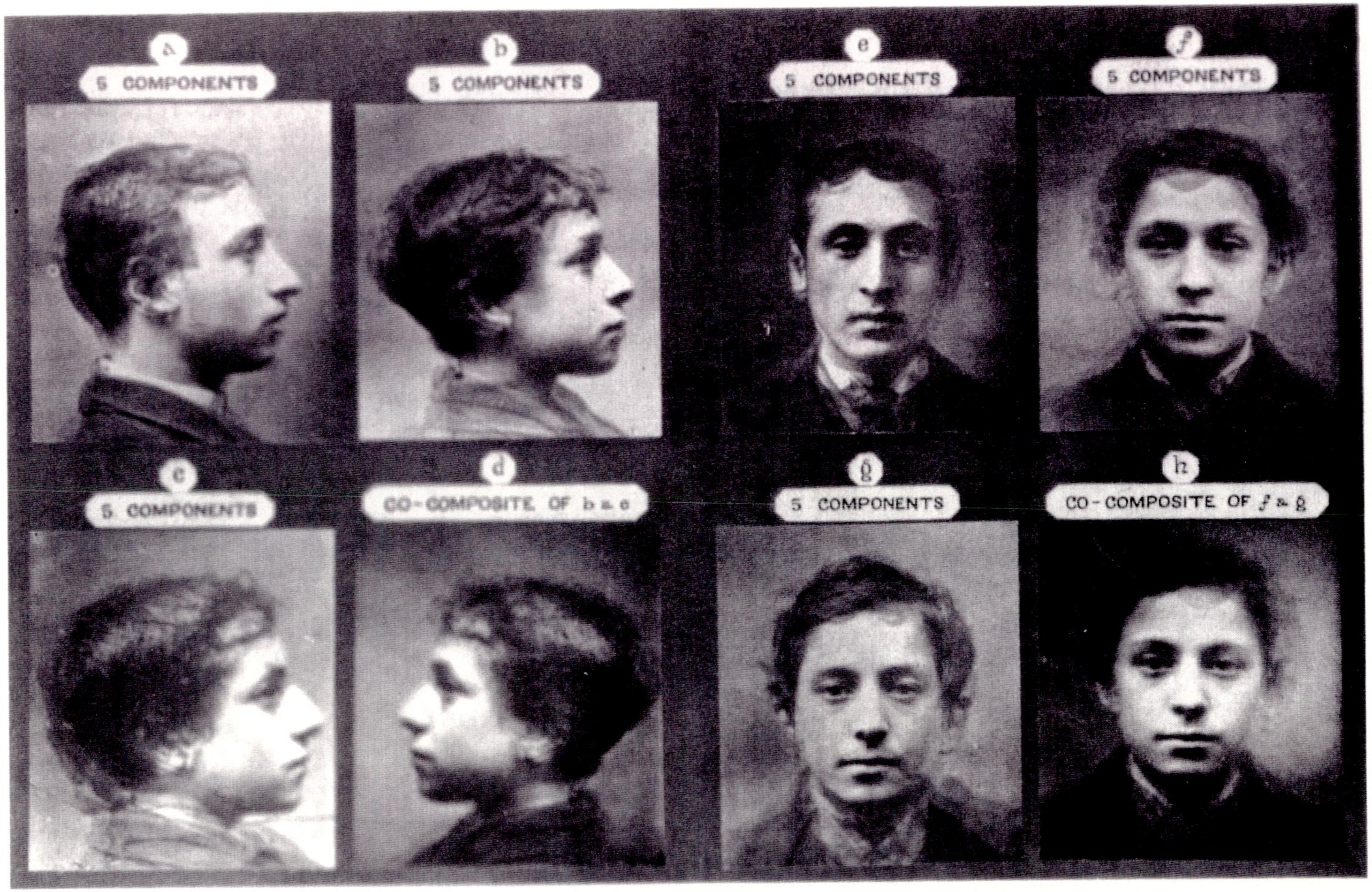
With the evidence invested in these scientific documents Galton hoped to determine the course of evolutionary progress.

> My general object has been to take note of the varied heredity faculties of different men and of great differences in famalies and races to learn how far history may have shown the practicability of supplanting the human stock by better strains and to consider whether it might not be our duty to do so by such efforts as may be reasonable, thus exerting ourselves to further the ends of evolution more rapidly and with less distress than if events were left to their own course.
> (Galton. 1978, pg. 12.)

To what extent were these methods to be adopted to further the ends of power and domination, under the veil of enlightened logical scientific procedure? To what extents was civilised man willing to go to initiate human progression? In Galtons words;


SPECIMENS OF COMPOSITE PORTRAITURE
PERSONAL AND FAMILY.
Alexander the Great From 6 Different Medals.
Two Sisters.
From 6 Members of same Family Male & Female.
HEALTH.
DISEASE.
CRIMINALITY.
23 Cases. Royal Engineers. 12 Officers. 11 Privates
6 Cases
9 Cases
Tubercular Disease
8 Cases
4 Cases
2 Of the many Criminal Types
CONSUMPTION AND OTHER MALADIES
I
II
20 Cases
36 Cases
56 Cases
Co-composite of I & II
Consumptive Cases.
100 Cases
50 Cases
Not Consumptive.


(a) 3 COMPONENTS
(b) 8 COMPONENTS
(c) 7 COMPONENTS
(e) 9 COMPONENTS
COMPOSITE OF (e) & (f)
(f) 5 COMPONENTS
(d) 9 COMPONENTS
(g) 9 COMPONENTS


a
5 COMPONENTS
b
5 COMPONENTS
e
5 COMPONENTS
f
5 COMPONENTS
c
5 COMPONENTS
d
CO-COMPOSITE OF b & c
g
5 COMPONENTS
h
CO-COMPOSITE OF f & g

> I do not see why any insolence of caste should prevent the gifted class,when they had the power, from treating compatriots with all kindness, as long as they maintain celibacy. But if these continued to procreate children, inferior in moral, intellectual and physical qualities, it is easy to believe the time may come when such persons would be considered as enemies of the state, and to have forfeited all claims to kindness.
> (Galton. 1978. pg.22.)

Galton referred to composite portraiture as a system of 'pictorial statistics'. The credibility of eugenics and its claims for the necessity of social reform rested upon the demonstration that it was a legitimate science, consistent with 'fact' rather than 'theory'. The conclusions of eugenics seemed beyond impeachment. But, for all their evident simplicity, these were carefully constructed images. They were composed within a small and yet quite specific set of photographic codes and conventions and were subject to elaboration by methods which governed their production. Behind these statements of comparative morphology is not, however, a pre-existing truth of pure unadulterated facts but a complex system of social knowledge.

> Their intelligibility does not reside in their correspondence with a reality of appearances but in their relation to a varity of other discourses, representations and signification which specified the ‘body’ as the nexus of a network of scientific practices and new modes of surveillance and documentation.
> (Sekula, 1989, pg.352)

The utopian dream was realised as unattainable by Galton at an early stage of his investigations. The hope for an improved racial stock through the programme of selective breeding, eventual social betterment and the disappearance of the distopian counterpart was realised as unattainable by the discovery that successive generations of eugenically bred stock tended to regress.

Francis Galtons research reached its practical implication in the political program of the international eugenics movement. In 1926 the American eugenics society advocated the sterilization of the insane, the retarded and the epileptic. The Nazis began by aplying the principles of eugenics to the mentally disabled who were the first to be experimentally gased. Some 200,000 adults and children between 1939 and 1941. Homosexuals were also classified as unacceptably deviant, while Gypsies and Slavs were classified as racially inferior. They died in large numbers in extermination camps during world war two. The 'Jewish nation' was the embodiment of racial inferiority that posed a treat to the 'pure Aryan' stock of the Germans.

> Jews are an alien body that create ill-feeling, disease, ever-festering sores and death. These aliens are the cause of putrefaction and should be distroyed as quickly as possible.
> (Jansz, 1993, pg.42.)

During the regime of the National Socialist Party over 6 million Jews met their death in extermination camps in Poland alone. This is to say nothing of the other anti-semetic movements throughout Europe in the early half of the 20th century and the last century.

> Eugenicists justified their program in utilitarian terms. By seeking to reduce the number of 'unfit' they claimed to be reducing the number of those predestined to unhappiness.
> (Sekula, 1989, pg 365.)

Eugenics is the most developed scientific justification for the formation of a totaliterian regime. With the use of eugenic theory the oppressor could expand and justify his authority to a degree never known before. The final element of total control, offers total power. That power is the power for man to act as a god, for the 'assumed' good of humanity. The totaliterian regime is a state unified and regulated in the interests of society as a whole by the converging of differences under the myth of the ‘pure’, the ‘superior’, the ‘race’. The 19th century utopian dream was realised in the horrors of these regimes. The innate dangers of eugenic theory met its realisation in the pointless and systematic massacre of millions.

Chapter five. The effect of eugenic theory.

> Now I will tell you the answer. It is this. The party seeks power entirely for its own sake. We are not interested in the good of others, we are interested solely in power, pure power. What power means you will understand presently. We are different from all other ogligarchies of the past, in that we know what we are doing. All the others, even those who resembled ourselves, were cowards and hypocrites. The German Nazis and the Russian communists came very close to us in there methods, but they never had the courage to recognise there own motives. They pretended, perhaps they even believed, that they had seized power unwillingly and for a limited time, and that just around the corner there lay a paradise where human beings would be free and equal. We are not like that. We know that no one ever seizes power with the intention of relinquishing it. Power is not a means, it is an ends. One does not establish a dictatorship in order to safeguard a revolution; one makes a revolution in order to establish the dictatorship. The object of persecution is persecution. The object of torture is torture. The object of power is power. Now do you begin to understand me ?
> (Orwell, 1949, pg 276.)

The essential element of the totaliterian state was fear. To unite the people as a whole fear of the other had to be instilled. But not just fear of the other, but fear of being that other. For all others had the embodiment of being human. This is something that is impossible to ignore. They are the same as us. The central fear was if one did not belong to the party, the group, they would become that other.

Eugenics resting on the visual empirical methods, was easily assimilated into the mass conscience. channeling religious superstition. Such superstition is easily instilled and not easily lost. Galton's model for the English social average was towards an imaginary lost Athens and away from an equally imaginary threatening barbaric Africa. He made compositions of Greek and Roman portrait coins and medallions, seeking the likeness of a vanished physiognomy of a higher race.

The fear instilled by these mock theories act to further control and regulate society today. Every portrait photograph bears the 'veins of resemblance' of Galtons theories of eugenics. Our society adheres to the image. We hold the dream of transcending the present condition of our physical body as the achievement of an idealised image of beauty. Beauty is the model given to us of superior evolved forms.

Control is exerted in the way the modern state speaks to a world where change is the rule of the day. Where one's place in the social order is a matter of one's own perception, the product of an assembled illusion - a constructed perception. In order to maintain the illusion of a progressive society and to regulate the consumption of goods, we voluntarily buy into the evolution of human appearance, the assembled illusions of evolutionary progress presenting the politics of eugenics within the consumer society. One can buy a composite portrait of one's self. Within our society eugenics manifests itself in consumerism, offering a realease from the confinements of class and race associated with directly totalitarian forms of control. Consumerism upholds the theories of eugenics, demanding that one adhere to the 'look' or 'image', Plate# 4, of a given year to be part of the progressive society, and also to trancend ones natural position, be it social or racial. Plate# 4.

> Assuming the iconography or 'attitude' or image, may for some, present a change for the better, an elevation of status. More and more however, fashion offers visions of change drawn from an endless repository of images

2

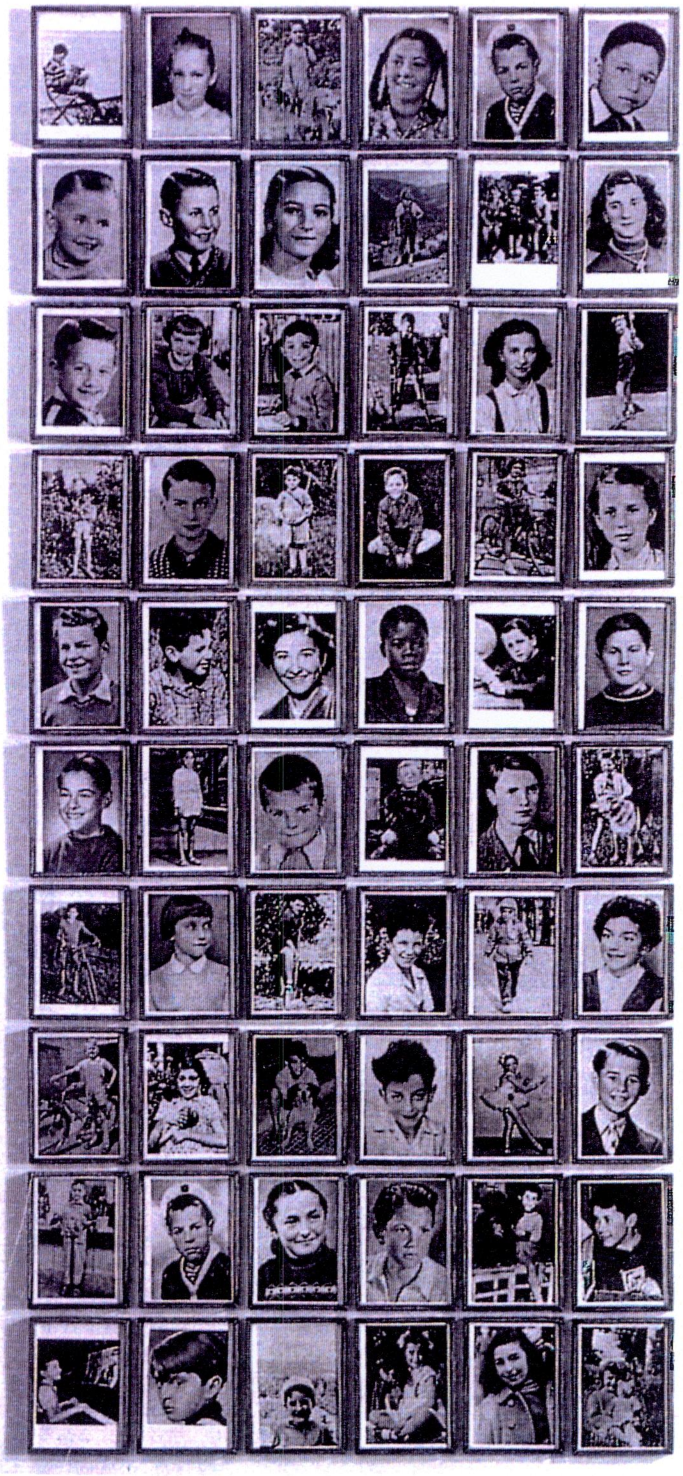


Plate # 5.

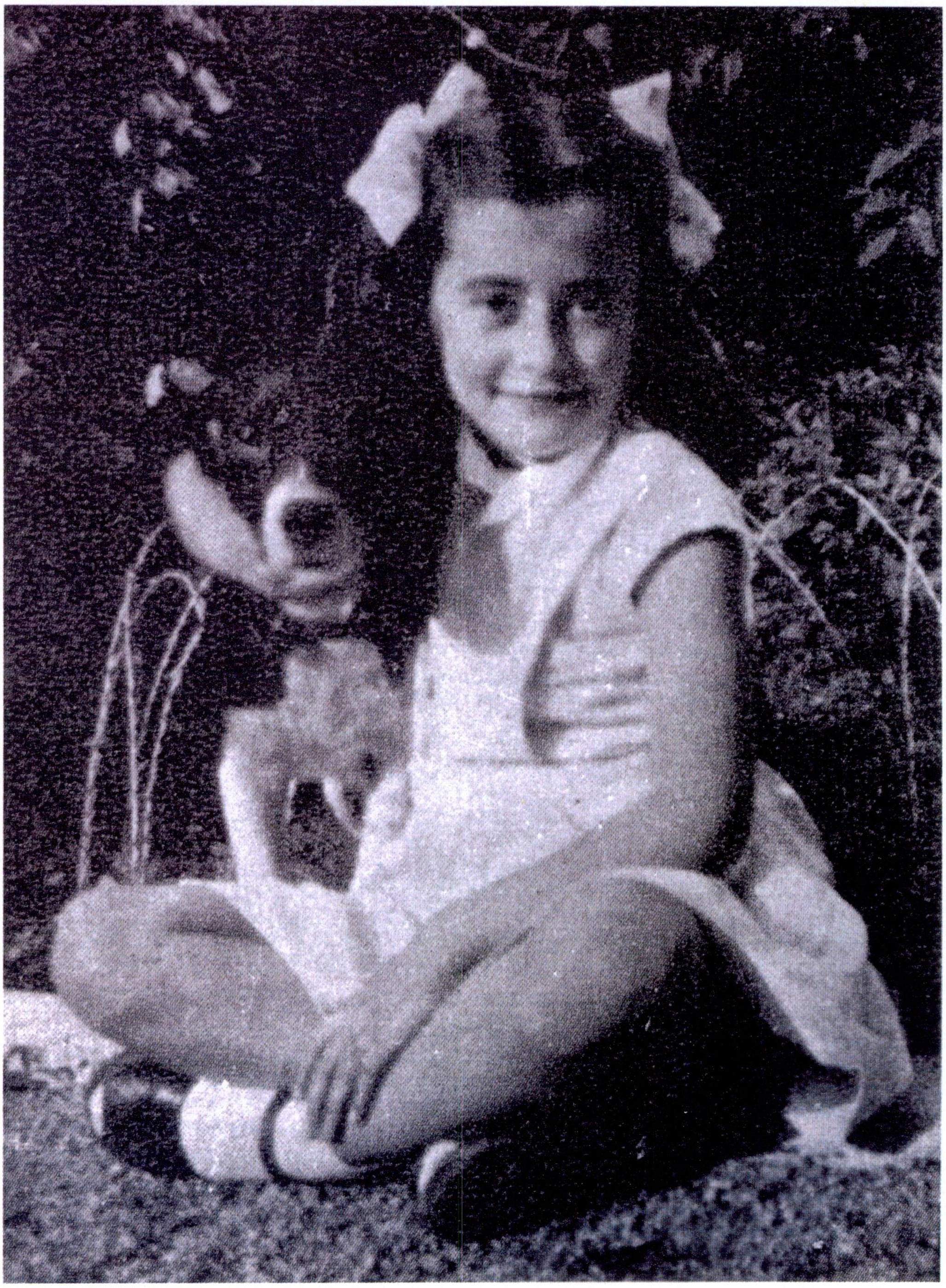
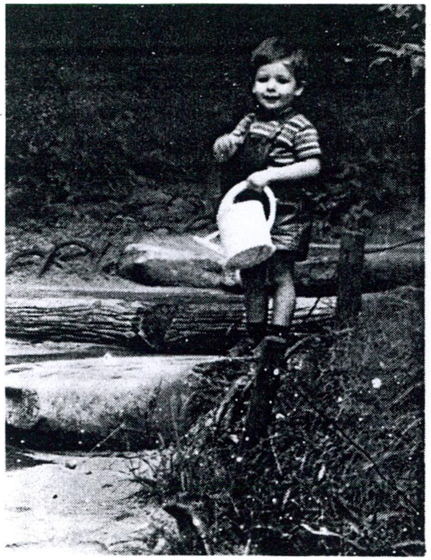
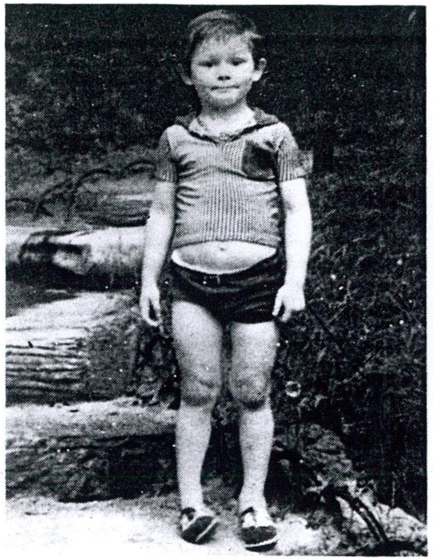


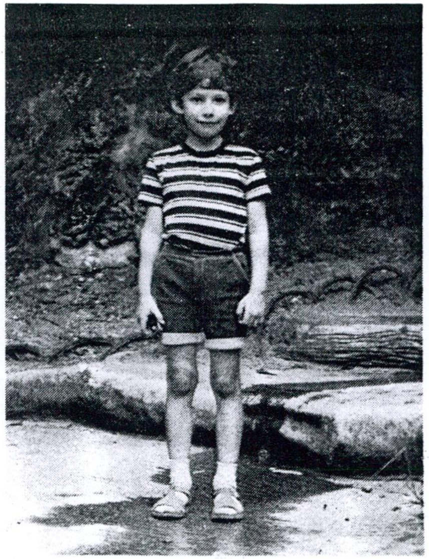
Plate # 5.



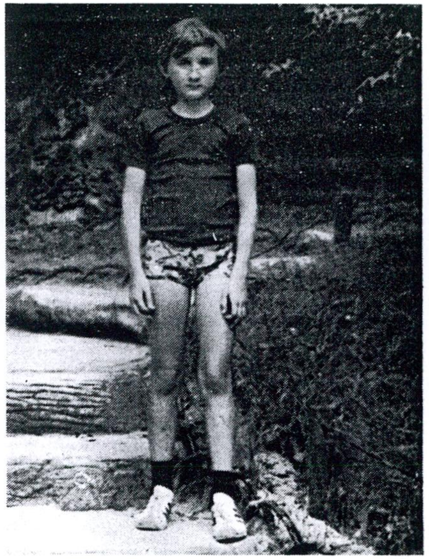
Christian Boltanski aged 3 years, 7 June 1947



Christian Boltanski aged 5 years, 12 March 1949

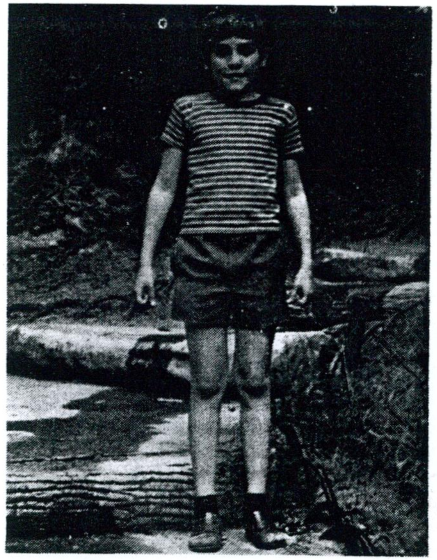


Christian Boltanski aged 7 years, 6 July 1951

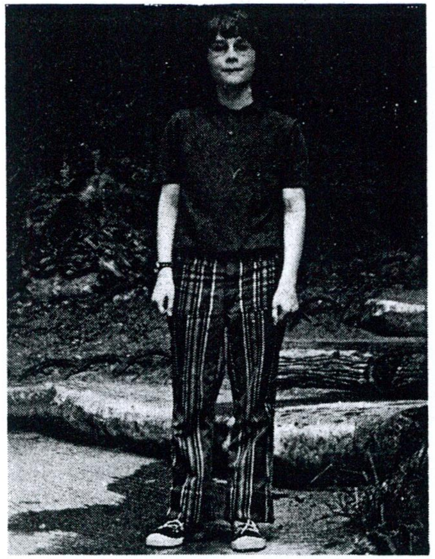


Christian Boltanski aged 9 years, 20 June 1953

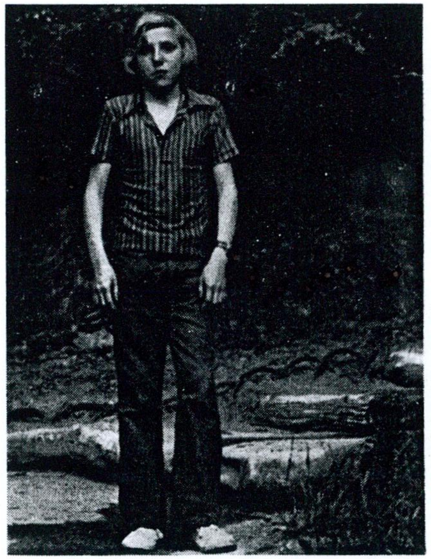
Christian Boltanski aged 10 years, 3 May 1954



Christian Boltanski aged 11 years, 20 August 1955



Christian Boltanski aged 14 years, 25 April 1958



Christian Boltanski aged 17 years, 5 August 1960

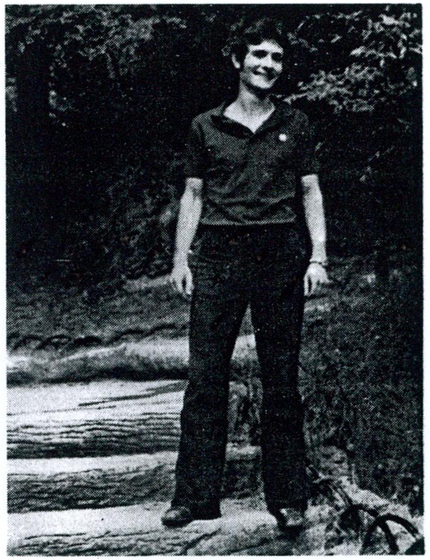


Plate #6

(Evan, 1988 p. 16)

Development, continuity, modernisation and acceleration are the most ‘visible’ representations of the need for a better way of life, acknowledged and expressed on a material level within our society. It constitutes a politics of “change” that resides wholly on the surface of things. The surfaces themselves are lifted from an infinite number of sources that reside in the photographic archive. But beneath the surface exists the fear of being seen as different or of being outside the group. As it is all image, one must construct the appearance of belonging, before anything else.

In *The 62 members of the Mickey Mouse club 1955.* (1972), Plate#5, Boltanski illustrates transcendence from a group mentality. Taken from a children comic book are 62 portraits of young children, which he displays, uncaptioned, side by side.

> I was 11 years old in 1955 and I resembled these 62 children whose photos where pictured in that years Mickey mouse club magazine. They had the same interests as I had. Today they must all be about my age, buy I can’t learn what has become of them. The picture that remains does not correspond with reality any more and all the children faces have disappeared.
> (Gumpart, 1994, pg.18.)

Does this suggest that each of these children is in some way Mickey mouse because they belong to that group and at that time resembled each other and shared the same interests? Neither does it determine their future. Boltanski uses many images of children. It is unlikely that this is part of some obsession to reclaim a lost childhood as is often suggested.

> Since photography records a dead past they represent requiems for the adults inevitable lost childhood. Sheer sentimentality for the artists loss of his own infancy.
> (Marmer, 1989, pg170.)

Rather Boltanski recognises the transition from childhood to adulthood as a natural human state, uncontrolable and undefinable by us. He reflects on the contradiction between the existence of an adult life and a childhood , illustrating the multiple identities in ones life that are beyond our control. The attempt to try and capture and freeze ones childhood or identity is impossible and a Mickey mouse idea. The Mickey mouse club is a childish game, which we must grow beyond and leave behind. Change is constant. It can no more be stopped than it can be accelerated.

Boltanski's work attempts to defy categorisation, resulting in multiple personalities. The question "who is Christian Boltanski" has been asked countless times. He has produced, with the aid of the photograph various factual biographies and appearances for himself. We can now understand the motives behind Boltanski's activities, but what is the outcome? Must we undergo a denial of self in order to be oneself?

Fixed identity as promoted by Galton through the assignment of innate characteristics to the group has transpired to the illusion of multiple identity . By assigning the same characteristics to a group according to similarities, individual differences can also be adopted by the people within the group.

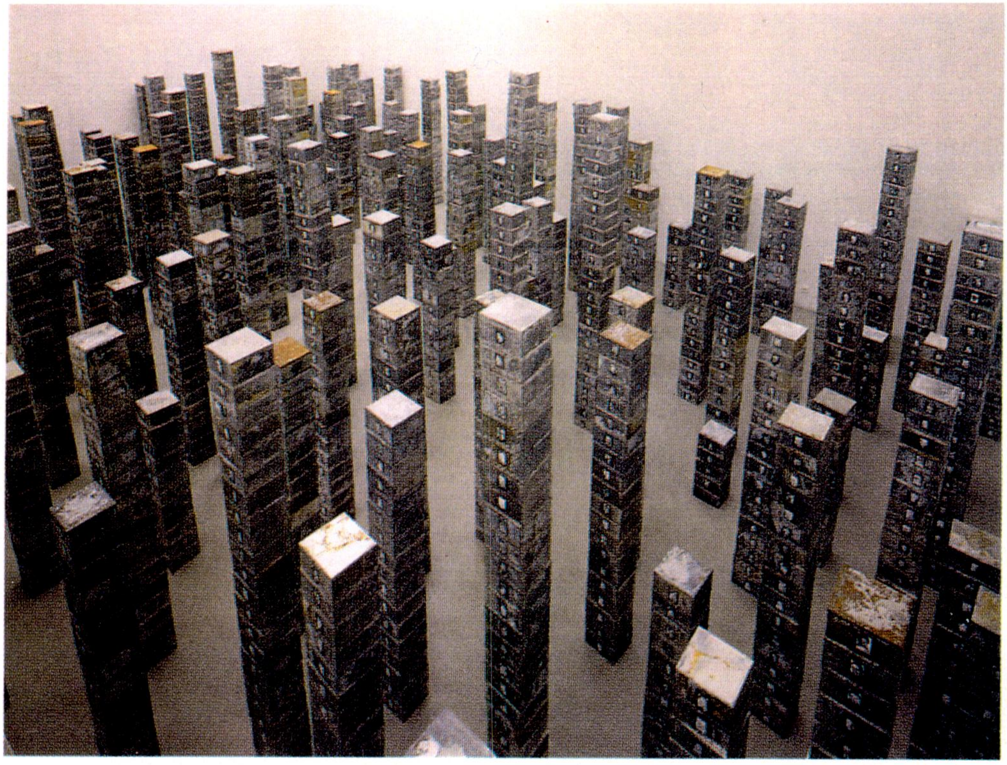
One of Boltanski's early pieces that reflects on this notion is, *10 photographic images of Christian Boltanski, 1946-1964.* (1972.) Plate#6. Ten photographs of the artist , between the ages of 2 and 20, all taken at the same place, are gathered together and captioned giving Boltanski's age at the time and date of each photograph. The photographs seem straight forward. One has the sense of a family ritual, that prehaps the family visted that park once or twice a year and photographed there young boy as he became older. A sort of documentary process in the formation of an individual. But, in fact, all these photograph's were taken in the same day by Annette Messager, near the waterfall in the parc Montsouris in Paris. Only the last photograph really portrays Boltanski, buy at the age of 28, not 20. This again suggests atempts by Boltanski to confuss us.

Contradictory, as he ever is throughout his work, the basic idea that Boltanski conveys is the connectedness of humanity. Using multiple photographs of different people who appear to be the same, Boltanski adopts a multiple personality. We now realise that each portrait is actually a different individual.

Always changing, never oneself, this is the condition of the modern day consumer, cut off from reality, in an attempt to resist the totalitarianism of modern society. Boltanski seems to lament the impossibility of our situation;

> "What characterises Boltanski's sum total activity is the idea of
> nihilism or defeat."
> (Stephino pg25.)

He realises the danger of attempting to change. His photographic archive alludes to the millions who died in the holocaust of World war 2. But never has he referred to or directly attempted to retrieve a portrait from a Nazi externination camp. In his instillation, "Lessons in darkness', (1989.) Plate#7, Boltanski gathered together his entire collection of photographic representations. He employed multiple photographs from multiple sources, pre war Jewish high school students in Vienna, post-war photographs of the students at a Dijon area college, pictures of a French childrens club, club Mickey Mouse, snapshots from family albums of friends, and journalistic photographs of murderers and victims culled from French and Spanish tabloid magazines. Forming a retrospect of his work to date. But within this installation all previous grouping is lost and the only indicator we have of these people and who they are, are there individual face, each one different , everyone human. Boltanski avoids defining these portraits. Humanity to Boltanski is undefinable, even photographs cannot be defined. The simplest process of looking at a photograph, without a caption illudes us. Yet we continue to battle with our lives with the aim controling our destinies and ultimately to achieve our dreams.



Conclusion.

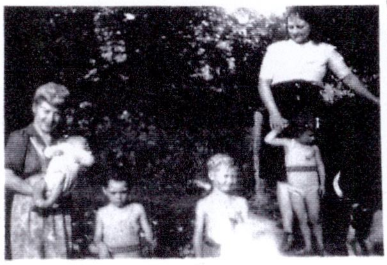
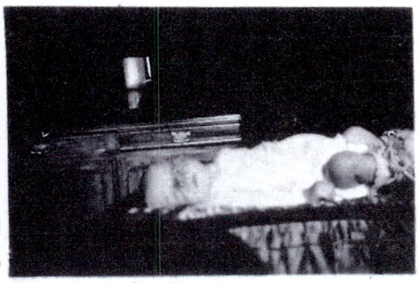
Boltanski askes that a transcript of these statements by him be included in any reviews of his work. Ultimately, they are the best words to describe the artist and conclude this investigation of his work.

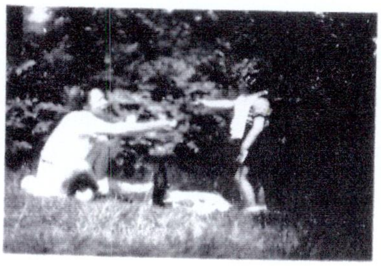
> I am reading a very interesting book on these times about the Nazi soldiers who killed the Jewish in Poland one by one before the Russians come. They kill 100,000 people in two months. What is very funny is that these soldiers were in fact German soldiers who were too old to go to the war, all of them were good fathers of very nice families. After the war, they did'nt have any problem's and they became just normal good fathers. Only during two months of their lives they killed 100,000 people. This is interesting because it appears that in fact they did that because, first, the officer said to them if you don't want to do it, don't do it and they did not want to look like a girl they wanted to say "I am a man, I can do it" and also because it was a group and they wanted to be with their friends. For me that's a big interrogation, that is why people who were nice people, were not Nazi, were sweet people, can do something like that. Really the big question in my life is, what we are, can I kill somebody? or can't I.....what does this mean? Me I don't know. There are people who can't. I have a book at home with all the photographs of these people, all kinds, young, poor, rich. There were 200 people, they refused. I am looking at these photographs, sometimes for hours, to try to understand their faces, why they refused. They are so normal, they can be Nazi, they can destroy people and they are literally people. But they refuse? There is nothing we can know for sure of these people.

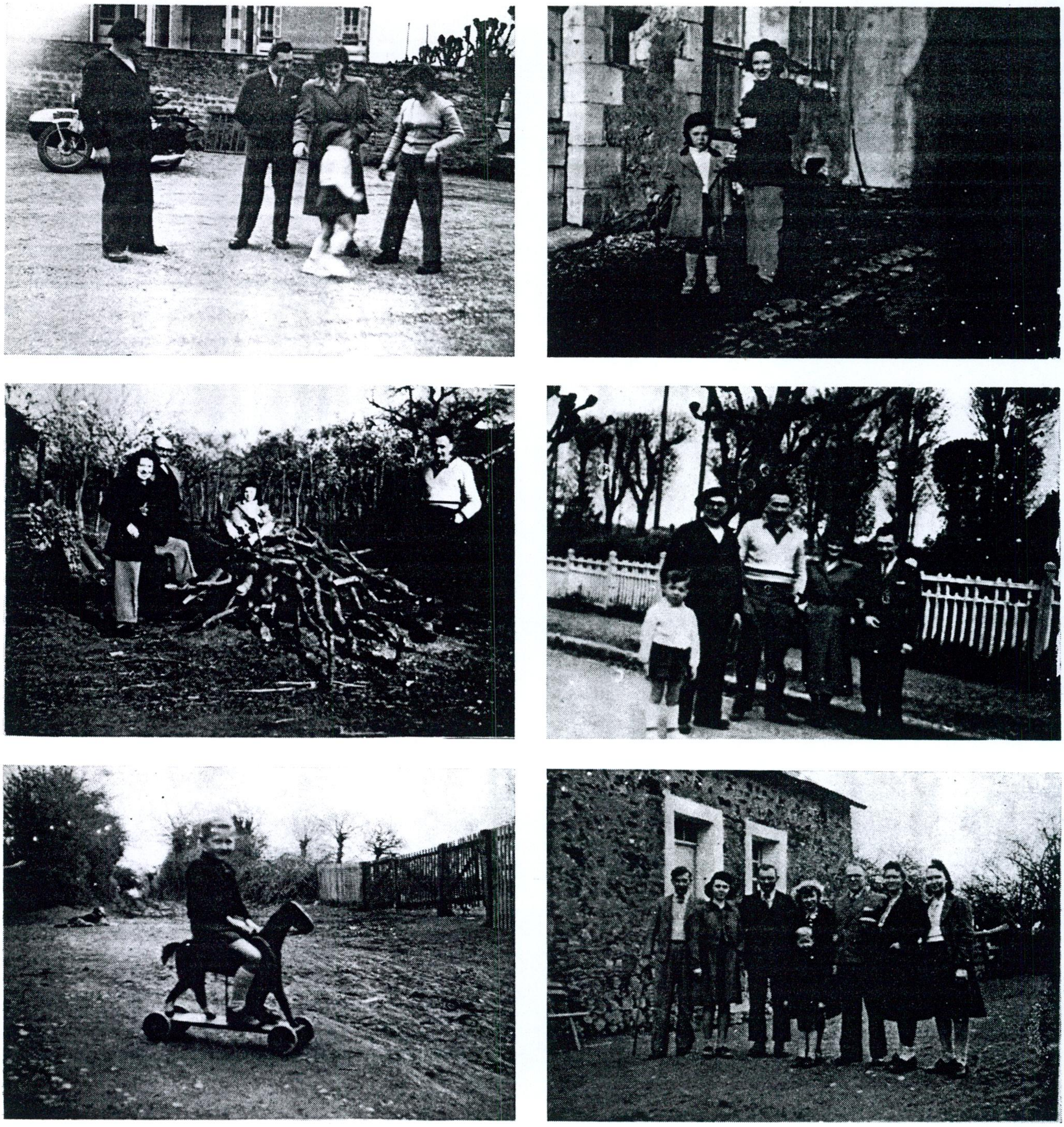
It seems to me that there is a debate in my generation, that it is nearly impossible to believe in utopia. The loss of the great Christian utopia; you know, 'everyone is equal'. Now for my generation we know that utopia is dangerous. The big problem is that utopia is always for a lot of people. I mean to give rules, it is always a problem. These politicians who say rules are good for everybody, in fact there is no 'everybody'. I mean there is one who loves spaghetti and the other one who has a girlfriend and one who is gay and one is nice and the other.... There is always one and one and one and when we think of utopia it is always rules for a lot of people. I think my generation know we can't belive in utopia. On the other way, if we don't have utopia we are nothing, we are completely dead. And you know that the big problem is not to speak about the group, but to speak about the individual and all utopia is always speaking about the group not for each person. And that is why they are photographs of people cause they are all different and all another story. And that is what I am trying to do, I think to work about it. About people. I made a catalogue for Chicago and I said to the curator, 'I wish that there are plenty of people in my catalogue', I really wanted to have plenty of people in my catalogue.

When I am optimistic I try to believe not in big utopia, but in very small utopia. My idea to speak about what I am doing is to change nothing, because the way you look at it is the same. But what we can try to do is not to change the form but to try to change the way we look at something.

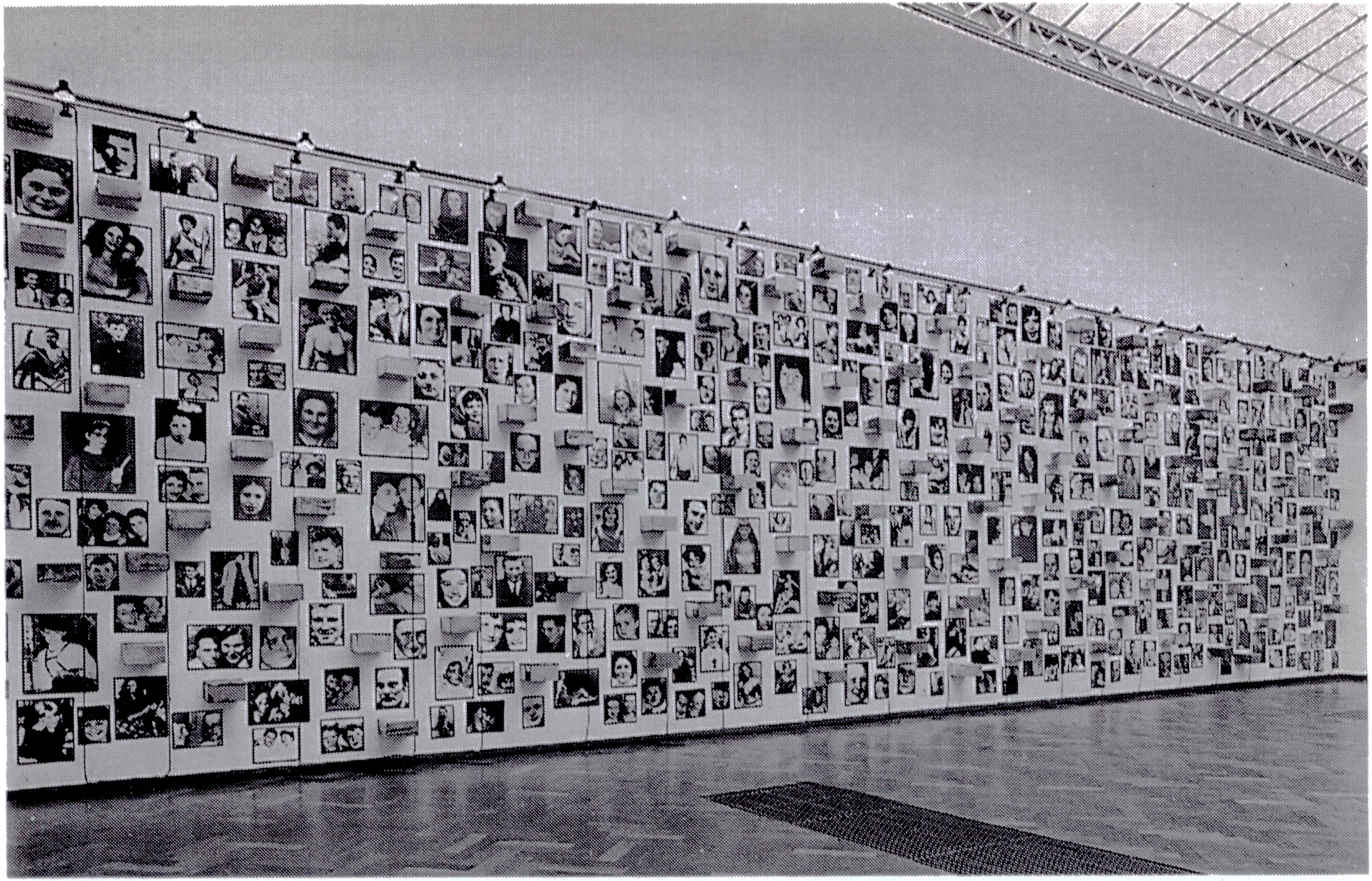
KATRIN





Christian Boltanski's Photo Album (1948–1956) 1972



BIBLIOGRAPHY.

BANN, Stephen, "The Clothing of Clio. A study of the representation of history in 19th century Britain and France", Cambridge, 1984.

BANN, Stephen, "The inventions of history.", Manchester, 1990.

BANN, Stephen, "Utopias and the millennium." Manchester, 1989.

BARTHES, Roland, "A Barthes reader." Canada, McGraw and Hill, 1982.

BARTHES, Roland, "Camera Lucida.Reflections on photography." New York, Hill and Wagner, 1981.

BENJAMIN, Walter, "One-Way street." Norfolk, Lowe and Brydone, 1979.

BERTILLION, A, "Archaeology and statistics, in laws of imitation."New York, Henry Holt, 1903.

CRARY, Jonathan,"Techniques of the observer", On vision and modernity in the 19th century".Massachusetts, Institute of technology, 1990.

EDAR, Joseph, M., "History of photography." New York, Columbia university press, 1945.

EVAN, Stuart, "All consuming images,The politics of style in contemporary culture." New york, Basic books inc., 1988.

GALTON, Francis, "Heredity Genius.- inquiries into human facility and its development." London, Friedman, 1978.

FREUND, Gisele, "Photography and society.", Boston, D.R Godine, 1980.

HUYSSEN, Andreas, "After the great divide, Modernism, Mass culture and Postmodernism."Indiana University press,1886.

FOUCAULT, Michel, "The archaeology of knowledge."London, Tavistock, 1972.

PEARSON, Karl, "The life, letters and labours of Francis Galton."Cambridge, University press, 1924.

NEWHALL, Beaumont, "The history of Photography, 1836-1909." New York, The museum of modern art, 1982.

PHILIPS, Christopher, "The judgement seat of photography."1982, in BOLTON, Richard (Ed.), "The context of meaning", Critical histories of photography, Massachusetts, Institute of technology, 1989.

RUSSELL, Bertrand, "The A.B.C of relativity." London, Unwin Hynm limited, 1925.

RONELL, Avital, "The telephone Book, Technology, Schizophrenia, Electric speech." Lincoln, University of Nebraska press, 1989.

SQUIRES, Carol, "The critical image. Essays on contemporary photography." Seattle, Bay press, 1990.

SEKULA, Alan, "Photography against the grain. Essays and Photoworks, 1973-1983." Halifax, Nova Scotia collage of art, 1984.

SONTAG, Susan, "On photography." Harmondswort, Penguin, 1977.

SEKULA, Alan, "The body and the archive", in BOLTON, Richard (Ed.), "The context of meaning", Critical histories of photography, Massachusetts, Institute of technology, 1989.

TRACHTENBERG, Alan, "Classic essays on Photography."Leete's island Inc., 1980.

TAGG, John, "The burden of representation. Essays on photography and power." London, 1988.

ARTICLES.

DAVIETAS, Demonsthenas, "Christian Boltanski." Flash Art, Vol. No. 124, October, 1985, pg.82-83.

DAVIETAS, Demonsthenas, "In the 20th century, C.B." Artforum, Vol. No. November, 1986, pg.108-109.

GREEN, David, "Veins of resemblance", "The Oxford Art journal."Vol. No. 7:2, 1985, pg.3-16.

HACKING, Ian, "How should we do the history of statistics?", Ideologie and Consciousness, Vol. No. 8, Spring 1981.

HACKING, Ian, "On the invention ofmultiple personalities", Ideologie and consciousness, Vol. No. 9, 1983.

KUSPIT, Donald, "Christian Boltansk." Artforum, Vol. No. 62, March, 1991, pg.123.

MARMER, Elain, "Christian Boltanski.The use of contradiction.", Recherche photographique, Vol. No. 4, May, 1988, pg.170-182.

MILLER, John, "Christian Boltanski." Artforum, Vol. No. March, 1989, pg.31.

RICHARD, Alan, "Christian Boltanski. Memory without images and paintings with the naked eye." Opus International, Vol. No. 93, Spring 1984.

RUBINSTEIN, Meyer, R., "Christian Boltanski." Flash Art, Vol. No. 145, March 1989. pg.103.

TAUSK, Victor, "On the origin of the influencing machine in schizophrenia", Psychoanalytic Quarterly, Vol. No. 2, 1933.

CATALOGUES.

COOKE, Lynn, "Reorienting, Looking East." Third eye centre, Glasgow, 1990.

FLAY, Jennifer, "Christian Boltanski, Catalogue." Verlag der Buchanellung, Koln 1992.

GUMPART, Lynn, 'Christian Boltanski."Klammarion, 1994.

JACOB, Mary, J. "Places with a past: New site specific art at Charleston's Spoleto Festival." Rizzoli international pub. 1991.

SINGERMAN, Howard, 'Christian Boltanski, Lessons in darkness", Museem of modern art, Chicago,1988.

WHITECHAPLE, Art Gallery, "Reconstitution." Eindhoven and Grenoble, 1990.