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**NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART & DESIGN**

**FINE ART SCULPTURE**

**Contemporary Figures**

**The 'Dummy Art' of Dinos and Jake Chapman and Charles Ray.**

by

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Submitted to the Faculty of History of Art and Design and Complementary Studies in  
Candidacy for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts in Fine Art Sculpture.

**1997**

I wish to acknowledge the invaluable assistance of my tutor Gerry Walker, Gareth Tolan  
for aiding research and Philomena Harnet for her technical advice.





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## Introduction

Four years ago Jeff Rian declared , that the number of artists and exhibitions “making reference to the body are enough to make one think that its twilight for the latest manifestations of body art” (Rian, '93:51). Two years later and a similar announcement “that perhaps it is time to declare a moratorium on body art” was made in Art Monthly(Garlarce 95:4). A plethora of these works exists. From the video-art of Viola, Barney and Hill, to the photography of Serrano, Sherman and Taylor-Wood. From the bodily traces incorporated in the installations of Hartoum and Antoni, to the current deployments of the human body in Orlan's, Stellarc's and Flanagan's performances. Some of these artists' practices are unique to postmodernism. One traditional art form which has evolved and adapted is that of figurative sculpture.

The construction and adaptation of bodily forms is (generally) the body's “deployment not just as a vehicle of reference but as an object of enquiry in its own right”(Sladen, 95:5). Current figurative artists are themselves a divergent group. The class of the late 80's and 90's includes Gober, Kiki Smith, Gormley, Graham and Marc Quinn. This disparate band itself branches off to allow a subset of figurative art to be identified.

Under the rubric of “mannequin artists” their work is conspicuously linked through the motif of fibreglass cast dummies. The generic shop dummy may not be present in all the works but exists in an aberrated form. Witness Paul McCarthy's work of “psycho-active human/vegetable hybrids” and John Issac's skinheads in bunny suits. From Abigail Lane's disturbingly familiar crime scene reconstructions, to Kerry Stewart's altered models of disabled children in calipers, once seen outside chemists.



Dinos and Jake Chapman and Charles Ray are also prominent exponents in this mini-scene of “dummy-art”. In approaching this pairing, while not directly contrasting, consistencies and common practices of the mannequin artist will be witnessed. Firstly, manner of presentation and subsequent psychological, social and cultural situations evoked will be analysed. These include polymorphic libido, voyeurism, identity and the family, consumerism and gender. This is a systematic analysis of themes and occurrences.

Secondly, in Chapters 2 and 3, explicit similarities and issues pertaining to this figurative genre will be explored. Chapter 2 discusses influences, hyper-realism, material, the innate significance of the mannequin, the uncanny and shock tactics in art. Chapter 3 examines proteiformity of work, tri-gender, mimesis, posthuman projections, the Pygmalion ‘kiss of life’ and the ‘enlivening gaze’. The success, worth and difficulties of this ‘mini-scene’ will thus be ascertained.





## Chapter 1- Libidinal Models and The One-man Orgy

Dinos and Jake Chapman are ex-Gilbert and George assistants currently riding the bandwagon labelled 'Young British Art'. Latest indication of membership would be inclusion in Richard Flood's Brilliant! compendium. Aged 34 and 30 respectively, both are graduates of Goldsmith college. They hail from London, the offspring of Cypriot and English parents. Until '93 they worked individually. Working together produces a schizophrenic art, which retains an element of their brotherly banter (Fogle 95:22). Theirs is seen as "the totally most smooth made and most labour intensive work in Brilliant!" (Collins 95:27). This is applicable to all of their works.

Great Deeds Against the Dead (1994), is three mutilated mannequins, bound and hung from a toy-model type tree, set on a patch of artificial grass [ Fig 1]. The piece is a three-dimensional realisation of etchings and sketches by Goya, "inspired" by war atrocities. Jake claims they intended to detract from the expressionistic qualities of the Goya drawing. The models were perceived as the "most neurotic medium possible". The aesthetically adroit, emotive draughtsmanship of a celebrated art historical figure has been upended. There is a deconstruction of Desastres. A critique is offered of Goya's (and the war artist's) motives. The tableaux is given a contemporary, vicarious spin. The work now mediates in a different manner and connotations pertaining to authorship and format arise. This harks back to Jake's preoccupation with semantics in his degree show (Goldsmith '89). Revolving slats in a three poster advertising hoarding explored how meaning was not innate, but "contingent upon the context in which it is spoken and ... heard" (Hall '91:428).





Fig.1 Great Deeds against the Dead





Jake and Dinos now use the body as “the vehicle of reference ... exploration,” of meaning and context. For instance Roland Jones writes : “We see the list in the morning paper at breakfast .. we forget the horrible significance that dwells amid the type” (Jones '91:19). This is in reference to the remote realities of the battlefield. Media coverage of atrocities ranges from Eddie Adam's horrific images of Vietcong executions to displays of clinical air-strikes and flashes on hillsides. We comprehend yet “forget the horrible significance”.Uncensored versions are here presented to the viewer in the surrogate flesh. Despite the mannerist depiction the reaction may still be “so what?”. Thus the viewer approaches some type of understanding or dialogue with the apathetical and voyeuristic self.Is this indifference symptomatic of an information saturated postmodern era? Apparently not, ours is not an irruptive point in time. Goya's originals inferred likewise;

Irony is everywhere,sponsored by disbelief .....the original titles he(Goya) chose; ‘This is bad’, ‘Everything is going wrong’, ‘That always happens,’ ‘One shouldn't look’(Worsdale '94:36).

The pseudo-realistic manner in which the diorama is presented-absence of body hair, prominent articulated mannequin joints, ridiculous moustaches and blow-dried wigs- alerts the viewer to the fact of this inurity to violence. Hyper-realism would be superfluous and self-defeating. It is employed only in detailed sections. Claiming to be “detrimental to our audience, to pollute and corrupt their mind” is one of their goals. They are thus questioning the viewer's faculties of choice. As easily as one may procure a ‘snuff movie’, one may gaze at masterfully realistic depictions of severed genitals. Harris underscores the work by declaring it “conventionally avant-garde ... offending the public but a public now inured to nearly





all forms of offensiveness” (Harris ’96:64). This is essentially true. Conversely it ignores the preoccupations with choice, compulsion, revulsion and fascination.

Alliance to a historically ‘serious’ artist evades criticisms of shock tactics or prurience to an extent. Relationships between art and the pornography are announced in more emphatic terms in subsequent pieces. “Dicks, cunts and arses (no bollocks though) are all over Dino and Jake Chapman’s mannequins” (Beech ’96:5). Fibreglass models of prepubescent sex-fiends, with ‘Bobby Ewing-style haircuts’, Nike or Fila trainers ,often a fresh white T-shirt and neutered pudenda. Vulvae and phalluses sprout from various surfaces of the body. Titles range from Fuck Faces (95), Two Faced Cunt (95) and Siamese Twat (95)(Fig. 2), to Tragic Anatomies (96)(Fig. 3) and Zygotic Acceleration, Biogenetic Desublimated Libidinal Model (95)(Fig. 4).The combination of libido,expensive runners and the mannequin allude to mass production, consumerism and invariably pornography and the sex market. The generic pornographic image is one “designed for men”, giving rise to “the production of sex regulated through the visual” (Gagnon ’86:21). For whom is the Chapman’s product designed ? The creations are highly sexed and yet genderless. Are they indicative of an evolving culture of equality and absence of domination? An image of unsubjected libidinal drive is provided. Notions of Eros and Thanos arise. Here gratification and the sex urge have been degendered and sex robbed of its reproductive consequences. These hormonal hermaphrodites echo Gayle Rubin’s sentiments of “far from being an expression of natural differences, exclusive gender identity is the suppression of natural similarities” (Milligan ’93:6).







Fig.2 Siamese Twat









Fig.3 Tragic Anatomies







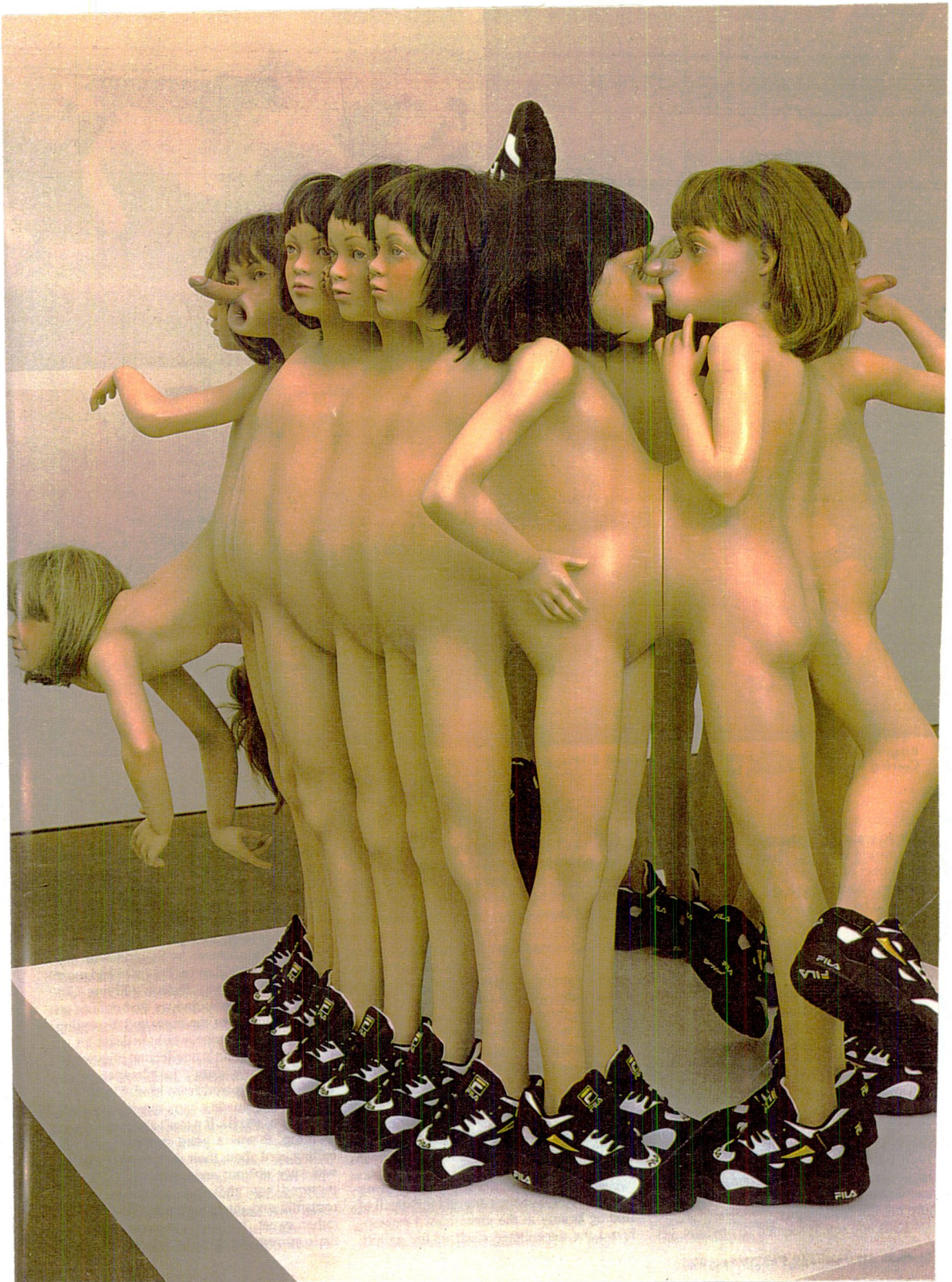


Fig.4 Zygotic Acceleration Biogenetic Libidinal Model









Fig.5 Sad Doggie







Anti-patriarchal stances and negation of roles are therefore established through this all-consuming asexual libido. This is due to the acceptance of the non-relation between fucking and reproduction - the relation upon which patriarchal humanity is predicted - because of the diversity of sexual practices ... technological options (etc.) (Halberstan '95:59).

Jake says that his models are not gender specific but are often read as being female. He claims not to know why this is. Undeniable, is their distinctive childlike appearance. The child as a highly sexually motivated entity isn't a recent concept. Yet misunderstanding and shock continues. For instance, the work of Larry Clark polemicalises this issue in his explorations of promiscuous youth. His film "Kids", like the Chapman's work, is a case of "strong meat provoking strong reactions." (Bear '95:59)

Childhood as a time of identity formation is explored and questions of abjection are presented. Boundaries are not significantly established at this early age, morals not firmly imbued. The child is without "total experience socialisation", a process in which our thoughts and behaviour traits are formed. A significant part of this concerns morality (Huer '87:181). Sense pleasures including the libidinal urges are thus less inhibited. This boundaryless and formative body is the basis for the morpheic appearance of these mannequins. They apparently procreate in an amoebic fashion-reproduction without sex. They have cut out a large part of the equation. Since "copulating is an act of social significance, sex has carried the burdens of being heavily controlled" (ibid .. 176).



Charles Ray is a California based artist, born in Chicago in 1953. He “broke into” the art scene in 1973 with various static performance pieces. For the past 7 years his genre has been that of the mannequin. This has substituted his own presence from those earlier static performance pieces, such as Phantom Limb (81-85), Death of Sadat (81), and Shelf (81). He sets out his agenda;

I’m not so interested in the body per se, its simply that this old trite problem of the mind-body relationship creates this schism which in some ways isn’t really there and in other ways it’s really a fallacy that it isn’t there .... The mind-body problem is an illusion but at the same time it isn’t we have been brought up this way (Bonami ’95:99).

Whatever the confused nature of his outlines he sets out to explore these age old conundrums of personal identity and perceived postmodern body systems. His work concerns timeless and yet strongly contemporary issues. One of these discourses is explored in Family Romance. This piece features 4 fibreglass dummies, each four and a half foot tall. There is a naked man aged 40, a naked woman aged 30, and a boy and a girl aged 8 and 4 respectively. Each maintains its correct physical proportions despite being of equal height. They all hold hands like an apocalyptic post-holocaust mutant arrangement, or more mundanely one is reminded of the reverse ageing family from Mork and Mindy. The single and most defining group of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the family unit, stands in the nude. They are the foundations and basis of western civilisation. The conservative family, vanguard of traditional values, an icon of stability in an era of flux. They are all that’s ‘right’ in a pluralist vortex. The perceived tragedy is only beginning. This unit of belonging is slip-sliding. The family, as The Report of the National Commission on America’s Urban Families states, “is the most human, the most powerful and by far the most economical system for making and keeping human beings





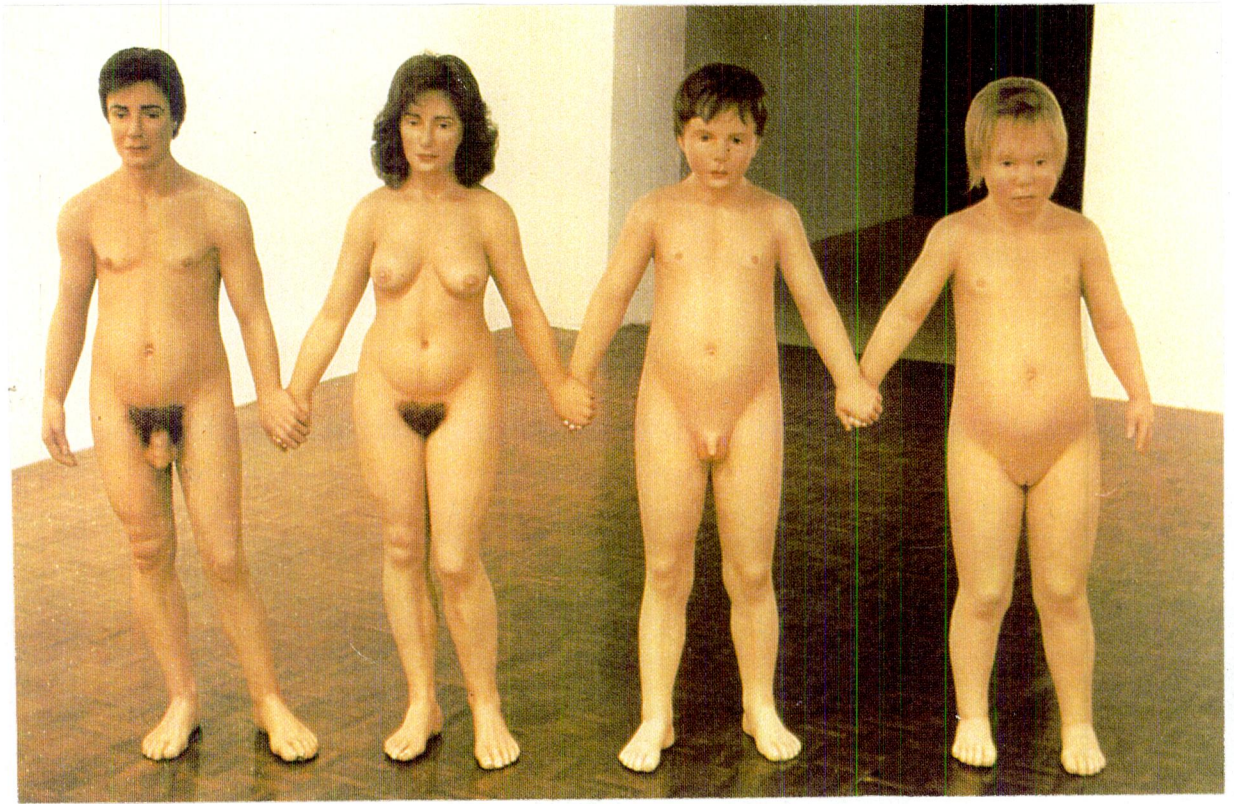


Fig.6 Family Romance





human”(Reid ‘95:177).This ‘imaginary place called home’ through the homeopathy of postmodernism - the resistance through indulgence - is dissolving at a touch. The decentred individual now faces the fragmentation of the family.

The biological link between parent and offspring is the basis for this social system. Ray’s image is therefore, as S. Muchric states in Art News (Nov 93:126), a “response to the political concept of family values, and expression of his belief that children are as powerful as their parents”. In Family Romance this contested link of emotional, financial and moral dependency on the much lauded family unit is emphasised. Any one of these individuals is capable of breaking off and destroying the unit, going solo at any moment. It is the postmodern family of “rented uteruses, divorce from parents, genetic fumbling, and false child abuse memories” (Ferguson 94:9). Post humanity is about multiple viabilities. Family Romance is indicative of current social cris-crossing, flux and explosions. This complex unit joins Stuart Hall’s fragmentation list of “class, gender, sexuality, race and nationality which gives us firm locations as social individuals leading to the crisis of identity for the individual” (Hall 93:275).

While the pre-teen hermaphrodites’ sexual identity is here in a state of arrested flux, they seem to have a definite notion of style and what is contemporary hip. They parade in the ubiquitous Nike or Fila trainers. This is multinational footwear. It’s an affront of choice i.e. choosing one label over another. Comfort and durability are not necessarily dismissed. But the symbol /logo is paramount where these creatures are concerned. Jake declares; “It was a way of making the sculpture that more perverse, without wigs and shoes it was not as insane as it





should be" (Maloney 64:96). It is an oddity that a generic multimillion pound commodity has the ability to add a perverted dimension to an already surreal image. What it certainly adds is an intrinsically hedonistic element to the overall picture. Jouissance is everywhere, from sexual delight to the pleasures of consumption. This pleasure of the commodity is seen as part of a process of "self and collective empowerment"(Halberstam '95:31).

These munchkins epitomise a culture which today is as much about texts, images and representations as about social relations. They are experiencing pleasure from the tips of their noses to the tips of the toes. There is a transference of sexual pleasure. McRobbie tells of our enormous capacity for pleasure, leisure and enjoyment. One case put forward concerns the fall of the old Eastern European regime. After forty years of Eastern European and Soviet consumerism these people :

derive the utmost pleasure from the glossy objects provided only by the consumer capitalism and further when the self restraint described above begins to seem politically like an unnecessary sacrifice (McRobbie 94:40). A questioning of our relationship to the commodity world and consumption is posed.

A snapshot of no holds-barred cheek and audacity is presented. Is this a "ridiculously futuristic" leisure time? The balance between labour and pleasure is absent and is therefore conspicuous . Only through labour is the purchasing of the commodity possible. Reality and pleasure principle are at odds. Existing primarily as sex driven animals these bodies contradict. Marcuse paraphrases Freud in declaring that society "has not means enough to support life for its members without work on their part, it must see to it that the number of these members is restricted and their energies directed away from sexual activities to their work" (Marcuse 56:17). Plausibly it is the



play out of phantasy. It is the phantasy linked with utopia and freedom of sorts, a protest against the logic of domination and drudgery. This 'phantasy' insists "that it must and can become real, that behind the illusion lies knowledge" (Marcuse 56:143).

The freedom evoked in the Chapmans' pieces follows Sontag for instance, when "the freedom to consume has come to be equated with freedom itself" (McRobbie'94 :32). While Baudrillard's genealogy of consumption indicates a system of needs which are "radically different from the category of pleasure (jouissance)" (Gane'91:57). He sees it as the utmost form of the "rational systematisation of the productive process at the individual level" (ibid). Consumption is not exclusively categorised with free pleasure but based on the 'denegation' of such pleasure. Consequently Dinos's and Jake's creatures hypothetically possess an inherent distrust, fear and neurosis. If the consuming mass has 'no collective existence' social facts must be realised in an individual manner. Fear of missing the latest fads is a subjective neurosis. It is here that the collective and individual intersect. The unity which exists between these hybrids is an uneasy one.

Their trainers are the very simple symbols of pecuniary exchange. This physical exchange has been slowly dematerialised, a new liquidity abounds. It is a facet of homogenisation - style, currency, living and shopping spaces etc.. This is ambient and total. As one of the titles suggest, it is a desublimated lifestyle. The 'biogenetic desublimated' lifeform may be already evolving in today's unique environs. Use of the mass produced mannequin reinforces this ideal. It is an evolutionary step lamented by Baudrillard (again). One in which the "substance of life, unified in this universal digest, can no longer have any meaning" (ibid :71). His lament is echoed in Huxley's





much cited prophesy. This is when humanity becomes distracted and mesmerised by trivia, cultural life becoming sheer entertainment and consumption. "Public business becomes a vaudeville act ; culture death becomes a clear possibility" (Postman '86:56). Passive control is the sentiment. Sexual urges, consumption and pleasures freely exist resulting in this culture death.

One individual who has exchanged Nike for high heels is Ray's Fall '91(92). It is a female mannequin, enlarged by 30%, standing eight feet tall, power dressed in the latest 90's fashion (Fig. 7). Exuding an aura of assurance, independence and success is a "mechanical ubermistress" (Rian 93:52). Here is an "Amazonian cover-girl" (Relyea '92:66). She presents a very real threat to a constantly weakening male hegemonic society. Ray, by emphasising physical differences, draws attention to the fact that physicality is the final bastion of male supremacy. This woman has brains *and* brawn. Any male dependent on weights constructing a body echoes Berger's sentiments of a man's presence being "dependent upon the promise of power which he embodies" (Berger '72:45). In Ray's set up this modern primitive would be downtrodden and superfluous. In effect, she is a variation of the hooligan i.e. "a young man occupying public space in a particularly loud and aggressive manner" (Morgan '93:72). Her power is suggested, latent and controlled. Her power is exercised in bodily terms "even when no direct physical contact takes place" (ibid:70).

While she puts to lie the physical conundrum, she is obviously a signifier or metaphor for success in every arena. Fall '91 is a powerful totem of the female usurping the historically given patriarchal position. Following Lacan, the phallus is here representative of lack. Standing tall in the pluralist stream, rising







Fig.7 **Fall '91**





above the feminist voice as being seen as “one amongst many, its insistence on difference as testimony to the pluralism of the times” (Owens ’93:37).

This eight foot woman is asking us to relive our experience as babies in the presence of the ‘great mother’. As with your mother she looked like a ‘dominant sphinx’ (Bonami ’92:99). It puts the viewer, both sexes, back into the position, however lightweight, of dyadic unity. To many this was God, the “dominant sphinx”. The mannequin exists for the viewer as a dummy surrogate exists for a young chimp. Maybe ....

Returning to a male vantage point, she is, as Relyea puts it “the hypertrophic vision of the other, whole lotta woman, a monumental punchclock for true blue male desire” (Relyea ’92:61). She is thus akin to some oppressive sex-shop doll. This is in line with Owens’s thinkings of pubescent males’ fantasy of Wonder Woman. She allegedly is “the perfect, embodiment of the phallic mother” (Owens ’93:343).

Is it really possible to envisage this glamour cave-girl, with the Mensa I.Q. as “mammy”? The control and power she emits and her “severe” appearance, would include her in a certain echelon of female forms. Bordo sees these extreme body types e.g. anorexics, bodybuilders etc. as disidentifications with the maternal body. They symbolise a “freedom from a reproductive destiny and a construction of femininity seen as constraining and suffocating” (Bordo ’90:90).

The subject of dress codes is vital. Power dressing runs parallel to this empowered body. It acts as a liberating force of femininity. Fashion, to some, denaturalises the body, diverting essentialism. And as Liz Wilson states “Fashion in our



epoch (is) ... good news for woman, since essentialist ideologies have been oppressive to them” (Wilson '90:223). Any clothing articulates the body and the psyche. Yet some feminists would see certain modes of dress as restrictive. Fashion, capitalism and consumption veer toward notions of dictation from a male hegemony. Power dress codes are essentially patriarchal constructs. I'll allow Burchill to take over here. She disparages this fashion, as it succeeded in:

collapsing feminism into liberalism, thereby portraying the woman's movement as driven only by moral righteousness and self-interest, which (she) caricatured as hallmarks of the progressive middle-class.  
(Mort '96:40).

Is the liberated woman being merely assimilated into a male constructed society ? If so Fall '91 holds as a pathetic image of woman's loss of identity.

Clearly Ray approaches his work from a male viewpoint. While man may wish for equality, it will always be a peculiarly male notion of what the women want. Weil writes in relation to Fall '91 : “Men glorify a fantasised omnipotence of women, rather than trying to acknowledge them as alter ego in rights rather than identity” (Weil '92:83). Tolson tells of how men have joined male groups because of the feminist challenge; “We were in favour of woman's independence, but felt threatened by it” (Tolson '77:138). There will always be tension, suspicion or distance between the sexes. Ray seems to depict this battle, declaring that there is always a sexus sequior. Have women been sold short ? Had this been their goal ? As Susan Faludi summarises; “You may be free and equal now .. but you never have been so miserable” (Weil '92:83). Finally, Ray describes this impasse of the sexes as the





“neurotic social contract”. His I.C.A. exhibition contains an imaginative composition of a male and female Neanderthal embracing in a prehistoric scenario (Fig.8).

“When I look at this couple I see an aspect of togetherness that seems unattainable to modern man. Neurotic social contract is absent and for a moment pure animal instinct is at bay” (Ferguson '94:14).

This yearning and despair expressed in the I.C.A. catalogue is partly reflected in Oh Charley, Charley, Charley...(92) (Fig. 9). It comprises of 8 fibreglass figures, each a bodycast of Ray. All are naked and interconnected, receiving or initialising a sexual act. It is a Mobius strip scenario, eight identical sexually mature men indulging in one another.; “It’s a sex orgy and I’m the only participant ... when I first began... the notion of different sex positions was really on my mind” (Bonami '92:98). Taking this as a starting point he expands that after being involved with different partners he enjoyed sleeping by himself. It is disenchantment, apathy and a certain selfishness, the “narcissistic orgy” Verzotti speaks of (Verzotti '95:99). Ray is simply fed up. Matthew Ritchie, (in approaching the work of Barney, Lucas, Smith and Donning) believes there is a type of narcissistic reaction to dating.

Self-love means never having to say you’re sorry. Who hasn’t looked in the mirror and asked -why aren’t there more people just like you?  
(Ritchie '95:51).

Ray likens this piece to Bracusi’s The Kiss, but as more of a quest for pure love rather than a celebration of it. Equally it describes the wholly narcissistic and selfish nature of relationships. Gagnon writes of how we seek the fulfilment of self identity in love; “This love is itself precarious because it resides outside ourselves in the other, who likewise does not possess his or her own fulfilment” (Gagnon '93:100). Ray is at once noting how one may enjoy ones own company ,and, at the same time, the lack in this emptiness. The negativity and self-





Fig.8 Untitled









Fig.9 Oh Charley,Charley,Charley....





based nature of the sexual act is depicted. This again echoes Gagnon's sentiments of the disappointment of the sexual act, being merely a "dissipation of the energy that sustains us, producing no more than a limited economical sexual pleasure" (ibid:124).

Ray uses his own body as a direct mediator in depicting the subjectivity of this universal feeling. He also displays a masturbatory pleasure ,and while this is experienced by both sexes, this jouissance, as a principle, is imagined as "strong, muscular and phallic" (Hewison '90:123). Conversely, Ray's orgy, which we see as male due to our gendered environment, could exist as a independent system. It is all Ray and to an extent is neutral. As Wittig explains, in relation to lesbians:

It would be incorrect to say that lesbians associate, make love, live with women, for women has meaning only in heterosexual systems of thought and heterosexual economic systems. Lesbians are not women.  
(Milligan '93:7)

Oh Charley, Charley, Charley.. may thus be read as homosexual, asexual or autoerotic. In this homo or autoerotic set-up the "neurotic social contract" is being quashed. Fears of performance are here lacking, when " a sexually dysfunctioning man is interacting with an opposite sexed partner"(ibid :97).

Ray has evoked Wittig's neutre. It is a reassessment of gender identity. This eroticism is emancipatory as the "neutre is reached though perversion and pleasure" (Hewison '90:113). It is disruptive to the general viewer and audience and a disorientation of sexual identity occurs. This disorientation undermines the viewers confidence in the scheme of classification;

People will regard any phenomenon that produces disorientation as disgusting and dirty ... the phenomenon must destroy their whole cognitive system(ibid).





In a different mode Ray searches for security in a politically correct culture in a time of date rape, queer bashings, sexual harrassments and false allegations of the above. Add to this the threat of lethal STDs , and a precarious post structural sex evolves. All contrive to cause, as Kroker puts it, “that faithful rupture between the death of a sex with secretions and the incarceration of sexuality in the prison house of social code” (Kroker ’88:24).

Ray has a vision of a sexual utopia in this zone of hyperindulgence in one’s own body. Completely absorbed in oneself and one’s own gratification. Not merely adolescent masturbation, but some type of auto-ultrasex. An infinite overstimulation of self desire. Ray prophesises that when technology gets sophisticated enough “ you may get to have an orgy with yourself” (Bonami ’92:100).

This virtual sex may have already arrived in a different literal sense. Kroker and Cook bombastically discuss how sex today is “an endless seminology of signs; panic sex. It is a sex without secretions”(Kroker ’88:240). Genetic engineering, abortion, artificial insemination, surrogates and HIV have resulted in a transformation of the natural process of sex. It is a site for the playing out of “the thermodynamics of cynical power” (ibid).Advertising, film, ‘sex-tips’ in periodicals etc. have all contrived to point our libido in certain directions. Oh Charley Charley Charley.. is a manic never ending quest, striving to attain a degree of comprehension of the situation. Or it may be the final regression, giving up all effort.

Another Chapman piece worth mentioning is Urbemensch (95). This is life-size fibreglass replication is of the popular physicist, Stephen





Hawking.(Fig. 10). In a simple sense it is a depiction of his emphatic triumph over disability. It is therefore another work in the expanding posthuman collection. He is a sheer example of the obsolete corporeal frame. He is an actual living epitomy of the predicted cybergenic hyperhuman. 'Übermensch' could refer to Nietzsche's prophesy of the Overman, "man is something he should overcome". This is a concern of the Chapmans i.e. future viabilities.

While they also see art antecedents as anathema and refuse any background insights, they contradictally produce these projections. The fusion of body and technology in the production of these mannequins runs parallel to current smudgings of distinctions between natural and artificial phenomena. And in their current output, have, against their own desires, been saved for posterity. As B.M. Stafford puts it; "The art-historical perspective may offer a useful reminder of the cultural potential and implications of this dream technology" (Stafford '94:198).

The Chapman's latest venture was the sale of undeveloped rolls of film, of the artists every day life ( Sawyer '96:38). They served as a demystification of the artists lifestyle.Übermensch gives Hawkings a spacey, celebratory aura. He is a celebrity intellect, revered by the public. His intelligence removes him from the everyday, not his disability. This is the myth of Einstein which Barthes describes. His mythology of 1957 describes Einstein's brain as a mythical object, removed from psychology, introduced into another world of objective observation.





Fig.10 Übermensch





Analysis thus far has seen the mannequin simply as a point of departure, a catalyst for evocation of meaning (as the art object is normally seen). I have viewed the mannequin as a body surrogate. It is viewed in part with a romantically liminal openness. Partially it is a unmediated art. Particularly in Ray's work which offers a visceral and at times vicarious experience. The Chapman's work generally operates at the former level. This approach is often slated for disengaging critique (cf. Boland, Art Monthly 192; Editorial, Art Monthly 188). (The Chapmans in fact aim toward this pre-emptive intellectual displacement). Yet once these responses have been assimilated a more detached volition comes into play. The dramatic ,yet insipid, antromorphs of Ray and the Chapmans then allow something of an intermediate state of discourse.





## CHAPTER 2 - Plastic Dummies, Shock Tactics and The Uncanny.

Undeniably the surrealists pioneered the mannequin tradition. The mannequins themselves, and the theatrics they are involved in, suggest these Surrealist codes of the readymade, phantom object and symbolically functioning object. Ernst, de Chirico, Dali and Bellmer spoke in 1985 (some 40 years after his heydays) of the 'Plastic Anagram'. He saw dummy art as rearrangements of the body. "Like a sentence.... So that its real meaning becomes clear through a series of endless anagrams" (Kraner '91:42). The valency of this statement is clearly evident in the reconstituted forms of Rays and the Chapmans. They place a definite spin and new perspective on body types.

Further parallels may be drawn. The surrealists perceived the doll/dummy as either (or simultaneously) innocent, a potential victim or a seductress. Erotica, male anxiety and desires were concerns. These agendas are easily pinpointed in the Chapman's work. Their freaks are usually vacant looking but sometimes positively sexually aggressive. At once they are provocateurs of sexual acts (assertion of childhood sexuality) and innocents. Falling victim to consequences of libidinal urges are possibilities. Ray's bodies are confused, victims of language, culture and confrontation. Their innocence lies in the subjugation to Fate or the greater social psychological system.

Hanson, Kienholz, Segal and De Andrea were major players in the 60's and 70's. Hanson and de Andrea in particular exhausted the exploration of the



overly mimetic object. The imitative power of art has largely had ambivalent responses and is seen at this point as redundant. They are at best interesting in their craft and in their ability to capture an essentialism, immortalise and exaggerate it. At worst, vulgar, sterile and jarring. The universality of death is harshly reiterated. Little room is left for analysis or the power of the symbol. It simply invites a dull, dead-end debate into reproduction, transformation of material and hyper-realism. They largely cancel themselves out as objects of enquiry. Ray and the Chapmans have thus felt able to bypass this foregone methodology. In a tighter contemporary scene it is more difficult to separate influencers, influencees and plagiarists. Generally the fledgling Chapman brothers have had the direction of other artists loaded onto them. Reliance on virtually no other medium or experience also narrows down the possibilities. Reviews of their work are dotted with allusions, as a position and sequence is determined for the brothers. They “add considerably to the Ray-McCarthy-Smith line of investigation” (Worsdale 180:94). Their “combination of the grotesque and extreme matter-of-factness” is the surrealist sensibility seen in the work of Gober, McCarthy and Ray. Indeed Rosenblaum observes “how much the Chapmans ‘creature features’ may owe to Charles Ray’s creepy mannequins” (Rosenblaum ’96:101). The brothers understanding of the situation is that it is non-patriarchal. Jake ‘happily confesses’, “we steal their ideas. They steal ours. Everyone is happy”(Maloney ’96:64).

Ray's career has been more varied, and the mannequin is only a part of his oeuvre. Clearly his dummy pieces have seen him places besides Gober, McCarthy and the Chapmans. What this simply exposes is the symbiotic relationship of the current crop of mannequin works. To say artists steal is a little blunt. Within a short timescale this mini-scene seems to be about giving allegorical significance to archetypal





images. It will only become delineated and better defined once played out and viewed from a lengthier historical perspective. The next crop will then decide who to 'steal' from.

The material base of these artists work is the ubiquitous plastic. In a relatively short period the centuries old traditions of the bronze, marble or plaster figure have largely been disregarded as participation in a serious critical figurative debate. This is the face of logical progression. Ray outlines this development:

I can't carve those clay figures out of stone or model them out of clay. It would be a ridiculous proposition in this day and age, but if I use a laser scanner, it's the same. (Bonami '92:100)

Any traditionalist cries of 'cheat' or a nostalgia for past 'masters' is rendered null and void by various witnesses. According to Worsdale they "could belong to the studio Bronzino" (Worsdale '94:101). While Birnbaum curtly declares "these mannequin kids are meticulously finished pieces of careful craftsmanship. (Birnbaum '95:117). These artists are slick, highly competent professionals. It is the use of their starting material, plastic, which poses questions, and exudes and evolves meaning.

Barthes, in the late 50's wrote "that in the hierarchy of the major poetic substances it figures as a disgraced material" (Barthes 57:98). Effusiveness and hard-edgeness are lost, he mourns. The 'plastic artist' must override any disgraces of the material (unless intending to do otherwise). The image becomes all distinguishing. The plastic-mould figures have rendered redundant the emotive psyche, in a field which largely celebrates gesture, mark and engagement with the artists 'touch'. This touch is otherwise seen as the artists signature. Their pieces are of the highest craft yet are too





controlled to belong to any heroic figurative tradition. The plastic itself nullifies the gesture. "It must be content with a 'substantial' attribute which is neutral inspite of its utilitarian advantages "(Ibid). This allows the artists meaning to be immediately through the image produced itself. Traces of the artists touch or feel are removed from the surface.

It is a strange fellowship. Form and elegant craftsmanship are extremely evident yet the plastic negates these devices to an extent. They become sheer objects, presences. Certain degrees of significance may be lost, while others will override. Richard Garnet disregards Barthe's argument as dated, yet unconsciously adds to it:

Since then we have become quite at home in our  
'plastic world' and the dissolution of the hierarchy  
of materials has long ceased to be an issue  
(Garnett'96:62) .

Had Ray or the Chapmans cast solid bronze figures or spent months chiselling, would hierarchy not have been an issue ? Garnett's other point however, deems that the audience will not be otherwise distracted whilst viewing the object i.e. by the material basis.

These plastic figures dismiss notions of patina and ageing. Plastic exists universally in time. It is inherently, at once, a new, old, and evolving substance.

First revered for its ability to simulate precious materials,  
then reviled for its cheap, popular tackiness, and finally  
rehabilitated for its contribution to high-tech high style.  
(Myerson '90:51).

The material has generally been assimilated into the form and content. It acts as the most diffident, subdued provider of a presence. Plastic doesn't preach. What little it does suggest has been exploited, and benefits the work. Neutral plastic evokes the



neutre, gender and a neurotic absence of surface character. The synthetic sheens, flawlessness and economy conjure up the homogenous, pluralism and consumerism. Literal interpretations are assisted by the substance base. While representative analysis challenges notions of representations of reality. Generally the body is pale and unheroic. Expressionistic, spontaneous character is absent. The ubiquitous plastic assists the artist as “the whole world can be plasticized”(Garnett '96:62)

The thing itself, the mannequin. Taken on its own, minus the interference of Ray and the Chapmans what starting point does it propose ? As a raw material they are “‘easy on the eye’ the way Burt Bacharach is ‘easy on the ear’” (Popham '95:22). They also cause an undercurrent of unease and disturbance. We represent ourselves through these conventions. The mannequin is “physiologically familiar but emotionally alien” (Brown '95:74). Like dolls, waxworks and other dummies, they are “automatically sinister”(ibid). The surgery that the Chapmans and Ray perform, upsets our, at best, apathetic, uneasy relationship with these archetypal images. We must further reconsider these human surrogates. Consider the high street mannequins, are we to aspire to these models of the body. Who is reflecting whom ? Deitch writes of our posthuman condition, “reality, fantasy and fiction are merging into a new model of personality organisation” (Deitch '92:18).

Mike Kelley curated a 1993 exhibition entitled The Uncanny (Sonsbeek). In it he recognized this “recent sculptural trend ... known as ‘mannequin art ’” (Kelley '93:5). We can empathise with these simulcras .Yet they hint at our presentness, their immutability exaggerates our ephemerality.Kelley describes an irrational, ‘uncanny’ condition which they provoke in us. These creations; “desire a





violent death to relieve them of the pathos (projected by the viewer) of their pseudo life” (ibid :21)

This phenomenon was recognised by Freud in his 1919 book, also entitled, The Uncanny. He sees it as a fear caused by intellectual uncertainty. This is a “decontextualized strategy”. The uncanny is nothing else “than a hidden, familiar thing that has undergone repression and then emerged from it” (ibid:3). Certainly Siamese Twat or Family Romance has defamiliarised the familiar and made the conventional suspicious.

The mannequin is generally perceived as a fashion module. It is a representation of “neutrality, a device used to display clothes and appeal to the consumer” (Weil 92:82) . Maloney declares that mannequin art is not new, and often seen as “Kitsch, comedy or a serious critique of commodification” (Maloney 96:64). Reference to mannequins reiterates the body as a mere vehicle. We are expendable In the fashion world for an inanimate prosthetic. Take Baudrillard’s theory that today “everyone has become a mannequin; each is summoned to threat (her) body as an investment through clothing and style”(Gane 91:106). The body is a serviceable device. Mannequins acquire a degree of identity through dress, such is the value we place on clothing as signifiers. The clothed static model is “a visual metaphor for identity...registering the culturally anchored ambivalences that resonate within and among identities” (Davis ’92:25).

It is disturbing that these are the conventions of how we represent our species. And for the mannequin substitute the fuck-doll, prosthetics and plastic surgery devices, effigies, voodoo dolls, surrogate artificial companions e.g. the





tactile teddy-bear. Our mortality, obsolescence and projected identities are conjured up. Ray and the Chapman brothers make the uncanny stranger, more upsetting.

The concept of shock is an unavoidable issue in the presentation of these mutant marionettes to the public. The degrees of this artifice varies. Careful handling of the topic is required. Ray's Oh Charley, Charley, Charley was deemed, by one critic, a failed sculpture "because given the sexual display in the work, people don't want to look too closely" (Volkart '95:104). Overall, Ray has escaped being regarded as too shocking, prurient or lude. Firstly, his overall oeuvre is extremely varied. Secondly, there exists a playfulness, which can itself become a pitfall. A tension exists between the jocular and the shocking. Like any serious artist, Ray "doesn't want to set himself up as the spectacular joker of modern art" (ibid). He strives for that juncture "called the search for a 'just image' in opposition to just an image" (Ferguson '94:8). Through his inimitable marriage of shock and humour he jolts the viewer into a response. As he himself claims "We have lost our relationship with the world, we are observers and not participants anymore" (Bonami '92:100).

With works entitled Siamese Twat, Cunt Face and Fuck Face, Dinos and Jake don't beat about the bush. Couple this with alignment with the yBAs, at a time when "sex and violence, smut and nastiness, are an exclusive preoccupation of Young Brits" (Kelly '95:42). Dinos and Jake are unflinching in their address. This is the "conventionally avant-garde" aim of offending the public. While one may recognise this methodology, response is highly subjective. Harris sees them "repeating empty significations of transgressions". More seriously he believes their work "is bound to



collapse into ludicrous and self-demeaning pornography” (Harris ’96:129). Maloney feels utter boredom and embarrassment with their work, not because of its severity, but “because it is second-rate art with a pretence to being something grander, profound and enduring” (Maloney ’96:67). More favourable are citations such as “an accurately targeted homeostasis of shock, humour and elegant craftsmanship” (Jacques ’95:57). She likens this art to a “certain spirit of our time”, of the Tarantino school for instance. Critical responses vary, but undoubtably the knee-jerk controversy of their work capitulated them into the top flight. And divergent receptions surely announces an art which cannot be anything less than busy and engaging.

The shocking images of Rays and the Chapmans will carry on into the everyday. This is the net profit of these manipulated body substitutes. They will go on spooking our lives wherever we are. We are reminded of them “in Soho or Toys’R’Us or just looking in the mirror” (Rosenblum ’96:101)..Popham writes that shock is the most important weapon in the modern artists armoury. “But shock tactics can backfire too” (Popham ’96:22). So is shock a mere guaranteed attention grabber or a ‘just image’? Burchill laments the passing of an art once about exalting the human spirit. Now it is about nothing more or less than helping to “confuse and disgust further a species already reeling with disgust and confusion” (Burchill ’95:36). True. But the artist cannot be seen as a ‘soul-doctor’, offering cures or a postmodern panacea. The viewer must digest and cogitate all that pervades. And the Chapman’s and Ray’s scatological aesthetic both breaks and contributes to this dialectic.





### CHAPTER 3 - Multiple Readings, the Third Sex and the Enlivening Gaze.

Presenting two dummy-artists allows general trends to be witnessed within the 90's figurative tradition. Divergent themes within a specific set are noted. The figure is a vehicle for exploring ideas but "primarily those involving race, class, gender and sexuality" (Gibson '94:10). Age-old concerns are given an end of century spin. Again Deitch (being interviewed about *Posthuman* '92 ) speaks of this fin-de-siecle manifestation;

...a reinvention of figurative art, however, rather than a return to figuration. I feel that we are seeing a rebirth of figurative art that is coinciding with these changes in the social and technological environment (Kontova '92:66).

One couldn't discount these features from the Chapmans', and particularly Ray's work. The generalised themes become even more fluid when dealing with these artists. All artwork is layered, problematic and susceptible to various interpretations. The very use of the body produces loaded responses. Family Romance suggests multiple readings, ranging , as Heartney saw it, "from a mediation on a child's fantasy of mastery over its parents to a revelation of the suppressed sexuality of the family unit" (Heartney '93:46). Verzotti reinforces this generalised nature of Ray's work; "Today's most typical interpretative categories are easily adapted to Ray's work" (Verzotti '95:99). The leeway the body allows, may be beneficial, or may cloud the artists' immediate goals. Ray is personally pleased at this mercurial aspect. He isn't particularly interested in "picking out cultural bar-codes with which to imprison his work" (Relyea '92:64). He intentionally produces sculptures as "a singular event to set off complex responses" (Muchnic '93:126).





This tact generally succeeds for Ray. He doesn't set out to 'trip people up'. His work has set agendas, but the agendas themselves, and mode of presentation, are fluid and debatable. The Chapmans produce pieces which question even the 'singular event', which sets off the complex responses. They claim to be anti-conceptual. Art to Jake is highly democratic;

It is available for interpretation, for discussion, for pleasure,  
for any type of pathological, normal, neo-normal projection.  
Any kind of desire can be placed upon it  
(Maloney '96:67).

They deliberately undermine the process of even dignified exchange. The critics, whose profession is being nullified, have not taken kindly to being fed "mounds of pseudo post-deconstructionalist gibberish" (Popham '96:22). Neal Brown wearily notes that;

the work is intellectually proteiform and aching, successful  
in the pleasure it takes in itself, shuffling significant interpretative  
probabilities.  
(Brown '95:50).

Open-ended work is produced by both artists. Ray upsets our perspectives and intends to set the ball rolling, as it were. The brothers motivation in producing these protean works is intellectual disengagement. In producing objects for the "chattering classes ...we're trying to stop the chatter"(Fogle '96:22).

Their intentions may be divergent. Their focal point is the mutual mutation and readjustment of the human body. Whilst being intellectually lucrative, these simulacra are very definite, solid entities. Very real hallucinations are presented. These aberrations include the equal family, an eight-foot ubermistress, the one-man orgy and prepubescents sprouting genitalia on their faces and torsos. This plastic army



share the floor of the posthuman epoch. Whilst, not proposing to be pertinent prototypes, like much 'posthuman art', they hint at and suggest possibilities. To be labelled scientific prophets would be demeaning and a misnomer. The work would be reduced to novelty status, pseudo-scientific speculations. They must be viewed in their broadest sense as locations, occurrences and viabilities which the individual is likely to contend with. Once again, Deitch, something of a sensationalist crusader in this field, speaks of his engrossment:

... always fascinated to see how artists parallel the most advanced thinking in, science and philosophy and then crystallize and communicate it  
(Kontova '92:68).

The works are located at this future philosophical/scientific intersection. The very nature of sculptural art makes this a physicality. The humanities and science both strive for better understandings. Technology and science particularly make forays into a utopian future. An instance of this gel of art and science is in Jake Chapmans statement: "They are ridiculously futuristic, a morphological model of how voyeuristic desire might effect evolution" (Tressider '95:29).

A striking feature of both the Chapmans and Rays mannequins, is, despite their predicaments, their static nature, matter of factness, the dumb stare. If belief is suspended, conceivable they 'contain' someone. They exist as physical representations of (posthuman) psychological and social problems. Their matter of fact stares dissolves the nuances of character and allows focus on already complex affairs. Morris describes an aspect of our advancement. He tells that "... the quest for a pain-free life-relocating utopia within the solitary, private individual- entails grave dystopian consequences" (Morris '95:170). No tortured expressions of bewilderment or anguish. Progress is played out on the body, our locus for experience. Existing in Rays or the





Chapmans fantasy world allows enhanced perspectives of these developments. Developments affecting body and mind and future utopias/dystopias are through these devices given an arena in which to be considered.

The plastic mannequin speaks of the mass-produced, and neutrality. Even if nominally ascribed with a life identity or gender, it remains essentially non-descript. Attributes of sex belie an underlying androgyny . Minus wig, dress and make-up would Fall '91 convince ? In Family Romance age issues and sexual contestations are, through equal proportion, placed on a level playing field. Fuckface and Siamese Twat echo the sentiments that “the libido is genderless”(Chapmans '96:16) . These are influences of the third sex. Currently a popular discourse with many artists, it isn't homosexual, cross-dressed or transsexual. It is, as Ritchie puts it;

trigender identity relying less on a double take of concealment and revelation and more on a declaration of possibility  
( Ritchie '95:51).

Dinos and Jake portray beings possessing both male and female genitals or possessing none at all, or, in a neutral, nullifying location. They are also child-like. They are of no definite sexuality - yet. Support is found in Ruyter's self-portraits, as a figure of indeterminate age and sexuality. Or Lucas's image of perpetual adolescence “choosing to remain for now, undifferentiated, all the potential of both boy and girlhood”. (ibid) Fictional life is given to the third sex in Matthew Barney's videos. By the conclusion of Cremaster 4 he has evolved into, or returned to, an undifferentiated new sex. It is “neither male nor female, but a third sex, or the next sex” (Saltz '96:91). Ray and the Chapmans not only share these concepts with high art theorists. It also





finds voice in popular culture. In 'Trainspotting', (a 'critique' of heroin, a base, genderless, libido suppressant), its anti-hero states;

1000 years from now there'll be no guys and gels,  
only wankers... its all about aesthetics and fuck all  
to do with morality (Welsh '94 ,Screenplay Hodge'95).

We are *at least* 1000 years from this ubiquitous state. Manifestations include the performances of female body-builder Lisa Lyons, or the hermaphrodite Loren Cameron. Discreditable as 'tri-gender', but the closest current actualities. A stauncher stance views Fall '91 as a *woman*. Oh, Charley,Charley,Charley.... is eight *male* figures. Great Deeds Against the Dead comprises of mutilated, castrated *men*. Yet even this blatant, frank interpretation is undermined. It all becomes relative. Hewison comments;

The body is not sexed, the blood and implied pain is something  
the sexes experience in common (Hewison '90:161).

The representational dummies of Ray and the Chapmans can be seen as sexually linear, an existence beyond gender boundaries. There will always be differences, but they echo Barthes cry for a zero-degree body. Maleness and femaleness barely exist, producing "a neutral, anatomical body, a body which signifies nothing" (Wiseman '87:116).

The strength of the work and the imbued significance is reliant on the artists presentation and the viewers ability to imbibe and ponder the various signifiers. Figurative and body art have become increasingly difficult both in production and assimilation. Basic figurative art is abstractions of representations of the human form. Body art tends to be seen as a phenomenal experience, and possesses a more conceptual, cerebral quality. Figurative tends to declare nudity and gender (usually female) in whatever attenuated or abberated form. Body art locates itself



beyond these points of view, or at a perceived deeper level. A crossover of these traditions causes a collision of issues.

From Segal to Smith, Jasper Johns to Abramovic, Rodin to Gormley, artists have tackled the body, its meanings, functions and relative art historical position on individual counts. Overwhelmingly the question of mimesis and the Pygmalion “kiss of life” is asked. A relevant, convincing representation is pursued. The Modernists dismissed the figure as a relic of tradition no longer worth struggling with, collapsing it into abstraction. They “reshaped it so it represents an idea, in the process denying its organic reality”(Kuspit '94:21). More recent attempts are generally incapable of bridging the notion of the body as fiercely mortal, weak and never again truly organic, overrun by technology.

Similarly figuration always contends with the previously mentioned uncanny. Figurative work transcends logic. In the estimated image of ourselves, there is a fear and repression at large, which is sometimes embarrassing. Taplin lists this strange logic of our responses;

Pornographic photographs and movies create real arousal, defamation of official portraits, instigate real anger on elation and hardly anyone is willing to stick pins in a photograph of ones mother (ibid :31) .

Images and depictions go beyond the mere metaphorical where the body is concerned.

There is a heightened symbolism and a relocation or extension of our feelings.

Kuspit and Taplin offer conclusions in their respective essays on how to restore a vitality, making body art more accurate, important and relevant. Touch is Kuspits panacea. The great task of sculpture is now “to represent touch convincingly - to create a touching space” (ibid :23). He cites the “consummate, intangible, spaceless orgasm” as his point in being. This is a daring and exciting possibility. Taplin offers up





a more probably successful viability. It is the marriage of intellect, imagination and humanity ;

To look with the 'enlivening gaze' ...if we can take the reality it represents seriously... in the attentive imagination... then we might see the unknowable in the familiar (ibid: 32).

Two current thinkings, and two survival packages offered. Meanwhile Ray and the Chapmans have loosely adopted and tackled the multitude of codes surrounding figurative art. Dinos and Jake would typically dismiss their work as relating to this discourse. They "don't create anything ...(they) put things in a different order". Their mannequins "refer to nothing but themselves" (Tressider '95:29). Ray's use of the figure wholly embraces the uncanny. His corporeal representations are approachable, adequately divulgent in content. The perceived futility in imitation, the imbuing of life and the artists touch has been noted.

The consistencies in much dummy art is the insistence on producing the iconic rather than the representational - "something that is more like an hallucination" (Frolger '96:22). This generally negotiates Taplin's anodyne of "enlivening with the gaze", seeing the unknowable in the familiar. Or seeing things we'd thought of but didn't want to see in the flesh. The extent of Ray's mimesis, evokes corporeality sufficiently to allow empathy with the situation presented. Kuspit declares Ray a "Pygmalion who lacks the kiss of life" (Kuspit '94:23). This is possibly true. Yet Ray like the Chapmans, never denies the turgid, 'dumminess' of the pieces. The quietly played out histrionics jar the senses and play out in the imagination.



## CONCLUSION

A summary of themes would include a search for pure love, libidinal speculation, questioning of gender and male female relationships. Issues regarding consumerism, mortality, phantasy, the family unit and posthuman entities also arose. Subsequently, approaches and responses to this art type, regarding shock, protean presentation, mimesis and the uncanny, were discussed.

Whilst these artists struggle with a figurative discourse, attempts at a cogint display of the body ,and thorough engagement with the figurative tradition, is a stifling approach. Precedents have been noted if not conversed with. The mannequin opens up a crack in an increasingly homogenised culture, offering an access point between the art object and greater social and cultural condition.

Manipulation of this form allows another point of departure via the uncanny, empathy, distress and imagination. Experience of the work ranges from the unmediated and vicarious to the mediated and literal.

What is at stake is the production of a versatile contemporary metalanguage. The Chapmans' iconic hallucinations create dialogue. Or contrarily they may 'stop the chatter'. Rays manipulation of scale and viewer-object relationship contaminates perspective and our worldly views. Dummy-art is a pick and mix of social, artistic and subjective values. Dinos and Jake and Charles Ray create a vital context which shakes us visually, emotionally and intellectually.





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