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**COLAISTE NAISIÚNTA EALAINÉ IS DEARTHÁ
NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN
FACULTY OF EDUCATION**

**POPULAR CULTURE:
ITS EFFECTS ON VISUAL AWARENESS IN THE CLASSROOM**

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Education
in
Candidacy for the
DIPLOMA FOR ART AND DESIGN TEACHERS

by
Heather Moore

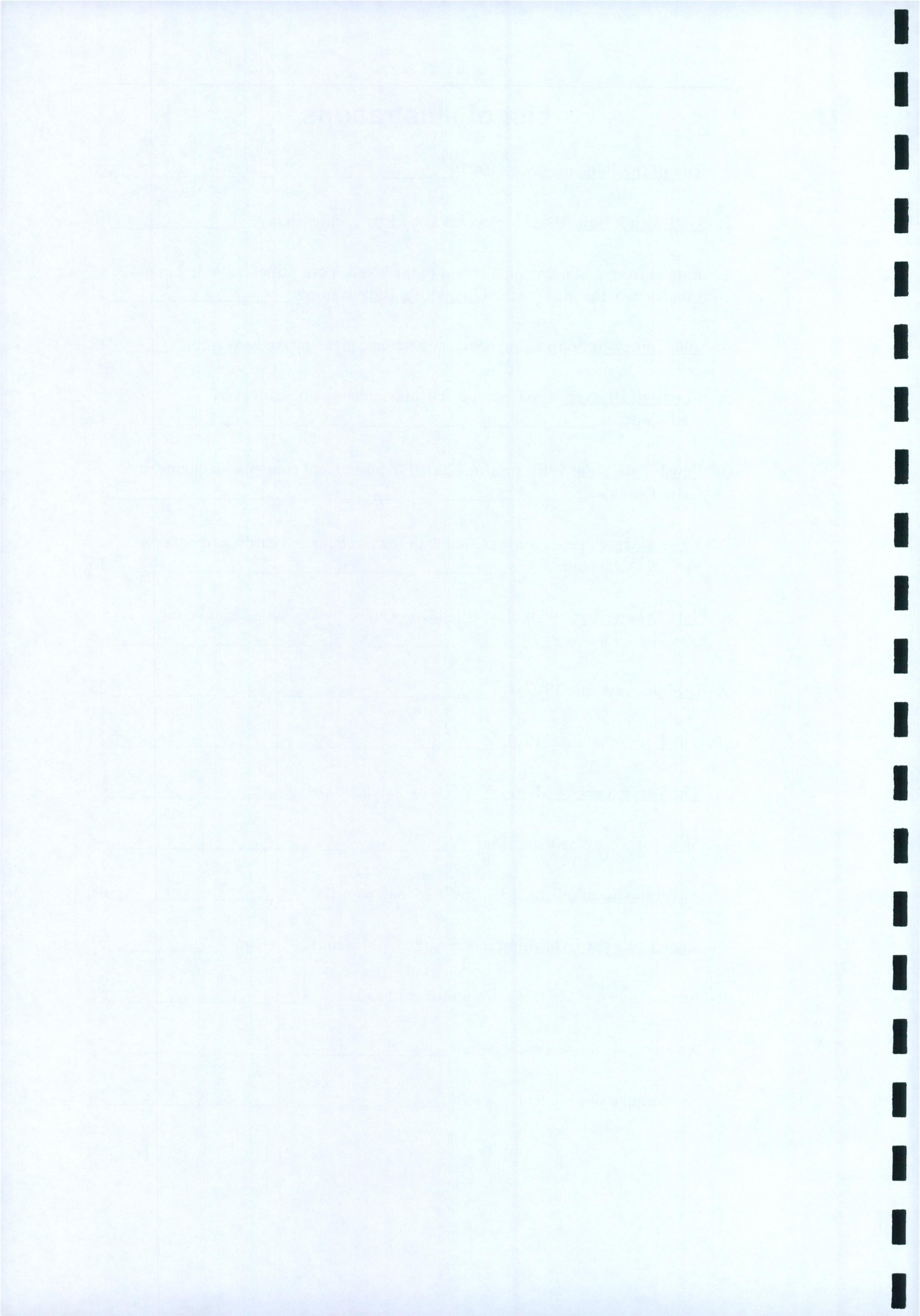
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Introduction

"The young people everywhere must learn the forgotten art of seeing life with their own eyes." ¹

This quote by Oscar Kokoschka epitomises the main concerns of this dissertation. Many of the experiences that children have during art lessons reflect the larger influences from the mass culture outside the school. The polemics of popular culture have impinged and encroached on the very definition of visual awareness in our classrooms. Popular culture is a pervasive and omnipresent influence in contemporary living. It seeps into every nook and cranny of our existence and no lesson in the classroom, is safe from its two-dimensional snare.

Very little theoretical work has been done to establish a widely agreed criteria for evaluating popular culture in Ireland or its impact on education. On examining the short history of media education in Britain, it is impossible not to view this subject as essentially a middle-class and paternalistic movement, sole bent on improving or upgrading the tastes of the students. With the exception of perhaps a few articles published in the education section of the Irish papers, small evidence was found to support this body of work; even the Statistics section of the Department of Education had no actual facts on television viewing or any other kind of media participation in Ireland.

It seems strange that the Irish Government that makes policy for society could overlook such an incredibly penetrating influence, as that of the mass media. However the subject of popular culture is addressed under the aims of Art, Craft and Design in the Junior Certificate Syllabus Introduction, as the following:

**The Aims of Art, Craft and Design at Junior Cycle:
To develop in the student the ability to apply evaluative criteria to his/her own work and to the work of others and in his/her daily encounters with the natural, social and man-made environments and with the mass media. ²**

And outlined once again under the Art, Craft and Design objectives:

**The Art, Craft and Design course develops the student's ability to:
develop an awareness of the historical, social and economic role and value of art, craft and design and aspects of contemporary culture and mass media. ³**

REPORT

Submitted by: [Name] Date: [Date]

1. Introduction: This report describes the results of the experiment conducted on [Date].

2. Objectives: The objectives of the experiment were to determine the effect of [Variable] on [Variable].

3. Materials and Methods: The materials used were [List Materials]. The methods used were [List Methods].

4. Results: The results of the experiment are shown in the following table:

Table 1: [Table Description]

5. Discussion: The results of the experiment indicate that [Variable] has a significant effect on [Variable].

6. Conclusion: The conclusion of the experiment is that [Variable] is [Result].

7. References: The references used in this report are [List References].

8. Appendix: The appendix contains the raw data and other supporting information.

9. Acknowledgments: The author wishes to thank [List Acknowledgments].

10. Summary: This report summarizes the findings of the experiment and provides a clear and concise overview of the results.

This dissertation proposes to define the nature of popular culture in chapter one and then to investigate the regrettable effects that mass culture has on art education in chapter two. The opinions of Neil Postman and Len Masterman, two contemporary cultural critics and F.R. Leavis and Raymond Williams; critics during the emergence of popular culture, are used to support the negative influences of popular culture on education.

A broad media questionnaire was used in The Assumption Secondary School in Walkinstown, Dublin, to establish the extent to which pupils interact with the mass media on a daily basis and to summarise their views on art and the history of art. Research was then carried out with the class that participated the *most* with popular culture, to prove whether or not it is possible to teach pupils the art of visual discrimination and criticality. At the same time, was it also possible to persuade students that the traditional arts *are* relevant and exciting? "against which the offerings of the mass media will appear cut down to size." ⁴

This dissertation draws extensively on the philosophies and pedagogies of educators such as Irving Kaufman, Eliot W. Eisner and Viktor Lowenfeld in defending art's role and the indigenous contributions it makes to the student and the school. In light of our present mass culture dilemma, it endeavours to point out the very present need for developing visual awareness and visual discrimination in our classrooms and in instructing pupils in the "forgotten art of seeing life with their own eyes."

FOOTNOTES – INTRODUCTION

1. Irving Kaufman, Art and Education in Contemporary Culture. Macmillan Publishing: New York, 1966, p. 176.
2. Roinn Oideachais, Art, Craft and Design: The Junior Certificate Syllabus, (Dublin, 1989): 3.
3. Ibid.
4. Quote by F.R. Leavis, taken from Len Masterman, Teaching the Media. (London: Comedia Publishing Group, 1985) p. 43.

POPULAR CULTURE: ITS EFFECTS ON VISUAL AWARENESS IN THE CLASSROOM

Abstract

During my year (1996-1997) as a student art teacher in The Assumption Secondary School in Walkinstown Dublin, it became blatantly obvious to me that popular culture or mass culture is an undeniable fact of life. This became apparent through a survey that I carried out with the classes I taught, emphasising further, the extent to which the average adolescent participates with the media. The survey also highlighted the pervasiveness of popular culture in our current society and in particular its influence in the classroom.

This dissertation proposes to define popular culture in Chapter One and then to investigate the effects of the dominant mass culture on the art room in Chapter Two. Chapter Three explores the role art education needs to play to meet this challenge. To address my main concerns I have drawn on the pedagogies and philosophies of educators and cultural critics. I have also carried out research with students in the goal of developing visual awareness to our present culture.

This body of work endeavours to point out the very present need for developing visual discrimination in our classrooms and in instructing pupils in the "forgotten art of seeing life with their own eyes." (Oscar Kokoschka)

Heather Moore

Dip. A.D.T.

CHAPTER 1

What is Popular Culture?

Popular 2. Of, pertaining to, or consisting of the common people, or the people as a whole; 4. Adapted to the understanding, taste, or means of ordinary people 1573. †5. Studious of, or designed to gain, the favour of the common people; devoted to the cause of the people - 1771. 6. Finding favour with the people, or with many people; favourite, acceptable, pleasing. ¹

Culture *n.* 1a The arts and other manifestations of human intellectual achievement regarded collectively. 2. The customs, civilisation and achievement of a particular time or people. ²

Popular Culture is the prevailing dominant culture of our time, that has been modified and adapted to the understanding, taste or means of ordinary people. Intrinsic to its nature is *mass* appeal, catering for the lowest common denominator of taste, in its search for the widest possible audience. Audience, viewers or customers; being the appropriate terminology in describing us - the people, who interact with it everyday and almost every hour of our lives, because at the core of popular culture, undergirding it, is our consumerist society. ³ The primary function of popular culture is not to challenge, or convey complex ideas or engage the individual, but to persuade it's viewers, in short to consume conspicuously and relentlessly.

It basically consists of an interface between mass media and the response and interpretation of its large audience. Popular Culture is aimed as said before at a broad heterogeneous audience and is very much concerned with the production and sale of leisure items and services for this market. It largely focuses on fashion and lifestyle: the modes of expressive human behaviour in our Late-Capitalist society, ⁴ but this also includes the political and moral stance, of that period. It is a process that defines a particular mode of human activity in everyday life and "imparts both style and substance to the expressive dimension of culture." ⁵ The carrier of all this consumer information in today's terms is primarily through the sophisticated visual format of television. Neil Postman has called this phenomenon "The Televisual Age" ⁶ and laments that television has become the "command-centre of our culture," ⁷ driving all other mediums to the sidelines.

In the analysis of popular culture, the problems lie in its omnipresence and virtual invisibility of its forms. Popular culture is *mass* culture and it is characterised by the proliferation of glossy magazines, the rise in Disneyland simulacra,⁸ themed or mass-produced restaurants such as MacDonalds or Burger King, sensationalist newspapers such as The Sun, or The Star, manufactured musical outfits like The Spice Girls or Boyzone, Stephen Spielberg films, Sky Sports, soap operas, The Oprah Winfrey Show, Music Television, advertisements, billboards and even chocolate wrappers and bottled water! We are absolutely bombarded with this plethora of stimuli, that is in essence not stimulating but soporific and enslaving to the individual.

Media Saturation

If we documented a commonplace day of an average Irish teenager and the amount they are exposed to the media, even before they arrived in the classroom; the results would prove considerably shocking. Obviously, there would be the viewing of Breakfast Television coupled with Breakfast radio switched on in the background. Then there is the breakfast table infested with garish cereal boxes and food packaging. The trip to school itself could possibly involve "cruising"⁹ through a glossy magazine (*see fig. 1*), listening to the Spice Girls on a personal stereo and various convergents with advertisements on billboards, at the bus shelter, inside the bus or even on the outside of the bus. This adds up to possibly two hours of media saturation and the day has not even begun and does not take into account the average four hours spent primarily watching television in the evening and the two hours listening to the Chris Barry Show on the radio.

We consume popular culture on so many levels. Jeremy Tunstall estimated in 1983, that the average British adult spent 75 hours per week with television, radio, newspapers and magazines.¹⁰ This figure not only indicates the extent to which our lives are saturated by the mass media, no matter how resistant we think we are to its influence; it also draws attention to the complexity with which the media interact with one another and integrate themselves into the very fabric of our daily lives.

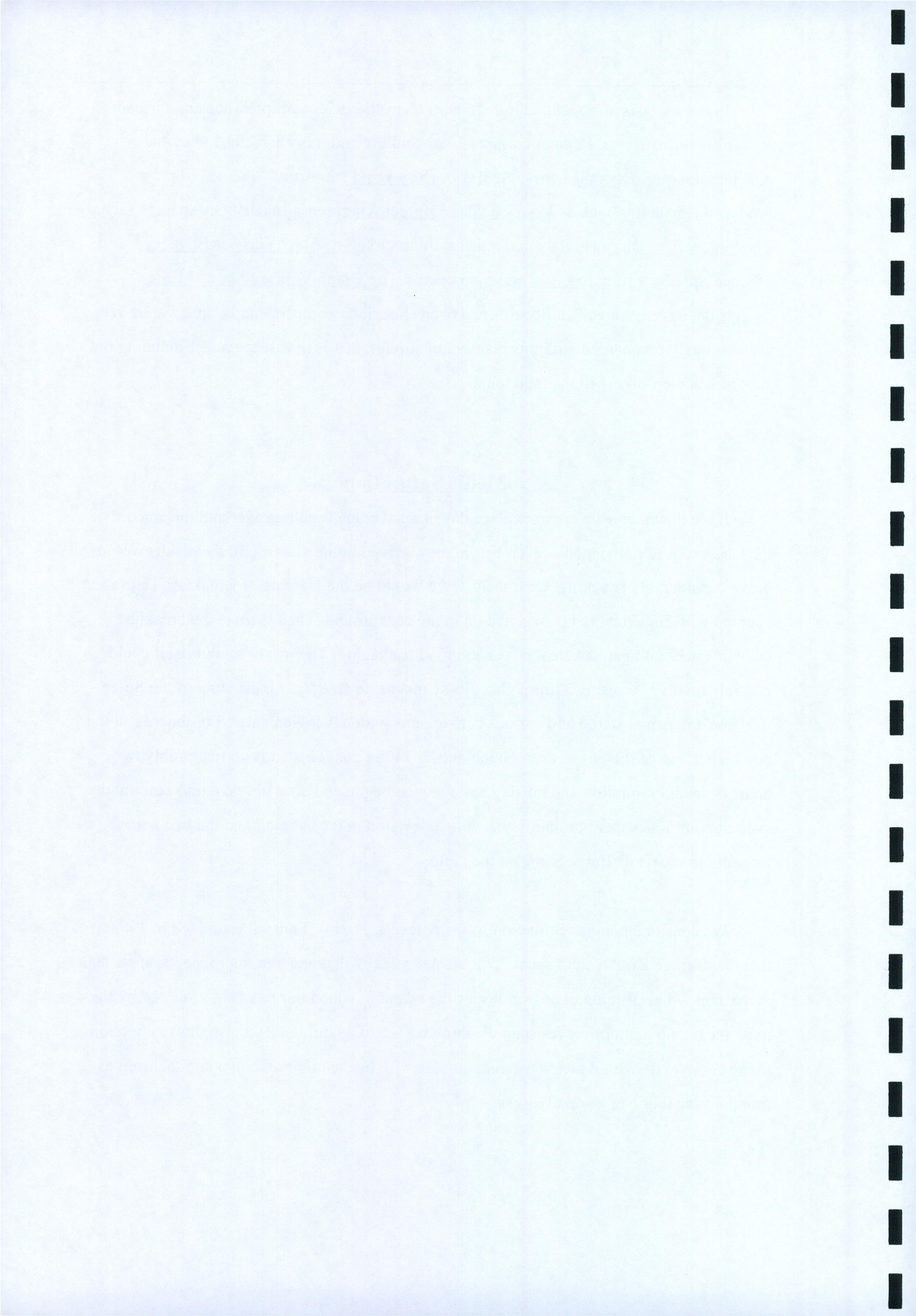




Fig. 1: *Top of the Pops* magazine 1997

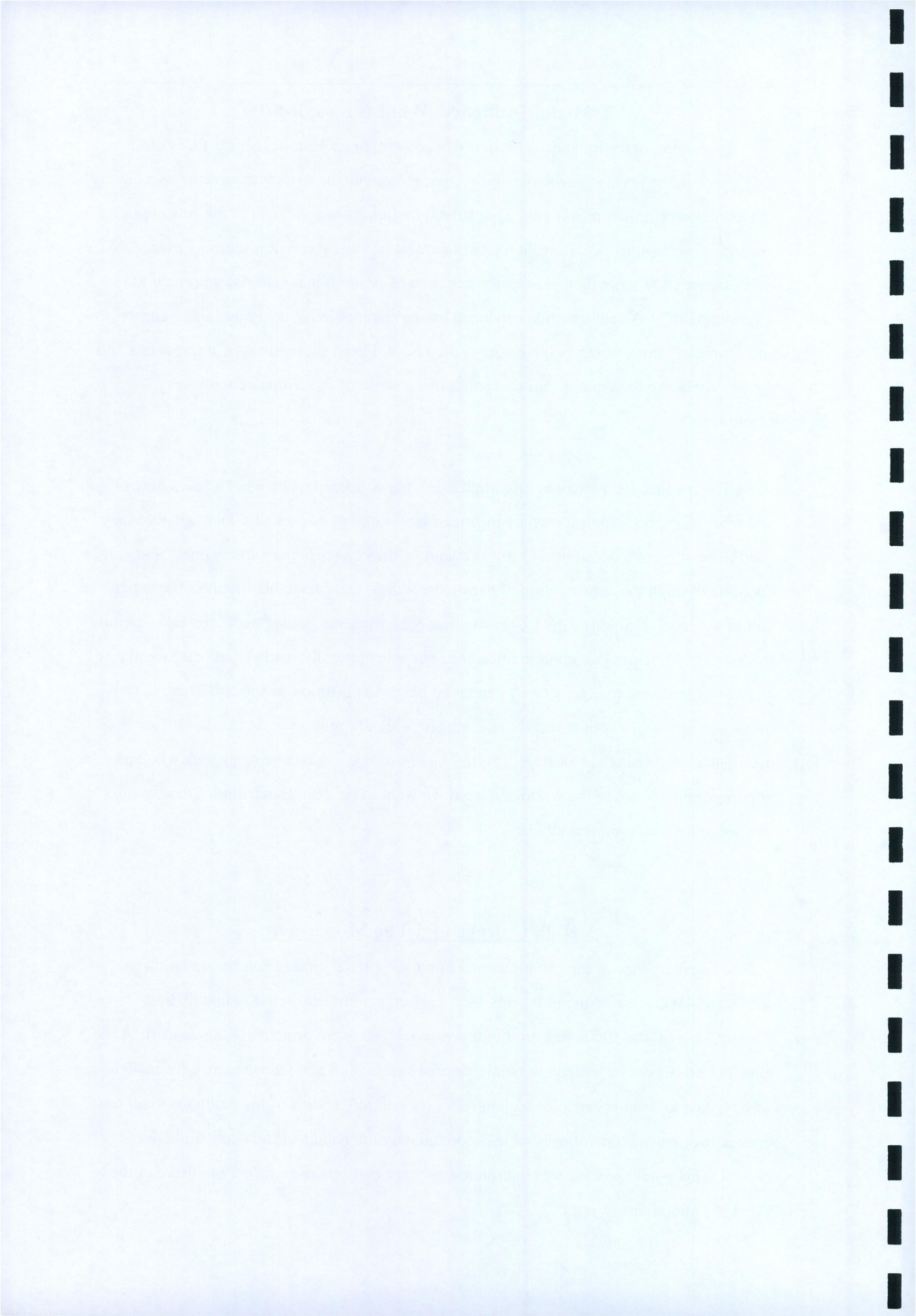
Media Influence, What is it saying?

In contemporary Ireland, as probably in contemporary Europe, Music Television (MTV), could be defined as the personification of popular culture for the average secondary school adolescent. In a recent media questionnaire that was carried out in the Assumption Secondary School, MTV came out tops as the most popular television station viewed. "MTV is in essence little more than a diverse succession of promotional material presented as entertainment." ¹¹ All information produced by the seminal MTV is highly image-conscious and supremely dominating in the realm of the visual. Rapid successions of impressions and images appear so fast, that teenagers cannot make sense of them intellectually or emotionally.

The media tells us what is important and what is ridiculous by what it takes note of and what it ignores. Adolescents are informed how to *be* in our society. They are told they need to be attractive or rather they are shown how they can achieve attractiveness and *coolness* through the consumption of various products, that inevitably involves the expensive cult of the label. Drinking Diet Coke, wearing Nike runners, Adidas tracksuits and listening to Oasis cds indicates that commodities have become culturally-loaded symbols, signifying and communicating to others, one's perceived place and position in society. There is no moral obligation or depth of insight encouraged, everything is governed at the surface level of "signs" ¹² rather than use values. "Signs" have become a language signifying who and what we think we are to the world and what we want to be. Jean Baudrillard fittingly calls this scene the "excremental culture." ¹³

High Culture and The Modernist

The emergence of the phenomenon known as popular culture can be located in the 1950s and 1960s. It came into being as a reaction against the then dominant 'High Culture.' Up till the 1950s fine art, literature and music, were principally the concern of the elite and privileged in society. It mainly catered for the rich, the informed and the academic, who wished to be engaged and challenged by the sublime realms of the aesthetic. Galleries, operas, theatres and art colleges were predominantly the haunts of the upper and middle classes. This whole process was interpreted as 'high culture' and was not inclusive of the average proletariat.



Modernists opposed the mainstream commercialism and consumer values associated with the Americanisation of a society. They very much upheld the transformative nature of art, it had the properties to better and develop mankind. In the nineteenth century, the spiritual and aesthetic realms of art as viewed by John Ruskin and William Morris were perceived as having potential to effect change in society. Ruskin's definition of art: "mixed religion and aesthetic experience, which together would be combined with an ethical mission. Art would make people better – spiritually uplifted and morally more upright members of society."¹⁴ Morris insisted that the industrial processes "pauperised man's spiritual and aesthetic nature as well as making poor robots out of the workmen."¹⁵

In **The Aesthetic Dimension**, Herbert Marcuse defends art's separateness and independence as a realm and its largely autonomous nature. Art according to Marcuse "subverts the dominant consciousness, the ordinary experience."¹⁶ In its capacity to transcend the "ordinary experience",¹⁷ Marcuse hints at the other major role of high culture – art as critical discourse. He sees in Victorian narrative paintings and in the work of the pre-Raphaelites a critical point of view allied to a moral position.

The Emergence of Popular Culture

In the post-World War years, we see a cultural revolution, a challenge to hegemony, the overthrow of the dominant high culture ideology. The critical function of art and the aesthetic dimension were replaced by the prevalent consumerist society. Capitalist and commercial values became central as the assumed role of art. The origins of popular culture can be located in the 1950s and is based in changes in cultural practice, critical theory and most importantly socio-economic conditions.

The consumerist society of post-War Europe arrived when the rationing and austerity of the later 1940s and early 1950s were superseded at an increasingly rapid pace by prosperity, private affluence and greater social mobility. Teenagers became an independent market for two reasons. First there was the economic factor: youth had a higher disposable income and became a much sought after target group as manufacturers attempted to fulfil youths perceived needs and desires. Second was the demographic increase of the post-War 'baby boom'. This resulted in a twenty per cent increase in the number of fifteen to

nineteen-year olds between 1956 to 1963.¹⁸ The combination of these two factors combined with the changing social attitudes and mores, gave youth a confidence and brashness not seen before. Therefore, teenagers being a prime focus for popular culture and also became central to the effects of popular culture in the classroom.

Pop Art

Pop Art was significantly, a British and American cultural phenomenon of the late 1950s. Lawrence Alloway, christened the movement Pop Art¹⁹ in reference to the prosaic iconography, of its painting and sculpture. Pop art, according to Richard Hamilton, one of its English exponents is "Popular, Transient, Expendable, Low-Cost, Mass-Produced, Young, Witty, Sexy, Gimmicky, Glamourous, Big Business..."²⁰ Works by American artists such as Roy Lichtenstein, Andy Warhol, Claes Oldenburg and Englishmen like David Hockney and Peter Blake, were characterised by their portrayal of any aspect of popular culture that had a powerful impact on contemporary life; taking their iconography straight from television, comic books, films and forms of advertising. It is seen as a direct descendant of Dada, a nihilistic art movement of the 1920s, championed by Marcel Duchamp, who tried to narrow the distance between art and life by celebrating the mass-produced objects of his time.

Pop art represented an attempt to produce an objective and universally acceptable form of art after the strict dominance in America and Europe of the high culture ideology. Pop artists wanted to create art that was indistinguishable from life using the same commercial techniques used by the media from which the iconography was borrowed. Roy Lichtenstein's reproductions of comic strips used the commercial colour dot printing (*see fig. 2 and 3*), Andy Warhol's meticulously used silk-screen printing to reproduce his repetitious Campbell soup cans (*see fig. 4*), Brillo soap pads and Marilyn Monroe images (*see fig. 5*) and Claes Oldenburg used soft plastic sculptures to reproduce his bathroom fixtures, typewriters and gigantic hamburgers (*see fig. 6, 7 and 8*).

In England Pop artists formed the Independent Group and Lawrence Alloway describes how it developed from meetings between young working class and urban professionals who made up this London advance guard:

The area of contact was mass-produced urban culture: movies, advertisements, science fiction, Pop music. We felt none of the dislike of

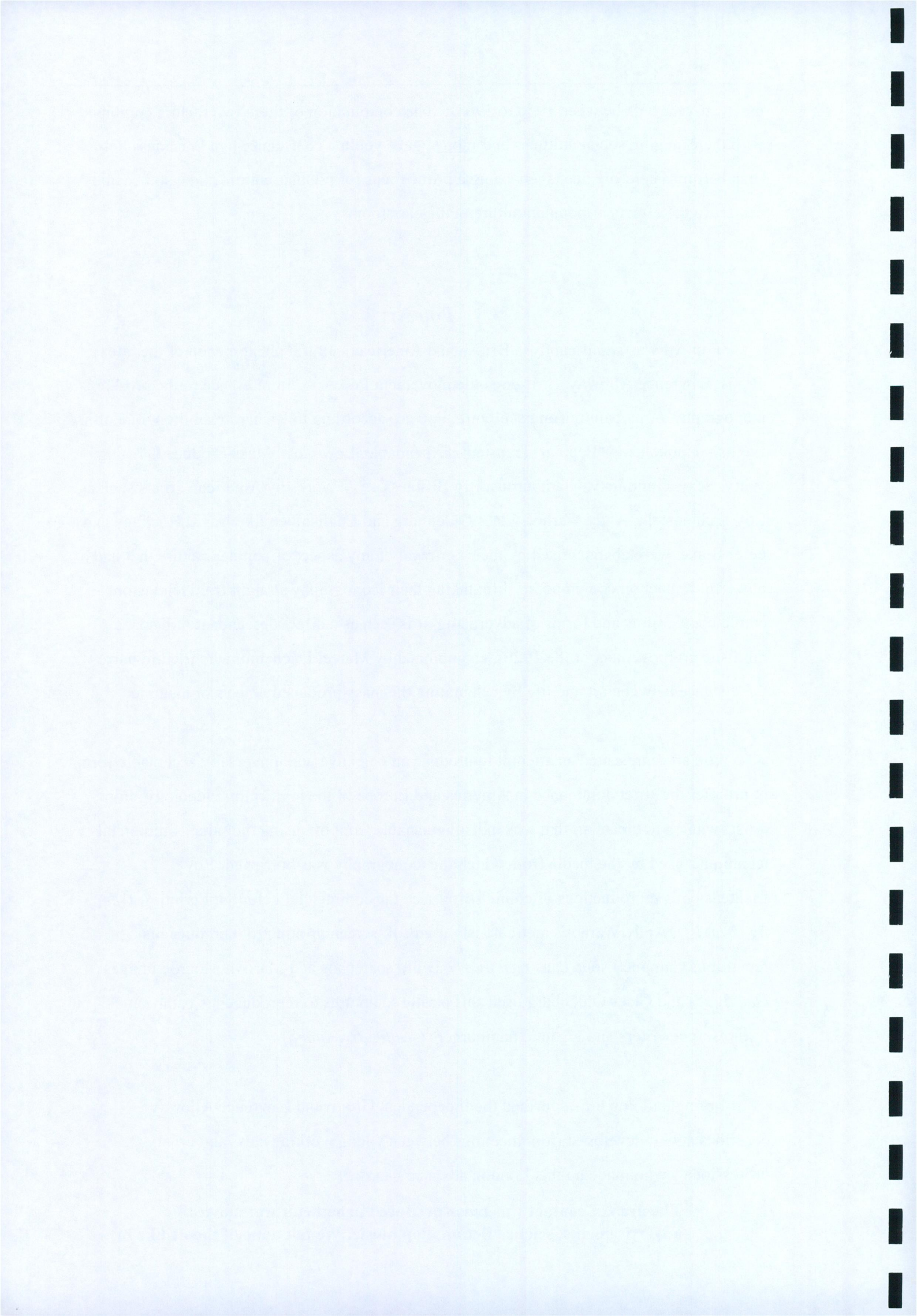




Fig. 2: Girl with a Ball, 1961 Oil on Canvas by Roy Lichtenstein



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*Fig. 3: Extract from a Sunday Supplement
of the "New York Times", 1963, that gave
Lichtenstein the idea for the
Girl with a Ball, painting*

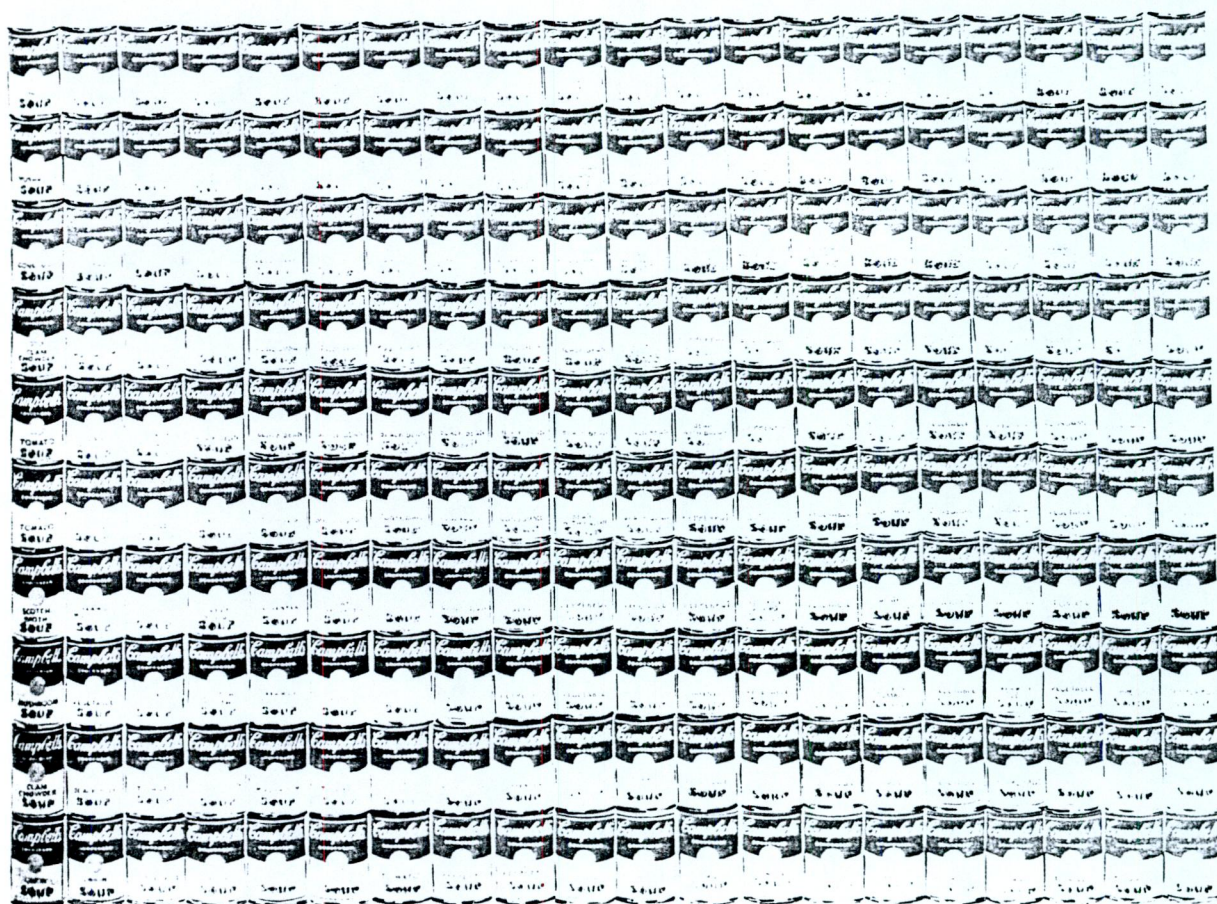


Fig. 4: 200 Campbell Soup Cans, 1962. Acrylic on Canvas by Andy Warhol.



Fig. 5: Marilyn, Diptych. 1962. Acrylic and Silk-Screen Ink on Canvas by Andy Warhol.



Fig. 6: Pepsi-Cola Sign, 1961.
Muslim soaked in plaster and painted
with enamel by Claes Oldenburg.



Fig. 7: Floor Burger, 1962.

Canvas filled with foam rubber and cardboard boxes by Claes Oldenburg.

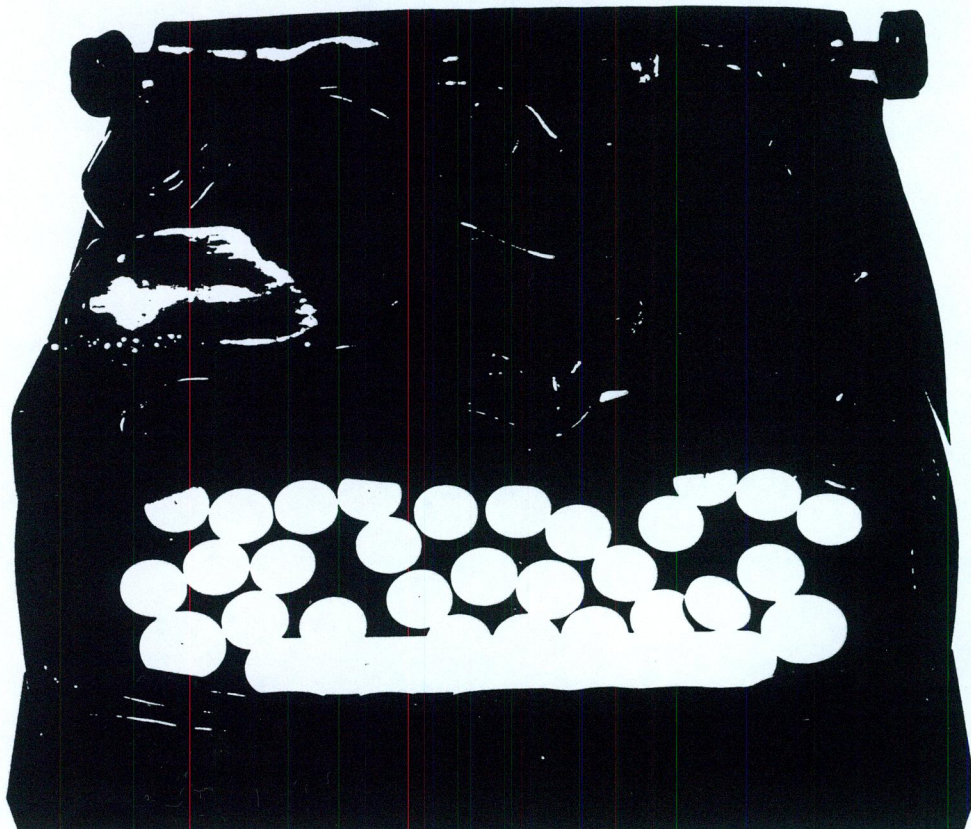


Fig. 8: Soft Typewriter, 1963.

Vinyl filled with kapok, plexiglas and vinyl cord
by Claes Oldenburg.

commercial culture standard among most intellectuals, but accepted it as a fact, discussed it in detail, and consumed it enthusiastically...²¹

The Descent of Critical Theory

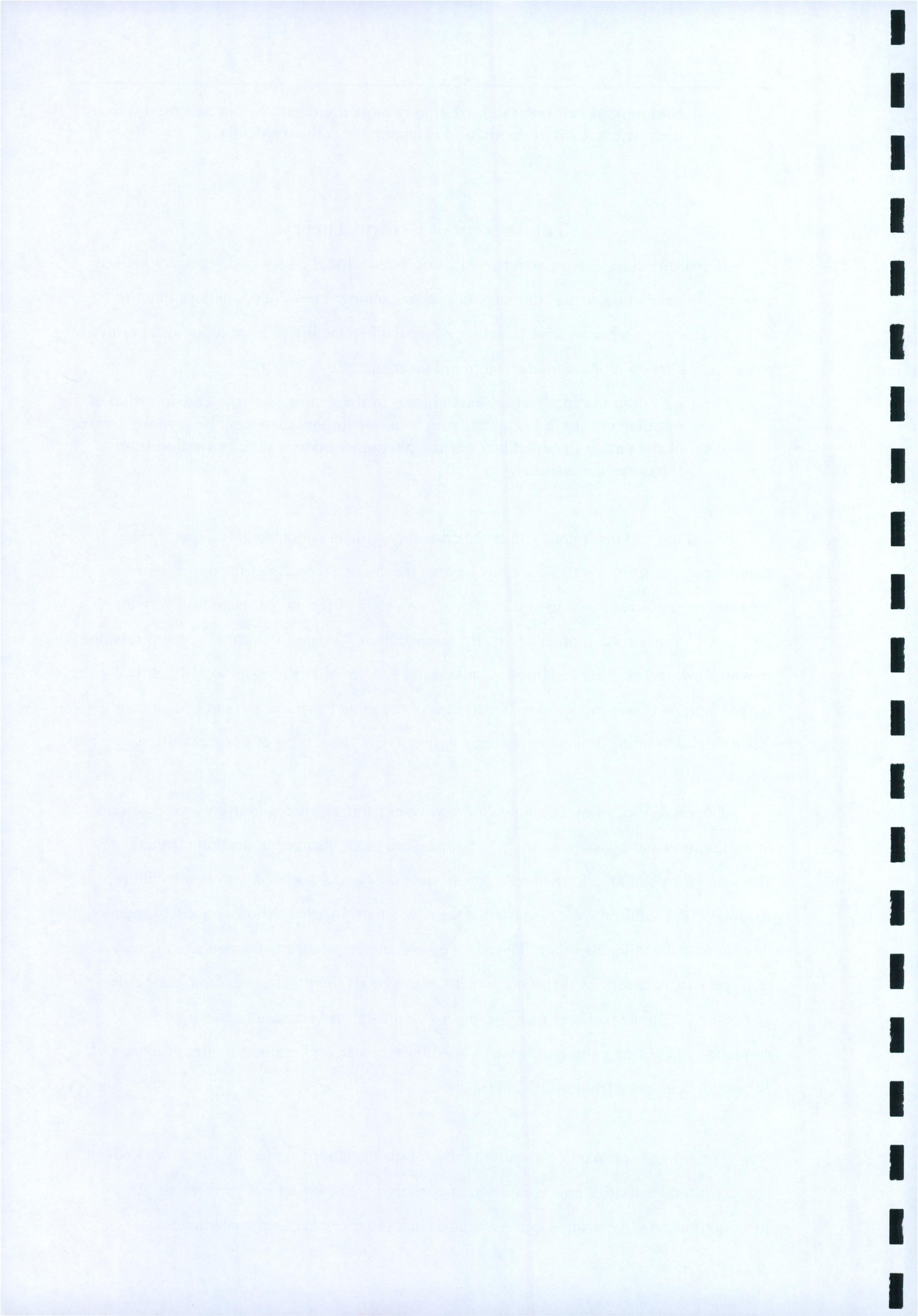
Richard Hamilton and Lawrence Alloway, both cultural critics of this period, viewed art's role in promoting critical thinking and understanding. They did not believe that the artist had to turn his/her back on popular culture and live the life of a hermit in his/her lofty tower of aesthetico-moral attitudes, but it did mean that,

although the intellectual participates in the production and consumption of popular culture he is apart from it in one important sense; he is more aware of the entire circumstances of the phenomenon as a social situation than is the normal consumer.²²

Hamilton and his friends combined criticality with an undoubted affection for the popular culture of the 1960s. They saw beyond the dominant forces of the oppressive consuming mainstream and used it in their art as a form of retaliation. Hamilton very much advocated an informed approach to their present culture "an ideal culture in my terms, is one in which awareness of its condition is universal."²³ A lot of Pop art was socially critical – for example Warhol's monotonous repetitions of the same banal images and Oldenburgs disturbingly drooping objects were subtly expressive of the effects of popular culture.

The early 1960s saw a complete new wave of painters, fifteen to twenty years younger than Hamilton and his generation. In 1963 the word 'pop' changed in meaning from the shorthand for popular culture to refer to any style or sound associated with youth culture. Alloway and Hamilton were disgusted at the new artists. In 1962, Alloway accused them of this pathetic juvenile rebellion. "The new Pop art painters use the mass media in the way teenagers do, to assert, by their choice of style and goods their difference from their elders and others."²⁴ In the hands of many younger Pop artists, art became a fashionable commodity of alluring surfaces.²⁵ Much to Alloway's fear, art became a matter of mere *style* completely detached from its critical function.

Pop art was the main contributor to the "aestheticization"²⁶ of daily life as we know it today. Cultural activities now comprised of consuming, displaying and performing. As a spectator one would consume Pop Art images in a gallery rather than contemplate or



critically examine their meaning. Their artifacts had become part of the expendable image-culture, where everything could be judged amorally and apolitically on first impressions. The essence of Pop as one fashion journalist so accurately observed in 1965, was its "...enjoy-it-today-sling-it-tomorrow philosophy... uninterested in quality and workmanship as long as the design is witty and new."²⁷ George Melly noted the bias in Pop towards the visual and musical and described the "deliberate impoverishment of vocabulary, in spoken and written utterances."²⁸ Mick Farren wrote about Pop's, "non-literal culture dependent on style, mannerisms and emotional response for its expression."²⁹

The media as agents of cultural decline was largely documented by two literary critics; F.R. Leavis and Denys Thompson, in their book Culture and Environment. Both Leavis and Thompson viewed education as a process of inoculation against the infectious, anti-cultural environment produced by the mass media and:

though not all teachers are willing and equipped to give their pupils lessons in discrimination, schools can still pursue one central purpose and many of them do, supremely well. That is to bring their pupils into as much contact as possible with the first-rate in art, literature and music, all widely conceived. The aim is to provide children with standards...against which the offerings of the mass media will appear cut down to size.³⁰

The year 1960 saw a watershed in the education sector, in a movement away from the Leavis and Thompson position. A new generation of educators who *liked* popular culture and could see value in the new forms of the mass media. They criticised the "Leavisite" approach, as elitist and "grounded in the value system of the pre-industrial aristocracy"³¹ and accused it as "a defence of *that* class's cultural dominance against the philistine masses."³²

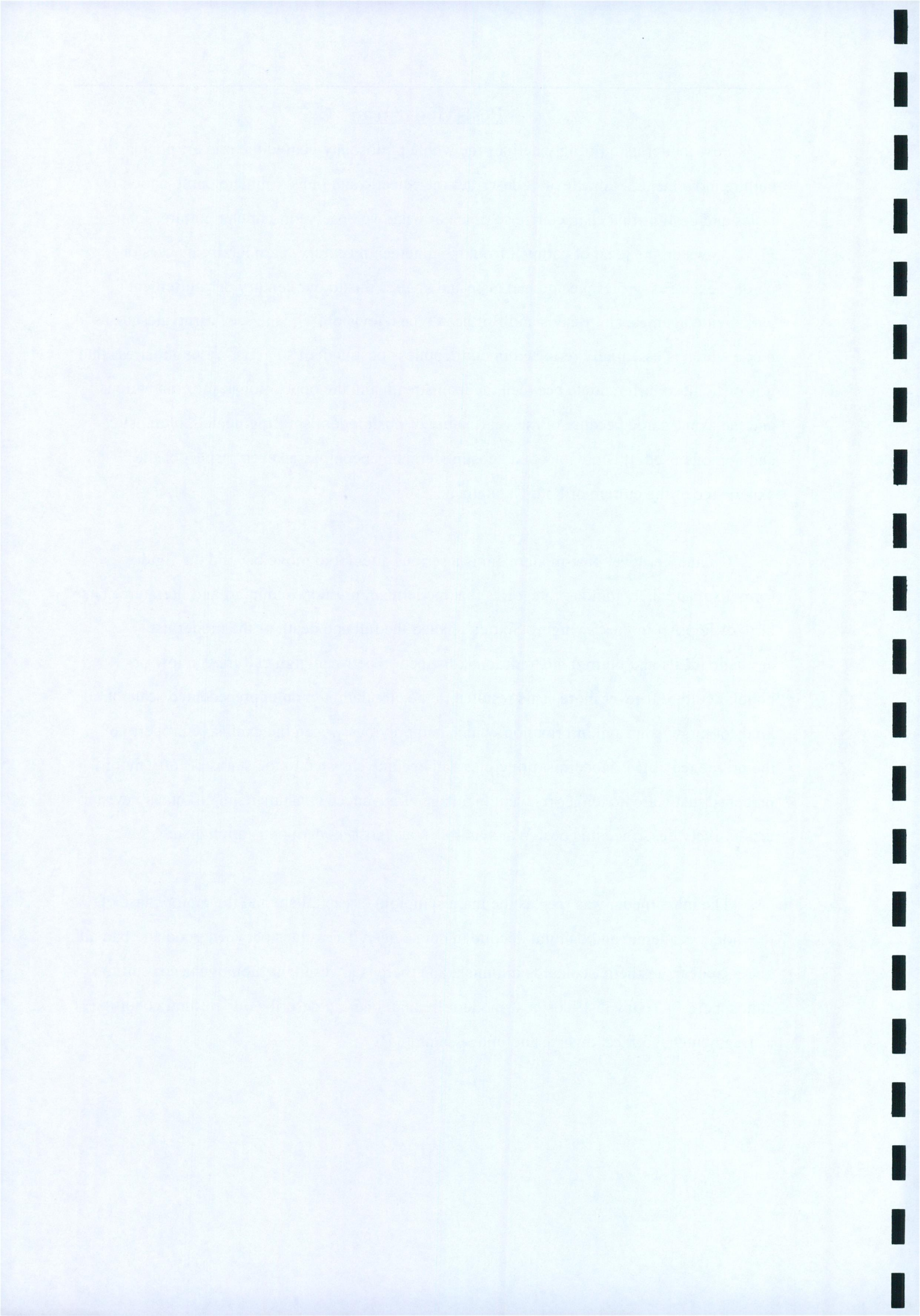
Critical discrimination was viewed as a tool not *against* popular culture, but to be used within it. Raymond Williams, at this time of great upheaval managed to contextualise the current situation, by turning the focus from the pupils onto institutions like the BBC and its paternal, bourgeois attitude. "I will have no more blaming the young.....and no more blaming the parents and no more nagging until we are prepared as a society to do something radical about institutions."³³ He also called for a more structured approach to the problems raised by the media in education. Williams viewed education and "sustained kinds of intellectual work"³⁴ as the defence needed against the system of meanings and values generated by a capitalist society: a cultural process he called "the long revolution."³⁵

Post-Modernism

Post-modernism fittingly defines the whole philosophy behind the pop art-popular culture movement. At one level it describes the eclectic and indiscriminate combination of tastes and designs that characterise so much of what we observe in popular culture. John Fiske draws on the ideal of carnival from the nineteenth century, particularly its uses of parody, excesses, grotesque and bad taste and applies this to our century of amusement parks, video games, and Beavis and Butthead type television.³⁶ Fiske sees carnivalesque as a mode which is essentially reflected in our depthless postmodern society. We might stress that it is difficult to differentiate between the mainstream and the oppositional, the conventional and the avant-garde because of the very nature of postmodernism: fragmented, pluralistic and homogenised. It is obvious that "postmodernism encompasses every aspect of the experience of the culture of Late-Capitalism."³⁷

On another level post-modernism is a serious attempt to move beyond the rigid formalism and dichotomous categories that modernism presupposed in art and literature. The birth of Pop Art in the 'Swinging Sixties', hailed the fall and death of the modernist aesthetic ideals and blurred the traditional distinction between high culture and low or popular culture forever more. This resulted in the circulation in an unprecedented scale of all kinds of knowledge and information, which had previously been the exclusive property of the privileged elites. Modernist principles had become elevated to the status of lofty moral precepts, that were no longer relevant in an age of advanced consumerism. Nikolaus Pevsner dismissively described this post-War syndrome, as "post-modern anti-rationalism."³⁸

The mass media was seen as the main symptom of capitalism and the major cause of the moral, academic and cultural decline in our society. The values between good and bad all but disappear, aesthetic standards diminish, and there is a "resultant 'homogenised' cultural atmosphere."³⁹ Today in 1990s post-modern Ireland, one can describe our cultural condition as fragmented, surface, diverse and image-saturated.

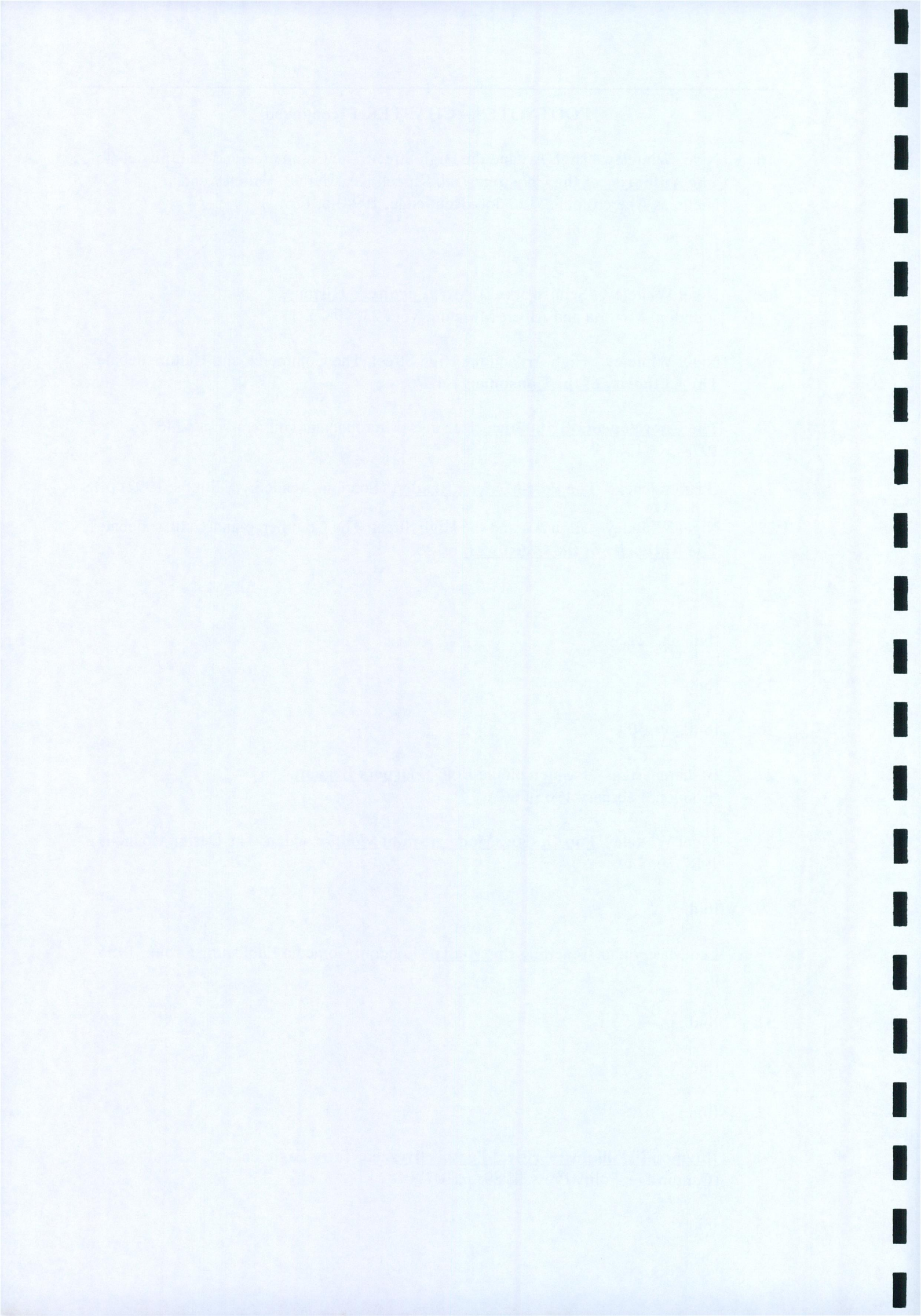


 FOOTNOTES – CHAPTER 1

1. Definition from **The Oxford English Dictionary of Current English**. ed. R.E. Allen, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992) p. 1630.
2. Ibid, p. 282.
3. Consumerist Society: a term coined by Frederick Jameson, in **Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism**. (London: Verso, 1991).
4. Late-Capitalism: a term coined by Frederick Jameson, **Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism**. (London: Verso, 1991).
5. Martin Laba, "Making Sense: Expressiveness, Stylization and the Popular Culture Process", **Journal of Popular Culture**, (Ohio: Midwest Modern Language Association, Vol. 19, No. 4, Spring 1986): 107.
6. Michael Foley, "Television and the End of Childhood", **The Irish Times**, (Dublin: Ireland, Tuesday, January 7, 1997): 11.
7. Ibid.
8. Jean Baudrillard, "The Evil Demon of Images and The Recession of the Simulacra", **Postmodernism**, ed. T. Doherty, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993) pp. 194-199.
9. A post-structuralist phrase coined by Roland Barthes, meaning to take pleasure in a text without being critically engaged. Dick Hebdige, **Hiding in the Light**. (London: Routledge, 1988) p. 162.
10. Len Masterman, **Teaching the Media**. (London: Comedia Publishing Group, 1985) p. 3.
11. William Bergman, 'The formal and the free', **The Magazine of International Design**, (New York: Design Publications, September/October 1984) pp. 42-45.
12. Alan Warde, "Consumers, Identity and Belonging", **The Authority of the Consumer**, ed. R. Keat, N. Whiteley and N. Abercrombie. (London: Routledge, 1994) p. 63.
13. Arthur Kroker and David Cook, **The PostModern Scene: Excremental Culture and Hyper-Aesthetics**. (London: Macmillan Education, 1988) p. 10.
14. Nigel Whiteley, "High Art and the High Street: The Commerce-and-Culture debate", **The Authority of the Consumer**, ed. Russell Keat, Nigel Whiteley and Nicholas Abercrombie. (London: Routledge, 1994) p. 126.
15. Irving Kaufman, **Art and Education in Contemporary Culture**. (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1966), p. 62.

 FOOTNOTES – CHAPTER 1 (continued)

16. Nigel Whiteley, "High Art and the High Street: The Commerce-and-Culture debate", **The Authority of the Consumer**, ed. Russell Keat, Nigel Whiteley and Nicholas Abercrombie, (London: Routledge, 1994) p. 126.
17. Ibid.
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19. Nigel Whiteley, "High Art and the High Street: The Commerce-and-Culture debate", **The Authority of the Consumer**, p.127.
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37. Timothy Druckery, "Reading Postmodernism", **SF Camerawork**, (Vol. 16, No. 1, 1989): 19.
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CHAPTER 2

The effects of Popular Culture on Art Education

In view of our post-modern sensibility characterised in the 1990s, by the amalgamation of high and low culture, this thesis investigates how this has implications on art education.

Visual Fatigue Syndrome

As discussed above, our society is super-saturated with visual images from popular culture. All modes of communication have become increasingly more visual in order to attract greater audiences. Even the print media, typography and the layout of magazines, has taken on the visual tourism and sequential format of television.¹ This new visual language is very much embodied in trendy youth culture-orientated magazines like **D-Side** (*see fig. 9*) and **The Face**. (*see fig. 10*)

As a result, in the classroom, are we experiencing an epidemic of the more visually aware adolescent or incredible outbursts of creative personal expression? The answer is a resounding no, in fact quite the opposite is occurring, pupils are almost if not completely suffering from visual fatigue. The process involved in the designing or constructing an artifact for the Junior Certificate Syllabus is long, demanding and requires concentration and research. One would imagine that due to the copious availability of visual imagery, that research for the pupil's chosen Junior Certificate topic would not be a problem; but the majority of Irish art teachers comment on the apathy their students display at the prospect of this. In psychological developmental stages a two-three year old is said to have an attention span of three minutes; with the general acceptance of popular culture, this return to childhood is mirrored amongst adolescents.

There is a glut of fast, visual information to be processed. Neil Postman comments on this condition in an **Irish Times** interview. "The average length of a shot on US Television is 3.5 seconds: that means every 3.5 seconds the viewer has to process a different angle." We are reminded yet again of the polemics of shortened concentration spans, which can only serve to hinder the activities of engagement, productiveness and visual awareness in our schools. Teachers often feel required to offer students more of the same. Rather we should be slowing down the pace in the classroom and should be taking responsibility for greater

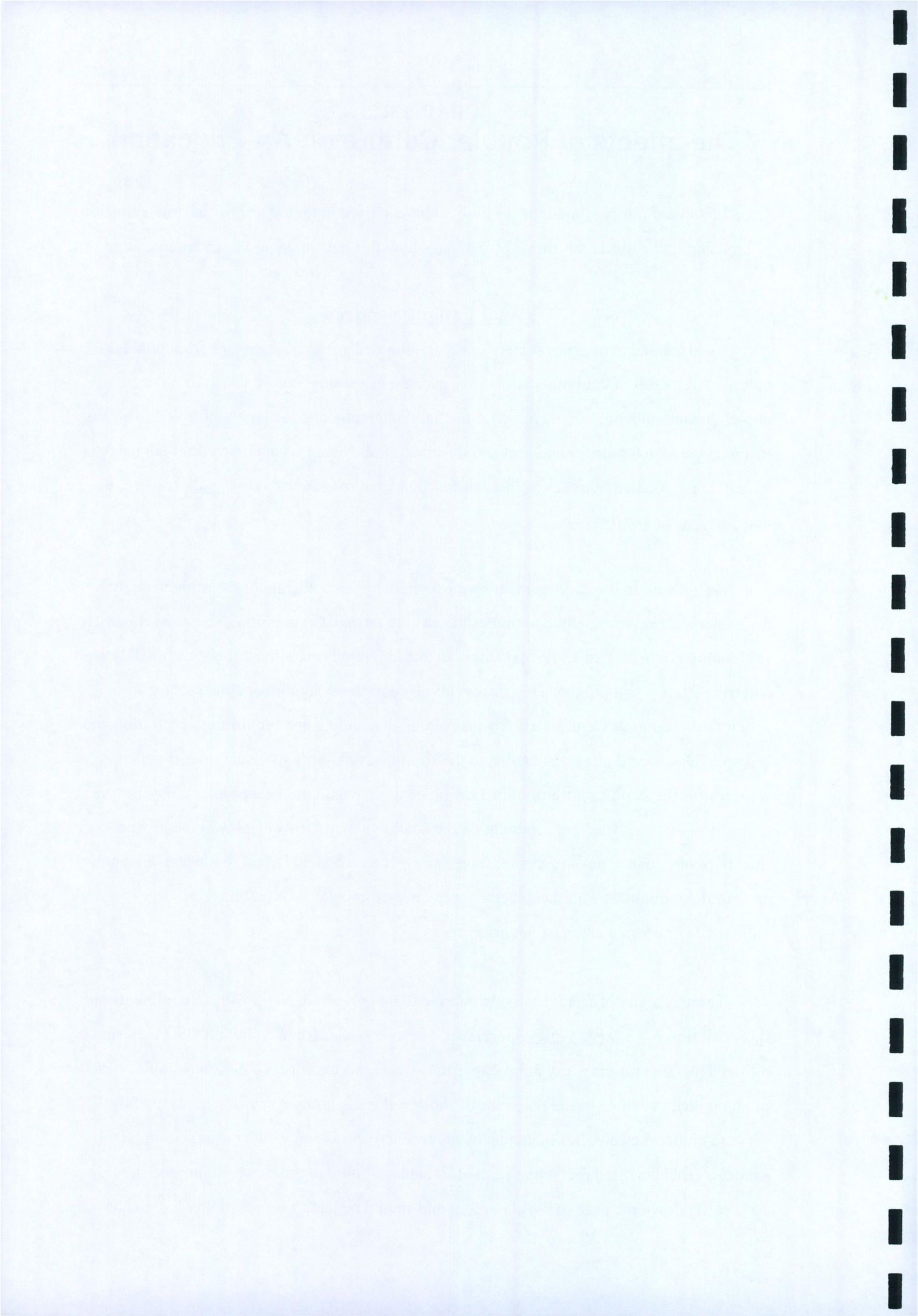




Fig. 9: D-Side magazine 1997.

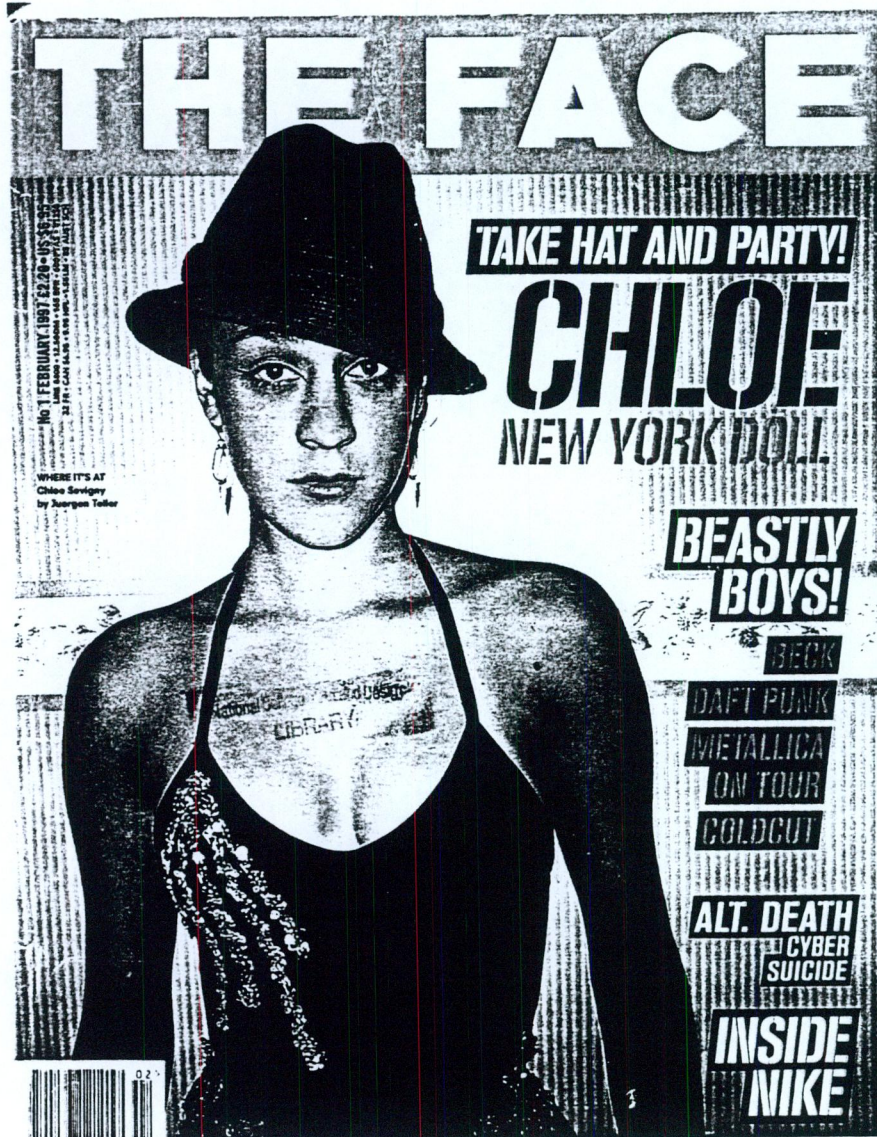


Fig. 10: The Face, magazine 1997.

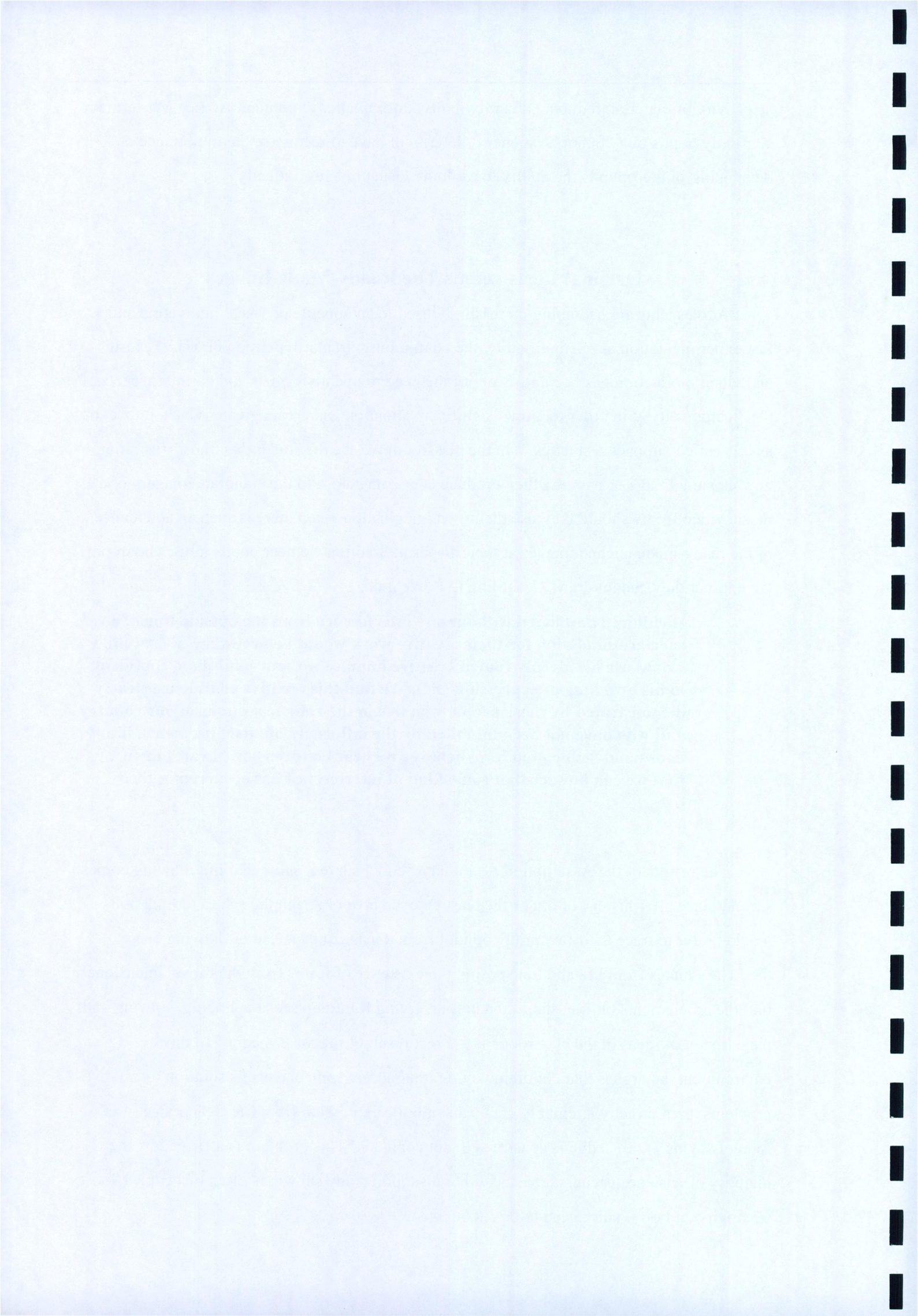
selectivity of material, reducing quantity in favour of quality of content. As Len Masterman so rightly points out: "Schools, sooner or later, will have to recognise the importance of developing in their pupils the ability to examine visual images critically."³

Original Ideas versus The Ready-Made Images

Adolescents are becoming increasingly used to an appetite of visual innovation and fast experimentation as exemplified by the continuous, circular repetition of MTV. Music and video production has become aware of the need to update formats and various aspects of the "technovelty"⁴ in order to attract significant attention and create greater visual impact or as it is called "impact aesthetics."⁵ In the classroom we see the student's utmost frustration, how can any image or painting they produce ever come close to the elaborate imagery of a music video? Why should they use their own imagination when there is such an abundance of the ready-made clichéd images at their disposal. So often we hear pupils in the classroom lament that they cannot draw. According to Lowenfeld:

If children developed without any interference from the outside world, no special stimulation for their creative work would be necessary. Every child would use his deeply rooted creative impulse without inhibition, confident in his own king of expression (sic). We find this creative confidence clearly demonstrated by those people who live in the remote sections of our country and who have not been inhibited by the influences of advertisements, funny books and "education"...Whenever we hear children say, 'I can't draw', that we can be sure that some kind of interference has occurred in their lives. "

The results of the Assumption Secondary School survey, show that life drawing comes second place after history of art, as the least enjoyed area of Art in the schoolroom. Pupils would prefer to trace their favourite pop idol from a magazine instead of drawing one of their class mates from life and transposing the existence of forms from the three dimensional into the art elements of line, shape and colour. Irving Kaufman sees the tracing, copying and plagiarising of ideas in the classroom as a direct result of the mass media.⁷ In this environment, he argues that children would rather accept someone else's solution to creative problems, than directly attempt to create a symbolic expression from life. Jean Piaget was fond of saying "knowledge is constructed, not copied."⁸ This problem is affirmed by the majority of Irish art teachers; a visual aid or a support study shown, is often just copied. Creativity and originality need to be encouraged.



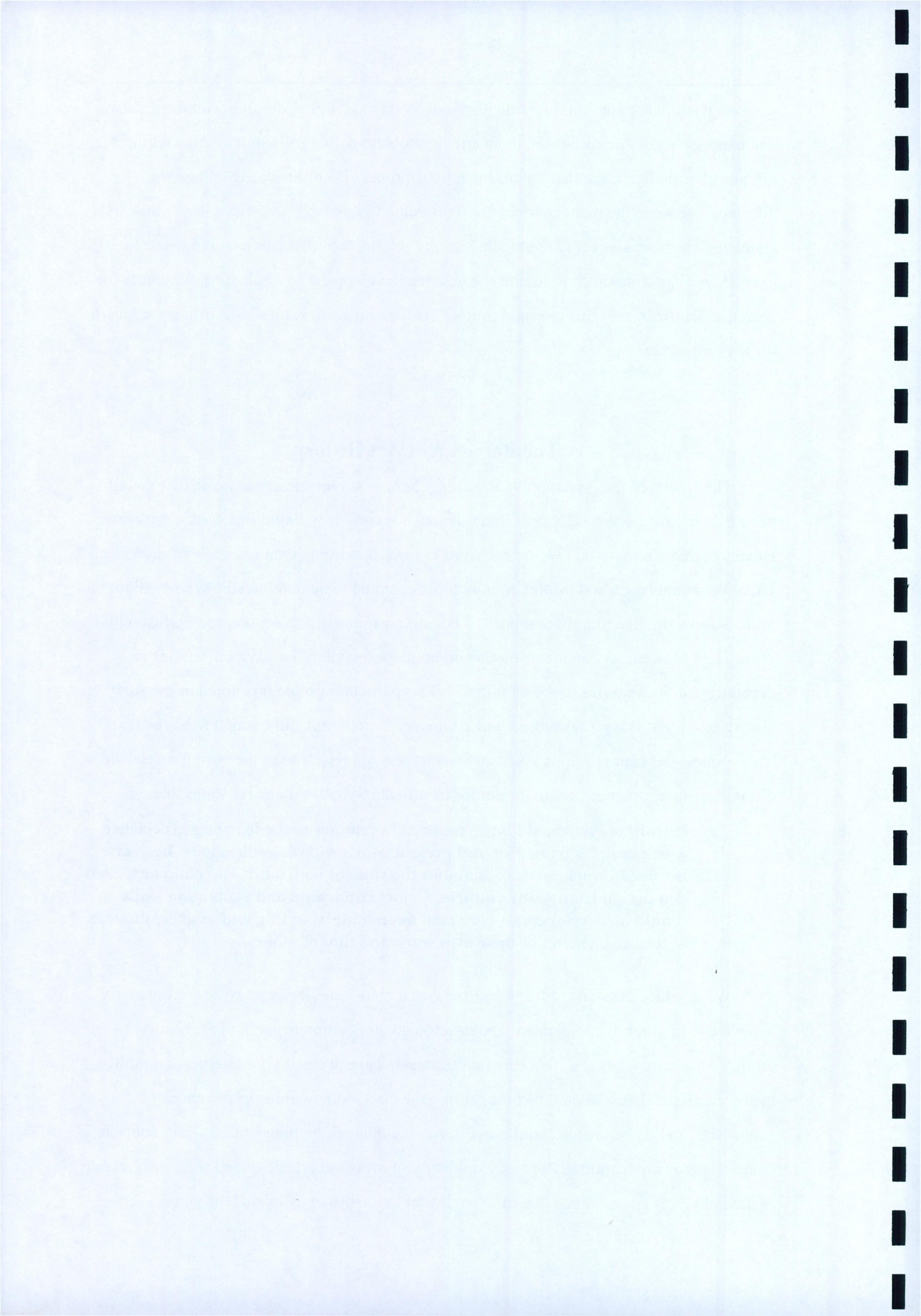
In Kaufman's opinion, life drawing from a real model provides one with the creative and expressive conditions needed in an artistic problem-solving situation. It also requires a high level of participation that values the artistic process itself, hence the incredible difference between the real experience and just superficially copying. He believes that art education has been subject to the media's forms and the resultant confusion of aesthetic experiences has done much to inhibit the genuine development of aesthetic experiences for students. Kaufman sees this intermingling of "real and pseudo values",⁹ as primary concern for the art teacher.

The Boredom of Art History

The results of the Assumption Secondary School survey clearly indicate that young people do not read books. George Orwell feared a society that would ban books, Aldous Huxley feared a society that would not *want* to read. It is ironic that in an age of increasing visual communication and information, schools continue to be dominated by the medium of print. Meanwhile, the important modes of communication outside school, are exclusively visual. Len Masterman comments on this dilemma in schools: "To have difficulties in decoding print is, in terms, to be a failure."¹⁰ This particular problem is noted in the study of history of art. Art is a visual subject and art history is predominantly taught from the text book. Ninety per cent of pupils voted Art history and appreciation as the boring, irrelevant distant cousin of practical art. In the Junior Certificate Syllabus it clearly states that:

History of Art should be introduced in relation to the learning experience, with examples from past and present, worldwide as well as local Irish or European work, so as to acquaint the student with adult and child art, craft and design from many cultures. Critical appraisal and evaluation skills should be developed, so as to lead to an understanding and appreciation, as well as enjoyment, of their own work and that of others.¹¹

We as educators must utilise whatever visual media and technology discriminatingly and wisely; in order to complement and develop greater comprehension of art history in school, especially when we are aware that teenagers have access to the Internet and multi-media packages. These should be brought into the classroom learning experience. Technology in this incidence could prove a useful vehicle in helping students gain control over what they are learning. The study of history of art is too often isolated from the practice of art and yes of course it does seem so irrelevant to the life of an average teenager. Art



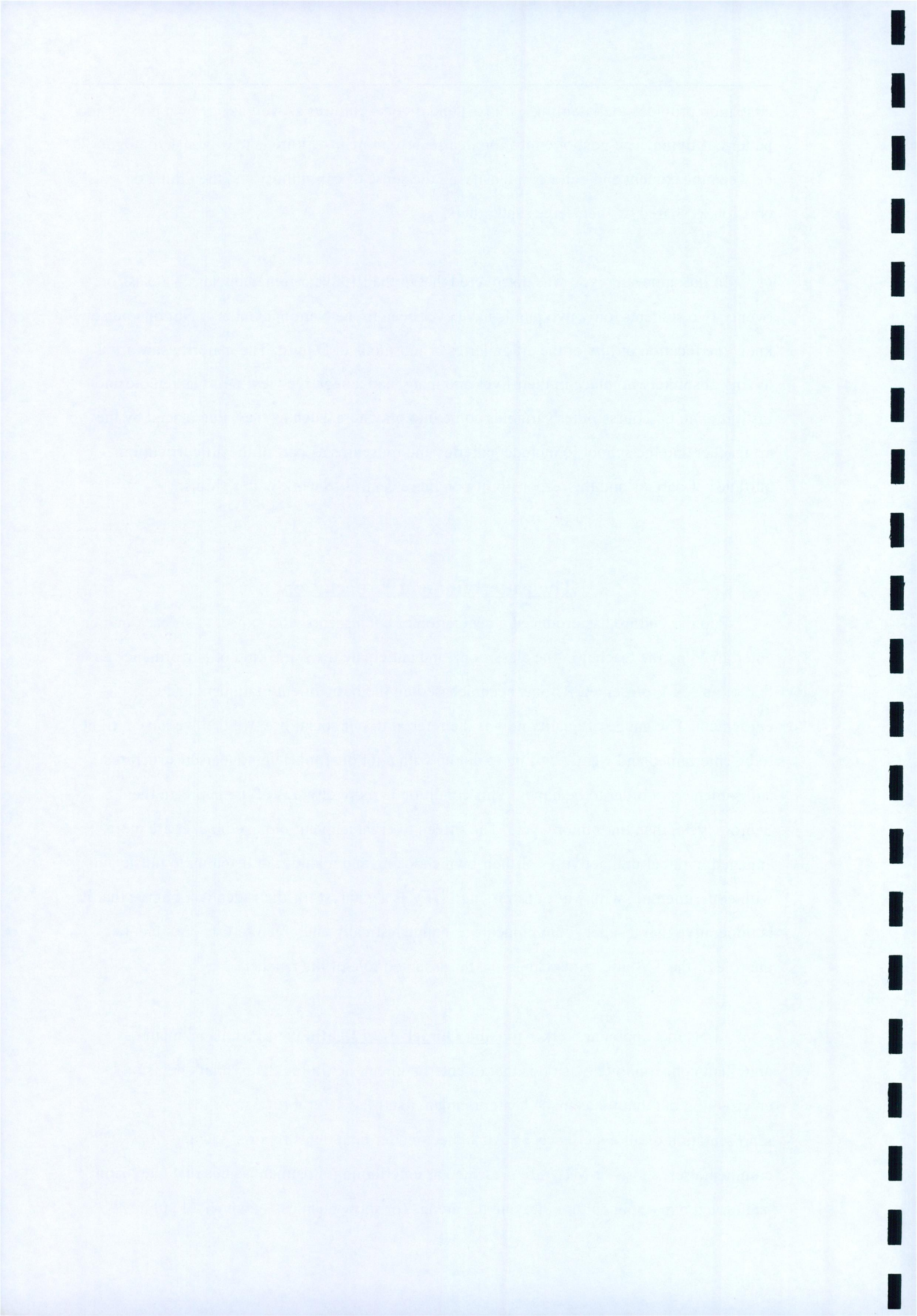
education provides the vital link with past and diverse cultures as well as our own present pattern of living. The goal of education in a society of mass-culture is to establish dialogue between the student and culture, intensifying the sense of community and the drama of creation as shared by themselves and others.

In the same survey, it was discovered that in the fifth year remedial class – a class of twenty-two students, only two pupils have ever been to the National Gallery. Not one person knew the location of *any* of the art galleries or museums in Dublin. The majority saw art as having absolutely no place in their lives and many had a negative view of art as remote and institutional. Of course other variables come into play here, such as the value placed by the art teacher and the school to include galleries and museums as part of the art curriculum, attitudes of parents and the responsibility on these centres to work with schools.

The Entertainment Expectation!

Popular culture has produced a generation of adolescents who expect to sit back and be entertained by the teacher in the classroom, and anticipate the same kind of performance as that of an MTV presenter. Art has been debased on the basis of entertainment and easy enjoyment. The gauge of quality now is the referral to our social life; we feel we have a right to be entertained and we are willing to put up with a lot of similar homogenised structures and sameness in order to be happy. This condition is more obvious of the pupils in the Senior Cycle, than the Junior Cycle. The fifteen to eighteen year old age bracket are more engaged with cultural activities of their own choosing and making: in listening to music and with experimenting with ways of dressing; MTV is a catalyst for their identity. I agree that it is imperative that teachers communicate as enthusiastically and creatively as possible, but the role of the TV entertainer cannot be the assumed role of the teacher.

In his most popular work **Amusing Ourselves to Death**, Neil Postman's main argument concerning television is that of entertainment, not in the theory that television is entertaining but that it has made "entertainment itself the natural format for the representation of all experience."¹² All subject matter be it news reports, social commentaries, sports or MTV are presented as entertaining. Postman argues that television had turned our whole culture into one big arena "for show business in which all public



affairs, including education and journalism, had been turned into entertainment.”¹³

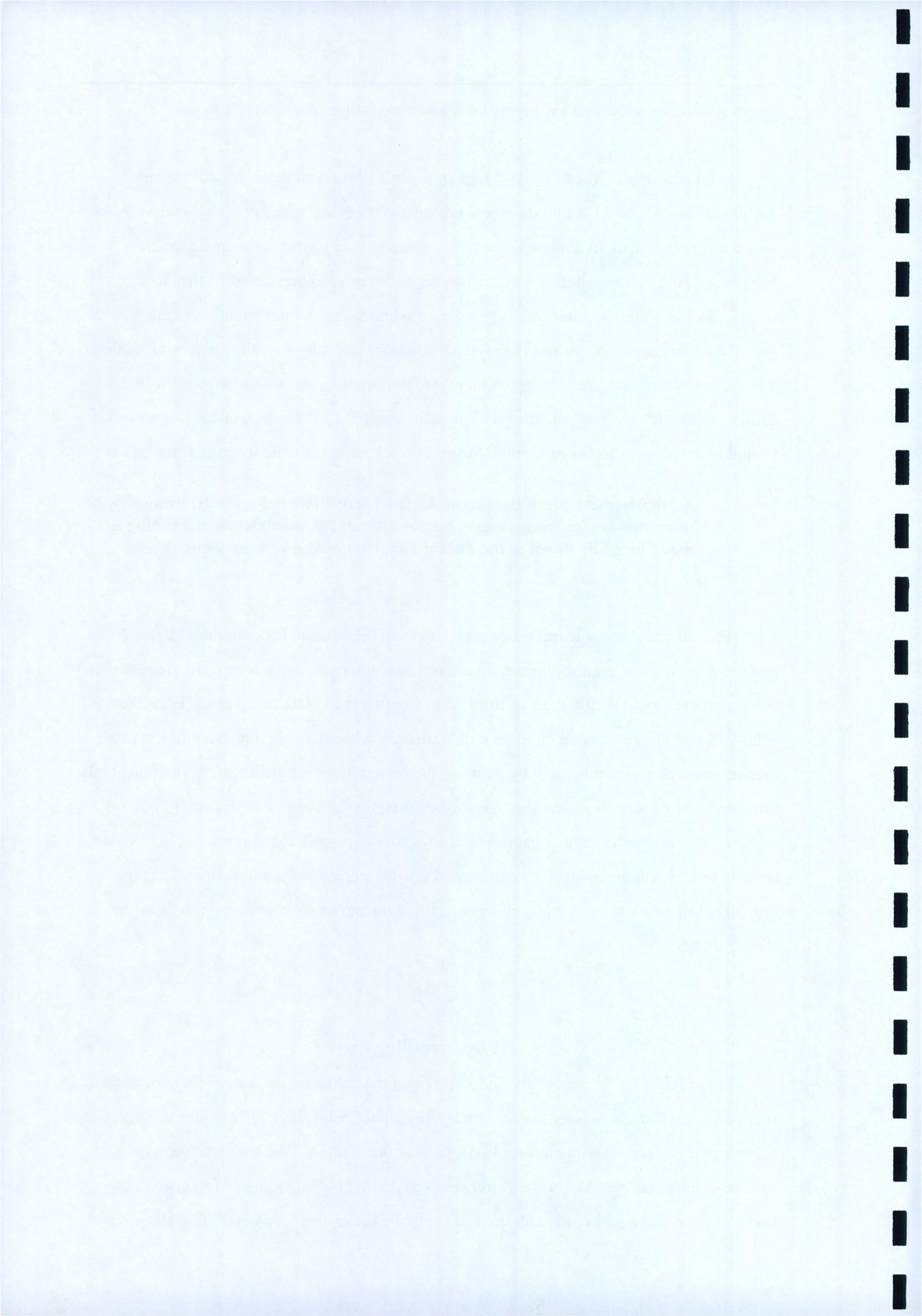
In an article published by **I.D. Magazine**, six leading American cultural figures discussed the state of art in entertainment design and predicted whether global culture would be shaped or flattened, by branded leisure environments. In its introduction the article begged the poignant question: “Why do 10-year-olds prefer to press buttons than to contemplate genuine dinosaur fossils?”¹⁴ Susan Abrams draws their attention to the seminal rise of entertainment venues and Disneyland simulacra and questions the responsibility they owe to the culture they are shaping. With regard to museums, the outcome was, that the exhibit was no longer the “conclusion of the experience”¹⁵ but the lure of consumerism via shopping in the gift shop or restaurant. Susan Burdick reflects on the inherent laziness of the:-

Give Me, Give Me Entertainment. Interactive technology may, ironically, be very passive for most people, because it's not as much work as reading a book or going down to the Public Theatre or even to a museum.¹⁶

This all has incredible impact on educators and the educated. Down through the ages and the genealogy of philosophical thinkers and educators, not one put forward the idea that entertainment would facilitate education. From Confucius to Plato to Cicero to Locke to John Dewey; all stressed that children will learn best, when they are interested in what they are learning and when cultivated by a loving and benign teacher. Media and communications are seen to be creating a global homogenised culture, that serves to delight, amuse but not really to educate, provoke or engage. This draws attention again to the previously discussed levelling or “dumbing down”¹⁸ of culture and the disturbing loss of the aesthetic and the critical realm, that has been replaced by entertainment and in the words of Andy Warhol ‘liking things.’¹⁹

Pleasure/Plaisir

In the Assumption Secondary School, 90% of the students spend an average of three to four hours per day *exclusively* watching television. The Irish Deputy Film. Censor Audrey Conlon in an interview with Gemma Hussey, reckoned that TV viewing is the third most time consuming activity of children after sleeping and school attending.² Television has become a pervasive part of the cultural and symbolic life of the Irish youth. There is no



doubt it, watching television is a major source of pleasure in our lives and it is crucial to our understanding of popular culture.

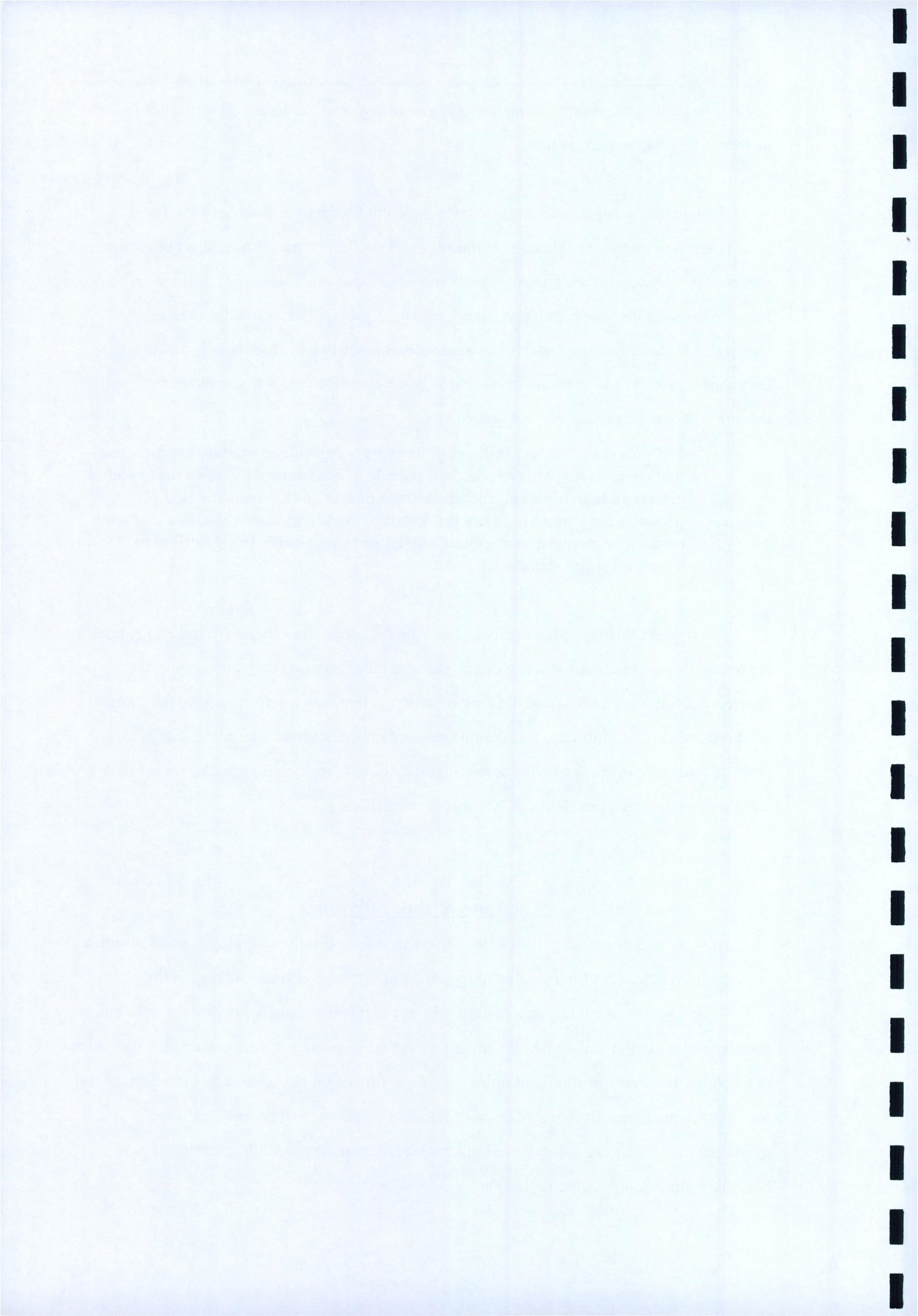
“Television is not a medium for conveying complex ideas or a sense of continuity,”²¹ artistic learning on the other hand is complex and insists on connections and yet television is regarded in our society as the most reliable source of news and recorder of political events. John Fiske in his discourse on **Television Culture**, draws on Barthes under-used term ‘*plaisir*’²² to describe the everyday mundane pleasure we derive from television viewing. He chooses this form of pleasure because it is more pluralistic in its social dimension, unlike the one and only ‘*jouissance*’.²³ He argues that:

MTV deals with the products of bourgeois capitalism - urban landscapes, fast cars, flashy, glitzy style, in a parade of consumerist images that relate it closely to television commercials. But counter to this runs the text of pleasure that consists of the fast cutting, the high visual gloss, the extreme camera angles and vertiginous movement that enable the signifiers to overwhelm the signified.²⁴

Fiske views this recycling of images and the plundering of images from their original context as devoid of common sense or any sense at all except that they are pleasurable; “...free-floating signifiers whose only signification is that they are free, outside the control of normal sense”²⁵ Griel Marcus takes this concept one step further, insisting that MTV promises pleasure in the same way as pornography does – an addiction that never actually satisfies, but in actual fact delivers “the stupor of reification.”²⁶

The Loss of the Individual

In such a homogenised impersonal society as ours it is only natural that we experience such an incredible loss of personal identity and the powers of critical thinking in the classroom. The media are important shapers of our perceptions and ideas of the world, but popular culture is flat and empty. Postman argues that the media of communication available to a culture becomes the dominant influence on the formation of the culture’s intellectual and social preoccupations; or to use Marshall McLuhan’s aphorism “The medium is the message.”²⁷ If the medium *is* the message, as McLuhan maintained, then the message is becoming almost impossible to decipher.



To illustrate the effects popular culture has on education, Neil Postman draws on the analogy of Aldous Huxley's **Brave New World**: warning of a future in which people come to love the technologies that took away their capacity to think, that destroyed their critical powers and creativity and deprived them of their freedom. In our present school situation this Huxleian prophecy has come to pass:

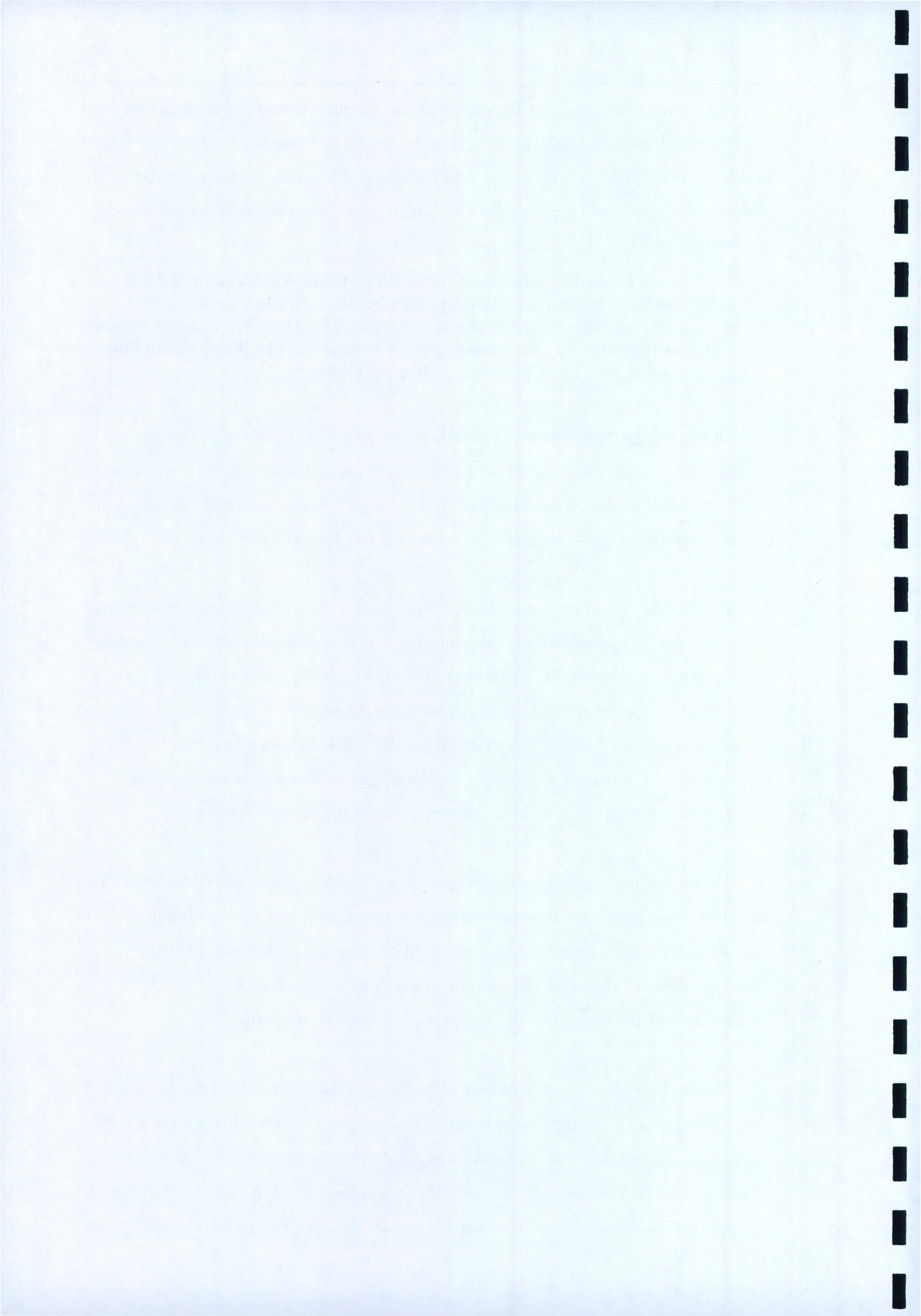
When a population becomes distracted by trivia, when a cultural life is redefined as a perpetual round of entertainments, when serious public conversation becomes a form of baby-talk, when, in short, a people become an audience and their public business a vaudeville act, then a nation finds itself at risk; culture-death is a clear possibility. ²⁸

In **Brave New World** people are controlled by an inflicting disease that we begin to love and that ultimately kills us. This is reminiscent of the article written by Griel Marcus, who likens MTV to obscene pornography, "MTV can glue you to the screen - at least until the split between what ought to be fun and what is in fact oppressive becomes intolerable." ²⁹

Postmodernism has created a chaotic, empty, nihilistic world and television only serves this world view by fragmenting and disconnecting any sense of knowledge and learning. By ignoring and by amplifying, the media dictates to us, what is important and what is trivial. The concepts of impartiality and objectivity are sadly claimed and central to the broadcasting philosophy. The mass media cannot by its very nature reflect the world as it really is, it is not ever to be the "windows of the world." ³⁰ Barthes, as we have said before coined the influential phrase of *myth* to describe these examples of the "falsely obvious." ³¹

Disinformation has replaced information. Disinformation is not false information but superficial, fragmented, trivial or misleading information, which creates the illusion of knowledge but actually diverts the audience from knowing. As Postman so rightly puts it "television does not encourage people to see connections" ³² which is completely at loggerheads with the main aims and objectives of our education system.

Half an hour of television viewing and we are soon reminded of John Berger's comments in **Ways of Seeing**, on the harmful juxtapositions of the real life tragedy and the superficial. A documentary on the Troubles of Northern Ireland can be followed by a comedy. What is the connection? "The idea of causality does not exist in TV's grammar."³³ The co-existence of the two worlds on one flat surface only can indicate the sick and cynical



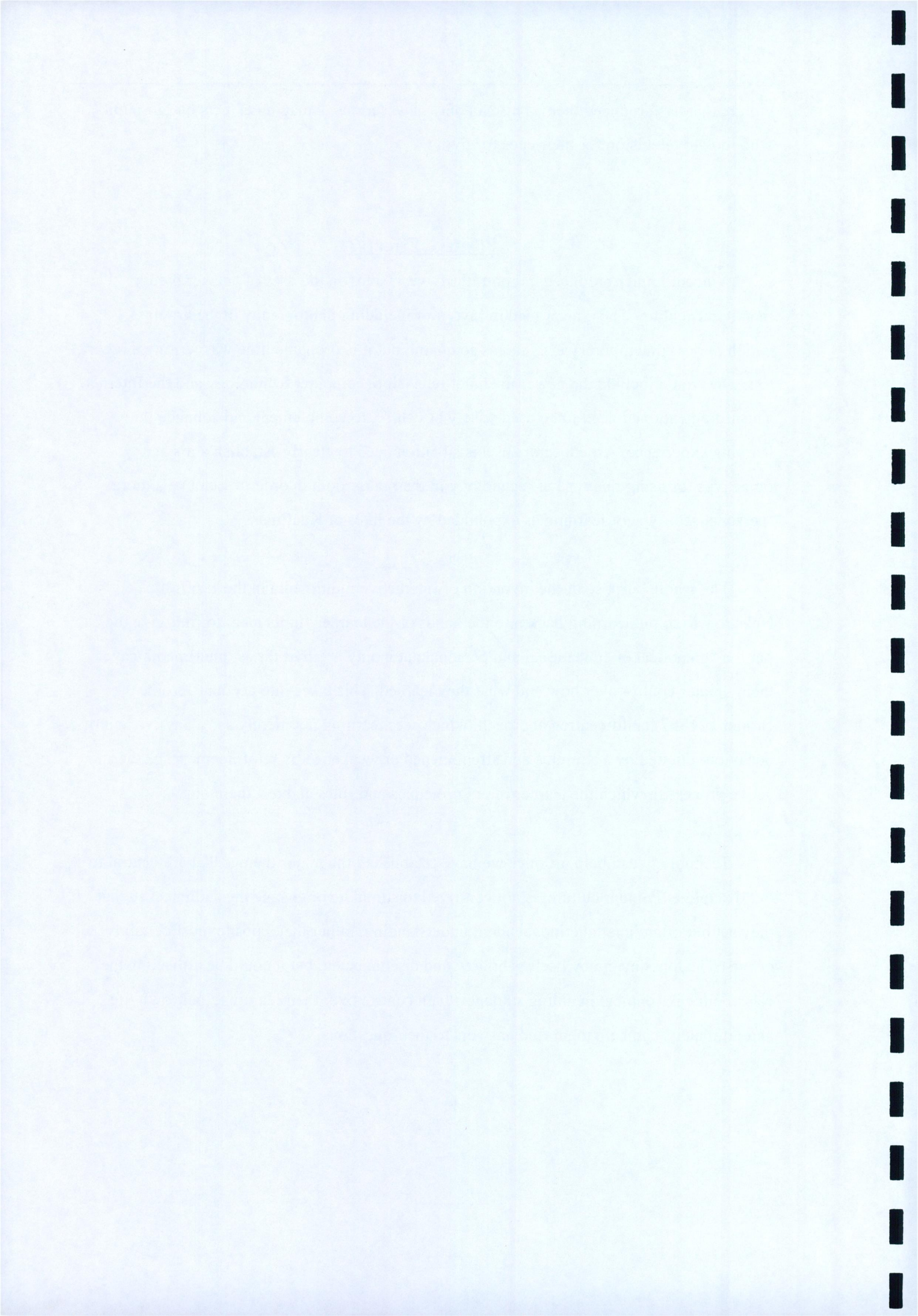
culture that has produced them. This can only have serious damaging effects on our pupils who look to television for their cues for living.

Positive Effects?

Vincent Lanier produced a report, thirty years ago, on the uses of "newer media" ³⁴ in the art curriculum. Then, he argued in favour of including photography in the art class, which in our contemporary eyes seems so quaint, but it is probable if he was writing a report today he would include the newer media of television, computer technology and the Internet. The aforementioned need to be used wisely of course, to complement and enhance the learning experience. Art educators in this situation need to clearly establish aims and objectives for using this type of technology in their classroom in order to achieve a more 'personalised' type of learning as expounded by the likes of Kaufman.

The whole purpose of the invention of Interactive multimedia in the 1960s by Ted Nelson, was to put learning back into the hands of the learner. In its ideal form it give the pupil a "great deal of educational and personal autonomy" ³⁵ in as far as, multimedia gave them greater control over how and what they learned. This takes into account Jerome Bruner's (1957) child-centred approach, which sees learning not merely as "a passive unit of behaviour elicited by a stimulus and strengthened or weakened by reinforcement, but as an active process in which the learner infers principles and rules and test them out." ³⁶

Technology can help us, once we have established the major themes that are central to our discipline. Popular culture, is not contrived to stimulate or engage the audience, so that they act out of an inner and independent understanding, rather the opposite most certainly occurs. The mass media by itself is hollow and disconnected, but it could be utilised in the classroom environment in aiding students "gain control over their learning, their own life and ultimately, can help them find answers to their questions." ³⁷



 FOOTNOTES – CHAPTER 2

1. Jon Wozencroft, **The Graphic Language of Neville Brody**. (London: Thames & Hudson, 1987) p. 94.
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3. Len Masterman, **Teaching the Media**. (London: Comedia Publishing Group, 1985) p. 13.
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8. Jean Piaget, **Science of Education and The Psychology of the Child**. (New York: Viking, 1971) p. 28.
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11. Roinn Oideachais, **Art, Craft and Design: The Junior Certificate Syllabus**, (Dublin, 1989): 6.
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16. Ibid., p. 61.
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18. D. Davis, **Art Culture: Essays on the PostModern**. (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1977) p. 88.

 FOOTNOTES – CHAPTER 2 (continued)

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26. Marshall McLuhan, E. Bruce and R. Powers, **The Global Village**, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989)
27. Neil Postman, **Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business**, (London: Heinemann, 1986) p. 1.
28. Marcus, "Speaker to Speaker", **Artforum International**, p. 12.
29. Masterman, **Teaching the Media**, p. 6.
30. Ibid.
31. Quote by Neil Postman in an interview with Michael Foley, "Television and the end of Childhood", **The Irish Times**, (Tuesday, January 7, 1977): 11.
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33. John Berger, **Ways of Seeing**, (London: BBC & the Penguin Group, 1972).
34. Philip C. Dunn, "More Power: Integrated Interactive Technology and Art Education." **The Journal of the National Art Education Association**, (Columbia University, Vol. 49, No.6, November 1996): 8.
35. Diane C. Gregory, "Art Education Reform: Technology as Savior." **The Journal of the National Art Education Association**, (Columbia University, Vol. 49, No.6, November 1996): 53.
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CHAPTER 3

How art education can address the balance

**The Art, Craft and Design course develops the student's ability to:
develop an awareness of the historical, social and economic role and value of
art, craft, and design and aspects of contemporary culture and mass-media.¹**

Art education is the perfect antidote to the destructive powers that popular culture has on education. This chapter investigates the balance that art education has to offer to the classroom.

Visual Awareness is the Tool

Children need to be informed and trained, to look critically and discriminatingly between what is good and bad in what they see. Len Masterman is convinced of the increasing need for a successful media education, that can be taught in a systematic, intelligent and coherent manner like the more established subjects.² This in my opinion is where art educators must take up the gauntlet and bring media studies, especially in the Leaving Certificate under the umbrella of Art Appreciation. Cicerco remarked that the purpose of education is to free the student from the tyranny of the present, which cannot be pleasurable for those like the young today, who are struggling hard to do the opposite.³

In the true Huxleian sense adolescents are accommodating themselves or willingly allowing themselves to be seduced by the mass media. Teachers owe it to their students to develop criticality and visual awareness in these classes and inform them of the society in which they live.

Gemma Hussey in her report "Television Violence and the Child", comments on the effects on children viewing violence on TV and video. She argues that education holds the keys in helping children make wise judgements about what they watch and quotes David Buckingham of London University's Institute of Education. He advocates "a constructive educational approach that empowers children and parents to make informed decisions on their own behalf."⁴ Hussey then proceeds to exemplify this in a Dutch study carried out with ten to twelve year olds, based on the premise that attitudes are conditioned and learned, but can be changed by information and education:

Six 20-minute school broadcasts used violent film clips followed by

commentary from real police officers and others pointing out the differences in real life. Work books and manuals were part of the project. This was all based on the premise that attitudes are learned predispositions that can be changed by new information. 80% of the teachers involved were highly pleased with the project. It seems to have sown the seeds of a new long-term approach to this major social problem. ⁵

In many ways teachers have to expand the philosophy of their methodology, from the traditional Aristotelian method; of communicating truth and knowledge, to a more constructive educational approach, that is also more student-centred. Ministers for Education need to play a more central role as well, in developing these programmes in schools.

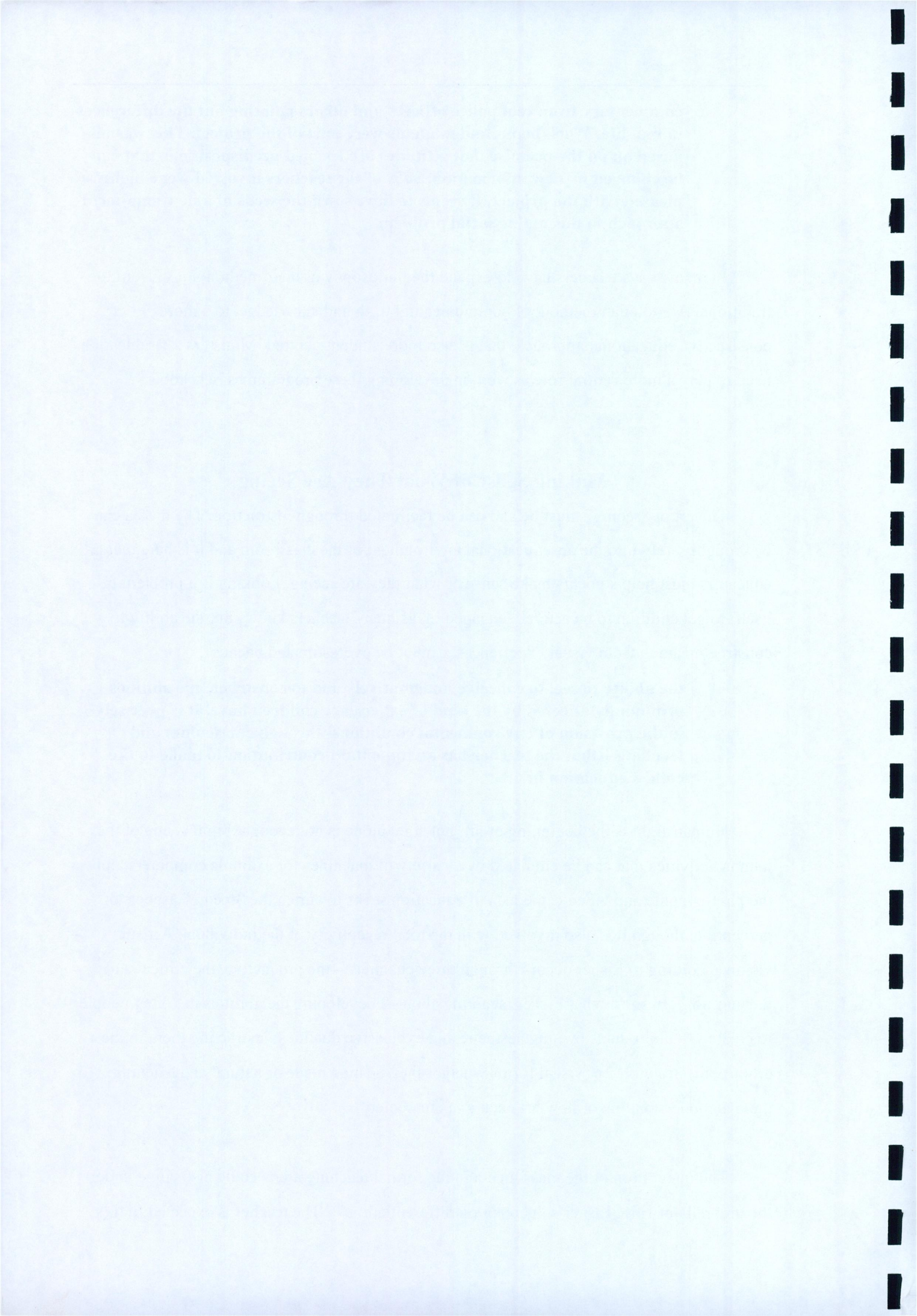
Making Sense of What They Are Seeing

The art of "seeing" must be and can be facilitated through instruction. The media can be brought safely into the art educational environment of the classroom and it is here that art educators must help students make sense of what they are seeing. Looking is a problem in itself, to get children to be actively engaged in, as many teachers know, but the ability to construe meaning from visual experiences, cannot be overestimated because,

the ability to see, to conceive imaginatively and to construct, are abilities profoundly affected by the kind of experience children have. It is precisely in the provision of environmental conditions- through curriculum and teaching – that the teacher has an important contribution to make to the child's education in art. ⁶

Human sight is the beginning of art, but sight alone is not enough. Sight is one of the human activities that can be emulated by a variety of machines for example computers and the photographic and video cameras. Art education seeks to enrich the "seeing" aspects of perception, though it is also involved with the total receptivity of the individual. Artistic vision according to Eisner occurs through three channels:– the productive, the critical and the cultural. ⁷ In short what Eisner is talking about is developing the abilities in young people to create visual products owning aesthetic and expressive qualities: instructing them in the art of perception to 'see' visual forms whether they be man made or natural and teaching them an understanding of how art occurs in our society.

The integration of the mass media in the formal teaching arena could also come under the umbrella of Eliot Eisner's "perception differentiation." ⁸ The teacher is expected in this



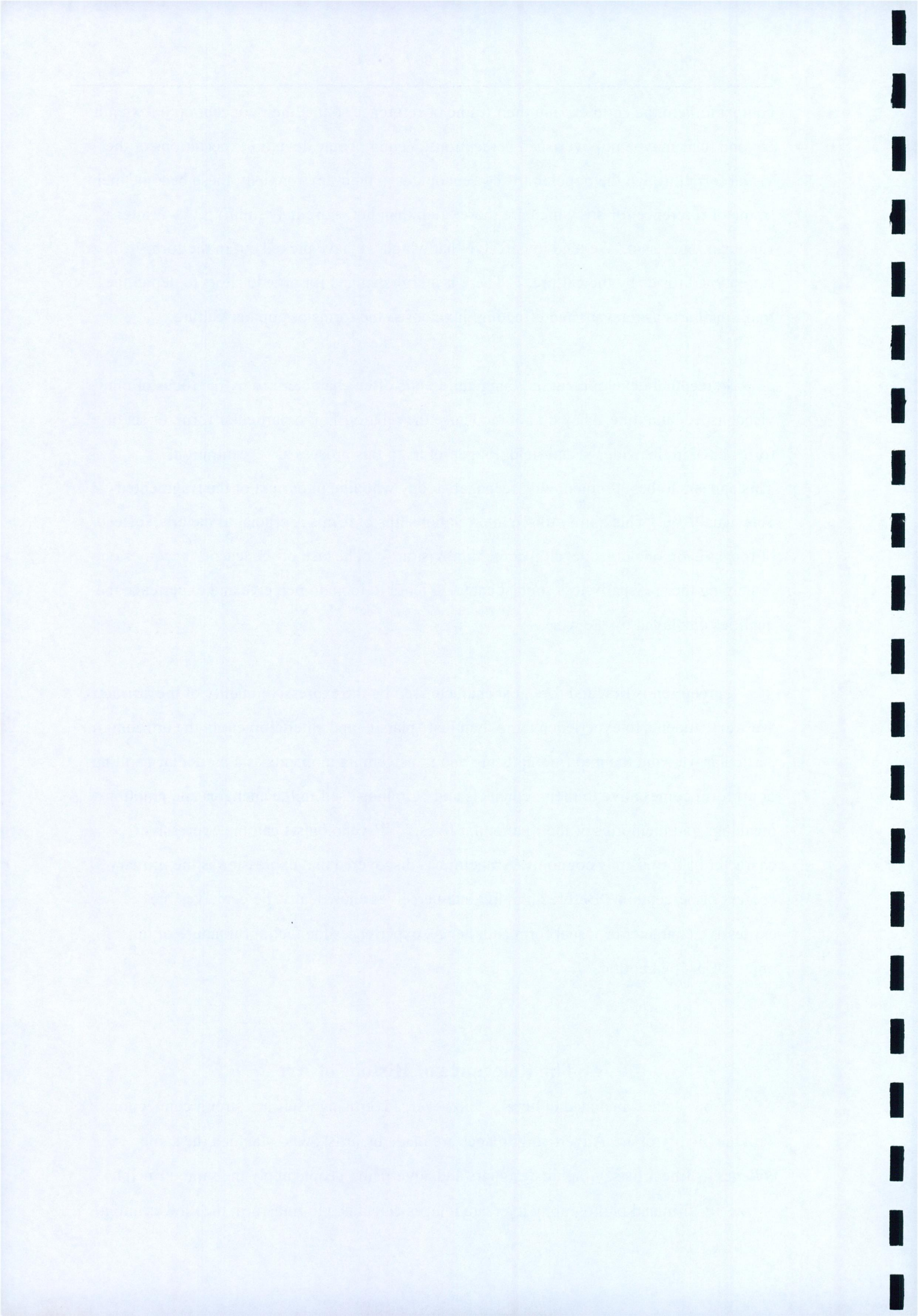
context to help the child expand their frame of reference so that their concept of art extends beyond their maybe impoverished perceptions. Young people develop expectations of the visual form through the popular art they encounter in their environment; these become their frame of reference for art, which are more often than not, extremely limiting. As Walter Lippman, once said, "We tend to perceive that which we have picked out in the form stereotyped for us by the culture." ⁹ There is a high demand for art educators to depict the traditional arts as relevant and affecting, juxtaposed the forms of popular culture.

Perceptual development in young children is often characterised by the focus of one visual aspect at a time. They do not recognise the relationships a particular form, or set of forms have in the wider visual field. Piaget refers to this process as – "centration." ¹⁰ This appears to be a problem with teenagers today who live in our era of the fragmented Televisual Age. "This ability to see interrelationships of forms is crucial to the arts, instead of focal vision one must develop contextual vision." ¹¹ The task of the teacher becomes one of helping those visually-less sophisticated, to learn to look, to perceive and experience the qualities displayed by the work.

Perception is first and foremost characterised by the expressive quality of the artifact. We want students to experience more than just "plaisir" and entertainment in the artroom, in particular we want them to find uplifting and transforming moments as a particular painting or art form comes alive to them; connects and "grounds itself in the energies and emotions, meanings and memories of their particular lives." ¹² Psychologists call the expressive character of forms– physiognomy. Arnheim has discovered that expression is the primary content of perception. "Before an individual perceives analytically, he perceives the expressive character of visual form and, hence, experiences the feelingful nature of the object of his perception." ¹³

The Relevance of History of Art

In our "mass-mediated culture", ¹⁴ however, advertising itself has strong connections with the history of art. Advertising images are made by artists who attended the same colleges as fine artists. Graphic designers and advertising people apply the same principles of fine art, film and photography to create images calculated to transform the viewer into a



consumer. A sense of visual literacy is needed at present to decipher and realise that our fine art tradition, has influenced and helped create the world of advertising. Imagination and creativity have produced television, billboard and magazine commercials.

Lowenfeld stated that, "It is important that history, criticism, and the analysis of art begin with the tangible, a reference point that can actually be touched..."¹⁵ Advertising is part of the everyday ordinary cultural experience of young people and I believe that media references should be used in the classroom successfully and would prove to be an immediate catalyst for developing student's visual literacy. Are pupils aware that the Surrealist-inspired Benson and Hedges and Silk Cut advertisements can be traced back to the work of Salvador Dali and that publicity has relied so heavily on the visual language of painting? Are students aware of the influence of the pre-Raphaelites in the latest Levi Jean commercials? The list is endless.

Many of children's first experience of a work of art, has been handed down second-hand, via advertisements, MTV and or through the Internet. Edvard Munch's The Scream, for the majority of contemporary teenagers was first viewed not in the art room, but in animated format on MTV. The Scream is taken from its established context, as a profoundly expressive art form and then becomes exploited and transformed by the social dimension of mass communication into a stylised representational form of culture; encoded with a completely different message. Martin Laba explains this process in his discourse on the subject: "Making Sense: Expressiveness, Stylisation and the Popular Culture Process."

...We are concerned therefore with the meaning of the code chosen rather than the meaning of the encoded message...In the transformation of popular culture forms, we must deal with the curious blend of artistic expression and commercial process, and we must reconcile the function of popular art as both cultural artifact and profit-making commodity.¹⁶

If this is the child's first experience of The Scream, then just like Lowenfeld advocated, this is the reference point to start with and build upon. Let us bring these video-taped clips into the classroom and re-establish a work of art to its proper context and historical background.

The modern tradition of fine art has emphasised three inherent conditions: "the value of the unique art object; the value of the artist's individual personality and the value of

innovative artistic form.”¹⁷ Once in the media, an original work of art loses these qualities and becomes nothing more than just a mere image, devoid of historical background and depth. Jean-Luc Godard once coined the maxim: “This is not a *just* image. This is just an *image*.”¹⁸ Children do need to know of the link on one hand of the abstract ideals of Justice and on the other, the “politics of representation.”¹⁹ Television does not represent a piece of reality, but rather produces or constructs it.

This can be illustrated blatantly with the recent unrest in Belgrade, that was not carried on its own national TV station, due to political control of the media, yet was broadcasted all around the world by other TV networks. To examine even ten minutes of Sky News under the microscope of discussion and in light of what John Berger and Postman says about detrimental and inappropriate juxtapositions, would prove so relevant to the world in which the student moves in.

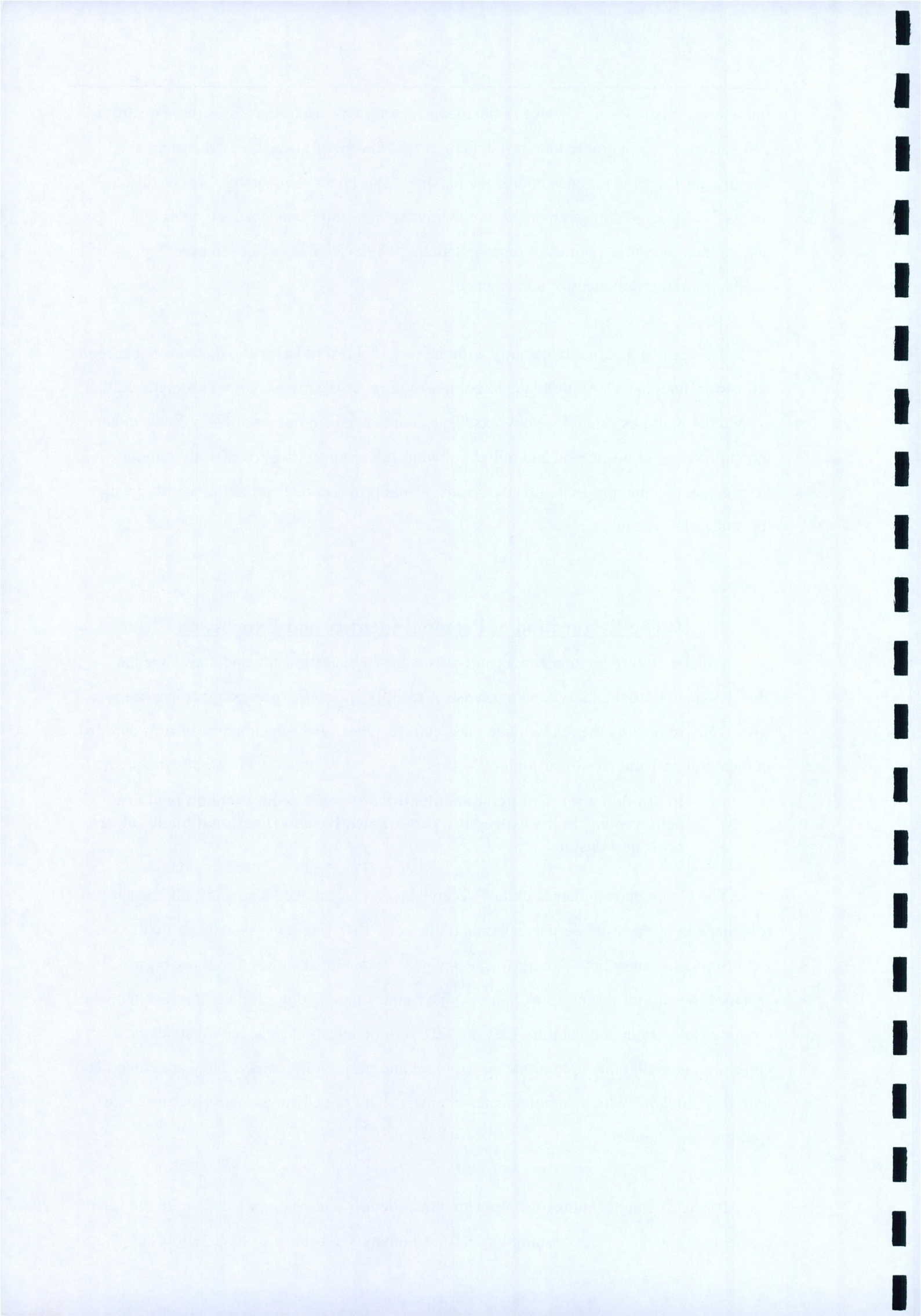
The Restoration of Personal Identity and Expression

Popular culture by its nature is anti-personal. Art education can and does have the ability to restore to the individual the sense of identity and self-expression that has been wrongfully robbed by the ready-made mass culture. One of the fundamental aims as outlined in the Art, Craft and Design at Junior Cycle is:

to develop a sense of personal identity and self-esteem through practical achievement in the expressive, communicative and functional modes of art, craft and design.²⁰

The Greek philosopher Socrates’ deceptively simple advice “Know thyself”, has much resonance in our post-modern age. Commodities of a Late-Capitalist system are now, as Levi-Strauss so aptly put - “goods to speak with.”²¹ Functional values have now been replaced by cultural meanings. A pair of Nike runners or an Adidas top are not just items of clothing for warmth and comfort, they are *texts*; communicating a chosen lifestyle and a coded *language* to others of our perceived place and position in society. They are embodied with this *language* which communicates to others ‘I am cool. I am attractive because I am wearing these items.’

It was Zygmunt Bauman’s proposition that identity and belonging constitute the basic elements of the theory of consumption.²² To be human is to belong, to have fellowship and to

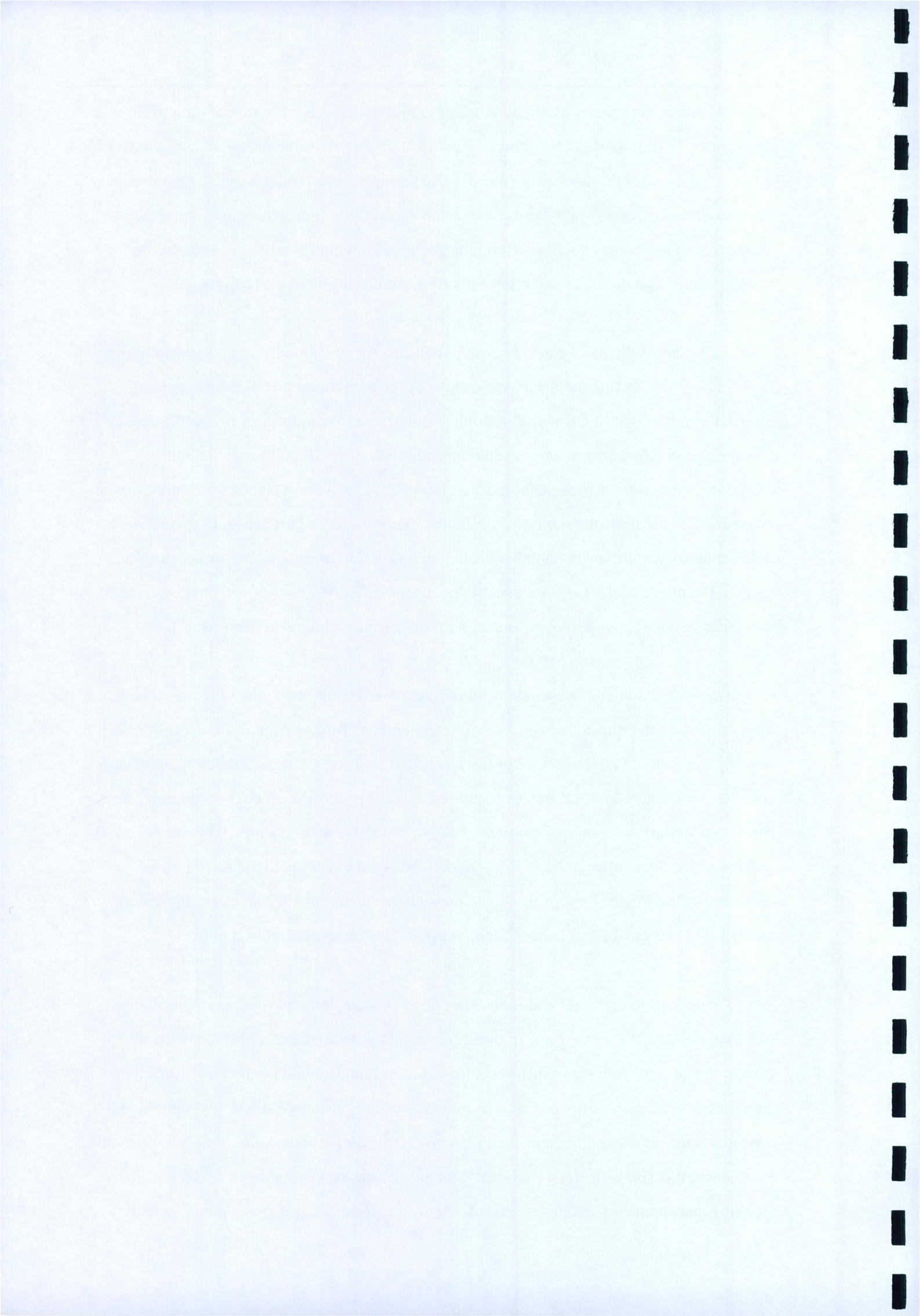


identify with a community. Bauman redefines modern lifestyles in terms of membership of "neo-tribes."²³ Belonging comes before identity, the youth sees the group or sub-culture s/he is attracted to and then chooses the meaningful commodities. I belong to this cool group therefore I wear Oasis/Adidas tops. Neo-tribalism captures and defines in essence the adolescent in a secondary school situation. Today "Knowing thyself" means knowing the images, icons, commodities and representations produced by popular culture.

Secondary schools ought to provide the means for self-identification and belonging. It is absolutely crucial that the needs and desires of the adolescent be taken into account, especially in the light of the world of popular culture and the emptiness of what it does of fer. "By the age of fifteen the average American child has spent 20,000 hours watching television, more time than in school (Swerdlow, 1981)."²⁴ Their value systems are greatly influenced by the mass media. Lowenfeld mentions a variety of art activities that lend themselves to acquiring self-identification: painting, sculpturing, making prints, pots, and murals. Painting and drawing are usually the most expressive types of art, but posters and montages provide an opportunity to deal with the social problems of our time.

Lowenfeld and the Progressives, viewed expression and the value of the art process as more important than the actual finished product. True, self-expression is a must for those bewildering years of adolescents, but there needs to be a stress on the incredible amount of personal satisfaction and self-achievement in actually finishing a product or project. The whole process gives us an opportunity to initiate, elaborate and conclude what we began. In this sense the work reflects the maker – homofaber – man/woman the maker. This is reiterated in the White Paper, art education is characterised by its "development of self-reliance and responsibility for decision-making in the young person."²⁵

One of the huge values Kaufman, sees in art's contributions, is again in this area of personal identity. "In a society of imposition and acceptance of mass, undifferentiated values; the general public has suffered a loss of individualism and identity."²⁶ Kaufman views art in education as the perfect antidote and restorer of personal worthwhileness. Art education aims to expand the student's response to the aesthetic and emotional qualities of experience. It is fundamentally involved with all the senses: tasting, hearing, seeing, touching and smelling; it hopes to educate them so that the imaginative and perceptual



responses will result in a more qualitative experience.

An innate sense of "*play*" is involved in the whole artistic process, finding release in imaginative, satisfying and perceptual ways. Play in this context is not the mindless passive play of postmodern fun or entertainment. It is the heightened interrelationship between senses, perceptual understanding and the imagination, that characterises *learning*. Kaufman calls this phenomenon "the expansion of one's personal horizon."²⁷

 FOOTNOTES – CHAPTER 3

1. Roinn Oideachais, Art, Craft and Design: The Junior Certificate Syllabus, (Dublin, 1989): 3.
2. Len Masterman, Teaching the Media, (London: Comedia Publishing Group, 1985) p. 17.
3. Neil Postman, Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business, (London: Heinemann, 1986) pp. 146-147.
4. Gemma Hussey, "Television, Violence and the Child", Education Matters, (Dublin, February/March, 1997): 12.
5. Ibid.
6. Irving Kaufman, Art and Education in Contemporary Culture, (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1966), p. 100.
7. Eliot Eisner, Educating Artistic Vision, (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1972). p. 65.
8. Ibid., p. 70.
9. Kaufman, Art and Education in Contemporary Culture, p.176.
10. David Fontana, Psychology for Teachers, 3rd ed. (London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1995) p. 55.
11. Eisner, Educating Artistic Vision, p. 70.
12. Pelfry, Art and Mass Media, p. 7.
13. Eisner, Educating Artistic Vision, p. 74.
14. Phrase coined by Michael Read in R.H. Pelfry, Art and Mass Media, (New York: Harper & Row, 1985) p. 9.
15. Viktor Lowenfeld, Creative and Mental Growth, (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 7th ed., 1975) p. 415.
16. Martin Laba, 'Making Sense: Expressiveness, Stylisation and the Popular Culture Process', Journal of Popular Culture, (Ohio: Midwest Modern Language Association, Vol. 19, No. 4, Spring 1986): 113.
17. R.H. Pelfry, Art and Mass Media, (New York: Harper & Row, 1985) p. 4.
18. Dick Hebdige, Hiding in the Light, (London: Routledge, 1988) p. 160.
19. Ibid.

FOOTNOTES – CHAPTER 3

20. Roinn Oideachais, **Art, Craft and Design: The Junior Certificate Syllabus**, (Dublin, 1989): 2.
21. John Fiske, **Understanding Popular Culture**. (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989) p.34.
22. Alan Warde, "Consumers, Identity and Belonging", **The Authority of the Consumer**. ed. R. Keat, N. Whiteley and N. Abercrombie, (London: Routledge, 1994) pp. 60-63.
23. Ibid., p. 68.
24. Viktor Lowenfeld, **Creative and Mental Growth**. (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 7th ed., 1975) p. 323.
25. Roinn Oideachais, **Charting our Education Future: White Paper on Education**, (Dublin: Stationery Office, 1995): 21.
26. Kaufman, **Art and Education in Contemporary Culture**. p. 34.
27. Ibid., p. 35.

CHAPTER 4

The Results of the Media Survey

This survey was carried out with eighty-three students who are currently studying art in The Assumption Secondary School in Walkinstown, half who are in the Junior Cycle and half who are in Senior Cycle. The questionnaire that was actually used can be found in the appendices on page 60. These were the results:–

- The average secondary school adolescent spends *four* hours per day exclusively watching television and *two* hours listening to the radio.
- The favourite television programmes watched by all the pupils were the British and Australian soap operas, such as East Enders, Brookside, Home and Away and Neighbours.
- The most popular television channel was **MTV**.
- The most listened to radio programme was The Chris Barry Show on FM 104.
- Bliss, Sugar, Top of the Pops, (*see fig. 1*) Smash Hits and Just Seventeen were the most popular magazines read.
- 70% of the Junior Cycle pupils had been to an art gallery as part of a school tour .
- 65% of the Junior Cycle pupils had *never* gone to an art gallery as part of their own leisure time.
- 88% of the Senior Cycle have *never* been to an art gallery with the school.
- 88% of the Senior Cycle had *never* been to an art gallery in their own leisure time.
- Not one pupil knew where the four main art galleries in Dublin were located.
- 60% of the Junior Cycle students watched television whilst doing homework.
- 56% of the Senior pupils watched television whilst doing homework.
- 100% of the Senior students voted History of Art as the part of the art class they least enjoyed, deeming it boring and irrelevant to their lives.
- 75% of the Junior Cycle pupils read books such as Point Horror and The X-Files.
- 89% of the Senior pupils studying Pass Art did *not* read any books at all.
- 44% of the Senior pupils studying Honours Art did read books, such as Science Fiction and books written by Irvine Welsh (author of Trainspotting).

Class Research (1)

School Profile:

The Assumption Secondary School in Walkinstown, is situated in the south of Dublin. It is a Catholic convent, run by the Irish Sisters of Charity and has a Board of Management consisting of the Sisters of Charity, members of the teaching staff and some people from the local community. The catchment area is made up of Drimnagh, Crumlin, Clondalkin, Palmerstown and Tallaght which predominantly are working-class regions.

The research mentioned in this context was based on the pupils in the Fifth Year Remedial/Pass class in a time duration of forty minutes. This class was chosen as a result of the evidence of the survey – it consumed the most television, radio and magazines, combined with the fact that none of the class had ever been to an art gallery and they unanimously displayed a distaste to the history of art and reading.

Theme:

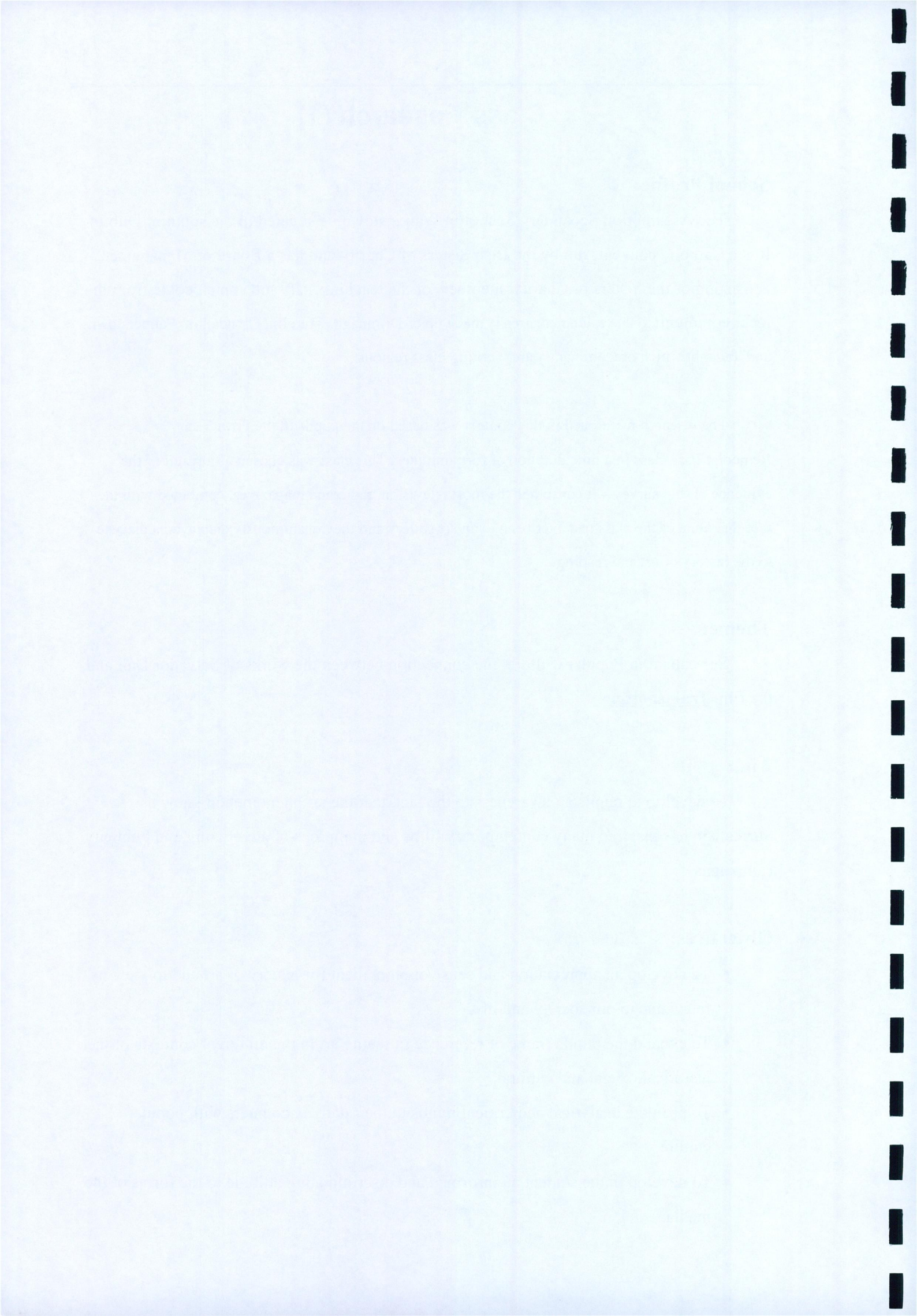
Surrealism in Popular Culture; the connection between the works of Salvador Dali and the film Trainspotting.

Aim:

To develop in pupils an awareness to the fact, that the art phenomenon known as Surrealism has inspired many contemporary films and numerous of advertising and publicity campaigns.

Objectives:

- To develop an appreciation and sense of enjoyment for history of art and to view its relevance to our society and life.
- To expand the pupils frame of reference in seeing art in the different contexts of the historical, social and cultural.
- To promote analytical and critical minds in their daily encounters with popular culture.
- To develop in the student an informed and discriminating attitude to the forms of the media.



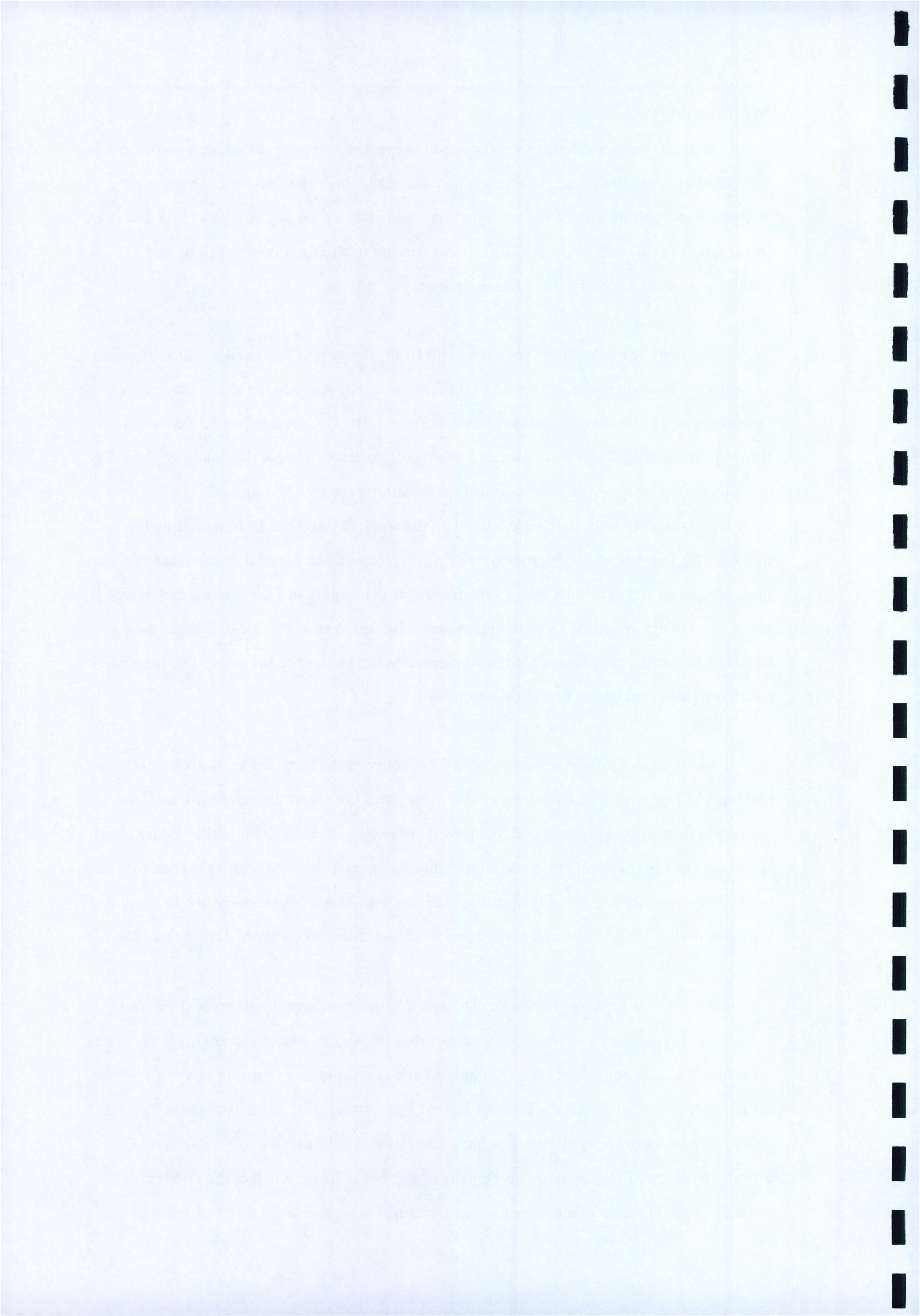
Methodology:

The topic was introduced by referring to the recent survey that had been carried out in their class and how they had all unanimously voted that history of art was completely irrelevant and boring. Part of the introduction was in telling the pupils that art was and is an integral part of our contemporary culture and that the roots of a numerous films and publicity campaigns can be traced back to history of art.

They were then shown a very select clip from **Trainspotting**, (a film which they had all seen) a scene where the actor who plays Renton disappears down a toilet and ends up swimming in a kind of surreal, underwater world, whilst trying to recover his narcotics. The film was stopped and they were asked to use words to describe what they had just seen. The majority said it was 'weird', 'mad' and 'like something out of a bad dream'. The students were then presented with four slides based on the work of Salvador Dali, including the famous **The Persistence of Memory** (see fig. 11). No one had heard of him, never mind his most renowned works, which was a surprise. After the display of Dali's work, they were asked to once again outline the qualities of the paintings. Yet again, most of them used words like 'weird', or 'like a nightmare' to describe the content of his work. The majority also liked his work, which I had not anticipated.

I asked them did they see any connections between the film clip and Salvador Dali's paintings? They answered - yes they could, in so far as both were strange, eerie and 'really druggie'. At this point I introduced the movement known as Surrealism in the history of art. We broke the title Sur-realism down simply and renamed it 'beyond realism'. Then for ten minutes we described some of the attributes of this movement as embodied by the work of Dali, discussing his lifestyle and his influences. The students took notes during this time.

After this we began a classroom discussion based on where in our present cultural environment, have they viewed aspects of Surrealism. All the students, were quite vocal and opinionated at this point. They began naming various promotions or music videos they had seen such as 'The Smirnoff Vodka' campaign, 'The Carmel Bar' advertisement, a Bjork video, the latest Levi advertisement, which has also strong links with a Pre-Raphaelite painting by Burne Jones entitled the **Depths of the Sea**. The majority of the class really liked all of the aforementioned, the campaigns they did not like were those of Silk-Cut and



Benson and Hedges. They dismissed them as too complicated, but they could see the connection between them and Dali's **The Persistence of Memory**. Homework consisted of jotting down more examples of Surrealist work as viewed in the media and to bring in examples from magazines they were reading.

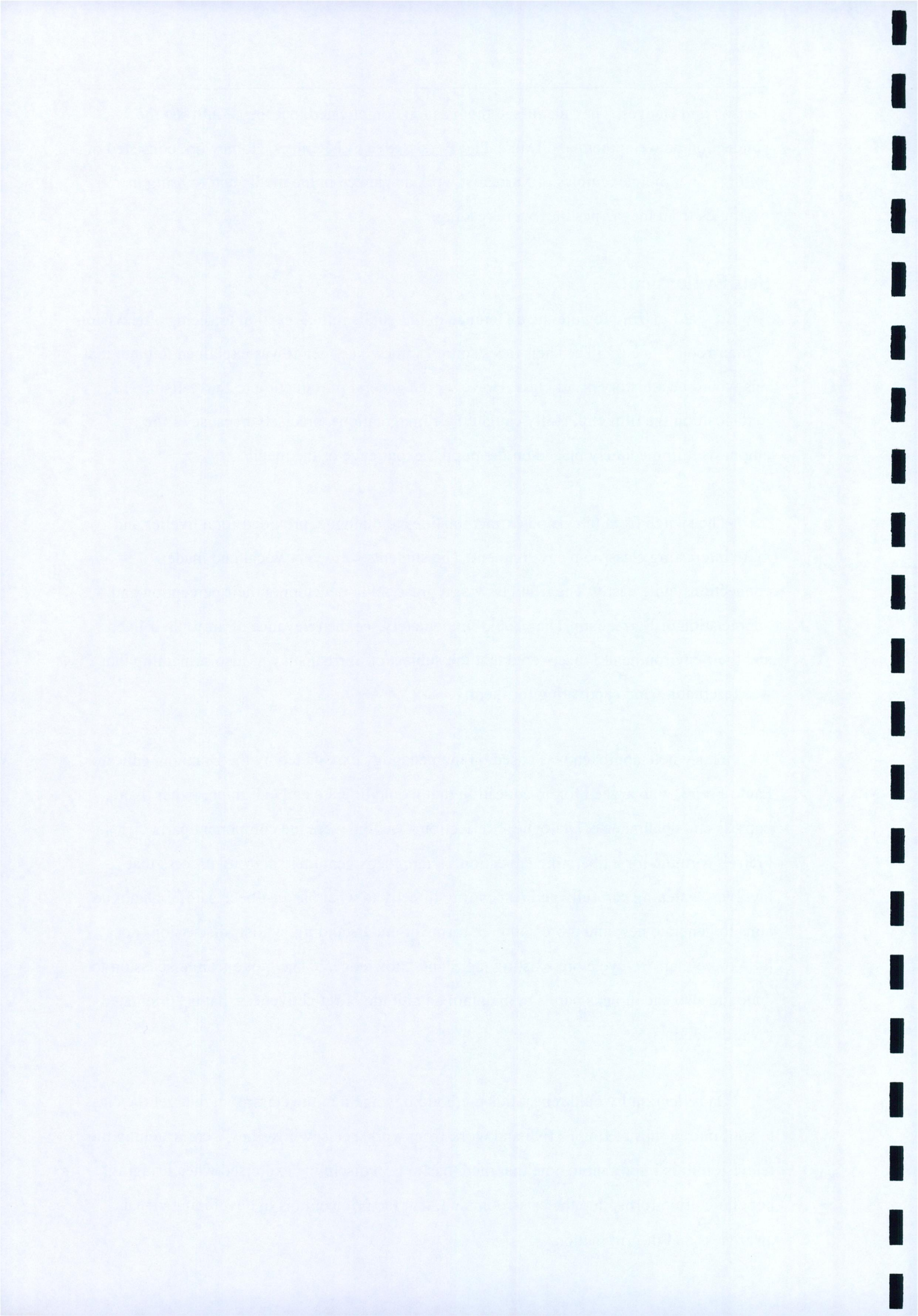
Self Evaluation:

It was amazing to note the difference in the pupils initial reaction to seeing a television in their room - one of glee. Their faces soured somewhat when it was explained to them that this would be a history of art class. However the general introduction to Surrealism, juxtaposition the film clip, really caught their imaginations, precisely because of the emphasis it immediately placed on the pupil's experience of the media.

The switch from television extract to slides to dialogue, provided for a livelier and more interesting classroom environment. The students were very vocal and made connections quite easily. The film clip was a great aid in developing their perception and appreciation of Surrealism. They could immediately see the relevance of art to their lives and their environment. I discovered that the subject of Surrealism was also something that was fascinating and captivating for them.

This whole approach was based on the pedagogy expounded by the Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire, who argued for an education that would liberate and enlighten, rather than oppress and dehumanise. Dialogue - Reflection - Action, were the component parts of Freire's formula for a liberating education.¹ Dialogue is genuinely a group process that involves "listening carefully and responding directly to what has just been said."² Dialogue aims to generate new and more complex forms of understanding, whilst 'discussion' does little more than "re-cycle pre-existing ideas and knowledge."³ The move from discussion to dialogue also encourages pupils to maintain an attitude of reflectiveness that is "orientated towards action."⁴

On reflection I would repeat this methodology again in the classroom, but get the class to split into groups of four or five and work from worksheets, whilst they were watching the television. It is important to note that there has to be a discipline exercised when bringing popular culture forms into the classroom and, that the prime aim is in developing visual awareness and discrimination.



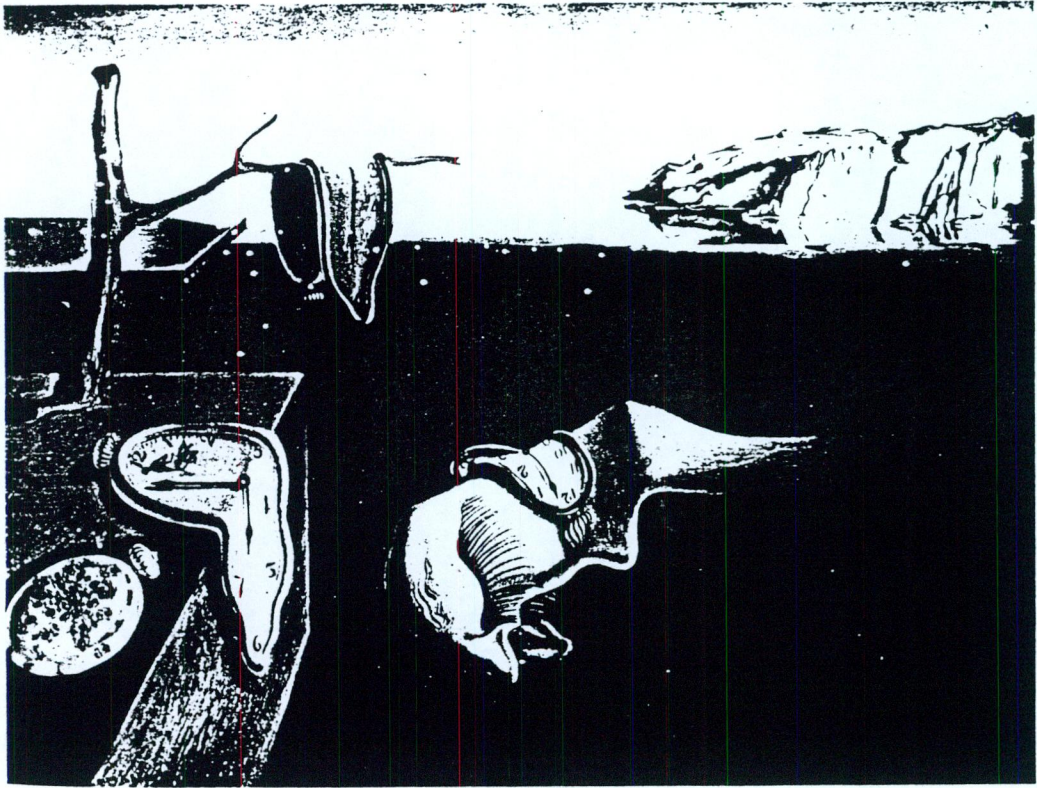


Fig. 11: The Persistence of Memory, 1931, by Salvador Dalí.

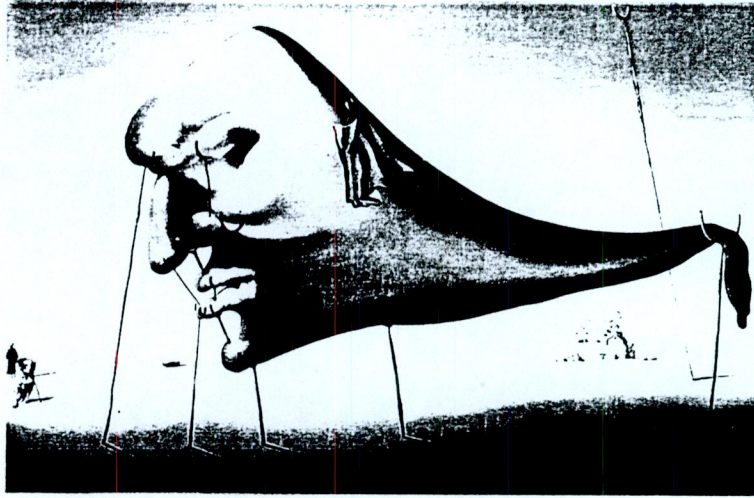


Fig. 12: Sleep, 1937, by Salvador Dali.



Fig. 13: Autumn Cannibalism, 1936-1937, by Salvador Dali.

Class Research (2)

School Profile:

The school profile is the same as before. The research mentioned in this context was based on the pupils in the Fifth Year Remedial/Pass class in a time duration of forty minutes.

Theme:

Ancient Egypt.

Aim:

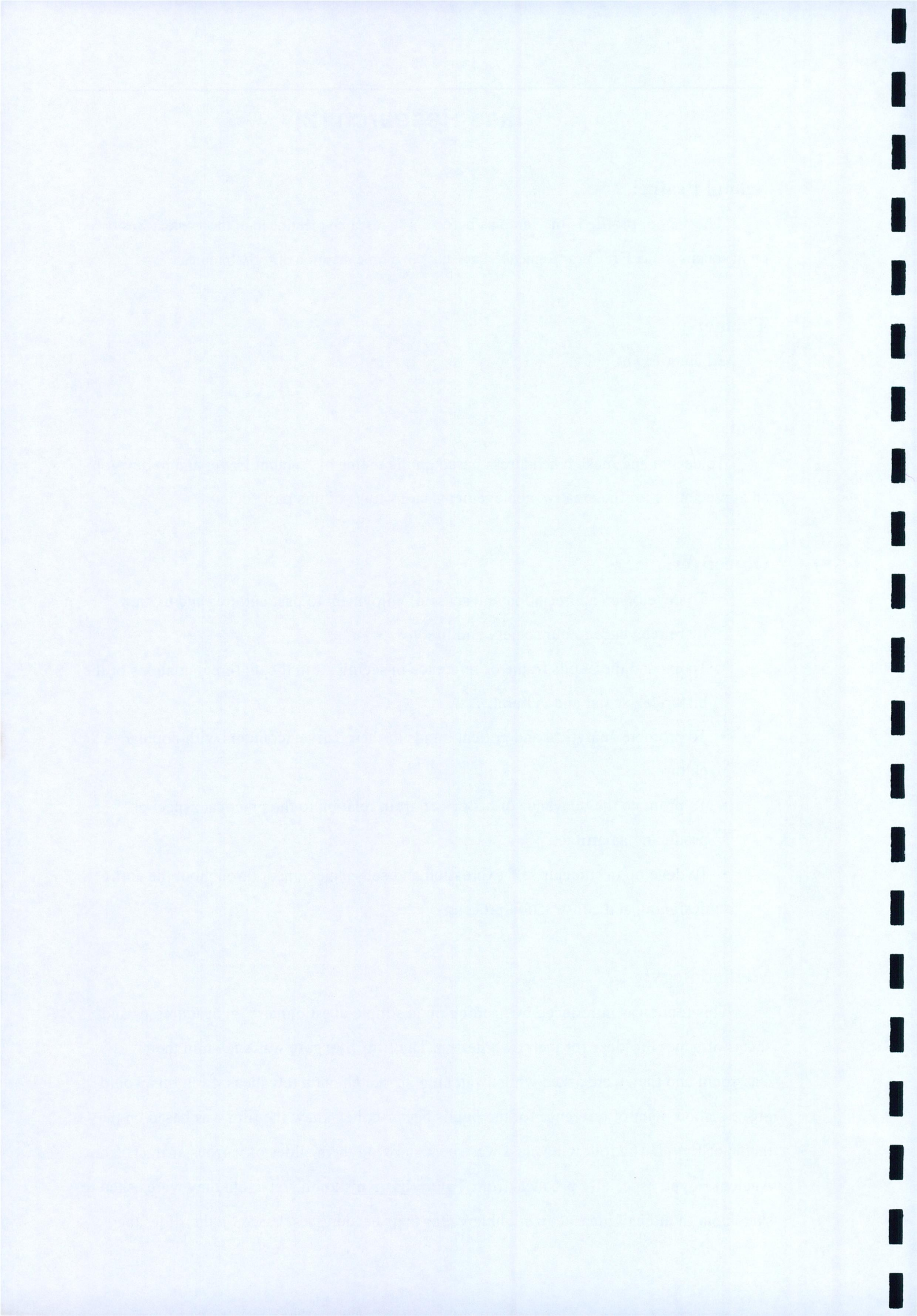
To design and make a headdress based on the theme of Ancient Egypt and to develop an appreciation for the creative achievements and values of this past society.

Objectives:

- To develop an appreciation and sense of enjoyment to past cultures and to view their relevance to our society and life.
- To expand the pupils frame of reference in seeing art in the different contexts of the historical, social and cultural.
- To promote analytical and critical minds in their daily encounters with popular culture.
- To promote the relevance of history of art in relation to the practical aspect of producing an artifact.
- To develop in students self-expression and self-achievement throughout the entire designing and construction process.

Methodology:

This topic was introduced by handing out a simple questionnaire on headdresses and sheets of paper for ideas for their own design. The film Stargate was shown in their classroom and they were asked whilst watching, to sketch out a few ideas. I felt this would prove a good point of reference for the pupils because they knew the film was based on the theme of Egypt. The following class was spent showing them slides of various artifacts from Ancient Egypt, especially products from Tutankhamen's tomb, yet again they were asked to sketch out thumbnail ideas they might have for their headdresses, based on the slides they



had been shown.

The third class involved a trip to the National Museum of Ireland to see **The Ancient Egypt** exhibition (*see fig. 14*). The collection was acquired from excavations carried out in Egypt between the 1890s and the 1920s. The students were given worksheets to fill in whilst they viewed the exhibit and paper and pencils to sketch out ideas of artifacts that caught their imagination. Here they had a chance to view jewellery, examples of hieroglyphic script, mummified people, cats, examples of burial casts and wooden statues and models of people and boats.

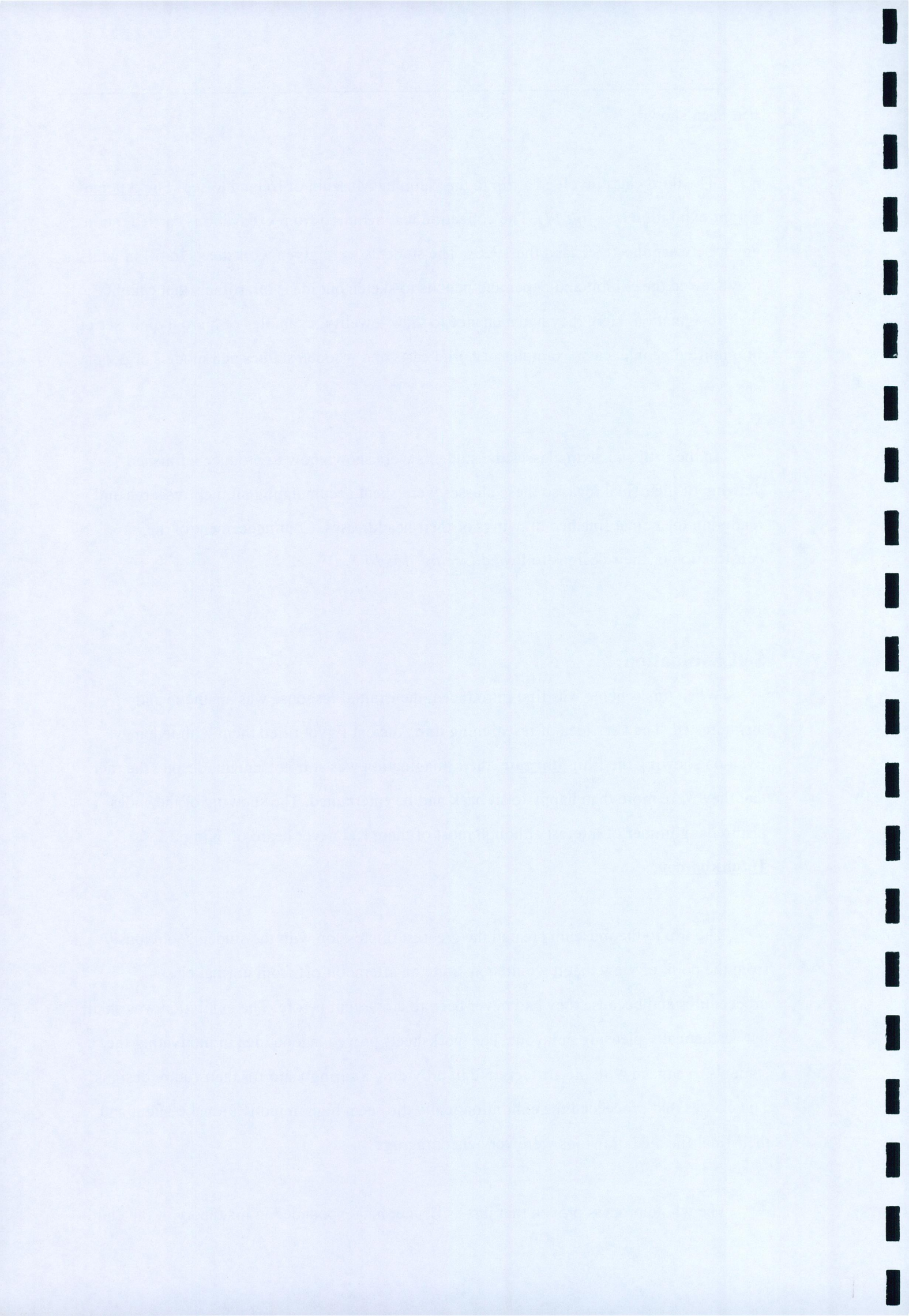
In the fifth and sixth classes the students were shown how to produce a finished drawing of their final idea, so these classes were spent accumulating all their research and rendering their final finished drawings of their headdresses. Commencement of the construction of their designs followed (*see fig. 15, 16 & 17*).

Self Evaluation:

When this scheme was first introduced, their initial response was apathetic and disinterested. The very idea of researching into Ancient Egypt filled them with lethargy. Even on showing the film **Stargate**, their imagination was still not caught, despite the fact that they were more than happy to sit back and be entertained. The showing of the slides inspired a glimmer of interest although most of them had never heard of **King Tutankhamen**.

The trip to the museum created the greatest impression with the students, obviously from the point of view that it would constitute an afternoon-off from normal class proceedings and because they had never been to a museum before. The exhibition was small but aesthetically pleasing in layout. The worksheets proved a good idea in motivating the students to engage with the artifacts and in providing a springboard for their future designs. The classes that proceeded the exhibition really did seem high in motivational content and their final finished drawings were very encouraging.

The whole process proved that just as Bruner had expounded in his theory of the child-



centred approach to teaching, it was important to take the students at their pace and from their reference point, but they really needed their frame of reference expanded in view of this ancient culture. I was pleasantly surprised at their interest and at their engagement with the real Egyptian artifacts and very impressed at the outcome.

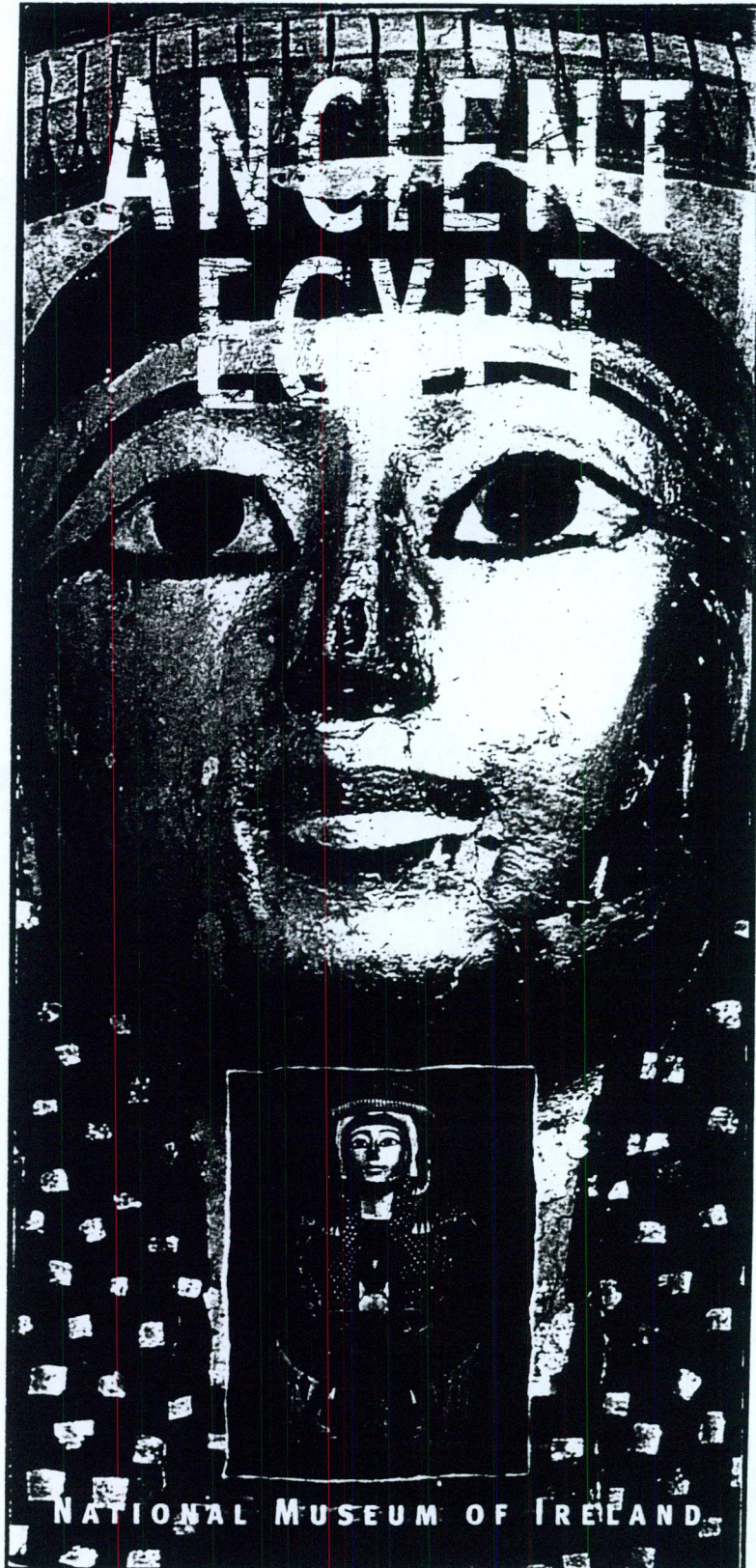


Fig. 14: Ancient Egypt Exhibition, in the National Museum of Ireland



Fig. 15: An example of a student's design for her headdress.

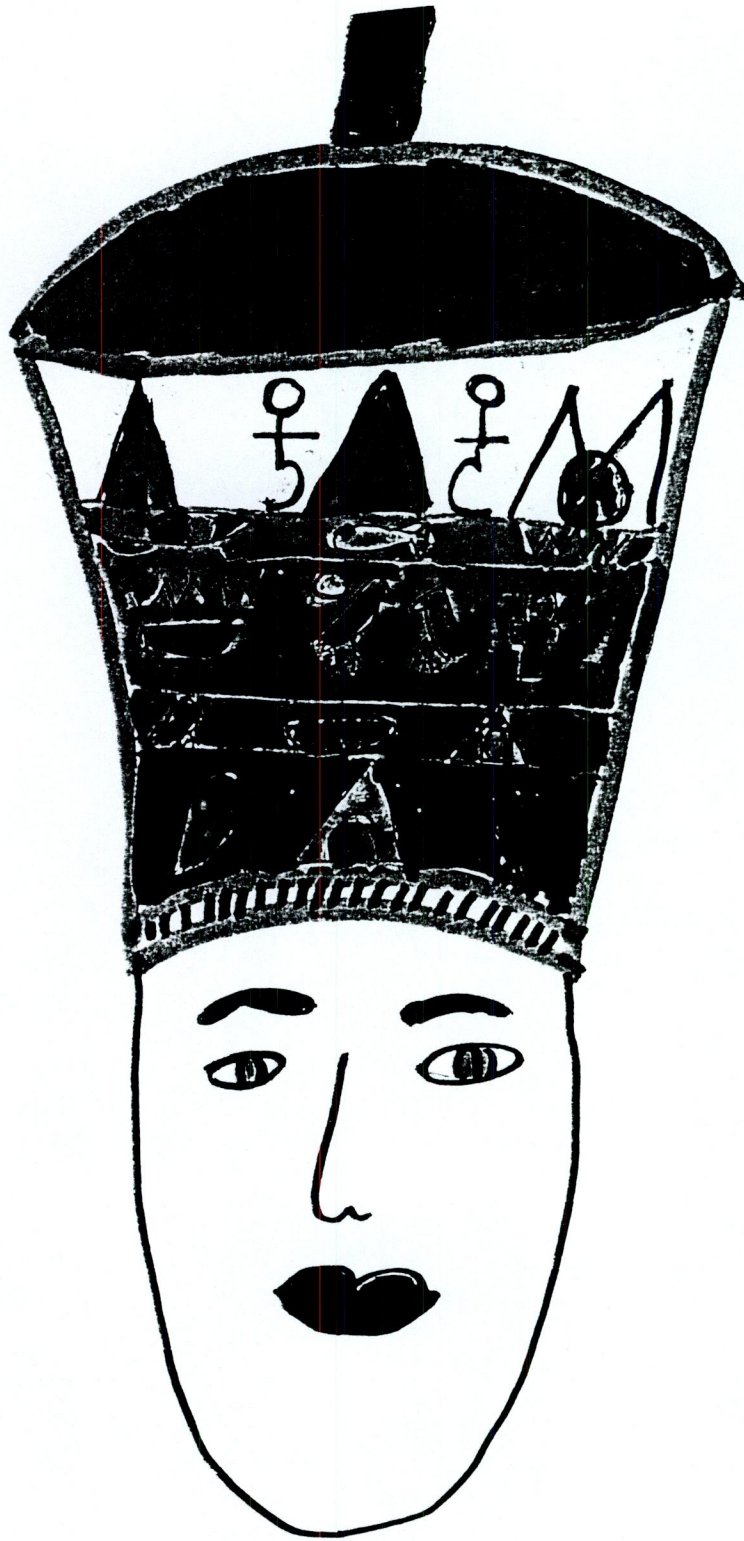


Fig. 16: An example of a student's design for her headdress.



Fig. 17: An example of a student's design for her headdress.

FOOTNOTES – CHAPTER 5

1. Len Masterman, **Teaching the Media**. (London: Comedia Publishing Group, 1985) p. 33.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.

Conclusion

What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow
Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man,
You cannot say, or guess, for you know only
A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,
And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,
And the dry stone no sound of water. Only
There is shadow under this red rock,
(Come in under the shadow of this red rock),
And I will show you something different from either
Your shadow at morning striding behind you
Or your shadow at evening rising to meet you;...¹

T.S. Eliot's **The Waste Land** represented the world as he saw it in 1922 after the First World War. The 'waste' is not however the devastation and loss of human life; but the emotional, spiritual and creative 'waste' of civilisation as he saw it then. The poem is organised to present a perspective of history in which twentieth-century forms of belief and disbelief, of culture and of life are kept in a continuous and critical relationship with those of the past.

The Waste Land as a poem in its form and structure could be considered in essence to be post-modern. It is unfinished, naked, deconstructed in format, containing fragments and fragments of scenes and pictures of life; very much in the same vein as any popular culture form. However in their content they are worlds apart. The fragments of life that T.S. Eliot proposes have an underlying link. It is this central modernist viewpoint that holds it together, the Classical European sensibility that invites the audience to participate, to construct meaning, to engage in putting the poem back together.

Throughout all the researching and reading needed for this dissertation the conclusion is that popular culture is a *wasteland*, that is competing against and destroying creativity and visual awareness in our schools. All mass culture has to offer is an exploitation of the cheapest emotional responses. Commercially-catered films, television and publicity all

provide satisfaction at the lowest level and inculcate the choosing of the most immediate pleasures got with the least effort. Popular culture homogenises human experience to a common denominator or in the words of Andy Warhol to just “liking things.” It holds no such engagement with its audience, that contemplative and perceptive quality or that sense of criticality is sadly lacking.

Unfortunately, the questionnaire alone showed the extensiveness to which pupils interact and participate consciously or unconsciously with popular culture everyday. It highlighted their disdainful attitudes to the rich and diverse subject of history of art. This was predominately due to the fact that history of art is *still* taught through the medium of print, which cannot compete against the visually-dominated environment of popular culture. The survey also clearly highlighted the non-literacy of pupils today.

Research was carried out on the highest consumers of mass culture, which where the fifth year remedial class. Paulo Freire’s Dialogue-Reflection-Action approach, in **Class Research 1** demonstrated the potential of this form of pedagogy in developing pupil’s visual literacy and in the benefits of bringing popular culture forms and media studies into the classroom. The surface character of popular culture has reduced children’s powers of perception to the mindless act of just looking or “cruising” with their remote control. The prospective teacher who is to arrive at an individual and authentic method of teaching art, must be prepared to answer to the distinctions between looking and seeing.

Depicting the traditional arts as relevant and affecting juxtaposed the forms of popular culture, showed potential in improving the students’ attitude towards history of art. In **Class Research 2** the visit to the Egyptian exhibition against the film Stargate, indeed proved that the standards and offerings of the mass media were a paltry second-best.

Eisner discloses two major types of justification for the teaching of art: the contextualist position and the essentialist justification. *The contextualist position*² emphasises the particular needs of the students or the society as a major basis for forming its objectives. In our Irish postmodern society, we are talking about the need for identity and belonging in young people, the need for self-achievement, the need for fun in a dull sequential curriculum and the need for meaning and purpose in a vacuous culture. *The*

essentialist justification ³ affirms the kind of contribution to human experience and understanding that only art can provide: it emphasises the qualities that are unique and inherent to art. In many ways these indigenous characteristics of art may hold the answers to the needs of our young people in schools.

Kaufman and Eisner, both expound on the essential character of art and its teaching. They also focus on the aims of art in education, the responsibilities of art teaching, the various contending ideas in the teaching of art and the value of relationships between art, education and society. A greater emphasis on the study of art is needed at present in Ireland, as a positive force against the cultural deterioration and general lack of aesthetic concern in our contemporary schools. Art education, needs to be viewed not as some esoteric subject, but as a necessary tool that we need against the tensions and paradoxes of living in a 'mass-mediated' society.

Culture can be defined as the shared pattern of customs, ideas, beliefs, images and language that unite a group. Even though popular culture is made by human beings, it also makes each individual-to some extent-in its own image: a generation of visually-fatigued and willingly oppressed young people. The process of inoculation against such a depthless and anti-personal environment is held within art education. It can compensate for this phenomena, by insisting on the worth of the individual by respecting their "personal idiosyncrasies and by appealing to his (sic) unique being through the directness of the senses and the satisfaction of the imagination."⁴

FOOTNOTES – CONCLUSION

1. Extract from The Wasteland 1. The Burial of the Dead (1922) from **T.S. Eliot: Selected Poems.** London: Faber & Faber, 1961.
2. Eliot Eisner, , **Educating Artistic Vision.** (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1972). p. 2.
3. Ibid.
4. Irving Kaufman, **Art and Education in Contemporary Culture.** (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1966), p. 34.

Appendices

MEDIA QUESTIONNAIRE USED IN CLASSROOM

What year are you in? _____ Honours Art ☐ Pass Art ☐

How many years have you been studying art in school? _____

Have you ever been to an art gallery as part of a school tour? ☐ Y ☐ N

if so can you name the galleries? _____

Have you ever been to an art gallery as part of your own leisure time? ☐ Y ☐ N

if so can you name the galleries? _____

Do you know where the following art galleries are in Dublin?

The National Gallery of Ireland? ☐ Y ☐ N

The National Museum of Ireland? ☐ Y ☐ N

IMMA? ☐ Y ☐ N

The Municipal Gallery? ☐ Y ☐ N

Have you ever been to the cinema as part of an art class? ☐ Y ☐ N

Which part of art do you **least** or **not** enjoy? _____

Please give reasons for your answer? _____

What are you favourite TV programmes? _____

What is your favourite TV channel? _____

How many hours a day would you roughly spend watching TV? _____

Would you watch TV whilst doing your homework? ☐ Y ☐ N

What is your favourite Radio Show? _____

How many hours or minutes would you spend in a day listening to it? _____

What magazines do you read? _____

What books do you like reading? _____

QUESTIONNAIRE USED IN CLASS RESEARCH 2
AFTER THE FILM STARGATE

What is a **head-dress**? _____

Have you heard of this word before and where? _____

Do you wear any kind of head covering in the form of a bicycle helmet, hard hat, hood, cap, sun-hat, favourite hat?

For what reasons do you wear it? Protection? Safety? Comfort? Warmth? Fashion? _____

For what reasons does a bishop wear a mitre or headdress? _____

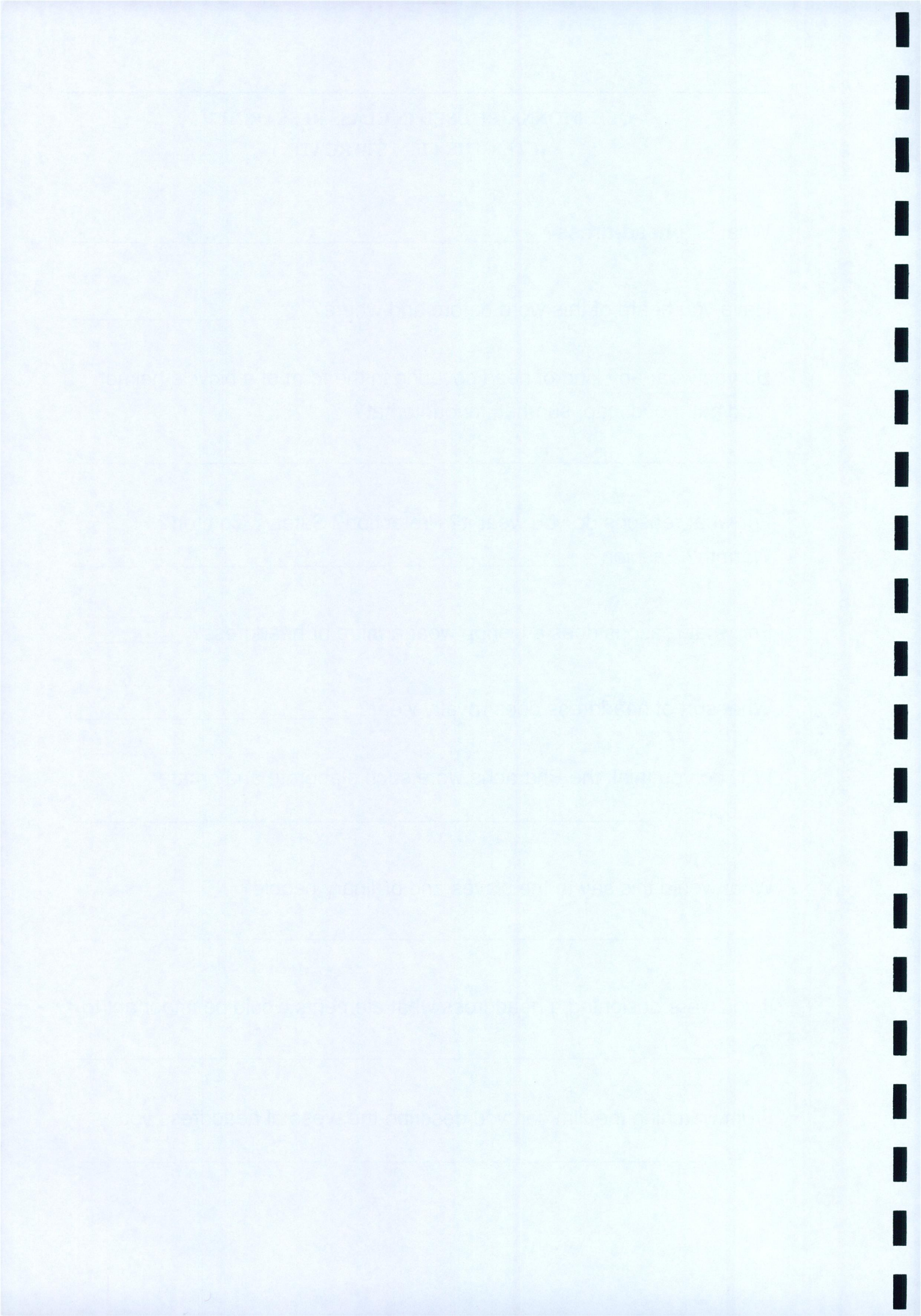
What sort of headdress does royalty wear? _____

Why do you think the Pharaohs wore such elaborate and ornate headdress? _____

What would this say to the slaves and ordinary people?

If you were designing a headdress what elements would be important to you? _____

From watching the film can you describe the types of headdress you saw? _____





WORKSHEET

Name: _____

Name of Teacher: Ms. Moore

Year: Fifth Years

Form: _____

Date: 4th March 1997

Place: National Museum

Always write down the name of the artist, the title of the work and the date when taking notes:

Please find a piece of work in this museum that appeals to you and that you can use as research for your headdress

Artist/Sculptor: _____

Title of Work: _____

Date: _____

Below are questions which are really helpful and important when assessing a work of art.

1. What is it? (i.e. painting/sculpture?) _____

2. What material or medium is it done in? (stone, marble, paint etc?) _____

3. What is the subject matter? (cat, people, queen, etc?) _____

4. For what purpose was this piece of art created? _____

5. Do you like or dislike this piece of work? Please give reasons _____

6. What elements in this work of art would you like to use in your headdress design? Please give reasons _____



WORKSHEET

Name: _____

Name of Teacher: Ms. Moore

Year: Fifth Years

Form: _____

Date: 4th March 1997

Place: National Museum

Make a sketch of your favourite piece and any other designs you might see as useful or helpful in the construction and decoration of your headdress.

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, occupying the lower two-thirds of the page. It is intended for the student to draw a sketch of their favourite piece or designs for a headdress.

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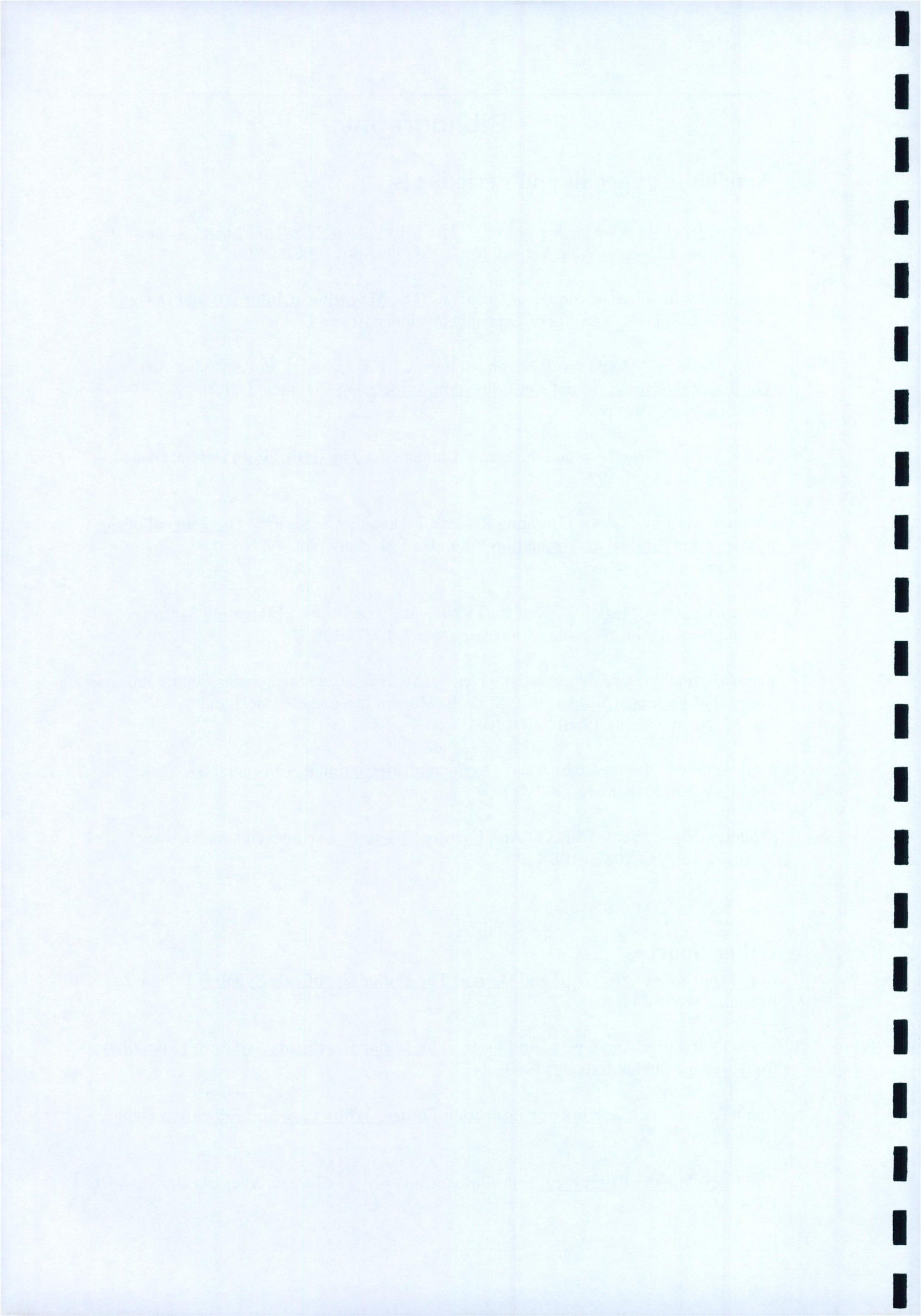
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