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THE NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN.

Introduction To The B.S.

METHOD AND INTENTIONS OF ARTWORK IN THE 80'S.

Abstract.

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO:

Faculty Committee

**THE FACULTY OF HISTORY OF ART AND DESIGN AND
COMPLEMENTARY STUDIES**

Chapter 2.

AND

New Order Painting 1970-1980

IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE.

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DEPARTMENT OF SCULPTURE.

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BY**AMANDA RALPH.****MARCH 1990.**

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INTRODUCTION.

Consumer culture creates the illusion that life is not about our day to day activities but that life is a style, which we fashion around our perception of ourselves. Consumer culture, administered through advertising, is centred on us believing in a glossy, cheerful, prosperous world. It flirts with our aspirations. In making a family snapshot album we also create a false world. From birth to old age everyone smiles. Albums are almost interchangeable between one family and another, such is the strict format by which we compose them. We are accustomed to smiling for the camera knowing that we are creating our future memories of a happy past. As with the family album, advertising encourages us to suspend our beliefs. The main reason for the increased success of advertising is connected with technological development. The pace of our lives seems to have speeded up. Some theorists welcome this advancement in relationship to art, in that it eliminates the 'aura' around the Work of Art. This is true in the case of developments in reproduction. A wider range of media is available like television and video which is not exclusive to an artist. Some other theorists see such a culture as tending towards 'technocratic facism'. There is an argument that a culture which draws on a plurality of past and present styles is superficial and banal. On the other hand, some argue that Modernism creates an obscure elitism. Something had to give in the antagonism between these two kinds of culture. This is where Postmodernism began to make its mark. Artists working in the 80's are aware of these discussions. Their work tries to place the viewer

a decade of i-Deas

the encyclopaedia of the '80s

The '80s was the decade when everybody dealt in Ideas. From the pages of magazines, the catwalks, art galleries, music to nightclubs, the energy that punk unleashed at the end of the '70s became the rationale of a decade. Broken glass stuck on canvas became art, records were made in bedrooms, magazines bred like rabbits, anything and everything became fashion, and the publishing success story was a comic with a character called Johnny Farwants. Ideas were reworked with such speed that nothing ever stood still, and the information technology that evolved made sure that everybody knew what was happening *then*, even if it couldn't predict what was going to happen next. Popular culture became a game in which anybody could join in, and everybody broke the rules. Soap stars became pop stars, pop stars became politicians, comics became graphic novels, Wimbledon FC reached the First Division, a Soviet leader became a hero, and everybody turned into hippies. When i-D magazine started in September 1980, it was responding to the creative energy of London - by 1985 it was reacting to events all over the globe. The '80s may have started in London but the '90s will belong to the world...

A Decade of i-Deas. Inside Jacket.

'A Decade of i-Deas', compiled and produced by i-D magazine which was a quarterly fashion fanzine. It was a breeding ground for talent in that it documented people on the street.

in a more critical position, in order to counter the concept of an 'administered culture'.

In September 1980 i-D magazine was launched. It describes itself as the first 'manual of style' and as the 'style bible'. It features fashion from the streets and makes ghetto culture popular. It attempts to encourage innovation in music, clubs, film, books and art. It generally reflects the idea that consumer culture sees life as 'style'. The book 'A Decade of i-Deas', the encyclopedia of the '80s', compiled and produced by i-D magazine, further itemizes the '80s as an era of African Music, the Guardian Angels, Michael Jackson, The Pink Pound (an early marketing term coined to take account of gay spending power), Satellite TV, Vegetarianism, Wall street and the Zippo lighter. In short the book is about 'streetwise' designer multi-culturalism. In the '80s design itself became a culture. The actual layout of magazines became more important than the subject being illustrated. Words like Layout, Face, Interface, and Face Values became relevant in discussing this style. On the surface it seems that this multi-culturalism is catering for the needs of our multi-layered personality, but what becomes apparent is that this 'multi-layered personality' is being used by the culture industry to ensnare rather than to free the consumer.



Guardian Angels. A Decade of i-Deas.

Middle class vigilanteism swept through the suburbs in the 80's. Consumer goodies like CD players and videos had to be protected. Neighbourhood watchers and Guardian Angels came out on patrol to protect good citizens, though with little success. The watchers went back to being behind net curtains and we all focus distractedly at the advertisements on the tube in the event of rowdiness.

CHAPTER 1.

Advertising.

Postmodernist Theory.

Society Consensus.

Adorno/Benjamin Debate.

Additional extras that we were introduced to in the '80s are BMX and mountain bikes, yuppies, MTV, lite beers, safe sex, steroids, Mad Max, filofaxes, Channel 4's American football and appropriately Trivial Pursuit. Our knowledge of the media vernacular was enhanced by words such as Glasnost, Gorbachev and Perestroika. Television advertising became the subject for serious gossip. Vance Packard's book 'The Hidden Persuaders' was considered a load of old wive's tales. The fact that meaning could be marketable meant that ads were produced that didn't just sell, but crystallized contemporary aspirations. Levis re-marketed the button fly with a series of TV ads using images of a '50s mid-western America. (1) These were some of the most influential ads of the decade, not only because they brought denim back into fashion but also re-introduced boxer shorts. The sight of Nick Kamen stripping down to his boxer shorts in the launderette, wrenched soul searching gasps from cinema audiences able to view the situation on a large screen. Even the music tracks from these ads were re-released to become hits. TV advertising really began to push things to the limit with the introduction of the Arielette and Radion. The makers of the Arielette were wary of the British public's reception of their product and announced it with a suitably incredulous ad campaign - "She's washing my son's clothes with a ball!! Now I know she's mad!"

Radion took a more bizarre approach, back into the realms of 'Hidden Persuaders' using a dubbed or double dutch ad, with a girl shrieking "Yeuch, your shirt stinks", and enveloped their product in a blaze of day-glo colours. It worked, everyone was talking about these ads. The central theme of this advertising was about re-working ideas at a such a fast pace that nothing ever stood still. (Even coffee ads were serialised.) The technological developments in the '80s were more than adequate to deal with this fast pace.

The washing powder/liquid ads were successful in that people could be heard mimicking the incredulous catchphrases. This is where we have to consider the idea of an 'administered culture'. The person who echoes the advertising jingles, half-indulgently, half in self-parody is a prisoner of the system of mind control. We accept these administered ideas and absorb them as our culture. The epitome of the ability to poke fun at cliches, stereotypes and conventions of advertising commercials within an advertising commercial was the Sony Trinitron. Two housewives with super conditioned hair, giggle at their man tramping his muddy boots across a deep pile carpet looking for his double-action hammer drill while they idolize/praise the telly set. This ad implies a distanced and knowledgeable relationship to the conventions of advertising on behalf of both the producer and consumer. Advertising has so educated it's audience that this is now possible. But this game playing does not indicate a genuine emancipation from the conventions of mass culture. It could be said that this self-parody is a way of giving exhausted conventions an extra lease of life. It makes them bearable for just a little longer.

Discussions of the arts, design, fashion and sub-cultures in the late 1970s and early 1980s have been notable for the usage of the term or concept 'postmodernism'. For some copywriters it spelled anything novel, trendy or exciting. For some theorists and critics it meant a whole lot more. Postmodernism is difficult to tie down to any single definition, other than describing it as a follow on from the time that high modernism and its dominant aesthetics became 'established' in the academy. But even this attempt to date its origins is in dispute. For Marxist theorist Fredric Jameson postmodernism is described as 'the termination of twentieth century modernization and the retrenchment of an aggressive post industrial capitalism'. For critic Hal Foster it meant 'the end of Heroic Modernism and the return of free collective bargaining between commerce and culture, Art and trash'. (2) Confusion arises because critics, in developing any particular theory, use a wide range of texts, and vary their subject matter from community or street events to mass culture and to the avant garde. Even more confusing is that part of the postmodern discourse appears to have admitted that distinctions cannot be made, are undesirable, or no longer exist. 'Commercial' or Co-opted postmodernism is linked to multi-national, multi-conglomerate consumer capitalism, and to all the new technologies that this stage has brought about. It seems that a new undimensional universe has been created from which there is no escape and inside which no critical position is possible.

John A Walker in his book 'Art in the Age of Mass Media' has itemized the typical features of postmodernism as follows:

1) The Modernist idea that each age has only one style is rejected in favour of the idea that a plurality of styles exists. Eclecticism, hybrid styles becomes fashionable. No single style appears to be dominant.

2) History and tradition (including the history of Modernism) become available again - hence 'retro-style' via the use of 'quotations' and the technique of collage, involving recyclings, parodies and pastiches of old styles.

3) Ornament and decoration become acceptable again.

4) Complexity and contradiction (the title of a book by the American architect Robert Venturi) and ambiguity are the values which replace simplicity, purity and rationality. Mixtures of high and low culture, fine art and commercial art styles are encouraged as a way of producing buildings capable of yielding multi-layered readings appealing to audiences of different levels of sophistication and knowledge.

5) Postmodernists are concerned with meaning - that is they treat architecture and design as 'languages' which can be used to construct all kinds of different statements.

6) The basic characteristics of art intertextuality, is heightened in postmodernism. 'Inter-textuality' is a term which indicates that every literary text or work of art relates to, alludes to, or comments upon (either implicitly or explicitly) various other texts or works. It is possible to consider two opposite reactions to stylistic and cultural pluralism. The first reaction is a positive one - variety being the

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spice of life. Such a healthy variety demonstrates the freedom of choice typical of Western democracies. Cross-fertilization of styles is interesting and amusing. The complexity of hybrid styles demands more 'working out' and therefore yields more enjoyment. The second reaction to stylistic and cultural pluralism is that it is shallow and superficial, an unhealthy obsession with the past and is a sign of a divided decadent society which is incapable of producing a consensus.

In terms of the artist making art and the viewer's reaction to art it is necessary to consider the issue of a society being capable or incapable of producing a consensus. Mary Louise Pratt, in her essay entitled 'Interpretive Strategies/Strategic Interpretations: On Anglo-American Reader- Response Criticism', discusses Stanley Fish's attitude towards the human capacity for interpretation, and the question of how to assign validity to interpretations. (4)

"Interpretations get validated by virtue of being assented to, accepted, and ratified by communities that hold the assumptions on which they rest. Validity, in other words, consists of consensus; Consensus rests not on agreement as to the interpretation itself but on agreement as to the beliefs and assumptions on which the interpretation is based". (5) When Fish states that 'consensus rests on agreement as to the beliefs and assumptions on which the interpretation is based', he seems to be describing the way in which people get their beliefs from the societies they live in. He is suggesting that completely idiosyncratic or personal interpretations are impossible. "For any interpretation that gets put forward, consensus of some kind is therefore likely, because the individuals constructing the interpretations get their beliefs and

assumptions from the societies into which they project their interpretations". (6)

This leads one back to the realm of a co-opted society and also seems a little 'utopian'. What seems to be the difficulty is that Fish's claims are not wrong, but true only part of the time. For instance, Fish overlooks the existence of cases where agreement is not ensured and is actually imposed by rules and regulations of power hierarchies. He also ignores the fact that belief systems have internal contradictions. He avoids the question of power relations.

"If everyone experiences their worldview as satisfying and complete, what motivation would members of one community have for adopting the norms of another?.... (within a given interpretive community, what would produce change in the strategies at work, and how could such change take place without producing simply a split into two communities? And how could the common experience of simply not understanding something or not feeling qualified to judge be accounted for?" (7)

Fish's analysis obliges him to mystify change. He acknowledges its occurrence but states that there is no point in considering change until it occurs, and up to the point of change the interpretation is still valid, no matter how many previous changes can be recalled.

"We always know for certain what is true...even though what we certainly know may change if and when our beliefs change. Until they do, however, we will argue from their perspective and for their perspective". (8)

Fish's attitude seems to deny the possibility of freedom of choice. We have to believe what we believe, because of a consensus of

interpretation, and that a mysterious change may only come along when society's beliefs and assumptions are adjusted. How do we then consider the reaction to stylistic and cultural pluralism, which is that, it's a sign of a divided decadent society which is incapable of producing a consensus? Do we believe in Fish's statement that 'interpretations get validated by virtue of being accepted, and ratified by communities that hold the assumptions on which they rest?' Or do we believe in a new undimensional universe from which there is no escape and inside which no critical position is possible? Is there such a thing as 'freedom of choice'? The modernist tradition is linked to the concept of a unique self and private identity. The postmodernist idea is that personal identity is a thing of the past. There are in fact two positions on this. One is that once upon a time in the classic age of competitive capitalism there was such a thing as individualism. But in today's age of corporate capitalism, that older bourgeoisie individual subject no longer exists. The second position is that the individual subject is actually a myth. There have never been autonomous subjects of that type. The older models of Picasso, Proust, T.S. Eliot - do not work anymore, since no one has that kind of unique and private world to express any longer. The reasoning behind why we no longer have a private world and style to express any longer is because mass media has intervened and millions of people have become mere consumers of culture produced by others. Capitalism has co-opted technological developments to bring about an administered culture. Consider for example the mass produced game show. An American Wheel of Fortune telly show has been devised and also appears on TV screens across Europe, in the same format but with a 'local' host speaking in whatever language is native to the particular country.

Fredric Jameson is another theorist who has some pretty strong words to say on this subject. He argues that we are unable to focus our own present. He suggests that we have become incapable of achieving aesthetic representations of our current experience. Jameson sees us as something "like a mutation in build space itself. My implication is that we ourselves, the human subjects who happen into this new space, have not kept pace with that evolution...an imperative to grow new organs to expand our sensorium and our body to some new, as yet unimaginable, perhaps ultimately impossible dimensions". (9)

It appears that Jameson sees us stuck in a 'present' with no chance of going further than that, but it must be seen, that to consider this present as being any way continuous is a gross error. He also does not consider the possibility of revolt. He sees us stuck in a situation of capitalist domination with no possibility of resistance.

The Adorno/Benjamin debate has been going on for some time and their views represent diametrical extremes. On the one hand an essentially optimistic view of the role of technology in relation to culture; on the other an almost despairing opinion of the manipulative and dominating role of the culture industry where modern technological developments are co-opted in the service of an entertainment 'culture' and are used as an instrument of repression and control. For Theodor Adorno there is a strict line between modernism and mass culture. His praise of avant gardism went hand in hand with his suspicion of and contempt for kitsch or mass culture. The standardisation of mass culture engenders automatised reactions, in Adorno's view, and weaken the possibility of individual resistance. Adorno saw television not as tending towards a "global village" but towards technocratic facism. For Walter Benjamin, developments in

mechanical reproduction eliminate the 'aura' of the work of art, mainly its unique , individual existence, its authenticity, and its unapproachability. (10) It seems that because of the antagonism between the two kinds of culture - banal lunacy on the one side and obscure elitism on the other, something had to give. So this is where postmodernism began to make it's mark, characterised by the breakdown of the distinction between 'serious' and popular art. But postmodernism brings with it too a whole amount of opposing arguments. Warren Montag in his essay 'What is at stake in the Debate on Postmodernism' , suggests while discussing Jameson's arguments, that we have all been duped by theory. "...Marxism, faced with an art and literature that question the very foundations of traditional philosophical reflection...can do no better than cry 'Apocalypse Now!;' taking for the end of art what is in reality a crises of it's own theory... perhaps all of us in one way or another have been duped by the subjectless cunning of the struggle in theory...For the signal feature of postmodernism most inimical to historical materialism is its claim to be the end of all crises, the end of all narratives, the end of resistance and revolutionary transformation. The debate on postmodernism will prove to have been productive to the extent that it awakens in us the consciousness of its own limits, which are not the limits of history itself (as the partisans of postmodernism claim), but rather the boundaries of that territory where marxist theory has always intervened most effectively: the present conjecture. The only truly irremediable error would be to believe that this present will endure forever". (11)

Footnotes Chapter 1.

- (1) Andy Darling and John McCready, A Decade of i-Deas, Page 137.
- (2) Steve Beard, A Decade of i-Deas, Page 172.
- (3) John A Walker, Art In The Age Of Mass Media, Page 82.
- (4) Mary Louise Pratt, Postmodernism and Politics, Page 47.
- (5) Ibid.
- (6) Ibid.
- (7) Ibid, Page 50.
- (8) Stanley Fish, Is There A Text In This Class?, Page 365.
- (9) Fredric Jameson, Postmodernism And It's Discontents, Page 21.
- (10) Paul O'Brien, Art and Technology, Circa Magazine, No. 44
March/April 1989, Page 15.
- (11) Warren Montag, Postmodernism and It's Discontents, Page 102.

CHAPTER 2.

Mixture of 'high' and 'low' culture.

Mass culture feeding off of fine art.

Fine Art using mass media images.

Although it is true to say that a huge variety of cultures and styles now exist and overlap, it does not follow that the distinctions between these have become blurred. It would not be possible to appreciate the irony of such mixtures unless the viewer was fully aware of the history and ideas behind the different styles being contrasted or combined. To be a connoisseur of current art and fashion it is necessary to have an excellent knowledge of past and present cultural forms. It may also be true to say that the divisions between high and low culture have not been broken down. It seems more accurate to say that the mixing of such cultures allows the work to be viewed through different levels of sophistication and knowledge. The word 'pluralism' can also be used to describe a situation in which fine art is simply one kind of cultural activity amongst many others. This implies that the experience offered by art is neither better or worse than that offered by the mass media. Though fine art can be seen as one cultural activity amongst others it is also important to note the way in which it is different from the other kinds of culture. It is mainly distinguished by its independence, personal expression and hand work. Because of its marginal position it enables politically conscious artists to adopt a critical attitude towards society. For example, fine artists are not bound to obey the directives of a commercial firm in the same way that graphic designers do. Even art

works which make use of mass media images and stereotypes are separated from other cultural products by, what could be called, their meta linguistic relationship to their source material. Meta language is any language which is used to talk about another language. (12) Art can take, for example, some representation of reality which exists in the realm of the mass media, and examine and scrutinise this to indirectly come up with its own reality. For these reasons it seems, even after discussions on postmodernism, to regard fine art as a particular branch of human culture.

Fine art often uses mass culture as a source point, but it is noticeable that mass culture feeds off of fine art. In Britain advertising has 'borrowed' conceptual and surrealistic art. It has stolen its techniques and to a certain extent has nullified its political stance. The large scale selling of entire political parties by up-to-date methods has made conceptual art and its aims seem puny and small minded. The best example of this is the increasing subliminality of cigarette advertising. Silk Cut and Benson and Hedges advertised on large bill boards without even having to state the brand name. They depended on the government health warning to let the viewer into the secret and the visual language told the rest. Modern art movements have been used in so many advertising campaigns, that fine art could cynically be seen as a 'research and development;' department of the mass media. The formal and technical experimentation explored in fine art can easily be introduced into the mass media. Usually after a suitable assimilation period, when the public at large have been manoeuvred into being able to read/see such images. This advertising is particular to, or at least more advanced in Britain. Such advertisements lean heavily on



LOW TAR As defined by H.M. Government

Warning: SMOKING CAN CAUSE HEART DISEASE

Health Departments' Chief Medical Officers



MIDDLE TAR As defined by H.M. Government

Warning: SMOKING CAN CAUSE FATAL DISEASES

Health Departments' Chief Medical Officers

Silk Cut and Benson and Hedges. Cigarette Advert.

Subliminal cigarette advertising which has such a 'soft line' on selling is prepared to allow the health warning help the viewer into realising what is being advertised. The health warning can further explain which brand is on offer by announcing the level of tar contained.

conventions of British conversation like understatement and oblique references, as well as peculiarities such as spoonerisms, shaggy dog stories and running jokes. They are very noticeable by their almost unconcerned and careless approach to selling. This attitude is very different to their North American counter-parts. It can be argued, on the positive side of things, that, in this way the mass media helps to create a more perceptive audience, in the public, for art work that commonly could not be approached. But it seems that, the way in which fine art commandeers mass media images, is much more 'honourable' in intention because of what has been previously described as the meta linguistic relationship to source material.

Artists have been fascinated by the landscape of media and mass culture. Their interest has been captured by advertising and motels, by the Las Vegas strip, late shows and Grade-B films, by airport paperbacks and gothic and romance novels, by popular biography, murder mystery, science fiction and fantasy books. It is important that art works must only be tenuously connected with these cultural systems, otherwise they may become one and the same. In order to produce a sense of truth which has the appearance of being objective and 'concrete', artists in common with scientists have attempted the creation of non-metaphorical forms of language. This has led to art which works to a programme, but is never seen as exhaustive in scope. There is a distinction to be made between 'seeing' and 'reading' while considering this work. To 'see' is to apprehend the thing itself: to 'read', is to reach beyond its physical attributes. For artists up to the middle of the nineteenth century the idea of reading was closely attached to representation. Today's artist does not speak of a 'pictorial language', but of a picture in certain prescribed circumstances, or of a

In ornamental lakes swim
fish of savage appetites.
Strange fruits
and stranger flowers
bid welcome to
Dr Shatterhand's
Garden of Death.
The girl is tempting;
her hard, lithe body
promises life.
But Shatterhand promises
vengeance, and, for Bond,
vengeance is sweeter -
even if the price
is extinction . . .

'Masterly story-telling,
marvellous,
almost fiendish,
ingenuity of plot . . .
It all adds up
to the Best Buy
in Bonds since Dr No'

RICHARD BURY, BOOKS AND BOOKMEN

ISBN 0-586-04520-1



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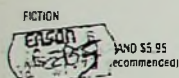
FLEMING YOU ONLY LIVE TWICE

James BOND

in Ian Fleming's
You Only Live
Twice



THIRD CANADA



You Only Live Twice, Ian Fleming. Outside Jacket.

Artists appropriate imagery from media culture in order to establish the conventions and then lay them bare. Their concern is subverting the original intention is to ask us not just to 'see' but to 'read' the image.

'language', but never in the same breath. This places the viewer in a new role. The viewer has to commit a purposeful act of imaginative construction. With every new image there is a new language - a code to be cracked. The viewer is placed alongside the artist in a critical position.

Footnotes Chapter 2.

(12) John A. Walker, *Art In The Age Of Mass Media*, Page 90.

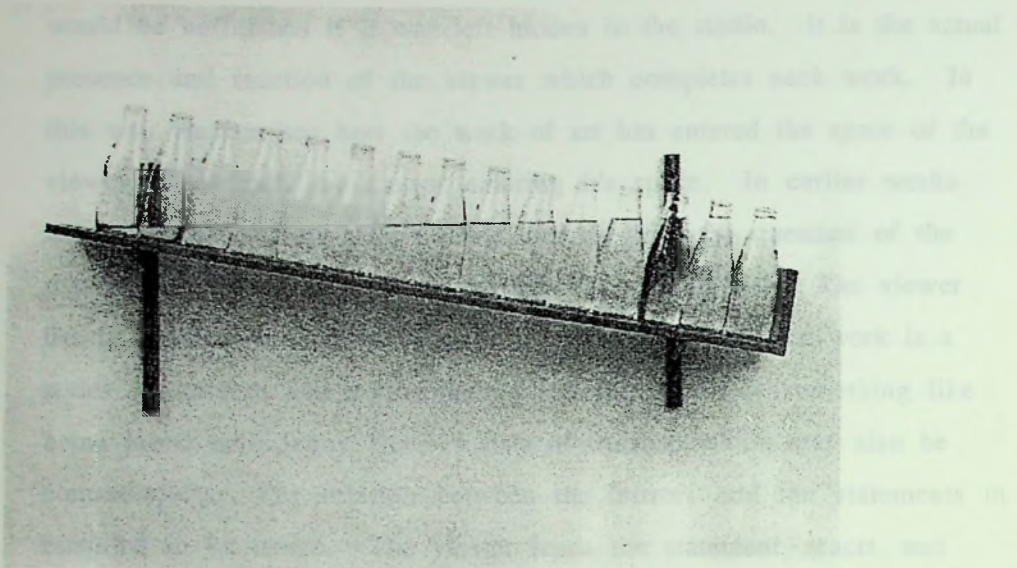
CHAPTER 3.

Michael Craig-Martin.

Richard Wentworth.

Boyd Webb.

Michael Craig-Martin was born in Dublin in 1941 but lived in the United States from the age of five until his mid-twenties. He moved to Britain in 1966. Craig-Martin concentrates his work on the nature and function of ordinary objects, and on our perception of them. He uses the language of ordinary objects, though while carefully guarding against the introduction of symbolism, to talk about another language. That other language explores the relationship between experience and knowledge, between belief and understanding. 'An Oak Tree', 1973, comprises of a glass of water on a shelf and an interview style text with the artist apparently explaining why a glass of water is an oak tree. I have said that he guards against symbolism so it is not possible for the viewers to make a massive poetic leap between acorn + water = growth, therefore an oak tree. The artist insists that a glass of water has become an oak tree. He declares that he did not always realise this, but now it has become possible for him to do this. Once we start to take him seriously we begin to think along the lines of theological arguments, though the water into wine parable does bring us back into the realm of symbolism. What is essential to the work is the act of faith demanded of the viewer. An intellectual requirement is the objective to pass beyond the two alternatives of assertion and denial, both of which obscure the truth. It is the intention of this work to ask the viewer to question what he is actually seeing. Craig-Martin's work



On the Shelf, 1970. Michael Craig-Martin.

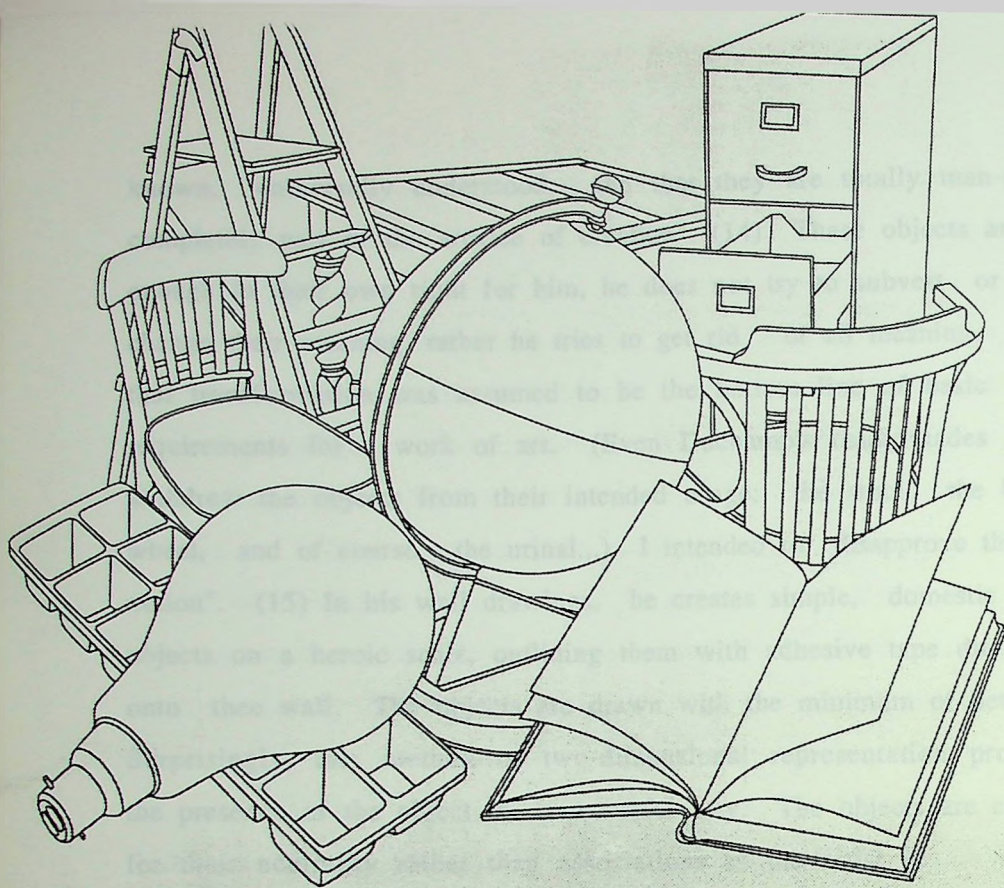
Michael Craig-Martin's humorous and simplistic manner of asking us to suspend our ideas of how things should be.

would be unfinished if it was left hidden in the studio. It is the actual presence and reaction of the viewer which completes each work. In this way we can see how the work of art has entered the space of the viewer rather than the viewer entering it's space. In earlier works using mirrors, Craig-Martin deals directly with the question of the psychological confrontation of the viewer with himself. The viewer has to question himself in relation to the work. One such work is a series of mirrors and corresponding statements. It is something like being faced with Jenny Holzer's lists of truisms. which may also be contradictory. The relation between the mirrors and the statements is intended to be ironic. The viewer reads the statement, reacts, and looks at themself in the mirror. For evidence? For confirmation? For denial? For an answer? The mirror tells everything and nothing. "Mirror, mirror on the wall, who is the fairest of them all?" Except in this case the viewer must confront himself. In each succeeding mirror the face is always the same and always different.

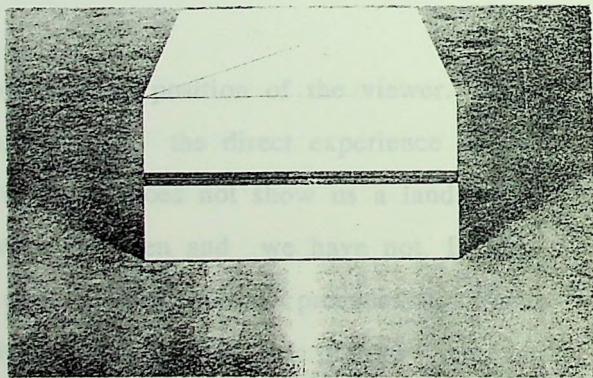
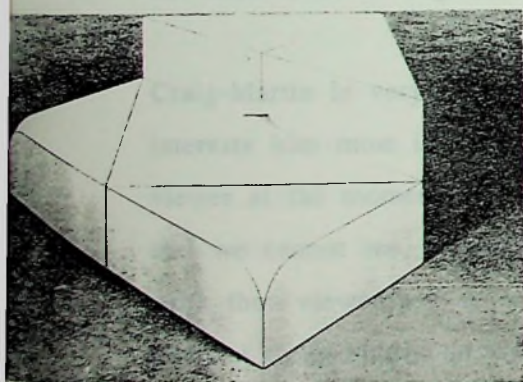
Craig-Martin says that he does "not believe that the art object is the symbol of the art idea. It is its embodiment. The relation of idea to object is directly equivalent to the relation of colour, or material, or scale to object. They are all basically formal, i.e. internally determined considerations". (13) I think it would be impossible to see Craig-Martin's work as simply symbols of the art idea. The actual physical/visual look of the object is completely the idea. It would not be feasible to know what the work was about by reading a written text describing it. The early formica box pieces help to illustrate this. They are autonomous objects, made from familiar materials in standardized forms. They are about the ordinary functioning of an object which is the opening and closing of a box. In making these the

artist has tried to establish the box's status as a work of art instead of an object of use. The function, therefore, becomes an aspect of expression, not of usage. Craig-Martin says that he tries to get rid of as much meaning as possible but that people's need to find meanings, to create associations, renders this impossible. The associations made with these boxes is that they are like some kind of graphic IQ test - how to work out in our head the folding and unfolding of an object, without touching it. A sort of mind puzzle, they are like a completely opened out envelope with hundreds of possibilities. It is hard to disassociate the objects from any kind of function, after all they are hinged together to facilitate some movement, which makes one consider what purpose this movement is for. One thinks along the lines of industrial design, and economy of shape. The final fact that these boxes really have no function, that is in terms of usage, forces us to admit that we cannot label them with a 'meaning'. The artist states that to him, "the most interesting things in art happen in the border area between art and non-art. between sculpture and furniture, between one form of art and another, between painting and sculpture".

Craig-Martin thinks of ordinary objects as representing some kind of perfect sculptures. These ordinary objects express their own language. They have a code which explains their nature. When we see Craig-Martin's outline of a light bulb we instantly recognise it. We know the materials which is composed of - frosted glass, tiny metal wires capable of going ping, metal base with ridges to house it into a casing. When we see the ridged outline we immediately know the language of the object. This is the appeal of ordinary objects for Craig-Martin - "I love the idea that there are things which are universally



Reading (with Globe) 1980. Micheal Craig-Martin.



Formica Box, 1969 (remade in 1989), Michael Craig-Martin.

Michael Craig-Martin asks us to acknowledge a 'universal language'.

known, universally understood, and that they are totally man-made, completely part of the artifice of creation". (14) These objects are enough in their own right for him, he does not try to subvert or change their meaning, rather he tries to get rid of all meaning. "I felt that transformation was assumed to be the bottom line of basic requirements for a work of art. (Even Duchamp's ready-mades withdrew the objects from their intended usage: the stool, the bicycle wheel, and of course, the urinal...) I intended to disapprove this notion". (15) In his wall drawings, he creates simple, domestic objects on a heroic scale, outlining them with adhesive tape directly onto the wall. The objects are drawn with the minimum of detail. Surprisingly, this method of two-dimensional representation projects the presence of the object in a powerful way. The objects are chosen for their neutrality rather than associations as the artist is emphasising that they are not still-lives. They question what constitutes a picture and how we recognise it as such. His work does not need to be in a gilded frame.

Craig-Martin is very concerned with the position of the viewer. What interests him most is direct experience, the direct experience of the viewer at the moment of viewing. He does not show us a landscape that we cannot see, that the artist has seen and we have not. In his work the viewer gets to see what he sees, nothing precedes it. For Michael Craig-Martin this is the experience of a work of art. "Art is an oblique procedure...one gets at the truth through a form of lying". Craig-Martin sets up an object, draws us to it and then asks us to look for the truth in it. To do this we are asked to look between past experience and knowledge, between our beliefs and understanding.

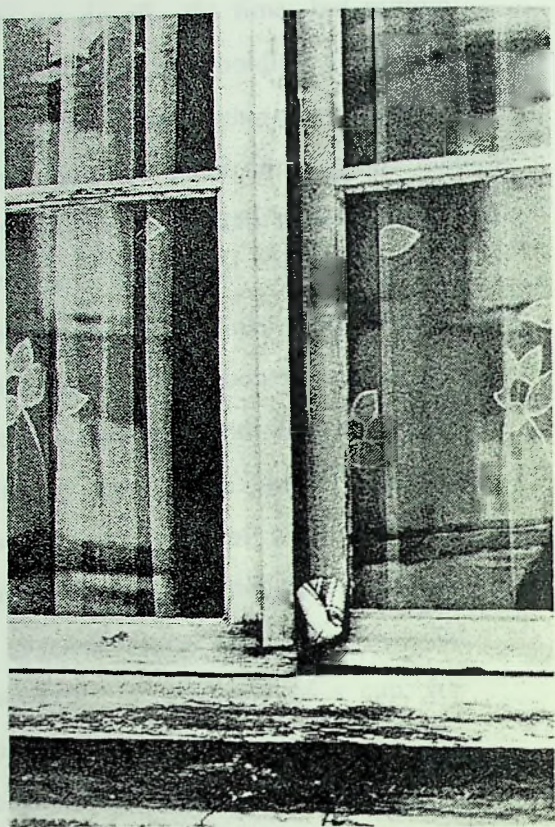
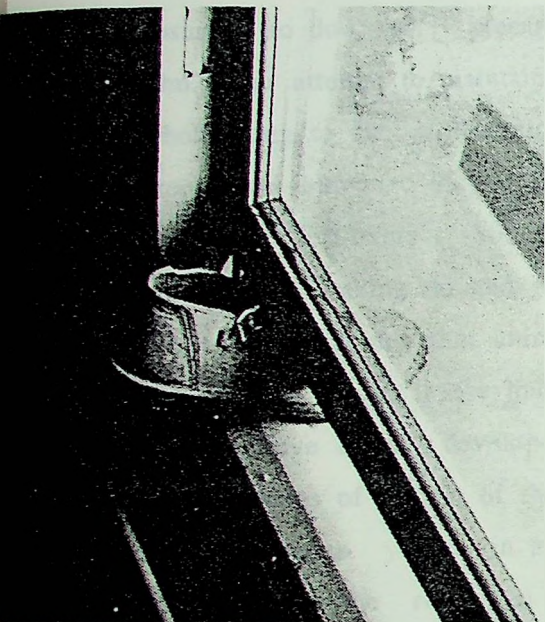
As with 'An Oak Tree' we have to look past assertion and denial so as not to obscure the truth.

In common with Michael Craig-Martin, Richard Wentworth also uses ready made objects in his sculptures. There is a precedent of this kind of work going back as far as Duchamp, but it was the pop artists in the '60s who really celebrated the 'ready made'. There are some remarks by Warhol concerning the nature of American society which can be considered an ideological justification for an artistic obsession with consumer goods: "What's great about this country is that America started the tradition where the richest consumers buy essentially the same things as the poorest. You can be watching TV and see Coca Cola, and you know that the President drinks Coke, Liz Taylor drinks Coke, and just think. You can drink Coke, too. A Coke is a Coke and no amount of money can get you a better Coke than the one the bum on the corner is drinking. All the cokes are the same and all are good. Liz Taylor knows it, the bum knows it, and you know it". (16)

The valid point here is that mass production does enable the same consumer goods to be enjoyed by virtually everyone in an industrial society, it does produce a levelling of culture and a uniformity of social habits. Warhol does not pause to consider whether or not a drink such as Coke is socially beneficial or necessary, whether it meets any real needs of the human species. Nor does he consider the reasons for its worldwide manufacture: it is not produced as a social service but in the interests of private profit. Choice in terms of consumption does not mean choice in terms of production. There is no control by the people over what is made, how much, and for whose benefit.

Also, it is obvious that this 'equality' of choice does not apply to more expensive items such as housing, welfare, health and education.

Richard Wentworth uses consumer goods with a very different sensibility to that of Andy Warhol. He is interested in objects made from wire and sheet tin, which are just stapled and fitted together through highly skilled use of the fingers. This is like the craft of tinsmithing. He says "you can't find it anywhere here, it's really gone from the fabric of English life. But those things bear a kind of reality for me,....We now live in a culture where it all takes place in an industrial estate, it's terribly secret if it exists at all, some of it is so secret it's done in Korea or Taiwan". (17) It seems that the more machines take over in the realm of production, the more people train themselves for machine related skills. It seems that man has become 'a tool of his tools'. In his work Richard Wentworth tries to reclaim some human and social abilities from this technocratic culture. In the late '70s Wentworth reached a point where he felt he could no longer make sculpture. He had become so conscious of all the conventions by which one might make sculpture that he didn't feel he had any freedom to move. He found taking photographs an incredible relief. After a while he began to notice what the consistencies in his selection of images were. The subject matter he came up with was about all sorts of 'innocent' responses to what we consider our lives to be made up of. The images ranged from what he describes as "acts of great affection - like trying to keep a window open, and using something soft and small as if you were expressing how much you wanted the window open. Little physical gestures like tidying up a cafe and putting all the cups and saucers which had been

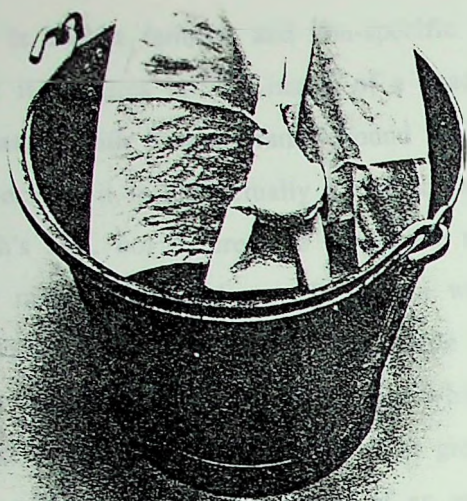


Photographs by Richard Wentworth.

In his photography, Richard Wentworth, depicts physical gestures, which he describes as being almost a lighter kind of embrace, as if we were describing how much we wanted to window open by using something small and soft.

washed up in a big pile and then putting the teacloth over them as if you have put them to bed. Things we do all the time, but seldom realise they are a lighter kind of embrace, like holding a hand or even smiling so that would be one area. And at the other end, although in a way of course they're just the same thing, is the kind of absurdity to do with precariousness that you find in a Jacques Tati film. Our attempt to maintain decorum against all the odds; the whole thing to do with adult behaviour. What links them is that they are always human, they're always about what people have done, they're our left-overs". Some ideas associated with this selection of photographs 'making do and getting by' are, a) an idea of coincidence, Wentworth imagines that animals have no sense of what a coincidence is, because it's all in the human perspective of things. b) that people actually have a very developed physical sense about the material characteristics of things, of the strength or weakness of a cup, for example, when you're in a hurry to achieve something and you glance around the room....c) the photos are about physical circumstances, about trying to make something higher, to shut something, trying to stop things falling over, or hold something up. The prime physical content of them is gravity.

Wentworth's photographs of 'shorthand solutions' seem to indicate a passive observance of human behaviour. Later his work becomes more active when he actually constructs the sort of narrative he found in the photographed images. 'Tree of the Street' is a sculpture constructed quite simply. The work is a bamboo going through a cylinder of perforated zinc, similar to a drinking straw in a glass. He put some blobs on the cylinder and cut a hole for the bamboo to come through. This is like 'a foot coming out of the bottom of a long



Dry Crying, 1982/1983; Gosse 1984, Richard Wentworth.

Wentworth's sculptures conjures up images that are both familiar and non-specific. In reading these the viewer has to make a poetic jump.

skirt'. It is both a familiar and non-specific image. Familiar in the sense that it conjures up an image of a dead or half-dead tree in an urban location with a wire frame around it for protection. It is non-specific because it is not actually a tree in this setting. It is Wentworth's aim, not to create a complete narrative, but to ask the viewer to make a poetic jump. He says "I want to run somehow parallel to these things I'm thinking of". The battle for the Falklands war in '82 was a flashback to the 19th century which resulted in a pointless loss of life. The war was maintained at great expense over many thousands of miles and was an echo of an empire spirit long gone. An Argentinian ship the *Belgrano* was sunk, and this led Wentworth to make a piece of sculpture entitled 'Toy' 1983 or otherwise known as 'Belgrano'. It is a beautiful piece of work, with a sardine tin, braised into a sea of metal, enclosed in a galvanised tub. His language is so precise, the technical work so accurate and the object so beautiful, that the harshness of the statement he is making reaches us with perfect, controlled effect. The poignancy of his work is sharply contrasted with the shocking extent of Fleet Street's grossness. The Sun, in particular plumbed new depths with its infamous 'Gotcha!' headline. Though Wentworth, in this instance, may be seen to be interested in 'political' work, in spite of his unwillingness to be prescriptive, his attitude is somewhat 'fundamentally political', in the sense of relating to the 'polis'. He makes a connection between aesthetic concerns and practical decision making.

Richard Wentworth could be compared to an investigative 'man-watcher'. He finds something new or important in what we might see as trifling actions. Peter L. Berger in his book 'Invitation to Sociology - A Humanistic Perspective' gives a description of sociology which could well be related to Wentworth's work. "There is a deceptive simplicity and obviousness about some sociological investigations. One reads them, nods at the familiar scene, remarks that one has heard all this before and don't people have better things to do than waste their time on truisms - until one is suddenly brought up against an insight that radically questions everything one had previously assumed about this familiar scene. This is the point at which one begins to sense the excitement of sociology".

In 1977 Boyd Webb created a work which showed everyday life, but which had assumed a theatrical air. In this work he defamiliarised life and isolated it like a specimen on tweezers. The title of this work is 'Worms'. It is a scene which must appear in millions of family albums. An angelic, smiling child stands in the front garden of a bungalow. The sun is shining, everything in the garden is in full growth and all's right with the world. That is, except for one small detail. Surrounding a circular flower-bed is a low fence made of loops....frozen eels, bent into semi circles and thawing quickly in the heat. Webb has offered us something quite different from the usual snapshot. The photograph is a kind of forgery. The recipe is fine but the cake comes out burnt. It is a snapshot, but it's not quite as it should be. To try and find a definition for Webb's work is difficult. We might like to call it photography, but the term does not account for the fact that he constructs what he records. Though he 'constructs', it is not possible to describe him as a sculptor. His constructions would be considered eccentric, (partly because of their flimsyness) without the flattening and the framing of a world seen through a viewfinder. In fact, his making, photographing and destruction



Herbert Groves, an amateur lichologist, has successfully developed and introduced a lichen (*Sponso Grovesiaceae*) to the moist lining of his throat in order to become eligible for disability compensation. A keen punter he now studies form in earnest, investing sometimes to advantage, sometimes not.



Through skilful husbandry the lichen *Sponso Grovesiaceae* has adapted successfully to the inclement environment of the human throat. Nutrients essential for this lichen's survival are filtered from the humid fug of despair, jubilation and nervous human effluvium peculiar to betting shops.

Photographs by Boyd Webb.

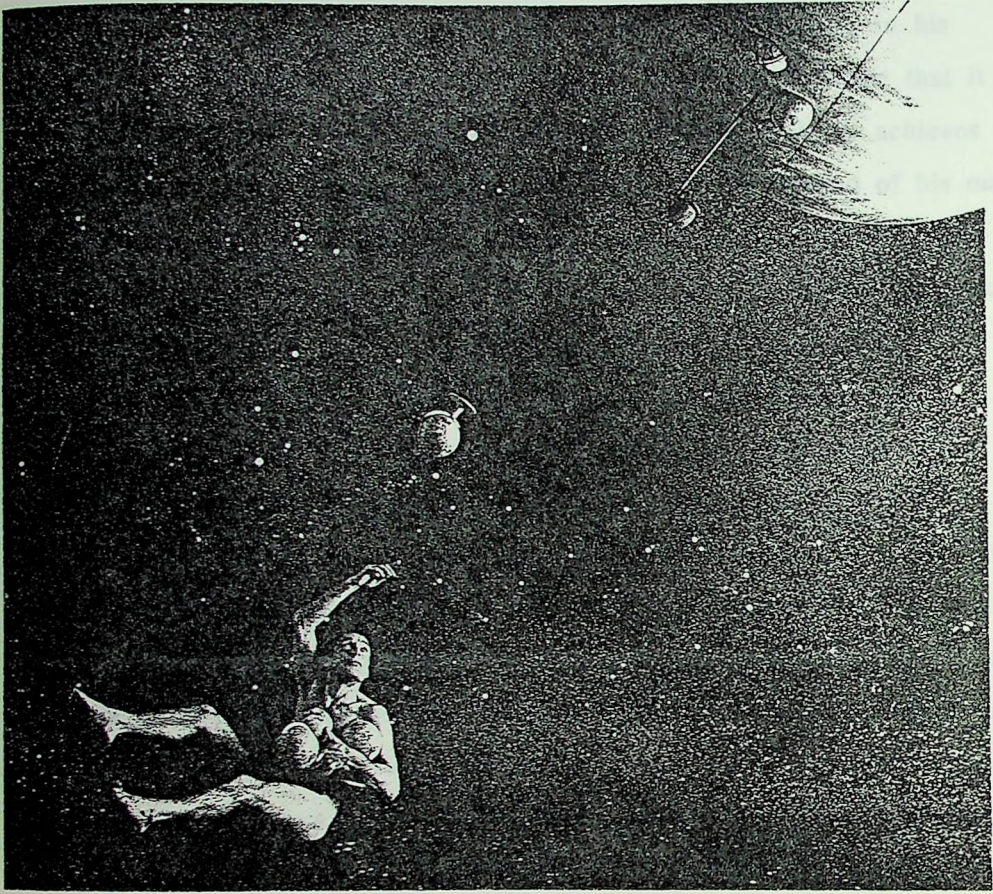
Boyd Webb defamiliarises life and isolates it like a specimen on tweezers in his photographs. He insists on the identical gesture of fiction but does not follow through with a linear plot.

of purpose-built sets constitutes a critique of both photography and sculpture at the same time. It seems that his work pokes fun at the material limitations of sculpture. His work has an instantness about it which could never be captured, for instance, in a bronze casting. He also humorously turns his back on the traditional concerns of sculpture. One of which is, the concern with getting the object to stand up or balance. Webb bizarrely drapes carpets and suspends figures and makes them look as if they could hang that way forever. His critically humorous attitude to photography is rather like the child at the back of a class photo sticking his tongue out, "Anything you can do, I can do better".

The early 1970's was pretty much Boyd Webb's point of emergence as an artist. This coincides with the coining of the term 'metafiction', by the American philosopher and novelist William Gass, in 1970. (21)

Metafiction is the act of establishing the conventions of fiction, then laying them bare. He insists on the identical gesture of fiction but does not follow through with a linear plot. His 'images' vary between two extremes. On one hand he tries to make his work as stagey as possible and on the other tries to disorientate the viewer by offering impossible details like frozen eels.

The focus of attention in Webb's current work, has shifted its attention from the absurdities of individual behaviour to a more poignant reflection on human planetary existence. The role of the everyday in his work is intertwined with excursions into other realities. The images are built on metaphor: carpet, with its pile facing upwards, becomes grass, sea and the face of the moon; when it's turned over it is rock or an elephants skin. Paper is turned into sky or breaking waves. Cardboard is turned into a ship and polystyrene into clouds or snowfields. The people



Trophy, 1988
100 x 100 x 100 cm

Boyd Webb humorously turns his back on one of the traditional concerns of sculpture. That is, getting an object to stand up or balance. His photograph makes you believe that his figures and drapes could hang that way forever.

of these makeshift worlds expose his depiction of the elements as fiction, and continually bring to our attention the falseness of the scene as a whole. We are brought back and forth, at one point believing in his deception, or going along with it, and at another stage admitting that it is more imagined than real. Another way in which Boyd Webb achieves this is in his refusal to make alterations of scale. The method of his makeshift constructions is in keeping with his reflection on planetary existence. Survival can be achieved by avoidance of conspicuous waste. He sees many more uses for items often regarded as having one particular purpose. He has a 'waste not want not' philosophy. He suggests that we should be prepared to compromise in material terms, in order to preserve the ever fragile hold on the future of the planet. Webb's protagonist is the average man in the street. He dramatises the fate of the figure - whom he sees as mainly responsible. Boyd Webb's work is always reminding us of the fragile boundaries between real and imagined, between what we see, what we know and what we sense. To retain our sense of sanity we often declare the world to be more logical than we actually know it is. Webb obliges us to suspend our order and to rely on a sort of inborn comprehension.

Footnotes Chapter 3.

- (13) Michael Craig-Martin, Whitechapel Art Gallery.
- (14) Ibid.
- (15) Ibid.
- (16) John A Walker, Art In The Age Of Mass Media, Page 36.
- (17) Richard Wentworth, Riverside Studio Catalogue, Page 13.
- (18) Ibid, Page 9.
- (19) John McCready and Ann Hogan, A Decade of i-Deas, Page 82.
- (20) Peter L. Berger, Invitation to Sociology, Page 33.
- (21) Nicholas Serota and Joanna Skipwith, Boyd Webb, Whitechapel Art Gallery Catalogue, Page 19.

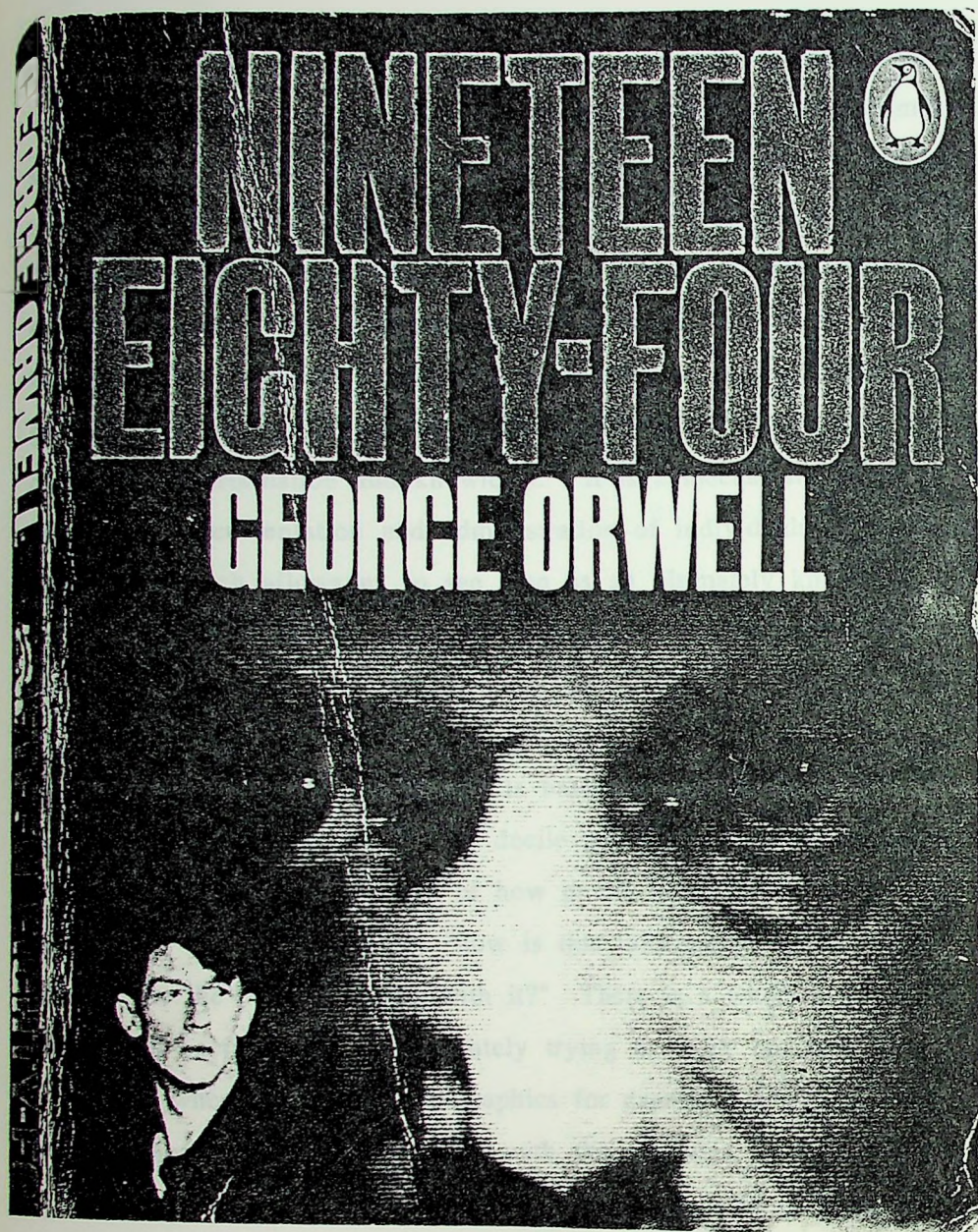
CHAPTER 4.

Power and knowledge in Social Science and Marketing Techniques.

The telescreen received and transmitted simultaneously. Any sound that Winston made, above the level of a very low whisper, would be picked up by it, moreover, so long as he remained within the field of vision which the metal plaque commanded, he could be seen as well as heard. There was of course no way of knowing whether you were being watched at any given moment. How often, or on what system, the Thought Police plugged in on any individual wire was guesswork. It was even conceivable that they watched everybody all of the time. But at any rate they could plug in your wire whenever they wanted to. You had to live - did live, from habit that became instinct - in the assumption that every sound you made was overheard, and, except in darkness, every moment scrutinized".

Nineteen Eighty-Four, George Orwell. (22)

French historian and philosopher Michel Foucault was interested in finding out, when the modern notion of man as a unitary and knowable subject began. He was curious to understand how the human and social sciences became historically possible. Much of his work is about 'disciplinary society'. It involves the gradual replacement of torture as a form of punishment, in which the body of the offender was under attack, by a more subtle means of correction and training. This more subtle means of punishment was targeted at the 'soul' or what could be described as the subjectivity, consciousness and personality of the



Nineteen Eighty-Four, George Orwell.

offender. For this punishment to be effective, the subject had to be known better. The corrective method could no longer be indiscriminate, so to work out where to target the attack much information would have to be gathered on the subject. Jeremy Bentham's 'Panopticon' is a science fiction, architectural construction designed to facilitate absolute surveillance. (23) It is a central tower surrounded by cells in circular building. The occupants of these cells are exposed to the unremitting gaze of their guards. The Panopticon's main purpose is to enable the collection of information and knowledge. It is a mechanism which enables the documentation and administration of individuals. In effect, a mechanism which allows us to see man as an ultimately knowable subject. This is what we understand today to mean the human and social sciences.

Like the Telescreen, the Panopticon is based on the possibility of rendering the accumulation of men docile and useful. Their use value is important and leads on to ideas of how power is mixed up with knowledge. We want to know "how is this information used?", "how credible are the people dealing with it?" There is a whole range of human and social sciences desperately trying to work out how, why, where and when we tick. Demographics for example, is a branch of anthropology which treats or deals with the statistics of births, deaths, diseases and so on. These social statistics now quantify us in terms of employment, income, religion etc. We can see ourselves somewhere in a pyramid of a caste system. A, B, or C type adults with such and such spending power. Marketing statistician's revel in this information. They can decide what 'type' of person you are, what image you want to project, and how many vitamins you'd like to believe were contained in your breakfast cereal. We must ask ourselves if such a compiled-

MR AVERAGE

Mr Average is five foot eight,
works for Plessey's
and he's never been late.
Mr Average drives a new Ford Escort;
he's known to his bank manager as twenty-two
point nought.

Mr Average has a wife and a dog,
a corporation terrace
and an outside bog
and an average number of kids
(that's two point five).
His wife's pretty average –
she's just learned to drive.

Mr Average goes out
about three times a week.
hasn't got a temper
(in fact he's rather meek),
sees things he wants
but is content to gloat,
liberal with his money
and liberal with his vote.

Mr Average
doesn't read books,
just watches the telly,
doesn't do much exercise,
so he's got a large belly,
doesn't read papers,
just stares at the sun,
prepared to fantasize
over some tart's bum.

Mr Average is an average Englishman:
does as little work
for as much as he can.
When you pass a mirror
take a closer look too:
make sure Mr Average
isn't looking at you.

John Hollingsworth

Mr Average. John Hollingsworth.

Mr Average experiencing a life mediated through his bank account, the
telly and The Sun.

questionnaire-type-identikit picture can have any relationship to our 'real' personal selves. We may realise that whether we like it or not, if marketing statisticians decide that we are like this, then our ultimate destiny is that we shall become this. If we believe that our subjective experience of reality is mediated by the imagery of the mass media, then it would seem that we really only are receivers of an administered culture. In time we allow ourselves to believe in the 'reality' of this administered culture.

Footnotes Chapter 4.

(22) George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Page 8.

(23) David Green, *On Foucault: Disciplinary Power and Photography*,
Camerawork, Volume 32, Page 7.

(24) John Kenneth Galbraith, *The Affluent Society*, Page 261.

CHAPTER 5.

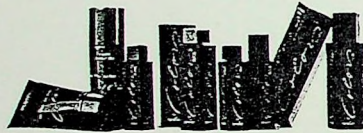
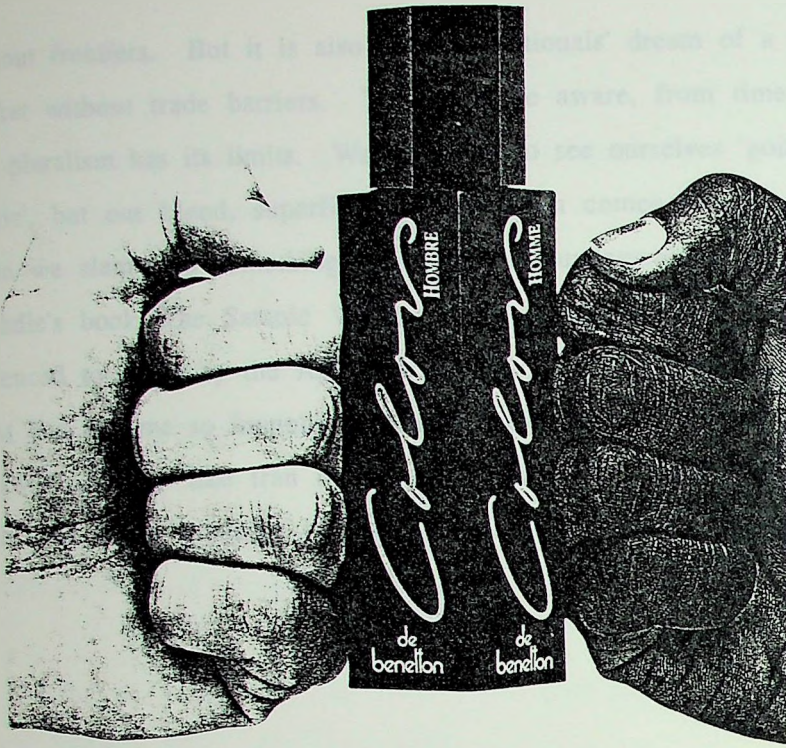
Conclusion.

In 1850, the working week was estimated to be just under seventy hours. That works out being Monday to Saturday, from six in the morning to six at night. Today, the work week is estimated at five eight-hour days. (24) Because of job-sharing, flexi-time and overtime, it is possible for the employee to have more control over his work and leisure time-tabling. Statistically we have a lot more free or leisure time than in the last century. Concurrent with this increase in leisure time has been an increase in the entertainment business, which has come about by technological advances. This technological culture has shown itself to be manipulative and very difficult to escape from. The ultimate example of this is the television which, with its remote controls, spawned 'the couch potato' phenomenon. The wonder of television is that in half an hour of television you can experience more than most people can physically (do in a month). Television here may seem far behind the American 40 channel plus selection, even with its new satellite offerings, but video rental makes sure we can extend our choices and be couch-ridden all week. The work week became much shorter mainly because the affluence of our society increased and we do not have to work so hard. As a society we have not really taken stock of the realities of this situation. People live longer, we ask them to retire earlier but we did not work out what to do with them except insist that they accept drastic reductions in income and living standards. We have increased the age where it is legal for a young person to work, because we don't need them in the labour market and we would like them to get an education. But we

have yet to provide them with the education that their exemption from work was designed to make possible.

It may be possible that, all culture values will disappear except for those which have been co-opted into mass culture. The role that art plays in this affair is very small, because of its marginal position. But it is because of this marginal position, that art is still free to fulfil a positive critical function in relation to the mass media. The aim of contemporary art which uses mass media imagery is to subject it to a critical examination. Its purpose is to illuminate the ideological assumptions behind the mass media.

Capitalism is characterised by private ownership of the means of production, an extreme division of labour and the domination of exchange value over use value. Commodity fetishism is a negative element of capitalism, where the world of commodities takes on an autonomy divorced from the process of production. People who can afford to indulge in such fetishes, continue to bolster the market, continue to ensure that such luxurious commodities keep rolling off of the production lines. We have become ensnared in our administered desires. We are happy to accept ideas of our multi-layered personalities because we believe this gives free expression to our very complex and intricate selves. We embrace 'pluralism' because we are now 'of the world'. We have shopping malls which encompass a whole bric a brac of cultures just there for the taking. It comes as no surprise to hear of advertising agencies getting into politics, and attempting not just to push the product but to promote world peace. The United Colours of Benetton campaign mixed vivid colours and ethnic models to create advertising's version of Live Aid's global pop humanism. This is a utopian image of a world



Body Shampoo 150 ml. Deodorant 150 ml. After Shave 50 ml. 100 ml. Eau de Toilette: 50 ml. 100 ml. Vapor Spray 50 ml. Flacon.

**UNITED COLORS
OF BENETTON.**

Colors. A New World For Men. United Colors of Benetton.

Benetton's vision of a world humanism is based on global markets without any trade frontiers.

without frontiers. But it is also the multinationals' dream of a global market without trade barriers. We are made aware, from time to time that pluralism has its limits. We may like to see ourselves 'going all ethnic', but our bland, superficial interpretation comes to a sudden halt when we slam into something like religious fundamentalism. Salman Rushdie's book 'The Satanic Verses' fueled many bonfires and the author sentenced to death by the Ayatollah Khomeini. It was ironic that the West had become so immune to media images, that it took a relatively backward country like Iran to remind us of how powerful the 'word' could still be in attacking long established beliefs.

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