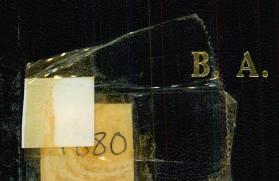
MASS CULTURE AND THE STABILITY OF THE SELF: TOWARDS THE LIBERATION OF THE INDIVIDUAL THROUGH FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

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THE NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN

MASS CULTURE AND THE STABILITY OF THE SELF:

TOWARDS THE LIBERATION OF THE INDIVIDUAL THROUGH FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO:

THE FACULTY OF EDUCATION AND

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BY

STEPHANIE TROY

JUNE 1991

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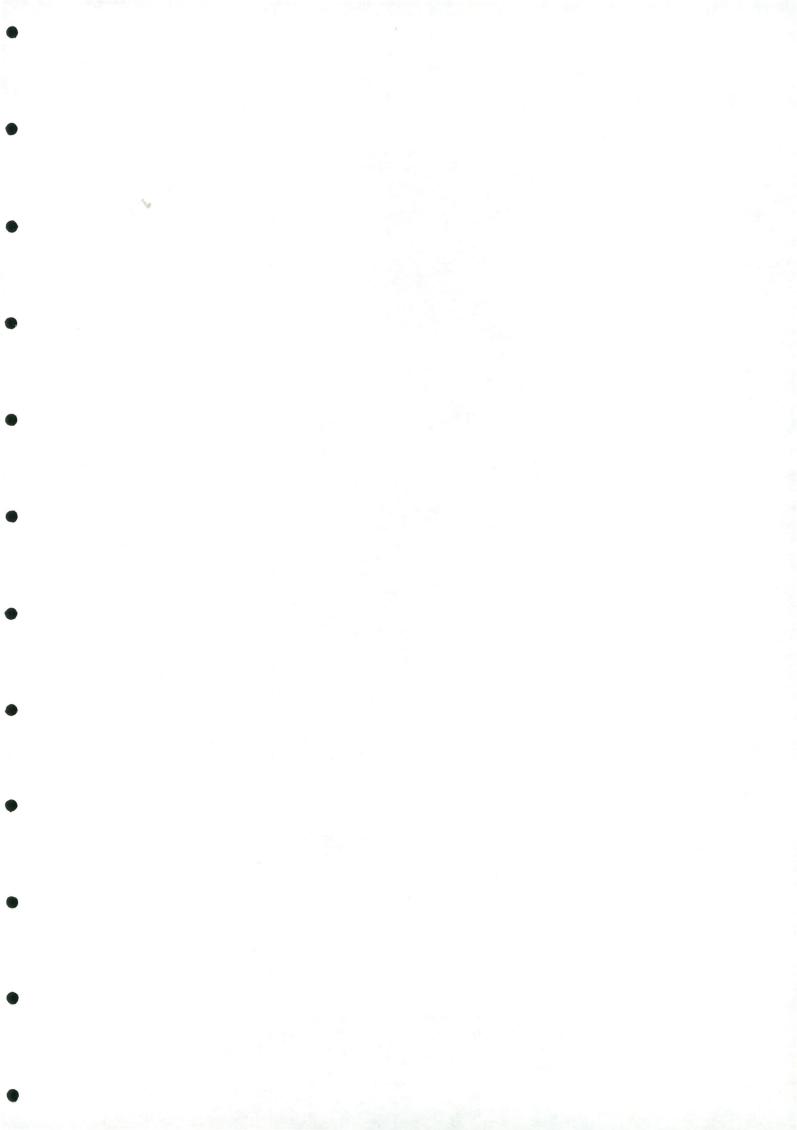


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INTRODUCTION

"PSEUDO-INDIVIDUALITY IS RIFE" (1)

In this postmodern society the concept of the individual has been negated as an unstable entity. We are constantly being offered exemplars of what the ideal individual should be, but this is the pseudo-individuality Adorno speaks of.

Broadly my Degree is concerned with challenging the whole 'Television Culture' as a vehicle through which stereotypes and roles have been created and which has led to the wholesale loss of individuality. This I feel is a trend which is reinforced through the education system.

In the chapter dealing with education, I will discuss this idea through confronting the examination system which reinforces uniformity and conservatism in education. I would also like to examine the enforcement of the uniform as one 'particular' of the education system which is totally scholiocentric and anti-individual.

My personal ceramic project confronts the whole concept of freedom of expression and the very essence of the individual. I want my forms to struggle with a tension and a sense of movement. This movement denotes an intrinsic power of the individual which, I belive, is to some extent untainted by the stereotypes and oppressive external forces that seek to control it.

1. Brandon Taylor, Modernism, Post Modernism and Realism: A Critical

Perspective for Art. P. 91

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CHAPTER I

THE UNTAMED FORM: MAJOR STUDY PROJECT

My major study ceramic project is made up of a series of decorated horizontally presented forms. The source for these forms is the figure, more particularly the human torso.

These forms will be constructed horizontally using a pressmounding technique. I will press terracotta clay into a plaster cast taken of a modelled torso form. The pieces will be decorated by drawing into the clay and painting on wet clay with slips. I have also considered painting with oils on the biscuit fired pieces. Through the form and its decoration I wish to achieve a sense of movement, a visual dynamism.

Francis Bacon's studies of the human figure have been a major source in my development of the torso form. Bacon manipulates the paint on the canvas to create a dynamic figure form, I wish to manipulate clay to achieve that same sense of energy. Fig. 1 & 2. Bacon distorts the body image - leaving out features, faces, heads - this gives the impression of the figure still being in the process of realizing itself as a figure. Bacon destroys the appearance of things in order to convey a real likeness. My torso form is distorted in order to give the impression of the figure and in many respects to deal with the true essence of the human being beyond the conventional figurative representation.

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Fig 1: Figure in movement 1978, Francis Bacon.

Fig 2 : Study of Human Body 1982 Bacon.



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The negative shape of my forms is based on the human scream. The scream in Bacon's Head studies 1948/49 Fig. 3 and Eduard Munch's "The Cry" Fig. 4 show how the physical spasm of the scream can overtake all other features and both contort and distort the body form itself. I want my scream to come from such depth and to dominate so physically that there is no head or neck to the form (figuratively speaking) just tense shoulder-like forms containing between them an "angst" energy.

The reason I chose to construct the forms horizontally is because I felt a horizontally presented form could convey a more dramatic sense of movement and direction. There is sometimes a problem when constructing a form that it will appear too weighted.

This heaviness can be accentuated or disguised according to the resolution of the base. The base can root a form to the ground or give the illusion of motion. The work of Jacqui Poncelot the ceramist achieves this sense of dynamism. Her forms are predominantly horizontal and contort with an electric energy. Fig 5. The sense of energy can be interpreted as a sense of struggle within the forms. This sense of struggle is heightened by the lively colours and active lines and textures of the surfaces (2). Therefore I see decoration as playing an essential role in accentuating the sense of movement and struggle in my forms. Working as I am on the torso form, I decided to explore body painting. Fig. 6. The face and body paintings of the so-called primitive tribes of Africa, America. Australia and Polynesia are aesthetically very stimulating. They are at the same time somewhat intimidating. Having examined some photographs of painted

(2) LA County Museum, Clay Today - Contemporary Ceramicists and Their

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Fig 3: Head II 1949 Francis Bacon

Fig 4: The Cry Eduard Munch

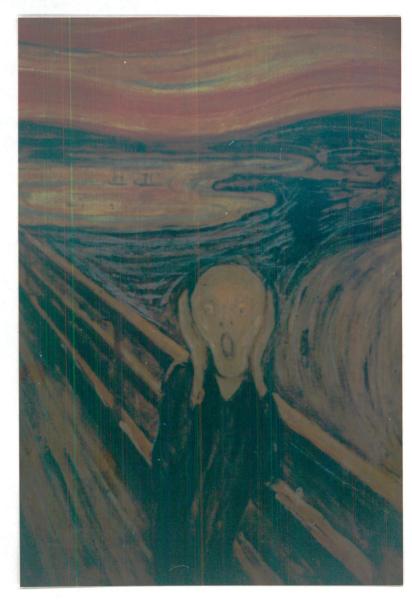
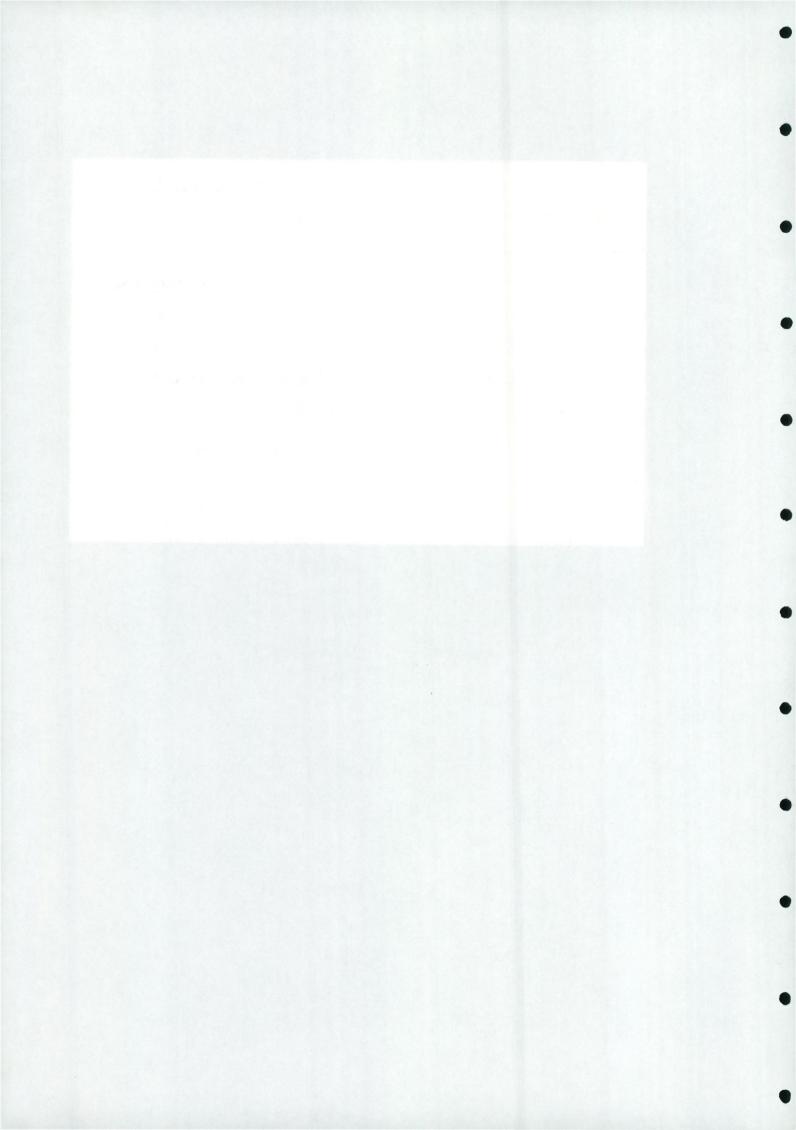






Fig 5: FORM 1985, JACQUI PONCELOT



faces and bodies I was very conscious of the innate lack of comfort I felt with these decorated human images. A painted face is human but does not appear so wrought as it is with animal characteristics. These animal characteristics deprive the person of his/her civilised and tamed predictability. According to Michael Thevoz author of The Painted Body, the qualms we feel before the painted face are due to the fact that it is at once very close to us, since it belongs to a creature of our own species, and very remote, since it frontally obliterates what we have learned to recognize as the essential physiognomical attributes of the human person (3).

What returns, according to Freud, is a formation belonging to the primitive psyche, a formation originally familiar which the work of repression has rendered strange and disturbing (4). In my chapter on education, this idea of Freud's is discussed in some detail.

In decorating my ceramics I would like to achieve this aura of the strange and disturbing. The difference is that my work is not body art or performance art. I am constructing clay forms. However, if, as Philip Rawson suggests, our first approach to a ceramic work is via body image (5) some of the strangeness of the primitive body art should hopefully translate.

- (3) Thevoz, Michael The Painted Body P. 30.
- (4) Echoes <u>Historical References in Contemporary Ceramics (Edited by</u>

 Garth Clarke. P. 14
- (5) IBID P. 6.

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The role of decoration in my work is a dual one -

- (a) to give a sense of the strange and
- (b) to give a greater sense of the form.

Lines, colours and textures on the surface of the form should indicate the direction of the piece and describe the actual form itself, accentuating or disguising where appropriate.

An important objective of my work this year is to address my analytical ability. In my ceramic major study for the past four years I have worked intuitively as an artist and left my work in many respects without analysis. Analysis was less important than the emotional quality of my work. I have used my craft as a medium for self-expression. Making marks and building forms is my language and though the work was open to be misunderstood, I was talking to myself and from that perspective articulated well. However as an art educator, one has undertaken to communicate and pass on that language of expression to others. In order to communicate one must know what one is talking about. That involves critical analysis of one's own work. As an artist I feel I have been selfindulgent and aesthetically uninformed. Craft design often has an emphasis on being activity based, building and making without critical analysis. In the chapter on educational implications I would like to explore this point in relation to the sphere of the Art class. In my own ceramic work, I am examining form and its decoration working together as a language of expression. Rather than have the work become self-indulgent I would like to explore the many ways these art elements can be used as a means of

communication whether figurative or abstract. A work that springs simply from instinct is as incomplete as one that is based purely on analysis.

In becoming overly analytical there is a danger of artwork becoming meaningless and empty. The art language, be it form, line or colour, is not an end in itself. The language is a vehicle for the expression of an experience. According to Caroline Tisnall in her essay 'Every Human Being is an Artist' the creation of an art work involves 'intuition, reason, emotion and sensation'. She goes on to state that "the artist as a specialist in modern society operates within the divided spectrum established by classic western philosophy in which senses, too, are categorized and read as quite clearly distinguishable even to the extent that they are allocated different ranks in a hierarchy" (6). It is essential to my work that I do not separate analysis from the intuitive making them so separate that they may conflict. It is a blending of the two which means that they work together in harmony rather that either one dominating the other. This is the balance I want in the creating of my artworks in order to step nearer to maturity as an artist.

(6) Csaky, Mick How Does It Feel? P.56

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Fig 6 ; Painted body by author

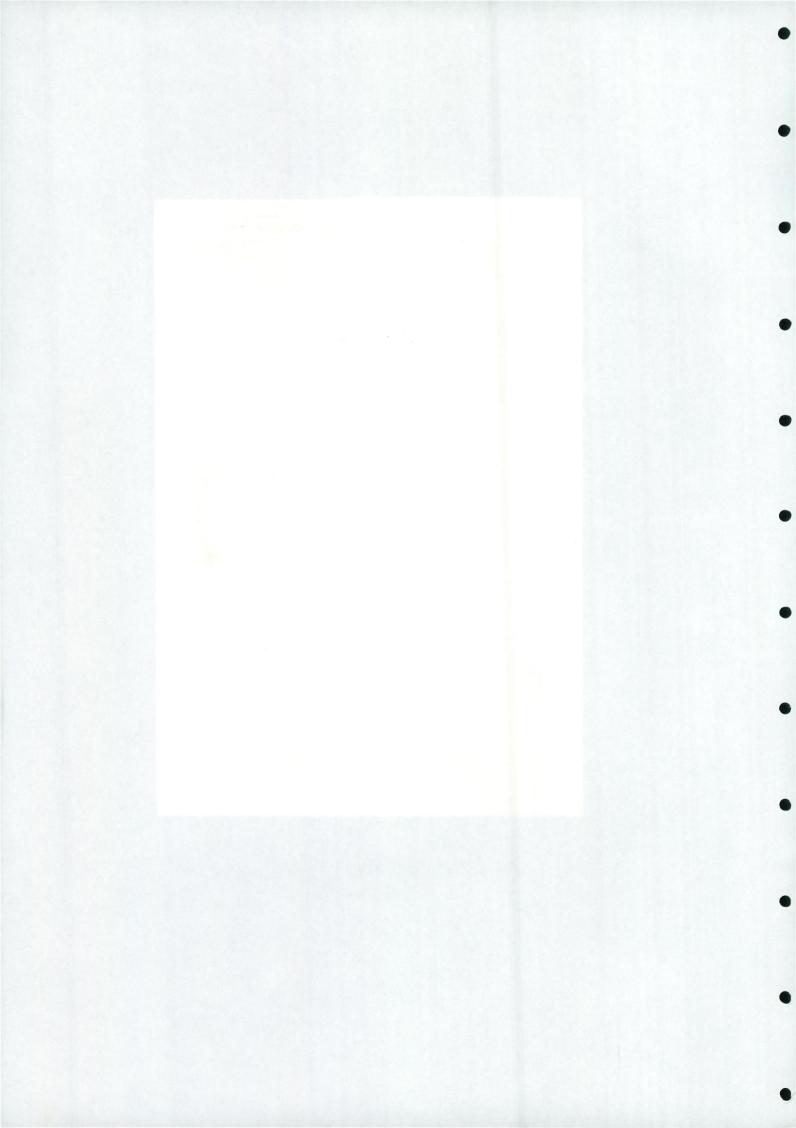
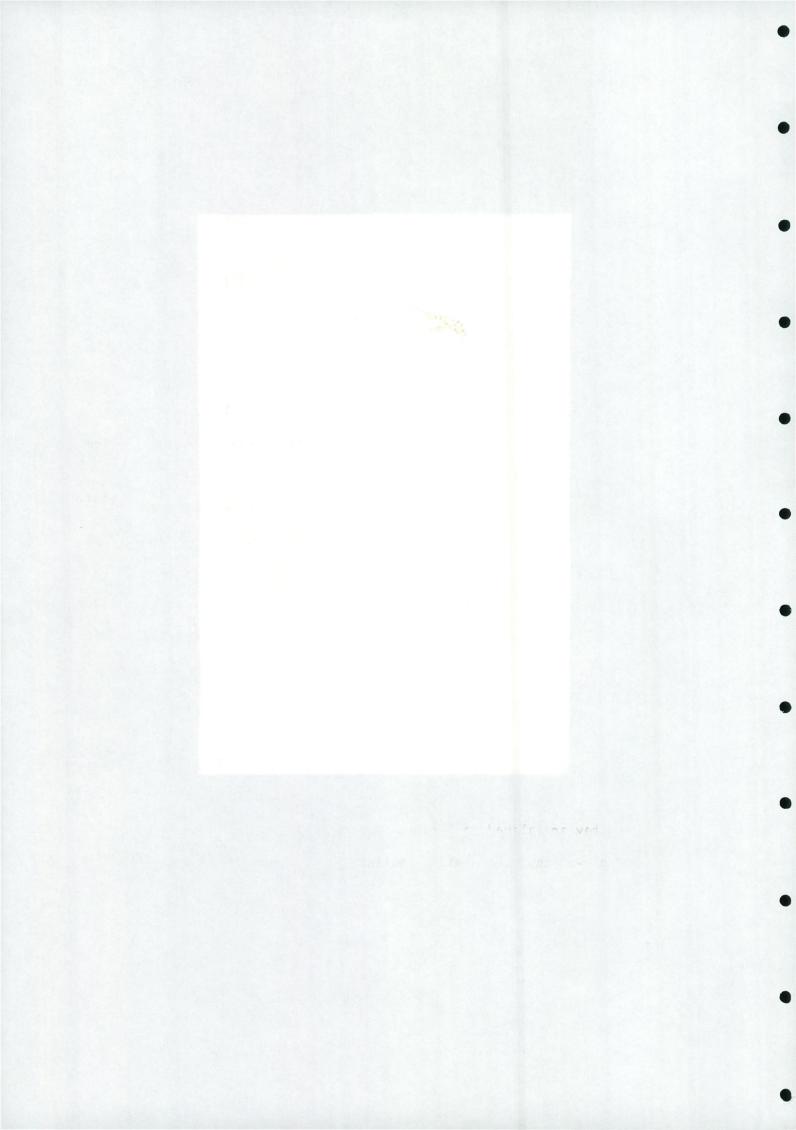




Fig 6a:Painted body



CHAPTER 11

THE SPIRIT OF CLAY: ART HISTORICAL CONTEXT

As a ceramicist, I like to consider myself a traditionalist, carrying on an age old tradition of coaxing clay into majestic forms. Though my work has moved very much away from the traditional vessel, I feel strong roots with the historic container. I like to think of my work, not as literal containers, but very much as containers of ideas, of philosophies and of personal expression. Another bond with tradition I have is that though my work is quite literally figurative there is a universal language that describes clay forms quite anatomically. The pot is known by common metaphors - the neck, lip, mouth, belly, shoulder, foot.

Philip Rawson suggests that our first approach to any ceramic work is made through body image. He also says that we tend to judge the expression of a pot by the way it addresses us, body for body, and by the way we apprehend the posture it takes as if it were another body (1).

The hunble clay vessel has a very strong symbolic connection with humankind. In Nepal when villagers reached the day before their 100th birthday they are placed in a vessel which is then broken in a ritual signifying rebirth. The Mimbres Indians buried a man's pots with a hole in the base to allow his soul to escape (2).

- (1) Echoes <u>Historical References in Contemporary Ceramics</u>
 (Edited by Garth Clarke) P. 14
- (2) Campbell, Joseph The Way of the Animal Powers P 41

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No matter how advanced we become technically in terms of clay and glazing and kilns, and no matter how complex the ideologies we convey through clay, it is, I believe, essential to hold passionately onto the spiritual quality of clay. Ceramics is basically earth and fire: two very natural elements which combined together have borne wares of significant spiritual value, a value which to an extent has been lost in our civilized hellpot of commercialism. Bernard Leech recognised a lack of creativity evident in commercially available ceramics. He subscribed to the early twentieth century yearning for a return to the pre-industrial handmade wares that were believed capable of restoring quality of life (3). My figurative forms find their inspiration in female statuettes, no more than 3 to 6 inches tall which appeared over a large part of Europe as far back as 20,000, 18,000 BC.

Examples such as the Venus of Willendorf (Austria) Fig. 7 and the Venus of Lespugne represent an overriding abstract style of figurative forms Fig. 8. They concentrated mainly on the torso with either a head with no features or without a head at all. The forms are also without feet, the accent falling on the breasts and the buttocks. These forms, concentrating on the maternal were a symbolic arrangement. These forms were often buried with the deceased as a maternal protective force. There was also a find in European Russia, mainly from stations of the late paleolithic mammoth hunt. Along the bank of the river Dresna, an accumulation of mammoth skulls arranged in a circle was uncovered with a Venus statuette among them evidently as a goddess or patroness of the hunt. In the valley of Mexico 1200 - 700 BC from more than 200 graves, a rich harvest of figurines of clay has been collected (4).

- (3) Clarke, Garth Echoes P. 5
- (4) Campbell, Joseph The Way of the Animal Powers P. 12

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Fig 7: Venus of Wil lendorf

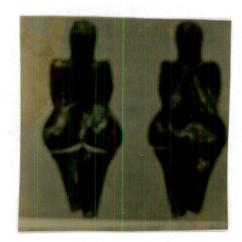
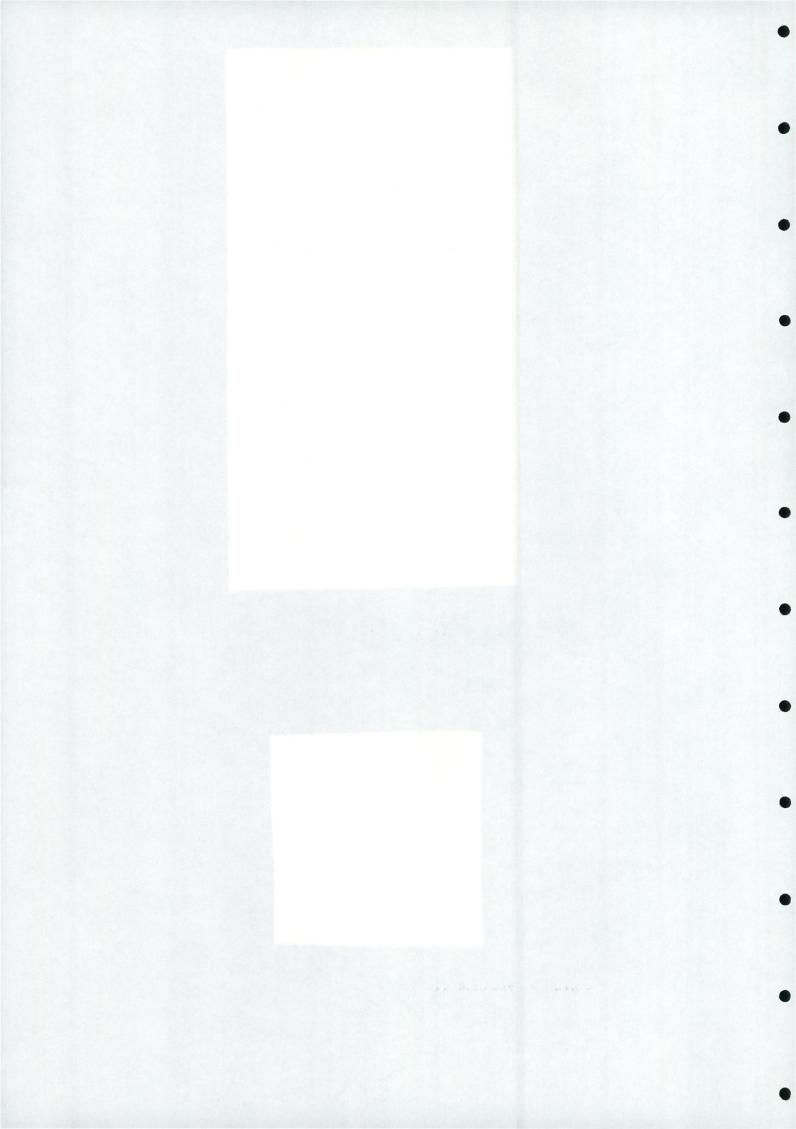


Fig 8 : Venus of Desdonia



Finely modelled, highly polished, in a varied range of styles most are of women with long slanting eyes, small breasts, short arms, slim waists and large bulbous legs. They carry babies on their hips or caress small dogs held in their arms, a few have two heads. Miguel Covarrubias, who supervised the excavations states: "Beyond the fact that these figurines were made to be buried with the dead, their purpose remains a mystery". However he does add that it is not an irreducible mystery: being buried with the dead they serve as an assurance of the maternal power of the seeded earth there to receive them.

It is exciting to discover how contemporary these forms seem and they serve as a wealth of inspiration for my own figurative forms. As with the humble vessel, these figurines are surrounded with a sense of spiritual depth, yet nonetheless are unpretentious. The lack of pretention strikes me not solely through the actual forms but through their burial - rooted back in the soil with the human element most significant.

I am rooted in a tradition to which I hope I am honest. I am also inspired by modern ceramicists. The ceramic sculptor, Jacqui Poncelot, has had a major influence on my most recent work.

She studied in Wolverhampton College of Art from 1965 - 1972 and the Royal College of Art in London. It is her most recent work that inspires me. She travelled to America in 1978. The variety of the new physical landscape she was confronted with presented her with a new challenge as a ceramic artist. It led her to explore the limitlessness of clay through colour and texture. Through her exploration she called into question the nature of ceramic quality.

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She also questioned the concept and form of the ceramic object asking with alarming directness, "What is a pot?" (5).

By 1983 she was producing a series of stubby, rounded, embryonic forms in which containment appears complete. However they are not totally self-contained but of such a bulk that they suggest a dynamic inner space that seeks to emerge and be filled.

The forms are organic in presence and appearance, yet unstable in their definitions as objects - "That they are something with being". They nevertheless have a strong sense about them of becoming. They seem already on the move, rising and opening in a slow tension with the surfaces on which they rest. This is a quality I wish to achieve in my own forms. Poncelot's forms are horizontal, as are mine, and this lends itself to this sense of movement. Poncelot's work is described as "squat tense forms resembling headless, mobile, amphibious creatures, whose fat softly rolled necks sensuously invite an entry that threatens engorgement" Fig. 9,10 & 11. A continuity of form is reinforced by rich and detailed patterning and colouring of textured exterior surfaces reminiscent of tattoos and peacocks tails.

Another significant ideological and aesthetic influence on my work is Francis Bacon, the figurative painter. His paintings of figures contain an even more dramatic struggle in the forms, similar to the ceramic forms of Poncelot that pulsate with an internal energy. I find a similarity with Bacon's work and Michelangelo's "Bound Slaves" sculptures. In all of these works there is a sense of trying to escape from the torture of being.



Fig 9 FORM 1983 Jacqui Poncelot

Figs 10 July FORMS 1985 JACOUS PONCESOT

An intrinstic force is like molten lava within us all, bubbling towards eruption. Michelangelo's figures seem destined to struggle eternally. Bacon in many respects releases the lava. Bacon's work explores the human face and figure beyond the social mask. He does not dehumanize the human but depicts the human in a moment of extreme experience (6). Bacon has used the physical quality of the scream to convey this extremity of experience. As Julia Kristeva said: "The cry shares the character of a laugh in that it is both evaporation of meaning and the only possibility of communication". Speech may be the sign of human intelligence, eyes the window to the soul, but the cry, visibly speechless is an instinctive spasm of the body (7).

In Bacon's "Head 1" (1948) Fig. 12, we see the mouth tilted sideways, the neck and cheek bulging massively as though attempting to contain and suppress the bestial spasm. In the study after Velazquez's portrait of Pope Innocent X (1953) Fig. 13, we see Bacon perhaps testing one of the greatest portraits ever painted, of a man set highest above his fellow men (the archetypal father, verging on the divine) in the grip of a feeling so intense that the only expression of it brought him close to the beasts. Bacon's figure paintings are of dynamic forms twisting almost as if anticipating combustion.

What can be read into Bacon's work is an honesty of expression. That step beyond the stereotypical pleasing image of portraiture and figurative work. Bacon's paintings dig deep down through the shallow mask of social acceptability and into the actual essence of being human.

- (6) Russell, John Francis Bacon (Thames and Hudson) P. 50
- (7) Ades, Dawn Francis Bacon Andrew Forge P. 32

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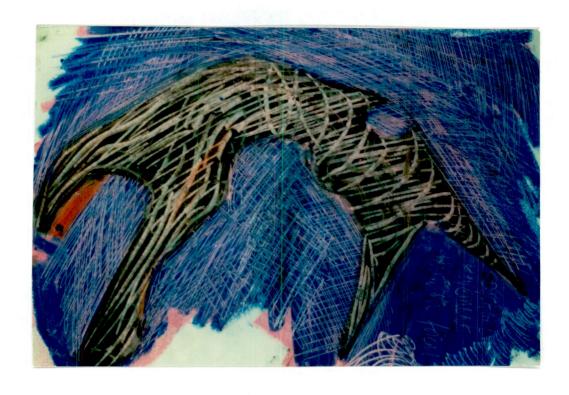
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Bacon unveils the raw emotions and anguish of the human species and shows how we use our bodies, (the form we are trapped within) to express these emotions. Through studying these various artists and artistic traditions I have found inspiration for my own work and have accumulated a diverse vocabulary for my own personal expression. Artwork I relate to best is work in which I read my own philosophies particularly those relating to freedom of the individual and freedom of expression. This leads me on to my next chapter which deals with the educational implications of art in the classroom.



Fig 1 2 HEAD I 1948 FRANCIS BACON

Fig 13 Pape Innocent X 1955 Francis Barrat



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CHAPTER 111

ART EDUCATION IN THE TELEVISION CULTURE

So long as the young generation is and continues to be well brought up the ship of state will have a fair voyage; otherwise, the consequences are better left unspoken. Plato (1)

To Plato, the state was a primary concern, with education playing an essential role in maintaining the ship of state on its fair voyage. The stability of cosiety could only be guaranteed through a guarded education which would protect the young student "against physical and social influences which might lie across the path of his smooth progress towards self-mastery and peace with himself" (2). Plato's advocation of the protection of youth from what he considered disharmonious and dangerous influences, was not out of a profound respect for the individual. Protection of the youth is not an end in itself: it is a provision for the safeguard of the welfare of the state. It was through authoritarian control that Plato saw the way to a harmonious Utopian society. Freedom was not a positive concept in Plato's philosophy. Plato regarded spontaneity as a destructive force within a society. With regard to play, Plato viewed spontaneous play as helpful to proper growth in children from three to six. After this age however, Plato would restrict the freedom allowed in games for he feared that beneath the superficial innocence of spontaneous play in older children, "Lurk grave perils for the state". (3)

- (1) Castle EB Ancient Education and Today Penguin London, 1971 P. 2
- (2) Castle EB Ancient Education and Today P. 86
- (3) Castle EB Ancient Education and Today P. 88

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Children who make innovation in their games, when they grow up to be men will be different from the last generation of children, and being different, will desire a different sort of life, and under the influence of this desire will invent other institutions and laws (4).

Plato's fear of spontaneity and freedom and his view that within them
'lurks grave perils for the state' is a fear I see echoed in today's modern
society. I would argue that the school system is based on providing for
the welfare of individuals within the state.

I feel that if we examine the society we live in, we can get a clearer picture of how the educational institutions are functioning within that society. My basic argument is that there has been, as Adorno states: "a wholesale loss of individuality" (5). I blame, as do Adorno and Horkhiemer, (the art critics) mass culture, more particularly the 'television culture; we live in today. Television, after barely forty years in our midst, has become an activity pursued almost as universally as eating and sleeping. Television has had a dramatic effect on the structure of society.

Raymond Williams has written of what he calls the 'mobile privatisation' encouraged by television, in which people increasingly live in self-enclosed, small units, surrounded by media signals generated elsewhere (6).

- (4) Castle EB. Ancient Education and Today P.88
- (5) Taylor, Brandon Modernism, Post Modernism and Realism P. 91
- (6) Playfair, Guy Lyon The Evil Eye (Unacceptable Force of Television

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This privatization is responsible for a re-education in social relations to calculations of material improvement alone (7).

Television has offered an excellent vehicle through which mass control can be obtained. Researchers Fred Emery and Merrelyn Emery having examined the effect of television on the brain, found that television watching induces a form of hypnotic trance in which any image at all can take on the quality of a suggestion, and can be expected to work its way into consciousness in its own time. "It can then cause actions that may be entirely out of character" (8). They go on to state that the suggestion is usually indirect (except in commercials) and that this tends to be more effective than the direct kind for the simple reason that there is less resistance to it. Television's influence is much too subtle to be detected by its victims. Emery ad Emery put it very bluntly when they state "Television as a simple, constant, repetitive and ambiguous visual stimulus gradually closes down the nervous system of man" (9).

The frightening fact is that there are very few homes in Ireland today without a television. This means that a large part of the population, particularly young people, spend their time being subtly brainwashed by a box in the corner of their front room. Emery ad Emery have established the power of suggestion that television has. We must now look into what messages television feeds us. According to Brandon Taylor, the typical image of human personality on television tends to be wholly shallow and

⁽⁷⁾ Taylor, Brandon Modernism, Post Modernism and Realism P. 93

⁽⁸⁾ Playfair The Evil Eye P. 67

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banal. Television presents stereotypes and roles and codes of social action for society's members. In my introduction I said that postmodern society had negated the individual as an unstable entity. It all has echoes of this horror situation depicted by Aldous Huxley in, Brave New World - Modernism, Post Modernism and Realism, P. 89 Brandon Taylor.

"Till at last the child's mind <u>is</u> these suggestions, and the sum of these suggestions <u>is</u> the child's mind. And not the child's mind only. The adult's mind too - all his life long. The mind that judges and desires and decises - made up of these suggestions. But all these suggestions are <u>our</u> suggestions. "The director almost shouted in his triumph" (10). In this chapter, I intend to consider the role of education in today's TV culture and whether the educator has an obligation to teach and facilitate the individual or to facilitate the state. Because of the usual context of television and the nature of Art, is there a particular role for the Art educator to play in the liberation of the individual?

There are many indications that schools do not cater for the individual. For example, there is the question of the school uniform which is implemented in most post-primary and many primary schools in Ireland. Its very implementation is, I feel, totally scholiocentric and functions as a means of maintaining order and discipline in the school. The uniform can be seen to serve as a means of group indentity. Making every student look the same is a way of suppressing the individuality of each student. Adolescents often rely on clothes as a vehicle through which they make statements about their individuality and express themselves. The school

(10) Huxley, Aldous Brave New World P. 94

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uniform facilitates a conformity which tends to become a bad thing when it leaves no room for individuality or personal idiosyncrasy. According to psychologist Gordon R. Lowe, the school insistence on conformity at best teaches the child to co-operate with others, and to enjoy teamwork in projects which might be impossible for the isolated individual. At worst, however, the child may become merely indoctrinated and brainwashed, have all his/her native originality stifled for ever, and come to believe "that the aim of schooling is to make all children average for the sake of administrative convenience". The exam system in schools could also be accused of encouraging conformity. The present leaving Certificate examination in second level education is by its nature subject (11).

The function of the individual teaching the Leaving Certificate syllabus, is to provide information and facts not for comprehension but to be learned off and to be demonstrated at the end of the year for two hours in an examination hall. Widespread review of the Irish education system is currently taking place. The Junior Certificate was introduced for first year post-primary students in September 1989. Its general aims show a much more pediocentric outlook. The Junior Certificate guidelines states the aims of education. According to the guidelines "The general aim of education is to contribute towards the development of all aspects of the individual, including aesthetic, creative, critical, cultural emotional, intellectual, moral, physical, political social and spiritual development, for the personal and family life, for working life, for living in the community and for leisure (12).

- (11) Lowe, Gordon R. The Growth of Personality P. 137
- (12) <u>Junior Certificate Guidelines for Teachers, The National Council</u>
 for Curriculum and Assessment P. 1

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What is appealing about the aims of the Junior Certificate is its apparent appreciation of the rather broader responsibilities of education. What reads is a greater emphasis on the self as opposed to a vocational or examoriented script. It appears that the educational authorities are aware as James Hemming was aware in his book <u>The Betrayal of Youth</u> that if we are to advance from the confused present to a clearer future, we have to switch over from teaching subjects to teaching people (13).

Herbert Read states that the purpose of education must be to develop the uniqueness of the individual (14). He does not advocate this to the neglect of social consciousness but states that education must be a process not only of individuation, but also of integration (15).

The new Junior Certificate syllabus via its aims gives the impression of a reconciliation of individual uniqueness with social unity. The programme's aims show a concern with "developing the young person's personal and social confidence, initiative and competence and also recognize the need to "prepare the young person for the responsibilities of citizenship" (16). Recognising social responsibilities has always been a foremost principle of education. Developing the personal confidence and initiative of the young person, is a new concept. It is, I believe essential to recognise the

- (13) Hemming, James <u>The Betrayal of Youth</u> P. 2
- (14) Read, Herbert Education Through Art P. 6
- (15) IBID
- (16) Junior Certificate Guidelines for Teachers P. 1

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power of the individual. As Carl Jung says when discussing man in his relation to others: "A million zeros joined together do not add to one (17).

With all the complexities of todays television culture one has to ask oneself what are the justifications for teaching art? The world is so visually complex, full of images and forms, full of colours - why make more images and forms? Frederick Franck begins to answer these questions in his book The Zen of Seeing. He says of people in modern society 'We do a lot of looking: we look through lenses, telescopes, television tubes - our looking is perfected every day - but we see less and less' (18). This reinforces what was discussed early in the chapter concerning the passivity when watching television. Viewers are constantly bombarded with images. According to Franck when a man no longer experiences, the organs of his inner life wither away. Franck says we cannot experience unless we learn to see (19). Perhaps the ability to see is the most valuable asset art has to offer.

other reasons and justifications have been offered for teaching art. In Educating Artistic Vision, Elliot Eisner discusses Dewey's notion of 'art as a form of experience that vivifies life' it helps the growing organism recognise that it is alive; it moves one to a height of feeling that makes it possible to identify that experience as a unique event in one's life (20).

⁽¹⁷⁾ Jung, Carl G. Psychological Reflections P. 167

⁽¹⁸⁾ Franck, Fredrick The Zen of Seeing P. 4

⁽¹⁹⁾ IBID

⁽²⁰⁾ Eisner, Elliot Educating Artistic Vision P. 10

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Art can be perceived as a language of expression. Eisner says that art primarily functions in three ways, which may be outlined as follows: the visual arts have been used "To give expression to man's most sublime visions". Art can put visual metaphors on what may otherwise be perceived as abstract and intangible ideas. Eisner goes on to state that "when art performs this function it transforms the personal and ineffable into a public artform in which others may participate" (21).

Apart from the sublime and the spiritual art can also function as a vehicle for the articulation of innate characteristics of humankind. One's fears and dreams can also be expressed through visual metaphors. This I see as an essential function of art in the classroom. The subject-centred nature of education today does not facilitate the expression of experiences in youth. Adolescents are subjected to a great many physical and emotional changes throughout their teenage years. By making tangible the fears and anxieties of the self through visual metaphors, the teenager can sail somewhat more smoothly through the rough seas of identity crisis and role confusion in adolescence. In his book, The Growth of Personality, Gordon Lowe says that the main problem of the adolescent is identity diffusion. Depression and anxiety are facets of identity diffusion. Lowe goes on to state that "when adolescents are unable to externalize their conflicts of anxiety and depression, they may give up and escape into their inner world of fantasy" (22).

⁽²¹⁾ Eisner, Elliot <u>Educating Artistic Vision</u> P. 9

⁽²²⁾ Lowe, Gordon The Growth of Personality P 137

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This however is not just the normal tendency to daydream and neither is it the severe withdrawal from reality evident in adolescent schizophrenics. What it becomes is a "neurotic defence mechanism" (23). The neurosis results in a lack of self esteem and a hostility towards one's environment.

If as Eisner proposes, art can externalize fears and emotions it is surely an essential part of a curriculum for the training of young people. Eisner proposes a third function of art. He states that it is "Its capacity to vivify the particular" (24). He also says that art "frames our view and captures the moment" (25). This reinforces the idea of education as a means of teaching individuals to see. If one is studying patern it is not necessarily so one can make colourful prints. The actual activity is not as important as what is learned through the activity. What should occur is an ability to perceive pattern around us, - to see the rhythmic pattern of trees through iron railings on a winter's evening.

Positive art education heightens awareness as Eisner says "of vistas that many of us have encountered before, but have not seen" (26).

Art education has an essential role to play in creating an awareness of our environment and heightening an awareness of ourselves. Through the art class individuals can become more aware of their own personalities and their relationship to those around us. Perhaps art can free the individual through giving the artist/student this control and awareness that modern society seems adament to oppress.

- (23) (25) IBID
- (24) Eisner, Elliot Educating Artistic Vision P. 10
- (26) Eisner, Elliot Educating Artistic Vision P. 10

CHAPTER VI

CLAY IN THE CLASSROOM

This year I have been teaching in Mount Temple Comprehensive. It is a protestant school in North Dublin. The school situated as it is on the Malahide Road, draws it's pupils from all over Dublin. The school is a mix of gender, religions and classes. It is also to an extent a mix of races and cultures as the school plays host to many foreign students.

Mount Temple is very much pupil centred. There is a strong awareness of the individual and an emphasis on facilitating the individual's development. There is no school uniform. This I consider a strong factor in facilitating the individuals need for self expression. Without the presence of the uniform there is a greater sense of personal identity among the students and this has lent itself to the identity of the school as a vibrant conglomerate of personalities.

The students demand a lot from their teachers and are articulate about any grievance they may have. The staffroom hums with social and political discourse. Aspects of education are discussed and inevitably lead to lively debate. There is a sincere preoccupation with the welfare of the students and a constant evaluation of the effectiveness of various teaching methodology along with aspects of the curriculum. Teaching and learning are passionately explored. The architecture of the school is also worth noting as playing an essential role in accentuating the ethos of the school. Unlike many schools built in the seventies, Mount Temple is without

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Fig 14 Pupils project work



the factory-like facade of so many. The school is situated in beautiful grounds and the buildings blend harmoniously with the natural environment.

I introduced a classroom project to a second year group which related to my own personal work in college. The average age of the group was fourteen. This was very much a mixed ability class with a variety of learning types. As a whole they are a very responsive group, highly motivated and full of uninhibited energy.

Working as a ceramicist and with my interest in the history of the ceramic vessel and it's quality as an expressive vehicle, I decided to introduce clay into the classroom. We worked on a project called 'the stories of pots' and through it explored the history of the form and its decoration as a means through which we could articulate a theme. The basic form we worked on was that of a vessel. The limits of the project were that we had to construct a container, but with the idea that the quality of the container form was limitless. There were various qualities of form we looked at, such as a rounded smooth rhythmic form or an irregular, assymetrical form.

We also looked at the quality of decoration on a form and what messages different decorations gave to us. Working with terra-cotta clay to build the forms, we painted white slip on the clay while it was leather hard. The actual decoration of the form was achieved by drawing into the white slip, revealing the orange terra-cotta beneath. Fig. 14

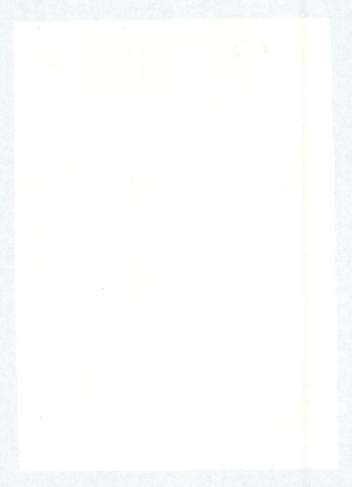
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Fig 15 JUG - FRENCH MEDIEVAL



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Before we started drawing into the forms we explored the different quality of lines and how different qualities of line could convey different messages. We look at line decoration on ancient pots such as Pueblo Indian Pottery, Turkish Ceramics and Sosa-Ware. There pots convey messages of eternity, ceremonies and celebration. We discussed also how these pots often were decorated according to what was inside them. For example, medieval French pottery has examples of jugs that were used for water that are decorated with flowing lines that symbolize water. Fig 15. Though we talked about Greek vases and how they told stories of Greek heros and battles we decided we did not want to have the forms decorated pictorially. Instead we concentrated on using an abstract composition of lines to convey an essence of the theme we chose. The class divided into two, with two separate themes being dealt with. One theme was war and the other was the festival.

The overall aim of my scheme of work for this project is to create an awareness of the expressive qualities of form and line. I believe strongly in the fact that art must be a vehicle for expression and that my job is to equip individuals with a language for articulation of ideas. This involves studying the components of this language. Through the project we have explored form and explored line. This then made for exciting discoveries when we combined line and form together. We did much preliminary work constructing inchpots and coil pots. This gave the class a feel for the limitations of clay and equiped them with the appropriate handbuilding techniques.

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If I was to pursue this project again I would place greater emphasis on drawing and designing alongside making. This would have ensured a more explorative look at how line and form can work together on a page. In my scheme I advocated the cross-curriculum possibilities of the project lying in a geography project. I felt that a study of the primitive cultures for whom the vessel is a significant spiritual and cultural symbol would have given the project a greater dept and energy.

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CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

All human control comes to an end when the individual is caught in a mass movement (1). What I am advocating through this written project is that human control has to a great extent been lost in the mass movement of the television culture. My ambition as an educator is to facilitate the individual in school. I believe that the teacher must be on the frontline in the war against conformity and uniformity. The mass control manipulated through the vehicle of the television has led to a 'wholesale loss in individuality' and this is a serious problem for humankind.

Resistance to the organized mass can be effected only by the man who is as well organized in his individuality as the mass itself (2). It is for this reason that I see the art educator as a particularly strong force in the rebirth of individuality. Art can teach people to see and art can show the way to communicate what we see. Art can as Eisner said 'heighten awareness' and it is only through awareness that positive change can eventuate through the individuals recognition of self and environment. We are in danger of becoming the uniformed machines that Aldous Huxley describes in Brave New World. Imagine he says; a small boy asleep on his right side, the right arm stuck out, the right hand hanging limply over the edge of the bed. Through a sound grating

⁽¹⁾ Jung, Carl G. <u>Psychological Reflections</u> P.155

⁽²⁾ Jung, Carl G. Psychological Reflections P.158

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in the side of a box a voice speaks softly. "The nile is the longest river in Africa and the second in the length of all the rivers of the globe. Although falling short of the length of the Mississipi. The nile is at the head of all rivers as regards the length of it's basin, which extends through 35 degrees of latitude".

At breakfast the next morning -

'Tommy'someone says, 'do you know which is the longest river in Africa?' - a shaking of the head.

But do you not remember something that begins: The Nile is the?

The - Nile - is - the - longest - river - in - Africa - and - the second - etc. - The words came rushing out. 'Well now, which is the
longest river in Africa?' The eyes are blank. 'I do not know' - 'But
the Nile Tommy'.

'The nile is the longest river in Africa.....

Then which river is the longest Tommy?' Tommy bursts into tears 'I don't know he howls (3).

Is Aldous Huxley's prediction so remote from what is happening today? My arguement is that the world is moving in this direction and may already have arrived at apocaluptic situation. Education I feel can combat the destructive influence of television and mass culture through recognizing the value of the individual. The art teacher can encourage a visual literacy in a very visual world and help to make people active participants in their environment.

(3) Huxley, Aldous Brave New World P. 97

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