National College of Art and Design
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LIMITATIONS OF THE WESTERN DIALECTIC SYSTEM
AND ITS EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Education
in
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B.A. Degree in Art and Design Education

by
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ILLUSTRATIONS

INTRODUCTION

> The human race is a myriad of refractive
> surfaces staining the white radiance of
> eternity. Each surface refracts the
> refraction of refractions of refractions.
> Each self refracts the refractions of
> others' refractions of self's refractions
> of others' refractions......
>
> Here is the glory and wonder and mystery,
> yet too often we simply wish to ignore or
> destroy those points of view that refract
> the light differently from our own.[1]

In this dissertation I will aim to demonstrate how all
too frequently, when in social and intellectual inter-
action, we fail to acknowledge the perceptions of those,
which are in variance with our own. I will make the
point that this situation leads to a clash or conflict
in thinking which in many cases remains unresolved,
through demonstrating how the 'dialectic' system, through
which our thinking and linguistical structures are
governed, is designed to resolve conflict thinking, yet
often fails in this task.

In chapter one, the limitations of western dialectics
will be discussed. By tracing the roots of this system
in its problem-solving capacity, and also the limitations
of this system as a means of solving conflicts, will be
discussed. I will show how dialogue often becomes a
'simple trial and strength idiom'.[2] The point will
also be made that our western dialectic system which is
now rooted in a firm tradition, lacks critical thinking
and creative exploration because of it's clashing nature.
Another system of interaction, that of the Japanese, where
the dialectic or argument mode had no part in the
traditional culture, will also be dealt with. Finally,

through the non-violent martial art of Aikido I will
demonstrate a system of interaction based on the principle
of harmony and balance.

Chapter two entails a discussion of my project work
which is based on the principles of Aikido. I will
discuss my final piece which deals with two figures in
interaction, in a non-representational way. Through a
process of abstraction I have aimed to produce a painting
that declares the interdependence of human beings. The
development of my research during the course of this year
will be traced and an explanation given of my arrival at
semi-abstract forms.

Chapter three includes my art historical references,
and the various influences on my personal work this year.
I will deal firstly with the various cultures where
visual expression has taken place in an abstract form,
and secondly with those artists who have been most
influential to my painting most notably Wassily Kandinsky,
Johannes Itten and Albert Irvin.

Chapter four includes the educational implications of my
project. I will argue that 'dialectics' or 'dialogue'
as used in many schools is an inefficient means of resolving
conflict in pupil teacher relationships.

The point will also be made that Paulo Freire's true
'dialogue', which for him is the beginning and end of
all education, cannot exist under our present classroom
structure.[3] Western dialectical systems have governed
the thought structure (linear thinking) and linguistic
systems in our schools, where rational and logic take
precedence over critical and creative thinking. The
point will be made that art is perhaps one of the only

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areas in the present school curriculum that offers a
different mode of thinking than the 'dialectic'
approach. In the artistic process, emphasis is placed
on the creation of something new, rather than the
defence or destruction of something that has already
been created. I intend to show how through exploration,
problem solving and design a good art education caters
for and encourages critical and creative thinking in
its students. In light of the stated general aim of
education in the Junior Certificate course, which
proposes to 'contribute towards the development of all
aspects of the individual including aesthetic, creative,
critical ...'.[4] I believe that a good art education
should be an integral part of the overall education that
every pupil receives.

My school based project 'The Cap That Fits' will be
discussed in my final chapter. I will show how my
fifth year class in Loreto Convent, Dalkey, designed
and constructed hats to match the five main characters
from 'Hamlet', the assigned play for the English
Leaving Certificate course. I intend to show the various
aims and objectives set out in this project, and trace
the research undertaken by the students in order to
arrive at the design stage.

Although Shakespeare has already limited our perceptions
of the characters since he has created them, I intend
to illustrate how the artistic process allows an
unlimited interpretation of these characters by its
nature. The relevance of this project to the students'
learning experience will be discussed and an evaluation
of the process through which they designed and constructed
these hats will be made.

FOOTNOTES

1   R.D. Laing and H. Phillipson, Personality and
    Learning, Vol 2, Open University Press, 1976, p.19.

2   Edward de Bono, Conflicts, Penguin Books Ltd.,
    Middlesex, 1986, p.18 & 19.

3   Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Penguin
    Books Ltd., Middlesex, 1972, p.59.

4   National Council for Curriculum and Assessment,
    A Guide to the Junior Certificate, An Roinn Oideachais,
    1989.

I. THE LIMITATIONS OF WESTERN DIALECTICS

My project work this year is based on an area of human
interaction, principally that of 'face to face' or
interpersonal interaction. My paintings during the
second and third years of this course were largely
influenced by the question of conflicting cultures.
For these paintings I researched the art work of the
South African townships and the Aboriginal art of
Australia. I also researched the wider cultural
implications of these societies. My paintings served
only as a generalized statement of the opposing
conditions in which peoples of these minority cultures
must live. In order to further my research into this
crucial aspect of man in society, I found it necessary
this year to personalize the issues surrounding
conflicts, arising from human interaction.

The most common form of interpersonal interaction is
revealed through dialogue. Dialogue stems from the
word. Language becomes the systematic organization
of words in order to define and make logical reality.
Dialogue must, however, involve more than one person.
This gives rise to the communication through words and
emphasizes the interdependence of persons, in order to
construct and understand reality. Dialogue is the
basis of everyday social interaction. It's function
however in a system of 'dialectics' is my main concern
in this chapter. Dialectic is the art of logical debate
or discussion used to distinguish truth from error or
in the context of today's society, used to make
fallacies pass for truth.

The conception of resolving conflict to attain something
new stems from ancient philosophy, where it was apparent
that many kinds of changes were brought about as a
result of opposing forces. This resulted in the
formation of the dialectic process. The study of logic
has for centureis formulated 'new' theories through
dialectics. Karl Marx used the dialectic process in
the conflict model of society and social change.[1]
The dialectic system has been borrowed for almost
every niche of Western society. Today we find ourselves
enveloped in a network of dialectical systems. These
systems have become so intricate it is almost impossible
to conceive of another mode through which 'reality' and
indeed the communication of man can be explored. I
would like to question here the validity of our present
dialectical system which filters through all avenues
of society including that of education.

Plato, one of the great godfathers of dialogue is not
so much revered for his theories today, but instead
for his actual structure of argument. Plato used a
dialectic format in his discussions of various issues
in his Republic.[2] This structure of argument has not
changed, since its formation. Instead it has filtered
through to our linguistic system whereby western
societies base their language structure and argument
on classical schools.

On reading Plato's dialogues, it is clear that his
argument is pre-determined. It is Plato who carries
the weight, structure and logical theories in his
Republic.

If dialogue involves opposing forces creating something
new; it is not evident in the dialogues of the

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Republic. Plato certainly enlightens others through
this process, but I do not believe he himself has
been enlightened.

Paulo Freire in Pedagogy of the Oppressed deals with
the meaning and function of the word dialogue. Given
these definitions the validity of Plato's and indeed
all deriving western dialectic systems needs to be
rethought. Friere identifies the word as the very
essence of dialogue. The word in turn is comprised
of dimensions which can be classified as 'action' or
'reflection'. These dimensions must be simultaneously
working together if the word is to function as a true
word.

"Men are not built in silence, but in word, in work,
action-reflection".[3] The sacrifice of either action
or reflection makes dialogue impossible. Friere sees
dialogue as an "encounter between men".[4] He indicates
the necessity of a willingness of both parties to
enter dialogue. And also says that "Dialogue cannot
be reduced to one persons' depositing of ideas to be
consumed by the participants in the discussion".[5]
When Freire refers to this "depositing" of ideas
we need look no further than Plato's dialogues to
see this in action. These dialogues do not show an
encounter between men mediated by the world in order
to name the world. Instead they portray an image
of a man with pre-determined ideas "depositing" in a
logical manner these ideas on others.

The adoption of a method of dialogue similar to that
used by Plato dominates society on a broad scale,
i.e. Government, world politics, institutions and
also on a more personal level, through interpersonal
interaction.

Edward de Bono deals with these issues in <u>Conflicts</u>.
He stresses the dangers of the dialectic system as
a means of solving conflicts. Placing the argument
made in a historical context he explains how the
method which dates back to the Socratic Dialogue,
was refined by the Church thinkers of the middle
ages.[6] The Church set the tone for western thinking,
culture and education and so the "argument" tradition
was solidly embedded. It is easy to comprehend how
the dialectic system which now has firm roots in
western society, cannot alone resolve conflicts in
interpersonal interaction and in the wider social
sphere. Dialogue in its finest state is based on the
assumption that two or more parties come together
with varying or conflicting viewpoints. Through logic
and rationale each view is deciphered, defended and
sometimes destroyed in order to determine the real
"truth". The merging of viewpoints in order to
combine the best in both is perhaps the most ideal
situation. Sadly because of the clashing nature of our
dialectic system this is an unusual occurrence. Because
of ego, tunnel vision, lack of perceptual skills,
inflexible thinking and so forth, the dialogue more
often becomes a "simple trial and strength idiom".[7]
De Bono makes the point that in argument of this kind
neither side makes an attempt to develop an idea
different from the two that are clashing. The creative
and critical skills are not utilized in improving their
idea but in securing the defeat of the opposing idea.
The idea which triumphs in the end is the stronger
one but not necessarily the better idea.

Peter Sloterdijk in his <u>Critique of Cynical Reason</u>
recognizes this pitfall in the dialogue of the
Enlightenment when "everything but truth is at stake".[8]

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The dialogue which on the one hand points towards
new knowledge and truth, fails miserably because
of "hegemonic positions, class interests, established
doctrines, desires, passions and the defence of
identities".[9] Sloterdijk also suggests that "these
impediments so strongly remould the dialogue of
enlightenment that it would be more appropriate to
talk of a war of consciousness than a dialogue of
peace".[10]

The dialectic mode is rooted in a firm tradition and
its limitations in distinguishing truth from error
are not uniquely a twentieth century occurrence. I
do believe however, that the limitations of this
approach present a specific uniqueness to our century,
particularly the post-modern culture. My belief is
based on two positions. The first being that as
today's society has become more "mass orientated"
than ever, this has led to the destruction of the
individual in many areas of social experience. Advance-
ments in technology have improved more rapidly in the
latter half of this century than ever before. As
machine quickly becomes "man" in the age of computers,
so too does man become men, in the expansion of
production lines. The post-modernist school of thinking
in philosophical and psychological terms points towards
the demise of the self. Freud's theory of the "I"
and "Ego" has now been displaced. The "I" or the
"Self" is now recognized as having no fixed state,
being constantly altered by any experience.

This is also reflected in poast-modern art where
the "self" is unimportant and subjective images no
longer seem to validate an expression of "being".

Cindy Sherman juggles with this notion in her
contemporary photos and filmstills. Both the
content of her work and the media through which
it is presented reflects the self as displaced in
the impersonal society in which she works. The
question of self identity and the struggle of the
self is evident as she poses for all her own
photographs, assuming the role of other characters
yet never revealing her own. We are left with the
tantalizing question, who is Cindy Sherman?

The main point I would like to make here is that the
"self" must struggle in today's society to remain
autonomous. The individual in fear of losing identity
must become a defender of his position, which is
already under threat. The defence of identity here
forces the individual into a defensive mode of dialogue.
The guard is always raised. The individual must
maintain a guaranteed space in order to survive the
system. Dialectics become now more than ever a
"simple trial and strength idiom", whereby the
individual's strength lies not in the capacity to
formulate new ideas, but to cling desperately to old ones.

The second limitation of our present dialectical system
which merits urgent attention must be that of the "veil"
which shrouds the inadequacy of the system. The
illusion of equivalent exchange of ideas is created
by our "democratic" societies. Where issues of
equality were once black and white, they are now hidden
in a network of dialectics. The French Revolution
constituted a disintegration of the bourgeois ruling
class and liberation of the French peasants. It
would today be unthinkable to imagine another of
its kind. Yet were the workers really liberated?
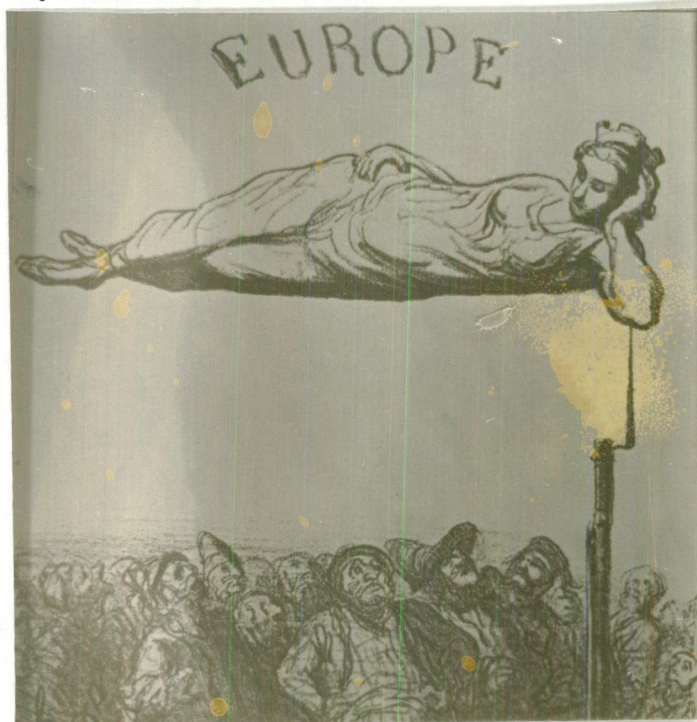Certainly the Bourgeois are still the ruling class.
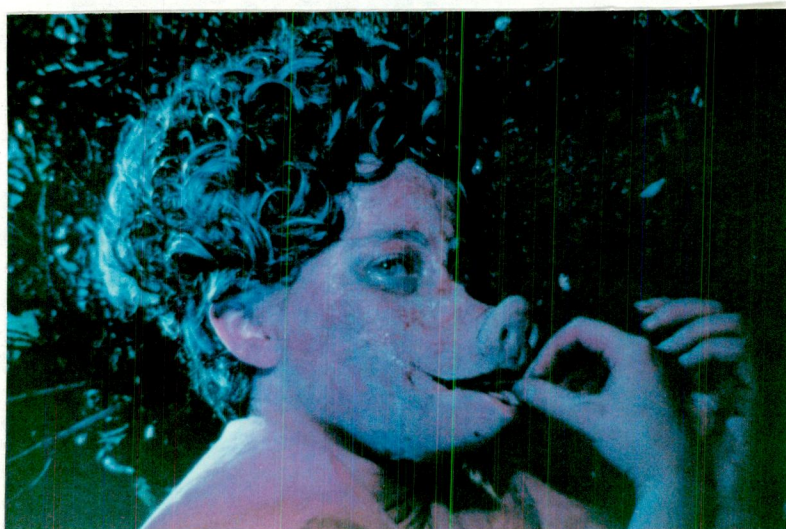
1. Cindy Sherman, Untitled, 1985.

2.   "Pardon me - let's try it my way first."
     By Honore Daumier (1808-1879)

3.   The New Aerodynamics
     by Honore Daumier

Ernst Fischer recognizes the position of the ruling
class when he says, "The defenders of the bourgeois
world do not speak today of its capitalist content
but of its democratic form, though this form is
cracking at every joint".[11]

Through localized government, voting systems, and
access to "information" via the media, the "masses"
now have a dialectic relationship with those in
controlling positions in society, this is in effect
a democracy. The "dialectic" approach to
governing societies is more civilized and in some
ways more flexible than that of dictatorship.
However, it does not follow that "dialectics" through
democratic government is an adequate system. We are
led to assume that a "dialectic" approach to governing
societies, considers the voice and works in the best
interests of the "masses". This is clearly not the
case, but merely an illusion created by the nature
of "dialectics" which is in essence concerned with
distinguishing truth from error.

At this point I found it necessary to research a
system where opposite modes of thought harmonize rather
than conflict. This led me to the ancient Japanese
culture where for centuries the feudal society
maintained opposing systems of thought within one
culture,without the conflicting dialectics that are
the brainchild of western society. The essence of
Japanese religion may be found in the interaction of
two kinds of belief systems; a folk or "little
tradition" that is based on blood or close community
ties and a "great" tradition originally introduced
from outside Japan that is adopted by individual or
group choice. Shinto, the traditional religion was

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joined by Confucianism, after the Japanese came into
contact with Chinese learning at the beginning of the
fifth century. For a long time these separate disciplines
worked side by side. Instead of the defence idiom a
dominant part of Western thinking, these separate
disciplines borrowed freely from each other, constantly
re-organizing their own ideas.

De Bono mentions the Japanese system of thought when he
demonstrates the exploration idiom, a more positive
form of solving conflicts. Unlike Western cultures
the Japanese were for a long time a people full of
protocol and respect. Rather than destroying an
opponent's ideas in order to provide more status for
their own, the system was based on an exploration of
ideas to formulate new theories. If this was not
successful the previous theories had not been damaged
and so were still valid to work from.

It is on this form of interaction I have chosen to
based my painting this year. I felt I needed a visual
source to complement these ideas. In this respect I
found the non-violent martial art of Akido which is
deeply rooted in Shintoism, suitable for my purposes.

Through drawing, photography sessions and observation
of Akido sessions in Whitefriar Street, Dublin, I
accumulated valuable resources and inspiration for
my painting. Akido, which is based on the way of
harmony, offers a dynamic, yet graceful flow of
physical interaction between partners. The movements
are based on the blending of positive and negative ki
(vital energy); practitioners of Akido attempt to
harmonize their ki, with both that of their partner
and that of the larger environment.

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Akido exists on two levels, the lower being a
harmony of the three functions of the body, mind
and kokyu (life breath of the cosmos), and then
a blending of movements with partners. The higher
level is a way to become one with nature to function
in harmony with the Universe.[12]

I have attempted to translate the principles of
physical and mental interaction that exist in
Akido into my paintings this year, concentrating on
the interdependence of humans in order to become one
with their surroundings.

4.   Photograph taken in Aikido session
Whitefriar Street, Dublin, 1991.

FOOTNOTES

1   Plato, <u>The Republic</u>, Book II, Pneguin Books Ltd.,
London, 1974.

2   Paulo Freire, <u>Pedagogy of the Oppressed</u>, Penguin
Books Ltd., Middlesex, England, 1972, p.61.

3   Ibid., p.60.

4   Ibid., p.61.

5   Edward de Bono, <u>Conflicts</u>, Penguin Books Ltd.,
Middlesex, 1986, p.9.

6   Ibid., p.9.

7   Peter Sloterdijk, <u>Critique of Cynical Reason</u>,
p.14, Verso, New York, 1988.

8   Ibid.

9   Ibid.

10   Ernst Fischer, <u>The Necessity of Art</u>, Pelican Books,
London, 1963, p.129.

11   John Stevens, <u>Akido/The Way of Harmony</u>, Shambhala
Publications, Boston, 1984, pp.23/24.

II.   THE ABSTRACT IMAGE, A VEHICLE FOR
INTERPERSONAL INTERACTION

>   Migrating billiard balls cannot pass
>   through one another; encounter means
>   displacement. But migrating waves from
>   different centres (as on the surface of
>   the pond) can pass through one another
>   without conflict, adding to one another
>   as they pass. And ordinarily, two gases
>   released into the same closed space, will
>   expand through one another until each
>   fills the entire space. In the physical
>   world there are examples of "interpene-
>   tration". Is it conceivable that political
>   expansions might also interpenetrate like
>   waves, rather than collide like billiard
>   balls.[1]

>   (William Ernest Hocking)

Could this "interpenetration" exist in human beings?
Artistic licence has allowed me to create such a
state, through the visual image. There are some
who would class this as naive idealism. I disagree.
Although conflict thinking is inevitable, since we
cannot truly perceive from a perceptual set at
variance with our own. The method through which we
approach conflicts in thinking could and needs to be
rectified. Indeed opposite forces form the dynamic
equilibrium of the Universe and all it encompasses.
Only when these opposites stand side by side, can we
envision their powerful effect. The effect need not
be one of collision like "billiard balls". In colour
we can achieve a harmonious and complementary state
by placing contrasting colours in juxtaposition.
Consider the dynamic life, green, ordinarily a
neutral colour, takes on when viewed beside red its
contrasting opponent. The "Ying Yang" an ancient

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Chinese symbol is based on the interdependence of opposites to create harmony. Through light-dark contrast and alternation of shape, the black and white motif proved to be a totally harmonious and balanced one.

In my painting this year I have aimed to create a state of dynamic harmony, deriving from the principles of contrast. The final piece has been developed to convey a number of ideas to the viewer. I see my painting not as a static entity, but one of fluctuating forms and colours, to convey the diversity of human interaction. "Our experience of another person, for example, no matter how close he stands to us, can never be complete so that we have a logical right to a total evaluation of him, all evaluations are premature and are bound to be"[2] (Nietzsche).

My painting deals with two figures in interaction. By stripping the figures of their representational forms, through abstraction, I have hoped also to strip the viewer of any preconceptions or premature evaluations of the figure and what they perceive it to be. To remind the viewer of the fundamental physicality of human interaction, I have incorporated some elements of representation in my painting. By placing them in an obscure context within the picture space, the figurative presence is evident yet indefinable as a concrete entity.

The composition is made up of two interacting triangles which symbolize and incorporate two figures in motion. The triangles are imperfect, declaring the imperfection of the human condition. My aim here was to parallel

the intangibility of a "true" isoceles triangle in
geometry, with that of an intangible state of
perfection, which man struggles to achieve in
society. Although the triangles are used as the
actual framework within which my painting has been
made, the triangular idea has come from an old
principle used by many artists through the ages.
Kandinsky speaks of Raphael's "Holy Family" when
he examines the triangular composition, used only for
"harmonizing of the group and without any mystical
motive".[3] Cezanne in "Bathing Women", pushed the
boundaries of triangular composition when he consciously
distorted the human figure in order to follow the
lines of the triangle. Each human limb grows narrower
from bottom to top, paralleling the broad base and
narrow apex of a triangle.

My use of the triangle as a compositionary device is
based on its spiritual and harmonizing effect within
the picture space. The triangular shape corresponds
with the principles of movement in Akido, whereby
the "black" Hakama worn onthe lower half of the body
symbolizes the root with firm foundations in the
earth. The base of the triangle possesses a weighted
structure that is inevitably drawn towards the earth.
The "white" kiegogi worn on the top half of the body
symbolizes the supple, flowing aspect of the figure.
The apex of a triangle also possesses this lightweight
supple character. The two triangles set obliquely on
their sides fuse together in order to achieve a
cycle of constant motion. The irregular shape made
by the "interpenetration" of the two triangles
becomes the new picture in which the figures must
interact.

13. Raphael, Holy Family with Saints
Elizabeth and John, 1506.

14. Cezanne, The Large Bathers, 1906.

This interaction is described through the ineerplay
of form and colour on the surface of the picture
space. By reducing the visual image to the basic
elements of line, shape and colour, I felt I could
somehow reconstruct the figures to suggest maximum
diversity of interaction. The blue background against
which these various forms and colours interact has
a dual purpose. By using blue, a cold receding colour,
I have suggested distance. This device can be seen
in the blue backgrounds of many medieval paintings,
where distance has been created in a different way
from the usual laws of perspective. I have also
suggested a spiritual or internal depth, recalling
Kandinsky's suggestion "The power of profound meaning
is found in blue, and first in its physical movement(I)
of retreat from the spectator(2) of turning in upon its
own centre".[4] This painting is a result of much
research undertaken during the course of this year.
I also made two other paintings dealing with
isolated figures. I have considered these as preliminary
steps towards abstraction of the figure and will be
discussed as such, later in this chapter.

I began my research by first applying myself to the
study of the figure. In my early drawings I chose to
depict the figure from unusual and sometimes obscure
angles. This was to rid myself of any preconceptions
of what a figure actually looks like. As too often
seeing becomes recognition I felt the need to suggest
an infinity of figurative movements, by choosing
poses that I had never encountered before. These
drawings sometimes took the shape of the figure in
extreme foreshortening. I also carried out a number
of action drawings, where the figure was in constant

motion. These quick sketches were mainly carried out
in an Akido session. Photographin- Akido sessions
also proved to be invaluable, as these frozen movements
were a source for my painting later in the year.

At this point I began to consider abstracting the
figure, in order to capture the essence and infinity
of movement in a single painting. Movement or "motion"
has been an ongoing concern in art since the early
twentieth century. Picasso's multiple images emerged
through the combination of various viewpoints until
the final image was scarcely recognizable.   Marcel
Duchamp's ready made of a bicycle wheel took motion
in art one step further, when the stationary wheel
evoked recollections of motion rather than portraying
movement itself. I found myself drawn towards the
approach of Louis le Brocquy where his portraits display
the essence of time and motion through the multiple
image technique. His "accidental" marks and brush-
strokes convey in a subtle manner the restructuring
of human forms throughout time and experience. Le
Brocquy's portraits suggest the "magic Box" in which
the inner spirit or soul is emerging.[5]

In order to communicate my ideas through an abstract
form I began to explore the possibilities of conveying
a message through the use of the basic art elements;
line, shape and colour. Colour became a crucial area
in my research because of the immediacy of its effect.
Colour also suited my purposes because of its
"interdependent" nature. The figure is not a static
entity and depends on "others" and the environment to
form a "whole". Our experience of colours in the
environment is never that of a colour in isolation.
Theinteraction of unlimited organizations provides us

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5. Figure in extreme foreshortening, Author's work.

6. Early abstraction of the figure, Author's work.

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7. Line drawing of the figure, Author's work.

8. Line and colour drawing to Music, Author's work.

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with our experience of colour. In this respect
colour could now assume the role of the figure in my
paintings. At this stage I carried out numerous
colour studies based on Itten's seven colour contrasts,
and also his theories on objective nad subjective
colour.[6] In order to discover the true character
of colour I made these studies as objective as
possible. The ideas of Joseph Albers also influenced
my colour studies. In his statement, "every perception
of colour is an illusion.... we do not see colours as
they really are. In our perception they alter one
another",[7] I found a parallel with our perceptions of
others, where we can never achieve a true perception
of another human being.

At this point I began counteracting this somewhat
theoretical approach to colour by producing free
flowing colour and line drawings to music. The
association between music and art intrigued me. The
lyrical quality of music suggests and is produced by
motion, through the passing of time. Art also struggles
to possess this quality of lyrical movement, the
strong correlation between music and colour, where both
have the power to evoke response and emotion.
Kendinsky sights this connection when he suggests
that "colour is the keyboard,the eyes are the hammers,
the soul is the piano with many strings. The artist
is the hand which plays, touching one key or another
purposely to cause vibrations in the soul".[8] Through
this process of drawing to music I hoped to maintain
a fresh and spontaneous approach in my paintings.

Line became a prominent feature in my research at
this point. Where previously my lines had been hard
edged and angular, I began to substitute these with

free flowing lines based on the calligraphic letter.
Where the Chinese character is always written in an
imaginary square, mostly a ninefold structure, I
examined how each part of the character touches
one of the nine squares, achieving balanced
asymmetry. This made me more aware of linear
qualities and also manipulation of space in order to
achieve compositional harmony.

The transformation from the representational to
the abstract image proved to be an exciting challenge
for me. In my work previous to this the subject seemed
to take precedence over the fundamental techniques
and aesthetics of painting.

This year I have worked towards a process of abstraction
whereby my painting has not become devoid of subject
matter but has instead enclosed the subject within the
basic elements of line, shape and colour. By exploring
these basic elements as languages in themselves, I
have in turn gained a greater understanding of the
language of vision. By seeing these as separate yet
interdependent entities I have attempted to construct
a combination of colour and form that would convey
a dynamic yet harmonios relationship that can be
found in the movements of Aikido.

9.   Figure Abstracted (1)   Author's work.

10. Figure Abstracted (stage 2) Author's work.

FOOTNOTES

1   Gyorgy Kepes, <u>The Language of Vision</u>, Paul Theobalt,
Chicago, 1944, p.77.

2   Friedrich Nietzsche, <u>Human: All Too Human</u>,
Cambridge University Press, 1986, p.28.

3   Wassily Kandinsky, <u>Concerning the Spiritual in Art</u>,
Dover Publication Inc., New York, 1977, p.31.

4   Ibid. p.38.

5   Kernel Gallery, <u>Louis le Broquy</u>, Exhibition
Catalogue, February, 1991.

6   From Ittens, <u>Basic Elements of Colour</u>, Thames
and Hudson, 1973.

7   Joseph Albers, <u>Interaction of Colour</u>, Yale
University Press, New Haven, 1975.

8   Kandinsky, <u>Concerning the Spiritual in Art</u>, p.25.

III. ABSTRACT ART AND ARTISTS;
INSPIRATION FROM PAST TO PRESENT

Because of the nature of my personal project which is
based on the abstract, I researched the major cultures
where expression has taken place in an abstract form.
Some of the earliest surviving works of art demonstrate
the used abstract symbols, most notably those of the
Aztec, Aborigine, Arabian and European Megalithic
cultures. The legendary art of the Aztecs of Mexico
as they are more generally called, boasts a richness in
its abstract decoration. Such art was not meant for
public consumption, but for a few initiates, priests
and gods who understood the symbols and could decipher
the abstractions. The art of the Aborigine people
depended for centuries on an intricate abstract
language, where much of the culture's storytelling has
taken place through the visual image. Our own passage
graves in New Grange, Ireland which date back to 2500
B.C. display spirals, zig zags, circles and lozenges
amongst the many abstract symbols carved into the
tombstones for decorative purposes.

Since thise earlier period however, abstraction was
not a key factor in Western art works until the end
of the nineteenth century, although other cultures
have continued to use this form of expression. The
Aborigine culture has continued to use the ancient
abstract symbols in most of their art work. These
symbols convey a timeless network of stories and
religious beliefs which represent the spiritual
tradition of the Aborigine people. Although Western
art through the ages has largely been concerned with
the representational, abstract qualities are apparent
in the paintings of many of the so-called great

masters. Johannes Itten in <u>Design and Form</u>, explains
how his students studied these paintings for their
abstract qualities. Indeed the same compositional
devices used by these artists have been carried
through to the present day. The triangle which was
used frequently by Raphael, Fra-Angelico and many
others as a harmonizing device, whereby groups of
figures were arranged in a triangular format, can
still be seen today in the non-figurative works of
Albert Irvin.[1] The same principal of compositional
harmony can be applied to Irvin's paintings, where
the triangular play on form and colour provides the
basis of the composition.

Although El Greco was essentially representational
in his approach to painting, he painted using large
expressive colour areas which cease to represent
local colours but are abstract, matching the physical
expressive elements of the theme. Turner further
exploited the abstract quality of colour to convey
intense feeling and emotional turbulance in his
paintings. In his painting rain, steam, speed,
he abstracted representational forms and colours in
order to heighten the expressive element of the theme.

It was not until the early years of the twentieth
century, however, that a conscious break from
representation towards a fully abstract image was
sighted. As Donal Kuspit says, "The enlightened
experimentalism of the emergent abstract art, was
a complex response to the new analytic and
technological dynamic that at the beginning of the
20th century began to pervade".[2] One such artist
to emerge, amidst this development of abstract art
was Wassily Kandinsky, whose work I avidly admire.
Kandinsky has been a great influence on my work this

11. Entrance stone motifs at
    New Grange passage grave (2500 B.C.)
    - Irish megalithic art

12. Aborigine art, Michael Nelson Tjakamarra,
    Possum Dreaming, 1985

year, for a number of reasons. Firstly, because
of his pioneering role in the freeing of art from its
traditional bonds to "material reality". As Werner
Haftmann stated "The Russian, Wassily Kandinsky,
proclaimed another fundamental insight, that creative
man is able to report on the world and on life without
having to rely on physical appearances. This approach
to reality was the essence of abstract painting".[3]
According to Kandinsky as long as art possessed "soul"
there was nothing to prevent ie being abstract.[4]
Through the publication of On the Spiritual in Art[4]
and Blaue Reiter Almanac[5] Kandinsky offered numerous
theories justifying abstract art. Much of my work
embodies these theories whereby I attempt to convey
the essence or the "soul" through my paintings.
Kandinsky suggests that through colour and form the
artist can have a direct influence on the world. This
was not a new discovery, indeed artists for generations
have been working towards this condition. Perhaps the
conscious effort Kandinsky to exert such influences,
without the facade of representational images makes him
more powerful in his attempt.

In considering pictorial form Kandinsky maintains
that there were two issues to bear in mind; the
composition of the whole picture and the creation of
individual forms within it, which relate to each other
in various combinations, yet remain an integral part
of the whole.[6] Kandinsky's paintings demonstrate
this, where fields of energetic forms provide a
network for a singular picture space. Kandinsky's
first consciously abstract water colour which was
painted in 1910 shows patches of colour placed in
dynamic juxtaposition without an attempt at figuration.
In his "Composition VI" (1913) the colours and forms
take on a more turbulent and expressive role. The effect

15. Kandinsky, Composition VI, 1913.

16. Kandinsky, Composition 224, 1920.
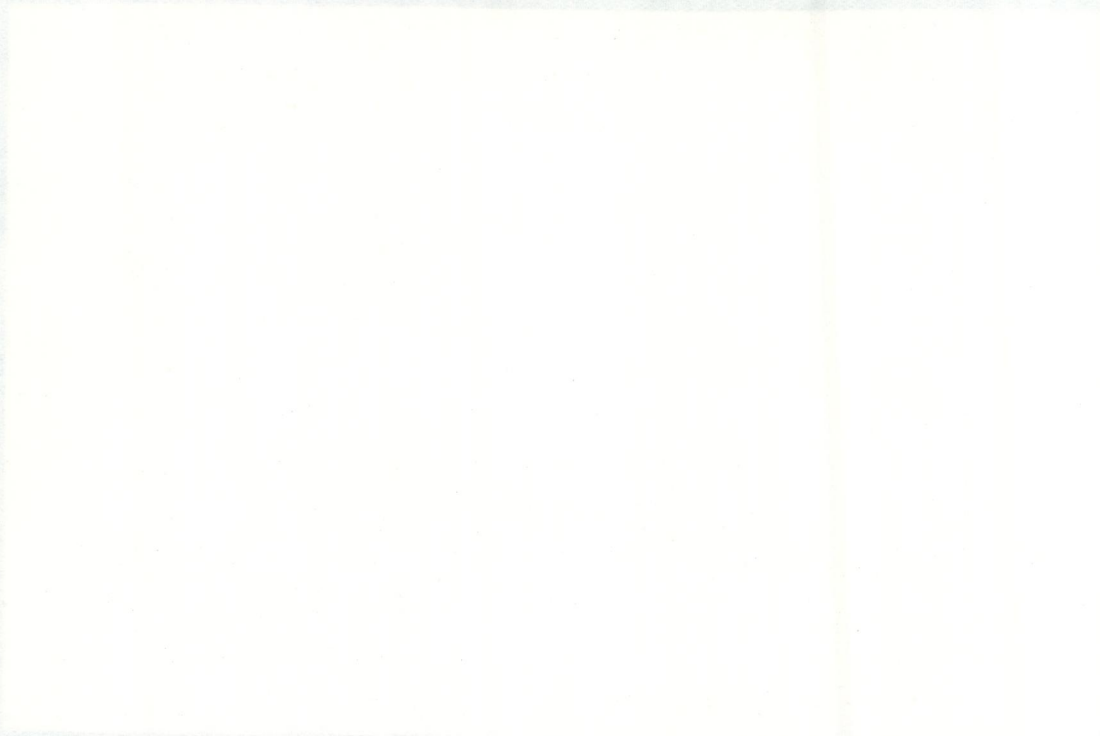
is of an intense orchestral piece where the most
powerful instruments are blaring in conjunction with
those softest in tone. The relationship between
music and art which was of utmost importance to Kandinsky
is clearly evident. The forms take on a lyrical
quality, bouncing passionately across the picture
space.

Felim Egan utilizes Kandinsky's theories in his
lyrical abstractions. His works are based on
modifications of Kandinsky's ideas on art and music.
Egan, a purely formal artist, freely interprets the
natureof musical distributions within his work.
This musical relationship is further enhanced as he
is a practising musician. Egan's themes in art are
closely related to the traditional Irish music that
he plays. Through ancient Irish signs and symbols,
most notably the "spiral", his work conveys a strong
aura of Irish tradition. In my own work I have borrowed
freely from the ancient cultures, through my use of
abstract symbols and the immediacy of my mark marking
on the board. The archaic or ancient symbol has
always been of much concern in the reading and
production of art work perhaps most prominently in the
work and ideas of the abstract expressionists in the
mid-1900's. In searching for the hidden meaning of
life, the return to archaic symbols became an evident
route through which a timeless state of art could be
identified. Wendel Wilkie in Come World suggested that
"Since art is timeless the significant, retention of
a symbol no matter how archaic, has as full a
validity today as the archaic symbol had then, or is
the one 3,000 years old truer?"[7]

Another important influence on my work this year
has been Albert Irvin, who has kept the spirit of
abstract expressionism alive, through the dynamic
energy displayed in his work.[8] Irvin enjoys painting
and makes no attempt to hide the pleasure he gains
from it. His approach is spontaneous, drips, dabs
and splashes enhance this air of freshness, yet
Irvin still maintains a solid structure in his
compositions. Water colour, oil, acrylic and the Print
process form the basis of his working media. This
flexibility has enabled him to accumulate valuable
techniques and disciplines for his art work. In print-
making the sequential approach demanded by the screen
has made him aware of the possibilities of layered
spatial devices and colour. This layering approach and
interaction of form and colour, within the rectangular
picture frame produces an intensity of actions and
drama. The drama is further heightened by unexpected
colour relationships. This sense of pushing paint
to its limits, appeals greatly to me, this is why I
find Irvin's work so intriguing.

Paintings such as "Blue Anchor" and "Sandymount"
display the use of solid circular forms rising across
the front of the canvas. The effect, on interaction
with background lines and planes, produces tension,
a key element in Irvin's paintings. His approach to
colour is one of confidence, colour speaks for Irvin.
Through vibrant and sometimes jarring colour relation-
ships, he evokes gut response, but also leaves room for
contemplation. In my work I have tried to evoke
similar responses through colour and have been greatly
inspired by Irvin's work throughout this year.

In order to obtain a more comprehensive understanding
of colour however I chose to return to the theories
of Johannes Itten who maintained the need for a
balance between the objective and subjective, in
order to maximize the character of colour. When
Itten speaks of subjective timbre in "The element of
colour" he warns of the dangers of producing colour
combinations based solely on personal taste.[9] Certain
objective rules must be adhered to in order to
communicate through colour. Itten's colour theories
which examine the various colour relationships and
universal colour rules have been a key factor in my
research this year. In describing the seven main colour
contrast principles Ittem sets a base from which various
colour combinations can be worked.

I have incorporated the cold/warm contrast in my
painting through the juxtaposition of hot and cool
tones to convey depth. I have also employed
complementary contrasts and contrasts of extension
in my work. Itten describes the basic principles of
colour but does not see these as an end in themselves.
"Just so a painter may know all the resources of
form and colour, yet remain sterile if inspiration
be denied him".[10]

This I feel is relevant not only to my own work but
to that of students in the art class. As a prospective
teacher, I feel students need to acquire a basic
working knowledge of certain rules and principles, in
order to facilitate expression. This knowledge should
be treated as a foundation for more exploratory work
of a more creative nature. My approach to the
teaching of art history is similar to the method used
by Itten where his students were encouraged to receive

17.   Albert Irvin's Blue Anchor, 1989

18.   Albert Irvin, Sandymount, 1987.

artistic images in an analytical way. Although a
sociological understanding of an art image is necessary,
it is not the only means through which the image can
be viewed. To develop the perceptual skills of the
student, they must be actively engaged in the process
of "looking". This entails, for example, analysing
of art works for their compositional values, spatial
relationships, and abstract qualities. Indeed, the
discussing of art works in this manner allows
flexibility in viewpoints and inevitably in thinking.
I agree with Itten who has stated, "Teaching with
enthusiasm is the opposite of a merely methodical
approach". Itten has also stated that, "respect
for the human being is the beginning and end of all
education."[11] This leads me to my next chapter which
deals with this point through the examination of
pupil-teacher relationships in the light of our
western "dialectic" systems.

FOOTNOTES

1   Albert Irvin, Sutherland Catalogue, 1985.

2   Donal Kuspit "Back to the Future", Art Forum
    International, Publisher Anthony Korner, September,
    1985.

3   Werner Haftmann, German Art of the Twentieth
    Century, Yale University Press, 1968, p.43.

4   Kandinsky, Concerning the Spiritual in Art, p.9.

5   Wassily Kandinsky & Franz Marc, Blave Reiter
    Almanac, Thames and Hudson, London, 1974.

6   Johannes Itten, The Elements of Colour, Yale
    University Press, 1968, p.9.

7   Harold Rosenberg, The Tradition of the New,
    University of Chicago Press, 1982.

8   Albert Irvin, Sutherland Catalogue, 1985.

9   Johannes Itten, The Elements of Colour, Yale
    University Press, 1968, p.9.

10 Ibid., p.7.

IV. DIALECTICS IN EDUCATION

The dialectic mode through which most of our thinking
and communication takes place is rooted in a firm
tradition. The limitations of this system have
inevitably spilled over into our classrooms. This
has many consequences in the school situation. For
the purpose of this dissertation I have found it
necessary to discuss these in two separate categories.
In the second part of this chapter I will be dealing
with its effect on our thinking structure, in the
broader social sphere, and more specifically within
the educational system. This section deals specifically
with its effect, in the light of pupil-teacher inter-
action within the classroom.

A. THE INEVITABILITY OF CONFLICT IN THE CLASSROOM

> There is probably a tendency in us
> all to behave not as unique individuals
> perceiving other unique individuals but
> to perceive others through our perceptual
> set."[1]
>
> (Brophy et al, 1981)

The limitations of a "dialectic" mode of thinking
as used in western society, can be seen throughout
our Educational structure, perhaps more immediately
through teacher-pupil relationships in the class-
room. Docking in his excellent work on management
of pupil behaviour in the classroom, suggests that
too often "classroom relationships that were
intended to be firm but friendly end up in a
cycle of conflict and confrontation."[2]

41.

Citing one reason for this he suggests that
"insufficient attention is paid to the
perceptions and expectations teachers and
pupils have of each other and themselves."[3]
This is perhaps one of the main deficiencies of
the dialectic mode, when it is reduced to what
was previously identified as a "simple trial
and strength idiom". An important factor in
dialogue of this kind is that it is not concerned
with an attempt to perceive a situation from
various viewpoints. Moreover it provokes a situation
where the maintenance of a pre-determined viewpoint
is crucial.

The consequences of this in the classroom are
many. On an interpersonal level this can be seen
through pupil-teacher interaction within the
classroom. An analysis of this interaction clearly
involves a consideration of the ways in which
persons perceive one another. Hargreaves suggests
our interaction is guided by our perceptions and
evaluation of others.[4] This gives us an idea of
how we might behave towards that person. "Most
people are prepared to make interpretations and
inferences on the basis of a very small amount of
material".[5] Teachers' perceptions of pupils
are usually formed at an early stage in the
relationship. Indeed, there are cases where
teachers have a specific perception of students
based only on the relationship with a sibling, e.g.
"Another one of the O'Brien family is starting
next year, he'll be a messer like his brother".
This in effect provides the basis of a pupil-
teacher relationship that can last for up to five
years. For those students who conform to the

teachers' image of an ideal pupil conflicts may not arise. For the many pupils who do not conform to this image the consequences can result in a conflicting relationship that may have a negative effect on the totality of a child's learning progress.

This is because through our evaluation of others we ultimately expect those others to behave as we perceive them. Hargreaves makes the point that "once the person has developed a fairly consistent picture of another he will tend to resist new information which threatens this consistency".[6] This is akin to the defensive position in dialectics whereby, admitting error in judgement threatens the logical structure of an argument and so becomes the "last" resort. The implication of this is that teachers perceptions are closely related to their expectancies of pupils and how they will perform within the classroom. Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) studied the impact of teacher expectations on their pupils. In "Pygmalion in the Classroom" they suggested that pupils who were labelled potential achievers showed significant gains in I.Q. scores and the reasons for these gains was the fact that teachers expected more of them.[7]

Brophy suggests that teachers possess more favourable attitudes to students who are helpful, neat, happy, physcially attractive, socially mature and less likely to daydream. Those students who do not possess these "admirable" qualities, are in danger of a somewhat negative pupil-teacher relationship. This negativity is imposed through the labelling of pupils. Docking deals with this

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issue when emphasising the need for a reprimand
system that does not characterize the pupil in
any way, "verbal devices that comment unfavourably
on the pupil's character may be resented by them
and therefore be counter productive."[8]

Counter productive behaviour in the pupils can
be seen as a reaction to teachers' reprimand systems,
or direct labelling in the class. Another parallel
can be cited here with the dialectic system in the
reactive mode of behaviour as opposed to an
interactive mode, which would be more conducive to
a positive relationship. The students' perception
of the classroom situation is usually at variance
with the teachers. In a recent Irish survey
concerning children's perceptions of teachers
undertaken by Hugh Gash et al., only a small
proportion of the primary school pupils thought
of themselves as being punished justly.[9] This
suggests a discrepancy between pupil-teacher
perceptions as to what type of behaviour actually
merits punishment.

Tattum (1982) found that pupils who were regularly
disruptive in class, were critical of their
teachers who publicly abused them and who lacked
compassion and understanding.[10]

This situation forms a cycle of confrontation
whereby teachers must constantly defend their position
while students try to undermine it. The defensive
mode of the teacher can be seen through the need to
maintain a higher status and the assertion of
control over the students. The authority to punish
deviant students in an appropriate manner is a

direct result of this. A more subtle example being
the second name basis through which the student
must address the teacher. Pupils, at the same time
try to undermine the teacher (that is, those who do
not passively accept the situation) through deviant
behaviour, outsmarting the teacher, ganging up
against the teacher and so on. I do not suggest
that this forms the basis of all teacher-pupil
relationships, although in some cases it does.
During my teaching practice last year in a
V.E.C. school in the Dublin area, I found that
pupil-teacher relationships were generally of a
conflicting nature. The students and teachers
in some cases had little or no respect for each
other, leading to a relationship that hindered
much of the learning taking place. It is hardly
surprising that in conditions like this, students
who were perhaps encouraged to leave school before
or immediately after their Intermediate Certificate
by their families, made life a lot easier for
all concerned.

It could be said that the pupil-teacher conflict
has become more equal in the last few decades.
The traditional idea of a teacher, as a strict
authoritarian figure, exerting powerful control
over pupils, has been largely replaced. Teachers
today find themselves with less power in the class,
and as Hugh Gash suggests, "Perhaps one can say
the stories of sadistic teachers have been replaced
by sadistic and cruel children."[12] Barry (1986)
has pointed out the increasing difficulty of the
teacher, those who choose their profession because
they believed it would provide them with job
satisfaction are perturbed because children now
have so many problems that it is hard to do the
job in a satisfying way.

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Changes that have been made in the quality of
teacher-pupil relationships over the last few
decades, owe much to those who, from the beginning
of this century, began to question the traditional
view of education. John Dewey, influenced by
the writings of Rousseau, was in the early 1900's
redefining our conception of the child and the
conditions that would educate him. This created
a shift towards a child-centred education, whereby
the child was seen as an active agent and not a
mere recipient of instruction. The child could no
longer be viewed as an empty vessel that needed
to be filled.[13]

Piaget's cognitive viewpoint of learning holds
that if we are to understand learning we cannot
confine ourselves to observable behaviour,but
must also concern ourselves with the learners
ability to re-organise his psychological field.
In this approach, the learner is seen as not the
somewhat mechanical product of his environment
but as an active agent in the learning process,
deliberately trying to process and categorise
the stream of information he receives. Bruner
reinforced this concept through the advocation
of "discovery learning" whereby the pupils take
responsibility for their own learning, through
exploration, and problem solving. An important
factor in learning of this kind is that the
students seek to find their own solutions to
problems, as opposed to passively accepting all
information available to them.[15]   Kohl in the
late 1960's developed the theory of "open
learning", which again relinquished the control
of the teacher, producing an active and inquiry
centred learning environment.[14]

The later development of a collaborative mode of
learning involved a free and active exploration of
knowledge. Collaborative classroom modes are
rooted in a view of learning which rejects the
passive role assigned to the pupils by traditional
learning. Perhaps the most crucial aspect of this
learning procedure is the emphasis on classroom
communication. Torode (1977) says that classroom
communication if it is to be effective, must
depend on mutual understanding, otherwise, teachers
messages are not received as intended, nor as
Driver (1982), shows are pupils messages understood
by teachers.[15]

Unfortunately, change is a slow process and many
of our Irish schools are still rooted in an
academic mode of teaching, where students are not
in control of their own learning. The examination
system reinforces this, by focussing on the students
ability to record specific information and facts
that sometimes have no relevance to the students
particular interests, in or outside of the classroom
context. These restrictions placed on the childs
learning inevitably lead to a conflicting relation-
ship between the educators and those who are being
educated.

Hargreaves in citing various impediments that lead
to conflicting relationships in the classroom,
suggests that whilst most ineractions are entered
into freely by the participants, for pupils this
is not the case. The child is obliged by law to
attend school up until the age of sixteen. There
is also the enormous power differential between the
two participants. In classrooms teachers are

permitted to, and frequently do, make all the
decisions affecting the child's behaviour. The
teacher's power derives from several sources,
adult status, traditional authority as a teacher,
legal authority and expertise on subject matter.[16]

This is akin to Freire's concept of Banking
Education, which maintains and even stimulates
student-teacher contradiction mirroring oppressive
society as a whole. Freire makes the point that
"Education must begin with the solution of the
teacher-student contradiction".[17] The Banking
Concept of education does not allow for this as
it is rooted in the dialectic mode, which regards
men as "adaptable manageable beings".[18] For
Freire, true dialogue is the beginning and end
of all education. This means the active engage-
ment of teacher and pupil in dialogue which
stimulates an inquiry on behalf of mankind. Both
participants must be equally engaged in the
learning process, leading to an equal relationship.

It would be fair to say that Freire's true
dialogue could not exist under our present
educational system, and the dialectic mode through
which it functions. The many imbalances in pupil-
teacher status, authority, and degree of flexibility
create the first seeds of a conflicting relation-
ship. This conflict is further maintained by
the behavioural tactics of both participants.
within the classroom.

I have found in my research however, that the
teacher can do much to aleviate these conflicts,
and establish conditions that are conducive to

co-operative behaviour, and positive relationships
with pupils. Docking suggests that such a teacher
"employs skills and tactics that forestall possible
disruption and prevent the occurrence of incidents
that attract reprimand and punishment."[19] This
involves a "prevention rather than cure" method
of dealing with conflicts.[20] A flexible approach
to teaching is also necessary to maintain a good
relationship with all the pupils in the classroom.
This is especially true in the case of divergent
thinkers, for whom the educational system seldom
caters for.

Perhaps the most important quality of the teacher,
as I have found during my research, is the ability
to receive students as individuals, with unique
perceptions, personalities and learning habits.
This results in respect for the student, which
in turn generates respect for the teacher also.
I have been aware of this during my teaching practise
this year, and have seen my role as a teacher as a
facilitator of learning, providing space for the
students to develop their own solutions to problems.
In essence, I have facilitated the students in
thinking for themselves. This is crucial in today's
society where much of the thinking done tends to
be mass orientated, directed by the media, large
scale institutions, governments, etc.

My next chapter section deals more thoroughly
with this issue, specifying the need for critical
thinking in education.

B.   CRITICAL THINKING IN ART EDUCATION

The increasing complexity of society imposes on
man an urgent task of deciphering and indeed
coping with "post modern reality". As the
influence of the New World Order diminishes
the status of the individual, the individual
is in danger of having his thinking done for him.
The structure of the Super Powers is changing not
only in the shift of location but also in the degree
of control. This creates an urgency in the individual
to remain autonomous in a society that threatens to
engulf his or her very existence. As the media,
a reflection of world power invades the privacy
of people's thoughts through propaganda and the
falsification of reality, the old saying, "nothing
is sacred" becomes a very apt one. This same
society however, places a demand on the individual
to make many complex decisions in order to survive
the obstacle course of life in general.

This places the individual under pressure, having
to cope on the one hand with powerlessness in
decision making and thinking, since Governments,
institutions and organized systems of power now
have this responsibility; while on the other hand,
the individual also has to cope with much complex
decision-making of an immediate nature. Both
situations ultimately involve thinking. The
latter I believe is firmly rooted in the rational
and logical, and as a consequence of this in the
dialectic system, whereby logical decision-making
is encouraged in order to maintain a grip on the
present and conform to society. Decision
making of a more critical and in-depth nature is

taken away from the individual. In short,
I think society encourages thinking to an
extent where it can be used as a means of
survival; thinking for the immediate future.
But conceptual thinking, that of a critical and
creative nature is not encouraged. Perhaps
the most obvious place to see the lack of
critical thinking in action is in our
educational system, which is after all, a reflection
and even reproduction of society.

The position is somewhat akin to Maslow's theory
of motivation where he identifies a hierarchy of
human needs.[21] These can be summarized into two
categories: deficiency needs and growth needs.
Where the individual seeks to get rid of deficiency
needs, he seeks the fulfilment of growth needs.
In this hierarchy, physiological needs are lowest
in ranking order, aesthetic needs are in turn the
highest. In education Ifeel too much emphasis is
placed on the deficiency needs of the individual,
with regard to thinking skills, leading to neglect
of the growth needs. It could be said that the
deficiency needs require to be overcome before
growth needs can be actualized, this would be
correct. But the true value of education cannot
be utilized, when only the deficiency needs of the
individual are catered for. The result of this
is that our educational system caters for and
promotes convergent thinkers in the classroom.
Divergent thinking is seen as a rebellious threat
to the educational system and society as a whole.
The critical and creative nature of a divergent
thinker finds it difficult to conform to the
pre-determined rules of the educational structure

and so is identified as a student with an
attitude problem.

Paulo Freire suggests that true dialogue cannot
exist unless it involves critical thinking. He
identifies the contrast between "critical" and
"naive" thinking which sees "historical time as
a weight, a stratification of acquisitions and
experiences of the past; from which the present
should emerge normalized and well behaved."[22]
For the critical thinker the important thing is
the "continuing humanization of men."[23]
He also says that "Only dialogue, which requires
critical thinking is also capable of generating
critical thinking."[24] Unfortunately, in education
the "naive" thinker is well suited to classroom
learning because of his conforming nature. The
"critical" thinker on the other hand threatens the
conformist system in which he must play a part.

Edward de Bono, in Teaching Thinking, demonstrates
the need for critical thinking in students today.
De Bono blames our inefficiency in thinking, on
the Western dialectic mode through which most of
our thinking is done. "Our whole system of adversary
thinking in politics, in the courts, in school
debates is based on the logical support of a
position. It is assumed that if a position is
logically supportable then it must be right,
unfortunately, it is possible to have mutually
contradictory positions, each of which is logically
supportable if the value system and perceptions
are different."[25] He also outlines several
errors in our thinking structure and suggests
that these are all based on inadequacies of

perception. He warns of the dangers of confusing
perception with knowledge, where perception is
not knowledge but the way in which we look at it,
our perceptions are hindered because of the logical
structure we must adhere to in thinking. This
logical structure allows little scope for flexibility
but forces us into a dialectic mode, whereby the
skilled logical mind can create consistent arguments
to support any point of view. Indeed freedom from
logical error is not the same as thinking skill.
De Bono warns that "our traditional adoption of this
fallacy has made it difficult to develop broader
thinking skills and especially to recognize the huge
importance of perceptual skills in thinking."[26]
Finally he emphasizes the need for exploration in
place of logical support: "Exploration opens up
perception, logical support closes it down."[27]

This emphasis on logic and the rational can be seen
in the Educational system through the linear
thinking that is encouraged in our students. I agree
with Rudolf Arnheim who suggested that "we are
victims of an inveterate tradition according to
which thinking takes place remote from perceptual
experience."[28] Because our thought and language
structures have become so intertwined, language
becomes the prominent vehicle through which all our
thinking is expressed. Western education has been
concerned foremost with words and numbers practised
as skills that detach the child from sensory
experience. The consequences of this are such that:
"Deprived of their most precious mental powers
by a one sided education millions of adults will
spend their working days exclusively on paper,
words and numbers."[29] The main point I would like to

make here is that the language systems of
words and numbers are not the only available systems
where communication and learning take place. I
believe the artistic process involves a way of
thinking that does not rely on the dialectic mode
for support. Unlike other areas in the school
curriculum where the student seeks to find pre-
determined answers the artistic process seeks to
create new answers to problems.

The Arts in Education, a Curriculum and Examinations
Board Discussion Paper states that, "An important
distinctive feature of such artistic problems is
their inherent ambiguity and uncertainty."[30] It is
evident here that logical structure does not take
precedence over critical and creative thinking. It
is also suggested here that "The solution to an
artistic problem cannot be arrived at by following
a given set of rules." Placed in a society where
much of our thinking is based on given sets of rules,
I feel it is imperative that another mode of thinking,
which is not based on logic, should be encouraged
in the educational system.

This, as I have already stated, can be found in the
artistic process. Eisner suggests that, "Aesthetic
experience is a process emerging out of the act itself.
Unlike so many other types of human activities, the
experience that constitutes art does not begin
when the inquiry is over."[31] Unlike other areas
in the school curriculum where the learning content
is, to an extent, based on the aftermath of an
inquiry, a good art education offers unlimited
opportunity for exploration and discovery learning.
When De Bono calls for an exploration idiom in our

thinking structure, I must recall the art class
where students perceptual and thinking skills
are broadened through exploration and not hindered
by the dialectical process.

The general aim of the Junior Certificate states
that, "education should contribute towards the
development of all aspects of the individual,
including aesthetic, creative, critical, cultural
....."[32]   Breadth and balance is one of the
three principles outlined in the programme. The
objective here suggests that "in the final phase
of compulsory schooling every young person should
have a wide range of educational experiences."[33]
Although this seems promising, the paragraph
continues to read:

> Particular emphasis must be given to
> reinforcing and developing the skills of
> numeracy, literacy, and oracy. Particular
> emphasis should be given to social and
> environmental education, science and
> technology and modern languages.

On reading this, I must question how balanced
the Junior Cycle Syllabus actually is. Indeed,
art can function as a subject where the aesthetic,
creative, critical, cultural and many more aspects
of the individual can be catered for. And yet
it does not merit particular reference in the
Junior Certificate aims and objectives! I
believe the lack of due consideration given to
art education and indeed the arts in general, is
derived from our traditional emphasis on the
verbal and numerical systems of communication,
which are embedded in the dialectic mode of
thinking. This has been an impediment in the

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status of art in this country, and is reflected
in the poor attitude towards visual heritage.

The low status of art in education is further
reinforced by the fact that it is not a
compulsory subject at secondary school level.
It is generally regarded as an extra option taken
by those who are low achievers, or those who
have a particular interest in the subject.

Our traditional emphasis on the verbal and
numerical systems of communication, is embedded
in the dialectic mode of thinking. Although
these symbols systems are necessary modes of
communication, The Arts in Education, a Curriculum
and Examinations Board Discussion Paper, makes the
point that there are many other symbol systems available
to us, the artistic language being one of these.[35]

In my teaching this year I have concentrated on
the importance of Art as a unique symbol system
through which we can communicate. As Eisner
suggests, "Aesthetic experience is a process
emerging out of the act itself. Unlike so many
other types of human activities the experience that
constitutes art does not begin when the inquiry is
over. It is not something at the end of a journey,
it is part of the journey itself."

FOOTNOTES

1 Quoted in J.W. Docking, <u>Control and Discipline in Schools: Perspectives and Approaches</u>, London, Harper and Row, 2nd edition, 1988, p.61.

2 Ibid., p.59.

3 Ibid.

4 David Hargreaves, <u>Interpersonal Relations and Education</u>, (2nd Ed.), Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1975, p.48.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

7 Robert F. Biehler, Jack Snowman, Psychology Applied to Teaching, (5th Ed.), Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1986, p.161.

8 Docking, <u>Control and Discipline in Schools</u>, p.82.

9 Hugh Gash, "Children's Perceptions of Teachers", <u>Irish Educational Studies</u>, Vol.9 No.2, 1990, p.7.

10 Docking, <u>Control and Discipline in Schools</u>, p.76.

11 V.E.C. abbreviated version of Vocational Educational Committee, Visually in V.E.C. Schools an emphasis is placed on manual and technical skills as opposed to academic.

12 Gash, "Children's Perceptions of Teachers".

13 John Dewey, The Child and the Curriculum : The School and Society, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1951.

14 Refrences cited, Rienier and Snowman, <u>Psychology Applied to Teaching</u>.

15 Phillida Salmon and Hilary Clarke, <u>Classroom Collaboration</u>, Redwood Burnlian, 1984, p.38.

16 Hargreaves, <u>Interpersonal Relations in Education</u>, p.42.

17 Freire, <u>Pedagogy of the Oppressed</u>, p.46.

18 Ibid.

19 Docking, <u>Control and Discipline in Schools</u>, p.81.

20 Ibid, p.90.

21 Biehler and Snowman, <u>Psychology Applied to Teaching</u>, pp. 160-161.

22 Freire, <u>Pedagogy of the Oppressed</u>, p.65.

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.

25 De Bono, <u>Teaching Thinking</u>, Maurice Temple Smith, London, 1976, p.27.

26 Ibid., page 29.

27 Ibid.

28 Gyorgy Kepes, <u>Education of Vision</u>, Studio Vista, Great Britain, 1965, p.2.

29 Ibid.

30 The Curriculum and Examinations Board <u>Discussion Paper: The Arts in Education</u>, An Roinn Oideachais, 1984, p.12.

31 Elliott W. Eisner, <u>Educating Artistic Vision</u>, MacMillan Publishing Co. Inc., New York, 1972, p.27.

32   The National Council for Curriculum Assessment,
A Guide to the Junior Certificate, An Roinn
Oideachais.

33   Ibid.

34   Ibid.

35   The Curriculum and Examinations Board
Discussion Paper; The Arts in Education.

V. "THE CAP THAT FITS"

My school-based project was undertaken by a fifth year
class in Loreto Abbey, Dalkey. "The cap that fits" is
a project based on Hamlet, the play currently on the
Leaving Certificate course for these students. It
includes the design and construction of hats to
represent the five main characters in Hamlet. I chose
this project for a number of specific reasons. Firstly
the idea of a "cap" fitting has relevant undertones in
our perceptions of others, when in face-to-face or inter-
personal interaction. In evaluating others, i.e. "she's
alright; but she doesn't have a clue about music." We
inevitably categorize and place a specific "cap" on
others although it may never belong. Indeed we also
like to see ourselves as a specific character type and
wear our own "caps" to ensure we can assume and
portray this image when dealing with others. The
portrayal of a specific image is very important to
teenagers, because of peer groups, adolescence and
the generation conflicts, etc. Because the average
class age of my fifth years is 15/16 I felt this would
have specific relevance to them. It is an all girls
class and their natural interest in fashion at this
age, provided motivation for the designing of a hat.

The project was also designed to integrate into
another subject area, namely English. When dealing
with a specific play in the classroom context, room
for alternative viewpoints is limited. Indeed
Shakespeare limits us further by creating the
characters, their specific quirks, personalities and
mannerisms. By doing this he inevitably forces us

to perceive the characters in much the same way. By bringing this play into the art class, the students were enabled to involve themselves in the re-creation of these characters, while not destroying those that had alrady been created. Alternative viewpoints could now be welcomed. Although the students had similar perceptions concerning the nature of a specific character, their perceptions as to how this character could be interpreted into the form of a hat were diverse and had no strict limits. Through exploration, problem-solving and design this project emphasized the creation of something new rather than the defence or destruction of that which has already been created.

The first stage of the project involved the arranging of the students, in order to make a group for each of five of the play's characters; Hamlet, Polonius, Claudius, Gertrude and Ophelia. That the students would work in the group format, had a particular significance to the project. Through this mode, the students would have the opportunity to integrate and interact more with other members of this class. The students were given more responsibility for their own learning and were answerable to other members of the group instead of the teacher when things went wrong. Group work also made discussion classes and "bouncing" of ideas more feasible. The students when engaged in open discussion in the class on the ideas for their hats were not alone as they had support from the rest of the group. In the first class we discussed the characters in the play and how to go about interpreting these in the form of hats. We also discussed the relevance of "group work" and how specific tasks could

be shared in order to divide responsibilities amongst
members of the group.

The next stage involved observational drawing and
research work. The students made colour and tonal
studies of hats through still life. Emphasis was
also placed on structure, as this would be a key factor
later, in the construction of the hats. At this point
I showed slides of hats from various cultures and
historical periods. This helped to remove any pre-
conceptions of what a hat should actually look like,
examples ranged from African tribal and Indian
headdress to bronze age helmets to prairie bonnets
and fashion hats from the early 1900's etc. The
students also accumulated reference material through
magazine cuttings, encyclopaedias and various other
sources. At this point the students actually moved
into their five respective groups and began to juggle
ideas and research material, in order to formulate
basic designs for the hats. More detailed analysis
of the specific character was undertaken and cross
references were made between personality traits and
their visual parallels, e.g. Phelia was seen as a
somewhat floating fragile character, this notion was
likened to a water lily floating in a pond. The
students would now have another visual source to work
from and make observational drawings of flowers and
green leaves. Various proposals were suggested as to
how the hats could be designed, these were discussed
openly in the class and within the specific groups.
Much consideration was given to the media through
which the hats would be created. The specific
materials used could describe much of the character:
e.g. Gertrude was also seen as fragile, this was

19. Initial hat constructions
     5th yr. Loreto, Dalkey

20. Class group working on project

21. Construction of hat - using coke cans

22. Finished hats, constructed in a wide
range of media.

conveyed through building the hat from paper, a
fragile material.

The materials chosen were of a diverse range, coke
cans, paper, various fabrics, papier mache, wire,
etc. were used by the various groups. The students
has the opportunity to explore different media and their
limitations, because of the nature of the project where
the live characters had to be described in a different
way. When the students had resolved design problems
and experimented with various media and techniques,
the construction of the hats finally got underway.
At this point emphasis was placed on improving skills
and attaining a professional finish to the various
hats. As the hats were three-dimensional exploration
of construction, scale and form now became integral
to the building proces. Various craft techniques such
as embroidery and papier mache were introduced into the
hats at this stage. The students encountered many
technical and aesthetic problems in the construction
of these hats. This meant a challenge was always
available. As fifth year students I felt this would
be important to them and their hats would be as
creative and sophisticated as the work and ideas they
had put into them.

PROJECT EVALUATION

The project was completed a seven week block within
which the students had approximately seventy minutes
per week working time. During this time the students
maintained a consistent interest, which was, I feel,
important to the quality of ideas and development of

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work throughout this period. The project was successful
in a number of ways.

Firstly, the underlying aim of the project was to
create an awareness of how in our evaluation of others,
we tend to place specific "caps" on those others.
The students, I feel, responded well to this idea and
quickly made reference to incidents of stereotyping in
advertising and other areas of social experience.

Another aim of the project was to create an awareness
of the artistic process as a way of creating something
new as opposed to the defence of destruction of
something that has already been created. By working
through a design process the students explored new
possibilities in the approach of construction and also
in the media through which their construction was made.
Here the students coped well, in selecting, inter-
preting and carrying out the particular requirements.

Overall I am pleased with the students' learning
process, and feel they have achieved a high standard
of work. Future modifications would entail a more
structured group organisation, by reaffirming individuals'
responsibilities and assigning more specific tasks.
This would lead to more co-operative teamwork and
further reinforce the need for positive interaction
in the classroom.

CONCLUSION

In this dissertation, I have aimed to demonstrate the effects of western dialectics on society in general and more specifically within the educational sector. As the dialectic system is now firmly rooted in our communication, thought and language structures, it would be futile to suggest that it has no place in society today. I have stated moreover the limitations of this system as a problem solving idiom and also a process through which critical and creative thinking can be developed.

The results of my research for this project are two-fold. Firstly, I have become more aware of the need to see others as individuals, with perceptions, sometimes very different from my own. I feel this has been especially beneficial to my teaching this year whereby, instead of imposing my ideas, attitudes and subjective interests on the students, I facilitated the students in developing their own. This led to a positive relationship with the students, based on "interaction" other than "reaction".

As the students dealt with interpersonal interaction through their project they became more aware of alternative perceptions. They began to realise that our perceptions of others determines how we will behave towards those others. Flexibility in thinking was necessary for the project to come to fruition.

Another aspect of the project was the emphasis placed on exploration and critical analysis. This was also

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an important criterion in my own work, during the year.
I discovered many new image-making possibilities,
through an exploration of the traditional art elements.
By dealing with another mode of interaction,
paralleling that of Akido, I was able to express my
ideas through the visual image. I hope I have in some
way reconstructed the figure to enhance the diversity
of human interaction and the many possible ways of
exploring this theme.

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