The Dissolution of the Readymade's Semiotic Imperative

Sean Ashton

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Goldsmiths College
University of London

Thesis Abstract

This thesis investigates the altered status of the readymade in relation to its Duchampian inception. With *Fountain*, Duchamp's most exemplary readymade, the strategy is semiotic, a commonplace object being deployed as the sign of an 'absent' artwork. The object's inherent qualities are subordinate to its signification of an evident morphological alterity; insofar as *any* non-art object could have signified this alterity, the actual one chosen could be called a virtual art object. Initially exploiting an opposition between generic (non-art) objects and specific (art) objects, the artistic enunciation of commonplace objects to signify such a perceived morphological alterity has all but vanished. But this diminished alterity has not rendered the readymade an obsolete strategy, the terms of its contemporary application now being understood outside the Duchampian enunciative paradigm. I explore the relationship of this outsideness to the readymade's incipient semiotic imperative, moving from an analysis of more traditionally enunciative works—that is, those which emphasise the necessary (institutional) conditions for artistic expression *per se*—to an analysis of works which assert other (non-institutional) paradigms for their appraisal. Using Richard Wentworth's photographic work, I compare artistic appropriation with 'civilian' appropriation. I examine how Haim Steinbach's enhanced presentational approach conflates Duchampian virtuality with an object's vernacular identity. I explore the idea of consumption as an artistic procedure in which the exchange value/use value axiom is adopted as an alternative to the art/non art dichotomy inaugurated by Duchamp. Finally, I assess the relevance of these concerns to my own art practice, which has been characterised by the displacement of readymade objects into a hypothetical, and sometimes heterotopian, order of things. I end the thesis by explaining how the recent shift from this object-based strategy to a photographic, poster-based one attempts to make this heterotopian dynamic more explicit.

Contents

Introduction

The title of this project refers to a process that has been taking place in art since roughly 1917. Before describing this process, I will first describe the event, or series of events, that led to it. As a callow teenage student I can remember seeing a reproduction of Duchamp's *Fountain* in a '20th Century Art' anthology and assuming its conception, production and presentation had followed the same straightforward disseminational path as any other work—for there was no information in the accompanying text that stated otherwise. I was later to discover that such oversight is second nature to a particularly elliptical form of art publishing which specialises in books that have so much to tell us they end up telling us very little. Although, thankfully, such works continue to be supplemented with more forensic critical and monographical material, the brevity of the anthological strain of art publishing (which, in understandable reciprocation to the teenage autodidact's thirst for an immediate overview, is more interested in joining the dots between artists than in those artists themselves) allows the newcomer to infer a misleadingly truncated version of events: that *Fountain* delivered its message, like most other artworks, through the straightforward expedient of its immediate exhibition in a sanctioning art context; that the passage of a generic object into the specific realm of art was simply a facet of sculpture's nascent material expansion; that there is an identifiable 'ground zero', a specific date to which we may attribute the inauguration of the commonplace in or as art; and, most falsely of all, that this inauguration was met with a global fanfare of astonishment. Of course, it is the reader's prerogative to treat such tomes as nothing more than glorified reference books, to disregard them quickly in favour of more specific research. But it seems to me—sorry to purge these hoary frustrations here—that Duchamp, more than any other, is an artist who people believe they can 'get' immediately without having to engage in such research, and this complacency is invariably based on a rather sketchy picture of *Fountain*'s initial dissemination. In my experience public knowledge of what *actually* happened in 1917 is as variable as Duchamp's influence is pervasive. The majority of people know that Duchamp acted as 'Richard Mutt', but few pursue this pseudonymous element beyond the mere physical inscription we see faithfully reproduced on the replicas made after the loss of the original. It would therefore be prudent, in introducing the thesis, to set down pragmatically the facts of the readymade's relatively innocuous inception, in order to place the function of this pseudonymous strategy in its historical context. To my knowledge the most informative account is Thierry de Duve's,[1] which I will now paraphrase.

On April 10, 1917, a short article appeared in an obscure magazine called *The Blind Man*, reporting how one Richard Mutt entered a urinal to be judged for inclusion in The Society of Independent Artists' annual art exhibition in New York, open to all-comers, renowned and unknown alike. It seems that the rejection of this 'exhibit' by the Society's steering committee (of which Mutt, aka Duchamp, was a respected member) did not set in

motion the desired chain of events: it was not, as Duchamp had hoped, considered that much of a newsworthy incident by the press—which had in fact more or less ignored the earlier exhibition of two other of his readymades in group shows at the Montross gallery and at the Bourgeois gallery in 1914.[2] It was perhaps for this reason that *The Blind Man*—edited by Henri-Pierre Roché, Beatrice Wood and, of course, Marcel Duchamp—ran its own article, printing a reproduction of Richard Mutt's work (fig. 1) and indicating its rejection by the Society with a short caption (effectively handing *Fountain* its own *salon du refusé*). This photograph had been taken by the photographer and gallerist Alfred Stieglitz at Mutt's (that is to say, at Duchamp's) request. Director of the cutting-edge gallery, 291, and a renowned avant-garde player, Stieglitz (at the time a more significant figure than Duchamp) could not resist showing this photograph to a small but influential coterie of cultural soothsayers (among them the respected art critic, Henry McBride), thereby inadvertently endorsing it as art before it had been physically displayed as such.

I could continue summarising de Duve's exposition, but we have all we need to demonstrate that the inception of the readymade was more like a short story that played itself out in reality than an art object contrived in the privacy of the studio and then presented for public appraisal. Now, there had been other artworks prior to this whose very production had aroused an interest somewhat ancillary to their content, but the content of *this* work consisted, seemingly, of nothing but these ancillary exigencies of production and dissemination: here was a work that was *about* attempting to get it shown. The catch was, as its author rightly foresaw, that blind acceptance would not advance its cause. After all, Duchamp had gone down that road before, had seen his presentation of earlier readymades subsumed by the safety-in-numbers libertarianism that was, and is, the ubiquitous group show. On the other hand, its rejection by the Society—from a show which purported to be a paragon of libertarianism but which was in fact (like so many 'freethinking' institutions) using libertarianism to shield conservative pressure-points it never even knew it had—set off a chain of events which meant that, from the very beginning, the use of the commonplace in art was accompanied by a *commentary* of its use. The documentation by Stieglitz of 'the rejected work'; his growing fascination with its equivocal status; his sharing of this fascination with, eventually, it seems, anyone who would listen; his taking the trouble to engage eminent critics in correspondence about the rejection of Mutt's submission[3]—these are the actions of a man attempting to find a place for something which both thrives on yet falls foul of its indifference towards institutional aesthetic appraisal. When accepted unquestioningly into group shows three years previously, Duchamp's readymade was overlooked; only through an odyssey of institutional rejection, restitution and counter-rejection could it gain a sense of *what it was*. *Fountain* had to be *represented* in order for its author to fully grasp what it was, and Stieglitz—by running with the layer of representation already imposed on the work by the faux-proletarian *nom de guerre*, 'Richard Mutt'—is the mediational patsy it utilises, the man who, somewhat unwittingly,

makes it all happen.

Is 'patsy' being somewhat ungenerous to Stieglitz? Not in de Duve's opinion:

By photographing the [*sic*] *Fountain*, by inviting McBride to come and see it in his gallery,he [Stieglitz] was actually endorsing it in a roundabout way, as though it had been exhibited at 291, as though Duchamp had been among his protégés instead of compromising himself with minor artists such as Rockwell Kent or teaming up with clowns such as Arensberg and Man Ray. Though Stieglitz was amused at the prospect of sanctifying the rejected *Fountain*, turning it into a Buddha or a Madonna, he didn't realize that in doing that he was giving it the aura of a full-fledged work of art and that, by veiling the urinal with his own symbolist taste, he was shifting his defence of Richard Mutt [in a letter sent to The Blind Man] from ethical to aesthetic ground. Stieglitz didn't understand that the function of the urinal's photograph was not to feed an immediate press scandal but to put Fountain, whose very existence could be doubted were it not for this photograph, on the record for subsequent art history.[4]

In being represented, *Fountain* changed into a different work. It changed *medium*—thus proving the metaphysical 'transportability' of the idea behind it (a metaphysic that was not to be invoked again until the advent of conceptualism). Ironically, what we now see when we look at *Fountain*—that is to say, at any one of the vitrined replicas made after the loss of the original—is effectively a 'figurative' representation of the first 'conceptual' artwork: a bespoke representation of a work whose original medium was as much that of a photographic reproduction in a publication as it was already-formed porcelain (for it had had no public display prior to this). Reproduced in *The Blind Man*, *Fountain* invoked the rhetoric of endorsement conferred naturally by publication, advancing directly into the public imagination without first appearing in any exhibiting context . But it was only the institutional prohibition of its appearance in any such context that set it on this more oblique disseminational path.[5]

We can begin to see how *Fountain* acquires the status of a 'virtual object' which effectively absorbs the commentary of those with whom it comes into contact. It becomes the signifier of a gap between the 'general idea' of what an artwork is and the particular examples on which this idea may be based. Stieglitz's photograph of the urinal in *The Blind Man* enshrines art-as-a-general-idea within a single object by displacing it from reality into a rhetorical zone of adjudication. Within this zone, the object is simply a 'sign', inasmuch as we are given to infer that, in principle, *any* object could have been used by Mutt to demonstrate the inevitable shortfall between a general idea and a particular example. In fact, this is what is meant by my titular phrase 'the readymade's semiotic imperative'. This virtuality will be defined more clearly throughout the ensuing chapters; for now it suffices to say that, the more the readymade has become a tradition (or trope) much like any other, the more its semiotic imperative is offset by an *inverse* emphasis of its specific qualities (its pre-art, vernacular condition). Subsequent deployments of the readymade are to lesser and

greater extents a 'dissolution' of the semiotic imperative synonymous with its Duchampian/Stieglitzian inception. As we can see, this imperative, based as it is on the manner in which something is 'announced' as art, attempts an exposition of the enunciative structures within which artistic expression is possible. By exposing the hidden constraints of a supposedly freethinking Society—one that had assumed itself to represent the 'possible limits' of artistic expression and the survey of these limits through the anthological expedient of the group show (it is difficult to conceive of a more anthological organisation than one calling itself the Society of *Independent* Artists)—Duchamp attacked the very autonomy it presumed to epitomise. He exposed the fact that the Society's policy of championing individual artistic sovereignty above all other considerations was itself corrupted by the inevitable bureaucracy of institutional superintendence. As a member of the Society's steering committee—which presumably entailed acting as an occasional judge of good and bad art—he was in a good position to observe the precise manner in which each claim was either endorsed or refuted, and it was *this*, rather than some 'personal', 'individual' or 'independent' artistic expression that he thought needed articulating. Since individual artistic sovereignty was subject to exterior institutional ratification, why not make a work whose sole characteristic was an anticipation of this institutional ratification? Duchamp articulated the problem of how an artist announces *to the world* what, in the conception and execution of his work, he has already privately announced—indeed, 'proved'—to himself. He did this by attempting to make these two enunciations one and the same thing, by conflating individual expression with institutional reception.

The process that has been taking place in art since 1917 is that of how to interpose other enunciative paradigms before Duchampian institutional enunciation. The exact nature of the Duchampian paradigm and, more importantly, its inheritance by contemporary artists, is the subject of Chapter 1, focusing as it does on artworks which attempt nothing more than an emphasis of the necessary conditions for artistic expression *per se*. Although enunciation is now often taken for granted as an aspect of artistic production no longer *needing* emphasis, there nevertheless persists—thirty years after the so-called 'dematerialisation of the art object'—a contemporary interest in exploring art's ontological limits. Of course, these 'necessary conditions for artistic expression' change, and any art made in direct response to these changes, we may argue, performs a valuable barometric role. In the second half of this chapter I limit my survey to the enunciative approach of Martin Creed, whose practice can be seen as the absurdist conclusion of a strategy inaugurated by Duchamp and later extrapolated by certain conceptualists (most notably Joseph Kosuth) into an entirely semiotic proposition.

Using as a model Richard Wentworth's photographic series *Making Do and Getting By*, Chapter 2 compares artistic appropriation with what I call 'civilian' appropriation. My interest in Wentworth lies in his apparent conflation of the Duchampian

use of a commonplace object to stand in for an artwork with a civilian's use of a commonplace object to stand in for a functional item that is not to hand. The aesthetic which underpins *Making Do and Getting By* hinges on an anonymous practitioner's *visually disinterested* execution of a functional tableau. As a sculptor working in the tradition of the assisted readymade, Wentworth perhaps invites us to consider the improvised formalism of these gestures as an instance of creativity playing truant from art.

Chapter 3 examines Haim Steinbach's approach to appropriation. Duchampian appropriation, initiated entirely from the perspective of art, suppresses the quotidian dimension of the object with a more general concept of the *art* object: in the first readymades Duchamp is more interested in an object's powers of cultural negation than in its inherent identity. It is in this respect that we might call *Fountain* a 'virtual' artwork (though posterity has preferred 'institutional critique'). Steinbach's appropriational *modus operandi* attempts to confront this virtuality with the object's vernacular identity, advancing an object's 'original qualities' as the essence of its arthood.

Building on the relationship between consumer product and art product introduced in the preceding chapter, Chapter 4 explores the idea of consumption as an artistic procedure. This is a natural segue from Steinbach's sculptural technique, which is an historically nodal consolidation of the presentational exigencies common to both consumerism and art. If Steinbach's 'transactional' sculptural technique depends on denying an object its right to be considered within a utilitarian context, then the artists showcased here—Jeff Luke, Joe Scanlan and Neil Cummings & Marysia Lewandowska—are all concerned in some way with themes of use and quotidian consumption. Arguably, these artists offer ways of becoming 'better' consumers, through redefining the notion of product; not necessarily in an obediently Marxist sense, but in a manner nevertheless cognizant of how 'use value' and 'exchange value' can be adopted as alternative axioms to the art/non art dichotomy inaugurated by Duchamp.

The final chapter adopts an altogether different approach, concentrating exclusively on the change my own art practice has undergone over the last three years. As an oeuvre of largely readymade-based artworks made over a period of time, the work of the recent past has functioned as something like the proposition of an alternative order of things (or what might be called a heterotopia), in which stepladders, tape measures, shelves etc. audition as more intense incarnations of themselves rather than as signifiers of a personal subjectivity. Within this, the object is not subordinated to a pre-existing 'sculptural language' that I bring to bear on it. Indeed, the language which, in my hands, these objects 'speak' is not really one I could confidently call my own, as the slight adjustments made to them seem to me distinctly non-idiomatic—often one of relatively few options offered by their existing characteristics. The change I have made in the work over the last three years is an attempt to explore the above heterotopian dynamic without the encumbrance of the readymade's Duchampian and sculptural heritage. This is characterised by a shift away from using

existing, readymade objects towards the adoption of a photographic representation of existing objects and recurrent phenomena. In place of the readymade *object* is an approach which is to be construed as a readymade *representational format*, one which adopts the promotional rhetoric of tourist board and special-interest posters. Within this framework the idiosyncrasy of a chosen category is presented using a style readily associated with institutional forms of expression. If the provision of artistic uses for readymade objects effectively proposes an alternative order of things (as it has done for me), then this more recent work (which is concurrent with the writing of this thesis), is an attempt to make this expression of an alternative status quo more explicit.

The cynic might suggest that my analysis of the readymade's mutation into more institutional and consumerist modes of artmaking could have taken the form of a study of any number of various practitioners; that the list is, potentially, as inexhaustible as postmodernism is (or was) eclectic in its pseudo-Alexandrian adoption of past visual styles. So why single out these artists for specific consideration? What do they have in common?

These artists' many differences conceal a shared characteristic: they are all, to lesser and greater extents, nominalists. They are all interested in confronting general ideas with particular examples. The nominalist holds that general or universal ideas are mere names, that general ideas are abstractions—rather than accurate descriptions—of how reality unfolds for the perceiving subject. For the nominalist, the world reveals itself as a succession of 'definite articles': the table, this path, that leopard. This does not mean that the nominalist refutes any general sense in which all tables, paths and leopards can be said to exist concurrently, but that an appraisal of their existence should be instituted from the viewpoint of each particular incarnation rather than from the 'overview' of the generic table, leopard and path. Of course, on seeing a leopard, no one says 'Look, the leopard', as if it were unique; they say 'Look, a leopard', a statement which implies that the animal is a member of a category, a species. In such instances, nominalism would seem inappropriate, but there are certain circumstances in which it is the most rational way of appraising phenomena. For example, scientific research into diversity-within-a-species might be more inclined to ascribe a definite article—a 'the'—to every specimen of that species, if only as a temporary rule of thumb. There are certainly circumstances in which nominalism seems the most natural, if not always the most rational, approach. The paradigms in which my chosen artists choose to operate seem to induce in them responses which are to varying degrees and in different ways typological. Duchamp's readymade, as I have already said, is the inauguration of the process whereby we are forced to consider what type of object an artwork is, while Martin Creed has an equally metaphysical fascination with 'physically articulating' different types of nothingness. Richard Wentworth documents a 'circumstantial formalism' improvised by citizens the world over, whereby objects—when used in an ad hoc manner to solve practical difficulties—seem to relinquish their particularities. His interest is sustained, one feels, by the suspicion that there are unlimited

solutions to recurrent problems: the general problem remains much the same, but the particular object used is different every time; there is, seemingly, a 'metaphysical' object behind each solution. Haim Steinbach's appropriation of objects is a more nominalist extrapolation of Duchamp's: where Duchamp takes something out of society to (re)define art, Steinbach takes an object out of society (out of 'circulation') to show the 'society within the object'. In so doing, he extends Duchamp's interrogation of art's definition beyond the use of the commonplace in general to the use of the commonplace in particular. This reinvestment in the appropriated object's vernacular qualities presages an approach adopted by several contemporary artists—Jeff Luke, Joe Scanlan and Neil Cummings & Marysia Lewandowska are those featured here—in which use value and/or the rhetoric of function is the main focus of the work rather than a remaindered quality in a process of artistic enunciation. What is of interest to these artists is not the object's particularities but their subsumption within a more general system of consumption. (Their work often de-emphasises the object in favour of the context, or 'ground', intimated by it.) In nominalist terms, then, these artists move from the particular back to the general—perhaps in the conviction that the individual 'choice' which the acquisition of consumer products supposedly signifies revolves around a bogus particularity. Jeff Luke and Joe Scanlan redefine the notion of 'product' in art (be it the readymade product appropriated in order to make the artwork or the product constituted by the resultant artwork) by inventing their own objectual systems (the former's is sculptural, the latter's quasi-commercial), while Cummings and Lewandowska dispense with the notion of making any physical product at all, preferring instead to critique existing objectual systems and to present their findings in the book and seminar format.

I described Duchamp's, Creed's and Wentworth's approaches as 'metaphysical'—meaning that the material used in the gestures they make (or photograph) signifies something which is not actually present. (With Duchamp it is 'the art object'; with Wentworth's photographs it is 'a product'; with Creed, it is nothingness itself.) In the thesis I have preferred the word 'virtual' to the word metaphysical. I suspect that this is because virtual is a more lucid antonym of the word 'actual'. 'Metaphysical', by comparison, has too many semantic nuances. Moreover, virtual is not just a more lucid antonym of actual; it is one of those words that defines itself through the immediate suggestion of its antonym (few words have this quality). As used in this thesis there is no sense in which virtual is to be construed as 'virtual reality'; it denotes a lack or want, not of materiality in general, but of a particular kind of materiality. For example, with regard to Wentworth and Duchamp I use virtual to indicate that the material present in a gesture or situation stands in for something that is missing from its place. In the final chapter, in which I assess the typological aesthetic of my current work, the word virtual is used to describe not just a want of a particular kind of materiality missing from its place, but a shift from one material thing to another (a shift that Gilles Deleuze, as we shall see, calls "vice-

diction"). Virtuality is the means by which we are able to see one material thing in terms of another material thing without the two things being completely interchangeable. It is the means by which we are able to migrate from one thing to another without encountering ontological contradiction. Within a given series, or 'genus', virtuality is an x factor which members of that series or genus exhibit to lesser and greater extents. (A consolidation of this last statement is offered in Chapter 5 in my analysis of Deleuze's/Spinoza's 'the being square of the circle'—an 'impossible' object which requires the thinker to imagine a continuum, or genus, of intermediate shapes.)

It remains to say two final things. The first concerns the symbiotic relationship between the written and studio practice demanded of a research project of this nature. The above-mentioned shift in the studio practice from generic object to generic representational format has an affiliation with the endorsing edifice initially erected around the readymade by its reproduction in a publication. As an object displaced into a rhetorical zone of adjudication *prior* to its actual physical display, *Fountain* suggests that there is not always a direct correlation between a thing's place in the world and the function we may attribute to it. I have chosen to displace each of my more recent (poster) works into a similarly rhetorical zone of endorsement. Where Duchamp adopted the persona of a lone 'outsider', I have adopted the guise of a faceless, bureaucratic entity that, through a ubiquitous aesthetic style, seeks to create the impression of a factitious monolithic institution. While, as a separate entity, my studio practice can be read in a number of different ways, I would suggest that, within the scope of this research project, this latter affiliation with the Duchampian institutional critique is where the written and studio practices are most contiguous. This said, the studio practice in its entirety—especially that part of it which is explicitly readymade-based—is concerned less with the 'cult of the art object' than with the culture of objects as it exists prior to any artistic appropriation. The oeuvre of readymade-based pieces showcased in the first half of the final chapter is intended less as a series of appropriations aimed at expanding the definition of 'the art object' (which definition I hold to have greater semantic laxity than at any other time in art history) than as a means of 'auditioning' objects for what I have called an ontological heterotopia. By 'ontological heterotopia' I refer to a metaphysical space in which objects exhibit qualities that are, so to speak, one remove from the functions they perform or appearances they have in everyday reality. (I use an analogy culled from a Borges story to help clarify the 'proximal' rubric that defines this ontological heterotopia, as well as glossing Foucault's initial coining of the word heterotopia in endnote 2 of the final chapter.) The appropriational strategy of this readymade-based work tends to foreground not just the perceived cultural indexicality of a given object but the proximity of that object to others, its status within a continuous field of materiality. However, I express reservations about the clarity of this rubric, proposing that the more recent poster-based works (assessed in the second half of the final chapter) are a more effective exploration of its proximal conception of objects; that its 'typological

aesthetic' communicates a more lucid profile of my psychological relationship with the material world than the former 'enunciative aesthetic' of displacing an altered readymade object into a metaphysical zone of artistic adjudication. The above-mentioned factitious institutional paradigm is effectively a kind of intermediate metaphysical space invented to pre-empt such adjudication by positing the assembled (photographic) appropriations as somehow already officially sanctioned. While entirely invented, this factitious paradigm is somehow more 'real' for me than the enunciative paradigm which inevitably attaches itself to (my earlier) readymade-based art.

The second thing concerns a less practice-based motivation behind this project. In the final pages of the thesis I choose to contextualise the aforementioned institutional artifice within a wider vocational scheme of things. While this final section ('Art as Meta-vocation or "The Club of Queer Trades"') advances the theory that the generic modes of artmaking engendered by the readymade have increasingly embraced the appropriation of existing vocations as much as that of existing objects, it is more of a coda to the thesis than a definitive conclusion of it. In particular, my comparison of contemporary art with G.K. Chesterton's fictional work, The Club of Queer Trades, is offered more in the spirit of my own studio pratice's intended development than in a desire to corral all the artists here showcased into a single paradigm of 'vocational neologism'. The idea of any given art practice as an 'invented vocation' is something that I have extrapolated from (early to mid-20th Century) art's 'baptism' of materials hitherto considered inappropriate for artistic use. That the continued use of these once novel materials should consist in a more exacting engagement with their accustomed vocational deployment (rather than in the perpetuation of either an outmoded material enunciation or an impartial interrogation of their 'essential properties') seems to me crucial if recent sculpture and object-based art's increasingly ubiquitous (and often somewhat tokenistic) 'critique of the everyday' is to be taken seriously.

End Notes

1 'Given the Richard Mutt Case', *Kant After Duchamp* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: October & Mit Press, 1996), pp. 89-131.

2 Indeed, the presentation of the readymades at both these galleries was so innocuous that there remains no reliable historical record of which ones Duchamp actually exhibited. Furthermore, as de Duve here indicates in his account of 'The Richard Mutt Case', Duchamp exhibited them—or was forced to exhibit them—in such a way as to distinguish them from the 'other' art on show, which included one of his own paintings: "In the unpublished interview he gave to William Coldstream, Ron Kitaj, Richard Hamilton, Robert Melville, and David Sylvester for the Arts Council of Great Britain on June 19, 1966, Duchamp replied to Richard Hamilton, who had asked him whether the hat rack had not already been exhibited in a commercial gallery before the urinal: 'The director of the gallery said yes if I gave him a painting to show. I said, 'I will give you a painting but let me have my readymades also.' He said 'all right' and then put them in the entrance where you put your hats.'" (Ibid., p. 103.)

3 Stieglitz's quest for publicity is demonstrated by this note sent on April 19, 1917 to the art critic of the *Sun*, Henry McBride: "I wonder whether you could manage to drop in at 291 Friday some time. I have, at the request of [Pierre] Roché, Covert, Miss [Beatrice] Wood, Duchamp & Co., photographed the rejected Fountain. You may find the photograph of some use. It will amuse you to see it. The Fountain is here too." (Quoted by Thierry de Duve in ibid., p.116.)

4 Thierry de Duve, ibid., p. 120.

5 It is no coincidence that those who are most ignorant of the actual facts of *Fountain*'s dissemination are often its most vehement detractors. Resistance to the readymade as an artmaking paradigm is usually consistent with its denunciators' presumption of a more exhibitory inception than was actually the case. For example, consider this perfunctory sentence from 'This house believes that a found object cannot be a work of art', a motion proposed by the Royal Society of British Artists in the Federation of British Artists 2004 Summer Newsletter: "The concept of the found object as art came into being in 1917 when Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968) exhibited a urinal called 'Fountain' and signed R. Mutt, at the Independents Exhibition in New York." The RBA's statement is preceded by a claim that they "are hosting the event to air the issues as part of their education programme"; that they then go on to *mis*educate in the very next sentence does not augur well. The sheer belatedness of the motion's proposal surely indicates an institution suddenly becoming aware of its anachronistic state, and there is every chance the event may backfire, that those relied upon to speak in the motion's favour (Roger Scruton and Julian Spalding) and to refute it (Jonathan Jones) will generate a debate which actually transcends the trenchant cultural demarcations it is in fact intended to consolidate.

Chapter 1

Enunciation

enunciation, noun.

> 1. the manner of pronouncing words and syllables; articulation.
>
> 2. a definite statement; announcement.

Whatever artists want to do, including the anything whatever—a work made by chance, say—they have to do something.[1]

A slogan could sum it up: it is forbidden to do whatever, let's do it. The Dada moment would be that of an *Aufhebung*, the moment when the prohibition and its transgression flow together into their contrary: it is permitted to do whatever, let's do it.[2]

Thierry de Duve

While the contemporary application of the readymade can obviously be understood in terms of the generic codes of artmaking ushered in by Duchamp (in the same way that the jet age can be seen in terms of the Wright brothers' maiden flight), it more often than not deputes these generic codes to a form of subjectivity which would have been unthinkable in 1917. This subjectivity, as we shall see, hinges on the decreasing relevance of the term 'art object' in an artist's enunciation of an artwork. But do artists really 'enunciate' any more? Perhaps not—not, that is, in the sense of proclaiming a thing to be an art object. No, it is the *diction* of the enunciation, the elocution—or lack of it—which concerns the majority of contemporary practitioners and their critics. We have passed over from one definition of enunciation into another, from proclamation to pronunciation—that much is clear. We can all, from a retrospective viewpoint, pinpoint a decisive moment in art history as the fulcrum of this shift, a moment after which it becomes inconceivable for an artwork to hinge on the introduction of 'alien' form(at)s into the sphere of art. But a review of such moments would in my view belong in a treatise on the avant-garde, and my first concern is to isolate the generic mechanics of the readymade from the avant-garde's themes of transgression (what Thierry de Duve above describes as the establishment of an *Aufhebung*), so that its principles of application can be understood outside the mores of bygone art frontiersmanship. The reason that a certain determinedly philistinistic faction persists in renewing its scepticism of the readymade is because it is hellbent on placing it within the historical diorama of the frontiersmanship known as Dada, anti-art, non-art. There no longer *being* any anti-art to speak of, I should like, quite simply, to sidestep these oppositional, 'but is it art?' farces from the very beginning, for they conceal a far more essential opposition—between the specific and the generic—that invites a much richer ontological

14

discussion of art's current condition.

Although I will try and keep the historical details of the readymade's Duchampian inception to a minimum, the most important of these will emerge as a natural by-product of my enquiry. It is through Thierry de Duve's cross-examination of the effect of Duchampianism on Joseph Kosuth, Clement Greenberg and Kantian aesthetics that I will first seek to clarify the readymade's most salient characteristics—not, I should add, with a view to presiding in judgement over the expiry date of any 'Duchamp Effect' (as I believe de Duve does), but with a view to considering how its nominalism persists in a more mutated form. In Martin Creed, I will propose a contemporary exponent of the nominalist craft, one who has arguably exploited its institutional rhetoric to suit these more bureaucratic times (in which, after all, it is often more prudent to institutionalise *oneself*, if only to control more assiduously the parameters of the institutionalisation). This chapter, then, is a kind of portmanteau which opens out to reveal a comparison of enunciation as it was in Duchamp's time with how it is now. The Duchampian act appropriated existing artefacts in order to ask how we define an art object when the 'culture' of artmaking is absented from it. Creed, as I later hope to show, is also interested in appropriation as a pure signification of absence, and in this respect his strategy is Duchampian signification carried to its natural conclusion.

Thierry de Duve is right to draw our attention to the difference between Duchamp and the Dadaists. He accuses the Dadaists of suffering from the "illusion of being the authors of their own liberation"[3]—having had to assume the position of establishing exactly what art *was* (the position of the initiated, of the connoisseur) in order then to do its opposite. Put simply, to take bourgeois outrage for granted is to perform an act of inverse connoisseurship.[4] Duchamp's approach was more like that of an inventor than a connoisseur. In the manner of any good inventor, Duchamp made public reaction, public use, public interest, the *raison d'être* of his brainchild in a way that differs markedly to Dadaism. His readymade is an experiment *to find out* what art is, rather than to say emphatically what it is not and then flaunt the trophy of its opposite as a personal 'style'; it is a propositional rather than programmatic gesture. This is why the readymade is styleless; not so much an object demanding appreciation as a term indicating a nominal experiential paradigm, one in which we entertain a 'this is art' claim.[5] As such, *Fountain* presents itself as an artistic statement appealing to the 'uninitiated' for judgement: Duchamp, acting as 'Richard Mutt', effectively mimicked the role of the uninitiated and, by so doing, wrote into the readymade's genetic code an insistence that the 'whatever' now represent any object previously excluded from art. Of course, from one viewpoint, it's just a game. Duchamp is *pretending* to be uninitiated, is pretending to make a categorical error. He is pretending to get things wrong in order to suggest that the designation of an artwork entails a greater ontological complexity than that expressed by the mainstays of painting and sculpture. This is sophistry. Dadaism was many things, but sophistry it was not. Dadaism was explicit in its

contempt for the laity—especially the bourgeois laity—and expressed this contempt in an oppositional manner. The readymade, by contrast, is not the opposite of art; it is the means by which it begins to be rethought as a category with each subsequent example, with each new enunciation, as a proliferation of differences.

For Thierry de Duve the readymade is a metonym not only for the exclusion from high culture of certain types of object but of certain types, or rather classes, of people. The nominalist paradigm it introduces enables these objective and subjective entities to impact upon one another; that is to say, the uninitiated viewer and the excluded object meet one another on similar terms:

> Once the Salon and a public market for painting existed, the crowd could no longer be held at bay, but academicism still thought it could show the crowd its place. This wrong needed to be righted as the crowd—or the masses—waited for their right to legislate to be rendered. This had to be done so that art, whatever it might become, might live and not be suspended in the forever *aufgehoben* reiteration of its own death sentence, and so that it might live as it has always done, as a ceaseless production of differences, even in the henceforth fatal conditions of standardization, of mass culture, of what we a bit too quickly call indifference. It is this transfer of legislative power that the readymade symbolically accomplished, as its author anticipatively assumed the position of the viewer, of the uninitiated, and handed him or her the right to judge about art, to judge anything whatever as art.[6]

What is being suggested in this objective/subjective encounter is that the permission to make anything means that, for the first time, the artwork is answerable to an element which speaks from beyond the tradition of the things on which it has established its authority. We should quickly add, however, that the picture conjured up by this symbolic "transfer of legislative power" is one of an uninitiated viewer standing not in silent, rapt contemplation of an Armitage Shanks, but in contemplation of the legislative context which endorses such an artefact. The caveat we need to attach to this "transfer of legislative power" is that the uninitiated do not base their judgement on a particular profane object masquerading as art but on the wider context which enables it to be considered as such.

Duchamp recognised that the permission to make anything is not in itself a "formula of authorisation; it doesn't free authors"[7]—actually, it reveals them as being at the *mercy* of an audience. The readymade thus emphasises subjectivity as an uncertain realm. Dada, on the other hand, seeks to elicit bourgeois revulsion as a readymade subjective certainty, directing its non-art towards an indefatigably shockable laity. Duchamp's readymade, on the other hand, is directed to what de Duve calls the "layman of the future".[8] This layman of the future is our layman of the present: none other than the kind of pliable, passive, disinterested gallery-goer who has made Nicholas Serota such a happy man. The kind of layman who is able to go to the cinema, browse in Waterstones, ride the

London Eye and visit the recently decamped Saatchi Gallery in a single afternoon. The kind of layman for whom art is simply another facet of the entertainment industry. In de Duve's view, this layman is not to be considered in the Baudelairean sense of belonging to a crowd comprising individuals who "do not stand for classes or any sort of collective" but, on the contrary, as

> ceaselessly 'mediatized' by the mass-media, whose main function precisely is that of gridding the amorphous crowd and differentiating it according to a variety of finely meshed semiotic grids that are so many networks of imposition and circulation of power: social class, age-class, professional category, level and type of education, political affiliation, leisure class (in Veblen's sense), mode of consumption, cultural behaviour.[9]

De Duve emphasises the Duchampian author as "a subject of the law among other subjects", as a subject among "the society of laymen that had already undertaken the mass-mediatization of the Baudelairean crowd"[10]; in short, as a subject who, to put it jingoistically, is 'on the viewer's side'. Dada, as we know, was directed at that social demographic known as the bourgeoisie: the class of people for whom art was something they were 'prepared to go along with' without necessarily subjecting themselves to a bracing intellectual engagement. There is nothing in principle wrong with this, but the worst bourgeois subject is the kind who hides their inner uncertainty beneath a veneer of urbane confidence and cultural sophistication. This was Dada's target audience, and they confronted it with artworks that would only engage with such cultural dalliance by execrating it. The dalliance of the bourgeoisie also interests Duchamp, but he does not explore it through execration. For Duchamp, the bourgeoisie's dalliance is not to be rebuffed; it is to be courted, confronted with a curiosity rather than with an excrescence. It is to be confronted with what Duchamp himself called "something one doesn't even look at, or something one looks at when turning one's head".[11] An object one scarcely looks at? An object one nearly overlooks (because it is in the wrong place)? An object whose out-of-placeness perhaps mirrors, is in dialogue with, the viewer's? In other words, an object at one with the viewer's *diffidence*. Where Dada sought to stigmatise the bourgeoisie's dissembling assertiveness, Duchamp, I think, appeals to a faction of this stigmatised social demographic that is merely diffident. Richard Mutt would probably count himself among their number. Much has been said of Duchamp but not enough has been said of Richard Mutt, and one of the most helpful contributions of de Duve's book is its painstaking revisitation of the readymade's pseudonymous inception. What is the intention of Duchamp's faux-proletarian pseudonym, other than to make us consider the readymade less as an invention by an artist than as one perpetrated by the member of a rhetorical laity? It seems to me that one of the most overlooked factors of its inception is the extent to which the readymade conflates the spheres of 'art' and 'citizenship' into a single creative act. It

seems clear to me that the inscription 'R. Mutt' is the origin of such conflation as may be observed in contemporary art.[12] Duchamp derived the pseudonym as a "transparent parody" (de Duve) of J.L. Mott Iron Works, the sanitary ware manufacturers from whom he acquired the urinal for Fountain. The transparency of Mott/Mutt is equal to the transparency of taking an ordinary thing and merely displaying it with the rhetoric of an art object: a substitution of vowels is equal to a substitution of contexts. It is significant that no other readymades were inscribed with 'R. Mutt'. As we have already seen, earlier readymades 'by the artist Marcel Duchamp' went overlooked in comparison to 'the citizen R. Mutt's' readymade. The faux-proletarian inscription 'R. Mutt' is effectively the catalyst that facilitates a minimally modified (i.e. inverted) object's transition from the generic to the specific. The similarity of Mott to Mutt is perhaps a clue that the transition is not to be read as a literal 'transfiguration' of an ordinary object into an exalted one: Duchamp's readymades are less about the exaltation of banality than an intersection of two supposedly distinct objectual categories, and the fact that Mott and Mutt differ by but a single vowel is an indirect intimation of this intersection.

Though I grimace slightly at the paranoid cynicism of de Duve's above overreaction to the mediatising infrastructures of the culture industry, as an artist I certainly affiliate myself with this idea of the author as "a subject of the law among other subjects". I agree with his claim that the readymade is the metonymical device on which this subjective affiliation hinges in an historical sense. What needs to be clarified is the way in which the readymade's status has changed from a metonymical to a more localised one. Central to this change is the way that its use has often tended to bear the mark not of artistic but of civilian application. In this way the author has indeed become a subject of the law among other subjects. But what aspects of the civilian Richard Mutt's metonymical grounding of the original subjective affiliation are retained in these contemporary readymades? If the affiliation between author and viewer/civilian is to be thought of as an initial subjection of the laws of artmaking to a form of public enquiry, then do the more localised contemporary applications work in tandem with or in categorically different ways to this affiliation? It seems to me that the laws artists now wish to subject to a form of public enquiry are not those that govern the production of *art* objects. However, while the generic nature of the readymade artwork is no longer predominantly associated with the general concept of 'an art object', I would like to retain some focus on the essential nature of the 'art transaction', on the conditions necessary for art's existence; for even now, ninety years after the readymade and thirty years after conceptualism, there are practitioners for whom these conditions are a fertile domain for artistic production.

The audience, whether it acknowledges it or not, performs the role of confirming that art has 'taken place', has been 'announced', has 'occurred'. Duchamp inaugurates the idea that a work is not art until shown as such, an idea that can only be expressed using something which is unlike an artwork—since a thing that already resembles an artwork does

not have to be revealed or named as one. It is an idea that, arguably, can no longer be encountered in any profound experiential way, as the category 'artwork' now contains everything once outside it. Despite this diminution of alterity, there nevertheless remain other ways in which it is possible to signify either the presence of art or the encounter between a spectator and an artwork. Richard Mutt, as a layman of the future, put to the public the following, gauche question: 'Do you want art to continue being what it always has been or do you want it to become something else?' But the specific identity of the 'something else' contained in the question is secondary to its displacement of an artwork: whatever the 'something else' is, it takes the place of *that which is missing*, and thereby proposes a kind of virtuality in place of the artwork's aesthetic signature. At the time, the readymade's virtuality lay dormant, the complex question of its relationship to aesthetics largely unanswered—indistinguishable, it seemed, from the more explicitly non-art posturings of Dada. This is unsurprising, since after being rejected from The Society of Independents' inaugural show in 1917, its dissemination into public consciousness was a somewhat muted affair, appearing, as we have already seen, in the form of Alfred Stieglitz's photograph published in *The Blind Man* journal and captioned THE EXHIBIT REFUSED BY THE INDEPENDENTS. That Mutt's action was intended to appeal to a spirit of public enquiry rather than to court public disdain is supported by the editorial policy of this short-lived journal, here articulated by its editor-in-chief, Henri-Pierre Roché:

> The second number of The Blind Man will appear as soon as YOU [the readers] have sent sufficient material for it...The Blind Man's procedure shall be that of referendum. He will publish the questions and answers sent to him. He will print what the artists and the public have to say. He is very keen to receive suggestions and criticisms. So, don't spare him...[13]

This "referendum" was not met with the anticipated public response, and the truth is that only with its reception into the conceptualist discourse was the relationship between aesthetics and the readymade's virtuality investigated with any rigour. Up until the late 1960s the readymade tends to find itself cast in the role of a figurehead for an overgeneralised concept of the avant-garde. Conceptualism, resistant though it was to affiliating itself with forbears of any kind, certainly needed a precedent to underpin its claim that art had an ontology that was *entirely separable* from its hitherto aesthetic condition. It was Joseph Kosuth, the most inveterately conceptual of his contemporaries, who posited Duchamp's first unassisted readymade as the birth of art's non-morphological identity. The claim is stated matter-of-factly enough in his 1969 text 'Art After Philosophy':

> The function of art, as a question, was first raised by Marcel Duchamp...In fact it is Marcel Duchamp who we can credit with giving art its own identity...The event that made conceivable the realization that it was possible to "speak another language" and still make

sense in art was Marcel Duchamp's first unassisted readymade. With the unassisted readymade, art changed its focus from the *form* of language to *what* was being said. Which means that it changed the nature of art from a question of morphology to a question of function. This change—from one of "appearance" to "conception"—was the beginning of "modern" art and the beginning of   "conceptual" art. All art (after Duchamp) is conceptual (in nature) because art only exists conceptually.[14] (My italics.)

What is interesting is that little phrase "its *own* identity". It conceals a paradox: art could only be given its *own* identity by adopting that of 'any object'—what de Duve calls "the whatever". What kind of an identity is *that*? What Kosuth means—what is concealed in this seemingly innocuous phrase—is that art *has* no identity (because it "only exists conceptually"). This is the metaphysical contention the readymade embodies, and this is what we mean when we speak of the virtuality that lies beneath its objecthood. Why not, thought Kosuth, clarify this metaphysical condition by seeing if the virtuality of the readymade could be reduced to an *immaterial* procedure?

What I have been calling 'virtual' Kosuth understands to be 'conceptual'. But Duchamp did not know *exactly* what he was doing when he unleashed his seeming profanity into the cultural sphere. It was less a 'conceptual' act than a metaphysical one: he was not so much adding to art's morphology as creating a gap, a void within it. It is this gap, this glade of morphological abstinence, that provides Kosuth with the metaphysical space in which to erect his entirely conceptual, tautological definition of art ("All art [after Duchamp] is conceptual [in nature] because art only exists conceptually"). The virtuality of the readymade *accommodates* Kosuth's conceptualism, but should not be mistaken directly for it. Kosuth's conceptualism is what he makes Duchampian virtuality 'do'. Contrast Kosuth's recycling of Duchampian virtuality with that of most of his contemporaries; he alone, it seems, reduces it to an entirely conceptual operation. This is perhaps in response to the following question: If, within the readymade's paradigm of displacing the art object, the appropriation of *any* object will serve, why use any *single* object?

It is at this point that the following observation should be made: post-Duchampian interpretations of the readymade's tenability can be thought of as falling into two distinct (if probably hypothetical) categories. These can be generalised in the following way.

On the one hand, there is little intellectual gain, it would seem, in labouring the institution of 'the art object' through perpetual resignifications, using other objects and running through the entire class of everything (what de Duve calls "the whatever") that the original readymade symbolises anyway. Such an approach would be akin to a kind of autism—and this potential absurdity is one motivating factor in conceptualism's attempted evacuation of the art object. The natural impulse, then, is to abjure all physical presentation of objects, be they appropriated or otherwise, in favour of signifying the minimum conditions necessary for the presence (and appraisal) of art. Historically, exponents of this

approach tended to become corralled within the general concept of 'the dematerialised art object'. Such approaches, which have been reinvestigated by a new generation of artists,[15] never quite give up—while simultaneously acknowledging the futility of—that quest for the grail of art's essential identity, offering the viewer ever more spartan concretisations of the terms of its existence.

The second category is more resistant to such essentialism, giving up entirely on the notion of the readymade as a means of signifying the "proper name", Art.[16] If, in order to remain true to that semiotic imperative, the readymade has to relinquish its diversity as a class of objects, the advocates of the *second* approach have a mind to win this diversity back, object by object, justifying each appropriation, as it were, from the other end of the telescope, looking back at art from within the context from which the object has been appropriated. In so doing they give up on the essentialist conviction that we are any longer all working within the same enunciative paradigm. While the term art still defines what they all do collectively as artists, the exponents of this approach have an interest in defining the terms of art only insofar as they coincide with the terms by which the appropriated artefact was already available as an object in the world.[17] At its most explicit, this approach is inherently humanist, often revisiting the readymade through an anthropological conflation of artistic and civilian creativity.

These categories are almost certainly hypothetical: tendencies towards which a given practice might lean rather than fully epitomise. If these tendencies symbolise two different ways of looking at aesthetics—the latter emphasising intrinsic attributes of an object and the former emphasising the extrinsic (institutional) circumstances of its appraisal—then perhaps to separate the two is a synthetic distinction. I do so here merely for purposes of clarity, and having betokened the readymade's subsequent, post-Duchampian application with these two contrasting ways of looking at it as a 'class of objects', it would be helpful to conduct a more thorough analysis of its relationship to aesthetics.

Considered in its historical context, *Fountain* is less an object than a question indicating a general paradigm: what is an artwork when it is not a painting or a sculpture? The majority of subsequent commentators, Kosuth especially, take this resistance to specialism as a straightforward resistance to aesthetics. After all, why disagree with Duchamp himself, who explicitly inveighs against the readymade's aesthetic appraisal? It may be argued, however, that the readymade's resistance to aesthetics is not as straightforward as it seems. Firstly, it should be noted that Duchamp's famous aesthetic indifference vis-à-vis the readymade is not *ipso facto* a transcendence of aesthetic paradigms. That the readymade abjures emphasis of its *inherent* qualities in favour of the *extrinsic comparison* of itself with other cultural artefacts should not in itself be taken as a circumvention of aesthetics. Duchamp's indifference to the inherent qualities of the readymade is merely a way of removing our appraisal of aesthetics from the sphere of connoisseurship. But *Fountain* is still indexed to

aesthetics. While not intended as an aesthetic object, it nevertheless functions, so to speak, *in view* of its aesthetic counterparts. In so doing it indicates that there might be functions for those objects which are ancillary to their aesthetic imperatives: functions that might bridge the gap between *their* unmistakable art morphology and *Fountain*'s commonplace morphology. It does not propose what, exactly, these functions should be; it merely asks us to entertain the idea of a gap between the two, a gap that aesthetics—as understood in 1917—cannot adequately explain. Of course, Duchamp *does* propose other functions in the assisted readymades, but the first stage in his proposition of new functions for artworks has to be the liminal iteration of the 'art object' as the mere *potential* for art. The foundation on which aesthetics is thenceforward reconstructed invites us to consider every subsequent contribution within an aesthetic paradigm that, though not severed from the axiom of taste, does nevertheless exhibit an increasingly parallactic condition due to the other praxes intimated by the readymade's morphological alterity, be these merely technical, political, anthropological, sociological or otherwise (depending on the context from which the object has been appropriated). In other words, since Duchamp, aesthetics is redefined as the apparent change in the essential nature of an object when seen from two different perspectives.[18]

The idea of the readymade standing aloof from, but in view of, its aesthetic counterparts is taken up by Thierry de Duve, who, in his book *Kant After Duchamp*, critiques it through Kant's antinomy of taste. Far from being simply a method of by-passing taste, the readymade is held up as an analogy of Kant's 'resolution' of the antinomy, of the symbiosis of its thesis and antithesis. This is done by approaching the readymade through the two seemingly opposing theories of Clement Greenberg and Joseph Kosuth. De Duve sets out to prove that the readymade "is at once their common blind spot". Kantian scholars will recall that Kant's resolution of the antinomy is not so much a resolution as a proof of the flawed oppositionality of its thesis and antithesis. Here is Kant's antinomy as it appears in *The Critique of Judgement*:

> *Thesis.* The judgment of taste is not based upon concepts, for otherwise it would admit of controversy (would be determinable by proofs).
>
> *Antithesis.* The judgment of taste is based upon concepts, for otherwise, despite its diversity, we could not quarrel about it (we could not claim for our judgment the necessary assent of others).[19]

Within Kantian thought, "a judgment of taste", writes de Duve

> is essentially sentimental, not cognitive...Such a judgment naturally expresses itself (if it expresses itself out loud, which is of course not necessary) through a sentence such as "this is beautiful." Let's call it the classical aesthetic judgment...With the readymade, however, the

shift from the classical to the modern aesthetic judgment is brought into the open, as the substitution of the sentence "this is art" for the sentence "this is beautiful."[20]

This rereading of the antinomy "rests," declares de Duve, "on only one hypothesis", namely that

> ...the sentence "this is art," though not necessarily any longer a judgment of taste, remains an aesthetic judgment, even though no particular meaning is attached to the word "aesthetic" until the rereading is completed. The logical thing is to replace the word "beautiful" by the word "art" wherever it occurs in the third *Critique*, starting with the antinomy itself.[21]

The antinomy is then condensed into something which can be recognised as a stand-off between Greenbergian formalism (the thesis) and Kosuthian conceptualism (the antithesis):

> Thesis. The sentence "this is art" is not based upon concepts.
>
> Antithesis. The sentence "this is art" is based upon concepts.[22]

And finally, even more simply:

> Thesis. Art is not a concept.
>
> Antithesis. Art is a concept.[23]

De Duve now sets about showing that the opposition between the Greenbergian doctrine of taste and the Kosuthian doctrine of art as a pure concept can be removed by transposing Kant's resolution of the antinomy directly onto their supposed disagreement. Both doctrines, he suggests, in spite of their overtly philosophical origins, neglect to consolidate their positions with the necessary dialectical rigour, wilfully seeing only that side of the coin that underpins their own partisan advocation of art as either 'concept' or 'non-concept'. Both parties are therefore guilty of "upholding only one half of the antinomy",[24] when its resolution requires the simultaneous upholding of both halves. Kant's resolution of the antinomy is as follows.

> ...all contradiction disappears if I say: the judgment of taste is based on a concept...from which, however, nothing can be known and proved in respect of the object, because it is in itself undeterminable and useless for knowledge. Yet at the same time and on that very account the judgment has validity for everyone (though, of course, for each only as a singular judgment immediately accompanying his intuition), because its determining ground lies perhaps in the concept of that which may be regarded as the supersensible substrate of

humanity.[25]

Kant's solution, far from hingeing upon the issue of which proposition is 'true', "depends on the possibility of showing that two apparently contradictory propositions do not contradict each other in fact",[26] or that their 'disagreement' is actually the *necessary condition* of an overarching "aesthetic Idea":

> In the two contradictory statements we take the concept on which the universal validity of a judgment must be based in the same sense, and yet we apply it to two opposite predicates. In the thesis we mean that the judgment of taste is not based on *determinate* concepts, and in the antithesis that the judgment of taste is based on a concept but an *indeterminate* one (viz. of the supersensible substrate of phenomena). Between these two there is no contradiction.[27]

The thesis cannot say exactly what taste *is* because it refutes determinate concepts, and its advocate's response is therefore the total refutation of *all* conceptual paradigms. The antithesis, though it cannot clarify a 'concept of taste' as such, nevertheless continues to operate within conceptual paradigms. Both thesis and antithesis are prevented from achieving closure by the same indeterminacy. This indeterminacy is what Kant called the "super-sensible substrate of humanity" present in each individual observing subject. The indeterminate concept which may accompany each individual aesthetic experience can only be thought of with any unity under the more general concept of the "aesthetic Idea", which, in Kantian terms, is a meta-concept signifying the way in which judgement has equal validity for everyone, even though each judgement is in itself not equal to the next. One's own view of what art is, of what beauty is, of what taste is, is a solipsistic manifestation of the aesthetic Idea. Kant saw that it was only with the acknowledgement of *the overarching aesthetic Idea*, and not with an explanation of *the solipsistic manifestations which comprise it*, that we can begin to dismantle the antinomy's apparent contradiction.

It is this aesthetic Idea that the readymade embodies. It does not embody, as both Kosuth and Greenberg presume, a remaindering of aesthetic judgement, a reduction of art to an antithesis (art is a concept). Kosuth's art-as-idea and Greenberg's art-as-non-idea both derive from the same indeterminate concept. The introduction of the readymade reifies the notion of art as a meta-concept—an idea that can be traced back to a more recognisably classical (and, as we have seen, Kantian) understanding of aesthetics. This fact is refuted by such antagonists as Greenberg, whose resistance to the idea of actualising an existing object as an artwork blinds him to the antinomical nature of aesthetic judgement. Greenberg fails to see that even the readymade—the proposal of the artwork as a seemingly flat *disagreement* with its handcrafted forebears—does not make the antithesis any truer, does not tell us *exactly* what kind of concept an artwork is. It simply extends the physical correlates of its indeterminacy *ad infinitum*. In so doing it actually makes things a whole lot

less clear. With this observation advocates of the thesis might breathe a sigh of relief. But that is not all. The traceability of the readymade's meta-concept back to a classical understanding of aesthetics is also unwittingly refuted by conceptual apostles such as Kosuth, whose tautological missives are like telegrams sent back through history to alter our perception of the readymade, representing it exclusively as the sole means by which 'art' is finally able to emerge from its aesthetic chrysalis—rather than as the demonstration of a 'general idea' which still admits of an aesthetic sensibility. The former objects to the notion of art as a concept when what has in fact been demonstrated by the readymade is the aesthetic Idea itself, the space in which it is announced; the latter misconstrues this space as a purely conceptual one.[28]

If the above conclusions derived from Kant's antinomy are correct, if the readymade's seemingly partisan advocation of the *antithesis* is, in fact, not as partisan as first seems, then it is presumably possible to choose other vehicles for the demonstration of Kant's antinomy, vehicles which initially seem to run the risk of appearing as advocates for its *thesis* but which, like the readymade, can retrospectively be seen to underline the symbiosis of both its two halves. In order to augment his justification of the readymade's relationship to Kantian aesthetics, de Duve casts around for just such an exemplar—using another 'actualised' object, but this time a more Greenbergian one: the blank canvas. When Duchamp introduced the readymade, he made the jump from painting to art, from the painted artefact to *any* artefact, and thereby "abruptly jumped from the specific to the generic".[29] The blank canvas is also a generic object, and it was Greenberg who said that while a "stretched and tacked up canvas already exists as a picture", it is "not necessarily a very successful one".[30] In other words, he seems to recognise its identity as a picture, and even, perhaps, its status as an art object—albeit one 'without qualities'. That is to say, he recognises the status but dismisses the quality.[31] Kosuth, on the other hand, tends to dismiss the quality, recognising only the status. The purely conceptual terms in which he defines his own practice (which I will examine in more detail later on in this chapter) tend to extract the precious metal 'art' from the ore of 'aesthetics', conferring on aesthetics the status of an impure remainder or 'slag'.[32] Greenberg, encumbered though he may be by his doctrine of taste, will at least admit that the blank canvas is "a picture", though "not necessarily a very good one". Kosuth's and Greenberg's critical view of the blank canvas, says de Duve, is equally myopic :

> As if in mirror image to Kosuth's contention that Duchamp's readymades have changed the nature of art, there was already Greenberg's contention that the blank canvas had changed the nature of painting. Since Duchamp avoided "actualising" the blank canvas Kosuth doesn't see its "readymade" nature, and Greenberg doesn't see the change in "nature" that the vantage point of the readymade imprints on it. The readymade canvas is at once their common blind spot.[33]

What would have happened had Duchamp actualised the blank canvas? The problem with the blank canvas is that it is not generic enough to operate as a semiotic counterpoint to existing artworks because it is already a 'signified' vehicle of artistic representation. In 1917 actualisation of the blank canvas would have been much closer to the spirit of Dada—which was subversively conservative in cleaving to existing representational modes. By utilising these modes of convention Dada's seemingly nonsensical approach was able to register as somehow simultaneously 'beyond and within their remit': as articulations of a representational dissolution. Nonsense is, after all, a form of metalanguage framed, but not semiotically constrained by, existing conventions.[34] Duchamp is usually careful to avoid nonsense, hysteria and dissolution—which can be seen in the way he soon finds a quasi-scientific use for the nominalism established with the readymade in his concurrent work, *The Large Glass*.[35] High modernist painting's later interrogation of the blank canvas's flat, liminal pictoriality epitomises an approach of precisely the kind Duchamp sought to avoid: whereby a 'brotherhood' of artists is seen to subsist on a staple formal axiom. This stable of painters all subsisting concurrently on the staple axiom of the blank canvas's liminal pictoriality, for all the sobriety of its Greenbergian supervision, is no less a dissolution of representation than Dada. Furthermore, as a metalanguage evolved among a group of practitioners to articulate *what has become of painting*, formalism's critique of liminal pictoriality is no less a *pathology* of representation than Dada. Its champions sought to conceal formalism's pathological tendencies by maintaining (with their backs turned to the future, the better to survey the past) that theirs was the 'natural' terminus of a canonical critique that had begun with Manet. Duchamp's more Janus-like approach, by forcing the viewer to focus on the enunciative aspects of artmaking—on the moment of an artwork's birth—is the opposite of pathology. Duchamp is not the coroner passing his verdict on what has become of representation; he is more like a midwife who assists in bringing something (the readymade) into the world *with no idea* of what will become of it.

Conceptualism, inheriting Duchamp's enunciative approach (but not necessarily under the provisos stipulated by Kosuth), was also much more midwife than coroner, sometimes only conceiving artworks in order to see what became of them in the institutional setting of their appraisal. Like Duchamp, it constructed a metalanguage that did not claim to be the natural consequence of an earlier one. Rather, the artworks it gave birth to were a series of *hapax legomena*: things never before said, and perhaps sayable only once, laconic expressions of how art is possible, a reification of the conditions under which it is 'allowed'. I'd like now to review the characteristics of this enquiry from the perspective of one of its contemporary avatars—for my interest is in how these conditions have changed.

Something on the left, just as you come in, not too high or low is the title of a work by the

artist Martin Creed, the physical form of which is nothing more than a framed A4 text telling the viewer exactly what it says in the title. I saw it in 1999 at Anthony Wilkinson gallery. The next time I went to this gallery there was *nothing* on the left, just as I went in, *not* too high or low; these co-ordinates had returned once more to an area of the gallery *not* chosen for the display of art. For Martin Creed, writes Godfrey Worsdale,

> the realistic achievement of nothing, either as a practice or as a product is a paradox, endlessly reiterated. As pragmatic as it is semantic, his continuous inclination to consider the fundamental nature of nothingness has become the vacant foundation on which his practice is based.[36]

The "vacant foundation" on which Creed's practice is based has been celebrated by some for its 'updated' critique of what came to be known in the late 1960s as the dematerialisation of the art object. This was characterised by an ambivalent genre of artworks which questioned, and often undermined, the very liberating aspects of the context that made them possible, in the process reifying the institutional infrastructures more 'inherently interesting' works tended to ignore. What such works have in common is that the permission to make anything whatever is not merely indulged but rather treated as a subject *in itself*. Keith Arnatt's self-analytical text panel *Is it Possible for Me to Do Nothing as My Contribution to this Exhibition?* (initially published in Lucy Lippard's 1973 book *Six Years: The Dematerialisation of the Art Object* and more recently shown in *Live in Your Head*, Whitechapel Gallery, 2000) epitomises the genre. The contention of such works is clear: 'do whatever' has become a dogma, an orthodoxy to be met with recalcitrance , if not refusal (the irony being that even refusal must be enunciated). Other less belligerent works, such as Robert Morris's 1963 *Location* or Liz Price's more contemporary *Trophy 2000-*, are not so much retractions of expressivity as devices altered according to the way in which they are shunted back and forth within the art institution.

A wall-based piece, Morris's *Location* (fig. 2) consists of a two-feet square board containing four numerical gauges which are set according to its spatial position. These indicate how far the object's sides are from the ends of the wall on which it is hung, and how far its top and bottom edges are from the ceiling and floor. Like Creed's *something on the left, just as you come in, not too high or low* (henceforward SOTL) it therefore 'appears' as its own co-ordinates; unlike Creed's co-ordinates, however, Morris' are alterable, allowing the piece to be exhibited in an infinite number of positions on a given wall. *Location* therefore functions like a nomadic version of SOTL, and is also a metaphor for what would later come to be understood as 'sculpture in the expanded field'.[37]

Liz Price's *Trophy 2000-* (fig. 3) is a stainless steel cup of the kind presented to a triumphant football team. When displayed in a gallery or public space, it is engraved with the venue's name and the exact date of its exhibition. In this way it recycles its exhibitory

history as the material for the work, reducing itself to the simple provenance of its journey from one place to another. But this engraved object—a symbol of achievement and success—is hardly to be understood in terms of its being 'awarded' to the gallerist/curator in recognition of a perceived cultural cachet; rather, it *condescends* to appear, taking its place among the other exhibits with a highly equivocal aloofness, a demure cultural inertia. (While obviously more pronounced in the context of the group show, this inertia is even maintained in the context of the one-woman show, when the accompanying exhibits are Price's own.) To date, *Trophy 2000-* has deigned to appear at Anthony Wilkinson Gallery, London (4th May - 4th June 2000); Lenbachaus Museum, Munich (22nd June - 8th September 2002); Mobile Home Gallery, London (3rd May - 8th June 2003); Houldsworth Fine Art, London (17th July - 8th August 2003); and, most recently, at 1,000,000 mph, London (11th October - 2nd November 2003). Anyone familiar with these spaces will attest, I think, to their wide-ranging objectives. Speaking as a follower of its appearances in hardcore-commercial, artist-run, museum and critical/commercial contexts alike, *Trophy 2000-* seems to me like a more social (and certainly less formal) version of Morris's *Location*, metering a demographic rather than spatial odyssey—and somehow reifying the objectives of each context in the process. The viewer refers the most recent outing to its previous ones, reflecting on the propinquity of one venue to another, and on how these venues reconcile *Trophy*'s zahir-like subjectivity[38] with their own objectives. These objectives differ markedly to one another, and promise to diversify still further as the dynamic of the art world organically adapts to meet the increasingly eclectic needs of audience, artist and curator. One final conceit of *Trophy* is that its reification of these objectives will cease when there is no room for any more venues to be engraved on its base. Its circulation will thus be brought to a seemingly arbitrary end; but what is not so arbitrary is the history it will come to speak of, the status quo that must necessarily change—certain venues having long since disappeared and others having risen to more influential positions. Interestingly, in an age in which overexposure is often said to diminish the aura of cultural artefacts, the more *Trophy* is exhibited the more effective it becomes: the accretion of ubiquity is its *raison d'être*. The artist herself informed me that she is quite happy for *Trophy* to go wherever it is wanted, and we can perhaps foresee a time when some more prestigious venues are added to those listed above, thus emphasising the relative anonymity of less established recipients; in the same way that the European Cup, usually shared between Madrid, Milan and Munich, has occasionally found itself in the trophy cabinet of Borussia Dortmund or Nottingham Forest, so *Trophy* must deign to appear at places like 1000 000 mph or Luton Central Library Concourse.

What these last two pieces have in common is that they become altered by their circulation. They denote the circulational, presentational and ratificational exigencies which in fact attach themselves to all artworks but which are usually suppressed by their inherent qualities. Martin Creed's piece, SOTL, might be placed somewhere between these last two

works and Arnatt's, and somewhere between the readymade and the blank canvas. The blank canvas, as I said earlier, is an object already signified as a vehicle for artistic representation, whereas the incipient Duchampian readymade has (in 1917) no history of artistic representation. Both, however, present vehicles of expression which, at certain historical moments, seem simultaneously unbounded and restricted. The blank canvas is, in the high modernist period, increasingly to be seen, in advance of *any* artistic mediation, as the already existing picturehood from whose perfection an author must diverge—but never in betrayal of its flatness if the resulting work is to remain in critical dialogue with the existing canon. And the readymade's signification of a virtual artwork is to be understood, in advance of any artistic mediation, as something which might take the form of anything we care to appropriate. As terms which oscillate between a condition of freedom and confinement, the readymade and the blank canvas are the vehicles which consolidate the idea that even the most unbounded aesthetic expressions must be subject to the constraint of canonical contextualisation. They actualise (and axiomise) what every artist knows: that we transgress in order to be reined in;[39] that the absolute limits of aesthetic expression are perhaps best left—can only be left—as virtual objects, as unindulged prerogatives.

Like the readymade and the blank canvas, SOTL seems to actualise an unindulged prerogative. (From the frontiersman's viewpoint, this last statement is perhaps a definition of 'good' art.) It is merely a representation of the space it occupies, a representation of its place in the world: the cause, as it were, of its own effect. But this place is a generic place: most, if not all, galleries, museums and houses will have *somewhere* on the left, as you come in, not too high, not too low. By anticipating this fact, SOTL's co-ordinates represent a virtual place. It is a virtual object representing a virtual place; as such, it conflates the two historical paradigms of virtuality mentioned above, namely, the blank canvas and the readymade. The representational specification of the blank canvas (on which 'anything' might be inscribed) re-emerges as the inscription of a generic co-ordinate, while the semiotic condition of the readymade (which recruits 'anything' as an artwork) re-emerges as a mere 'something'. Furthermore, like Price's *Trophy 2000-*, a generic artwork of this nature effectively ironicises the museum's powers of endorsement by reducing itself to a nominal object of circulation.

It is to a museum that we would perhaps direct an alien who wanted to know what made mankind tick, for it is "The museum", as Allan Kapprow said in 1970, that "...tries to assemble all 'good' objects and ideas under one roof lest they dissipate and degenerate out in the street."[40] The very existence of museums encourages a kind of complacency that what is worth preserving will indeed be preserved, a complacency which is no doubt the result of noticing how some of the unlikeliest things end up in museums. No matter how ephemeral or commonplace an object, its candidacy for a place in the museum, tenuous though it may have been before its inclusion, always seems a matter of course when it is safely vitrined therein. This is not the case with artworks. Artworks remain locked in a

confrontation with the very terms of their reception into the museum—which, on those little informational plaques accompanying each work, sometimes likes to guide the viewer towards the specific critical flashpoint provoked by this or that artwork in its time.

We can imagine the discerning alien we just directed to the museum leaving, scratching his head at the fact that, at some point in the late 1960s, a group of artists began to militate against the museumification of their artefacts. This resistance was, he learns, a logical conclusion of the above observation that artworks remained locked in a confrontation with the terms of their reception into the museum. The fear was, claimed the artists, that if these terms were initially misrepresented, the content of the work, the artist's intention, might be traduced forever.[41] The engagement led to the production of so-called 'dematerialised' works, which, although they, too, invariably ended up in the museum in photographic or other documentary form (or as ideational 'commodities' snapped up by institutional cognoscenti whose understanding that all resistance was futile was as acute as their purchasing powers were infinite), at least performed the role of redefining the increasingly elastic parameters of institutional endorsement. [42] As time passes, these artworks whose subjectivity revolves around and is even predetermined by their museumification become increasingly difficult to interpret as partisan expressions of institutional distrust, obdurately resistant as they are to anything other than an elementary acknowledgement of the generic modalities of cultural production.[43] In short, while these artworks may still explore the *structure* of institutional co-option, they are no longer the result of a genuine confrontation between individual and institution. There *is* no confrontation, for the museum by now well understands that it is only to be thought of as the custodian of an artwork insofar as it is willing to place its endorsing prerogative at the mercy of a perpetual rereadability. (The proliferation of curation as an *artistic* practice has been instrumental here.) From this point on, museum and artist advance together in nuptial unison and bipartisan recognition of their shared debt to culture, which is, it turns out, far too complex and nebulous, far too ineffable and organic a thing to be exclusively entrusted either to those who produce it (artists), or to those who administer and interpret it (curators). Each is the other's raw material in a perpetual embrace of mutual endorsement; if this were not the case Nicholas Serota would be unlikely to sanction Cornelia Parker's appropriation of Rodin's *The Kiss*.[44]

It is in the context of such mutual endorsement that it is interesting to consider Martin Creed's work. If, in its maximum indulgence of the permission given to appropriate the museum's resources, Cornelia Parker's *The Distance (a Kiss With Added String)* is the crescendo of the symbiosis between artist and museum (its appropriation of such a sculptural icon certainly gives it the feel of an *historical* consolidation of institutional critique), then Creed's practice surely represents a much more ambivalent indulgence of the permission given to artists to do what they will. Granted, he is not so explicitly involved with rummaging among the museum's actual artefacts; *his* interrogation of the institution is an

excoriation of its carapace rather than an archaeological excavation of its archive. (I will show how he goes about this in due course by examining some other works. Suffice to say, for now, that his appropriation of actual artworks in work # 128, as we shall see, differs markedly to Cornelia Parker's.) Creed is involved, I feel, in critiquing permission in a far more indirect, metaphysical way. His use of institutional 'props' is a method of conducting a more general existential interrogation of presence, absence and the materiality of the gesture—anyone who has attended one of Creed's talks will testify to the way in which he constantly returns to the subject of wanting to make 'something' where there was 'nothing'. Those familiar with Creed's practice can perhaps supply their own examples to support these last statements, which are somewhat general in nature. I will equip the less familiar reader with examples as I proceed.

Creed, it seems to me, has a fascination with the same kind of virtuality that we associate with the readymade as a *class of objects*, one of the most pragmatic clarifications of which can be found in Victor Burgin's text *Rules of Thumb*. Burgin makes the distinction between the 'denoted' and 'denoting' object, arguing that "Modernist works are obvious candidates for inclusion in the class of works which are *denoted*"[45] (my italics) because of the fact that in " 'abstract' painting and sculpture a work has no apparent significance but is rather *itself* an object of signification."[46] In other words, the denoted object is 'explained' by its very appearance. A denot*ing* object, on the other hand, is one that refers to a world *outside* of itself, its appearance as an entity being subordinate to an extrinsic significational imperative. "However", as Burgin continues,

> the class of works which are denoted is by no means confined to abstract art, it also includes that ubiquitous format—the "readymade." [...] A bottle-rack does not function as a sign in any language, it denotes nothing but is itself "denoted as" art.[47]

"A bottle-rack does not function as a sign in any language." To agree with this statement we must agree that art itself is not a language. In fact Duchamp is stressing the very inability of art to be a universal language: the art object as a locus of difference rather than one of agreement. The bottle rack is not a sign because it has no referent—other than that which is 'missing from its place', namely, the work of art. For Burgin, writing in 1971, the readymade already

> functions as a historical precedent endorsing a presentational strategy which might be expressed: "By definition, an art object is an object presented by an artist within the context of art. Therefore any object which meets these conditions may serve as an art object." [...] Against the above background assertion, foreground activity takes the form of an attempt to find objects which are *a priori* least expected but yet which *a posteriori* will appear historically

31

inevitable.[48]

Citing the various examples of bottle-rack, bridge and, somewhat drily, the planet Jupiter, Burgin then asserts that this *a posteriori* inevitability confers on all readymades an "equivalent status", and that consequently

> Once this governing principle has been grasped our ability to predict the imminent choice of object is greatly increased and so the information transmitted is proportionately decreased. The recent widespread uses of photography and natural language very often *function* as ostensive definitions in regard to a found object. A photograph of a bridge, or the word "bridge," are *operationally* ostensive here; similarly, where *objet trouvé* is replaced by *évenement trouvé*, the phrase "building a bridge" also, in the final analysis, functions ostensively *if no other informationis supplied* [...] There is, then, a sense in which both abstract art and "operationally ostensive" post-minimal art place the percipient in almost identical situations—he is simply presented with an object upon which he may impose entirely his own interpretation"[49]

The quote from Rudolf Carnap with which Burgin footnotes this claim is also helpful here:

> "... whatever does not belong to the structure but to the material (i.e. anything that can be pointed out in concrete ostensive definition) is, in the final analysis, subjective."[50]

Adapting Carnap's statement, we can simplify Burgin's analysis to the basic premise that the readymade presents an experience which purports to be a structural one but which increasingly owes something to the concrete materiality of the appropriated object (on which the viewer "may impose entirely his own interpretation"). Our increased ability to "predict the imminent choice of object" means that the information—namely, the designation of art's structural identity—is proportionately decreased, introducing the ostensive qualities of the appropriated object into the equation as possible modes of interpretation.

The 'ostensive qualities' which reassert themselves in the wake of what Burgin refers to as our increased ability to predict the choice of readymade provide a multifarious network of interpretational routes. An artist like Martin Creed *seems* to eschew these routes in favour of a more essentialist virtuality which runs from Duchamp through Kosuth to the present time. Historically, this virtuality is to be understood as substituting a metaphysical zone of engagement for an empirical one. But Creed's strategy is not so straightforward; there is undoubtedly a virtual aspect to most of his gestures, but one which evolves from rather than transcending the materiality of the objects used.

A typical work places the ostensive qualities of everyday objects—masking tape, floor tiles, balloons, tables, Blu tac, door stops, walls—within an experiential context which

neither invites the viewer to "impose entirely his own interpretation" nor imposes (à la Kosuth) a materially/morphologically transcendent model for the work's appraisal. Creed's use of objects, in its casual rudimentariness, recalls the laid-back demonstrations of a high school physics teacher forced to improvise with such items of stationery as he has in his drawer. And however much they may flirt with calibration and meticulousness, the purview of these objects is hardly rigourously scientific: in work # 200, for example, hundreds of balloons are used to signify *half the air in a given space* (fig. 4), but our actual experience of the work, as we inch through the room, our hair standing on end and our heads pounding from the migrainous static created by the mass friction of so much inflated rubber, is anything but scientific. Why, our very entry releases some balloons out into the vestibule, instantly invalidating the accuracy of the work's proposition. (An invigilator appears from nowhere, cramming them, and us, back into the room.) Our first experience of work # 115, *a doorstop fixed to the floor to let a door open only 45°* (fig. 5) is of something which impedes our entry into the gallery. Having passed over the threshold, we find we are to re-evaluate this annoying impediment as an artwork. It is as though the work, by 'beginning' outside, indicates that we have passed from one zone into another, that we have entered a place where the ostensive qualities of commonplace objects as perceived on one side of the door have a different significance when perceived beyond it. Of course, in beginning outside of the art space, such a work is hardly original, but it is difficult to think of many works which incorporate our arrival into their very conception and execution in such a predetermined fashion. Work # 115 is not so much interactive as interstitial, insinuating itself into the gap between an enunciative and a non-enunciative space.

It is possible to think of Creed's oeuvre as exploring the various ways in which art is 'allowed' within the granted ground of the gallery/museum. The very characteristics of this granted ground—the museum's conventions of display, labelling, archiving, description, administration, its existing collection, even the monotony of its painted walls—have all been used by Creed as a means of restricting the artistic act to a verification of opportunity. The ostensive qualities of Creed's objects are often (but not always) inextricable from the context of their appraisal. The kind of things he uses are generic enough to be thought of as things which might be found lying around anywhere. For example, in work # 100, *on a tiled floor, in an awkward place, a cubic stack of tiles built on top of one of the existing tiles* (fig. 6), the 'work' appears as a surplus of what is already there. Work # 95, *all the sounds in a given space, amplified*, miked up all of the noises produced in the gallery to a sound system, transforming its peripheral administrative weather—fax machines, computer keyboards, telephones, people going to the toilet—into the very art that is usually the object of its administration. Ironically, the gallery conspires with the artist to do away with the very commodity it is supposed to stock, and the piece accentuates the gallery's complicity as the agency of such evacuation, placing a skein of representation over its existing material topography. Work # 95 perhaps even satirises the extent to which, historically, the

complicity of artist and institution became a precondition of works seeking to eschew their materiality: the more 'dematerialised' the work, the more palpable the framing presence of the institution. Creed's amplification of the gallery's framing presence makes this paradox explicit.

The idea that Creed's work foregrounds the notion of its being *allowed* is compatible with the something/nothing dichotomy routinely offered as its dominant characteristic. This might be summarised thus: uncertain as to whether anything at all ought be made, Creed wishes nevertheless to communicate the exact nature of this fundamental uncertainty—in the form of a 'thing'. Consequently, 'something' is brought into existence only as a means of signifying 'nothing'—as though these were the sincerest conditions under which 'something' were permissible. This is most explicit in the work SOTL, which evacuates all specificity from the artwork, reducing it to a nominal unit of expressivity. The material gesture, one sometimes feels, is merely a way for Creed to test out how an object will fare on its journey, how it will conform to or react against the mundane vicissitudes of (institutionalised) existence. Creed's description of the conception and production of individual works recalls a small businessman describing the exigencies of getting a product onto the market. Here he is describing work # 74, *as many 2.5cm squares as are necessary cut from 2.5cm masking tape and piled up, adhesive side down, to form a 2.5cm cubic stack*:

> If anything, this work began as an attempt to make something, if not nothing.
>
> If that, the problem was to attempt to establish, amongst other things, what material something could be, what shape something could be, what size something could be, how something could be constructed, how something could be situated, how something could be attached, how something could be positioned, how something could be displayed, how something could be portable, how something could be packaged, how something could be stored, how something could be certified, how something could be presented, how something could be for sale, what price something could be, and how many of something there could be, or should be, if any, if at all.[51]

The refrain of the word 'something' is a defining characteristic of Creed's practice. The statement shows how his interest is not necessarily in the diminution of an object's inherent materiality, but in how it can be made to comply with all of the above disseminatory factors. The result is often an object that seems 'indefinite' and generic but which is highly specific with regard to its fulfilment of the above criteria: the physical properties of things are always seen in relation to a wider nexus of materiality rather than as independent units of expression.

Any ambivalence towards materiality Creed harbours is not, as it was for Kosuth, the

result of an investment in art's essentially "conceptual condition", as laid out in 'Art after Philosophy'. "Works of art are analytic propositions", writes Kosuth, "the artist, as an analyst, is not concerned with the physical properties of things."[52] For Kosuth the empiricism of 'thingness' threatens the precision of art's codification, its status as a self-sufficient tautology: any physical element of the work extraneous to this code "is usually irrelevant to the art work's 'art condition'."[53] Creed's works also offer seemingly narrow propositions, but these are not, like Kosuth's, aimed at a condition of truth or semantic closure; rather, he deliberately allows 'things' to encumber the veracity of the (titular) propositions he appends to them.

Famously, Kosuth tried to use the evaluation in A.J. Ayer's *Language, Truth and Logic* that "A proposition is analytic when its validity depends solely on the definitions of the symbols it contains, and synthetic when its validity is determined by the facts of its experience"[54] to argue that 'pure' art is obtainable only from the former. This was, it seems, to express the belief that art had always allowed the synthetic to subdue the analytic. Kosuth's works try to express themselves as analytic propositions, propositions that can be verified through the definitions of the symbols they contain; there can be no 'unexplained' empirical factor. He effectively appropriates the semantic verities of actual language as an 'artistic language', thereby creating the impression of avoiding the synthetic propositionality which attaches itself to the more empirical procedures characteristic of art of the preceding millennia. In swapping one language for another, Kosuth seems to demand that we go along with the belief that art *is* a language, and that ordinary language can therefore stand in for it. His conviction that Duchamp's readymade changed art's focus "from the *form* of language to *what* was being said" is meant literally: it is used as a licence to extirpate all 'technique' ('forming' or 'imaging') in favour of linguistic assertion ('saying'). In Kosuth's seminal 'proto-investigation' piece, *One and Three Chairs* (fig. 7), which presents an actual chair, a photograph of a chair and its dictionary definition alongside one another, the 'actual' and the 'pictorial' (the formed and the imaged) simply converge at the accompanying linguistic definition rather than stand as equal significational elements. Although the work is a triumvirate signification of three representational axioms, *any* object could be used—and that automatically relegates the actual to a subsidiary role. The pictorial element, as a photographic depiction of the actual element (rather than of a chair that is not present), shares its ancillary status. The three representational axioms are invoked only so that the linguistic one can subsume them. The result is that the actual and pictorial are expressed as essentially 'empty' modes of representation requiring no synthetic or empirical verification, since their convergence at the dictionary definition 'chair' has priority over the intrinsic qualities of actual chairness or depicted chairness.

Victor Burgin notes of conceptualism:

That the tendency of a work to *diverge* in its significance is seen as a problem is evidenced by

the wide use of the "self-referential" format, where signification is as far as possible recursive and *con*vergent...The paradoxical nettle always to be grasped is that of reconciling the artwork's status as an empty structure with its existence as an assembly of meaningful signs.[55]

With Martin Creed, the relationship between the artwork's status as an empty structure and its existence as an assembly of meaningful signs is explored with greater regard for an object's ostensive qualities. This does not mean that Creed is primarily interested in the particular 'materiality' of masking tape and Blu Tac etc., but that he perceives in different objects a range of means for signifying a kind of virtuality. Traditionally, this virtuality is associated with the readymade's metonymical definition of the art object, whereby one object stands in for all others. But Creed's interest is not so much in defining the art object as in signifying a more profound virtuality, a larger nothingness which merely utilises the institutional virtuality as a kind of default setting. In his oeuvre—at least, in that significant portion of it which deals explicitly with presence and absence—each work is intended, it seems, to imbue nothingness with a different cadence: the strategy is not metonymical, each work expanding rather than merely signifying the concept of nothingness.

This expanded notion of the virtuality which originates from Duchamp—whereby for 'art object' we should now read 'nothingness'—recalls Robert Smithson's idea of a 'museum of emptiness'. "The best thing you can say about museums," says Smithson in the same conversation with Allan Kapprow cited earlier,

> is that they are really nullifying in regard to action, and I think that this is one of their virtues ...I'm interested...in that area that could be called the gap. This gap exists in the blank and void regions or settings we never look at. A museum devoted to different kinds of emptiness could be developed. The emptiness could be defined by the actual installation of art. Installations should empty rooms, not fill them.[56]

Note that Smithson advocates the "installation of art", and not art's removal, as a way of revealing different kinds of emptiness. He speaks of installations emptying room*s*. As if in deliberate contrast to that more literal concept of emptiness we associate with formal abstraction, Smithson provides us with a more contingent concept of emptiness, one in which the 'predicament' of emptiness changes from one location to another. With formalist abstraction, the issue was—according to Greenberg—one of creating a visual experience that had no contential reference to anything outside its liminal pictoriality, so that degrees of 'somethingness' appear to unfold only according to the rules of the painting's own autonomy: this is what is meant by those commentators who say that the form is its own content. Such a position, we might presume, would be hostile to Smithson's proposition of actual 'sites' as ways of articulating emptiness—as actual sites have all sorts of socio-

cultural associations. More recently, however, artists such as James Turrell have indeed taken the Greenbergian idea of 'contential emptiness' and applied it to actual (i.e., non-pictorial) space and/or different sites (e.g., Roden Crater). With the typical Turrell piece, the viewer is made to feel that emptiness or nothingness assumes a kind of overwhelming palpability: the retina often has nothing to focus on, the result being a non-figure/ground, homogenous stimulation of vision (known in the field of optics as a 'ganzfeld'). Where Turrell uses actual space to allow us to 'see' emptiness or nothingness (it would be more accurate to say that the experience of his work enables us to 'see how we see', his oeuvre being an ongoing overture to the mechanics of human perception), Smithson's putative museum of emptiness is the template for a decidedly more 'cultural' emptiness. His early death means that we will never know the specific manner in which he would have used actual spaces to articulate his grave reservations about the museum's cultural didacticism, but we can probably assume that his methodology would have embodied his objection to the notion that the museum's objects "somehow constitute a representational universe"[57] which is wont to "deny the heterogeneity of its objects" in favour of "a homogenous system or series."[58] The story the museum wishes to tell is not one that he wishes to perpetuate. And yet, as Allan Kapprow points out in the same conversation, he "nevertheless goes on showing in them." The idea behind Smithson's museum of emptiness is to 'show' museums themselves, to show what they do, rather than "going on showing *in* them." Emptiness is offered as a possible avenue for exploring the museum as a granted ground. It is an avenue that Creed has already extensively explored, albeit under the different name of 'nothingness'—as can be seen with some of the examples I have already offered.

Both Creed and Smithson conceive of nothingness/emptiness as having a more exotic topography than is commonly thought. While his museum of emptiness remained very much an idea, Smithson intimates in the same exchange with Kapprow that it would be some kind of exploration of the museum's vanity:

> Extremity can exist in a vain context too, and I find what's vain more acceptable than what's
> pure...I think I agree with Flaubert's idea that art is the pursuit of the useless.[59]

The vanity of the institution figures quite prominently in Martin Creed's work, a good example being the sound piece (work # 95) mentioned earlier—which can be interpreted as a play on the phrase 'empty vessels make the most noise'. Others include work # 102, *a protrusion from a wall* (fig. 8), in which the ubiquitous painted white wall of the gallery/museum is built out to form a globular wart on the institution's skin,[60] and work # 128, *all the sculpture in a collection*, which simply gathered together Southampton City Art Gallery's existing sculpture collection (Deacon, Cragg, Whiteread et al) into a single room and presented it (still crated), as another 'Creed exhibit'. If Cornelia Parker's appropriation

of the museum's jewel in the crown, *The Kiss*, can be seen as a positive consolidation of institutional critique, then Creed's appropriation of an entire collection is a much more ambivalent gesture, the implication being that the collection, seen in its entirety, might constitute an embarrassing wardrobe of cultural artefacts.

The above works eschew inherent materiality in favour of reshaping or amplifying the museum as a container of materiality. The way in which emptiness, or nothingness, is reconstituted differently in each work often makes it ambiguous (especially with the *protrusion* pieces) whether art is trying to dissolve into the institution or whether the institution is attempting to materialise as art. Creed appropriates the museum's vanity, which is now derived not merely from the fullness, the glory, of its past collection (as it was in Smithson's time) but from its sometime willingness to be analysed as an empty container. Within this strategy the most spartan gestures—particularly his winning contribution to the 2002 Turner Prize, *the lights going on and off*—seem like extravagant, baroque squanderings of opportunity. The more spartan the gesture, the greater our awareness of the museum as a "vain context"—to the extent that it sometimes has the feel of a vanity publishing house for gestures that would simply not register at all in other contexts. *The lights going on and off* is one hundred percent context.

Pragmatically speaking, art might be defined as the licence we grant certain objects to detach themselves from those constraints imposed upon all other objects in the world. In Creed's equation *the whole world* + *the work* = *the whole world* (work # 143, a neon text piece shown in 2002 on the portico of Tate Britain), the 'work' is recouped by the world. In other words, the work's—that is, art's—'freedom' is recouped by the world's constraints.[61] Creed's artworks 'work' in much the same way as they would do in the world: work # 127, *a door opening and closing and a light going on and off* , work # 79, *some Blu Tac kneaded, rolled into a ball, and depressed against a wall* (fig. 9) and work # 142, *a large piece of furniture partially obstructing a door* (fig. 10) all occur 'as art' in a manner not greatly different to the way in which they would occur as non-art. We tend to think of the things that happen in the art world as belonging to a sort of rhetorical universe which somehow exists outside of, or parallel to, 'reality'. But regardless of how devious and far-fetched its rhetoric, an art object is still concrete matter. The seemingly elementary point Creed makes in his equational mission statement is that the 'whole world' *includes* what happens in the art world. I believe that Creed's often diminutive gestures attempt to remove the rhetoric that history has attached to the art object. The result, to put it gauchely, is an object or unit of matter that is art not just because Creed says it is, but because he is saying it is at the same time as saying that there is, concurrently, a whole load of other identical stuff which *isn't* art. This material concurrence is an important factor. Creed's ideal situation, one feels, would be to have art and not have art at the same time: whence those works like the tile piece which, in their extension of such materials as are already to be found in a given context, indirectly refer to a time when there was *no* art object in *this* place,

in *this* sense, but which nevertheless iterate that the possibility of such an object was there all along. In other words, such works attempt to propose as precise an existential signature as possible—even if what is signified is scant.

There is no more lucid expression of this than his SOTL. Through its repudiation of specificity and its consequent arrival at the status of 'notional work' ('something'), Creed's SOTL functions in a metonymic capacity for the freedom art has to be 'anything'. Distrusting, on the one hand, the empiricism of the overtly morphological (even the nominal morphology of the readymade) and, on the other, the Kosuthian analytic proposition as a means of signifying art, SOTL makes the 'object' retreat into a state of mere potentiality. In 1968, Robert Barry, speaking of his own work, maintained that "I use language as a sign to indicate that there *is* art, the direction in which the art is, and to prepare someone for the art..."[62] We can think of any number of 'refusal pieces' which might epitomise similar dematerialist impulses, and at first sight SOTL seems to follow a premise similar to Barry's. But in generating an object, a *thing*, from this premise (rather than simply closing the gallery like Barry did), Creed manipulates the premise into parody. In this sense his work seems to encapsulate materiality's initial rebuke at the hands of conceptualism *plus* the ironic capture of its ephemera by the museum as ideational commodity.

But what kind of materiality does a piece such as SOTL exhibit? Effectively, its existence cannot be consummated until it has carried out the task of occupying the co-ordinates specified in its text. It cannot announce itself as a figure on a ground until it has found the exact ground specified in its figure: its display therefore entails a kind of rendezvous with its own existence. Imagine that the piece is replaced by a less notional object: say, a light switch (something on the left, just as you come in, not too high, not too low). A light switch would not rendezvous with its own existence in the same manner as the framed text because it is already denoted as a thing and has a natural place in the world. SOTL has a paucity of 'natural thingness', and must state its place as a thing in the world literally. This paucity of natural thingness forces the viewer to confront such materiality as it has as a sort of 'deferred nothingness'—as if the object were the last stage of matter before it vanishes into oblivion.

In a recent catalogue text on Creed, Godfrey Worsdale writes:

> One is compelled to contemplate the possibility that nothingness is in fact more textured and has greater potential than is commonly attributed to it; that nothing is more than a zero point against which degrees of somethingness can be measured and is in its own right spatial, variable and temporal.[63]

This 'diversity of nothingness' might be thought of as the inverse of materiality. If we follow Godfrey Worsdale's speculation that the topography of nothingness is indeed exotic, that, "For Creed, the measured, eloquent and at times beautiful achievement of

nothing—in any of its forms—assumes altogether different levels of satisfaction",[64] then perhaps systems of representation can be devised to enunciate these different forms of nothingness. Sartre reminds us that, within the contingency of being and nothingness,

> ...being is prior to nothingness and establishes the ground for it. By this we must understand not only that being has a logical precedence over nothingness but also that it is from being that nothingness derives concretely its efficacy. This is what we mean when we say that *nothingness haunts being*.[65]

If nothingness haunts being, does it follow, in everyday life, that there should therefore be as many ways of signifying nothingness as there are beings? Confronting this question demands the immediate distinction between nothingness and *absence*. Our attempt to imagine nothingness as a thing in itself always results in the imagining of a mere absence, an absence of 'something', of a particular being that was there one moment and not there the next. Our attempt to conceive nothingness as the absence of Being in general is always liable to seek a compromised consolidation around the absence of a single, individual being. The wholesale absence of Being in general is an impossible concept, and the absence we actually end up imagining is always an *a posteriori* reaction to a 'missing' object or, as Sartre here puts it, a missing world:

> If adopting for the moment the point of view of naive cosmogonies, we tried to ask ourselves what "was there" before a world existed, and if we replied "nothing," we would be forced to recognise that this "before" like this "nothing" is in effect retroactive. What we deny *today*,we who are established in being, is what there was of being before this being. Negation here springs from a consciousness which is turned back toward the beginning. If we remove from this original emptiness its characteristics of being empty *of this world* and of every whole taking the form of a world, as well as its characteristics of *before*, which presupposes an *after*, then the very negation disappears, giving way to a total indetermination which it would be impossible to conceive, even and especially as a nothingness.[66]

It may be the case that objects which do not have a natural place in the world, which question that place, or which are displaced from their usual context, can better articulate this retroactivity of being and nothingness than those objects whose presence is 'explained' by a seamless, conventional relationship to the material environment. Such objects are perhaps able to register as *existential events*. The topography of being/nothingness expressed by Creed's oeuvre certainly seems directed at something other than the imagining of nothingness as an absence, as something merely "empty of this world". After all, there is never anything missing, removed or absent in Creed's works; always something added. But whatever is added appears to refer to a nothingness that preceded it—as though the thing

had been added in order to articulate the retroactive "before" and "after" described above by Sartre. SOTL is Creed's clearest articulation of this before and after.

End Notes

1 Thierry de Duve, *Kant After Duchamp* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: October & MIT Press, 1996), p. 355.

2 Ibid., p. 333.

3 Ibid., p. 338.

4 The paradox of making non-art to affirm the nature of art, more than any other attribute, came to define the essence of the various movements and intellectual factions subsequently corralled within the general term 'avant-garde'. Richard Huelsenbeck, a founding member of the Dada movement and sometime practising psychoanalyst, saw this oppositional dynamic as operating within a wider context than the ontology of the artwork: "The basic paradoxical position of the dadaists, eluding all logical definition, can nevertheless be explained psychologically. Carl Jung's theory of complementary psychological antitheses describes the dada stance as well as the stance of modern man. One is opposed because one advocates, one hates because one loves, one turns pious because one has no faith. Existentialist nonbeing is the starting point of a vast plethora. In art, rejected because of our bondage to it, the object becomes the very problem of reality." (*Memoirs of a Dada Drummer* [University of California Press, 1991], p. 140.) A 'death of the avant-garde' could be understood as the lack of a need to define art antithetically. The reason that the antithetical or paradoxical are rarely any longer invoked as an artwork's defining characteristics is that they have been incorporated into most branches of artmaking as a naturalised psychological impulse, rather than as a figurehead philosophy for demonstrating the ontology of the art object.

5 The enunciative paradigm will of course be fleshed out and reiterated at various points in this thesis—mainly, however, in relation to *subsequent* artworks, for I have little interest, as a contemporary artist, in revisiting it as a free-standing historical phenomenon in itself, thereby adding to an already extensive corpus of mainly historical works. At this early stage it should serve to remind the reader of the enunciative paradigm's main characteristics. These, briefly, can be thought of, as de Duve says, in terms of 'The Encounter of an Object and an Author, 'The Encounter of an Object and a Public' and 'The Encounter of an Object and an Institution' (ibid., pp. 393-410.). The readymade reified these terms in a way that existing artworks could not. The dynamic of this reification is as follows: firstly, the **authorial** encounter with an object renounces the idea of fabrication. This leads to a confrontation in which the readymade is 'acknowledged' by a **public** not so much as a thing in itself as an interruption in the cultural field—as "*something one doesn't even look at, or something one looks at when turning one's head*" (sourced below in footnote 11). Nevertheless, the **institution** of art soon adapts these interruptive faculties into the 'constitutional right' of all authors to renounce fabrication. De Duve consolidates his analysis of these three characteristics in a single paragraph (pp. 411-12), which emphasises the role Alfred Stieglitz's photograph of *Fountain* played in its initial dissemination. Arguably, it is only with the publication of this article that the above three characteristics of the readymade are stated with any clarity.

6 De Duve, ibid., p. 339.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid., p.337

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid., p.338.

11 Marcel Duchamp, 'Conversations With Marcel Duchamp' in *Opus International* 49 (March 1974), p. 89.

12 This conflation of art and citizenship is discussed within a more contemporary context in relation to Richard Wentworth in Chapter 2 and Jeff Luke in Chapter 4.

13 Quoted by Thierry de Duve, ibid., p. 107. For a more detailed discussion of this see p. 106 and pp. 115-116.

14 Joseph Kosuth, 'Art After Philosophy' in *Conceptual Art: a Critical Anthology* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1999), p. 164. It is doubtful that the intention of Duchamp's readymade was ever to reduce art to a concept. This would have conflicted with his (public) assertions regarding the creative act, which in fact advise against any analytical definition of art by calling our attention to a "personal art coefficient" . This, says Duchamp, "is like an arithmetical relation between the unexpressed but intended and the unintentionally expressed." ('The Creative Act', *Salt Seller: The Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, ed. Michel Sanoillet and Elmer Peterson [New York: Oxford University Press, 1973], p. 139.) Kosuth's later tautological definition of art—"...what art has in common with logic and mathematics is that it is a tautology; i.e., the 'art idea' (or 'work') and art are the same and can be appreciated as art without going outside the context of art for verification" ('Art After Philosophy', ibid., p.166.)—attempts extirpate the discrepancy between intention and reception by reducing the artwork to an 'analytical propositions' which 'explains' art's structure. This is explored in greater detail later on in the chapter.

15 Creed's work is critiqued in the second half of this chapter as a 'bureaucratisation' of institutional critique.

16 See *Kant After Duchamp*, p. 74. "*Art as proper name*" is introduced by de Duve to dissuade us from thinking of it as a concept. Art, says de Duve, is a "rigid designator". It "does not follow that the word 'art' is a concept, any more than the word 'Peter', since proper names are not concepts.

17 These terms can nearly always be thought as being in dialogue with the Duchampian inception of art as a proper name. Chapter 3 is an analysis of Haim Steinbach's work, which explicitly engages with this inevitability.

18 Kosuth's analytic conceptualism denies this parallactic reconstruction of aesthetics, dwelling on the readymade's liminal iteration of an 'art object' and thus preferring instead to see 'arthood' from a single ontological perspective. The relationship between this parallactic approach and analytical conceptualism is cogently summarised in a text by Mari Carmen Ramírez: "As Benjamin Buchloh has argued, with regard to analytic Conceptual art, the revival of the readymade led to an analysis of the self-reflexive or self referential qualities of the object. This analysis originated in a narrow reading of Duchamp's original intention; the significance of the readymade was reduced to the act that created it: 'It's art because I say so.' On the other hand, in the case of Pop artists such as Andy Warhol, appropriation of the idea of the readymade led to the exaltation of marketable commodities, represented by the Coca-Cola bottle or Campbells soup can, as icons of a market-driven culture. Both approaches to the readymade can be seen as grounded in a passive attitude towards the prevailing system..." ('Blueprint Circuits: Conceptual Art and Politics in Latin America' in

Conceptual Art: a Critical Anthology; ed. Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson [MIT Press, 1999], pp. 554-55)

19 Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, trans. J.H. Bernard (London: Hafner Press, 1951), pp. 183-184.

20 De Duve, ibid., p. 302.

21 Ibid., p. 304.

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid., p. 305.

25 Kant, ibid., p.185.

26 Ibid., p. 185.

27 Ibid., p. 185.

28 Other conceptualists did not make this error. They kept the jury out on the artistic act, allowing it to be simultaneously 'conceptual' and 'aesthetic' according to an empirical viewpoint. Under the subheading *Art Without Aesthetics Versus Aesthetics Without Art*, de Duve summarises the alternative adopted by those artists seeking to diametrically oppose themselves to 1960s Greenbergian formalism: "...either we claim the name "art" for what we do, but then at the expense of the aesthetic; or we claim the aesthetic, but then under a name that is not art." (Ibid., p. 296.) At this point in time the avant-garde project begins to concern itself less with a straightforward *conversion* of non-art into art than with a category of designated things which may or may not be art or, rather, have an equal capacity to be either; in other words, have the capacity to acknowledge the truth of both halves of Kant's antinomy. A convenient example of this is the work of the Canadian duo 'N.E. Thing Company', who divided their work into two categories: *Aesthetically Claimed Things* and *Aesthetically Rejected Things*. Aesthetically *claimed* things consisted of things intended to be aesthetic but not intended as art; aesthetically *rejected* things of things purged of all aesthetics and yet called art. Unlike Kosuth's *Art After Philosophy*, which presents the exile of the term 'aesthetics' as a necessary condition for arriving at the term 'art', this position does not prioritise either of the terms over the other as an ideology. Rather, by simultaneously upholding both parts of Kant's antinomy, there is only an oscillation from one ideology to the other, depending on what one *encounters*. It was on this empirical basis that N.E. Thing Company would 'aesthetically claim' (photographically) such things as a wood pile—perhaps impishly perceiving therein a kind of 'found formalism'(see *A Portfolio of Piles*, 1968)—while 'aesthetically rejecting' its art world counterpart. For more on N.E. Thing see Lucy Lippard's *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object* (University of California Press, 1997), in particular pp. 66-67.

29 De Duve, ibid., p. 251.

30 Clement Greenberg, 'After Abstract Expressionism' in *Art International* 6, no. 8 ,1962: 30.

31 As de Duve has noted, Greenberg's criterion for the point at which 'quality' segues into mere 'status' is subject to constant revision. As time passes, the division between the two—between an object which seems like a painting and an object which merely seems like a blank canvas—is increasingly fine. Greenberg himself describes this very compactly: "The essential norms or conventions of painting are also the

limiting conditions with which a marked-up surface must comply in order to be experienced as a picture. Modernism has found that these limiting conditions can be pushed back indefinitely before a picture stops being a picture and turns into an arbitrary object; but it has also found that the further back these limits are pushed the more explicitly they have to be observed." ('Modernist Painting' in *The New Art*, ed. Gregory Battcock [New York: Dutton, 1973], pp. 72-73) As the endgame of flatness grinds to its inexorable stalemate, formalist criticism and formalist painting become interlocked in a siamese rubric of mutual explication that reaches its apogee with the shaped canvas. Stella's shaped canvases, whose "marked-up surfaces", in following the eccentric contours of the edge, problematise the Greenbergian distinction between "picture" and "arbitrary object". With Stella's paintings there is no distinction between an "arbitrary object" and a "picture" : there is no point at which the canvas is a mere given, an "arbitrary object" yet to be invested with pictoriality. The picture begins not *on* an object but *as* an object; with the construction of an eccentrically shaped stretcher that is an anticipation of imminent pictoriality.

32 "...aesthetics, as we have pointed out, are conceptually irrelevant to art. Thus, any physical thing can become *objet d'art*, that is to say, can be considered tasteful, aesthetically pleasing, etc. But this has no bearing on the object's application to an art context; that is, its functioning in an art context. (E.g. if a collector takes a painting, attaches legs, and uses it as a dining table it's an act unrelated to art or the artist because, as art, that wasn't the artist's *intention*." (Joseph Kosuth, 'Art After Philosophy' in ibid., p. 164) That somewhat dismissive phrase "tasteful, aesthetically pleasing, etc." seems like a deliberately banausic definition of aesthetic sensibility, and overlooks the way in which art objects like Judd's or Stella's deliberately impose generic or arbitrary constraints on the term "aesthetically pleasing". The question of what is *already* "aesthetically pleasing" and how the aesthetic pleasure afforded by art might relate to it is a question that Kosuth avoids—probably because of the conflation of Duchampian nominalism with Greenbergian formalism that would be required to address it.

33 De Duve, ibid., p. 250.

34 Nonsense as a metalanguage is touched on in Chapter 5.

35 Duchamp's own views on these uses are expressed in some of the notes in *The Green Box*, his abstruse 'exegesis' intended to accompany his *Large Glass*. These are published in *Salt Seller: The Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, ed. Michel Sanoillet and Elmer Peterson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973).

36 Godfrey Worsdale, 'Something **and** Nothing', *MartinCreedWorks*, exh. cat.(Southampton City Art Gallery 2000). Frustratingly, I could find no illustration of *something on the left*. The piece, which is an edition of 10, 'occurs' in this catalogue not as documentation of a framed text on a wall but as an entire first page.

37 We associate the term 'expanded field' chiefly with the freedom of the 'depedestalled' sculptural object—critiqued by Robert Morris as "but one of the terms...in the expanded situation" ('Notes On Sculpture' 1-3, republished in *Art in Theory*, ed. Charles Harrison [Blackwell, 1992], pp. 813-22)—rather than that of an itinerant wall-based one, but the principle of unbounded placement is essentially the same. Here, already, in 1963, we have an artwork which can be read as a sardonic interrogation of this freedom. Viewed alongside Morris' work, we cannot help but feel SOTL also wishes to reel some of this freedom back in. Shunning the expanded field, it remains obdurately anchored to its initial specification, and asserts

itself as one of a potential series of similar pieces laboriously occupying as many different co-ordinates as the art world/market and the author's own ecological conscience will tolerate. In contrast to SOTL, by offering to stand in for any co-ordinate, *Location* eradicates the need for such surplus materiality. In order to 'designate' the centre of a wall, Morris's piece simply has to be moved into position and reset, whereas Creed would have to make a slightly different piece of work. For example, *something in the middle of a wall*, shown at Camden Arts Centre in London 2000.

38 In Islamic theology, the zahir is a commonplace object said to be invested with the 'inscrutable' image of God. In his story 'The Zahir', Jorge Luis Borges writes that "*Zahir* in Arabic means 'notorious', 'visible'; in this sense it is one of the ninety-nine names of God, and the people (in Muslim territories) use it to signify 'beings or things which possess the terrible property of being unforgettable, and whose image finally drives one mad.'" (*Borges: a Reader*, ed. Emir Rodriguez Monegal & Alastair Reid [New York: Dutton, 1981], p. 200.) The zahir can be any object, and differs for every person. Contemplated, it offers the essence of all things in the shape of a single object—whence its property of being unforgettable.

39 Peter Bürger summarises this phenomenon in his critique of "The New", *Theory of the Avant-garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (University of Minnesota Press, 1984). While, long before the advent of the avant-garde, newness and novelty had existed in art as *technological* innovations, only with the onset of Modernism do they become viable as an autonomous subjectivity in itself. Before Modernism, newness tends to be thought of in terms of stylistic innovation and changes in systems of representation within medium-specific fields. The avant-garde arose from the desire to invoke newness as an autonomous "aesthetic category" in its own right; one that, at its most definitive (says Bürger), was concerned with "the total abolition of the institution that is art. This is undoubtedly something 'new', but the newness is qualitatively different from both a change in artistic technique and a change in the representational system." (p. 63.) Bürger felt that this qualitative difference was, in itself, an inadequate definition of "avant-gardiste" works because it risked misrepresenting them as expressions that were, above all else, in opposition to 'artistic technique'. If artists transgress in order to be reined in by canonical contextualisation, then the way in which a formalist painter like Kenneth Noland is 'reined in' is categorically different to the way in which the animal-eviscerating Hermann Nitsch is reined in. Bürger's text is the search for a model of the avant-garde which takes greater heed of such categorical differences—rather than attempting, like Adorno, to theorise them into a homogeneous 'aesthetic theory'. (For more on Bürger's disagreement with Adorno see ibid., pp. 58-65.)

40 'What is a Museum?' (a dialogue between Allan Kapprow and Robert Smithson) in *Robert Smithson: Collected Writings* (University of California Press, 1996), p. 43.

41 Robert Smithson's 'Cultural Confinement' (*Artforum*, 11:2 [October, 1972], p. 32.) is the definitive text here: "Cultural confinement takes place when a curator imposes his own limits on an art exhibition, rather than asking an artist to set his limits...Once the work of art is totally neutralised, ineffective, abstracted, safe, and politically lobotomized it is ready to be consumed by society. All is reduced to visual fodder and transportable merchandise." This is the clarion call for the subsequent conflation of artist and curator presently reaching its zenith. If the above cultural confinement is to be avoided, the "limits" of the artwork have to be in dialogue with those of its exhibitory context.

42 The most comprehensive and factually accurate commentary on this is Lucy Lippard's *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object* (University of California Press, 1997).

43 An example is Daniel Buren's 1976 work *Sail/Canvas, Canvas/Sail*, which sought to express the shared physical modalities of artistic production and sailing in the form of a pun. In this piece, painted canvases were used as actual sails in a children's boat race and then displayed in a museum in their finishing order. In the catalogue produced to document the performative nature of the piece (*Sail/Canvas, Canvas/Sail*, [Berlin: Reiter Drück 1975]), Buren says of the paintings—somewhat cornily, it has to be said—that "In the museum they are canvases that sail the wall" and that outside they are "painting setting sail".

44 Shown in the exhibition *Days Like These*, Tate Britain, 2003, *The Distance (a Kiss With Added String)* entailed wrapping a mile-long length of string around Rodin's *The Kiss*.

45 Victor Burgin, 'Rules of Thumb' in *Conceptual Art: a Critical Anthology*; ed. Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1999), p. 249.

46 Ibid., p. 249.

47 Ibid.

48 Ibid.

49 Ibid.

50 Ibid., p. 255, footnote 4.

51 Martin Creed, *MartinCreedWorks*, exh. cat.(Southampton City Art Gallery 2000). The pages in this book are unnumbered. This text is printed opposite a reproduction of work # 74.

52 Joseph Kosuth, 'Art After Philosophy' in ibid., p.166.

53 Ibid, p. 166.

54 Ibid, p. 165.

55 Victor Burgin, *Rules of Thumb*, ibid., p. 254.

56 Robert Smithson, 'What is a Museum?' (a dialogue between Allan Kapprow and Robert Smithson) in *Robert Smithson: Collected Writings* (University of California Press, 1996), p. 44.

57 Eugenio Donato, *The Museum's Furnace*, quoted by Douglas Crimp in *On the Museum's Ruins* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1993), p. 53.

58 Douglas Crimp: "Founded on the disciplines of archaeology and natural history...the museum was a discredited institution from its very inception. And the history of museology is a history of the various attempts to deny the heterogeneity of the museum, to reduce it to a homogenous system or series." (Ibid., p. 49.)

59 Robert Smithson, ibid, p. 44..

60 As if to indirectly suggest that the institution should explore its rhetoric of endorsement by cultivating its 'own' art. Smithson may have liked this piece, as it plays on his notion of the museum as a place in which artworks "seem to be going through a kind of aesthetic convalescence. They are looked upon as so many inanimate invalids, waiting for critics to pronounce them curable or incurable." (Robert Smithson, 'Cultural Confinement', ibid., p. 32.) If the museum is a kind of hospice, then Creed's *a protrusion from a wall* is like one of those infections generated from within its walls as the natural inevitability of so many commingling diseases.

61 As Matthew Higgs says, Creed's expression of art's relationship with all other matter as a negational equation invites a reading of art as a 'valueless' term: "Creed's lower case conundrum ultimately leaves 'the work' nursing a bruised ego—its (numerical) 'value' reduced to zero. In so doing he begs the question: if art has no value—then why make art? Short of an answer, Creed carries on regardless, pursuing a contradictory impulse—a paradoxical desire to produce both something and nothing." '(Martin Creed: 20 Questions', *MartinCreedWorks*, exh. cat. [Southampton City Art Gallery, 2000]).

62 Robert Barry, from a statement in *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object* (University of California Press, 1997), p. 131.

63 Godfrey Worsdale, 'Something **and** Nothing', ibid.

64 Godfrey Worsdale, ibid.

65 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (Routledge, 1998), p. 16.

66 Sartre, ibid.

Chapter 2

The Aesthetic of Disinterest

I'm wandering around north London with my camera, somewhere between Caledonian Road and King's Cross. On my left is a small council block, the freshly painted entrance to which has been blocked off with a couple of pieces of timber that happened to be to hand. They make a cross, quite literally implying that to seek any means of ingress here would be not only hazardous but somehow *incorrect*. Around the corner, outside a second hand shop, I encounter a sack trolley with some bits of carpet zip-tied to its metal frame to prevent the bruising of cabinets and wardrobes. I am reminded, briefly, of Meret Oppenheim's fur tea cup; except, there's no send-up of functionality here: the union of carpet and trolley renders the trolley even more functional than it already is. Later, walking past a fence, I notice a paper cup shoved not so absent-mindedly into the railings; further along, a crisp bag held quite deliberately in place with an unerring faith in the plastic's inherent expansiveness.

The photographs I am taking are a deliberate pastiche of another artist's. Ten minutes later I'm standing at the door of his house; I've come to borrow some of his slides to help me demonstrate something about authorship to some academic colleagues. He leads me into what I presume, in the encroaching dusk, is the lounge—it being lit by nothing more than a light box stationed at the centre of the room, on top of which is strewn a selection of slides picked from an archive documenting tableaux of a similar nature to that which I have just been photographing. 'I would offer you a sandwich,' he says, 'but I've a train to catch in an hour...oh, this is my son, Felix.' Felix and he are preparing some visuals for a lecture somewhere in the Baltic. 'Look at this,' he says, handing me a slide of some car doors crammed into a doorway, '—but let me show you *this*,' he quickly adds, ushering me over to the dining table, partially hidden beneath a spillage of parcels, envelopes, photographs, letters, drawings—most of which, I am guessing, document small acts of civilian ingenuity, ad hoc appropriations of objects: a door wedged open with a screwdriver, paper weighted down with a cup of tea, a magazine pressed into service as an umbrella, the kind of impulsive, circumstantial formalism we all adopt from time to time, and which occasionally yields assemblages that would not look out of place in a provincial amateur Dada competition—were it not for their explicit functionality.

Richard Wentworth (yes, it is he) thrusts into my hand a photograph depicting, if I remember rightly, some metal railings in Hertfordshire that rise and fall in an eccentric parabola over the ruins of an old Roman viaduct, a town planner's conscientious concession to an earlier stab at civilisation. 'It's amazing,' begins Wentworth, 'every month—every *week*—I receive in the post something like this, or this, or *this*,' he says, his hand thankfully passing over the "intriguing letter"[1] I myself had sent him only a fortnight ago, which I notice on the table and which forms but a tiny fraction of his correspondence ("all from

people who clearly feel they are contributing to some kind of archive"). I blush. I'm here to take rather than give; because of a mutual interest in a quotidian, unexalted form of creativity. Thanks to his compulsive documentation of this creativity—stretching back to the early 1970s and reputedly comprising an archive of some several thousand examples—Wentworth has become known, whether he likes it or not, as its custodian, as the man who put a name to it.

Initially, my interest in his documentation of this creativity revolved around the issue of authorship. Wentworth, as we know, is an artist. Had he been an anthropologist, a photojournalist or an employee of Camden Borough Council, the phenomenon that is *Making Do and Getting By* (as he calls it) may have eluded me altogether. The point is that my experience of this phenomenon is mediated through a field (art) whose chief characteristic is authorship. Clearly, what makes artworks fizz with significance is not just their inherent qualities but the fact that these qualities are attributable to a specific human being. If they were attributable to a syndicate of anonymous producers (as most things are) our attitude towards them would be different. This, now, is the only certifiable difference between ordinary objects and artworks: the demand that a single human being be seen to take responsibility for their conception, execution and dissemination (regardless of whether they are actually physically responsible for the latter two). In the wake of the readymade and the generic artmaking it has engendered, this is the only *essential* difference we are left with.

Artworks are directed at a general 'audience', yet are usually encountered *tête-à-tête*. The viewer is nearly always made to feel anonymous, one of a non-specific group of all-comers addressed by a specific author. In Wentworth's *Making Do and Getting By* (henceforward MDGB) there is a near reversal of this status quo: in the majority of photographs (see figs. 11-17) a 'civilian-author' is addressed by an 'artist-viewer'. This civilian-author has the same anonymous status as the all-comer to whom an artwork is usually addressed, with this exception: that he or she is providing the raw material for the transaction. Our interest in the much celebrated 'human' instinct that MDGB invokes resides entirely, it seems, in the anonymity of this authorship: the acts documented are the kind of thing 'we all do' from time to time. In this 'we all' lies an aesthetic of disinterest which intrigues me. The expedient civilian actions that has Wentworth reaching for his camera are usually visually *indifferent* gestures, and it is precisely this quality of visual indifference that allows the postDuchampian artist to appropriate them. Things that 'we all do' are, one presumes, the complete inverse of what an artist does. And yet it is within the context of art that Wentworth proposes to examine this anonymous authorship. In being displaced into this context—into a visually interested field—it swaps visual indifference for visual disinterest; that is to say, in Wentworth's hands it inclines more towards what might be called a visual *impartiality*. In other words we move from one definition of disinterest

(indifference) to another (impartiality). The 'aesthetic of disinterest' is a term I have contrived to describe an *artist's* interest in what has been done by *someone else*, by a non-artist, an everyman, a 'civilian'.[2] Wentworth's approach can be seen as the origin of a strategy in which an anonymous action or gesture, with its distinct syntax of another human's relationship to his or her material environment, is treated as though it were 'a practice'. The syntax of MDGB is appropriational, a civilian Duchampianism, as it were: one recognised by Wentworth as an artistically disinterested form of creativity, each new tableau being tacitly hailed, one feels, as an instance of creativity happening outside of art. The idea that it is possible for creativity to play truant from art is not new, but the idea of showcasing its truancy within art's institutional context is a fairly recent one. The appeal of considering such activity within an art context perhaps resides in the knowledge that, no matter how it is mediated, it will always be recognisable as something that does not admit of a specified author.

So what is that genus of thing that has Wentworth reaching for his camera? This much is clear: each new photograph adds a new species to it. As a class of things it is as accommodating as the circumstances which force civilian improvisation are unforeseen, a list whose criterion of inclusion diversifies exponentially with each new addition. In his catalogue essay to Wentworth's curatorial project at Camden Arts Centre in 1999, *Thinking Aloud*, Nick Groom cites—as many have before him—a famous list from a Jorge Luis Borges essay 'The Analytical Language of John Wilkins'. Borges mentions a "certain Chinese encyclopaedia entitled *The Celestial Emporium of Benevolent Knowledge*", in which animals are divided into

a) belonging to the Emperor

b) embalmed

c) tame

d) sucking pigs

e) sirens

f) fabulous

g) stray dogs

h) included in the present classification

i) frenzied

j) innumerable

k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush

l) *et cetera*

m) having just broken the water pitcher

n) that from a long way off look like flies...[3]

For Groom the exponential inclusivity of this list is analogous to the myriad diversity of the

objects which comprise *Thinking Aloud*, whose inventory contains such things as a Romanian flag with the Socialist Republic emblem ripped from it; a small metal cylinder designating the weight of a standard kilogram; Fischli & Weiss's film *Der Lauf der Dinge*[4] playing on a monitor; a doodle said to have been drawn by Mr. Lloyd George during the meeting to decide the terms of the Armistice in Versailles—oh, and a number of artworks by various artists. As Groom says, "lists are made by arranging differences, and so formed in a sense by the signatures of objects."[5] But the articles of a list, we ordinarily assume, are also supposed to share a characteristic that justifies their very inclusion in that list—even if this characteristic is stated as one of randomness and wilful miscellany. Whence, on finding the list 'baked beans', 'rice', 'noodles' and 'toothpaste' we naturally infer its author's trip to a supermarket. But if I add to this list 'Manchester' (meaning, perhaps—or perhaps not—'book tickets for a trip there') or 'remind Jack about half-term holiday', it begins to suggest a mental itinerary that becomes more dissolute by virtue of a categorical slippage from the shared characteristics of the preceding victuals. If we continued with this game, would there necessarily be a point at which, the further through the list we read, the more reason we would have to doubt the authenticity of any corresponding itinerary? There is actually no *logical* reason to suggest that a list beginning with, say, 'carrots', moving through 'bagpipe sealant' and ending in 'the Nuremberg Rallies' precludes a plausible narrative. Unless, that is, an overarching theme has been established beforehand, so that each article is referred to a grounding principle. Only with thematic pre-establishment does a list risk dissonance and incongruity; if unestablished, the theme has to be divined through an actual examination of its articles.

With Borges the theme is 'animals', and we expect the list to unfold taxonomically. But rather than telling us how the animals actually relate to one another taxonomically, the list represents a sort of 'animality in general', as perceived from a human perspective—the gaps between each category running counter to an anticipated epistemological equidistance, as if in caricature of the human mind's digressive tendency. With each entry we are simply struck, as was Foucault, by the "stark impossibility of thinking *that*."[6] "It is not", suggests Foucault, " the 'fabulous' animals that are impossible, since they are designated as such, but the narrowness of the distance separating them from (and juxtaposing them to) the stray dogs, or the animals that from a long way off look like flies."[7] This distance between each animal can only be made to appear narrow when it is expressed within "the non-place of language",[8] through the simple expedient of the alphabet (a, b, c, d). Language is the only grounding principle we have that is capable of assembling 'all things' in a single place (the dictionary). In some sense the assertion of an overarching theme at the head of a list (animals, food etc.) is a provocation to leave language behind for the world of the 'things' it designates: 'look,' says the theme, 'all these things correspond to this characteristic...go see for yourself.' But Borges's list will not allow us to do so, for the propinquity of the included articles is tenable only in a linguistic sense, straddling too many

categories than can be verified by actual experience.

If, through thematic constriction, many exhibitions attempt to site their works too keenly within "the non-place of language", then *Thinking Aloud*, like Borges's list, concerns itself with a language spoken *in the form* of its exhibits. It possesses a similar animality to the "ancient Chinese encyclopaedia", its 'theme' existing as much in the psychological interstices which separate each exhibit as in their inherent characteristics. The moment we think we have the curatorial thread, it loses us. The proximity of political artefacts to formalist artefacts forces us to review the formalist aspects of the former and the political aspects of the latter. The proximity of remaindered objects to those that still have a material currency, and of artworks to ubiquitous, overlooked 'design classics', forces us to take seriously Wentworth's suggestion that the gallery is "somewhere between a library and a shop",[9] a place where the inherent qualities of an object are but the first principles of its value. As an ongoing 'list' of tableaux, MDGB often presents situations in which an object's value runs counter to its universally accepted use—or what Groom might call its "signature". In each case the signature of the deployed object is redefined in relation to an exterior object: is it heavy enough to hold open, or cuneiform enough to jam beneath, a door? In this way the object reveals an aspect that has lain dormant and unseen. Groom's summary of the exhibits we find in *Thinking Aloud*—"The object incorporates something outside of itself...In other words, the full definition of an object incorporates its future and a sense of its possible destinations"[10]—though pertaining to an overtly curatorial venture, also describes the dynamic that underpins much of the material we find in MDGB. The 'extrinsic' aspects which have yet to be manifested by an object's "possible destinations" might be referred to as its *ulteriority*. In revealing an overlooked aspect, the object loses its signature, or perhaps counterfeits the signature of the object that does not happen to be to hand, the object it is standing in for. Sometimes, as in Wentworth's many photographs of things propping open doors, that missing object—a doorstop—is a readily identifiable product. But often there is no such item, for the function the appropriated object has been conscripted into has not yet prompted anyone to design a product for it. Thus it is that we find two scaffolding planks and a boulder—an apparatus no one would seriously consider marketing—standing jealous guard over a motorist's parking space, the planks balanced precariously on the car bumpers (fig. 17). Regardless of whether or not there is a designed precedent, the appropriated object counterfeits the signature of an 'absent product'.

This recalls the design ethic showcased in a 1998 exhibition at the ICA, *Stealing Beauty*, which advocated a self-consciously homespun invention of products (using whatever is to hand) over the traditional design, manufacture and marketing of new products. (For example, the design collective, el utimo grito's coat hanger made by rolling up the magazine or newspaper one happens to be carrying.) A 'designed object' represents a recurrent point of contact between a person and the material world. A product emerges when certain points of contact become widespread repetitions. This show explored what

happens when this point of contact is not consolidated in the form of a 'marketed' product, but rather 'kept open' by the provisional use of something which would be unmarketable due to the seeming randomness of its application. As Claire Catterall says in her catalogue essay, 'Stealing Beauty', the designers in the show "... insist on the experience of living in a confused and confusing world".[11] The conflation of art and design that figured prominently in *Stealing Beauty* has a similar dynamic to that of MDGB, but is approached from the perspective of design rather than art. The distinction to be made between the two is that the generic, designed object is more viable for art than the specific 'art object' is for design. Where designed objects are heeled to a place in the world, art objects exist in a non-place of critical and metaphysical interrelationships; confusion arises when the designed object is introduced into this metaphysical context as a speculative form of arbitration between the two. As Michael Horshaw writes in an essay in the same catalogue, "Art in all its artfulness...exploited the value of confusion long before design could even walk."[12] Horshaw rightly suggests that design's "inability to address themes raised by art"[13] lies in its generic role. Nevertheless, in a somewhat belated reversal of Duchampianism, *Stealing Beauty* proposed generic objects in which "the marks of the hand are discernible against the blank, regimented canvas of mass production",[14] the underlying claim perhaps being that it is more interesting to think of design not in terms of the 'best' product for a recurrent functional need (i.e. as the 'brainchild' of a single inventor) but in terms of each individual's use of it (i.e. as brain*children*). Out of this realisation comes the idea of the meta-product, a mutating product borne of heuristic human improvisation. *Stealing Beauty* was a call-to-arms to the consumer to devise their own notion of product by "looking at their own lives";[16] to recognise a product only in the instant one has fashioned it for oneself. Here, 'product' is an open term[17] that describes the outcome of a creative self-sufficiency whose conclusion is something which isn't quite a designed object and isn't quite an art object. (It has to be said that, for all its laconic improvisation, this 'homespun' product is as equally redolent of the 'lifestyle magazine' as any more compliantly commodificational rubric—a good example being Georg Baldele's *Molotov Cocktail Light*: revolution as lifestyle).

MDGB investigates a phenomenon that is characterised, if anything, by its openness: Wentworth does not know *what* he is looking for, but recognises it when he finds it. He recognises it most frequently in those situations where the signature of an object is distorted within an ad hoc functional relationship—in those situations where someone has said 'fetch me a doorstop' and someone else has come back with a fire extinguisher or screwdriver. The situation is analogous to when a speaker's search for a straightforward word, or words, to represent a thought breaks down and he resorts to a metaphor or simile to explain what he means. Linguistically, we demand a 'doorstop' when what we actually mean is 'any object heavy enough to keep the door open'. But we continue to refer to the

fire extinguisher as a doorstop until, one day, we revert to the word 'fire extinguisher', which has by now, in this context, come to encompass 'doorstop': the one is effectively a metaphor for the other.[17] This is possible only because, as Magritte spelled out, words are *not* the things they designate. In situations like the one just described, it often takes an impartial 'audience' (a health and safety officer, perhaps?) to fully appreciate this divergence of linguistic and actual sense. Step forward Richard Wentworth, whose ongoing photographic project seems concerned with the points of greatest divergence—and is fuelled, I suspect, by the fascination that this divergence so often goes overlooked. MDGB explores how the world revolves as much around this divergence as it does around the veracity of language as a supposedly transparent representational tool. It explores the extent to which metaphor, so often thought of as the most highly attenuated form of linguistic representation, is actually a commonplace behavioural impulse which serves us well—almost unconsciously so—in our quotidian relationship with the material environment.

Linguisticians and semiologists alike will be clamouring to point out that no knowledge whatsoever of the *words* 'doorstop' and 'fire extinguisher' is required in order to see that one object is being used as if it were the other; that an acquaintance with the normal *function* of these objects is the only thing required to make this observation. Nevertheless, there is a sense, I feel, in which our appraisal of MDGB's civilian extemporisations would be different if language did not play some invisible, or tacit, 'straight man' role. This is borne out simply by stating the usual reaction to such extemporisations. When we see one thing used as if it were another—a fire extinguisher for a doorstop—something inside us says 'But that's a *fire extinguisher*,' meaning 'This is not a doorstop.'. In so doing we perform something like Magritte's 'This is not a pipe': our perception of the appropriated object is accompanied by a sort of disclaimer which forces the object into a fleeting relationship with language. Confronted with the not-thing, which we have internally verbalised, our response is to cast around for 'the right thing', for that object which is 'missing from its place'. As I remarked earlier, this object could be an actually existing, designed precedent, or it could be a 'virtual product' that no one has deemed worthwhile inventing—in which case a 'lack' is met with a whole series of mental propositions which are different approximations of the 'right thing'.

While our appraisal of MDGB is conducted chiefly under the theme of 'application', language is an important touchstone. The civilian, as one who is civilised, finds himself implicated in an ongoing anthropological narrative which, technologically speaking, is characterised by the gradual realisation of the applicability of certain objects and materials to certain tasks. Clearly, humankind didn't just become adept at adapting material to his own ends and *then* suddenly invent language to describe it all—as though it were simply another new object. No, each minor, incremental breakthrough, each new man-made object was consolidated by an utterance or gesture henceforward taken to be the

mark—or want—of that object. Language arose, albeit for a long time very primitively, as a natural by-product of technological breakthrough. And the greater the range of objects required to accomplish given tasks, the more necessarily complex language became as a means of discrimination. Once this means of discrimination is established, the appropriateness of an object for a task is symbolised by the utterance one makes when in need of it. While, as we know, language and objects are not the same thing, it nevertheless remains the case that objects have proliferated words. The invention of a new object requires the invention of a new word, and it is impossible to conceive of an already existing object that cannot be named or described using language. Due to the hand-in-glove evolution of technology and language, when we encounter a 'misused' object, the instinct to refer it back to the 'truth' of the utterance which designates it—'But that's a fire extinguisher'—is a quite natural one. Such points of dissonance appear to weight the significational marquee of language down, so that it becomes contiguous with the actuality of its referents. We know that, in some cases, individuals may differ widely in the referents they have for the same word and yet still get by in the world.[18] MDGB seems to extend this linguistic disconsensus into a material realm.

In an interview, Wentworth once said that "Who first said 'readymade' was clever, but it's a long time since people discovered that you could dig with an antler..."[19] This comment places two different attitudes to civilisation—the semiotic sophistication of Duchamp and the empirical eureka of the savage—alongside one another. The first is an act of language, the second an act of—well, survival. As an artist, it seems Wentworth's desire is to bring them together: "a sort of thesaurus of objects has arisen",[20] he says in the same interview. In this statement the two attitudes are conflated into a single metaphor. The things we find documented in MDGB are like a form of survivalism seen from the perspective of civilised man: 'primitive' solutions to problems that have arisen as the very *result* of civilisation. There is no finer example of this than Wentworth's photograph of a Jack Russell tethered to a holdall (fig. 11), its owner having presumably just gone into a shop. What, thousands of years ago, may have been hunted down as food now endures as a kind of living ornament, an endearing encumbrance to the modern equivalent of the hunting and gathering of which it may once have been the intended quarry. Is the dog standing guard over the holdall? Or is the holdall thwarting his animal inclination to escape from his master? The tableau is an allegory of civilisation: there are now so many artefacts 'to hand' that when the hand reaches for the nearest thing it inevitably finds something that will do the job. But the 'made ground'[21] on which we live, for all its complex, careful premeditation, is defined most succinctly—I would contend—when treated as natural ground; which is to say, when subjected to a kind of 'civilised primitivism'.

The ulteriority which characterises MDGB—whereby artefacts evolve new signatures in ergonomically foreign climes—seems to mock the material world's very

division into autonomous objects that can be defined through 'essential' attributes. In his book *Closure: A Story of Everything*, Hilary Lawson writes that "the possibility of dividing the world into things at all is itself the outcome of a process of which language is a part."[22] Rejecting the rational empiricist tendency to behave as though "there is a world which can be accurately described"[23], Lawson instead conceives of the world as a 'not-thing'. He does this in the belief that the propositional nature of language and the essentialist nature of 'the thing in itself' are in fact incompatible. What defines things in themselves is the abstract notion of the 'logical simple'. Rather than attempting to translate these logical simples with the 'transparency' of language, Lawson is more interested in how the logic of these simples alters according to a shifting propositional viewpoint. By 'logical simples' Lawson alludes to a *general* notion of a thing which lies behind all material objects: the object as *x*. In modern logic, says Lawson, there has been a

> confusion between the *thing* [the object = *x*] and its *identification*, between reference and meaning. While any particular thing may be identified in innumerable ways, and can be described as consisting of innumerable other things, the thing in question is unique and could not be something else. The subject of a proposition need not uniquely label a thing with the consequence that there are as many things as subjects of propositions. The subject of a proposition is not a name for an individual thing but a set of criteria whose solution is found in the thing to which they refer. Thus 'that house' and 'that structure' can both refer to the same material thing because each offers a different set of descriptions which in each case is satisfied by the physical entity in question.[24]

By inscribing objects with new signatures, MDGB's civilian protagonists blur the distinction between things in themselves and the propositions we might use to describe those things. The material object *itself* begins to take on the variety of the different propositions we might use to describe it. As Lawson says, we can use language to give different descriptions of the same object. We can describe *that* banana as a 'yellow object', as a 'crescent-shaped fruit' or as a 'cash-crop of Costa Rica': separate propositions which all allude to the same object. But in order to understand that they all allude to the same thing, one has to have encountered the actual material object. Only once this encounter has taken place is the object seen to embody all these propositions. In itself, however, it remains a single material thing. Far from having to 'adapt' itself to fit these propositions, it transcends them. The 'logical simple' is not the material thing in itself but the general term used to describe the process by which *all* material objects, in principle, transcend propositional representation. Propositions describe aspects of a material thing, not the entirety of the material thing 'in itself'. This 'in itself' is an ontological secret not vouchsafed to the chinese whisper of language. 'Logical simple' is the term language has invented to pass on this secret without misrepresenting it—without, indeed, 'knowing' it.

In MDGB we encounter material objects that are somewhere between a logical simple and a material object, somewhere between a virtuality and an actuality. This is possible because of an elision between the material thing and a proposition we might use to describe that material thing. More accurately, the object describes itself by becoming an unforeseen aspect of itself, by 'proposing' itself as another thing. In so doing, in carrying out its own propositional analysis, it traverses the two propositional universes, the analytic and the synthetic.[25] The logical simple, the object = x, is no longer an 'in principle' algebraic value but one governed by the facts of experience: its virtuality is manifested as a palpable synthesis. This synthesis is the changing role the material thing has with regard to the randomness of the problem it is used to solve. By focusing on the relationship between general problems and particular solutions, MDGB illustrates the dialectical relationship between logical simples and material things, between the general idea of a thing and particular incarnations.

Through its photographs of coat hangers propping open windows, of chairs and planks guarding parking spaces, of books and other objects shoved under the legs of tables, MDGB portrays objects that perform the material equivalent to a homonym, a word that accommodates two entirely different meanings without changing its spelling or pronunciation (e.g. the word 'mail', meaning both 'letter' and 'armour'). Sometimes, as with the photograph of the Jack Russell, the homonymical appropriation of objects reaches a crescendo of absurdity. At certain points MDGB seems to risk lapsing into the same sort of Middle England eccentricity we used to associate with That's Life, while at other points the subject is relatively banal—and very occasionally seemingly unapparent. The candour of certain examples is offset by the comparative subtlety of others. The exponential inclusivity described earlier might also be understood as an apparency of subject: a man walking down the street using a magazines as an umbrella; an improperly aligned tile disrupting the pattern of a chequered floor (fig. 13); two lengths of piping standing in for the letter 'T' on a hotel sign (fig. 14); a shop façade; a pile of rubbish in the street; some chairs arranged outside a second hand shop; a pencil inserted where a padlock should be (fig. 16)—the subjective timbre is inconsistent, though never completely muted. The subject is usually always centralised as a standout, figure/ground composition, but occasionally one bleeds into the another, so that initially we see nothing more than a 'street scene' or an amalgam of stuff. That said, as might be expected with an approach which aims at transparent documentation, most of the photographs yield their subject eventually.

Although, within this majority, there are so many thematic repetitions—doorstops, fences, refuse disposal—that individual examples begin to dissolve into general typologies, the taxonomic approach is not one that interests Wentworth as a means of imposing an epistemological framework on what has been 'collected'. Archivally, then, MDGB remains in a random state (I detected a palpable resistance to the word 'archive' on my visit to Wentworth's house), and even the rudimentary cataloguing system which evolves as a result

of natural chronology is disrupted by the constant plunder of material for lectures, talks and so forth—for to have to put all this stuff back in the 'right place' would in itself be to embark on a process of thematic rationalisation. Where, in relation to a mitten left on a wall, *is* the right place for a car wing wrapped in carpet? One feels that the impulsive act of recording this phenomena would be traduced by such rationalisation:

> I record things as if I were trying to fix the visual weather. I don't file these pictures or order them, I don't look at them for pleasure or analysis; so they are almost like biologist's slides—slides of thoughts visible only when illuminated.[26]

It would be a mistake to seize upon any selection of photographs in an attempt to extract the essence of MDGB, for this would be to overlook the role it seems to play within Wentworth's practice: it is not so much a way of stalking a premeditated subject as a method of registering surprise. As things chanced upon rather than sought out, the documented tableaux demonstrate a subjective thirst felt only at the moment at which it is slaked. Wentworth's own attitude to these photographs ("thoughts visible only when illuminated") mirrors the solutions of the practical dilemmas they depict. Within these scenarios, an object's ulteriority arises precisely because it fits into a gap, or situation, for which it wasn't designed—into a sort of 'hole' that has opened up in the protagonist's immediate reality. It is striking just how many of these photographs portray bits of reality 'stitched' together: a length of piping serving as the letter 'T' in a hotel sign stands abreast the letters 'H', 'O', 'E' and 'L' in much the same way that an escaped prisoner's papier mâché dummy might stand abreast his fellow inmates at roll-call. Reality is allowed to carry on happening, unimpeded—not *quite* as it was, but with a modicum of continuity.

The various ways in which we strive to maintain continuity can be thought of in terms of openness and closure. Hilary Lawson's model is worthy of consideration here. He asks us to consider the material world as being equivalent to a random pattern of dots on a page:

> ...we can imagine scanning the pattern looking for some combination of dots that allows the formation of an image of some sort [i.e. a material thing]. To begin with nothing may be seen other than the dots [i.e. undifferentiated matter], but in due course let us suppose that an image of a face is identified...The page of dots is now not what it was. The dots appear to be the same yet we see something which we did not previously see, which we can describe and identify and which was previously absent. This thing which we see is an example of closure: the outcome of a   process of closure.[27]

As Lawson acknowledges, this is only an analogy: "the page of dots is not openness and is already the outcome of a complex form of closure",[28] and cannot simulate the texture of

our 'random' material world. Nevertheless, the analogy indicates how a rhetorical "preliminary layer of closure" is necessary in order to identify any material at all from openness. Unlimited material differentiation is then initiated on the basis that "subsequent layers of closure realise material from other forms of material themselves the outcome of prior closure."[29] Closure is in this way folded into the openness of a given situation rather than imposed entirely from without. There is not really any point at which one is engaging with the world from a position of pure openness; rather, we proceed from one closure to another without ever falling out of the loop. And yet there are, of course, certain situations in which falling out of the loop seems a very real possibility. MDGB depicts these very situations, in which people have sought a certain kind of closure and instead had to settle for a degree of openness. Thus it is that a pencil is inserted where a padlock should be, to keep a van door from sliding open. The appropriation is a way of defining a closure without fully achieving it.

In most cases the material world obeys a law of interdependency, whereby each thing's qualities are revealed through proximity to another's. Functionalism is the prime manipulation of an already existing, natural interdependency, exploiting its elemental qualities for artefactual gain, domesticating materials within a more highly regulated set of interrelationships (the padlock to the door, the hammer to the nail etc.). But when an artefact is estranged from its function, when we end up using a steam iron to bang a nail into the wall, the liminal, elemental interdependency tends to reassert itself: the object just feels like a lump of iron. Even with the most serendipitous appropriations a certain amount of openness is retained through a deviation from the functional laws of interdependency.[30] This openness results from the difference between the thing as matter and the thing as artefact, [31] between elemental and functional interdependency: a difference usually experienced as an ancillary or 'irrelevant' materiality made palpable by the removal of functionalism's "preliminary layer of closure". Without this layer of closure it continues to operate, but as a more equivocal 'something'. This something, earlier generalised as the virtual 'object = x', can be thought of as the immanent tendency of all objects to yield to an heuristic form of interrogation. Problem-solving tends to fall into two categories, heuristic and algorithmic. The latter, in conducting an exhaustive examination of all possible solutions, invariably arrives—eventually—at the best; while the former, relying on shortcuts and inspired guesses, is usually (but not always) content to settle for the next (or next next) best. In its entirety, as a documentation of many (but not all) possible solutions to recurrent problems, MDGB tends towards an algorithmic representation of an heuristic phenomenon.

In their virtuality—that is, as 'units of being' drafted in to plug existential gaps—the objects in Wentworth's photographs recall Leibniz's *Monadology*, a philosophical system devised to describe the ultimate elements, or 'parts' of reality. In their loosest sense 'monads' are units of being, "simple in that they have no parts".[32] The "simple substance", in Leibnizian terms, is actually more akin to something like a 'soul' than to a

physical being. Monads, to quote Anthony Savile, are "those individual things whose existence makes true or false the thoughts and utterances that we aim at the world."[33] Thus, to use Savile's analogy "the individual sparrowhawk makes true the assertion that some predator is terrifying my pigeons". What confirms this truth is not its feathers, bones, cells, nor even the atoms comprising them, but the *bindedness* of these elements, its wholeness. According to Savile, for Leibniz the individual form

> is conceived of as a distinct and theoretically autonomous element of the composite whole, which binds together the animal (or the organ) as a unity. So...the man or the ox is a unit in virtue of its bodily mass being held together and is given its particular human or bovine organisation by its own dominating and unitary substantial form. The move to simple substances is a consequence of that view.[34]

The monad, then, is not just a unit of being but the organising principle behind the unit of being (or, theologically, its soul). In this sense it is not the world's various *material* qualities that reveal its monads; the monad is more like a 'metaphysical atom', necessarily fugitive and never quite surfacing as a tangible entity—in fact, very much like the thing that Lawson terms a logical simple.

In § 20 of *The Monadology* we find the following statement:

> We sometimes experience in ourselves states in which we remember nothing and have no distinct perceptions, as when we fall into a faint or when we are overcome by a deep dreamless sleep. In such states our souls scarcely differ from those of bare monads. But since such states are of short duration and we emerge from them, souls are something more than they are.[35]

'Bare' monads, says Savile, are those that have

> perceptions without consciousness at all. Why they are required in his [Leibniz's] scheme of things is not all that obscure. Many things we encounter in the world around us display no signs of conscious experience. Within a Leibnizian understanding of them we are obliged to construct them from monadic elements. Since they display no signs of consciousness, it would be gratuitous to attribute consciousness to them. Yet we know we have to attribute perceptions to them as a condition of their existence. So it would seem that we have good reason to suppose that the world contains bare monads.[36]

The bare monad, while itself an unconscious entity, is nevertheless the site at which the perceptions of superior monads (animals, humans, divinities) individuate themselves in the world; the co-ordinate where the predatory instincts of perception locates its quarry. As I understand it, Leibniz's *Monadology* effectively describes an ontological algorithm that

runs from God, through man and animal, to insentient matter. The world we have, argues Leibniz, is the "best possible world".[37] In such a world, humans, as apperceiving monads, understand that there is a maximum efficiency at which their perceptions can aim. Animals, on the other hand, as merely perceiving monads, tend to get by with repetitive perceptions aimed at survival. And bare monads are replete with the perceptions of the foregoing monadic hierarchy without themselves having any awareness of this repleteness.[38] In this way *The Monadology* describes an algorithmic unwinding of consciousness of which bare monads are a sort of bedrock, and is perhaps the basis on which later philosophy formed ideas of the enmeshing of consciousness with the material world.

The material artefact is not only the most efficient way humankind can devise to navigate God's "best possible world", but a natural consequence of its existing material interrelationships. If the bare monads exhibit a repleteness of perception, then any material artefact made from them is an alteration of these perceptions. Only through the alteration of matter do we acquire evidence of this repleteness. But within this alteration we tend to overlook the fact that materials are as much a manipulation of us as we are manipulators of them. Their distinct qualities court our perceptions, directing them to specific purposes—which are of a limited number in this "best *possible* world". When these alterations of matter, these artefacts, are themselves subject to a further alteration (as they are in MDGB), they are invariably returned to a more elemental state. In this return, the object displays an ability to conform with a perception that was not part of the functional imperative of its initial design. This functional imperative was a response to the repleteness of perception contained in the original bare monad. Only with the hindsight that accompanies this functional imperative's denial do we realise the true nature of this repleteness. The appropriation serves to show that 'elemental state' here means the organising principle, the unit of being behind the material thing and the tendency for it to mutate according to circumstance without relinquishing its sense of wholeness. When, like the anonymous civilian-authors of MDGB, we 'reach for something' to plug an existential gap, the world manipulates us, and its manipulation is all the more evident in forcing us to 'undo' the constrictions we have imposed on its matter. Furthermore, the survivalist instinct that inevitably induces this 'alteration of an alteration' effectively animalises our status within the monadic hierarchy. Short of a litter bin, we impale a polystyrene cup on a railing. Like a bird impaling a moth on a thorn, we become the missing link between a seemingly preordained convenience between objects that reveals itself only at the moment of contact.[39] By plugging gaps in reality, these heuristic acts forge hidden correspondences in search of a best possible world, as it might be arranged *now*. Insofar as the sustenance of this best possible world is of necessity one that happens in the present, the object's former life is, quite literally, history. If an object's functional imperative—itself an artefactual extrapolation of an existing elemental one—is its 'history', then history is ignored to meet the demands of the present, which, while it may resemble the past, is never quite the same on

any two given occasions. MDGB, in portraying those occasions on which an object deviates markedly from the history of its functional imperative, shows how its essence, its wholeness, is of an utterly *contemporary* nature. Such contemporaneity always places our appraisal of the object's essence not just in the present but in the future—for the homonymical role it fulfils in the present is but one stage in a providential trajectory of imminent mutation.

From an aesthetic viewpoint, what strikes us in our appraisal of MDGB is the way in which our inability to say how a thing might be beautiful is replaced with an inability to say what, exactly, a thing *is*. (It 'is' precisely what providence has in store for it.) Now, at face value, this is simply part of the wider artistic development since Duchamp, whereby aesthetics is reconstituted around a displaced object's ontological uncertainty ('parallactic' was the word coined to describe this development in the previous chapter). As the readymade became widespread and conventionalised as a given, sculpture found itself bifurcating into the continued (but still innovative) use of traditional materials and the adoption of an increasingly homonymical approach to the general 'semantic field' of materiality, whereby hitherto 'unconsidered' materials and objects were gradually named and defined as artistically appropriate (usually under stipulated theoretical conditions). As a practice which includes both MDGB and his sculptural output, Wentworth's engagement with the material world is one in which art's incipient baptism of hitherto unconsidered materials is brought back into proximity with those practices of the everyday[40] which in fact share its appropriational dynamic. MDGB reappraises appropriation as something characterised not just by artful strategising (the calculated 'occupation' of existing territory *as*, or in the service of, art), but by natural human inclination. The Duchampian and the civilian appropriation are, in their own way, both critique: both seek to understand the conventions of a situation by testing the viability of various alternatives. In MDGB they sit side by side: never quite touching but distantly aware of one another through the mediation of photographs presented in an art context.

In Wentworth's actual sculpture, however, they come into more literal contact with one another (see figs. 18-20). The laconic elegance of this work made a big impression on me when I first encountered it. To me, Wentworth was, and still is, Arte Povera meets Ealing Comedy. That is to say, a concern for weight, lightness and economy is offset with a more semiotic manipulation readily associable with Duchamp, but far more faithful to the "involuntary geometry"[41] of the street and the junk shop that is the province of MDGB. All the pared-down, entelechal formal language of *Povera* is in place: objects simply lean, sit on, are propped up against, wedged into, balanced, or nearly falling. Things just *are*; nothing is made to do anything against its will. But there is none of the elemental possessiveness we sometimes associate with that genre, whereby Flanagan becomes renowned as the man who did 'the' sand bags, or Kounellis 'the' horses. Wentworth's approach is to avoid the fanfare of iconoclastic enunciation. It is true that he has his recurrent motifs, his ladders, his

chairs and so forth, but what is refreshingly absent is the rhetorical contention of having taken personal possession of a hitherto ignored material or existential aspect of these objects. Wentworth purports to discover no such thing; in fact, his sculpture seeks to engage us on a formal level he hopes we will recognise as 'our own'—as something 'we all do'. His approach is to claim the obvious, to claim what is already interesting, and hardly ever is artistic technique reduced to the mechanics of how something is to be *made* interesting through recourse to rhetorical devices. The sculpture, at its best, is an extension of a process that seems to begin in some anonymous civilian's hands, the more engaging pieces, in my view, being those in which craft and fabrication play an ancillary role in the quotation of a quotidian language, so that the appropriational equivalence between the sculptor's and the civilian's material lexicon is evenly balanced.

This appraisal of Wentworth's sculpture is the terminus of a highly specific inquiry, and not to be construed as a value judgement; after all, my explicit interest has been in his 'source material' rather than in his place in the sculptural canon. In art, the boundary between source material and final work has been increasingly blurred over the past two decades. Only, it seems, in the last two decades has it become possible for source material to *be* a final work, and practices abound which, formally speaking, are nothing other than research carried out and presented.[42] There is a difference, of course, between regulated research and something one does merely because one feels compelled to. I am not certain which category MDGB falls into. As an activity, it is casual and infrequent, something Wentworth does 'on the way to the studio'. It seems to function as a manual of found dress rehearsals for still life dramas which unfold in his sculpture with more thespian clarity (as if no longer performed by Joe Public but by Sir Alec Guinness). But is the vernacular of the street enhanced or constrained by sculptural elocution? Is Wentworth method-sculpting? Perhaps we should give him the last word. Here he is describing to Paul Bonaventura the difficulty of reconciling the visually disinterested "involuntary geometry" of the street with the visually interested medium of sculpture:

> I try very hard to make the work appear matter-of-fact. My studio is a mass of items, a bizarre landscape of abandoned forms which serve as a parallel to the haphazardness of both the natural and fabricated environment...Objects aren't necessarily what they appear to be, so in my work I endeavour to replicate the full range of factual and fortuitous possibilities. Contrary to appearances, it requires a great deal of labour on my part to regenerate the effect of improvisation.[43]

End Notes

1 In which I asked to borrow some slides from Wentworth's archive to show alongside those I had taken in King's Cross, in the expectation that my audience—a visually articulate group of artists and scholars—would not be able to discern the difference.

2 'Civilian': a somewhat military term I will continue to use. The engagements of an artist are carried out as strategic manoeuvres which run largely parallel to the less contrived (but often no less strategic) manoeuvres of non-artists. Certain artists bring the two together. When they touch, the result is a sort of guerrilla engagement with the world. In Chapter 4 I examine consumption as the area in which this shared zone of engagement is most explicit.

3 Nick Groom, 'An Artist's Manual' in *Richard Wentworth's Thinking Aloud* (London: Hayward Gallery Publishing, 1999), p.38.

4 *The Way Things Go*, prod. T & C Film AG, Alfred Richterich, 1987. Close in spirit to MDGB, this 30 minute film shows a 'domino effect' of everyday objects falling on one another in a seemingly endless chain of cause-and-effect. A sort of Heath Robinsonesque, animated version of MDGB, *The Way Things Go* has recently been famously pastiched—some have said plagiarised—by Honda in a recent advertisement (prod. by Wieden & Kennedy adv. agency), the astonishing technical virtuosity of which is matched only by the viewer's suspicions of digital legerdemain. Apparently filmed in a single take (in fact there are two takes seamlessly spliced together), the advertisement, when compared to Fischli & Weiss's much longer 1987 film, nevertheless suffers from being produced in a post-analogue climate in which anything is possible. The interesting thing about the advertisement is not *whether* it is digitally manipulated (it isn't—apart from the splicing of two takes) but that its slick production ignores the role that failure and breakdown play in Fischli & Weiss's original. Despite some obvious edits in the latter, the viewer is astonished to see the precarious, ramshackle cause-and-effect chain remain unbroken for periods of up to ten minutes (Wieden & Kennedy's advertisement is approximately two minutes). The possibility of imminent failure and breakdown is central to its success. By contrast, the Honda advertisement is predestined to succeed, since to do otherwise would ill-promote the product: the viewer is encouraged to expect failure, knowing full well it will all end in a moment of perfect success (the ignition of a Honda's engine).

5 Nick Groom, ibid., p.39.

6 Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (London: Routledge, 2001), xvi.

7 Michel Foucault, ibid., xvii.

8 Michel Foucault, ibid., xviii.

9 Richard Wentworth, *Thinking Aloud*, p. 6.

10 Nick Groom, ibid., p.66.

11 Claire Catterall, 'Stealing Beauty' in *Stealing Beauty: British Design Now* (London: ICA, 1999), p. 9.

12 Michael Horshaw, 'The Value of Confusion' in *Stealing Beauty: British Design Now* (London: ICA, 1999), p.13.

13 Ibid., p.14.

14 Ibid., p. 15.

15 Claire Catterall, 'Stealing Beauty', ibid., p. 9.

16 This discussion of product as an open term has quasi-Marxist overtones. The classic Marxist abstraction of the object—the subordination of its inherent value to a more general exchange value—is here reversed (but not overturned). By abstracting the notion of product, by making the concept of product relate to the provisional, the appropriations seen in *Stealing Beauty* reassert 'value' as something synonymous with those "sensuous" material qualities described by Marx as a remaindered element in the exchange process. It should be added, however, that these sensuous qualities are discovered only in light of—in fact *because* of—a pre-existing commodification. As such, the appropriations embody not so much a *return* to some more authentic notion of value as the 'ironic' persistence of sensuous value in the face of continued commodificational abstraction. The relationship between appropriation and exchange value is discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

17 If its use as a 'tool' for some alternative purpose seems to contradict the fire extinguisher's essence, this contradiction is reinforced in conversation: our understanding of language is simply 'adapted' (without having to invent a new word) to fit the new use of the object. Wittgenstein, famously, called for a more pragmatic analysis of the role that context—specifically the change in context from speaker to speaker—plays in defining how we use language. As Marie McGinn reminds us, he compared "the different functions of expressions in language to the different functions of tools in a tool kit. The emphasis this places on the practical use of language, on its embedding in a wider activity…brings out the everydayness of language, which focuses on the humdrum aspect of its practical role in our lives, and which thereby makes language look less 'gaseous'. The comparison also works against our urge to look for the representational essence of language, for we simply don't need to explain what makes a tool a tool, or to describe a common essence of tools. What makes a tool a tool is simply that it is *used* as a tool…" (*Wittgenstein and the Philosophical Investigations* [London: Routledge, 2000], p. 47.) MDGB is characterised by a similar anti-essentialist,Wittgensteinian pragmatism, a willingness to ascribe meaning only through the examination of a thing's deployment.

18 Again, Wittgenstein is instructive here. For Wittgenstein language was "a shifting motley of techniques" that might be compared to a city, "in which ancient streets are constantly added to and what is there is subject to continual modification; the idea of completeness simply doesn't apply." (Marie McGinn, *Wittgenstein and the Philosophical Investigations* [London: Routledge, 2000], p. 50.) Most conversation does not revolve around the belief in the completeness of language (i.e. around the belief in an idealised semantic perfection at which the conversation aims) but around the willingness of each interlocutor to shift his or her own semantic position in relation to another's. Wittgenstein went so far as to state that the meaning of the simplest of words ('I' , 'is') is never essential or cardinal, but rather divined through the interlocutor's deployment of it—even if it is being used malappropriately. Though a document of *material* (rather than linguistic) malapropisms, MDGB cannot help but resemble an ongoing conversation in which one interlocutor (the anonymous civilian-artist) has coined for an object a different meaning and another (Wentworth) has not only divined this meaning but has cross-referred it with other malapropisms.

19 Richard Wentworth, *Thinking Aloud*, p. 7.

20 Richard Wentworth, ibid., p. 7.

21 'Made ground' is a term used by archaeologists to describe land shaped by man.

22 Hilary Lawson, *Closure: A Story of Everything* (Routledge, 2001), xxxviii.

23 Hilary Lawson, ibid., xxxix.

24 Hilary Lawson, ibid., xl-xli.

25 A J Ayer's distinction between analytic and synthetic propositions is obviously intended to relate to the veracity of our linguistic descriptions of the world, while the thing in question here—the kind of object use particular to MDGB—is actually *part* of the world. Nevertheless, its 'virtual' aspect means that the object becomes a symbol in a propositional situation—a situation brought about by the facts of experience. And I hold that, in documenting it, Wentworth is putting it forward as a kind of shared language. From Ayer's point of view, most logical, philosophical and linguistic error occurs as a result of not being able to distinguish between a proposition that relies solely on the definitions of the symbols it contains (analytic) and one whose truth is verified through the facts of experience (synthetic). The error is particularly common, he suggests, in the area of metaphysics, which is prone to statements which can be verified neither by the facts of experience nor through a cross-referral of the symbols they contain: "...such a metaphysical pseudo-proposition as 'the Absolute enters into, but is itself incapable of evolution and progress,' is not even in principle verifiable. For one cannot conceive of an observation which would enable one to determine whether the Absolute did, or did not, enter into evolution and progress." (*Language,Truth and Logic* [London: Gollancz, 1970], p. 36.) Such a statement, suggests Ayer, lacks both symbolic and experiential significance; indeed, it "has no literal significance", even for the writer. (By 'significance', Ayer refers to a proposition's readiness to succumb to verification.) In my opinion MDGB consists of phenomena which make metaphysical statements but through an elision of the synthetic and analytic, of experiential and symbolic significance, rather than by ignoring the logical mechanics of significance altogether (like the statement quoted by Ayer). In doing so outside of language they achieve a degree of verification which usually eludes metaphysics. The objects Wentworth photographs say more about the being of things than metaphysical language can. They do this by showing how 'beings' become 'significant' in ways which are beyond language to describe, in ways which are not constrained by its analytic and synthetic axioms. It is the very desire of metaphysics to break free of its own linguistic axioms that forces it to use essentialist terminology that does not succumb to verification. For a more detailed discussion of the relationship of metaphysics and linguistic propositions see Ayer's 'The Elimination of Metaphysics' (ibid., pp. 33-45.)

26 Richard Wentworth, *Thinking Aloud*, p.32.

27 Hilary Lawson, ibid., p. 5.

28 Hilary Lawson, ibid., p. 5.

29 Hilary Lawson, ibid., p. 9.

30 We might say that our familiarity with these laws occludes the real relationship between openness and closure beneath a veneer of efficiency. These laws are perhaps "constraints often sufficiently tight to give us the impression that there is no alternative to the closures adopted, and that these closures are demanded by the way the world is divided up, with the consequence that the particular closures we happen to have realised are often mistaken for a description of the world." (Hilary Lawson, ibid., p. 7). The closures obtained in

MDGB *feel* more like descriptions of the world than those that abide by more conventional laws of functionality simply because they seem more detached from it—Wentworth's camera gives them a rhetoric of objectivity.

31 The relationship between 'substance' and 'artefact' is explored in the next chapter in relation to Haim Steinbach.

32 Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, 'The Monadology', in Anthony Savile, *Leibniz and The Monadology* (Routledge, 2000), p. 227.

33 Anthony Savile, *Leibniz and The Monadology* (London: Routledge, 2000), p.64.

34 Anthony Savile, ibid., pp.70-71.

35 Leibniz, 'The Monadology' , ibid., p.230.

36 Anthony Savile, ibid., pp. 107-108.

37 Anthony Savile, ibid.,p. 10. This "best possible world" stems from Leibniz's Principle of Sufficient Reason: "...the Principle of Sufficient Reason leads us to see that in his choice of a world at the moment of creation God will have been guided by a desire for the best (thus displaying his benevolence), and exercising his omniscience will be sure to have identified that best correctly, and in virtue of his omnipotence will have realized it flawlessly. Sufficient Reason thus brings us to the knowledge that the actual world around us was selected by God from among the alternatives that presented themselves on account of its being the best of the various possibilities that were. This choice, lying rooted as it does in God's essential nature, can require no further explanation." (Savile, ibid., p. 10.)

38 Leibniz also uses the word 'entelechy' to describe the bare monad. An entelechy is a thing that is real or actual, and not simply a potentiality. It is Leibniz's most general description of the monad: "One could give the name 'entelechy' to all simple substances or created monads, for they have within themselves a certain perfection (*echousi to enteles*). They enjoy a self-sufficiency (*autarkia*) that renders them the source of their internal actions and makes them, so to speak, incorporeal automata." (Leibniz, 'The Monadology', ibid., p. 229.)

39 Foucault has written extensively on the various categories of correspondence and resemblance that obtain between material things. His conception of the world as a continuous 'rope of convenience' is analogous to the description of MDGB I have been attempting in this chapter. "Convenientia is a resemblance connected with space in the form of a graduated scale of proximity. It is of the same order as conjunction and adjustment. This is why it pertains less to the things themselves than to the world in which they exist...Thus, by this linking of resemblance with space, this 'convenience' that brings like things together and makes adjacent things similar, the world is linked together like a chain. At each point of contact there begins and ends a link that resembles the one before it and the one after it..." (*The Order of Things*, p. 21.) Man-made artefacts are an attempt to emulate and enhance the chain of convenience which already exists in the world. Effectively, functionalism is our attempt to construct a world within a world. That this world is still contained within a wider 'natural' convenience we tend to overlook—until those moments when circumstance forces us to fashion more primitive, but nonetheless effective, links in the chain. MDGB documents these links, these unforeseen conveniences brought about by adventitious points of contact.

40 Speaking from a more general socio-political perspective, Michel de Certeau tends to generalise all urban, domestic and municipal action as having an inherently appropriational dimension: civilised existence is itself a challenge to be met with the tactical strategy of a 'practice': "Dwelling, moving about, reading, shopping and cooking are activities that seem to correspond to the characteristics of tactical ruses and surprises: clever tricks of the 'weak' within the order established by the 'strong,' an art of putting one over on the adversary on his own turf, hunter's tricks, manoeuvrable, polymorph mobilities, jubilant, poetic, and warlike discoveries...Perhaps these practices correspond to an ageless art..." (*The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven F. Kendall [Univ. California Press, 1984], p. 40.)

41 This is Wentworth's phrase for describing MDGB. His descriptions of his practice and its related activities tend towards the laconically poetic. For instance Geoff Dyer's description of Wentworth's many 'bin' photographs—"That half-hearted compromise whereby people neither quite drop trash in the street nor—as tins of Pepsi urge—'dispose of properly'"—is condensed by Wentworth to the "last gesture of politeness". ('Les Mots et Les Choses', *Richard Wentworth/Eugene Atget: Faux Amis* [London: The Photographers' Gallery and Lisson Gallery, 2001])

42 Chapter 4 includes an appraisal of Neil Cummings & Marysia Lewandowska's research-based projects.

43 'Today, We Have Naming of Parts: Richard Wentworth Interviewed', interview with Paul Bonaventura in *Richard Wentworth*, exh. cat. (Diputación Provincial de Valencia: The British Council, 1986), p. 156.

Chapter 3

Haim Steinbach: Artefact and Plastic Form

For a long time after 1917 the appropriation of commonplace objects tends not to affiliate itself with the readymade's semiotic imperative; rather, the art of assemblage that gradually asserts itself in the wake of Dada and Surrealism, culminating in the neo-Dada incorporation of the readymade into a more recognisably sculptural, and often painterly, format, tends to position the artefact so that its plastic qualities are seen in relation to a wider compositional whole. Cubist collage notwithstanding, it was Kurt Schwitters who pioneered the relationship between the plastic and artefactual dimensions of objects. A typical early Schwitters consists largely of paint, with the instrumental addition of tram tickets and pieces of wood, objects which function pictorially as part of a wider plastic structure. We can observe similar strategies in the work of his contemporaries Picabia, Cornell and Ernst, and to an extent in the much later 'combine' work of Dine, Kienholz and Rauschenberg, where it acquires a more explicitly artefactual bias. The aforementioned artists incorporate existing objects into a wider compositional whole in such a way as to lay different degrees of emphasis on their artefactual/plastic dimensions. We can understand the *Merzbau* of Schwitters, the 'combines' of Rauschenberg, the early assemblages of Ed Kienholz as all exploring the tension between the object as self-contained artefact and the object as component of a wider plastic structure. Eventually, this wider plastic structure is itself forsaken and, sure enough, a crushed automobile is put forward, not as *part* of some overall plastic form, but *as* one. But even this lone object, this seemingly Duchampian appropriation, doesn't so much seek to embody some institutional notion of the Art Object as some more general notion of 'the gesture': it is appropriated plastic form rather than appropriated artefact. The point is that, at some point in time, it becomes possible to simply select and present a single authorially unaltered object (i.e. one altered through some other agency) and still have it function within a paradigm of plasticity. That said, the less has been 'done' to the object, the more likely its claims of plasticity are to be cross-referred with a more Duchampian, institutional paradigm. After a certain point in time, then, a conflation of plasticity and artefact is unavoidable; in fact, it is under this paradigm that sculpture is now made and appraised.

I would contend that we associate artefact with what an object *is*, and that we associate plasticity with how an object reveals itself phenomenologically. From an artistic viewpoint, in order to stress the latter over the former, it is obviously better if the object under consideration has no specific artefactual identity. When the artefactual identity of an object is ambiguous (or not 'given') our contemplation of it will rely more on a sensate appraisal of its ostensive qualities than on the consideration of what that object *is*. This is

not to say, of course, that identifiable artefacts do not yield to sensate appraisal (which is absurd) but that sensate appraisal is prefaced by a nominal assessment of their place in the world. We know that Duchamp's own readymades came with a personal caveat warning against mere sensate appraisal of their ostensive qualities. The puns and linguistic conceits attached to them (often physically) are designed to refer our sensate appraisal to the issue of what the object 'is' rather than to how it reveals itself phenomenologically as plastic form. For Duchamp this 'is' is already a construct of language and context. In *Fresh Widow*, for example (fig. 21), the inscription signifies (through the loss and addition of consonants) a slippage from what the object was to what it is now. Whatever phenomenological experience unfolds does so in respect of this inscription. Pure plastic form—that is, form without a specific artefactual identity—on the other hand, when given as a purely sensate experience, unfolds of its own volition. Ordinarily, plastic form makes itself 'available' in the very act of its being, and does not have to be 'named'. But Duchamp's 'plastic forms' (even appropriated artefacts imbued with rhetoric are, by default, plastic forms) are not given as a purely sensate experience. He gives us a description of the plastic form as a commentary of its phenomenological revelation. To regard *Fresh Widow* is to regard an object in the process of self-description: the object is a consequence of its own description, to be 'read' and 'looked at' simultaneously. This plastic form is an existing rather than an authored artefact, for only by using an existing artefact can Duchamp emphasise the object as the site of a complicity between form and language *over* the more essentialist reading we invariably bring to those acts of authorship intended for exclusively sensate appraisal. His linguistic description builds upon an element suggested as much by the artefact's name as by its plastic properties. The material manipulation—the substitution of black leather for clear glass—inspires a renaming of it, as though the titular linguistic mutation had somehow been immanent within the material object all along. In fact, linguistic and material mutation are as one, for the unity of the work is such that we cannot ascertain whether the former suggested the latter, or vice versa. Of course, the viewer perceives that such mutation is only immanent within those objects whose names suggest those of other objects. (The linguistic aspect of Duchamp's work is of course one its most celebrated qualities—but one which is, I feel, too ancillary to the aims of this thesis to warrant much further discussion. I would like to note something here, though. It is interesting that, for an artist so adept at wordplay as Duchamp [as the titles of many of his works demonstrate], his own prose writings on art are remarkably pragmatic in style, and sometimes comically plain-speaking. It is as though he chose to express himself most elegantly when deploying language not within 'literary' or pedagogical contexts but in direct relation to visual phenomena; that is, by forcing language into relation with the actuality of its referents [Fresh Widow being a good example]. In certain of Duchamp's linguistic gambits, the effect of certain words and phrases—"Why not sneeze?"; "Anemic cinema"; the "even" in "The Brides Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even"—is, when considered in relation to the accompanying visual tableaux, one

71

of curious semantic disorientation.)

Haim Steinbach is interested in a similar kind of immanence, though his interest, as we shall see, revolves around the context from which a given object has been appropriated rather than in any linguistic extrapolation. Steinbach's interest in plasticity is related to the way a thing embodies the context of its availability. This context is often the department store, and Steinbach has become known as the artist who purports to make a sculptural technique of shopping, of acquisition. His interest is in *what*, exactly, is acquired in an artefact. The presentational exigencies and decontextualising rhetoric he uses in his work are of course synonymous with Duchampian institutional discourse. Critics have been at pains to point out the differences between Steinbach and Duchamp, while simultaneously upholding an affinity between them as the former's critical currency. The main difference is that Steinbach's work is viewed as sculpture rather than as art. Steinbach, perhaps, is the artist who returned to the issue of plasticity after conceptualism had abandoned it (leaving it to the assemblagist morphology of neo-Dada). He picks up from where neo-Dada's 'appropriated gesture' left off. Except, for Steinbach, this gesture revolves not around a physical manipulation of a material artefact, nor in any contiguous juxtaposition of objects, but around the character imparted to an object by the transactional and acquisitional modes of consumption.

Consumption and consumerism have played a key role in changing artists' attitudes to the plastic form. Arguably, however, not until its morphological possibilities reach saturation point and appropriation ceases to offer a meaningful material alterity does art actually begin to examine the *sources* of its appropriations with any rigour. It seems that only when the fanfare of enunciation has subsided can art investigate material culture from perspectives other than those of material and morphological alterity—a possibility which was there all along, in principle. What seems to prevent this principle from being taken up is art's obsession with defining its own parameters; with exploring its essence as an infinitely differentiated material product. Steinbach's work can be seen as the point where this principle is not only taken up, but taken up in direct confrontation with the very (Duchampian) enunciative act which helped inaugurate art's discourse of material and morphological alterity. That, as we shall see, is what Steinbach's dialectical relationship with Duchamp entails.

While posterity has decreed that the main contribution of Duchamp's readymade was to conduct an enquiry into the artwork's institutional aspect,[1] we should not overlook its ancillary inauguration of art as research into 'already existing objects'/'already worked material'. Duchamp's famous indifference to the purely material/sensate qualities of his readymades has been stressed time and again. *His* project, we are constantly reminded, is not an anthropology of the hardware store; Duchamp is only interested in the material constitution of the everyday item insofar as it negates the established hegemony of painting and sculpture, thereby revealing the inadequacy of these 'classifications' as reliable

definitions of art.[2] But even such a negational concept of materiality indirectly asks us to compare an *artist's* production techniques (and values) with those of manufacturing in general. Through the simple process of accruing an oeuvre of readymades, Duchamp cannot help but usher in such a comparative notion of artistic materiality, invoking not just the contrariety of the commonplace item (that is, its power to contradict the art objects of his time), but also the diversity of the consumerist context from which it is taken.

There are three main stages to consumption: acquisition, use, and obsolescence. The previous chapter focused on the second of these, contriving the term 'civilian' appropriation to describe a 'feral' creativity from an artistic standpoint. I ended on a somewhat ambivalent note, unsure of what to make of Wentworth's sculptural appropriation of *Making Do and Getting By*'s formal language. In these civilian juxtapositions we witness different *contexts* inspiring people to use objects in an alternative fashion, but when replayed as sculpture this diversity of context is removed from the equation and replaced with the stock laboratory conditions of the gallery. Only now do I see that this deliberate partitioning of Wentworth's practice into what might be thought of as two distinct 'cultural' and 'civilian' provinces was to prepare the way for an analysis of recent practices which use the readymade as a vehicle for investigating consumption as an artistic procedure. In these practices, which are surveyed in the next chapter, *utility* is mobilised by a number of practitioners as a counterpoint to the perceived moribundity of the Duchamp Effect.[3] The less enunciative paradigms of these practices effectively propose a form of research into the notion of product, of worked material, and the way in which it is made available to both artist and viewer. Haim Steinbach is perhaps the most important historical precedent for these practices because his work pursues these paradigms in relation to a rhetorical 'Duchampian Readymade', rather than just adopting them in a spirit of defaulting, postmodern eclecticism. His work advances the Duchampian imperative—in order to then deny it by drawing our attention to the acquisitional context as an alternative paradigm of enunciation. Without consumption, without being able to go into a shop and acquire an existing artefact, the readymade is not possible as an artistic vehicle. Commerce makes the readymade possible; it's an obvious but overlooked point. Surely, then, this acquisitional context deserves to be addressed directly, rather than sublimated, as it has been in the past? Steinbach certainly thought so.

The readymade replaces the invention of form with the acquisition of form. Historically, the acquisitional context is played down throughout the readymade's various incarnations up to—and for the most part including—pop art. It seems that, up to a certain point in time, artists are only interested in how the introduction of 'mere real things' changes our attitude towards *art*, as opposed to changing our attitude towards these mere real things and how they come into the world in the first place. It was only twenty-five to thirty years ago that this imbalance was first tentatively addressed; remarkably, not until the late 1970s does the appropriation of existing objects begin to comment explicitly on the

context from which they have been appropriated.[4] Within such practices the context in which the object was initially encountered is seen, or is intended to be seen, as remaining immanent within the art object, as opposed to being a mere 'practical' means to a 'cultural' end. Such strategies thereby make explicit that which was always implicit (but undiscussed) in Duchamp's original transactions: that this 'virtual' object has to come from *somewhere*; and this somewhere *could* be an important part of the artwork's condition. Duchamp's readymade (or rather its historical misreportage) allows the commonplace item's dramatic enunciation as art to occlude the very structure, texture and ideology of consumption which makes such an enunciation possible. And yet doesn't the readymade propose to replace authorial endeavour with simple and emphatic *choice*, and is choice not the chief agency of consumption? Isn't the concept of choice the very thing which links Duchampian nominalism with that more widespread civilian nominalism (consumer choice) we are all constantly exercising? If Duchamp nominated the object as 'other', it is now not uncommon to see artists use a product 'as intended', but in such a way as to make of its function (or of its signature) a sort of caricature. Whatever the case, it does seem to me that there is a sense in which orthodox consumption and artistic consumption (appropriation) now exist in closer proximity to one another.[5]

I should perhaps briefly qualify my use of the term 'nominalism' here. In relation to the Duchampian readymade I use the term nominalism (rather than 'nomination') to refer to the process whereby an individual example is used to expose the fact that the general concept of art is a mere name; and in relation to civilian appropriation in order to refer to designed objects as the mere naming of a recurrent physical action: the feral creativity of *Making Do and Getting By* is to the universal name 'consumption' what the Duchampian readymade is to the universal name 'art'. I also understand the term 'civilian nominalism' as referring to a definition of consumption as an acquisitional agency which must be understood in the widest possible sense: as the chief vehicle through which Individualism's increasing predominance as a social paradigm is manifested.[6] The lamentation that Individualism's triumph is so wholesale that there *is* no longer any individuality is a familiar one, and is often built upon that even more familiar view of 'consumer choice' as an *illusory* form of self-individuation which, far from indicating essential subjective difference, simply emphasises a form of cellular 'separateness', a way of distinguishing 'me' from 'you' in an entirely arbitrary sense. In other words, a form of difference-in-the-same, a form of *institutionalised* individuality. In the final chapter I touch on the idea that the generic systems of representation which have arisen (as the signification of mere separateness) effectively incite the individual to impose his or her *own* institutional maxims, and that art, as a praxis which has, as a result of the readymade, already embraced an idea of institutional critique, provides the best context in which to examine these maxims.

Before assessing its critical acme, let me first offer a pragmatic description of Haim

Steinbach's work. The kind of works we are talking about here are typically those in which an obvious shop-bought artefact is presented on a purpose-made shelf. Constructed from wood and formica, the form, colour and size of this shelf is intended to offset the presented objects in a particular way, so that their plastic qualities become 'enhanced' and therefore readable, in a sense (as I shall argue), as 'sculptural decisions'. Some pieces just present a single object; more commonly, however, a combination of different objects is presented. Sometimes combinations of objects are presented in quantities of twos, three and fours to stress their commodification. The combinations vary greatly, and often indicate chasms in status: cheap is arranged alongside expensive; elegant alongside kitsch; valuable alongside throwaway (see figs. 22-26).

Even by this description we can see that without a direct confrontation with Duchampian institutional critique, Steinbach's work might risk being mistaken for a more straightforward 'anthropology' of consumerism. What makes Duchamp such an important (if antithetical) sounding board for Steinbach is the issue of presentation. In Steinbach's work there is *only* presentation. "The post-Duchampian collapse of medium-specific technicality", write Art & Language, "amounts to a transformation and relaxation of practical tasks, as the problems of production are replaced by the exigencies of presentation."[7] While it is true that many a contemporary artist's take on presentation is fanatical, it still nevertheless often remains within the realm of establishing a fairly conventional cordon sanitaire around the work. Steinbach appears to have made of "presentation" a form of "production". He has elaborated its "exigencies" into a "practical task" on a par with the construction of an entirely new object, such are the extremes to which he goes to animate his selected items in a way that is reminiscent of an acquisitional context—and whence of his initial encounter with them. Steinbach's cordon sanitaire reverberates with something more than the regulation objectivity normally demanded of exhibitory apparatus; it is, rather, an *extension of the work's plastic properties*. Indeed, over the years, it has undergone a literal extension, spreading from the early shelves of the late 70s to colonise the walls, floors and, occasionally, the entire room (see fig.22). What Steinbach does is to invoke the 'expanded field' of (minimalist) sculpture to intimate the contextual (and therefore social) space in which the objects are initially encountered: object and environment bleed into one another in the gallery, as they do in the acquisitional context. The existing artefact takes the place of the 'gestalt' form—whose 'fabricated' quality is not so distant from that of the acquired consumer object. Interestingly, the formal domestication of pedestals and plinths which the minimalists jettisoned in their exploration of an expanded field is revived in the slightly different shape of the shelf and display unit: what sculptors of the preceding generation saw as a restriction of the object's spatial remit is for Steinbach its principle emphasis. This domestication of the expanded field merges formal and social ideas of space; it is as though the *representation* of domesticity that Richard Artschwager brings to the gestalt form (the intagliating of Juddian 'unitary forms'

75

with the 'relational' components of such recognisable objects as tables and chairs) is *actualised* through the introduction of concrete objects.[8]

But perhaps this is too indirect a way of approaching the distinction between Steinbach and Duchamp. Dan Cameron summarises the distinction thus:

> The readymade was only the *material support* of the concept [art] in its manner of intervention. Steinbach contests this domain, this centrality of concept, and pleads in favour of the multiplicity of objects.[9]

Steinbach's own reading of his work does indeed show an explicit mistrust of this "centrality of concept":

> For me, a thing is not a vehicle for universal statements, and, therefore, an object is an object, not a readymade.[10]

Such "universal statements" misrepresent the object, overlooking its contextual dimension, that is, "the manner by which objects are made to relate to one another".[11] The Steinbach object, surmises Cameron, "is a 'made-ready-to-relate' rather than a readymade".[12] Now this ready-to-relate, as Michel Gauthier points out, *is* intimated in the Duchampian assisted readymade (in, say, the union of stool and bicycle wheel), but in such a way as to finalise each object's relational identity as the one presented in the artwork. To say, writes Gauthier, that Steinbach's object displays therefore "stem simply from the technique of the 'assisted readymade'", is to overlook the fact that, in *Bicycle Wheel*,

> ...the help is given by an object, which is itself a readymade, whereas with Steinbach's pieces it is provided by a shelf, made specially for the occasion, in a word, an object whose initial purpose   is to act as a support for [other] objects, so that they can be displayed thereupon.[13]

The shelf is a neutral ground which enables the viewer to project *possible* relations onto such juxtapositions of objects as are displayed thereon, whereas, with the Duchampian assisted readymade, this relation is already finalised—and often consolidated with a highly specific pun, as in *Fresh Widow*. Such decisive titular inscription, to reiterate my earlier point, effectively clinches the object's subversion as a kind of *fait accompli*—as if conformance to the pun were the natural significational destiny of its plastic properties.[14]

Steinbach's appropriations remain comparatively unsubverted. By remaining unsubverted they are able to remain truer to their former status as objects of *display*. It is this, Gauthier persuasively suggests, that most differentiates Steinbach's work from

Duchamp's:

> ...Steinbach's readymades cannot have the same significance as Duchamp's. If the former, like the latter, question the differentiation between art objects and non-artistic objects, this is for another reason: both are exhibitory objects. And both share the same condition of spectacle. So the Steinbach object, unlike the Duchamp readymade, does not need converting into an exhibitory object, because it already belongs in this category. It is thus not so much a ready-made as a "ready-shown".[15]

The critical currency of Steinbach's work lies in its ability to reveal the degree to which the "ready-shown" aspect of Duchamp's objects is in fact occluded by their very enunciation as artworks: though the bottle rack, comb and urinal are indeed, before Duchamp's intercession, displayed as so much merchandise, he still has to symbolically convert them into 'exhibitory objects', for the simple fact that such things have no precedent as art. There being no such conversion necessary for Steinbach's objects allows us to incorporate into our appraisal of the appropriated item a speculation as to the utilitarian/consumerist context from which it has been lifted.

The readymade initiates a bifurcation of object-based art into sculpture and 'something else' (with the Picasso assemblage representing the former's inception and Duchampian nomination the latter's). Initially, this 'something else', as we know, is an object which has to be *declared* art. Sculpture differs mainly in that it is *already* art; more specifically it is *an* art—based on the physical manipulation of plastic form. Since Duchamp, artists have combined both this physical manipulation of plastic form *and* the declaration of 'something else as art' within the same object. Now Duchamp's readymade, within its contemporary context, is obviously *not* sculpture; though an object, it does not seek to redefine what sculpture can be, for this would contradict its provision of an intellectual alternative to the specialist mainstays of both sculpture and painting. And yet, together with his well-documented interrogation of art, Duchamp also indirectly asks the question: 'What is an object-based art when it it is not sculpture?' This is a question it has become pertinent to ask only with the hindsight of the readymade's subsequent incorporation into sculpture. It is a question which seems to concern Steinbach, for his work is arguably the first critique of the relationship between sculpture's 'plastic form' and the Duchampian semiotic approach. If, as Nicholas de Ville has pointed out, sculpture is to be thought of as "a tactile and visual form created in parallel to some perceptual experience"[16], then what Steinbach does is to re-enact the perceptual experience he has had in an acquisitional setting using the very objects which were the subject of that perceptual experience, as opposed to making or assembling new objects in response to it: the objects he perceives are those he assembles. The sculptural, or plastic, form of these objects is no less important to Steinbach for its being a pre-existing one.

As an interrogation of plastic form, sculpture is concerned with "discovering sensate equivalences from outside the world's catalogue of existing objects"[17]. The very "plasticity of plastic form suggests the continuing possibility of an empty conceptual space around the art object which is not occupied by theory's pre-existing systems of signification."[18] Before Duchamp, this "empty conceptual space" is filled in automatically by tactile manipulation, by the *physical* demonstration of that which is 'unthinkable', or 'unsayable'(sculpture as 'physical rhetoric', if you will). By removing manipulation from the equation, by removing what ordinarily 'fills it in', Duchamp demonstrates the emptiness of that conceptual space: the first unassisted readymade signifies a complete void. The only possible course of action after this is to fill it back in. But with what? The problem is that the 'material' which we use to do this has, after Duchamp, a different significance. That significance, so difficult to describe in words, can only be defined through an empirical reintroduction of plastic forms and artefacts into the "empty conceptual space".

Steinbach would appear to be emphasising an empty conceptual space around existing plastic forms, not through the act of tactile manipulation (physical rhetoric) nor through enunciation (Duchampian institutional rhetoric), but through a collapsing of one into the other. Though this collapse is seemingly precipitated through a convenient shop/gallery conflation sustained by the factor of display common to both contexts, it is, I believe, the result of a more fundamental agency. In Steinbach's work the already existing plastic form takes the place of the artist's tactile manipulation *without* rendering the concept of tactile manipulation a remaindered, or 'nominal', part of the creative act. On the contrary, the viewer is encouraged to adopt the view that pre-existing form is the natural corollary of a sculptural enquiry. The conceptual space that Steinbach constructs around the object renders—through an intense reconsolidation of presentation—*more* visible such manipulations as the object already exhibits. For Steinbach it seems that an object's status is never wholly synonymous with its 'qualities'. Marooned forever in a state of presentation, of display (a state which has no seeming objective, no ontological *outlet*), the object's qualities become detached from the very idea of *raison d'être*. They become 'just' qualities: matter which takes the form of this and that object. It is not just a case of the object's qualities being appreciable as 'abstract' ones through the divestment of function, but of its anticipation of a perpetual inertia, a kind of existential listlessness.

To describe this phenomenon literally, as I have striven to do, is exceedingly difficult. The description of non-manipulation as sculptural technique is ill-served, it seems, by entirely analytical or empirical means, which have a tendency to lapse into a defaulting metaphysic at the vital moment. But this slippage is induced by the hyperreal pretensions of the work,[19] that method of displacement whereby an object is removed from society in order to reveal the 'society in the object'. Dan Cameron's archaeological metaphor describes something like this process:

In Haim Steinbach's work the object has the right to keep its original qualities...while, from now on, ceasing to exhaust itself in this definition...[The objects] enter silently into a tense anticipation of an archaeological future to which they belong in advance. An artful "balance" between contrasts (art object-kitchen utensil) maintains, in subtle oscillation, appearance and meaning, the indifference of the utensil and the commanding presence of an increasingly demanding formal articulation.[20]

With his Bart Simpson heads, chrome dumb-bells and plastic dog bones; his cacti, bassoons and egg plants, Steinbach reconsolidates the gallery as a site of occidental ethnography (if that is not an oxymoron)—in the same way that Marcel Broodthaers reconsolidates the gallery as a repository of 19th century arcana.[21] I say *his* Bart Simpson heads etc.; I mean *ours*. The "archaeological future" to which these objects "belong in advance" is best intimated by allowing them to remain as they are. For by allowing them to remain as they are, Steinbach stresses their status as *our* objects, our material culture. So is the gallery performing the same role here as a design museum or a museum of consumerism? Not entirely. The things we find in these places usually have a story to tell (even if it is only one of provenance), are either patinated with the tribulations of use or else touted as prototypes of now ubiquitous objects (to name but two modes of museumification). The unused, utter contemporaneity of Steinbach's object-selections dispels any idea that such occidental ethnography as they present is to be taken as museumification. Even the older artefacts scream 'now', joining the chorus of brash contemporaneity through their very proximity to, and implied equality of availability with, more commonplace objects. Steinbach's usually voguish tableaux present themselves as ironic counterpoints to art's rhetoric of critical contemporaneity, its presuming to do in the present what past critique has decreed should be the next logical step. (For Steinbach, this next logical step is 'shopping'.) It occurs to the viewer of Steinbach's work that his entire oeuvre will age and accrue nostalgia in direct relation to the appropriated objects' increasing scarcity in the world and eventual anachronism/obsolescence. Most contemporary artworks are subject to a certain amount of this literal nostalgia simply because the materials from which they are made are redolent of particular eras, but in Steinbach's case there is no 'timeless' physical manipulation to offset this literalness other than that of presentation. The artefacts which comprise his oeuvre are simply subject to the usual, 'secular' morphology of obsolescence we associate with the commodity in general. But we should not forget those shelves, that baroque system of presentation, which is there to remind us that these items were chosen to follow a more distinguished—perhaps even redemptive—path to obsolescence. If design is an object's conception, the department store-transaction its birth, and utility its 'life', then we look at a Steinbach and see objects that have no more 'lived' than Inca children sacrificed on a Peruvian hillside to appease the gods (Steinbach having already done the archaeology for us).

Any direct physical manipulation of his objects would distance Steinbach from Duchamp, when what he wants is to subvert pure Duchampian presentation into an *extension* of sculptural technique—not sculptural technique as it was understood in 1917, but as it is understood circa 1978, 61 years on (that is, after the most intense period of material consumption ever seen). Only by sailing so very close to Duchamp can Steinbach lay bare the relationship between 'physical' and 'institutional' rhetoric. If this reappraisal of sculptural technique has to do with the collapsing of physical and institutional rhetoric into one another, as I earlier claimed, should we not therefore be able to point to a factor common to both which precedes the shared exhibitory status of art and consumer objects? We can. This factor is *substance*. If sculpture before Duchamp is a sculpture of pure plastic form, then after Duchamp it is also a sculpture of *artefact*. But both artefact and form partake of the third term 'substance'—form being defined as the shape and mass of substance, and artefact as the evident imposition of workmanship on substance. But form can also mean the imposition of workmanship on substance, just as 'artefact' can also be nothing more than *existing* shape and mass as we find it in nature (think of a stone used as a paperweight). When substance is manipulated into artefact, its form is subordinated to the function of that artefact; when substance is shaped with no functional design—as an ostensive act 'in itself'—form predominates. Substance in its functionless, unmanipulated state can, of course, also be appropriated as 'readymade sculpture' (as Arte Povera has shown us), just as the substance in functioning readymade artefacts can be 'reclaimed' as non-functioning, mimetic art components (as Picasso demonstrates in one assemblage by using a toy car as a baboon's head). Now common sense dictates that substance is obviously present to the same degree in both the sculpture of form and the sculpture of artefact. But we often still tend to think of substance in a subordinate sense when it is presented in the form of an identifiable artefact (say, a tool), and in a primary sense when it is presented as an 'ostensive plastic form'. We take the steel of a hammer for granted; its very effectiveness for the job in hand induces a sublimation of its material constitution (which we only pay attention to when it fails to measure up to a job which may require, say, a rubber hammer). Perhaps this sublimated materiality is a modern condition brought on by our hyperfunctional environment, which proliferates with things that work in a predetermined way, and which we tend to naturalise to the extent that it can often require an existential shift to make us fully aware of our relationship to it.

I experienced one the other day while I was out walking in the rain. Passing under a small bridge and experiencing a short period of dryness, I suddenly became aware that I was holding a curved rod covered with stitched leather. I looked at my right hand; in it was an umbrella. 'You are holding an umbrella,' I said to myself, staring at this vaguely ostentatious object with unfounded bemusement. The umbrella's physicality, seemingly suppressed through several minutes of fairly intense use, now became very apparent in that brief window of non-functionality as I passed under the bridge.[22] Locked though my arm

was in the accustomed umbrella-holding position, it had been ignoring (for how long?) the material constitution of the object it held. This experience is similar to that described by Antoine Roquentin, the narrator in Sartre's *Nausea*:

> Just now, when I was on the point of coming into my room, I stopped short because I felt in
> my hand a cold object which attracted my attention by means of a sort of personality. I opened
> my hand and looked: I was simply holding the doorknob. [23]

Sartre's novel abounds with scenes in which substance, or rather Being, momentarily seems to give objects the slip, before regaining the sanctuary of specific things. This sanctuary is none other than 'recognition' itself, and to lose the power of immediate recognition is to succumb to the 'nausea'. This vacillation between particularity and generality, the detaching of an object's 'quality' from its identity, is what Sartre refers to in *Being and Nothingness* as the apprehension of "quality only as a symbol of a being which totally escapes us, even though it is totally there before us." "In short", says Sartre, "we can only make revealed being function as a symbol of being-in-itself".[24] As symbols of being-in-itself, actual objects ("revealed beings") form a variegated ontological matrix which our regime of hyperfunctionality attempts to control and refine still further. This refinement sublimates the relationship between the bedrock of being-in-itself and the variegated symbols of its expression that we see all around us. Sometimes—as with the ulterior objects of *Making Do and Getting By*—the relationship nevertheless manifests itself in an almost accidental fashion. The more deliberate, contrived, calculated manifestation of this relationship goes by the name of sculpture. Sculpture attempts to desublimate the relationship between being-in-itself and its variegated symbols of expression by dismantling the functional regime we have contrived as its ontological adjunct. Within this process of desublimation, the relationship between plastic form and existing artefact functions like the relationship between what Sartre calls "being-in-itself" and "revealed beings". The clearest demonstration of this—one of the first, faltering stages of sculpture's 20th Century reinvention—is the explicit subversion of function: Man Ray's *Cadeau* , Oppenheim's *Fur Teacup* etc.

Sculpture has long since emerged from these relatively gauche beginnings, developing an interrogation of the material world whereby nothing is accepted as 'given'. The functional imperative we have imprinted on materials is investigated not simply by hobbling the existing object or through oppositional, knee-jerk subversion: 'utilitarian artefact' and 'functionless plastic form' are no longer seen as complimentary opposites but as more relative terms. We associate plastic form with the exploitation of a material's behaviour as an end in itself, and utility with the formation of substance as a means to a more teleological end. The behaviour of substance is unsublimated in the former and sublimated in the latter. Contemporary sculpture abolishes all such demarcation, and there is a sculpture by David Nash which demonstrates this very clearly. *Cracking Box*, 1979 (fig.

27), is formed of six 1" thick cross sections of oak, which are pegged together at each corner with a dowel hewn from the same oak. The undried oak Nash has chosen has warped and cracked, making each face curl outwards, as if the material were trying to rebel against the form Nash has imposed on it. The pegs check the warping of the wood, so that the form of the sculpture does not deviate too far from that of a cube. The substance is therefore 'utilised' to control its own natural behaviour: the invention of form for its own sake is offset with utilitarian pragmatism.[25]

As we know, the sculpture of artefact which gradually asserts itself in the post-Duchampian era embraces everything that was once outside art's material lexicon. The current epoch is obviously sculpture's first expansive interrogation of 'substance'; previously it is clearly limited to a handful of 'appropriate' materials. The sculpture of artefact which arises after Duchamp reveals the monomaterialistic sculpture of pure plastic form to be an exceedingly limited interrogation of substance. In fact, only with the benefit of hindsight does it become clear that it is such material and contextual restriction that is, for centuries, sculpture's very *raison d'être*, for only through material restriction can it announce itself as pure form: a pure form arrived at *in spite of* a substance's versatility, regardless of all the other uses to which it can be put and the shift in contexts which would be reciprocal with such uses. Contemporary sculpture is concerned with *how* and *why* we arrive at form. It is concerned not just with effect but with cause. The David Nash piece is an example of how contemporary sculpture has tended to recoup cause as part of the overall effect, rather than hiding the means by which form is 'controlled'. Sculpture has become more involved with the artefact not just because it uses it as material but because, like artefacts, it yields to a similar analysis of material propriety (and its opposite). The crucial difference between sculpture as it is and sculpture as it was is that where material propriety was once 'given' it must now be demonstrated. This, to adapt a phrase of Art & Language's, is the 'work' that the artwork must do. A work that uses a range of materials invites the viewer to examine their points of intersection: is the transition from one material to another a smooth one or does it jar? If so, why? Does the overall *substance* of the sculpture appear continuous despite its internal material differences or is a kind of material antithesis being aimed at...?

The 'physical rhetoric' that sculpture now imparts to its raw material is that of exploring the *proximity* of objects and materials to one another and their propriety within a certain synthetic configuration. The period of sculpture that, for me, most consolidates this shift is the one dubbed *New British Sculpture* in the late 1970s and early 1980s. What relates the work of Wentworth, Cragg and Woodrow in particular is their obsession with the propinquity of things, with how we 'get' from one object to another (though with Woodrow it is the more straightforward question of how an object is, literally, to be got 'out of' another). Cragg's most effective pieces, in my opinion, are still those in which he imposes a formal rationale on a disparate group of existing objects.[26] *New Stones-Newton's Tones,*

1980 (fig. 28), comprises a group of plastic objects collected (I think) from along the banks of the Thames and arranged on the floor in the colours of the spectrum. The viewer negotiates the differences between the objects through their chromatic similarity, a rhetoric which forces a kinship between the objects that simply does not hold in the real world. Conversely, almost any work by Richard Wentworth, as we have seen, proposes a sculptural relationship between objects whose origin we can trace to one that actually holds in the real world: one in which, through fragile but tenable contiguities forced by circumstance, objects attain new signatures of being.

We can contrast these approaches with that of Wentworth's and Cragg's American contemporary, Haim Steinbach, whose equally gregarious attitude towards materiality is consolidated not through directly contiguous combinations of materials and objects but through the deadpan presentation of unaltered artefacts. Sculptural technique is pursued not as the manipulation of substance but as an anthology of 'substantial' differences, enhanced through re-presentation. While, through this assembling of differences, it is also an indirect anthology of material processes and actions, these are not *Steinbach's* processes or actions, and are not, therefore, the imposition of any workmanship (however slight) on substance. If such an imposition is to be understood as the 'cause' of a desired effect, then what we have in Steinbach is an artist who brings together existing effects in the hope that something new is caused by their propinquity to one another. Now Steinbach is not the only artist to merely present existing things, but his deployment of things that have acquired no patina of use effectively places all the objects he uses on an equal psychological footing. Physically untested, they retain (in spite of the false *raison d'être* already established by commodification) an air of provisionality. The "original qualities" which Dan Cameron says it is the objects' "right to keep" are in fact a single quality, a palpable sheen of unhandledness common to them all. They exhibit different qualities without demonstrating how these qualities relate to any context other than the notional one of being in proximity to other objects. All qualities are subordinate to the dominant signifier of propinquity: the object is to be understood not in terms of an inherent essence but as a relational concept which changes according to whichever object it is displayed alongside. This transient signification of quality is then, it seems, deliberately contradicted through fixing the object's identity forever within a set relation: Bart Simpson effigy goes next to Tit Mugs; Bassoons above Jackets; Japanese Cereal Boxes alongside rustic Earthenware Pots; Plastic Yoder Heads alongside Ghetto Blasters (see figs. 23-26). Given that, within Steinbach's oeuvre, none of these objects recurs within other tableaux, we can perhaps infer that, in the absence of any other authorial decisions, *these* object relations—sometimes seemingly entirely arbitrary, at other times more obviously political—are in some sense definitive, are chosen above all the other possible relations that might hold for *these* objects.[27] That, then, is the *effect*, the end result at which Steinbach's process is seemingly aimed.

In the previous chapter the reader will recall an appropriated object's ability to be

'this' or 'that' depending on circumstance. Its signature, or its qualities, are thereby revealed to be a sort of pre-established harmony constantly jeopardised by consecutive reappropriation. Nevertheless, we think of the object as continuing to be 'itself'.[28] Steinbach's and Wentworth's practices can be thought of as attempting to understand this 'itself', this signature of an object, from opposing perspectives. It is not difficult to think of the Wentworthian object as a sort of 'animated' version of Steinbach's displays. If Steinbach arrests the object's journey 'at point of sale', then Wentworth is interested in the juxtapositional fate that befalls it further down the line of consumption. The qualities Wentworth invokes are those of use, of what *happens* to the objects within a nexus of enforced metafunctionality; those that Steinbach invokes (or rather wishes to preserve) are the qualities which the objects have before anything happens to them. He effectively 'takes them at their word'—while simultaneously curtailing their powers of speech at the hands of would-be users. The rhetoric of the object as it stands before its journey forth into the world serves as its qualities. It is a form of control Duchampian in technique if not in spirit. For Wentworth 'quality' never means quality *control*; it means something accrued: wear, tear, improvisation. Both artists are concerned with the issue of what, exactly, an object *is*—and both seek to understand its essence through paradox: with Steinbach it seems that an object is most itself before it can be used as such; with Wentworth a thing is never itself until used as 'other'. We might say, where the former critiques consumerism (the system within which we *acquire* objects), the latter critiques consumption (the system within which we *use* objects). Of course, usually, the system in which we acquire objects is based on an anticipation of how they will be used. We must add the final observation that Steinbach's process, by abstracting the former from the latter, has a tendency to reduce it to an image, to the order of a representation; and that Wentworth's process tends, through the invention of a new 'users manual' (MDGB), to replace the 'projected image' of consumerism with a more concrete alternative. Steinbach's work is an ethnography of civilised artefacts; Wentworth's, a survey of an atavistic primitivism that resurfaces in civilised society.

It is accepted that substance, artefact, materiality mean different things to different cultures: *my* everyday item might be, for a Samoan, a unique object, just as a Samoan's everyday item might be, within my culture, a unique object. How certain can we be that significant discrepancies do not also occur at a more regional—perhaps even individual—level? It seems to me that a belief in such regional difference is central to that artistic enthusiasm for 'the everyday'—an enthusiasm which shows no sign of abating. The contingency of the term 'everyday'—an increasingly hackneyed one[29]—is played with by Steinbach in those works which present ethnographic curiosities alongside 'western banalities'. (The aforementioned flattening of qualities that Steinbach's transactional sculptural technique knowingly expedites perhaps anticipates the current increasing tendency for cultural difference to be subsumed within a globalised condition.) The significational and substantial dimensions of objects, we may contend, present themselves in

different ways to different cultures. For example, there is evidence that, where western cultures tend to focus on what an object is (an approach consolidated linguistically in the form of a name, although the name is not the thing named), other cultures may concentrate on the material from which it is made. As a final coda to this critique of substance and artefact, consider this recent article in *New Scientist* by Alison Motluk, which cites an experiment in which English and Yucatec-speaking volunteers were given

> three combs and asked which two were most alike. One was plastic with a handle, another wooden with a handle, the third plastic without a handle. English speakers thought the combs with handles were more alike, but Yucatec speakers felt the two plastic combs were.[30]

In a similar experiment Mayans and Americans were asked to distinguish between

> a plastic box, a cardboard box and a piece of cardboard. The Americans thought the two boxes belonged together, whereas the Mayans chose the two cardboard items. In other words, Americans focused on form, while the Mayans focused on substance.[31]

For the Americans, artefact (box) is the dominant signifying factor, whereas the Mayans adopt a more 'substantial' attitude (thing of cardboard) towards the object. This may allow the Mayans to discover in it a wider array of alternative uses—though the reverse might equally be the case, the priority of the one over the other being entirely dependent on circumstance (there being, in principle, an equal amount of uses for both 'box' and 'cardboard'). The experiment demonstrates the tendency of objects to oscillate between artefactual and substantial states. These are polarities that much contemporary sculpture seeks to dissolve, and the agency of this dissolution can in some cases be thought of as an act of consumption refined into an artistic procedure. This is the subject of the next chapter.

End Notes

1 Duchamp's own justifications for his readymades are famously casual, and there is little evidence to suggest that the nomination of objects as artworks had to do with simply going beyond the pale. There is a tendency to associate the impact of the readymade with Duchamp's concurrent disavowal of painting—which, in itself, probably solicited much more astonishment from those who had an interest in his work than did the readymade (whose low-key inception has already been addressed). But the two things are by no means coterminous. Within Duchamp's *Large Glass*, for example, the concreteness we associate with the readymade is deployed to disrupt the medium-specific complacencies of painting in several ways, chief among which is that the transparency of glass is nominated to subvert the notion of the painting support being a retinal window onto an 'other' world; rather, the painted imagery is seen within the concrete context of *this* world, of that which is happening in the room at the time of viewing.

As for the readymades themselves, there is a 1916 letter from Duchamp to his sister mentioning his plans. It is fascinating to witness the prodigious introduction of the commonplace into art as a 'private moment': "...if you have been up to my place you will have seen, in the studio, a bicycle wheel and a bottle rack. I bought this as a readymade sculpture. And I have a plan concerning this so-called bottle rack. Listen to this: here, in NY, I have bought various objects in the same taste and I treat them as "readymades". You know enough English to understand the meaning of "readymade" that I give to these objects. I sign them and I think of an inscription for them in English...This long preamble just to say: take this bottle rack for yourself." (*Affect⁴ Marcel: The Selected Correspondence of Marcel Duchamp*; Francis M. Naumann & Hector Obalk [London; New York: Thames & Hudson, 1999], p.43.) In light of his militation against their aesthetic appraisal as plastic form, Duchamp's use of the word 'sculpture' to describe the readymade here is interesting. Perhaps just a slip of the tongue.

2 Duchamp's readymades have been celebrated as somewhat 'generalised' emancipative gestures at the expense of their appraisal as expressions of a highly individual intellect: "...the readymades of Duchamp are far from mere negation. The most important aspect of Duchamp's thinking is the sovereign nature of the individual intellect; he would not accept at all the hostility to reason which we associate with Romanticism, Existentialism, and Freudianism, as well as with Heidegger, Deconstruction, and Postmodernism. Duchamp is a champion of the autonomous man of reason, and interpreters should not fail to see that he has a neoclassical side." (Clifford G. McMahon, 'The Janus Aesthetic' in *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, Vol. 26, No. 2, pp. 41-51.) Duchamp's drive to find out what defines art leads him, we might say, to undermine it in as 'plausible' a manner as any "man of reason" might do. Above all else, what interests Duchamp is the *kind* of thing an artwork is, and he uses 'any' thing as a sort of litmus test to find out. It is disappointing that McMahon refers to Heidegger in an entirely negative sense, rather than entertaining any metaphorical similarity between that author's musings on 'The Thing' (which also explore a kind of virtuality) and Duchamp's own enquiry. Heidegger: "What in the thing is thingly? What is the thing itself? We shall not reach the thing in itself until our thinking has first reached the thing as a thing." (*Poetry, Language and Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter [London; New York: Harper & Row 1971], pp. 167-168.) Constant reiteration of the readymade's negational aspects has obscured the way in which

subsequent nominalist artists (such as Martin Creed) have employed it in a quasi-Heideggerian attempt to understand the difficulties of defining 'the thing' with respect to *this* or *that* object. For Heidegger and Duchamp (and many since) the essence of 'the thing' is related only partially to a given object's inherence, and more primarily to its status within a nexus of verbal, positional and semiotic considerations.

3 It seems to me that this moribundity is due partly to the continuing prioritisation of *conceptualism's* reception of Duchamp over more contemporary engagements with his legacy; in other words, due to an historical, archaeological fascination with effect rather than affect. *The Duchamp Effect*, ed. Martha Buskirk & Mignon Nixon (Cambridge, Massachusetts: October & MIT Press, 1996), an anthology of Duchamp-related essays, interviews and ephemera, is a typical example. Of particular interest is a round table discussion between Rosalind Krauss, Thierry de Duve, Alexander Alberro, Benjamin Buchloh and Yves-Alain Bois, who conduct an autopsy of the period 1960-75, recouping bygone pieces of art-frontiersmanship as the metonym for the 'correct' (or so it seems they would have it) reading of Duchampian virtuality. This obsession with ascribing the birth of art's conceptual dimension (or, as Kosuth preferred, the birth of *art*) to Duchamp intimates that to approach Duchamp in the most meaningful critical sense it is now mandatory to pass through conceptualism. This overlooks the tendency for more contemporary artists to overlook, or wilfully ignore, that mistrust of object-appropriation which we associate with conceptualists and which led them to the dematerialised artwork. For example, what are we to make of the fact that Tracey Emin's *Bed* is described as 'conceptual art' even though it lacks the very engagement with the readymade—that is, the repudiation of it—which some (i.e. the above) commentators would probably identify most readily with conceptualism? It is simple, straightforward appropriation, reification in the traditional sense, as we may have found it in 1917—the difference being its author's stated lack of intended irony (see Emin's own comments on her work in Julian Stallabrass's *High Art Lite: British Art in the 1990s* [London: Verso, 1999], p. 37.). In fact, Emin's 'conceptual' piece, though it uses a Duchampian format, is entirely antithetical both to Duchamp's 'anonymous', manufactured object and conceptualism's flight therefrom, because it presents the personalisation of generic objects as a form of expressionism. Such 'conceptualism' as it possesses revolves around a genericisation of expressionism, which is manifested not as an emotional but as a biological imperative (poo stains, carnal fallout etc. etc.). This is an unforeseen 'affect' of Duchampian *effect* that has little to do with conceptualism. It seems to me that concentrating overtly on the perceived conceptualist executors of a Duchamp *effect* is not necessarily the best way of arriving at an appraisal of its *affect* that rings true with regard to contemporary art. It is precisely an inability, or unwillingness, of artists and commentators to articulate the aforementioned difference between effect and affect (epitomised by the erroneous castigation of a work like *Bed* as a flagship of 'conceptualism') which has led to the semantic diminution of the term 'conceptual art', currently a generic term used with much the same laxity as 'pop music'.

4 Claes Oldenberg is a partial exception to the rule here. On several occasions in the 1960s Oldenberg actually set up a temporary shop in which to exhibit and sell his artworks. However, I think that these contextual experiments are an extension of the objects Oldenberg was already making (I am thinking particularly of the painted plaster food pieces), whose commodified look was such that, when seen in a gallery setting, effectively served to remind the public that the gallery was not just a quasi-mystical context

for the pursuit of the sublime but also a kind of veiled shop. However, there is a difference between Oldenberg establishing his own acquisitional context and Steinbach's taking an item from a department store with a view to critiquing existing acquisitional contexts. Steinbach is one of the artists responsible for inaugurating the latter approach as a critique of something more than the high/low culture dichotomy capitalised on by Pop Art. Pop, through its appropriation of consumer iconography, is too often wrongly assumed to be a 'critique' thereof. To use consumer iconography is not necessarily to *enter into* the dynamic of acquisition associated with it, and we may imagine a continuum at one end of which are those artists for whom it is evidently a 'source material', and at the other end of which are those artists for whom it provides an alternative rubric for the production and consumption of high art. In the 1960s, the fledgling high/low cultural dialectic (which itself begins in the mid 1950s with neo-Dada) is still sufficiently dichotomised to enable most Pop artists' work to subsist on the straightforward tension between the quotidian banality of the source material and the high art status of the art object. In short, the artwork looks like 'a product' but is in fact usually hand-crafted. Of all the Pop artists, it is clearly Warhol—through his Factory—who embraces most explicitly the idea of abolishing this dichotomy, so that the rubric of production, mass-manufacture, marketing and brand image that holds for consumerism also becomes synonymous with high art. See Dick Hebdige's article 'In Poor Taste: Notes on Pop' in *Block*, No. 8, 1983, pp. 54-68.

5 I need hardly add that the relationship between consumption and (Duchampian) appropriation is riper for critique now than it ever has been—certainly riper than it was ninety years ago. Duchamp lived in more 'bespoke' times, an era in which even the poorest consumers could demand a certain degree of personal specification; ours, by comparison, is a decidedly off-the-peg era. It is, perhaps, precisely this off-the-peg condition of material culture which attracts artists to reclaiming the 'serial' product as a 'bespoke' entity. This way of thinking about the readymade is particularly relevant to sculptors such as (early) Tony Cragg and Jeff Luke, whose work is examined in the next chapter.

6 Borges summarises the dynamic of this modern condition : "Nominalism, which was formerly the novelty of a few, encompasses everyone today; its victory is so vast and fundamental that its name is unnecessary. No one says that he is a nominalist, because nobody is anything else. But we must try to understand that for people of the Middle Ages reality was not men but humanity, not the individuals but mankind, not the species but the genus, not the genera but God." ('From Allegories to Novels', *Other Inquisitions* [Austin: University of Texas Press, 1988], p.157.)

7 Review of Julian Stallabrass's *High Art Lite: British Art in the 1990s* in *Everything*, 2000, 3.3, p. 48. In this same amusing article Art & Language venture some strong opinions on the diverse cornucopiae of the current British art scene as chronicled in Stallabrass's book: "...to witness the juxtaposition of Tracey Emin's minge talk with the self-regarding silliness of Kapoor is fun—instructive, even if dubiously so." The subtext of this statement, and of the review in general, is that what is of interest currently is not so much the differences between the various 'critical positions' of individual artists (which, in any case, if I follow Art & Language correctly, seem to be homogenised as one big 'culture industry') as the fact that there is considered *room* for such diversity, the fact that all differences are considered reconcilable. Implicit even in the mere title of a book such as *High Art Lite* is the contention that so many artists abstain from

adopting a meaningful critical position that it becomes difficult to say for certain what, exactly, all this diversity actually adds to the canon in an intellectual sense, and certain curatorial strategies of the current art establishment (which champion the artist/museum symbiosis mentioned in Chapter 1) sometimes come across as a tautological attempt to convince us that art is as meaningful as it is diverse.

8 Artschwager—whose historical importance has steadily increased the more Minimalism has come to be seen as the origin of contemporary sculpture's conflation of domestic and gestalt form—was probably one of the artists alluded to by Donald Judd in his essay 'Specific Objects', in which he wrote that "Half or more of the best new work in the last few years has been neither painting nor sculpture" (*Complete Writings, 1959-1975* [Halifax: The Press of Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1975], p. 181.).

9 Dan Cameron, *Objectives: The New Sculpture* (New York: Rizzoli, 1990), p. 156.

10 Ibid., p. 162.

11 Ibid., p. 156.

12 Ibid., p. 156.

13 Michel Gautier, *0%: Haim Steinbach* (Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien/John Hansard Gallery, University of Southampton, 1997), p. 156.

14 Duchamp intimates that the very purpose of the readymade object was to concretize a verbal expression which, though it is 'caused' by the object, soon leaves it behind: "One important characteristic was the short sentence which I occasionally inscribed on the 'readymade'. That sentence, instead of describing the object like a title, was meant to carry the mind of the spectator towards other regions more verbal." ('Apropos of Readymades' in *The Essential Writings of Marcel Duchamp* [Thames & Hudson, 1975], pp. 141-142.)

15 Michel Gautier, ibid., p. 156.

16 Nicholas de Ville, 'The Indeterminate Object Theorized and The Discursive Plastic Form' in *Space Invaders*, ed. Nicholas de Ville (John Hansard Gallery, 1993), p. 88.

17 Ibid., p. 88.

18 Ibid., p. 88.

19 I should briefly qualify the use of the term 'hyperreal' here. "For Baudrillard", writes Douglas Kellner, "the hyperreal is not the unreal but the more than real...In a hyperreal world, the model comes first, and its constitutional role is invisible, because all one sees are instantiations of models." (*Jean Baudrillard: From Marxism to Postmodernism and Beyond* [Polity, 1989], p. 82.) Steinbach's displacements of objects reveal their condition as "products which are reproductions of models and instantiations of codes" (ibid., p. 113), and are hyperreal by metonymically indicating the structure, the 'reality' within which the production of such artefacts is possible. With such a strategy comes the implied contention that certain objects serve this purpose more effectively than others, and Steinbach's oeuvre is presumably to be thought of as a selection of the *most* effective. However, Kellner points out that Baudrillard, in a lecture given at Columbia University in 1987, objected to the so-called Neo-Geo movement's specious appropriation of his simulacral analysis to gain critical currency (see ibid., pp. 112-113). Baudrillard sees the hyperreal, and simulacral culture in general, as being so all-pervasive as to afflict even art: art has no power to step outside of, and critique, hyperreality because it has already contributed, through the readymade, to its own 'virtualised'

demise. Worse still, it has 'naturalised' its virtualisation: "The readymade always seems like those stuffed animals, vitrified as if they were alive, hypnotized in the pure form of appearance—'naturalized'. But I would say that today art in general also looks like a naturalized species, vitrified in its pure formal essence." (Jean Baudrillard, 'Aesthetic Illusion and Virtual Reality' in *Art and Artefact*, ed. Nicholas Zurbrugg [London: Sage, 1997], p. 21.)

20 Dan Cameron, ibid., p.160.

21 "It remains to be seen", said an ambivalent Marcel Broodthaers, "if art exists anywhere else than on the level of negation." (*Writings, Interviews, Photographs*; Ed. Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, [Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1988], p.48.) Broodthaers' attitude to the all-too negational conditions afforded by art led him, in his Départment des Aigles, to propose for it an 'alternative use', one arrived at through a conflation of Duchamp's 'This is a work of art' with Magritte's 'This is not a pipe' (see Douglas Crimp's essay 'This is not a Museum of Art', *On The Museum's Ruins*, [Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1993], p. 218.). This reconsolidation of the gallery as a site of broader social investigation is important to later artists such as Neil Cummings & Marysia Lewandowska and Joe Scanlan, whose work is discussed in the next chapter.

22 Jean Baudrillard's concept of how we 'possess' objects is based on a similar kind of abstraction: "A *utensil* is never possessed, because a utensil refers one to the world; what is possessed is always an object *abstracted from its function and thus brought into relationship with the subject.* In this context all owned objects partake of the same abstractness, and refer to one another only inasmuch as they refer solely to the subject. Such objects together make up the system through which the subject strives to construct the world, a private totality." (*The System of Objects* [London: Verso, 1996], p. 86.) It certainly seemed to me the case that, as the umbrella (a utensil) stopped referring to the world, to the *raining* world, I suddenly 'possessed' it: its brief window of non-functionality made it suddenly "refer solely to the subject" rather than to the world.

23 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Nausea* (London: Penguin, 1965), p. 13.

24 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 603-604.

25 See *David Nash: Sculpture 1971-90*, exh. cat. (London: Serpentine Gallery, 1990).

26 See Mary-Jane Jacobs' essay on Tony Cragg, 'First Order Experience', *A Quiet Revolution: British Sculpture Since 1965* (London; New York: Thames and Hudson, 1987).

27 Rudolf Carnap, in *The Logical Structure of The World* (University of California Press, 1969) classified the way in which we think about objects into the following hierarchy: property description, relation description, structure description. These various categories usually function reciprocally; art sometimes has a tendency to isolate them as formal systems. Steinbach's art , for example, isolates relation descriptions.

28 That is to say, while its value is equal to the thing it stands in for, it still nevertheless has the potential to return to what it started as. Saussure uses objects-as-a-system-of-language to explain how identity is subordinate to the notion of 'value'. If a thing will perform a task, but nevertheless has an identity incongruous with that task, it still has a value equal to the thing more readily associated with that task. Within a chess game, asks Saussure, can a lost knight "be replaced by an equivalent piece? Certainly. Not only another knight, even a figure shorn of any resemblance to a knight can be declared identical provided

the same value is attached to it. We see then that in semiological systems like language, where elements hold each other in equilibrium in accordance with fixed rules, the notion of identity blends with that of value and vice versa." (*Course in General Linguistics*, ed. Charles Bally & Albert Schlage in collab. with Albert Riedlinger; trans. Wade Baskin [London: McGraw-Hill, 1966], p. 110.)

29 The question we need to ask, as Art & Language have said, is "The everyday for whom?...How can there be an everyday *in general* in a critical discourse? The compelling power of the ordinary to a Walter Benjamin—who correctly perceived himself to be threatened by practically everything, not least by the Nazis—will not be exactly reflected by an art critic in 1990s London." (ibid., p. 51.)

30 Alison Motluk, 'You are what you speak' in *New Scientist*, 30 Nov., 2002, pp. 35-38.

31 Ibid.

Chapter 4

Consumption as an Artistic Procedure

Where I tend to agree with Andre is that Duchamp is involved in exchange and not use value. In other words, a readymade doesn't offer any kind of engagement. Once again it is the alienated relic of our modern post-industrial society. But he is just using manufactured goods, transforming them into gold and mystifying them. That is where alchemy would come in. But I see no reason to extrapolate that in terms of the arcane language of the Cabala.[1]

Robert Smithson, 1973

As Smithson claims, Duchamp probably *is* involved primarily with exchange rather than use value: the look of manufacture is used as a symbolic commodity to be exchanged for the look of art. It is a transaction of deliberately flawed economy; to put it crudely, we see something cheap where there should be something valuable. When, with Minimalism, the look of manufacture is finally reconciled with artistic *technique*—that is, with the concept of 'work'—the relationship between exchange and use value changes. Initially this change seems a subtle one: the look of a thing bought in a store is swapped for the look of a thing made in a factory. But this, clearly, is something more than a mere incremental shift, for it involves a paradigmatic leap from object to the procedure which begets the object. What makes Donald Judd's objects 'specific' is not just the interrogation of a grey area between 'object', 'architecture' and 'monument' that they share with those of Robert Morris, but that they seem to be—and this is related to their having no internal compositional relationships—pure units of procedure. Judd invites us to contemplate the art object as neither achieved plastic form nor readymade but as *an occupation of space* with a standard manufacturing procedure. His objects occupy a conceptual and literal space once inhabited by another three dimensional art—sculpture—the displacement of which is made possible by prioritising procedure over form.[2] Judd's work prioritises procedure over form by deliberately opting for those procedures which can only yield forms of a certain kind (basic gestalt forms). Up until the 1950s procedure is still largely in the service of form; Minimalism's notable contribution is to propose the synonymity of form with an *existing* procedure—usually one alien to sculpture's lexicon. Only by opting for procedures outside of sculpture's lexicon is Minimalism able to prioritise procedure over form, because tried and tested sculptural procedures run the risk of camouflaging its pioneering morphology in the 'period costume' of preceding eras. It is possible to imagine two works of similar form by Donald Judd and an imaginary contemporary, distinguished from one another purely on the basis that the latter is a gestalt form cast in bronze from an 'original' made in the studio,

whereas the former is fabricated directly in the factory with manufacturing-grade aluminium. Where the bronze object is evidently to be regarded in relation to a language called sculpture, Judd proposes "a very different sort of autonomy for the art object...predicated on the object's existence within the world of other objects (as opposed to art objects)."[3]

Minimalism's morphological stance is characterised by the seemingly more limited number of ways of manipulating such materials as perspex, aluminium sheeting, birch ply and so forth, the properties of which are determined in advance by the trade procedures their manufacturers foresee them undergoing. This language is informed mainly by the demands of the construction industry, with whom manufacturing is in perpetual consultation as to which kind of products are required to accomplish which kind of engineering feats: if there is no product available, then manufacturing had better invent one. It is architecture that is most demanding in this respect: a building is proposed that requires the manufacture of sheet glass in hitherto unprecedented dimensions; a solution is found, and the lexicons of manufacturing, architecture and the construction industry all advance together. Art, too, has thrown its hat into this ring—most notably with public works from a line of artists stretching from Tatlin to Gormley. But I am not really interested in these kinds of works, which seem to me to use industrial processes as much through straightforward practical necessity as through aesthetic/conceptual innovation. The artworks I will be concerned with here are those that take on something which has already been through the manufacturing process, rather than co-opting it as sculptural technique. As Tony Cragg once remarked, the total number of artworks made represents a near invisible fragment of the sum of all other things made, even now, in an age fortunate enough to have such a surfeit of practising artists. This dry, arithmetical observation of Cragg's[4] has always stuck in my mind; it conjures up a cartoon image of a tiny faction of material dissenters plotting to overthrow the hegemony of industrial manufacturing. Among this tiny faction is a still tinier subgroup of artists—those using readymades—whose works literally plunder the physical results of the GNP as raw material. This tiny proportional representation still confers on the artist a strange status within the general manufacturing kingdom. I would like to make a distinction between those artists who recognise the strangeness of this status and those to whom it is a matter of indifference As a survey of the former, this chapter explores the extent to which the format of the readymade can be seen as a refined act of consumption. The work I will focus on here tends, to varying degrees, to exhibit a consciousness of the appropriated object's commodity status—a status which, until fairly recently, it has been an artist's prerogative to ignore, perhaps in the belief that its artistic appropriation will transcend, rather than emphasise, the process of consumption by which it was obtained.

We know that, in the classic Marxist understanding of the commodity fetish, the exchange value of an object is to be understood as encoding the labour invested in its production. In a bartering system, an object which took a long time to produce would be

worth *x* amount of an object which took less time to produce. As industrial manufacture replaces artisanal workmanship, objects that once required different amounts of time to produce are now produced, as it were, instantly. Exchange ceases to rely on any calculable investment of labour, and the social relations which once held between the production and use of objects in the pre-industrial era become estranged from one another, the increasing mediation of capital rendering all objects exchangeable on the *same basis*: as commodities.[5] Marx saw the commodity as an abstraction of an object's "sensuousness":

> It is absolutely clear that, by his activity, man changes the forms of the materials of nature in such a way as to make them useful to him. The form of wood, for instance, is altered if a table is made out of it. Nevertheless the table continues to be wood, an ordinary, sensuous thing. But as soon as it emerges as a commodity, it changes into a thing which transcends sensuousness. It not only stands with its feet on the ground, but, in relation to all other commodities, it stands on its head, and evolves out of its wooden brain grotesque ideas, far more wonderful than if it were to become dancing of its own free will.[6]

Commodification abstracts the object by presenting its inherent qualities as being first and foremost relative to the value of other objects. From the viewpoint of commodification, the object might just as well be anything, as long as its value is equivalent to the thing exchanged for it. The object's qualities thus become an extrinsically determined set of values which just happens to be indexed to an identifiable physical object. In the economic field objects function as signifiers of value, of a constantly shifting *transfer* of value. 'Value' is perpetually reconfigured in the form of diverse objects, thanks to the abstracting mediation of capital, which knows no arbitrational bounds. An analogous thing happens in art, which can be seen to recoup a 'definition of itself' in spite of its illimitable manifestations. Like 'value', 'meaning' is simply referred to a proliferation of possibilities; like value, meaning is relative, a thing to be determined through the cross-referral of many different concrete examples. We have already seen how the readymade exploits the impossibility of deriving a definition of art from a single example.[7] The principle of the commodity is similar: one could no more grasp the concept of value from the price of a single table than one could derive a definition of art from the content of single artwork. The readymade, as it were, embodies art's semantic indeterminacy in a similar way to which the commodity embodies the shifting notion of value. Duchamp effectively fetishises art's indeterminacy in the same way that the commodity fetishises value. When Robert Smithson says that Duchamp "is involved in exchange and not use value", he is referring precisely to this fetishistic aspect of the readymade, its tendency to subsist solely on the currency of indeterminacy.

I wanted to mention something about Steinbach in the last chapter, but held off doing so in the anticipation it would be more appropriate to mention it here. This has to do

with the price of Steinbach's work, which is calculated in the following way:

price of artwork = retail cost of appropriated items + price of artwork's market value.

For example (and I have invented these figures): 2 toilet brushes + 2 lava lamps = $473. Add this to Steinbach's 'market value'—let's say, $70 000—and you get $70 473, a figure which represents the shift from one commercial sphere to another. By including the store price of the original items in the price of the artwork, Steinbach emphasises the shift from one economic sphere to another. His arithmetical fetishisation of this shift refines the above affinity between the readymade and the commodity into a sort of parody. Steinbach is as interested in the abstracting aura which exchange value and commodification bring to an object as Duchamp was in the abstracting aura that artistic designation and institutional endorsement bring to an object. As I noted towards the end of the previous chapter, he is more interested in consumerism than consumption; in exchange value rather than use value.

In the practices of Jeff Luke, Joe Scanlan and Neil Cummins & Marysia Lewandowska, the alteration, dissemination and displacement of an object is pursued as a refined act of consumption rather than as an exploitation of any abstraction shared by the commodity and the artwork. Use value is the order of the day, the monolithic ideology of consumerism being met with empirical subversion 'in the field'. However, as we shall see, the results are neither so obediently Marxist nor anti-Duchampian as one might expect, for these artists (the latter two, at least) retain an interest in the theme of enunciation, the act of declaring or showing something as art—what Smithson disparaged as 'alchemy'. Indeed, only through rethinking enunciation are they able to espouse new attitudes towards consumption. In short, consumption—be it the consumption of consumer goods by an artist or of an artwork by an audience—is defined as an ironic and guarded restitution of use value rather than as a return to some more 'authentic' realm of engagement.

Jeff Luke, who sadly died aged 33 in 1995, left behind a small but coherent body of sculptural works characterised by a preoccupation with the assisted readymade. To give the reader an insight into his approach I will first give a description of a definitive piece.

In his 1993 work, Spend, Spend, Spend (figs. 29-30), the floor of a room is strewn with numerous items which, at first sight, appear to be unmanipulated objects taken directly to the gallery from the hardware store. Closer inspection reveals that each object has been subtly altered, be it partially dismantled, welded to another object, sawn in half, or simply repainted. These alterations are all characterised by the same, semi-paradoxical quality: it is difficult, if not impossible, to recognise what the object was, yet no trace can be seen of any manipulation, of the artist's hand. All abrasions seem healed, all seams removed. The conviction that it has been altered is thus mitigated by the object's continuing to exhibit the

readymade integrity of a manufactured item—though this strategy is arguably more rigourously enforced in the concurrent work, *Doing Nothing* (fig. 31). It is not so much that the object has been divested of function but that a use has yet to be found for it, and some objects have the appearance of things wrested from the manufacturing process one stage, or several stages, before completion.[8]

While many artists have employed the familiar artistic strategy of divesting an object of its function, few have done so as emphatically as Luke, who seems to know exactly how far to go with each item. The abstraction which the object undergoes in his hands somehow seems like a logical extrapolation of its function. Not only is the object's identity overthrown without relinquishing the visual trappings of utility, it is precisely these inherent qualities which form the basis of the artist's manipulations—just as, in judo, an opponent's own weight and momentum form the basis of his downfall. In other words, we are speaking of a formal language which, while certainly importing items from the utilitarian to the cultural sphere, is nevertheless still imbued with the dynamic of use. Or, rather, the *rhetoric* of use. This rhetoric is not so much concerned with subverting the object into a disavowal of its previous state (that is, with getting it to actually do or say something 'opposite', like Man Ray) as with breaking it down into its most basic syntactic components. Luke's is a procedure whose credo might be: What if consumption, like sculpture, is staged as an abstract, formal game, and not one whose goal is the elementary subordination of form to function? The resulting object is a 'muscle of functionality' which moves nowhere, responds to nothing, deprived as it is of its interfacial prerogative: it is cut off from the world—in it, but no longer *of* it. This artifice is sufficiently convincing to induce an uncertainty as to whether the item is an existing functional object abstracted or an invented plastic form that has a semi-functional appearance.[9] As a practice in which artefact now plays a role equal to that of substance, sculpture often posits subdivisional categories of object that span the more definitive types already abundant in the world. If Donald Judd and Robert Morris exploited the gap between 'object' , 'architecture' and 'monument'[10], then Luke's practice perhaps bridges the gap between what we might call 'utensil' and 'ornament'.

While presenting a range of objects which require varying degrees of manipulation to achieve the overall 'muted' quality the artist evidently seeks to impose upon the utilitarian world, *Spend, Spend, Spend* also presents things which require no manipulation whatsoever. This implies that the generic world of the hardware store already contains 'Jeff Lukes', and the inclusion of such sundries as grommets, flanges, rods, discs etc.—which constitute an evidently irreducible order of object—is seemingly intended to corroborate the 'unmanipulated' posture of the whole tableau. It is not difficult to imagine Luke in the hardware store, separating everything into a continuum of objects according to the degree of alteration required to assimilate each into his sculptural procedure. It is tempting to say that, for Luke, the hardware store comprises things that are already more or less like his work, or

'like art', but this would be a somewhat trite observation. He is drawn to the hardware store not because it contains things that are 'like' his work; that would be a tautology, since the hardware store contains more or less everything that comprises his work and therefore cannot fail to yield things like it. Like many adherents of the readymade since Steinbach first ironed out those distinctions between 'enunciation' and 'appropriation', Luke's work neither resembles nor contradicts a notional object we refer to as 'art'. It does not even assume the dynamic of an object, let alone the rhetorical exemplar of some 'art condition'; it assumes the dynamic of a *survey* of objects, a survey whose motivation, at first sight (like Wentworth's MDGB) might seem *entirely civilian* were it not for the fact that it is presented in an art context. Before examining this civilian aspect, I want to propose a phenomenology for its dynamic. I hope, thereby, to go beyond the aforementioned, and somewhat rudimentary, utility/abstraction dialectic which, though undoubtedly an important point of departure, is a route to something more complex.

An object is purchased by Luke for inclusion in his work. What is this purchase based on? Not just on some ineffable, ill-defined curiosity in that object, but on a desire to integrate its qualities within a wider system of objects. In other words, the object occurs to Luke's perception as a vehicle of immanent *change*, rather than as a foreclosure of functional reciprocity (the 'right' tool for the job). The subsequent physical alteration of the item consolidates the precise way in which the material object 'occurs' to his perception. The artist is running each object in the hardware store through an imaginative transformational sequence, a sort of forecast as to how it can be integrated into a given work-in-progress. While the other customers are relating to the lexicon of the hardware store in a more generic way (looking for the right tool for the job), Luke's perception of it is filtered through its applicability to an alternative world. This world he calls his *work*. And yet within this world, the appropriated objects do not take on a more 'personalised' aspect than in the immediate reality of actual, conventional use. The order of things proposed in the work, though deviant, is equally generic, in the sense that no discernible 'voice' is given to the objects contained therein. The paradigm of the work is *grammatical* and *syntactical*, rather than expressive, because it explores the *sense* in which objects are what they are, not what they can be made to say or do.

This conjecture on what happens phenomenologically in the creation of Luke's works is a Wittgensteinian one, in the sense that a subject is not so much seeking to steer his experience of a material thing towards an objective closure as seeking to describe the conditions under which the experience is made available to him. Luke's methodology is like a physical extrapolation of the role that *response* plays within Wittgenstein's description of perception. Usually this response takes the form of language, a statement, internally uttered, or uttered aloud, which 'confirms' what we see before us. But perception is simply not that objective, says Wittgenstein, and *the language used to describe* these perceptions is an overly objective, or 'premature' attempt to fix the essence of a thing, when we have not even

begun to understand the 'grammar' of the general perceptual situation of which it is but one element. For Wittgenstein, in the experience of the material world an object causes something *in* the viewing subject, as opposed to appearing objectively *to* them:

> What I really *see* must surely be what is produced in me by the influence of the object—Then what is produced in me is a sort of copy, something that in its turn can be looked at, can be before one; almost something like a *materialisation*. [11]

From this Wittgenstein develops his idea of the 'visual room', which can be summarised in the following way: a given perceiving subject converts an actual, material domestic room into a set of visual pictures, and thus into a 'visual room'. Whereas the actual room is, itself, a *material* picture, the visual room, as it appears to the perceiver, is but a representation of that picture. Wittgenstein argues that because this representation is not any kind of tangible object, we cannot therefore say of the copies, impressions or "materialisations" it elicits that they invite any concrete 'possession' in terms of their being 'our' impressions. It makes no logical sense, says Wittgenstein, to hold these materialisations of the objects contained in the visual room as *one's own*. The visual room, he says, "has no master, outside or in". As Marie McGinn has said in her exegesis of *The Philosophical Investigations*, we should not "think of visual experience in terms of our each having access to images that no one else is privy to".[12] Wittgenstein stresses the possessive nature with which we tend to regard visual impressions:

> Might I not ask: In what sense have you *got* what you are talking about and saying that only you have got it? Do you possess it? You do not even *see* it. Must you not really say that no one has got it? And this is too clear: if as a matter of logic you exclude other people's having something, it loses its sense to say that you have it.[13]

Not that Wittgenstein does not empathise with those who say they 'possess' their visual impressions. He understands

> ...how one thinks to conceive this object, to see it, to make one's looking and pointing mean it. I know how one stares ahead and looks about one in this case—and the rest. I think we can say: you are talking (if, for example, you are sitting in a room) of the 'visual room'.[14]

I have introduced Wittgenstein's observations in some detail here because I think that Jeff Luke's work makes use of the relationship that exists between the 'visual room' and the 'material room'. Put simply, the 'imaginative transformational sequence' I referred to earlier opens up a sort of portal between the two. Let me recall the first quote from Wittgenstein: "What I really *see* must surely be what is produced in me by the influence of

the object"—Then what is produced in me is a sort of copy, something that in its turn can be looked at, can be before one; almost something like a *materialisation*." Using Wittgenstein's language, I would say that the *alteration* of the object is Luke's attempt to "materialise" his response to "the influence of the object." Perception makes of objects a kind of assisted readymade, in the sense that it does not so much confirm as *respond* to their presence. The fact that, in Luke's case, the perceptual response the object inspires is converted into a physical one emphasises the notion that a given object is to be understood not as a distinct, knowable entity (what Heidegger might have termed a *ding an sich*), but as something which is in dialogue with its own representation:

> The concept of what is seen, like that of a copy, is very elastic, and so *together with it* is the concept of what is seen. The two are intimately connected. (Which is not to say that they are alike.)[15]

Others have observed analogous dynamics at work within Luke's strategy that I believe corroborate this Wittgensteinian reading. Andrew Wilson, for example, has remarked that

> The possibility of tracing where Luke's objects have been, what has been done to them and what they have become entails that the extent to which these objects can also be recognised to exist either in the factual or in the symbolic realm remains elusive.[16]

Whether the objects exist within the "factual" or the "symbolic realm" "remains elusive" precisely because "what has been done to them" is a direct response to "where they have been" (i.e. their alteration is a direct response to the context of their perception). As Wilson elsewhere notes, "The fact and the symbol—the object and what the object might signify—skid apart in [a] displacement."[17] I would add, finally, that they "skid apart" to the extent that theirs is no longer either the symbolic or factual realm at all. It is more the case that Luke is intuitively attempting to refute polarised ways of thinking about objects. The problem with the fact/symbol opposition is that it encourages us to imagine a continuum at either ends of which sit 'pure fact' and 'pure symbol'. In Chapter 2 I showed how the Wentworthian, 'ulterior' object undermines the stability of these poles, emphasising its potential to be *this* or *that* depending on circumstance. Luke's objects make a more general abstraction of this ulteriority, since they have no circumstances in which to manifest their ulteriority beyond those of the gallery; rather, they propose a 'new order of things'. While I agree with others that this proposed order of things is a critique of 'use', I also think it is a critique of possession. The value of analysing this artist's work through Wittgenstein's concept of the visual room lies in the introduction of a more refined notion of possession to counterbalance that which is intrinsic to the general rubric of consumption. My reading of Luke's work is that it conflates the cathexes of *perceptual* consumption (i.e.

the ownership of visual impressions) and *actual* consumption (the ownership of actual objects) into a single act. Its altered rubric of consumption sits between a visual impression of the material object and the (flawed) language used to express this visual impression, while simultaneously rendering the object less 'ownable' as a conventional consumer item (and, in turn, more accessible as an object of thought).

Luke's works comprise such an overwhelming number of products that his visits to the hardware store must have been a daily constitution—the discovery of this or that crenelated plastic cylinder a cause for some private jubilation. Its evident penchant for the generic notwithstanding, what most distinguishes Luke's work from either the semiotic machinations of Duchamp or the strategic presentational stance of Steinbach, or from the artefactual formalism of early Tony Cragg (which some would say it most resembles) is its informal civilian *covetousness*. Consumption is integral to Luke's practice in a more than perfunctory sense because it extrapolates a form of sculptural enquiry from the psychological act of coveting. The form of covetousness attached to consumption is a familiar one; that which Wittgenstein suggests is attached to our 'own' visual impressions of the material world is more sublimated.

Luke has said of his work that

> There are so many things, so much stuff, an impossible parade of products. I could never use them all. This is my way of becoming a better consumer...I am making no decision about what best represents my 'time', but leaving it to merely what is available.[18]

Confronted with "an impossible parade of products", Luke's response is that he "could not possibly use them all". This does not stop him from trying. But why, confronted with a surfeit of uses, should it make sense to employ *sculpture* as a method of "becoming a better consumer"? I have suggested that Luke's artefactual sculpture brings the possession of objects and the possession of visual impressions into proximity with one another. As for social critique, Luke is concerned less with analysing the anthropological mores of consumption than with treating it as a kind of naturalised formal game. Consumption is not so much his 'subject' as his methodology: he makes things *by* consuming, by attempting to understand the texture of consumption (unlike Steinbach, who is more interested in a structuralist notion of consumption). The work, as he intimates, is a study of "available" forms; form is conceived of less as something to be striven for (wrought) than as something to be examined, scrutinised, surveyed.

A certain school of thought holds that an object is not 'itself' at the moment of its production or acquisition; that it becomes itself through use, maltreatment, salvage etc. This is a romantic way of looking at objects, one to which we all regularly succumb: the new Travelcard wallet the London Underground assistant gives us has somehow 'not yet become' because it has not been subjected to the continual wear and tear of removal and

repocketing. Indeed, we might define its identity in terms of its lacking precisely those qualities of the Travelcard wallet that we recently lost, qualities accrued through years of use—qualities so familiar to us that their sudden absence occasions a sense of mourning. The lost object proved the extent to which we travelled, registered our episodic comings and goings, and even perhaps kept us in touch with the past—whereas its replacement helps only to erase the past. Objects become themselves by colluding with their owners' itineraries. We look at them and somehow manage to see ourselves.[19] In relation to this romanticisation of, and honing of identity through, objects, consumerism presents itself as a game which dares us to forge *immediate* identities with items that bear no provenance of personal possession whatsoever; indeed, it is probably the absence of such provenance which excites our acquisitional impulses. Everyone has to renew their possessions at some point, but shopping is often a gamble, and sometimes a complete stab in the dark, a quest for a non-existent idealised object doomed to end in failure, embarrassment, or worse. We all, from time to time, acquire objects which we fail to integrate into our lives, or do so in such a way as to only ratify what we were before we acquired them. The most recurrent errors are with clothing and fashion, but even something as simple as the purchase of a corkscrew from Conran's can signify a sort of inadvertent aspirationality, for the truth is that our dinner guests preferred watching us struggle with the old seventies one with the blue wooden handle—and to witness our effortless uncorking of a Chablis using this svelte, anodised changeling is quite frankly disconcerting.

If we believe that we can fully rationalise our psychological relationship with the material world either at the moment of acquiring objects or through the coveting of our own object-perceptions, then consumerism exploits this by inviting us to aid and abet the 'becoming' of objects. The consumer object is marketed as *that which is missing* from one's existing inventory of possessions, and there are even certain objects—faded, ripped denim clothing is a good example—which anticipate ownership by simulating wear and tear, thereby appealing to the above romantic notion that objects only become themselves through use. This simulacrum of ownership reveals the extent to which consumer objects are made available to us in such a way as to make us think of them in advance as 'our objects'. The role of *choice* within the consumer context is that of encouraging us to invest in a given item to the extent that we can envisage that object becoming part of our everyday lives. As Jean Baudrillard writes in *The System of Objects*:

> The availability of the object is the foundation of personalisation: only if the buyer is offered
> a whole range of choices can he transcend the strict necessity of his purchase and commit
> himself   *personally* to something beyond it...Indeed, we no longer even have the
> option of *not*
> choosing.[20]

But the most obvious characteristic of choice vis-à-vis the industrially produced consumer object is that one is nearly always choosing between a set of what David Riesman calls marginal differences—or what Baudrillard calls *inessential* differences. These inessentials are characterised by such criteria as variations in colour, size, edition etc. A given range of products all invariably perform a task with the same degree of efficiency, their varying stylistic carapaces housing identical working components. If the 'essence' of the object is in such cases functional, then it is not one that is in dialogue with its appearance, which is deliberately altered to distinguish it from its counterparts (or competitors). Its essence is thus not inherent but, rather, shared among its competitors as a compendium of tokenistic differences: a new product's difference to existing products may "momentarily lend it a privileged status"[21], but only *in relation to* the very things it is competing with in the marketplace. There is, in effect, no *exemplar* (or 'Model', as Baudrillard prefers) to which 'lesser versions' aspire, for each object makes an equal claim to such a status. The object's essence is therefore diffused: "The model", says Baudrillard, is "everywhere discernible in the series".[22]

Marx's abstraction theory—whereby objects relinquish their individual sensuousness through commodification—resurfaces in Baudrillard's concept of 'Model and Series', his critique of the relationship between uniqueness and ubiquity, between original and copy, between authenticity and simulation. Earlier, with regard to Jeff Luke's work, I stated that the perceptual response an object elicits is converted into a physical one, and that this emphasises the idea that a given object is to be understood not as a distinct, knowable entity but as something which is *in dialogue with its own representation.* Within Baudrillard's concept of Model and Series, the object is in dialogue with its own representation to the extent that it *is* its own representation. The distinction between original and copy is blurred: the Series is not simply a copy, a counterfeit, a *denigration*, as it were, of the Model's prized value. The two are no longer separable: for example, the kind of family heirloom—say, a handcrafted sideboard—which once epitomised the idea of the unique object is now widely emulated in serial production. It is more the case that, if the Model now exists at all, it does so only through utilising the Series as 'software' in order to save itself the trouble of having to appear in actuality. Where, in the past, Models were totemic objects around which other items were deferentially configured, they have now (says Baudrillard) "quit their former isolated, caste-like existence; having become part of industrial production, they are themselves now open to serial distribution."[23] To put it another way, the Model's 'authenticity' endures only as a kind of tincture, an essence added to all other objects which cannot be extracted in a refined form. In attempting to extract the authentic from the tincture of simulation, one either kills it or traduces it in the form of an anachronism—attempts at restoring authenticity to a world of inessential differences reach instinctively for something from the past. Perhaps the latter point is indirectly demonstrated by those metonymical phrases which are gradually falling into

102

disuse: few people any longer refer to 'the turf' when speaking of horse racing, and William Hague's desire "to return to kitchen-table issues" was met with universal disdain. As almost everyone outside of the shadow cabinet pointed out, Hague—or his speech-writers—had obviously not confronted the possibility that the kitchen table was not quite the locus of familial debate it had once been. For some people the phrase may even have evoked the opposite: grim, silent repasts punctuated by incessant parental rebuke.

At the other end of the political spectrum, Marxists would perhaps be tempted, in their analysis of Baudrillard's critique of objects, to read 'Series' for 'exchange value' and 'Model' for 'use value'—for both 'Model' and 'use value' represent lost absolutes within Baudrillard's and Marx's respective theses. But Baudrillard is concerned, I think, with the related difficulty of asserting essentalist values in an age in which we (as users, viewers or customers) no longer identify with objects in such a direct, intimate, one-to-one sense, for the diffusion of a given object's essence into a more systemic ontology undermines its self-autonomy, making it seem less remarkable *in itself*. The result is that the relationship is no longer one-to-one, but one-to-*one of many*, for to contemplate any single object is to extrapolate the system of production which underpins it:

> The principal basis of this system [i.e. our consumer society] would appear to be official, obligatory and supervised demise of the objects it comprises...Here again one could argue that nothing more is involved than an infantile disorder of the technological society, and attribute such growing pains entirely to the dysfunctionality of our present social structure—i.e. to the capitalist order of production. The long-term prospect of a transcendence of the whole system would thus remain open.[24]

What form would such a "transcendence" take? What kind of time scale does "long term" entail? Hundreds of years? Millennia? Consumption, as Baudrillard suggests, is a sort of tautology:

> The particular value of an object, its exchange value, is the function of a cultural and social determinant. Its absolute singularity, on the other hand, arises from the fact of being possessed by me—and this allows me, in turn, to recognise myself in the object as an absolutely singular being. This is a grandiose tautology, but one that gives the relationship to all objects its density—its absurd facility, and the illusory but intense gratification it supplies.[25]

If consumption is a tautological game which everyone is playing 'for real' and yet in tacit recognition of its simulacral nature, I think that artists' continued appropriation of readymade objects can be read as an attempted transcendence of this tautology, as a method of questioning this "[recognition of oneself] in the object as an absolutely singular being".

If we accept Baudrillard's tautological concept of possession as the terms by which things gain initial entry into the world, then some artists, we might say, are concerned with how to *repossess* objects. Such artists propose a new order of consumption which, arguably, falls under the aegis of neither exchange nor use value. Some (for example, Neil Cummings & Marysia Lewandowska) have done this by divorcing objects' identities from the commercial sphere, instead considering how, on their 'travels', they accrue signatures that usurp their original identities as abstracted commodities. Such strategies, perhaps in the romantic style, hold that an object's life does not begin until subjected to 'use'. And yet *this* use value has seemingly little to do with a Marxist reinvestment in the incipient social context of an object's *production*; rather, it is concerned with such value as the object comes to accrue at the *terminus* of its journey, be it as 'lost', as 'gift' or otherwise.

Other artists have flirted much more candidly with exchange value. Joe Scanlan, for instance, is concerned with preserving the 'product' status of the readymade in the presentation of a functional object as a work of art. From 1989 to 1995 he made a series of *Nesting Bookcases*: structures of wooden, interlocking shelves which collapse into one another for easy transportation. Shown as seemingly readymade artworks in galleries, these soon ended up in the homes of various collectors. Within Scanlan's rubric, only when the object was installed in the collector's apartment was it deemed to have completed its artistic mission (that is, defined the sense in which it was to be construed as art). This mission was an inversion of the Duchampian stance of presenting 'not art' as art: the bookcases, absorbed into the domestic fabric of the collector's home, effectively eschewed the enunciative context of the gallery in favour of more generic surroundings, achieving a kind of camouflage. They therefore took advantage of the fact that anything appearing within an art context as a readymade is liable to 'disappear' when removed from it. Instead of simply using art's cordon sanitaire to displace a commonplace item, Scanlan used it as a space to 'market a product'. This was his thinking behind the work at the time:

> Many artists today are keen on blurring the distinction between art and design, and rightfully so, since once you admit that anything is grist for the art mill, the next logical thing is to design your own products as works of art.[26]

Perhaps the selling point of Scanlan's product, from a critical point of view, is that it is an object designed to embody the shift from a rhetorical environment (the gallery) to a vernacular one (the home). While artworks have to be 'shown' as art, they also, in principle, have to be *owned* as such. Let us admit that, when it comes to readymade art, there is often a conflict between the two: the readymade requires the perpetual resuscitation of the institutional critique, which is perhaps more demonstratively upheld if that readymade is in the hands of the museum; in the hands of a collector it flirts too closely with its original function. 'No problem,' says Scanlan, 'just accept its functional dimension; in fact,

emphasise it.' Thus it is that *design* is invoked as the means by which the institutional critique is circumvented.

Artworks do not usually specify the particular way in which they are to be 'consumed'. They may have intended *critical* functions, but these are established not just by the artist but by the viewer's reading. One reason why artworks are considered to be the least generic of objects is their propensity to submit to a diverse range of particular readings. But Scanlan conflates critical function and literal function by conceiving of the artwork at the outset as something to be surrounded eventually by the generic objects of the collector's home. Michael Newman describes this conflation in his essay 'After Conceptual Art: Joe Scanlan's *Nesting Bookcases*, Duchamp, Design and the Impossibility of Disappearing':

> While the structure of the *Nesting Bookcases* and the permutation of their modes of display remain constant—they may be shown [in a gallery setting] nested or braced, empty or used, against the wall or free-standing—when they are in use the particular ways in which they may be filled will remain unpredictable, specific to each user and situation. Repetition—the sameness of each example of the *Nesting Bookcases* to each other—is allied with a singularity that is outside the artist's control. In this way the limits of the work, where it begins and ends, and its traditional identification with the agency of the artist, are thrown into question.[27]

Subjectivity is consolidated only once the artwork has fallen into the collector's possession. The collector is encouraged to see the object less as a vehicle for the *artist's* subjectivity than as a method of restructuring their own relationship to their existing possessions. This restructuring of possession is, I believe, one example of an artwork attempting to militate against the tautological nature of consumption. The precise nature of how this is achieved and what it means with regard to art can be gleaned through a closer examination of Newman's critique.

Newman describes a photograph of a *Nesting Bookcase* taken in a collector's house (and reproduced alongside his essay). His description suggests an investment in each object that is simultaneously symbolic and ironic. Firstly, Newman gives us his personal, quasi-symbolist reading of the tableau—

> On the last of the cases the objects have a slightly sinister appearance: a man in black like an undertaker stands beside a box on the other end of which a black spider is suspended from the tensing cord of the unit; the objects continue with a model bench in the vernacular style and a family photograph. These evoke a combination of threat and remembrance, unsettling the typical boyishness of the sporting and sci-fi interests evinced in other things.[28]

—and then contextualises it within the idiom of the institutional critique (i.e. within an ironic

revisitation of the dematerialised object), arguing that "The Nesting Bookcases function like quotation marks,

allowing the simultaneous presentation and negation of whatever is placed upon them...They perform an almost impossible operation, whereby the work is simultaneously absorbed into the ground of the everyday, while constituting the viewer as viewer-who-knows, as meta-subject, and thereby, precisely, preventing the disappearance of the work. The quotation marks tend towards their own abolition in practice, allowing for a transformative collision of moments, while still being reinstated through the representation of the work in the institution of art, in this case through a photograph which may travel through the gallery and into publication...It is the very structure of aesthetic appropriation that the *Nesting Bookcases* seek to appropriate—by disappropriating or dissolving it, and then failing to do so—in their turn thus acknowledging and inverting, by siting it within the everyday, the appropriation of the avant-garde by the institution of art.[29]

In short, the critical DNA of Scanlan's project is the reiteration of conceptualism's discovery that "the very attempt to make the object disappear becomes a condition for its appearance. The object appears in and as its disappearing, and therefore cannot disappear."[30] To Newman's observations I would add that Scanlan appropriates the disappearance conceit to say something about consumption's relationship to an artwork's production and reception. If the *Nesting Bookcases* perform a disappearing act by becoming generic objects, then the collector is invited to be the agency—Newman would say the "condition"—of the work's *reappearance* through his imposition of a specific, personal tableau. In actuality, this reappearance occurs only for the collector, and is conveyed back to the institution of art via the photograph. It is difficult to say whether the *Nesting Bookcases* are art auditioning as furniture, or furniture auditioning as art; perhaps they are both and neither. They certainly use art to market a sort of meta-product, one that the buyer can use to re-examine such products as they already have, and make them speak to one another in a way that is at once factual and symbolic.

The rhetoric of consumerism holds that a given product will say something about the person who consumes it. This 'something' can be either the marketing man's encoded message (which, if successful, sees consumer and product demographically matched) or the consumer's adaptation of that message into an altogether more antithetical expression (which sees teenage gangs from Stepney sporting Burberry caps). Consumption is the terrain on which such divergence and convergence occurs. As any impulse-purchaser will testify, things can go either way. We have grown used to this way of thinking about consumption, and now tread more warily, or with greater irony, depending on our appetite for consumption as a synthetic, formal game that not so much expresses our 'individuality' as encourages us to show the extent to which we comprehend its rules of convergence and

divergence. The *Nesting Bookcases* invite the consumer to play this game with things that they *already* own. We can picture the collector returning to his flat in Greenwich Village, installing his *Nesting Bookcases* and contemplating his artefacts anew, re-examining his life through his possessions in the fashion Newman describes above, deciding what is to be displayed on his new artwork/shelf unit and what is to be left in its usual place. Sure enough, the configuration is as mutable as the collector's own mental state, certain objects falling from favour and others promoting themselves into a worthy expression of his psyche until, one day, he tires of the sheer narcissism of this solipsistic materialism.

The *Nesting Bookcases* reappropriate the disappearance conceit not just as an end in itself but in order to rejuvenate the collector's existing artefacts. Through the mediation of Scanlan's meta-product, these artefacts effectively become signifiers of a buried subjectivity that the collector is invited to disinter and galvanise through 'revisitation'. Our investment in objects often goes undetected until we are forced into some kind of editing process, into a consideration of what to keep and what to get rid of; only then do we disinter this buried subjectivity and dare to question what such and such an object 'means' to us—as if the object, encrusted with years of actual and psychological neglect, were a word whose definition we once knew but now hesitated over. Sometimes this meaning is implicit in the object from the beginning, as with a gift from a loved one. As we know, however, its meaning can change: a gift from a loved one can become all too swiftly the signifier of a terminated relationship, of dysfunction—of the moment when 'we changed'. Objects, we often forget, do not just define us merely through the fact of our having chosen, acquired or been given them; their real purpose, perhaps, is to operate as psychological yardsticks for measuring the difference between who we were when we acquired them and who we are now.

To arrange one's personal effects in a semi-public display is to invest those objects with a notional set of characteristics which, with respect to their owner, ring more or less true (depending on who is looking at them). When the physical apparatus of this display also happens to be an *artwork* the ante is upped somewhat. Within Scanlan's *Nesting Bookcases* there is a correlation between the disappearance of the artwork as a formally distinct entity and the emergence of the self as constituted by the collector's own tableau. The collector is given to understand that 'possession' of the piece as a product defining them as an "absolutely singular being" (to recall Baudrillard's words) is dependent on an ongoing manipulation of its elements as a form of personality examination. The "gratification it supplies" as a product is relative to its usefulness as a repository of gestures which attempt to represent the facets of the collector's character. Some may choose to arrange a given set of objects in the hope that it fixes in time a definitive expression of the self; others may see the *Nesting Bookcase* as a tabernacle of continual psychological flux. This intense subjectivity invited by the *Nesting Bookcase* is offset by its generic origin as an extrapolation of institutional critique. If the shelves were compelling sculptural objects in

their own right it is unlikely they would speak to any kind of self-totemising instincts in the collector, for it is the very fact that the shelf appears, to all intents and purposes, as an object merely *designated* as art (even though it is a made artwork) that sets the ball of self-affirmation rolling. This quality of its being the generic compère of another's subjectivity is the *Nesting Bookcase*'s defining quality, for what looks like an act of mere designation is given an active *function*.

Scanlan uses consumption to reconcile subjectivity with generic artmaking in such a way that he, the artist, does not 'express' anything—at least nothing *in particular*. The *Nesting Bookcases* facilitate expression but delegate the task of *particular* expression to the collector. And yet this expression is recouped, or 'reappropriated', in the work's photographic representation. It was Duchamp who first remarked that the spectator was the most decisive part of the art equation, the final component, as it were, in the artwork's production; Scanlan seems to have taken this principle and extended it to include the owner of the work. As I write, he is currently staging an exhibition—*Pay Dirt*—at the Ikon Gallery in Birmingham in which visitors are invited to purchase a special compost the artist has produced using coffee grindings, sawdust, eggshells, dried blood and gypsum (materials gathered from various places in the city). In this piece Scanlan has elected to use the gallery not just to market a product, but also to show the method of its manufacture—which constitutes the viewing experience. The bags of compost, which retail at £6.50, are an invitation to the viewer to consolidate the viewing transaction with an actual transaction. It seems that, as Scanlan's work evolves, the distinction between *owner* and *viewer* of the artwork is elided to different degrees in different pieces. In *Pay Dirt* all viewers become possible part-owners—with the added conceit that the actual use of the compost returns it to a condition of (optional) disappearance. The 'status' of the art object is left to the buyer, who can keep it as an *objet d'art*, as a souvenir, or take it down to the allotment. The reification we used to associate with the enunciation of existing products as art is seen as a temporary state, one to be integrated into a wider praxis which sees the work materialise, affirm itself and disappear. Some might see Scanlan's work as little more than a mechanistic kind of Social Formalism, in the sense that it replaces art's formal disappearance with a set of social analogies. In other words, the disappearance conceit drops its 'institutional' status in favour of a more privatised one. This is what designing one's "own products as works of art" entails. But the product is not simply a cynical exploitation of the shared abstractions of mercantile and artistic institutions I presented at the outset; namely, the readymade's tendency to embody art's semantic indeterminacy in a similar way to that in which the commodity embodies the shifting notion of value. The acceptance of the fact that the artwork is just a product like any other does, admittedly, exonerate the artist from generating an autonomous morphology for it, and it is true that he has simply to produce something which we recognise as making sense within a mercantile context. But the function of Product here is that of examining the problem of how an artist

can integrate himself into an existing municipal infrastructure without being seen to thrive on the perceived (vocational) alterity of his discourse; it is to this imperative that the morphology of his art defers. Artists—especially 'international' artists—can so often seem like those quacksters in old western movies, sauntering breezily into town with their 'rejuvenating tonics'. They almost beg to be tarred and feathered. Scanlan, in seeking to ally the alterity of artistic discourse with the ubiquitous mores of consumption, makes himself seem less like an out-of-towner. The very name of his product, *Pay Dirt* ('earth, ore, or the like containing enough metal to be worth mining'), with its clear associations with showing a community what is right under its nose, casts Scanlan more in the role of altruistic 'prospector' than self-interested quackster.

Pay Dirt is just one work among a significant number of contemporary examples which propose to replace art's autonomous morphological and vocational characteristics with those of an exterior praxis. The judgement we bring to bear on such works entails reading the proposed praxis as an analogy for those which once held as a normative and regulating sense in art, but which now persist only in a rhetorical sense. This analogical approach is now an almost generic strategy, so widespread as to resist questioning. Mark Dion's *Tate Thames Dig*, for example, proposed a conflation of the 'site-specific' artwork with the 'archaeological dig'.[31] Now, the disinterment of existing social and cultural values embodied in the imposition of a site-specific artwork on a given contemporary landscape *is* or *can be* seen as analogous to archaeology's disinterment of the recent past: in the sense that it is constructed in response to what has been made in the past, an artwork *is* a kind of metaphysical archaeology. But, having made the analogy, or metaphor (which, by the way, is a very generic one), what use is then made of it? Dion, it seems, simply monumentalises archaeological praxes using a set of mid-Victorian visual signifiers: the glass case, the cabinet, the drawers of taxonomied earthenware. But what critical function does the emergence of the art object in *this* set of visual signifiers serve? Does the comparison between art and archaeology serve to clarify what archaeology has that art doesn't, or what—more importantly—*art* has that archaeology doesn't? What magical, emulsifying ingredient does art add? Is there any? Apologists, one senses, will point immediately to the way in which Dion's divesting archaeology of its pedagogical imperative invites us to view the product of its labours as a thing 'in itself'. If this is the case, then is archaeology not just being used as a formal escape route from art's visually exhausted lexicon?

It is tempting to compare this work with the one by Tony Cragg (*New Stones-Newton's Tones*) mentioned in the previous chapter. In Cragg's piece, archaeology is conflated with the formal demands of sculpture's morphological concerns (as they were in 1980) rather than simply being appropriated—whole—as an alternative kind of objecthood. It *absorbs* archaeology rather than deferring to it. *Thames Dig*, by contrast, invites the observation that, in 1999, it is not so much a case of absorbing exterior praxes into a pre-established sculptural morphology as *replacing it with them*, for by simply selecting the

paraphernalia of archaeological museumification and the performativity of excavation *as* both the formal structure and contential territory of an artwork, Dion defers completely to archaeology. What both works have in common—archaeology—is considerably less than their differences: Cragg is interested in archaeology only insofar as he can incorporate it into the being of a thing called sculpture, whereas Dion immerses himself in its most forensic exigencies. It would not be entirely inaccurate to suggest that what they illustrate as a pair is the difference between sculpture and art: where sculpture prioritises an innovative approach towards morphology over a fidelity to the alternative praxis invoked, art is characterised by a more nominal approach to morphology and a determination to be more faithful to the invoked praxis.

As much as *sculpture* has a tendency to overformalise such extra-vocational praxes as it incorporates into its morphology, *art's* to-the-letter nomination of these praxes is equally problematic. It often leads us tautologically back to the inherent characteristics of a given praxis through an unwillingness to *incorporate* (a word which, after all, has a bodily etymology) them into its being and thereby enable the viewer to appraise its function within a new ontological order. The invocation of an exterior praxis often comes across as a cynical appropriation of its perceived contential cachet, which is seen as an inherent 'subjective given' in the same way that the readymade's dumb utility was once perceived as an objective one. The invocation of exterior praxes therefore often simply replaces the generic *objectivity* of the ready*made* with the generic *subjectivity* of the ready*done*. Vocation is treated as though it were an object, as though it can be simply transported into the realm of art and signify what it 'does' without actually having to do it, without being accountable to that vocation's attendant codes of practice. (What if Dion's project had inadvertently unearthed some finds of genuine significance? Would it have been necessary to invoke these codes of practice? Would its art status not thereby revert by default to archaeology?) It is the same process by which we decline a verb into a noun: action is converted into nomination.

Perhaps the problem lies in the simple need to make or present an object; in the need the artist feels to *add* (to the world). I appreciate, and identify with, the urge to express analogies between artistic procedures and other vocational procedures, but I think that these analogical comparisons should generate objects which are not just straightforward concrete affirmations of the analogy made. In other words, this new object has to be a palpable embodiment either of some 'coefficient' yielded from the comparison of two distinct spheres (art and whatever) or of some essential difference. In other words, the object has to site itself at the *cusp* of these differences/similarities, rather than capriciously invoking a praxis as just one of many alternatives. It may be that this is too much to demand of art objects; it may be that the very act of objectification is so freighted with historical and canonical baggage as to traduce the subtlety of the difference/similarity, so that the work feels weighted either too much in favour of art or too much in favour of the praxis being

invoked.[32] In which case, why make an object? Why yield to the temptation of concretising the analogy? Why not simply employ *commentary* as a means of expression?

That is indeed the approach adopted by Neil Cummings and Marysia Lewandowska, and I will end this chapter with a review of their practice. In *Collected*, a 1997 project, "a series of objects selected from the British Museum and Selfridges department store were presented together in order not only to compare notions of value but also the ways in which each institution communicates those notions to its visitors, via systems of display and information."[33] Within such works, process clearly takes on a more social articulation that would be compromised rather than enhanced by the production of a new object. *Collected* brings together a set of objects in the knowledge that they will soon be reclaimed by their respective spheres of dissemination. The artists' intervention proposes what might be called a contingent, or temporary appropriation: the art context no longer fixes rhetorical enunciative conditions for an appropriated object's appraisal, but rather emphasises certain parallels which Cummings and Lewandowska wish to make between two other distinct spheres of dissemination. How manifest, exactly, Cummings and Lewandowska seem to ask, *are* the differences which characterise these spheres? Are they *embodied* in the objects? If so, when the context of their appraisal is changed, in which objects does this embodiment disappear and in which does it remain as a seemingly indefatigable 'essence'? The comparison invites us to consider the essential qualities of objects as being related to their disseminational contexts to varying degrees, and any direct imposition on the project of art's enunciative signifiers would undermine our appraisal of these shifting degrees: the question of how these things may be permanently physically appropriated as or in an artwork is not one that interests Cummings and Lewandowska.

In *Capital* (2001) Cummings and Lewandowska

> staged an act of gift giving. In an area set aside for visitors to sit, read a selection of books laid out on tables and admire the view across the Thames, gallery staff would select a recipient for the gift and present it with the words 'This is for you.' This act would be repeated several times a day, not only at Tate Modern, but also across the river at the Bank of England Museum. The gift was a two-sided limited edition print, rolled up inside a silver-coloured tube with an elaborately scripted label. The print had also been displayed on the wall of the space in the form of two framed photographs. These showed the two ends of a spoon, part of a silver cutlery service owned by the Bank of England, the division suggestive of a split according to one side for giving and one for receiving. The gift of the print served as an anchoring device for the other elements of the project, which took the form of a seminar series and a book.[34]

In the accompanying book *Capital* we find a mixture of photographs documenting these encounters and essays examining their implications. In other words, the publication

functions both as the project *and* its own discursive commentary, the event '*Capital*' giving birth to discursive responses which are then recouped under the same name. Only then, it seems, is *Capital* considered complete. By this 'project that contains its own commentary' the viewer or reader is given to understand that that the original event—if you like, the spectacle—is conceived of not as an end in itself but as a fulcrum for a general discursive dynamic. While, within Cummings' and Lewandowska's projects, this self-commentary is present in different ways and to different degrees, it is nearly always presented through the expedient of the book format.

While, with *Capital*, the book is used in a conventionally pedagogical manner, other works employ it as a photographic alternative to the physical appropriation of objects. In *Lost Property* (figs. 32-34),[35] a book of photographs of objects from London Underground's lost property department, the category 'lost' is seized upon as a kind of readymade commentary on the nature of possession. Possession imbues objects with a sense of narrative; when acquired, they become possible nodes of occurrence around which the events of an individual's life may unfold. Paradoxically, it is only when possession is relinquished that these nodes become accessible for anyone other than the possessor. In other words the loss of these objects is our gain. The book offers, in each depicted object, a succession of truncated narratives, narratives perhaps to be resumed when (or if) the object is reunited with its owner. The format of the book is ideal for navigating the nexus of 'lost things' as a typological proliferation of differences; we skim its pages, unconsciously categorising each object according to how vital we feel it to have been to its owner. The turn of each page introduces a new object: we go from a rubber snake to a ceramic Santa to a birthday card depicting the former Tottenham Hotspurs and England striker Les Ferdinand, and so on. It is only the knowledge that all these things have been 'lost' which excites our curiosity as to what their place in the world may have been. Our interest in their status is established only through their displacement from this status. The inclusion of certain objects gives the book an occasionally disconcerting quality: the proximity of a birthday card or a stethoscope to a gun reminds us that public transport is used by birthday guests, doctors and hit men alike. It seems inconceivable that a gun or stethoscope might be lost as easily as a cap or a plastic bag containing a few scraps of cardboard. The differences between each object are effaced by the common denominator of loss. All the objects become imbued with a kind universal ownership (i.e., negligence), as if all lost by a single person. The diversity of the objects is further offset by the fact that they were all lost in the same context. They were all lost *en route*, on their way to playing crucial parts in narratives of varying apparentness: the birthday boy did not get his card, the patient's chest went unexamined, and the Yardie arrived at the agreed car park in Stockwell at the appointed hour—only to find he had mislaid his 'piece'.

Although the dynamic of its object-commentary is rethought with each new venture (and the above three projects demonstrate a certain flexibility within the book format), there

are themes which recur within Cummings and Lewandowska's practice. Of these the relationship between the readymade and commodification is the most pertinent. "No longer does it seem desirable or possible," says Cummings in his text 'The Alibi of Use',

> to situate a boundary between reality and its representation. The strategy of playing dumb utility against the chatter of aesthetics has been tirelessly repeated in the last 80 years; it was Marcel Duchamp who initially slipped the urinal into the stream of aesthetic objects. What I may suggest is to recognise that all objects can be brought to the level of speech, and to consider instead the mechanisms for producing and structuring meaning across the spectrum of material culture.[36]

If, as Cummings later surmises, "Commodity objects lend themselves to being severed from their material presence" and are "easily flattened down into an economy of visual signs"[37], then the readymade is perhaps the point at which the abstraction intrinsic to the commodity and that which is intrinsic to art are brought together. (The virtuality of the Duchampian readymade certainly corroborates his observation that "commodified objects yield easily to the play of semiotic analysis"[38].) Citing Steinbach and Koons as the apotheosis of what he calls a "homeopathic tactic" (whereby commodity fetishization is critiqued through an intensification of display, marketing, gloss), Cummings suggests that this "increasingly rhetorical" position can be challenged by charting "the object's encounters in the babble of *use*."[39] The 'chartings' of Cummings and Lewandowska purport to offer an alternative to the continuing hegemony of the 'contemplated art object', and can perhaps be seen to return the readymade to a more vernacular condition.[40] "In place of the plimsoll line of function", says Cummings of the art object, "taste and various aesthetic criteria pretend to replace the concrete affiliation of utility."[41] Unless I am mistaken, he believes that utility can undermine the efficacy of our largely semiotic relationship to the world, a semiotics made possible by the abstraction of objects into the commodity form. "If the commodity is characterised by arbitrariness," he says, "*use* is not."[42] Use is specific, he suggests, because it inflects generic objects with the mark of the individual.

As can be seen, Cummings and Lewandowska's distrust of physical appropriation as an artistic strategy leads not to a subdual of process but to a redefinition of it. 'Process' is analysed less as an abstract noun signifying an artist's physical methodology than as a verb signifying how objects are consumed, utilised, taken advantage of: how they are processed. It is conceived of as something occurring *after* the object's manufacture. This retrospective notion of process places existing objects outside of the paradigm most commonly associated with the readymade: namely, that in which the mere selection of objects replaces physical manipulation of material. In the preceding examples, process is

conceived of less as something that is usurped by the mere *selection* of an existing object than as something which the selection of objects *makes possible in another sense*. Cummings and Lewandowska identify process as something which no longer has to be controlled and harnessed in order to *cause* an artwork to happen as an *effect*, for the processes which interest them are already at work in the world as cause-and-effect phenomena, and the task they set themselves is to make these processes submit to an *a posteriori* mode of appraisal without merely displacing them from the contexts in which they already operate. If Cummings and Lewandowska's interrogation of objects expedites any kind of *abstraction*, it is not through the contextual displacement of objects into sovereign units of 'achieved' artistic expression, but through the exaggeration or emphasis of an object's existing context and the terms of its availability therein. Seemingly disparate and generic object-structures are revealed to have shared subtleties, prejudices, arbitrary conceits: who decides whether an object left on a train is lost property or merely litter? Is a platinum mobile phone retailing at £14 950 and displayed in a bespoke glass case (itself more expensive than most other cellphones) and watched over by a uniformed attendant (as though it were an artwork) not more suited to the museum than to the department store?[43] What difference is there between the way in which Tate Modern underwrites the value of art and the way in which The Bank of England underwrites the value of money?

End Notes

1 Robert Smithson, 'Robert Smithson on Duchamp: An Interview' in *Artforum* 12, no. 2 (October 1973): 47.

2 Judd's views on these procedures are stated in his essay, 'Specific Objects': "Most of the [Minimalist] work involves new materials, either recent inventions or things not used before in art. Little was done until lately with the wide range of industrial products. Almost nothing has been done with industrial techniques and, because of the cost, probably won't be for some time. Art could be mass-produced and possibilities otherwise unavailable, such as stamping, could be used...Materials vary greatly...They are specific...Also, they are usually aggressive. There is an objectivity to the obdurate identity of a material." (*Donald Judd: Complete Writings 1959-1975* [Press of Nova Scotia College of Art and Design; New York Univ. Press, 1975], p. 187.) This "objectivity" of such "obdurate" materials as Plexiglas, aluminium, formica etc. lies in their being produced for standard industrial uses, rather than for the supposedly more 'unpredictable' morphology of sculpture. The 'prescribed' methods of application intrinsic to such materials as aluminium, steel, Formica etc. means that they yield forms which are, in themselves, predictable—and yet unforeseen by sculpture because of its tendency to be, as Judd says, "executed in some neutral and homogeneous material." (ibid., p. 188.) With Minimalism we see the beginning of a reversal of polarities for sculpture. Minimalism's first industrially realised forms are deemed so unlike as to not *be* sculpture. Then, gradually, as more artists embrace the *prescribed* form implied by 'trade-standard' materials, the distinction between minimalism and most other forms of object making ceases to be such a critical one, and sculpture returns once more to a general term used to describe 3-dimensional artworks.

3 Andrew Wilson, 'A Strange Hankering After Differences' in *Jeff Luke: Use*, ed. M. Higgs, G. Jones, H. Lloyd (London: Cubitt, 1995). The pages of this book are unnumbered.

4 Cragg made the observation in a documentary on Brancusi, 'Artist Journeys: Tony Cragg on Constantin Brancusi', *Illuminations* (BBC, 1992).

5 The socio-economic breakdown of the commodity fetish is stated in its most concise form on pp. 161-166 of *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (Penguin, 1976).

6 Karl Marx, ibid., pp. 163-164.

7 Arthur C. Danto has shown how the pursuit of a single definition of art leads to an increasingly refined, convoluted—and often absurd—theory of distinguishing between works of art and "mere real things". The central focus of his book is whether objects can actually *embody* their 'art status' or whether they are constructs of exterior systems of meaning: "The distinction between artworks and mere real things reappears as a distinction between the language used to describe works and the language of mere things." (*The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* [Cambridge, Massachusetts; London: Harvard University Press, 1981], p. 104.) Because artworks always embody a *theory* of art rather than an essential art condition, the only way of expressing this is through propositions whose logic states in an analytical sense the 'criterion' by which a thing is considered art. With Danto, these sometimes tend towards the comically algebraic: "In art, every new interpretation is a Copernican revolution, in the sense that each interpretation constitutes a new work, even if the object differently interpreted remains, as the skies, invariant under transformation. An

object *o* is then an artwork only under an interpretation *I*, where *I* is a sort of function that transfigures *o* into a work: *I(o)* = *W*. Then even if *o* is a perceptual constant, variations in *I* constitute different works." (ibid., p. 125.) Eureka.

8 There is a work by Cornelia Parker, *Embryo*, which consists of two guns extracted from the manufacturing process after the first stage. Parker 'alters' the object by arresting its journey towards a finished product. If, generally, there is a sense in which industrially manufactured items appear as though they have simply materialised directly from the designer's drawing board, a work such as *Embryo* undermines this by presenting a familiar, industrially manufactured object at an unfamiliar stage of production. The result might be thought of as sculpture-as-interim-morphology, and explores the gap that has opened up in sculpture between the achieved plastic form and the existing artefact—a gap that Judd fills with his 'specific objects'. In Judd's time the division between the two was explicit enough for him to affiliate the generic aspect of minimalism's materiality more with the appropriational Duchampian readymade than with the plastic tradition of sculpture. Works like Parker's *Embryo* straddle this division.

9 This is also the territory of the sculptor Grenville Davey, who takes a similarly overlooked category of object and remakes it as an enlarged version using an industrial process. With a typical Davey work the viewer is unsure whether they are looking at a monumentalised grommet, or button (or some such diminutive object), or a 'diminished' monument.

10 For more on this see *Robert Morris*, exh. cat., ed. Michael Compton and David Sylvester (London: Tate Gallery, 1971), p. 69. Here, under the subheading 'Permutations', Morris states his interest in "a particular scale", describing his works as "larger than the human [scale]—that is, too large to handle—and yet the vertical dimension is generally less than eye height so that the top is visible and the object not 'architecture' or 'monument'." This is clarified further in his essay 'Notes on Sculpture II' as a strategy which "takes the relationships out of the work and makes them a function of space, light, and the viewer's field of vision." (*Artforum*, October, 1966, p. 21.)

11 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, ed. G.E.M. Anscombe and G.H. von Wright; trans. G.E.M Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1963), p. 199.

12 Marie McGinn, *Wittgenstein and the Philosophical Investigations* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 182.

13 Wittgenstein, ibid., p. 398.

14 Ibid., p. 398.

15 Ibid., p,198.

16 Andrew Wilson, 'A Strange Hankering After Differences' in *Jeff Luke: Use*, ed. M. Higgs, G. Jones, H. Lloyd (London: Cubitt, 1995). The pages in this book are unnumbered.

17 Ibid.

18 Ibid.

19 Or someone else—metaphorically if it is an old object which has recently come to light, or perhaps literally if it is an object we have lent to someone else. It is always mildly disconcerting, when a friend returns a book we have lent them, to behold marks, tears and scars which have not been caused by us.

20 Jean Baudrillard, *The System of Objects*, trans. James Benedict (London: Verso 1996), p. 141.

21 Ibid., p. 144.

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid., p. 139.

24 Ibid., p. 133.

25 Ibid., p. 90.

26 Quoted in Michael Newman's essay 'After Conceptual Art: Joe Scanlan's *Nesting Bookcases*, Duchamp, Design and the Impossibility of Disappearing' in *Rewriting Conceptual Art*, ed. Michael Newman and Jon Bird (London: Reaktion Books, 1999), p. 207.

27 Michael Newman, ibid., pp. 207-209.

28 Ibid., p. 209.

29 Ibid., pp. 212-213.

30 Ibid., p. 217.

31 Over a period of several months Mark Dion worked with a team of volunteers on a dig along the banks of the Thames, presenting the finds in an enormous purpose-built cabinet in Tate Britain. The relationship between art and archaeology in *Thames Dig* is dealt with in the accompanying book *Mark Dion: Archaeology*, ed. M. Dion and A. Coles (London: Black Dog Publishing, 1999); firstly by Colin Renhew (a professional archaeologist) in his essay 'It may be Art but is it Archaeology? Science as Art and Art as Science', and secondly by Alex Coles (a writer on art) in 'The Epic Archaeological Digs of Mark Dion'. Of these essays, Coles' is the more meticulous in tracing a precedent for Dion's appropriation of archaeology, comparing his gregarious approach to the issue of 'site' (the audience is invited to attend all stages of the work's production: the dig, the sorting and the presentation) to Robert Smithson's Site/Nonsite pieces, in which Smithson presented in a gallery rubble taken from a desert alongside photographs of the site from which it was taken. Dion, says Coles, treats each stage—and therefore each site—of the work "with equal emphasis" (p. 28) in terms of the way in which the necessarily shifting context of its production (from river bank to Tate lawn to gallery) is made available to the audience as a key element of its identity, whereas Smithson simply brings everything into the gallery. In Dion's hands, the archaeological praxis, suggests Coles, is as much a form of epic theatre as it is a means of generating an art object. Furthermore, Dion "protests against the scientific techniques of archaeology...blasting the objects out of traditional forms of classification." (p. 32) Where Coles sees Dion's intensification of archaeology's theatricality as perhaps constituting 'the art', Renhew's view is that archaeology is already a more muted, tacit 'version' of art: "the archaeologist, by placing a found object on display in a glass case, is himself highlighting that artefact, just as if it were a work of art." (p. 21) Both seek a conflation of art and archaeology, but through arguably inverse means: the former through performativity, the latter through the reifying exigencies of display common to both spheres.

32 In the mid 1990s Mark Hoskins made a series of sculptures using components of readymade agricultural implements designed for use in Third World countries. Hoskins assembled and painted these various steel contraptions (which come in kit form) in such a way as to invite a comparison between their generic qualities and the sculptural qualities of British formalism of the 50s and 60s, most notably (to my eyes) that of Anthony Caro. As we know, Caro brought (figurative) abstraction into proximity with industrial utilitarianism, and his work—perhaps more than any other artist's—speaks of an age in which everything

was still possible in terms of appropriating 'foreign' materials. Hoskins' appropriation of these somewhat quaint and endearing agricultural constructions makes an analogy between 50s formalism and Third World improvisation, emphasising a spirit of resourcefulness common to both. The gloss paint with which each piece is finished—a unifying device associated with a British Formalist approach that runs from Caro through to Phillip King—ushers the viewer away from utilitarianism towards the sculptural canon, inviting the contention that the appropriation of existing objects is more critically fertile when approached from the point of view of an awareness of their already having been absorbed into the art canon.

33 Frances Morris, 'Gift, Economy, Trust' in *Capital* (London: Tate Publishing, 2001), p. 11.

34 The description is Dan Smith's, from 'The Secret Value of the Gift: The Movement of Value in Neil Cummings' and Marysia Lewandowska's *Capital*' in *Parachute* , No. 106, pp. 86-97.

35 The book was "a selection from one day's property recovered by the London Transport Lost Property Office; on average some three hundred items." (Neil Cummings and Marysia Lewandowska, *Lost Property* [London: Chance 1996])

36 'The Alibi of Use', *Reading Things*, ed. Neil Cummings (London: Chance, 1993), p. 15.

37 Ibid., p. 18.

38 Ibid.

39 Ibid.

40 As did a piece by Sarah Lucas shown at the ICA in 1998. The work, a fully operational toilet plumbed into the centre of the gallery, seemed to invite the viewer to reiterate the institutional critique's obsolescence (that is, to reclaim the readymade's vernacular dimension from the negational semiotic constraint imposed on it by Duchamp) by emptying their bladder/bowels into it, thereby reifying what has in recent times become something of an urban myth: namely, the often-told tale of this or that viewer urinating into Duchamp's *Fountain*.

41 Neil Cummings, *Reading Things*, p. 27.

42 Ibid., p. 24.

43 The department store in question was Selfridges in London. This platinum cellphone and a less expensive (gold) companion were the only objects in what can only be described as an installation devoted to the sanctification of the commodity. Clearly, it would have been an act of sacrilege to display these artefacts anywhere near the rest of the products in the cellphone department; thus it was that they were housed in a specially constructed cloister guarded by two uniformed sentinels.

Chapter 5

Towards a Typological Aesthetics

In this final chapter I will speak more openly about how my concerns as an artist relate to the ground covered so far. The first part will look back at earlier works, while the second will focus on my current project, which has seen me adopt a quite different approach. All works mentioned (except those still in progress) are reproduced at the end of the thesis.

When I began the thesis my practice was more sympathetic to some of the issues discussed in relation to Creed, Wentworth, Luke and Steinbach. I was working mainly within the format of the assisted readymade, using things which could be acquired easily. I was interested in the generic qualities of existing artefacts as both an enabling device and a limitation. There is only a certain amount of things that can be done to an industrially produced object. How does an artist alter the properties of such an object without the work seeming like a gauche and clumsy intervention into an otherwise coherent order of things? More importantly, what reason is there for the intervention that goes beyond the convention of making art from the everyday? The reason, in my case, was not explicitly anthropological, political or symbolic; I was not especially interested in what the object 'stood for' when decontextualised, or in how it could be used didactically to denote certain issues. Neither was I interested in revealing an uncanniness in the familiar and commonplace, which has always seemed to me a relatively straightforward thing to achieve. I was interested simply in what the object was, what it did, how it was put together, how many different forms it came in... I was interested not so much in 'hobbling' the object as in doing something to/with it that did not completely impair its function. The objects I made had a negational quality in that their function was extended to include a kind of self-examination. That is to say, the inevitable functionlessness which occurs as a result of turning an item into an art object itself played by the rules of that item's functionality.

For example, a shelf would be fixed to the wall using as many different brackets as could be found in a single DIY store, at such a height as to display prominently only its means of support— which was also what it 'displayed'. The larger brackets attached to the shelf assume the responsibility of supporting the bulk of the weight in the same way that leading characters in a play convey the bulk of its narrative; in fact, the title of the piece, *Members of the Cast*, recalls a phrase commonly heard at the end of radio plays ('other parts were played by members of the cast'), which refers to the fact that the actors with leading roles have also assumed minor ones. In the same way that, without these minor roles, the narrative of a play could not advance, the shelf is presented as though it would be incomplete without even the tiniest of its brackets. Of course, in reality each kind of bracket is intended by its designer to support a different kind of shelf. My single white melamine

shelf presents this diversity of function as something which has yet to happen to the brackets, as an anthology of distinguishing characteristics which have yet to be deployed as active differences-in-the-field.

In another piece, *Stepladder Made from as Many Different Kinds of Wood as it Has Parts*, I followed the procedure indicated in the title, using a different wood for each of its seventeen parts. In this piece the elevational vector of difference expressed by a ladder is also manifested as a *substantial* difference. Each type of wood can be identified with a prevalent use: mahogany is redolent of banisters and pub bars; pine, inexpensive Swedish furniture; oak, rustic dining tables; ebony, ethnic carvings and so on. But the ladder forces us to compare the woods with one another in terms of their suitability for this single object. We survey the anthology in the knowledge that some woods are undoubtedly stronger than others. Is the weakest still strong enough to support our weight? How effectively does the ladder work in spite of its anthological superfluity? If the object performs the exact function of the object it appropriates, is it then to be considered an *actual* ladder or does its anthological superfluity make it a *representation* of a ladder? I place the anthology of woods within a functional rather than abstract format in recognition of the fact that an anthology of materials is already a kind of abstraction,[1] and to impose on the anthology an 'invented' (rather than appropriated) form would be to present a double abstraction. The formal constraint of the ladder—the fact that it offsets the woods with an elevational vector of difference—prevents the anthology from appearing in this way. Its components are all committed towards the same function, but with an incrementally different material inflection. Their material difference establishes an undertone of resistance and compliance: here is an object which is more and less serviceable from component to component.

The objects I have been drawn to as an artist tend to be those which invite their functionality to be replayed as a kind of *audition*. In the aforementioned works an object appears seemingly as 'just itself', its functional imperative remaining intact and perhaps (in *Members of the Cast*) even improved. But the object also performs a representational role. It attempts to represent all the possibilities of a certain kind of object's material production within the scope of a single example. It displays, so to speak, a 'talent' in excess of what we expect from a single example. Looking back on this and other works, I suspect their conception and production is motivated by an interest in where we start when bringing an artefact into the world, in how we narrow down the manifold material possibilities to the few manageable alternatives which in fact hold as the prevailing order of things. In many of these works the aim has been to counterpose a 'fictional' element to the factual verity of the readymade. Within art, this factual verity of the readymade was initially used, as we know, for its alterity rather than for its inherent aspects—which are only defined through antithesis to a 'cultural object'. In light of alterity's diminution as an antithetical counterpoint, the problem of what these 'inherent aspects' of the commonplace mean with regard to art obviously has to be rethought. How are they to be defined if not within the ambit of alterity?

120

I address the question by recasting the readymade's factual verity within a more fictional narrative. By 'fiction' I mean simply that I behave as though the commonplace object rested from the world indicates a different order of things than the one which in fact prevails. In the case of the examples mentioned above, if the commonplace object becomes, in my hands, 'less like itself', it is not simply by virtue of a contextual displacement from one sphere to another but through its metonymical intimation of what I will call an 'ontological heterotopia': a metaphysical counter-site that proposes parallel but alien *raisons d'être* for commonplace artefacts.[2]

These *raisons d'être*, far from locating the object in the now familiar realm of the uncanny, tend towards a subtler displacement, operating as they do 'but one remove' from reality. I hope my description of the ladder and shelf pieces demonstrates what I mean by this, but perhaps I can clarify things still further by comparing how my objects operate to a heterotopia described by Jorge Luis Borges in his story, 'The Library of Babel'.[3] Borges proposes the idea of a library containing all possible permutations of 25 orthographic characters—and therefore, by definition, all possible books. Any given recognisable book—say, *Don Quixote*—would have a counterpart that differed by but a single letter or comma, which itself would differ by a single letter from the one next to it, and so on. *Don Quixote*, *The Arabian Nights*, *Hamlet*, in fact, *all* books that we recognise as major literary works would therefore occur as arbitrary values within an algorithmic continuum which yields (from the viewpoint of *known* literature) more and less nonsensical works. In my view, an artwork that uses or adapts an existing, recognisable readymade object has a similar relationship to it as those Borgesian books which differ marginally to the *Quixote* have to the *Quixote*. Such artworks might be regarded as one, two, three, four, or however many 'steps' from an object's actual *raison d'être*, in the same way that each of Borges's Babylonian tomes have a varying linguistic proximity to actual literary works.[4] This objectual proximity could be thought of as literally as, say, a plastic artefact melted down and reconstituted as substance (as with the sculptures of Ian Dawson) or as metaphysically as a new attitude adopted towards an otherwise physically unaltered artefact (as with Steinbach's or certain of Beuys's works).

The process by which a readymade is 'assisted' to become 'less like itself' is common to most generic forms of artmaking, and historically this 'less like itself' has been associated with notions of alterity. As we have seen, these artefacts initially appeared as 'profane' intrusions into a cultural sphere, and were taken as a deliberate negation of aesthetic value. With hindsight it became evident that the assisted readymade proposed an enmeshing of the profane and the cultural, rather than an aesthetic negation of the latter. Unlike the pure readymade, the assisted readymade is a 'cultural profanity' in a conciliatory rather than negational sense. An assisted readymade is like a portmanteau of these two words, one which might be written 'profultural' or 'cultrane'—corny contrivances, it is true, but then again many of the iconic artworks which spring to mind as incipient exemplars of

the assisted readymade—Man Ray's *Cadeau*, Oppenheim's *Fur Tea Cup*, Duchamp's *Bicycle Wheel*—are corny: straightforward oppositions (flat/sharp, soft/hard, movement/inertia) which cohabit a single object that physically annotates that opposition between art objects and mere things which we encounter in a more obdurately rhetorical form in the unassisted readymade. With the assisted readymade, it is the object's *alteration* rather than its negational power that is taken to equate with a condition of arthood. The gradual waning of the unassisted readymade's alterity means that its more conciliative deputy, the assisted readymade, soon adopts a different annotational mode. Freed from its association with a negational directive, its 'less like itself' comes less to depend on contextual displacement than on a self-sustaining aspect which eludes comprehensive definition; the 'culture' with which the profane object *now* conjoins is no longer one instituted from the point of view of high art. With regard to the artists whose work I have analysed, we have seen how the appropriation of the commonplace which once served to explicate the mystifying culture of artmaking now replaces that culture of artmaking with its own culture, to the extent that it is not art that imparts culture to existing objects, but existing objects which impart *their* culture to art.

What we have now is a system of objects whose existing cultural indices are entirely dissociated from the historical diorama of 'appropriation'. It was Douglas Crimp who wrote that "If all aspects of the culture use this new operation [appropriation], then the operation itself cannot indicate a specific reflection upon the culture".[5] But the operational paralysis alluded to here (whereby appropriation cannot stand outside of itself in a reflective sense) has relevance only if we conceive of appropriation as an institutional operation still performed on the 'body politic' of a thing called Art. If one of the purposes of this thesis has been to gradually extricate a more self-autonomous culture of objects from such an institutional operation—by showing their association and dissociation with a Duchampian maxim—it remains to be clarified whether we can make any definitive statements about what, exactly, it is that existing objects impart to art in an era of diminished alterity.

As an artist, I have a general theory that the cul*ture* of objects which replaces the *cult* of the art object has to do not just with the cultural indices of individual objects but with the *proximity* of those objects to one another: with the way in which, taken as a continuous field, they form a ground of possibilities. If a given appropriation appears simultaneously continuous and discontinuous with the general ground of all the other commonplace objects from which it emerges as a 'claimant', then the diminution of alterity means that its discontinuity now has to be annotated in a much more specific—and often ancillary—manner. In Cornelia Parker's work the object's emergence from the continuity of the ground is often underpinned with a specific kind of provenance: not just any old feather, then, but *A Feather From Freud's Pillow*; not just any old dust, but the *Dust From the Whispering Gallery of St. Pauls*; not just any old tarnish, but the *Tarnish From Charles Dicken's Knife*.[6] It was while considering the nature of this provenential approach that I

122

established what for me is an important difference between the selectional *modus operandi* of the cult of the art object and the cul*ture* of the object. This difference has to do with the 'activeness of the ground' from which the object emerges as claimant. In emerging from its quotidian ground of 'all imaginable objects', Duchamp's readymade, as Burgin noted, confers on an unselected 'everything' an equal status. Insofar as this is represented metonymically by a single claimant, the emphasis is on the object rather than on the ground from which it emerges. Cornelia Parker's selections could not be more different: dust collected from the Whispering Gallery of St. Pauls emphasises the (absent) ground at least as much, if not more than, the (present) object. While both strategies invoke the idea of the ground, it is active to drastically different degrees and in categorically different ways in the final work:[7] Duchamp's readymade embodies the ground; Parker's requires us to imagine it.

The selection of an individual object in or as art intimates the ground that has yielded it, to the extent that the object is in metonymical dialogue with something that is not present in the work. We may imagine a hypothetical situation in which two artists nominate the same object but do so in order to refer to a different ground. The difference between these works which happen to nominate the same object is therefore non-representational in that this difference is not 'there' as a visible one; that is, as a difference *between* the two objects. The difference belongs to the ground which yielded the object, and the difference in the methods the two artists' use to present that object will probably indicate this contextual difference. We can even imagine a meta-work, which traces the appropriation of x as it occurs in art over a certain number of years. That such a work might already exist is a very real possibility (especially given the rise of curation as an 'art practice'), and has become viable only in light of a shift in emphasis away from the object to the ground intimated by it. (This hypothetical work would seek to examine the breadth of a given object's or symbol's recurrence rather than its specific meaning, in the same way that, in Marcel Broodthaers' highly prescient 1968-72 work, *Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles, Section des Figures* [a collection of objects all bearing the eagle motif], "no single item in the exhibition achieve[s] symbolic dominance over the others.")[8]

Of course, the most general ground of which we can speak is the entire field given to sensate experience. This ground resolves itself into particularities which accord with the ostensive deliberations of a perceiving subject: I go there, I pick up this etc., constantly sorting and resorting the world, tethering the generality of the ground to shifting loci of particularities. These deliberations are often expedient, having no more longevity than the tasks they accomplish. But sometimes—perhaps increasingly—they seem directed by a more arbitrary faculty of determination. This can be described straightforwardly enough: I look at my desk and the first thing I see is a pair of stainless steel scissors. Without even asking myself why it was the scissors I was drawn to, my focus has moved from the scissors to other objects. These objects, I notice, exhibit a succession of qualities which are,

to diminishing degrees, like those of the scissors: I move to a Papermate pen to the rim of a clock, and finally to a wrist watch in the foreground, at which point my focus has slipped its moorings from its initial point of entry. Then, having no more like objects to migrate to, my perception begins to function antithetically, seeking out objects which exhibit contrary qualities to steelness.[9] Admittedly, this is idle observation, perception as a sort of leisure activity, 'looking' for its own sake—a far cry from primitive man's wholly expedient attitude to the perceptual field, which would have been restricted to those things that had a direct bearing on survival. Although the way in which such idle and apparently aimless observation singles out things is, arguably, just as instinctive, the contextual 'predicament' is hardly an urgent one. Within our hyperfunctional environment our determinations lack urgency; most problems we encounter have already been resolved, and we have only to reach for the prescribed solution. The urgency of running to catch a bus is diminished by the knowledge that they run every ten minutes. Urgency now manifests itself as frustration: frustration that the prescribed solution could not be found more quickly, could not be found *immediately*.

It seems to me that art has increasingly taken on the role of compensating for our once direct, teleological interrogation of the world by subjecting its civilised artefacts to a sort of animal inquisition. Put simply, if hyperfunctionality now downgrades each utilitarian accomplishment, then perhaps art is a way of making this interrogation seem 'real' in another way: by contriving artificial situations within which to redeploy the world's artefacts. This, I believe, is one of the functions that contemporary art now proposes for aesthetics. Much art of our current time has less to do with responding to the 'aesthetically refined' (and in that I include the aesthetically resistant) art of the past and more to do with establishing ways of adapting those aesthetic paradigms into, or placing them in critical proximity with, new ways of relating to material culture.

Hyperfunctionality is not just about the saving of labour and the vanquishing of urgency; its efficiency leaves in its wake a void once occupied by the survivalist instincts of teleological perception. We now fill this void with a more arbitrary, teleologically disinterested determination. Let us examine my desk again. This time I see a pair of opera glasses, an octagonal antique clock in the art deco style, a first-generation touch-tone telephone and a Bic pen. What do we notice about the order in which I see these objects? A path which takes me quite naturally from oldest to newest—as though I can 'get' from the opera glasses to the other objects only through a series of chronological pit stops. As with the scissors earlier, the seemingly arbitrary point of perceptual entry does not stop me developing a sense of 'project', whereby the being of things is appraised as a continuum of old to new. The pen is the conclusion that my beholding of the opera glasses instinctively proposed, given the latter's anachronistic status among a group of more contemporary items. But only in *that* instance; I do not always go around sorting the world into a chronological continuum, but having done so the once I mentally file this method of

representing it as a possible artistic conceit which says something about how objects relate to the ground from which they emerge. But what does it say? Well, it suggests the idea that a given percipient's engagement with the world is subject to a chain of significations which is at first analogical and ultimately antithetical in relation to the perceptual point of entry. It suggests the idea that a given object or phenomenon, when perceived, has, somewhere, a counterpart, possibly even an 'opposite'—opposite, not in any empirically demonstrable, or even logical, sense, but simply in the sense of something *other* sought as a *response* to the initial phenomenon.

For example, consider a sunset. Now sunsets fall into that category of thing which is not well-served by explanation or even by aesthetic analysis. The most interesting thing about any given natural phenomenon is not its beauty but that its beauty is entirely accidental; it is we who *claim* as beautiful an aesthetically indifferent universe, and sunsets, which we behold as though in thrall to some intentionally expressive act, are the epitome of this: the busiest of passers-by will pause to acknowledge this accidentally beautiful phenomenon. But just as accidental are all those other phenomena which do *not* bring out the quotidian connoisseur in us all. And so it is that, having considered all these things while regarding the sunset, I am seized by an urge to behold its antithesis, and I find myself staring at the nearest dogshit. In so doing I have not merely sought out contrariety for its own sake; I have improvised an antinomy of the kind Kant uses in his analysis of aesthetic judgement. I stare at the dogshit and see something whose 'beauty' I will certainly have to make a much more strenuous claim for. In short, where the sunset merely *is* beautiful, the dogshit obliges me to construct an *idea* of beauty: the proposition of an antithetical counterpart is not a resistance, a refusal; it is part of the same process which begins in the observation of the sunset.[10]

To return to the objects on my desk, as different as they may be, Bic pens and opera glasses do have a certain complementary, if not antinomical, relationship. Even though I am constantly losing Bic pens and never losing my opera glasses, I regard both the opera glasses *and* the Bic pen as being there (or 'available') all the time, because if I mislay my pen I will just take another from the drawer. The Bic pen exists *in order* that I can lose it. Of all objects it has achieved perhaps the greatest ubiquity, and *loss* is central to the character of this ubiquity. Like rats, there is always a Bic pen within ten feet, and the one we instinctively reach for is often not the one we put down—which is almost never where we left it. Its particularity is consumed in a cycle of loss and recovery: it is not *the* Bic pen which is lost, since when we lose one we have good reason to believe that another can be found, if not at arms length, then at least in the very same room. Very rarely, however, our inability to immediately locate a Bic pen can be a cause of great annoyance, and we ransack the entire flat in a state of histrionic agitation, finally exhuming from some asthma-inducing crevice of the sofa...a fountain pen. And suddenly we are handling an object whose ostentatious appearance is at odds with the indifference with which we groped around in

search of something—anything—with which to write down a shopping list on the back of an envelope. Why, we even doubt whether we possess the talent to wield such an object. Sure enough, our first attempts do little more than caress the paper into a preludial state of anticipation, the nib scratching archaically away at the surface of the paper without making a mark. Then, suddenly, in huge torrents—always in huge torrents—the ink finally deigns to flow forth, assuaging those anxieties of non-inscription as only a fountain pen can, and the words CARROTS, ONIONS, GARLIC assume a cathartic quality completely alien to the Bic pen.

Opera glasses, on the other hand, exist as obdurate anachronisms whose sole purpose is to impede the duster's otherwise smooth progression. Occasionally, however, on hearing some disturbance or other in the street outside my flat, I will reach instinctively for my opera glasses (always forgetting they are not binoculars) to have a closer look. No sooner have I done so than it becomes immediately apparent to me that I am using an apparatus designed for looking at *Tosca*, a fact which imbues the scene—some youths trashing an abandoned Fiat Uno—with a certain irony.

We sometimes reach for one thing but 'use' another. By this I mean that the relationship between an object and the context of its application sometimes allows an overlooked cultural dimension to emerge. In the first of the two examples above we observe how the instinctive search for pure function is unexpectedly rewarded with an object which has become a symbol of cultural refinement; in the second we observe cultural refinement imbuing pure function with a kind of representational 'excess'. However, the way in which we engage with an art object is obviously very different to the way in which we engage with an everyday item. As an artist, I have opted *not* to appropriate objects in an attempt to express the kind of alternative representations caricatured above, for these, as can be seen, are characterised by the transformation that actual application brings to the rarely used/often used. For me, the most interesting aspect of an art object is that it is never used: the art object, as a rule, edits out actual application as a means of making its representations available to the viewer.[11] As I have said, in my earlier work I sought to impose on objects an 'auditional' process that, though retaining some trappings of functional application, places them within a somewhat heterotopian order of things. The scope of this strategy is probably best demonstrated by a pragmatic description of some other works.

Manifesto comprises a Bic pen tied to a clip board. On the clip board is a piece of paper bearing a drawing of the Bic pen *using* the Bic pen. The tableau of objects has been used 'as intended' but has gone no further than simply reiterating its own presence through a naturalistic depiction of itself.

The Devolution of Useful Things is a calculator whose keypad consists entirely of 'off' buttons (cannibalised from a job lot of remaindered calculators found in a flea market). The object uses actual calculator parts, and thus looks manufactured rather than altered, to the extent that it suggests a recalcitrant element at work at some point in its

evolution: flawless manufacturing gone 'flawlessly wrong'. Effectively, it marries the highly regulated, serial production of manufacturing with an attitude of error or refusal, a marriage which proposes an impossible action: to turn off that which cannot even be turned on.

In the series of drawings *From the Genus 'Paper'*, I took different sheets of paper and reproduced them by hand in graphite pencil, to scale, on slightly larger sheets of paper. Each sheet—ranging from plain, lined, notebook, graph etc.—is not so much drawn as mapped onto a different surface. From a distance these works simply look like mass-produced sheets of paper stuck on a black background; closer examination reveals a handmade process. In these works the opportunity to make a mark is rejected in favour of the gesture already indicated by the selection of the paper. Drawing is reduced to an ostensive recognition of its defining terms, figure and ground—which are reduced to attributes of one another.

Distance Expressed as a Refusal of Measurement is a tape measure whose blade has been denuded of markings to leave a retractable length of bare steel. The title, which is engraved on the side of the object where the 'Stanley' sticker would usually be, describes the partial usability of the object in this altered state: it will span, but not measure, distance. It is thus a form of technology which is effectively reduced to the more primitive forms of measurement—the hand or arm span—which preceded it.

The Absurdity of Privatisation is also a play on measurement. In this piece an old-fashioned measuring rule has been sawn into a pile of individual inches. These inches recall the finger/thumb gesture we all make when attempting to estimate 'about an inch' (which is perhaps the only occasion when we 'see' inches in isolation). They have an 'aboutness', an indeterminacy which arises from their deregulation, even though they are exactly one inch. The title of the work obviously alludes to the fact that a system's effectiveness depreciates when it is devolved into disparate, independent entities whose individual interest runs counter to its former cohesion .[12]

Palette is a work made from a plastic laundry basket full of clothes. The basket is of the kind with square holes which reveal the different colours of its contents. On one side the square holes have been filled in with different coloured pieces of Formica, so that the surface is flattened into a grid reminiscent of painterly formats found in geometric abstraction. Because the other side of the basket is unaltered, it appears to mutate from being a ordinary object into an abstracted depiction of itself. There is thus a kind of double take which forces the viewer to contemplate the object as the site of a shifting existential emphasis: as with the ladder piece (which it predates), I was concerned with using an object's existing structure to bring its actuality into proximity with its own representation.

Hearse explores this relationship between actuality and representation in a more illusionistic fashion. The work is a collection of jars filled to the brim with black dye and presented on a laquered serving tray. Each jar's bulging meniscus creates the effect of its outer glass surface blending seamlessly with the liquid it contains.

Decommissioned Knots is a photograph of knots which have been physically removed from their contexts. The knot is cut from the length of string, rope, cable etc. used to tie it, so that all that remains is a pure muscle of functionality, fossilised as an irreversible action—an action no longer capable of being 'undone'. A knot is perhaps the purest expression of functionality, given that, once undone, it ceases to exist. A knot's hyperfunctionality depends as much on temporariness as on serviceability: shoelaces are tied to be undone as well to stop the shoe from slipping. By denying the knot its temporariness I wanted to show how its morphology is dependant upon the possible return to a condition of non-being (to a mere length of string). I sought to emphasise the principle of *unbecoming* which lies at the heart of its becoming.

My works have also used text; more specifically that of existing publications. Using a Burroughsian cut-and-paste technique, I have edited single issues of *The Economist* and *Good Housekeeping* magazine down to sonnets. The former was produced as a steel plaque installed in The Economist headquarters in London in May 2002; the latter was embroidered onto a tapestry frame purchased from a department store. In both cases the object and the particular method of inscription were suggested by the editorial tone of the publication, which I did my best to exaggerate in composing the sonnet. The object, then, is chosen as a metonym for the publication, whose text I tend to view in much the same way that I do manufactured objects: as complete, 'decided' vehicles which provide little room for manoeuvre. This text-as-object is perhaps more explicit in *Lady in Red*, which, by retabulating Chris de Burgh's famous song as a poison-pen letter (carefully arranged as a triptych on three separate sheets of red card), filters the viewer's familiarity with it through the rhetorical persona of some marginalised outcast.

In a general sense, what these works have in common is that they all seek to *remake* the world, refracting its generic material systems through a personalised, fictional *status quo*. In order to do this convincingly—in order to create a *status quo* whose obvious artifice is offset by a compelling sense of equilibrium—the artist has to create the impression that the strategy is generic enough to incorporate *any* given object. An oeuvre of works has to propose an even-handed emphasis from work to work, so that each piece is not doing something which is too ancillary to the concerns of the series as a whole.[13] I believe that, in the way I have just presented the above works, some consistency of approach can be seen. But let me also admit that this consistency is as much a retrospective, propositional artifice imposed on an existing *body* of work as it is a principle applied at the time of each *individual* work's conception. I will even go so far as to admit that the heterotopian intimations offered as a grounding principle articulate what I would like the work to do, rather than what it actually does. I would probably have to concede that the practice as it was does not come across as ascetic enough to propose itself as a system which might effortlessly incorporate any given object. That is, each object's being 'given' in a different way means that, as a visual continuum of objects, the body of work admits of too many

other variables to be considered a system of which I am in sufficient control: arguably, each of the above works possesses a quality that actually distinguishes it from the others at least as much as it affiliates it with them. Each work is too possessive of its own identity to subordinate itself to a more general system.[14] In fact, I have deliberately allowed this caprice of difference to hold sway in the hope that the viewer's sense of systematisation was, like mine, attenuated in such a way as to embrace rather than distrust the variability of approach required to 'audition' each object.

I think that this may have been hoping for too much. As I have said, I was happy to be dictated to by the generic qualities of my chosen object, and comfortable with the notion that *it* appropriated me as much me appropriating it (which is what working within the confines of the generic object entails). However, it is possible that, in overseeing how generic materialism might be adapted to suggest a hypothetical status quo, I have appeared as an insufficiently sovereign guiding presence. Hence, what my interventions have hitherto represented is an association of subjectivity not with a *consistency* of position to be iterated in different formats but with a tendency to change my position in relation to these different formats. The difficulty is establishing some positional consistency as a counterpoint to the oeuvre's material heterogeneity. I decided that if, as I suspected, I was interested in maintaining this heterogeneity, then I needed to reign with harsher rule over its differential field, rather than allowing this differential field to dictate the terms of its governance. Gone, then (for now), is the strategy of appropriating a different object for every work. In its stead I have nominated a representational artifice which is benignly dictatorial/institutional in its presentation of the 'individual artistic voice' as an axiomatic rather than idiomatic force. (To reduce it to a sound bite, the tone of this voice is something like opinion ventured as fact.) In so doing, I seek to enhance the quality of the hypothetical status quo referred to above by *personifying* rather than by objectifying it.

This axiomatic filtration of personal subjectivity is compatible with the Cartesian idea of subjectivity that philosophy has continually returned to (if only to gainsay) as a first principal, and it is worth spending some time delineating this philosophical context before offering an overview of the more recent work. While I resist the tendency to speak or think from the vantage point of an *a priori* subjective position, I of course recognise that there is something that it is *like* to be me, some notion of the self that is ever-present. Patently, 'I' am not in a state of completely continual becoming, according to the perpetual exposure to a procession of external stimuli. Nevertheless, we may conceive of subjectivity as occurring through a provisional series of closures constituted around—if not comprising exclusively *of*—external stimuli, none of which have the right to be considered the mark of subjective truth. In other words, we seek out things which neither concur with nor confute this fragile yet obdurate, *a priori* sense of selfhood. As Hilary Lawson summarises, "While existential truth applies to all closures at the point of realisation, there are no closures which live up to

the notion of ideal truth. All closures are thus existentially true and ideally false."[15] It is true that every "point of realisation" provides us with the opportunity to bring what we might call the contingent self into alignment with what we might call the idealised self, but this alignment never results in a single propitious summation of subjectivity. And yet, if the former is constituted through the randomness of sensate experience, then the latter is constituted by the investment in the notion that there is something in itself that it is *like* to be me, a subjective bedrock. We *may* interpret this notion as an aspect of the Cartesian cogito, in the sense that *our* thought brings us into direct proximity with a being which pre-exists phenomenological experience. However, as Dalia Judovitz notes, "Self-knowledge and knowledge of the world mirror each other through the paradigm of interpretation, which cannot be fixed for lack of a foundational difference separating the subject and the world."[16] And in any case this 'something that it is like to be me' is in fact different to Descartes' 'something that it is like to be 'I''. It is, rather, a "counteridentity...in which the 'I' affirms itself as other than itself...viewing itself from new circumstances or perspectives."[17] It is the 'like' in the 'something it is like to be me' which causes the 'I' to pass over into the representational condition of a 'me'. In other words this counter-identical 'me' is the externalised 'I' brought about by the projective gambit of sensate experience: *my* interest in this or that phenomenon is already a method of going beyond the concept that 'I' exist primarily within the paradigm of my thought.

Judovitz contrasts Descartes' "classical" view of the self with the "baroque" view of Michel Montaigne, who "recognises the impossibility of knowing himself as a definite entity", and for whom "the differences internal to the self are but the mirror of endlessly proliferating circumstances and events. His self-description cannot extricate itself from a description of the world."[18] According to Judovitz, from a Montaignian perspective, subjective being is constituted in a *description* of the world. Montaigne's conception of subjectivity is of the self as an *unfolding* rather than *a priori* condition. Of course, within this self-as-world-description it is *I*, the subject, who describes. But I do not, as such, *enact* the description: the description occurs within me; it happens *to*, rather than being instituted *by* the subject. The subject is always the already present axiom through which all representation must pass, but its already presentness does not imbue it with an essential autonomy whereby it can know itself:

> The priority of the subject, as that which is already present for representation, does not reflect its autonomy for representation. Rather, the pre-eminence of the subjective position emerges merely as the expression of the mathematically determined character of representation, as its axiomatic projection. This axiomatic entity does not really refer to an actual being and its existence, but rather to representation as constituted through the instance of discourse. This subject thus governs the order of representation, as if it existed outside of itself. As the substrate of representation, and concomitantly, its product, this subject is inaccessible to an

inquiry regarding its representational content. The Cartesian subject is thus constituted in the order of representation as the symbol of a discursivity which cannot reflect upon its own practical reality.[19]

From the Montaignian perspective, subjective identity is related to intention, and intention is fashioned in the spatio-temporal matrix of the sensate: I go there, I do this. In so doing I continually pass from one state to another, adapting each moment of being into a representation of itself. As Montaigne says, "I do not portray being; I portray passing."[20] We attempt, of course, to recoup this passing as a more fixed 'presentness' of being. But this presentness is simply the *a priori* presentness of the axiomatic subject, the stable point from which the 'present' collapses into what will be. It is the very continuity of this collapse which militates against subjective fixity. The pursuit of subjectivity is, to be sure, Beckettian in the sense of awaiting what we already understand to be a non-arrival of the self. And yet, despite this notion of the subject as an axiom of *endurance*,[21] I persevere with the notion that there is some essential thing that it is like to be me, something irreducible and impermeable that transcends the merely ostensive conception of the subject as the simple axiom of all representation.

If there is a natural tendency to think of the self as something constituted through the repetition of daily experience, then there is also a counter tendency to seek some kind of subjective 'truth' in those phenomena which lie outside these cycles of repetition. This counter tendency is touristic in that it seeks to identify subjective revelation with the not-yet-experienced. The symbiosis of these two tendencies—and the craving for such desiderata—is at the heart of much of Samuel Beckett's work. The ineffable feeling of subjective imminence which hangs over the protagonists of *Waiting for Godot* is one from which they are doomed never to emerge. One feels that the protagonists might encounter some novel phenomenon, some propitious revelation—if only they could extricate themselves from the burden of *awaiting* it. The message of the play is, it seems, that we can actually *perpetuate* the monotony of existence by the very act of awaiting change, of yearning for mutability. The characters are defined most lucidly in those moments when they propose courses of action and then remain immobile on the stage. They bid adieu to one another but remain in position (Pozzo at one point proclaiming "I don't seem to be able...to depart."[22]), and at the end of both acts Estragon says to Vladimir, "Shall we go?" To which Vladimir replies "Yes, let's go." They then remain rooted to the spot, as if unable to conceive of themselves beyond the repetitious, circular behaviour induced by their indefinite vigil. As Beckett's work implies, we perhaps identify the not-yet-experienced phenomenon as a deferred self-representation. There is a reciprocity between the deferred self we ascribe to unexperienced phenomena and the pure language of subjectivity which would presumably be required in order to represent the ever-present cogito or 'idealised self': the former is never-present but articulable as a lack; the latter, ever-present but only

articulable as the axiomatic, Cartesian 'I think therefore I am'.

In *Difference and Repetition* Gilles Deleuze reminds us that the 'I think therefore I am' of the idealised self contains the presupposition that "everyone knows what is meant by 'self', 'thinking and 'being'".[23] But the fact that these terms are ambiguous immediately refers "the pure self of the 'I think'...back to the empirical self...back to sensible, concrete, empirical being."[24] That is to say, the 'thought' of the 'I think' is empirically induced by the 'experience' of the 'I am'. 'I think therefore I am' is a true beginning only with the proviso that it refutes the empiricism of exterior stimuli. [25] Thought is not comparable from case to case due to the experiential difference of each empirical self, which always wants to change, alter and adapt according to *its* own circumstances. Because 'everybody thinks'(suggests Deleuze), everybody "is supposed to know implicitly what it means to think."[26] This 'everyone knows', this 'everyone recognises' is the basis on which has been constructed what Deleuze calls an 'image of thought'. I interpret this image of thought as something analogous to common sense (which might be defined as the tendency of individual thought to seek ratification through cross-reference with that of others). But common sense is simply an intersubjective instrument of cognitive comparison, a form of universal compromise that we use to *delimit the circumstances* in which each empirical self 'thinks', or is said to think, so that the differences of each thinking subject can (seemingly) be answerable to one another. Common sense's appeal to a universal 'everyone knows what it means to think' scenario causes subjective differences to be passed over in favour of subjective similarities, so that the circumstances in which you and I think *appear* to be the same (hence, the "*image* of thought"). Common sense therefore describes how thought is *shared* rather than how individuals think; it is the more atypical and wayward representations of thought which more accurately describe what it means to think—that is, what it means for an *individual* to think—by virtue (to recall Foucault's description of the list in Borges's "ancient Chinese encyclopaedia") of introducing into the equation the "possibility of thinking *that*". In other words, thought is demonstrated most clearly not at points of subjective convergence and concurrence but at points of subjective demurral and divergence; not by that which seeks to shorten the cognitive distance between two given individuals' perspectives through commonsensical arbitration, but by that which acknowledges this distance: in the most extreme cases, by that which has the power to *astonish*. Such examples perhaps have the right to be considered thus not merely because they 'introduce new thoughts' but because they imagine, or acknowledge, new circumstances for the possibility of thought; not merely because they tell us something we didn't already know but because they contrive representations to delineate the necessarily different cognitive circumstances which must prevail in order for a given thought to occur to an individual subject.[27]

In my view the touristic tendency to ascribe a deferral of the self to an as yet

unexperienced phenomenon reflects the difficulty of *truly thinking*, of discovering a free-standing identity within the act of thought itself, one which goes beyond the 'natural bureaucracy' of common sense. In such touristic instances we unwittingly substitute observation and recognition for thinking; the experience of novel phenomena come to bear the stamp of original thought, of thoughts that have not occurred to us before. We imagine (not always erroneously) that new empirical circumstances are bound to be accompanied by new cogitational circumstances. But spatial contexts and cogitational contexts differ markedly: we ignore or edit most of what we experience in the former, whereas, in the latter, each thought—being 'ours'—seems to occur as an equally relevant subjective unit. This is why we mistake thinking as something we 'do all the time', as if it were the same as observing and recognising exterior phenomena—as if thinking, in fact, were nothing more than an axiomatic self-observation. That thinking is something more than this is evidenced by those cases in which we break off from this solipsism (in which we 'recognise' a supposedly virtuous recurring self):

> It cannot be regarded as a *fact* that thinking is the natural exercise of a faculty, and that this faculty is possessed of a good nature and a good will. 'Everybody' knows very well that in fact men think rarely, and more often under the impulse of a shock than in the excitement of a taste for thinking.[28]

The distinction between 'recognition' and 'thought' is a crucial one for Deleuze. We should immediately note that, in relation to 'cognition', the word *'recognition'* indicates a revisitation of a supposedly existing or previous thought rather than a sovereign act of thinking. For Deleuze, recognition is the *mimesis* of thought. There are, he says,

> two kinds of things: those which do not disturb thought and...those which *force* us to think. The first are objects of recognition: thought and all its faculties may be employed therein...but such employment and such activity have nothing to do with thinking. Thought is thereby filled with nothing more than an image of itself, one in which it recognises itself the more it recognises things: this is a finger, this is a table.[29]

But it is not, therefore, simply a case of ascribing thought to those things that are *un*recognisable. That which is (as Deleuze calls it) "dubitable" is no more a mark of thought than that which is certain: doubt and certitude indicate the same concept of recognition, and there is no logical reason to suppose that the failure to recognise a phenomenon automatically produces some incipient cognitive act. We may refer the phenomenon in question to a list of things we recalled, conceived and imagined before, but will not, through some identificational deficit, thereby default into a more incipient cognitive mode. For Deleuze nothing could be more antithetical to the actual nature of thought:

Thought is primarily trespass and violence...Do not count upon thought to ensure the relative necessity of what it thinks. Rather, count upon the contingency of an encounter with that which forces thought to raise up and educate the absolute necessity of an act of thought or a passion to think. The conditions of a true critique and a true creation are the same: the destruction of an image of thought which presupposes itself and the genesis of the act of thinking in thought itself.[30]

Attempts to imagine the impossible—even in their inevitable failure—approach a more lucid description of thought than those which aim to 'reproduce' thought as a recognisable product. To elucidate the distinction between thought and recognition, Deleuze supplies an example: 'the being-square of the circle'. An oxymoronic, impossible object, the being-square of the circle, says Deleuze, "has a sense even though it has no signification"[31] in that we can imagine a circle in terms of squareness but not to the extent that we can picture or recognise it as one (and thus reduce thought to a product). Imagining the being-square of the circle allows thought to continue as a generative force by denying it the sanctuary of definitive closure. The distance between the 'products' of square or circle is bridged by a series of shapes which are more and less 'like' the circle and square. "Signification" of the being-square of the circle is forsaken in favour of the "sense" of migrating from one thing to another: I move from a circle to a many-sided polygon, which is then rationalised into a hexagon; from hexagon to pentagon, from pentagon to rhombus, from rhombus to rectangle, and finally from rectangle to square. This rectilinear odyssey would not be induced by something which already has a determinate signification. In response to the impossibility of signifying a circle's squareness, thought embarks on a chain of significations in which the recognisable in-itself of each shape defers to a role within a wider morphological narrative. The impossible object forces us to look beyond the 'significant' points at which forms attain a condition of decidedness—of being this or that shape—into the mutational syntax at the heart of morphology: the fact that each shape is a precursor for another. While this is not, perhaps, the completely non-representational response that Deleuze has in mind for the conceiver of the being-square of the circle, it nevertheless forces us to consider it as "an object not of recognition but of a fundamental encounter".[32] Within this encounter the inherent identity of definite, recognisable form defers to an exterior contingency. This exterior contingency manifests itself as a repetition insofar as each shape is invested with the same coefficient (the being-square of the circle). This is *my* repetition, a form of representation that I perform for myself, a form of spin which I impart on the hexagon, rhombus etc. without visually changing its identity. We can see that the being-square of the circle redefines each 'recognisable object' as one of a series of types interacting with one another within an evolving continuum. It is a directive that, instead of aligning the inherent identities of each shape alongside one another, forges a

continuous passage from each to the next. Within this operation, difference, instead of being an *a posteriori* audit of 'diversity', becomes the active principle by which the in-itself of each shape is generated.

In relation to any given series, then, we can see that it is possible to think of difference in two ways: as either a (conventional) 'difference-between' brought to bear on the series as an *a posteriori* comparative force, or as an *a priori* 'difference-in-itself' which precedes any diversificational audit. (Deleuze might say that the former is dictated by recognition, the latter by thought.) I feel that my current work is an attempt to understand this distinction, to explore the relationship between intrinsic and extrinsic concepts of difference and their role within an individual's subjective constitution. Using this 'typological aesthetics' (as I have provisionally dubbed it), I have striven to provide what I can only describe as a sort of cerebral profile of myself. As I have already said, this profile is filtered through an institutional alter ego, one which I have invented to prevent the whole enterprise from descending into nebulous solipsism. As I will now show, this alter ego has been suggested by an existing representational style which most people would recognise.

Sometimes, in tourist shops specialising in rustic knick-knacks and locally produced knitwear, one finds posters bearing titles like *Doors of Dublin*, *Windows of Ireland*, *Shops and Pubs of Limerick*, *Humorous Road Signs of England & Wales* or, if one is lucky enough to be holidaying abroad, *Mail Boxes of Wyoming*. Such posters should of course be distinguished from those more conventionally touristic vehicles—which bear titles like *The Ring of Kerry* or *The Blasket Islands*—whose more general purpose is to distil a given locale into a portfolio of invitingly picturesque hotspots. Juxtaposing such miscellany as fishermen, celtic monasteries, standing stones, famine ships and gannet colonies alongside one another, these latter promotional vehicles suggest an itinerary for us to follow, indirectly underlining the shortness of our vacation by recommending a succession of 'guaranteed' closures over mere aimless peregrination. If this second kind of poster purports to offer something conceived of as lying outside our daily experience, the first kind presents us with what it hopes are 'its' culturally distinct, autochthonous versions of commonplace phenomena. The tourist is presented with quotidian details rather than directed towards unique landmarks and sites of natural beauty/historical importance; everyone has seen doors, mailboxes or windows, but have we considered the notion that there is *something that it is like for a window to be Irish?*

It is not so much the earnest cultural indexicality of these photographic typologies that interests me as the deadpan representational style with which it is enforced. This style is characterised by a consistent 'rhetoric of endorsement' which is consolidated with each new category, and it is this that my current work has striven to emulate. I invent my own, somewhat more (but not exclusively) leftfield categories (listed on p. 139), establish my own spectrum of typologies—which is presented in a deliberately impersonal way. In so

doing, I seek to present my choices of category and the selections which comprise each category—if you like, my 'personal subjectivity'—as if they/it were arrived at by some form of institutional, or oligarchical, arbitration rather than through individual conception and production. The 'voice' of the individual thus appears sanctioned by the sobriety of the stock representational format. Each category that I invent is not simply executed as a collection of actual, 'original' photographs (thereby immediately asserting a conventional authorial stance), but as a set of photographs which has seemingly already undergone a process of reproduction (i.e. printed on a single surface). Of course, this 'reproduction' is a ruse: the posters are not mechanical print runs but unique, large-format inkjet prints which simulate the *appearance* of reproduction. An 'original' which apes the look of reproduction is very different to an actual reproduction. The actual reproduction—as seen in books or in promotional ephemera—is usually subordinate to some notion of the original; in my work the relationship between the terms 'original' and 'reproduction' is not so hierarchical.

We associate the term 'original' with a personal order of subjectivity established *in* the work by the author, and the term 'reproduction' with an exterior order of subjectivity imposed *on* the work in the course of its dissemination. However, as can be seen with *The Blind Man*'s showcasing of *Fountain*, the reproduction can play more than a passive role of faithfully mediating the original work's subjectivity; it can assume a subjectivity of its own—one that, in certain circumstances, may even eclipse that of the original. (It should be noted that, within commercial photography, most photographs are seen only as reproductions, or are eventually seen as *originals* only after a photographer's years of toiling as a jobbing professional. Only recently have figures such as Wolfgang Tillmans blurred the distinction between the commercial and high art sectors and, by implication, the distinction between the reproductional context in which their work may initially have appeared—e.g., *The Face*, *Dazed and Confused*—and the gallery context in which we are invited to review earlier commercial assignments as high art.) As I have already claimed, *The Blind Man*'s captioned picture of *Fountain* 'reproduces' its essential subjectivity more effectively than could the actual object *Fountain*: the work begins as an object (met with confusion and rejection), becomes a reproduction (surreptitiously advertising its author's actual intention), and is later reclaimed as an object by art history (as a metonym for the Art Object), acquiring its aura in an *a posteriori* fashion. It would have been far better, we might think, if these three stages could have been compressed in the initial gesture as a single unit of expression, rather than being extrinsically indicated by shunting the work back and forth between what is effectively *notional* and *actual* states of being. Of course, such compression became possible—and is now widespread—only as a result of *Fountain*'s incipient didactic signification of these states.

It is within the context of such compression that my poster works perhaps advance the notion of the art object as a 'unique reproduction'. This seemingly oxymoronic claim can be considered in the terms laid out in Walter Benjamin's 'The Work of Art in the Age

of Mechanical Reproduction':

> ...that which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art. This is a symptomatic process whose significance points beyond the realm of art. One might generalize in saying: the technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition.[33]

> Works of art are received and valued on different planes. Two polar types stand out: with one, the accent is on the cult value; with the other, on the exhibition value.[34]

We can state with reasonable confidence that it is through the expedient of the reproduction that an artwork's "cult value" is established. This cult value can sometimes be diminished by our experience of the actual work—that is to say, by what Benjamin calls its "exhibition value". My poster works attempt to merge these two poles, using the cult value of reproduction *as* an exhibition value. In so doing they present themselves as if already having seeped into public consciousness.

If all this sounds a little too neat, let me openly admit that I have only just begun to road test these theories concerning the 'unique reproduction' and the 'stock representational format' on the demanding terrain of the art world. There are potential difficulties which need to be acknowledged here. Firstly, it could be said that an artwork made using reproductive technology, even one insisting on its own uniqueness, on its 'edition of one', is unique only in a nominal sense—since the possibility for an infinite edition exists as long as I retain the work as data on the hard drive of my computer or on backed-up discs. The work's uniqueness is therefore a rhetorical restriction of its chosen medium's inherent potential for unlimited editioning (unlike printing plates and moulds, digital data is infinitely reusable). Moreover, it has been put to me that the insistence on each poster's being a single work actually inversely emphasises this possibility of its being an infinite edition. At this stage, then, let me acknowledge that the term 'unique reproduction', while not completely apposite, is a first attempt at articulating a quality I hope these works have: namely, that of already being 'at large' in the world (the works behave as though we should be familiar with them) and a consequent conflation of "exhibition" and "cult" value. It is possible that, if these works do achieve such conflation, it is not by virtue of any rhetorical uniqueness. After all, their 'stock representational format' deliberately invokes the appearance of things made in unspecified print runs (without itself undergoing the exact same technical processes associated with such print runs). In which case, why specify an 'edition' of one? It is probable that I have clung to the term 'unique' simply because, for current exhibiting purposes, it has been unnecessary to make more than one of each work. In other words, it is a piece of absolutism that tries to fix or foreclose the limit of the work, rather than observing what the limit or scope of the work is and then gradually adopting a

position accordingly. In short, the effect that editioning has on the work is still being considered. Maybe the reason I am inclined to see each poster as a 'unique' piece has something to do with the fact that I do not consider it completed until it exists as an object behind glass, framed to a standard specification. It is important to stress that, even when collecting the visual material for these works, I always see the finished product not as an image but as an object. At this stage I would be wary of mass-producing a poster, thus leaving the manner in which it exists as an object—i.e., the mounting, framing and glazing—to someone else (as those editions which offer the buyer a 'framed' or 'unframed' option invite us to do). On the question of exploring alternative modes of objecthood for the work, when one of my posters, Holes and Orifices of Great Britain and Ireland, was reproduced on the invitation card for a recent exhibition (Family Business, at Pitzhanger Manor in 2003), it made it (the invite card) look like the kind of promotional ephemera one would expect to find in any National Trust manor house. This was a deliberate conceit on my and the curator's part—one I was willing to embrace in my desire to road test the work's aforementioned conflation of exhibition and cult value. There is perhaps an argument that such promotional ephemera provides a more natural objecthood for my current work than an 'actual' picture in a gallery setting or other exhibition space; that the work should exist only within the window of ephemerality afforded by such promotional vehicles. I rather like the idea that the promotional vehicle and actual work are indexed to one another in such a way that the latter is perceived simply as a more highly attenuated (or 'anchored') incarnation of the former, so that the viewer/invitee discovers that what was initially taken for being 'merely' a piece of promotional material is in fact an actual, permanent object.

It has been put to me that the deadpan nature of the work is such that some viewers may perceive insufficient ironic distance between its 'stock representational format' and the somewhat kitsch items which have 'inspired' it. Considered as a whole series, I think it is unlikely that these objects would be taken as anything other than the work of an artist, and that even the least art-savvy of viewers would struggle to place the series in an alternative vocational context; taken individually, however, I am willing to concede that certain works might resemble things which one would expect to find already existing in the world (which is part of the intention, but more of that in due course), for instance, Bollards and Posts of Greater London. But these supposedly more 'credible' examples, as I will later show, lose their credibility when seen as part of a series which includes such categories as Sunsets and Dogshits. If the stock representational format I use is redolent of kitsch, the various subjects which it represents all have a decidedly different relationship to kitsch. At its most pointed, kitsch is the perceived vulgarisation of the spectacular, unique and/or sublime through ubiquitous representation: cheap plastic models of the Eiffel Tower and so forth. When kitsch is derided, it is not simply because it is inherently cheap and nasty but because it purports to tokenise the sublime, to bring the experience of the sublime within easy reach.

Kitsch items are derided because they make the sublime familiar (rather than something to be striven for)—to the extent that the 'original' spectacular thing which the kitsch item represents is no longer experienced as sublime (or even original) at all, but as the fount of a jaded familiarity. With regard to the spectacular and sublime, kitsch is nearly always regarded as performing a negative role, but when the thing undergoing supposedly kitsch representation is neither spectacular nor especially sublime—as with my own practice—kitsch performs a different function. Within my own practice, it is not so much inverted (as is the case with Koons's expensively hand-carved versions of cheap funfair knick-knacks); rather, it is the means by which idiosyncratic things and familiar/platitudinous things are considered alongside one another. What is meant by this will become clearer in due course. For now it suffices to say that, although the motivation behind representing bollards is different to, say, the motivation behind representing sunsets and dogshits, I want it to seem as though there is no difference. This is why the 'kitsch' poster is used as a stock representational format.

It is not surprising that the first poster to emerge from this series of works had an unmistakably touristic tone of voice. *Holes and Orifices of Great Britain and Ireland*—an anthology of drain holes, letter boxes, effluent pipes, caves, burrows etc.—subjects the rhetoric of cultural endorsement described above to a more abstract way of thinking by presenting a superabundant generic phenomenon as though it were a distinguishing national characteristic. Only with the completion of this poster did I fully appreciate the universality of the representational format it emulates, whose typological aesthetic is of a kind commonly deployed in such disparate fields as (to name a few) advertising, government health warnings, workshop and swimming pool safety advice, market gardening, fishmongery, collecting, dermatology, the automobile industry, calendar design, heraldry, catalogue layout design, knot-tying, cloud identification, military camouflage techniques, bushcraft, gymnastics—to say nothing of its taxonomical origins in the ordering of species and genera. In its most general sense typological aesthetics might be described as a strategy adopted to represent that which appears as a recurring phenomenon—each new incarnation of the phenomenon being compared to earlier ones in the hope of establishing a category of which it can be considered a member. Of course *most* things exist as recurring phenomena; the point is that a general method of comparative representation has arisen whereby the differences between each incarnation can be readily perceived. Each member of a typology has a dual identity in that its difference to its counterparts is offset by its extension of the typology's stated brief. The more heterogeneous or elliptical a typology, the more divergence, discord and paradigmatic shifts it exhibits, the greater the emphasis on the collating process, whose cohesive rhetoric expedites a conciliation of distinct logical types—sometimes through cosmetic resemblances, at other times through invisible taxonomic affinities. (For instance, in the kingdom of birds, both the magpie's and the jay's

139

corvid affiliations are disguised by plumage which is eye-catching compared to that of the rook, crow, hooded crow, raven and chough.)

Despite its ubiquity, typological representation (usually a straightforward accumulation of images presented in close proximity to one another) is detachable from the taxonomic logic with which it is often associated: the look of the 'definitive overview' can be appropriated as an authoritative trope, and certain artists have manipulated its authority in such a way as to 'officially endorse' what might be called leftfield phenomena. What happens when the look of authority becomes detached from the logical mandate of taxonomy is a question that has attached itself to artists as diverse as Ed Ruscha, Marcel Broodthaers, Bernd & Hilda Becher, Richard Wentworth and Adam Chodzko, in all of whose work might be perceived—to varying degrees—the stylehood of the overview, a strategy which invokes the rhetoric of endorsement.

A full survey of these artists' different applications of typology would be a digression here, but the books of Ed Ruscha demand brief mention. Made over a ten-year period from 1965-75, Ruscha's bibliography includes such titles as *Twentysix Gasoline Stations*, *Various Small Fires*, *Coloured People* (a misleadingly titled series of colour photographs of cacti), *Some Los Angeles Apartments* and *A Few Palm Trees*. Small, pocket-size publications containing factual photographs of precisely what is stated on the cover, these books, I would contend, introduce into *visual* art a notion of subjectivity which is unprecedented in its wilful arbitrariness, the intention being, as Ruscha has said, just "to make a book of some kind", just "to get the book out".[35] The use of photography is "just to do a job, which is to make a book".[36] The choice of subject matter is expedient; Ruscha chooses things simply "because they are there",[37] and not because he wants some kind of credit for 'uncovering' them. What each publication presents, then, is a collation of evident 'facts' which, given its resemblance to manuals or field guides, we are invited to place within a sphere of 'hypothetical usefulness'. The question is, who would use things like this? Ruscha is less interested in the differential field of his chosen typology than in the format of its presentation; the typology is simply an excuse for the execution of the book. As to what the resultant book is *about*, we should perhaps go so far as to question whether it really has an 'aboutness' (Ruscha speaks of their eliciting a 'Huh?' response from the viewer). Its subjective appeal, if Ruscha's interviews are anything to go by, consists entirely in the notion that a person would actually go to the trouble of doing 'a thing like that'. In one interview with Henri Man Berebdse, Ruscha speaks of how "some intellectual friends...were disgusted...not so much stumped as insulted [by the books]...What's he trying to put over on the public?—that old idea."[38] What Ruscha's books problematise is the simple fact that there is 'a public' and there is an artist who has something to convey to them, and between the two is this mediational device which has to take *some* form. The question Ruscha asks is 'what if this mediational device were not an artwork but something

that looked like an existing informational vehicle?' Ruscha's interviews reveal an ambivalent and contradictory attitude—in artist and interlocutor alike—as to whether or not his books are fully fledged artworks, though the bemusement/hostility with which these essentially random publications were initially met has certainly mellowed into easygoing acceptance. Even today, however, they still inhabit a nether region between aesthetics and utility, and stylistically they still refute reconciliation with the slick urbanity of his painting oeuvre. For my own part, I tend to think of them as being the starkest, most extreme deployment of a typological strategy which many artists have patronised but few have deployed to the exclusion of all other expressive formats.

For the last two years I have indeed been working exclusively within this format, and 'Typological Aesthetics' is the term of convenience I have contrived to describe it. An enumeration of the entire series to date may help portray the full scope of the typologies. They are as follows:

HOLES AND ORIFICES OF GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND

SELECTED FIRE EXITS

SUNSETS AND DOGSHITS

IMPENDING STORMS (in progress)

STUFF CHUCKED MINDLESSLY INTO TREES AND BUSHES

CANING THE NATIONAL GRID: AN AESTHETIC PERSPECTIVE

BOLLARDS AND POSTS OF GREATER LONDON

MODERNISM IN THE COMMUNITY (in progress)

ARBOREAL DISFIGUREMENT: SCARS, LESIONS AND TUMESCENCE

ENDEARING VANS (in progress)

'ELAMENT'

Within typological aesthetics, the 'work' lies in *finding* rather than representing. Or perhaps it conflates finding and representing, in that the search for, and factual presentation of, an object or phenomenon takes the place of any interpretational depiction. For this reason the typological aesthete tends to view the photograph as a transparent document rather than as a transformational vehicle of representation. The buck stops with photography's seemingly natural air of facticity, which is seen to respond 'impartially' to the 'natural syntax' of the typology's differential field without imparting any interpretative spin. The only choice made by the typological aesthete is what to include and what to omit, and this choice is made according to some organic, cumulative principle whereby each example is measured against those gathered so far. Each example will make the cut only if it exhibits enough difference to the existing set. This means that the nearer a category gets to completion (I set myself a target of 32)[39] the harder it is for something to gain entry, as its characteristics are more likely to resemble those of existing members. This process of reducing representation to a condition of inclusion and omission means that we are talking of representation in its most

rudimentary sense: in the sense of affirming the existence of *this thing* to a notional viewer who is not present at the site of its existence. It is impossible, we might counter, to present something in such a way as not to represent it in this or that manner. That is true, but the typological aesthete nevertheless presents each representation as an individual example occurring in direct proximity to others, placing its uniqueness in a context which proposes a constant shift from one example to another—from one 'this' to another 'this'.[40] If, within a certain objective notion of photography, an individual photograph proposes a nominal 'thisness',[41] then a series of photographs depicting a recurrent phenomenon diffuses this thisness over a wider area. *Holes and Orifices of Great Britain and Ireland* is a quite literal demonstration of this: it is as though there is a universal blackness behind the edifice of the poster, a larger thisness which shows through the smaller thisness of each example.

What is this larger thisness? It seems to me that it is not simply to be defined by the difference *between* each example's particular thisness, for to define it thus would be to define only the *results* of the procedure, rather than the procedure itself. The procedure has to be defined in terms of a relationship between a *notional* category of things and the *actual* demonstration of that category. In principle the notional category *Holes and Orifices* can include an infinite number of examples, whereas its actual demonstration proposes, for practical reasons, that the category be represented by *this* set of examples. And this set of examples will always conjure up a *that* (or, more accurately, a 'why not that?'), another set of possible things that is absent from the category's actual incarnation. *That* set of examples is as much a part of the work as those which make the cut. The latter are understood to be merely representative of the typology's differential dynamic, and could be replaced by another set without significantly altering this dynamic's diversificational pitch. It seems, then, that even as an existing actuality the category is shot through with notionality: despite its intensely visual representation of so many things, it is not so much a representation of *those things* as of the mental state which imagines and executes this representation.

What these representational vehicles really 'endorse' is an uncertainty: an uncertainty as to how we reconcile actuality with notionality. This, I think, while not *wholly* Deleuzian in character, nevertheless has something to do with the relationship between thought and recognition, in that each poster proposes a set of things which are recognised in light of an overarching category. This category is the thought, and each addition to the category is a recognition of that thought. But the recognition concurs with the thought in a different way with each included example—and to different degrees within different posters. In some of the posters the category seems to provide a quite practical foreclosure that the constituent examples are happy to meet: we can envisage without too much difficulty what *Bollards and Posts of Greater London* will look like as an anthology. What *Holes and Orifices of Great Britain*, or *Stuff Chucked Mindlessly into Trees and Bushes* will look like is another matter. We can conjecture that, where the former may be considered

142

'impersonal' because it resembles something which may already exist in the world (it is not inconceivable that such a poster might adorn the wall of a street furniture manufacturer's office), the latter indicates a more anomalous subjective stance which is perhaps, crudely speaking, closer to the individual personality of the thinker. If, in this way, we can identify the foreclosure of each category as less or more personal, then the relationship between the foreclosure and the gathered examples is clearly different in each poster. It leads to a different kind of thought-register each time, rather than being simply the same *kind* of thought brought to bear on a different set of phenomena. The series is, so to speak, a 'continuum' of thought.

The representation of this continuum with a stock institutional rhetoric of endorsement attempts to dissolve the barrier between what a thinker regards as personal and impersonal thoughts. The continuum represents the cogitational proximity of the impersonal to the personal, the banal to the rich, the commonplace to the unique, the strait-laced to the outlandish. The banal, commonplace and impersonal seem banal, commonplace and impersonal precisely because they already seem to exist as established facts in the world and thus do not require an individual mind to iterate them. Nevertheless, iterate these things the mind will, and we can perhaps conceive of such platitudes as the general ground on which 'other' notions appear to our minds as *comparatively* unique cogitational figures. Ordinarily, these cogitational figures are the notions we would be keenest to represent to others. But what happens if we represent these notions *as a part* of the ground, if we see their relative idiosyncrasy as an aspect of, rather than as a distinction from, the platitudes of established facts? [42] While my work doesn't claim to conform exactly to the foregoing analysis, it does claim to be attempting to shorten the distance between idiosyncrasy and platitude, and I offer the notion of a continuum of thought as a general description of the dualistic subjective state which encompasses these polarities.

The poster works are supposed to look like things which might already exist in the world, intended as they are to imbue dubitability, tenuousness and reconditeness with an air of fact. The typological aesthetic's rhetoric of endorsement lends a platitudinous, truistic tone to what, ideationally speaking, is an idiosyncratic operation. Set alongside the others, *Bollards and Posts of Greater London* is arguably the poster in which the representational style of endorsement is in greatest harmony with the idiosyncrasy of the ideation. That is to say, the representational style and what it is representing are equally platitudinous, to the extent that it would not surprise one to learn that this poster was a commercially oriented, humdrum piece of promotional documentation undertaken by a company as a tax loss. The things which distinguish the work from such a promotional vehicle are (a) the fact that its anthology comprises examples which span a greater stylistic range than a single company would produce, (b) its membership of a subjectively divergent series of other posters and (c) the geographical designation in its title. The ideation of the category is thus only 'idiosyncratic' in its minimal divergence from a hypothetical counterpart which we might

imagine to exist factually somewhere in the world. And yet it is only my 'version' which encourages us to imagine the existence of such a hypothetical poster.

Most of the other posters also suggest hypothetical counterparts—though to admittedly different degrees. The series can be divided into two categories. From a purely ideational perspective '*Elament*' (the unsolicited documentation of a graffiti artist's tag) might be imagined as something produced by the transport police or anti-vandalism unit (albeit in a different format); *Arboreal Disfigurement: Scars, Lesions and Tumescence* as a tree surgeon's almanac; *Caning The National Grid: an Aesthetic Perspective* as a piece of agitprop conceived by some freelance ecologist; and *Modernism in the Community* as a municipal survey of public art commissioning. Other posters suggest hypothetical counterparts in a more straightforwardly visual sense: *Selected Fire Exits* cannot help but ape the aesthetic of 'Doors of Dublin' (one of the titles already mentioned as the impetus of this work); *Endearing Vans* would perhaps make a convincing supplement to some notional 'special interest' publication; while *Impending Storms* is not completely unlike the visual documents I have come across on certain tornado-fetishists' web sites. As with the *Bollards* poster, the former, ideationally driven examples could be mistaken for the results of vocational praxes, while the latter, more visually oriented, examples are redolent of the essentially aesthetic delectations of the independent leftfield hobbyist. Each addresses the hypothesis of its factual counterpart in a different way: the former by imagining the operation as a form of institutionally sanctioned behaviour; the latter by identifying itself with what might be called a self-sanctioned idiom of eccentricity. Perhaps the plausibility of each poster as a hypothetical object depends on whether we wish to posit the former as somehow being more 'official' than the latter. For my own part, I would like to think that the series transcends this subdivision, and I draw attention to it in order to invite a reading of the series in terms of a dissolution between what I understand in myself to be institutional and 'independent' subjective faculties.

'*Elament*' might be the clearest example of this subjective dissolution. The compilation of the photographs comprising this poster obviously entailed tracing the footsteps of a lawbreaking individual: as Elament intones in one piece, "It's the spots u get, style's not important". My unsolicited documentation of Elament's oeuvre could be read either as an independent championing of this credo or as a body of evidence accrued by the anti-vandalism unit to secure his eventual conviction. The fact is, however, that I simply elect not to think about it on such a moral level, documenting the tags and 'pieces' as things among many others which occur within my daily experience as recurrent but differentiated phenomena—phenomena I would no more *judge* than things which are *not* the outcome of criminal activity. For me, castigation and approval represent overly partisan subjective polarities. Nevertheless, there is value in having documented a phenomenon which flirts with moral interpretation, as its resistance *to* this moral reading helps clarify my subjective engagement as lying outside of these polarities (and others like it).[43] This clarification is

enhanced when the phenomena featured in *'Elament'* are considered in relation to that of the other posters.

This affiliation of subjectivity with recurrent phenomena is an ongoing experimental response to that 'touristic' tendency in which, as I noted earlier, one seeks in the not-yet-experienced phenomenon a fundamental otherness, an absolute difference or 'contradiction' to one's subjective norm. If the ultimate in such experience is indeed to be thought of in terms of contradiction, then I would conceive of the typological aesthetics' subjectivity in terms of what Deleuze calls 'vice-diction'. To briefly explain my interpretation of this term: 'vice' is a prepositional prefix meaning 'in place of', 'instead of' or 'in succession to', and 'diction' alludes to the clarity with which, or manner in which, something is stated (or, more generally, the manner in which it presents itself). Ontologically speaking, vice-diction might be defined as the manner in which one phenomenon, substance or entity takes the place of or succeeds another—not, crucially, as the paradigmatic *contrary* of that thing's essence (as with contradiction)[44] but as a different 'case' or 'instance' from which the idea of essence is to be regarded. Within vice-diction, then, all is inessential: being is univocal. Vice-diction has for me played a key part in establishing a systematised method of representing the world as something which 'repeats itself' for the axiomatic subject. I propose a category whose essence shifts the more perspectives it is seen from. Each category proposes synthetic subjective conditions whereby individuation is reduced to the processing of recurrent, predetermined phenomena. The question we need to ask with respect to each category—and in relation to the entire series—is this: what, exactly recurs? Answering this in a meaningful way—that is, other than by simply pointing sheepishly to the examples in each poster—requires an understanding of difference which is retailored with respect to each example.

The central contention of Deleuze's book *Difference and Repetition* is that difference cannot be an object of representation; that representation distorts rather than reveals difference. Difference cannot be represented in the form of verifiable *identities*. It is only *repetition* that subordinates difference to identity, by ordering the Being of everything into a series of beings which succeed one another as (to the percipient) similar, dissimilar or contradictory entities. Repetition is the process of vice-diction which encompasses these successions, enabling Being to manifest itself as a series of smaller and larger differences (i.e. as specific and generic). But there is a sense, says Deleuze, in which we can conceive of a "Difference-in-itself" as a "precursor" to this repetition of beings—a repetition which we are inclined to think gives difference its essential quality but which in fact is merely the carapace of an *a priori* differentiating factor which already lurks at the centre of all beings. This sense is none other than that in which Being *is* Difference, in that the existence of things *as* individual things is defined by a perpetual distinction in attributes. In part, Deleuze's philosophy of Difference takes its cue from Spinoza's propositions concerning the nature of substance. For Spinoza, Being is nothing less than a spectrum of attributes of

a single substance. The attributes intrinsic to a given individual substance define that substance's existence completely, for without these attributes it would not exist or would simply be another substance instead. What defines the essences of two given individual substances is the mutual exclusivity of their attributes. Without this mutual exclusivity they would simply be the same substance.[45] In a similar way that, for Spinoza, Being, as a continuous field, *is* attribution, so Being, for Deleuze, *is* Difference. The two positions seem to be one and the same, but the latter is actually an adaptation of the former. Spinoza's claim that Being is univocal is credible, Deleuze seems to suggest, only insofar as we can consider Difference to be at the *heart* of its manifold attributes:

> In effect, the essential in univocity is not that Being is said in a single and same sense, but that it is said, in a single and same sense, *of* all its individuating differences or intrinsic modalities. Being is the same for all these modalities, but these modalities are not the same. It is 'equal' for all, but they themselves are not equal. It is said of all in a single sense but they themselves do not have the same sense. The essence of univocal being is to include individuating differences, while these differences do not have the same essence and do not change the essence of being—just as white includes various intensities, while remaining essentially the same white.[46]

To reiterate, Being can only be univocal—that is, "said in a single and same sense"—by *becoming* Difference, for differentiation is the only sense in which we can conceive of all things as a continuous entity:

> Each point of view must itself become the object, or the object must itself belong to the point of view. The object must therefore be in no way identical, but torn asunder in a difference in which the identity of the object as seen by a seeing subject vanishes. Difference must become the element, the ultimate unity; it must therefore refer to other differences which never identify it but rather differentiate it.[47]

Vice-diction is the means by which we navigate Being as a continuous entity without delegating to specific beings the task of representing it metonymically, for these individual beings 'stand to be corrected', as it were, by subsequent specific beings. Difference is more than a comparative 'vetting' of Being's diverse attributes; it is the means by which Being declares its essence through constantly shifting centres of gravity, in the same way that a gymnast supports his weight now on a foot, now on a hand, now on the head. (This shifting concentricity of Being recalls Pascal's famous description of the universe as "an infinite sphere, the centre of which is everywhere, the circumference nowhere."[48]) As long as it is seen as a simple concatenation of beings, Difference will be misconstrued as purely the result of those analogies of identification with which we compare a series of things as 'less'

or 'more' like one another. Deleuze calls this "organic representation".[49] The form of representation through which Difference *actually* operates he calls "orgiastic representation". Within orgiastic representation, Difference is not a reflective, *a posteriori* system for the analogical comparison of beings: it "no longer refers to the limitation of form, but to the convergence towards a ground; no longer to the distinction of forms but to the correlation of the grounded and the ground; no longer to the arrestation of power but to the element in which power is effectuated."[50] But if Difference is less a passive "distinction of forms" than an element effectuating the power whence form emerges (and is not therefore indexed directly to the *resemblance* of forms) how is it that given systems of forms can interact at all in an identificational sense? What, Deleuze asks, "is this agent, this force which ensures communication [between them]?"[51]

At this point Deleuze introduces the slightly comic notion of the "dark precursor":

> Thunderbolts explode between different intensities but they are preceded by an invisible, imperceptible *dark precursor*, which determines their path in advance but in reverse, as though intagliated. Likewise, every system contains its dark precursor which ensures the communication of peripheral series.[52]

Leaving aside for the moment the apparent contradiction of that which can have its path determined both "in advance" and "in reverse", we can perhaps see that the dark precursor is invented to explain Difference as a *cause* rather than an effect of representation, to explain the "intensities" of resemblance and identity in a given series as the fallout from some underlying metaphysical confrontation. The precise manner in which it fulfils this role changes according to whichever series it precedes. "There is no doubt", says Deleuze,

> that there *is* an identity belonging to the precursor, and a resemblance between the series which it causes to communicate. This 'there is', however, remains perfectly indeterminate. Are identity and resemblance here the preconditions of this functioning of the dark precursor, or are they, on the contrary, its effects?[53]

The precursor is 'bespoke' by, without leaving its essential mark on, the resemblances and identities it gives rise to. As Deleuze says, we have a situation in which it is unclear as to what is the cause and what is the effect. If resemblance and identity are indeed the *effects* of this precursor then they are "no more than inevitable illusions—in other words, concepts of reflection which would account for our inveterate habit of thinking difference on the basis of the categories of representation."[54] In short, we mistake the effects of difference for its concept. The way in which the effects of resemblance and identity can be both determined "in advance but in reverse" is thus clarified somewhat: what Deleuze means is that the

resemblance and identity in the differential system actually cover over the tracks of the dark precursor which precedes them, so as to misportray the *concept* of difference as being literally "intagliated" on the surface of things. But the Difference-in-itself of the dark precursor does not conform to the conditions of representation "because the path it traces is invisible and becomes visible only in reverse, to the extent that it is travelled over and covered by the phenomena it induces within the system", and therefore has "no place other than that from which it is 'missing', no identity other than that which it lacks: it is precisely the object = x, the one which is 'lacking in its place' as it lacks its own identity."[55] This notion of difference as an identity perpetually "missing from its place" effectively proposes that the *actual* resemblances and identities which arise in the wake of the dark precursor become surrogates of a *virtual* object. This virtual object symbolises the power of Difference-in-itself to be in all places at once, whereas tangible, actual forms are, to recall the earlier quotation from Deleuze, an "arrestation of its power".

Earlier in *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze quotes the following passage from Lacan's 'Seminar on *The Purloined Letter*':

> What is hidden is never but what is *missing from its place*, as the call slip puts it when speaking of a volume lost in the library. And even if the book be on the adjacent shelf or in the next slot, it would be hidden there, however visibly it may appear. For it can *literally* be said that something is missing from its place only of what can change it: the symbolic. For the real, whatever upheaval we subject it to, is always in its place; it carries it glued to its heel, ignorant of what might exile it from it.[56]

The reader familiar with Poe's story will recall a thief who steals a compromising letter from "a certain royal personage" and hides it in his apartment. The thief, who simply crumples it up in a self-addressed envelope deposited in an ordinary letter rack, gambles on the expectation that the police, having in mind not an image of the *actual* letter but that of a 'virtual' letter which they have never seen, will automatically restrict their search to everywhere other than where one would expect to find a real letter. Carefully probing every table leg and every cushion with a gimlet, looking in every book and dismantling every chair, they evidently consider the objecthood of the letter as conforming precisely to the cavities in which they search for it. They have thereby already invested the 'identity' of this virtual object with the objectivity of its concealment; in other words, with the idea that it could be anywhere. They therefore look everywhere other than where it is, and its 'form' changes according to wherever it is sought. They fail to find the letter because of the impossibility of conceiving of the concealed, or virtual, object as being "in its place"; indeed, the concealed (or virtual) object *has* no place until found, and the fact that it is *not*, in this case, concealed means that it is never found. The letter is not found because the policemen ascribe it a generic objectual difference with each place in which they seek it. In fact the object of their

search is to be found alongside its more humdrum counterparts, which exhibit not generic but marginal differences to it. As a species of thing, the police place the letter in a genus entirely of its own, as if it were a thing that contradicted rather than resembled an ordinary letter. Dupin (the detective who solves the mystery), on the other hand, employs something similar to what, earlier, I called vice-diction, by conceiving of the letter as an 'attribute' of an existing genus.

If the world consists of species of things, then we might say that the virtual object is what lies behind the identification of each individual species insofar as it can be said to belong to this or that genus. It is only the virtual object which allows us to even posit the notion of a genus: a collection of things united by a recurring characteristic in spite of other differences. This virtual object is the genus that grounds all the species, but it is only incarnated in the *switch* from one to the next; that is to say, *in the moment of the characteristic's repetition*. It is constantly in search of itself, and can only find itself through fleeing from one being to the next, leaving in its wake—in its search for recurrent resemblances—the bow wave of Difference (i.e. the characteristics which do *not* recur). It can only *be* itself through repetition. To return to my work, the question I asked earlier with respect to each category (What recurs?) seems less asinine: it is the virtual object that recurs.

Typological arrangement originates, we should remember, in scientific epistemology. As Foucault has pointed out, taxonomy (or, as he prefers, *taxinomia*) is to ontology what algebra is to *mathesis*:57 it is effectively a form of algebra (with genera and species as x and y values) which helps us to navigate Being *as* Difference. In place of the virtuality of symbols and numbers there are actual, individual beings which express a continuity or discontinuity with one another:

> Taxinomia...implies a certain continuum of things (a non-discontinuity, a plenitude of being)
> and a certain power of the imagination that renders apparent what is not, but makes possible,
> by this very fact, the revelation of that continuity.58

With algebra, each symbol is in itself a virtual unit signifying an incremental mathetic shift: the 'quantity' changes but the means of signifying it (numbers and symbols) remains constant. *Taxinomia's* attempt to rationalise its plenitude of being has to take into account the fact that *its* means of signification changes all the time; in fact, with every individual being. Moving from actual being to actual being could hardly be less like 'counting': we simply count 'one, one, one', and so on. The only 'symbol' that recurs in each case is that of Difference; that is, the virtual object, which allows us to posit the next being in terms of its (dis)continuity with a previous one.

The taxonomic strategies of my work tend to alter the concept of Difference with each category. This tinkering is the inevitable result of trying to visualise the relationship

between resemblance, dissimilarity, contrariety, negation, notionality and actuality within essentially random circumstances. If the only way of thinking Difference-in-itself is to do so within the non-representational paradigm of the virtual object (or "dark precursor") then I can think of no better way of expressing this virtuality than by confronting it with, quite literally, whatever is around the corner. There is an inherent humour in the epistemological rigour with which *taxinomia* systematises the world's plenitude of Being. Its many visual incarnations invite questions like 'Is this taxonomy complete?', 'What is missing?', 'Does the category show *all* or just *some* of its members?' In my view, to subject *taxinomia* to the threat of *in*completion[59] is to confront more directly the virtuality which lies beneath its carapace of resemblance. To doubt whether a taxonomy is complete is to think of Difference as extending beyond the visual representations manifested in a given genus. The hypothetical or actual absence of certain members from that genus imbues it with a virtuality, so that its differential field is to be defined by what is 'missing' as well as by what is present.

As Foucault says in speaking of *taxinomia*, "genesis presupposes a progressive series"; it divides the "table of visible differences...up into an analogon of time...a chronology."[60] Within the rubric of my work it is important that each category is evidently a group of things amassed over a period of time, not in order to create the impression of working towards some auspicious revelation[61] but so that its genesis as something inspired by an 'inaugural encounter' with an original phenomenon is gradually effaced through a proliferation of other encounters. While, in *Bollards and Posts of Greater London*, every bollard may be 'an autonomous idea' of a bollard—if you like, a 'thisness'—there is no sense in which any single one has evolved from an original: the genetic blueprint is shared equally among all examples. What this repetitive representation of phenomena amounts to for me is a letting go of the idea of subjective sovereignty, of the notion that a single representation of a certain thing or phenomenon has the right to be considered a definitive spokesman for it. This stance arises partly from a circumspect attitude to photography as a proposition of 'sovereign' or 'best' representations of an essentially repetitive world. My aim is to represent this repetition rather than editing its motifs of recurrence down to a handful of representational exemplars. The use of repetition to efface an inaugural encounter with a subject is a response to that 'touristic' tendency I described earlier, in which one seeks in phenomenological experience a fundamental otherness, an absolute difference or 'contradiction' to the norm. When single images proliferate into series, an 'original' cannot be received as the mark of a definitive, propitious 'moment of subjectivity'. The important thing for me is that subjectivity is *reconstituted* in each image rather than 'dealt with' in a single image and then laid to rest.

End Notes

1 An abstraction in the sense of being an inchoate enumeration of materials whose use has not been specified.

2 The term 'heterotopia' is first used by Michel Foucault in a 1967 lecture: "There are also, probably in every culture, in every civilisation, real places—places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society—which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality. Because these places are absolutely different from all the sites that they reflect and speak about, I shall call them, by way of contrast to utopias, heterotopias." ('Of Other Spaces, Heterotopias', http://www.foucault.info) Examples of heterotopias cited in Foucault's lecture include prisons, cruise ships and care homes. I should stress again that my works are not intended to suggest any such *actual* heterotopias; they are more akin to—and in some cases inspired by—the kind of objects we might encounter in a heterotopia proposed in a work of fiction.

3 Jorge Luis Borges, trans. Andrew Hurley, *Fictions*, (London: Penguin, 1999), pp. 65-74.

4 While those of Borges are arguably the most philosophically rigorous heterotopias, the most famous are those proposed by Jonathan Swift in *Gulliver's Travels* (London: Penguin, 1978). In each of Gulliver's voyages the one or two key differences to the natural order of things (scale, scientific truth etc.) that Swift proposes occur as divergences from an otherwise 'normal' social status quo, in which we recognise such institutions as monarchies, political parties, the military and so forth. Without such contextualisation the divergences would obviously lose their ability to satirise allegorically the things that Swift found so objectionable about contemporary society—a more explicit and unveiled attack on which would have left him vulnerable to litigation. Heterotopia is often the most effective form of satire, as it allows the satirist to operate 'at one remove' from the truth without preventing him from uttering it. Indeed, in his description of the outlandish scientific experiments conducted in 'The Academy of Lagado' which Gulliver visits during his voyage to Laputa (pp. 217-241), Swift was reputed to have simply written down experiments actually performed by members of the Royal Society at the time of writing. It is the mention of such experiments alongside (surely completely fictional) activities like the "reduction of human excrement to its original food" (see p. 224) that gives *Gulliver's Travels* such satirical purchase.

5 In the essay 'Appropriating Appropriation', *On the Museum's Ruins* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press 1993), p.128.

6 Germaine Greer raised this issue of continuity/discontinuity in a discussion with Cornelia Parker at the National Gallery in July 2002, emphasising the importance of the cordon sanitaire in her vitrined works. In the pieces here mentioned, Parker uses an object's provenance as a kind of readymade cordon sanitaire, detaching the object from the world—that is, from less illustrious dust, tarnish or feathers—in an entirely metaphysical way: through the expedient of the caption. The provenance claimed in the caption confers on the object an allegorical status—given that all is not revealed in its mere appearance. There is, then, a curious experiential inertia induced by Parker's vitrined objects, our empirical contemplation of which

quickly elides into an imagining of the circumstances that have occasioned the work's production.

7 A work by Liz Price is worthy of mention here. *Dead body dial 999*, shown at Mobile Home Gallery, London, in 2003, entailed the artist copying out every piece of text from a single issue (no. 17, 024) of the *Hackney Gazette* (omitting pictures). All the text was homogenised into a single typeface and reprinted (with each item appearing in its original position) as a newspaper. In order to consolidate an appropriation of an object, artists often attempt to enhance its existing formal qualities by placing it within a cordon sanitaire; Price's work, by extirpating the visual rhetoric of reportage we associate with the newspaper, subdues its formal qualities, reprocessing the object as a colourless diagram of itself, a thing which occupies the same *space* as an ordinary newspaper without exhibiting any of its character. This characterlessness is enhanced by placing a copy of *Dead body dial 999* within a domestic context (the viewer was invited to take a copy—at least I did), where its denuded appearance is compellingly discontinuous with the surrounding objects, lacking as it does the *candour* of that which has a place in the world and which embodies that place in its appearance. Informationally replete but stylistically barren, it creates a sort of void, erecting a cordon sanitaire in the midst of actual things by proposing itself as an object drained of ontological imperative.

8 Rainer Borgemeister, trans. Chris Cullens, 'The Eagle from the Oligocene to the Present' in *Marcel Broodthaers: Writings, Interviews, Photographs*, ed. Benjamin H. D. Buchloh (Cambridge, Massachusetts: October & MIT Press, 1988), p. 138. The works I am currently making also emphasise an object's or symbol's recurrence over its specific meaning. The works reproduced at the end of the thesis, while they have not yet been publicly shown all together, are produced in the anticipation that the viewer will appraise each as one of an ongoing series. So far I have shown the posters on two occasions. On the first occasion I showed one on its own; on the second occasion I showed three together. The quantity in which they are shown clearly affects the way that each individual work is perceived, just as the quantity of 'examples' collected in each individual work, or category, affects the way we see each example. The best way of showing these works is by no means clear to me. While I would rather the viewer have an awareness that each work is one of an ongoing series, it may be that to show the series in its entirety would be monotonous. It may be unnecessary to physically display the entire series. It may be that all that is required is to inculcate an awareness of the series. Having to show the entire series in order to 'do justice' to each individual work is clearly problematic, as it would be highly impractical—not to mention absurd—to have to repeatedly wheel out the whole series for every new category's debut.

9 This thumbnail sketch needs placing within a wider phenomenological context. None of the operations here described necessarily takes me from a position of indistinctness to one of greater objective clarity, as each has the same objective value. This is why I use the term arbitrary determination. "We are not", writes Merleau-Ponty, "called upon to analyse the act of attention as a passage from indistinctness to clarity, because the indistinctness is not there. Consciousness does not begin to exist until it sets limits to an object, and even the phantoms of 'internal experience' are possible only as things borrowed from external experience." (*The Phenomenology of Perception* [London: Routledge, 1992], p. 26.)

10 It was this thinking that led to the creation of *Sunsets and Dogshits*, one of the current series of poster works.

11 Ironically, the many 'usable' or ergonomic works which have purported to break this rule, far from expanding the interpretational possibilities of a work, actually narrow them down through the imposition of a functional application. The problem invariably lies in the singularity of the application, which is effectively synonymous with a 'prescribed' reading. This, admittedly, is a generalisation, and we have already seen (with Joe Scanlan's *Nesting Bookcases*) how the production of seemingly generic functional items can be used to induce a viewer/collector into a highly personal engagement with the work. Clearly, within this territory, there are important distinctions to be made between 'kinetic', 'handleable' and 'furnishmental' artworks. The problem with much kinetic work is that it delimits the terms of its 'success' to its very kineticism: it moves, *ergo* it 'works'. That is to say, an artwork which exhibits limited movement—and with kinetic works movement is nearly always limited—invites us to contemplate movement as little more than an extension of its inertia. The best kinetic work seems to be that which understands the absurdity of movement being in dialogue with the work's inertia (as with Hirst's table tennis balls used as a skeleton's eyes), and may even (in Tinguely's case) seek to deploy it as a mechanism for the work's destruction. The ergonomic works of Franz West—which, typically, can be drunk from, sat on or carried around—often function as inert objects in dialogue with the *spectator's* mobility. A limited dialogue, it is true, but the appeal of West's objects is their often wretched construction and ugliness—qualities from which we are invited to emancipate the object by pressing it into service in the suggested fashion ('it's ugly but at least it works'). The effect, I suppose, is something like the opposite of Duchamp's deployment of the generic and the specific: ugly art redeemed by utility, as opposed to ugly utility redeemed by art. There is an extensive overview of West's work in *Parkett* no. 37, 1993, pp. 54-99.

12 Frankly, I've never been sure about this particular work, but I'm glad I made it, for the sole reason that it was once viewed by Michael Heseltine. I know this because I happened to be in the gallery at the same time. It was one of those rare occasions on which an art object and a viewer complement one another so perfectly as to take the work into another subjective dimension, though I am not sure whether the former Deputy Prime Minister approved of its formal qualities. I considered asking him—I was young and reckless—but it seemed slightly vulgar to impinge on his retirement with surly allusions to the deregulation of the rail network and its subsequent private sector mismanagement. In any case, I simply saw the title as expressing the formal procedure of the work in a language I hoped everyone would grasp, rather than as a politically partisan expression—the deregulation of the rail network and its subsequent private sector mismanagement being the nearest metaphor my brain reached for in its attempt to justify what was essentially an impulsive act of destruction. Throwaway though *The Absurdity of Privatisation* may have been in its execution, I find that the provenance of unforeseen ministerial contemplation somehow ratifies its extravagant titular claims, making it hard for me to excise it from my oeuvre.

13 This 'even-handedness' is not usually enforced in order to create a deliberate homogeneity, no matter how authoritarian an artist's system might be. Martin Creed's system allots each work a number—as though, as an oeuvre, it were moving towards a complete, indexical catalogue of existential propositions which could be consulted by the would-be ontologist. This is in fact a ruse, as Creed numbers the works fairly erratically, not using almost half the available numbers. (There is no 'No. 1' for example.) Perhaps the jump from one number to another could be seen as a vector of difference? For example, the similarity of

153

works 200-204—all variations of # 200, *half the air in a given space* (see the exh. cat. *Martincreedworks*)—is reflected in their numerical succession. It would be interesting to see a catalogue raisonné of works, to assess whether the numerical gaps corresponded to any significant strategic shifts.

14 The reader can decide for him/herself whether or not this is the case by perusing the selection of works enclosed in the thesis.

15 Hilary Lawson, *Closure: A Story of Everything* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 100.

16 Dalia Judovitz, *Subjectivity and Representation in Descartes: the Origins of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 13.

17 Ibid., p. 13.

18 Ibid., p. 12.

19 Ibid., p. 84.

20 Ibid., p.12.

21 It should be noted that this axiom of endurance is to be conceived of in a more explicitly bodily sense in relation to Beckett, the acknowledged master of describing how subjective consolidation is at its most profound in the detachment of mind and body from one another. In Beckett's work, as Ulrika Maude points out, it is "the body, rather than the cogito, that gives the character assurance of their existence. In *Company*, the narrated character is lying on his back in the dark, listening to a voice. The figure is aware of this 'by the presence on his hind parts and by how the dark changes when he shuts his eyes and again when he opens them.' His existence, in other words, is determined and even brought about by tactile, visual and acoustic sensations." ('The Body of Memory: Beckett and Merleau-Ponty', *Beckett and Philosophy*, ed. Richard Lane [London: Palgrave, 2002], p. 108.)

22 Samuel Beckett, Waiting *for Godot* (London; New York: Faber & Faber, 1955), p. 47.

23 Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (London: Athlone, 1994), p. 129.

24 Ibid.

25 In an essay on the temporality of subjectivity, Jorge Luis Borges mentions Georg Christoph Lichtenberg's refutation of the cogito. Like Montaigne, Lichtenberg ascribes to thought the same involuntariness as we associate with meteorological phenomena: "The Cartesian 'I think therefore I am' is invalidated. To say 'I think' is to postulate the ego; it is a *petitio principii*. In the eighteenth century Lichtenberg proposed that instead of 'I think,' we should say impersonally 'it thinks,' as we say 'it thunders' or 'it lightens.' I repeat: there is not a secret ego behind faces that governs actions and receives impressions; we are only the series of those imaginary actions and those errant impressions." (Jorge Luis Borges, 'A New Refutation of Time', *Other Inquisitions*, trans. Ruth L. Simms, [Austin: University of Texas Press, 1988], p. 175.) This impersonal "it thinks" rings true for me as the subjective mode in which I operate as an artist.

26 *Difference and Repetition*, p. 131.

27 The clearest demonstration of these 'necessarily different circumstances' is comedy. There is a sketch by Stephen Fry and Hugh Laurie, 'Sound Name' (*Three Bits of Fry and Laurie* [London: Heinemann, 1992], pp. 375-378), in which a man (Hugh) goes into a police station to report a stolen car. The officer (Stephen) asks for the man's name. Hugh replies "My name is Derek...." and drops a lighter on the desk to indicate

his surname. Stephen asks Hugh how to 'spell' this surname. "It's as it sounds," replies Hugh. Eventually Hugh spells the name out 'properly': "N-I-P-P-L hyphen E." As an art form, the comedy sketch often cleaves to the convention of imagining a skewed order of things, and it often falls to a straight man to tease this out by subjecting it to the logical interrogation of the *actual* prevailing order of things—an interrogation which invariably leads to an escalating absurdity. Comedy uses logic to amplify rather than dispel absurdity. If it were not the case that comedy seems to imbue absurdity with 'perfect sense' then no one would laugh at it.

28 Deleuze, ibid., p. 132.

29 Ibid., p. 138.

30 Ibid., p. 139.

31 Ibid., p. 156. The example is borrowed from Spinoza. See *Spinoza's Ethics and De Intellectus Emendatione* (Oxford: Everyman's Library, 1955), p. 8.

32 Deleuze, ibid., p. 139.

33 Walter Benjamin,'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (Philadelphia: Fontana Press, 1992), p. 215.

34 Ibid., p. 218.

35 These statements were made in an interview with A. D. Coleman, " 'I'm Not Really a Photographer'" in *Leave Any Information at the Signal: Writings, Interviews, Bits, Pages*, Ed Ruscha, ed. Alexandra Schwartz (Cambridge, Massachusetts: October; MIT Press, 2002), pp. 51-54. Ruscha initially resisted attempts to 'show', or even market, his books in galleries (though he has since relented), perhaps feeling that they should be disseminated in a way that echoed the perfunctoriness of their subject matter (which is chosen "just to get the book out there"). It is no surprise that he should choose the book—an absorptive rather than enunciative vehicle—as a format for his typologies, as literature is no stranger to the arbitrary subjectivity they propose. The most obvious example is Gustave Flaubert's *Bouvard and Pécuchet* (trans. A. J. Krailsheimer [London: Penguin, 1976]), an unfinished novel about two copy-clerks who inherit a large sum of money and embark on an inconsequential odyssey of autodidactic pursuits encompassing the spheres of agronomy, chemistry, philosophy, pedagogy, love, art, law, theology...all of which end in spectacular failure. Not once does it occur to the protagonists that there are some things to which an individual may be better suited than others; they believe that, given time (of which they have plenty), anything can be mastered. None of the pursuits Bouvard and Pécuchet adopt has precedence over the others: each is to be 'learnt whole' and then discarded, as if it stood in arbitrary rather than synergistic relation to the others. This atomistic approach means that they fail to appreciate, say, the relevance of chemistry to agriculture, the relevance of sociology to pedagogy—and the relevance of philosophy to just about everything. This book, the research for which required the reputed consultation of some 1500 other books, is generally regarded as the most heterogeneous, anthological novel written before the 20th Century, and the one which flirts most openly with arbitrariness as a subject in itself. Though Flaubert is obviously concerned with how arbitrariness is to be represented in fiction, and Ruscha with how it might be expressed through the rhetoric of factual representation, both exploit the ability of the book to ground phenomena that have no other significance than that they 'occur' for the same individual subject (or, in Flaubert's case, for

the same individual characters).

36 Ibid.

37 Ed Ruscha, 'Ed Ruscha: An Interview', Henri Man Berendse in ibid., p. 210.

38 Ibid., p.213.

39 This figure is determined by the number of images (slightly bigger than snapshot size) required to make an overall composite picture that, when framed, measures four by three feet. This is the pre-established size of every work. I like the idea that the 'kind' of phenomenon proposed by each category is determined by its ability to recur at least 32 times (or 30 in the case of portrait-oriented photographs). The nature of the material sought defers to the vehicle of its presentation; I could not imagine ever presenting any 'holes and orifices' as photographs in their own right (that is, outside of the inverted commas in which I have just placed them), since such autonomy would contravene the basis of recurrence by which they are deemed worthy of photographic representation in the first place. There may come a time when a phenomenon presents itself in either lesser or greater numbers, in which case the current representational vehicle may be inappropriate.

40 Although we can understand, for example, each of a series of nine photographs of winding towers by the Bechers as being physically identical to one another (all being silver gelatin prints) their separateness is emphasised by each being individually framed. Each offers itself to the viewer both as an individual and as part of a larger whole. It is important for me to deny the viewer this simultaneity and to insist on a vehicle that echoes the fact that each example is *only sought out in the first place* on the basis that others like it will be encountered. Each example exists in light of another, consecutive example. I sought to exaggerate this moving from one example to the next by arranging all the images contiguously on a single continuous physical surface, rather than as separate photographs. This continuousness of surface echoes the continuousness of the search.

41 The most conventional conception of this nominal 'thisness' is that of the photograph as "a neat slice of time" or, as Susan Sontag elsewhere puts it, as "an event worth photographing". ('In Plato's Cave', *On Photography* [London; New York: Penguin, 1979], p. 19.) Sontag's book is still considered an authoritative overview of the photograph's status as a political, personal and bureaucratic document. "Photography", she writes, "reinforces a nominalist view of social reality as consisting of small units of an apparently infinite number—as the number of photographs that could be taken of anything is unlimited. Through photographs, the world becomes a series of unrelated, free-standing particles. The camera makes reality atomic, manageable, and opaque." (Ibid., pp. 22-23.) This "atomic" model is particularly evident in the approach of Wolfgang Tillmans, particularly in his book *if one thing matters, everything matters* (London: Tate Publishing, 2003), in which every photograph the artist has issued as a work is presented in a 6x6 cm format. The book contains an interesting interview in which Tillmans, speaking of the huge quantities of frames he shoots in relation to the actual images he issues as pieces, estimates the ratio to be 1 to 175.

42 The relationship between idiosyncrasy and convention is usually encountered in visual art in an oppositional, antagonistic or negational sense. For example, the Dadaists' heuristic proposition of an 'opposite' of convention reveals its exponents as all too aware of being idiosyncrats 'under observation'. In

presenting themselves as idiosyncratic figures against the ground of bourgeois platitude, the Dadaists inaugurated that process whereby the avant-garde artist effectively coins himself as a neologism. The case is different in literature. On p. 32 of Joyce's *Ulysses* (ed. Hans Walter Gabler with Wolfhard Steppe and Claus Melcior [Penguin in association with The Bodley Head, 1986]), we find the words "strandentwining", "upstiffed" and, most spectacularly, "contransmagnificandjewbangtantiality". Even the most effulgent of Joyce's portmanteaux can be coldly dismantled into linguistic units, showing how literature evolves idiosyncrasies from the fabric of linguistic convention rather than in heuristic opposition to it. Deleuze speaks of how the "nonsense" or "esoteric" word of the kind used by Joyce or Lewis Carroll (who favours the pure neologism over the more deconstructible portmanteau) explicates the function of language while simultaneously resisting definition as a thing in itself. He describes such a word as a "linguistic precursor" which "does not have an identity in itself, not even a nominal one". It is, he says, "a word about words...whose value lies not in the extent to which it claims to say something but in the extent to which it claims to state the sense of what it says...The linguistic precursor belongs to a kind of metalanguage, and can be incarnated only within a word devoid of sense from the point of view of the series of first-degree verbal representations." (*Difference and Repetition*, p. 123.)

43 Had I wanted to sing the ideological praises of graffiti, I could have chosen a more accomplished exponent of the art—say, 'Banksy', whose distinctive stencilled pieces (predominantly in Shoreditch and Hoxton, London) have been the subject of cult media coverage. I was drawn towards Elament's more generic and mediocre pieces in the anticipation that my documentation would not be misconstrued as an act of connoisseurship.

44 See *Difference and Repetition*, pp. 45-47. The passages in which Deleuze expands on the term 'vice-diction' champion its value as a term that describes more accurately than contradiction the "differential relation" between beings (their "internal qualitative relation").

45 See *Spinoza's Ethics and De Intellectus Emendatione* (Oxford: Everyman's Library, 1955), p. 8.

46 *Difference and Repetition*, p. 36.

47 Ibid., p. 56.

48 The quote is from Borges's essay, 'Pascal's Sphere', *Borges: A Reader*, ed. Emir Rodriguez Monegal & Alastair Reid (New York: Dutton, 1981), pp. 241-242. The idea has become associated chiefly with Copernicus and Pascal, although, as Borges points out, it was the twelfth-century theologian Alain de Lille who first formulated it: "God is an intelligible sphere, whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere." (Ibid., p. 240.)

49 Gilles Deleuze, p. 34.

50 Ibid., p. 43.

51 Ibid., p. 34.

52 Ibid., p. 119.

53 Ibid.

54 Ibid.

55 Ibid., pp. 119-120. The "object $= x$" is the ontological equivalent of the linguistic precursor described above in end note 41.

56 Ibid., p. 102.

57 Mathesis in the arithmetical sense, rather than in the sense of 'learning in general'.

58 Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 80.

59 This notion of incompletion (or of an arbitrary number of members) is central to the series of works I have completed so far, since each typology is begun with an uncertainty as to whether it will attain the requisite number of examples. Inevitably, numerous categories have ground to halt.

60 Foucault, ibid., p. 82.

61 If Difference is to be thought of in terms of what is missing as well as what is present, then it is wrong to fix a limit on a given series. As Mary Bryden has said, "a repetitive and linear search for the limit in a series is a dead end, since the series itself is extensible and permutable into other series." ('Deleuze Reading Beckett' in *Beckett and Philosophy*, ed. Richard Lane [London: Palgrave, 2002], p. 86.) In my work I am more concerned with the endurance of an autonomous idea which each member of the series claims to embody. It is the nature of the embodiment which interests me—the way it changes from case to case.

Coda

Art as Meta-vocation or 'The Club of Queer Trades'

Most of what I have left to say is based on the premise that the genericisation of the art object that begins with the readymade has its natural conclusion in the appropriation not of existing objects but of existing vocations as art. Art's sometime practical mainstays, painting and sculpture—which once characterised it as a medium-specific vocation in much the same way that other vocations are defined by 'given' praxes—now exist for many artists as essentially nominal terms. Observing the development of art in the latter half of the last century, we notice that one of the ways in which specialisms continue to thrive is through the introduction of some 'extra-vocational' element. Initially, this vocational element plays an overtly materialistic role, being the necessarily 'alien' factor introduced to expand art's visual lexicon from a handful of previously 'exalted' materials. The saturation point quickly reached in this process de Duve labelled the 'whatever'. Now that this lexicon is no longer defined by an antagonistic relationship between exalted and unexalted materials and procedures, it is time to rethink how it is to be defined—for today, it is possible to find practices which offer nothing *but* an extra-vocational element (for example, Joe Scanlan's horticultural *Pay Dirt* and Mark Dion's archaeological *Thames Dig* mentioned in Chapter 4). As art has colonised other vocational lexicons, so its former self-reflexivity (the idea that certain gestures are explicable—or 'allowed'—only through critical and historical cross-referral with others) has given way to a situation in which artworks submit more willingly to an extra-canonical critique. This was perhaps implicit all along in the art/non-art dialectic of the avant-garde, and once the diminution of radical alterity has run its course (abandoning, amongst other dichotomies, the distinction between exalted and unexalted materials) it becomes *explicit*. The era in which art's most defining imperative was to either sanctify unexalted or to profane exalted materials and procedures—thereby engendering, through the elimination of high and low cultural distinctions, a 'complete' continuum of morphological possibilities—has long since come to an end. Having explored its essential, or ontological, condition—initially through occupying strategic nodes on this continuum and then subsequently through the antiphenomenological gestures we recognise as 'dematerialisation'—art is now re-evaluating its morphology as something whose acme does not reside in casting around for 'alternatives' to an existing lexicon (i.e. does not merely 'appropriate') but rather utilises quotidian forms and procedures to situate the artwork within a more exoteric dynamic. If almost all the works reviewed in this thesis can be thought of as demystifying, or attempting to demystify, the rhetorical boundary between the commonplace and the 'elevated' artefact (a boundary that, rudimentary though it may now seem, once served as a datum edge with which to appraise a given artwork's relationship to aesthetics), then I would like to offer 'vocation' as one of the paradigms

under which to consider the artwork within this exoteric dynamic.

Does art's protean colonisation of so many different praxes undermine the very meaning of the term vocation? Can it be called a meta-vocation? What *are* horticulture and archaeology when deployed outside their usual context—that is, as 'theatrical/social formalism'? (Or, to put this last question more provocatively, what if *Thames Dig*'s somewhat prosaic taxonomies harbour some genuinely significant, perhaps even unique, archaeological find?) Perhaps it is merely the inverse of 'public art'; that is, an exoteric procedure carried out within an esoteric context. We can imagine an individual who appropriates the production of compost to not entirely horticultural ends, but who does so without feeling the need to enunciate the activity within the sphere of art—in spite of a conviction that the subtleties of compost production are indeed worthy of the kind of esoteric contemplation encouraged in that sphere. The misgivings of such an individual, who would advance an activity as worthy of esoteric consideration but not through the channels of art, perhaps lie in the feeling that what is 'gained' in the displacement from one sphere to another is less than what is relinquished. There is, even in an era of diminished alterity, something about the way that much art still operates which always results in displacement, in extracting a thing from its place in the world—as though it cannot be considered interesting until regarded as 'other'. This principle of otherness is a shockingly straightforward principle, one that effectively puts the 'vocationally disinterested' agency of art forward as a form of arbitration. The problem with it is that here the term 'other' doesn't, as many believe, actually convey a thing's or a procedure's quality of no longer being 'itself', but simply describes an enacted displacement, and is as such non-objective. To displace an object or procedure from its accustomed worldly position is not necessarily to bring about a situation in which it somehow functions as other with an intensity directly proportionate to its former identity. As Wentworth's *Making Do and Getting By* shows, the identity of the object before it is displaced is just as contingent as any condition of *otherness* we may ascribe to its 'new identity' within a contrived artistic artifice. Things attain a fixed position in the world because they continue to be the perceived terminus of recurrent deliberations and intentions we aim at them ('function' being the clearest manipulation of this). By the 'otherness' supposedly occasioned by displacement, people often refer to nothing more than an absence of such contingencies, to a desire to contemplate an uncontingent object.

An activity which resists the temptation to take part in this game, which instead chooses to highlight one, some, or perhaps even all, of an appropriated thing's perceived contingencies, we might call 'embedded art'. Scanlan's *Nesting Bookcases* straddle two spheres rather than displacing an object from one to another: the collector who installs his gallery acquisition in a domestic environment is encouraged to dissolve two distinct ontological provinces into a single republic, bringing an artwork—supposedly the most metaphysical and exalted of objects (with the possible exception of religious relics and

liturgical paraphernalia)—into proximity with his personal possessions. Admittedly, these works do have a somewhat 'missionary' quality; as Michael Newman's essay implies, Scanlan's art masquerades as 'design' as much to preach the gospel of art's 'disappearance' to a secular congregation of objects as to advance the merits of an alternative vocation. This dialogue with the disappearance conceit—or any other bygone critical stance—is understandable, for how else can art adopt an alternative vocation without simply *becoming* that vocation?

It is possible that only a certain amount of these bygone critical flashpoints will be compatible with the adoption of an alternative vocation. With works such as *Pay Dirt*—an allegory of an artwork's institutional passage from conception to consumption—Scanlan continues to work his way through them. The strategy is this: embed your art within a wider vocational fabric in such a way as to invite its extraction through a critique once restricted to art's institutional dominion. In so doing, you behave as if the rule as it once applied within art is henceforward subject to your own personal amendment, an amendment proposed from the perspective of another discipline. Of course, this 'other discipline' can be potentially anything, and is perhaps the means by which initially hermetic art 'theory' will become gradually 'applied' through vernacular deployment. Where, once, art extracted objects and vocations from life in order to enhance its understanding of itself and invent new theories of art, it now embeds those theories within the quotidian landscape, feeding the refined mineral 'art' homoeopathically back into the ore from which it was extracted. However, these rhetorically embedded art practices hardly ever remain *incommunicado*; rarely do their authors resist the fanfare of explicit artistic enunciation, and the more extreme projects—such as Mark Dion's *Thames Dig*—leave one feeling that an existing vocation has been transfigured into art in precisely the same way that existing objects ever were.

Other forms of embedded art, following in the tradition of N.E. Thing Company (see note 28, Chapter 1), are subtler, perhaps even working in reverse. For example, David Bachelor's slightly Hancockian *Found Monochromes* (an ongoing series of photographs of blank street signs and billboards) effectively parodies the practical economy of formalism, the 'everyday' being utilised not as some alien element introduced into art but as an analogical flashpoint. The result is a sort of Venn diagram whose two sets, 'historically exalted object' and 'overlooked commonplace object', intersect to form a third term. Shown recently as a slideshow piece at Anthony Wilkinson Gallery, London, *Found Monochromes* (figs. 33-34) presents this intersection in such a way as to deny the primacy of either term over the other. Such simultaneity is possible, it seems, only through photo-documentation, the camera arbitrating between cultural and quotidian contexts as a propositional intermediary (whereas physically appropriated signs would appear as 'actual' rather than proposed monochromes). While, in my own work, the camera allows me—as it does Bachelor—to appropriate something while leaving it embedded in the place of its discovery, I have little interest in harnessing its mediational powers to a similar canonical

didacticism; I am not interested in the extent to which my selections may resemble bygone artistic tropes, for such didacticism subordinates the randomness of the world to the sovereignty of art historicity. As discussed in the last chapter, the procedure I have contrived to present this randomness is founded not on the canonical institution of art, but on a more general institutional aesthetic. I want to end by qualifying how this aesthetic (of endorsement) is related to a increasing tendency to conceive my work through the paradigm of *métier*.

Ideas of what artists 'do' are often distorted by the manner of art's mainstream reportage, which is invariably conducted in such a way as to court the response: 'What? Someone does *that* for a living?' Its glib appearances on the *and finally...* addenda of regional news bulletins subsists on a run-that-by-me-again principle which seeks to elicit a response whereby the viewer reaches out for some sort of vocational endorsement: through what kind of vocational loophole has this 'Martin Creed', the author of THE LIGHTS GOING ON AND OFF, managed to slip unnoticed? Artists, for their part, still tacitly draw a line between whatever it is that they do and what everyone else does on a daily basis—in spite of an often vocationally piratical approach to the practical exigencies of artistic production (a situation which is ironic rather than hypocritical). On beginning the poster works (roughly three years ago) I began to predicate my work as an artist on a paradigm that fused specific art-formalist concerns with more general vocational anxieties. The series can perhaps even be seen—if only within the context of this research project—as a personal consolidation of the readymade's mutation into vocational critique. I was interested in making work that looked like it might be 'of service', that had a generic enough appearance to suggest another walk of life. My strategy was to use photography's ubiquity as a trans-vocational medium to suggest a sort of occupational romanticism—the visually unchanging style of the works being suggestive of that general sense in which we can conceive of art as 'a calling in search of a place', a *métier* in search of a position, a post. This, I think, was in response to a rhetorical question I had always asked myself: what form would my work take if art did not exist as a context in which to realise it? Surely the first thing it would have to relinquish would be its diverse physicality, its prerogative to be whatever, for without the art context, the 'work' would have no choice but to opt for a 'trade', and this trade would have to take its chances with all the others in the world. The degree to which this trade resembled any other would be entirely up to me: on the one hand, we can conceive of a commonplace trade undertaken in a highly unorthodox manner (like those Las Vegas marriage officials lampooned on a particularly good episode of *The Simpsons*); on the other, we can conceive of an individual inventing an entirely new trade: if you like, a vocational neologism. It seems to me that artists are for the most part (but not exclusively) to be considered as members of the latter category. More on this in due course. As to the rhetorical existence of art without an art context, on realising that my subdivision of the world into a proliferation of categories would not fit easily into the existing structures of commerce, I hit upon the idea of

expressing it in the medium of fiction: I would write a fictional account of a character whose 'job' was to bureaucratise his responses to worldly repetitions. After a short while (in fact, a few seconds later), rather than trying to invent such a character, I decided to become him, to take on the role, to *accept* the appointment—as if from some higher, possibly municipal, authority. I should stress that this vocational conceit falls short of any notion of 'going into business'; it is restricted to the conception and production of goods, and does not extend to their distribution in a market place. I don't disseminate my posters as products on the open market; I produce them as unique objects and show them in an art context. They are to be thought of as products of which only one physical example exists, rather than as the merchandise of an accredited trade. These products are not marketed, for it is they themselves that market the idea of a fictional vocation.

For an artist whose fascination with art was, from the outset, chiefly with its espousals of non-art and the related disavowal of its vocational characteristics, this imagining of a fictional vocation is quite natural. In fact, I perceive it to be related to the paradox that, historically, the closer art gets to a condition of non-art, or to a condition of disappearance, the more it requires art's institutional superintendence. To address the question of what possible form an artist's work might take or what possible home it might find *without* art's institutional superintendence is, from the viewpoint of the consciously enunciated gesture, to consider an impossible artwork—for, as we have seen with Scanlan's *Nesting Bookcases*, the best an artist can hope for is a sort of duplicity of appearance. I believe the question is best answered by proposing a fictional/hypothetical superintendence: one erected prior to the inevitable fact of institutional ratification. To our avant-garde and conceptualist forbears, the rhetorical annihilation of art was a device for the creation of more art, a necessary psychological inducement to act; for contemporary artists it is also a device for the creation of more art, but functions as a watershed that must be *straddled* rather than crossed. As far as the 'vocational pirate' is concerned, whichever praxis is adopted, it is not in order to 'go beyond' art but simply to place a foot in both art and what we might cumbersomely refer to as 'life'.

As we know, institutional critique investigates the conditions under which art exists, how it is accommodated in everyday life: how, in short, it is possible. Its strategy is often the occupation of a rhetorical watershed between art and life, a viewpoint from which to spectate on the dissolution of categorical distinctions (as with Bachelor's *Found Monochromes*). It is true that its modalities, in adopting generic procedures to camouflage or subdue authorial individuality, have so far been of a predominantly impersonal nature, but it was not always thus. The aforementioned distinction—cumbersome or not—between art and life is crucial to an understanding of some pivotal (and not just 20th century) artistic figures, Oscar Wilde being the most significant example. It it is no coincidence that, in recalling Wilde, it is his epigrams for which we instinctively reach, the popular image being that of an artist whose most personally satisfying creations were neither his plays nor his poems and novels, but

the things he uttered while adjusting a cravat, stepping forth from a carriage or passing through customs (with "nothing to declare except my genius"). Wilde was one of the first to fully appreciate that we attach as much value to the quotidian context of a beautiful thing as we do its inherent beauty, and his epigrams—beguiling things said in dull moments—have survived as the epitome of this appreciation. So much is known of Wilde's social life that his epigrams have somehow retained something of the context in which they were uttered: each invites us to imagine a different scenario which required a different rejoinder. This contextual immanence would doubtless have pleased Wilde, who indicated quite candidly that he would have preferred his mere existence to stand as his work, or for his art to stand as a glossary of his lifestyle. Of course, Wilde's conflation of art and life was eventually turned against him during his 1895 trial for homosexual acts, his conviction seemingly augmented by the prosecution's insistence that what one was capable of in art one was surely capable of in life: never has art been so institutionally ratified as when extracts from *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and other of Wilde's works were read out in court by the prosecution in an effort to corroborate the charges of moral and sexual turpitude.

All this is far from saying that Wilde *invented* institutional critique, but the conflation of art and life to which he subscribed (so publicly as to remain, to this day, its standard-bearer) *is* one of its central tenets. The intense individualism that was, for him, the natural corollary of this conflation is a seemingly far cry from the rather more impersonal (though equally insurgent) approach of conceptualism and dematerialised art, which were concerned less with the perceived individuality of the author than with the given parameters of art's dissemination. My deliberately dissonant mention of Wilde at this late stage is to emphasise one final important characteristic of institutional critique. Wilde's expression of individuality is a monolithic assertion of selfhood in the (equally monolithic) face of institutional censure; it is as expressive as can be, sometimes overbearingly so. Up until the 1960s, the conflation of art and life is invariably the province of bombastic self-promotion (though Wilde usually transcends bombast through the simple expedient of always being right). With conceptualism/dematerialisation comes the idea that individuality must be metered rather than meted out. The 'personality' of the artist is carefully rationed, not unleashed in subjective torrents: subjectivity can be disclosed only by finding a reciprocal institutional outlet, so that the work seems to be as much *its* creation as the author's. Individuality is never imposed; it is, rather, *discovered*, and is thus no more or less 'expressive' than the context of its expression demands. At its most archly didactic, institutional critique is like a sauna in which art sweats out all its toxins: the 'work' perspires from the pores of the context in which it is experienced, and in so doing demonstrates that individualism need not be thought of as a monolithic assertion of selfhood in the face of monolithic institutional control, but as a series of contingent consolidations of subjectivity, consolidations that are cognizant of the manner in which they

are superintended, or induced.

Earlier, in Martin Creed's doorstop piece, I noted an artwork which indicates nothing more than our entry into a culturally consecrated space—one whose rules, as unspecified as they may be, are nevertheless upheld by some tacit institutional superintendence. Works that adopt the look of existing vocations, and that produce objects that seem rested from another walk of life, effectively propose a pre-emptive institutional superintendence. What such works emphasise—and I am alluding to my own here—is an author's need to ratify their behavioural impulses in such a way that they are grounded not only in the moment of their expression 'as art' but as an expression within the 'serviceable' domain of the invoked vocation. In its suggestion of hypothetical representational vehicles of varying plausibility, the 'continuum of thought' proposed in the series of current poster works spans the realms of service and extreme indulgence, and is intended to indicate the difficulty of how to reconcile one's own psychological caprices with worldly demands: how *does* one fit in? From a purely civilian viewpoint, a given individual's behaviour tessellates within the general pattern of social conventions with varying precision: life visits upon each of us all manner of displacements, occasionally rendering every citizen a square peg in a round hole. In some situations it is all too often the very 'normative' behaviour we self-consciously adopt that actually makes us stand out, while other situations present the obverse problem of fitting in to the scheme of things while simultaneously preserving one's individuality. Sometimes *in* the crowd and *of* it, at other times in the crowd but *not* of it, the individual oscillates between camouflage and exposition, between self-diminution and self-amplification. The speed of this oscillation tends to create the illusion of a static or predictable character, and within everyday life—particularly within the context of 'public service'—vocation, *métier* and trade are the armature of this illusion, erected as they are on the rhetorical mutual exclusion of self-diminution and self-amplification (if we agree that servitude is, on the whole, taken as a temporary abeyance of the latter). Clearly, these polarities are a lot less mutually exclusive in some spheres than in others, and there are even certain trades which seem designed purely for individuals to demonstrate that 'this is not all they do'. It is a well-known fact that taxi drivers possess as many strings to their bow as they have passengers. These are, admittedly, almost exclusively *commentatorial* in nature—their sedentary peregrinations within a limited geography somehow inducing a proclivity to socio-political dissection. (Sartre, who hated the idea of defining people solely through vocation, would have loved English cabbies.)

Vocation can be thought of as the generic ground against which to perceive the figure of individuality. Of course, *institutional* vocations that require the subordination of individuality to a collective monolithic identity, be it corporate, party political, municipal or otherwise, seem to emphasise the ground over the figure. But even those vocations which operate in a seemingly more informal fashion—as small business or lone individual—invariably do so according to an equally strict protocol; it is just that it is

165

enforced from a more evidently personalised perspective. In these more autocratic or oligarchic 'institutions', the figure permeates into the ground far more noticeably; that is to say, we discern an *author* in their protocol, and the individuals who implement this protocol do so as 'author surrogates'. I have stated that my own work presents an individual's findings as if from the perspective of an institutional collective, each work being offered in the manner of a 'public inquiry'; I forgot to mention that, when passers-by or residents of housing estates ask me why I am photographing a particular subject, I tend to tell them I'm 'from the council'. Although this statement began as an instinctive lie perpetrated to conceal a genuine shame at not knowing where my activities fitted into the scheme of things, I have begun to think of it as at least metaphorically true—in the sense that it euphemises the individual/institution conflation advanced as the impetus for the work. Where the activities of, say, Scanlan, Dion and Cummins & Lewandowska can be considered to be *actually* embedded within prevailing praxes, social conditions and commodificational infrastructures, mine is undertaken *as if* it were embedded within prevailing praxes, social conditions and commodificational infrastructures.

I want to leave the reader with a short critique of a literary work which I believe has an allegorical relationship to the idea of vocationally embedded art. At least, *I* am appropriating it as an allegory—in the conviction that what has come to pass in art is perhaps best considered within the paradigm of fiction. While I have done my best not to prognosticate in this thesis, I cannot resist the temptation—indeed, I think the approach adopted in my work requires me to yield to it—to submit that, just as the 'history of art' gave way to the 'theory of art', this theory of art must in turn give way to a 'fiction of art', one that can be realised, moreover, not as criticism, nor even as literature of any kind, but *as art*.

The work in question is G.K Chesterton's 1905 book, *The Club of Queer Trades*. To become a member of Chesterton's Club of Queer Trades "one must have originated one's profession and earn a living by it" (as Martin Gardner writes in his introduction to the book). The examples we come across in Chesterton's book of six stories—each devoted to a different 'trade'—include such vocational neologisms as P.G. Northover's Adventures and Romance Agency, dedicated to restoring richness and diversity to the lives of a jaded populace through the enactment of real-life theatrical dramas "to waylay us and lead us splendidly astray"; The Organiser of Repartee, a gentleman who hires himself out at dinner parties and manipulates the conversation in a prearranged fashion, so as to 'assist' the host's witty *bon mots*; The Professional Detainers, "paid by our clients to detain in conversation, on some harmless pretext, people whom they want out of the way for a few hours"; a botanist-turned-estate agent, one Mr. Montmorency, who specialises in leasing arboreal villas; The Strangers Assassination Company, whose paradoxical *raison d'être* I will leave to the reader's imagination; Professor Chadd, who invents a new language (attempting to communicate with people solely through the medium of dance) and who

swears that "till people understand it...he will not speak in any other"; and, finally, The Voluntary Criminal Court, a judiciary with no legally ratified coercive powers that tries people for 'minor crimes' such as "selfishness...impossible vanity...scandalmongering ...or stinginess to guests and their dependants". Each story relays events that completely discombobulate the protagonists—until, that is, the mystery is explained by the machinations of an invisible agency. This agency is any of the trades listed above, but they are revealed as such only in the final denouement of each story. The pivotal character of every story is Basil Grant. It is his job to work out what is going on, and we follow him from one seemingly absurd or arbitrary situation to another. Basil's initially bizarre but retrospectively logical behaviour is the necessary fictional component for revealing the existence of each trade. In every adventure his friends openly assert that he is going mad, but this madness is revealed to pertain quite logically to the prevailing order of things. In the final story we are unsurprised to discover that Basil has been in on the Club of Queer Trades all along; in fact, it is *he* who sits as *judge* in the The Voluntary Criminal Court that features in the book's final story. In this story, whose ending doubles up as an AGM for The Club of Queer Trades, each member of the Club, starting with Basil, is called upon to give an account of his trade. It is here that the book ends, each practitioner's justifications for his trade being left to the reader's imagination....

Such justifications would doubtless pursue the argument that it is sometimes necessary for certain individuals to adopt a peculiar position in order to fit into the scheme of things. In Chesterton's fiction the meaning of 'the scheme of things' is as general as 'society', and the members of society who patronise the various trades of the Club are—if one reads between the lines—evidently of a certain social standing, the peculiarity of each trade being conveniently reciprocated by an individual who has devised an equally unusual way of offloading a private income. But that is a merely incidental resemblance to the art world. Chesterton's is a society peopled by individuals who realise a kind of art within the very humdrum business and commercial praxes (once) supposed to be its antithesis. When we first encounter his vocational renegades they appear much the same as any other clerical drudge, bereft as they are of any tell-tale trappings of eccentricity. But the peculiar nature of each individual's vocation—his 'art', if you will, 'of how to live'—is enhanced rather than constrained by the clerical protocols of its 'administration'. This bureaucratic consistency is augmented with the disclosure that all the Queer Trades operate from a single building. The discovery of this last fact ratifies what from all other perspectives would seem deviant behaviour. Taken individually, each tradesman might risk being seen simply as the 'exception to the rule'; seen as a member of a wider guild of tradesmen he gains credibility. All tradesmen are united not only in their divergence from the norm, but in their willingness to express this divergence in vocational unison: the greater the divergence, the greater the need for institutional cohesion. It is a similar situation with visual art, in whose name the many disparate claims made are at such variance with one another as to require a

superintendent critical faction to span the gaps between them. Chesterton rendered fictionally the kind of thing that came to pass in art, instead presenting his unlikely practitioners within the more socialist paradigm of vocation and making them answer—in that typically Edwardian manner which somehow fuses sobriety and extreme indulgence—to a larger institution, to a 'guild of alterity'. It is to a similar fusion of sobriety and indulgence that my current work aspires.

Chesterton's The Club of Queer Trades does not exhibit complete vocational alterity; it is a vocational reality that unfolds in tandem with a more conventional one: it intersects with society while simultaneously being distant from it. It was Foucault who first coined the word 'heterotopias' (see endnote 2 of the last chapter) to account for this phenomenon as it occurs in the prevailing order of things (e.g., as self-contained realities like penal colonies, residential homes, cruise ships etc.). I believe that art's inexorable baptism of once alien materials and the elision of this into the colonisation of alien vocations qualifies it as a form of heterotopia. Usually thought of socio-geographically, heterotopia has, with art's superintendence, gained another dimension. In the final chapter I attached the qualification 'ontological' to the word heterotopia in order to describe the 'auditioning' process whereby my (earlier) work sought to place certain everyday objects at one remove from their accustomed place in the world. With regard to the current work, I must go further, since the practice now aims not just at positioning the work within a world known as the art world, but aims to envelop itself, before its reception therein, in a quasi-vocational artifice. The difference between the work as it was and as it is now is not just a material/representational difference. The work as it was did not make the viewer dwell on its author's vocational relationship to the world—i.e. on what its author 'does' on a day to day basis. The object appropriations and manipulations were gestures that seemed to happen entirely outside of this paradigm. The work as it is now—more rigourously programmatic, homogenised and self-institutionalised—attempts to make the viewer think more about artistic practice as métier, about the contiguity of art practices with other practices, about where artists 'fit in', exactly, if at all. And yet this is just a ruse, just another artistic conceit—an artifice that allows me to insert myself within a rhetorical vocational universe. It is rôle-playing: a psychological position adopted in order to explore what happens to artistic subjectivity when it is exercised with a stylistic perfunctoriness similar to that found in commonplace institutional rubrics. The readymade is the origin of such stylistic perfunctoriness (or, if you prefer, the oracle of stylelessness). The readymade was the seemingly beyond-the-pale act undertaken to find out whether art was still possible—whether art could still 'occur'—when denuded of authorial style. I think that what we still do as artists, even now, in an age of such critical and canonical hypersensitivity, has to do with imagining scenarios—often extreme scenarios—in which art is still possible. The fruits of these imaginings have been, and often still continue to be, works which eschew intrinsic qualities in favour of an extrinsic, or annotational, demonstration of art's

ontological frontiers. For my own part, I am still interested in such extrinsic demonstration, but am highly ambivalent about relinquishing inherence as a defining characteristic of art. It may be that future work of mine will explore scenarios under which art is still possible, not by offering a metonymical annotation of its ontological frontiers (i.e., by offering a physical art object that is entirely extrinsic in character) but by allowing the scenario to remain entirely in the imaginative realm. In short, rather than actually producing artworks, it may be better to pretend that those artworks already exist, and to offer a commentary on them.

Glossary of Terms

Aesthetic of disinterest. A term used to describe certain 'civilian' (see below) gestures/tableaux that have no aesthetic aim but that are nevertheless appraised within an aesthetic paradigm.

'Civilian'. A military metaphor used to distinguish artist appropriators from non-artist appropriators.

Civilian Duchampianism. Civilians' use of objects to stand in for objects that are not to hand. This process seen from an artistic (more specifically, post-Duchampian) perspective.

Civilised Primitivism. Describes the ad hoc improvisation of man-made artefacts for purposes other than those for which they were designed. It is the means by which **ulteriority** (see below) is manifested in objects.

Cordon sanitaire. The means by which the audience is kept at a physical and/or psychological distance from an artwork. In this thesis it more specifically describes the phenomenon of 'quarantining' unmanipulated objects away from their quotidian context in order to emphasise certain qualities over others. The cordon sanitaire (manifested as plinth, vitrine, didactic captioning, restriction of access etc.) is visual art's equivalent to the proscenium in the theatre.

Difference/Difference-in-itself. Difference considered as an *a priori* generative force rather than an *a posteriori* appraisal of diversity.

Enunciation. The act of announcing an object to be an artwork; the baptism of materials and objects hitherto excluded from artistic use.

Heterotopias. According to its inventor, Foucault: places that "are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality [e.g. prisons and cruise ships]." (see Chapter 5, endnote 2.) Places that function with an autonomy that is a microcosmic representation of the rules and institutional governance of the immediate society that contains them, but which are displaced/annexed/distant from that society.

Hyperreality. The idea that the individual objects constituting the 'material' of our observable reality are simulacral instantiations of a model reality, rather than its ontological essence.

Institutional critique. The tendency of artworks to draw specific attention to the immediate spatial or institutional context of their expression. An artwork can be said to critique the institution of art when its inherent qualities emphasise, or 'reify', certain disseminatory aspects which are in fact common to all artworks but which are usually occluded by their more localised concerns. Institutional critique is to be distinguished from **canonical critique**, which is the creation of artworks whose inherent qualities engage directly with those of preceding/contemporary works in the canon (à la modernism).

Morphological alterity. The quality of an artwork's being alternative in shape, or having

formal properties that seem directly, deliberately and even provocatively alternative to, the prevailing or dominant 'school'. The use of materials and objects hitherto ignored by art to create sculptural forms that would have been impossible to create with more traditional materials. E.g., Anthony Caro's I-beam figuration.

Nominalist. The term used to describe artists who test the veracity of a general idea with particular incarnations of that idea—especially in such a fashion as to show the limitations of unexemplified thinking.

Object = x. Also 'virtual object' (see **virtual**). A (monadic) unit of being underlying all possible objects/beings. The object = x describes the potential for Being-in-general to assume the particular incarnations we refer to when speaking of this or that being.

Occidental Ethnography. A term coined to describe Haim Steinbach's tendency to present western consumer products as 'anthropological curiosities'.

Ontological heterotopia. A term describing art's displacement of commonplace artefacts into a metaphysical counter-site that proposes parallel but alien *raisons d'être* for them.

Physical rhetoric. Thought manifested as the manipulation of physical (i.e. tactile) material.

Plastic Form. The form of an object or piece of matter considered distinct from any function it might have as an artefact. The availability of such form for sensate rather than utilitarian appraisal.

Sculpture of artefact. Used to distinguish sculpture that manipulates base materials (which I hold to be non-artefacts) from sculpture that manipulates already formed materials (which I hold to be artefacts). The former and the latter are hypothetical extremes that given practices might tend towards, rather than mutually exclusive modes of sculpture (some practitioners comb both elemental and artefactual approaches within a single work).

'The everyday'. While, in the past decade, it has suffered semantic dissolution through overuse, the everyday is still a seemingly necessary term for distinguishing between those artworks which emphasise their quotidian origins and those which don't. Like everyone else, I have no catch-all definition of this term but, being as guilty of using it as the next man, I should offer an observation of its application in general art discourse. When people speak of the everyday, it seems that it tends to be either (a) in tacit antithesis to, or dialectical relationship with, some notion of the sublime or (b) in equally tacit presumption of empathy from their interlocutor/audience about what it means for fellow citizens to co-exist on a day-to-day basis. A thoroughgoing notion of the everyday that paid even vague lip-service to issues of paradigmatic cultural—e.g., third world/first world, rural/urban—differences would surely have to be more primarily anthropological than artistic in ambit. Art is not necessarily an unsuitable vocational context in which to explore the everyday, but its habitual presumption of a generalised audience—its purporting to address 'all-comers'—would seem incompatible with the highly specific details that characterise *my* and *your* 'everyday'.

171

The readymade's semiotic imperative. This term refers to the incipient incarnations of readymade-based art; to Duchamp's initial substitution of a generic item for an artwork; to the idea that this commonplace object's intrinsic qualities are subordinated to a signification of the absence of those qualities normally associated with artworks. The object is a sign (whence semiotic) indicating that these qualities are 'missing'.

Typological Aesthetics. The appraisal of a thing's qualities through comparison with others of its class or genus.

Ulteriority. Used in relation to artistic and certain civilian gestures to describe the ability of an object to perform a role for which it is not intended, an application that contradicts its 'signature' (i.e., what it 'is'). Ulteriority reveals that the signature of an object is not just immanent, but imm*i*nent—that is, defined not just by what it is but by what providence has in store for it.

Vernacular. Used to describe those instances in which the artistic appropriation of an object foregrounds its quotidian attributes in an entirely ostensive and transparent fashion, rather than emphasising a) its uncanniness/'otherness' when decontextualised (as with surrealism) or b) its ability to negate prevailing aesthetic attitudes (as with Duchamp).

Virtual. In the thesis 'virtual' denotes a lack or want, not of materiality in general (like 'cyberspace'), but of a particular kind of materiality that is missing from its place. Virtual is used to indicate something that is not 'actually' present but rather intimated or implied. With regard to typologies and taxonomies, virtual is also used to describe not just a want of a particular kind of materiality missing from its place, but a shift from one material thing to another. E.g., the single criterion that unites otherwise different species together as a genus is itself akin to an unseen or 'virtual' species (or virtual object) that exists within the interstices of the visible ones.

Vocational neologism. The coining of new and officially unrecognised vocations. Artistic practices considered as an example of this.

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Illustrations

Fig. 1: Marcel Duchamp, *Fountain*, 1917 (photographed by Alfred Stieglitz)
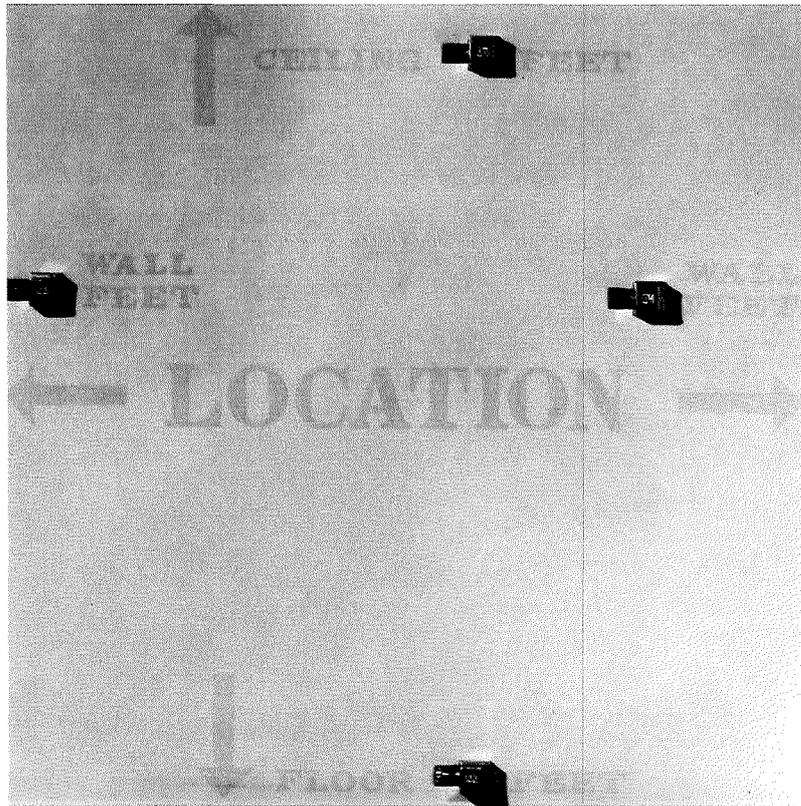
Fig. 2: Robert Morris, *Location*, 1963

Fig. 3: Elisabeth Price, *Trophy 2000-*, 2000-

182

Fig. 4: Martin Creed, *Work# 200, half the air in a given space*, 1998

Fig. 5: Martin Creed, *Work # 115, a doorstop fixed to a floor to let a door open only 45°*, 1995

Fig. 6: Martin Creed, *Work # 100, on a tiled floor, in an awkward place, a cubic stack of tiles built on top of one of the existing tiles*, 1994-1999
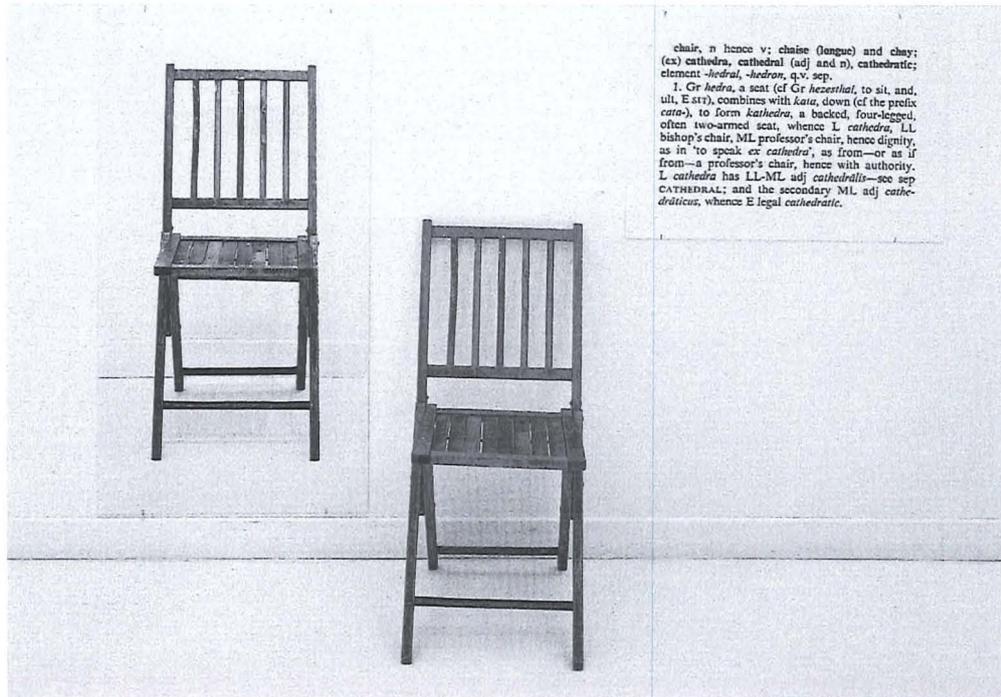
Fig. 7: Joseph Kosuth, *One and Three Chairs*, 1967
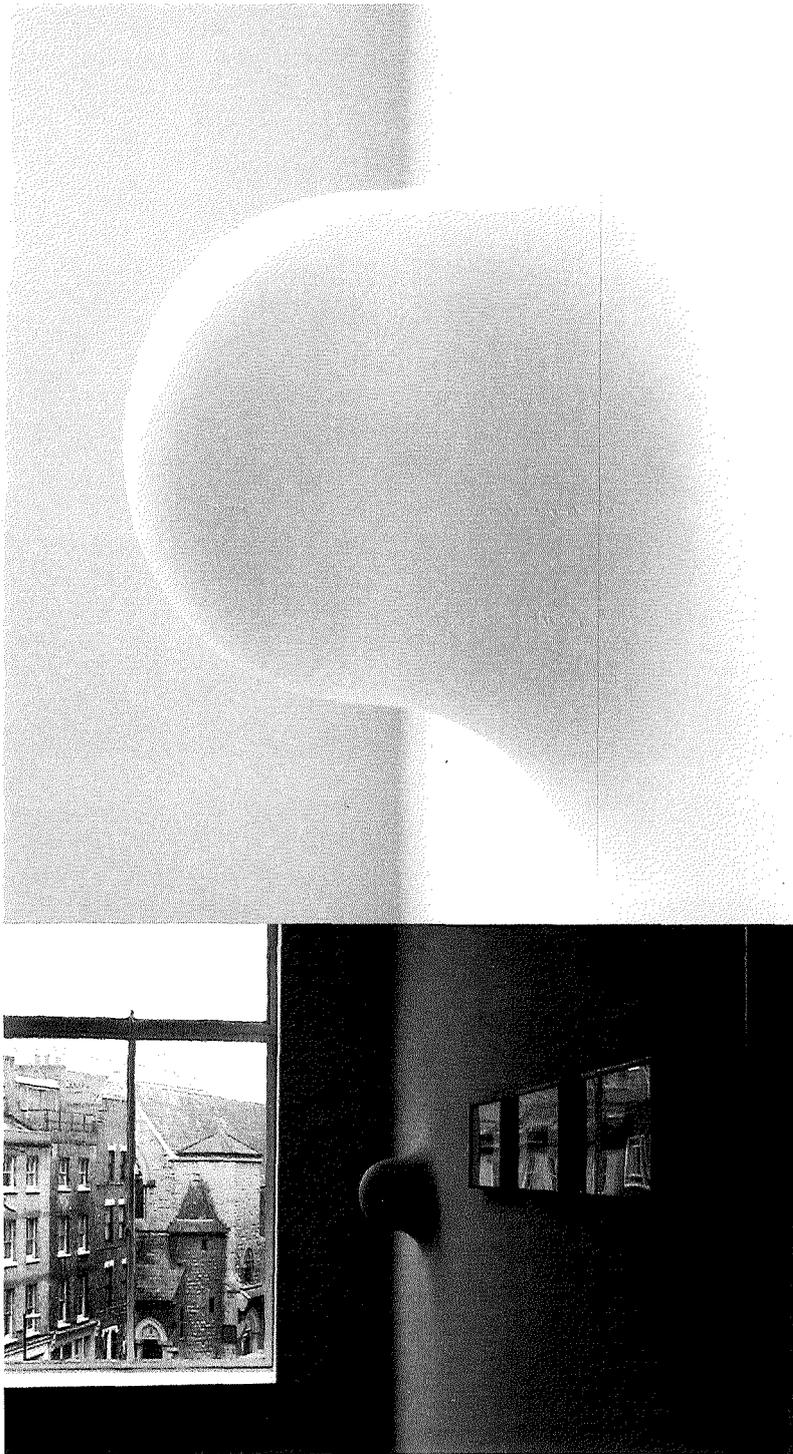
Fig. 8: Martin Creed, *Work # 102, a protrusion from a wall*, 1994

185

Fig. 9: Martin Creed, *Work # 179, some Blu-Tack kneaded, rolled into a ball, and depressed against a wall,* 1993

Fig. 10: Martin Creed, *Work #142, a large piece of furniture partially obstructing a door,* 1996-1999

Fig. 11: Gray's Inn Road, London, 1982
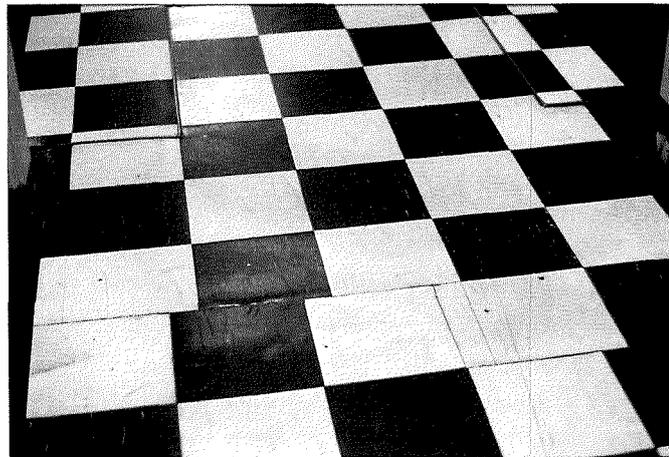
Fig.13: Bloomsbury, London, 1997

Fig. 14: South West France, 1982

Fig. 12: Moorgate, London, 1979

Fig. 15: Staten Island, New York, 1975
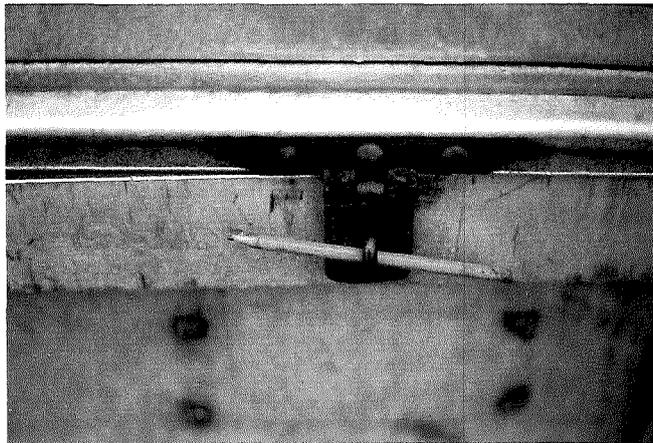
Fig. 16: Islington, London, 1979
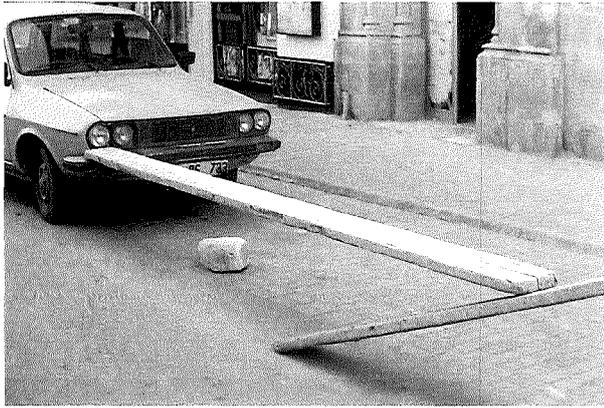
Fig 17: Nicosia, 2001
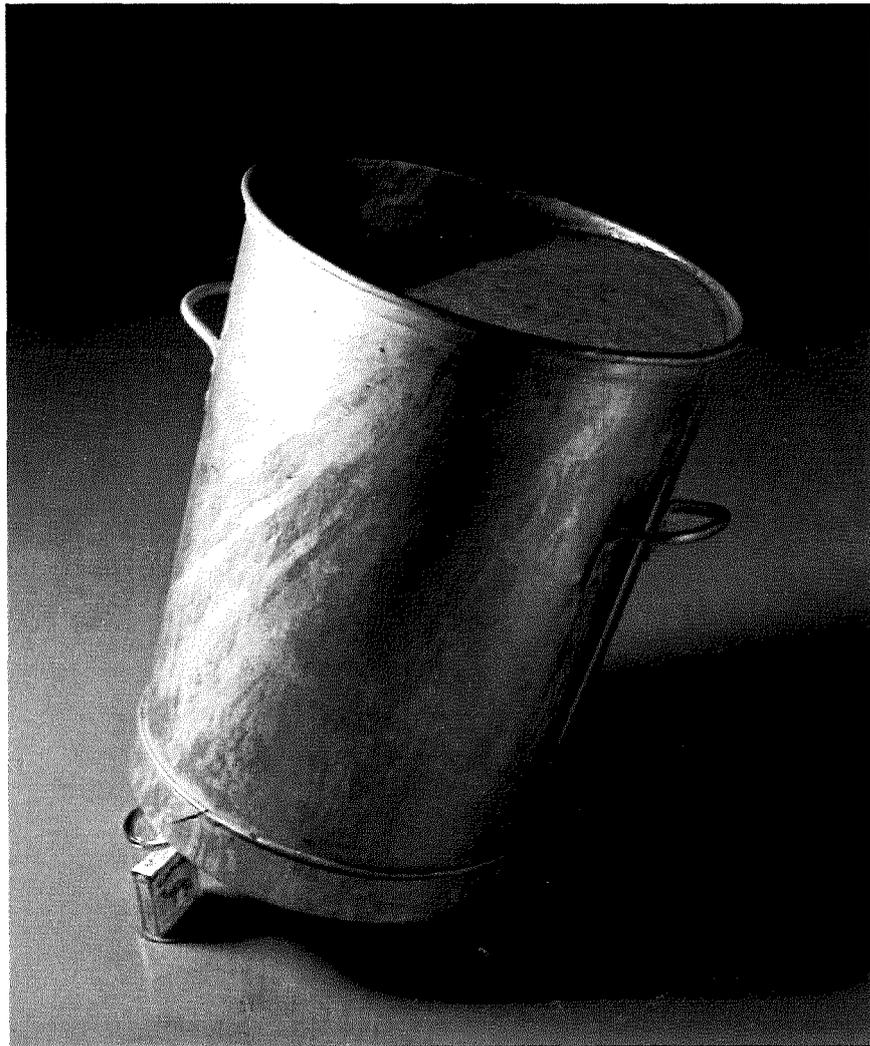
Fig. 18: Richard Wentworth, *Store*, 1986

Fig. 19: Richard Wentworth, *Shower*, 1984
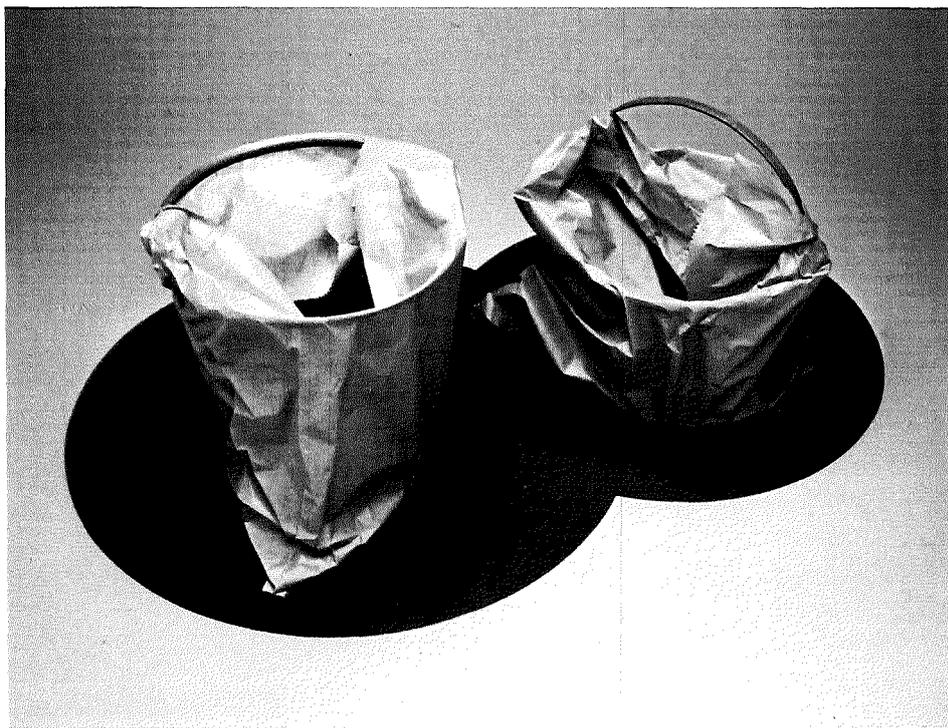
**Fig. 20:** Richard Wentworth, *Pair of Paper Bags with Large and Small Buckets*, 1983
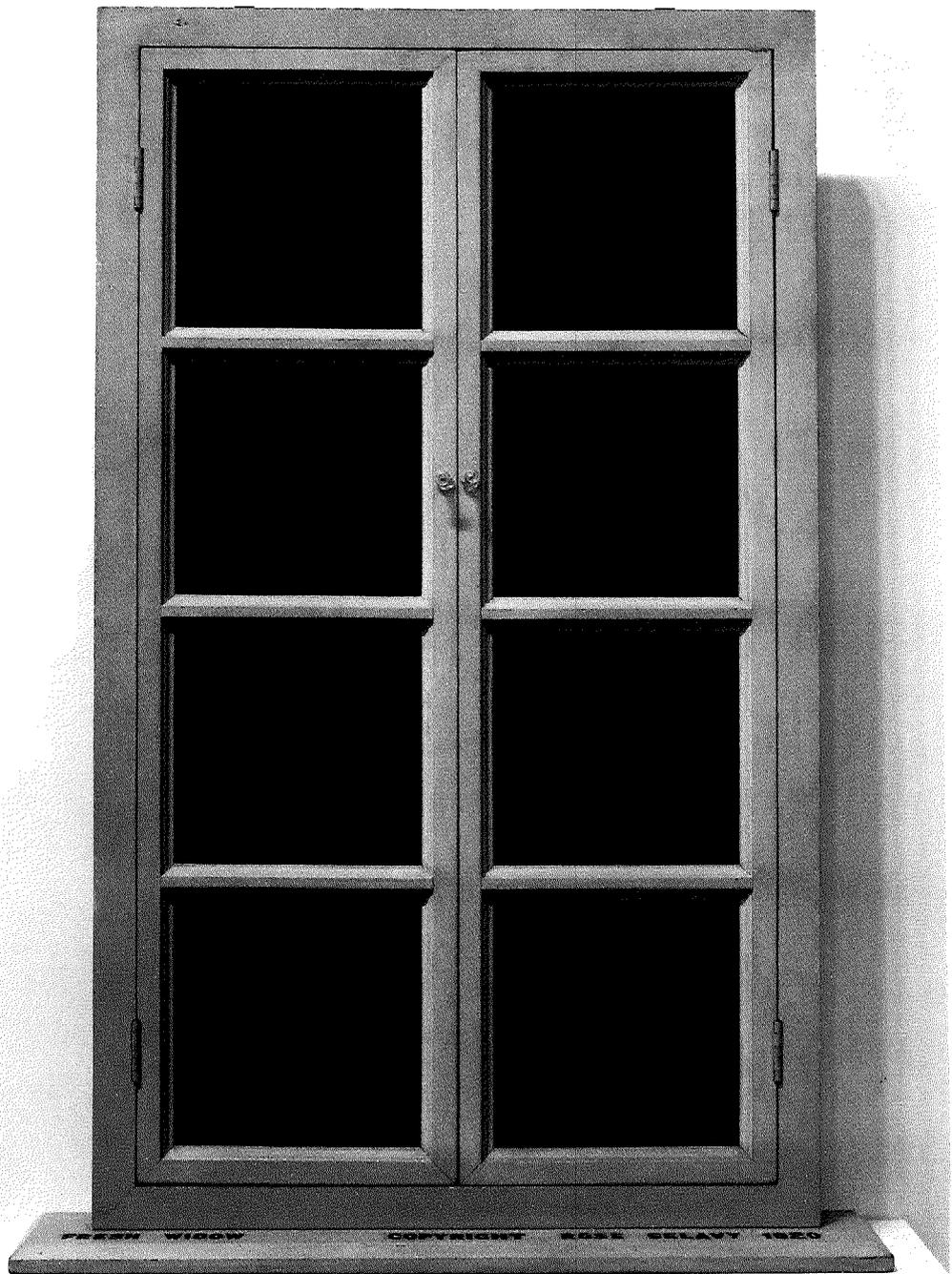
Fig 21: Marcel Duchamp, *Fresh Widow*, 1920
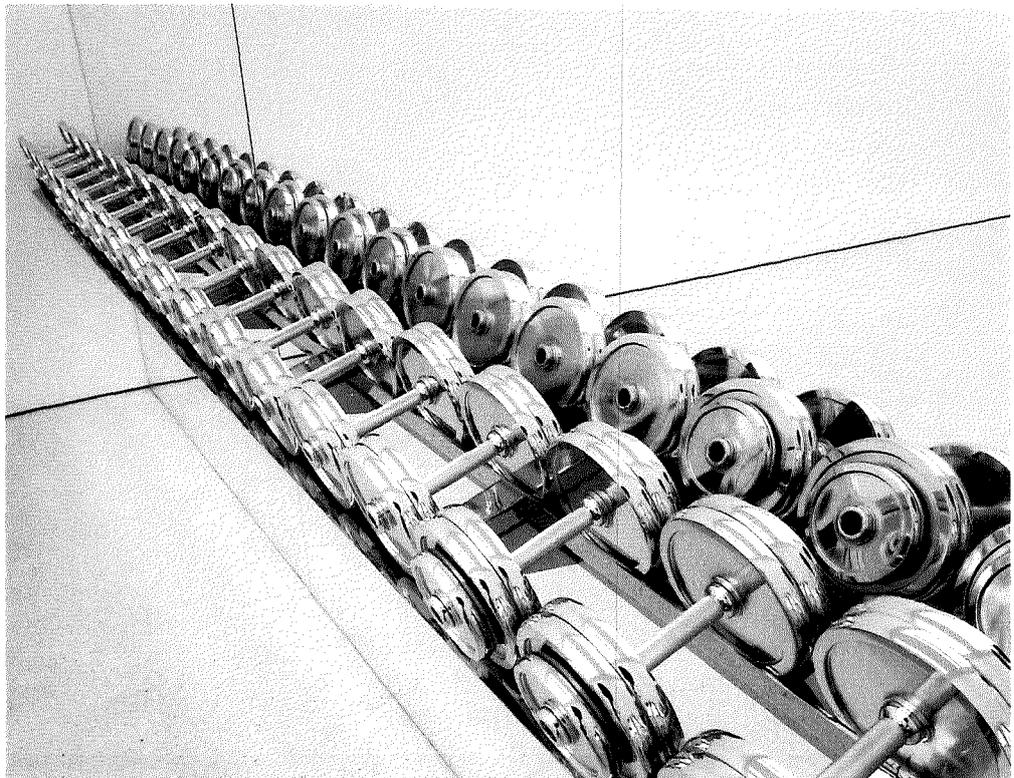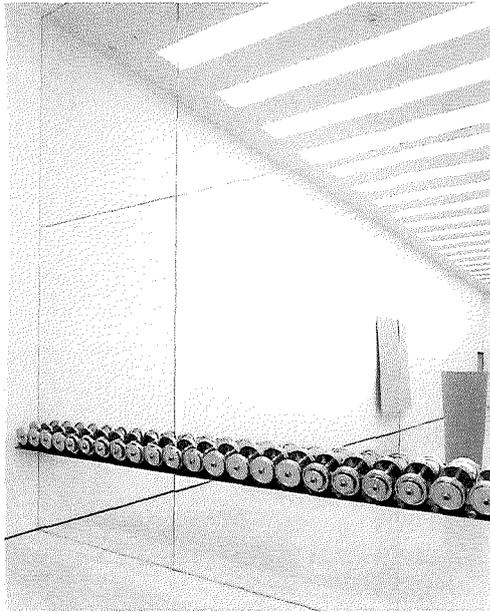
Fig. 22: Haim Steinbach, *Mirror, Rack, Dumbells*, 1993
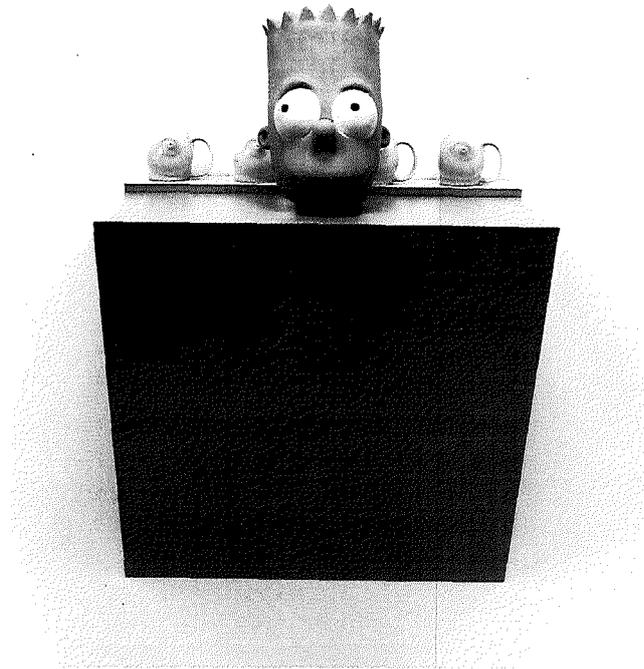
Fig. 23: Haim Steinbach, *Pop Art I-1*, 1990


Fig. 24: Haim Steinbach, *Coat of Arms*, 1988
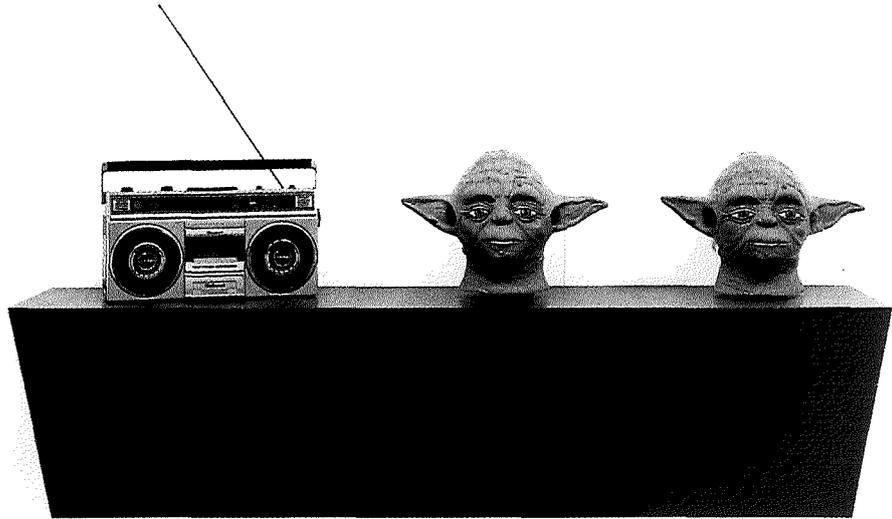
Fig. 25: Haim Steinbach, *Un-color Becomes Alter-ego*, 1984

Fig. 26: Haim Steinbach, *Stay With Friends*, 1986
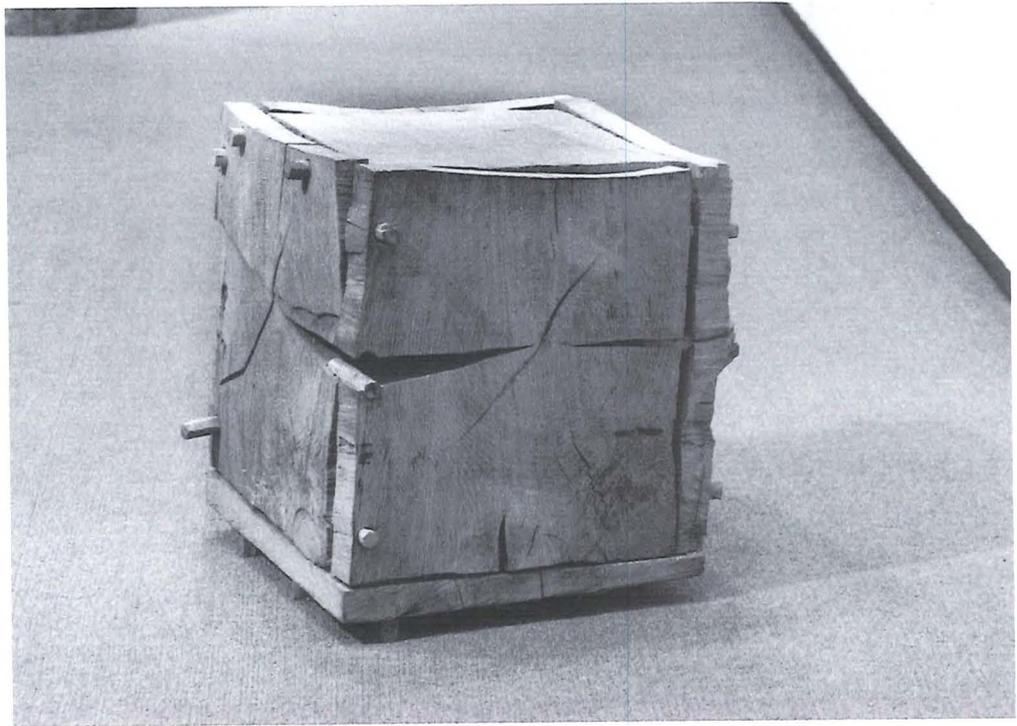
Fig. 27: David Nash, *Cracking Box*, 1979
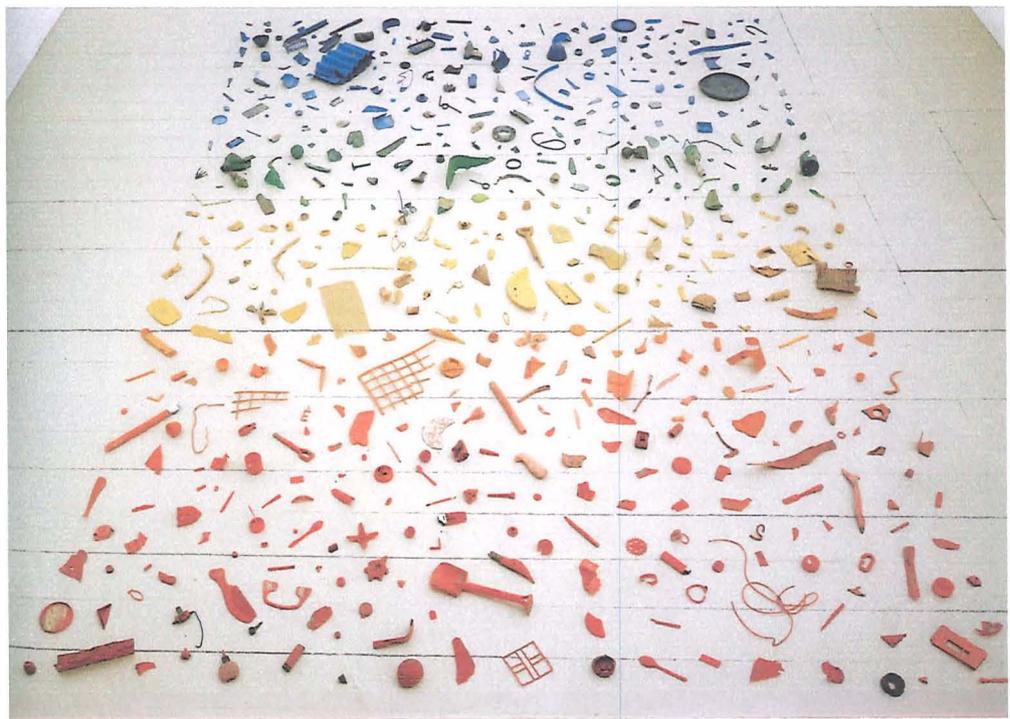

Fig. 28: Tony Cragg, *New Stones - Newton's Tones*, 1980
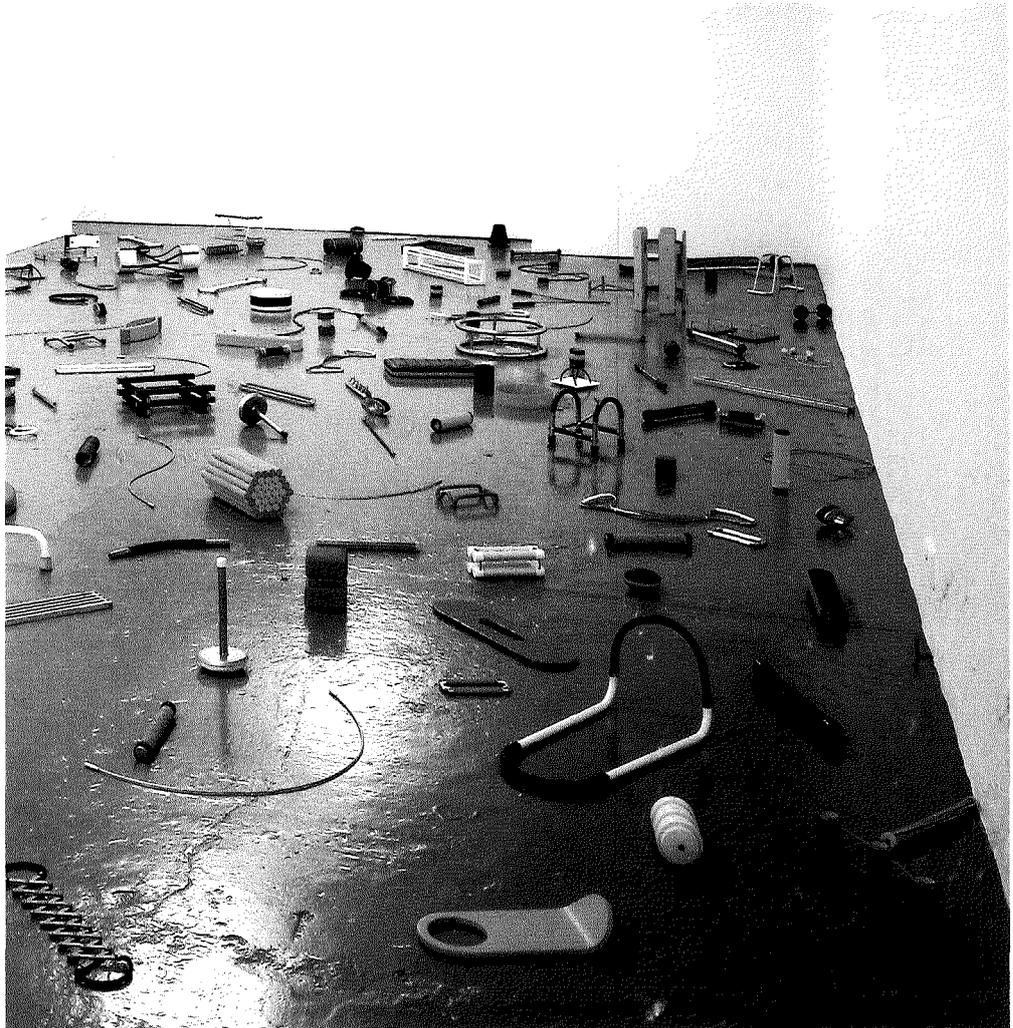
Fig. 29: Jeff Luke, *Spend, Spend, Spend*, 1993

Fig. 30: Jeff Luke, *Spend, Spend, Spend* (detail)

Fig. 31: Jeff Luke, *Doing Nothing*, 1993
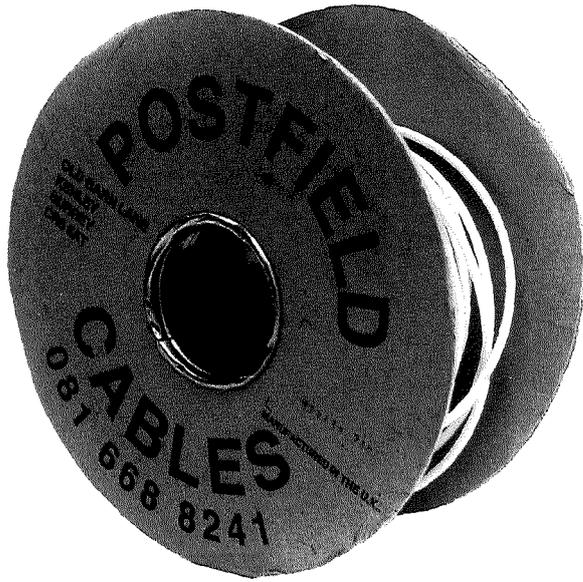
Fig. 32: Spool of Cable

Fig. 33: Birthday Card

Fig. 34: Handgun

Lost Property, **Neil Cummings & Marysia Lewandowska**

Selected Works
by the Author

Stepladder Made from as Many Different Kinds of Wood as it Has Parts
2001 (wood, rope, bolts, hinges, 210 x 62cm)

Stepladder Made from as Many Different Kinds of Wood as it Has Parts (details)

201
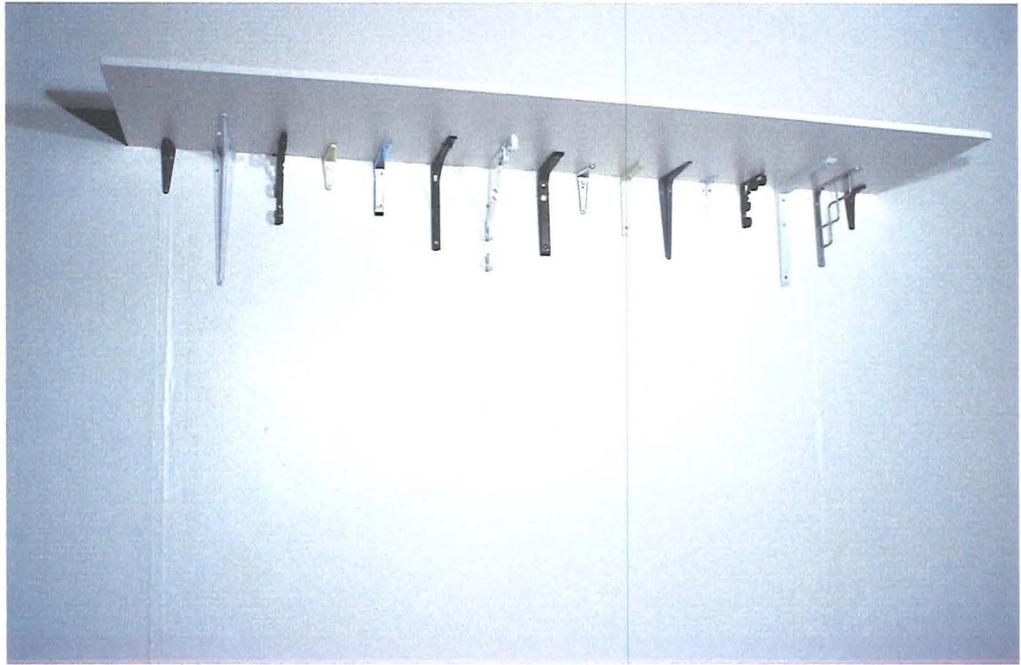
Members of the Cast, 2001 (shelf, brackets, screws, 150 x 41 x 32cm)

Hearse, 1999 (jars, black dye, serving tray, ø40 x 22cm)

The Absurdity of Privatisation, 1997-99 (sawn ruler, dimensions variable)
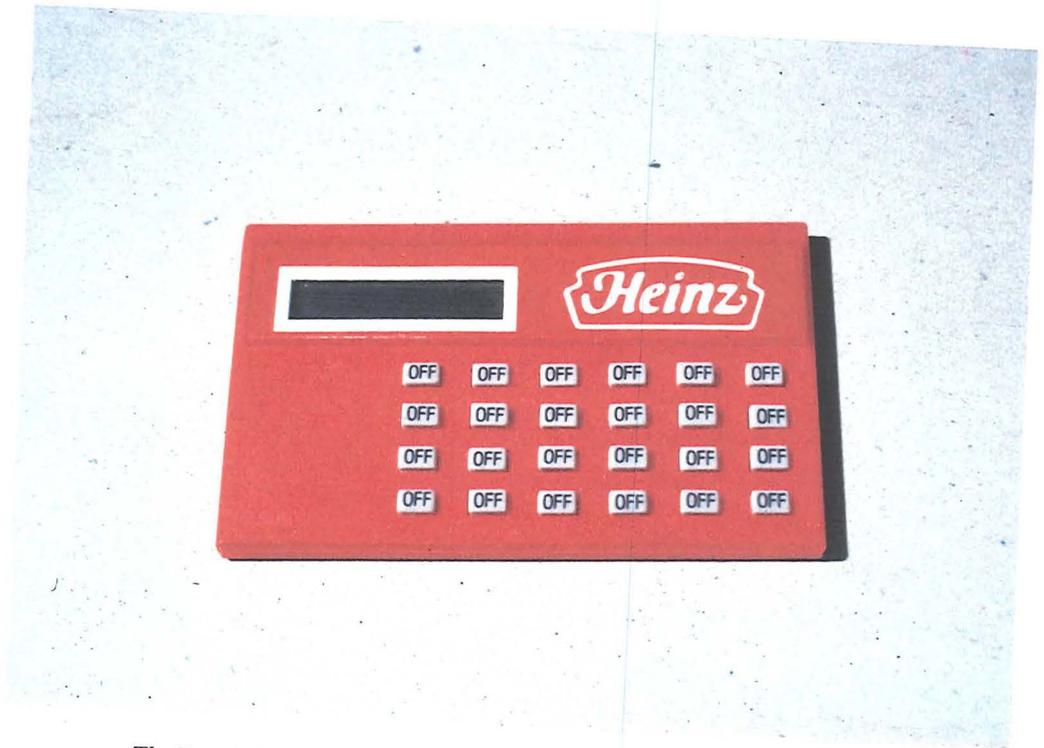
The Devolution of Useful Things, 2000 (altered calculator, 11 x 7 x 0.8cm)

Distance Expressed as a Refusal of Measurement, 2001 (altered tape measure, dimensions variable)
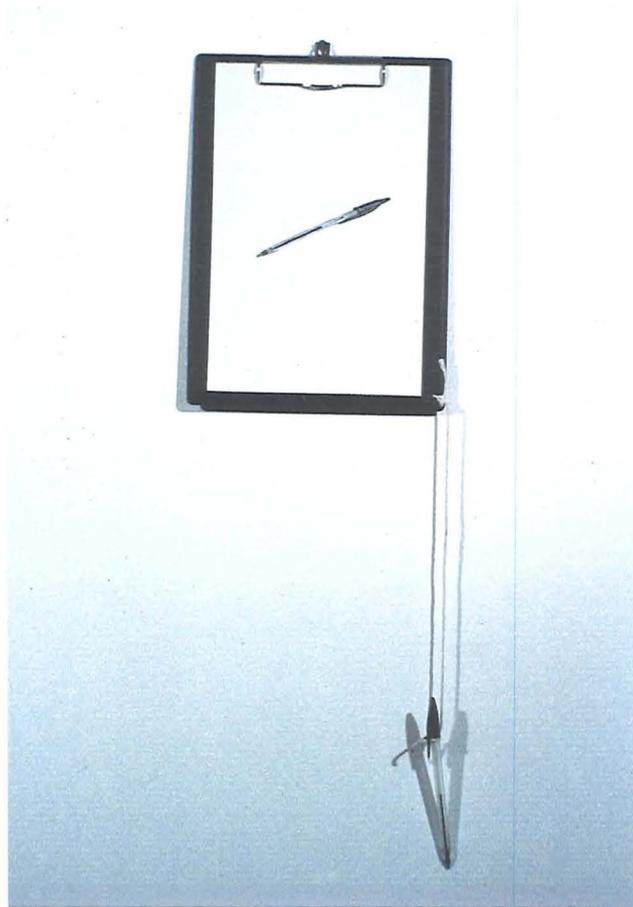
Manifesto, 2000 (biro, biro on paper, clip board, string, 62 x 26cm)

Palette, 1999 (washing basket, Formica, clothes, 59 x 40 x 32cm)

Decommissioned Knots, 2000-01 (photograph 80 x 70cm)
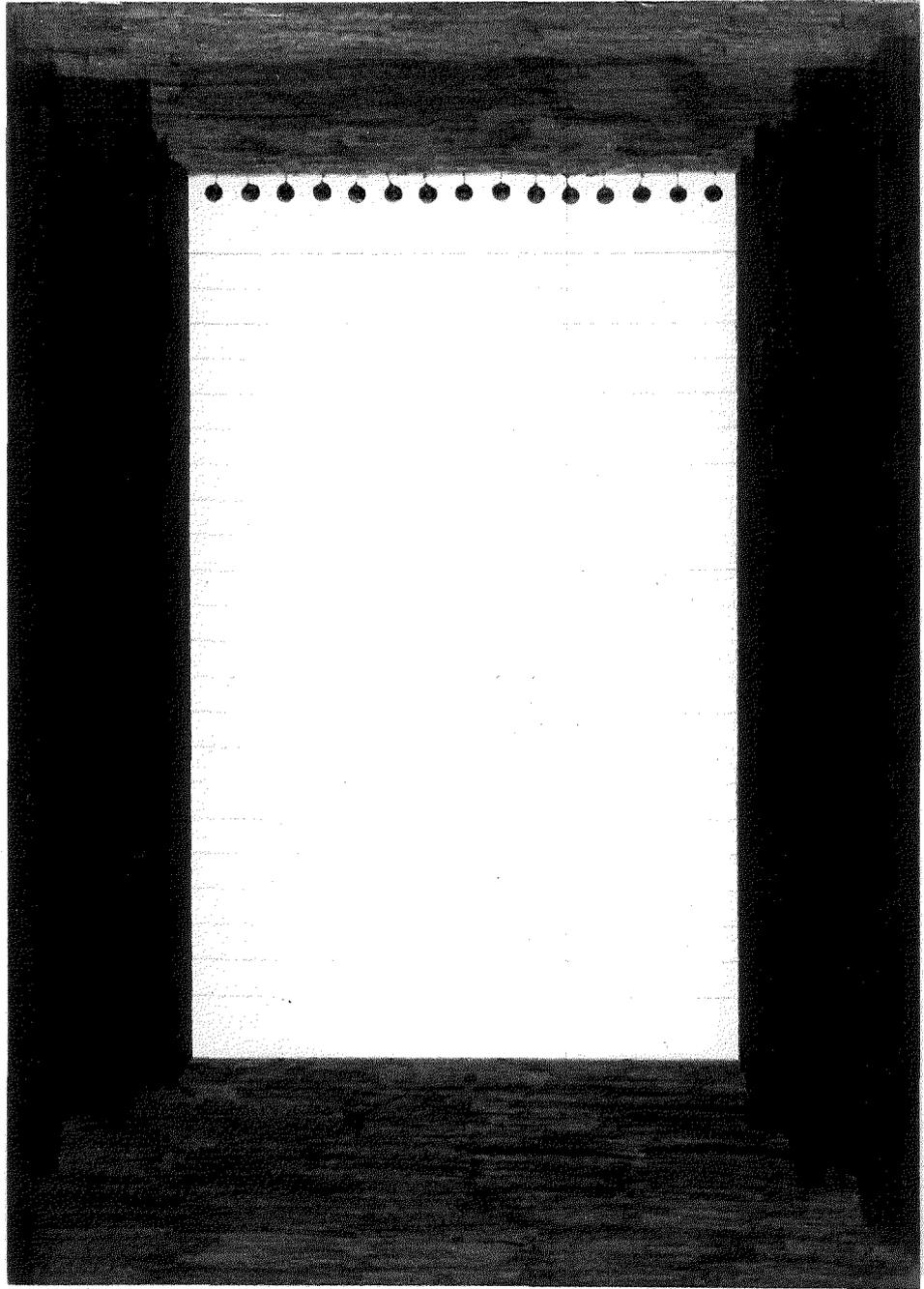
From the Genus 'Paper' (fig. 9), 2000 (graphite on paper on card, 29 x 21 cm)

**Sonnet Written Using
Text from *The Economist***

Under a bogus Tuscan sky mention is made
Of fleecing octogenarian cash.
Yes, it's time for guerrilla and warrior to trade
Their junk bond portfolios and Kremlin gas
And urge the nation's slowest learners
To harass the wives of its highest earners:
Tiger, your outmoded Confucian management
Is caught in limbo between dog and fire hydrant.

'Alarmist nonsense.' Cisco retorts,
And to prove it cites his think-tank's thoughts.
And so they fight, yen for yen, by a putrid canal,
Till quarantine is lifted at La Banque Centrale...
The urge is as old as sex-and more plausible too;
'Best invest west,' inveighs Cisco. Well, wouldn't you?

Sonnet (The Economist), 2001-02 (etched stainless steel plaque, 62 x 60cm)
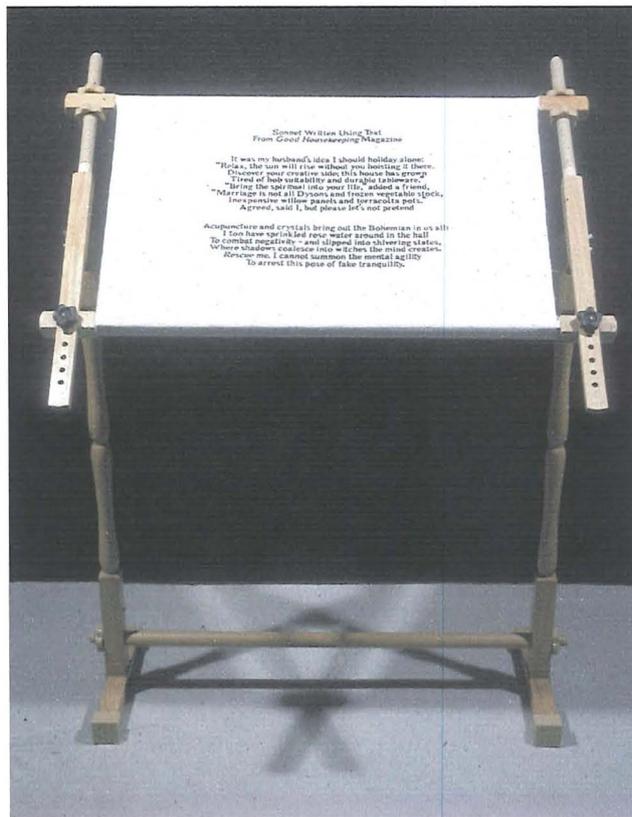
Sonnet Written Using Text
From *Good Housekeeping* Magazine

It was my husband's idea I should holiday alone:
"Relax, the sun will rise without you hoisting it there.
Discover your creative side; this house has grown
Tired of hob suitability and durable tableware."
"Bring the spiritual into your life," added a friend,
"Marriage is not all Dysons and frozen vegetable stock,
Inexpensive willow panels and terracotta pots."
Agreed, said I, but please let's not pretend

Acupuncture and crystals bring out the Bohemian in us all;
I too have sprinkled rose water around in the hall
To combat negativity – and slipped into shivering states,
Where shadows coalesce into witches the mind creates.
Rescue me. I cannot summon the mental agility
To arrest this pose of fake tranquility.

Sonnet (Good Housekeeping), 2001 (embroidery, tapestry frame, 90 x 65 x 40cm)

i've never seen you looking so lovely as you did tonight. i've never seen you shine so bright. i've never seen so many men ask you if you wanted to dance, looking for a little romance, given half a chance. and i've never seen that dress you're wearing, or the high lights in your hair that catch your eyes. i have been blind. the lady in red is dancing with me, cheek to cheek.

there's nobody here, it's just you and me. it's where i wanna be. But i hardly know this beauty by my side. i'll never forget the way you look tonight. i've never seen you looking so gorgeous as you did tonight. i've never seen you shine so bright, you were amazing. i've never seen so many people want to be there by your side, and when you turned to me and smiled you took my breath away, and i have never

had such a feeling, a feeling of complete and utter love, as i do tonight. the lady in red is dancing with me, cheek to cheek. there's nobody here, it's just you and me. it's where i wanna be. but i hardly know this beauty by my side. i'll never forget the way you look tonight. i never will forget the way you look tonight. lady in red, my lady in red. i love you.

Lady in Red (after Chris de Burgh), 2001 (collage on card, 160 x 100cm)
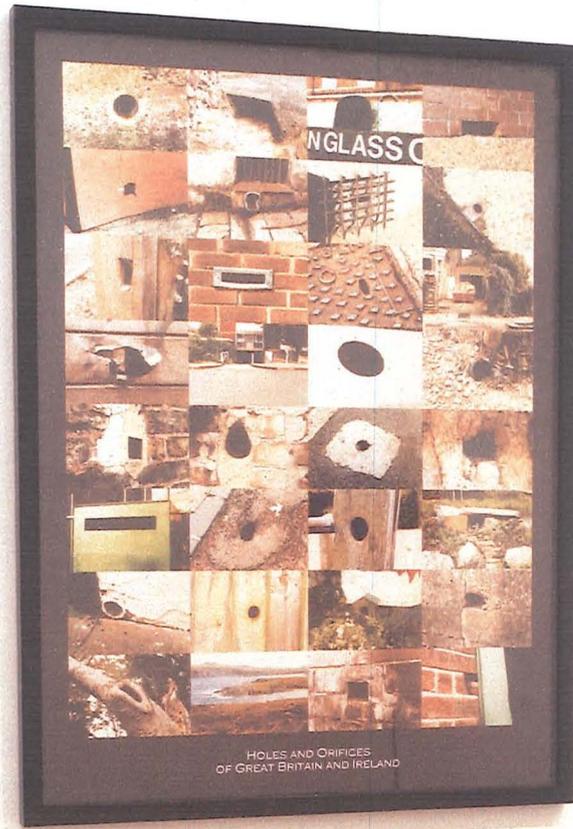
Holes and Orifices of Great Britain and Ireland

All completed poster works are digital prints measuring 122 x 91cm when framed.
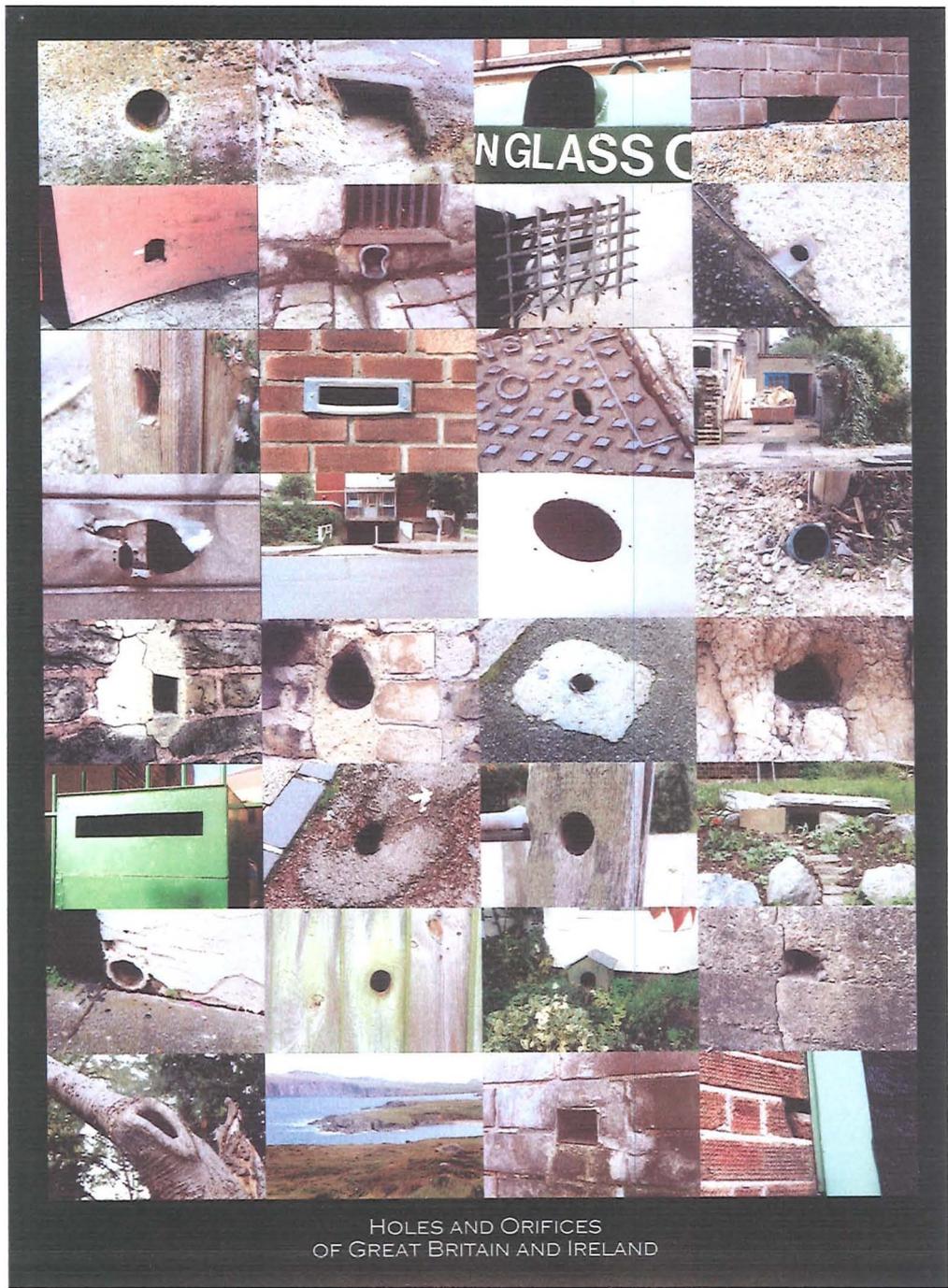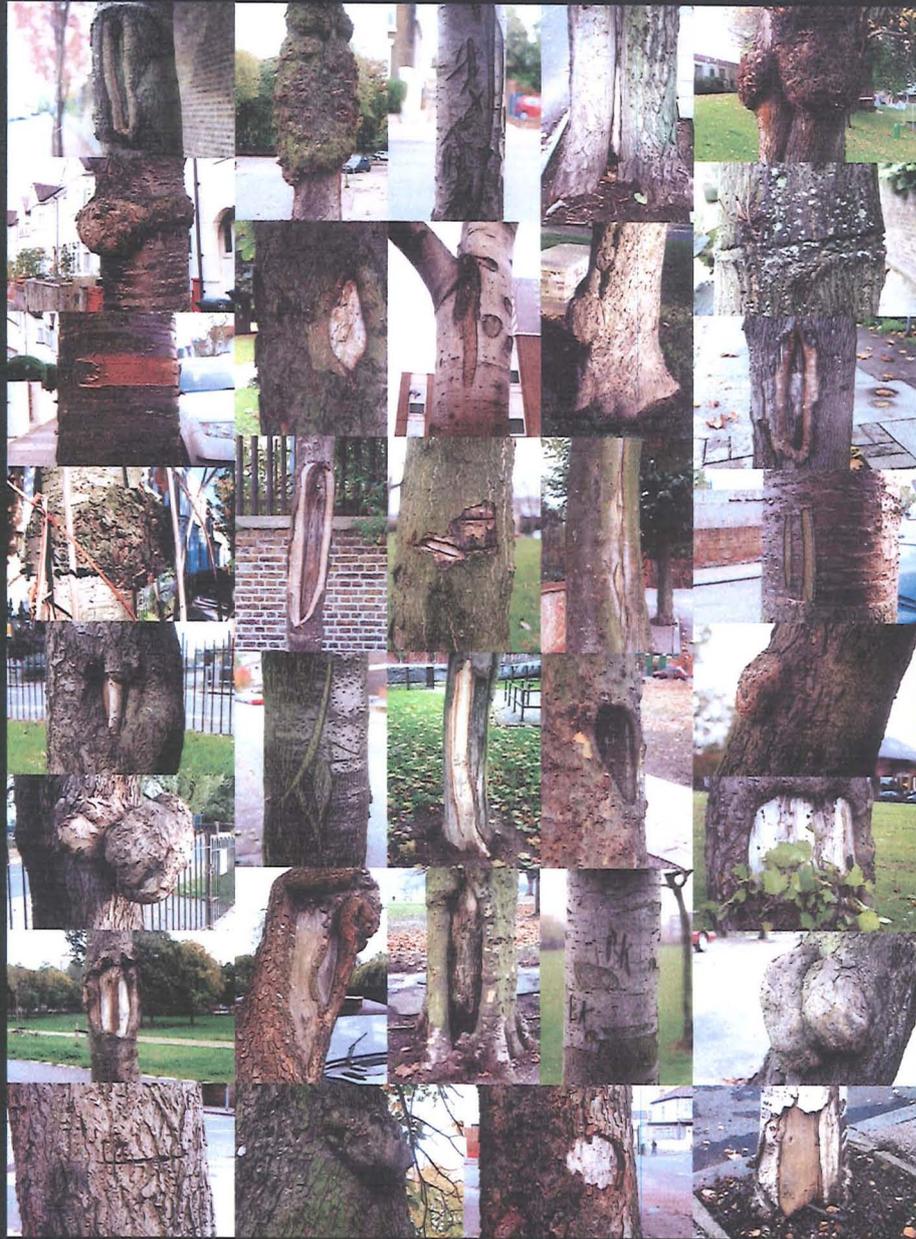
HOLES AND ORIFICES
OF GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND

BOLLARDS AND POSTS
OF GREATER LONDON

ARBOREAL DISFIGUREMENT:
SCARS, LESIONS AND TUMESCENCE

215

SELECTED FIRE EXITS

CANING THE NATIONAL GRID:
AN AESTHETIC PERSPECTIVE

217
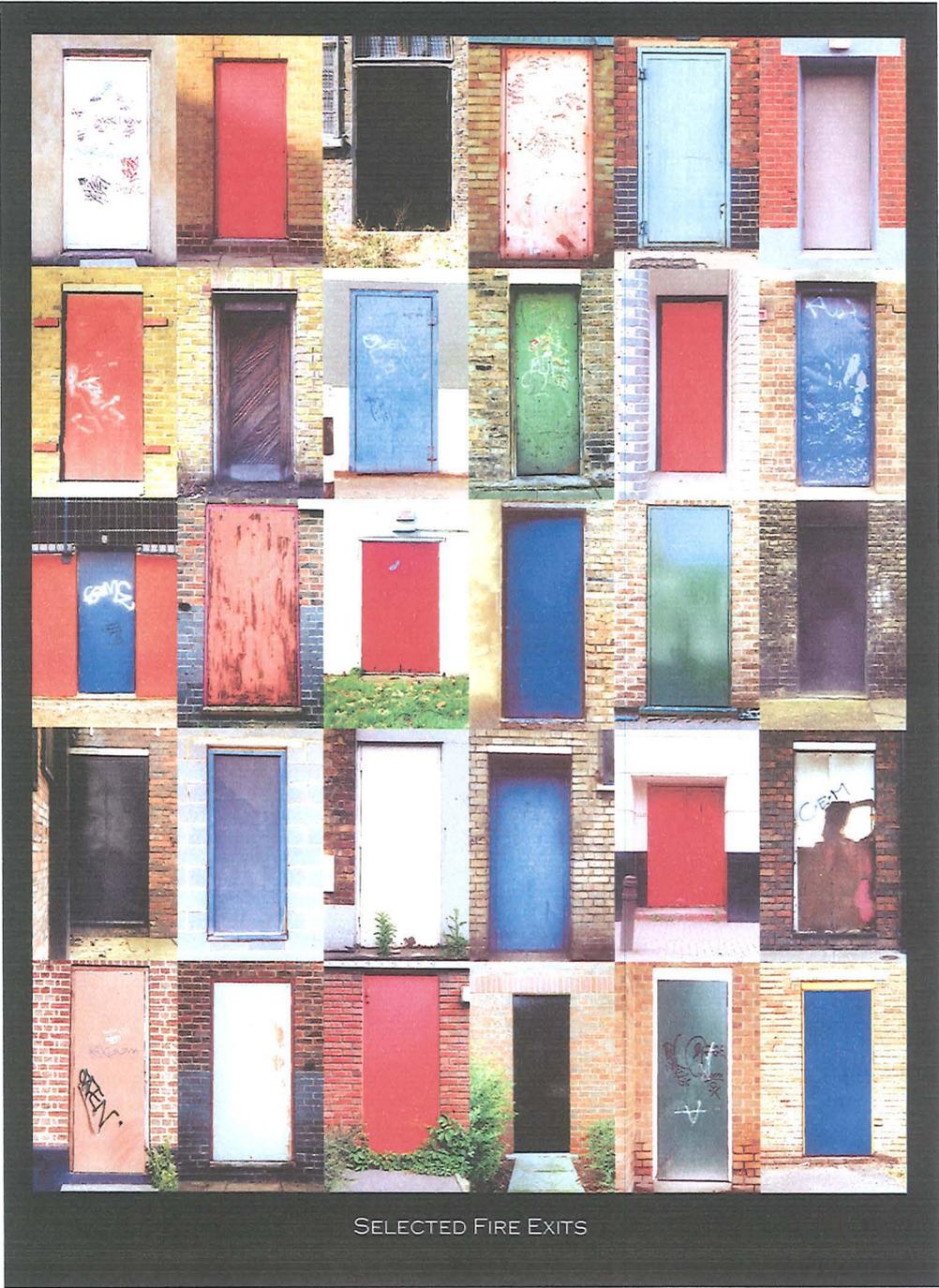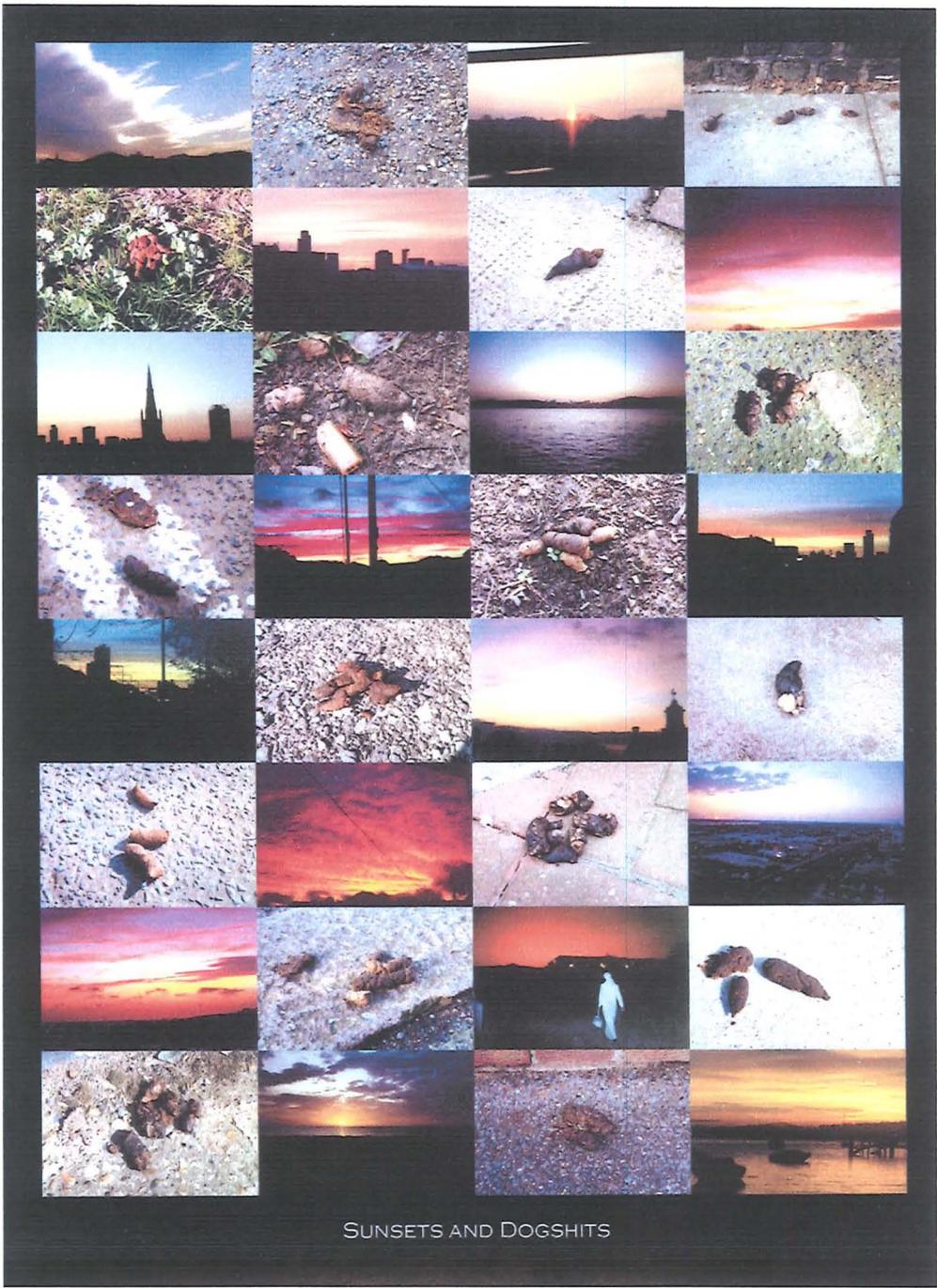
SUNSETS AND DOGSHITS

BOLLARDS AND POSTS
OF GREATER LONDON (II)

219

STUFF CHUCKED MINDLESSLY
INTO TREES AND BUSHES

'ELAMENT'