
1

The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction

In 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', Walter Benjamin argued that the era of unique, authentic, 'original' art objects – those that had 'aura' – had been fore-closed by the advent of industrialization and the rise of the mass audience: photography and especially film exemplified this development.¹ He could also have used the example of the artist's multiple – he was writing in 1936, a year after Marcel Duchamp had published an unnumbered, unsigned edition of his *Rotoreliefs*, the earliest multiple in this catalogue.²

Defining an artist's multiple is difficult. Indeed the difficulty of definition seems at times to be its chief characteristic. Attempts to cajole the resistant, intractable, artist's multiple into some strait-jacket are doomed to failure – as was Denise René's copyrighting of the term in 1966. A *via negativa* may seem a way forward: what differentiates a multiple from other media and formats? The overlap with sculpture and the print is crucial. The sixteenth-century sculptor, Giambologna (Giovanni Bologna) and his principal assistant, Antonio Susini, editioned numerous small-scale bronze statuettes of human figures, bulls and birds.³ How different are they to the portrait busts by Kenny Hunter of Osama bin Laden, and Monica Lewinsky, which he made for The Multiple Store. Giambologna's and Hunter's works are obviously both sculptures, but there is a difference: Hunter's choice of the portrait-bust for the media personalities, the terrorist leader and mistress of the American President, Bill Clinton, interrogates the medium by asking who is a suitable subject, and its strange pairing

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and use as bookends, suggest a difference in intention.⁴ For Hunter, making sculpture is secondary to making a multiple. This argument would also apply to prints or photographs. Many of the latter – portraits, still lifes or landscapes – are sold in an edition, or could be printed anew from the negatives. A photograph only becomes an artist's multiple when the artist decides that the photograph is the appropriate means of making a multiple artwork: Joseph Beuys's *Bonn Kunstverein 8.11.1977*, published by the Bonner Kunstverein, is a signed and numbered edition of 21 photographs of Beuys signing a piece of paper which could be the photograph itself, a multiple of a multiple being made *en abyme*.⁵ It is a similar situation with prints: if the printmaking process is a suitable medium for executing an idea for an artist's multiple, a print can be an artist's multiple. Claes Oldenburg's '*Airflow*' Box (1966) is a four-colour offset lithograph on smooth-coated paper, published as the cover of *Art News* magazine (vol. 64, no. 10, February 1966) in an edition of approximately 36000 copies, intended to be cut out and folded into a box – the printmaking/printing process being incidental to the end product.⁶ Beuys's use of the print is potentially more problematic: *Threshold* (1984) is a blind etching on white and cham-
ois Hahnemühle woven stock in colours that vary over the edition of 120 copies and 40 trial or reject proofs. This could be a conventional print edition. Again, what transforms this into a multiple is the prominence of the imprimatur of the artist: the signature is the subject: the unique autographic signing is reproduced.⁷ We are not far away from Ben Vautier's 'multiple' labels which could be attached to any object: the label is the multiple and what it is attached to – print, sculpture, everyday object – is not of great importance.

This may or may not help us with the overlap with other categories. Fiona Banner's *The Nam* (1997) is both an artist's book and a multiple. It is insistently an object: its 1000 leaves on 80 gsm Redwood Part Mechanical paper constitute an intimidating *pavé* 28 × 21 × 6 cm of 2.338 kg. In an exhibition at the Frith Street Gallery in 1997 a large number of copies were displayed in industrial metal shelving, a garish orange and blue parody of self-advertisement. This raises another problem: the breaking up of a whole 'work of art' into saleable parts: Cornelia Parker's miniature cast cathedrals from an installation at Actualities Gallery, London, were available as 'multiples' with a de luxe version of *Actualities Yearbook*. Similarly, Fiona's Rae contribution to the *Voorwerk* cata-

logue for the Witte de With Center, Rotterdam, 1990, consisted of unique fragments from one of her canvases. There is, of course, another way of looking at this phenomenon: Alan McCollum's or Mike Kelley's works could be seen as the piling up of multiples, a sorites, that is suddenly, magically complete at some point, a work of art.

Mail art, like the artist's book, is intimately bound up with the multiple. The portability of the multiple makes it a candidate for distribution through the post. Fluxus depended upon the postal network mail order for its dissemination, but there was always a subversive note in its desire to clog up the postal arteries. There is something slightly mischievous in the mailings of Jon Smith or Peter Liversidge: the latter sends, bit by bit, whole wooden chairs or picture frames, stamped and franked, through the postal system. But mail art and the artist's multiple are not synonymous: mail art extends into stamp art, while the multiple is not always sold or sent through the post.⁸

Artists have adopted the media available to them – records, tapes, CDs and CD-ROMs: not all these are multiples, but some of them are, depending on the intention and execution. Christian Marclay's *Footsteps* (1989) is a transformed record, walked over during the installation at the Shedhalle, Zürich, before being repackaged, complete with dust and embedded dirt. The installation would also be a candidate for a 'multiple' artwork.

Further complications are the issues of endorsement – Warhol's packaging and wallpaper for Chanel, or Beck's beer bottles – with Rebecca Horn, Damien Hirst or Tracey Emin. These latter could be seen as the carriers of images or prints as much as multiples. At the opposite extreme, the multiple can almost camouflage itself as a product. Simon Lewandowski's *Magic Car Air Polluter*, made during his Grizedale Forest Sculpture Residency, parodied the perfumed cardboard trees that hang from car mirrors or dashboards: under legal threat from the makers of the original product, the multiple was withdrawn and its purchasers offered a new piece made from its ashes, complete with a signed certificate of the whole process.

An equally grey area are the museum publications – those of the Städtisches Museum Mönchengladbach, a series that between 1968 and 1973 encompassed Carl Andre, Bernd and Hilla Becher, Daniel Buren, Hanne Darboven, Jannis Kounellis, Richard Long, Giulio Paolini, Reiner Ruthenbeck

and Lawrence Weiner, or the Renaissance Society, Chicago, editions. Are these multiples or de luxe exhibition catalogues?

Three further issues need to be taken into consideration as they have dogged the definition of the multiple. What is the minimal number in an edition? Duchamp famously said that one was unique, two a pair and three was mass-produced.⁹ Should a multiple be in an edition of two, three, over ten, over 20 or over 100? The bottom line must be two: a unique multiple (admittedly the artist could make another in an unlimited edition) is an oxymoron – it is too contaminated by the notion of the ‘original’. On the other hand, the part/whole artwork – a cut-up painting or broken-up installation suggests that this is not always a tenable position. Bob and Roberta Smith has pointedly made a ‘multiple’ in an edition of one – the conceptually oxymoronic *Concrete Boats* (1996) has masted and funnelled concrete ships which are not identical.

A related issue is whether the multiple should be mass-produced or could be made by hand. The dichotomy is misleading: many components for mass production are made in small workshops which hover on the border of being ‘craft’ or ‘industrial’. The artist Grenville Davey at the seminar ‘Multiple Meanings and the Object’, in December 1998, at the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA), London, saw one of the incidental characteristics of the artist’s multiple as its imperfection – it was flawed, unlike the identical, perfect objects of mass production, carefully quality controlled. The tradition of conceptual art favoured the making of art objects by others, but this is not a necessary quality of the artist’s multiple.

It is commonly accepted that the multiple is three-dimensional: as we have seen above there are times when a three-dimensional object is not a multiple, and the apparently two-dimensional print or photograph can be. And after all, a piece of paper has three dimensions.

Another way to define the artist’s multiple is to describe its history – a sort of cumulative definition. Unfortunately, as many artists working in various and apparently mutually exclusive traditions – from Art and Language to Artschwager, Beuys to Broodthaers, Copley to Emin, Hirst to Lichtenstein, Manzoni to Tuttle, Vostell to Warhol – have made multiples, this is not quite as easy as it would seem.

Notes

- 1 Benjamin (1992), pp. 211–44: 'that which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art'. But see the critique of Benjamin in Adorno (1997), p. 56.
- 2 Cf. The Dadaists achieved 'a relentless destruction of the aura of their creations, which they branded as reproductions with the very means of production', Benjamin (1992), p. 231.
- 3 Avery (1978), pp. 42–4.
- 4 I was about to make a comparison with Mozart's disruption of the classical opera by making the bird-catcher Papageno into the 'hero' of *Die Zauberflöte*, but of course Giambologna's *Bird-catcher* sits in his repertoire of Mars, Hercules, Philip III and Henri IV.
- 5 Schellmann (1997), p. 213. For *mise en abyme* see Dällenbach (1989).
- 6 Axsom and Platzker (1997), p. 99.
- 7 Schellmann (1997), p. 367.
- 8 I hope to explore mail art further in a future monograph.
- 9 3->°° (1970), p. 2. This is probably a paraphrase of: 'For me the number three is important, but simply from the numerical, not the esoteric, point of view: one is unity, two is double, duality, and three is the rest. When you've come to the word three, you have three million – it's the same thing as three.' Cabanne (1971), p. 47.

2

The *jeu d'esprit* and the joke

The founding story of the history of painting is a joke or rather Pliny the Elder's account of a practical joke. The Greek painters Zeuxis and Parrhasius contest their representation of 'reality': Zeuxis' grapes tempt the birds but he is then himself confused by Parrhasius' depiction of curtains.¹ *Trompe l'oeil* painting lived on the unstable edge of reality and simulation: it became a joke when one was confused for the other. Towards the end of the nineteenth century the artist's sense of humour also found an outlet in the titles of works: Alphonse Allais's *Première communion de jeunes filles chlorotiques par un temps de neige* ('The First Communion of Anaemic Girls in the Snow'),² in the 'Equivoques' exhibition, in its blankness (only destabilized by an ornate frame), could be seen as a forerunner of modernism and abstraction.³

At the beginning of the twentieth century, with the avant-garde synonymous with modernism, humour was an important device it deployed in its assault on the past, its desire to shock and *épater le bourgeois*. Picasso was fascinated by Jarry and his pataphysics, Duchamp by Roussel and his puns. Dadaists and later neo-Dadaists, such as Fluxus, revelled in the joke and the subversion of the serious. While these were quite public events and attitudes, the object as joke was for long confined to the privacy of the studio. Picasso's *Pomme* (1909–10) is an apple, crudely carved with a knife, 12 × 10 × 8 cm.⁴ This was never cast in bronze. It references not only Picasso's own cubist still lifes but also those of Cézanne. Richardson describes it as 'a monument to an apple,

untiringly as a game in itself, though there is no doubt that the greater pleasure was attached to the second act.⁸

Freud explained this game as 'the child's great cultural achievement ... the renunciation of instinctual satisfaction' in allowing his mother to leave him without protest. If we map this on to the artist's multiple, the repetition of the 'multiple' reinforces the negative non-presence of the original object, either as 'authentic' or as 'real/representational'.⁹

Piero Manzoni's *Merda d'artista (Artist's Shit)* (1961) is one of the most famous, notorious even, of twentieth-century avant-garde artworks. It is often forgotten that this is an artist's multiple. In an edition of 90, 5 cm High × 7 cm in diameter, it consists of a can of the artist's own excrement, with a label in four languages. It is a joke, a parody of the art market, and a critique of consumerism and the waste it generates.¹⁰ William Copley's *S.M.S. (Shit Must Stop)* magazine of 1968, Dieter Roth's *Schiess-Hase (Shit-Rabbit)* (1975), Felix Droese's *Regenwald (Rainforest)*, the cardboard inner of a toilet roll, and Paul McCarthy's *Phoney Shit* (1992) both equate art, value and the excremental. Less emotive, perhaps, are the garbage paintings of Spoerri or the waste-bin collages of Arman, the *poubelle* series of the 1960s.¹¹ Metonymically, many multiple artists have referenced flies – Kabakov's *Zwei Freunde* (1992), Alexander and Susan Maris's *Friday Object No. 1 b* (1999), Elizabeth Price *Fly* (2000) and Boyd Webb's fly mobile (2000). In his *Store Days*, Oldenburg had proclaimed that he was 'for art that is ... abandoned with great contempt, like a piece of shit'.¹²

Besides the allusion to piss in *Fountain* (1917), Duchamp also used sexual waste – semen in *Paysage fautif (Wayward Landscape)* (1946) from the *Boîte-en-valise*, No. XII, dedicated to Maria Martins.¹³ The sexualization of commodities – objects – is developed by Marx, who used the image of the prostitute Maritornes in *Don Quixote* to explain the levelling of commodities through money, and by Georg Simmel: 'The indifference as to its use, the lack of attachment to any individual because it is unrelated to any of them, the objectivity inherent in money as a mere means which excludes any emotional relationship

– all this produces an ominous analogy between money and prostitution.¹⁴ Artist's multiples, sold for money, present a reversal of the trend from barter to gold to paper money, and the economy of the joke, waste and value is endlessly deferred.

Notes

- 1 Pliny (1952), pp. 308–11. 'A triumph of the gaze over the eye', is Lacan's gloss, Lacan (1998), p. 103.
- 2 For a history of titling, see Welchman (1997).
- 3 Allais's painting is an overlooked influence on Duchamp's *The Large Glass*. Allais (1855–1905) was 'one of his favourite authors', whom he was reading immediately before his death, see Tomkins (1998), pp. 449–50.
- 4 *Musée Picasso* (1985), p. 154. It is number 242 in the museum inventory.
- 5 Richardson (1996), p. 140.
- 6 Freud (1991), pp. 76–7.
- 7 Freud (1991), p. 68.
- 8 Freud (1991), p. 284.
- 9 Rosalind Krauss in 'Yo-Yo' emphasizes the linguistic doubling aspect of *fort/da*, before relating it to the anti-maternal artist practice of Manzoni, see Bois and Krauss (1997), pp. 219–23.
- 10 For a history of shit see Laporte (2000), *passim*; for waste, see the classic assault on built-in obsolescence in Packard (1960); tin-canning is parodied in *Bouvard and Pécuchet*, first published in 1881, Flaubert (1976), pp. 64–5.
- 11 In the 1960s Lacan punningly compared the act of publication with *poubelliciation*, throwing it a waste bin, see Lacan (1998), p. ix.
- 12 Oldenburg (1967), p. 39.
- 13 Ramirez (1998), p. 56. Reproduced in Ades, Cox and Hopkins (1999), p. 175.
- 14 Joselit (1998), p. 36–7.

3

Duchamp: the readymade

In 1969 for *Flux Fest Kit 2*, George Maciunas (1931–78), the anarchic promoter of Fluxus, made *Bulls Eye Face Clock*, a clock with a target for its face: it may refer to Jasper Johns's *Targets* (1955–) or to Ben Vautier's *To Look At*, included in *Flux Year Box 2* (1967–68) but with its optical shimmer from close concentric circles it is more likely a homage to the *Rotoreliefs* of Marcel Duchamp (who had died the year before, 1968).

Although highly critical of *oculiste* or retinal painting, Duchamp was obsessed with optical effects.¹ This is reflected in a series of works which include the *Handmade Stereopticon Slide* (1918–19), *Rotary Glass Plates (Precision Optics)* (1920), *Rotary Demisphere* (1925) and in the palindromically titled *Anémic Cinéma* (1926). The rotating spirals of the latter formed the basis of the *Rotoreliefs*, which Duchamp described to his patroness, Katherine Dreier, as a 'playtoy'.² It consists of six cardboard discs with colour offset-lithographic printing on both sides, each with a title: 'Montgolfière/Cage', 'Lampe/Coralle', 'Oeuf à la coque/Lanterne chinoise', 'Spirale blanche/Eclipse totale', 'Poisson japonais/Escargot' and 'Verre de Boheme/Cerceaux'. They were to be placed on a turntable of a record-player, and when played 'at an approximate speed of 33 revolutions per minute' three-dimensional images are apparent – 'a relief obtained by rotation'. From 30 August to 7 October 1935, Duchamp exhibited his 'playtoy', of which he had made 500 sets, at the inventors' fair at the thirty-third *Concours Lépine*, Porte de Versailles, Paris, hoping to sell them for 15

francs each. Henri-Pierre Roché, who had provided financial backing, describes their less than successful launch:

His little stand went strikingly unnoticed. None of the visitors, hot on the trail of the useful, could be diverted long enough to stop there. A glance was sufficient to see that between the garbage compressing machine and the incinerators on the left, and the instant vegetable chopper on the right, this gadget of his simply wasn't useful. When I went up to him, Duchamp smiled and said, 'Error, one hundred per cent. At least, that's clear.'³

Roché also described the discs rotating 'some horizontally, others vertically'. All the instruction leaflets until at least 1953 describe a horizontal turntable (not supplied), and it was not until 1959 that the *Rotoreliefs* were sold with a 'turntable' with holes drilled in the bottom of the base for affixing it with screws to the wall. The Editions MAT catalogue spoke of them as 'presented for the first time on an appropriate wall-hanging unit'. Possibly, what Roché had seen at the Concours Lépine was a similar device to the *Rotary Demisphere* adapted to the cardboard discs. More likely, Duchamp's conception of the device changed from one powered by 'home-made' electric motors to one placed on an existing record-player, that started to replace the gramophone in the USA in 1934, and then back to an electric motor mountable on the gallery wall.

The *Rotoreliefs* is another multiple *avant la lettre*. Designed as a toy (although Duchamp was shocked to discover that it had recuperative qualities, helping to restore three-dimensional vision to those that had lost an eye), its failure at the Concours Lépine suggests that in the everyday world of gadgets it was an art object, underlined by the poetic titles on the discs. But as such, in its cheapness, reproducibility and marginal utility, it badly fitted the conventions of what was expected of an art object as well.

Many critics have seen in Duchamp's readymades his main contribution to the history of the multiple. As we have seen, the first readymades were confined to the studio. The first to enter the art world was the infamous *Fountain* (1917).

A letter to his sister, Suzanne Duchamp (1889–1963), and dated 15 January 1916, uses the term ‘readymade’ for the first time:

Now, if you went up to my place you saw in my studio a bicycle wheel and a bottle rack. I had purchased this as a sculpture already made. And I have an idea concerning this said bottle rack: Listen.

Here, in N.Y., I bought some objects in the same vein and I treat them as ‘*ready-made*’. You know English well enough to understand the sense of ‘*readymade*’ that I give these objects. I sign them and give them an English inscription. I’ll give you some examples: I have for example a large snow shovel upon which I wrote at the bottom: *In advance of the broken arm*, translation in French: *En avance du bras cassé*. Don’t try too hard to understand it in the Romantic or Impressionist or Cubist sense – that does not have any connection with it.

Another ‘readymade’ is called: *Emergency in favour of twice*, possible translation in French: *Danger (Crise) en faveur de 2 fois ...*

You take for yourself this bottle rack. I will make it a ‘*Readymade*’ from a distance. You will have to write at the base and *on the inside* of the bottom ring in small letters painted with an oil-painting brush, in silver white color, the inscription that I will give you after this, and you will sign it in the same hand as follows:

[after] Marcel Duchamp⁴

Two unidentified readymades – described in the catalogue as sculptures – were shown at the ‘Exhibition of Modern Art’ at the Bourgeois Galleries, New York, in 1916.⁵ Duchamp claimed that they went unnoticed in the vestibule. It was with the entry of *Fountain* at the 1917 Independents exhibition at the Grand Central Palace, Lexington Avenue, New York – the porcelain ‘Bedfordshire’ urinal, purchased at J. L. Mott Iron Works, 118 Fifth Avenue – that the readymade became part of history. Not that it was exhibited, as it was ‘withdrawn’ under pressure from the painter George Bellows before the private view, but the subsequent controversy, meant that *Fountain* existed more as a media object – a Stieglitz photograph – while the ‘original’ seems to have been lost.⁶

The ‘performative’ aspects of the deed are important – a founding gesture – for the multiple: whatever the ‘artist’ does or makes is ‘art’ if the artist says so. Duchamp’s intention might have been negative, a critique of existing

'art', but it has been seen as a liberating, enabling gesture – not least to the artist making a multiple. But the readymade is not a multiple.⁷ It is almost its opposite. The readymade imports the quotidian into art, whereas the multiple exports the art object into everyday life.

Notes

- 1 For the erotics of Duchamp's optical concerns, see Krauss (1994), pp. 99–146.
- 2 Tomkins (1998), p. 301.
- 3 Lebel (1959), pp. 84–5. Schwarz (1997), p. 729, dates the Concours as lasting from 30 September until 7 October, but as Duchamp later talked of it lasting a month (and needing to hire a secretary) the dates of 30 August to 7 October, in *Plan pour écrire une vie de Marcel Duchamp* (1977) are probably correct. The stand was No. 147, Alley F.
- 4 Naumann (1982), p. 5. *Emergency in Favor of Twice* is a lost work.
- 5 Schwarz (1969), p. 463 identifies them as *In Advance of the Broken Arm* and *Pliant ... de voyage*.
- 6 Tomkins (1998), pp. 180–86; Camfield (1989), *passim*.
- 7 In 1964 Duchamp allowed Arturo Schwarz to make an 'edition' of eight copies of *Bicycle Wheel*, *Bottle Dryer*, *Comb*, *Fountain*, *Fresh Widow*, *Hat Rack*, *In Advance of the Broken Arm*, *Paris Air*, *Pliant ... de voyage*, *Trébuchet*, *With Hidden Noise* and *Why Not Sneeze Rose Selavy?*. See Buchholz in *International Index of Multiples* (1993), pp. 61–4. For Duchamp's attitude to business, see Judovitz (1998), pp. 160–94. While I accept her case for Duchamp's indifference to business (despite being at various times an art dealer himself), for me, the Schwarz works are editioned reproductions rather than multiples, i.e. they were conceived as one-off pieces made from pre-existing objects or materials, and not as maquettes for some future edition.

4

The artist as fabricator

Rembrandt's *Self-portrait* (Iveagh Bequest, Kenwood) has two large circles in the background. It alludes to Vasari's account of Giotto's demonstration of artistic skill, the freehand drawing of a circle.¹ El Lissitzky's *The Constructor* (1924) is a photogram, a photomontaged self-portrait with Lissitzky's hand seeming to come out of the right-hand side of his head, and gripping a compass against a graph-paper background.² The compass seems to describe a perfect, mechanical circle. Handmade versus mechanical? This would be simplistic: as Alpers has argued, Rembrandt's left hand is fused with brushes, mahlstick and brushes, 'almost a prosthetic device'.³ But Rembrandt's studio is one of almost alchemical transformation – of materials into art through skill, mark and human gesture. The trajectory of modern art can be seen as one of the relegation of human skill, and its replacement by the mechanical. Drawing is replaced by technical drawing with set-square and compass, as in Picabia's *Portrait d'une jeune fille américaine* (1915) and taken to new heights with Duchamp's *Large Glass*.⁴

Molly Nesbit has explored the context of Duchamp's readymades, bringing out the influence of the technical drawing lessons of the centralized French curriculum and its concomitant manuals, such as Darchez's *Nouveau cours de dessin* (1986–88), emphasizing the repetitive copying of quotidian artefacts – wooden stools, step-stools, step-ladders, pails, tubs, flowerpots, music stands, barrels, bushels, chests, Guéridons, tables, trestles, sawhorses or mason's

troughs: 'At one stage in the history of industry, it displayed a culture for itself, rather than, as came to be the case, using another kind of culture to represent its interests.'⁵ 'Art' and the 'artist' as individual may have been the result of the rise of bourgeois capitalism in fifteenth-century wool-rich Siena and Florence – Baxandall's account of a perspective grounded in the gauging of barrels is pertinent – but art did not reflect its economic base in a direct fashion, despite the proprietorial display of Dutch seventeenth-century still life.⁶ Nineteenth-century English art painted the Industrial Revolution indirectly through classical iconography: Vulcan stands for the industrial forge.⁷ With industrial capitalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, industry/capitalism could nakedly flaunt its own image and processes – a superstructure to its own base: this is the moment of the birth, among others, of the readymade and the artist's multiple.

Ironically or through overdetermination, the artist as fabricator came to the fore during the socialist revolution taking place in Russia. The compass image reappears in Naum Gabo and Antoine Pevsner's *Realistic Manifesto*, published on 5 August 1920:

The plumb-line in our hand, eyes as precise as a ruler, in a spirit as taut as a compass ... we construct our work as the universe constructs its own, as the engineer constructs his bridges, as the mathematician his formula of the orbits.

We know that everything has its own essential image: chair, table, lamp, telephone, book, house, man ... they are entire worlds with their own rhythms, their own orbits.⁸

They went on to reject local pictorial colour, descriptive line, volume and mass as sculptural elements and affirming 'kinetic rhythms as the basic forms of our perception of real time'.⁹ Constructivism could be seen as an attempt to match the triumph of the Enlightenment project which had culminated in socialism: a new 'realism', a supra-realism was required, appropriate for modern Russian society. But it owed much to Italian futurism. Balla's *Technical Manifesto of Sculpture* (1912) and (with Depero) his *Futurist Reconstruction of the Universe* (1915) had promoted the use of unconventional sculptural materials – coloured wires of every thickness, of metal, wool, silk; coloured glass, tissue paper, cellu-

loid, metal net, all sorts of highly coloured transparent materials, glass, metal laminates, coloured metal paper and all sorts of dazzling materials; mechanical, electronic, musical and noisy units, chemically luminous liquids of variable colours, springs, levers, tubes etc. Tatlin uses metal sheets, wire, glass etc.¹⁰

Although Russian constructivism was short-lived it had an important impact on the history of the artist's multiple. Tatlin's and the other constructivists' use of industrial materials, interest in the kinetic and their making of models, mobiles and maquettes (unable, perhaps, to do otherwise until the new utopia was attained) were taken up by the Groupe de recherche d'art visuel (1960–) – Julio Le Parc (*Jeu visuel formes en mouvement*, 1966), François Morellet (*Sphère trame*, 1966), Francisco Sobrino (*02M (Cercles)*, 1968), Joel Stein (*Kaleidoscope*, 1969) and Jean Pierre Yvaral (*Plan espace*, 1967) – all made multiples, motivated by a desire to involve more spectators and to involve them more with art, and utilizing new materials: perspex, metal, elasticated string etc.

More importantly, the legacy of constructivism for the artist's multiple, lies in its critique of the studio mode of artistic production. Rather than the individualistic artist, the constructivist used the workshop team, the industrial process. Moholy-Nagy (1895–1946) anticipated conceptual art in his *Telephone Pictures* (1922):

In an industrial age the distinction between art and non-art, between manual craftsmanship and mechanical technology is no longer an absolute one. Neither painting nor photography, the motion pictures nor light display can be any longer jealously separated from each other. In 1922 I ordered by telephone from a sign factory five paintings in porcelain enamel. I had the factory's colour chart before me and I sketched my paintings on graph paper. At the other end of the telephone the factory supervisor had the same kind of paper, divided into squares. He took down the dictated shapes in the correct position.¹¹

Although artists had previously used a primitive division of labour in their studios and employed others to fabricate or complete works, with Moholy-Nagy's recipe the route to conceptual art and the fabricated artist's multiple is clear.

Chris Burden's installation at the Tate Gallery, London, 18 March–18 July

1999, *When Robots Rule: The Two-minute Airplane Factory*, installs a high-tech factory production line in the neo-classical Duveen galleries and Sackler Octagon – an industrial, robotic process in a traditional museum space. Every two minutes the production line is intended to assemble and launch a Peck-Polymer model aeroplane:

The airplane factory is designed to be as automated as possible ... Humans only load the raw materials into the totally robotic factory, i.e. wood, paper, glue and pre-made plastic parts. The factory loads 1/16 inch squared sticks of balsa, holds these sticks in an accurate jig, glues the sticks together at the proper angles, delicately lays and glues the tissue paper across the tops of the finished wing, tail and rudder assemblies, glues these sub-components onto the fuselage stick, assembles and attaches the wheels and propellor, and finally winds the rubber band and launches the finished airplane ... Each plane spirals upward to a height of thirty to forty feet until its power is dissipated and it glides back to the floor. Immediately the planes are retrieved by a gallery attendant and offered for sale to the public at a nominal price.¹²

This is almost *the reductio ad absurdum* of the artist's multiple. Unfortunately this total automation of the process, situated as an artwork itself in a museum context, was less than than successful: technical problems dogged the project and very few planes were made and flown.¹³

Notes

- 1 See Broos (1971), pp. 150–84.
- 2 Cf. the compass in Durer's *Melancholia*.
- 3 Alpers (1988), p. 28.
- 4 Krauss (1998), pp. 89–210. Cf. Bury (1999), p. [1].
- 5 Nesbit (1986), p. 54. A gendered account by Nesbit appears in Duve (1991), pp. 351–94.
- 6 Baxandall (1988), *passim*.
- 7 Cf. Klingender (1972). See also Buck-Morss's exploration of Ur-forms etc. in Buck-Morss (1991), pp. 114–17.
- 8 Bann (1974), p. 9.
- 9 Bann (1974), pp. 9–10.
- 10 For the poor treatment of Italian futurism by art historians and the complex relationship between Italian and Russian futurism, see Bury (1995), p. 16, n. 1–2. For Depero and Balla's 'reconstruction', see Apollonio (1973), pp. 197–200.
- 11 Moholy-Nagy (1969), p. 30.

12 Morris (1999), p. 8.

13 Whether the airplanes are multiples or parts of the whole piece is debatable – they could be compared to the submarines in the installation, *All the Submarines of the United States of America* (1987). On the other hand they came off a production line and became saleable almost immediately.

5

The store and more: Pop Art and Fluxus

Emile Zola's *Au bonheur des dames* (1883), the eleventh book in the Rougon-Macquart series, uses the setting of a modern Parisian department store, the Ladies' Paradise, in the Opéra district. Octave Mouret, the owner-manager, has the talent to display the fecundity of mass production in such a way as to provoke and satisfy the desires of the women of Second Empire Paris: within the store Mouret is the literal seducer of his female assistants, until he meets the resistant Denise Baudu, relative of a small-time, failing draper, opposite the expanding Ladies' Paradise.¹ Denise Baudu refuses to be 'commodified', until, like Richardson's Pamela, she is victorious over Mouret or perhaps has become 'commodified' after all. The manipulation of hysteria is one of the leit-motifs of the book. Its connection with erotic fetishism had been theorized in advance of Freud by the French writer, Alfred Binet: the mannequins, ribbons, dresses, underwear and other haberdashery become so many objects of fetishism.²

The French for window-shopping is *lèche-vitrine*, literally window-licking: economic consumption is equated with eating, with carnal union, the glass only temporarily delaying (and provoking) sexual satisfaction. Duchamp later spoke of 'hiding this coition through a sheet of glass with one or more of the objects in the shop window' and the shop window is the determining referent of his *The Large Glass*.³ Curiously, the vitrine, the glass or Perspex case, is the favoured mode of display for the artist's multiple.

The changes taking place in mass production and mass consumption at the end of the nineteenth century were dwarfed by those taking place in the USA after the Second World War. Technical innovation necessitated by the war, coupled with the freeing up of materials, such as polyethylene used as insulation in aircraft, an increase in disposable wealth and leisure time, combined with developments in mass-media – television (both a product and a cause of the phenomenon), radio, hi-fi, mass leisure journals – were the context of Pop Art.⁴ Indeed, to begin with, mass culture meant Pop Art: the English artist Richard Hamilton's famous list – 'popular (designed for a mass audience), transient (short-term solution), expendable (easily forgotten), low cost, mass produced, young (aimed at youth), witty, sexy, gimmicky, glamorous, big business' – could almost read as a checklist of criteria for the Pop Art multiple.⁵

Christo's *Look Magazine empaqueté* (1965) uses a mass leisure magazine with a cropped photograph of a glamorous girl for 'The American Woman' issue; itself, the result of offset colour reproduction, it is wrapped in polyethylene, imitating news vendors' packaging. Andy Warhol's *Campbell's Soup Can on Shopping Bag* (1964) again uses a pre-existing printed form, the actual label of the soup can, as the basis of his silkscreen print: reproduction is reproduced. The images of culture, culled from magazines, packaging, film etc., were as important as the real things, especially in England, to some extent remote from the excesses of the American market.⁶ For Claes Oldenburg reproduction was part of a distancing process:

There is first the ice-cream cone as it is. This would be one imitation. Then begins a series of parallel representations which are not the ice-cream cone but nevertheless realistic or objective: f. ex. The ice-cream cone in a newspaper ad. The ice-cream cone or any popular shape as a fetish object. The ice-cream cone in altered scale (giant). The ice-cream cone as a symbol etc. Only the created object – my parallel cone – will include and/or concentrate several of these.⁷

Oldenburg's *Store Days* (1967) documents his 'Store' project of 1961. Alternatively called 'My Store' or the 'Ray-Gun Mfg. Co.', this was located in a 10ft x 80ft space at 107 East 2nd Street, New York. Oldenburg's intention was to create an environment from painted 'popular objects of merchandise, such as

may be seen in stores and store-windows of the city', particularly of the vicinity, Clinton, Delancey and 14th Street.⁸ An inventory of December 1961 itemizes 107 items including: a cash register, US flag fragment, Times Square figure, Statue of Liberty souvenir, wedding bouquet, mannikin [*sic*] with one-leg, sewing machine, cigarettes in pack fragment, Pepsi-Cola sign, oranges, plate of meat, bacon and egg, big sandwich, red pie, small yellow pie, ice-cream cone and heel, braselette [*sic*], man's shoe, white gym shoes, big chocolate cake, cheese cake, cherry pastry, pile of toast, carrots, fried chicken, fried egg in pan etc. Garish colours and variable scale made for a startling effect.⁹

An Art Freed photograph shows a man walking past The Store on a wet New York day. The front of the store is glass almost to the floor: on the painted wooden floor are plates with slices of cake of varying size, an out-of-scale, large airmail envelope etc. The multiples are plainly 'imperfect' impersonations of objects – 'unreal'. But as design historians such as Petroski have argued, most manufactured goods that we take for granted today had a history of design failure – the can invented before its opener, the long struggle to make a zip that worked reliably (or at all).¹⁰ The 'American Supermarket' show was a much more glamorous presentation. Organized by Ben Birillo with Paul Bianchini and Dorothy Herzka (Lichtenstein), it took place at the Bianchini Gallery, 16 East 78th Street, New York, 6 October–7 November, 1964: Robert Watts supplied wax tomatoes, chrome cabbages, cantaloupes, peppers, eggs and bananas; Mary Inman fabricated steak, chicken, pastrami and cheeses; Billy Apple, slices of painted bronze watermelons; Andy Warhol, cartons of Campbell's tomato juice, Kellogg's cornflakes and Brillo soap pads (perhaps a pun on Ben Birillo's name); Tom Wesselmann made a turkey design for a shopping bag, while Andy Warhol contributed a Campbell's Soup Can bag, both intended to be used to carry away purchases from the supermarket.¹¹ Pop Art's hard-edged, colourful brashness had become its hegemonic style. Barbara Kulicke and Robert Graham's Betsy Ross Flag and Banner Company, Rosa Esman's Tanglewood Press (1964–93), which produced the influential *7 Objects in a Box* (1966), Tatyana Grosman's Universal Limited Art Editions (1956–) and Kulicke, Graham, Sonny Sloan and Marian Goodman's Multiples Inc. (1965–) utilized the banner fabricators, model-makers and silkscreen workshops of industrial America to imitate itself.

Meanwhile, the Fluxus 'movement' had started with the foundation of the Fluxus Press in 1961. Influenced by Dada, the activities of John Cage and Merce Cunningham, Ferlinghetti's City Lights Bookstore and Alan Kaprow's Happenings, European Situationism and the Gutai Group in Japan, Fluxus was centred around its Lithuanian-born master of ceremonies, George Maciunas (1931–78).¹² Primarily interested in improvised performance and intermedia, Fluxus now seems primarily a printed matter and multiple movement, simply through the survival of material, which might have originated as notation for performance (Brecht's *Water Yam*) or prop. But distribution (of ideas) was its watchword: Naim June Paik in his contribution to *Fluxus, etc.* announced: 'Marx: Seize the production-medium! Fluxus: Seize the distribution medium.'¹³ The 1964/65 photograph Willem de Ridder's *European Mail-order Warehouse/Fluxshop* displays the products of Fluxus – Ay-O's *Finger Box*, Ben Vautier's *Mystery Box*, George Brecht's *Delivery Direction* and *Water Yam*, the collective *Fluxkit*, Fluxus newspapers and year boxes. Price lists were revised, mail order provided and advertising matter made.¹⁴ The centre of this network was Maciunas's New York apartment: Maciunas pioneered the collective use by artists of 'loft' spaces and derelict industrial buildings in downtown New York, and the situation of Fluxus productions seems appropriate to these surroundings. He also could not resist buying in bulk, whatever the product – automobile tyres or cans of drink – and colleagues testify to the shelves and shelves of boxes and boxes of cans, bottles, jars, components, bulbs and the inevitable canned food.¹⁵

Joseph Beuys's series of Economic Value multiples are relatively subfusc, reflecting perhaps the grey world of post-war Europe. American consumerism provided the colour and humour for Fluxus multiples: indeed, there were crossovers between Fluxus and Pop Art – Oldenburg contributed *False Food Selection* (1965–68) to the Flux Cabinet and Robert Watts was a prominent Fluxus artist. A distinctive feature of Fluxus multiples is the packaging – wooden boxes, boxes within boxes, cardboard cartons, jars, bottles and clear plastic containers with hinged lids. The relationship between container and contained – 'content' – can be problematic, as if the container is the context for the work or the object, which would otherwise pass unnoticed. Fluxus multiples often play on the frustration of expectations, the proclaimed purpose of the label

being discrepant with the banal tools within. But packaging is also the lifeblood of consumerism, protecting goods from factory or farm to warehouse and store and home. Its anonymity is congruent with the doctrine of Fluxus that art is inherent in everything. It also allows art to escape the gallery distribution system – at least theoretically.

George Maciunas had the (serious) ambition to overthrow the state and the institutions of art by clogging up postal boxes with thousands of heavy bricks, addressed to galleries and artists, without stamps, complete with the return address of other museums and galleries. But the multiple perhaps was more revolutionary: it stands for the abstraction of art and the abstraction of commodities. Goux has argued that the departure from the gold standard in favour of paper and of credit, destabilized the world of literature, using Gide's *Counterfeiters* as one of his examples.¹⁶ Krauss has extended this theory into the art world, seeing the abstraction and surface of the early cubist works of Picasso and Braque as an equivalent.¹⁷ The multiple might be a better example: its separation from and proximity to the real world give it a symbolic, abstract value. It is negotiable, saleable and widely distributable. Curiously, there are quite a few multiples that refer to money directly – Oldenburg's free-hanging 9 99 sign and the 39 Cents sculpture in *The Store* or Marcel Broodthaers's *One Kilo of Gold* (1971), General Idea's *Liquid Assets* (1980) or Jessica Diamond's *Gold Bar* (1989/90). General Idea's *The Boutique from the 1984 Miss General Idea Pavilion* (1980) displays its wares in a dollar-shaped boutique counter and backdrop.¹⁸

The abstraction of the multiple also represents our separation from the world of objects. We no longer associate milk with the cow or wool from the sheep as we ascend the food and product chain: we no longer know how things are made or repaired. The multiple sets up a resistance to the inevitable tide of consumerism. In the fourth book of *Gulliver's Travel*, the voyage to Laputa, Jonathan Swift satirizes the universal language scheme of John Wilkins:

Since Words are only Names for Things, it would be more convenient for all men to carry about them, such Things as were necessary to express the particular Business they are to discourse on ... many of the most Learned and Wise adhere to the new Scheme of expressing themselves by *Things*; which hath only this Inconvenience

attending it; that if a Man's Business be very great, and of various Kinds, he must be obliged in Proportion to carry a greater Bundle of *Things* upon his Back ... I have often beheld two of those Sages almost sinking under the Weight of their Packs, like Pedlars among us; who when they met in the Streets would lay down their Loads, open their Sacks, and hold Conversation for an Hour together; then put up their Implements, help each other to resume their Burthens, and take their Leave.¹⁹

Just as the cargo cults of Melanesia – where natives went on ‘strike’ awaiting the ship full of Western goods but made stone, leaves and wood into simulacra of paper, rifles and knives – resisted colonialism and missionary activity, so the artist's multiple resists the consumption of goods, interrogating the gaps between use and exchange value.²⁰ It was Rousseau who argued that with the advent of society man no longer wanted what he needed: he only wanted what he did not need. Christian Jankowski's video *The Hunt* (1992) has a hunter with bow and arrows bagging the tins of meat and fish in the supermarket – an ironic comment on human progress.²¹

Notes

- 1 Interestingly, Claes Oldenburg claimed that *The Store* was influenced by ‘Atget corset shops’, Oldenburg (1967), p. 26.
- 2 I am indebted for this point to Brian Nelson's introduction to Zola (1995).
- 3 Duchamp (1999), pp. 5–6.
- 4 For polyethylene see Clarke (1999), pp. 36–42, and Meikle (1997), p. 175. Barthes's 1957 essay ‘Plastic’ reveals the post-war fascination with this protean ‘substance’, see Barthes (1993).
- 5 Hamilton (1982), p. 28.
- 6 Stich (1987) and Varnedoe and Gopnik (1990) describe the relationship of art to consumerism.
- 7 Oldenburg (1967), p. 48.
- 8 Oldenburg (1967), p. 16.
- 9 Oldenburg (1967), pp. 31–4.
- 10 Petroski (1992), *passim*.
- 11 The best account of ‘The American Supermarket’ is in Glenn (1997), pp. 31–40. The photographs are especially informative.
- 12 For a summary of the Dada connections, see Bury (1995), p. 17.
- 13 Hendricks (1981), p. 19.
- 14 Hendricks (1988), pp. 231–7. The first Fluxshop was in the cellar and shop window of a bookshop, Amstel 47, Amsterdam. Maciunas hoped to have other distribution nodes in Nice, Berlin, Copenhagen and Tokyo.
- 15 See Williams (1997) for the Fluxus Cooperative Building Project. Maciunas lost an eye in the Mafia assault, pp. 211, 222, 34f.
- 16 Goux (1994), *passim*.

6

Joseph Beuys: 'Why doesn't the "Felt Suit" have buttons?'¹

Joseph Beuys (1921–86) made over 520 multiples, starting with the cast-iron *Eiserne Schädelplatte* (Iron Cranial Plate) for the Art Association of the Rhinelands and Westphalia issued in 1952 in an edition of 100, largely concentrated in the period 1965–85.² This constitutes a serious and sustained project, and it should be possible to see how Beuys developed and used the multiples format. Despite Jörg Schellmann's excellent documentation, it is difficult to generalize from the disparate types of multiples – photographs, prints, drawings, film and video, 'assisted readymades', editioned multiples, postcards, posters – except to say they are held together by the artist's signature, rubber stamp or the reddish-brown *Braunkreuz* (brown cross), have some stability of materials (fat, felt, paint, glass, wood) and Beuys's evident exploratory approach to the format.

How did Beuys see or define the multiple? In an interview with Schellmann and Bernd Klüser in December 1970, Beuys spoke of 'two intersecting' explanations:

Naturally, I search for a suitable quality in an object, which permits multiplication of that object, for instance the quality implying a series, found in this bottle of tonic water. Just by being an article of commerce, this bottle can communicate much through repetition.

But actually, it's more important to speak of distribution, of reaching a larger number of people.³

The interview was continued in June 1977 when there was much more emphasis on the political aspects of Beuys's work and, in particular, on the developing 'iconography' of the multiples, as if they had developed an aesthetic momentum and self-referentiality of their own, as if they had become an art institution in themselves.

Intuition was published in 1968 by Vice-Versand, Remscheid, in an edition of 12 000–15 000 ('unlimited' in some accounts). It consists of a simple, primitive even, wooden box, 30 × 21 × 6 cm. On the inside base of the box is a dated signature of the artist and simple lines, terminated with a short vertical mark, all in pencil. It is shocking in its naked simplicity. But the combination of artist's mark and 'mass'-produced object is perhaps most disturbing: the difference in knot, texture, nailing and assembly of each wooden box seems more 'individualistic' than the artist's gesture. The photograph of Wolfgang Feelisch and Beuys, signing some of the edition in front of the Kunstakademie, Düsseldorf, reinforces this dichotomy between mass production and artistic 'mark'. *Intuition* was a formative piece, and through a variant, the drawer with *Guloborealis, beschriebenes Papier in En bloc* (1969/72), influenced Maciunas's *Flux Cabinet* (1977). Beuys had already taken part in some of the activities of Fluxus: notably, the 'Festum Fluxorum Fluxus' concert at the Staatliche Kunstakademie Düsseldorf, 2–3 February 1963.⁴ There would remain consistent differences between Maciunas's Fluxus and Beuys's multiples: the latter still retained a preoccupation with the artist's individual personality and mark, and although many of the Fluxus works were simple they were never as simple as Beuys's, where everyday objects had a certain sadness as opposed to the jaunty American-ness of Maciunas's.

Everness II 1 was made in the same year in an edition of 40 for Galerie René Block, Berlin. The *II* may refer to an earlier prototype, but it is much more likely that the epithet relates to the doubling of the bottles, and operates within the

series of 'doubled' works – *Sulphur-covered Zinc Box (Plugged Corner)* (1970), *Silver Broom and Broom without Bristles* (1972) and *Telephone T——A* (1974) – the latter especially, reminiscent of a children's tin-can telephone, is suggestive of the communication (or its opposite) between two objects/persons operating the object/s.⁵ *Evervess II 1* consists of a wooden packing crate 27 × 17 × 10 cm with two compartments both containing club soda bottles, one with dark blue, light blue and white commercial labelling for Evervess, a trade name of the Pepsi-Cola Company, the neck and body labels on the other being replaced with felt.⁶ The crate lid has stencilled on it: 'Sender beginnt mit der Information wenn "II" ausgetrunken und der Kronverschluss möglichst weit weggeworfen ist': the 'user' or 'sender' or 'communicator' is enjoined to drink the contents and throw the cap as far away as possible. Many of Beuys's multiples relate to some action or performance – as instructions comparable to Brecht's *Water Yam* (1959–66), as 'props' or 'tools' as Beuys preferred to call them, or as the residue of the performance. To complete the instructions for *Evervess* – or any similar multiple – would cancel out its value as a work of art: this is important in differentiating goods 'branded' by an artist from the multiple: the latter should have no 'utility value' other than its being an art object.

The felt on one of the *Evervess* bottles continues Beuys's obsession with this material. In the context of the bottles it suggests both insulation to keep the bottle's contents cool (or warm) and reinforces the dark blue, light blue and white landscape on the label of the other bottle.⁷ It is the sort of landscape that *Sled* (1969) would be dragged through with its survival kit of felt, belts, torch, rope and fat, and where one might perhaps wear *Felt Suit* (1970). Of the latter Beuys remarked: 'On the one hand, it's a house, a cave that isolates a person from everybody else. On the other, it is a symbol of the isolation of human beings in our era. Felt plays the part of an insulator.'⁸ The suit was tailored after one of Beuys's own but with the legs and sleeves lengthened. It also has no buttons.⁹ This incompleteness or deformation of 'reality' suggests another possible characteristic of the multiple, that differentiates it from the mass-produced 'perfect' object.¹⁰

Beuys's multiples oeuvre demonstrates his interest in communication of ideas, that this can be accomplished through the most simple and imperfect means, and perhaps that we can all be artists:

'Everybody is an artist' simply means to point out the human being is a creative being, that he is a creator, and what's more, that he can be productive in a great many different ways. To me, it's irrelevant whether a product comes from a painter, from a sculptor, or from a physicist.¹¹

Beuys's *Enterprise 11/18/72, 18 : 5 : 16 Hours* (1973) is a zinc box with a camera, and the lid contains a photograph by Michael Ruertz of the Beuys family watching *Star Trek* (Raumschiff Enterprise) on 18 November 1972. Immersed in the quotidian, the family, the particular – the month, day, minute, second – this multiple is almost shocking: who would have expected to see the iconic Beuys in such an 'unartistic' setting?

Notes

- 1 Schellmann (1997), p.16.
- 2 Schellmann (1997) lists 557 items and 68 'postcards' but curiously chooses to leave out *Eiserne Schädelplatte* 'because it antedates Beuys' real activity in the field of multiples, indeed the concept of multiples itself', p. 29. Buchholz in *International Index of Multiples* (1993) implies that a stricter definition of multiples would reduce them to 112, pp. 35–6 and Felix (1994), 21, see pp. 131–9.
- 3 Schellmann (1997), p. 9.
- 4 Beuys is almost entirely absent from the canonical catalogue of Hendricks (1988). From the photographs in *1962 Wiesbaden FLUXUS 1982* (1982), pp. 18–23, the stage with ladder, blackboard, grand piano and plan chest seems to have been common to all performances.
- 5 Compare also the singleton, *Bruno Corà Tea* of 1975, a Coca-Cola bottle re-filled with herb tea in a glass-fronted box, and this with Warhol's *Silver Coke Bottle* (1967).
- 6 The placement of the felt and 'standard' bottle seems to vary within the edition.
- 7 Beuys also talked of felt in terms of protection from the outside, from noise as well as cold, and of the use of its greyness 'which serves to emphasize the colours that exist in the world by a psychological after-image effect', Tisdall (1979), p. 120. Of course the simplicity of the material itself was attractive: it is a pre-weaving material reliant on the tendency of fibres to adhere one to another.
- 8 Beuys (1990), p. 206.
- 9 Cf. Duchamp's *Waistcoat* (1957), described as a 'rectified ready-made': it has buttons.
- 10 Grenville Davey talked of his interest in the fault, flaw, error, mistake, 'the wobbly' and the distressed in his talk at the seminar, 'Multiple Meanings and the Object' at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, 5 December 1998.
- 11 Schellmann (1997), p. 19.

Conceptual art and the artist's multiple

Conceptual art was an umbrella term used to describe a cluster of activities – anti-form, art language, eccentric abstraction, anti-illusionism, information art, land art, process art, and serial art – characteristic of avant-garde art practice in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The American art critic Lucy Lippard defined its chief quality as a preoccupation with ‘dematerialization’, an eschewal of ‘uniqueness, permanence, decorative-attractiveness’.¹ The artist Sol LeWitt set the conceptual in opposition to the perceptual/optical: the artist had more control over the former. The Execution of the work became a ‘perfunctory affair’: and, reminiscent of Moholy-Nagy’s description of his telephone pictures, he described the idea as a ‘machine that makes art’.² Conceptual artists were primarily interested in constructing a formulation which laid out how a work of art should be made: whether it should be made more than once, or not at all, did not particularly matter. The collector bought Buren’s or LeWitt’s instructions and whether the wall-drawings were then executed in the owner’s chateau or a gallery was a particular, local manifestation. Conceptual art was repeatable, and its interest in repetition echoed that of minimalism, where industrially fabricated units in the work of Judd, for example, were non-figurative versions of the preoccupation with mass-produced (and stacked) consumer goods – soup cans and Brillo pads – in Pop Art.³

Yet the conceptual art multiple was a rare phenomenon in the period 1966–72, the period covered by Lippard’s chronology and bibliography of con-

ceptual art, *Six Years* (1973). Lippard includes the Pop artists, Fluxus, kinetic artists, Beuys and Christo, but multiples by major conceptual artists – art and language, Graham, Haacke, Huebler, LeWitt or Weiner – are rare, although most of them went on to make many multiples. The anti-form artists, Robert Morris, Richard Serra or Robert Smithson, are more conspicuous, but on the whole their multiples are very close to their sculptural practices of the time.

Why is there this avoidance of the artist's multiple? The conceptual artist still tried to avoid the facture of any object: for LeWitt 'the serial artist does not attempt to produce a beautiful or mysterious object but functions merely as a clerk cataloguing the results of his premise'.⁴ Eschewal of the unique again did not necessarily legitimate an edition, still heavily suggestive of exclusivity, 'authenticity', signature and limitation. The longing to circumvent the gallery system and produce 'democratic' or, at least, democratically distributable art would not easily be served by the artist's multiple. On the other hand one could regard all their work as multiples or, at least, as instructions for their creation.⁵

In a sense their democratic ambition and predilection for repetition reach their apogee in the work of the Cuban-born artist Felix Gonzalez-Torres (1957–96). While he made some traditional multiples such as the *Untitled* series of C-print jigsaw puzzles in editions of two or three, 1987–92, it is the installations of piles of offset-printed sheets (on plain or coloured paper stock) or sweets that fulfil the conceptual artist's dream. *Untitled (Veteran's Day Sale)* (1989) consists of an endlessly renewable pile of paper, 56 × 59 cm, with the words 'VETERANS DAY SALE' in capitals, centred and well spaced out. It has an ideal height, 74 cm, but is endlessly renewable and re-executable by anyone who possesses the signed certificate: the gallery visitor is encouraged to remove one sheet, but what is being taken away?

An individual piece of paper from one of the stacks does not constitute the 'piece' itself, but in fact it is a piece. At the same time, the sum of many pieces of the identical paper is the 'piece', but not really because there is no piece only an ideal height of endless copies ... Yet each piece of paper gathers new meaning, to a certain extent, from its final destination, which depends on the person who takes it.⁶

Untitled (Placebo) (1991), *Untitled (Lover Boys)* (1991) or *Untitled (Para un hombre*

en uniforme) (1991), candies or lollipops, individually wrapped in coloured cellophane or paper, not only invite removal one by one, but suggest consumption, consummation. It is reminiscent of the story of the early Irish scholar, Mac Conglinne, who succeeds in curing the greed of King Cathal of Munster by a process of quasi-sorites: the pile of apples before the king is diminished one by one, each smaller number becoming more mystical as it approaches the mystical, indivisible one.⁷

Notes

- 1 Lippard (1973), p. 5.
- 2 Legg (1978), p. 166.
- 3 Hal Foster develops the relationship between pop art and minimalism in these terms in 'The Crux of Minimalism', Singerman (1986), pp. 178–80. Of course, another influence was the use of repetition in music – in John Cage (who also made multiples) and Steve Reich.
- 4 LeWitt (1967), p. [3].
- 5 For the primary 'literary' quality of the output of conceptual art, see Bury (1995), pp. 20–21.
- 6 *Felix Gonzalez-Torres* (1993), p. 23.
- 7 Hughes (1972), pp. 214–16.

8

The contemporary multiple

Does the contemporary multiple clarify our definition of what is a multiple? The 1990s saw a revival in the medium. The 1960s and 1970s saw a constellation of famous names – Oldenburg, Rauschenberg and Lichtenstein – coinciding with economic growth that financed gallery projects with established and younger artists, and technological advances in two- and three-dimensional reprography from silk-screening and die-cutting to vacuum-forming.¹ These conditions largely disappeared in the 1980s and have remained largely absent in the 1990s. Another conjunction of circumstances had come into play. Neo-conceptualism resulted in an interest in the creation of artefacts other than painting and sculpture, such as artists' books, multiples, films, videos and CD-ROMs. Artists also operated independently of the art market: artists were curators (like Damien Hirst) and writers (Matthew Higgs, Juan Cruz and David Musgrave), and the boundary between artist's book, exhibition documentation, mail art and multiple became very blurred.

This brought into focus the question whether the multiple should be two-dimensional or three-dimensional. There is something artificial in this dichotomy as even a so-called two-dimensional sheet of paper is really three-dimensional, having depth, however slight. The Multiple Store, London, set up by Sally Townsend and Nicholas Sharp, in 1998 seems to have a presumption in favour of the three-dimensional. Its first collection included Dalziel and Scullion's *The Idea of North*, a compass in an engraved Perspex disc in a print-

ed polypropylene wallet; Graham Gussin's *Ghost*, a 20 cm in diameter pulped paper disc; Grenville Davey's almost sculptural *Little Emperor* in slipware (and later, aluminium, bronze and wax); Kenny Hunter's *What is History?*, two cast resin heads of Monica Lewinsky and Osama bin Laden – bookends; Keith Coventry's cast plastic *Inhaler* and Simon Periton's *Barbiturate*, glass barbed wire in white or black or lilac. Only Cornelia Parker's *Meteorite Lands on ...* series was 'two-dimensional', consisting of a maple-boxed framed map of London tracing the burn mark left by a meteorite on Buckingham Palace (popular with republicans), the Houses of Parliament (popular with Scots), the Millennium Dome, Wormwood Scrubs and St Paul's Cathedral. This trend was continued in the second series of 2000 where the only two-dimensional work is Paul Winstanley's *Exhibition*, 'paintings' made from cast plastic with transfers, of Augéan non-places – the waiting room and ineluctable student lounge. The Camden Arts Centre series, commissioned by Jackie Jefferies, has an almost equal mix of the three-dimensional and paper or photograph: Zarina Bhimji's *1822 – Now*, an aluminium-mounted black and white photograph of a mixed-race couple or Juan Cruz's *That That Which*. Paul O'Neill's and Ronan McCrea's *Multiples x*, Dublin, does not eschew the paper-based work – Simon Starling's *Poster Edition*, Martin Boyce's *House Blessing*, silkscreen on uncoated paper, Mark Dickenson's *6B* or Matthew Crawley's *Untitled*, a Perspex-framed Xerox of a letter to NASA asking for help in making an 'Armageddon-proof art object'.

The connection with the artist's book is equally problematic. Fiona Banner's chunky *The Nam* (1997), Jacqueline Donachie's *Kenny's Head* (1999?), David Shrigley's *Blank Page and Other Pages* (1999) or Alun Rowland's *The Origin of the Work of Art* (1999), full of the loan dates taken from the date labels of five copies of Heidegger's *The Origin of the Work of Art*, found in London public libraries hover on the edge of the multiple/artist's book.

While books and prints offer a portable, easily distributable and relatively cheap format, the productions of the Zurich-based Parkett tended to be more expensive, partly because they collaborated with established artists – Richard Artschwager, Vija Celmins, Ilya Kabakov, Mike Kelley or Sigmar Polke. For issue 52 of *Parkett* magazine, Ugo Rondinone's multiple consists of a 14–20 lb stone from the Valle Maggia, accompanied by a polaroid of the stone

and the rather pompous title, *All Moments Stop Here and Together we Become Every Memory that has Ever Been* (1998). For the same issue, Karen Kilimnik's folkloric *Rapunzel* consists of a spindle of golden thread on a bed of moss in a Plexiglas box. Like the de luxe publications of Book Works, London, these editions which appeal to the collector cost originally US\$500 and US\$600 and are in marked contrast to the Bonn-based *PIPS* magazine in a box, which costs 180 DM for three issues. Its subtitle, *Zeitschrift für unZeitgeist, UnKomMerz & Objektliteratur*, gives some indication of its collaborative, neo-Dada nature. Edited by Claudia Pütz, issue no. 3/97, for example, has multiples made from corks, pins, lead, discs, clips, plaster, stone and the ubiquitous banknote on the theme of 'Trophies'. It is similar to Iain Forsyth's and Jane Pollard's *Words + Pictures* (London, 1994–97), boxes containing small, fragile works by Martin Creed, Bob and Roberta Smith, Matthew Higgs, Virgil Tracy and Hadrian Pigott. The magazine performs a function analogous to that of *S.M.S. (Shit Must Stop)*, edited by William Copley (1919–) in 1968, except that the artists Copley included were relatively well known.

This perhaps presents a geographical distinction between the American and mainland European multiples and the British Isles, where the multiple has often been the format that artists, with little or no access to the gallery system, used and through which their work became more widely known. Even the small distributors and publishers like La Belle Haleine, Paris, or Shark Editions in New York present quite a contrast to Tracey Emin's and Sarah Lucas's 'The Shop' (1992) and Sarah Staton's 'Supastore' (1993–98) and, later, the 'The Store and More' (1998–99) which represented a quest for independence and avoidance of the intermediaries of the art market. Staton's own work would reflect the original ambition of Claes Oldenburg's 'The Store', mixing studio with 'gallery' and an overriding interest in the quotidian – painted paper pulp coins, cigarette packs, phone cards and matchboxes. The portability of 'Supastore' in its stencilled boxes also suggested a desire for freedom, and escape from being tied down to one place.

Interrogation of the everyday and interest in the miniature, perhaps fuelled by the popularity of Susan Stewart's *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (1993), are characteristic of the 1990s British multiple which also reflects a renewed interest in situationism,

strategies of resistance to consumer society, such as Neil Cummings and Marysia Lewandowska's 'Currency' project, recovering £1 objects bought on the Holloway Road, London, 'on the last leg from commodity to waste'.²

This has often been accompanied by a use of non-traditional materials. Martin Creed has used Elastoplast, masking tape, Blu-tack, and crumpled paper.³ Cornelia Parker's *Small Thought* (1994), a commission from the Arts Council, adds to a printed circuit board silver lace designs, recalling that electronic component assembly is just as much woman's work as lace-making. Keith Coventry has been concerned with exploration of the underside of urban life, the glue-sniffer, drug addict and vandal. *Inhaler* (1998), commissioned by The Multiple Store, is a true-to-size cast plastic inhaler, the purpose of which has been changed from an aid to the asthmatic to part of a drug addict's equipment. Here the function of the object is made 'defective'. A more obvious interest in the defective is evidenced by Richard Wilson's *Watertable* (1994), developed from his installation at Matt's Gallery, London, a dysfunctional snooker table with drainpipes: it is a 7-inch vinyl record, already an obsolescent format: its playing hole is slightly off centre and therefore it is only playable via 'scratching' on the turntable.

The question 'what is a work of art?' is the basis of Mark Wallinger's *A Real Work of Art* (1994). Traditionally, a trophy is presented to the owner of the winner of a horse-race – redolent of privilege, class and wealth: trophies are redolent of commercialized 'academic art'. Wallinger defeats these expectations: as a multiple in an edition of 50 it cannot be unique. It parodies the sameness of the style of these trophies: it enables a non-horse-owner to own a trophy. At the same time, by declaring itself by 'illocutionary force' to be a 'real work of art' it mocks Adorno's insistence on the authentic. The whole history of the multiple is here.

Notes

- 1 The multiple could also pioneer technological processes and products: Claes Oldenburg's *Profile* (1968) pushed the plastic to its limits and early copies had to be recalled (like defective cars), Fine (1984), pp. 62–3.
- 2 See the Cummings and Lewandowska website: www.chanceprojects.com and Bury (2000a).
- 3 In *Martin Creed Works* (2000), Matthew Higgs talks of Creed's interest in 'object situations' and quotes Creed's belief that 'the whole world + the work = the whole world'.

Afterword

The problem with history is that its participants – especially artists – can be conscious of what has gone before and even want to parody it. Daniel Spoerri's *L'Optique moderne* (1963), consisting of a book with a pair of glasses with pins on the lenses, pointing towards the eye, is the base of an iconographic chain of reference that runs from Rosemarie Trockel's *Four Eyes* (1991), glasses with different lenses, Jonathan Monk's *My Glasses* (1994), Fiona Banner's *Inside-out Aviator Glasses* (1994) through to Rirkrit Tiravanija's *Untitled, 1995 (450/375)*, gold-rimmed Ray Ban glasses with text engraved on the lenses. Peter Liversidge's *Bird Box* (1996) references Felix Droese's economic *Regenwald* (1987), a toilet-roll cardboard core recycled into a possible bird box, and Maria Eichhorn's *Nistkasten* (1992). Hadrian Piggott's *Boy, ?, Girl* (1994) may refer in its use of soap to Peter Freeman's *Freeman's Hepworth Perfumed Toilet Soap* (1969) or Claes Oldenburg's gigantic floating bar of soap project for the river running through Proctor and Gamble's headquarters city, Baton Rouge, resulting in the multiple, *The Soap at Baton Rouge* (1990).

While artists are consciously subverting or extending the images, materials and methods of other makers of artists' multiples, any definition of them will be difficult – as in topological theory where sets can be unstable, with objects sometimes in one set and at another time in a different one. Even the traditional quality of multiples, three-dimensionality, is open to question: the Pop multiple was as synonymous with banners and silk-screened shopping bags

as with cast hamburgers; conceptual and neo-conceptual multiples primarily use text. A broad definition would have to take this into account. The artist's multiple is a twentieth-century phenomenon – perhaps the art of the century: it is made by an artist (however defined); there is always more than one, the denial of the authentic 'original' and the insistence on the equality of each one in the 'edition' being important characteristics; and the artist chooses the medium 'multiple' rather than painting, sculpture, printmaking, audio or video (although the multiple might take the form of one or all of these). The following catalogue of over 900 multiples takes this 'maximum', broad-church definition.

But for me, personally, there is a more central definition too: this multiple would be in an edition of at least 50; it would be fabricated by another; it would use new materials and processes rather than, for example, traditional bronze; it would simulate an everyday object but not be useful; and it would be humorous in its subversion of that object.¹

Note

- 1 For different 'uses' of household items see Lansky (1991), *passim*.