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**Fundamentally Photographic:
The Art of Bill Culbert**

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A thesis submitted for the degree of
Master of Arts
at the University of Otago, Dunedin,
New Zealand.

2005

ABSTRACT

This thesis applies photographic theory and approaches to the interpretation of Bill Culbert's three-dimensional installations, elucidating the interdisciplinary nature of his oeuvre. It examines the writings of Roland Barthes, Rosalind Krauss and Susan Sontag, amongst others, and relates their discussions of photographic theory to the role that photography plays in Culbert's work. Chapter one examines Culbert's use of photography to explore themes further developed in his installations, investigates the role of the camera obscura in his break from painting, and identifies the continuous interaction between his three-dimensional work and his photographs. Chapter two explores Culbert's use of light and its interaction with space, relating the examination of light and space in his work to aspects of photography such as the index, time, movement, multiplicity and the photographic surface. It also identifies his site-specific practice as part of a broad challenge to Modernism's autonomy and the coded nature of the gallery that began in the 1960s. Chapter three examines Culbert's use of readymade objects and his manipulation of their original contexts, noting parallels to the photographic image's relationship with context. This chapter compares Culbert's use of found objects to Marcel Duchamp's readymades, the Surrealist found object, avant-garde photomontage and Minimalist sculpture. Chapter four investigates the binary states of reality and illusion – integral to photography – that inform Culbert's work. This chapter discusses Plato's allegory of the Cave and the indexical nature of photography, then goes on to explore Culbert's use of shadow, reflection, metaphor, metonymy, pun and inversion, arguing that these devices resonate with photography's mediation of our perception of reality. The thesis concludes by arguing that Culbert's rejection of Modernism's self-referentiality and his fusion of painting, photography and installation locates his work within Postmodernist practice.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Firstly, much gratitude and heart-felt thanks to Dr Erika Wolf for her support, enthusiasm and engagement with my work. This thesis would not be what it is today without her valuable input and depth of knowledge. Thanks also to Dr Mark Stocker for his advice and exceptional editing skills – I hope I can always live up to the challenge of being ‘not entirely bad’ at what I do.

I vividly remember the day I received a letter from the Centre for Contemporary Photography (CCP) in Melbourne accepting me as an intern. CCP fostered my love of photography and encouraged my desire to study again. Limitless gratitude to Tessa, Rebecca and Charlotte for the amazing opportunities they gave me.

Thanks must also go to Lissa Mitchell in the photography department at the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa for making available Bill Culbert’s photographs, amongst others, and to the E. H. McCormick Research Library at the Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki.

I would never have survived this year without the support of my family and friends. To everyone, from the bottom of my heart, thank you. In particular, I cannot express how grateful I am to Mum and Anna for their absolute commitment to supporting me through good and bad days alike, and to my brother Gareth, the postmodern superstar DJ. Many thanks also to my office buddy Anna for her company, her editing, many laughs and Wednesday evenings at Poppa’s Pizza. And, of course, thanks to Michael (Mikey) for his love, encouragement and patience during the long trial of separation.

Undertaking this thesis was about restoring my faith in my own ability. Thank you to everyone that has supported me through this process, which has been in turns rewarding, torturous, fascinating, exhausting and, in the end, everything I hoped it would be.

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INTRODUCTION

“We are always using light; it is a function of living.”¹

- Bill Culbert, interview with Yves Abrioux, 1994

The Light Goes On

The inspiration for this thesis began while I was working at the Centre for Contemporary Photography (CCP) in Melbourne. During my time there, I decided that – should my academic study in Art History and Theory continue – I wanted to learn more about photography and photographic theory. CCP instilled in me a love of photography and an intuitive understanding of the medium, but I was all too aware of the omission of photography from my formal education. I wished to later address this gap in my knowledge.

While living in London some years later, I decided to undertake postgraduate study in Art History. However, apart from knowing that my thesis would involve photography, I had yet to decide on a topic or a body of work to explore. During the lengthy hours spent at my desk in a central London office, I searched for inspiration on the Internet. My surreptitious investigations yielded two hits that ultimately led to the formulation of my topic. Firstly, I found an article by New Zealand critic and academic Christina Barton on the Conceptual Art Online website. The article, titled “Traces and Boundaries: The Photographic Legacy of Post-Object Art”², introduced me to a number of points about photography and encouraged me to think about photography’s impact on post-object art and installation practices. I also noticed in her footnotes that Barton had written an essay about photography in the art of Bill Culbert. This reference triggered me to remember Culbert’s *LIGHTWORKS* exhibition, which I had seen early in my undergraduate studies – an exhibition that had captivated me at the time. I

¹ Bill Culbert, with Yves Abrioux, “An Understanding of Light – Interview” in *Bill Culbert – Afterdark*, Yves Abrioux et al, (Limoges: Editions FRAC Limousin, 1994): 38.

² Christina Barton, “Traces and Boundaries: The Photographic Legacy of Post-Object Art”, posted on *Conceptual Art Online*, (last modification unknown), www.imageandtext.org.nz/tina.html, [accessed 26 August 2003].

searched Culbert on Google and discovered an image of his photograph *Sun, Glass/Wine* (1992; fig. 1). The photograph depicts a small wine glass filled with red wine sitting on a table in the sun, the shadow cast by the glass resembling the shape of a light bulb, complete with illuminated filament. This optical peculiarity delighted and fascinated me, and the light quite literally went on in my mind. Despite not knowing at that early stage how involved Culbert was with the medium of photography and how significant a part of his oeuvre it formed, I decided to explore the connection – if there was one – between his photographs and his installations, and to see if I could succeed in applying photographic theory and principles to his three-dimensional installations. The result is this thesis.

Bill Culbert: An Overview of His Career

Bill Culbert was born in Port Chalmers, New Zealand, in 1935. After studying at the Canterbury University School of Art from 1953-56, he was offered a scholarship in 1957 to study painting at the Royal College of Art in London. Upon his arrival in England, he was so overwhelmed by the European art he saw that he stopped painting for two years, resorting to photographing in order to keep working.³ Culbert graduated from the Royal College of Art in 1960 and had the first solo exhibition of his paintings one year later at the Commonwealth Institute Art Gallery in London. Like his very early photographs, Culbert's paintings are not reproduced in any readily available sources. David Thompson, in his introduction to Culbert's 1977 *Beyond Light* exhibition, states that Culbert's early paintings reflected his interest in recording sequences in time and changes to the features of a particular object, themes that have continued to inform his work throughout his career.⁴ In 1961-2, Culbert spent a year in France. He bought a house in the Lubéron district of southern France, which still serves as his part-time studio. Since this first visit, aspects of France and French life, including objects specific to the area, have played an integral part in his work. When he returned to London in 1962, Culbert brought with him a range of objects from France, including saw blades. He incorporated these blades into his paintings to create pictorial 'constructions'. Although the experiment was never repeated, it demonstrates an early example of his

³ David Thompson, *Bill Culbert*, (Great Britain: Westerham Press, 1977): unpaginated.

⁴ David Thompson, *Bill Culbert*: unpaginated.

ongoing interest in the use of objects, their familiarity, and the sense of memory that is attached to them.⁵

From 1960-62, Culbert lectured once a week at the Hornsey College of Art. There, he came into contact with Bridget Riley and Maurice de Sausmarez, a teacher who influenced a range of young painters at the time. Culbert became friends with Riley, and, in different ways, both painters explored the realms of optics, illusion, and movement. Around this time, Culbert's paintings were concerned with rhythmical repetition and superimposition, issues related to Futurist dynamism and the Cubist construction of space. From 1962-65, Culbert held a position as Fellow in Fine Art at the University of Nottingham and subsequently turned to full abstraction, his paintings creating a structured and patterned pictorial dynamism.⁶ In 1966, Culbert returned to Hornsey to teach part-time and began a close collaborative partnership with fellow teacher Stuart Brisley. Both artists were dealing with light, kinetics, and optical illusion, though Brisley lacked Culbert's experience with colour and Culbert in turn lacked Brisley's familiarity with three-dimensionality. Both were dissatisfied with the personal art object, and their collaborations were designed to articulate that dissatisfaction. Culbert and Brisley constructed a series of *Neons* from 1967-68, which were assembled from coloured neon tubes that went through a range of sequential light and colour changes.⁷

Culbert's final paintings were produced around the time of his collaborations with Brisley. His canvases explored the optical and kinetic effects of colour. David Thompson states "One of his concerns was pictorial space, layering the painting with an unfocussed grey to establish a middle ground against which the optical distances of more positive colour could be measured."⁸ Concurrent with Culbert's break from painting was the British art scene's emphasis on art and life. The self-referentiality of Modernism was being challenged by a diverse range of practices designed to push back

⁵ David Thompson, *Bill Culbert*: unpaginated.

⁶ David Thompson, *Bill Culbert*: unpaginated.

⁷ David Thompson, *Bill Culbert*: unpaginated.

⁸ David Thompson, *Bill Culbert*: unpaginated.

the limits of art.⁹ Pop Art had played a prominent part in the British art scene during the late 1950s and early 1960s, and both the second and third wave of British Pop artists were, like Culbert, students at the Royal College of Art. Op Art aimed to destroy the limitations of the picture surface by introducing the illusion of movement to the surface of the canvas. Kinetic sculpture, which was part of an international trend towards creating moving works of art, turned Op Art's implied movement into actuality. Like the American Minimalist sculptors, Anthony Caro was engaged with removing sculpture from a rarefied aesthetic discourse by introducing everyday materials such as steel into his work. Running parallel to the influence of Minimalism in Britain's art scene was Conceptualism, which focused on information and ideas rather than the finality of the art object. Conceptual artists such as Victor Burgin and collective Art & Language turned to the more depersonalised media of photography, video and text to escape the conventions surrounding the unique work of art. Photography, with its inherent connection to the real world, was also being used extensively to document art practices such as performance, earthworks and ephemeral sculpture. Gilbert and George used their own bodies to create 'living sculptures' and documented their performances in 'photo-pieces' that later became their principal form of expression. Sculptors such as Richard Long also began incorporating time into their work, and used photography to record their movement through the landscape.¹⁰ Culbert has adopted many of the techniques that these and other British artists working in the 1960s and early 1970s used to challenge the discrete categories of art. His work reflects an ongoing interest in illusion, the use of everyday materials, movement, time and photography – approaches and themes that dominated the British art scene during his early artistic career.

Culbert's first light objects were constructed in 1967-68. They consisted of black metal boxes containing light, which were drilled with holes so that the geometrically patterned fields of light induced a sense of space by perspective. Several grids of small light bulbs arranged on the floor followed, designed to establish the space they

⁹ Gladys Fabre, *Bill Culbert*, (Rayleigh: W. H. Houldershaw, 1990): 55.

¹⁰ Frances Spalding, *British Art Since 1900*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1986): 191-221; and Richard Cork, "Breaking the Boundaries" and "The Seventies and After" in *British Art in the 20th Century – The Modern Movement*, ed. Susan Compton, (Munich: Prestel-Verlag and London: Royal Academy of Arts, 1986): 370-371 & 394-395.

occupied by means of light. In 1968, Culbert constructed the first of his light works to achieve critical acclaim. *Cubic Projections* created the effect of a camera obscura, and was produced as a multiple by Lisson Gallery.¹¹ Since then, light and photography have formed the basis of Culbert's oeuvre. Photographs, such as *Small Glass Pouring Light* (1979) and its subsequent versions,¹² have become as synonymous with Culbert as his light installations. Throughout his career, Culbert has divided his time between London and the south of France, and has exhibited widely in both countries, as well as in Germany, Ireland, Italy, and Australia. Despite the fact that he returns to New Zealand on average once a year, his international reputation is significantly greater than his reputation in New Zealand. Culbert is arguably best-known in New Zealand for his collaborations with Ralph Hotere, involving large-scale permanent installations such as *Fault* (1994) in Wellington, and *P.R.O.P.* (1991). Major exhibitions such as the touring *LIGHTWORKS*, organised in 1997 by City Gallery in Wellington, have raised his profile in New Zealand and encouraged New Zealand's viewing public to appreciate what I believe to be Culbert's unique, witty, and knowing vision.

Interpretations of Culbert's Work

The primary interpreter of Culbert's art is French critic Yves Abrioux. Abrioux's numerous essays on Culbert focus principally on his installations, and his analysis of Culbert's work is indicative of a particularly French approach. In his book *Bill Culbert* (1997), Abrioux compares Culbert's work to the writings of a number of French philosophers, including Michel Serres and Claude Lévi-Strauss. Abrioux is clearly a close associate of Culbert's, the only full published interview in English being conducted between the two. Featured in the book *Afterdark* (1994), this interview deals specifically with Culbert's photography. Despite this emphasis, throughout his writings Abrioux treats Culbert's photographs and installations separately. In several essays, he barely mentions Culbert's photographs. When he does so, as in *Bill Culbert*,¹³

¹¹ A later version of the work, measuring 2.7 m high, was used on stage in Covent Garden in London for a production of the ballet *Lament of the Waves*, staged in 1970.

¹² *Sun, Glass/Wine*, discussed at the start of this introduction, is one such version of Culbert's 1979 photograph of the same subject.

¹³ Abrioux touches on Culbert's use of photography in *Bill Culbert*, (Annecy: La Petite Ecole, 1997:144-151). In addition to this book, Yves Abrioux's published writings on Bill Culbert include *Bill Culbert*, (Saint-Fons: Editions Centre d'arts Plastiques de Saint-Fons, 2002); "Accidents of Light" in *LIGHTWORKS: Bill Culbert*, Paula Savage et al, (Wellington: City Gallery, 1997: 6-13); and *Bill*

Abrioux employs the photographs to obliquely advance arguments about Culbert's installations. Abrioux fails to explore the relationship between the photographs and their role in introducing photographic processes and approaches to the installations themselves.

Barton is the only author to explicitly explore photography's effect on Culbert's three-dimensional work. In her essay "'Mon soleil' – Considering photography in the work of Bill Culbert", she argues that Culbert uses photography as an analytical tool, a medium through which to frame objects investigated throughout his work. She touches upon the visibility of photographic processes, such as a reliance on light and the image's causal connection to the photographed object in his three-dimensional work, and comments on the retreat of his subjects from the condition of reality. Although Barton identifies a number of connections between Culbert's photographs and three-dimensional installations, her essay constitutes a general discussion of these themes. This relatively brief catalogue essay understandably restricts Barton's ability to fully explore the implications of her observations in Culbert's oeuvre.¹⁴

In my initial reading of the literature on Culbert's work, two things struck me. Firstly, with the exception of Barton, most critics engaging with his work have focused on the presence of light in his practice and have banished photography to the shadows. While the majority of writers mention that photography plays an important part in Culbert's oeuvre or discuss particular photographic images, the connection between his photography and his three-dimensional work is neglected. Even in *Afterdark*, a book which deals specifically with his photography, or in essays that focus on his photographs,¹⁵ discussion is limited primarily to one medium or the other. Secondly, individual artworks are very rarely examined in detail.¹⁶ Discussions of his installations and photographs, along with the influences and complexities at play within them, have been rather cursory, limited to at most a paragraph or two.

Culbert and Yves Abrioux, "An Understanding of Light – Interview" in *Bill Culbert – Afterdark*, Yves Abrioux et al, (Limoges: Editions FRAC Limousin, 1994: 37-43).

¹⁴ Christina Barton, "'Mon Soleil' – Considering Photography in the Work of Bill Culbert" in *LIGHTWORKS: Bill Culbert*, Paula Savage et al, (Wellington: City Gallery, 1997: 14-23).

¹⁵ See, for example, Luke Smythe, *Bill Culbert: Colin McCahon*, Auckland, 2004: 5-19.

¹⁶ One noticeable exception to this is Abrioux's extensive discussion of *Flotsam* in *Bill Culbert*, (Annecy: La Petite Ecole, 1997: 135-141, 147, 173).

In light of these observations, the goal of my thesis became to explore whether or not photographic theory and approaches could be used to examine Culbert's three-dimensional installations. I believe the installations that explore optical effects and the nature of perception clearly relate to the medium of photography. I will also argue that other, less ostensibly photographic works are also informed by features shared with photography. Furthermore, I wanted my examination of Culbert's work to involve in-depth, engaged dialogue with the art. My goal, first and foremost, was for the artwork to explain my hypothesis, rather than theories which lend themselves to my hypothesis explaining the artwork.

Overview of chapters

Chapter one focuses on Culbert's photographs and their function as tools for exploring themes that make their way into his three-dimensional installations. The chapter examines the camera obscura's role in Culbert's break from painting, and how this photographic apparatus and its optical effects continue to inform Culbert's work. It also points to the continuous interaction between Culbert's three-dimensional installations and his photography, and the exchange of ideas and principles between the two. The chapter identifies Culbert's interest in referencing the three-dimensionality of sculpture in his photographs, and his recreation of the two-dimensionality of the photographic image within a number of his installations.

Chapter two examines Culbert's use of light, and light's interaction with space. Through a detailed analysis of several major installations, I relate qualities of light and space visible in his work – such as movement, time, intensity, the definition of form, location and distance – to aspects of photography. The chapter also explores the similarity between the site-specific nature of a number of Culbert's installations and the photographic image's indexical relationship to the objects photographed. Aspects of Culbert's site-specific practice are related to a range of artistic practices that challenged the coded nature of the gallery and Modernism's self-referentiality during the late 1960s and the 1970s.

Chapter three considers Culbert's use of readymade objects and his manipulation of their original contexts. The chapter argues that the importance of context to Culbert's art parallels the photographic image's particularly close relationship with context, and goes on to draw a comparison between Culbert's and Marcel Duchamp's use of readymade objects. The chapter also discusses the similarities between Culbert's use of common everyday objects and both the Surrealist found object and photomontage. This chapter also investigates Culbert's serial arrangement of readymades and draws attention to this approach's link with the reproductive nature of photography and the photographic image's removal from the condition of originality. Culbert's serial arrangement of manufactured objects is linked to that of Minimalist sculptors.

Finally, chapter four examines the binary states of reality and illusion present in Culbert's work – states that are also integral to the medium of photography. The chapter takes an expansive approach in order to explore Culbert's interest in creating perceptual illusions and incongruities based on resemblance. I examine the presence of features as diverse as shadow, reflection, metaphor, metonymy and pun in Culbert's work, and their incorporation into his practice in order to create comparisons between something which his artworks are not – an approach reminiscent of the photographic image's resemblance to the objects it depicts and of photography's mediation of our conception of reality.

CHAPTER ONE

Photographic Vision

“... a steady pleasure in the extraordinary otherness of familiar things.”¹

Photography forms an ever-present and integral part of Bill Culbert’s artistic oeuvre. His photographic vision focuses on and extrapolates themes that are later transferred into his installations, acting as bridges for the translation of ideas from two-dimensional into three-dimensional form. Like the lens of a camera, Culbert uses photography to focus on and examine details that become major thematic concerns in his installations – aspects of light, the form of everyday objects, the perceptual peculiarities of natural phenomena and the exploration of space. Following the artist’s break from painting and his early sculptural investigations of the behaviour and appearance of light, elements of photography have come to inform all aspects of Culbert’s artistic practice. His technological knowledge of photographic processes is also particularly evident in many of his photographs, stemming from his early experimentation with re-creating the effects of the camera obscura. The structure and function of the camera permeates photographs that explore the dynamics of inside/outside, inversion and the singular viewpoint of the monocular aperture. The constant interaction between Culbert’s sculptural practice and his use of photography, and the translation of ideas and principles between the two, alludes to the true mutability of the medium of photography within postmodern and contemporary art practices.

Black and white photographs

Culbert’s photographs act as a transition point between his ideas and their manifestation in three-dimensional form. Culbert’s choice of photographic formats is particular to the ideas processed in the images. In his black and white photographs, he ‘brainstorms’ ideas that later find their way into his installations. In essence, they are

¹ David Thompson, *Bill Culbert*: unpaginated.

sketches through which he processes subjects that interest him. As he states: "In the black and white square format I was thinking through the camera."² Through photographs, Culbert observes objects and the effects of light that interest him. He isolates objects and focuses on their specific characteristics, subjecting to his scrutiny everyday items as diverse, or indeed banal, as lampshades, light bulbs, windows, wine glasses, car parts, buckets, kitchen utensils, tables, chairs, wheels, and road signs. He seldom manipulates the photographed objects beyond their placement and the cultivation of relationships between them and the sun. The black and white format also provides an appropriate vehicle for exploring the qualities of light and shade that preoccupies so much of Culbert's work. By emphasising the tonal variation between areas of light and shade, the photographs provide an ideal medium for Culbert to observe perceptual incongruities involving shadow and reflection.

Colour photographs

While Culbert utilises black and white photography to observe the objects and light effects that are of interest to him, his colour photographs involve significant intervention by the hand of the artist in order to achieve their meaning. Culbert reintroduced colour to his photographs twenty years after his break from painting.³ His final paintings were concerned with creating optical effects with colour, and along with his abandonment of painting, he abandoned the use of colour in his work. Since its reappearance, he has used colour photographs to capture subjects that have been arranged as temporary installations, been constructed in order to achieve a desired effect. In this respect, they appear more polished, calculated and less spontaneous than the black and white images. They implicitly allude to Culbert's actions in creating the photograph – selecting, lifting and placing objects, waiting for ideal environmental conditions, and eventually photographing the outcome of his interventions. When interviewed about his colour photographs, he stated "When I put down notes in colour they are about specific things."⁴ Culbert's statement highlights the conceptual nature of his colour photographs, and the fact that he sees them as a form of note-taking, a processing of ideas before they are translated into his three-dimensional practice. Some

² Bill Culbert and Yves Abrioux, "An Understanding of Light – Interview": 37.

³ Bill Culbert and Yves Abrioux, "An Understanding of Light – Interview": 41.

⁴ Bill Culbert and Yves Abrioux, "An Understanding of Light – Interview": 41.

photographs involve the deliberate placement of objects to create a set of perceptual conditions, in *Verre à vin / vin à verre* (1993; fig. 34). This requires the specific placement of both the red and white wine glasses and the camera's fixed viewpoint for the photograph's visual effect to be achieved. Other works demonstrate Culbert's interest in manipulating the context of objects and exploring a conceptual idea. For example, in *Abat-jour/Seau* (Lampshade/ Bucket) (1992; fig. 2)⁵, an artwork comprising nine separate colour photographs, the artist has placed a beige lampshade on a combination of coloured buckets. The buckets' previous use as containers for lifting and carrying is denied. Instead, each bucket is given a new function – that of a lamp base. In this series, Culbert examines the success, or failure, of his contextual manipulation of the buckets' expected use. The visibility of the buckets' handles in several photographs reminds the viewer of their previous function, making their transformation into lamp bases less successful. A number of Culbert's colour photographs also involve the interaction between natural environmental conditions and a collection of objects, such as those that comprise his *Sunset* series. As these effects cannot be replicated in the gallery, the concepts explored in these colour photographs are not incorporated into his three-dimensional artwork like many of the themes explored in the black and white photographs.⁶ Instead, these colour photographs function as records of his temporary experimentations. In both the black and white and the colour photographs, Culbert's thought processes are distilled into a particular point of interest. In this respect, his photographs reflect the function of the camera's lens, presenting the viewer with a concentration of thematic concerns central to his work.

The break from painting

Culbert arrived in London in 1957 after winning a scholarship to study painting at the Royal College of Art. Initially, his introduction to both the British and European art galleries overwhelmed him, and he stopped painting for two years, instead resorting to

⁵ Culbert touches on this work in his interview with Yves Abrioux, while discussing the appearance of colour in his photography. See Bill Culbert and Yves Abrioux, "An Understanding of Light – Interview": 41. The photographs are also mentioned in passing in Yves Abrioux, *Bill Culbert*, (Annecy: La Petite Ecole, 1997: 171).

⁶ Frédéric Paul, "Bill Culbert: *Home Sweet Home*" in *Bill Culbert – Afterdark*, Yves Abrioux et al, (Limoges: Editions FRAC Limousin, 1994): 21.

photography.⁷ In 1959, he returned to painting, and over the next several years his painting progressed from canvases that worked with recorded sequences in time and changes to the features of objects, to abstraction and the construction of a structured pictorial dynamism. His final paintings, produced between 1967-68, explored the optical and kinetic effects of colour.⁸ In 1967-68, following a collaboration with Stuart Brisley, Culbert made the transition from painting to constructing light objects.

Although Culbert has predominantly worked within the media of photography and installation since 1968, painting continues to inform his work. The themes of movement, time and optics that featured in Culbert's paintings are still visible in both his photographs and his installations, indicating his interdisciplinary approach to art. It is reasonable to assume that his use of photography during the two years after his arrival in London played a significant part in his shift from painting to creating light objects. After his brief return to painting, the subject of his work became light itself⁹ – the very fundament upon which the technology of photography relies. For Culbert, photography became a means of articulating and examining light, the appearance of objects and optical illusions.

The camera obscura

The camera apparatus itself has played a primary role in the development of Culbert's three-dimensional practice. His transition from painting to light installation began with several works based on the principles of the camera obscura. Culbert has stated that in 1968:

I used the *camera obscura* for the first time ... This used photography physically in space. Things started to move: I was released from the restrictions of the canvas and the frame. What I was doing could be quite small, yet it seemed to have power and energy.¹⁰

⁷ Oliver Blanckart, "Not a Lot, But a Whole World" in *Bill Culbert – Afterdark*, Yves Abrioux et al, (Limoges: Editions FRAC Limousin, 1994): 59.

⁸ David Thompson, *Bill Culbert*: unpaginated.

⁹ Oliver Blanckart, "Not a Lot, But a Whole World": 60.

¹⁰ Bill Culbert and Yves Abrioux, "An Understanding of Light – Interview": 37.

The camera obscura provided an apparatus through which Culbert could explore the optical effects he had created in his late paintings in a format that was less restrictive than the canvas: three-dimensional space. The role of the camera obscura in the development of Culbert's mature artistic style resonates with the apparatus's impact in revolutionising pictorial depiction in the art world. In China in the fifth century B.C., Mo Ti observed that the reflected light rays of an illuminated object passing through a pinhole into a darkened room resulted in an inverted replica image of the object on the wall opposite the hole. It was during the Renaissance that attempts to harness the phenomenon resulted in the concept of the camera obscura, and by the seventeenth century it had become a widely used tool in the quest for naturalistic pictorial representation.¹¹ The camera obscura came to be seen as a device through which to understand the complexities of human perception, offering a set of perceptual rules based on a fixed viewpoint.¹² It was both hugely influential in creating a unified concept of vision and in prompting the later technological developments that led to the invention of photography. In a similar manner, Culbert's progression into three-dimensional practice was closely tied to the camera obscura, and many of his photographs and installations continue to reflect and refer to the camera obscura's structure and the processes involved in creating an image.

The first of Culbert's three-dimensional camera obscura works was *Cubic Projections* (1968; fig. 3),¹³ which was also one of the first major installations he constructed after abandoning painting. The installation consists of a black fibreglass sphere drilled with a system of holes that rotates at alternating speeds, placed in a darkened room. A light bulb projects light from the centre of the sphere through the multitude of apertures that puncture its surface, casting lines of light on the walls. *Cubic Projections* is informed by

¹¹ Naomi Rosenblum, *A world history of photography*, (3rd edition), (New York: Abbeville Press, 1997): 192.

¹² Jonathan Crary, "Modernizing Vision" in *Poetics of Space – A Critical Photographic Anthology*, ed. Steve Yates, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995): 88-89.

¹³ Yves Abrioux discusses this installation with relation to the myth of Plato's cave in his book *Bill Culbert*, (Annecy: La Petite Ecole, 1997: 155-157). The visual effect of the installation is also discussed at length in David Thompson in *Bill Culbert*, (Great Britain: Westerham Press Ltd, 1977: unpaginated). Brief discussions of *Cubic Projections* also feature in William McAloon, "An Art of Delight" in Christopher Knowles et al, *Bill Culbert – light wine things*, (Blenheim, Millennium Public Art Gallery, 2003: unpaginated); Christina Barton, "'Mon Soleil' – Considering Photography in the Work of Bill Culbert" in *LIGHTWORKS: Bill Culbert*, Paula Savage et al, (Wellington: City Gallery, 1997: 22); and Gladys Fabre, *Bill Culbert*, (Rayleigh: W. H. Houldershaw, 1990: 58-59).

the dynamics of inside and outside, which parallel the function of the camera obscura. However, *Cubic Projections* operates as an inverted camera obscura. Instead of light from the outside world being projected onto a flat plane within the apparatus's enclosed space, in Culbert's installation light from within the camera obscura is projected outward into the darkened gallery space. The externalisation of the light, projected from the centre of the sphere, defines the space of the room, creating patterns that play over the flat surface of the walls. When the sphere rotates slowly, the pinpricks of light extend into ephemeral ribbons that form a grid-like configuration, emphasising the cubic confines of the room and echoing the title of the artwork itself. The emphasis that the spots of light place on the space of the gallery is also reminiscent of strategies employed by Minimalist sculptors. Like Robert Morris's mirrored cubes,¹⁴ *Cubic Projections* calls attention to the parameters of the gallery space, and makes visible the context of display that gives meaning to the artwork. The roundness of the perforated sphere alludes to the circular hole necessary to create the projected image in a camera obscura. The solid, defined circles of light that formulate closest to the base of the orb create a platform of light that seems to support the sphere, the solidity and definition of the dots of light contrasting with intangible, shifting wisps that dance in a stately manner over the surface of the walls. However, as the sphere begins to rotate faster, the grid of projected light dissolves into a blur, the ordered regulation of space melting under the chaotic whirls and whipping licks of light. Despite Culbert's replication of the structure and effects of the camera obscura, his decision to introduce the quality of rotation to *Cubic Projections* denies the fixed position of the camera obscura's monocular aperture. This decision characterises an essential difference between Culbert's approach to his photographic images and his three-dimensional work. In the photographs, he adopts the singular viewpoint of the camera obscura, focusing on a static scene or an object that has captured his attention, while in his installations light assumes qualities of dynamism, multiplicity and movement.

Interior/exterior space

Cubic Projections marks Culbert's progression from painting to employing features of photography in an effort to engage with three-dimensional space, a theme that he has

¹⁴ Robert Morris, "Notes on Sculpture", (written 1966), in *Minimal Art – A Critical Anthology*, ed. Gregory Battcock, (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1968): 222-235.

continuously explored in his work from 1968 until the present. *Cubic Projections's* investigation of the optical principles of the camera obscura has had a long-lasting effect on Culbert's practice. Aspects of the camera obscura have continued to inform the subjects and perceptual effects he has chosen to photograph during his career, highlighting the impact that photography and its technology has had on his work. One of the principal themes that can be traced back to Culbert's interest in the structure of the camera obscura is the interaction between interior and exterior space. *Window Light Outside* (1980; fig. 4) is a striking example of this dynamic. The photograph depicts a view of a darkened room with the appearance of a stone storehouse or farm building. The darkness of the space is punctured by a brightly illuminated window that casts bright patches of light on the floor. The vertical axes of the photograph are reiterated by the solid vertical presence of the stone doorway that leads into the room.

The dark confines of the space in *Window Light Outside* parallel the blackened enclosure necessary for the formulation of an image in a camera obscura. The glowing window, divided into eight small panes, marks the transition point from the oppressive darkness of the room into the exterior world. The light that inscribes the surface of the floor emulates the progression of light through the aperture of a camera obscura and its formulation against a planar surface. The view depicted in Culbert's photograph is also reminiscent of the inside of a camera, as if the viewer is inside the architecture of the apparatus, looking out through the aperture.¹⁵ Curiously, the patches of sunlight on the floor appear to be larger than the window they have travelled through. This is a phenomenon that has captivated Culbert's attention. He states:

One of my photographs shows sunlight coming through a window on to the floor. As it comes towards you, the shadow increases. This is the opposite of what you see when you look out of a window. Light is the reversal of perspective. When light projects something, the size actually increases with distance.¹⁶

¹⁵ Geoffrey Batchen makes a similar observation in regard to a photograph by James Casabere that is comparable to Culbert's *Window Light Outside*. Geoffrey Batchen, *Each Wild Idea: Writing, Photography, History*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: The MIT Press, 2001): 120.

¹⁶ Bill Culbert and Yves Abrioux, "An Understanding of Light – Interview": 37.

The light that enters the window reaches towards the viewer, as if it is elongating itself over the surface of the floor. Culbert's statement suggests an awareness of the commonplace analogy that paintings are like a window on the world, and demonstrates the way that references to painting continue to inform his work. Moreover, his observation of the effect of light's lengthening on the construction of perspective alludes to his interest in examining and challenging the traditional quest for perspectival space in the picture plane. A number of Culbert's photographs imitate or examine the pursuit of perspectival depth in a two-dimensional surface, while several of his three-dimensional installations reject outright the cultivation of pictorial depth in favour of two-dimensional, planar surfaces that parallel the structure of a photograph. In *Window Light Outside*, the lines of light that traverse the floor act like a bridge, articulating the space between the two-dimensionality of the photograph and the invisible three-dimensional world that exists beyond the window's glass panes. The transition between interior space and exterior space is further suggested by the visibility of the doorframe in the periphery of the image. The passage of light, and its role in marking the transition between inside and outside, is symbolic of the intermediary point that Culbert's photographs occupy. Like the light that demarcates the space between the two-dimensional surface of the photograph and the three-dimensional world beyond the window in *Window Light Outside*, Culbert's photographs act as a bridging point between his ideas and their manifestation in three-dimensional form.

Inversion

Principles of inversion, which are similarly traceable to the perceptual processes of the camera obscura, are also explored in Culbert's photographs. The ability of the camera obscura's pinhole aperture to create an accurate but inverted replica image of an illuminated object or scene gave the device its privileged status before the invention of photography. The camera obscura's inverted image came to represent the ideal model for the attainment of truthful pictorial representation.¹⁷ The inversion of light rays as they converge and travel through an aperture is also a characteristic of human visual perception,¹⁸ and reflects Culbert's interest in examining the scientific principles of

¹⁷ Geoffrey Batchen, *Burning with Desire – The Conception of Photography*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: The MIT Press, 1997): 80.

¹⁸ Maurice Hershenson, *Visual Space Perception – A Primer*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London:

perception and the behaviour of light. The phenomenon of inversion is observed in Culbert's photograph *Bonbonne with Landscape, France* (2002; fig. 5). The black and white photograph depicts a wine *bonbonne*, or demi-john, sitting on a wooden table. In the background, tree-covered hills stretch into the distance, melting into the wide band of sky. Full-bodied clouds creep into the frame from the left-hand side of the photograph, partially obscured by the *bonbonne* that dominates the centre of the image. In the bulbous container, the vista beyond the table is reproduced in an inverted state, replicating the camera obscura's inversion of the image. The inverted image reverses the background view's tonal qualities of black and white, the darker shade of the hills occupying the top of the *bonbonne* while the light-filled expanse of the sky sinks towards the bottom of the bottle. This reversal of tonal values is also reminiscent of photography's positive/negative process. The containment of the inverted image within the confines of the bottle resonates with the apparatus of the camera obscura, as both rely on the parameters of a given space for the production of the image. In addition, the small hole that marks the mouth of the *bonbonne* is suggestive of the device's aperture. The inverted scene seems almost to have slipped through the neck of the bottle and settled into an image, an effect that resembles the passage of light rays into a camera obscura and their formulation into an image. The curvature of the *bonbonne* is also reminiscent of the curved lens of a modern camera. The bottle acts as a focusing device that captures the effect of inversion comprising the point of interest in Culbert's photograph. The curvature of the bottle also concentrates the rays of the sun that pierce it, creating an intense highlight of brightness amidst the shadow cast by the bottle on the table's surface that echoes the role of the camera's lens in concentrating or dispersing light rays. *Bonbonne with Landscape* replicates the process of inversion that takes place within the camera obscura, and reflects Culbert's interest in exploring the behaviour of light.

Monocularity

A number of Culbert's temporary installations and photographs, including *Bonbonne with Landscape*, also emphasises the monocular viewpoint of the camera obscura.¹⁹ The

The MIT Press, 1999): 4-6.

¹⁹ Jonathan Crary, "Modernizing Vision": 88. Photography, of course, is not confined to a monocular viewpoint. Stereography was also a dominant photographic technology in the nineteenth and early

monocularity of photographic devices such as the camera obscura added to the systematisation of vision that became dominant with the fifteenth century invention of a unified system of perspective. As Jonathan Crary points out:

Monocularity, like perspective and geometrical optics, was one of the Renaissance codes through which a visual world is constructed according to systematized constants, and from which any inconsistencies and irregularities are banished to insure [sic] the formation of a homogenous, unified, and fully legible space.²⁰

Culbert arranges many of the objects that he photographs in relation to the fixed orientation of the camera's lens. As a result, the perceptual effect of the photographs is only visible from a single point of view. *Bonbonne with Landscape* demonstrates this point. The image of landscape and sky inverted in the *bonbonne* is reliant on Culbert's orientation as the photographer. If he were to photograph the *bonbonne* from an alternative angle, the scene reflected in the bottle would necessarily change, perhaps depicting instead a view of his house in Provence, or the backyard where he carries out so many of his photographic experimentations. In order to achieve the desired panorama of *Bonbonne with Landscape*, Culbert has had to arrange his objects in relation to the monocular viewpoint of the camera, highlighting the fact that he constructs many of his temporary installations specifically in order to be photographed. His choice of outlook in *Bonbonne with Landscape* is also suggestive of the picturesque views that artists employed the camera obscura to recreate, as if his photograph is paying homage to the continued impact of the camera obscura on his work.

The merging of mediums

Since the camera obscura's early role in introducing photographic processes to Culbert's three-dimensional practice, his artistic oeuvre has been defined by the presence of two mediums that demonstrate fundamental oppositions: the two-dimensional medium of photography and the traditionally three-dimensional medium of sculpture. One of the most striking features of his body of work is, however, the recurrent exchange of

twentieth century.

²⁰ Jonathan Crary, "Modernizing Vision": 88-89.

characteristics that are conventionally assumed to be unique to each. This tendency echoes the mutability of photography and its role within a range of artistic practices since the 1970s. As Geoffrey Batchen points out:

the boundary between photography and other media like painting, sculpture, and performance has been made increasingly porous ... In other words, even if photography as a separate entity may be fast disappearing, the photographic as a vocabulary of conventions and references lives on in ever-expanding splendour.²¹

Characteristics of photography have found themselves widely translated into postmodern art practices, highlighting the adaptability of the medium and its role in re-introducing references to the real world to the realm of art; a role which challenged the insular purity of formalist Modernism. The Postmodern blurring of discrete categories of art features prominently in Culbert's work. He melds features belonging to both photography and sculpture, firstly, by exchanging the spatial qualities that are traditionally associated with each medium. In many of his photographs, Culbert utilises various pictorial techniques, such as perspective, in order to achieve a sense of three-dimensional depth. This pursuit of three-dimensionality is furthered by his decision to physically frame the photographs. As he states, "The frame has to do with symmetry. It sits on the photograph like a three-dimensional projection."²² The physical presence of the frame intensifies the sense of depth that he attempts to create by projecting into the three-dimensional space of the viewer. In his installations, conversely, Culbert regularly constructs flat, planar surfaces reminiscent of the two-dimensionality of a photographic image.

Photographs, and the three-dimensionality of sculpture

The pursuit of three-dimensional space within a two-dimensional surface is the subject of *Wine in Perspective* (1996; fig. 6). This black and white photograph depicts a wooden table in the foreground, and in the background, tree-covered fields disappear into the faint horizon. On the table are five glasses of red wine, arranged one after the other in a

²¹ Geoffrey Batchen, *Burning with Desire*: 216.

²² Bill Culbert and Yves Abrioux, "An Understanding of Light – Interview": 42.

straight line. The first wine glass, which is closest to the viewer, is the only one visible in its entirety. As they progress away from the position of the viewer, the wine glasses are foreshortened, emulating the principles of perspective. The bodies of the glasses positioned behind the first glass are obscured, the solidity of their existence implied only by their disembodied rims and feet. However, the opaque wine that fills the glasses ensures that shadows are cast on the surface of the table. The shadow closest to the viewer is the most substantial, echoing the visibility of the glass that has cast it. The shadows that follow the first glass recede in size like a line of falling dominoes, imitating the recession of the wine glasses. The shadows also become more insubstantial as they progress towards the far edge of the table, replicating the transition in the landscape from the clear definition of tree-covered fields to the vague haziness of the distant hills that meld with the sky. The placement of the glasses and the fall of their shadows encourage the viewer's eye to track towards a vanishing point in the horizon, creating an increased sense of three-dimensional depth in the picture plane. This visual recession is further encouraged by the orthogonals created by the planks of wood comprising the table. Culbert's photograph emulates the Renaissance pursuit of perspectival depth in a flat, two-dimensional surface, and references once again painterly concerns – concerns that he rejected in the 1960s, and now uses photography and three-dimensional installations to parody.

The visual effect of *Wine in Perspective* is reliant on the static viewpoint that is common to one-point perspective. One-point perspective shares with the camera obscura the need for a monocular orientation in relation to the object or scene under scrutiny. The foreshortening of the wine glasses and shadows in *Wine in Perspective* is entirely reliant on Culbert's placement of the objects and his decision to photograph the scene from the position demonstrated in the photograph itself. However, *Wine in Perspective* was created in tandem with another image, *Wine Real* (1996), which is photographed from the side of the table and therefore is unable to achieve the visual effect produced in its sister image. In *Wine Real*, it becomes clear to the viewer that the five glasses lined up along the table actually have differing amounts of red wine contained in them, partially accounting for the increasing insubstantiality of the shadows they cast. The shift in the orientation of the photographer destroys the foreshortening of the glasses and their shadows seen in *Wine in Perspective*, highlighting the importance of a monocular

viewpoint in constructing one-point perspectival space. Instead, *Wine Real* depicts a different kind of recession. Culbert has parodied the conventions of perspective by filling the glasses with lessening amounts of red wine, gradually reducing the level of liquid in the glasses. The glass that occupies the right hand end of the table – the glass in the foreground of *Wine in Perspective* – is filled with the most wine, while the glass at the left end of the table holds just a small mouthful. I imagine Culbert happily drinking from the glasses in order to attain the level of wine he desired for each glass, amused with his new technique for achieving the appearance of recession characteristic of perspectival optics.

Wine Real demonstrates Culbert's tendency to parody artistic devices of representation by drawing the viewer's attention to how such conventions are created. By juxtaposing the traditional construction of perspectival space in *Wine in Perspective* with an analogous method for achieving a similar effect in *Wine Real*, Culbert emphasises the illusory nature of the attempt to create three-dimensional depth on a two-dimensional surface. In this respect, *Wine in Perspective* is equated with a falsehood, and is in fact not 'real'. In contrast to its sister photograph, which is based on the illusion of perspectival foreshortening, *Wine Real* presents the viewer with a very real phenomenon with which we are all familiar – the inevitable disappearance of wine as it is drunk over the course of a social occasion. *Wine Real*, then, is equated with reality. The title *Wine Real* also creates a pun around the word 'real', which could also be read cinematically as 'reel'. The gradual recession of the levels of wine in each glass is suggestive of different frames in a film, the wine lessening in each shot. *Wine Real's* link with cinematic time also creates a further analogy with the camera obscura. The image projected in a camera obscura literally renders the subject in 'real time', as the apparatus does not fix the image. The camera obscura's image is in constant flux, changing as the subject moves.

Sculpture, and the two-dimensionality of photographs

Just as many of Culbert's photographs make reference to or attempt to create the illusion of three-dimensional depth on a flat surface, a number of his installations emulate the two-dimensionality of the photographic image. Despite the fact that his installations necessarily involve three-dimensional objects, they are regularly

constructed in order to create an impression of the taut, planar surface that is so characteristic of photography. These two-dimensional surfaces further highlight Culbert's frequent transfer of photographic processes and features into his sculptural practice. An example of this can be seen in *Sky* (1992; fig. 8).²³ The installation comprises sixteen suitcases arranged on the polished wooden floor of the gallery. Culbert has cut a rectangular panel out of the lid of each suitcase, replacing it with perspex. Beneath the perspex, hidden inside the suitcases, fluorescent tubes illuminate the rectangles, causing them to glow like light boxes. The dark rims of the suitcases frame the glowing perspex, projecting the radiant surfaces towards the viewer. The suitcases also resemble television sets, their luminous surfaces like empty screens awaiting the appearance of an image. Although the illuminated surfaces exist within three-dimensional containers, the light presses against the perspex panels, melting the three-dimensionality of the suitcases into visually arresting two-dimensional rectangles. As in a photograph, light defines the nature of the suitcases' surfaces. The taut planes further emulate the process of photography by reproducing themselves in the glossy varnish of the gallery floor, their brightness creating hazy yellow reflections of their surfaces. This replication of two-dimensional surfaces in a three-dimensional installation is also a feature of *Light Plain, An Explanation of Light* and *Skylight 2* (figs. 15, 16, 17). The exchange of three- for the two-dimensionality is, of course, completed with Culbert's decision to use photography to record his installations. This exchange becomes vital for his temporary installations and experimentations, where the transfer of the artwork to the photograph's planar surface may be the only documentation indicating that the installation ever existed.

The merging of three-dimensional containers with two-dimensional illuminated surfaces that characterises *Sky* creates a curious tension between the spatial parameters of photography and sculpture. This is also the subject of Culbert's black and white photograph *Light Box, France* (1989; fig. 9). The photograph depicts a decrepit shelter made out of opaque sheets of plastic. A sheet of corrugated plastic spans the shelter's bowed walls, creating a flimsy roof. The plastic is supported by a skeletal metal

²³ An installation of the same name, also from 1992 and utilising illuminated suitcases, was mounted to the wall of an office in St Pancras Station, London. This artwork is noted in Yves Abrioux, *Bill Culbert*, (Annecy: La Petite Ecole, 1997: 171).

structure, and a concrete pad indicates the original position of the walls that have since been bent out of alignment with the structure's base. Three notices, stuck to the upper half of the shelter, reiterate the shape of the panels they adorn. The tree that stands behind the shelter emerges from behind the opaque plastic, creating a mass of curved and disorderly lines that contrast with the rigid configuration of the shelter. Several of the lower panels in the back wall of the shelter have been destroyed, revealing a section of the tree trunk and the field beyond. *Light Box* presents the viewer with an uneasy representation of both two-dimensional and three-dimensional space. The grid-like metal skeleton of the shelter, along with the shadows that extend along the concrete pad from the back of the box toward the viewer, create lines akin to perspective orthogonals. The viewer's eye is encouraged to trace these lines towards the horizon, an exercise which is then thwarted by the flat, planar surface that comprises the back of the shelter. Like the glowing rectangular planes fitted into the suitcase lids in *Sky*, the rear wall of *Light Box* creates a radiant two-dimensional surface that resembles the surface of a photograph. Its taut grid combats the ability of the shelter's makeshift orthogonals to suggest three-dimensional pictorial space, obstructing their continuance into a vanishing point. However, the two missing plastic panels from the rear of the shelter tantalise the viewer's eye, hinting at the presence of the horizon obscured behind the rear wall. The plastic structure, like the suitcases in *Sky*, is a three-dimensional container, yet the side walls and the roof of the box give way to the visual impact of the glowing two-dimensional surface at its rear. The rear wall also emulates the flat plane inside the camera obscura necessary in the formulation of the replica image, and the silhouette of the tree projected through the plastic echoes the function of the apparatus itself. Within the confines of its two-dimensional surface, *Light Box* alludes to both the flat surface of a photograph and the three-dimensionality of sculpture, presenting the viewer with traditionally opposing spatial parameters in one image. In contrast, *Sky's* three-dimensional suitcases exchange the spatial values under scrutiny in *Light Box*, examining instead two-dimensional surfaces within a three-dimensional format, again highlighting Culbert's tendency to explore ideas through the medium of photography before translating them into three-dimensional installations.

Light

Beyond the permeation of spatial characteristics unique to each medium, Culbert's photographs and installations share a fundamental reliance on light. Since the introduction of photography to his working process, light has become the primary element and theme for investigation in Culbert's three-dimensional artwork. This highlights Culbert's awareness of photography's inherent relationship with light, and gives testament to photography's role in shaping his artistic approach. Photography is, before all else, a registering of light rays on a sensitive surface and is inescapably bound to the action of light. And like photography, Culbert's artwork primarily examines the interaction of light with objects of interest. A great many of Culbert's photographs observe characteristics of light and the objects that transmit or control it; or else they capture the illusions he creates through the subtle placement of objects in relation to the sun. Culbert's use of the sun to create optical tricks and illusions resonates with the view of early photographers that photographic images were drawn by the sun.²⁴ Light's role in formulating the photographic image is also alluded to in *Light Box*. The back wall of the shelter, illuminated by the sun, emulates the flat plane of a photograph, and the silhouetted tree becomes the subject of the substitute photographic surface. The sun projects an image of the tree against the flat panels of plastic, creating a two-dimensional trace of the trunk and its branches. The visibility of the tree through the destroyed lower panel of the shelter's back wall makes further reference to the process of photography. It reminds the viewer of the three-dimensional object that has caused the tree's silhouette against the shelter's back wall. The title *Light Box* also alludes to the role of light in exhibiting photographic images. Light boxes are used as a technique for mounting and illuminating photographs for exhibition. By titling his photograph *Light Box*, Culbert is obviously aware that he has stumbled across a natural light box, which mediates the appearance of its subject in a manner similar to that of an actual one. Moreover, his photograph juxtaposes qualities of opacity and transparency. The missing panels from the shelter, and the subsequent visibility of the tree and fields beyond, suggest that photography is a transparent medium easily equated with reality. However, the opaque plastic panels, and their mediation of the view behind the shelter,

²⁴ William Henry Fox Talbot, in his publication *Some Account of the Art of Photogenic Drawing, or the Process by Which Natural Objects May be Made to Delineate Themselves, Without the Aid of the Artist's Pencil*, (London: R. and J. E. Taylor, 1839), stated that his house drew its own image.

remind us that photographs are in fact representations of reality that mediate our view of the world.

The plastic shelter depicted in *Light Box* emulates light's role in the formulation of the photographic image – a role that Culbert's installations also imitate. In almost all of them, light is the principal component, existing as both the means through which to construct the artwork and the subject of the installation itself.²⁵ The installations' reliance on light in defining their form and meaning parallels the role of light in photographic processes and demonstrates the lasting impact that Culbert's early experiments with both modern photographic processes and the camera obscura have had on his work.

'Trinocular' – mechanisms of vision

Photography has come to inform all aspects of Culbert's vision. His interest in visual perception and optics has been fundamentally affected by the introduction of photography to his working process. The impact of photography on his vision is alluded to in the pair of colour photographs, *Long View* (1992; fig. 10). The photographs are unusual for its depiction of Culbert himself – his photographs rarely depict people, and almost never himself. The photographs are arranged vertically, one above the other. The top photograph depicts Culbert standing in front of a vista of green, tree-covered fields, hazy hills in the distance and a muted blue sky dotted with white clouds. He holds a pair of binoculars to his eyes, focusing on an object or view beyond the frame of the photograph. The photograph below depicts Culbert in front of the same view, standing in the same position, only with the binoculars exchanged for a brick. The brick is divided into three apertures, presumably disturbing the coherence of Culbert's own binocular vision. The presence of the brick provokes curiosity in the mind of the viewer, who wonders what Culbert is actually able to see through this incongruous choice of visual aid. Of the brick and its impact on his perceptual capabilities, he states:

²⁵ Oliver Blanckart, "Not a Lot, But a Whole World": 66.

The brick has three holes. We have got two eyes and we get one image. The hole in the middle is actually non-functional in terms of the binoculars but it seems logical that you are looking through it. I adore it when logic misfires. Astonishingly, the brick/glasses do give you the concentration. They almost seem to function!²⁶

Long View clearly registers Culbert's interest in visual perception, optical incongruities and mechanisms of vision. Like the role that the camera plays in his work, the binoculars that Culbert holds to his eyes in the top photograph afford him the ability to focus on objects and states of light. By concentrating light rays into a coherent and focused image, binoculars function like the lens of a camera. The proximity of the binoculars to Culbert's eyes, and the ability of binoculars to enlarge or bring objects closer for scrutiny, parallels photography's role in his processing of ideas. This is highlighted by the fact that it is Culbert himself who is the principal actor in the image, which further equates the apparatus with his own ways of seeing. Culbert's exchange of the binoculars in the top image for the brick 'trinoculars' in the lower photograph of the *Long View* diptych is symbolic of the role that common, everyday objects play in his installations. He substitutes the brick for the photographic apparatus, echoing his translation of ideas explored through the medium of photography into his three-dimensional installations. Culbert's unusual use of the brick also indicates his ongoing interest in applying the expected functions of readymade objects to new roles. The vertical arrangement of *Long View* is suggestive of Culbert's progression from using the medium of photography to explore ideas, indicated by his use of binoculars in the top image, to the subsequent translation of those ideas into the unique and witty vision that informs his three-dimensional practice.

Summary

Since Culbert's break from painting, photography has formed an integral part of his artistic practice. He uses photography to focus on themes that are later transferred into his installations, his photographs acting as bridges for the translation of ideas into three-dimensional form. Culbert's interest in examining features specific to

²⁶ Bill Culbert and Yves Abrioux, "An Understanding of Light – Interview": 43.

photography is also evident in the installations that explore qualities of light and space, as will be discussed in chapter two.

CHAPTER TWO

The Exploration of Light and Space

“Light is the weight, speed, dimension and time of the universe.

Light is at once origin and reflection, emission and resonance, source and image.

So it is light ... which at once produces the image and *is* the image.”¹

Light is the principal medium and subject of Bill Culbert’s installations and photographs. His artistic oeuvre has been defined by experimentations and observations involving light since the early 1970s, with his installations incorporating both natural and artificial light in a range of gallery and site-specific environments. Culbert’s work explores qualities of light, such as movement and the conveyance of time, intensity, light’s role in defining form, its illusory qualities, and its interaction and effect upon the viewer’s body. The artist’s observations and witty manipulations of light, articulated as much through his use of photography as his sculptural practice, also demand of the viewer an awareness of how space impacts on states of light. The perception of space is entirely dependent on light, demonstrating the inseparable nature of these two aspects of our visual world. Thus, Culbert’s examination of the visual and aesthetic qualities of light that characterises much of his work must also involve an investigation of how light interacts with the space that his artwork occupies. Along with the character of light, Culbert’s art explores spatial qualities such as movement, distance, location and time. Beyond these aspects of perceptual space, Culbert’s installations are also in dialogue with site-specificity and the coded nature of the gallery, concerns that preoccupied Minimalist artists of the 1960s and artists who adopted diverse artistic practices during the 1970s.

¹ Oliver Blanckart, “Not a Lot, But a Whole World”: 66.

Light and space in photography and sculpture

Since abandoning painting, Culbert has primarily operated within the mediums of photography and sculpture. They are both explicitly concerned with, and defined by, the interplay of light and space. Photography is, of course, a technology that relies on light – the photographic image can only be formed when a light-sensitive surface is exposed to light. Beyond the obvious importance of light to the medium, photography is also reliant on spatial representation as a device that imparts meaning within the two-dimensional image. Light allows the image to be registered on the two-dimensional surface of a photograph, but “the meaning of [the] imagery depends upon the visual relations between the objects and how directly these relations are reflected in the spatial ties between them.”² The meaning of a photographic image, then, is constructed through the interaction of light. In combination with the photographer, light is the causal agent that allows the image to be recorded, and space is articulated through the relationship between objects depicted in the image. In contrast, sculpture’s three-dimensionality traditionally comprises the medium’s most important and visible difference from other fine arts. Despite demonstrating inherently dissimilar qualities to those of photography, sculpture shares photography’s reliance on light to articulate space. In order to perceive the three-dimensionality of a sculpture, the viewer must experience the volume that imparts a sense of the space – it is the interaction of light and shadow over the surface of a sculpture that communicates the volume of three-dimensional space.³ In this respect, sculpture and photography both depend on the differentiation of light values upon a given surface to suggest space. Culbert’s sculptural approach is constantly informed by elements of photography, demonstrating his sensitivity to the inherent similarities of both mediums, similarities that are above all based on the interaction between light and space.

Site-specificity

Photography’s relationship with sculpture was further expanded with the development of artistic practices that rely on photography as documentation. Site-specific works that are later dismantled, ephemeral sculpture, and environmental works created in remote

² Rudolf Arnheim, “A Study in Spatial Counterpoint” in *Poetics of Space – A Critical Photographic Anthology*, ed. Steve Yates, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995): 8.

³ Jean-Claude Lemagny, “Is Photography a Plastic Art?” in *Poetics of Space – A Critical Photographic Anthology*, ed. Steve Yates, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995): 138.

locations, such as Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty*, are all experienced primarily through photographic documentation.⁴ A number of Culbert's installations are site-specific, and utilise photography to document the artwork in situ. As with his contemporaries, Culbert's site-specific installations often examine the construction of the gallery space as an ideology, a realm for the separation of art from the real world. As Miwon Kwon states:

The seemingly benign architectural features of a gallery/museum ... were deemed to be coded mechanisms that *actively* disassociate the space of art from the outer world, furthering the institution's idealist imperative of rendering itself and its hierarchization of values "objective", "disinterested" and "true".⁵

Photography assisted in dislocating post-object and site-specific practices from the autonomy of Modernist art and the gallery space in two ways: firstly, it reintroduced traces of the real world into the gallery, which were recognisable to the viewer and thus operated within discursive fields rather than being strictly self-referential, and secondly, the inclusion of photography in the gallery space rejected the hierarchy associated with 'pure' Modernist artworks, a purity that was upheld by the isolation of such works within the art institution.⁶ Despite these intentions, the photographic documentation of temporary and site-specific works and that documentation's subsequent display in art galleries, art books, or on websites, transfers these practices back into the institutional discourses of art, the very ideological environment that artists were so often trying to avoid.⁷ Furthermore, site-specific sculpture was also developed in order to privilege the viewer and their experience of the artwork, by "establishing an inextricable, indivisible relationship between the work and its site, and demand[ing] the

⁴ Photographs of sculpture were also present at the very origins of photography. Early photographers such as William Henry Fox Talbot, Daguerre, and Hippolyte Bayard used photography to document sculpture.

⁵ Miwon Kwon, "One Place After Another: Notes on Site Specificity", *October*, (No. 80, Spring 1997): 88.

⁶ Christina Barton, "'What Was Directly Lived Has Moved Away into a Representation' – Photography and Post-Object Art" in *Action Replay: Post-Script*, ed. Stella Brennan, Robert Leonard and Hanna Scott, (Auckland: Artspace and New Plymouth: Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, 2002): 17.

⁷ Douglas Crimp, *On the Museum's Ruins*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: The MIT Press, 1993): 167.

physical presence of the viewer for the work's completion."⁸ This goal of site-specific work, however, also becomes problematic through the use of photography to document the installation: it is precisely the viewer's ability to directly perceive the artwork that is denied when a photo-document is presented as a substitute for the absent artwork.

Culbert's art subverts the authority of the gallery space in a range of ways, but particularly through the incorporation of diverse photographic approaches into his work. As discussed above, Culbert photographically records his temporary installations or experiments using photography as a kind of sketching, a way "to *think* through the camera".⁹ In these 'sketches' he explores ideas that may or may not later be transferred into full installation pieces. The majority of these photographic explorations are carried out in the backyard of Culbert's house in Provence and the surrounding countryside, therefore privileging his own private domestic space over the authority of the gallery and breaking down the art/life distinction. His site-specific installations often exist outside the gallery, while those constructed within the gallery sometimes involve the alteration of fixtures and space, thus rejecting the pristine autonomy of the institution's usual space. Culbert also uses photography as source material for his installations. His photographic experiments focus particularly on the behaviour of light and its impact on form, and these experiments are later translated from his photographic sketches into primary material for his installations.

Plain of Jars and the science of light

Culbert's approach to light, as the primary subject of his photographs and installations, has a particularly technological feel to it. He explores the science of light and its behaviour in both its natural and artificial states, and examines the effect that such qualities have on any given space, on human perception, and on the body of the viewer. Culbert's approach often explores the technology of photography and its reliance on light to produce form. The cause-and-effect nature of photographic technology – the cause being light, the effect being the image – echoes Culbert's working process. Many of his photographs and installations seem to suggest an attempt to answer such questions as 'if I manipulate light in this way, what will happen?'. Culbert has stated

⁸ Miwon Kwon, "One Place After Another: Notes on Site Specificity": 86.

⁹ Bill Culbert and Yves Abrioux, "An Understanding of Light – Interview": 42.

that “the work is a question which I am trying to find out [sic].”¹⁰ This statement draws attention to the importance of process in Culbert’s artistic explorations, and his desire to experiment with the conditions of objects and environments in order to achieve a particular outcome.

An example of Culbert’s experimentation with the science of light can be seen in his installation *Plain of Jars* (1996; fig. 11).¹¹ The installation occupies a darkened gallery room, and consists of a collection of variously sized glass jars arranged on a polished table. Several of the jars stand empty. The majority, however, contain a light bulb held in place by an electrical cord that feeds electricity through the jar’s pierced lid to the illuminated light bulb suspended within. A number of the jars in the installation are clear, some are partially opaque, some are fully opaque, and a scattering are black. The view of the illuminated light bulbs within the partially opaque jars is at times obscured, depending on the viewpoint of the observer, while the black jars that hold light bulbs fully conceal their contents. *Plain of Jars* is like a science experiment, designed to observe the nature of artificial light, its properties and its sources.¹² Culbert is ‘growing’ light in jars, examining the impact that various surfaces and vessels of containment have on its intensity and appearance, and how the cultivated light infiltrates the gallery space. The electrical cords are like hoses, feeding the contents of the jars. Culbert propagates his desired product, the substance to be examined – light.

Plain of Jars primarily explores visibility and invisibility as states of light. Culbert controls his experiment with contained light by ensuring that the illuminated light bulbs held within the jars are the only source of light in the gallery space. By controlling environmental conditions, the artist ensures his control of the action of light so it accords with his desired demonstrative effect. What is therefore visible to the viewer within the gallery space is entirely dependent on Culbert’s installation, making

¹⁰ Bill Culbert and Yves Abrioux, “An Understanding of Light – Interview”: 43.

¹¹ For further on this artwork, see Yves Abrioux, “Accidents of Light” in *LIGHTWORKS: Bill Culbert, Paula Savage et al*, (Wellington: City Gallery, 1997: 12); Lara Strongman, “Moments of Illumination” in *LIGHTWORKS: Bill Culbert, Paula Savage et al*, (Wellington: City Gallery, 1997: 64); and Yves Abrioux, *Bill Culbert*, (Annecy: La Petite Ecole, 1997: 159).

¹² *Plain of Jars* is similar to several of Mark Dion’s displays of scientific specimens, such as *Selections from the Herpetology Collection of Cranbrook Institute of Science* (1999). For further discussion, see Dora Apel (ed.), *Weird Science – A Conflation of Art and Science*, (Michigan: Cranbrook Art Museum, 1999): 12-21.

his artwork both the primary point of interest and the means by which the viewer can perceive the space as a whole. By making *Plain of Jars* the only source of light within the gallery, Culbert draws the viewer's attention to the scientific fact that without light, space cannot be perceived. In other words, light is what makes visibility possible. He further emphasises this by rendering light invisible through its occlusion inside several blackened jars. Electrical cords still feed almost all of the black jars. Touching the jars and feeling the heat confirms that the light bulbs contained within them are illuminated. However, the light is invisible to the viewer, and the effect is to place the black jars in opposition to those radiating white light. Viewing the collection of jars on the table top, the black jars melt into the background, lacking clarity and volume when contrasted to the brightly lit clear and opaque jars. The opposition between visibility and invisibility is thus heightened by the juxtaposition of black and white within the installation. This juxtaposition is based on states of light: white light is the sum of all colours in the spectrum, and black denotes the absence of light. The value of white light exists in contrast to the light that is trapped inside the black jars, absent from the viewer's visual perception. The binary opposition of absence and presence in *Plain of Jars* evokes the same binary opposition inherent to photography. A photograph presents both an absence and a presence – the absence of the original referent, along with the presence of the photographic image that is causally related to it. The binary opposition of positive and negative, a set of opposites inherent to the photographic image, is also invoked in Culbert's installation by his use of opposing light values.

Beyond the light values in *Plain of Jars*, the absence or presence of light within each jar provokes a differing perception of volume and three-dimensionality in the viewer. The illuminated jars appear to be more substantial than those that stand empty upon the table, the permeation of light from inside the jars creating a definition of form and sense of volume that the empty or black jars lack. The illuminated jars stand out as the figure against the ground of the table, while the empty and blackened jars withdraw from the viewer, less prominent against the surface of the table. This process of the projection of one quality set against the recession of another reminds the viewer that light is necessary for the perception of three-dimensionality and space. Furthermore, the illuminated jars are more clearly reflected in the glossy surface of the table, whereas the black and unlit jars create only hazy, indistinct reflections. The surface of the table itself

demonstrates similarities to a photographic image – it is a flat, reflective surface upon which the causal agency of light has acted to create traces of the original referents. Like a photograph, the table offers the viewer a *re*-presentation of the objects that affect its surface.

***Anchois et moutarde* and properties of natural light**

While *Plain of Jars* manipulates, cultivates and observes artificial light within a constructed environment, Culbert is equally interested in the properties of natural light. His temporary site-specific installation *Anchois et moutarde* (Anchovies and Mustard) (1990; fig. 12)¹³, situated in the refectory of Tournus Abbey in Burgundy, explored the interaction of natural light with a particular set of objects and the space occupied by the artwork. *Anchois et moutarde* consisted of 77 glass panes, measuring four metres by two metres in total, laid flat against the concrete floor in the centre of the abbey's refectory.¹⁴ Sixteen empty mustard and anchovy glass jars were randomly set out upon the panes, the installation then completed by the fall of light through the refectory's arched windows. The sunlight plays across the surface of the highly reflective glass panes and catches the glass anchovy and mustard jars as it creeps across the floor over the course of the day. The site of the installation interacts, as does the light, with Culbert's choice of physical objects, adding meaning and resonance to the work. The location of the artwork within an abbey, a place for reflection and contemplation, adds another level of meaning to Culbert's cultivation of reflected images, through the placement of the jars on the highly reflective glass panes. Dancing reflections and ephemeral refractions relate to the site's connotations of divinity and contemplation. *Anchois et moutarde*'s changing states of light are small miracles worthy of delight, or at the very least, their own moment of contemplation. Furthermore, the refectory's prior use resonates with the jars in the artwork, as similar condiment jars may well have previously adorned tables in the eating hall for the occupants to enjoy. These understated connotations that resonate within the installation are characteristic of Culbert's approach to site-specificity; he introduces the subtle particularities of place into the artwork in order to enhance its meaning. In doing so, the artist achieves "the

¹³ For further discussion, see Yves Abrioux, *Bill Culbert*, (Annecy: La Petite Ecole, 1997: 168-169).

¹⁴ Yves Abrioux, *Bill Culbert*: 168.

wedding of the artwork to a particular environment” for which site-specific work so often aims.¹⁵

The fall of natural light within the refectory and its play over the surface of *Anchois et moutarde*'s glass objects allow the viewer to experience a full sense of the space occupied by the artwork. The patches of sunlight that enter the room through the windows, dynamic in their intensity, reflect from the floor of the refectory and highlight the features of the space itself: the textured brick walls, the ordered grid of the paved floor and the arched ceiling. The sunlight defines the space as voluminous and austere, yet simple and practical. Beyond the definition of form, another action of light becomes visible when the patches of sunlight touch upon the anchovy and mustard jars. When the sunlight hits the surface of the glass jars, it refracts into all the colours that comprise white light. The jars act as prisms, creating haloes of coloured light around the base of the jars as they stand on the panes of glass.¹⁶ This effect further demonstrates Culbert's interest in the scientific workings of light, its properties and behaviour under a certain set of conditions. *Anchois et moutarde* is an installation that explores the action of light upon surface – the surface of the glass panes, the anchovy and mustard jars, and the various surfaces that create the sum of the space within which the artwork is situated. This emphasis on surface, and the play of light upon it, shares fundamental similarities with photography. A photograph's reflective, two-dimensional surface is one of its most distinctive characteristics, dependent on the reflection of light from the surfaces of other objects for its own distinctive state. Like the highly reflective table in *Plain of Jars*, the shiny surface of the glass panes in *Anchois et moutarde* parallels the appearance of a glossy photograph's surface.

***Anchois et moutarde*: movement and time**

Another quality of light that *Anchois et moutarde* explores is that of movement. The movement of light through space brings into play the passage of time, a quality that is as essential as light in creating a sense of three-dimensional space. Given Culbert's persistent exploration of light and space, it is inevitable that the concept of time is also integral to his work. *Anchois et moutarde* is directly affected by time; the movement of

¹⁵ Douglas Crimp, *On the Museum's Ruins*: 17.

¹⁶ Yves Abrioux, *Bill Culbert*: 169.

the sunlight that enters the refectory windows is determined by the time of day and the movement of the sun as it crosses the sky beyond the windows. The position of these patches of light, the distinctiveness of their outlines and the intensity of their reflective capacity are all entirely dependent on the passage of time. Once day edges into night, the installation becomes indistinct in the voluminous space of the refectory hall; the reflections and contrasting areas of highlight and shadow appearing vague, if not entirely invisible.

Culbert's interest in the effect of time on the physical states and perception of objects is similarly evident in his photographs. Some of them form pairs, presenting the viewer with a 'before' and 'after' view of a subject that has been affected by the passage of time. *Clay with Watch* (1975; fig. 13) is the first photograph in one such pair. It depicts a young boy, Clay, sitting in a wicker chair, the view cropped so that his head and part of his right arm and leg are not visible. A watch adorns his left wrist. In the second photograph of the pairing, *Clay without Watch* (1975; fig. 14), the boy sits in exactly the same position, only in this photograph the watch is gone. Instead, the viewer sees the silhouette of white skin that the watch has created during the hours Clay has previously spent sitting in the sun with the watch on his wrist. The photographic pairing portrays the effect of time on Clay's body, an effect that is further highlighted by the fact that it is the presence, and conversely the absence, of Clay's watch – a method of observing time – that is the subject of the photographs. Culbert's observations of time through the medium of photography aid the development of this theme in his installations, the photographs acting as a way to demonstrate the complexities of such an abstract concept. Photography has a particularly intimate relationship with the passage of time. As Susan Sontag states:

Cameras establish an inferential relation to the present (reality is known by its traces), provide an instantly retroactive view of experience. Photographs give mock forms of possession: of the past, the present, even the future.

A photograph, though taken in an instant, depicts a specific moment. However, the fact that the specific moment has since passed equates the photograph with a historical

point in time. The photograph also helps the viewer imagine what might have happened after the image was taken, creating a generally unconfirmed sense of the future beyond the image. The qualities of time and movement that Culbert investigates in both his installation *Anchois et moutarde* and his photographs of Clay further reflect his ongoing interest in exploring properties of light.

Light Plain: merging properties of light and space

Many of Culbert's explorations of light involve sophisticated interactions between the properties of light and space, as well as the body of the viewer. *Light Plain* (1997; fig. 15)¹⁷ is one such artwork. This installation impacts physically upon the viewer's body, while simultaneously engaging with and challenging the pristine, rigorously ordered gallery space. *Light Plain* consists of 280 illuminated light bulbs, each contained within a white lampshade. The lampshades serve to isolate each bulb as an individual source of light, a separate entity within the overall plain of light. The lights, suspended from the ceiling, hang in a rectangular field in the middle of the darkened room that contains the installation. One end of the light field hangs lower than the other, impinging on the vertical parameters of the gallery space. *Light Plain's* primary unit is the multiplied household light bulb, a unit with which Culbert has experimented extensively in a range of environments and contexts, in both photographs and installations. Culbert's title brings into play a series of puns around the words 'plain' and 'plane'. The idea of something being simple or unadorned resonates with Culbert's use of ordinary, unembellished light fittings for the installation. The term 'plain' also evokes geography, while its homonym 'plane' connotes geometry. Both geographic and geometric plains/planes are associated with the quality of flatness – associations that highlight the flat surface created by the entirety of Culbert's light fittings. When the viewer enters the darkened gallery, *Light Plain* appears like a blanket of stars radiating light from the night sky. The installation also parodies the spotlights commonly used

¹⁷ This artwork was installed under the same title but in a different format at Zone Gallery, Newcastle upon Tyne, England in 1996. *Light Plain* is also reminiscent of Culbert's earlier *Light Field* installations, constructed in 1968, which created grids of light out of small holes drilled into metal boxes. For further discussion on *Light Plain*, see Yves Abrioux, "Accidents of Light" in *LIGHTWORKS: Bill Culbert*, Paula Savage et al, (Wellington: City Gallery, 1997: 13); Lara Strongman, "Moments of Illumination" in *LIGHTWORKS: Bill Culbert*, Paula Savage et al, (Wellington: City Gallery, 1997: 64); and Yves Abrioux, *Bill Culbert*, (Annecy: La Petite Ecole, 1997: 152).

within the pristine white gallery space to isolate artworks, endowing them with a sense of meaning and importance. In *Light Plain*, however, there is no object to be examined except the lights themselves, which have been multiplied to the point of ridiculousness, illuminating only their own presence and the emptiness of the room. When considering *Light Plain* in this way, there is humour in Culbert's use of ordinary domestic light fittings. The household fittings destroy any expectation the viewer might have of seeing the high quality, gallery-specific light fittings that are regularly used to aestheticise the objects exhibited within a gallery. In this respect, Culbert merges two types of space that usually exist in opposition to each other – the public space of the gallery and the private space of the home. Culbert's multiplication of the light fittings commonly found in a domestic setting, and his juxtaposition of two opposing realms of space, casts a 'spotlight' on the perceptual construction of space and how it comes to be used and experienced.

Light Plain's re-definition of space

Beyond the merging of public and private space, the light bulbs and lampshades that comprise the visual field of *Light Plain* also alter the viewer's ability to distinguish a consistent set of spatial parameters. The sloping gradient of the light fittings modifies the regularity of the gallery's ceiling line, thus impacting on the perception of the gallery's space as a whole. Culbert's ability to successfully manipulate these givens of perceptual space highlights his knowledge of the rules that govern its construction. The qualities of space that we experience in the real world are determined by our capacity to perceive the spatial elements of ground and sky. As Maurice Hershenson defines it:

The perceptual world consists of the ground and the sky, as well as objects (including people) that are in view at a given moment ... We move about in this space and interact with objects in it. This space has attributes such as depth, distance, location, direction and motion, all of which can vary.¹⁸

¹⁸ Maurice Hershenson, *Visual Space Perception – A Primer*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: The MIT Press, 1999): 1-2.

Culbert's installation, hung at an angle from the rigid horizontal line of the ceiling, allows the ground of the gallery floor to remain a constant while dissolving the perceptual regularity of the ceiling that defines the viewer's sense of the sky. Instead, *Light Plain* creates a set of spatial parameters that disturb the rules we are used to experiencing within both exterior and interior space. The disturbance is even more unsettling when it takes place within an art gallery, a space where we might normally expect a formal and ordered set of spatial rules, not the presence of 280 light bulbs and shades that impinge on the viewer's ability to distinguish a regular sense of ground and sky.

Along with the interruption of the expected spatial consistencies of ground and sky, *Light Plain* explores the ability of light to increase the volume of space beneath it without obstructing the physical passage of the viewer. Culbert has astutely observed that "Light [can] make a space enormous without there being a physical obstacle – the art work."¹⁹ This idea has clearly become a concept for investigation in *Light Plain*. The installation presents the viewer with an empty expanse of gallery floor, which they are free to walk over without any obstacle to negotiate. This ability to move freely through the space occupied by *Light Plain* also brings into play another set of relationships that are essential to the perception of visual space: direction and distance.²⁰ Having the capacity to walk from one end of the gallery to the other without hindrance increases both the viewer's sense of the particular nature of the room's space and of its size; reducing obstacles creates the feeling of a more expansive space. The light from the installation that penetrates the darkness of the gallery also increases the sense of space. The light rays that emanate from the ceiling play over the surfaces of the room, expanding and defining the space that the viewer occupies.

***Light Plain* and features of photography**

In addition to light, the perception of space is also dependent upon the perceiver.²¹ As with any environment where space can be perceived, *Light Plain* relies on the viewer to provide meaning to the spatial relations within the gallery and to the personal impact of

¹⁹ Bill Culbert and Yves Abrioux, "An Understanding of Light – Interview": 38.

²⁰ Maurice Hershenson, *Visual Space Perception*: 3.

²¹ Maurice Hershenson, *Visual Space Perception*: 3.

Culbert's installation. In their ability to impart meaning, space and photography share a fundamental similarity – reliance on a referent. Just as space requires the presence of a perceiver to have meaning, a photographic image can only take on a meaningful form once light rays are recorded from the surface of a referent. *Light Plain* also demonstrates further similarities with photography. Like a photographic image, Culbert's installation is constructed from light. When viewed from the end of the gallery room, *Light Plain* seems to form a two-dimensional surface defined by points of light, replicating the form of a photograph. The effect is created by the contrast between the darkness of the gallery space and the brilliance of the light fixtures, which dissolve any view of the electrical cords that suspend the lampshades, making them appear to float like a flat plane in the darkness. Emitting rays of light from its 280 light bulbs, *Light Plain* also exemplifies the process necessary in the formulation of a photographic image. Beneath Culbert's plain of light, the reflected rays create a patch of brightness on the glossy gallery floor, a two-dimensional representation of the three-dimensional installation that hangs above. The creation of this 'reproduction' echoes the causal connection between a photograph and its referent, and the role of light in formulating the image itself.

***Light Plain* and the body of the viewer**

Certain aspects of *Light Plain*, such as the heat emitted from the many suspended light bulbs, the reordering of the spatial parameters of the space itself, and the contrast between the brightness emanating from the light fittings and the darkness of the surrounding gallery room, are intended to physically affect the viewer's body and make the perception of the artwork more meaningful. Culbert's engagement of the viewer on a direct level and demand for interaction with the artwork beyond a purely visual experience may be traced back to evolving approaches to sculpture and site-specificity adopted by Minimalist sculptors in the 1960s.²² Frances Colpitt reminds us:

With the reduction or systematisation of internal relations came a new focus on relationships struck up across and within the space between the spectator and the object of perception. The nature of the spectator

²² Douglas Crimp, *On the Museum's Ruins*: 154.

confrontation, beyond the traditionally passive aesthetic *experience*, encompasses the actual space in which such a confrontation takes place, as a spectator responds to non-exhibited features such as presence, scale and architectural implications.²³

As well as utilising Minimalist techniques such as repetition of form, pre-fabricated readymade materials and an expansive scale, Culbert's installation also creates a specific environment within which the viewer experiences the artwork, an environment that involves a confrontation similar to that which Minimalist sculptors encouraged through their often large, site-specific sculptures. *Light Plain* places the viewer in close proximity to the primary subject of the installation, coaxing them to walk under the field of light that hangs from the ceiling. Most noticeable when stepping under *Light Plain* is the heat generated from the 280 light bulbs, which introduces the viewer to yet another aspect of light, both natural and artificial. The sensation of heat in the usually temperate gallery elicits from the viewer the natural response that people adopt when outside on a sunny day – the desire to turn their face up to the sun and feel its warmth. The play of white light and heat over the viewer's body, in the absence of any ground-based artwork, essentially transforms the viewer into the subject of the artwork. It is their body that is picked out in the gallery space and highlighted as a site of interest. The interaction of light and heat upon the viewer's body also makes the experience of viewing the artwork very concrete, extending the viewer's range of perceptions beyond the purely visual. The encompassing bodily sensations encouraged by *Light Plain* stand in contrast to the visual experience of viewing a photograph.

The sensation of heat that *Light Plain* produces upon the body of the viewer standing beneath it has an even greater impact when the viewing subject moves. By leaving the ground beneath the installation clear of obstacles, Culbert actively encourages the viewer to move freely within the gallery space and to observe the effect that movement within the room has on their experience of the lights, the sensation of heat emitting from them, and the bounds of the gallery space. In this way, the viewer's experience itself takes on a quality of intensity that is shared with Culbert's primary material.

²³ Frances Colpitt, *Minimal Art – The Critical Perspective*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1990): 67.

Because the field of light is hung at an angle, the intensity of sensations of heat and brightness is increased as the viewer walks underneath. Walking towards the end that hangs lower from the ceiling, the viewer becomes more acutely aware of the heat and light that play over the surface of their body. By encouraging the viewer to move freely within the gallery space and experience these sensations, Culbert reminds us that *Light Plain* is dependent as much on the articulation of space and the viewer's movement within that space, as it is on light, for its desired effect.

***Light Plain* and the 'white cube'**

Light Plain's alteration of the spatial parameters of the room that it occupies engages with and challenges the concept of the ideal 'white cube' gallery space. The white cube space, as a concept, is closely associated with formalist Modernism.²⁴ Designed to isolate the art object from the outside world, it has either sealed windows or no windows at all, the plain walls and ceiling are painted white, and the art object is picked out from the white expanse of the wall by spotlights that cause light to glisten on its surfaces, highlighting the position of privilege that the spotlights occupy within the dynamics of the space.²⁵ The space is so austere that people speak quietly and tread carefully through the gallery, as if at any moment they will be asked to leave, trespassers in an ideal space they are not actually privileged or knowledgeable enough to enter. Often, without knowing why, gallery visitors begin to feel uncomfortable, a feeling that is commonly exacerbated in the Modernist art gallery by the absence of artworks that provide a recognisable subject for contemplation. In *Light Plain*, Culbert has attempted to intensify this feeling of discomfort within the gallery space. As the viewer moves beneath the field of light that is suspended on a sloping gradient from the ceiling, the installation begins to impinge on their sense of vertical space, pressing closer to the head of the viewer. This reduction of vertical space destroys the spatial constant that we are used to experiencing in the white cube. The compression of space also results in an intensification of heat and brightness. Combined with the absence of an artwork beyond the lights themselves, the space begins to feel uncomfortable, echoing the discomfort that some viewers feel within the formal bounds of the art

²⁴ Brian O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube – The Ideology of the Gallery Space*, (expanded edition), (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1999): 15.

²⁵ Brian O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube*: 15.

institution. Furthermore, Culbert's plane of light destroys the perfect dimensions of the gallery space that we have come to expect. The installation alters the line of the ceiling, subjecting viewers to changing spatial relationships that specifically involve distance – the distance of the viewer from the light bulbs evolves as they move under the installation. Culbert also dissolves the crispness of the white cube by darkening the room that *Light Plain* occupies. This 'dark room', which stands in stark contrast to the expected brightness of the gallery space, is reminiscent of the camera obscura. Instead of letting in a controlled amount of light to formulate an image (as we would expect in a camera obscura), Culbert's plane of light becomes the image. Moreover, the single spotlight no longer isolates a solitary artwork; Culbert has multiplied it in order to emphasise the interaction between light and the construction of space. Simultaneously, he introduces the everyday familiarity of domestic light fittings to a space that usually displays unique and valuable creations. Beyond the examination of light and its qualities, *Light Plain* encourages the viewer to become aware of how the givens of a particular space impact upon the viewing experience itself.

An Explanation of Light: exemplifying the photographic

One of Culbert's most significant large-scale installations, *An Explanation of Light* (1984; fig. 16)²⁶, further explores the interaction between light and space, and the transfer of photographic processes into three-dimensional form. The artwork was a site-specific installation, constructed in a room in the Serpentine Gallery, London. As with *Light Plain*, the room itself does not adhere to the typical 'white cube' gallery space of most contemporary art venues. Instead, it includes an entire wall made of cross-hatched doors that overlook the Serpentine Gallery's grounds and London's Hyde Park. For this installation, Culbert constructed a replica of two of the Serpentine door panels and placed them several feet from the original doors, effectively paralysing their function. He then threaded 21 fluorescent tubes of varying lengths through holes in the replica

²⁶ For more on this artwork, see Christina Barton, "'Mon Soleil' – Considering photography in the work of Bill Culbert" in *LIGHTWORKS: Bill Culbert*, Paula Savage et al, (Wellington: City Gallery, 1997: 22); Francis Pound, "Culbert as Sciographer" in *LIGHTWORKS: Bill Culbert*, Paula Savage et al, (Wellington: City Gallery, 1997: 51); Bill Culbert and Yves Abrioux, "An Understanding of Light – Interview" in *Bill Culbert – Afterdark*, in Yves Abrioux et al, (Limoges: Editions FRAC Limousin, 1994: 38-39); Oliver Blanckart, "Not A Lot, But A Whole World" in *Bill Culbert – Afterdark*, in Yves Abrioux et al, (Limoges: Editions FRAC Limousin, 1994: 67); William McAloon, "An Art of Delight" in *Bill Culbert – light wine things*, Christopher Knowles et al, (Marlborough: Millennium Public Art Gallery, 2003: unpaginated); and Yves Abrioux, *Bill Culbert*, (Annecy: La Petite Ecole, 1997: 155).

window panes. The installation renders the invisible visible. It presents the viewer with a visual articulation of the action of light as it enters the gallery doors, something commonly overlooked and unexamined. *An Explanation of Light* draws attention to light's role in defining that space.²⁷ Culbert further alludes to the importance of process by leaving visible the electrical cords that hang from the fluorescent tubes and the transformer into which the tubes are plugged, which sits on the ground between the original doors and their duplicates. The references to the technology used to create *An Explanation of Light* expose how Culbert has replicated the movement of light. In addition, the title alludes to the artist's scientific approach to the exploration of light. His installation seeks an 'explanation' of light's behaviour as it moves through the transparent medium of glass. The artwork's presentation is similar to a scientific demonstration or exhibit, paralleling the quest for knowledge that characterises research.

An Explanation of Light: light, space, and movement

As with so many of Culbert's installations, *An Explanation of Light* is primarily concerned with the visual articulation of qualities and processes associated with light. However, the characteristics of light explored here are locked in an inextricable relationship with aspects of space. *An Explanation of Light* primarily focuses on the movement of light rays through the glass panes of the gallery doors; that is, both the movement of light through the original doors of which the viewer is less aware, and the visually explicit movement of the fluorescent tubes piercing the replica doors. The movement of light through the original doors defines the parameters of the space itself. The trajectory of light through the original doors is echoed by the downward angle of the fluorescent tubes that penetrate Culbert's replicas. The making visible of an invisible movement is also suggested by the construction process for the installation, to which the viewer is not privy, but to which the final product implicitly refers. Although the fluorescent tubes appear to be frozen in time, held static by the glass, Culbert's action of cutting holes in the doors and then threading the tubes through the glass brings about the movement of light that is the subject of the installation.

²⁷ Culbert's interest in examining light's role in defining space is similar to the approach of Minimalist sculptor Dan Flavin, who uses fluorescent light to explore the architecture of a given space. For further discussion, see Dan Flavin, "'... in daylight or cool white' – an autobiographical sketch", (written 1964), in *Minimalism*, ed. James Meyer, (London: Phaidon Press, 2000): 204-206.

Moreover, the reflection of the tubes in the original Serpentine doors create striations across the panes, further replicating the rays of natural light that flow into the room.

An Explanation of Light and time

The suggested movement of light through the replica doors of *An Explanation of Light* also introduces the idea of time to Culbert's installation. The trajectory of light through space results in a unit of time, measured as 'light years'. Our experience of the perceptual world is also reliant on the passage of time. As Hershenson states, "the perceived world is a four-dimensional world – 3D space plus time."²⁸ Culbert's re-creation of the passing of light rays through the replica doors marks the passage of time that is inevitably brought into play when light exists as a presence within three-dimensional space. The sense of time suggested by the tubes that slice through the glass panes is heightened by the time it takes the viewer to move around the gallery space and fully appreciate the installation, along with the passing of the day that visibly takes place outside the original doors of the gallery.

An Explanation of Light, photography, and time

While evoking a sense of movement and the passage of time, *An Explanation of Light* also paradoxically presents the viewer with an impression of the original doors and the penetrating action of light that is frozen in time. A static image within the gallery space, *An Explanation of Light* shares qualities with the photographic image. As Geoffrey Batchen points out; "Photographs depict a set of fixed spatial relations at a given moment in time, that instant lived by the subject or object before the camera. And yet photography figures time itself as a progressive linear movement from past to future."²⁹ Despite the fact that its technology allows the image to be formed instantly, the photograph occupies a position within the historical continuum of time while still allowing the viewer to imagine actions or outcomes that may happen beyond the captured moment. Culbert's installation simultaneously offers a static moment, a historical context and a suggested future. Like a photograph, *An Explanation of Light* is a resemblance of the original Serpentine gallery doors and the light rays that penetrate them, a double which is removed from its usual context. The installation is linked to

²⁸ Maurice Hershenson, *Visual Space Perception*: 2.

²⁹ Geoffrey Batchen, *Each Wild Idea*: 125.

the physical nature of the room it occupies and, in this way, the installation becomes site-specific. Culbert has made the ever-present action of light static at a particular moment: the tubes frozen as they enter the glass panes, poised and ready to fall to the floor. This sense of frozen time is furthered by the replicas, which stand inert in the space of the gallery and lack the functionality of the originals. The replicas frame the process of light entering the gallery space for isolation and contemplation, in a manner similar to the photograph's framing of a subject. The door frame contains Culbert's point of interest, the visible representation of light processes that both he and his viewers are to explore. As with most photographs, the viewer of *An Explanation of Light* can be drawn into imagining the future of Culbert's installation should it ever be freed from the static moment it represents. We imagine the fluorescent tubes slipping free from their glass confines and falling to the floor, only to disperse within the space and disappear from our view. In *An Explanation of Light*, Culbert has succeeded in transferring characteristics of time that are commonly associated with photography into his three-dimensional practice.

An Explanation of Light, photography, and the index

The similarities between *An Explanation of Light* and features of photography do not stop at capturing and manipulating time. The installation also demonstrates parallels with the indexical nature of photography. Photographs, like shadows and physical traces such as footprints, are indexical signs of the objects that have caused them.³⁰ As Rosalind Krauss states; "indexes establish their meaning along the axis of a physical relationship to their referents. They are the marks or traces of a particular cause, and that cause is the thing to which they refer, the object they signify."³¹ As the photographic process records the reflection of light rays off the surface of objects, the resulting image is therefore indexically linked to the original objects. The relationship that Culbert establishes between his replicas and the original Serpentine doors echoes the relationship between a photographic image and the referent from which the image is formed. The replicas faithfully reconstruct the appearance of the original doors in order to create an explicit connection between the two. Moreover, the reflections of

³⁰ Rosalind E. Krauss, "Notes on the Index: Part 1" in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: The MIT Press, 1985): 198.

³¹ Rosalind E. Krauss, "Notes on the Index: Part 1": 198.

Culbert's replicas in the original Serpentine doors create a double of the installation, which further parallels the formulation of the photographic image. *An Explanation of Light* achieves its meaning and site-specificity through its indexical link to the space that it occupies. The suggested action of light moving through the replica doors, produced by the fluorescent tubes that pierce the glass panes, creates further analogies with the technology of photography and its reliance on the movement of light. The passage of these light rays through the artificial doors suggests the need for light to travel down the aperture of the camera to interact with its light-sensitive surface and result in the photographic image. Indeed, Culbert has stated that "Windows act like the aperture in a camera – a passage of light".³² Culbert's doors function both as the camera's aperture, focusing light through its panes, and as the reproduction created through the light's movement.

An Explanation of Light, photography, and multiplicity

An Explanation of Light's indexical link to the original gallery doors brings into play the concept of multiplicity, which is also common to photography. Culbert's replicas, placed in such close proximity to their originals, act as a reproduction of their referent, presenting the viewer with a new, multiplied view of the doors. This multiplicity echoes the relationship between the photographic image and its referent. A photograph exists as a reproduction of the original object, possessing the ability to be multiplied over and over again. The potential of photography for repetition is further alluded to in the structure of *An Explanation of Light*. Culbert's replica doors contain multiple glass panes, the majority of which are pierced by at least one fluorescent tube. The individual panes are like small photographs within the entirety of Culbert's installation, and – like a photograph – it is through their relationship with the light acting upon their surfaces that their meaning becomes defined within the gallery's context. The multiple tubes and glass panes offer the viewer an altered view of the original Serpentine doors, and also reflect the ability of photography to present multiple viewpoints in a single image. *An Explanation of Light* is informed by the 'disunification' of space that the multiple viewpoints offered by photography have helped to construct in our image culture.³³

³² Bill Culbert and Yves Abrioux, "An Understanding of Light – Interview": 37.

³³ Steve Yates, "The Value of Space: A Theoretical Sketch for Photographic Art in the Late-Twentieth Century" in *Poetics of Space – A Critical Photographic Anthology*, ed. Steve Yates, (Albuquerque:

Rather than orientating the image to a fixed viewpoint for contemplation, *An Explanation of Light* encourages the incorporation of multiple viewpoints when perceiving the artwork in its entirety. Viewing the installation frontally, the most prominent feature are the tubes that protrude towards the viewer. However, when viewed from the side, the installation increases its sense of dynamism through the reflections of the tubes that play across the surface of the existing gallery doors. The proximity of the replicas to the original doors is essential for the conveyance of the installation's meaning and context, and the impact that Culbert's artwork has on the gallery space can only be appreciated if the viewer adopts an equally dynamic set of viewing positions.

An Explanation of Light, photography, and interior/exterior space

Finally, the opposition of inside and outside that is present both in Culbert's artwork and within the Serpentine gallery room can be equated with one of photography's most fundamental binary oppositions. When standing in the room occupied by *An Explanation of Light*, the viewer is able to see the external world that the interior space of the Modernist art gallery usually occludes from view. The comings and goings of other art patrons and the wider setting of Hyde Park beyond can be observed. The juxtaposition of these spaces can be linked to the oppositional states that polarise many theories regarding the designation of meaning to photographic images: nature versus culture. Discourse surrounding photography is regularly divided into two opposing fields; the first, supported by proponents of formalist Modernism, claims that the meaning of a photographic image is determined by the features that are particular only to the medium itself, while the second, argued by Postmodernist scholars and critics, claims that photography gains its meaning from the role it plays within a wider cultural context.³⁴ Geoffrey Batchen states:

Everywhere we have looked, photography's origins are found inscribed within a dynamic play of differences (the play of difference) that refuses

University of New Mexico Press, 1995): 212-217. Photography is not the only area of art that has contributed to the 'disunification' of space that Yates refers to. As he points out, Cubism and the use of collage and montage by the Russian and European avant-garde early in the twentieth century have also contributed to these changing spatial relationships.

³⁴ Geoffrey Batchen, *Burning with Desire – The Conception of Photography*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: The MIT Press, 1997): 9-17, 193-202.

to settle at any of the available poles of identification (nature, culture, the intrinsic characteristics of the medium, the exigencies of context).³⁵

This opposition of nature and culture in photography is indicated by the transition between interior and exterior space that interacts with Culbert's installation. The interior space of the Serpentine gallery can be likened to photography's Modernist position within the oppositional poles, dictated by formal features such as white walls, gallery spotlights and an institutional context. Beyond this ordered space, the viewer can see the outside world, which highlights the role of culture in the designation of meaning to the photographic image. *An Explanation of Light* evokes these oppositional states. Although the installation is located firmly within the formal space of the gallery, Culbert incorporates the real world into his artwork by positioning the replica doors where the viewer can see through to the grounds and park beyond. The transition from inside to outside space is further suggested by the passage of the fluorescent tubes through the artwork's panes, which trace the movement between the two oppositional poles of space. *An Explanation of Light* is a sophisticated and complex installation that exists as both an articulation of the dynamic relationship between light and space, and an example of how photographic processes and discourse inform Culbert's approach to his three-dimensional artworks.

Skylight 2 and the photographic surface

A photographic image is distinctive for its surface and the spatial relationships that help to comprise it. This is yet another feature of photography alluded to in Culbert's three-dimensional installations, most significantly in *Skylight 2* (1996; fig. 17).³⁶ The artwork is comprised of two flatbed trucks parked outside the Serpentine Gallery in London. One truck is positioned with its hydraulic system fully extended, tipping the flatbed on an angle that is neither strictly horizontal nor vertical. The progression towards a vertical position, however, has been fully achieved by the second truck. Its flatbed is separated from the body of the truck itself, and is instead suspended in the air from a metal frame made of perforated girders and rigid stabilising wires. Both of the trucks' flatbeds are covered with blue diffusing plastic, creating taut planar surfaces that are defined by the

³⁵ Geoffrey Batchen, *Burning with Desire*: 202.

³⁶ For more on this artwork, see Yves Abrioux, *Bill Culbert*, (Annecy: La Petite Ecole, 1997: 172).

fluorescent tubes that light them from within. The surfaces are like lids, acting as vessels that contain the light inside the flatbeds. These blue lids are reminiscent of the sky, which defines our understanding of space and acts as a domed blue lid that holds us contained within the bounds of earth's own spatial givens. This connection between the taut surfaces of the stretched plastic and the sky is also established in the title of the artwork, which highlights the links between the orientation of the flatbeds themselves, one of which faces skyward, their colour and their role as containers that diffuse light. The vivid blue of the illuminated diffusing plastic also teases visitors to the gallery, reminding patrons that the English weather does not always emulate the clear blue that Culbert's containers radiate towards the sky and the grounds of Hyde Park.

Skylight 2, photography, and the flatbed picture plane

Skylight 2's illuminated blue planes imitate the appearance of a photographic surface, as both are defined by the action of light and the severity of their flatness. These qualities of surface refer to the transition from the historical quest for perspectival depth in visual images to the cultivation of a flatbed picture plane that photography's optical compression of spatial relations has helped to achieve.³⁷ The orientation of *Skylight 2*'s flatbed components and their rigorous compression of space reflects the transition in art from an emphasis on picture planes that emulate the nature of seeing to art's inclusion of picture planes associated with the culture of making. The horizontal surface of a flatbed picture plane, as Leo Steinberg defines it, is associated with making, alluding to "any receptor surface on which objects are scattered, on which data is entered, on which information may be received, printed, impressed".³⁸ This type of surface can be closely associated with photography, as a photographic image is capable of recording the data that is available from the surface of any given object, a surface that is 'made' by reflected light rays. The flatbed picture plane, however, exists in contrast to the traditional vertical orientation of the picture plane and the pursuit of perspectival depth. Essential to this historical quest for depth and a resemblance to real spatial relationships is the orientation of the picture plane itself, which corresponds with the

³⁷ Leo Steinberg, "The Flatbed Picture Plane" in *Poetics of Space – A Critical Photographic Anthology*, ed. Steve Yates, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995): 198-199, 204-205. This essay originally appeared in the author's *Other Criteria: Confrontations with Twentieth-Century Art*, (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1972).

³⁸ Leo Steinberg, "The Flatbed Picture Plane": 199.

way we experience the world – through a vertical point of reference. As Leo Steinberg points out, “The top of the picture [plane] corresponds to where we hold our heads aloft, while its lower edge gravitates to where we place our feet.”³⁹ Our ability to perceive space is primarily dictated by our body’s relationship with the spatial consistencies of ground and sky, reflected in the vertical positioning of the picture plane in art from the Renaissance to Abstract Expressionism.⁴⁰ As vertical orientation is an aspect of three-dimensional space, this position is also adopted as a guiding principle for the orientation of sculpture.⁴¹ In *Skylight 2*, Culbert alludes to the verticality of the traditionally conceived picture plane by hanging one of the two flatbeds from the trucks in an upright position. It hangs like a painting, framed by the metal structure that supports it, reminding the viewer that the orientation of the hanging flatbed emulates their perceptual habits. Each metal beam that supports the flatbed also stands on two claw-like feet, echoing the embodied existence of the viewer. The rigid wires that help to maintain the upright position of the flatbed, converging at the top of both sides of the metal frame, are suggestive of the perspectival orthogonals that have historically assisted in creating depth within paintings. Any allusion to depth in this installation, however, is denied by the tight plastic planar surface stretched over the hanging flatbed. Culbert then challenges the tradition of vertical orientation through the incorporation of the second truck and its contrasting position, frozen at a mid-point between a horizontal and a vertical point of reference, which highlights the changing dynamics between surface and spatial orientation in the history of art.

The flatbed components of *Skylight 2* present the viewer with a curious combination of two-dimensional and three-dimensional space that echoes the ability of photography to take impressions from three-dimensional objects and transfer their appearance to a flat surface. Although the most striking feature of Culbert’s installation is the taut blue plastic that covers the flatbeds and their similarity with the planar structure of a photograph’s surface, the flatbeds are still three-dimensional containers. Their three-dimensionality is trivialised by the visual impact of the skylights’ two-dimensional

³⁹ Leo Steinberg, “The Flatbed Picture Plane”: 198. For further discussion of the vertical orientation of the picture plane, see David Summers, *Real Spaces – World Art History and the Rise of Western Modernism*, (London and New York: Phaidon Press, 2003: 36-45).

⁴⁰ Leo Steinberg, “The Flatbed Picture Plane”: 198.

⁴¹ David Summers, *Real Spaces*: 43.

compressed surfaces, which themselves are only made possible by the play of light contained in the space under the coverings. The rigid two-dimensionality of *Skylight 2*'s plastic coverings relates to the optical compression achieved by the technology of photography.⁴² As Steve Yates points out:

A detailed sense of deep space or overriding impression of perspective [is] less important than an attention to foreground, short focus, and the print's surface. Spatial unity [is] maintained in a closer relationship to the picture plane, allowing for new levels of experience.⁴³

The flatness of the photographic image, and the resulting spatial unity, is similar to the taut surfaces that comprise the visual interest of *Skylight 2*. The light that glows beneath the blue plastic causes an extreme compression of space, as if the light is literally pushing against the plastic that covers the flatbeds, dissolving the three-dimensional space beneath them. *Skylight 2*'s glowing planes of light are also reminiscent of the scrim screen present within some camera obscuras. Culbert's use of a singular surface colour achieves the sense of spatial unity associated with photographs, the lack of colour gradations ensuring that there is only an emphasis on foreground, with no surface variation to cultivate any sense of background or spatial depth. The dull metal of the flatbeds' edges contrasts with the glowing blue plastic, encouraging the projection of the illuminated planar surfaces towards the viewer from the heavy surrounds of the metal trucks, as if they were entities about to break free from their contextual confines and float skyward. *Skylight 2*'s taut blue surfaces are also suggestive of light boxes, or screens for the projection of light. In this respect, *Skylight 2* further develops ideas explored by Culbert in earlier projects, such as the *Sky* suitcase installation discussed in chapter one.

Skylight 2's allusion to the flatbed picture plane and the process of making is further suggested by the trucks, vehicles which are used to move materials employed in the process of making things. In *Skylight 2*, the flatbed containers that enclose the hidden fluorescent tubes 'make' the glowing blue surfaces by providing the structure required

⁴² Rudolf Arnheim, "A Study in Spatial Counterpoint": 8.

⁴³ Steve Yates, "The Value of Space": 215.

to produce the effect of the skylights. However, the role that the trucks play in creating the physical appearance of the illuminated surfaces is somewhat lessened in the case of the vertical flatbed, which is divorced from its usual orientation and its function paralysed by its static position within Culbert's supporting metal frame. In contrast, the process of making remains explicitly visible in the skylight that remains semi-horizontal. The truck's hydraulic system is clearly responsible for its surface orientation, and the flatbed itself is still attached to the truck that acts as its contextual agent. Thus, while many of Culbert's three-dimensional installations focus on the scientific and perceptual givens of light and space, *Skylight 2* primarily concerns itself with the exploration of the picture plane and its evolution within the changing history of technology and art.

Summary

The qualities of light and space explored in Culbert's three-dimensional installations share a number of similarities with aspects of photography. The site-specific nature of a number of his installations also emulates the photographic image's indexical connection to the objects photographed. Culbert's regular allusions to the technology of photography in his three-dimensional examinations of light and space further indicates the continuous translation of ideas between his photographs and his installations. Photographic approaches also inform his use of readymade objects, as will be discussed in chapter three.

CHAPTER THREE

The Readymade in Context

“... the secondhand/found object ...
shows itself to be full of potential in the form of unsuspected uses.”¹

A defining characteristic of Bill Culbert’s art is his use of readymade objects, which inevitably introduce context as an element integral to the artwork and its meaning. From the ubiquitous fluorescent tubes and light bulbs to wine glasses, bottles, buckets and car parts, these are the vehicles through which Culbert explores ideas central to his art. The context of an object is determined by the connections relevant to it, which helps to determine its meaning. Since each readymade object included in Culbert’s work has had a prior function, a range of associations connected to this function forms the object’s original context. An empty plastic bottle, for example, whether or not it still exhibits its label, unavoidably retains some reference to its former use and the product once contained within it. However, Culbert regularly alters and manipulates these anticipated references. His use of readymades frequently involves the exchange of one object’s use for another, thus creating incongruous and unexpected pairings and contexts. Moreover, by translating these everyday objects into a fine art environment, Culbert further dislocates them from their expected contextual associations.

The importance of context in Culbert’s art parallels the vital role it plays in understanding a photographic image. Photography demonstrates a particularly close relationship with context, which comes into play the moment the image is separated from the objects it depicts. This chapter will explore the importance of context to the photographic image by examining the writings of Roland Barthes, Allan Sekula, and Susan Sontag. As in photography, the context of readymade objects is altered through the artist’s act of choice. By selecting his objects, exchanging their uses, and translating

¹ Oliver Blanckart, “Not a Lot, But a Whole World”: 65.

them into an art context, Culbert displaces his readymades from their original context. In this respect, Culbert's employment of manufactured articles demonstrates fundamental similarities to Marcel Duchamp's pioneering use of readymade objects. The lingering presence of prior contexts and a history of use that informs Culbert's use of readymade objects is also reminiscent of the Surrealist found object. His juxtaposition of disparate objects that encourage new associations and connections parallels the Surrealist aim to elicit unconscious metaphorical associations within the mind of the viewer. Moreover, his arrangement of mass-produced items on the singular plane of the gallery floor, as seen in large-scale installations such as *Flotsam* (fig. 20), is reminiscent of photomontage, which played a prominent part in various early twentieth century European avant-garde movements, including Dada, Russian Constructivism and Surrealism. Finally, the chapter will examine Culbert's serial arrangement of readymade objects, a principle which has links to both photography and the sculptural approach such diverse artists as Constantin Brancusi, Marcel Duchamp and the Minimalists.

Changing contexts

Abat-jour/Seau (Lampshade/Bucket) (1992; fig. 2)² is a good example of Culbert's overturning of traditional functions and designation of new contextual relationships for readymade objects within his artwork. *Abat-jour/Seau* consists of nine colour photographs that record a group of temporary assemblages. The photographs themselves depict a range of coloured plastic buckets that rest on various stony surfaces. Culbert has placed the same beige lampshade on each of the buckets, then photographed the resultant assemblage so that the bucket and lampshade dominate the composition of each image. Apart from two fairly similar red buckets, Culbert has used different shades of buckets in each photograph. Against the neutral beige of the lampshade and the muted background colours, the artificial brightness of the readymade buckets stands out, highlighting them as the point of interest in the photographs. Culbert has selected the buckets for their resemblance to lamp bases, manipulating their expected context by placing a lampshade on them. He has

² This artwork is briefly discussed in Chapter One.

exchanged the buckets' traditional function as vehicles for lifting, carrying and containing, and instead ascribes them a new role – that of a lamp base.

Abat-jour/Seau, beyond the subversion of the buckets' traditional function, creates further contextual incongruities. Culbert's readymade assemblages, presumably constructed in the backyard of the artist's house, stand on various stony surfaces or on a slab of marble. Several buckets are photographed next to piles of rocks or other objects that the buckets may have been used to carry. The visibility of the bucket handles in all but three of the photographs reminds the viewer of their previous role as vessels. By using discernable clues suggestive of the buckets' prior use, Culbert cultivates a strange tension between their old use and their new function. As domestic 'lamps' – the new function implied by the addition of the lampshade – it would be unusual for the assembled objects to be situated outside. Furthermore, Culbert's act of photographing the objects and the photographs' subsequent appearance in galleries and catalogues creates a juxtaposition between the ordinariness of the objects in their backyard setting and their new status within an art context. Culbert's displacement of *Abat-jour/Seau*'s everyday objects from their expected context emulates Duchamp's selection and removal of readymade objects from their original contexts. *Abat-jour/Seau* also reflects Culbert's interest in creating photographic series based on the exploration of similar forms or ideas. This serial multiplication of analogous forms results in an overall sense of uniformity within the collection of photographs. *Abat-jour/Seau*'s sequential depiction of readymade buckets also hints at the serial arrangement of manufactured objects that features prominently in the approach of Minimalist sculptors such as Dan Flavin and Carl André.³

As with the readymade objects that are displaced from their original context in *Abat-jour/Seau*, photographic images are subject to changing contextual readings. The isolation of the subject from its original context through the act of photographing, coupled with the viewer's individual application of associations and cultural stereotypes, impacts on the meaning that can be inferred from a photograph. In *Abat-jour/Seau*, Culbert's juxtaposition of a singular lampshade with a series of buckets is

³ Mel Bochner, "Serial Art, Systems, Solipsism" (1967) in *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Gregory Battcock, (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1968): 92-100.

suggestive of the fact that, in different environments and under the scrutiny of diverse viewers, the context of a photographic image is subject to change. These fluctuating contexts are further alluded to through Culbert's orientation of the buckets. The contextual transition from the function of bucket to lamp base is more successful in those photographs that do not show the handles and, thus, create a more convincing illusion of a stereotypical lamp base. The success or failure of the buckets' translation into a lamp base suggests that Culbert's assemblages were constructed in order to test an idea. His apparent indifference to the success of the buckets' contextual exchange echoes Duchamp's proclaimed aesthetic indifference when choosing his readymade objects. The transition between two contextual positions in *Abat-jour/Seau* highlights the fact that our expectations, cultural assumptions and previous experiences partly determine the meaning we ascribe to an object or image.

Barthes on context

The role of context in creating meaning within a photographic image is examined in Roland Barthes' seminal essay "The Photographic Message" (1961), which considers the denotative and connotative elements of the photographic message. While Barthes frames his discussion within press photography and particularly emphasises the impact that accompanying texts have on the connoted message, his identification of the role that denotation and connotation play in creating meaning has relevance for the interpretation of all photographic images. In his essay, Barthes postulates that all the visual arts comprise two messages: a denoted message, which is the object itself, and a connoted message, which involves the rhetoric surrounding the image.⁴ However, unique to photography is its indexical relationship to the objects that have caused the image, which results in a detailed analogue of the original objects as they existed in the real world. This indexical relation endows the photograph with a particularly strong sense of denotation.⁵ After identifying the peculiar strength of photography's denoted message, Barthes hypothesises that a connoted message can also exist in conjunction with the photographic analogue.⁶ Here Barthes addresses the importance of context in

⁴ Roland Barthes, "The Photographic Message" in *A Barthes Reader*, ed. Susan Sontag, (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001): 197-199. Barthes's discussion of text in relation to the image, and the role of the text in creating meaning, is explored in Chapter Four.

⁵ Roland Barthes, "The Photographic Message": 196.

⁶ Roland Barthes, "The Photographic Message": 198.

creating the connoted message. He states that the connotation of a photographic image can be inferred at the level of the message's production and reception, dictated by both the photographer's role in shaping the image, and the image's reading or interpretation by the public.⁷

Barthes draws attention to the fact that the contextual reading of the image is largely cultural, dependent upon the stereotypical associations and expectations of the viewer. He states:

We saw that the code of connotation was in all likelihood neither "natural" nor "artificial" but historical, or, if it be preferred, "cultural". Its signs are gestures, attitudes, expressions, colours, or effects, endowed with certain meanings by the virtue of the practice of a certain society ...⁸

These culturally determined connotations are the same as those that inform the reading of Culbert's series *Abat-jour/Seau*. The bucket handles allude to their original function and encourage the viewer to equate the buckets with their historical connotations. Despite the presence of the incongruous lampshade in all of the photographs, the visibility of standard features belonging to a bucket hamper the ability of the viewer to see them in their new contextual role of lamp base. By identifying the role of culture and context in assigning a message to a photograph's denotative appearance, Barthes also touches on the most fundamental of photography's binary oppositions: nature versus culture. The photograph's denotative qualities constitute the nature of the image, and its connotative associations, its culture. From Barthes's early assertion that a photograph is primarily denotative, its meaning dictated by the nature of its surface and depictive abilities, he establishes instead that a photographic message necessarily constitutes the presence of both nature and culture. It is this fact he labels as the paradoxical form of the photograph, involving photography's transformation from "the unculture [sic] of a 'mechanical' art into the most social of institutions."⁹

⁷ Roland Barthes, "The Photographic Message": 198.

⁸ Roland Barthes, "The Photographic Message": 206.

⁹ Roland Barthes, "The Photographic Message": 210.

Sekula on context

Allan Sekula, influenced by Barthes' essay, also identifies the binary character of the photographic message and notes that a photograph's meaning is determined by context in his influential essay "On the Invention of Photographic Meaning" (1975).¹⁰ Like Barthes, Sekula argues against the formalist notion that the photograph derives its semantic properties purely from its own visual characteristics. Instead, he suggests that a photograph's information results from culturally determined relationships, thus challenging the idea that intrinsic meanings exist within the photograph itself.¹¹ As Sekula points out, "the photograph, as it stands alone, presents merely the *possibility* of meaning. Only by its embeddedness in a concrete discourse situation can the photograph yield a clear semantic outcome."¹² As Barthes did earlier, Sekula touches on the fundamental point that the perception of a photograph is not reliant solely upon what the image depicts, arguing instead that perception and understanding also involve the ability and desire of the viewer to engage with the subject presented. In this respect, the viewer adds a unique contextual component to the reading of the image, resulting in what I believe to be photography's particularly close relationship with context. Owing to the peculiar strength of a photograph's denotative qualities and its transcriptive link with the objects depicted, I believe that the contextual associations usually applied to the objects recorded in the photographic image are more readily prompted, and thus more entrenched, in the mind of the viewer than the associations encouraged by other mimetic visual arts.

Sontag on context

Along with the cultural associations assigned by the viewer, a photograph's contextual position is fundamentally affected by the moment of isolation and selection undertaken by the photographer in capturing the image. The photographer's act of recording necessarily removes the photograph from its original setting. From this initial act of

¹⁰ Allan Sekula, "On the Invention of Photographic Meaning" (1975) in *Photography in Print: Writings from 1816 to the Present*, ed. Vicki Goldberg, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1981): 453 & 472.

¹¹ Allan Sekula, "On the Invention of Photographic Meaning": 454.

¹² Allan Sekula, "On the Invention of Photographic Meaning": 457.

isolation and removal, the photograph is then subjected to a diverse range of contextual reorientations dependent upon external factors such as where the photograph is exhibited and the interpretations of viewers who are exposed to the image. Selecting the image and removing it from its original context exposes it to a multitude of changing contextual positions. The photograph's analogous appearance is not enough to fix the image to its original context. As Susan Sontag postulates:

Strictly speaking, one never understands anything from a photograph ... understanding is based on how it functions. And functioning takes place in time, and must be explained in time. Only that which narrates can make us understand.¹³

Like Barthes and Sekula, Sontag draws attention to the fact that a photograph requires the application of a connoted message for the viewer to understand the image, which must be established through a dialogue with the photograph over time. Through the photographic image's close relationship to the objects photographed, it adopts a unique proximity to the context of the objects depicted. However, the subsequent removal of the photograph from its original frame of reference through the act of isolation and selection allows for new contextual associations to be attached to the image over time, which impact upon the photograph's tenuous trace to its original context.

The readymade, photography, and the act of selection

Both photographs and readymade objects exhibit traces of their original contexts, while their position in the art world is determined by the alteration of these contexts through the act of selection. As Rosalind Krauss points out:

The readymade's parallel with the photograph is established by its process of production. It is about the physical transposition of an object from the continuum of reality into the fixed condition of the art-image by a moment of isolation, or selection.¹⁴

¹³ Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, (London: Penguin Books, 1978): 23.

¹⁴ Rosalind E. Krauss, "Notes on the Index: Part 1": 206.

The readymade object, prior to the artist's moment of selection, has previously existed in the world with relation to a specific context, that is, its prior function. The relocation of the object into an art context, through the artist's act of choice, results in the displacement of the object from its usual context.¹⁵ However, despite the newly ascribed contextual position of the object, the readymade still maintains a trace to its original function, thus creating an incongruous relationship between the readymade's new context and its previous use. In this respect, the readymade demonstrates another similarity to the photograph. A photograph, despite its own changing contextual positions, unavoidably exists as a trace of the objects that have caused it and therefore retains a lasting reference, however removed, to its original context.

Duchamp and the readymade

Marcel Duchamp pioneered the process of selecting readymade objects and translating them into an art context. Duchamp first introduced the readymade to his artistic practice in 1913, when he attached a bicycle wheel to a kitchen stool so that he could watch it turn. However, Duchamp did not apply the term 'readymade' to his selected factory-made objects until 1915.¹⁶ Crucial to Duchamp's concept for his readymades was his process for choosing the objects, which was based on a kind of chance encounter. Concerning the specifications for his readymades, he states in a note from *The Green Box* that "*The important thing then is just this matter of timing, this snapshot effect ... It is a kind of rendezvous.*"¹⁷ Duchamp's process for selecting his readymade objects, then, constituted a decision to choose an object at a given moment, the resulting choice depending on what was available to him at his location at that point in time. As Krauss did later, Duchamp links his rendezvous with a readymade object to the isolation of an object or scene undertaken during the act of photographing. His random choice of objects also resonates with the often arbitrary nature of the snapshot photograph – given the sheer proliferation of snapshot photographs, it seems as if both

¹⁵ Arturo Schwarz, *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp*, (New York: Delano Greenidge Editions, 2000): 31.

¹⁶ Marcel Duchamp, "Apropos of "Readymades"" in *The Essential Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, ed. Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1975): 141. This statement was delivered at the Museum of Modern Art, New York on 19 October, 1961, and was originally published in *Art and Artists*, vol. 1, no. 4 (July 1966): 47.

¹⁷ Marcel Duchamp, "The Green Box" in *The Essential Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, ed. Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1975): 32.

anything and everything has been photographed. Duchamp's 'snapshot timing' put him in contact with a range of readymade objects, including one of his earliest readymades, *Bottle Rack* (1914). This encounter yielded a galvanised iron wine bottle drying rack with protruding arms. Through Duchamp's act of selection, the factory-made bottle rack shed its original function and instead came to exist in a new art context, simultaneously challenging both the role of the artist in creating the art object and the entrenched expectations of its originality.

Culbert, Duchamp, and the act of selection

Culbert and Duchamp share similarities in their selection and translation of readymade objects into new contexts. Culbert pays homage to Duchamp's readymades in the black and white photograph *René's Christmas Tree, Café Regairs* (1980; fig. 18).¹⁸ It depicts the corner of a café, where a stone wall and the shop counter meet. Strung over several objects that hang on the wall is a line of sparkling tinsel, and baubles are hooked onto a skeletal-looking oil lamp. The counter also sports tinsel, along with an eclectic collection of consumer products. In the centre of the image, where the counter meets the wall, a bottle drying rack perches on the counter's edge. Its protruding arms are covered by silvery tinfoil, turning it into the café's token Christmas tree. The bottle rack is barely recognisable under the mantle of its newly assigned festive role. Its glittering surface places it in contrast with the shadowy corner of the shop and the dark wooden counter. In addition to the interest of both artists resting on similar objects, Duchamp's *Bottle Rack* and Culbert's photograph of *René's Christmas Tree* also share a rendezvous. Like Duchamp's encounters with his readymades, Culbert's photograph is testament to a chance finding. We can imagine his delight upon entering Café Regairs, finding the makeshift Christmas tree, and recognising the oblique reference to Duchamp that is inevitably attached to the bottle rack and its altered function. A further connection between Culbert and Duchamp exists in their choice of an object associated with wine. Culbert's choice reflects his regular incorporation of articles connected with wine – glasses, bottles, even wine itself – into his artworks. His record of this rendezvous also

¹⁸ This photograph is discussed in Kyla McFarlane's essay "Portrait of the Artist with a Wine Bottle: Bill Culbert's Collaborative Works" in *Bill Culbert – light wine things*, Christopher Knowles et al, (Blenheim, Millennium Public Art Gallery, 2003, unpaginated) and referred to briefly in Simon Cutts's untitled essay in *Bill Culbert – Selected Works 1968-1986*, (London: Institute of Contemporary Art, 1986, unpaginated).

documents the contextual change that results from René's decoration of the bottle rack's limbs. *René's Christmas Tree* depicts the bottle dryer in a new context, resulting from its displacement from its previous role as a bottle dryer and its new status as a Christmas decoration. In addition to its contextual repositioning, *René's Christmas Tree* also involves a conceptual change, which mirrors the way in which Duchamp encouraged new ideas to be assigned to his readymade objects. In an anonymous letter to *The Blindman* in May 1917, of which Duchamp later acknowledged his authorship, he drew attention to the conceptual change that resulted from choosing the *Fountain*. He stated:

Whether Mr. Mutt with his own hands made the fountain or not has no importance. He CHOSE it. He took an ordinary article of life, placed it so that its useful significance disappeared under the new title and point of view – created a new thought for that object.¹⁹

The new thought that Duchamp created by removing the urinal from its usual context and associating it with a fountain changed the way that the object was perceived. *René's Christmas Tree* emulates this kind of conceptual shift – the photograph introduces us to the new thought that a bottle dryer can be used as a Christmas decoration. Culbert's photograph echoes the contextual and conceptual repositioning of Duchamp's readymades through each artist's act of selection.

Selection is fundamental to both Duchamp's and Culbert's use of readymades, and both approach their choice of objects with clear goals in mind. The contextual alterations to which Duchamp's readymades are subjected are based on an indifference towards the visual qualities of the objects themselves, suggesting that Duchamp has no particular interest in the previous function of the object, no theme guiding their contextual reorientations, and no aesthetic rules by which to choose the objects beyond their factory manufactured status. As Duchamp emphasises:

A point which I want very much to establish is that the choice of these "readymades" was never dictated by esthetic delectation. This choice

¹⁹ Anonymous, "The Richard Mutt Case", *The Blindman*, no. 2 (May 1917), unpaginated. Duchamp later acknowledged his authorship of this text.

was based on a reaction of visual indifference with at the same time a total absence of good or bad taste ... in fact a complete anesthesia.²⁰

In contrast to Duchamp's proclaimed anesthesia when selecting his readymade objects, Culbert chooses the readymades he subjects to new contextual positions according to their appearance, his selection regularly involving the identification of shared formal properties belonging to two separate objects. He then replaces the traditional function of one for the other. Of this exchange Culbert states, "I do it because it interests me to change the nature of things and their usefulness."²¹ This substitution of roles can be seen in the temporary installation *Sunset I* (1990; fig. 19).²² Documented by way of a colour photograph, the installation consisted of a Sunlight Dishwashing Liquid bottle, still partially full, resting on a piece of wood. Into its lid Culbert screwed a light socket, topped by a frosted bulb. Behind the assemblage, the twilight landscape forms a black band that meets the sea. The only source of light in the image emanates from the sinking sun about to slip below the horizon. Culbert placed his collection of readymade objects carefully, so that as the sun descended towards the sea, it disappeared behind the light bulb, appearing to illuminate it. The glow of light around the obscured sun appears to belong to the light bulb itself, further adding to the sense that Culbert's construction actually functions as a source of light. *Sunset I* creates a very deliberate visual pun, playing on the connections between Sunlight Dishwashing Liquid, the setting sun, and the sun's role in lighting the bulb held aloft by the plastic bottle. The humour evident in Culbert's photograph, and indeed much of his work, parallels Duchamp's wit and fondness for creating puns.²³ In addition to his witty play on associations, Culbert has selected the Sunlight Dishwashing Liquid bottle for its similarity of form to a lamp base. The shared visual characteristics between the two objects allow for an easier exchange from the old function of the Sunlight bottle to its new role. This ease of contextual exchange commonly informs Culbert's process in

²⁰ Marcel Duchamp, "Apropos of "Readymades""": 141. Words capitalised in original.

²¹ Bill Culbert quoted in Virginia Were, "Plugging in to junk technology", *Art News NZ*, (22, no. 1, Autumn 2002): 49.

²² Luke Smythe discusses this artwork with relation to the animating power of sunlight in *Bill Culbert: Colin McCahon*, (Auckland: no publisher specified, 2004: 6). Culbert's *Sunset* series is also very briefly mentioned in Oliver Blanckart's essay "Not A Lot, But A Whole World" in Yves Abrioux et al, *Bill Culbert – Afterdark*, (Limoges: Editions FRAC Limousin, 1994: 62).

²³ Dawn Ades, Neil Cox and David Hopkins, *Marcel Duchamp*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1999): 132.

choosing readymade objects. However, as seen with *Abat-jour/Seau* (fig. 2), the Sunlight bottle's transformation does not completely sever its connection to its previous context; despite its new role in supporting the light bulb and its socket, the bottle still contains liquid and displays its label, therefore maintaining obvious traces to its original context. In this way, *Sunset I* imitates a photograph's lasting connection to the objects that the camera records.

Selection and displacement

Culbert's selection and displacement of objects from their usual contextual environment parallels Duchamp's displacement of readymades from their original function. By designating *Bottle Rack* as an object in the category 'readymade', Duchamp displaced the bottle dryer from its expected role. *Bottle Rack* was translated into an object for display, existing in a new art context, despite what Duchamp terms as "the basic antinomy between art and the readymades".²⁴ His pioneering role in severing readymade objects from their original function implicitly informs Culbert's use of readymades. The collection of readymade objects comprising *Sunset I* is displaced from a domestic environment. Sunlight Dishwashing Liquid is usually near the kitchen sink or on a supermarket shelf, while table lamps, with their fragile bulbs and exposed wiring, are better situated on bedside or coffee tables rather than outside. This locational displacement is emphasised by the contextual displacement that results from Culbert's decision to turn the Sunlight bottle into a lamp base. However, this displacement facilitates further associations beyond each object's usual function. These associations involve a punning play on the nature of the artwork's assembled objects. Aside from the obvious links between the brand name 'Sunlight' and Culbert's incorporation of the sun itself, the presence of the Sunlight Dishwashing Liquid evokes a range of further connections. The dishwashing liquid is suggestive of a transition from dirty to clean that is echoed in the sun's progression from sunset to sunrise. As the sun sinks behind *Sunset I*'s frosted light bulb, its light transfers into the plastic surface of the bottle, creating glowing yellow highlights that appear to drip into the dishwashing liquid. As the day ends, we can imagine the sun rising again the following morning, casting its light on a fresh new day, as if squeezed clean and bright from the bottle of Sunlight

²⁴ Marcel Duchamp, "Apropos of "Readymades"": 142.

Liquid. These possible associations result Culbert's displacement of the selected objects from their original contexts. Like Duchamp's readymades, Culbert's assemblage of manufactured items inevitably finds its way into an art context through his act of selection.

Culbert, Duchamp, and inscription

A number of Duchamp's readymades incorporate inscriptions, a feature which similarly plays a part in Culbert's use of readymade objects. In a talk on readymades, delivered at the Museum of Modern Art in 1961, Duchamp indicated the importance of his inscriptions to his readymades. He stated, "One important characteristic was the short sentence which I occasionally inscribed on the "readymade"."²⁵ Duchamp's earliest inscription was applied to a snow shovel. He describes the rendezvous and the resulting inscription in his talk: "In New York in 1915 I bought at a hardware store a snow shovel on which I wrote "In Advance of the Broken Arm"."²⁶ The snow shovel's inscription evokes existing contextual associations, further adding to Duchamp's manipulation of the shovel's stereotypical context. Inscription also has a role in Culbert's use of readymades. However, in the case of Culbert, the inscriptions on some of his readymade objects are themselves readymades – the brand names printed on the manufactured articles. *Sunset I* involves this type of inscription. The paper label from the Sunlight Dishwashing Liquid bottle still adorns the bottle, and in the subdued lighting of the evening, the white letters of the brand name 'Sunlight' are prominent. The inscription is doubled through the embossed brand name visible on the bottle's plastic surface.

Like the inscription on Duchamp's snow shovel, the presence of the brand name 'Sunlight' within *Sunset I* assists in the transposition of the readymade objects from one context to another, and the creation of new contextual associations. This alteration of ideas echoes the desired effect of Duchamp's readymade inscriptions. He stated "[t]hat sentence instead of describing the object like a title was meant to carry the mind of the spectator towards other regions more verbal."²⁷ The inscription "In Advance of the

²⁵ Marcel Duchamp, "Apropos of "Readymades"": 141.

²⁶ Marcel Duchamp, "Apropos of "Readymades"": 141.

²⁷ Marcel Duchamp, "Apropos of "Readymades"": 141.

Broken Arm” encourages this conceptual flight. It may conjure in the viewer’s mind, in conjunction with the normal function of the object itself, thoughts around the action of shoveling snow. I have always imagined the inscription as alluding to the potential for an unfortunate accident in the snow, involving the shoveller slipping and breaking their arm. Perhaps this association comes to mind purely because I myself have broken my arm three times in the past, but by inscribing texts on readymade objects, Duchamp has stimulated a multitude of potential associations for individual viewers. The readymade inscription visible in *Sunset I* prompts similar flights of the imagination in the viewer’s mind. The word ‘Sunlight’ parallels the sun’s role in illuminating the bulb that sits atop the bottle: the sun lights the bulb. The bottle’s label also depicts a stylised sun partially obscured by the ‘horizon’ of the brand name, which repeats the transition taking place in the photograph’s background of the sun disappearing into the horizon. These transitions are suggestive of the shift between contexts that Culbert’s acts of selection and placement have created. *Sunset I* challenges the viewer to create new connotations for the bottle and its altered context.

Culbert, context, and the Surrealist found object

Culbert’s cultivation of new associations between readymade objects and their contexts is also reminiscent of the Surrealists’ use of found objects. The Surrealists were concerned with the relationship between the conscious and the unconscious, and attempted to reconcile the world of the imagination with that of reality.²⁸ In 1924, André Breton defined Surrealism as follows:

SURREALISM noun, masculine. Pure psychic automatism by which one intends to express verbally, in writing or by any other method, the real functioning of the mind. Dictation by thought, in the absence of any control exercised by reason, and beyond any esthetic or moral preoccupation.²⁹

²⁸ Diane Waldman, *Collage, Assemblage, and the Found Object*, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1992): 154 & 156.

²⁹ André Breton, *Le manifeste du surréalisme*, (Paris: Sagittaire, 1924): 42, quoted in Diane Waldman, *Collage, Assemblage, and the Found Object*: 154.

Surrealist texts, objects, and paintings delved into the inner workings of the mind, encouraging in both creator and viewer the emergence of a range of previously unconscious associations. The Surrealist found object, which commonly took the form of a manufactured article, grew out of Duchamp's concept of 'aided' readymades.³⁰ Although the inscriptions that Duchamp sometimes applied to his readymades were designed to transport the viewer's mind to "regions more verbal", the Surrealist technique for encouraging new links in the mind of the viewer utilised a somewhat different approach. Typically taking the form of an assemblage, the Surrealist found object involved the juxtaposition of two or more disparate objects, placed together in order to liberate the mind of the viewer from preconceived ideas and to trigger a new set of associations.³¹ By combining several incongruous objects, the assemblage of found objects created metaphorical connections in order to extract further unconscious projections in the viewer.³² Metaphor, as a device that links two separate terms or subjects, was particularly apt as a means to achieve this goal; the juxtapositions that characterised the found object elicited in the viewer previously unknown or unacknowledged psychological links based on the viewer's individual memory, personal history, existing preconceptions and feelings. The incongruous pairing of objects helped to elicit these new associations. Man Ray's assemblage *Gift* (1921) demonstrates this point. Consisting of a flat iron with fourteen nails attached in a vertical line down its face, the iron itself carries associations of domestic use, along with the care and presentation of garments. However, his addition of a row of nails is violently incompatible with the iron's original use. We can imagine the terrible holes that would be ripped in a fragile garment should the iron be used. The title of the assemblage further enhances Man Ray's juxtaposition of violence with banal

³⁰ Rosalind E. Krauss, *Passages in Modern Sculpture*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: The MIT Press, 1977): 120. Duchamp refers to the readymades that he adds details to as "Readymade Aided" ("Apropos of "Readymades"" : 142). Literature concerning Duchamp also widely refers to the readymades that involve assemblage as a 'Semi-Readymade' or 'Assisted Readymade', but I prefer to use Duchamp's own definition.

³¹ Diane Waldman, *Collage, Assemblage, and the Found Object*: 158. For an extensive discussion on the Surrealist found object and the unconscious, see Steven Harris, *Surrealist Art and Thought in the 1930s: Art, Politics, and the Psyche*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

³² Rosalind E. Krauss, *Passages in Modern Sculpture*: 123. The Surrealist artist's interest in creating metaphorical associations is in keeping with Surrealism's professed interest in language and poetry. For further, see Diane Waldman, *Collage, Assemblage, and the Found Object*: 154-193, and Steven Harris, *Surrealist Art and Thought*. Chapter four discusses at length the role of metaphor in relation to Culbert's artwork.

domesticity, the pleasant connotations of the word 'gift' destroyed by the protruding nails and the suggestion of ill will.

Culbert's creation of new associations and contextual links has much in common with Surrealist juxtaposition and the assemblage of incongruous found objects. His large-scale installation *Flotsam* (1992; fig. 20)³³ is a case in point. This installation consists of a collection of fluorescent tubes of different lengths and a multitude of coloured and transparent plastic bottles, set against the unified plane of the gallery floor. The harsh illumination of the fluorescent tubes punctuates the darkened gallery space, their stark radiance providing the only light in the room. Electric cords thread through the plastic bottles and tubes like ripples, and switch boxes lie next to the empty bottles like more discarded trash, belying their functional role in lighting the tubes. All the plastic bottles are presented neutrally, devoid of the labels that would have identified their previous contents. However, some bottles are very distinctively shaped, the particularities of their form suggesting their prior domestic roles – a green Toilet Duck bottle with its idiosyncratic curved neck, a dishwashing liquid bottle with its pop-up yellow and white lid, and a trigger headed bottle of a disinfectant product. Culbert has cut a number of the bottles so that they appear to bob on the surface of the floor, as if they were actual debris floating in the sea, an association evoked by the title *Flotsam*. Like the Surrealist object, Culbert's assemblage of bottles evokes the memory of their previous functions. The objects that comprise *Flotsam* are items that can be found in the typical household, or at the refuse tip, and they retain traces of their previous domestic contexts. Each bottle reminds the viewer of their own daily domestic activities – washing the dishes, scrubbing the toilet, mopping the floor, doing the laundry. The bottles exist as a sample of the detritus of modern domestic living, and the cumulative effect of the installation reminds the viewer of the effect that our throw-away culture has on the environment.

³³ Yves Abrioux discusses this artwork extensively with relation to his concepts of contingency and pure event in *Bill Culbert*, (Annecy: La Petite Ecole, 1997: 135-141, 147, 173). The installation is also referred to in articles by Virginia Were, "Plugging in to Junk Technology", *Art News New Zealand*, (vol. 22, no. 1, Autumn 2002: 46-49); Jon Bywater, "Two galleries with plastic in them", *Listener*, (189, no. 3300, August 9-15, 2003: 56); and Allan Smith, "The Pragmatic Romanticism of Bill Culbert", *Art New Zealand*, (no. 84, Spring 1997: 57). I intend to treat *Flotsam* as an assemblage, despite the fact that the various elements of the installation are not physically joined together. The artwork is a collection of assembled objects placed in relation to each other, in order to form a whole, and therefore fulfils the majority of the characteristics associated with assemblage.

Flotsam's juxtaposition of empty plastic bottles and glowing fluorescent tubes encourages new associations in a manner that parallels the Surrealist found object. The most visually striking aspect of *Flotsam* is the white, crisp light of the fluorescent tubes that washes over the bottles and the gallery floor. Their singular uniformity of colour stands in contrast to the bottles and their multitudinous hues. The play of light over the bottles highlights aspects of their form, and the bottles that almost touch the tubes seem to glow from within. Several bottles are transparent, the presence of their brightly coloured bottle tops rescuing them from melting into invisibility under the harsh white light of the tubes. The presence of the fluorescent tubes amongst the plastic bottles creates the primary point of juxtaposition within the artwork. *Flotsam's* illuminated tubes remain functional objects that define the form of the artwork and the space that contains it. In contrast, the bottles lie empty and discarded on the gallery floor, unable to fulfil their previous functions. This point is highlighted by the 'bobbing' bottles. The severed bottles can no longer hold liquid and now only exist meaningfully in the new context of *Flotsam*.

Like the Surrealists, Culbert's juxtaposition of glowing tubes and plastic bottles evokes a range of possible associations unleashed by the artwork's combination of objects. Firstly, the tubes illuminate the reality of our throw-away culture. *Flotsam* suggests that our world is awash in a sea of plastic, the bottles testifying to the impact that our desire for pre-packaged convenience has on our surroundings. *Flotsam* is also suggestive of a rubbish dump, which provides an analogy that has specific interest for Culbert. When Culbert moved to the Lubéron district of France, he discovered an illegal rubbish tip at the foot of a hill and subsequently spent many hours fossicking through it in search of objects for inclusion in photographs and installations.³⁴ Culbert's interest in rubbish rescued from the dump is also reminiscent of Russian artist Ilya Kabakov's use of discarded objects in his work. Of the world and its detritus of daily life, Kabakov writes:

The whole world, everything that surrounds me here, appears a boundless dump with no ends or borders to me, an inexhaustible, vast

³⁴ Frédéric Paul, "Bill Culbert: *Home Sweet Home*": 19-20.

sea of garbage ... This whole dump is full of flashes, twinkling stars, reflections and fragments of culture ... all forms of packaging that were ever needed by man have not lost their shape, they have not become anything dead when they were discarded. They cry out a past, they preserve it ... And this feeling of a unity of the whole past, and at the same time the feeling of the separateness of its components, engenders an image ...³⁵

Flotsam is evocative of Kabakov's sea of garbage – the fluorescent tubes recall the flashes and fragments of culture that fill Kabakov's dump and, like the forms of packaging that 'litter' his description, *Flotsam's* discarded bottles preserve a connection to their past use while forming part of an image. Furthermore, as a collection of objects that may have been rescued from the rubbish dump in Lubéron, *Flotsam* is grounded in the Surrealist concept of the found object. The fluorescent tubes suggest the many moments of illumination that Culbert must have experienced when rummaging through the dump, when in an eruption of the marvelous he could foresee the redeployment of these found objects in artworks. *Flotsam* is also suggestive of the unconscious itself. The juxtaposition of bottles and tubes that comprise the installation are reminiscent of the multitudinous memories, thoughts, feelings and ideas that are submerged our minds – the very aspects of the unconscious mind that the Surrealist found object aimed to bring to the surface. Moreover, *Flotsam* naturally encourages associations with debris floating in the sea, in keeping with its title. The installation flows through the gallery space like a tide, moving on waves of light. The gallery floor is like the sea itself, supporting the floating objects that adorn its surface. Each fluorescent tube is like the white cap of a breaking wave, pushing the wreckage of modern living through the privileged space of the gallery.

Flotsam's use of rubbish also evokes Dada and Surrealism's challenge to the dominant paradigms of what was considered to be art. As avant-garde movements, both Dada and Surrealism presented the viewer objects not previously considered art. This approach was exemplified by artists such as Kurt Schwitters, who incorporated refuse

³⁵ Ilya Kabakov, "The Man Who Never Threw Anything Away" (1981), in *The Text as the Basis of Visual Expression*, (Cologne: Oktagon, 2000): 303-304.

and found materials into his collages and assemblages.³⁶ Similarly, *Flotsam* presents the viewer something diametrically opposed to the unique art object: rubbish.³⁷ The presence of rubbish within the art gallery is traditionally antithetical to the role of the gallery in upholding the value of art. In utilising these debased and discarded manufactured items, Culbert has created a further juxtaposition between expectations of two conflicting contextual environments. *Flotsam* merges the domestic realm with the conceptual space of the gallery, presenting discarded household bottles within an environment that seeks to heighten the qualities of value and uniqueness. This contextual juxtaposition recalls Surrealist strategies, which involved combining familiar objects or imagery with unfamiliar surroundings in order to give mundane or commonplace objects a new and unusual identity.³⁸

Photomontage

The arrangement of *Flotsam's* disparate manufactured objects on the singular plane of the gallery floor is also suggestive of photomontage, a medium which played a prominent role in various avant-garde movements, including Dada, Surrealism and Constructivism. During the 1920s and 1930s, avant-garde artists used photomontage as a way to avoid the incorporation of materials into their work that were usually associated with art. The Dadaists, for example, used photographs as a common mass-produced material devoid of the hierarchical associations of traditional art materials. Many of the photographic images and text fragments that comprised Dada photomontages were appropriated from magazines or catalogues, making the composite images themselves a kind of found object. Dada photomontages typically employed striking shifts in scale and planes within the singular picture plane, illogical juxtapositions of imagery, and dramatic diagonals.³⁹ *Flotsam* displays several elements of composition that are similar to photomontage. Firstly, Culbert employs objects within his installation that are not considered traditional art materials. Rather, they are common manufactured objects regularly used by the general populace. Similar to the Dada use of familiar photographic sources appropriated from the popular press,

³⁶ John Elderfield, *Kurt Schwitters*, (New York and London: Thames and Hudson, 1985): 12.

³⁷ Yves Abrioux, *Bill Culbert*: 135.

³⁸ Diane Waldman, *Collage, Assemblage, and the Found Object*: 160.

³⁹ Diane Waldman, *Collage, Assemblage, and the Found Object*: 103-113.

Culbert's use of objects creates social connections and associations. Moreover, Culbert's placement of the fluorescent tubes is strongly dictated by diagonals that cut across the sea of bottles, dividing them into small groups. The differing sizes of the tubes and bottles create shifting scales within the installation, and the harshly illuminated lengths of light project towards the viewer from the floor so that the bottles appear to occupy a separate plane to that of the tubes.

Flotsam is also characterised by the multiplicity of internal elements that distinguished photomontage as a medium. Artists such as Hannah Höch used photomontage as a means of fusing serial imagery and form to capture the speed and movement of modern industrial society.⁴⁰ The surface plane of the photomontage, rather than creating a unified image, was broken into repeated forms and multiple images. This kaleidoscopic effect is also a prominent feature of *Flotsam*. The installation is defined by the multiplicity of elements that comprise it, incorporating bottles of many colours and shapes, cords, switch boxes and fluorescent tubes of various lengths. However, within the overall juxtaposition of compositional elements, Culbert has also repeated a number of forms, echoing the serial imagery that interested artists using photomontage. Of the multitude of bottles used within the installation, several types of bottle occur within the sea of debris more than once. The distinctive shape of the green Toilet Duck bottle appears at least twice, and a yellow bottle with a handle and yellow cap is used at least six times. The majority of the severed 'bobbing' bottles are of the same type, their blue halves dotted down the length of the installation, floating disconnected from each other. The fluorescent tubes are also multiplied, each different size repeated a number of times throughout Culbert's assemblage. The largest of the illuminated tubes dominate the overall composition of *Flotsam*, creating the most striking of the serial forms. Radiating an intense white light, these lengthy tubes seem to dictate the arrangement of the bottles and smaller lights, like waves pushing all the other elements of *Flotsam* into their designated places. Culbert's use of mass-produced items, also echoes the photomontage artists' preoccupation with industrial society. However, while early twentieth century

⁴⁰ Diane Waldman, *Collage, Assemblage, and the Found Object*: 114. The presentation of multiple viewpoints within the singular picture plane is also reminiscent of Cubist painting, collage and *papier collé*.

avant-garde artists championed modernity, Culbert adopts a Postmodernist stance, using manufactured objects to draw attention to the excesses of consumer culture.

Multiplicity and photomontage

A number of Culbert's photographs involve the repetition of forms and the incorporation of multiple viewpoints that are characteristic of Dada photomontage. The black and white photograph *Bonbonnes avec abat-jour – deux côtés* (Bonbonnes with lampshades – two sides) (1991; fig. 21)⁴¹ is a simple photomontage that endows the photographed objects with a sense of three-dimensionality and expands the illusion of space in the two-dimensional photographic surface. Culbert arranged a collection of demi-johns adorned with lamp shades on an area of grass and photographed the cluster of objects from two opposing angles. The photographs then joined together, so that the two separate images appear as one. The point where the two photographs join is barely discernable, and at first glance the viewer can easily mistake the composite image for a single photograph. Culbert's creation of a more expansive sense of space and suggestion of the three-dimensionality of the depicted objects echoes the multiplicity that came to define photomontage's pictorial space. Exploiting the technological capabilities of the medium, photomontage expanded the image's sense of space by means of multiple viewpoints and the use of serial imagery. As Steve Yates points out:

The inventions of photomontage by the German Dadaists combined disparate photographic fragments – often reproductions from the printed page – into kaleidoscopic arrangements ... Picture space was no longer measured in terms of human form or proportion. Distance and scale were broken into a more vital multiplicity ...⁴²

In a manner reminiscent of photomontage, *Bonbonnes avec abat-jour* articulates the space of the photograph through a multiplication of viewpoints. If the two photographs existed as singular entities, the viewer would be unable to discern the form of several of the *bonbonnes*, as their forms are obscured. Culbert's photomontage allows several

⁴¹ This photograph is discussed briefly in Lara Strongman's essay "Moments of Illumination" in *LIGHTWORKS: Bill Culbert*, Paula Savage et al (Wellington: City Gallery, 1997: 68).

⁴² Steve Yates, "The Value of Space": 217.

bonbonnes to be seen clearly from both sides, echoing the sensation of seeing 'in the round' that is possible when walking around a sculpture. Within the confines of the two-dimensional surface, Culbert multiplies the viewpoint in order to create a stronger sense of the three-dimensionality of the objects depicted. The amalgamation of images in *Bonbonnes avec abat-jour* also results in the multiplication of the objects photographed. Culbert's collection of similar forms is doubled by his decision to merge the photographs, further paralleling the repetition of forms characteristic of photomontage.

Photography, seriality, and the multiple

Much of Culbert's artwork involves a non-hierarchical serial approach, which ensures that no single element of a series is privileged above another. In both photographs and installations, he introduces seriality through the repetition of identical or very similar forms. Appearing in both photography and sculpture, this principle of seriality undermines the authority of the original in the tradition of fine art. As Rosalind Krauss states, "... the serial principle seals the object away from any condition that could possibly be thought to be original and consigns it to a world of simulacra, of multiples without originals."⁴³ Since William Henry Fox Talbot's invention of the positive-negative process, photography's most significant technological feature has been its reproducibility.⁴⁴ Because a photograph is a copy of the original referent that has the ability to be reproduced multiple times, it is removed from the condition of originality traditionally associated with an art object. The role of photography's reproductive capabilities in eroding the authenticity of the art object was famously examined in Walter Benjamin's essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", first published in 1936. Benjamin argued that the presence of the original is a requirement of authenticity, and that authenticity is beyond the scope of technical reproducibility.⁴⁵ He equates the authenticity of a work of art with the significance, meaning, and historical testimony of the original object. Works of art possessing these qualities are imbued, Benjamin argues, with aura.⁴⁶ Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*, for example,

⁴³ Rosalind E. Krauss, "The Cultural Logic of the Late Capitalist Museum" in *Minimalism*, ed. James Meyer, (London: Phaidon Press, 2000): 287.

⁴⁴ Allan Sekula, "On the Invention of Photographic Meaning": 459.

⁴⁵ Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" in *Illuminations*, (trans. Harry Zohn), ed. Hannah Arendt, (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968): 222.

⁴⁶ Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction": 223.

demonstrates the quality of authenticity through its originality and its venerable history. However, reproductions of *Mona Lisa* have proliferated in our image culture, transforming her face into a mass-produced, decontextualised icon. These replicas, however, are not able to possess the quality of authenticity that Benjamin attaches to the original painting: “the technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition. By making many reproductions it substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence.”⁴⁷ Culbert at times creates a plurality of images that hides the uniqueness of each referent. This can be seen in his black and white photographic series of round forms, which includes *Iron Bike Wheel* (2002), *Barrel Hoop Wire Handles* (2002), *Car Wheel with Tire* (2002) and *Sieve* (2002).⁴⁸ Each photograph depicts a round form perched on a horizontal piece of wood, set against a background of wooden planks. Although each image consists of a different referent, by photographing a range of spherical shapes Culbert creates the same basic formula in each photograph. The multiplication of similar forms, when presented in a serial format, seems to melt away the individual features of each circular shape in favour of an overall sense of uniformity. In this respect, Culbert’s serial photographing consigns each photographed object to the very condition of reproduced unoriginality that Benjamin comments on in his essay.

Seriality and sculpture

The seriality that features in Culbert’s photography is also a prominent characteristic of his sculptural installations. The installations that utilise a serial principle commonly involve the sequential ordering of readymade objects, particularly identical or similarly shaped bottles strung along fluorescent tubes, or repeated units of light. Within the tradition of sculpture, the serial arrangement of multiple forms is indebted to sculptural works such as Constantin Brancusi’s *Endless Column* (1937-38, Târgu-Jiu, Romania). Brancusi’s cast iron sculpture consists of repeated diamond shapes placed end on end, creating a tower of multiple forms that soars into the sky. At both the base and the end of the column, Brancusi has used partial pieces of the diamond shapes. His inclusion of incomplete fragments implies that the sculpture is not a discrete entity as it currently exists, and that more units may be added to the column in order to achieve the promise

⁴⁷ Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”: 223.

⁴⁸ Black and white photographs, square format, dimensions unknown, collection of Te Papa Tongarewa, Museum of New Zealand. Te Papa has purchased six photographs from this series, which includes at least fourteen images.

of endlessness suggested in its title. In a recent temporary sculpture, recorded in a colour photograph, Culbert pays homage to Brancusi's *Endless Column*. *Light Column* (2001; fig. 22) consists of eight glass jars stacked one on top of the other, resting on a nearly invisible flat surface. Culbert has photographed the column at sunset, the light from the disappearing sun illuminating the jars and creating sparkling highlights. The strip of fading golden sunlight, which is the only source of light in Culbert's image, is encroached upon by the grey of twilight and the black band of hills in the background. Assembled out of clear glass jars, *Light Column* imitates *The Endless Column's* repeated forms. Culbert's serial arrangement of the column's banal components occupies the centre of the image, stretching through the background band of sky, echoing the way in which the striking scale of Brancusi's *Endless Column* dominates its surroundings. Despite his obvious imitation of Brancusi's *Column*, Culbert adds a signature element to his column: light. As declared by the title, the precise placement of the glass jars in relation to the setting sun makes the sunlight a feature of the installation. The viewer can see the setting sun reflected in the two jars at the base of Culbert's column. This reflected brightness gives the impression that the jars contain a light source. As the column reaches skyward, the gold highlights that adorn the surface of the bottom jars decrease in intensity so that the topmost jar appears indistinct in comparison. Unlike Brancusi's *Endless Column*, the sinking sun behind Culbert's jars ensures that the visual effect of his light column is only possible during a fleeting moment; the gold highlights will only be visible for as long as the sun remains above the dark horizon. The light's movement through the jars of *Light Column*, shifting from intense gold to a fading yellow, emphasises the serial placement of the jars, and the multiple bulbous curves of these readymade objects echoes Brancusi's sequential string of forms.

Culbert's *Light Column* also invites a comparison with Minimalist sculptor Dan Flavin's tribute to Brancusi. Flavin dedicated his first diagonally arranged fluorescent tube, *the diagonal of May 25, 1963 (to Constantin Brancusi)* (1963), to the Romanian sculptor. Comprised of a single gold-coloured illuminated tube, Flavin noted that his diagonal and Brancusi's *Endless Column* share "a uniform elementary visual nature".⁴⁹ Both Culbert and Flavin regularly employ mass-produced fluorescent tubes in serial

⁴⁹ Dan Flavin, "'... in daylight or cool white' – an autobiographical sketch": 206.

arrangements, echoing the repetition of form that defines Brancusi's sculpture. Moreover, the golden highlights that sparkle through the length of Culbert's *Light Column* are reminiscent of the gold light that radiates from Flavin's diagonal. Despite these similarities, Culbert's sequential stack of bulbous jars and their placement within the landscape is more faithful in its imitation of Brancusi's *Endless Column* and the distinctive surroundings of Târgu-Jiu than the single sculptural unit of Flavin's artwork.

Seriality and the readymade

Prefiguring Culbert's serial employment of mass-produced items, seriality featured as a principle in Duchamp's early readymades. In *The Green Box's* 'Specifications for "Readymades"' (1934), Duchamp points to "the serial characteristic of the readymade."⁵⁰ He began the serial reproduction of his readymades for the *Box-in-a-Valise*, an edition of portable "museums" of his oeuvre produced from 1936-49. The *Box-in-a-Valise* includes miniature reproductions of various readymades, including *Fountain*, *Traveller's Folding Item* (an Underwood typewriter cover), and the glass ampoule *50 cc of Paris Air*, along with photographs and colour reproductions of *The Large Glass* and other artworks. Duchamp produced twenty-four deluxe editions of the *Box-in-a-Valise* proper, and between 292 and 301 standard editions inscribed simply as *Boxes*.⁵¹ In keeping with the serial principle, Duchamp's numerous editions of *Box-in-a-Valise* undermine the originality of both the miniatures included in each box and his initial readymade objects. However, this unoriginality serves to highlight the inherent contradiction involved in calling Duchamp's first readymades 'originals', given the fact that they were chosen for being mass-produced items readily available to the public.

Seriality, Minimalism, and Culbert

Minimalism rose to prominence in the art world during Culbert's early artistic career, and his serial use of readymade objects demonstrates a number of similarities with the approach of Minimalist sculptors. The serial use of manufactured items, which began with Duchamp, became a defining feature of Minimalist sculpture. Artists such as Donald Judd, Carl André and Dan Flavin deployed factory-made objects such as

⁵⁰ Marcel Duchamp, "The Green Box": 32.

⁵¹ Ecke Bonk, *Marcel Duchamp – The Box in a Valise*, (trans. David Britt), (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 1989): 257.

stainless steel boxes, fire bricks, and fluorescent lights in sequential arrangements placed on the floor or mounted on the wall. Their artworks rejected the traditional elevation of the sculptural base, and their use of fabricated materials effectively made invisible the hand of the artist beyond the arrangement of the objects. One of the principal features of Minimalist sculpture was the refusal of relational composition. Rather than one element of the sculpture dominating the overall composition, the Minimalist sculptors' use of mass-produced articles ensured that each object had an identical size and shape, resulting in non-hierarchical relationships between each sculptural element.⁵² Artist Mel Bochner identified the serial nature of Minimalist sculpture in his essay "Serial Art, Systems, Solipsism", written in 1967. Bochner equated seriality with a systematic process of working, characterised by repetition, consistency and continuity of application.⁵³ He states "Individual parts of a system are not in themselves important but are relevant only in the way they are used in the enclosed logic of the whole."⁵⁴ The emphasis on the unified whole of the artwork that characterised Minimalist sculpture is present in a number of Culbert's installations, such as his *Total* series. Comprising four separate artworks exhibited in a series, the installation includes *Total Black*, *Total White*, *Total Red* and *Total Silver* (all 1991; figs. 23, 24, 25, 26).⁵⁵ Each *Total* consists of six or seven Total Oil containers threaded along an illuminated fluorescent tube, an arrangement which is then repeated three further times to create a grid that is mounted against the wall. *Total White* (fig. 24) is the only assemblage of bottles that includes the original packaging labels that previously identified the product within the bottles. Lines of light created by the fluorescent tubes that pass through the bottles mark the surfaces of *Total White* and *Total Red* (fig. 25). The opacity of the black and silver bottles, however, totally obscures the light that pierces them, except at the point where the bottles touch. The design of the Total bottles renders a seamless progression along the fluorescent tube impossible, as small glimpses of light are visible between each bottle. The faintly visible striations of light within the red and white blocks of colour emphasise

⁵² Rosalind E. Krauss, *Passages in Modern Sculpture*: 250.

⁵³ Mel Bochner, "Serial Art, Systems, Solipsism": 94 & 99.

⁵⁴ Mel Bochner, "Serial Art, Systems, Solipsism": 99.

⁵⁵ This series includes *Total Blue* (1991) that is not reproduced in the *LIGHTWORKS* catalogue that accompanied the exhibition at Wellington's City Gallery. The *Total* series is mentioned briefly in Yves Abrioux's essay "Accidents of Light" in *LIGHTWORKS: Bill Culbert*, Paula Savage et al (Wellington: City Gallery, 1997: 10); and Yves Abrioux discusses the series's reference to Modernist abstraction in his book, *Bill Culbert*, (Annecy, La Petite Ecole, 1997: 163-165).

the surface created by the bottles.⁵⁶ By accentuating the unified block-like surfaces, Culbert rejects sculpture's traditional emphasis on the medium's core and the quest to release the 'essence' held within. Instead, by piercing the bottles with fluorescent tubes, Culbert reminds the viewer that the bottles are empty and parallels Minimalist sculptors' emphasis on the exterior qualities of the object's form. The tubes themselves become a substitute core, serving as the structure that supports the bottles.

Culbert's *Total* series parallels Minimalist sculpture's repetitive formulation of mass-produced standard units. Each colour is arranged into successive strings of multiple forms, their identical shapes turning the surface of each assemblage into a rigidly structured whole. Culbert's elimination of hierarchical relationships between his readymade objects is reminiscent of such iconic Minimal sculptures as Carl André's *Lever* (1966). *Lever* was constructed out of 137 identical factory-produced fire bricks, placed end to end in a straight line. No one element of André's installation was privileged above the other, creating a coherent whole without any unique components. The serial structure that is common to André's *Lever* forms the basis of Culbert's *Total* series. Seriality is emphasised multiple times in the *Total* artworks – through the serial arrangement of the bottles strung along each tube, the subsequent multiplication of that arrangement, and the fact that each individually coloured *Total* is an element in an overall series. In addition, Culbert's title for the series alludes to the importance of the unified whole, as well as giving a clue to the original context of the bottles. The disappearance of each individual bottle into the entirety of each assemblage is also similar to the way that Culbert's photographs of similar forms melt into uniformity when exhibited as a series.

Despite similarly incorporating seriality as a guiding principle for arranging mass-produced materials into a unified whole, Culbert's installations also demonstrate fundamental differences to the approach of Minimalism. Of the Minimalist artists utilising seriality in their work, Bochner asserted the following:

⁵⁶ Yves Abrioux, *Bill Culbert*: 165.

... the idea is carried out to its logical conclusion, which, without adjustments based on taste or chance, is the work. No stylistic or material qualities unite the artists using this approach because what form the work takes is unimportant ...⁵⁷

In contrast to Bochner's assertion of the unimportance of form, Culbert's installations are characterised by an absolute awareness of form. His work is based on specific choices regarding the objects used and their arrangement, calculated in order to achieve a certain outcome. As an artist who is acutely aware of the complexities of perception, context, and the artistic tradition, Culbert explores these themes through the precise specifications of forms.

Barbara Rose takes a conflicting point of view to Bochner in her influential essay "A B C Art" (1965), where she highlights the importance of form in Minimalism. Rose notes that Minimalist artists were concerned with eliminating all the non-essential elements, resulting in a particular emphasis on the form of the object.⁵⁸ She postulates that "[t]he thing ... is presumably not supposed to "mean" other than what it is; that is, it is not supposed to be suggestive of anything other than itself."⁵⁹ Without the allusion to things outside of itself, the Minimalist artwork became defined by form – the form of the materials that comprised it, their overall composition, and the relationships between each component. In contrast, Culbert's installations are commonly suggestive of and make reference to themes and ideas outside the form of the artwork itself. His *Total* series demonstrates this point. Using carefully constructed blocks of colour as a vehicle to create the association, Culbert's *Total* series parodies Clement Greenberg's strict doctrine for Modernist abstract painting. Greenberg forcefully asserted that painting should return to a state of purity, by referring only to those aspects that are unique to painting, such as the flatness of the canvas, its support, and qualities that are specific to paint itself.⁶⁰ Much late Modernist painting presented the viewer with large canvases

⁵⁷ Mel Bochner, "Serial Art, Systems, Solipsism": 100.

⁵⁸ Barbara Rose, "A B C Art" in *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Gregory Battcock, (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1968): 285. Rose's essay was reprinted from *Art in America*, (October-November 1965).

⁵⁹ Barbara Rose, "A B C Art": 291.

⁶⁰ Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" in *Clement Greenberg – The Collected Essays and*

awash with blocks or drips or splashes of colour. His *Total* series imitates the monochrome abstractions of such artists as Ad Reinhardt and Yves Klein. However, Culbert's parody of Modernist painting's purity incorporates the most impure of materials – discarded plastic bottles and functional, mass-produced fluorescent lights.

While the surface of each *Total* assemblage can appear flat when viewed frontally, the surfaces are constructed out of a collection of three-dimensional objects. The rigidly constructed blocks of colour are also encroached upon by the cords that dangle from the end of each fluorescent tube and the shadows cast by the assemblage's projection from the flatness of the wall. These messy properties, which are unavoidable effects caused by the materials Culbert has chosen, destroy any illusion of modernist totality. Along with the protruding ends of the illuminated tubes, the cords and shadows distract the viewer from the uniformity of the blocks of colour. Culbert's incorporation of mass-produced oil bottles also encourages links to be made to their original context and traditional use, which further denies the self-referentiality that characterised both Minimalism and Modernist painting. References to the product previously contained within the bottles are particularly clear in *Total White* (fig. 24), resulting from the inclusion of the bottles' original labels. Like Duchamp's inscriptions, the labels transport the viewer's mind back to the previous context of bottles, conjuring up images of Total Oil containers placed neatly on shelves inside petrol stations or sitting in the garage at home. Culbert's encouragement of associations outside the form of the *Total* artworks constitutes a significant point of difference between his serial use of readymade objects and the approach of Minimalist sculptors. It also ties his serial approach to his interest in altering the contexts and functions of readymade objects in order to elicit a wealth of new associations in the mind of the viewer.

Summary

The importance of context in Culbert's use of readymade objects parallels the vital role it plays in understanding a photographic image. Culbert regularly alters and manipulates the previous contexts of the everyday items he incorporates into his work, echoing the photographic image's removal from its original context after the act of photographing.

Culbert's serial arrangement of readymade objects also hints at photography's reproductive nature and the photographic image's removal from the condition of originality. In addition to the photographic approaches evident in Culbert's use of readymades, the binary states of reality and illusion are visible in his work. These states, which are integral to the medium of photography, will be discussed in relation to Culbert's photographs and installations in chapter four.

CHAPTER FOUR

A Resemblance of Reality

“Representations of the world, whether verbal or pictorial in nature, are inevitably distortions of the infinitely rich and infinitely chaotic phenomenon we call reality.”¹

Much of Bill Culbert’s work is informed by an interplay between the binary states of reality and illusion – states that are fundamental to the medium of photography. This chapter will take an expansive approach, incorporating philosophy, photographic approaches and literary theory in order to explore Culbert’s interest in creating perceptual illusions and incongruities based on resemblance. I begin by examining how photographs mediate our view of reality, and link this mediation to Plato’s allegory of the Cave and Susan Sontag’s assertion that photographs have helped to construct new ways of viewing the world. Photographs have an indexical relation to the object they depict, giving rise to the belief that photographs are true visual statements of reality. However, the photographic image is first and foremost a resemblance, a double of the original object. This requires an awareness of the impact that the photographic object, the photographer and the viewer have on our understanding of the image. I explore features as diverse as shadow, reflection, metaphor, metonymy and pun in Culbert’s work. He uses these devices to create comparisons to things which his artworks are not; this approach parallels the photographic image’s causal resemblance to the physically absent object it depicts. I also compare Culbert’s use of the optical process of inversion to photography’s relationship with the opposing states of reality and illusion. I conclude by asserting that the binary terms of reality and illusion inherent in photography are in fact not in opposition, but have indeed merged, creating a unique visual medium that presents the viewer with traces of both truth and artifice.

¹ Charles Forceville, *Pictorial Metaphor in Advertising*, (Routledge: London and New York, 1996): 211.

Photography, Plato's Cave, and the mediation of reality

Photography mediates our conception of reality. The sheer proliferation of photographic images in our visual culture, and the fact that these images are causally linked to the objects they depict, has resulted in a tendency to see photographs as "true" visual statements that inform our perception of reality. In her influential book *On Photography*, Susan Sontag draws a comparison between the mediating role of photography and Plato's allegory of the Cave. She points to the fact that, like the prisoners that feature in Plato's story, humankind revels in "mere images of the truth."² This allegory appears in the *Republic*, a political treatise from the fourth century B.C.. It tells of a group of prisoners who dwell in an underground cave. Since childhood they have had their heads and legs fixed in a single position, their bonds ensuring that they are only able to see in front of them. Behind them and on higher ground, a path with a low wall stretches between the prisoners and a fire that provides the only source of light in the cave. People move along this path carrying artifacts, some talking and some not. Their bodies and the artifacts cast shadows on the wall in front of the prisoners, and their voices reflect off the wall so that it seems that the shadows themselves are speaking. Plato suggests that, given the peculiar set of circumstances outlined in his allegory, the prisoners would believe that the shadows moving on the wall in front of them were real. He states, "the prisoners would in every way believe that the truth is nothing other than the shadows of those artifacts."³ Plato's allegory demonstrates several fundamental similarities with the medium of photography. The wall in front of the prisoners, which mediates their view of what is real, is similar to the two-dimensional photographic image that presents the viewer with a trace of the real world. Yet, as Sontag points out, both photographs and the shadows that play on the wall of Plato's Cave are only images of the truth. Moreover, the illusion Plato constructs for his prisoners is reliant on the light that interacts with the people and artifacts moving along the path, echoing photography's reliance on light for the formulation of the photographic image.

² Susan Sontag, *On Photography*: 3.

³ Plato, *Republic*, trans. G.M.A. Grube, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1992): 514 b & c, 515 b & c; 186-187.

Victor I. Stoichita asserts that the allegory of the Cave is “a scenario committed to obscuring the boundaries between the world of appearances and the real world.”⁴ The story places an emphasis on vision’s role in the desire for knowledge, which parallels the often ‘oculocentric’ way we experience the world.⁵ As the wall of Plato’s Cave does for the prisoners, photographic images mediate our conception of reality and our knowledge of the world. The vast number of photographs present in our society, and their wide-ranging uses, have helped to construct what Sontag terms “an ethics of seeing.”⁶ We use photographs as evidence, for social commentary, as information and art. They both certify and limit experience, educate us about news and events, promote nostalgia, and create fantasy.⁷ Photographs are commonly seen as objective visual statements that present us with the truth. However, they are as much illusions as the shadows that formulate the prisoners’ view of reality in Plato’s Cave. Photographs are resemblances of objects that exist in the real world; resemblances which do not simply transcribe reality but exist as an interpretation of it.

Photography and the index

The tendency to equate photographic images with reality stems primarily from the indexical nature of the photograph. Created by the registration of light reflected off the surface of an object, the photograph inevitably demonstrates an indexical relationship to the original object. Shadows, reflections, fingerprints and footprints are further examples of indexical signs that display a physical trace to their referent.⁸ Excluding photographs that have been manipulated or retouched, a photograph is always a record of something that exists or has previously existed.⁹ It is this causal link with the object depicted that encourages the view that photography has an inherent connection with reality. André Bazin has been famously quoted as saying that the “photographic image is the object itself, the object freed from the conditions of time and space that govern

⁴ Victor I. Stoichita, *A Short History of Shadows*, (trans. Anne-Marie Glasheen), (London: Reaktion Books, 1997): 23.

⁵ Victor I. Stoichita, *A Short History of Shadows*: 22.

⁶ Susan Sontag, *On Photography*: 3.

⁷ Susan Sontag, *On Photography*: 5-16.

⁸ Rosalind E. Krauss, “Notes on the Index – Part 1”: 198-203.

⁹ Kendall L. Walton, “Transparent Pictures: On the Nature of Photographic Realism”, *Critical Inquiry*, (vol. 11, 1984-1985): 250.

it.”¹⁰ Yet despite the photograph’s indexical resemblance to the object depicted, the photograph is not literally real, in the sense that the object is actually there.

Culbert’s black and white photograph *Sun, Glass/Wine* (1992; fig. 1)¹¹ visually articulates the relationship between an indexical resemblance and the original object; a relationship which is integral to the photographic image. Culbert’s photograph depicts a small wine glass, filled with red wine, sitting on a stone table. The red wine occludes the passage of bright sunlight through the transparent glass, the wine’s opacity causing a shadow to fall to the side of the glass. Curiously, an optical incongruity results in a shadow that uncannily resembles an illuminated light bulb. The fall of light through the rim of the glass also creates the appearance of a light bulb’s filament, its brightness contrasting with the dark shadow so that it appears to be glowing. The shadow itself is an indexical image of the wine contained within the glass, its form dictated by the interaction between the wine and the bright sunlight. *Sun, Glass/Wine*’s title is also suggestive of an equation, stating the elements necessary to create the shadow that comprises the perceptual incongruity in Culbert’s image: the sun plus the glass and wine yields this curious resemblance of a light bulb. This process of interaction, and the resulting shadow, echoes the reliance of photography on light for the formulation of the image. Despite this optical illusion, *Sun, Glass/Wine* also demonstrates why photographs are often equated with reality. Because a photograph is always of something that exists – or has previously existed – and displays an indexical link to the original object, the image seems to possess a quality of veracity that is unrivalled by other mimetic arts. As Sontag points out:

¹⁰ André Bazin, “The Ontology of the Photographic Image”, (trans. Hugh Gray), in *What is Cinema?*, vol. 1, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967): 14.

¹¹ Culbert has produced multiple versions of this artwork, often titled *Small Glass Pouring Light* dating from the early 1970s onwards, which seem to have been photographed in very similar conditions to the version discussed here. For further discussion on these artworks, see Simon Cutts’s and Stephen Bann’s untitled essays in *Bill Culbert – Selected Works 1968-1986*, (London: Institute of Contemporary Art, 1986: unpaginated); David Thompson in *Bill Culbert*, (Great Britain: Westerham Press Ltd, 1977: unpaginated); William McAloon’s essay “An Art of Delight” in Christopher Knowles et al, *Bill Culbert – light wine things*, (Blenheim, Millennium Public Art Gallery, 2003: unpaginated); Yves Abrioux, *Bill Culbert*, (Annecy, La Petite Ecole, 1997: 144); and Oliver Blanckart’s essay “Not A Lot, But A Whole World” in Yves Abrioux et al, *Bill Culbert – Afterdark*, (Limoges, Editions FRAC Limousin, 1994: 64 & 68).

What is written about a person or an event is frankly an interpretation, as are handmade visual statements, like paintings and drawings. Photographed images do not seem to be statements about the world so much as pieces of it, miniatures of reality that anyone can make or acquire.¹²

Resemblance

Despite the photographic image's indexical link to the real world, however, it is first and foremost a resemblance, a double of the objects that have caused it. This feature of photography has its analogue in Plato's allegory of the Cave. The shadows and reflected sounds that comprise the prisoners' view of reality are doubles that give the illusion of being real. Stoichita states that "in Plato the image (shadow, reflection, painting, statue) is the same in a copy state, *the same in a state of double*."¹³ The bodies of the people carrying artifacts between the fire and the wall block the light, creating moving shadows on the wall in front of the prisoners. These shadow doubles share with photography a reliance on light for their appearance: both the shadow doubles and the photographic image exist as representations that mediate the viewer's impression of reality. This aspect of photography is also visible in *Sun, Glass/Wine*. It is clear that the shadow is cast by the wine glass and the wine inside it. Despite this knowledge, the viewer can read the shadow that falls on the table as an image of a light bulb. This optical incongruity indicates the difficulty in viewing a photograph as a true statement of reality – the photographic image, as a mediating representation of an original object, can give a false belief as to its nature. The shadow in Culbert's photograph, though we know it is a double caused by the sun's interaction with the wine and the wine glass, resembles more closely the shape of a light bulb than the shape of its original referent. The shadow displays qualities very different to the glass, as the sun penetrates the top section of the glass and its foot, rendering these aspects of the glass invisible in the shadow itself. The differences in the visual qualities of the filled glass and the shadow obscures our recognition that one is caused by the other. We are tempted to read the glass and the shadow as separate entities, despite the fact that they are inherently connected. On the other hand, it is our implicit knowledge that the shadow is a double,

¹² Susan Sontag, *On Photography*: 4.

¹³ Victor I. Stoichita, *A Short History of Shadows*: 27. Italicised in original.

cast by the glass, which elicits our delight in this optical trick. Without the acknowledgment to ourselves that the shadow is primarily a resemblance and indeed not an actual light bulb, the photograph loses its sense of magic.

Resemblance, transparency, and truth

One of photography's most valued features is its ability to present visual depictions that resemble the world as we ordinarily see it. Over time, the technology of photography has been specifically created and refined in order to ensure that photography approximates human environmental seeing.¹⁴ The photograph's proximity to familiar conditions of seeing results in a tendency to marginalise the nature of the photograph. Instead, the viewer looks *through* the image at the depicted object as if the photograph were transparent, ignoring the qualities specific to the photograph itself. As Geoffrey Batchen states:

the invisibility of the photograph, its transparency to its referent, has long been one of its most cherished features. All of us tend to look at photographs as if we are simply gazing through a two-dimensional window onto some outside world. This is almost a perceptual necessity; in order to see what the photograph is of, we must first repress our consciousness of what the photograph is.¹⁵

Batchen touches on one of the most prevalent approaches that we adopt when viewing a photograph. For example, when we view a Man Ray photograph of Marcel Duchamp, we see a photograph *of* Marcel Duchamp, yet we say to ourselves that it *is* Marcel Duchamp. We have essentially ignored the fact that the photograph is no more than a collection of markings on a light sensitive surface or a resemblance of Marcel Duchamp.

¹⁴ Patrick Maynard, *The Engine of Visualization – Thinking Through Photography*, (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1997): 196.

¹⁵ Geoffrey Batchen, *Each Wild Idea*: 59-60.

The photograph, the photographer, and the viewer

A photograph's ability to convey an understanding of its depicted object is affected by the three fundamentals: the object itself, the photographer and the viewer. Firstly, the tendency to see the photograph as transparent results in the marginalisation of cues as to the image's status as a representation of the original object. In the quest to understand what the image is *of*, the viewer disregards aspects of the photograph itself, such as the flatness of the image, the frame, presentation methods, lack of motion, and the often black-and-white tonality.¹⁶ This characteristic of viewing photographs is evident in *Sun, Glass/Wine*. The photograph's visual interest stems from the shadow's resemblance to a light bulb. Its similarity to the form of a light bulb encourages us to read the shadow *as* a light bulb, or at least a resemblance of one. However, in doing so, we must marginalise the cues that tell us it is actually a shadow that is causally connected to the glass and the red wine inside it. The tonality of the shadow, its flatness, and its proximity to the wine glass all give clues as to the true nature of the shadow. However, this true nature permits us to see the illusion of an illuminated light bulb.

The ability to see a photograph as a statement of truth is also fundamentally affected by the photographer. Historically, the camera has been seen as a mechanical apparatus that ensures the objectivity of the photographic image. However, the act of selection involved in taking a photograph inherently introduces the photographer's own interests, attitudes and subjectivity to the image. Sontag notes that

... despite the presumption of veracity that gives all photographs authority, interest, seductiveness, the work that photographers do is no generic exception to the usually shady commerce between art and truth. Even when photographers are most concerned with mirroring reality, they are still haunted by tacit imperatives of taste and conscience.¹⁷

¹⁶ Kendall L. Walton, "Transparent Pictures": 249.

¹⁷ Susan Sontag, *On Photography*: 6.

In deciding what to photograph, the photographer is unavoidably imposing their own viewpoint on the image's subject.¹⁸ In this respect, photographs are not objective visual statements. Any photographic image gives testament to the concerns of the photographer who took the image. This intrusion of subjectivity must be acknowledged by the viewer if they are to understand the complexities at play within the photograph itself. This is true of *Sun, Glass/Wine*. Culbert's decision to photograph the optical trick visible in the image reflects his interest in cultivating illusory representations of given objects in order to blur the distinction between fact and artifice.

To understand a photographic image, it is also crucial to acknowledge both the act of looking itself and the viewer's knowledge of their own looking. Like the photographer, the perceptions and motivations of the viewer also impact on what can be inferred from the image. The viewer is essential in endowing the photograph with significance; a photograph has no meaning unless it is seen and interpreted to some level. A viewer's perceptual activity will bring interpretations to bear upon the photograph that are informed by their background, education, experiences and perceptual awareness. In addition, the viewer's tendency to see the photograph *as* the object depicted requires a process of imagining – visualising the objects in the image as they exist or existed in the real world.¹⁹ This 'imagining seeing' creates an immediacy of experience, a vividness, which adds to the sense that the photograph presents the viewer with a close resemblance of reality. *Sun, Glass/Wine* requires a double act of imagining from the viewer in order for the experience to be interesting and satisfying. Firstly, the viewer must imagine the nature of the objects depicted in the image. This requires us to draw upon our previous knowledge of wine glasses, their transparent quality, the opacity of red wine and the behaviour of sunlight when both occluded and reflected. Our imagining, which is informed by our prior knowledge of the objects that comprise *Sun, Glass/Wine*, helps to make Culbert's photograph successful. As we do not expect a shadow caused by glass and wine to resemble a light bulb, the unexpected form of the shadow renders the illusion convincing and intriguing. A further imagining is introduced when we read the shadow in *Sun, Glass/Wine* as a light bulb. This act of imagining requires us to draw to mind the ways in which the shadow corresponds to

¹⁸ Susan Sontag, *On Photography*: 6.

¹⁹ Patrick Maynard, *The Engine of Visualization*: 104.

what we know of a light bulb. By looking at a photograph and allowing such imaginings to impact the interpretation of the image, the viewer's act of looking becomes as integral to the significance of the photograph as what the photograph depicts. The activity of looking, and the awareness of bringing into play particular personal interpretations, allows the viewer's experience of a photograph to be alternately fulfilling, rewarding, unpleasant, disturbing, amusing and – at the very least – vivid.²⁰

Shadow and absence

Culbert often utilises shadow to articulate the literal absence of the subject in his artworks. The illusory nature of photography is grounded in the absence of the original object, which is only available to us through the mediating function of the photograph. As Sontag has stated, a photograph “is both a pseudo-presence and a token of absence.”²¹ This interaction between presence and absence can be seen in Culbert's colour photograph *Self-Portrait* (1994; fig. 27).²² The image depicts a cast shadow of Culbert that has fallen on a sealed pathway, with a small section of the dry grass verge that borders the pathway visible in the upper left hand corner. The artist clutches two green glass bottles in one hand, and the form of the shadow suggests that he is wearing a cap, shorts and a tee-shirt. Culbert's designation of this image as a self-portrait suggests that he recognises shadow as a likeness of the causal object – in this case a likeness of the artist. Formed by the obstruction of light, a shadow draws attention to the light source that has caused it. In *Self-Portrait*, we can discern that the shadow is cast by the sun.

Self-Portrait gives testament to both an presence and an absence: Culbert's body is literally absent from the frame, yet the formulation of the shadow requires his physical presence. Absence and presence play an equally important part in shadow. It is commonly believed that artistic representation began thousands of years ago with

²⁰ Patrick Maynard, *The Engine of Visualization* : 109. For further on this, see Patrick Maynard's discussion of imagining, *The Engine of Visualization*: 85-109.

²¹ Susan Sontag, *On Photography*: 16.

²² For further discussion of this artwork, see Kyla McFarlane, “Portrait of the Artist with Wine Bottle: Bill Culbert's Collaborative Works” in *Bill Culbert – light wine things*, Christopher Knowles et al, (Blenheim: Millennium Public Art Gallery, 2004: unpaginated).

shadow-tracing. Of the importance of shadow and its status as a negative in the history of art, Stoichita states that

It is of unquestionable significance that the birth of Western artistic representation was 'in the negative'. When painting first emerged, it was part of the absence/presence theme (absence of the body; presence of its projection). The history of art is interspersed with the dialectic of this relationship.²³

Shadow is, before all else, an absence of light, and is considered to be a negative entity. But shadow is also a presence, a resemblance of the things that cast them as two-dimensional projections of a three-dimensional object.²⁴ In this respect, shadows are extremely close in structure to photographs. Both are two-dimensional indexes, causally related to the objects they resemble. The absence of the Culbert's actual body within *Self-Portrait* is emphasised by the way he appears to have 'stepped out' of the frame. The artist's feet are cropped out of the image, as if he has just walked out of the frame and left only his shadow. The feeling that Culbert has departed the image has resonance with the transience of shadow, and the fact that a shadow can only exist in a given form as long as the light source allows it. Ironically, it is at the point where the artist's legs disappear from the frame that Culbert's shadow becomes most defined and distinct, suggesting that if the viewer could only follow the legs out of the photograph they would find the substantial body that the shadow resembles. The theme of absence is further evident in the invisibility of the photographic act – the act of physically taking the photograph. While the title *Self-Portrait* suggests that Culbert did indeed take the photograph himself, we see no evidence as to how he managed to take the shot. The photograph, then, takes on the appearance of a magical, visually confounding illusion.

Shadow is reliant on the interplay between two of the binary oppositions that are so visible in photography: the opposition between absence and presence, and the opposition between the positive value of light and the negative value of shadow. These

²³ Victor I. Stoichita, *A Short History of Shadows*: 7.

²⁴ Patrick Maynard, *The Engine of Visualization*: 157. For a more technical discussion on light and shadow values, see Michael Baxandall, *Shadows and Enlightenment*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995).

oppositions are present in Plato's allegory of the Cave. The scenario of Plato's Cave is fundamentally reliant on the absence of the sun, an absence which gives rise to the ability to cast shadows on the wall in front of the prisoners by way of firelight. Stoichita asserts that the shadows in the Cave represent a fundamental negativity, a state totally opposed to sunlight.²⁵ In opposition to Plato's allegory, Culbert's *Self-Portrait* is reliant on the presence of the sun rather than its absence. However, his body introduces absence into the image. His body is both the physically absent referent that has caused the shadow, and the obstruction that ensures an absence of light from the path. The opposition between the bright sunlight that permeates Culbert's image and the fall of his shadow is also reminiscent of the positive/negative process in photography. His shadow is informed by the negativity Stoichita equates with shadow, contrasting the positive value of light that plays over the path and creates glowing green highlights in the shadows of the wine bottles.

Shadow and the other

Shadow, like photography, also involves the interplay between original and other. A shadow always demonstrates physical proximity to its referent; it is rare for a shadow to exist without literally touching the object that has cast it. Despite this causal relationship between a shadow and its three-dimensional equivalent, the formulation of a shadow also involves the creation of a double, an entity that represents the 'other'. For a shadow to exist as a resemblance, it must be understood that it is not the actual object that it resembles. Although a shadow will in most instances be touching the referent that has caused it, it will both occupy a separate space from the original referent and be distinctly different in its appearance. In the case of Culbert's *Self-Portrait*, his shadow extends from his feet – the point where his likeness physically touches his body – and occupies an area of the ground before him, highlighting the shadow's separation from the self. Culbert is faced with a double of himself, a reproduction of his own form. In this way, shadow parallels both the photographic image's indexical link to its referent and its physical separation from it. The status of a shadow as a double is further indicated by its lack of detail. In *Self-Portrait*, Culbert's shadow-double displays none of the features we know must belong to him: eyes, a

²⁵ Victor I. Stoichita, *A Short History of Shadows*: 25.

nose, a mouth, or other details such as the colour of his clothing. This further highlights the fact that, like a photograph, a shadow functions as both a duplicate of an object, while simultaneously bearing visual characteristics that are essentially different from the original.

Shadow and light

Shadows are equally reliant on light and a physical referent for their form. This aspect of shadow is another that is shared with photography, for, like photographs, shadows are essentially indexical in nature. A shadow “is the very prototype of the irremovable sign. It is undetachable from, coexistent and simultaneous with the object it duplicates.”²⁶ Light is the agent that allows Culbert’s *Self-Portrait* to exist. Beyond the absence of light caused by Culbert’s body, light also interacts with the bottles he holds in his hand. The wine bottles do not obscure the light of the sun as well as his body, thus allowing them to cast delicately glowing green shadows onto the path. Some of the bottles’ distinctive green light seeps up the arm that holds them and bleeds into the neighbouring leg of Culbert’s shadow, highlighting to the viewer that the other subject of the photograph – beyond Culbert and his bottles – is light itself. How light falls, reflects from surfaces, defines objects and is made absent becomes the secondary subject of the photograph. Light is the cause of Culbert’s shadow, and indeed the cause of the photograph itself.

Many of Culbert’s artworks explore the nature and form of an object as defined by the shadows they cast. He states: “The shadow seemed part of the object’s inherent qualities. The object was readable by the shadow.”²⁷ *Glass Table* (2003; fig. 28)²⁸ experiments with both light and shadow, in order to illuminate how these factors effect the viewer’s perception of objects. The work consists of a formica table, upon which a number of wine glasses are placed upside-down. Some of the glasses have been cut to

²⁶ Victor I. Stoichita, *A Short History of Shadows*: 170.

²⁷ Bill Culbert and Yves Abrioux, “An Understanding of Light – Interview” in *Bill Culbert – Afterdark*, Abrioux, Yves et al, (Limoges, Editions FRAC Limousin, 1994): 37.

²⁸ For a very brief discussion of this artwork, see Yves Abrioux, “Accidents of Light” in *LIGHTWORKS: recent work by Bill Culbert*, Paula Savage et al, (Wellington: City Gallery, 1997: 8-10); and for a general discussion on shadow in Culbert’s work, see Francis Pound, “Culbert as Sciographer” in *LIGHTWORKS: recent work by Bill Culbert*, Paula Savage et al, (Wellington: City Gallery, 1997: 50-58).

slight angles. A gallery spotlight is focused upon the table, so that the wine glasses form shadows on the table's surface. The glasses furthest from the direct light source are the ones that have been altered, resulting in denser or elongated shadows. The gallery lights create doubles of the wine glasses, shadows that appear to stand the right way up when they are cast from the inverted wine glasses. Although this artwork exists as an installation, Culbert has also photographed this phenomenon outside the gallery. *Winework* (1992; fig. 29), a black and white photograph of the same subject, functions as a sketch for the later installation. Culbert has arranged his upside down wine glasses on a wooden table outdoors, and it is the sun rather than gallery lights that dictates the fall of the shadows. In *Winework*, Culbert creates yet more doubles – eight of the glasses are arranged into pairs. By creating paired shadow-doubles, Culbert emphasises both shadow's and the photograph's status as a resemblance that is physically separated from the original causal object.

Due to the transparency of the glasses, the shadows in *Glass Table* appear to be more substantial than the real glasses, creating an illusion of solidity from mere light. The transparent nature of the glasses convincingly demonstrates the illusory nature of vision. The subtleties of light that penetrate the glasses combine with the absence of light caused by the solidity of the glasses, creating penumbrae shadows or 'almost shadows'.²⁹ They are less distinct than shadows caused by light sources placed closely to the obstructing objects. In *Glass Table*, these penumbrae shadows – combined with the transparency of the wine glasses – allow details such as areas of brightness to act upon the darker shades of the shadow, adding volume and substance to each of the shadows caused by Culbert's wine glasses. The transparency of the glasses can also be equated with the common belief that photography is a particularly transparent medium, giving a viewer a rather uncomplicated view of reality. However, the manipulation of the elements at play in this artwork – light, shadow and the physical nature of the wine glasses – shows us that both this artwork, and photography in general, have their basis as much in illusion as reality. Culbert's manipulation of objects to create a given effect draws attention to the fact that photography – and the recording of light effects that forms the basis of the medium – is far from "transparent"

²⁹ Patrick Maynard, *The Engine of Visualization*: 165-166.

and simple. Indeed, Culbert's brand of photography involves creative thought, imaginative seeing and an understanding of how photographic technology works. *Glass Table* also depicts a merging of subjects. Both the wine glasses themselves and their shadows touch each other, every shadow sharing the lip of its wine glass, echoing the inescapable link between the referent and its shadow resemblance. This merging represents the marriage between reality and illusion that exists within the medium of photography. Culbert's glasses symbolise reality, as physical objects that occupy a fixed position in the world, while the shadows cast by them can be equated with illusion, acting as transitory likenesses that are reliant on real objects for their existence.

Reflection and the double

Culbert utilises reflection in his artwork to further explore his interest in the illusory nature of seeing and the multiple ways in which objects can be viewed and understood. The mirror has commonly been regarded as a metaphor for photography, highlighting the photographic image's ability to 'reflect' a likeness that closely resembles the real object.³⁰ Like a photograph, a reflection is reliant on light for its form and re-presents the subject that has caused it, existing as a double of the original. Culbert's installation *Ten Glasses* (2003; fig. 30) makes use of both reflection and shadow. The installation comprises ten semi-circular clear glass shelves that are attached to the gallery wall. A glass filled with red wine stands on each of the glass shelves. With gallery lighting trained on the shelves, the surfaces of the red wine and the glass reflect the light, throwing both red and bright white patterns against the wall at various angles. Semi-circular reflections echoing the shape of the glass shelves also extend above the wine glasses like haloes. In addition to these reflections, the fall of light creates shadows of the glasses and shelves. Under the bright spotlights, the shapes of the wine glasses become indistinct, the shadows they cast giving more accurate testament to their form than the glasses themselves. Each reflection and shadow that originates from a wine glass or glass shelf exists as a multiple of the original referent. Like photographs, the reflected shapes in *Ten Glasses* operate visually as resemblances with a causal

³⁰ Mary Price, *The Photograph – A Strange Confined Space*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994): 138-141. For further discussion on reflection and photography, see Wendy Lesser's discussion of reflection in Cecil Beaton's photographs in *His Other Half – Men Looking at Women through Art*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 1991: 164-192).

connection to the original referent. The semi-circles of light reflected from the glass shelves also parallel the necessity of light in the formulation of the photographic image.

Like a photograph's relationship with its referent, the reflections in *Ten Glasses* are also separate entities, distinct from the glasses and shelves from which they have been created. This separation of the image from its original object defines both reflection and the photographic image. Both a reflected image and a photograph involve the perception of a subject that is absent and are, therefore, illusory in nature. As Jonathan Miller states:

[T]he usefulness of a mirror presupposes that as well as recognising what is in it, we must understand that what we see is, after all, a *reflection* and that what it shows is not where it seems to be. This is what is meant by reflection: something bent back from somewhere else. From the most indistinct highlight to the most recognisable scene, a reflection directs our attention to the existence of something that is elsewhere ...³¹

Viewing both a photograph and a reflected image requires the viewer to understand that the perceived image is a reproduction of an object as it exists elsewhere. Both, however, refer to an object or scene that has existed or continues to exist, therefore empowering the common belief that photography and reflected images can be equated with truthfulness and accuracy.³² The physical separation of both the reflection and the shadow from the original object is staged in *Ten Glasses*. Although the causal referents remain in close proximity to both the reflections and shadows, the reflected and shadow doubles occupy a different space to the original objects. They are projected against the flat surface of the gallery wall, highlighting the fact that they are two-dimensional resemblances of three-dimensional objects.

Both photographs and reflections depict a subject that is not physically where the image suggests it is. In short, photographic images and reflections are illusions that mediate

³¹ Jonathan Miller, *On Reflection*, (London: National Gallery Publications Limited, distributed by Yale University Press, New Haven, Connecticut, 1998): 82.

³² Jonathan Miller, *On Reflection*: 172.

our perception of the object depicted. This brings us back to Plato's Cave, where reflection also plays a role in mediating the prisoners' view of reality. In addition to the moving shadows that play across the wall, the echo of voices from the people carrying the artifacts helps to create the prisoners' illusory view of reality.³³ Stoichita calls this echo "specular reflection."³⁴ Like the shadows in Plato's allegory, the reflected sound creates an illusory belief as to the nature of the 'reality' visible before the prisoners, an illusion which is based on mimesis – the echo imitates the real voices present within the Cave.³⁵ This mimetic echoing of reality is closely related to photography's mediation of our view of the real world. Both the reflections of the glass shelves and the shadows of the wine glasses in *Ten Glasses* imitate the appearance of the real objects, their presence mediating how we read the objects themselves. However, the shadows are assigned an additional mediating role: they clarify the 'reality' of the wine glasses, which are difficult to distinguish under the gallery's bright spotlights. When viewed from a few paces away, parts of the glasses seem largely invisible. It is their shadows that provide clues to the physical shape of the glasses, appearing more concrete in form than the actual glasses.

Culbert's use of transparent glass shelves in *Ten Glasses* creates a further analogy to the medium of photography. The glass shelves offer the viewer an opportunity to regard the wine glasses and the reflections from underneath, echoing the way we 'see through' photographs in order to imagine a depicted scene. Despite their transparency, however, the glass shelves also cast shadows onto the wall. The contrast between the bright reflections caused by the reflective surface of the glass shelves and the darkness of their cast shadows conjures up connotations of photography's positive/negative process. This process is further replicated by the bright reflections of the semi-circular glass shelves and their corresponding shadows. These binary states of light create a bifurcated oval around each wine glass – bright reflection above, darker shadow below – emulating the opposition of negative to positive. The link to photography's positive/negative process is heightened through Culbert's use of red wine in the glasses, which appears very dark in comparison to the crystalline glassware that is

³³ Plato, *Republic*: 515b, 187.

³⁴ Victor I. Stoichita, *A Short History of the Shadow*: 23.

³⁵ Victor I. Stoichita, *A Short History of the Shadow*: 27.

illuminated by the gallery lights. In a manner similar to the photographic image, *Ten Glasses* merges the states of reality and illusion; the reflections and shadows exist as illusory and transient resemblances of the real objects that have caused them.

Resemblance and metaphor

Culbert utilises the device of metaphor in a number of his installations, using the visual qualities and title of the artwork to suggest a metaphorical resemblance between it and an object or objects that exist in the real world. The evocation of a resemblance between two things that are essentially different also resonates with the way in which the photographic image is causally connected to the photographed object yet is separate, a resemblance with its own unique qualities. A metaphor has two or more distinct subjects or domains, which necessitates the identification of similarities between characteristics of the domains that comprise the metaphor.³⁶ However, the domains of a metaphorical statement are of an inherently different nature, and their relationship is based solely on comparison.³⁷ A metaphor can also be visual, and Culbert constructs pictorial metaphors that rely on the artwork's title to make the comparison between its terms. In these pictorial metaphors, the artwork is the primary domain, and the title applied to the artwork constitutes the secondary domain, working to create a new set of associations not necessarily visible without the aid of the title itself. The way in which titles interact with artwork is very similar to the way a metaphorical expression gains meaning. M. B. Franklin states that "meanings of the title phrase are 'projected upon' the perceived artwork in just the way that 'associated implications' of the secondary subject [of a metaphor] are projected upon the primary subject".³⁸

Culbert's artwork *Long White Cloud* (1985; fig. 31)³⁹ demonstrates the relationship between an artwork and a metaphorical title. Together, they interact to form a pictorial

³⁶ Max Black, *Models and Metaphors – Studies in Language and Philosophy*, (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1962): 44-45. For further discussion on Black's interaction theory of metaphor and subsequent theories of metaphor, see Forceville: 34-66.

³⁷ Charles Forceville, *Pictorial Metaphor*: 5.

³⁸ M. B. Franklin, "'Museum of the mind": an inquiry into the titling of artworks", *Metaphor and Symbolic Activity*, (vol. 3, no. 3, 1988): 169.

³⁹ For further discussion of this artwork, see Simon Cutts's untitled essay in *Bill Culbert – Selected Works 1968-1986*, (London: Institute of Contemporary Art, 1986: unpaginated); exhibition catalogue *Bill Culbert – Bottle Combinations: 25 January – 24 February 1990*, (Munich: Galerie Six Friedrich, 1990); Yves Abrioux,

metaphor, the title illuminating aspects of the artwork's character. In *Long White Cloud*, the primary domain of the pictorial metaphor is the artwork itself, comprising two clear and eleven opaque plastic bottles, most of which have variously coloured lids, threaded along an illuminated fluorescent tube and mounted to the wall. The secondary domain of the pictorial metaphor is the title itself, which can be seen to refer to both an actual white cloud and the English translation of the Maori name for New Zealand: 'Aotearoa', or 'Land of the Long White Cloud'.⁴⁰ The possible comparison between the artwork and the secondary domain of a white cloud is based on Culbert's choice of plastic bottles. He has incorporated predominantly white bottles into the artwork that echo the reference point of the title. The mid-point of the installation is marked by two clear plastic bottles that contrast starkly with the white ones, the transparency of the bottles highlighting the brightness of the illuminated tube that pierces them. These clear bottles can be seen to represent a cloudless sky. The fluorescent tube that radiates white light can be compared to the white light that emanates from the sky, and the variously coloured bottle caps that adorn the bottles as the colours into which white light can be refracted – colours that make up part of how we perceive the world. The bottles, in their previous contexts, were designed to be containers of various liquids. By threading the bottles along the length of the fluorescent tube, Culbert has encouraged them to hold another substance – light. The white bottles obscure the visibility of the tube itself, echoing the way clouds obscure sunlight on an overcast day. As containers that hold light, the bottles can also be compared to heavy rain clouds that hold moisture. The combination of the fluorescent tube and the way that Culbert has strung the bottles along the shaft of the tube creates the impression of length, making an obvious comparison between the word 'long' in the title of the artwork and the formal structure of the artwork itself.

When the artwork is viewed with reference to New Zealand's geography, the comparison is most immediately relevant in the division of the artwork's elements into two parts. Two transparent plastic bottles divide the artwork into two, creating an analogy between the two groups of white bottles and the North and South Islands of

Bill Culbert, (Annecy: La Petite Ecole, 1997: 164; for references on other plastic bottle works, see pages 164-168); and William McAloon, "An Art of Delight" in Christopher Knowles et al, *Bill Culbert – light wine things*, (Blenheim: Millennium Public Art Gallery, 2004: unpaginated).

⁴⁰ The name Aotearoa was originally applied only to the North Island of New Zealand.

New Zealand. However, these separate entities or 'islands' are unified by the fluorescent tube that passes through each of the bottles, connoting the unification of New Zealand as a nation. The opacity of the white bottles make them appear more solid, like the earth of the islands that comprise New Zealand, while the clear bottles suggest the water of Cook Strait that divides the country in half. The artwork is exhibited in a darkened space, which emphasises the form of the installation. The enveloping darkness is like the sea surrounding New Zealand, which isolates the country and its people from the rest of the world. It is clear that the metaphorical interaction between the title *Long White Cloud* and the elements of the artwork itself gives meaning to the installation, and brings into play a wealth of associations that a viewer may not have had access to without the aid of the title.

The impact that Culbert's title has on the reading of *Long White Cloud* resonates with a photograph's relationship to text. Barthes, in his essay "The Photographic Message", argues that the photograph can never function as an isolated structure; it is always in communication with the text that accompanies it.⁴¹ Photographs are commonly accompanied by some form of text – a title, caption, article, text from a book. Titles tend to have a closer relationship with the photographic image than many other art forms. As indexical images that are inescapably *of* something, photographs create in the viewer the belief that there should be a recognisable referent, prompting the viewer consider the photograph's title or caption to establish what the image depicts. This tendency to turn to the title for confirmation of what a photograph is *of*, then, is more pronounced than with other art forms that indeed may not have any reference to a recognisable subject, such as Barnett Newman's abstract painting *Jericho* (1968-69). Like a title's confirmation of a photograph's subject, the title *Long White Cloud* enables the viewer to recognise the analogies offered between the illuminated plastic bottles, a cloud and New Zealand.

Culbert's metaphorical artwork and the medium of photography also share a status as a non-identity: they are physically different to the entities they resemble. Despite *Long White Cloud's* metaphorical evocation of qualities associated with a cloud and New

⁴¹ Roland Barthes, "The Photographic Message": 195.

Zealand, and the artwork's resemblance to these qualities, its metaphorical status is based on a fundamental truth: that it is neither a cloud nor New Zealand, but a collection of objects that resemble these entities. In this respect, Culbert's pictorial metaphor is analogous to how the photographic image incorporates both an 'is' and 'is not', an identity and non-identity.⁴² A photograph is an indexical resemblance and not the actual subject depicted, echoing metaphor's tendency to draw a comparison that is not literally true. In addition, the interaction between the terms present in a metaphorical expression, as well as the insight that this interaction provides, functions in a similar way to how a photographic image mediates our perception of a subject. By comparing one metaphorical domain to another, we "can say that the principal subject is 'seen through' the metaphorical expression."⁴³ The idea of seeing through the character of the secondary domain as a way of conceiving of the primary domain resonates with how we see through a photograph, marginalising cues as to the nature of the photographic object itself, in order to gain an understanding of the depicted subject. *Long White Cloud* operates in a similar manner. By applying the title and its wide-ranging associations, we come to see how the artwork is more than a collection of bottles threaded along an illuminated fluorescent tube and, instead, identify the assemblage with a cloud and the islands of New Zealand.

Resemblance and metonymy

In addition to metaphor, Culbert's work utilises the device of metonymy, which also shares a number of similarities with photography. Metonymy, like metaphor, uses one entity to refer to another related one.⁴⁴ While the terms of a metaphor are based on apparent unrelatedness, metonymy uses a related entity to stand in for another. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson also include synecdoche as part of metonymy, which involves a part representing a whole, that part being directly related or closely associated with the whole that it stands for.⁴⁵ Culbert adopts a metonymic approach in his installation *Miles Away* (1988; fig. 32). The installation consists of a collection of illuminated fluorescent tubes and light fixtures placed at the foot of a large black and

⁴² Charles Forceville, *Pictorial Metaphor*: 34.

⁴³ Max Black, *Models and Metaphors*: 41.

⁴⁴ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1980): 35.

⁴⁵ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*: 36.

white unframed photograph, which is mounted on the gallery wall. The photograph depicts a glacier advancing down a rocky valley. The glacier's jumbled mass of snow stands in contrast to the bare rock of the mountains that the snow cuts a path through. The photograph of the glacier is the term of the metonym that represents the whole, and the fluorescent tubes that lie beneath it are the entities that stand for a part of the photograph. The disorderly pile of illuminated tubes stands for the snow that is visible in the photographic image, which demonstrate similarities with the snow itself. Like snow, the fluorescent lights are white. Beyond this obvious likeness, the tubes share with snow an association with bright light – the harsh light that emanates from the tubes echoes the way in which light reflects off snow, and in the most extreme of cases, causes snow blindness. Culbert's collection of tubes are in their own way blinding, the sheer number of them and their close proximity to the viewer creating an uncomfortable sensation if the viewer looks at them for too long. Moreover, the jumbled heap of fluorescent tubes and light fixtures is metonymic in its resemblance to the glacier's piling up of ice and rock.

In *Miles Away*, Culbert employs metonymy in order to focus specifically on qualities associated with snow. By using the fluorescent tubes to stand for the glacier depicted in the photograph, Culbert encourages the viewer to make connections between characteristics they associate with snow and their similarities with the tubes in the installation. Metonymy's substitution of a part for a whole features widely in visual art. As Lakoff and Johnson point out, "metonymy functions actively in our culture. The tradition of portraits, in both painting and photography, is based on it."⁴⁶ However, metonymy and photography share a further trait. Like photographs, metonyms are indexical. A metonym is based on relationships between signifieds, notably the substitution of effect for cause, such as 'don't get hot under the collar' for 'don't get angry'.⁴⁷ The indexical relationship between metonymic terms parallels the way in which a photograph exists as a record of the light rays that emanate from the objects photographed – the photograph is the effect of light, and stands as a part connected to the wider context from which it was recorded. The photograph in *Miles Away* is itself

⁴⁶ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*: 37.

⁴⁷ Daniel Chandler, *Semiotics for Beginners – Rhetorical Tropes*, (last modified 6 November 2001): <http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Documents/S4B/sem07.html>, [accessed 1 March 2005]: 8-9.

indexically linked to the glacier it depicts. In addition, the fluorescent tubes substitute themselves for the snow in the image, creating a further indexical relationship within the installation as a whole. Moreover, both metonymy and photography are closely associated with reality. As Daniel Chandler points out:

The indexicality [sic] of metonyms also tends to suggest that they are 'directly connected to' reality in contrast to the mere *iconicity* or *symbolism* of metaphor. Metonyms seem to be more obviously 'grounded in our experience' than metaphors since they usually involve direct associations.⁴⁸

A metonym's connection to the object that it stands for, which is based on direct associations, resonates with the tendency to equate the photographic image with reality. The photograph in *Miles Away*, because it presents the viewer with a recognisable depiction of a glacier and is causally connected to it, appears to reflect a slice of reality. The similarities evident between Culbert's fluorescent tubes and snow also makes the metonymic relationship between the two entities convincing, as these similarities correspond with what we know to be true of snow. However, the title seems to playfully suggest that perhaps the jumble of fluorescent tubes are in fact 'miles away' from truly representing the natural beauty of a glacier.

Resemblance and the pun

In addition to the devices of metaphor and metonymy, Culbert regularly employs the pun to highlight the resemblance between elements visible within his artwork and their connection to a broader range of associations. Culbert's use of puns creates a resemblance between something that the artwork is not, echoing the way in which the photograph resembles objects that are literally absent. Of Culbert's punning artworks, Christina Barton has argued that he creates many of his photographs and installations in order to encourage "the revelation and perception of a momentary coalescence of fact and fabrication, whose effect is more like that of a joke or pun."⁴⁹ Like metaphor, the pun involves an interaction between two different elements that are compared to each

⁴⁸ Daniel Chandler, *Semiotics for Beginners*: 12.

⁴⁹ Christina Barton, "'Mon Soleil' – Considering Photography in the Work of Bill Culbert": 18.

other, but in the case of a pun the comparison involves the humorous use of a word or words to suggest multiple meanings, or the use of words of the same or similar sound that can have different meanings.⁵⁰ The pun may also function both linguistically and visually. A visual pun exists when a viewer notices that two different things have a similar appearance and that the picture has been constructed in order to make this similarity evident.⁵¹

Culbert's visual puns frequently function in combination with the artwork's title. This suggests that the definition of a visual pun can be extended to incorporate not just visual similarities, but also similarities that are suggested in combination with text. Visual puns commonly incorporate linguistic elements, such as a title or text present within the image itself. Like pictorial metaphor, the title given to a visual pun often plays a prominent part in the understanding of the image by evoking various associations with the artwork. *Green Piece II* (2003; fig. 33) operates as a visual pun, its title introducing a range of associations to the artwork. *Green Piece II* consists of five green plastic bottles - one darker than the others - mounted to a wall and pierced by a short fluorescent tube that illuminates the bottles from within. In this sculpture, Culbert has employed principles of the visual pun in order to create an artwork characterised by a certain range of associations that emphasise and explore a specifically New Zealand context. When viewing *Green Piece II*, we note that the majority of the elements incorporated are indeed green, as its title literally suggests. The title also evokes both the serial naming of Modernist artworks and monochrome abstraction, rendering the work an ironic commentary on Modernist painting. Beyond these initial connections, multiple meanings and associations become manifest when the title and artwork are imagined as a visual pun. When lit from within, the lighter green bottles take on the appearance of a piece of jade or greenstone, extending the associations of the artwork beyond the literal. The use of the word 'piece' is reminiscent of the way we would usually refer to an item of particularly valuable or treasured jewellery, in this case a piece of greenstone jewellery.

⁵⁰ J. B. Sykes, *Concise Oxford Dictionary*: 900.

⁵¹ Paul Hammond and Patrick Hughes, *Upon the Pun – Dual Meaning in Words and Pictures*, (London: W. H. Allen, 1978): unpaginated.

The title 'Green Piece' also alludes to the international organisation Greenpeace, a particularly evocative association in the New Zealand context. Firstly, the allusion makes links to New Zealand's 'clean green' image and the country's concerns with environmental issues, and secondly, it refers to the Greenpeace ship *Rainbow Warrior* that sank after being bombed by French agents in Auckland's port in 1985. The tie to things French has further significance in relation to Culbert, who has spent much of his artistic career in France. The comparison between the elements of the artwork and Greenpeace is further highlighted by Culbert's intentional use of bottles. The bottles themselves are vessels, designed to hold substances, just as the *Rainbow Warrior* was a vessel. By making reference to the fact that this installation is a 'second edition', Culbert makes it clear to the viewer that he had in mind a specific reference to an original 'Green Piece',⁵² strengthening the comparison between the artwork and the infamous event in New Zealand's history. The wealth of associations triggered by the elements comprising *Green Piece II* and its title is reminiscent of the Surrealist found object. The artwork's multiple associations also hints at the photographic image's quality of multiplicity. *Green Piece II*'s visual qualities and title equate the artwork with things that it is obviously not, but like a photograph, it is the artwork's resemblance to these things that makes the act of interpreting it infinitely richer and more meaningful.

Inversion

Culbert's temporary experiments with optical effects regularly involves the inversion of reflected images that are recorded through the medium of photography. Inversion demonstrates several similarities with the medium of photography. The word inversion means to turn something upside down, or a reversal of position, order or relation.⁵³ Inversion also requires a transformative act – the reversal of a positive to a negative state. An example this reversal can be seen in Culbert's colour photograph *Verre à vin / vin à verre* (1993; fig. 34). This photograph depicts a glass of white wine that sits on a wooden table. In the background a vista with trees, distant hills and blue sky can be seen. A glass of red wine is obscured by the white wine glass that occupies the foreground of the photograph. We are only aware of the existence of the glass with red

⁵² I have been unable to find any reference to or reproduction of *Green Piece I*.

⁵³ Barbara A. Babcock, "Introduction" in *The Reversible World – Symbolic Inversion in Art and Society*, ed. Barbara A. Babcock, (London: Cornell University Press, 1978): 15.

wine through an inverted image that is visible within the glass of white wine. The inverted image also shows an upside down view of the landscape behind the table. The optical inversion visible in Culbert's photograph resonates with the binary opposition of reality and illusion present in photography. Just as inversion involves both the positive and negative, reality and illusion can be conceived in the same terms: reality is equated with the positive, and illusion with a negative state of being. These terms are also evident in *Verre à vin / vin à verre*. The upside down scene reflected in the glass of white wine emulates a photograph's resemblance to the real object – in this case, the actual glass of red wine that is obscured – but also demonstrates photography's illusory nature. The real glass of red wine, and the view behind it, are not actually upside down – it is the replicated image, caused by the sunlight and the mediating presence of the white wine, that gives the impression that the reflected scene is literally upside down. The inverted scene, essentially illusory in nature, is reminiscent of a photograph's separation from the condition of reality. The theme of oppositional states present in *Verre à vin / vin à verre* is furthered by Culbert's use of wine. Roland Barthes, in his book *Mythologies*, argues that wine is a substance whose terms can change.⁵⁴ He states that wine "is above all a converting substance, capable of reversing situations and states, and of extracting from objects their opposites – for instance, making a weak man strong or a silent one talkative."⁵⁵ Culbert use of wine – a liquid associated with the reversal of states – strengthens the analogy between the process of inversion visible in the image and photography's opposition of reality and illusion.

Inversion's association with negation and a reversal of order can also be equated with photography's negative to positive process, which reverses the values of light and dark to a positive state that represents the world as we usually perceive it. *Verre à vin / vin à verre* visually articulates inversion's link with the positive/negative process of photography. The inverted image of the red wine glass and the landscape behind it symbolises the negative state of the photographic image before it has been translated into the positive; the positive image is represented by the glass of white wine standing upright. The positive/negative theme is further conveyed through the opposing colours of wine that Culbert uses. The positive term is represented by the white wine

⁵⁴ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, (trans. Annette Lavers), (St Albans: Paladin, 1973): 58.

⁵⁵ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*: 58.

that is light and clear in colour, while the negative term is represented by the upside down glass of red wine that is, like a photographic negative, dark in colour. The inverted image visible within the white wine glass also parallels the process of inversion that takes place inside the camera obscura, further demonstrating Culbert's ongoing interest in replicating the optical processes that take place within the apparatus.

When viewing *Verre à vin / vin à verre*, we are only able to see the glass of red wine by seeing through the white wine glass that obscures what could otherwise be seen were we able to change our point of view. The glass of white wine mediates what is visually accessible to the viewer. The way we read this image and what it depicts emulates how we look 'through' photographs at a subject to which we do not literally have access. The necessity of this singular viewpoint for the photograph's optical effect is also reminiscent of the monocularity of most photographic apparatuses. Moreover, our ability to view this photograph as an articulation of terms shared with photography is strengthened by the fact that Culbert presents his subject of exploration through the very medium with which inversion shares distinct similarities: photography.

Culbert's choice of title (in French) further enhances the theme of inversion seen in the image. The first half of the title translates as 'wine glass' in English – 'verre' meaning 'glass' and 'vin' meaning 'wine', 'verre à vin' being the usual French articulation of 'wine glass'. Culbert then reverses or makes negative the terms that we consider to be grammatically correct, the second half of the title translating as 'glass wine'. The reversible structure of the title echoes the inverted image of the red wine glass seen in the photograph. The title *Verre à vin / vin à verre* also creates a pun around the French word *vérité*, which means 'truth'. The similarity between the words *verre* and *vérité* calls to mind wine's role in distilling the truth from those who drink it. In his photograph, Culbert has used wine to draw attention to several truths; the truth of the optical effect visible in the white wine glass, and of photography's continual fluctuation between states of truth and illusion.

Merging reality and illusion

Culbert's continuous merging of reality and illusion within his work employs a range of approaches that are grounded in the medium of photography. His fusion of these apparently opposing states has encouraged my view that the binary terms of reality and illusion present in photography are in fact not in opposition but are inextricably linked, and are reliant upon each other. A photograph is not real, in the sense that the actual subject is present before us, nor is it strictly false. Given the way a photographic image is formed, the photograph's indexical link to its subject ensures a close resemblance to the original. However, our viewing tendencies are based on the tendency to either conceive of or refer to a photograph as something that it is not – the photograph is not the subject itself, but a resemblance of it. Moreover, the tendency to ignore the status of the photographic object itself, and to see the photograph *as* the depicted object, requires an imagining that has its basis in illusion. Therefore, for a photographic image to function according to its own unique visual, technological, and perceptual properties, it is essential to acknowledge both reality and illusion's place in the reading of the image, just as it is essential in the reading of Culbert's work.

CONCLUSION

“... you have to *think* through the camera.”¹

- Bill Culbert, interview with Yves Abrioux, 1994

The central aim of this thesis was to demonstrate the validity of relating photographic theory and approaches to the work of Bill Culbert. His use of photographs to explore ideas and record temporary installations, along with his examination of perception, optical effects and qualities of both light and space clearly relate to the medium of photography. My detailed reading of Culbert's work has also revealed close connections to photography visible in his use of readymades and their serial arrangement, his manipulation of context and his creation of perceptual illusions based on resemblance. Clearly Culbert does think through the camera – thoughts that manifest themselves in his three-dimensional practice and form an integral part of his working oeuvre.

In the process of researching and writing this thesis, I have become increasingly aware of the danger in equating Culbert's work with a single approach. Culbert is usually categorised as 'an installation artist who uses light'. This reductive description, however, belies his interdisciplinary, multiple media approach to the subjects that feature in his work. His art, as my thesis has shown, involves a cyclical progression between three media: painting, photography and installation. From early in his career painting informed – and continues to inform – his photography; his photographs inform his three-dimensional installations; and the conceptual ideas articulated in his installations give rise to further photographic explorations. Culbert's merging of these three media, as well as his break from restrictive self-referentiality, corresponds to the strategies adopted by other artists who began to challenge the strictures of formalist Modernism during the 1960s and 1970s. His commitment to referencing the world beyond the discrete categories of art and blurring the distinction between these categories firmly situates his work within Postmodernist practice.

¹ Bill Culbert, with Yves Abrioux, "An Understanding of Light – Interview": 38.

At first glance, Culbert's work seems uncomplicated and self-explanatory. Perhaps this is the result of his use of recognisable everyday objects. Or perhaps it is that his work presents us with a quality of the world that surrounds us daily – the quality of light. At times his art appears messy, ordinary and simple. However, what has come to light, as it were, during my engagement with Culbert's work is the complexity that informs his art. His work demonstrates a broad knowledge of photographic processes and theory, the history of art, visual perception and optics. His photographs and installations may appear simple, even banal, but are in fact startlingly elegant, witty and thoughtful. I hope that this thesis has succeeded in illuminating Culbert's knowing and sophisticated vision – a vision that has captivated and sustained me for the last year.

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Figure 1. *Sun, Glass/Wine* (1992)

Black and white photograph, edition of 5, 40 x 40 cm.

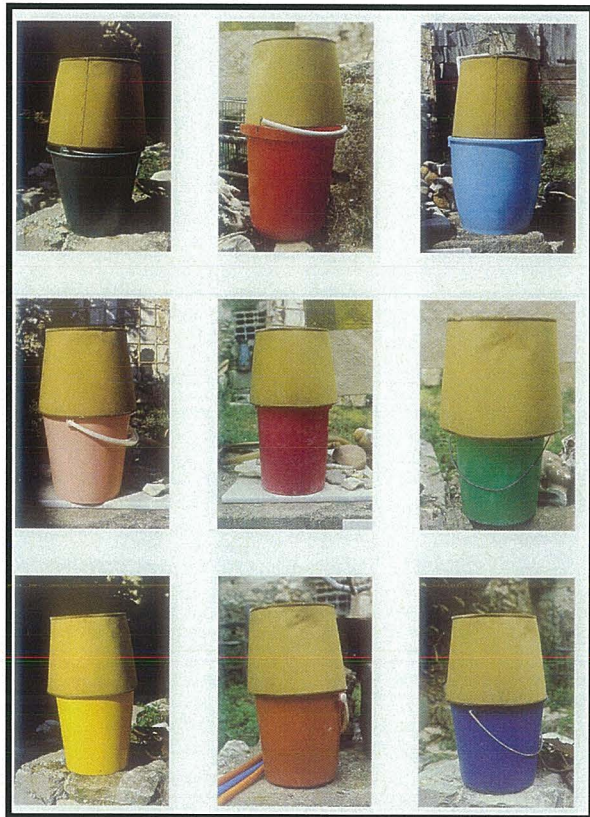


Figure 2. *Abat-jour/Seau* (Bucket/Lampshade) (1992)

Nine colour photographs, 100 x 150 cm.

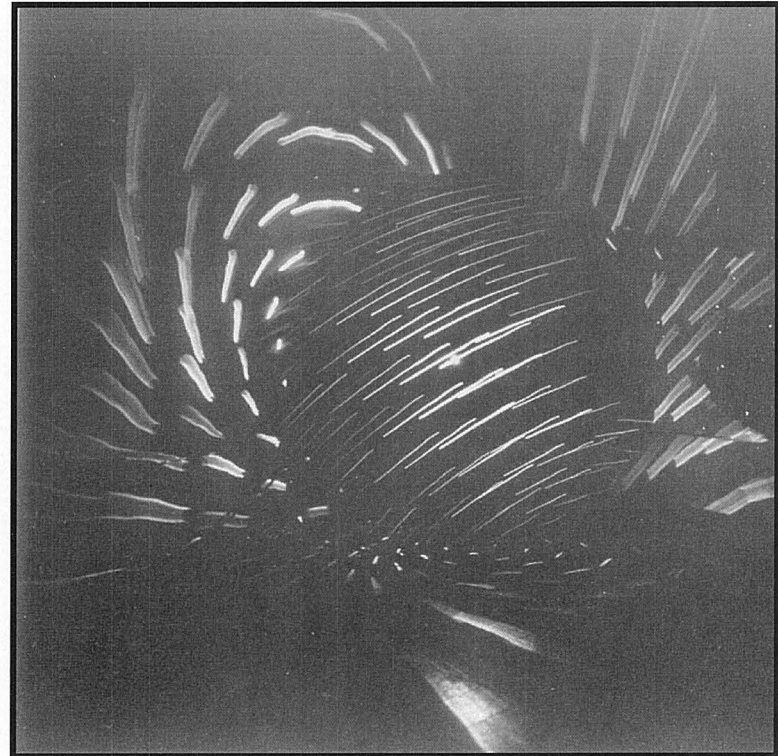
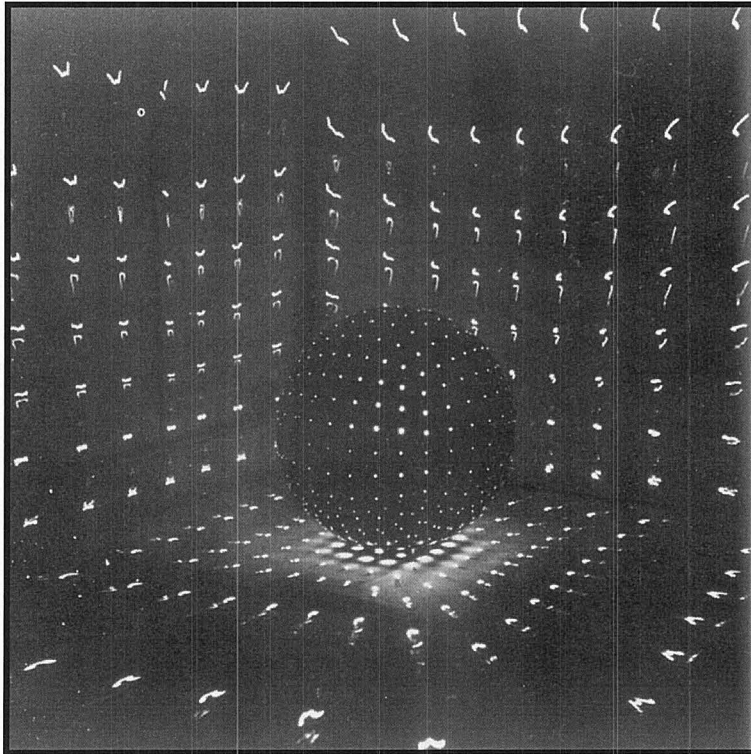


Figure 3. *Cubic Projections* (1968)

A black fibreglass sphere containing a single 150 watt bulb at the centre, drilled with a system of holes and capable of rotation, installed in a darkened room, diameter 64 cm, first exhibited at the Camden Arts Centre, London.

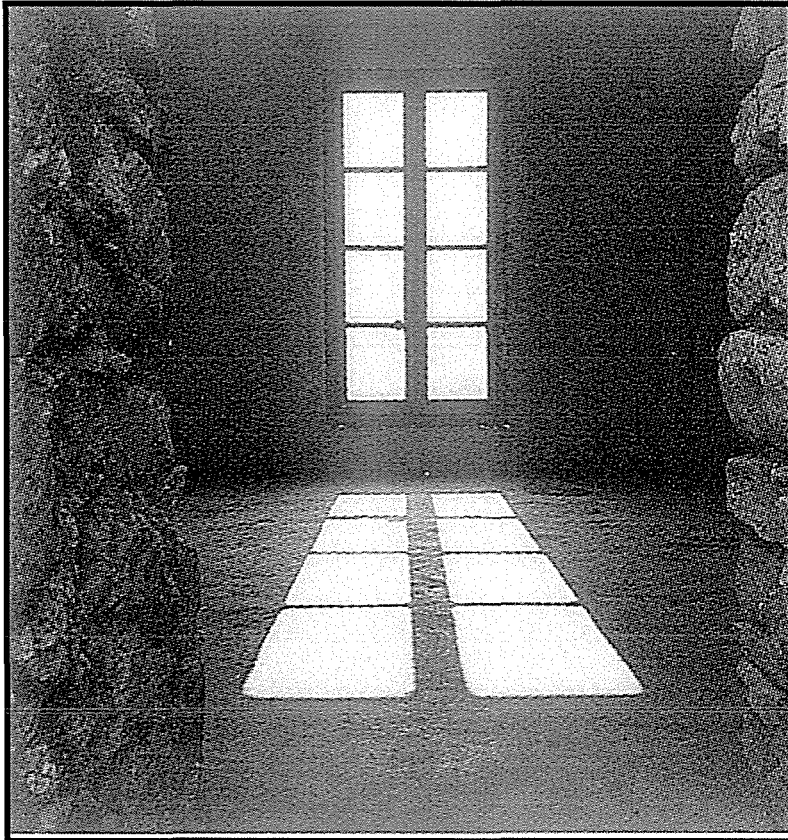


Figure 4. *Window Light Outside, France* (1980)

Silver gelatin print, 40.5 x 40.5 cm, Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney.

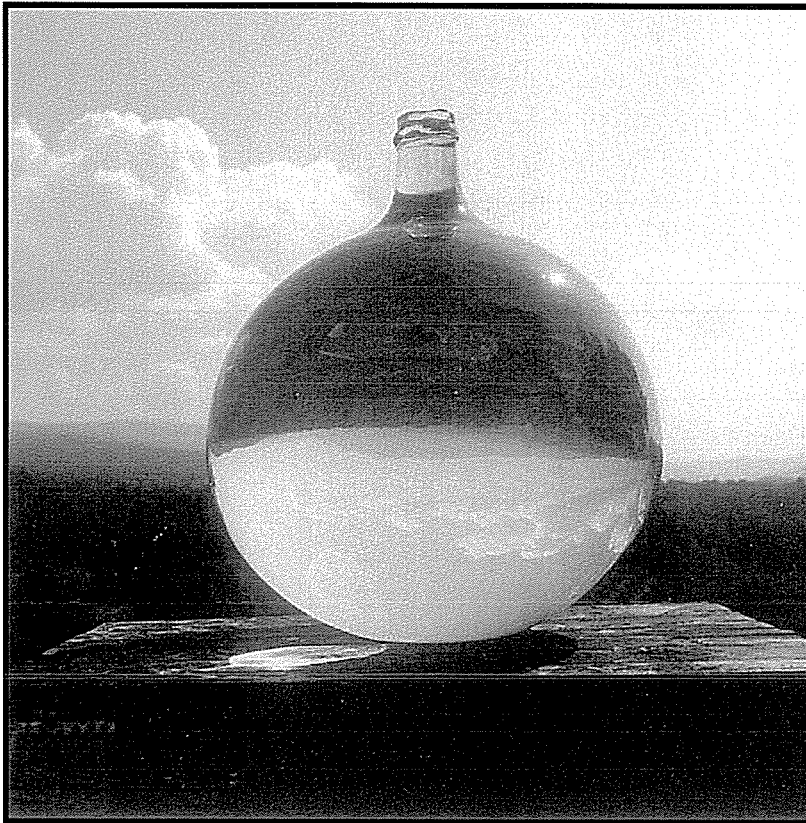


Figure 5. *Bonbonne with Landscape, France (2002)*

Gelatin silver print, 40.5 x 40.5 cm.



Figure 6. *Wine in Perspective* (1996)

Gelatin silver print, 40.5 x 40.5 cm, Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney.

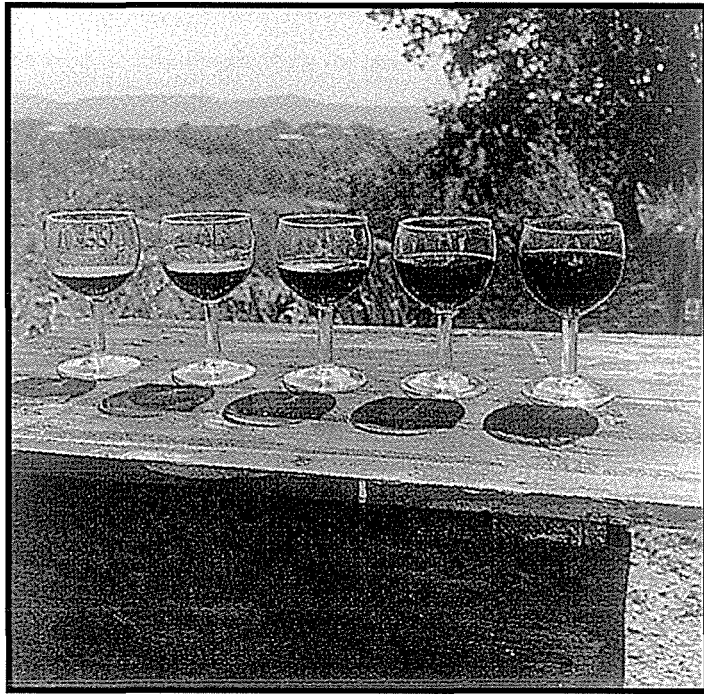


Figure 7. *Wine Real* (1996)

Gelatin silver print, 40.5 x 40.5 cm, Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney.

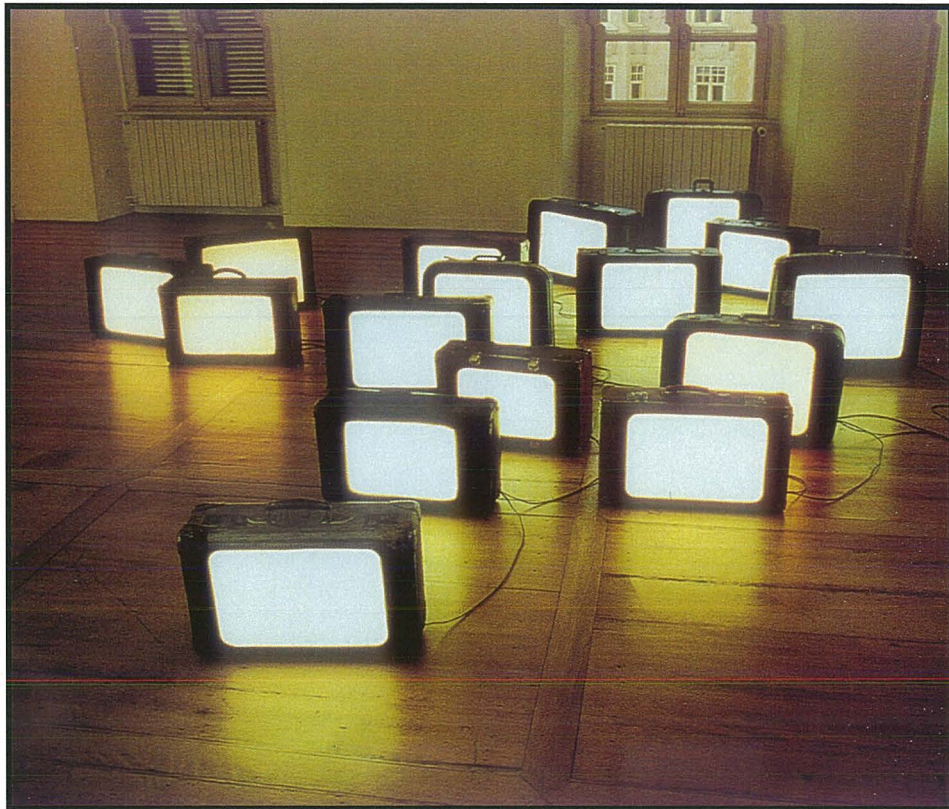


Figure 8. *Sky* (1992)

Suitcases, fluorescent tubes and perspex, Musée des Beaux Arts, Mulhouse.



Figure 9. *Light Box, France (1989)*

Gelatin silver print, 40.5 x 40.5 cm, Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney.

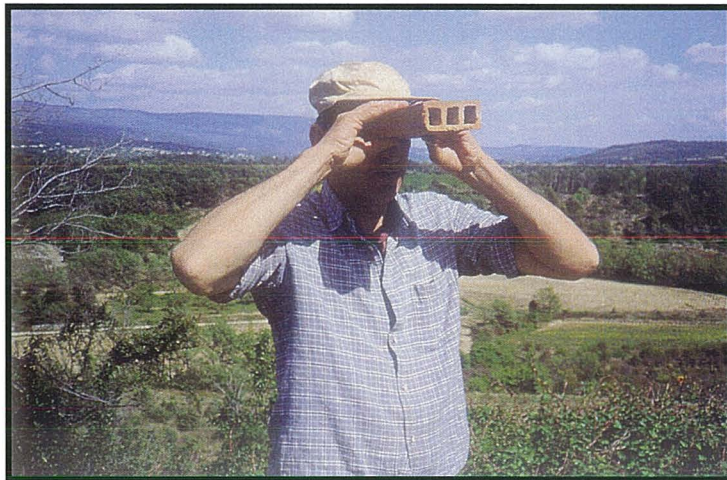


Figure 10. *Long View* (1992)

Pair of colour photographs, original prints, 78 x 122 cm.



Figure 11. *Plain of Jars* (1996)

Glass jars, light bulbs, electrical cords and table, City Gallery, Wellington.

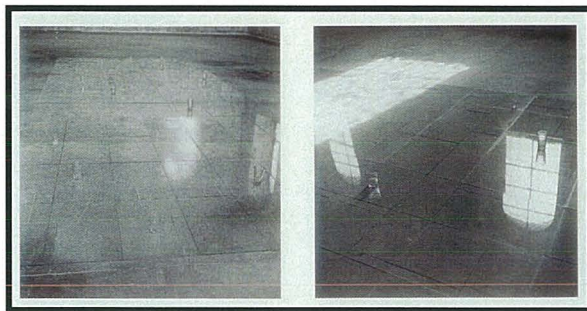
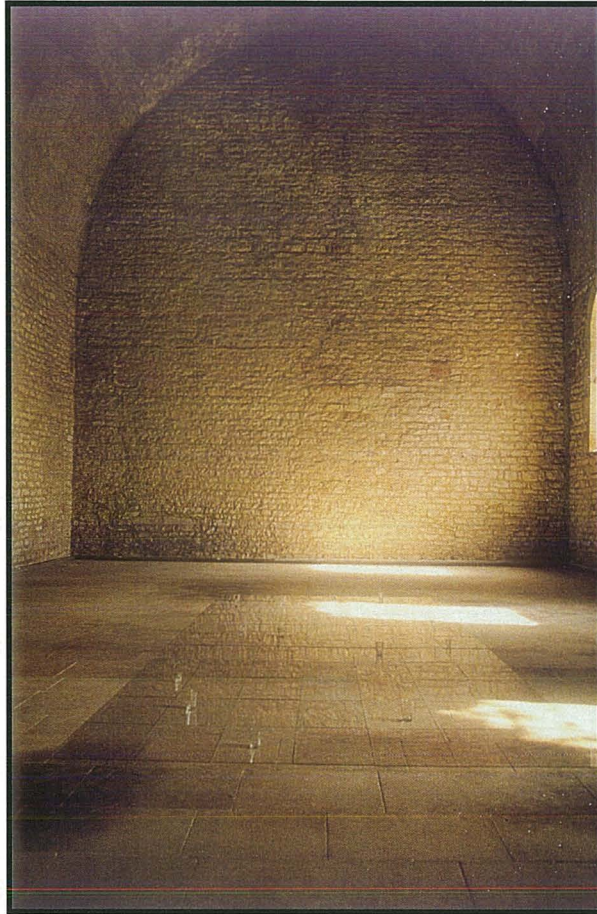


Figure 12. *Anchois et moutarde* (Anchovies and Mustard) (1990)

Sixteen glass anchovy and mustard jars on seventy-seven glass panes, Réfectoire de l'abbaye de Tournus (Refectory of the abbey of Tournus).



Figure 13. *Clay with Watch* (1975)
Black and white photograph.



Figure 14. *Clay without Watch* (1975)
Black and white photograph.

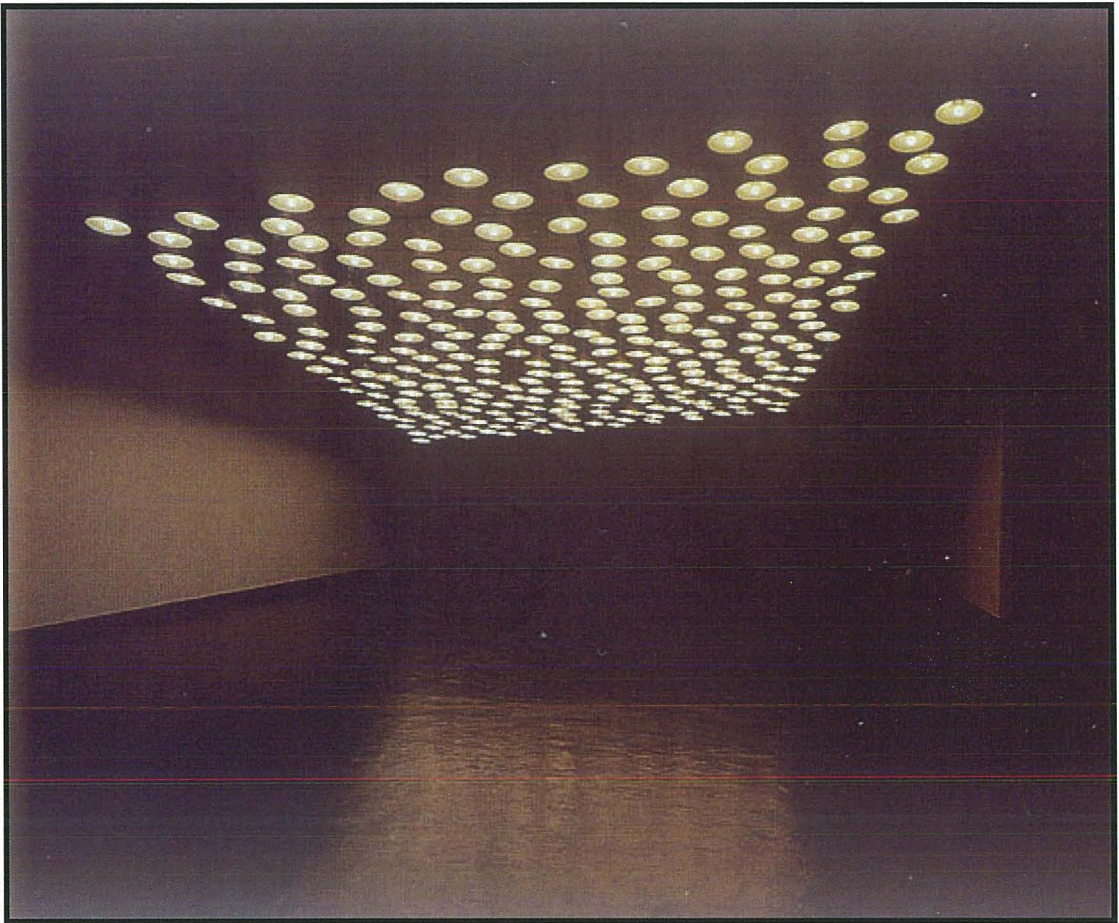


Figure 15. *Light Plain* (1997)

280 illuminated light bulbs with white lampshades suspended from the ceiling, City Gallery, Wellington.

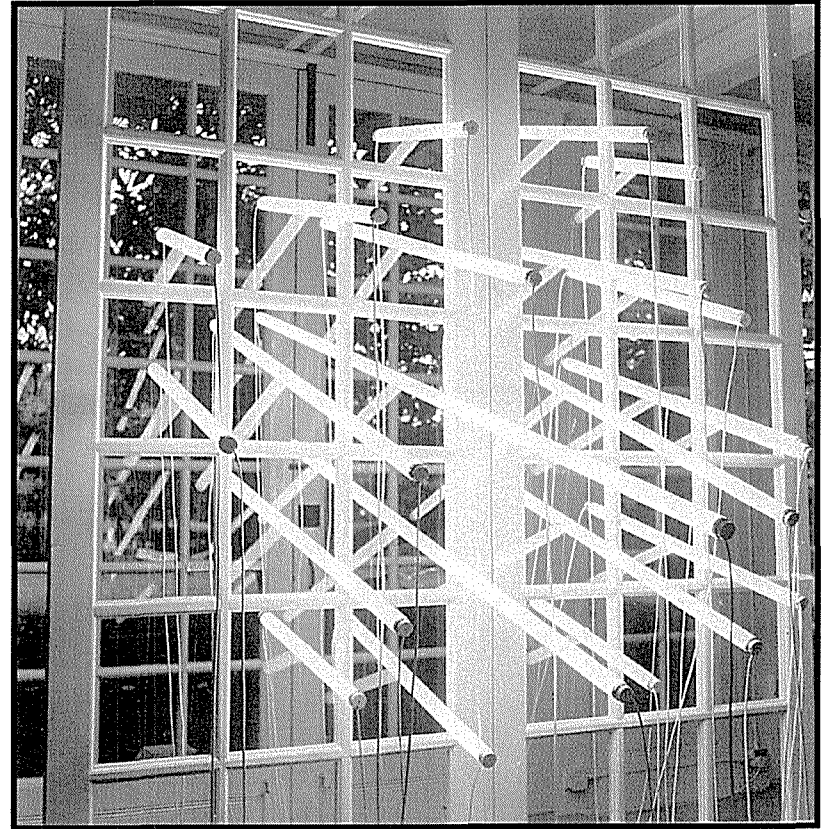
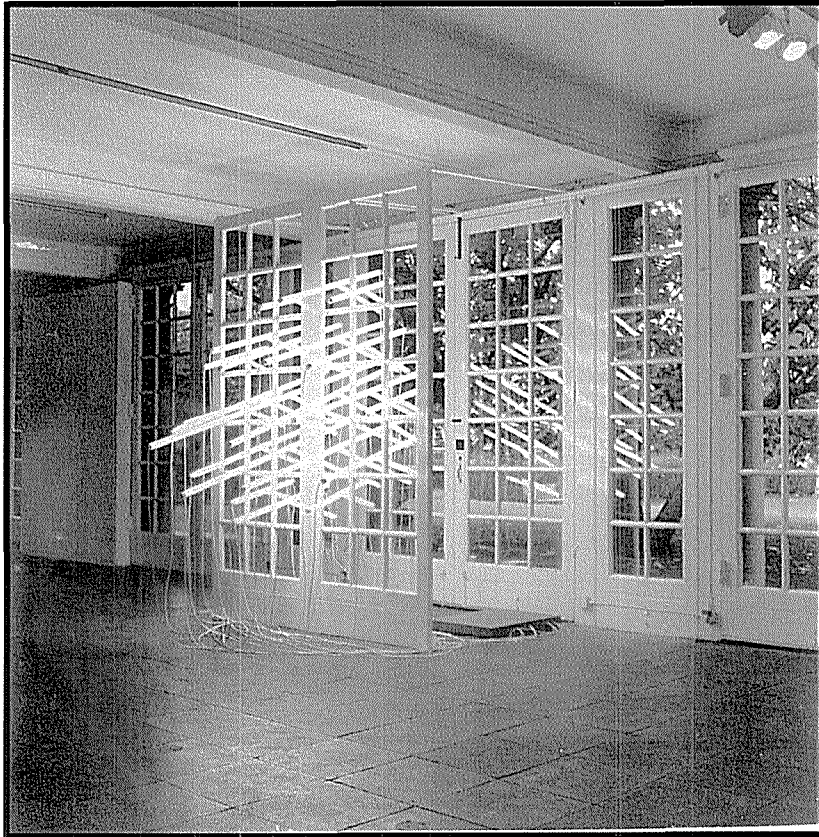


Figure 16. *An Explanation of Light* (1984)

A replica of existing double window doors with twenty-one fluorescent tubes, two-foot to eight-foot tubes held in place by holes in the glass panes, Serpentine Gallery, London.



Figure 17. *Skylight 2* (1996)

Two flatbed trucks, fluorescent tubes, diffusing plastic, Inside Out Exhibition, Serpentine Gallery, London.



Figure 18. *René's Christmas Tree, Café Regairs (1980)*

Silver gelatin print, 40.5 x 40.5 cm.

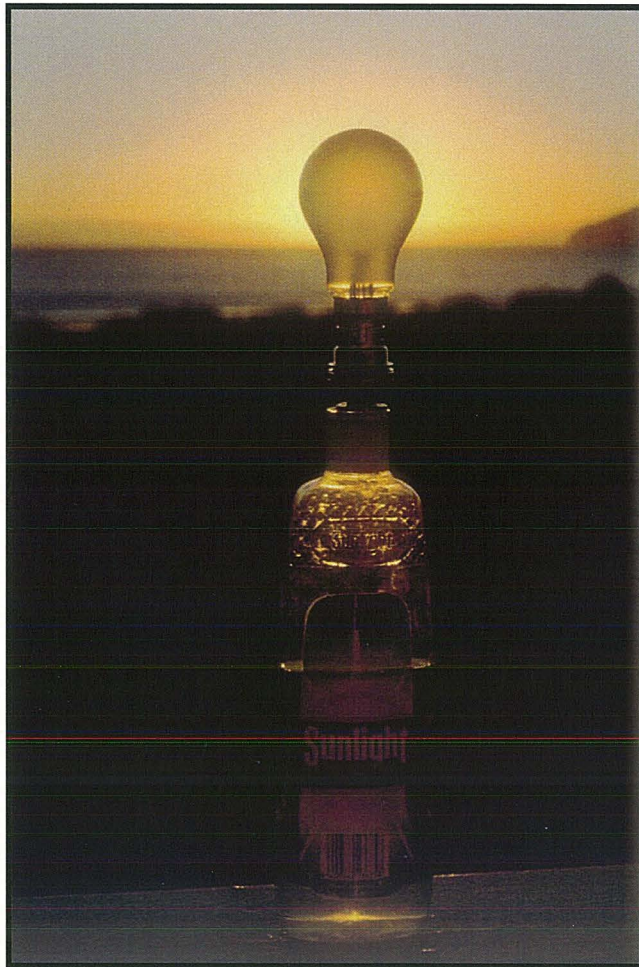


Figure 19. *Sunset I* (1990)

Sunlight Dishwashing Liquid plastic bottle with light socket and light bulb;
colour photograph, original edition, 100 x 150 cm.

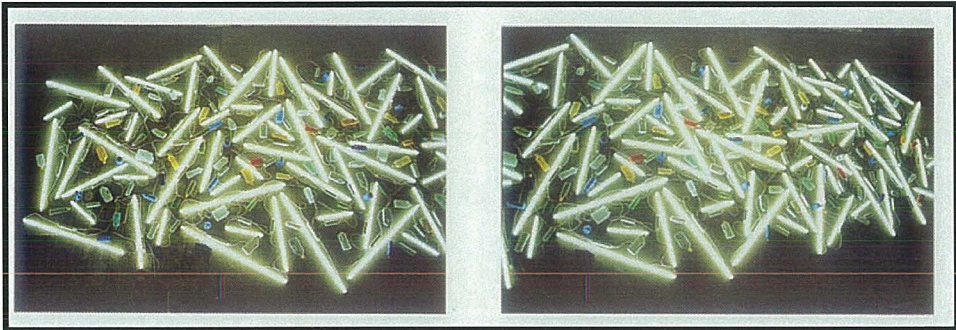
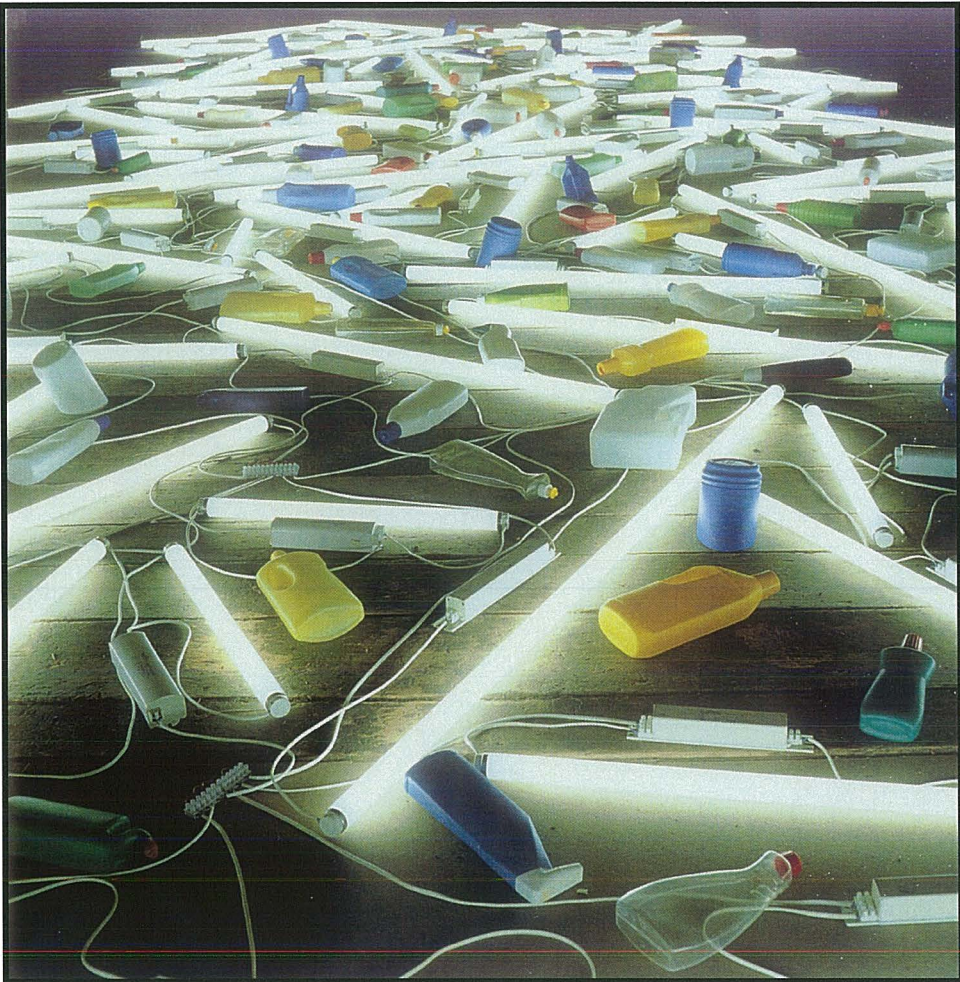


Figure 20. *Flotsam* (1992)

Plastic bottles and fluorescent tubes of varying lengths, 10 x 3 m,
A.A.A. Art Contemporain, Reycologne-les-Ray, France.



Figure 21. *Bonbonnes avec abat-jour – deux côtés* (1991)

(Bonbonnes with lampshades – two sides)

Black and white photograph, original edition, 122 x 244 cm.

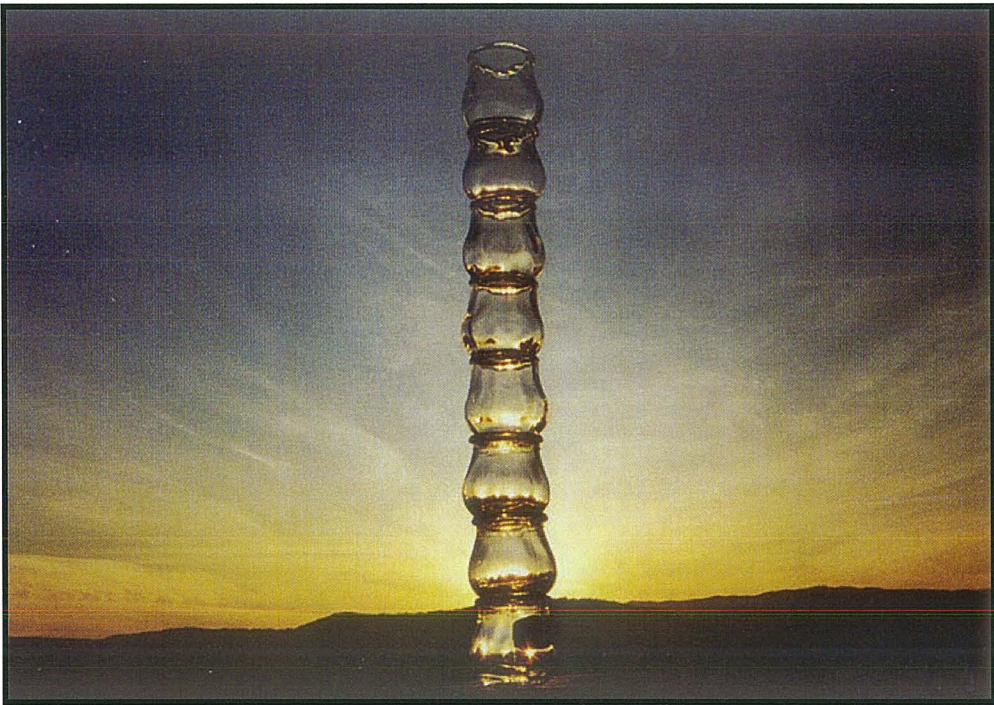


Figure 22. *Light Column* (2001)

Eight glass jars stacked on top of each other; colour photograph.

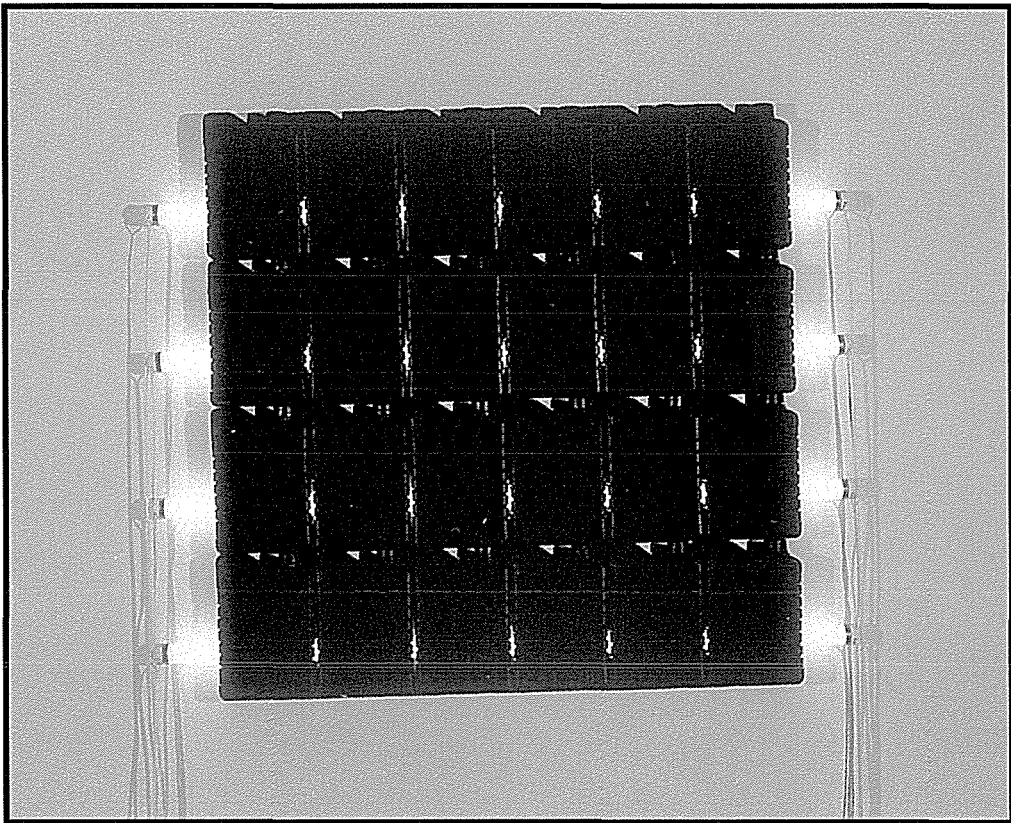


Figure 23. *Total Black* (1991)

Twenty four Total oil bottles and four fluorescent tubes mounted against the wall,
City Gallery, Wellington.



Figure 24. *Total White* (1991)

Twenty four Total oil bottles and four fluorescent tubes mounted against the wall,
City Gallery, Wellington.

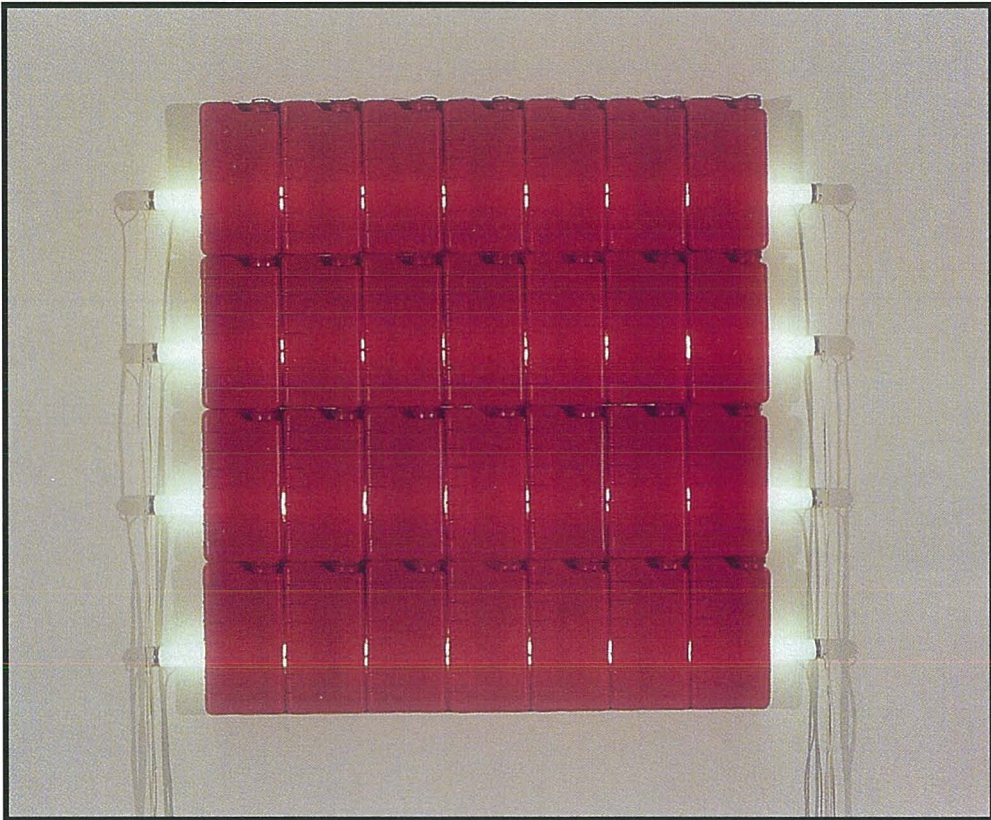


Figure 25. *Total Red* (1991)

Twenty eight Total oil bottles and four fluorescent tubes mounted against the wall,
City Gallery, Wellington.

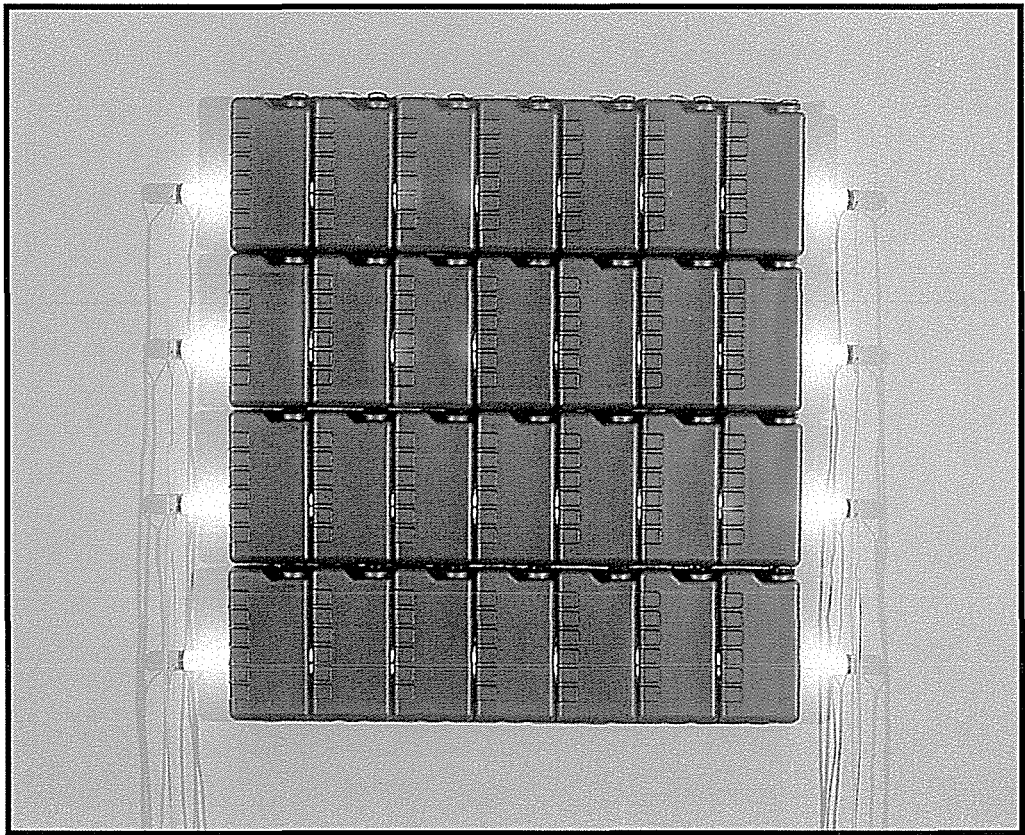


Figure 26. *Total Silver* (1991)

Twenty eight Total oil bottles and four fluorescent tubes mounted against the wall,
City Gallery, Wellington.

Figure 27. *Self-Portrait* (1994)
Colour photograph.



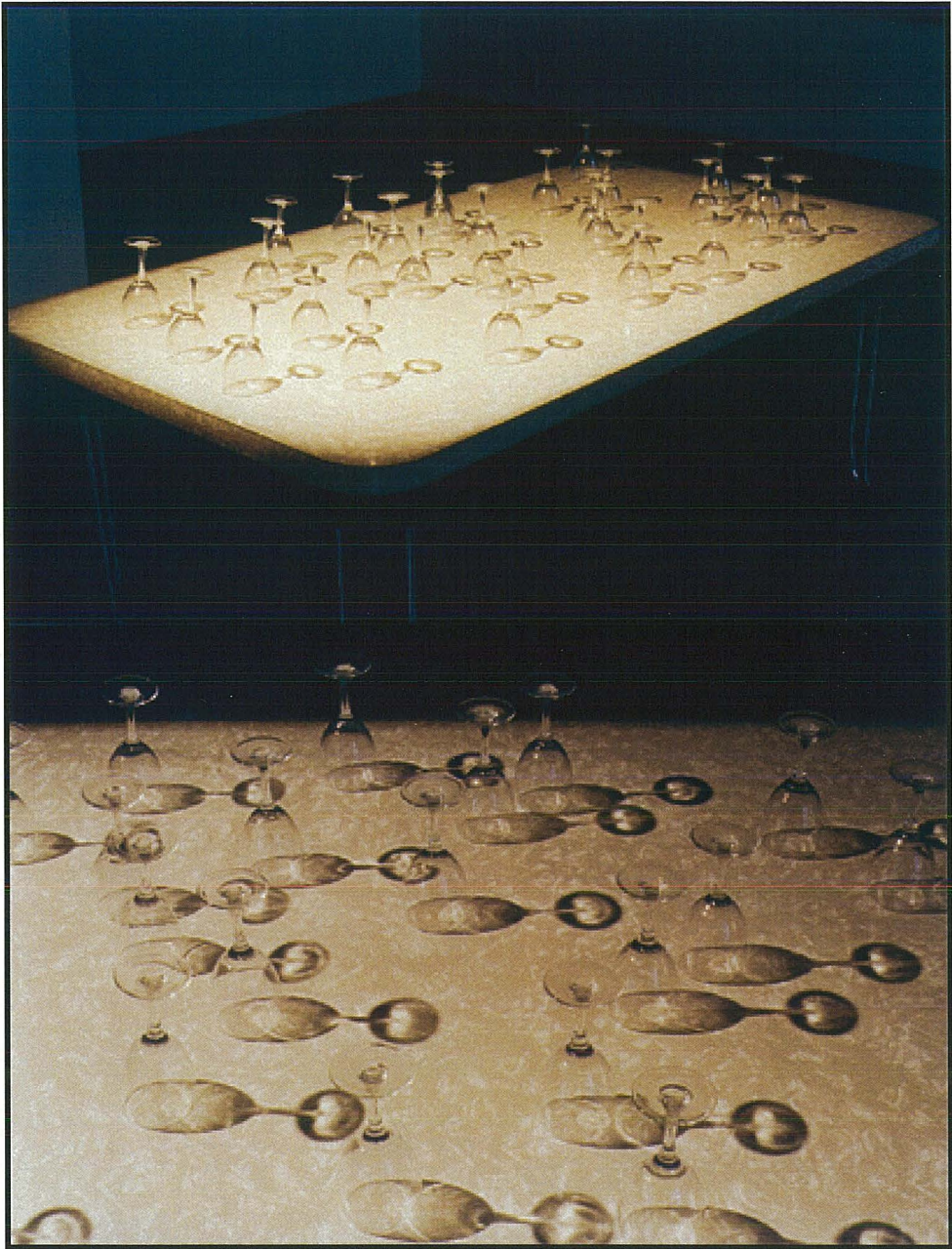


Figure 28. *Glass Table* (2003)

Table and wine glasses, Sue Crockford Gallery, Auckland.

Reproduction courtesy of Sue Crockford Gallery.

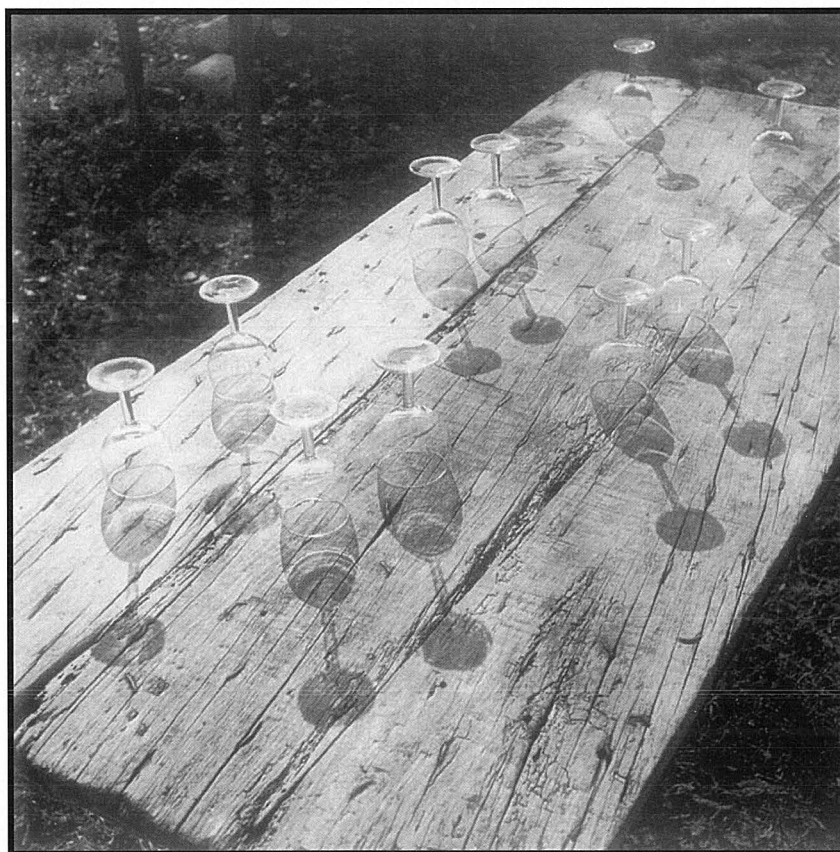


Figure 29. *Winework* (1992)

Black and white photograph, original edition, 183 x 183 cm.

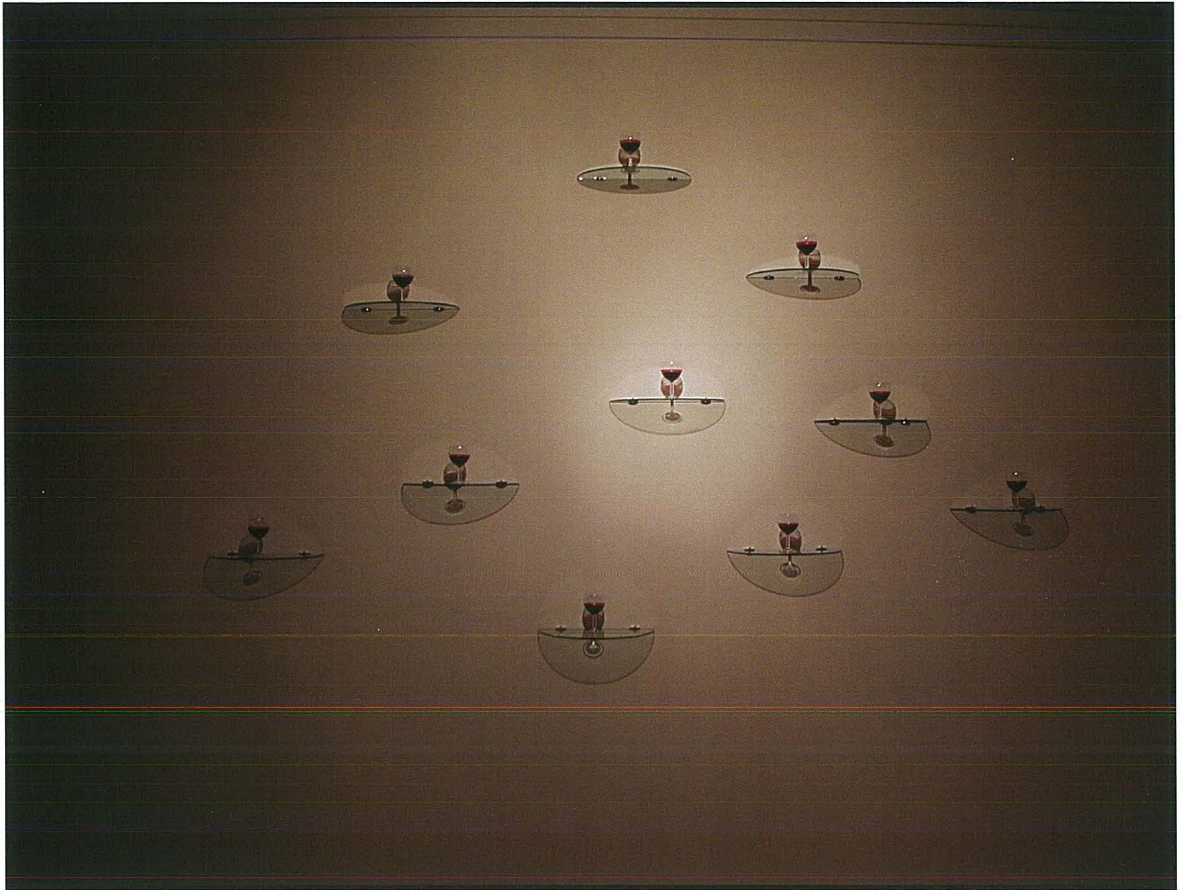


Figure 30. *Ten Glasses* (2003)

Wine glasses, red wine, glass shelves, Dunedin Public Art Gallery.
Reproduction courtesy of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery.

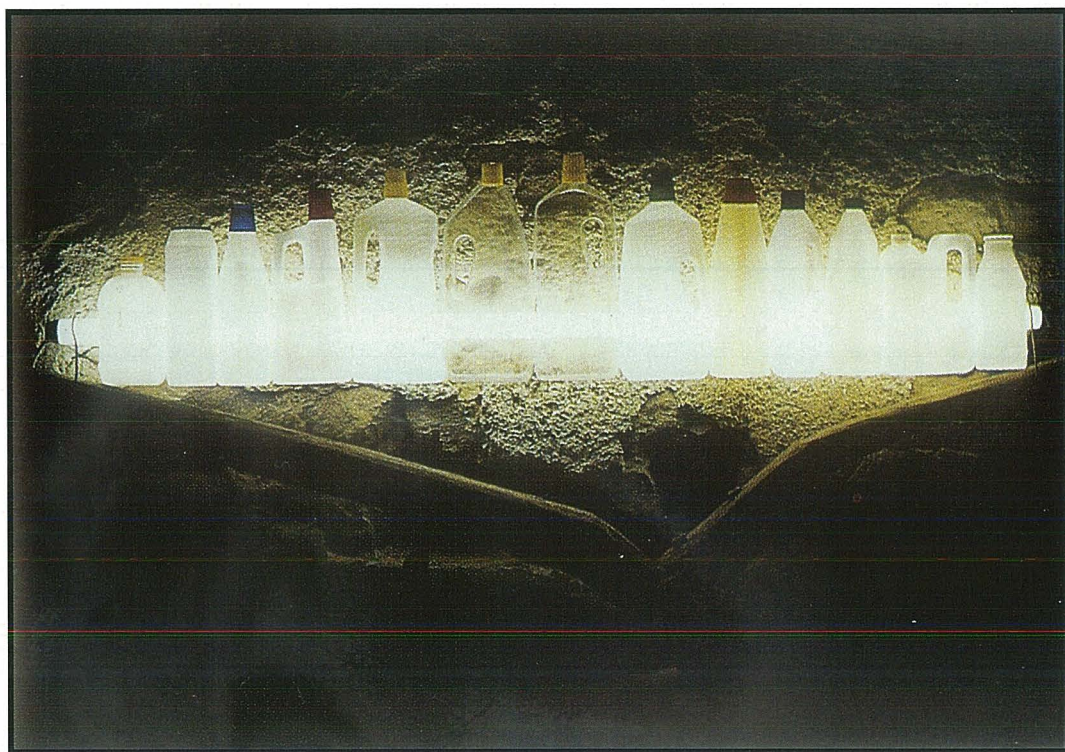


Figure 31. *Long White Cloud* (1985)
Plastic bottles, 5 foot fluorescent tube.

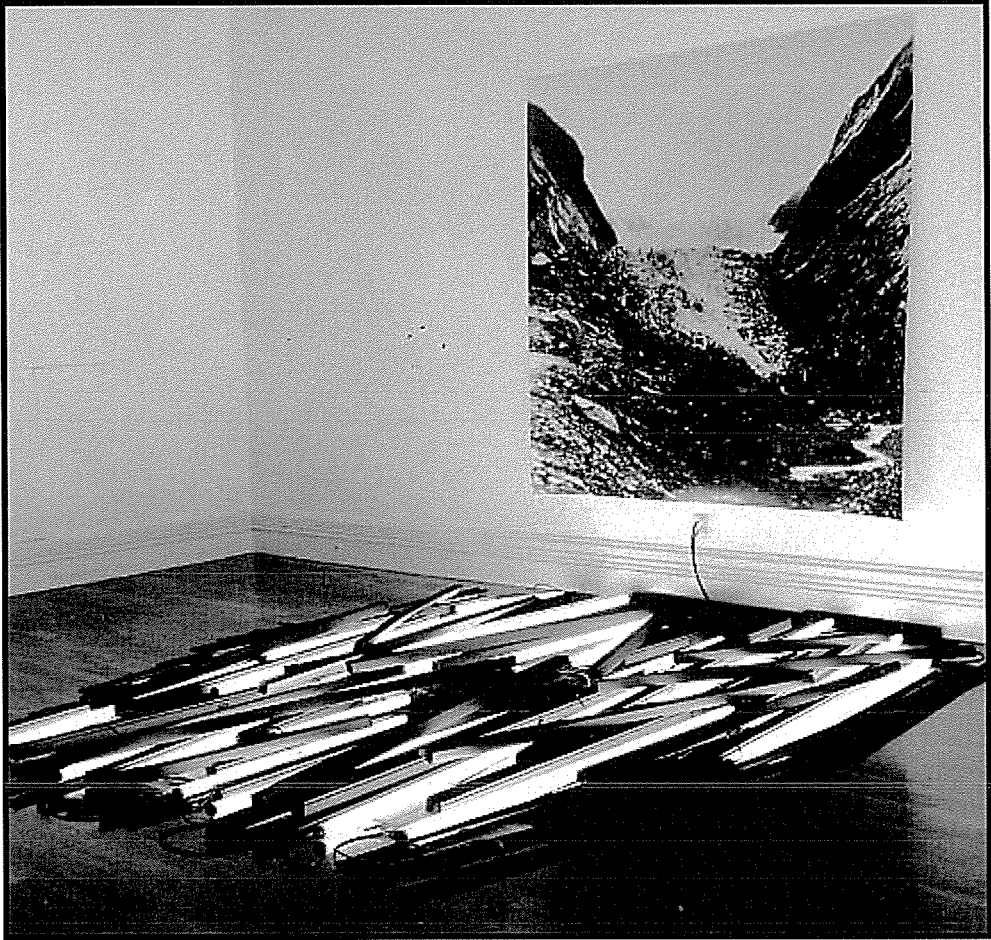


Figure 32. *Miles Away* (1988)

Fluorescent tubes and black and white photograph,
Dunedin Public Art Gallery.



Figure 33. *Green Piece II* (2003)

Five plastic bottles, fluorescent tube, Dunedin Public Art Gallery.

Reproduction courtesy of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery.

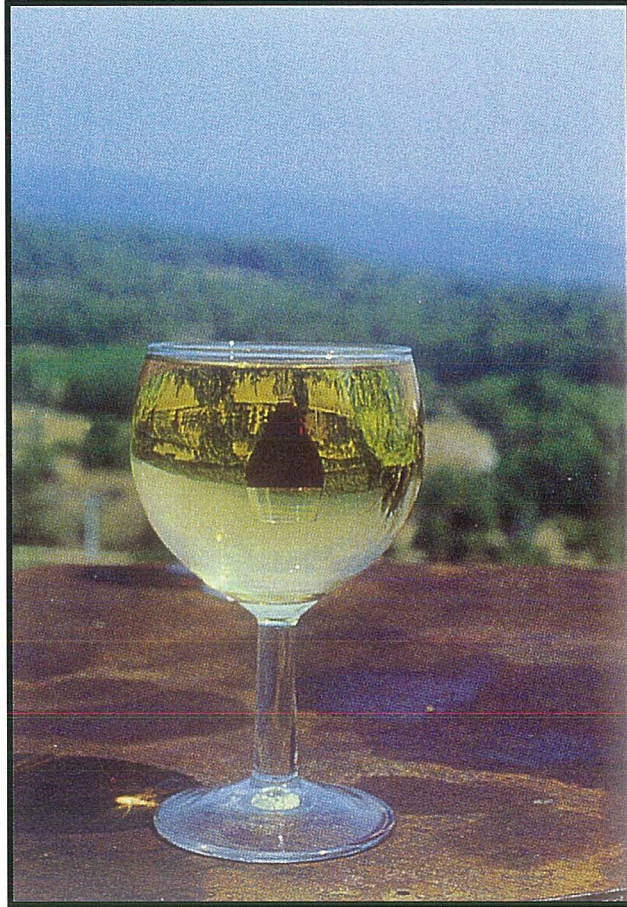


Figure 34. *Verre à vin / vin à verre* (1993)
Colour photograph, edition of 10, 75 x 50 cm.