

An honours research paper submitted to Queensland College of Art, Griffith University in partial fulfilment
of a Bachelor of Visual Art in Fine Art (honours) degree

IN WHAT WAYS CAN THE 'SUBLIME' BE RECONCILED WITH THE 'RIDICULOUS' IN THE
WORKS OF JULIAN OPIE AND ANDY WARHOL

CHRISTOPHER BENNIE

ART6008 QCA

HONOURS ART AND DESIGN RESEARCH PAPER

NOVEMBER 2002

Abstract

This essay examines whether an artworks appeal to the Kantian notion of the sublime can be reconciled with that of the absurd as theorised in existential philosophy. An analysis of two Contemporary artists is employed to link the notions of 'absurdity' and 'the sublime' to contemporary existence. Andy Warhol represents the absurd from the traditional existential viewpoint whilst Julian Opie represents the expansion of that concept in a contemporary context. This essay assumes that the 'ridiculous' is a contemporary version of the absurd as theorised in existential philosophy, and argues that contemporary existence, ridiculous as such, is sublime.

Opie's use of simplification and reduction of form induces a reading that is not reliant on representation. Rather instantaneous recognition occurs which lends the objects a quality of absoluteness similar to that required of Kant's interpretation of the sublime. Warhol's sublime disregard for traditional forms of printmaking technique invites an aspect of contingency within the presentation of iconic celebrities. The images reveal the absurdity of contemporary existence in their betrayal of the glamorised portrayal of popular stardom.

Statement of Originality

This is to certify that this essay has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the paper contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the paper itself.

Christopher Bennie
November 2002

Table of Contents

Abstract	2
Statement of originality	3
Table of Contents	4
List of Illustrations	5
Introduction	6
Section One: Explanation of Terms	9
Section Two: Andy Warhol	13
Section Three: Julian Opie	17
Conclusion	21
Bibliography	23

List of Illustrations

Example 1

Andy Warhol *White car crash 19 times* 1963

Source: Ratcliff, C. 1983, *Andy Warhol*, Abbeville Press, New York, p. 31.

Example 2

Andy Warhol *Optical car crash* 1962

Source: Ratcliff, C. 1983, *Andy Warhol*, Abbeville Press, New York, p. 28.

Example 3

Andy Warhol *Marilyn Diptych* 1962

Source: Honnef, K. 1991, *Andy Warhol 1928-1987 Commerce into Art*, Taschen, London, p. 42.

Example 4

Andy Warhol *Triple Elvis* 1962

Source: Ratcliff, C. 1983, *Andy Warhol*, Abbeville Press, New York, p. 32.

Example 5

Julian Opie *You are in a car and There is an office building* 1996

Source: Opie, J. 1997, *Julian Opie: Delhi, chandigarh, Bhopal, Calcutta, Bangalore, Mumbai*, British council, London, p. 14.

Example 6

Julian Opie *driving in the country* 1996

Source: Opie, J. 1997, *Julian Opie: Delhi, chandigarh, Bhopal, Calcutta, Bangalore, Mumbai*, British council, London, p. 5.

Example 7

Julian Opie *Imagine its raining* 1992

Source: *Julian Opie*, 1994, eds. L. Cooke, W. Herzongenrath, U. Loock, M. Newman & J. Roberts, Thames and Hudson, New York, p. 101.

Example 8

Julian Opie *Imagine you are driving (sculpture 2)* 1993

Source: *Julian Opie*, 1994, eds. L. Cooke, W. Herzongenrath, U. Loock, M. Newman & J. Roberts, Thames and Hudson, New York, p. 113.

Example 9

Julian Opie *Imagine you are driving (9 and 10)* 1993

Source: *Julian Opie*, 1994, eds. L. Cooke, W. Herzongenrath, U. Loock, M. Newman & J. Roberts, Thames and Hudson, New York, p. 106.

Example 10

Julian Opie *Imagine you are walking (wall painting 2)* 1993

Source: *Julian Opie*, 1994, eds. L. Cooke, W. Herzongenrath, U. Loock, M. Newman & J. Roberts, Thames and Hudson, New York, p. 99.

Introduction

This essay will examine whether an artwork's appeal to the Kantian notion of the sublime can be reconciled with that of the absurd as theorised in existential philosophy. In order to analyse such a reconciliation I will examine the work of two artists, one whose main body of work was produced around the 1960s whilst the other is representative of contemporary art today. The conceptual framework I shall base my investigation on will be guided chiefly by the theories of Kant, Lyotard and Satre. Kant (1790) will provide a basic understanding of the notion of the sublime whilst Lyotard (1989) will inform the expansion of this concept to include contemporary phenomena. Sartre (1956) and commentators on Existentialism, Cooper (1990) and Olsen (1962) will inform the notion of the absurd adopted in this essay. I will use the concepts drawn from the aforementioned theorists to investigate, compare and contrast the work of Julian Opie and Andy Warhol. This paper will argue that elements in contemporary art, such as representation, notions of pop culture, commercialisation, simplification and technique, reveal both a sublimity, and an absurdity, that is representative of contemporary existence. To distinguish it from the absurd as such I will call this contemporary form of commercialised absurdity 'the ridiculous'.

In short my central question is: in what ways can the 'sublime' be reconciled with the 'ridiculous' in the works of Julian Opie and Andy Warhol.

Section 1 will undertake an explanation of the terms 'sublime' and 'ridiculous'. Section 2 will comprise of an investigation into the work of Andy Warhol. It will focus on the notion that the 'ridiculous' is the modern version of the absurd. In this section I will argue that contemporary popular culture, in its phenomenological ontological sense, subsumes the individual by means of a persistent portrayal of desire. This section shows that Warhol unmask the façade implied by the presentation and glorification of popular culture, leaving a view of existence likened to the absurdity of which existential theory writes. Marilyn Monroe and Elvis Presley become, through Warhol's manipulation, symbols of an over glorified, synthetic and ridiculous existence.

Section 3 examines the imagery in Opie's work that, according to Kant, Lyotard and Sartre can be recognised as both sublime and ridiculous. This section presents the argument that Opie uses specific devices, such as simplicity and scale, to allude to a feeling that, according to the authorities, can be likened to the disorder and chaos as well as notions of magnitude requisite for the Kantian sublime. Likewise it will show that the simplicity of Opie's work, in its accordance to a formulaic logic and regularity, can be read as absurd.

Opie and Warhol have each been chosen for specific reasons. The examination of commercialisation in pop culture, evidenced in the work of Andy Warhol in his death series, is, in its acknowledgement of death, masked by the vulgarity of Day-Glo hyper-reality, the most obvious representation of the sublime/ridiculous dichotomy. Julian Opie's aesthetic has informed my studio practice profoundly. The simplification and reduction of form in his objects and paintings refer to an existence, that although appears complex nevertheless follows certain logical parameters. My studio research is motivated by a desire to see manifest recognition of the beauty or sublimity in all things. By that I mean, locating a sensation or experience of the 'sublime' within the commonplace. By placing commonplace objects in oppositional relationships I intend to subvert their hierarchical aesthetic value.

Issues surrounding contemporary artistic practice that deal specifically with aspects of the everyday and the overlooked are commonplace in contemporary theory. Patrick (2001), for example, argues that contemporary photographers, such as Stefan Banz, Wolfgang Tillmans, Thomas Demand and William Eggleston, present the everyday, the absurd and the ridiculous, in a new light. Often devoid of human form, their photographs reveal an ambiguous narrative. The viewer is confronted with a multitude of possible re-enactments, neither of which grant a specifically more truthful response. 'Taken in the context of what we know (and don't know) about this particular situation, none of the possible narratives can be particularly resolved' (Patrick, 2001, p.67). Closer to home artist Scott Redford employs a grungy aesthetic to his work that is similar to my own. Redford's black paintings employ objects from the consumer landscape such as shovels, records and axes. Often loaded with meaning these objects are stripped through Redford's washing them all in black paint. For Redford 'The cumulative construction of

the pieces invokes the tradition of collage. The artist's predilection for mass-produced and mass cultural artefacts recalls the pop aesthetic. The robust articulation of the surfaces alludes to the authoritative sweep of the Abstract Expressionist gesture, while the homogenising blackness of the works strives to level everything off into a Minimalist sobriety' (McAuliffe, 1993, p.75). No longer of utilitarian purpose these objects question the nature of the value previously assigned to them.

Section 1: Explanation of Terms

The explanation of 'the sublime' in regard to this essay need only concentrate on two aspects that Immanuel Kant, in *Critique of Judgement* (1790), declares requisite for an experience of sublimity. Firstly, the notion that an object must have magnitude. Secondly, that there must be an element of chaos and disorder and unpredictability. Kant explains the sublime as an *aesthetic* estimation of magnitude whereby judgement lends itself to the appreciation of an object in such a way that an instantaneous estimation of greatness assumes, over and above a standard of sense, that 'this' is absolutely great.

"In a judgement that without qualification describes anything as great, it is not merely meant that the object has magnitude, but greatness is ascribed to it pre-eminently among many other objects of a like kind, yet without the extent of this pre-eminence being determined" (Kant, 1952, p. 95).

To be absolutely great is to surpass comparable concepts and exist as a totality such that all remaining phenomenon are lesser and small. "The magnitude of phenomena is, in all case, utterly incapable of affording us any concept of magnitude and can instead only afford one that is based on comparison" (Kant, 1952, p. 95). This notion will be employed to deal with the work of Julian Opie in Section 3. It will argue that Opie presents objects such that they have only a vague representation of reality and become "comparable to [themselves] alone" (Kant, 1790, p. 97).

The second concept in Kant's *Critique of Judgement* (1790) relevant to this argument is the notion that sublimity arises in those aspects of experience that do not follow any logical formula or regularity. Rather, a feeling of the sublime arises "in its wildest and most irregular disorder and desolation" (Kant, 1790, p. 92). Such disorder and chaos is evident in the work of Andy Warhol and will be analysed in section 2.

This essay assumes that 'The ridiculous (in my terminology) is a contemporary version of the absurd as theorised by Sartre and Heidegger, *et al.* This form of contemporary absurdity presents a feeling of intensity that goes beyond our understanding of the historical explanation of the notion. Previously the

stuff of things, mere existence, was seen as absurd by the existentialist. Now television, cinema, mass media and entertainment franchises bombard our senses continuously. The very nature of things as absurd takes new form for the contemporary existentialist whom must now equate for consumerist domination and an out of control capitalist paradigm. In this era not only does the absurdity of being, in its traditional sense, present itself but is duplicated by the intensity of contemporary society. It is this intensity that I shall term 'the ridiculous'. In the following sections it will be shown that both Warhol and Opie can be seen to exemplify this notion of absurdity in their work.

Existentialism conceptualises the absurdity of existence within being in general and relates it to the concept of 'desire' 'Being' and 'freedom'. Existentialism holds that "every man, whether he (sic) explicitly recognises it or not, is marked by irreparable losses' (Olsen, 1969, p. 14). To be a conscious being "Man must desire in order to exist. To exist is to posit goals and pursue them...in the act of desiring (man) constitutes himself as incomplete and unfulfilled" (Olsen, 1962). For example, to be aware of ones surroundings is enough to suggest that either one's surroundings do not suit one's needs, one no longer feels comfortable and needs to make adjustments, or, one's surroundings are adequate and one no longer has necessities that require immediate attention. Both of these statements imply desirable circumstances. Thus desire is the foundation of Being which the Existentialist's argue is the root of unfulfilled happiness. Olsen in his account of Existentialism writes, "a life of frustration, insecurity, and painful striving itself generates values, and the values so generated are the only ones actually realisable and genuinely worthy of pursuit (Olsen, 1969, p. 14). The secret is then to abandon hope of obtaining happiness through the sequential fulfilment of goals in favour of living with a kind of reckless abandon or intensity. Put simply, "The secret of the greatest fruitfulness and the greatest enjoyment of existence is to live dangerously" (Neitsche, in Olsen, 1969, p. 18). Similarly according to Kant's interpretation, living dangerously as the existentialist suggests could imply a lifestyle that anticipates the chaos and disorder required to experience a sublime feeling. However, for the existentialist it is " not blindness to danger, but the intense awareness of danger that makes the blood mount (Olsen, 1969, p. 18).

The intensity of life the Existentialists recommend in response to an awareness of man's suffering and inability to find happiness, is the moment when one can comprehend absurdity the most. Olsen says, "The commanding value in life is intensity, as manifested in acts of free choice, individual self assertion, personal love, or creative work (Olsen, 1969, p. 19). What is of most importance to the understanding of absurdity in this argument is the belief that free choice is fundamental to the existentialists' notion of being. The opposite of free choice is the notion of programmed regularity and formulaic logic associated with 'ridiculous' contemporary existence. Through the doctrine of free choice man can be perceived as unpredictable. "For to say that man is free is just another way of saying that men always can and frequently do act in such a way as to render many important facets of their behaviour unpredictable" (Olsen, 1969, p. 24). The analysis of Julian Opie's and Andy Warhol's work in the following sections will employ and elaborate on this notion of contingency. Viewed from a Kantian perspective, contingency implies elements of chaos and disorder similar to that of the sublime. In the same way that forests organic and irregular growth can be likened to a sublime experience so can mans ability to surrender to the changes and unpredictable nature of existence. The ensuing freedom an individual assumes, according to the existentialist, is capable of inducing anxiety, that is freedom makes the viewer aware of the uncontrollability of their existence. "For some existentialists the primary object of anguish is the brute fact of being: for others, human particularity or individuality; for still others, human freedom (Olsen, 1969, p. 30). Antoine Roquentin, the hero of Sartre's 'Nausea', found absurdity in Being. The 'nausea' (anxiety) he gradually succumbs to throughout the course of the novel brings about a change in the appearance of things, leading him to write in his journal....

Existence had suddenly unveiled itself. It had lost its harmless appearance as an abstract category: it was the very stuff of things ... the diversity of things, their individuality, was only an appearance, a veneer. This veneer had melted, leaving soft, monstrous masses, in disorder – naked, with a frightening, obscene nakedness (Sartre, 1938, p183).

The experience of anxiety, evoked by an understanding of the process of desire and an acceptance of unmitigated unhappiness, is the platform from which to view the very substance of things as absurd. To

clarify, Olsen says, “anguish of being reveals the radical contingency and ultimate meaninglessness of both man and the world. To say that the *being of man* is radically contingent and ultimately meaningless is to say that man knows not why he exists and cannot rise to knowledge of his destiny” (Olsen, 1969, p. 77). Desire, then, is a mechanism which places value on objects and circumstances, that in light of the radical contingency and meaninglessness of man in the world, fails dismally to generate true meaning or sustain everlasting happiness.

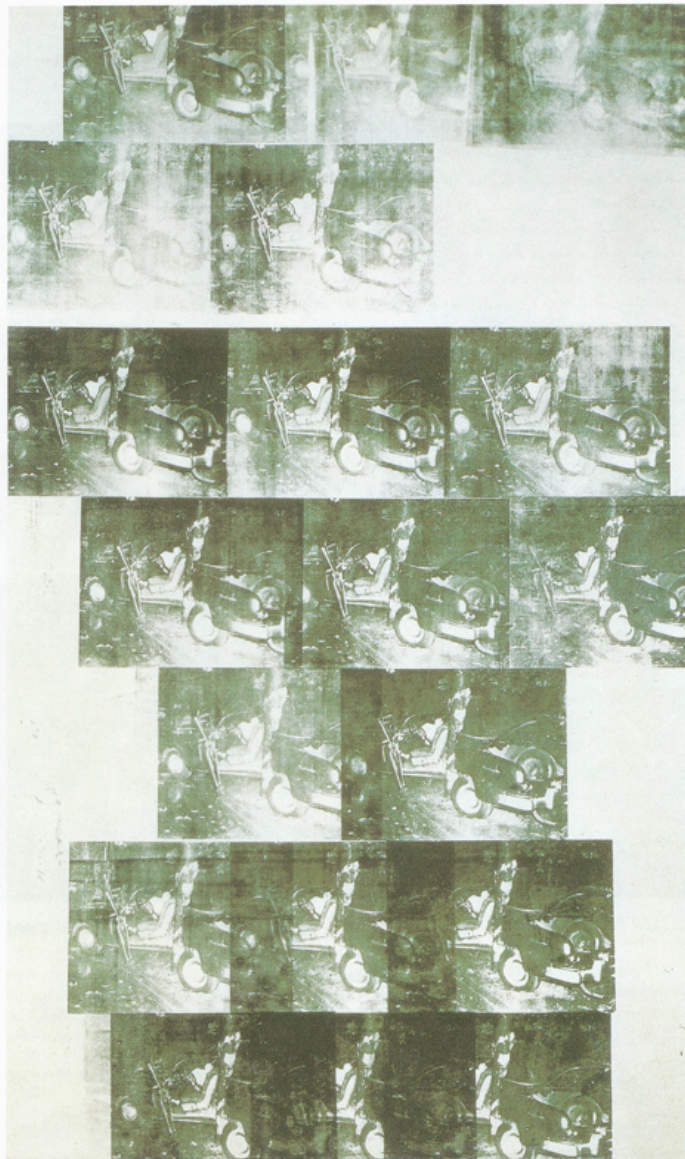
Section 2: Andy Warhol

In what we are want to call sublime in nature there is such absence of anything leading to particular objective principles and corresponding forms of nature, that it is its chaos and wildest and most irregular disorder and desolation that nature chiefly excites the ideas of the sublime (Kant, 1790, p. 92).

What can be interpreted as sublime in the work of Andy Warhol is technique. Lyotard writes, “the kind of perfection that can be demanded in the domain of *techné* isn’t necessarily a desirable attribute when it comes to sublime feeling” (Lyotard, 1989, p.201). Instead “slipping of the register of the image and the washing of the whole in colour” (Foster, 1997, p.120) is seen to agitate a sensation of the sublime by its intentional informality with regard to the tradition of printmaking technique.

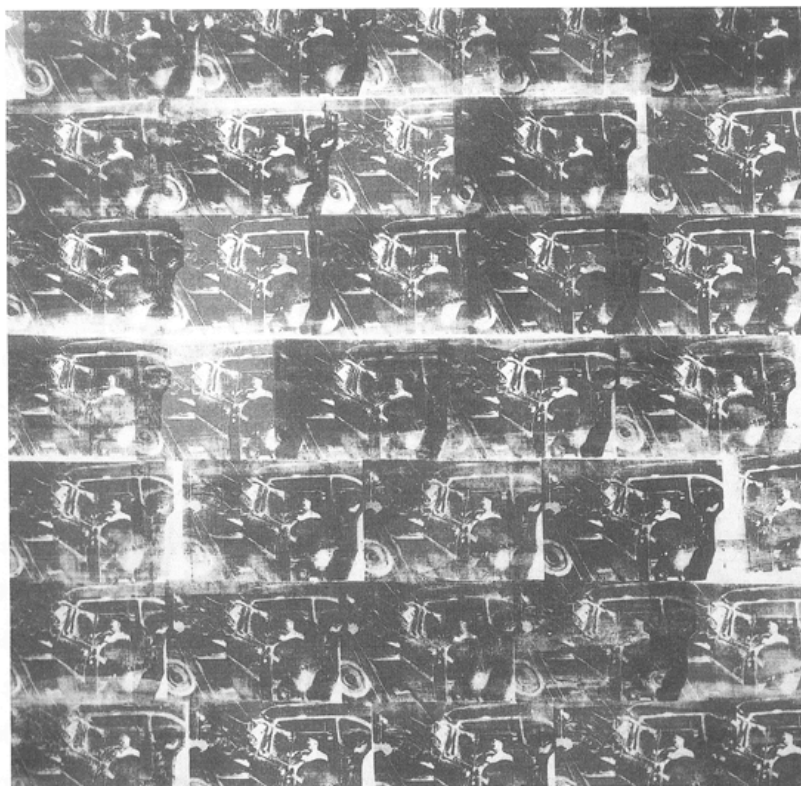
Foster (1997), in *Death in America* argues that for Warhol the “slipping and streaking, blanching and blanking, repeating and colouring of the images” (Foster, 1997, p.120) serves to make subjective, by technique alone, an encounter with the real previously muted by the de-saturating effect of repetition. “The more you look at the same exact thing, the more the meaning goes, and the better you feel about it” (Warhol and Hackett in Foster, 1997, p.120). For example, *White Car Crash 19 Times* 1963, (Example 1) and *Optical Car Crash* 1962 (Example 2) both portray photographic silkscreen images of car crashes. The first is a car bent in the middle; door flung open revealing a dead occupant sprawled across the front seat. The second image, albeit unclear, reveals a head on crash between two vehicles. Both images come from the ‘disaster’ series that also incorporate images of electric chairs and the thirteen most wanted men. They reveal a printing technique that “shows the image of an accident victim so blurred, so layered, so haphazardly repeated that the printing process itself seems to have suffered a catastrophe” (Ratcliff, 1983, p.39).

In *White car crash 19 times* 1963, the paintings overall affect is one of complacently removed objectiveness. Despite the concentrated dramatisation and intensity that the imagery contains, repetition, in this instance, serves to dilute its loaded content. What was previously powerful documentary



Example 1

ANDY WARHOL
 White car crash 19 times 1963
 Synthetic polymer, silkscreen on canvas
 368 x 211.5 cm



Example 2

ANDY WARHOL
Optical car crash 1962
Silkscreen on linen
82 x 82 in.

photography, reporting of a tragic motor incident, becomes, through Warhol's repetition, objectified. The initial feeling of shock, disgust or trauma that we experience when viewing the scene soon subsides as we witness the same image over and over again. Technique reinforces this purpose. Overlapping, blurring and fading maim the image to make it unrecognisable. Repetition serves at once to neutralise the content whilst technique, or rather lack of it, scars any sense of clean representation. The resulting image, washed in a faded muted green, becomes primarily about seeing. Likewise *Optical car crash* 1962 performs the same conceptual function. It differs to *White car crash 19 times* in terms of having a more constructed presentation. The ordered sequential grid like layout of the image on the canvas resembles a strip of black and white film. It is as if we are seeing the accident frame by frame. However the scene is just the same repeated over and over again. This film advances in pragmatic slow motion, never changing, never ending. Numbed by its inoculating effect, such a presentation affords us content that is rendered meaningless, absurd even.

The random and indiscriminate nature with which the image is applied to the canvas corresponds to Kant's (1790) notion of 'chaos and most irregular disorder'. This is especially pertinent in light of what Lyotard explains in *The Sublime and the Avant Garde* (1989). He writes, "by mediating on the theme of sublimity and of indeterminacy, meditation about works of art imposes a major change on *techné* and the institutions linked to it" (Lyotard, 1989, p.197). Lyotard assumes that technique is generated by the establishment of schools, academies and programmes, such that works were placed "under multiple regulation" and enforced the standard that "seeks to determine what has already been thought, written, painted, or socialised in order to determine what hasn't been" (Lyotard, 1989, p.197). For example a well-groomed French garden highlights a remarkable sense of control. Similarly a well registered print follows the principles of technique laid down by the aristocracies of history. Such perfection and order does not, however, reveal the immensity of uncontrollability of which both Lyotard and Kant consider sublime. It is precisely that which we have no control over, a sense of indeterminacy, of chaos and disorder, that not only offers us a feeling of sublimity but evokes a sense of the absurd. Nature is then more suited, in its unpredictability and radical contingency, to be more sublime than the regularity and order evidenced in any pruned garden. Likewise a Warhol image, with its deliberate mis-registration, offers a displacement of

content, that is arguably more sublime than the perfection granted of a technically precise print. What was previously an intentional representation of pop culture, becomes, through varying degrees of displacement and inaccurate registration on offer in Warhol's printing, more of a social critique, evidencing the system of desire that perpetuates our motives.

Marilyn Diptych 1963 (Example 3) is a double canvas made from a photographic silkscreen reproduction of Marilyn Monroe. The left panel, coloured in a kind of over-intensified luminosity, is reminiscent of hand coloured movies gone wrong. The right panel, stark black and white in comparison, is more raw and haphazard in its presentation. Whilst neat and tight in terms of registration, the printing process lacks, in the right panel, consistent inking. Instead, fading and smudging prove to render the image unrecognisable in some instances. This right panel contrasts to the brightness, clarity and neatness of the left panel, which evidences a much higher standard of technicality. The left panel appears to exonerate the glorification and elevation of pop cultural stardom. In that respect *Marilyn Diptych* can be read as both altarpiece and a tragic sentimentality, not due so much to the personal life of the star depicted but to the subjective tragedy defined by the presentation of absurd contemporary existence. The fading and erasing evidenced on the right panel evokes a kind of loss, similar to the unsatisfied desire the existentialists claim perpetuates our being. It is as though the pop iconoclasm that Marilyn represents shrouded in Day-Glo hyper-reality, and portraying an epithet of pop existence, is unmasked on the right, revealing an empty, scarred and tragic portrayal of our Being.

According to Foster, content, in its referential capacity, is as important in Warhol as the simulacral interpretation generated by the de-saturating effect of repetition (1997). Whilst technique might reveal sublimity, content for Warhol addresses the absurdity of contemporary existence. Content is representational, it is the device an artwork utilises to refer "to iconographic themes or real things in the world" (Foster, 1997, p.117). I would argue that such a statement constitutes a reference to objects subjectively possessed of meaning. In an economy of what the existentialists would call meaninglessness, desire projects itself as hope and is transferred to such iconographic themes and real things in the world as a projection of value. In Warhol, the meaningless anonymity of the mass subject is presented as an



Example 3

ANDY WARHOL
Marilyn diptych 1962
dimensions and materials unknown

essentially accessible mass icon in the form of 'iconic celebrity'. Marilyn Monroe (Example 3) and Elvis Presley (Example 4) parade unmittingly before us as our own projections of hope. Fifteen minutes of fame translates, in a Warhol print, to a frozen hermetic desire that is de-saturated and muted revealing emptiness. Foster in *Death and America* writes, "Imbued within the bodies of these public figures are prosthesis for our own mutant desirability (Foster, 1997, p.124).

Triple Elvis 1962 for example renders instantly a fuzziness and destabilisation of the nature of glorification, of Hollywood success. Made in the same photographic silkscreen process as *Optical car crash* and *White car crash 19 times*, *Triple Elvis* has literally been printed three times, one on top of the other. Warhol's lack of technique reveals a blurred, fuzzy, hallucinogenic representation of the King that offers, perhaps, a glimpse of the seedy underbelly often associated with celebrity Hollywood. Like *Marilyn Diptych*, *Triple Elvis* presents popular stardom dissimilar to its regular portrayal. No longer an image of marketable success and accomplishment, Warhol's take on Elvis speaks to the importance such imagery acquires.



Example 4

ANDY WARHOL
Triple Elvis 1962
Silkscreen on canvas
82 x 42 in.

Section 3

The beautiful seems to be regarded as a presentation of an indeterminate concept of understanding, the sublime as a presentation of an indeterminate concept of reason. Hence the delight is in the former case coupled with the representation of *Quality*, but in this case with that of *Quality* (Kant, 1790, p.91).

As far as Warhol's evocation of the sublime depends on a disregard for technique. Julian Opie, I would argue, invites into his objects and paintings an aesthetic estimation of magnitude that Kant explains is requisite for a sublime experience. Opie is a contemporary British artist who produces objects, scenes and settings derived specifically from daily life. His simplified cars, trees, buildings and people are modelled directly from the world, "not with individual, specific objects but more as an example of something" (Kurjakovic & Lamml, 1998, p.1). Opie's work can then be seen as being neither specific nor generic, instead he presents "an experience of looking, rather than [me] having made something and presenting it to be pondered or admired or rejected" (Kurjakovic & Lamml, 1998, p.1). He creates "room sized installations where the walls act as backdrops, and the floor space becomes a stage, packed not only with people, but also buildings, trees and cars" (Coles, 2002, p.74) that serve to decentre our experience of reality in relation to the very objects we are familiar with. Opie's installations (see Example 6, 7) not only reveal an oddness of scale that permeate throughout his objects. They also highlight the interchangeability and indeterminacy available in the way the work is presented. Example 5 shows two simplified life sized cars, made of painted wood, occupying the space of the gallery. Painted directly onto the gallery's wall is an office tower. The relationship between the cars and the office tower is not in naturalistic proportions, since the scale of the building is far less than that of the cars. What occurs is more like more compressed perspective. It might be said that in the distance there is an office block, in the foreground is a road. Lynne Cooke (1994), in *Rehearsing Realities* describes Opie's objects as "instantly graspable, the straightforwardness of their construction accords with the details of their iconography, so familiar as to be accommodated almost without attention" (Cooke, 1994, p.66). Accordingly it is precisely the instantaneous recognition that they afford that offers them an experience of sublimity. Kant (1790), in *The analytic of the Sublime* writes "in a judgement that without qualification describes anything as great, it



Example 5

JULIAN OPIE

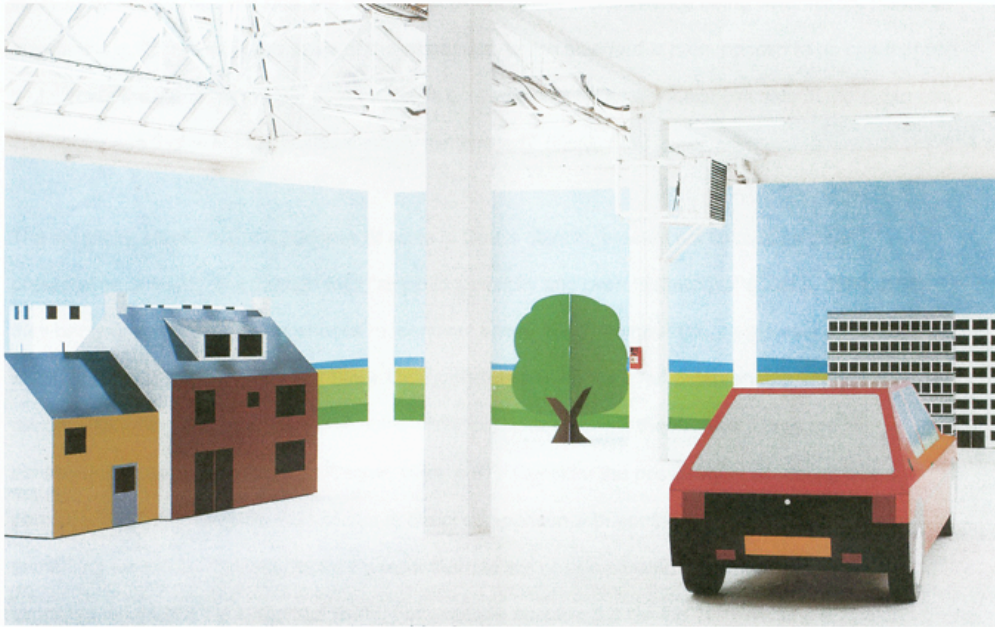
You are in a car (Subaru and Volkswagon)

oil based paint on wood

There is an office building (1-6)

water based paint on wall

Bob van Orsouw Gallery, Zurich 1996

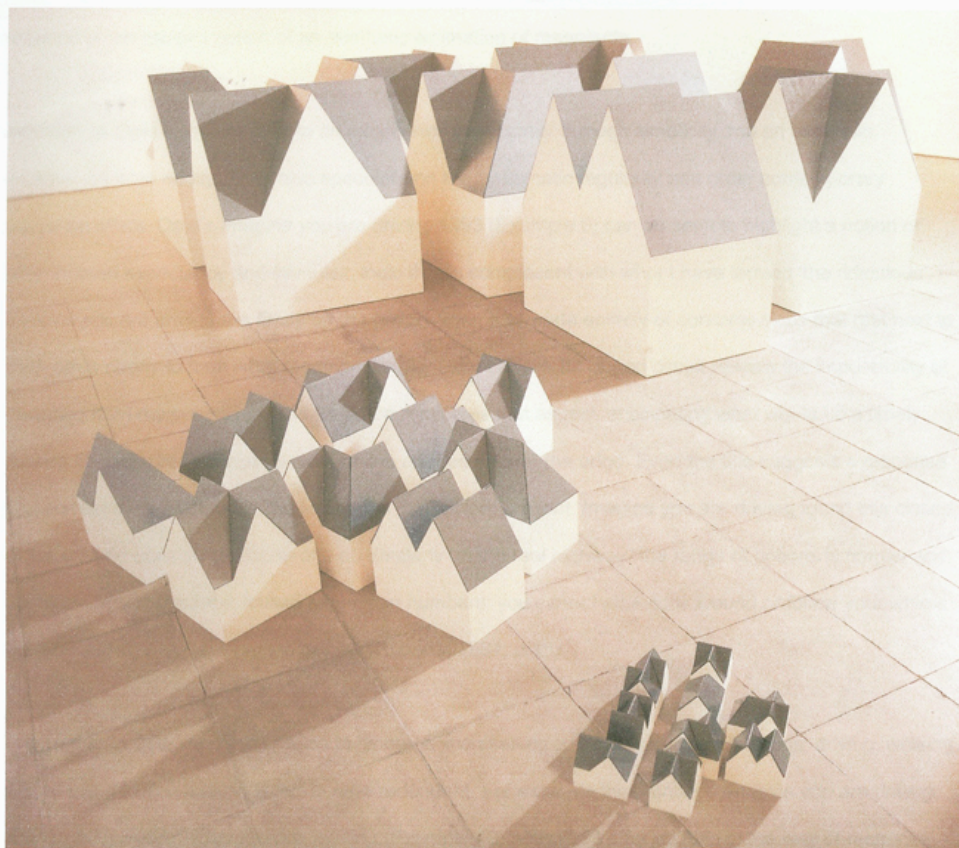


Example 6

JULIAN OPIE
 Driving in the country
 Installation view CCC Tours 1996

is not merely meant that the object has a magnitude, but greatness is ascribed to it pre-eminently among many other objects of a like kind, yet without the extent of this pre-eminence being determined. Hence a standard is certainly laid at the basis of the judgement, which standard is presupposed to be one that can be taken as the same for everyone, but which is available only for an aesthetic estimate of the greatness, and not for one that is logical (mathematically determined)” (Kant, 1790, p.96).

The simplicity, blankness and oddness of scale in Opie’s objects, present not so much a clear presentation of reality, but through a “stripped simplicity and overt hollowness” (Cooke, 1994, p.66) become simulacral. Instantaneous recognition: based not on comparison, or representation, is, I would argue a sublime experience. Since Opie’s objects have neither “an establishable, measurable relationship to any single prototype” (Cooke, 1994, p.67), or amongst themselves. “They are, in consequence strangely scaleless” (Cooke, 1994, p.67). Consider the possibility of assuming that a particular building is large. Is this not due to direct comparison with another building or at least with something we are familiar with. In Opie’s work there exists no comparable similarities other than a simplified representation to the real world. For example *Imagine it is raining* 1992 (Example 7) is an installation comprised of three groups of painted wooden objects. Each group differs in scale and consists of nine separate objects. The shapes, although geometric and simplified, cause a subjective referential response inclined towards the notion of a house. However, such a vague representation of reality borders on abstraction. In terms of scale we cannot decipher which is larger because we have no point of reference to estimate a true size. Had their representation been more precise we could estimate a comparison based on our knowledge of what a house looks like. In this case non-specificity offers no comparison other than to itself. Cooke (1994) is certainly correct here, the objects in *Imagine it is raining* become “instantly graspable”, and their reference to the world is sufficiently removed so as to be “accommodated without attention”. According to Kant “the estimation of the magnitude of the fundamental measure must, therefore, consist merely in the immediate grasp which we can get at it in intuition” (Kant, 1790, p.98). Imprecise representation, for Opie, affords an intuitive response based on the objectiveness the work assumes. Comparison to other objects becomes impossible. Opie therefore plays on perception, recognition and knowledge, strangely inverting what we know. His objects, comparable to themselves alone, I would argue, become sublime. Instantaneous



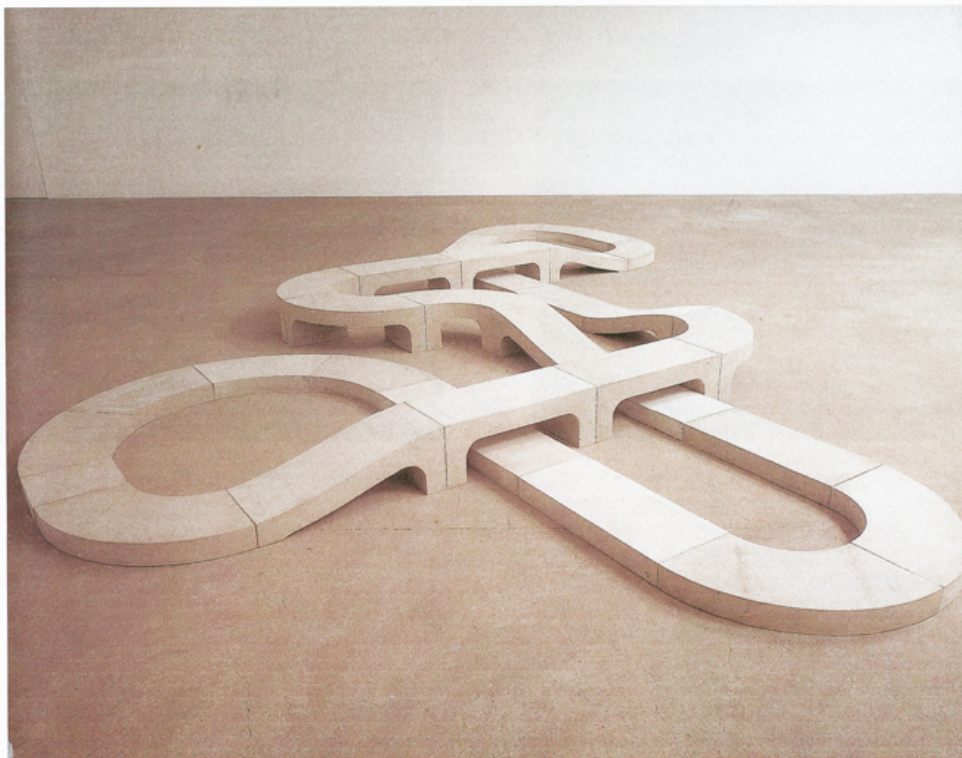
Example 7

JULIAN OPIE
Imagine it's raining 1992
 gloss paint on plywood
 27 units in 3 groups
 group 1 55 x 48 x 14 cm
 group 2 161 x 144 x 40 cm
 group 3 500 x 430 x 122 cm

recognition is likened to the intuitive response required of the Kantian notion of an aesthetic estimation of magnitude.

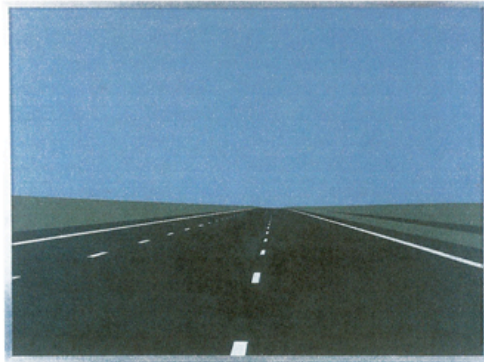
As much as Opie's objects refer to an experience of sublimity through simplicity and an aesthetic detachment from reality. They also speculate on the systematic regularity and order contemporary existence offers. Opie's *Imagine you are driving* 1993 (Example 8) can be seen to highlight a notion of programmed expectancy and formulaic logic that is complacent with what I have termed 'the ridiculous'. *Imagine you are driving* sits firmly on the gallery floor, it is made entirely of concrete slabs that rest next to each other neatly to form what resembles a giant slot-car set. Its closed circuit reveals the impossibility of deviating from the programme. Its elevation reinforces that aspect, anticipating what would be a timely demise should a protagonist step out of line and teeter over the edge. Even the title suggests a response that corresponds explicitly to the limitations the artwork present. Imagine you are driving round this closed circuit with no possible deviation or exit. Similarly on the real highway "the range of options is narrow and decisions are, in essence, limited to junction numbers: you cannot stop, turn around or follow your whims but only exit at those designated points" (Roberts, 1994, p.45).

The viewer in Opie's work is enticed to 'imagine' themselves occupying certain situations, driving, walking etc. where decision making is made near redundant. For example the paintings *Imagine you are driving* (Example 9) and *Imagine you are walking* (Example 10) both 1993 offer nothing in the way of response other than what is implied. *Imagine you are driving* 1993 is a series of paintings depicting a view of like that of gazing from a car window. The road ahead appears long and straight rendered in perfect perspective. There is no option of turning in this vista, as the road intersects the horizon without a curve. *Imagine you are walking* 1993 is a large canvas painted in a minimal style consisting of four flat colours. Its use of perspective acts similarly to *Imagine you are driving*, but holds the promise of some slight decision making. A left turn here or a right turn there. Nevertheless the viewer is still constricted in their decision making due to the options available within the system, in this case a maze like structure.



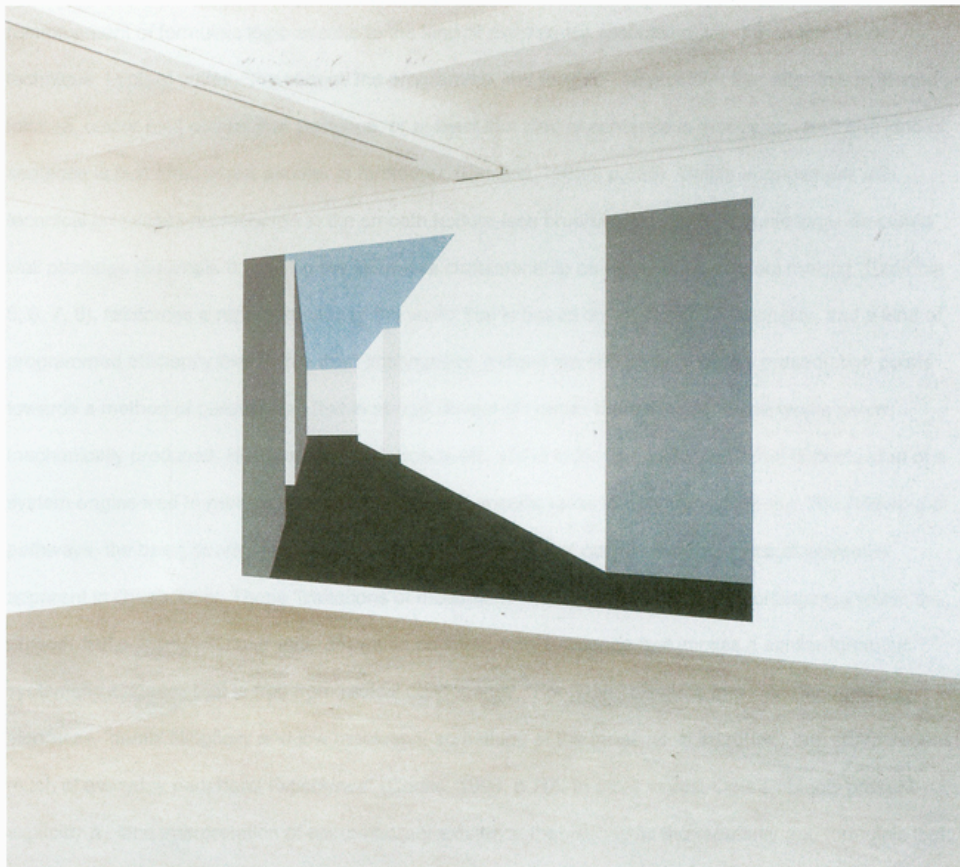
Example 8

JULIAN OPIE
Imagine you are driving (sculpture 2) 1993
concrete



Example 9

JUILAN OPIE
Imagine you are driving (9 and 10) 1993
acrylic on wood glass and aluminium
93 x 123 x 3 cm



Example 10

JULIAN OPIE
Imagine you are walking (wall painting 2) 1993
emulsion paint
dimensions variable

Where Warhol's deliberate disregard for printing technique invites a sense of the Kantian sublime. Opie's reinforcement of formulaic logic speaks to the kind of expectancy associated with the teachings of technique. Lyotard writes, "the school, the programme, the project – all proclaim that after this sentence [picture, colour etc.] comes that sentence, or at least that kind of sentence is mandatory, that one kind of sentence is permitted whilst another is forbidden" (Lyotard, 19989, p.195). Opie's engagement with technical processes represented in the smooth texture-less brushwork evidenced in his large simplified wall paintings (Example 9, 10). To the seamless craftsmanship on display in his object making (Example 5, 6, 7, 8), reinforces a representation of the world that is based on regularity, functionality, and a kind of programmed efficiency that is free from contingency. Indeed the slickness of Opie's presentation points towards a method of construction that is almost devoid of human hand. Rather, these works seem mechanically produced. His cars, buildings, roads etc. stand in for the kind of logic that is demanded of a system engineered to perform certain functions and specific tasks to optimum efficiency. The following of pathways, the being confronted with junctions, the limitations of options available, are all elements apparent in Opie's work. These 'limitations of movement' reveal not only a lack of contingency within the artwork, but a 'ridiculousness' inherent within contemporary existence that implies a similar formulaic systematic exigency that is free from radical contingency. "For [Opie] discerns in a kind of numb aloofness, 'dumb' simplicity and low resolution, something of the measure of adequacy that characterises much of everyday peripheral experience" (Cooke, 1994, p.70). In other words, Opie's objects present explicitly a bland interpretation of contemporary existence that highlights the regularity and formulaic logic that such a 'ridiculous' existence offers.

Conclusion

To conclude it can be seen that in dealing with a specific presentation of contemporary existence certain methods, to varying degrees, evoke notions of not only sublimity but also an absurdity or ridiculousness within that existence. This is primarily due to devices such as technique and content.

Negation of traditional forms of technique ruptures the notion of expectancy that keep it in place, Combined with content that presents a reflection of contemporary existence, anti-technique presents a view of reality that is critical of its establishment. Warhol's disregard for traditional printmaking technique, invites an aspect of contingency within the presentation of iconographic popular culture that can be likened to the chaos and disorder requisite in Kant's notion of the sublime. Moreover Warhol's scarred, defaced and blurred representations of iconic celebrities such as Marilyn Monroe and Elvis Presley offer a view of contemporary life based not on a clear presentation: one adorned with adoration and worship. But rather his defaced images of stars reveal an understanding of the mutant desirability on offer within contemporary society. Such presentation, in terms of existential philosophy, highlights the degree to which value is placed on objects and situations. Absurdity, based on the projection of value in an economy of meaningless existence, reveals itself through the scarring and maiming of iconic celebrities. A disappearing Marilyn and a cross-eyed triple Elvis replace the glamorised representation of popular stardom, one witnessed in magazines, on billboards, and in the cinema. Revealing through a disrespectful approach to traditional forms of art making the absurdity of daily life.

Whilst the ridiculousness associated with contemporary existence is consistently associated with a notion of programmed efficiency, ie through the principle of technique. A sense of sublimity can occasionally slip amongst the order and systematic regularity that such an existence establishes. The Kantian notion of chaos and disorder negates the predictable path of expectancy technique dispels. Likewise an apprehension of absoluteness or totality ruptures any sense of accountability that formulaic logic contains. Opie presents the viewer with a view of contemporary existence replete with formulaic efficiency. Order,

based on the principles of regularity, function and purpose, is given a hierarchy. At once revealing an absurdity that, according to existential theory, offers no choice or any decision-making or contingency. As well as a sense of sublimity, whereby the stripped down simplicity and overt hollowness of his work reveals a reading that is arguably sublime as a result of their absoluteness and totality as objects of themselves.

Both Opie and Warhol present us with interpretations of contemporary existence that are at once loaded representations as well as blatantly ordinary aesthetic surfaces. Where Warhol speaks to the absurdity associated with the nature of desire as manifested into popular iconographic figures and imagery. Opie points to the ridiculousness of contemporary existence as he sees it pursuing a kind of formulaic regularity. A sense of sublimity is evidenced for both artists in their separate interpretations of existence, For Warhol, sublimity occurs in the haphazard and disrespectful nature he applies his imagery on to the canvas. For Opie, it exists in presenting the quotidian, the blatantly ordinary, in such a way as to render it simulacral.

Bibliography

- Ackerman, F. Goodwin, & Kiron, N. D. (eds.), 1995, 'The Consumer Society', Island Press, California.
- Benezra, N. 1999, 'The misadventures of beauty,' in *Regarding Beauty*, eds. N. Benezra, O. M. Visa & A. C. Danto, Smithsonian Institute, pp. 17-38.
- Burke, E. 1987, 'A Philosophical Enquirey into the origin of our ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful', ed. Jane T. Boulton, Basil Blackwell. London.
- Butler, R. 1996, 'Scott Redford', in *Surf or Die*, ed. Peter Hallinan, Art and Oceania Publications, Gold Coast, Queensland. pp. 119-120
- Butler, R. 1997, 'No Way Out,' in *Scott Redford; Guy in the Dunes*, eds. IMA, Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane, Queensland, pp. 29-37
- Carter, D. & Roskill, M. 1983, 'Visual Lying: On the notion of falsehood in art and photography,' in *Truth and Falsehood in Visual Images*, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst.
- Chapman, C. 1997, 'Something About Desire,' in *Scott Redford; Guy in the Dunes*, eds. IMA, Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane, Queensland, pp. 20-25.
- Clarke-Cooke, B. 1996, 'Painting as Phenomenon', in *Surf or Die*, ed. Peter Hallinan, Art and Oceania Publications, Gold Coast, Queensland
- Coles, A. 2002, 'Julian Opie: Feel Good Landscapes', *Artext*, no. 76, Spring 2002, pp. 70-77.
- Cooke, L. 1994. 'Rehearsing Realities: Julian Opie's Scaled Buildings,' in *Julian Opie*, eds. L. Cooke, W. Herzogenrath, U. Loock, M. Newman & J. Roberts, Thames and Hudson, New York, pp. 64-75.
- Cooper, D. 1990, 'Angst, Death and Absurdity', in *Existentialism*, Blackwell Publishers, USA, pp. 127-152.
- Eco, U. 1990, *Travels in Hyperreality*, in *Travels in Hyperreality*, trans. William Weaver, Harcourt Brace and Company, London, pp. 3- 58.
- Elkins, J. 2001, *Pictures and Tears*, Routledge, New York and London.

Foster, H. 1997, 'Death in America', in *Who is Andy Warhol*, eds. C. MacCabe, M. Francis, & P. Wollen, St. Edmundsbury Press, London.

Grayson, R. 2000, 'Scott Redford: Starman,' *Eyeline*, no. 42, autumn/winter 2000, pp.37-41

Helmrich, M. 1996, 'The Gloss and the Veil: a sublime wasting in the black "paintings" of Scott Redford', in *Surf or Die*, ed. Peter Hallinan, Art and Oceania Publications, Gold Coast, Queensland.

Helmrich, M. 2000, 'Scott Redford: Surf Paintings/ Futurist City,' *Eyeline*, no.43, spring 2000, pp. 39-40.

Honnet, K. 1991, 'Andy Warhol 1928-1987 Commerce into Art, Taschen, London.

Kant, I. 1952, 'The Analytic of the Sublime', in *Critique of Judgement*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Kool – Want, C. 1999, 'The Sublime Now', in *Sublime: the darkness and the light*, Hayward Gallery Publishing, London, pp.40-49.

Kurjakovic, D. & Lamml, D. 1998, *Julian Opie Interview*, [Online], Available, <http://www.jca-online.com/opie.html>, [2002, April 4]

Loock, U. 1994, 'Beyond the Architectural', in *Julian Opie*, eds. L. Cooke, W. Herzogenrath, U. Loock, M. Newman & J. Roberts, Thames and Hudson, New York, pp. 34-40

Lyotard, J. F. 1989, 'The Sublime and the Avant Garde', in *The Lyotard Reader*, ed. Andrew Benjamin, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, UK, pp. 196-211

Lyotard, J. F. 1994, *Lessons on the analytic of the sublime*, Stanford University Press, Stanford California.

McAuliffe, C. 1997, 'Playing the Margins: Scott Redford as a regional artist', in *Scott Redford; Guy in the Dunes*, eds. IMA, Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane, Queensland.

McAuliffe, C. 1993, 'The Blank Generation? Monochrome in the Eighties and Beyond', in *Surf or Die*, ed. Peter Hallinan, Art and Oceania Publications, Gold Coast, Queensland. Pp. 73-78.

McAuliffe, C. 1994, 'Scott Redford: Untitled (the critic decamps)', in *Surf or Die*, ed. Peter Hallinan, Art and Oceania Publications, Gold Coast, Queensland. Pp. 81-86

- Moos, D. 2001, 'The Eggleston Effect', *Art and text*, no. 74, August-October, pp. 58-63
- Newman, M. 1994, 'Operation Atopia', in *Julian Opie*, eds. L. Cooke, W. Herzogenrath, U. Loock, M. Newman & J. Roberts, Thames and Hudson, New York, pp. 76-87
- Olsen, R. 1962, *An introduction to existentialism*, Dover Publications, New York.
- Opie, J. 1997, *Julian Opie: Delhi, Chandigarh, Bhopal, Calcutta, Bangalore, Mumbai*, British Council, London.
- Patrick, K. 2000, 'Thomas Demand: review', *Contemporary Visual Arts*, issue 33, p. 62.
- Patrick, K. 2000, 'Sites of Trespass: on the notion of the narrative', *Contemporary Visual Arts*, issue 33, pp. 42-47.
- Ratcliff, C. 1983, *Andy Warhol*, Abbeville Press, New York
- Roberts, J. 1994, 'Spam for Tea,' in *Julian Opie*, eds., L. Cooke, W. Herzogenrath, U. Loock, M. Newman & J. Roberts, Thames and Hudson, New York, pp. 42-48.
- Rohner, C. 'Stefan Banz: Gulliver', *Contemporary Visual Arts*, issue 29, p. 55.
- Sartre, J. P. 1938, 'Nausea', Penguin, Great Britain
- Sartre, J. P. 1956, 'Being and Nothingness: an essay in phenomenological ontology', trans. H. E. Barnes, Citadel Press, New York.
- Schiller, F. *On the Sublime*, [online], Available: <http://www.studiocleo.com./librarie/schiller/essaymain.html> [2002 April, 10].
- Schubert, R. *SR/RS The Scott Redford Interview*, [online], Available: <http://www.arts.monash.edu.au/visarts/globe/srxt.html> [2002, March 20].
- Schubert, R. 1996, 'Learn by Heart', in *Surf or Die*, ed. Peter Hallinan, Art and Oceania Publications, Gold Coast, Queensland, pp. 135-138.
- Thompson, J. 1999, 'The Sublime Moment', in *Sublime: the darkness and the light*, Hayward Gallery Publishing, London, pp. 20-29.

