

Visual Culture/ Material Culture

Overview

1. Image Commentary Overview
2. Visual Culture Concepts and Examples
 - Ronald Reagan Case Study
3. Medieval Visual/Material Cultures
4. Visual/Material Cultures Case Studies
 - Plastic in US Culture in 1950s
 - Concrete vs Brick in Late-20th-Century Britain

1. Image Commentary Overview

Checklist

◆ CONTENT

◆ MEDIUM and
MATERIALS

◆ CONTEXT

◆ PRODUCER(S)

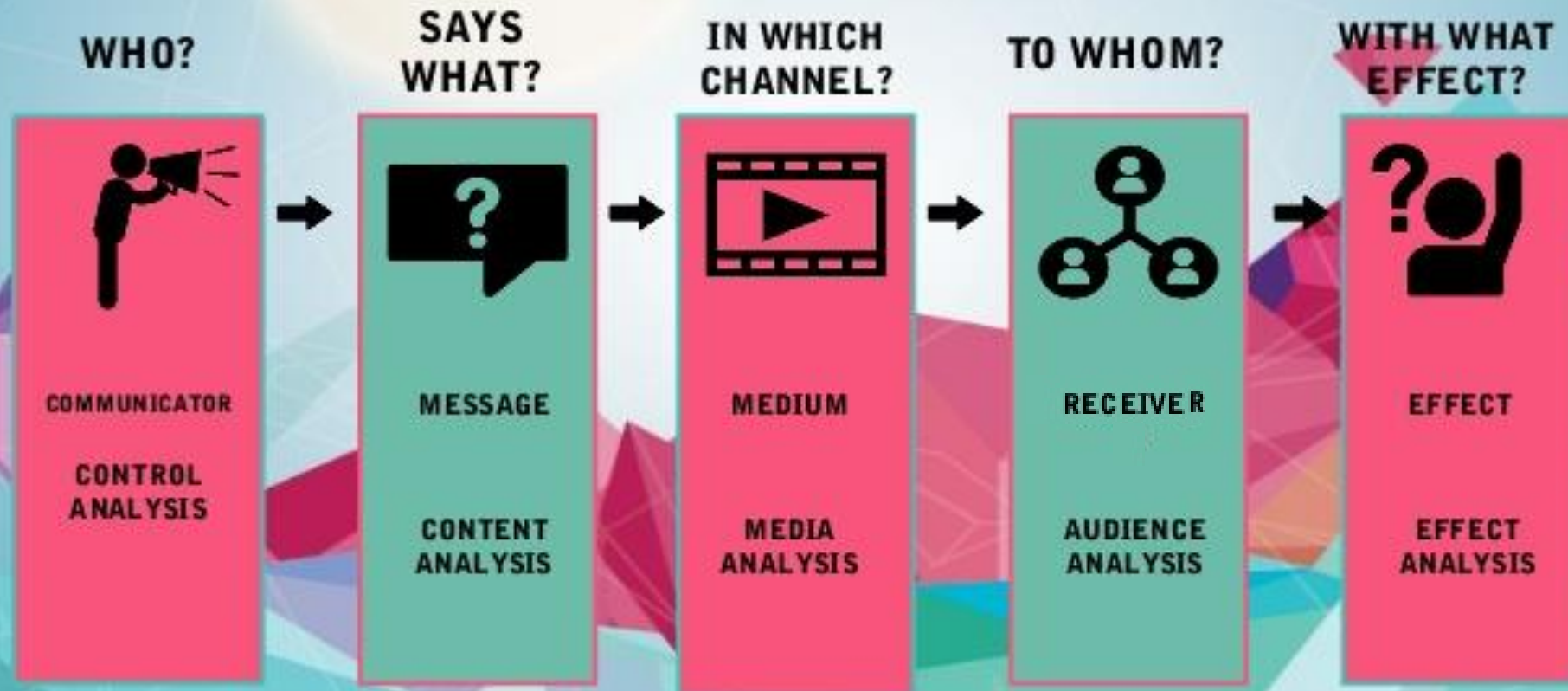
◆ SIGNIFICANCE

◆ AUDIENCE(S) and/or
SETTING

THEORY HOW DOES IT WORK?

THE LASSWELL FORMULA

"A convenient way to describe an act of communication is to answer the following questions..."





Harold Lasswell (1902–1972)

Lasswell's Model of Communication '5Ws'

"Who says What to
Whom in Which
Channel with What
Effect".

To which as historians,
we should add **WHEN**
AND WHERE

CHECKLIST

Who says What to Whom in Which Channel with What Effect, When and Where

- ◊ **WHO** = discussion of the **PRODUCER(S)** of the visual source (if known)
- ◊ **WHAT** = description and explanation of the visual source's **CONTENT**
- ◊ **TO WHOM** = discussion of intended **AUDIENCE(S)** for the visual source and/or the **SETTING** in which it is displayed or consumed
- ◊ **WHICH CHANNEL** = discussion of the **MEDIUM** in which the visual source was produced and the **MATERIALS** used
- ◊ **WHEN and WHERE** = discussion of the historical and geographical **CONTEXT** in which the source was originally made
- ◊ **WHAT EFFECT** = *ANALYSIS* of all of the above and a discussion of the source's overall **SIGNIFICANCE**

MATERIALITIES

- ◆ Study of the matter ('stuff') that things (everything) is made up of
- ◆ Significance of certain types of materials and how they impact upon humans (and vice versa)

2. Visual Culture Concepts and Examples

**What is
Visual
Culture?**

What is Visual Culture?

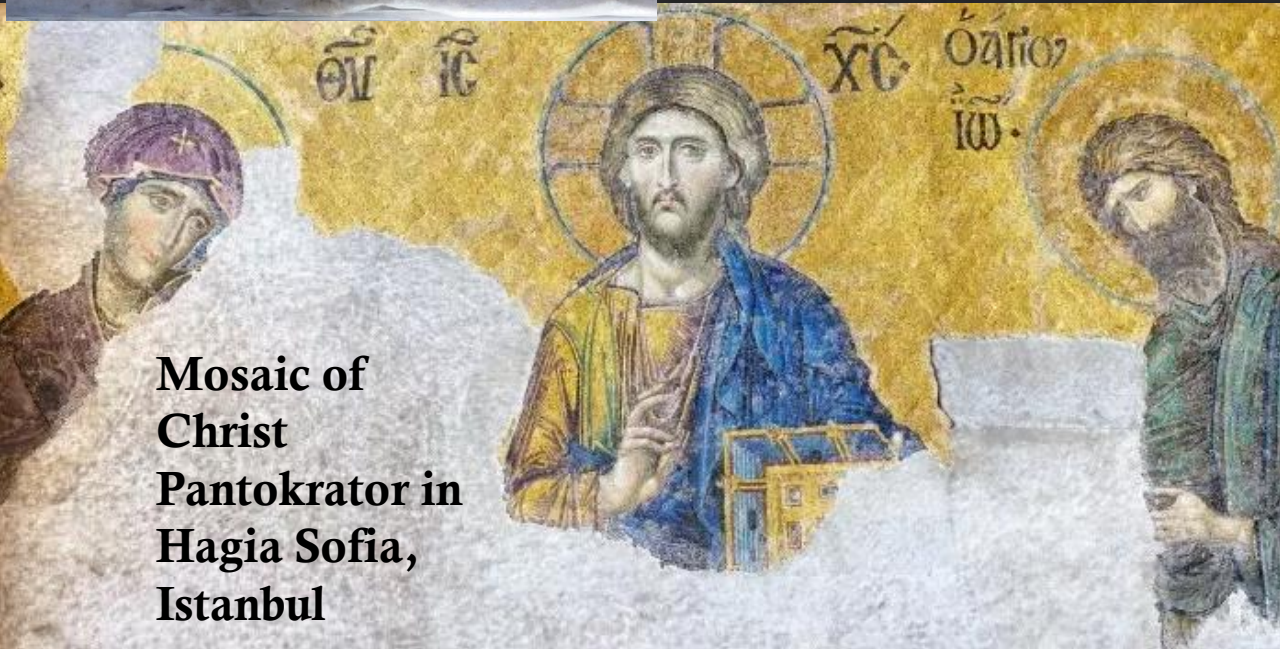
◆◆ Emphasis on sight
and 'visuality'

◆◆ Non-textual

◆◆ Not (just) art history

What *are* Visual Cultures?

- ◆◆ Emphasis on multiple visual cultures
- ◆◆ Varies according to technological capabilities
- ◆◆ Varies across time, geography and societies



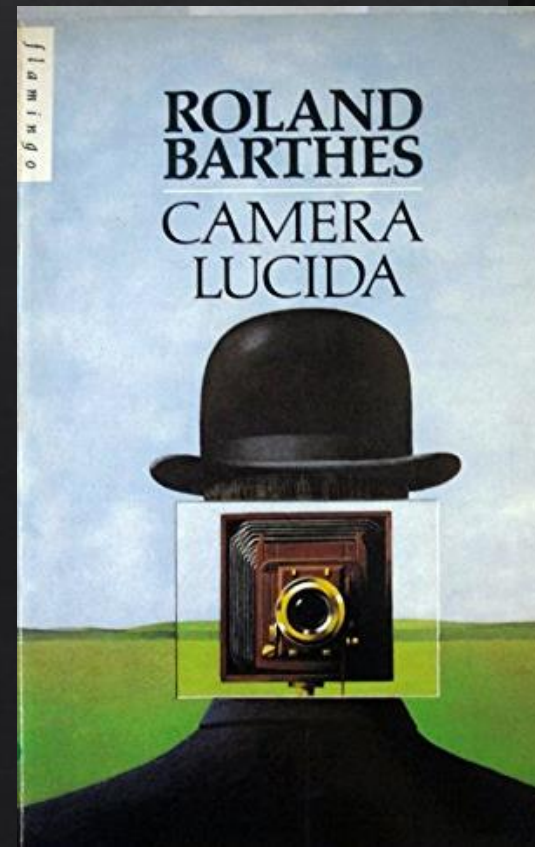
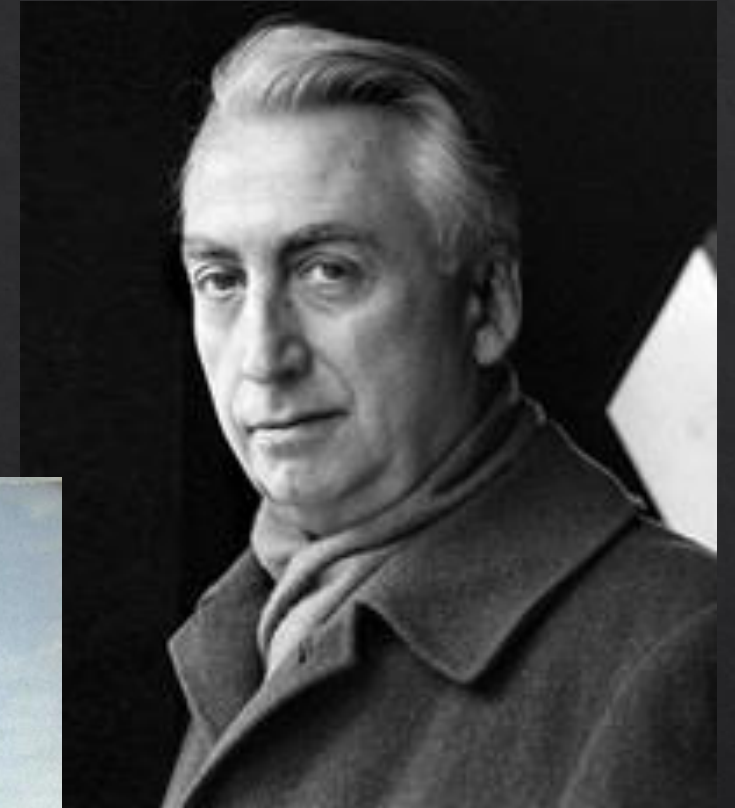
**Mosaic of
Christ
Pantokrator in
Hagia Sofia,
Istanbul**



**Interior of
Sultan
Ahmed
Mosque,
(Blue
Mosque)
Sofia,
Istanbul**



‘A photograph is
always invisible: it is
not it that we see’



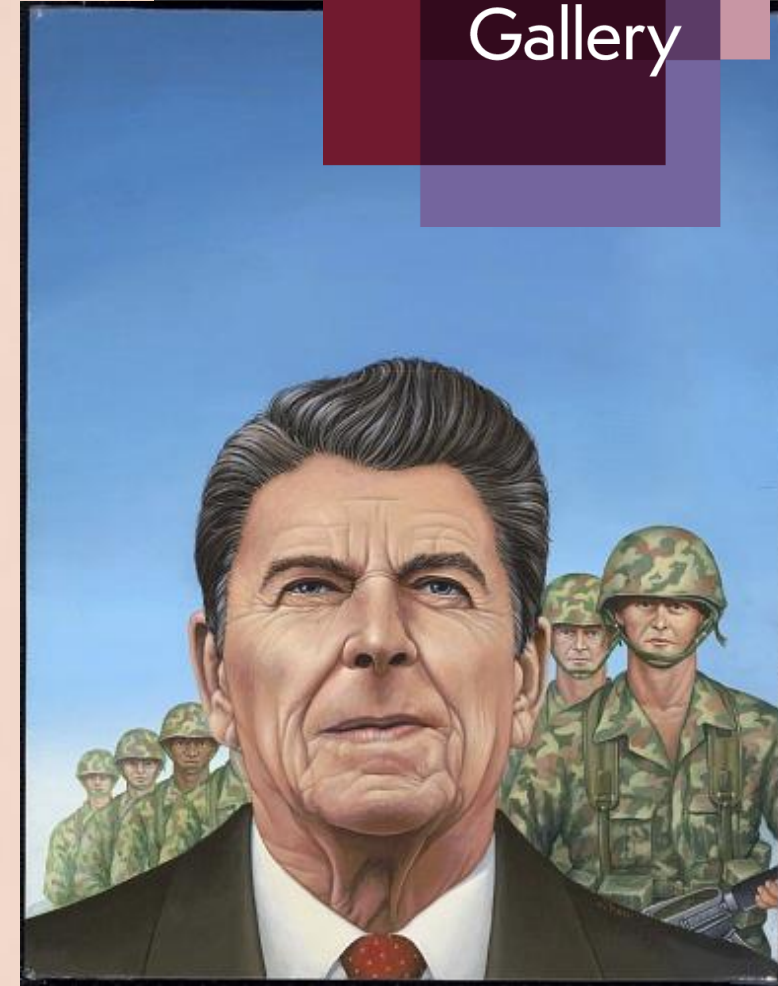


Case Study :
Ronald Reagan in Visual Culture

Henry C. Casselli portrait, 1989



Aaron Shikler, 1989



Mark Hess, 1983

\$150

JANUARY 5, 1981 \$1.50

TIME

RONALD REAGAN

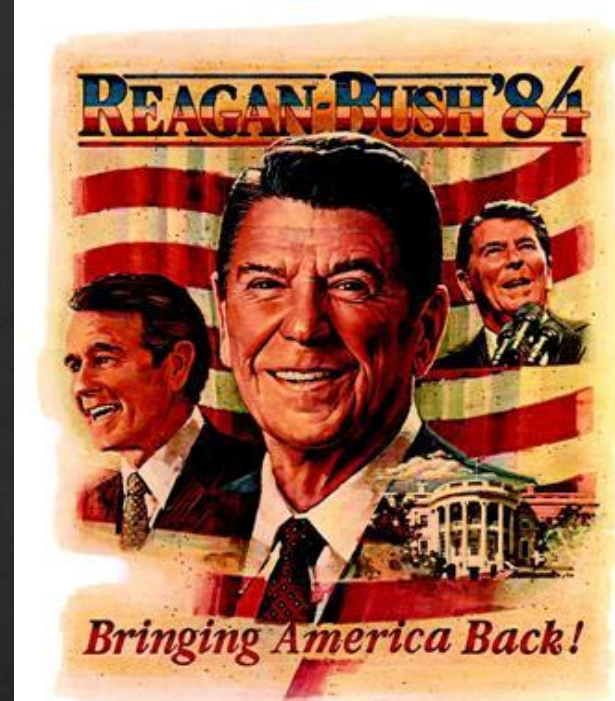
MAN
OF THE
YEAR





National
Portrait
Gallery

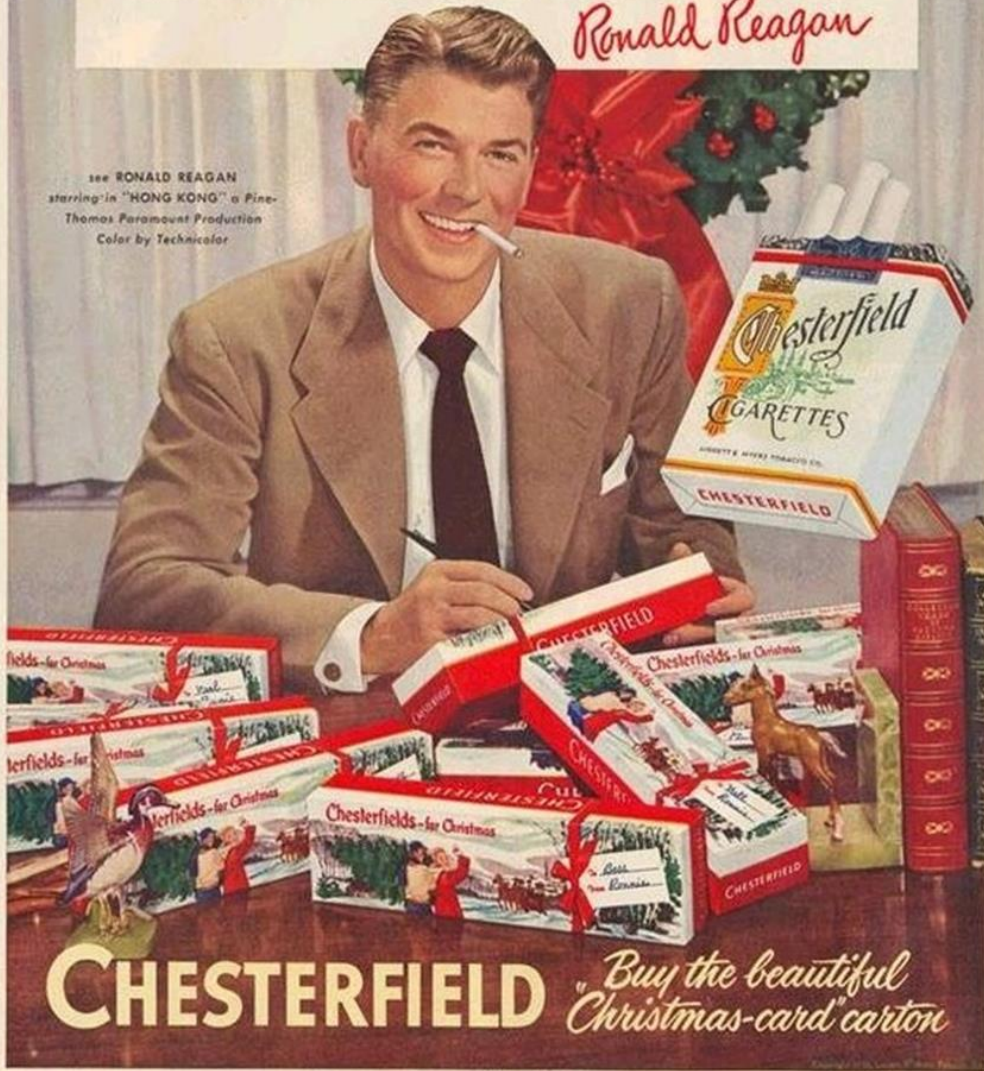




I'M SENDING CHESTERFIELDS to all my friends.
That's the merriest Christmas any smoker can have —
Chesterfield mildness plus no unpleasant after-taste

Ronald Reagan

see RONALD REAGAN
starring in "HONG KONG", a Fine-
Thomas Paramount Production
Color by Technicolor



CHESTERFIELD *Buy the beautiful
"Christmas-card" carton*

www.whitehouse.org

*Progress
Is Our Most
Important Product*
GENERAL ELECTRIC





7:^]

7:^]

7:^]

KEY CONCEPT: SEMIOTICS

What is Semiotics?



Semiotics - the science of signs - decoding images (and word)

Ferdinand de Saussure
(1857-1913)

SIGN

Charles Sanders Peirce
(1839-1914)

A successful, understandable form of communication.

SIGNIFIER

Any motion, gesture, image, sound, pattern, or event that conveys meaning and communicates.

SIGNIFIED

The concept that a signifier refers to, the meaning it conveys.



CONNOTATION

The feelings, ideas and cultural meanings which are associated with the word or object. Not the literal meaning.



Rose



DENOTATION

The literal or primary meaning of a word, in contrast to the feelings or ideas that the word suggests.



ICONS

Signs where the signifier resembles the signified.



SYMBOLS

Signs where the relation between signifier and signified is purely conventional and culturally specific.



INDEXES

Signs where the signifier is caused by the signified.



3. Medieval Visual & Material Cultures

What
are
material
cultures?

Objects, materials, matter, things and 'stuff'

What are material cultures?

- ◊ Their creation and manufacture
- ◊ Their usage and consumption
- ◊ Their emotional and physiological affects
- ◊ Their lives and changing meanings
- ◊ Their meanings and connotations

**What
were(/are)
medieval
visual and
material
cultures?**

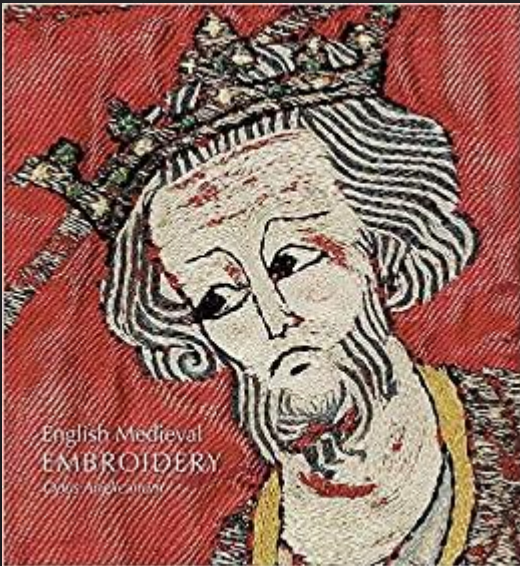
◊ What examples of
medieval visual and
material culture can you
think of/

What were medieval visual and material cultures?

◊ What are some of the specific features one should bear in mind regarding the following examples – particularly with respect to their medium and materials?

Tapestries and Embroideries

See: V&A Museum Exhibition *Opus Anglicanum: Masterpieces of English Medieval Embroidery*



Reliquaries



RELIQUARY CASKET OF ST THOMAS BECKET,
Ashmolean, Oxford

Memento Mori



See [Worcester Cathedral blog](#)

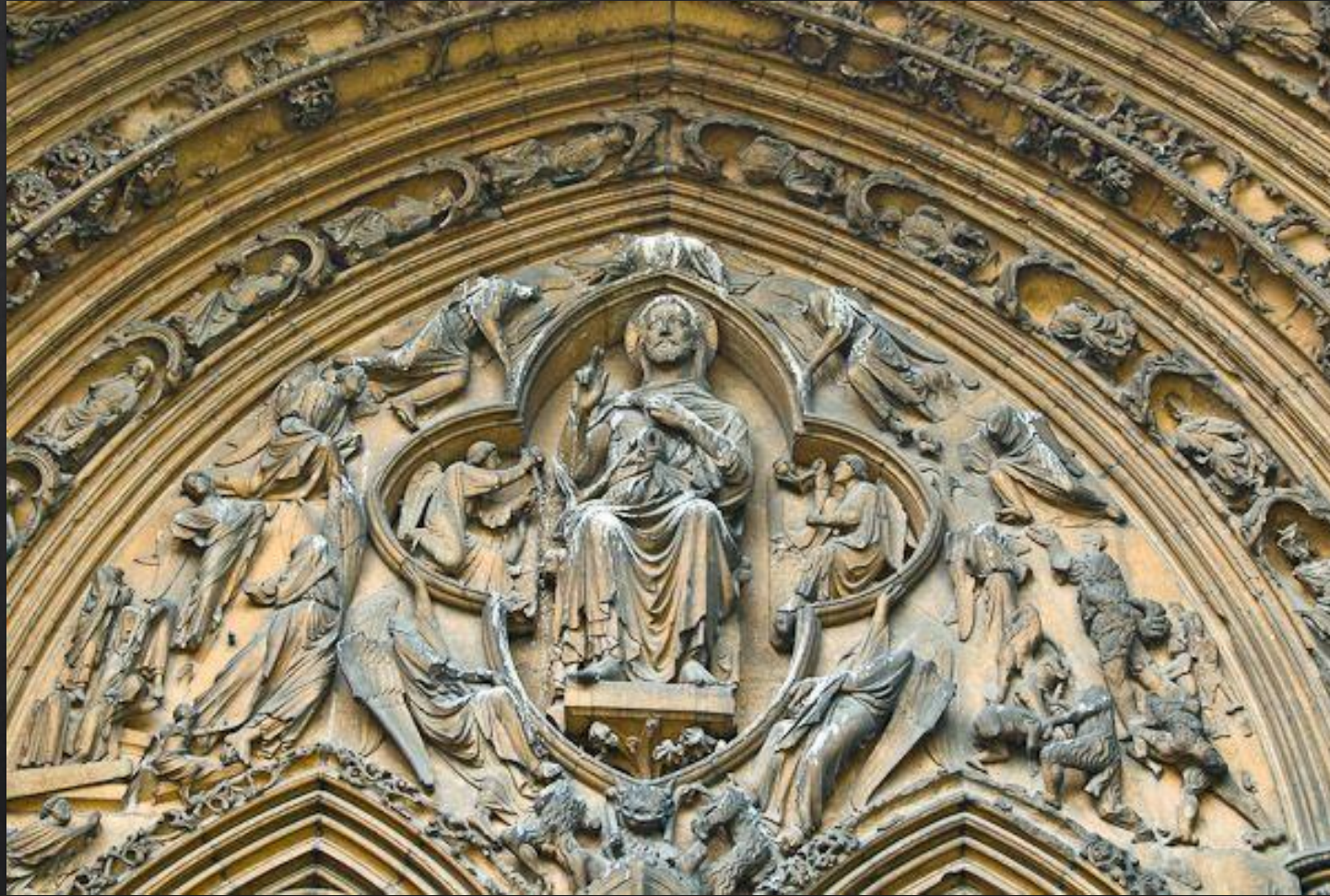
Altarpiece



Carlo Crivelli,
Demidoff Altarpiece,
National Gallery,
London

<https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/carlo-crivelli-the-demidoff-altarpiece>

Tympanum

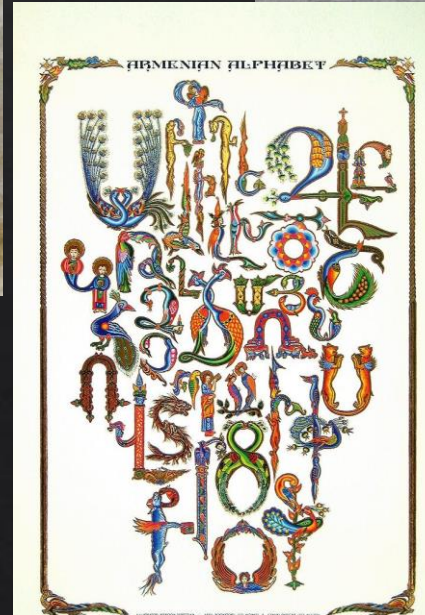
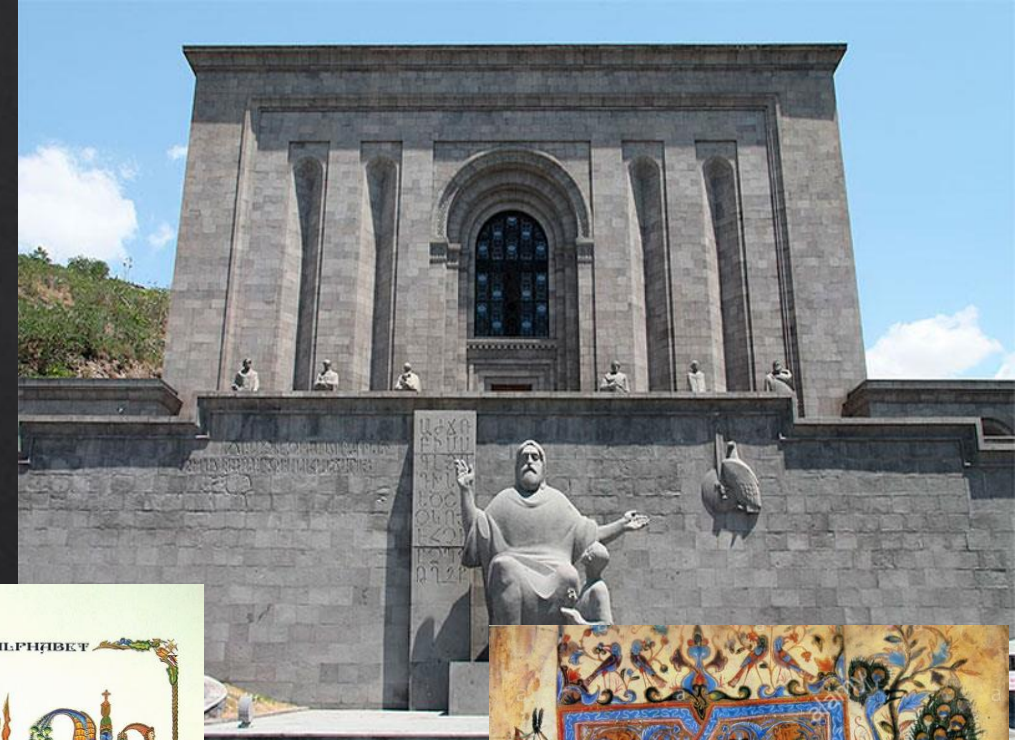


Lincoln Cathedral

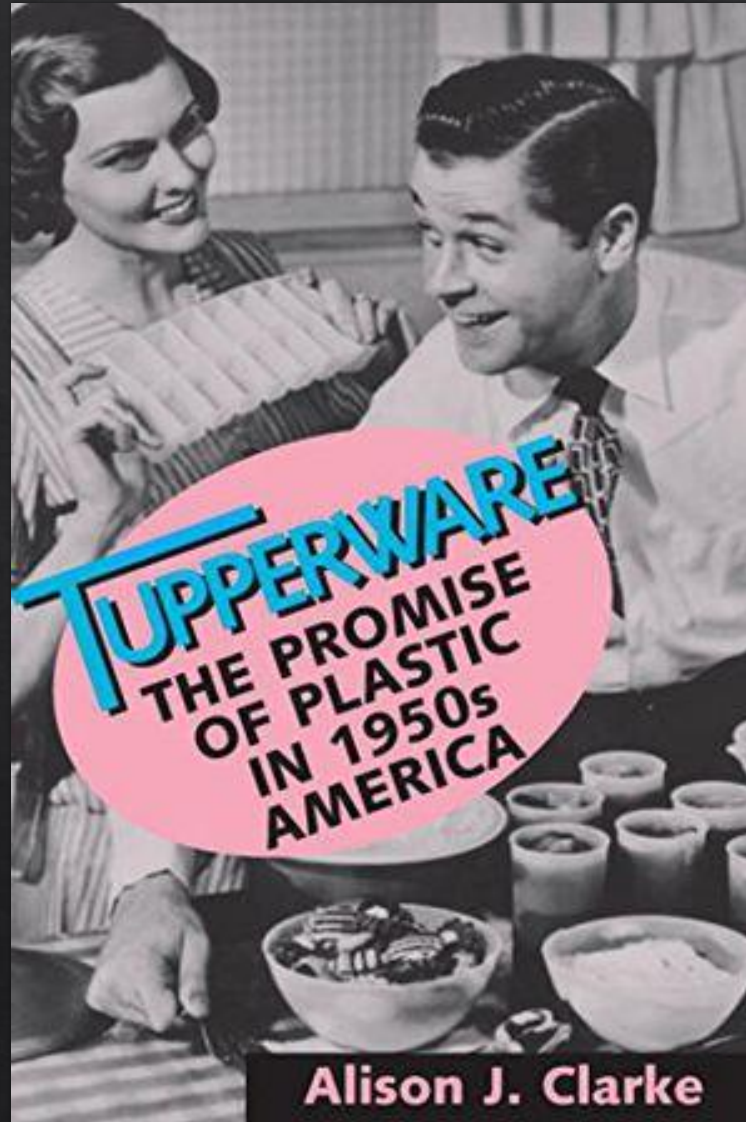
Manuscripts and Illustrations



Matenadaran, Yerevan, Armenia



4. Visual/Material Cultures Case Studies



Case Study 1: Plastic in culture of 1950s United States

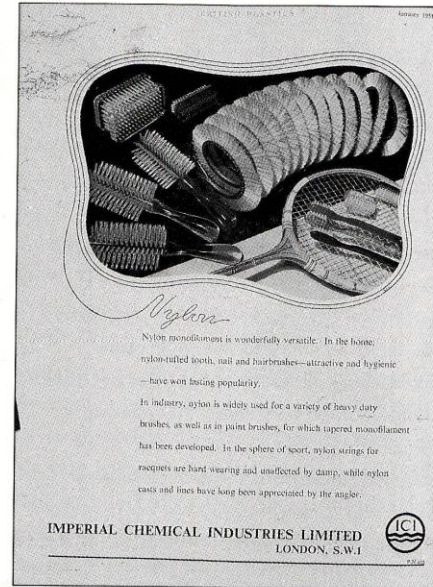
PLASTIC

Roland Barthes

Despite having names of Greek shepherds (Polystyrene, Polyvinyl, Polyethylene), plastic, the products of which have just been gathered in an exhibition, is in essence the stuff of alchemy. At the entrance of the stand, the public waits in a long queue in order to witness the accomplishment of the magical operation par excellence: the transmutation of matter. An ideally-shaped machine, tabulated and oblong (a shape well suited to suggest the secret of an itinerary) effortlessly draws, out of a heap of greenish crystals, shiny and fluted dressing-room tidies. At one end, raw, telluric matter, at the other, the finished, human object; and between these two extremes, nothing; nothing but a transit, hardly watched over by an attendant in a cloth cap, half-god, half-robot.

So, more than a substance, plastic is the very idea of its infinite transformation; as its everyday name indicates, it is ubiquity made visible. And it is this, in fact, which makes it a miraculous substance: a miracle is always a sudden transformation of nature. Plastic remains impregnated throughout with this wonder: it is less a thing than the trace of a movement.

And as the movement here is almost infinite, transforming the original crystals into a multitude of more and more startling objects, plastic is, all told, a spectacle to be deciphered: the very spectacle of its end-products. At the sight of each terminal form (suitcase, brush, car-body, toy, fabric, tube, basin or paper), the mind does not cease



from considering the original matter as an enigma. This is because the quick-change artistry of plastic is absolute: it can become buckets as well as jewels. Hence a perpetual amazement, the reverie of man at the sight of the proliferating forms of matter, and the connections he detects between the singular of the origin and the plural of the effects. And this amazement is a pleasurable one, since the scope of the transformations gives man the measure of his power, and since the very itinerary of plastic gives him the euphoria of prestigious free-wheeling through Nature.

But the price to be paid for this success is that plastic, sublimated as movement, hardly exists as substance. Its reality is a

Roland Barthes Mythologies



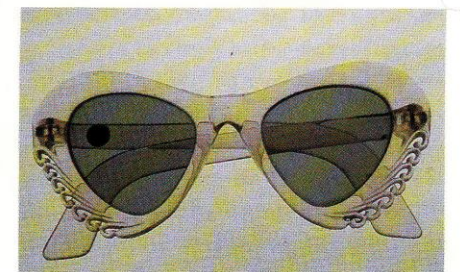
Polythene cups and food containers. Tupperware Plastics Company. USA 1940s-1960s.

Plastic sunglasses. 1950s.

negative one: neither hard nor deep, it must be content with a 'substantial' attribute which is neutral in spite of its utilitarian advantages: *resistance*, a state which merely means an absence of yielding. In the hierarchy of the major poetic substances, it figures as a disgraced material, lost between the effusiveness of rubber and the flat hardness of metal; it embodies none of the genuine produce of the mineral world: foam, fibres, strata. It is a 'shaped' substance: whatever its final state, plastic keeps a flocculent appearance, something opaque, creamy and curdled, something powerless ever to achieve the triumphant smoothness of Nature. But what best reveals it for what it is is the sound it gives, at once hollow and flat; its noise is its undoing, as are its colours, for it seems capable of retaining only the most chemical-looking ones. Of yellow, red and green, it keeps only the aggressive quality, and uses them as mere names, being able to display only concepts of colour.

The fashion for plastic highlights an evolution in the myth of 'imitation' materials. It is well known that their use is historically bourgeois in origin (the first vestimentary postiches date back to the rise of capitalism). But until now imitation materials have always indicated pretension, they belonged to the world of appearances, not to that of actual use; they aimed at reproducing cheaply the rarest substances, diamonds, silk, feathers, furs, silver, all the luxurious brilliance of the world. Plastic has climbed down, it is a household material. It is the first magical substance which consents to be prosaic. But it is precisely because this prosaic character is a triumphant reason for its existence: for the first time, artifice aims at something common, not rare. And as an

immediate consequence, the age-old function of nature is modified: it is no longer the Idea, the pure Substance to be regained or imitated: an artificial Matter, more bountiful than all the natural deposits, is about to replace her, and to determine the very invention of forms. A luxurious object is still of this earth, it still recalls, albeit in a precious mode, its mineral or animal origin, the natural theme of which it is but one actualization. Plastic is wholly swallowed up in the fact of being used: ultimately, objects will be invented for the sole pleasure of using them. The hierarchy of substances is abolished: a single one replaces them all: the whole world *can* be plasticized, and even life itself since, we are told, they are beginning to make plastic aortas.



- ◆ How might a semiotician interpret this image?
- ◆ What might plastic and Tupperware tell us about mid-20th-century American politics, society and culture?



MoMA



Manufacturer

Manufactured by Tupper Corporation, Farnumsville, MA

Medium

Polyethylene

Dimensions

Each: 6 1/2 x 2 15/16" (16.5 x 7.5 cm)

Credit

Gift of the manufacturer

Object number

529.1956.1-5

Tupperware as Art

Earl S. Tupper
Tumblers
1954

In 1947 Tupper, an inventor and chemist at DuPont, designed the unique air- and watertight Tupper Seal for containers to prevent both spilling and food spoilage. He used this feature to enhance his range of polyethylene Welcome Ware, devised years earlier. The result—Tupperware—became a powerful symbol of suburban domestic life in the 1950s. In addition to its cutting-edge material and form, Tupperware's innovative marketing secured its success. Brownie Wise, a single mother who ultimately became vice president of the company, developed the hostess party model that gave housewives the chance to earn money independently.

Gallery label from *What Was Good Design? MoMA's Message 1944–56*, May 6, 2009–January 10, 2011.

Inventor of **Tupperware** Earl Tupper was born on July 28, 1907

THE CONTAINER REVOLUTION

Tupperware as Technology



newsflicks

Tupperware is an airtight plastic container for storing food

Made using black, inflexible pieces of polyethylene slag, a waste product of the oil refining process

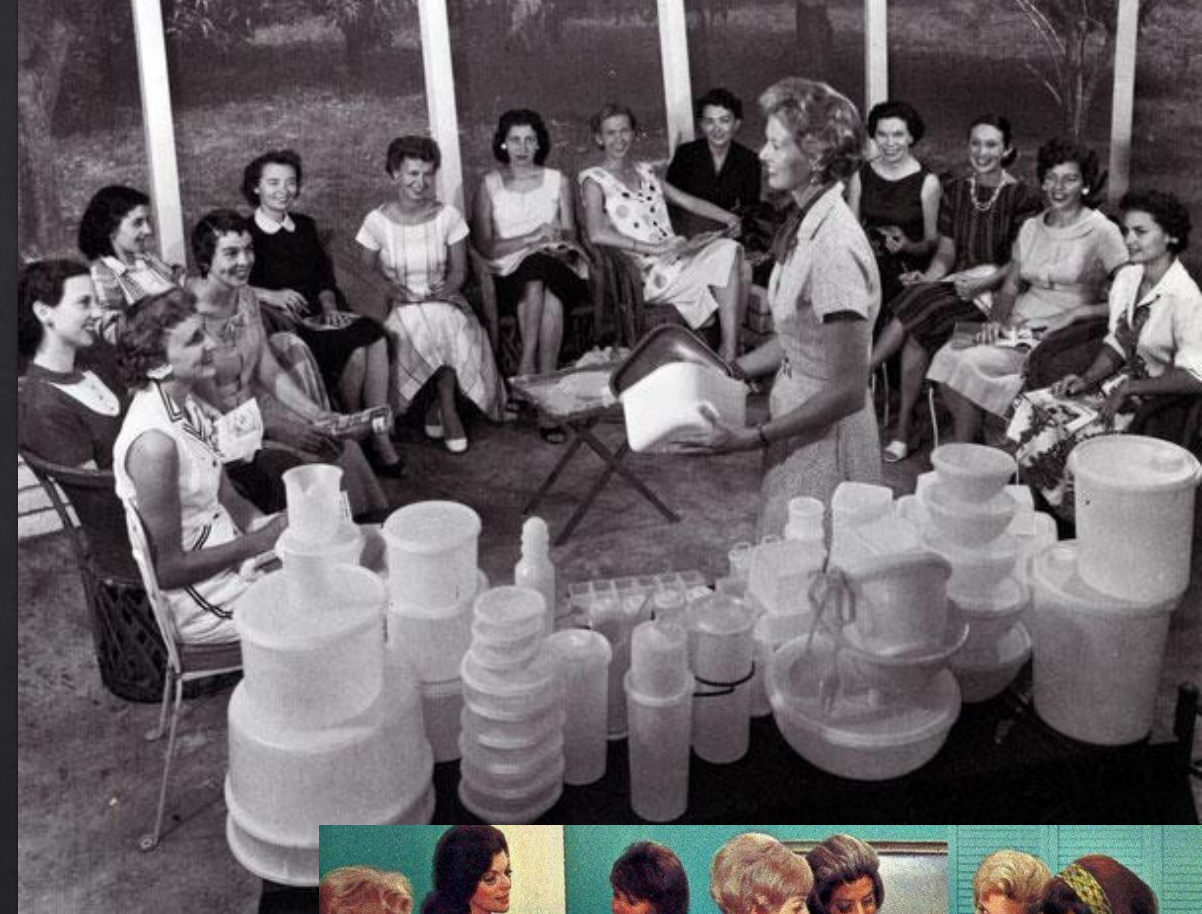
By **purifying the slag and molding it**, he created lightweight, non-breakable containers

Was also used to produce parts for **gas masks & Navy signal lamps**

The **“burping seal”** distinguished Tupperware from competitors

Started marketing his products as **giveaways with cigarettes**

Tupperware and Gender



Tupperware's famous table-shopping time

Leave It To Beaver

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ALL RIGHTS RESERVED



TWO big happy families



GEORGE AND HANNETT'S FAMILY. The boys are handsome—but you've never heard of some of the women they get into! Happy faces! Ricky Nelson sings.



DONNA REED'S FAMILY. The new's brand-newest quaking. Donna's married to a handsome young baby doctor—and the whole show is one kind of a mess.

Coming your family's way Wednesdays on ABC Television



When Material Cultures Clash: The Kitchen Debates



Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev and US Vice President Nixon exchange views, American National Exhibition, Moscow, July 1959



Nixon: I want to show you this kitchen. It is like those of our houses in California.

Khrushchev: We have such things.

Nixon: This is our newest model. This is the kind which is built in thousands of units for direct installations in the houses. In America, we like to make life easier for women...

Khrushchev: Your capitalistic attitude toward women does not occur under Communism.

Nixon: I think that this attitude towards women is universal. What we want to do, is make life more easy for our housewives ...



When Material Cultures Clash: The Kitchen Debates



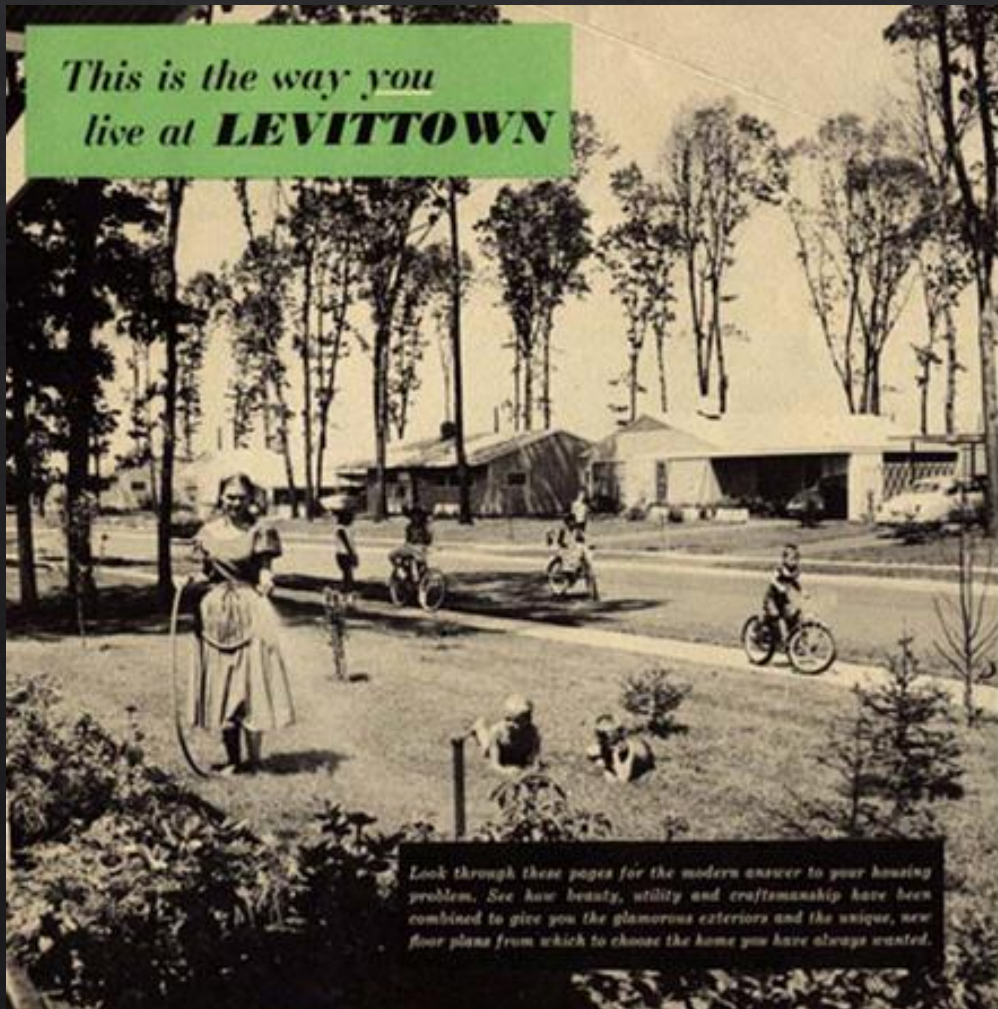
Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev and US Vice President Nixon exchange views, American National Exhibition, Moscow, July 1959

Khrushchev: Your American houses are built to last only 20 years so builders could sell new houses at the end. We build firmly. We build for our children and grandchildren.

Nixon: American houses last for more than 20 years, but, even so, after 20 years, many Americans want a new house or a new kitchen. Their kitchen is obsolete by that time The American system is designed to take advantage of new inventions and new techniques.

Khrushchev: This theory does not hold water. Some things never get out of date – houses, for instance, and furniture, furnishings, perhaps –but not houses. I have read much about America and American houses, and I do not think that this is exhibit and what you say is strictly accurate.

- Levittown, Pennsylvania, built 1949–1951 = suburban community mass produced adapting Fordist conveyor belt techniques



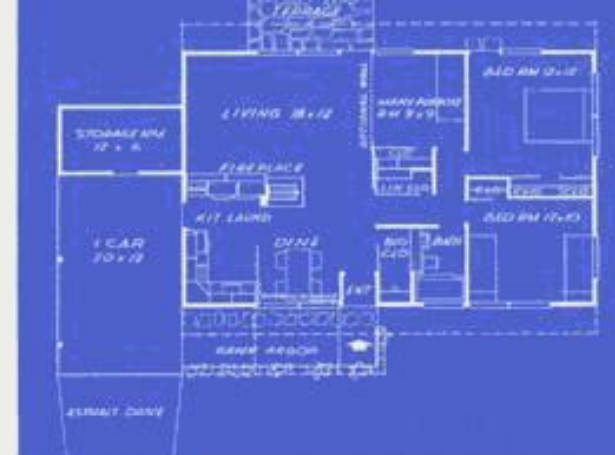


The Levittowner

PRICE—\$10,990 • GROUNDS 70 BY 100

Purchaser	Down Payment	*Approximate Monthly Carrying Charges
Veteran	\$550	\$67.00
Non-Veteran	1,550	65.00

*Includes taxes, fire insurance, interest, and principal payment.



William Levitt (foot on car), Levittown construction site

Little boxes on the hillside,
Little boxes made of ticky tacky,
Little boxes on the hillside,
Little boxes all the same.
There's a green one and a pink one
And a blue one and a yellow one,
And they're all made out of ticky tacky
And they all look just the same.

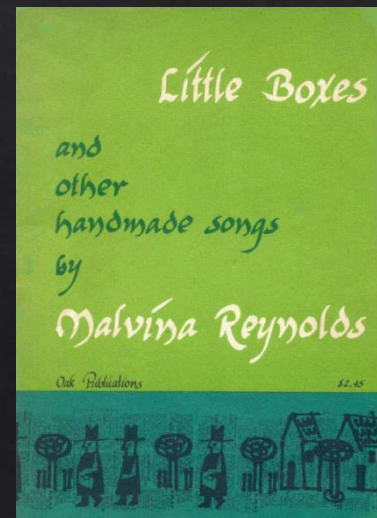
And the people in the houses
All went to the university,
Where they were put in boxes
And they came out all the same,
And there's doctors and lawyers,
And business executives,
And they're all made out of ticky tacky
And they all look just the same.

And they all play on the golf course

And drink their martinis dry,
And they all have pretty children
And the children go to school,
And the children go to summer camp
And then to the university,
Where they are put in boxes
And they come out all the same.

And the boys go into business
And marry and raise a family
In boxes made of ticky tacky
And they all look just the same.
There's a green one and a pink one
And a blue one and a yellow one,
And they're all made out of ticky tacky
And they all look just the same.

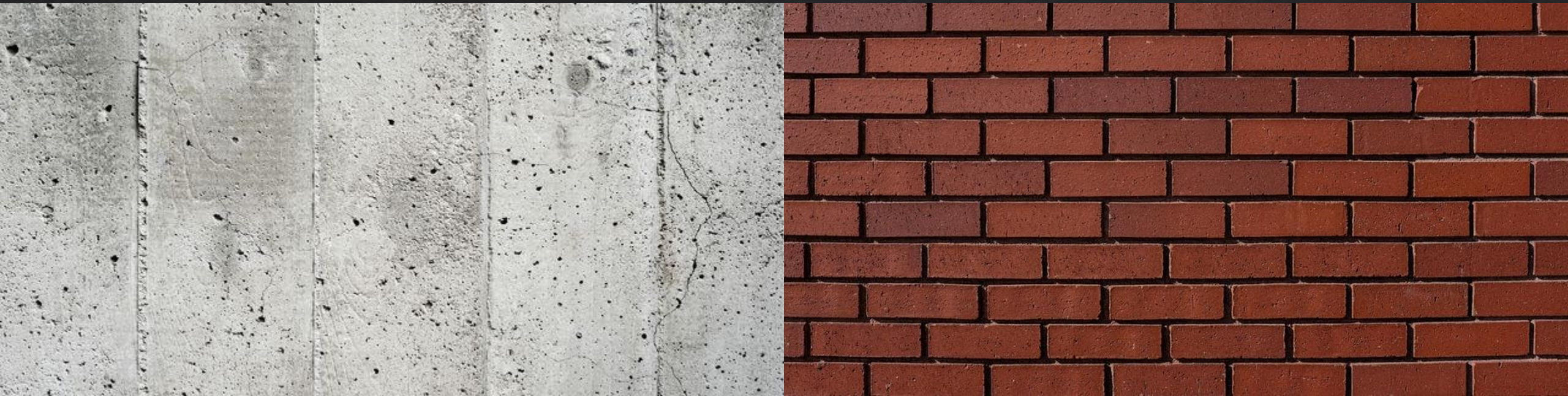
Contain ment and Confor mity?



Case Study 2: Concrete vs Brick in Late-20th-Century Britain



What might brick or concrete connote to
you?



WALLFRAME

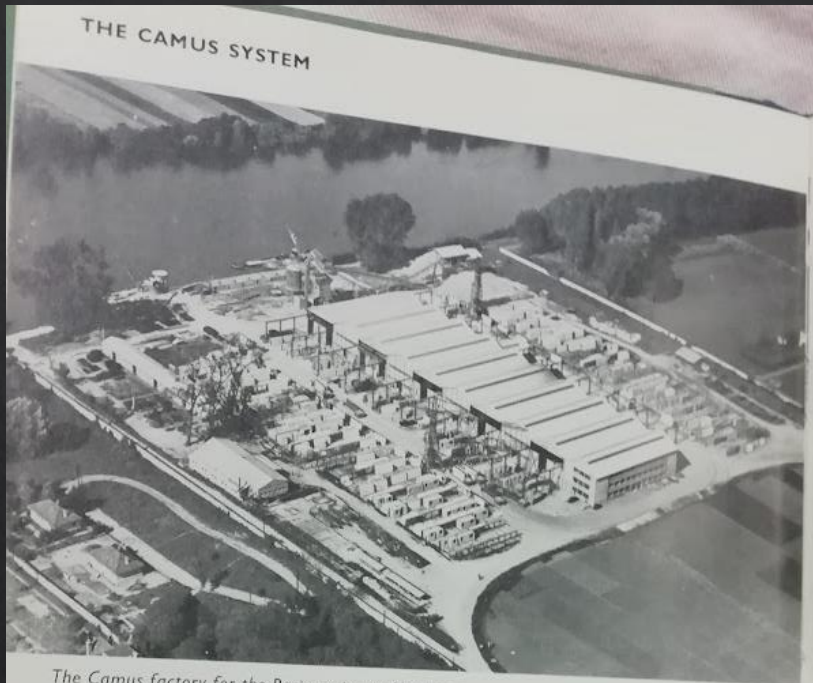
The full facilities of one of the largest builders of houses in this country, with an active research staff, extensive range of mechanical equipment and efficient site-organisation is at your disposal for all building and civil engineering contracts: employing qualified surveyors, architects and engineers in London, Liverpool and Belfast.



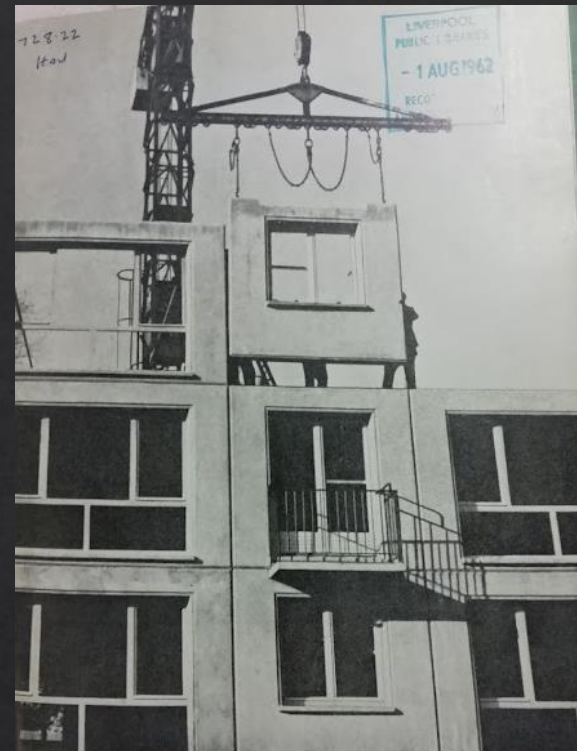
UNIT

CONSTRUCTION CO. LTD.
N-W Region, Speke Boulevard,
LIVERPOOL 24 Tel: HUN 2084





The Camus factory for the Paris region at Montesson.



THE CONSTRUCTION OF DWELLINGS BY INDUSTRIAL METHODS

REPORT OF
CITY OF LIVERPOOL DEPUTATION TO PARIS & ENVIRONS, JUNE 1962

1964 Liverpool City Council documents on concrete construction methods



Research in heat curing.

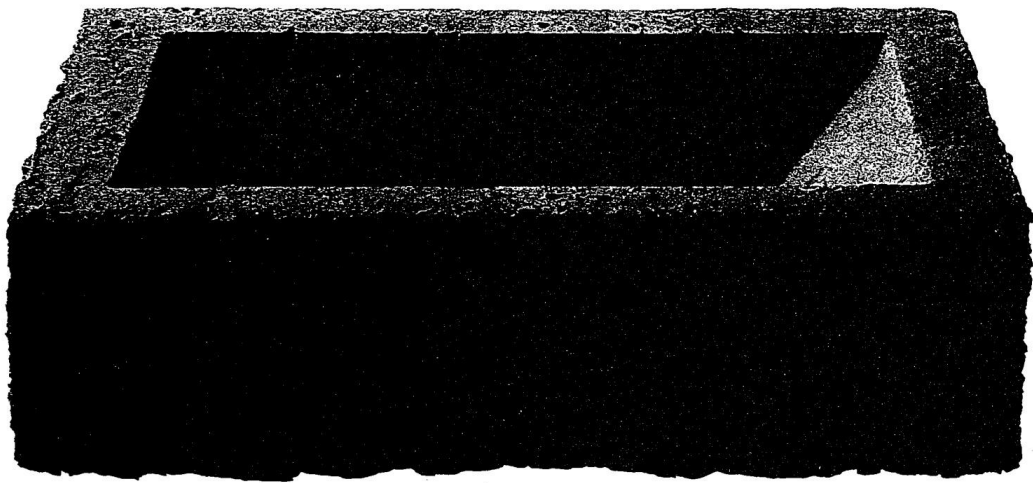


Concrete testing laboratory.



Selected concrete samples awaiting various tests.

Machine-made pressed brick.



The family size brick.

Ask a child to draw a house and he'll draw one made of brick. Brick has a lovely rustic roots quality that everyone recognises. Everyone likes having brick around. And its beauty is strong and durable so that people can go on enjoying it for centuries.

Brick is honest, dependable. It's been house trained for a very long time – with a pedigree going back beyond the Romans. Anything

that can be built, can be built with brick. It's easy to work with and is virtually maintenance free. It won't corrode or crack up on you. And with over 800 different colours and textures to choose from, you'll find something is always available to suit your needs.

Other materials may shout louder, but brick does everything they do without giving you a lot of other problems as well. Brick is safe. It can't start or spread a fire. It's a

good sound insulator – which means a quieter life. All in all, you can see it's good-looking, but it's very practical too.

Next time they try and tempt you with a flashier substitute, remember, no other material has the combination of advantages you find with brick. And that's the beauty of it.

The Brick Development Association,
Woodside House, Winkfield,
Windsor, Berks. SL4 2DX.



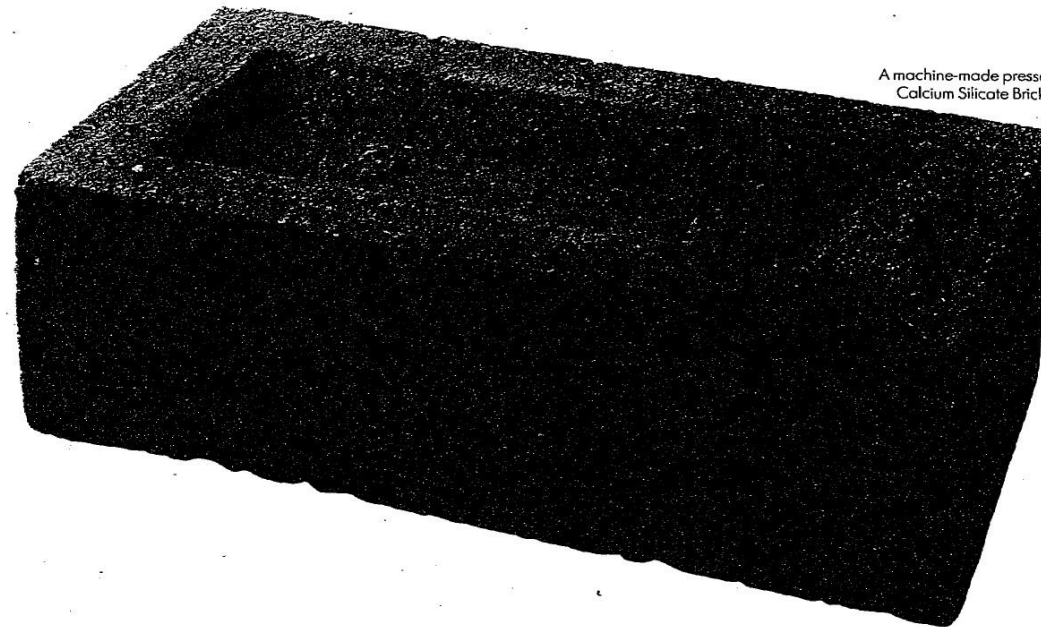
That's the beauty of brick.

Armitage • Beacon Hill • Birley Bricks • Bispham Hall Brick • Blackleys • Blue Circle • Bovingdon • Carlton • Colliers • Crossley • Dawning • ECLIP • Emlyn • Ensor • Esk • FLB • Gibbons Northern • GISCOL • Hadleys • Henry Foster • Ibsstock • Jacksons (Warwickshire) • J & A Jackson • London Brick • Lumley • Malby • MBC • Midhurst Whites • Milton Hall • Mosedale • Normanton • Northcot • Nottingham Brick • Ravenhead Brick • Redland • Rudgwick • Ryarsh • Scottish Brick • Sevenoaks • Severn Valley • Stoneware • Stourbridge Brick • Swanage Brick • Swarland • Wm. Thomas • Westbrick • Wilkinson-Elland • Yorkshire Brick

Sunday Times Magazine, 2 July 1978; September 1978,

Against the uniformity, the ugliness, the ordinary, the complexities, the imitations, the rigidity, the institutionalism, the banality, the boredom, the ready-made ideas, the hypocrisy, the routine, the severity, the prejudices...

A machine-made pressed Calcium Silicate Brick.



Against all that, there's brick. Brick is honest. Dependable. It's been house-trained a long time – with a pedigree going back beyond the Romans.

Whatever you want to build, you can build it in brick. Brick is beautiful for a start. It has a good rustic roots quality about it that makes people like having it around.

And its beauty is strong and durable so that people can go on enjoying its looks for century after century.

Brick is a friendly material – easy to work with and virtually maintenance free. It won't corrode or crack up on you. And with over 800 different colours and textures to choose from, you'll find something is always available to suit your needs.

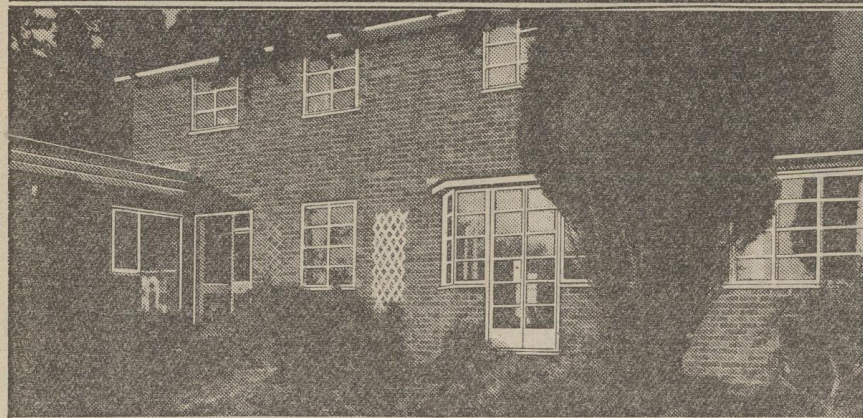
And brick is safe. It can't start or spread a fire.

Next time you're tempted by a flashier substitute, remember, no other material has the combination of advantages you find with brick. And that's the beauty of it.
The Brick Development Association,
Woodside House, Winkfield,
Windsor, Berks. SL4 2DX.



That's the beauty of brick.

Armitage • Beacon Hill • Birley Bricks • Bispham Hall Brick • Blackleys • Blue Circle • Bovingdon • Carlton • Colliers • Crossley • Dawning • ECLIP • Emlyn • Ensor • Esk • FLB • Gibbons Northern • GISCOL • Hadleys • Henry Foster • Ibsstock • Jacksons (Warwickshire) • J & A Jackson • London Brick • Lumley • Malby • MBC • Midhurst Whites • Milton Hall • Mosedale • Normanton • Northcot • Nottingham Brick • Ravenhead Brick • Redland • Rudgwick • Ryarsh • Scottish Brick • Sevenoaks • Severn Valley • Stoneware • Stourbridge Brick • Swanage Brick • Swarland • Wm. Thomas • Westbrick • Wilkinson-Elland • Yorkshire Brick



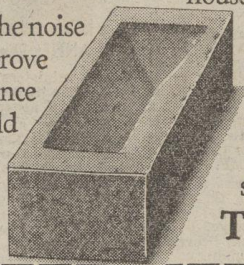
ARE YOU BUYING THE BEST OF BRITISH OR JUST A FOREIGN SUBSTITUTE?

When you come to buying a new house, beware. There are some houses around that have a layer of beautiful British brick on the outside, while inside lurk alternative building materials.

Materials that come from abroad and haven't stood the test of time in our damp, drizzly climate.

And these materials have other disadvantages too.

They won't keep out the noise as well as brick. They can prove costly in terms of maintenance and repairs. Some don't hold in the heat like an all-brick house. And most aren't as fire-proof as brick.



But worst of all, when you come to sell, you'll probably find this kind of house won't be worth as much as one that's brick through and through.

In fact, there's no building material that can beat the good old brick.

It's been around for long enough after all.

So before you buy that new house, check that it's brick right through to the interior walls and accept nothing less.

Because only then can you be sure you've got the best Britain can offer. And not some risky foreign alternative.

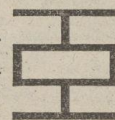
The difference is brick.

I want to know more about the advantages of brick.
Please send me, free of charge, your brochure "The Choice is Yours."

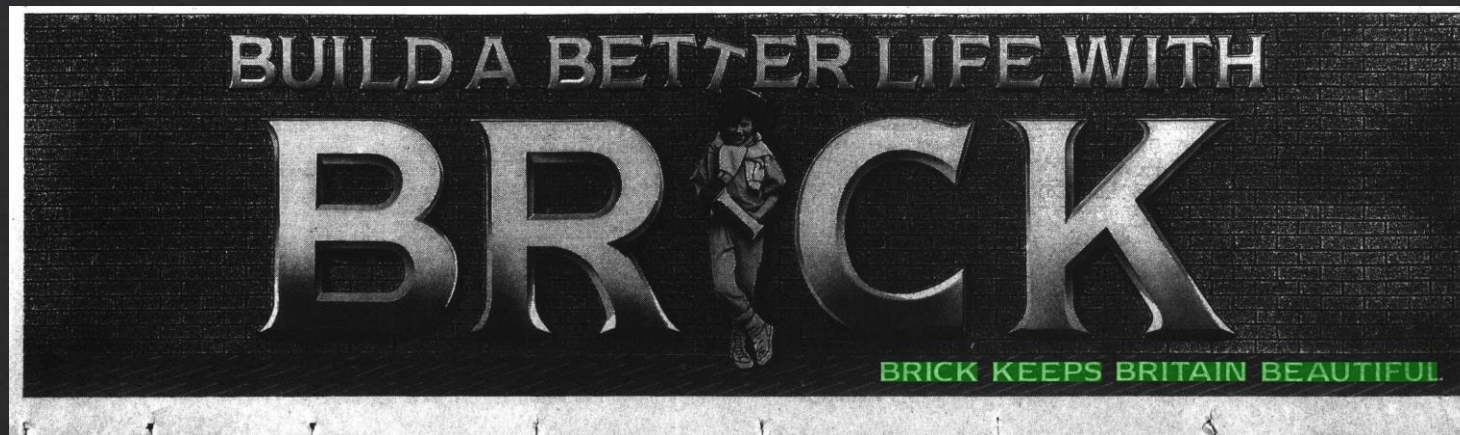
DR

Name _____

Address _____



The Brick Development Association, Woodside House, Winkfield, Windsor, Berkshire SL4 2DX. Tel: Winkfield Row (034 47) 5651



The Independent , 15 July 1989, p. 38

Daily Mirror, 13 October 1980, p. 16

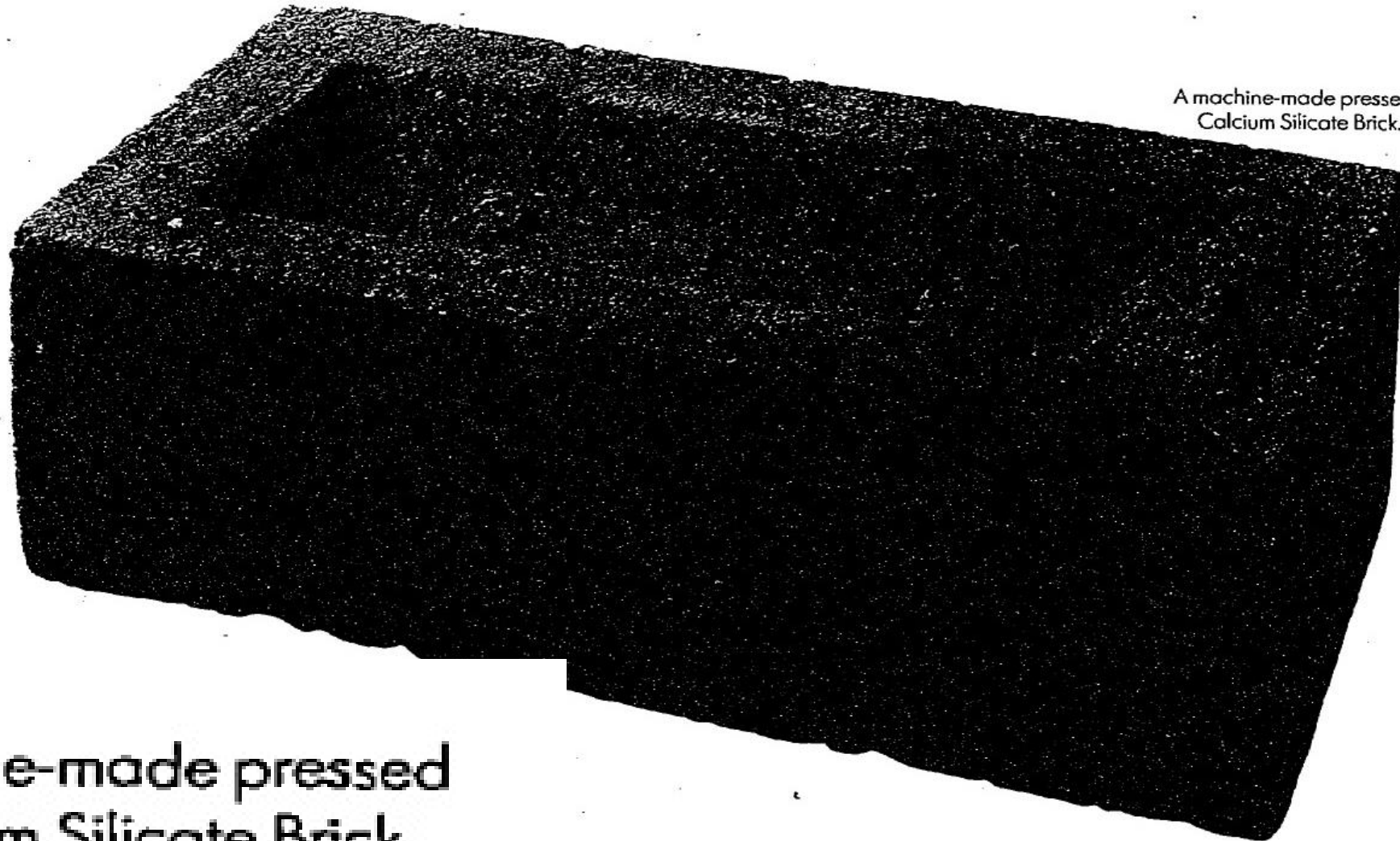
Brick and 1980s 'Middle England' The Barratt House; *Brookside*-Style Housing





Brookside

**Against the uniformity, the ugliness, the ordinary,
the complexities, the imitations, the rigidity,
the institutionalism, the banality, the boredom,
the ready-made ideas, the hypocrisy, the routine,
the severity, the prejudices...**



A machine-made pressed
Calcium Silicate Brick.

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Calcium Silicate Brick.**