

BOSS

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SYMBOLISM

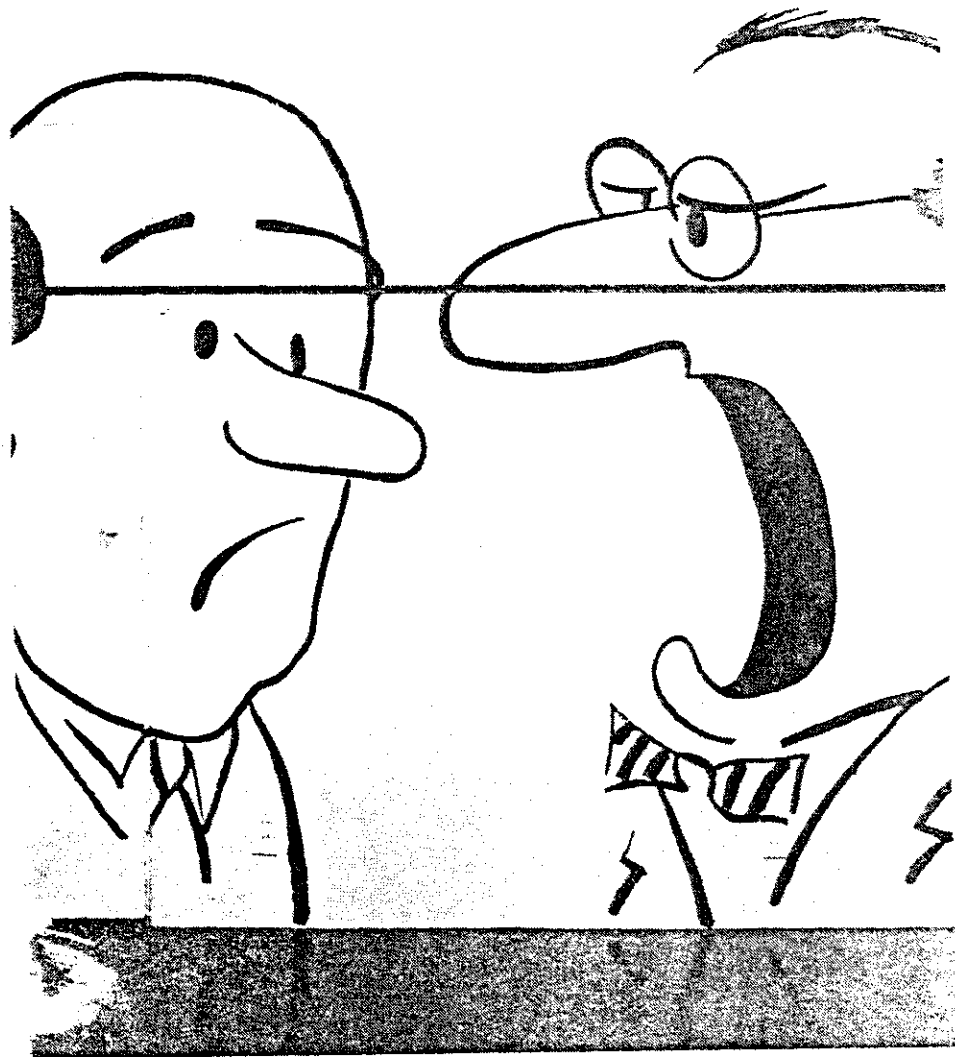
GARRY NEILL KENNEDY
OR Gallery
Vancouver

In Garry Kennedy's *Finchwell Continued* the OR Gallery becomes the abandoned crypt of the office place, and the invisibility of the workers, their aversion for reflections, indicates their antipathy to the Boss; one of the more interesting theoretical beings created by the bourgeois imagination.

The Boss is neither alive nor dead, but exists in an accursed state of irremediable tension and anxiety. Although his symbolic identity is complex and goes beyond its function in *Finchwell Continued*, the Boss embodies a certain sense of cosmic grief which is a diffracted image of concrete historical uneasiness. The most relevant aspect of his symbolism for our purposes is that from the point of view of liberal Romanticism, the Boss signifies not simply the unwillingness of the old regime to die, but the fear that the new order has unwittingly inherited something corrupted and evil

from the old, and is in the process of unconsciously engineering itself around an evil centre. The presence of the phantom of the Boss in the consciousness of modern, liberal men signifies the presence of an unresolved crisis in the creation of the modern era itself. Thus Boss symbolism persists as a codified form of expression of unease regarding the inner structure of the modern social order and rationality. The role of Boss symbolism in the expression of uneasiness about the effects of calculation brings it always very close to the symbolism of the robot, the spellbound automaton, which the victims of the Boss's curse often resemble. Boss symbolism is a disturbance in the historical process of construction of theoretical beings — abstract citizens — through technique, planning, contracts, and 'value-free' calculation. The crisis of the office place is the crisis of self-consciousness of such beings. The Boss is thus the 'inner speech' of that being — the ruler, the caesar, the prince — whose theoretical invisibility is constructed as the great task of this work, an undead art.

With the *Finchwell* works Kennedy begins from the failure of conceptualism's critique of art. But his intention is not the celebrate that failure and to throw away the lessons of the radical art of the 1960s in a theatricalized revival of the myth of authenticity. Rather, he intends with the office place project to build a critical memorial to that failure. And, in the spirit of the movement he memorializes, he



Garry Neill Kennedy: installation at OR Gallery, Vancouver, 1986. Photo: courtesy the artist.

In developing the *Finchwell* cartoons project, Kennedy begins from a distressed recognition of conceptualism's failure to rebuild art from its core outward, which was its aim. He reflects upon the forces unleashed in art by that failure, and his artistic language as a whole emerges from his struggle within the crisis of radical modernism exemplified for his generation by conceptual art.

Robin Peck