

**CONSUMING SUBJECTIVITY IN WARHOL AND KOONS:
MASS APPEAL AND COMMODIFICATION IN ART**

**A Thesis Submitted to the Committee on Graduate Studies
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
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ABSTRACT

Consuming Subjectivity in Warhol and Koons: Mass Appeal and Commodification in Art

Andrew Parker

This work explores the complex relationship between contemporary forms of subjectivity and the commodification of cultural production in technologically enabled, consumption-based cultures. Employing post-war American artists Andy Warhol and Jeff Koons as specific case studies, this thesis concerns itself with the paradoxical bind arising between the continuing social valorization of art as self-determined individual expression and the ubiquitous expansion and hegemonic establishment of commodity logic over the processes through which public and private meanings are forged. Areas of particular interest addressed include the development, implementation and implications of commercial mass media, the interpellation of subjects through contemporary cultural production, postmodern cultural formations, celebrity, and the seemingly inherent antagonism between kitsch and bourgeois subjectivity.

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CONSUMING SUBJECTIVITY IN WARHOL AND KOONS: MASS APPEAL AND COMMODIFICATION IN ART

INTRODUCTION

The following thesis aspires to contribute a further critical perspective in the on-going discussion surrounding those objects and events which are, in some form or another, meaningfully contemplated as art. Without delving too deeply into the jumbo-sized tin of worms that accompanies tackling broad philosophical questions along the lines of "What is art?", it seems necessary at the onset I at least qualify my general usage of the term art in the following discussion, in addition to offering up some idea of the interests that inform my own particular approach to questioning things "art."

Art in the context of my following usage refers specifically to the conception of art formulated in Europe during the conflux of broad social reorganization catalyzed in the American (1776) and French (1789) Revolutions and the implementation of "free market" capitalism as the dominant socio-economic force in Western culture. These "Bourgeois Revolutions" (as they are often called,) strove finally to break from feudal society and form a social order based on Enlightenment ideals - universal justice, equality, liberty, and democracy. Of paramount significance in this broad social transition is a discursive and institutional re-formation of the individual subject¹, henceforth to be universally acknowledged as fundamentally autonomous and possessing the freedom and responsibility of self-determined expression. Mary Anne Staniszewski reads the social revolutions of the late 18th century as realizations of,

¹ Within the context, of course, "individual subject" must be largely read as "white European male" for reasons that are now shamefully obvious.

a "paradigm shift" in Western political structures and subjecthood. In the modern Western liberal democratic state, the individual is no longer part of the natural order of things in which everyone is born to a specific rank within a social hierarchy that places the king at the pinnacle. The modern individual is no longer a subject under the power of a sovereign but a citizen with inalienable rights who is part of a collectivity that is sovereign....The modern era...inaugurates a sense of self whereby the individual is thought to be the king of "his" own castle and the master of "his" own fate, body, and mind.²

It is around this historically-rooted bourgeois conception of a subject, one assuming the birthright of expressive liberty, that art, as I mean to employ the term, crystallizes.³ As such, art is generally conceived as an expressive sphere in relation to an historically bourgeois conception of the individual subject, a conception embedded in the major discourses and institutions of Western culture since the late 18th century. Decidedly out of accord with individual experience under newer emerging cultural formations or not, this assumption of an expressive, self-determining subject is nonetheless still central to the terms of meaningful contemplation appropriate and necessary to appreciating artwork. Indeed, within such parameters of meaningful reception, even acts of self-negation are institutionalized and celebrated as individuating acts of self-expression, e.g., the modernist avant-garde movements.

Now it is exactly this same concept of the self-determining individual that also assumes the position of ideological necessity for enabling and legitimating the social reproduction of democratic capitalism.⁴ This is not a simple cause and effect relationship; autonomy first, then capitalism - but rather a complex and ongoing relation of mutually-arising interdependence and continual co-

² Mary Anne Staniszewski, Believing is Seeing (New York: Penguin Books, 1995), 101

³ This understanding owes much to Peter Bürger's work in Theory of the Avant-Garde (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1981)

⁴ Without the assumed capacity for individual autonomy, or self-determination, the concept of a democratic society based on individual choice made free from undo cohesion is dead before it takes off. Similarly, as the logic of capitalism relies on the institution of privatized possession, the autonomous individual (as a juridical, legal and ethical subject) is the ideological necessity which enables such institution.

affirmation. All of which may initially seem reasonable enough save for the paradoxical bind initiated in social relations under advanced (consumer) forms of capitalism. Namely, that consumer capitalism continually jeopardizes individual self-determination through the indiscriminate and increasingly ubiquitous commodification of experience whilst simultaneously relying on individual self-determination as the ideological necessity upon which capitalism's own social reproduction depends. Commodification, without exception, integrates everything in its path into the governing logic of its own operations. It is within this process of commodity-logic integration, as Georg Lukács observes in History and Class Consciousness, that reification occurs; that is, the transformation of the often intangible (i.e., cognitive process, emotion, imagination) into an exchangeable "thing", a commodity object and/or service fixed with an exchange value⁵. Indeed, the contention of this thesis is that the wide-spread effects of this reification/commodification process includes a re-articulation of the cognitive processes through which individuals form self-reflexive understanding and adopt modes of self-apprehension by the governing logic of commodity exchange. If the very processes through which one comes to create private meanings about one's self are reified in pre-digested yet seductively aestheticized representations offered up for mass consumption, then what basis is left for positing individual self-determination? Proponents of capitalism may interject at this point that self-determination is

⁵ My interpretation of reification is akin to Fredrick Jameson's following definition, "this sense of the way in which a product somehow shuts us out even from a sympathetic participation, by imagination, in its production. It comes before us, no questions asked, as something we could not begin to imagine doing for ourselves.

But this in no way means that we cannot consume the product in question, "derive enjoyment" from it, become addicted to it, etc. Indeed, consumption in the social sense is very specifically the word for what we in fact do to reified products of this kind, that occupy our minds and float above that deeper nihilistic void left in our inability to control our own destiny." Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 317. For individuals, the crucial effect of consuming reified phenomena as *the* primary means of participating in social reality entails assuming the status of passive receptacle/consumer (rather than active producer) for a vast majority of what now passes as everyday life.

actualized in individual choice - and indeed the scope and magnitude of choice offered contemporary Western individuals appears increasingly boundless. In this case, however, mass representation incessantly directs the play of choice to the vast and ubiquitous presentation of reified experience offered up for consumption. Individual choice becomes thereby qualified insofar as it pertains chiefly to individuals acting in the fundamentally passive capacity of consumers - everyone free to choose, but no one free not to choose. This qualification alone seems enough to throw any idea of self-determination as actualized in individual (consumer) choice into serious contention; a contention that will be returned to and elaborated upon over the course of the following argument.

Within cultural formations shaped by the logistics of mass production and consumption, the valorized concepts of individual originality and authenticity of expression attendant in assuming a bourgeois subject position have paradoxically become the highest sought after commodities. The logic of capitalist expansion seems to preclude any other option; everything that has the faintest smack of originality or authenticity is almost immediately integrated in the field of commodification⁶. And yet, at each advance, capitalist commodification moves further to jeopardize the very thing which ideologically enables it; the self-determining individual. In my understanding, it is the containment of this potentially explosive contradiction and the concomitant reproduction and expansion of capitalist relations that is the stuff of contemporary hegemony and consequently the most deserving recipient of critical inquiry.

⁶ As any advertising employee worth their salt will know, authenticity (even if only in reified form,) is a big seller. There is an insatiable thirst for consuming "authentic" experience (or at least those sign values that signify authenticity,) amongst increasingly "media-savvy" and cynically jaded consumers. Resultingly, marginal social enclaves are continually being scouted out and monitored as the signs of authenticity are appropriated, removed from context, stylized, devitalized, and reproduced for mass consumption.

Of additional concern and central to the following thesis are the implications for individuals arising from the rapid development of a networked system of mass communication during the decades following WWII. During this period, artists, particularly those in the United States where commercial mass media first achieved some degree of ubiquity in everyday life, began to incorporate aspects of commercial mass media influence into their work as commercial mass media incorporated more aspects of the artworld - thereby leading to a blurring of the lines previously separating high and low forms of art. The presence of a national mass media, informed and largely perpetuated by commercial interests, creates conditions under which mass mediated "truths" may be effectively disseminated and indefinitely reproduced. Truth is placed in quotes here insofar as the truth being experienced is one originating in an overtly mediated and openly representational articulation and as such is prone to representative bias⁷. The vast scale upon which representations of social reality are disseminated and reproduced in the mass media can be understood as effecting a type of discursive amplification⁸. If a character on a television advertisement sighs in quiet frustration at a loved one, for example, potentially millions of individuals will simultaneously hear it. When this discursive amplification is coupled with the potential of mechanical or digital reproductions

⁷ Not that claims of bias-free representation do not exist, however. In the case of tele-photographic news journalism for example, the claims of an unbiased representation of the facts find support and justification in the "common sense" (Gramsci's usage) belief that the "camera never lies." The claim that the apparatus records an objective representation is accepted to the degree that video-tape evidence is commonly submitted as inscrutably objective evidence of the "facts" in an increasing number of judicial inquiries. What is obscured in the easy deferral to this common-sensical notion, however, are the consequences on representational truth of what Doug Kellner refers to as the "cinematic apparatus and strategy". The camera may not lie, but the event recorded may be staged in the first place or/and furthermore altered in the manner in which representation is packaged, stylized and visually encoded. As Sergi Eisenstein first discovered over 70 years ago for instance, post-production editing may significantly determine what truths are immediately discernible in cinematic representation and narrative.

⁸ Here the discourses being amplified are those inherent in the representational coding, that is, the narrative(s) determined through readings of socially pre-coded appearance(s).

to be (indefinitely) reproduced and repeated⁹, the conditions for the development of what I will term "truth effects" are created. While it is arguable that all truth is found in its effect via attachment to particular institutions, discourses or technologies, truth effect in the context of my following usage may be distinguished as that originating from a mass-representation which mediates between a social reality and the individual participants of that social reality. With the rapid development of post-war commercial mass media, the means through which representations of social reality are disseminated and reproduced achieve unprecedented levels of social saturation, spawning an entire industry employed in the business of overseeing the production, and monitoring the reception, of specifically intended truth effects.

With the above considerations in mind, my concern lies with the status of the individual subject living under cultural formations informed by the totalizing logic of capitalist commodification and commercial mass-representations. Specifically, it is a question concerning the individual subject living in the paradox of being attributed the human right/responsibility to autonomous self-determination whilst simultaneously being presented with a social order in which individual experience is increasingly mass-consumed in commodified forms of pseudo-individuality and pre-packaged experience.

It is at this point that art suggests itself as a particularly relevant area from which to instigate a discussion of such issues. As even a quick perusal of the operational mandates of many a contemporary cultural organization and institution will confirm, the concept of the self-determining, expressive individual of bourgeois thought still continues to provide the ideological underpinning on

⁹ Many arguments that take a critical look at commercial mass media seem only to address the short-term effects of mass media on the individual psyche. Particular offenders are singled out from the contemporary morass and subject to critical analysis. As undeniably important and useful as this is, the broader, long-term effects of mass media reproduction on individuals whose experiential and cognitive histories become significantly comprised of, and repetitively informed by, mass mediated texts must also be granted due consideration.

which our cultural and economic reception of art is founded. It continues to inform the way in which art is meaningfully contemplated as something essentially different from the objects and experiences that usually populate our everyday lives. Insofar as art remains that category of human activity that continues to privilege and celebrate the creative expressions of self-determining individuals, it presents itself as a fruitful site from which to initiate a discussion regarding the contradictory status of the subject under advanced consumer capitalism.

Accordingly, the confluence of an upsurge in consumerist social relations and the provocative appearance of what is now known as American Pop Art at the onset of the 1960s will provide the focus for the first chapter of this thesis. As an exemplary artist of the pop movement, and one I suggest has enjoyed the greatest contemporary social resonance, the second chapter will focus around the enigmatic provocations of Andy Warhol. Historically, the latter half of this thesis will jump to the time period between the early 1980s and the early 1990s with chapter three turning to an investigation of the social legacies of pop art in more recent advertising, art work, and what has now been widely discussed as postmodern cultural formations and characteristically postmodern forms of subjectivity. Lastly, chapter four will provide a specific analysis of the art and infamy of Jeff Koons, considered by many as the heir apparent to Warhol's artworld clown-prince and by myself as suggestive of what I will refer to, for now, as post-cynicism.

CHAPTER 1

COMMODIFIED EXPERIENCE AND THE PROVOCATION OF POP

...we are talking about making impersonality a style, which is what I think characterizes pop art, as I understand it, in a pure sense.

- Claes Oldenberg, WBIA Radio interview, New York, 1965

The New York art scene had good occasion to indulge in a little satisfied self-congratulation. In the years following WWII, artists such as Rothko, De Kooning, Motherwell, Still and Pollock, all based around New York, had begun producing large-scale, expressive compositions that rejected figuration in favour of more abstract art forms. By 1960 this fiercely individualistic and characteristically austere group of New York "Abstract Expressionists" as they were dubbed, had achieved international recognition, general critical acclaim, and financial success. Their's was the first distinctly American "art movement", conferring on the U.S. and New York in particular, an international cultural prestige, previously afforded only to established centers of artistic production in Europe. It appeared, however, that an emerging group of artists such as Lichtenstien, Rosenquist, Warhol, Oldenberg, and Wesselmann amongst others, were threatening to spoil the party. In the radiant afterglow of "The Triumph of American Painting", to poach the title of Irving Sandler's 1970 retrospective of Abstract Expressionism, ill winds were brewing on the horizon. The alarmed and curious were called to assembly and on December 13th, 1962, the Department of Painting and Sculpture Exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) in New York City organized a panel discussion to address what was rapidly becoming known under the designation "pop art".¹⁰ Art critics

¹⁰ "Pop art" (popular art) is a term originally coined by Lawrence Alloway to describe the work of the British Independent Group (BIG) of the mid to late 1950s. Influenced by the appearance of

and commentators had experienced some initial difficulty in agreeing upon a suitable nomenclature in an effort to categorize what appeared to them as a curious new art movement. Various critics had grouped these emergent forms of art under the classifications of "New Realism", "neo-Dada", "Sign Painting", "Common Object" art, and even "New Vulgarism" by the terminally unimpressed art critic Max Kozloff. The panelists at this early MOMA symposium, "selected for their different points of view as well as for their past contributions to American art criticism."¹¹, were not expected to provide any hard and fast definition of pop art, but each prepared a statement that would hopefully instigate some "lively discussion".¹² Critic Hilton Kramer concluded his polemical summation of pop thusly,

Pop Art does not tell us what it feels like to be living through the present moment of civilization - it is merely part of the evidence of that civilization. Its social effect is simply to reconcile us to a world of commodities, banalities and vulgarities - which is to say, an effect indistinguishable from advertising art. This is a reconciliation that must - now more than ever - be refused, if art - and life itself - is to be defended against the dishonesties of contrived public symbols and pretentious commerce.¹³

Kramer's conclusion is in many ways exemplary of the negative response that pop's broad cultural acceptance and rapid ascension in the American art scene solicited.¹⁴ Kramer's underlying assertion that art must

glossy representations promoting the disturbingly sterile yet brightly packaged new "American lifestyle" in the drab context of war-ravaged Britain, the members of the Independent Group produced work informed by the fascination for new "American" forms of mass communication. The BIG are primarily remembered for the 1956 "This is Tomorrow" exhibit at London's Whitechapel Art Gallery and the early collage work of members Richard Hamilton and Eduardo Paolozzi. This early predecessor of American pop art, while undeniably interesting, is not the focus of this paper. My use of the term pop art refers to the New York/ American manifestation that eventually became known as, and definitive of, the category of "pop."

¹¹ Peter Selz, Henry Geldzahler, Hilton Kramer, Dore Ashton, Leo Steinberg, Stanley Kunitz. "A Symposium on Pop Art". *Arts*, April 1963, 35.

¹² Peter Selz et al, 35

¹³ Peter Selz et al, 38

¹⁴ Henry Geldzahler, an early supporter of the pop movement, claimed in this same symposium that pop was "instant art history". Appearing as it does in the lineage of art history following American Abstract Expressionism as a "clean break" with the artistic values held by its immediate predecessor, Geldzahler's comment has some validity. The mass media found pop art ideal fodder as pop reciprocally found the mass media. Pop art was bright, clean, immediate, titillating and it signified in a manner already common in the mass media. Not surprisingly, pop art received wide

speaking of an emotive or spiritual human condition, how it "feels" to exist at a given moment of civilization, rather than unreflexively reproducing the evidence of that civilization, is indicative of the time-honored trope concerning the appropriate nature of the relational space between artist and work.



fig 1. Hans Namuth, *Jackson Pollock*, 1950

This relational space found its exemplar at the time in the artistic persona of the critically celebrated American Abstract Expressionists. Hans Namuth, for instance, had photographed Jackson Pollock in his isolated Springs (Easthampton) barn studio in 1950, the prints of which were published in a subsequent special issue of Life magazine. With such a wide national readership, the photo-essay in Life established a strong public image of Pollock as emblematic of the new American artists, of the new American art. Namuth's famous photos give an impression of Pollock as a man consumed and

exposure in the mass media, forming a type of symbiotic relationship between itself and the mass media as each quoted from the other. Suffice to say that for pop artists the public exposure was massive and immediate in a manner unprecedented at the time.

transfixed by the explosive intensities of his own creative process, cathartically purging and giving expression to his inner psychological condition in a trance-like dance of bold, sweeping gesture above his floor-mounted canvas. The relational space between the artist and that toward which his¹⁵ creative impulse is directed, is similar to Rilke's description of sculptor Rodin's "vacuum gaze" wherein all social, historic and economic determinants are mentally evacuated, and an immediate transparency of knowing free from cognitive patterns inflicted through social determination is experienced.

The pop artists, in stark contrast, cultivated an attitude of ambivalent detachment or alienation from their creative output¹⁶. Using the same mechanical techniques of industrial production and adopting similar promotional styles of presentation, the pop artists reproduced, often on a monstrous scale, the images or "visual diarrhea" (Kozloff again) of commercial mass media. Everything from comic strips, photos and ads from weekly tabloids, brand labels from processed food, studio publicity shots of Hollywood celebrities, fast food; all became subject matter for these new artists whose work was rapidly garnering mass recognition - although not always favourable. The accusations from established critics came fast and furious; pop art does not transform its subject matter in any meaningful way, there is no evidence of the individual artist's interpretive faculties, no expression of an individually distinct subjectivity marked in and through aesthetic expression¹⁷ and no evidential testimony of the individual subject's response to the experiential conditions of his/her/our given moment of civilization. It can not, therefore, be legitimately

¹⁵ Masculine pronoun is consciously intended here, as befits the assumptive privileging of the male subject in the naturalized discourses of genius.

¹⁶ "a euphoric monotone that is half ecstasy, half hibernation" as one Newsweek journalist put it. See unsigned, "Saint Andrew". Newsweek, Dec. 7, 1964. reproduced in Steven Madoff (Ed), Pop Art: a Critical History (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 279

¹⁷ A expressive or "signature" style particular to a singular embodied subject. In the discourses of fine art painting, this is traditionally located in the visual trace of the hand/brush stroke.

considered as art. And yet it was. Its absorption within the institutional matrix that constitutes the "art scene" within certain paradigms of meaning validated it as such. Like Duchamp's infamous urinal ready-made, the objects of pop art were contemplated meaningfully by an audience as "art" within given frames of meaning informed by precepts derived from a modernist tradition of thought concerning the representational nature of art and the expressive individuality of the artist/subject. And to add insult to injury, it was wildly popular!, compatible with and readily disseminated by the rapidly developing mechanisms of commercial mass media.

My intent in the following section is to consider from a critical perspective the emergence of pop art in the context of particular socio-economic conditions that enable the production and reception of pop art as legitimate objects of meaningful contemplation. Specifically, it seems that within the concomitant theories which inform the modern practices of art¹⁸, there is an explicit or implicit concept of an attendant individual subject that both initially conceives of the work of art (i.e., a creator), and one which then meaningfully and privately experiences that creation, conceptually consecrating the work as proper "art". The meta-referent that binds this relation between artist and audience through art - taken as the expressive medium that mediates between the two distinctly autonomous subjects - is the unconfirmable yet necessary assumption that all exist within fundamentally similar, although subjectively determined, experiential conditions at the given "moment of civilization." The category of art can thus be positioned as a sort of privileged social "flow zone" through which

¹⁸ My use of the term "art" here and in following references, refers specifically to the bourgeois conception of art, that is, art which is produced by the individual (non--commissioned), is received individually and in some manner represents the process of coming to a self-understanding. See Peter Bürger's "On the Problem of the Autonomy of Art in Bourgeois Society" in Theory of the Avant-Garde (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1981) for a useful schematic illustrating the relationships between what he calls Sacral, Courtly and Bourgeois forms of art.

autonomous agency and individual identity appear meaningfully to manifest themselves in relation to a particular social reality. I say privileged in that everyday life under forms of industrialized mass capitalism, particularly when considered in terms of an individual's relationship to their own "creative" labor, does not generally allow for this individual "free expressiveness" within its utility-maximizing and profit-driven structuring. Categorically, art is excused from the capitalist division of labor and the near-tyrannical metaphysic of utility into which capitalist forms of everyday life and social reality are sublated. This separation, however, both privileges and distances art from everyday social reality. As Peter Bürger observes,

In bourgeois art, the portrayal of bourgeois self-understanding occurs in a sphere that lies outside the praxis of life. The citizen who in everyday life has been reduced to a partial function (means-ends activity) can be discovered in art as "human being". Here, one can unfold the abundance of one's talents, though with the proviso that this sphere remain strictly separate from the praxis of life.¹⁹

I take the very rudimentary presumption of the relational "linkage" between artist, artwork, and audience as fundamental, both to the formulation of cultural and subjective meanings about the cultural artifacts that are designated and received as art, and to considering the implications of pop art in relation to ideas about individual subjectivity within a particular "given moment of civilization", that is, the U.S. during the 1960s.

Having said that, a brief overview of the particular concerns entailed in my approach to this rather vague term "given moment of civilization" seems necessary before proceeding any further. Insofar as my interest is focused on art's expressive status, and its capacity for informing the terms and providing the means for contemplating and articulating subjectivity, I am limiting the cast of my

¹⁹ Peter Bürger, Theory of the Avant-Garde, 81

net to three areas I believe hold greatest relevance in informing what I will hereby refer to as culturally derived modes of self-apprehension.

Firstly, a brief overview of the residual, dominant and emergent²⁰ political and economic policy that informs socio-economic hegemony within the given historical context of postwar U.S. seems necessary. The transitions in economic, political and social policy introduced by the U.S. government's adoption of the Keynesian economic model will receive particular attention. The second area, intimately linked with the first, concerns the technological development and unprecedented implementation of relatively sophisticated systems of mass communication. The unilateral and popular implementation of these new forms of communication²¹, capable of reaching a nationwide mass audience, constitutes a new and increasingly ubiquitous sphere of representative meaning. With representations of national socio-economic conditions increasingly becoming the preserve of mass-mediated systems of communication, socio-economic realities become largely discerned by individuals through the mass representational texts of the developing communication industry. As I will address in detail further below, the gradual shifts in representational practices to the rapidly developing media of mass electronic communication systems have significant ramifications for the subject, particularly considering the majority of mass communication facilities are privately owned by corporations with fundamentally commercial interests at the heart of such ownership. In turn, the texts of the mass commercial communication apparatus assume a central role in the on-going reproduction of socio-economic hegemony. It need hardly be said that a representation of

²⁰ I mean to employ these terms in the manner suggested by Raymond Williams in Marxism And Literature (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).

²¹ Particularly the household television set, a medium of communication wherein a single transmission is broadcast on a mass scale. While the production and dissemination of television texts occur on a mass scale, the reception of television texts remains a largely private or individual affair.

something does not necessarily and unproblematically signify the immediate "Truth" of that which is represented. Nonetheless, the representations of mass communication media can be useful in discerning a mass-representative, or discursively amplified, "truth effect" through which meaningful terms of self-apprehension are indeed constituted. My intention in the following discussion is briefly to address certain key social institutions in their role as functioning agents of mass cultural regulation within the context of postwar America.

Lastly, the third area concerns the discursive formulations that constitute a conceptually enabling "is-ness" of artistic identification in providing institutionally consecrated answers to the on-going question of "what is art today?" This discursive sphere which socially constitutes the terms of artistic identification is reproduced in the commentary and public pronouncements of artists and various recognized specialists of the arts, i.e., critics, academics, curators, etc.. Providing the material compliment to this conceptual labor is an institutional matrix comprised of museums, galleries, dealers, collectors, publications, etc.. Those discursive formations that enable an artistic identification within distinctly regional areas I refer to as constituting a given art scene. Any given art scene is a regionally distinguished element of a broader discursive formation that aims to provide the ontological tenants necessary for recognizing this thing named art in the first instance. This broader discursive formulation which is required knowledge for enabling artistic identification I will refer to, following the argument set forth by Arthur Danto, as an artworld.²²

²² See Danto's essay entitled "The Artworld", reproduced in Steven Madoff (Ed), Pop Art: a Critical History, 269 - 278. Very basically put, Danto argues that the development of modern art since the post-impressionists has introduced new criteria for determining those things which are art from those which are not. The imitation theory of art, as critiqued by Socrates in Plato's Republic, can no longer be held as sufficient criteria for admitting an object into the class of things art (the advent of photography had much to do with this development.) Danto uses an example from Van Gogh to elucidate, "...*Potato Eaters*", as a consequence of certain unmistakable distortions, turns out to be a non-facsimile of real-life potato eaters; and inasmuch as these are not facsimiles of potato eaters, Van Gogh's picture, as a non-imitation, had as much right to be called a real object as did its putative subjects" (271). As such, new criteria must be established to

The socio-economic conditions in the post-WWII United States have now been widely cited by cultural observers, analysts and historians as conducive to the emergence of new forms of social organization and process. The conditions and experience of being employed, a central concern in everyday life, had gradually but steadily been altered for many individuals as a result of the implementation of new forms of labor management. Martyn J. Lee, in accounting for the significant changes in the organization of labor, focuses on the productive success of automated assembly-line Fordism (after American auto manufacturer Henry Ford) and the scientific models of labor organization proposed by Fredrick Taylor,

Fordism represented the emergence of an intensive regime of accumulation based upon a general system of mass production using semi-automatic assembly lines, "Taylorist" forms of job fragmentation and demarcation, and the implementation of forms of single-purpose or dedicated machinery. This regime of accumulation, when appropriately wedded to a developed monopolistic mode of regulation, opened up the possibility of the first high-wage, mass production - mass consumption economy.²³

Fordism and Taylorism, aside from inaugurating wholesale rationalization, standardization, supervision and the striving towards maximum utilization of industrial technology within the organization of labor, further engendered structural transformations of a whole way of life, "a transformation of the social relations of production and a transformation of the whole way of social life from which those production relations emerge and are ultimately sustained."²⁴ While the logistics behind this vision of restructuring labor had been in place since the early decades of the century, it was not until the years following WWII that

distinguish non-facsimile art, as an equally legitimate "real object" amongst many others, as art proper. Why is Rauschenberg's bed art and not simply a messy bed with paint on the sheets? Why are Warhol's Brillo Boxes art and not those found on supermarket shelves (aside from Warhol's being made of solid wood)? For Danto, the answer lies in the enabling function of art theories that comprise an artworld, "To see something as art requires something the eye cannot decry - an atmosphere of artistic theory, a knowledge of the history of art: an artworld." (275)

²³ Martyn J. Lee, Consumer Culture Reborn (London: Routledge, 1993.), 71

²⁴ Lee, Consumer Culture Reborn, 74

developing socio-economic conditions in the US. allowed for the successful and diffuse application of these organizational models of labor in the workplace. Efforts to unilaterally apply these organizational models of labor relations had been previously pushed back by the advent of two World Wars and the 1930s Great Depression. Following WWII, however, social, economic, and political conditions in the US. allowed for a gradual yet comprehensive restructuring of commonplace life under developing capitalist relations that the early "visionaries" such as Ford and Taylor had proposed.

By no means do I intend this to suggest, however, that such transitions were smoothly effected without hindrance. In the years following WWII, the occurrences of World War and recent economic hardship (still fresh in popular recollection,) became discursively positioned and mass represented as evidential of the need to initiate socio-economic change. During the years prior to WWII, US. labor organizations had actively resisted any restructuring of labor conditions which further exploited workers during the expansion of industrial capitalism at expense of the individual laborer. Common, as well, were sympathetic opinions toward a socialist politics amongst published journalists and academics, indeed, amongst several recognized and influential political parties.

The organization of labor imposed by the mechanized structuring and fundamentally privatized interests inherent in industrial capitalism's modes of production were criticized for dehumanizing and devaluing individual workers. What was implemented after WWII to address this problem of critical resistance to developing labor conditions was a mass-mediated social superstructure that would hopefully bring about the hegemonic formation and reproduction of a new type of worker in accord or in harmony with the reorganization of labor and the increased efficiency of the modes of production. From an economically-

motivated perspective, this seems a sound and reasonable deployment given the historical progress of capitalist development and labor relations. Simply put, the restructuring logic of labor can not limit itself exclusively to the relations of production for this would only leave it open to criticism from those spheres of human activity removed from sites of material production. To achieve widespread general compliance and social reproduction, ideological assumptions that animate capitalist economic interests must extend into and establish dominant hegemony in the sphere of the social and cultural superstructure. Failure to do so would only leave any sphere of human activity removed from the logistics of production and consumption as a site of potentially critical distance from which individuals may exercise their critical faculties and from which social antagonism may issue forth. Accordingly, not only is a new type of worker needed, but new forms of subjective self-apprehension are required to reproduce a general social hegemony in accordance with the historical social requirements arising from a developing capitalist economy. As evidenced in several recent critical surveys of mass media texts produced in the US following WWII, discernible and concerted efforts were undertaken to position self-apprehension within the terms and logic of mass consumption .²⁵

Furthermore, the positioning of subjectivity within a social logic based in commodity consumption is attuned to the deployment and development of state policies. As Christin Mamiya convincingly argues²⁶, the unreserved embrace of Keynesian economic models by both the Kennedy and Johnson Presidential

²⁵ As Stuart Ewen reports, even in wartime the US. mass media had begun to titillate the public with representations of the good life to come, whetting public appetite for a new and prosperous lifestyle come the end of the war. "through 1945, mass magazines and advertising had promoted a vision of postwar life that united prosperity, consumer goods, and single-family home ownership as a white American birthright." Stuart Ewen, All Consuming Images: The Politics of Style in Contemporary Culture, (New York, Basic Books, Inc., 1988), 224

²⁶ See Christin J. Mamiya, Pop Art and Consumer Culture: American Supermarket. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992.)

Administrations must be considered catalytic in the formation and establishment of both new socio-economic conditions and correspondent cultural formations which include within them certain invitational models of self-apprehension. The British economist Keynes had formulated, in his 1936 publication The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money, a theory of economic growth that argued against the traditionally held model of economic regulation as espoused by classical economic theorists such as Adam Smith. Smith, and those who built upon his ideas, posited an economic model of self-regulating capitalism, i.e., the "invisible hand of capitalism", wherein naturally-arising laws of supply and demand regulate the capitalist economy by their own accord. Classical economic policy thereby tended to focus on issues relating to productive capability in matching supply with demand. Contrary to this, Keynes suggested that a healthy GNP and full employment are rather questions of ensuring demand and healthy national consumption levels. Management of consumption, not production, is the key to securing economic stability and growth.

Capitalism, went Keynes's argument, is actually an inherently unstable economic system when left to its own devices. In order to maintain some stability and reliably project growth, some form of external regulation and control over socio-economic activity is needed. Here we have an economic model that openly solicits state intervention and regulation of socio-economic relations; self-regulating capitalism becomes state organized capitalism. Mass production, it stands to reason, requires mass consumption, "a sufficiently sized mass market composed of the wage-earning classes that would be able to absorb the full influx of mass-produced commodities."²⁷ A good economy must thus stimulate and maintain strong consumption patterns in individual

²⁷ Lee, Consumer Culture Reborn, 77

consumers as well as selling the self-regarding cultural logic of the system of mass consumption itself. Accordingly, as Mamiya observes, "American culture of the 1960s revolved around issues of consumption not only on the larger scale of government policy and legislation, economic planning, and corporate growth, but on the microeconomic level of personal lifestyle as well."²⁸

Consumption becomes ingrained in "lifestyle" as the prescribed means through which one socially "styles", "signs", or apprehends one's distinct individuality are persistently grafted in the narratives of mass representation to the act of privatized consumption.

The rapid expansion and technical development of privately owned mass communication systems, particularly the rise of television broadcasting, facilitated the dissemination of these messages meant to stimulate consumption on a nation-wide scope directly into the homes of an ever increasing number of American families.²⁹ Seen as an agent deployed under capitalist interests, mass media and advertising texts assumed the critical function of dissolving those traditional familial and community-based cultural formations and regional practices that did not conform to, or hindered, "the broad social trajectory of capitalist development"³⁰, substituting in their place a national and unified cultural logic of consumption.³¹ The mass media act as an intermediary agent for postwar political and socio-economic changes, constituting in part their

²⁸ Christin J. Mamiya, Pop Art and Consumer Culture: American Supermarket, 3

²⁹ "If the automobile was the motivating force of suburban life, television was its centerpiece....By 1950, many suburban developers...were including the lure of built-in televisions in the houses they sold. (In the case of veterans' homes, these built-ins were covered as part of a government-subsidized mortgage.) The television was being installed as a powerful fixture in postwar life, insinuating an unprecedented image-machine into the home." Stuart Ewen, All Consuming Images, 231

³⁰ Lee, Consumer Culture Reborn, 87

³¹ For a full account of the historical development of this function, see Stuart Ewen's Captains of Consciousness (New York: McGraw-Hill Books Co., 1976.) To say this is a unified and national cultural logic of consumption is not to ignore the regional variances in consumption pattern and fashion cycle, simply to point out that they are variables within a broader cultural logic of consumption.

correlate in certain hegemonic social and cultural formations which provide individuals with meaningful and often pleasurable models of self-apprehension that conform to the social trajectory of capitalist development. As for the effects on social relations, the private lives of individuals become targets of increasing social scrutiny based on these pre-determined models of normative self-apprehension provided in the alluring texts of commercial mass media. And as Lee testifies, these processes are effected within rationalized discourses similar to labor reorganization, a type of social engineering in which the individual psyche is taken as the fundamental unit,

In the fields of advertising, marketing and the newly emergent 'science' of motivational research, there was a growing feeling that the ethos which lay behind the principles of technological rationality and scientific objectivism, by now well enshrined within industrial orthodoxies, could also be brought to bear upon the individual cognitive processes by which collective social meanings were achieved.³²

The representational spaces of the individual's public and private everyday "life world" (as Jürgen Habermas³³ calls it,) were rapidly being colonized by the signs and narratives of ubiquitous corporate advertising, whose texts represented a social life shaped by a new hard logic of consumption and that offered to provide the cohesive social fiber for everyday life in post-WWII America.

In such a socio-economic model, however, the ongoing imperatives of capitalist growth - the realization and accumulation of surplus value - capital - must ensure that individual consumption levels are maintained in order that economic growth and stability are realized. The commodity consumed must satisfy a given need on some level, but it can not offer complete and indefinite satisfaction as this would quite plainly result in dramatic drops in national

³² Lee, Consumer Culture Reborn , 96

³³ Habermas develops this idea of discursively-based life world in The Theory of Communicative Action, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984)

consumption levels and send the economy into a tailspin. Subsequently, commodities appearing in the market require some form of pre-determined obsolescence, whether as a result of projected material breakdown in the materials used in production³⁴ or through their aestheticization and insertion within a fashion/style cycle (the latter proving itself the most popular contemporary option). Individuals successfully positioned to apprehend themselves through the models provided by mass advertising's corporate narratives of consumption are thereby implicated in a social system that promises satisfaction and individual gratification. Yet for such a narrative to actually deliver is to seriously jeopardize the reproduction of that same system. The engineering of individual dis-satisfaction is in many ways a necessary dynamo of progress in such a consumer society. Promises of a "happily ever after" that close advertising narratives are deferred in the text until hegemonically enacted by the individual in the consumption of the commodity, which in itself can only offer temporary or listless gratifications until new configurations of essential, "must have" consumables are introduced. In the postwar manifestation of the "American" way of life, representatively characterized as a prosperous new era of material abundance³⁵, more and more areas of any traditional and organically determined³⁶ life world were rapidly being co-opted by the encroaching logic of commodification. The separation between work and leisure became increasingly pronounced as both

³⁴ A short stint working in a warehouse for a certain Canadian retailer and auto-parts garage afforded me many a first-hand example of this as new replacement auto-parts shipments would arrive from the factory in various stages of rust and dilapidation. And this is before they have been affixed to any part of a working automobile.

³⁵ While the passage of time allows an ease of critical distance, it must be remembered that life for many US citizens had indeed improved in certain measurable aspects. Real wages for the American worker were indeed rising, measurable standards of living were higher than ever, and the average citizen had more disposable income with increased leisure time to spend it.

³⁶ I use this term in the manner employed by Georg Lukács. See History and Class Consciousness. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971)

were at the same time steadily sublated under the governing logic of the commodity,

the urban worker, whether in factory or office, compensates for the surrender of his personal autonomy to the discipline of the workplace in the intense development of the time left over; lost control over one's life is rediscovered in the symbolic and affective experiences now defined as specific to leisure. But because the ultimate logic of this re-creation (the hyphen restores the root meaning of the term) is the rationalized efficiency of the system as a whole, these needs are met by the same means as material ones: by culture in the form of reproducible commodities.³⁷

Additional historic factors that can be cited as facilitating postwar US. socio-economic transformations are perhaps less over-arching, yet each nonetheless contributes to informing and regulating the historical cultural formations within and through which individuals come to understand themselves. US industry, for instance, had emerged from WWII relatively unscathed in comparison to Western European political and economic allies. The booming industry of US. wartime production ground onward, re-situated and represented as vital to both economic prosperity and interests of national defense which in turn informs a general "techno-militarization" of national public discourse that continues unabated to this day. The new systems of mass communication were instrumental in decrying the need for constant vigilance against that which John Foster Dulles - U.S. secretary of state 1953-59 - was fond of calling "Godless Communism"³⁸. The communication machinery of mass

³⁷ Thomas Crow, "Modernism and Mass Culture in the Visual Arts" in *Pollock and After*. (New York: Harper & Row, 1985), 238. As an aside, it is interesting to see a contemporary reversal of this delineation as more and more individuals, armed with the latest in communication technologies, are integrating work and leisure in lifestyle options, always contactable, working from home, now "self-employed", etc.. See Chapter 3 of this thesis for further discussion.

³⁸ The nationally televised McCarthy hearings of the 1950s, the Cuban Missile crisis/media event of Oct. 1962, and the bizarre appearance of private bomb shelters in the backyards of suburbia are all cultural manifestations of this perceived national threat. It is morbidly interesting that this polarity between the "American Way" and "Godless Communism" was diligently enforced upon the very young through the education system as children were drilled to dive under chipboard school desks for protection in the possible occurrence of a full nuclear strike, courtesy of Russia, during school hours.

culture dutifully represented (American) capitalist democracy engaged in an ethical battle with the demonized specter of global communism over fundamental individual freedoms guaranteed each and every American citizen.³⁹ Mass representations of unforgiving persecution and generalized social suspicion repeatedly linked national patriotism to fiercely pro-capitalist sentiment, creating a political and intellectual ambiance of choking paranoia and anti-American (read: anti-capitalist) quietism. As a result there appears to be a general shift at the time in opposition or resistance to capitalist institutions from the sphere of production to the cultural sphere; that ostensibly operating beyond and removed from socio-economic realities although not providing total absolution as several artists would discover first-hand during the McCarthy trials. This idea that revolutionary change will be better initiated and take place foremost in cultural production or the superstructural, rather than on the factory floors - the economic base - now appears as the only option open under contemporary socio-economic conditions.

The years following the war furthermore saw personal finance, heavily socialized as consumer credit for new purchases, become widely available to a rapidly growing middle class. Easily acquired consumer credit for the middle classes facilitated in part a mass ethnographical relocation, particularly of young families, to vast housing projects outside of the major commercial and industrial centers; the suburbs⁴⁰. Populated by (white) migrants from urban centers and rural communities alike, suburban developments offered what amounts to a contained and engineered representation of open space

³⁹ This extends to a common belief held in America that all citizens of the world aspired to be, indeed had a fundamental right to be, like Americans; autonomous, individual, free. Such an assumption finds its legitimation in the founding myth of Jefferson's declaration of human rights which asserted that all humanity (men) held certain inalienable rights (as realized in the US. constitution.)

⁴⁰ "Between 1945 and 1960, it is estimated that more than 30 million people migrated to a new way of life." Stuart Ewen, All Consuming Images, 233

ostensibly removed from urban centers yet absolutely dependent on them. The suburban housing projects offered pre-fabricated communities that found coherence in a newly affluent and increasingly performative social space, one proffering an ideology galvanized around a fundamental notion that quantitative material possession is the qualitative index of personal success and ensuing happiness.⁴¹

Individuals living through these changes in socio-economic conditions found themselves having to adapt to new ways of working, of living, and of satisfying their needs. Not that there was any shortage of behavioural models to provide cues for appropriate public and private conduct. Glamorous new models of self-apprehension saturated the visual terrain of everyday consciousness as the symbolic and tactile "raw material" out of which social meaning is forged was steadily transformed and ordered into a hierarchical logic by the increasingly important and ubiquitous presence of commercial mass media. As Stuart Ewen has noted, in the 1950s and 1960s, the US commodity market developed promotional mechanisms modeled after the patterns of conspicuous consumption that Thorstein Veblen had noted amongst rich capitalists and middle-class imitators at the turn of the century, only this time "democratized" on "a mass scale."⁴² Veblen, in his 1899 polemic Theory of the Leisure Class, analyzed the consumption patterns and habits of the emergent American nouveau-riche (i.e., the leisure class,) and posited a social perception of hierarchical value and power based in money. This wealth, or "pecuniary power" as Veblen calls it, must have some type of performative manifestation in

⁴¹ There is, of course, an individual competitiveness in this, a "keeping up with the Joneses", which will be addressed below. Suffice to say, as Marcuse points out, "The corrosion of privacy in massive apartment houses and suburban homes breaks the barrier which formerly separated the individual from the public existence and exposes more easily the attractive qualities of other wives and other husbands." see Herbert Marcuse, One-Dimensional Man, (London: Ark Paperbacks, 1986), 75

⁴² Stuart Ewen, Captains of Consciousness, 206

order that it be recognized as having legitimate social influence or power. Hence, we have what Veblen terms "conspicuous consumption", a kind of performative consumption of goods or services, including those produced by the culture industries, that bespeaks of individual wealth, power, and positions of social worth and value.

Ewen's suggestion that the texts of postwar commercial promotion solicit "Veblenian" patterns of conspicuous consumption finds some support in the initial writing of Jean Baudrillard, most particularly in a collection of essays, For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign (1972). Taking up and fruitfully expanding upon Veblen's observations, Baudrillard makes the useful initial distinction between 3 types of value afforded the commodity object in consumption-based societies; use value, exchange value, and a relatively under-theorized conception of value based in sign value. Sign value, Baudrillard argues, determines an increasingly important operative function of the commodity in developing capitalist economies. Various commodities appear within hierarchically ordered sign systems of organized goods and services as primarily represented in the texts of commercial promotion and advertising. The conspicuous consumption of these pre-coded (fetishized⁴³) commodity/signs functions to affirm hierarchical social positions of prestige; such signs become the measures of success and often the yardsticks of self-worth. Consumption then, as Baudrillard astutely notes, is actually a type of social labor, an active manipulation of sign-objects keyed to a pre-coded system of impression management and linked to the individual through the institution of privatized

⁴³ "Commodity fetishism in this new stage of capitalism focuses not exclusively on the *product*, but rather also on the *sign values* invested in the product as an object. Sign value is, in part, the synthetic outcome of those rationalized special systems that Lukács saw as being based on calculation. It centers upon products, which have been reworked with abstract or symbolic codes, producing valorized differences through symbolic intensification and imaging." Timothy W. Luke, Screens of Power: Ideology, Domination and Resistance in Informational Society (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 33

possession. Sign value is a pivotal concept in that it affords an approach to understanding how capitalism's commodifying logic operates not only within the economic base of material production, but also within the super structural spheres of culture, of signs and the relationships between them. The dominant classes not only own the means of material production but also hold significant influence over the social processes of signification via the amplified system of mass communication. As Baudrillard observes, the goal here is not profit but legitimacy of socially dominant class interests that strive "to surpass, to transcend, and to consecrate their economic privilege in a semiotic privilege", the latter representing, "the ultimate stage of domination."⁴⁴

The ramifications of this are as extensive as the processes through which individuals form private and self-reflexive understandings. As Langman suggests,

Every historical era has not only its particular social structure, cultural forms and practices, but distinctive modes of subjectivity, ways which the individual experience a socially constructed and mediated reality of their own actions, thoughts, feelings, images of self and appraisals by other people. The more or less conscious locus of various social activities, practices, strategies, plans goals and understanding is the self. It is expressed in self-presentations and/or contemplated in reflection. It is at the same time subject to evaluations and appraisals by others. Recognition and positive appraisals by others influence self-evaluations and in turn self-esteem. At the same time, the self negotiates reality, formulates goals and initiates social interactions to achieve certain plans and goals that may often bring about rewarding recognition.⁴⁵

Langman goes on to claim that it is in the study of the commercially proffered modes of self-apprehension and their attendant narratives for achieving affective gratification that the secret of modern hegemony is revealed, i.e., that, "the dominant classes, via media, control norms of affective gratification and

⁴⁴ Jean Baudrillard, For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign. (St. Louis: Telos Press Ltd., 1981), 116

⁴⁵ Lauren Langman, "Neon Cages", in Rob Shields [Ed.] Lifestyle Shopping: The Subject of Consumption (London: Routledge, 1992), 43

control in everyday life. The 'general good' that sustains class privilege in Gramsci's sense rests on the consumption of goods, fantasies and forms of self-presentation."⁴⁶ Individual laborers may feel like replaceable cogs in someone else's machine during the hours of work, but during leisure time they are empowered, able to position themselves through acts of consumption to emulate certain modes of subjectivity whose pre-coded narratives (advertisements) afford the promise of social recognition and affective gratifications. To follow this line of thought, when the sign-value of an object is "democratized on a mass scale" through mass production, fears are inevitably raised about the ensuing standardization and rationalization of potential forms of self-identity (models of self-apprehension,) complicit with the logic of the capitalist commodity market and its bottom line of profit. This brings us back in a round about way to art, specifically to pop art within the context of reception shaped by the socio-economic conditions outlined above, and to Hilton Kramer's objection that pop is symptomatic of these "dishonesties of contrived public symbols and pretentious commerce" rather than being critically responsive to them.

The emergent socio-economic conditions in post WWII U.S. provided fertile terrain for the rapid expanse and firm establishment of social conditions that threatened the status and authenticity of the autonomous subject which modern art, and indeed the ruling ideologies of the bourgeois state itself, requires as a type of enabling ontological necessity. This is what sets Hilton Kramer's alarm bells off and prompts his rhetorically embellished call for immediate action, for vehement refusal. The threat of the dishonesties inherent in an increasingly standardized and commodified culture are a danger to both art and, for Kramer at least, nothing less than to life itself. Recall that art is here

⁴⁶ Langman, "Neon Cages", 54

positioned not only as the free play-zone of unrestricted expression for the bourgeois subject, but the expressive yardstick by which the self-reflexive individual's experiential conditions during a "moment of civilization" can be apprehended and ascribed with meaning.

These pop artists, in the dispassionate yet open embrace of both the subject matter and production techniques of commercial mass culture, make no distinction between the individual's self-determined creative life and the "banalities and vulgarities" of corporate capitalism that threaten to thoroughly penetrate the very interstices of everyday life. As Kramer goes on to lament, pop art does not "speak" in the language of (universal) formal aesthetics, but is rather "crucially dependent upon cultural logistics outside itself for its main expressive force."⁴⁷ These "cultural logistics", hitherto shunned from dominant formalism of aesthetic discussions framing Abstract Expressionism, make a perverse return in the work of the pop artists. They are pop art's "main expressive force" no less, a scandalous contradiction to modernist valorizations of art as aesthetic representation of the psychological/emotional process involved in the bourgeois subject's quest to achieve authentic self-apprehension.

Dore Ashton, another alarmed participant in attendance at the 1962 MOMA panel discussion, also directs criticism to what he sees as pop art's chronic lack of critical intent, its collapse of any contemplative distance,

Far from being an art of social protest, it [pop art] is an art of capitulation. The nightmare of poet Henri Michaux, who imagines himself surrounded by hostile objects pressing in on him and seeking to displace his "I," to annihilate his individuality by "finding their center in his imagination," has become a reality for would-be artists. The profusion of things is an overwhelming fact that they have unfortunately learned to live with."⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Peter Selz et al, 37

⁴⁸ Peter Selz et al, 39

Ashton's invocation of Michaux's nightmarish battle with the external "profusion of things" (or more specifically, commodity-signs in postwar US. society,) is suggestive of the terms through which many critics mounted attacks on pop art. For Ashton's contemporary "would-be artists" i.e., pop artists, the struggle to realize singular individuality is over. Hostile external objects have overwhelmed any individual self-determination in the persona of pop artists, a situation that Ashton balefully observes they have learned to live with and, we might add, live with quite successfully as artists. For fellow discussion participant and art critic Henry Geldzahler however, the rise of pop art is hardly surprising considering the cultural developments that have led to its immanent manifestation,

...from this vantage point it seems that the phenomenon of pop art was inevitable. The popular press, especially and most typically *Life* magazine, the movie close-up, black and white, technicolor and wide screen, the billboard extravaganzas, and finally the introduction, through television, of this blatant appeal to our eye into the home - all this has made available to our society, and thus to the artist, an imagery so pervasive, persistent and compulsive that it had to be noticed.⁴⁹

Geldzahler's sympathetic take assumes a field of imagery generated by and through commercial mass media (of which he lists examples,) so intrusive on our everyday thought that it only seems correct and inevitable that it be taken notice of. Artists like Lichtenstien, Rosenquist, Warhol and Wesselman had merely opened their eyes to the contemporary, immediately lived environment as a direct source of subject matter. Geldzahler's observation may be well taken in consideration of the socio-economic and cultural transformations influencing everyday life in post-war America. Significantly enough however, what is skirted around in Geldzahler's observations is any consideration of the way in which this ubiquitous and compelling imagery is noticed by the pop artists. For Geldzahler it seems enough that it be noticed by the artist and given full accreditation as an important source of the imagery that populates our everyday

⁴⁹ Peter Seiz et al, 36

lived experience, our "moment of civilization" if you like. But what pop art really antagonizes for the likes of Kramer and Ashton are the cultural models of self-apprehension characterized by individual self-determination and critical social impatience⁵⁰. And yet to speak and meaningfully contemplate pop as art in the first instance as Geldzahler does, requires conceiving of it within certain discursive formations (e.g., Danto's artworld) rooted in and discursively constitutive of a self-determining subject who has self-reflexively expressed something; the individual artist. Geldzahler later assumes as much in his anticipation to possible objections vis-à-vis the terms or manner through which pop artists "notice" mass commercial imagery as evidenced in the artistic treatment of the expressive medium,

My feeling is that it is the artist who defines the limit of art, not the critic or curator....responsible critics should not predict, and they should not goad the artist into a direction that criticism would feel more comfortable with. The critic's highest goal must be to stay alert and sensitive to what the artist is doing, not to tell him what he should be doing.⁵¹

The artist remains sovereign in Geldzahler's preemptive apologetic, conferred with the privilege of delimiting the boundaries of art in and through the art work produced. Artistic production, once constituted and recognized as such, needs to be meaningfully received and contemplated. The artist's expressive self-determination must be honoured (or so Geldzahler suggests,) for it alone constitutes the limits of art. And yet, for the likes of Kramer and Ashton, this is precisely the problem concerning pop art and the pop artists. Indeed, why afford these "artists" a certain meaningful reception of their work when they themselves quite openly and performatively reject such terms of (self-)apprehension in the act of producing their own work? It is this stark aporia between pop art's inversion of the terms of artistic production and the given

⁵⁰ Even though pop may, through an ironic reading, successfully suggest certain affectively-deadened responses solicited by commercial media imagery.

⁵¹ Peter Selz et al. 36

terms of artistic reception or contemplation that creates pop art's paradoxical yet compelling bind. As Roland Barthes describes it,

Pop art as we know it is the permanent theatre of this tension: on the one hand, the mass culture of the period is present in it as a revolutionary force which contests art; and on the other, art is present in it as a very old force which irresistibly returns in the economy of societies. There are two voices, as in a fugue - one says: "This is not Art"; the other says, at the same time: "I am Art."⁵²

Pop asserts itself into an artworld discourse informed by notions originating in the Romantic period that sutures the appreciation of art objects with a particular conception of the artist; that is, the autonomous individual with self-determining expressive capability. This persistent idea that art is "something that somebody decided to do" enables a certain apprehension (or appreciation) of it.

On the other hand, what the pop artist decides to do is pluck a familiar commodity-sign from the encroaching visual terrain of commercial mass media and re-present it as art without any readily discernible artistic or critical transformation or reflection whatsoever. In effect, the pop artists antagonizes or negates the terms through which they are meaningfully contemplated as artists while simultaneously enjoying the status of being meaningfully contemplated as such. This movement possesses what Barthes calls "revolutionary force" in that pop art reveals the arbitrary character of artworld distinctions between art and non-art and contests the traditionally fixed categories of high and low culture.⁵³ Yet as Jean Baudrillard points out, the responsibility for pop art's paradoxical positioning can not be chalked up exclusively to the pop artists themselves but

⁵² Roland Barthes, "That Old Thing, Art..." reprinted in Steven Madoff (Ed.), Pop Art: A Critical History, 371

⁵³ Pop art's initially perceived effect of contesting the grandiose preconceptions made in the deadly serious business of creating and appreciating art helped align pop with a long tradition of avant-garde movements intent on disrupting bourgeois assumptions and categorizations concerning the nature of art. As I have discussed above, several art critics and authors initially hoped to substantiate this perception in attempting to attach the name "Neo-Dada" to what eventually became known as pop art.

must be understood within a broader context as derivative of the structures of cultural production,

it is difficult to accuse either Warhol or the Pop artists of bad faith: their exacting logic collides with a certain sociological and cultural status of art, about which they can do nothing. It is this powerlessness which their ideology conveys. When they try to desecralise their practice, society sacrilises them all the more. Added to which is the fact that their attempt - however radical it may be - to secularize art, in its themes and its practice, leads to an exaltation and an unprecedented manifestation of the sacred in art. Quite simply, Pop artists forget that for the picture not to become a sacred super-sign (a unique object, a signature, an object of noble and magical commerce), the author's content or intentions are not enough: it is the structures of cultural production which are decisive.⁵⁴

Baudrillard's suggestion that it is this position of individual disempowerment in the face of the (ultimately) decisive logistics of cultural production and reception that pop art conveys seems an appropriate point to embark on a somewhat more specific look at pop art(ists). In this regard, we are most usefully served in citing the most salient and culturally resonant exemplar of the 1960s New York pop art scene; Andy Warhol. Warhol's abject negation of, and highly performative non-participation in the modernist tropes surrounding the social production and reception of art and the artist, coupled with his spectacular market success and prolific media presence, make him an obvious target of critical discussion (as the growing mountains of literature that take Warhol as subject matter testify to.) As for my own contribution, I submit that it is in Warhol's ambivalent artistic persona that a type of performative template for contemporary modes of self-apprehension is located. In considering several aspects of Warhol's career I hope to tease this idea out and to consider some of the more pressing implications for individuals invited to apprehend themselves within these historically contingent and increasingly performative cultural formations.

⁵⁴ Jean Baudrillard "Pop- An art of Consumption?" in Paul Taylor [Ed.] Post-Pop Art (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1989), 40

CHAPTER 2
ANDY WARHOL'S GENERIC DISTINCTIONS

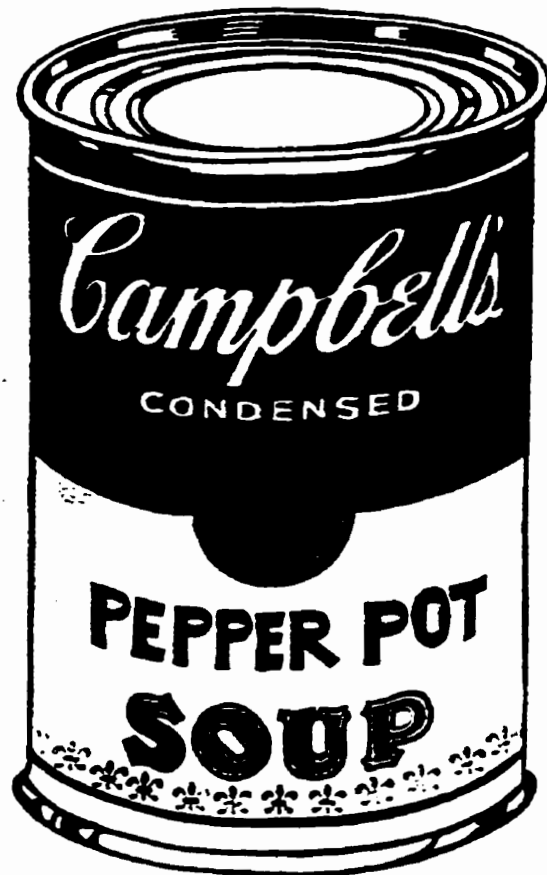


fig. 2 Andy Warhol. *Campbells Soup Can*. 1961

John Caldwell, current curator of painting and sculpture at the San Francisco MOMA, relates his amazement over the negative response (i.e., audible hissing) solicited by a slide photograph of an Andy Warhol soup can

(see *fig. 2*) from an audience during a Sunday afternoon public gallery lecture in 1982.

The work was then twenty years old, the artist a well-established figure, and the contents of the painting itself seemed entirely unobjectionable. Yet there was, from sources spread throughout an audience of normally sedate art lovers, a clearly audible chorus of disapproval. Naturally, one wondered at the reason for such an unexpected outburst.⁵⁵

Caldwell considers that in the end it must be that Warhol "had shown the audience something it did not wish to see.", or rather, his subtext reads, something they did not wish to own up to. The chorus of hisses from "normally sedate art lovers", presumably all somewhat familiar with the artworld discourses that enable an "is-ness" of artistic identification, bespeaks of a long-standing antagonism between high (Matthew Arnold's "sweetness and light") and low, or mass, culture.

Among the postwar "artworld discourses" in cultural circulation, none had greater resonance in the early debates surrounding pop art than Clement Greenberg's 1939 essay "Avant-Garde and Kitsch". Greenberg, who would eventually become critic emeritus for the Abstract Expressionist group, had mapped out the disparities between the "authentic" avant-garde and the mass-produced commodity objects of kitsch. Kitsch, posits Greenberg, consists of mechanically mass produced objects promising immediate gratification. The kitsch object, however, can never mirror the creative process(es) of art, it can only ever hope to mimic its effects in an impoverished form of "vicarious experience and faked sensation" that, "pretends to demand nothing of its customers except their money - not even their time."⁵⁶ Kitsch removes the trace of the individual creator in deference to the commercial efficiency of mechanical

⁵⁵ John Caldwell, "Jeff Koons: The Way We Live Now" in Jeff Koons (San Francisco: The San Francisco MOMA, 1992), 8

⁵⁶ Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" in Art and Culture. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), 10

(re)production while offering immediate, albeit superficial, gratifications⁵⁷.

Warhol's silk-screened Campbells soup cans, produced at his workshop/studio, "The Factory", not only takes a kitsch image as its subject matter - the soup can label complete with obscure culinary medals and gold fleur-de-lis - but further adopts the same means of production based on the commercial efficiency of mechanical mass (re)production). These fix Warhol's canvas itself well within the confines of the kitsch object. In this sense, Warhol's Campbells Soup Can may be understood as self-reflexive kitsch; a kitsch object which attempts to mimic the effects, not of any creative process, but of another kitsch object.

Yet Warhol produces work that is nonetheless meaningfully received as art; an art which aspires to mimic the effects of kitsch to such a degree that it often becomes indiscernible from that which it mimics. Like the emperor's splendid invisible robes, it seems pop requires something the "eye cannot decry", as Danto puts it, to engage our attention. Without the discursive framework of an artworld, very little separates the images of pop art from the increasingly ubiquitous and intrusive images of commercial mass media. And this can be engaging, even rewarding, for the spectator as Warhol does express by effectively articulating the very futility of expression, something of "how it feels" to exist at a given "moment of civilization." And yet to garner such appreciation, to receive Warhol's soup can within the terms of meaningful contemplation appropriate to objects of fine art, is tantamount to conceding to the sublimation of high culture and its traditional forms of self-apprehension to commercially driven and fundamentally empty forms of low, or mass culture.

⁵⁷ The pursuit of providing immediate gratification has seen the kitsch object continuously return to at least two tried and tested forms of predigested appeal; novelty and sentimentalized nostalgia. The question that arises from Greenberg's definition of kitsch, of particular interest to this thesis, regards the characteristic modes of subjectivity and the particular forms of experience that the kitsch object induces.

Warhol's early career as a relatively successful commercial artist and his later career as a spectacularly successful fine artist have now been well documented and extensively commented upon. What seems curiously neglected, but of paramount importance to the "Warhol issue", are the circumstances under which Warhol effected a transformation in the way in which his attributed work became contemplated within the discourses of fine, and not commercial, art. Kynaston McShine, although writing during 1989 for the introduction to the catalogue accompanying MOMA's posthumous Warhol retrospective, nonetheless offers the following pertinent observations,

In the later fifties Warhol became interested in the works and careers of Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg. And his own ambitions as an artist came to the fore. He seems to have thought of the artist as someone whose "aura" could transform ordinary things. As Charles Lisanby has said of Warhol and Matisse: "What interested Andy in Matisse was not, I think, so much the work but the fact that...all Matisse had to do was tear out a little piece of paper and glue it to another piece of paper and it was considered very important and very valuable. It was the fact that Matisse was recognized as being so world famous and such a celebrity."

The celebrity of the artist confers upon him the power to make the ordinary extraordinary. It is the alchemy of fame. And so Warhol now wanted above all to be a famous artist.... That would be his new identity, his way of transforming himself.⁵⁸

What is of immediate interest in McShine's text is how easily and unassumedly the concept of celebrity assumes a legitimacy to authorize that which had been erstwhile reserved for the concept of free and spontaneous "genius". According to McShine, it is not the work that draws Warhol to Matisse, but Matisse's socially conferred "transformative license" that enables him to render the ordinary, extraordinary⁵⁹. In other words, that which Matisse produces is

⁵⁸ Kynaston McShine, from the introduction to Kynaston McShine [Ed.] Andy Warhol: a Retrospective (Boston: Bullfinch Press / Little, Brown and Co., 1989), 14

⁵⁹ Of course, the same "transformative license" is still afforded present day celebrities. An object need only pass through the possession or attention of a celebrity to emerge transformed, extraordinary. An ordinary t-shirt, available at any number of retail outlets, suddenly becomes the preserve of auction blocks and glass-encased restaurant displays if it has been pulled off the back of a Tom Cruise or Demi Moore.

preceded and informed by Matisse's fame as an artist. The artworld, in Warhol's approach, becomes the social frame that provides a lever for inserting one's self into a higher or widely celebrated mode of subjectivity, socially conferring the power "to make the ordinary extraordinary". As an avenue of social mobility, art (like wealth for Veblen's turn of the century nouveau-riche industrialists,) provides the means for achieving wide social recognition and a stage for spectacularly conspicuous (cultural) consumption. Donald Kuspit offers the following interpretation of Warhol's artistic aspirations,

Art and money were simply the means of being seen: they made one conspicuous enough to be visually consumed by the public at large. To be seen was, for Warhol, the most conspicuous form of consumption there was. To be seen means to become the object of envy, the envy that shows itself in the eyes of strangers, the envy that shows they want to consume one. To be seen means to offer oneself as a feast for the eyes of strangers: to offer oneself as the sacramental meal in a cannibalistic ritual of "aesthetic" seeing. As Melane Klein says, envy works through the eyes, aggressively scooping out - emptying of all its goods - the object of desire. In the worlds of art and money the ideal or most consummate experience is to be envied by all, as though such envy made one ideal.⁶⁰

Baudrillard's assertion that it is the structures of cultural production that are ultimately decisive in the reception of art⁶¹ does not completely account for Warhol's transformation from commercial illustrator to artworld celebrity. While the structures of cultural production may indeed enable and act as ultimately decisive in the reception of art, they still require individuals willing to participate in them (i.e. those who become artists.) Warhol's keen understanding of the social mechanisms of celebrity, fashion and promotion - Warhol had been a voracious collector of Hollywood celebrity memorabilia during his infirm

⁶⁰ Donald Kuspit, The New Subjectivism: Art in the 1980s (UMI Research Press: Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1988), 398

⁶¹ As art critic Barbara Rose opines in a 1963 article on a pop art show at New York's Guggenheim Museum, "The Guggenheim exhibition seems to answer the question of whether "pop art" is art. I am willing to say that if it is in the Guggenheim, it is art." from Barbara Rose, "Pop Art at the Guggenheim" reproduced in Steven Madoff (Ed), Pop Art: a Critical History, 82 - 84

childhood in Pittsburgh - and the way in which they too effect transformations from the ordinary to extraordinary⁶² are also crucial.

Warhol affected a highly performative "non-performance" that claimed mechanic impersonality as a style. In interviews he played the adept master of deferral and ambivalence, "**Glaser: How did you get involved with Pop imagery, Andy? Andy Warhol:** I'm too high right now. Ask somebody something else."⁶³ Warhol's proclaimed stance regarding interviews was that "The interviewer should tell me the words he wants me to say and I'll repeat them after him. I'm so empty I can't think of anything to say."⁶⁴ Of course, his opaque persona and banal, monotone utterances only piqued further interest as Warhol himself was undoubtedly well aware.⁶⁵ Intensely aware of the visual mechanisms of mass representation and the truths they establish, Warhol engaged in highly orchestrated acts of impression management as commercial colleague David Bourdon would later recount,

His [Warhol's] metamorphosis into a pop persona was calculated and deliberate. The foppiness was left behind as he gradually evolved from a sophisticate, who held subscription to the Metropolitan Opera, into a sort of gum-chewing, seemingly naive teenybopper, addicted to the lowest forms of pop culture. When he expected important visitors from the art world,... Andy replaced a classical recording with a pop song.⁶⁶

⁶² "Without ever saying so explicitly, the media of style offer to lift the viewer out of his or her life and place him or her in a utopian netherworld where there are no conflicts, no needs unmet; where the ordinary is -- by its very nature -- extraordinary." Stuart Ewen, *All Consuming Images*, 14

⁶³ Andy Warhol in a discussion moderated by Bruce Glasser and broadcast on radio station WBAI in New York, June 1964. Transcript published as "Oldenburg, Lichtenstein, Warhol: A Discussion" (*Artforum*, Feb. 1966,20-24), 141

⁶⁴ Peter Gidal, *Andy Warhol* (London: Dutton Pictureback, 1971), 9.

⁶⁵ Warhol's familiarity with Duchamp may have suggested the precedent. Duchamp's (false) proclamation to have resigned from creating art in order to pursue a much more interesting career of playing chess only intensified interest in his work and ideas. His measured reclusiveness only fueled the speculation and eventual mythology that rushed in to fill the space left in his absence. Warhol's performative ambivalence works like a never-ending "teaser" ad in its perpetual deference of personal revelations. If public revelation of personal mystery is the name of the game, Warhol successfully banks on the idea that lack of personal mystery is the most compelling mystery of all.

⁶⁶ David Bourdon, quoted in, Caroline A. Jones, *Machine in the Studio* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.), 246

Such "backstage secrets" of the social presentation of self as Erving Goffman calls it,⁶⁷ underpin and allude to the highly performative nature of Warhol's assumed role of pop artist/celebrity while revealing assumptions regarding a certain fluidity or malleability of the self suggested in Warhol's performative self-transformation. Like the Hollywood studio publicists responsible for producing glamorous screen celebrities, Warhol understood the importance of packaging in manufacturing an image, creating an impression. Let us not forget that Warhol emerges in a historical context in which, since the end of WWII, "the increasing number and sophistication of the ways information is brought to us have enormously expanded the ways of being known."⁶⁸ The prodigious development of television broadcasting created an audience increasingly attuned to visual representation as the primary means of becoming publicly known. As Stuart Ewen has noted, in an economy of meaning based in visual representation, visual style becomes the arbiter of distinction, of public identity, "In a world where scrutiny by unknown others had become the norm, style provided people with an *attractive otherness*, a "phantom objectivity" (to borrow a phrase from Georg Lukács,) to publicly define oneself, to be weighed in the eye's mind."⁶⁹ Warhol's public artistic persona relies heavily on the social mechanisms of style, celebrity, and mass visual representation, an idea perhaps illustrated most effectively in turning attention to a single work by Warhol, 1963's "Early Colored Liz".

⁶⁷ See Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1959.)

⁶⁸ Leo Braudy, *The Frenzy of Renown* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 3

⁶⁹ Stuart Ewen, *All Consuming Images*, 77



fig. 3 Andy Warhol, *Early Colored Liz*, 1963

The greater part of the subject matter appropriated in Warhol's earlier work (1960 - 65) can be grouped under three basic themes; the brand icons of mass produced commodities, news photos depicting human fatality and/or suffering, and reproductions of glamour shots and publicity stills featuring popular Hollywood celebrities. Warhol's canvases of Marilyn Monroe from the latter category are arguably amongst the most widely recognizable "Warhols" next to his Campbell's soup cans. Rather than tread across that heavily trafficked area, I wish to turn my attention to another celebrity canvas of Warhol's, a garish depiction of Elizabeth Taylor (although garish is perhaps too mild a term of description).⁷⁰ Immediately we recognize, as confirmed in the title, that the image on the canvas depicts screen star Elizabeth Taylor. The graphic itself is taken from a Hollywood studio publicity shot, selected no doubt from Warhol's own extensive collection of celebrity tabloids and memorabilia.

⁷⁰ The reasons for my selection of this image in particular are dictated by curiosity regarding the terms and normative models of representational self-apprehension. In this instance, we have a canvas that signifies two celebrity personas, Taylor as subject matter, and Warhol as artist.

Since the late summer of 1962, Warhol had been experimenting with photo silk screen techniques, a significant deviation from the hand-cut screens that he had worked with up until this point. Commercially produced from black and white photographs, the technique entailed exposing a screen that has been coated in a light-sensitive material to a projected positive image. Those areas of the screen that are exposed to light harden and fix, the rest is rinsed away leaving a screen that allows ink to pass through it in a series of tiny dots. The resulting image produced back in Warhol's studio/factory through "squeegeeing" (a faster, younger cousin of the laborious old brush,) black ink through this screen thus resembles a black and white "Ben-day"⁷¹ photographic image as reproduced in a daily newspaper. Adopting this technique, Warhol had the means to directly appropriate any image circulating in the mass media and reproduce it, not once, but indefinitely. Any variation between these serial images produced in such a manner appear only in and as mistakes in the silk screening process: clogged screens, softened or damaged squeegee, too little ink, too much or too little pressure applied to the squeegee, etc.. Of course, what was most scandalous about this within context of the dominant artworld discourses was Warhol's flagrant negation of the brushstroke, that gesture of the hand as a trace of an authentic lived experience, i.e., the evidence of the autonomous modernist subject. After all, wasn't that supposedly what art was all about, individual artistic expression?

Perhaps it is more accurate to say that it is not the absolute negation of the gesture for which Warhol is responsible. He could, for instance, have had the entire execution of this process done commercially rather than

⁷¹ The Ben-day process was a method of adding tone to a printed image by imposing a transparent sheet of dots or other patterns on the image at some stage of a photographic reproduction process. The technique was invented and named after Benjamin Day, son of printer and journalist Benjamin Day Sr. who established the first "penny" daily newspaper, The New York Sun, in 1833.

administering the application of paint and ink himself. Rather, it is the subjugation of the gesture through a series of rationalized technological mediations that reduces any organic spontaneity to human error in the application of mechanical technique. Warhol's notoriously dead-pan commentary on his technique only serves to fan the flames and titillate the idol-topplers,

I'm using silk screens now. I think somebody should be able to do all my paintings for me. I haven't been able to make every image clear and simple and the same as the first one. I think it would be great if more people took up silk screens so that no one would know whether the picture was mine or somebody else's.

It would turn art history upside down?

Yes.

Is that your aim?

No. The reason I'm painting in this way is that I want to be a machine, and I feel that whatever I do and do machine-like is what I want to do.⁷²

Of course the immediate paradox in all this lies in the fact that Warhol is received and celebrated as an individual artist with a particular and identifiable style. Collectors and dealers trade in "Warhols" and contemporary traveling "mega-exhibits" offer Warhol shows promising to edify gallery patrons in "The Warhol Look". Rather than Warhol being eclipsed by the "machine-like" process employed as, say, an assembly line worker may feel, the machine-like process becomes strongly identified as stylistically "Warholian" in artworld discourse. Warhol's personal style, that aesthetic sensibility that socially distinguishes a certain expressive subject, becomes identified with that which others, in emptying the self to the same dispassionate and mechanical techniques of production, could in principle co-opt. Warhol's own fame and celebrity status, by the same line of reasoning, may likewise be co-opted by any individual willing to empty themselves to the structural imperatives of the primary means of public

⁷² G.R Swenson and Andy Warhol from "What is Pop Art? Part I" (*Art News*, Nov. 1963:24-27 ff.) reprinted in Steven Madoff (Ed.), *Pop Art: A Critical History*, 104. Incidentally, Warhol's claim of desiring "to be a machine" stands in direct contrast to Jackson Pollock's mythical proclamation when questioned about why he doesn't paint more scenes from nature that "I am nature."

acclaim, in this case, the commercial mass media. Everybody, prophesized Warhol, will have their 15 minutes of fame.⁷³ Yet, because Warhol circulates within the meta-narratives of the artworld and, moreover, within a capitalist "art market", the authenticity of style remains necessarily if problematically fixed in an embodied individual subject: Andy Warhol, pointedly idiosyncratic in all his generic aspirations. This is this paradoxical tension which arises between Warhol's performative negation of the artistic subject and its concomitant yet troubling return, initiated as soon as Warhol becomes meaningfully contemplated within a frame of understanding informed through artworld discourses. "Early Colored Liz" provides a nice example of Warhol's "hands-off" technique that has become somewhat paradoxically his identifiable style.

Aside from the artistic subject who authors the work and the subject who apprehends and consecrates the work as art, we have, as in all forms of portraiture, a third subject, the one represented by the artist in the work. In this case, it is Elizabeth Taylor, widely known at the time as much for sensationalized public accounts of her private life as for her film appearances. Warhol, using the photo silk-screen technique, is able to directly lift her image from a widely circulating and mechanically reproduced representation, the studio publicity still. In the commercial transference of the photographic image to the silk screen however, it appears that Warhol had commissioned a screen rendering that eliminates any fine gradients or shades undoubtedly found in the black and white photographic print. The resulting silk screen image, when printed, thus appears as a rather coarse outline of high-contrast black ink

⁷³ Or, in the case of recent "tabloid-style" confessional talk shows such as Jerry Springer, your "15 minutes of shame". As Leo Braudy writes, with an expansion of communicative mediums in the years following WWII, "the concept of fame has been grotesquely distended, and the line between public achievement and private pathology grown dimmer as the claims grow more bizarre." Leo Braudy The Frenzy of Renown, 3. Interesting to further consider the contemporary phenomena of "web-celebrities," individuals with web-cams that record the events of their everyday lives on a 24 hour basis for a devoted following of "fans." Interested readers may want to direct themselves to www.homecams.com for an extensive listing of such sites.

against the brightly coloured background. This reduction of any gradient has the effect of abstracting Taylor's facial features into a simplified configuration of black shape and line with only the deepest shadows and Taylor's dark helmet-like hair registering in the resulting screen print (with the possible exception of the small area between the nose and upper lip). Furthermore, the black ink of the silk screened forms do not maintain any real integrity in the imperfect technical application of the image by either Warhol or Gerard Malanga - his assistant at the time. There are two horizontal "bands" along the right of Liz's hair where it appears that the screen was either clogged or not enough pressure was applied to the squeegee. That Warhol let such glitches and other almost pointed failings (the celebrated technical failings of Andy Warhol!) go uncorrected is of importance and will be addressed below.

The subject of the portraiture, Liz Taylor, is rendered devoid of tonal gradation and complexity in Warhol's canvas. In doing so, Warhol effectively denies the spectator from a reading of the image in which subtleties of facial expression are read as a revelation of individual personality, of a private "thought-world." For an audience familiar with the cinematic and televisual vocabulary of the intimate close-up and photographic portraiture, Warhol's coarsely rendered representation of the immediately recognizable but brutally simplified face of Liz Taylor enact a certain violence on the spectator's expectations and preconceptions of being offered a tantalizing glimpse of the private Liz. As Cécile Whiting points out, Warhol's celebrity silk-screens "are at odds with the popular mythology according to which a star's 'true' identity lies trapped within a public image."⁷⁴ Through the omission of the visual traces signifying a private individual, it is the promotional social mechanisms of public

⁷⁴ Cécile Whiting *A Taste for Pop: Pop Art, Gender, and Consumer Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 148

celebrity that rise to the surface of Warhol's canvas and the spectator's attention. The individual being portrayed is reduced to a commodity-sign of glamour and celebrity; an icon, brand name "Liz".

The social nature of these high-contrast, iconic images of Warhol's are not lost on Caroline Jones who sees a correlation between them and the increasingly ubiquitous corporate logotype. "Just as designers of corporate image programs eliminated tonal shading or undue personality from their logotypes, so Warhol eliminated shading from the original photographs of celebrities that he used to prepare his silk-screens."⁷⁵ Such comparisons are indeed fruitful, particularly when the corporate logotype is considered in terms of constituting a technology of representation. Consider the following from Stuart Ewen in relation to Warhol,

Beyond serving the recognizable trademarks, logos are also designed to express an air of technical dominion, of sublime completion and control. When one looks at Eliot Noyes's orchestration of the IBM image, beginning in the 1950s, or at the expensively nurtured "looks" of other corporations, the accent on precision, preeminence, and depersonalization is evident. Even though a trademark or product design may express the *personality* of a given corporation, the designs bear no visible trace of human intervention. The creative force, itself, is attributed to the corporate mechanism, while the creative work of the people working within that mechanism is denied. Here, rational modernism, as a "technology of representation," reveals itself, without an apology, as an aestheticization of power. Even that which is a product of the hand, or the imagination of the commercial artist or designer, is represented as the product of nothing less than a perfect, smoothly running system.⁷⁶

In the case of Warhol, the "perfect, smoothly running system" is the self-referencing sphere of representation generated through the technologies of commercial mass media, although it must be recognized that Warhol's work conveys a deliberate "failed precision" in contrast to the corporate logo. In much the same fashion, Warhol may also be attributed with eliminating any "tonal

⁷⁵ Caroline A. Jones, Machine in the Studio, 215

⁷⁶ Stuart Ewen, All Consuming Images, 213

shadings" from his own public persona, abstracted and meant for consumption in the same manner as a corporate logotype. The creative work of individuals in Warhol's studio/factory is attributed to the pseudo-corporate mechanism of what we might call "Warhol Enterprises". If indeed we may liken Warhol's project to a corporate enterprise with Warhol assuming the role of head floor manager in his "Factory", it is a corporate enterprise that entails a self-reflexive "corporate irony". Warhol's name, usually rubber-stamped on the back of his canvases, operates with all the sign-value of a trademarked brand that has mastered the art of self-reflexive irony⁷⁷. As early studio assistant Malanga suggests, Warhol's over-arching career goal was to become a sort-of "Walt Disney" of underground New York art, "Andy always idolized Walt Disney. Andy wanted to be like Walt Disney. In other words, the entrepreneur or "Andy Warhol Presents...". Andy always wanted, in the end, just wanted to put his name to it, you see, which is basically what Walt Disney did later on in life."⁷⁸ So eventually successful was Warhol in this project that during the Fall semester of 1967, Warhol was able to dress dancer Alan Midgette in iconically "Warholian" leather jacket and silver wig and successfully pass him off as the "real" Andy Warhol for a college lecture tour by having him mumble incomprehensibly into the microphone (Andy Warhol presents...Andy Warhol.)

As with his "Marilyn" series done around the same period, Warhol's choice of subject matter is partly informed by a professed fascination he held at the time with mass representations of death and tragedy and partly informed by his life-long obsession with the famous, wealthy, young and beautiful. When asked about the Elizabeth Taylor pictures in an unusually articulate interview

⁷⁷ As I will discuss in the following section of this thesis, "self-reflexive corporate irony" is an attitude that many contemporary corporations are attempting to position themselves as holding in a bid to recuperate jaded and cynical consumers.

⁷⁸ Gerard Malanga, quoted in Patrick H. Smith, Warhol: Conversations about the Artist (Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1988.), 171

from November of 1963⁷⁹, Warhol explains, "I started those a long time ago, when she was so sick and everybody said she was going to die. Now I'm doing them all over, putting bright colors on her lips and eyes."⁸⁰ As we can see in "Early Colored Liz" his process of brightening with colour involves the initial application of solid areas of synthetic polymer paint on the canvas that correspond to the photo silk screen rendering of the publicity shot which is then inked over the polymer background. Warhol was apparently too impatient to follow this process exactly (an impatient machine?) as one of his commercial assistants, Nathan Gluck, would later recount.

And I told Andy, I said, "Now, when you start silk-screening, you put little marks here, and you line up the screens with the marks, so, you know, when you screen everything is exact." And Andy couldn't be bothered with this. So when he got through the lips [of a *Liz*] were a little askew, the eye shadow went a little high, or the hair went a little to the left, and Andy would look at it, and you'd look at it, and it was all a little off-register. And you'd say to Andy, "Andy, it's a little off register." And Andy would say, "I like it that way." And that's how it went.⁸¹

It is partly this appearance of the black ink photo silk screen over the coloured background being "a little off-register" that gives "Early Colored Liz" a further sense of tawdry artifice. Yet it is also, perhaps to greater effect, Warhol's intentional selection of garish day-glo colours⁸² - processed pea-green background, pale pink skin, electric turquoise eye shadow with royal blue irises, and bright red mouth - with all concerns of nuance unapologetically banished, that seems to complete this sense of monstrous artifice. As Barthes notes, "pop

⁷⁹ If we take Warhol's studio assistant at the time, Gerard Malanga, at his word, this interview was actually recorded without Warhol's knowledge which, "was very clever in terms of dealing with Andy. Andy doesn't say very much when he's being interviewed, or he'll lie about it...". See Patrick H. Smith, Warhol: Conversations about the Artist, 165

⁸⁰ G.R. Swenson and Andy Warhol, 105. Taylor had contracted pneumonia and had fallen into quite a serious sickness at the beginning of the decade.

⁸¹ Patrick S. Smith, Warhol: Conversations about the Artist, 61

⁸² It could be argued against those who claim that the pop artist does not transform their material and is therefore not an artist at all, that this intentional choice of colour (for if it is an "accident", it is one that continually repeats itself in Warhol's work,) often accompanied by a conscious increase in the representational scale, are transformational effects.

color is openly chemical; it aggressively refers to the artifice of chemistry, in its opposition to Nature."⁸³ The spatial depth of the painting is brought to the two dimensional surface by the hostile artificiality of Warhol's colour scheme, an effect that lends the canvas a certain repellent quality, providing no easy point in which the spectator can optically and otherwise "enter" the painting. What the spectator experiences is a play of visual surface that would itself settle neatly onto the seamless veneer of images generated through commercial mass culture.

While Warhol's rendering of Liz Taylor, and Warhol's own "performative rendering" of a public self for that matter, may appear flat and without depth or complexity, it remains nonetheless immediately identifiable.

we must first realize that if pop art depersonalizes, it does not make anonymous: nothing is more identifiable than Marilyn, the electric chair, a telegram, or a dress, as seen by pop art; they are in fact *nothing but that* : immediately and exhaustively identifiable, thereby teaching us that identity is not the person: the future world risks being a world of identities...but not of persons.⁸⁴

Barthes seems to suggest in the above passage that a public identity is in some manner completed or exhausted, fixed like the photographic pose that testifies to an unretractable "this-has-been-ness" of the posture before the lens, the easel, or the audience, as the frozen affirmation of the individual public identity. The "meaning" of the person, the private inner life of an individual, is, however, never exhausted, never fully arrested or sutured as a public identity may be. The "lesson" Barthes extracts is just this, (public) identity is not the (private) person. And yet it is precisely this private person that Warhol denies both in his celebrity portraits and in his own artistic persona. This despite attempts by

⁸³ Roland Barthes, "That Old Thing, Art..." reprinted in Steven Madoff (Ed.), Pop Art: A Critical History, 373

⁸⁴ Roland Barthes, "That Old Thing, Art..." reprinted in Steven Madoff (Ed.), Pop Art: A Critical History, 371

others, such as Barthes, to attribute these qualities in adopting paradigms of meaningful contemplation proper to the apprehension of the art object.

Warhol's Liz Taylor, depersonalized as an iconic image, furthermore signifies a certain state of being, of "Celebrity Being". Celebrities are those extraordinary individuals widely regarded as living life to the absolute limit, the wealthiest, most beautiful, most interesting, central and acknowledged. In a mass-mediated society where being a "nobody" is the norm, celebrity status affords the individual mass recognition as a "somebody", acknowledged, recorded, affirmed. Not surprisingly, celebrities tend to be the most widely envied and socially emulated modes of contemporary subjectivity. Quite obviously, the overwhelming majority of individuals do not have intimate personal relationships with celebrities. They are known primarily through visual commercial mass representation, a continual flux of visual style; image, posture, and "attitude". For individuals confronted with a social structure increasingly mediated by visual mass representations, style becomes the primary means of individual distinction despite the contrary governing logic of mass production and consumption,

Style is the realm of being "exceptional" within the constraints of conformity. In a bureaucratic world of rationalized impersonality, style offers the possibility of transcendence. It is style that allows the irrational and personal to flourish, while its images are meted out in a rationalized and impersonal sort of way. This is its appeal- particularly among those who choose to see themselves as "middle-class" -its ability to offer an escape from the routines, routinely.⁸⁵

That celebrity identity is a social construct that operates quite independently of the private subject represented is a fact that Taylor herself is well aware of, as she makes clear in a Life magazine interview from 1964, "The Elizabeth Taylor who's famous, the one on film, really has no depth or meaning for me. She's a totally superficial working thing, a commodity. I really don't know

⁸⁵ Stuart Ewen, All Consuming Images, 108

what the ingredients of the image are exactly - just that it makes money."⁸⁶

Within capitalist consumer cultures mediated through communication technologies, a "Society of the Spectacle", Guy Debord understands the function of the celebrity as both standardizing and compensatory,

The celebrity, the spectacular representation of a living human being, embodies... banality by embodying the image of a possible role. Being a star means specializing in the *seemingly lived*; the star is the object of identification with the shallow seeming life that has to compensate for the fragmented productive specializations which are actually lived. Celebrities exist to act out various styles of living and viewing society - unfettered, free to express themselves *globally*... Official differences between stars are wiped out by the official similarity which is the presupposition of their excellence in everything.⁸⁷

For Debord the celebrity has an affirmative role in the reproduction of the banal; they performatively represent the ideal subject able to experience the entirety of contemporary spectacular life, a techno-utopia populated with high sign value commodities. Experiencing an entirety of life under capitalist social relations entails staging a "seemingly lived" life where money is no object and immediate fulfillment no obstacle. Those consigned to live the impoverished partial life of the "everyday ordinary" derive compensation in vicariously experiencing the glamorous whole through identification with demographically appropriate celebrity figures. The steadily increasing plethora of contemporary "entertainment industry"-oriented television news programs and mass publications (always promising the "inside scoop" on the latest developments in the lives of the "hottest stars"), only lend Debord's position continuing credence.

Gazing out toward the spectator from a field of flat day-glo green, red mouth fixed in an unsettlingly wide and lurid grin, Warhol's image of Liz simultaneously signifies both this spectacular glamour fed by popular envy, and emphatic seediness. But is she merely an iconographic identity emptied of any

⁸⁶ Elizabeth Taylor quoted in Christen Mamiya, Pop Art and Consumer Culture, 152

⁸⁷ Guy Debord, Society of the Spectacle (Detroit: Black and Red, 1983), 60 & 61

complexity, nuance, ambiguity or mystery; a reified essence abstracted into a brand signifier of glamour and fame? As is the uneasy situation with Warhol, the answer must be both yes and no. Without the underlying belief that the celebrity Liz Taylor exists in relation to a real person, one existing under relatively comparable conditions of life to that which the spectator experiences, the celebrity cannot act as a repository of social desire nor a model to take behavioral and stylistic cues from. For if the lure of celebrity status rests on the mythology that anyone, by accident, chance or lucky break may be "discovered" and thereby elevated into a widely celebrated and spectacularly acknowledged condition of existence, then the iconographic representation of celebrity must still retain, in the final instance, the idea that the image somehow signifies or can be traced to, someone necessarily "real" in a way identifiable with the way the spectator regards themselves "in reality". Without this identification there is no transformative pathway, so to speak, between self and celebrity other.

The pointed artifice of Warhol's image of Liz makes the return of meaning, of the idea of the "real" Liz Taylor, difficult and uneasy. Yet this tension is further compounded in that it is also the very pointed-ness of the artificiality, along with the shoddiness and accident that Warhol allows in the work, that signifies the return of Warhol as artistic subject and throws Warhol's intended purpose of emptying himself in deference to the machine into dispute. For Warhol himself, even if he was the beneficiary of a new artistic authority based, "not on the concept of artistic genius, but on the notion of celebrity."⁸⁸, fails to thwart the depth-connection between the reception of his art and a "real" and autonomous, expressive subject attributed to its creation, despite provocative statements to the contrary. "If you want to know all about Andy Warhol, just look at the surface: of my paintings and films and me, and there I am. There's nothing

⁸⁸ Christin J. Mamiya, Pop Art and Consumer Culture, . 139

behind it."⁸⁹ Looking only at the surface, however, the contemplative spectator is drawn to the uncorrected glitches and seemingly deliberate "failed precision." Warhol is found in his failures, just as his work itself may be considered as "failed kitsch" - work that may well mimic the effects of kitsch, but which cannot hope to mirror the absence of creative process characteristic in the production of the true kitsch object. The fact of the matter is that Warhol's work is received as art, and as Barthes observes,

it is not only because the pop artist stages the Signifier that his work derives from and relates to art; it is because this work is *looked at* (and not only seen); however much pop art has depersonalized the world, platitudinized objects, dehumanized images, replaced traditional craftsmanship of the canvas by machinery, some "subject" remains. What subject? The one who looks, in the absence of the one who makes. We can fabricate a machine, but someone who looks at it is not a machine - he desires, he fears, he delights, he is bored, etc. This is what happens with pop art.⁹⁰

We might also say that "he" necessarily ascribes meaning to the thing perceived and an attendant meaning to the "artist" who creates it, a meaning structured in accordance with a prior knowledge of art framed within particular paradigms of meaning. The reception of art remains contemplative and individualistic regardless of whether the production of said piece of art occurs under conditions antagonistic to contemplation and individualism. Even if the objects themselves represented by Warhol merely exist as curious image/facts, stripped of any justification (a philosophical quality of things Barthes refers to as "facticity",) they still signify in the sense that in incarnating this bare facticity within the category of art they begin to signify again: i.e. they signify that they attempt to signify nothing. As Barthes has it, "meaning is cunning: drive it away and it gallops back."⁹¹ Meaning makes a difficult return to "Early Colored Liz"

⁸⁹Gretchen Berg, "Andy : My True Story," Los Angeles Free Press (March 17, 1967), 3

⁹⁰ Roland Barthes, "That Old Thing, Art..." reprinted in Steven Madoff (Ed.), Pop Art: A Critical History, 373

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 372

because it is looked at, not just seen,; it is contemplated as a meaningful object, both as an object of "art" and an object of social identification (i.e., celebrity). In much the same way, meaning returns to the persona of Warhol because he is contemplated as an artistic subject, as a celebrated "artist". Meaning may indeed "gallop back" from whence it had been driven, but - to continue Barthes' equine metaphor - this horse returns a little spooked and uneasy until it learns to settle into its new expressive/representational forms.

The polemics aimed at pop art must then be considered, not only against the immediate backdrop of American abstract expressionism and previous 20th century avant garde movements, but also in light of a central trope in modern art that privileges an autonomous self to the exclusion of the socio-economic and historical as a category of determination. As Goldman and Papson point out, "While corporate economic and social power depends on extending an organizational grid over all activities and spaces, bourgeois status and prestige are still ideologically dictated by appearing to transcend the constraints of a commodified and rationalized world."⁹² At the root of the indignant reception initially afforded Warhol and other pop artists by the established critics was pop's spectacular public acceptance, coupled with an attributed collusion with the standardizing and rationalizing logic of the mass culture industry; a malignancy that ran right down to the very forms of artistic persona socially manifested by the pop artists. This ambivalent collusion on the pop artist's behalf or an "ideology of powerlessness" as Baudrillard calls it, in the face of commercial mass culture signaled the end of a crisis in modernist art and the end of a particular mode of self-apprehension from within which this dilemma is experienced. This hitherto on-going crisis, as Thomas Crow neatly observes, is

⁹² Robert Goldman and Stephen Papson, Sign Wars: The Cluttered Landscape of Advertising. (New York: Guilford Press, 1986), 147

nothing less than a material and social crisis which threatens the traditional forms of nineteenth-century culture with extinction. This crisis has resulted from the economic pressure of an industry devoted to the simulation of art in the form of reproducible cultural commodities, that is to say, the industry of mass culture. In search of raw material, mass culture strips traditional art of its marketable qualities, and leaves as the only remaining path to authenticity a ceaseless alertness against the stereotyped and pre-processed. The name of this path is modernism, which with every success is itself vulnerable to the same kind of appropriation.⁹³

If this is the pathway of modernism, the route to self-authenticity, it becomes apparent how Warhol's ambivalent deferral to the encroaching bramble of the pre-processed would provoke cultural outrage and vehement rejection. Much of the criticism directed toward pop art hold underlying accusations of betrayal; that pop is an art form that not only actively reproduces the strategies and techniques of the increasingly pervasive mass corporate culture, but brings about a realignment of cultural practice in unapologetic compliance with its social and economic imperatives,

Pop artists were inextricably drawn into an institutional matrix that reinforced an ideology of consumption. By accepting and actively exploiting these strategies, the Pop movement ultimately denied the possibility of effective critique of this system. As such, the artists, through their statements and actions, did not merely reflect consumer culture but also actively absorbed or deflected criticism about such a system.⁹⁴

The critical utopianism characterizing modernist avant garde art, the promise of a "Great Refusal" as Herbert Marcuse calls it⁹⁵, is turned on its head by pop art's partiality to the immanence of the image over art's long-standing promise of offering individual transcendence over social determination.

As I have suggested, Hilton Kramer's lament that pop does not speak of the experiential conditions of a given "moment of civilization" seems somewhat

⁹³ Thomas Crow, "Modernism and Mass Culture in the Visual Arts", 237

⁹⁴ Mamiya, Pop Art and Consumer Culture, 143

⁹⁵ "Whether ritualized or not, art contains the rationality of negation. In its advanced positions, it is the Great Refusal --the protest against that which is. The modes in which man and things are made to appear, to sing and sound and speak, are modes of refuting, breaking, and recreating their factual existence." Herbert Marcuse, One-Dimensional Man, 63

contentious, particularly in hindsight of pop art's significant and continuing cultural resonance. Pop is, contra to Kramer's dismissal, quite revealing about the experiential conditions of a given moment of civilization, namely post-WWII American consumer society, and the attendant modes of self-apprehension proffered within its particular cultural formations. What it says, however, and unproblematically reproduces about these experiential conditions, is passively antagonistic toward traditional bourgeois sensibility with its heavy psychological investment in the unmediated and spontaneous cultural expression of the authentic inner self. As Crow puts it, "For a bourgeois public, the idea of a combative and singular individuality, impatient with social confinement, remained fundamental to a widely internalized sense of self - as it still does."⁹⁶

Warhol and pop art work to pervert the "authentic" subject constituted in the modernist discourses of art and to provoke all these individuals with a psychological investment in such modes of self-apprehension. It constitutes an author of the art work still grounded in the intensity of experience, yet it is an intensity of experience that is quite plainly mediated by and exclusively constituted in the logic of corporate and social sign-value. It is this dazzling yet vacuous play of commodified sign and pre-digested meaning within which personal meanings are forged, based on the individual consumer's choice amongst brand-differentiated commodities. Caroline Jones has suggested that Warhol can thus be understood as a "textually construed author", citing the following passage from Griselda Pollock for elucidation.

the author is to be understood as the effect of the text to which the author name is [appended], i.e., not a unitary source and originator of meanings but an entity construed by both the production (writing) and consumption (reading) of texts. ⁹⁷

⁹⁶ Thomas Crow, "Modernism and Mass Culture in the Visual Arts", 245

⁹⁷ Griselda Pollock Vision and Difference (New York: Routledge, Chapman and Hall, 1988), 214; quoted in Caroline A. Jones, Machine in the Studio, 190

In this case, however, the author name is appended to a mass-produced commodity which comes complete with a pre-determined sign-value generated through and by its representation in the promotional texts of mass commercial media. The similarities suggesting a lineage between Duchamp's ready-mades and Warhol's pop art end here. Duchamp's ready-mades signify themselves in usage, the objects selected as art (i.e., bicycle wheel, bottle rack, urinal,) are identified through terms of utility. Warhol's wooden Brillo boxes, in contrast, signify only in the visual economy of pre-established commercial sign-value.⁹⁸ What is ready-made in Warhol's work is the audience's pre-established relationship as potential consumers, to mass-produced objects which have been engendered with certain sign-values through advertising and promotional mass-media texts. In this case, the generated social sign-value of a Campbell's soup can label; soup like grandmother makes, wholesome, quality, childhood, cold rainy days, comfort, etc. (I invite the reader add his/her own associations.)

Far from operating from an antagonistic position "outside the system" of social organization and culture as a whole, Warhol's art and his status as artist flagrantly admit the social as its main determinative force. From the images of "before and after" ads for nose jobs to serial images of luridly rendered Hollywood celebrities, Warhol's work can be said to have a socializing effect on the spectator. "The viewer of Warhol's canvases becomes aware not of Warhol's identity (or her own), but of the social space where Campbell's soup, Marilyn Monroe,...might have significance."⁹⁹ Warhol's careful selection of mass-circulating imagery admits a social rather than a private world into the discursive frames of artworld meaning, the former having much greater salience across the wide spectrum of mass society. In this particular historic configuration

⁹⁸ That the Brillo boxes are made of solid wood and absolutely useless if you were to try use them as actual containers only helps finalize this point.

⁹⁹ Caroline A. Jones, Machine in the Studio, 212

of the social, Warhol's admission of social sign-value as a main determinative force in his work entails an admission of the corporate social mechanisms that both constitute and exploit via commercial mass media representations, the hierarchically-ordered structures of sign-value through which consumers are invited to socially position themselves. Not only does this facilitate a cross-over of the logic of commercial mass media into artworld discourse, it opens a reciprocal channel for the cross-over of artworld discourse into commercial mass media. Pop art, because of the pre-established sociability of its subject matter, becomes itself effortlessly recuperated back into the discourses of commercial mass media. Far from referring exclusively to the work of a particular grouping of artists, pop is positioned in terms of a generalized social attitude as discerned in the mass media itself, one synonymous with youth, excitement, fun, camp and, of course, consumption¹⁰⁰. As a Newsweek article from 1964 describes the "youthquakers" in attendance one evening at Warhol's Factory, "These violently groomed, perversely beautiful people want art, fun, ease, and unimpeded momentum in every conceivable direction. Pop art is their art."¹⁰¹

It is hardly surprising then that the initial U.S. collectors of pop art were for the most part upwardly mobile professionals who identified with the social logistics admitted as the determinative force in pop. Perhaps feeling long excluded by the formalist, academic language bandied about in discussions of abstract expressionism and lacking the social recognition of possessing cultural capital, the "new breed" collectors of pop art held professions that, "made them

¹⁰⁰ ABC's Batman television series provides the most salient early example of "pop sensibility" applied to mass media representation. The twice-weekly series, first broadcast in January of 1966, spawned an outbreak of "bat-mania" that carried the series through 3 seasons and fueled a minor merchandising empire.

¹⁰¹ unsigned, "Saint Andrew", Newsweek, Dec. 7, 1964. reproduced in Steven Madoff (Ed), Pop Art: a Critical History, 279

part of the corporate environment that provided the content and context for Pop works."¹⁰² Pop offered these U.S. collectors something they could easily recognize, visually and conceptually validating the now well-established imperative to consume that had provided collectors with the initial wealth and the consumption-based lifestyle in which the spoils of said wealth may be enjoyed. Much like Warhol, the collectors of pop art also held the belief that art could provide a means of social mobility, that owning work of a celebrated pop artist afforded the owner a certain cultural cachet or entitlement¹⁰³ (Warhol had first inserted himself into the artworld as a collector). Eventually known as exemplary of the new pop art collectors, self-made New York taxi cab magnate Robert Scull and wife Ethel not only aggressively consumed the works of pop artists, they insisted on meeting every artist and featured regularly in the social economy of artworld circles. Scull, for instance, was afforded an opportunity to wax rhetorical on pop artist James Rosenquist's immense "F-111" in the prestigious Metropolitan Museum of Art's March 1968 newsletter by dint of his ownership of said painting (to many a howl of indignation from established art critics).¹⁰⁴ Ethel Scull had posed for a commissioned portrait by Warhol in 1963. The resulting "Ethel Scull Thirty-six Times" sees Warhol's photo silk-screen technique applied to 36 panels, each with an image of Ethel taken from a coin-operated photo-booth snap. Sometimes with, sometimes without her sunglasses, the contrived spontaneity of Ethel's poses recall those found in

¹⁰² Mamiya, Pop Art and Consumer Culture, 144

¹⁰³ "Everybody was part of the same culture now. Pop references let people know that *they* were the happening, that they didn't have to *read* the book to be part of culture—all they had to do was *buy* it." John Lahr, Automatic Vaudeville: Essays on Star Turns (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1984), 223.

¹⁰⁴ Indeed, the very fact that New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art was exhibiting Rosenquist's 10 x 86 ft. long pop homage to the American military-industrial complex was enough cause for alarm amongst certain critics. The very idea of "Rosenquist at the Met" was enough to prompt Sidney Tillim to declare, "Sire, this is no longer the revolution, it is the Terror." in "Rosenquist at the Met: Avant-garde or Red Gaurd?" reprinted in Steven Madoff (Ed.), Pop Art: A Critical History, 258

fashion magazines, those staged shots that seem to catch the model in seemingly spontaneous moments of playful abandon or mock pensivity. The social aspirations are the same in both the sitter and the artist; Warhol provides the vehicle for social mobility and mass recognition for the Sculls via their patronage, just as being conferred the status of artist affords Warhol the means to similar ends. The "seemingly lived" credo of those enjoying celebrity status?; unimpeded momentum in every conceivable direction...

What is of importance here is Warhol's social positioning as "artist", as a mode of subjectivity whose privileged social position remains, however awkwardly, embedded in traditional modernist conceptions of art and the autonomous and authentic bourgeois subject ¹⁰⁵, although in this case such values appear to function more as alibi than self-evident truth. Warhol's deliberate attempts to erase the trace of the artistic subject is at direct odds with the contextual metanarrative of the artworld and of art history that continues to be reproduced and culturally reasserted as "extraordinary" in numerous contemporary institutional forms. As discussed in the previous chapter, the social space of postwar U.S. society with which Warhol's work initially engages may be broadly characterized as a period of expansive socio-economic restructuring accompanied by attempts to effect a technocratic massification of cultural consciousness under the logics of capitalist commodification and corporate industrial technology. The accommodation of consumption-based social logistics in Warhol's art can only be seen in terms of negotiation, concession; an attempt to cohabit with rather than reveal or resolve the arising contradictions born from imploding high art and commercial mass culture.

¹⁰⁵ A genealogy of the "artist" mode of subjectivity as a socially privileged site of the authentic would certainly be an interesting and worthwhile pursuit. An approach that endeavors to locate the historically contingent within that which appears as an ahistorical necessity would certainly bear fruit worth sampling. I am consigned by practical limitations, however, to set this aside for an upcoming project.

Consider this against the historic socio-economic conditions in postwar U.S. as critically summarized by Goldman and Papson,

After World War II, bourgeois cultural and social hegemony expanded with the new suburban middle class, molding social spaces around commodity relations and administrative logic. Government and market forces reshaped, and seemed to domesticate, the majority of social spaces. The culture industry threw kitsch together with bourgeois values, diluting the bourgeois value system, undermining it by the very market forces that empowered the corporate bourgeoisie. From shopping malls to manicured front lawns, no part of social life was immune from the calculating and controlling logics of rationalization and commodification. The resulting "one-dimensionality," as Marcuse put it, bothered the middle class more than the working class. Tourism packaged nature and otherness into standardized and listless experiences; psychology and its therapies rationalized ventures into our inner psyche; department stores trafficked in a steady stream of exotic commodities divorced from everyday referents. Authentic experiences - those that were unmediated and spontaneous - were pushed further to the periphery while middle-class notions of self and identity grew more dependent on accumulating those experiences that serve as signifiers of self-worth.¹⁰⁶

Put in such terms, pop art can be understood as responsive to this situation, a "one-dimensional art" befitting a "one-dimensional society" where the order of the day is rampant consumption accompanied by its own detached denial, a situation best negotiated, so Warhol's particular example would suggest, by adopting an attitude of cool ambivalence or indifference. Recall that it is not so much *what* is admitted into the class of objects considered art that this thesis takes as its focus, but rather *how* what is admitted under the classifications of art is then meaningfully contemplated in terms of constituting and affirming certain cultural modes of self-apprehension (i.e., the subject present in art's creation and meaningful reception.) Warhol's ambivalent artistic (non-)presence forces a redirection of the traditional desire to ascribe meaning to the artistic subject from the gestural trace or statement of artistic intent to a reading of the sum of socially pre-established texts consumed and reproduced as "art". The author's identity is realized not through being recognized as an

¹⁰⁶ Goldman and Papson, Sign Wars, 147

originary point of unique and authentic expression, but in an act of playful bricolage whereby identity is constructed through the self-reflexive assemblage of pre-coded social texts that coalesce in forms of self-presentation. That this is precisely the same process of constituting identity offered to individuals within consumption-based societies is obviously more than mere coincidence. As the performative mode of subjectivity mass represented, particularly the celebrity mode, can also be seen as a social recommendation and affirmation of a form of subjectivity, we must consider the implications of this "Warholian" mode of subjectivity in light of the production of cultural formations and terms of self-apprehension that either problematize or reproduce the socio-economic hegemony of U.S. consumer capitalism.

Caroline Jones, for instance, offers an insightful critical analysis of Warhol's Factory as "site of production", originating from her premise that,

Warhol joined other artists of the 1960s in seeking a radical distance from the Abstract Expressionists' version of modernism - their conception of originality, their emphasis on the autographic touch, and their romance with the isolated studio - advertising his wish for a submersion in the detached neutrality of the assembly line. The old emblems of solitude, the artist's isolated loft or garret, no longer served to authenticate artistic production in 1960s America. Emerging artists at the time instead chose the symbolic space of the manufactory, with its social and political implications, to signify their activity.¹⁰⁷

The inside of the Factory environment itself was entirely covered with aluminum tin-foil, further emphasizing the industrial metaphor as visitors were confronted with the metallic repellency of all interior surfaces. Warhol's embrace of the industrial metaphor, the compellingly seductive rationality culturally embodied in the machine, is in significant collusion with a dominant topos of postwar US. society: an ambivalent cultural fascination with automation, industrial

¹⁰⁷ Caroline A. Jones, Machine in the Studio, 189

technology, scientific rationalism and all their consequences. As Roy Lichtenstein offers regarding pop art in general,

It is an involvement with what I think to be the most brazen and threatening characteristics of our culture, things we hate, but which are also powerful in their impingement on us... Everybody has called Pop Art "American" painting, but its actually industrial painting. America was hit by industrialism and capitalism harder and sooner and its values seem more askew.... I think the meaning of my work is that it's industrial, it's what the world will soon become. Europe will be the same way, soon, so it won't be American; it will be universal.¹⁰⁸

Warhol's work and artistic persona operates in a social space that embraces this topos yet also allows, in Jones's phrase, for the accompaniment of "its alienated denial". What is crucial to consider here is that Warhol does not only embrace the machine iconically as earlier manifestations of the avant garde drawn to the industrial aesthetic had (e.g., the Italian "Futurists"), but also performatively, in his collaborative production of the artistic text, in his "Factory" setting, in his very social persona and terms of self-apprehension. As Jones observes, Warhol's alignment with the industrial aesthetic is not without an art historical lineage,

In the nineteenth century, images of machines participated in an iconic transfer of natural grandeur onto the technological; the relationship of the mechanical to the human recapitulated the sublime disparity of scale formerly figured by mountains, chasms, and the sea - with an important difference. Where sublime nature had been viewed as the manifestation of God's will, sublime technology was at least titularly under human control. Later on, in the early twentieth century, the mechanical was internalized - not into a fully performative mode, but into a kind of identificatory precursor. All types of bodies were rendered (in sculptures and paintings) with the smooth curves and lustrous surfaces to which machinists aspired; these bodies invited an imagined mechanical subjectivity on the viewer's part, but there was no performative enactment of this subjectivity offered, and few technological implications for the production of art.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ G.R Swenson and Roy Lichtenstein from "What is Pop Art? Part I" (*Art News*, Nov. 1963:24-27 ff.) reprinted in Steven Madoff (Ed.), *Pop Art: A Critical History*

¹⁰⁹ Caroline A. Jones, *Machine in the Studio*, 346

It is not until the pop artists, until the likes of Warhol, that the performative enactment of mechanical subjectivity and the technological restructuring of the production of (human) art really has a broad social manifestation. In incorporating the capitalist industrial aesthetic into a performative mode of subjectivity which becomes positioned within the cultural category of art, the "Warholian" mode of subjectivity pre-figures a subjectivity that apprehends itself exclusively through a technological, mechanical and digital, medium whilst maintaining a detached ambivalence or "alienated denial" about the whole situation. It is not until the 1980s and 1990s, however, that this mode of subjectivity, the template of which is found in Warhol's persona, becomes represented as a cultural norm for interpellating a mode of subjectivity that reproduces the social and cultural in collusion with the interests of capital. Detached ambivalence and alienated denial regarding the system of consumption as a whole are the character traits par excellence for the contemporary individual consumer, an uneasy solution that nonetheless contains the cultural contradictions between the developing interests of mass capitalism and the fundamental tenets that inform the ontological status of the (bourgeois) individual.

CHAPTER 3

POSTMODERN CULTURE AND THE LIKES OF WARHOL

Since the early 1980s, Jeff Koons has become a veritable lode-stone for critical and public opinion. In his adept deployment of the internal promotional mechanisms of what Horkheimer and Adorno¹¹⁰ call "the culture industry" to mass self-promote his artistic persona¹¹¹, Koons has attracted the attention and ire of the art critics and art public alike. In the process, he has created a promotion hype around himself which matches if not surpasses, that surrounding Andy Warhol two decades earlier. In his own The Jeff Koons Handbook (a handbook, one must ask, intended for whom?) the closest Koons gets to a broad statement of intent is a professed desire to steer art and the artist from the subservient margins back into a position of social empowerment. "In the art world I have always found everyone very weak. The art world really has been up for grabs. Anybody who has enough desire to lead, it's there for them to do. Because nobody else wants it. Absolutely not."¹¹² Representing himself through the promotional mechanisms of the culture industry as *the* art world maverick to take this place at the vanguard, Koons openly advocates appropriating the communicative powers of commercial mass media for getting his message across, "I want to have an impact in people's lives. I want to communicate to as wide a mass as possible. And the way to communicate right

¹¹⁰ See Theodore Adorno, The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture, ed. J.M. Bernstein (London: Routledge, 1991)

¹¹¹ Koons is the self-proclaimed "most written-about artist in the world.", D.S. Baker "Jeff Koons and the Paradox of a Superstar's Phenomenon" in Bad Subjects, Issue 4, Feb. 1993. There is some suggested evidence to back up Koons' claim, "Ilona and I have a world clipping service" says Koons. "They send stories about us from all over the world and they charge \$1.25 a clipping. And it costs us up to \$8 000 every month. It is becoming very, very expensive." "Tony Parsons, "Art Forum" in Arena, Autumn 1992.

¹¹² Jeff Koons, The Jeff Koons Handbook, (London: Thames & Hudson, 1992), 38

now is through TV and advertising. The art world is not effective right now."¹¹³ His personal appearances in numerous commercial media, television talk shows, glossy national and international lifestyle publications, street billboards, and ads in "artworld" magazines featuring Koons himself, all testify to this professed strategy. On such accounts, Koons reveals himself to possess quite a sophisticated business acumen¹¹⁴ with a keen sense for successfully promoting himself and his art. Indeed, even his most stringent critics may have to concede that promotion and business is the "art form" within which Koons' execution can not be faulted. His kinship to Warhol in this respect is plainly evident. I think Warhol's own comments effectively indicate the commercial aspirations inherent in both artist's over-arching projects. "I want to be an Art Businessman or a Business Artist. Being good in business is the most fascinating kind of art. During the hippie era people put down the idea of business... but making money is art and working is art and good business is the best art."¹¹⁵

That Koons' project can quite easily be, and often is, compared to aspects of Warhol's career is indeed significant. What appears seldom addressed at any great length, however, are the particular socio-economic and historic circumstances of this cultural confluence. I refer here quite specifically to the prolific return to interest in Warhol during the early 1980s following his relegation to relative marginality¹¹⁶ within influential art world circles for a good part of the 1970s. Interestingly, it is not through producing any new and/or

¹¹³ Jeff Koons, The Jeff Koons Handbook, 56

¹¹⁴ It has been suggested that Koons likely honed his business savvy during his stints first canvassing membership contributions for the New York MOMA, and then as a commodity broker (dealing primarily in cotton) on Wall Street before embarking on his eventual career choice of artist/superstar.

¹¹⁵ Andy Warhol, in Kynaston McShine [Ed.], Andy Warhol: a Retrospective (Boston: Bullfinch Press/Little, Brown & Co., 1989), 459

¹¹⁶ To all accounts, Warhol largely spent the 1970s attending various elite social parties, seeking "photo ops" for his celebrity social rag, Interview, and drumming up business amongst New York's anxious narcissists for commissioned society portraits a la Warhol. This is not to find fault with Warhol. I take him at his word that he was working on his "art of business".

significant work that Warhol finds himself once again culturally pre-eminent; it is initially as a celebrated figure of influence, as admired artistic role model for several up-and-coming young New York artists emerging in a historical context marked by a economic boom in the art market and a prolific expansion in the apparatus of art promotion and publicity. Warhol's "second-coming" during the early 1980s, enshrined in his untimely 1987 death and continuing unabated today, further coincides with a new "postmodern turn" in North American and European cultural production during the early years of the 1980s. It is within this confluence of economic upsurge and a growing interest in postmodern forms of cultural discourse that Koons shortly thereafter makes his appearance. The preeminence of both Warhol and Koons, and the parallels and divergencies drawn between them within this particular historic and cultural context, will provide the general context for much of the following argument. My intent here is to read Warhol and Koons in consideration of how each, in their respective roles as artist and celebrity, suggest behavioural postures for individuals living under seemingly contradictory cultural formations. This contradiction plays itself out between modernist notions of the autonomous and self-determining individual subject and capitalism's economic imperative for sustained accumulation that initiates a process of expanding commodification into the interstices of everyday experience, that is, into the very processes within which the individual subject is constituted.

While comparisons drawn between Warhol and Koons have some merit, Koons, as we shall see below, takes many of the characteristics originally associated with Warhol one step further, significantly altering the play of meanings in the process. Both do, however, court controversy, both cultivate a

“hands off” approach to their artwork¹¹⁷, and both understand and actively engage the promotional aspects of commercial mass media. Regarding this last commonality, Michael Compton suggests that Koons, “although speaking at a much greater length,... is playing the role of Warhol, the artist who, more than any other, taught the world to see that, if the medium of the painter is paint and canvas, the medium of the artist (Koons says he is not a sculptor) is himself in the artworld.”¹¹⁸ This is to say that both Warhol and Koons adopt self-reflexively performative elements in their respective self-presentations as “artist”. This carefully calculated presentation of “self as artist” within the institutional frames of meaning that constitute an artworld has in itself become accepted as a meaningful art form replete with both significance and exchangeable sign-value¹¹⁹. Under these circumstances it is the very idea of “art” embodied by “the artist” that becomes the commodity offered up for consumption, while the work actually produced often assumes a supporting role as a type of exquisite social prop to the primacy of the presentation of self as artist.¹²⁰ Indeed, Andrew Renton goes as far as to suggest that, in Koons’ case at least, these performative careerist strategies, “may be perceived as performance art on a

¹¹⁷ Warhol’s extensive use of the silk screen technique, often executed by assistants under his supervision, is now a well-documented and still somewhat contentious subject of discussion. For his part, Koons has commissioned skilled tradesmen and European artisans to render his concepts into tangible form on his behalf.

¹¹⁸ Michael Compton, “Pop Art II - Jeff Koons & Co.” Art & Design Vol. 5, No. 7/8, 1989

¹¹⁹ This exchangeable sign-value associated with the individuated and embodied subject is that phenomena usually referred to as “celebrity”.

¹²⁰ For a historical example of this, one need only think back to the highly performative antics and pronouncements of Salvador Dali during the 1940s and 1950s. His role as “gastro-cosmic, fiery mad genius”, indulging in highly performative presentations (i.e., walking his plastic lobster to the drugstore for more mustache wax, photographer in tow,) certainly made “Dali as artist” a salable commodity in the US.. Of course, one need also consider, as Max Kozloff does in his essay “American Painting During he Cold War” (in Steven Madoff (Ed), Pop Art: a Critical History (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997)) to what extent Dali’s cultural preeminence in the US. served to affirm the hegemonic ideology of individual freedom against what was represented as the numb conformity forced on those poor souls living in socialist/communist nations.

massive scale."¹²¹ It is this suggestion of the malleable and performative nature of the social self that both Warhol and Koons play with in their respective presentations of artistic persona (to some degree, it is their "subject matter"), and which provides the most significant point of comparison between the two in my opinion. If the institutional category of art still rests, however precariously, on the bourgeois modernist conception of art as a privileged social category, as a final refuge of authenticity within which singular, autonomous individuality is freely expressed and internalized as individually distinct, what then does the wildly successful reception of both Warhol and Koons within this category suggest about the general conditions and socially appropriate modes within which contemporary subjects constitute and apprehend their own identity?¹²²

As I have suggested, the cultural contexts within which attention returns to Warhol and Koons later emerges have altered considerably from the period in which Warhol originally produced his most engaging and renown work (1962-68). The specific terms through which art and artists are meaningfully contemplated have shifted considerably following the end of World War II. The ubiquitous influence of mass-mediated culture is now regularly cited in artworld discourse and representation, as art and artist are increasingly known through mass-mediated representation, as brand equity, or celebrity - helped along in no small part by the original success of pop art. Rapid and continuous advancements in mass media technology and production during the post-war decades factors significantly toward ushering in the changes in the perceptive and contemplative faculties of individuals. The sheer ubiquity and proximity of the image deployed in the service of commerce into the terrain of everyday

¹²¹ Andrew Renton, "Jeff Koons and the Art of the Deal: Marketing (as) Sculpture" Performance, September 1990, 21

¹²² As Thomas Crow reminds us, "For a bourgeois public, the idea of a combative and singular individuality, impatient with social confinement, remained fundamental to a widely internalized sense of self - as it still does." Thomas Crow, "Modernism and Mass Culture in the Visual Arts" Pollock and After: The Critical Debate, 245

(semi-)urban consciousness is a primary catalyst in these shifts of contemporary perspectives. Economic interests (i.e., the accumulation of capital) behind the largely private commercial organizations holding ownership over the majority of national mass media continue to have significant influence over shifts within the "visual grammar" of what has increasingly become a highly-administrated, collective imagescape. Of greatest general impact has been the creation and reproduction of what is now referred as the "attention economy" - the perpetual competition undertaken in the interest of sales to arrest the increasingly over-familiar and listless attention of individual spectators for as long as it takes to deliver the promotion. This not only goes for the overtly commercial advertisements, but for the actual content or programming, which - in the case of television for instance - hopes to sell an audience to an advertiser. The increasing ubiquitousness and proximity¹²³ of these (mechanical and digital) indefinitely reproducible images invite certain appropriate modes of perceiving and contemplating successive images by virtue of the manner and form in which they appear to us.¹²⁴ They help shape a type of "visual-cognitive habituation", that is, a perceptual framework that informs a meaningful way of seeing. Such shifts in the way in which individuals are invited to perceive, advanced in part by the demand for innovative representational practices placed on advertising texts by the bored and increasingly image-saturated

¹²³ It is not with ham-fisted intervention but with the sustained persistence of constant background noise that advertising texts encroach into everyday consciousness. As Raoul Vaneigem sharply puts it, "...a hundred pinpricks kill you as surely as a couple of blows with a club". The Revolution of Everyday Life (London: Rebel Press/Left Bank Books, 1994), 24

¹²⁴ "When every moment of signification is encapsulated in a sea of roughly equivalent video texts, the substance of any single signified tends to be eclipsed by its temporal video successors: its significance is lost in a stream of video matter. When this is compounded by the heavily privatized social relations of reception, we must wonder what kind of discursive rationality can grow in such a climate." Robert Goldman and Stephen Papson, Sign Wars: The Cluttered Landscape of Advertising. (New York: Guilford Press, 1986), 81

attentions of individual consumers,¹²⁵ have gradually had a re-valuating effect upon the nature and meaning of representational practice. Curiously enough, it seems as though the abundance and plurality of representational practices easily accessible in mass media culture have developed at the expense of any real sense of certainty as to what representation actually "re-presents". This concern with this evidential breakdown of representational truths and subsequent re-valuation is characteristic of much of what has come to be known as the postmodern turn in culture.

During the summer of 1989, for instance, The Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art housed an exhibition curated by Mary Jane Jacob and Ann Goldstein. This exhibition of contemporary work was entitled "A Forest of Signs: Art in the Crisis of Representation." Aside from the promotional intrigue of such a title, there are several things being postulated here, namely that culture is now suffering a "crisis of representation" and that such a crisis can be metaphorically alluded to as a "forest of signs." Forest is the interesting word here, connotating as it does a organic density in which one can easily become lost, in which the articulated components (trees/signs) that comprise the whole are lost in the bewildering interchangeability of the totality (forest/culture). We might even say, following Baudrillard, that the metaphor of forest as employed in this context stands as a site of implosion, an erasure of differentiation. As Jacob herself recounts in the publication that accompanies the exhibition,¹²⁶

¹²⁵ In this system, symbiotic as it is with that hyped-up "sameness in difference" Walter Benjamin observes in the fashion cycle, novelty assumes the primary means of differentiation. This type of valuing of the novel (subjectively manifested as youth.) is the impetus that drives the cycle onward. It can be seen quite plainly, for example, in the promotional language used to describe the "freshest, new, bright young stars" in Hollywood and all things "hot"(as in, out the oven.) The pursuit of the new and novel (the fashionable) is a drive for recognition, to be thought of (with envy) as always so fashionable, so with it, almost like a celebrity. This plays itself out socially in rituals of display that provoke envy with the double-edged taunt of "I conformed long before you did...."

¹²⁶ A publication, speaking of implosion, that can be no doubt be bought in the museum gift shop, read in the museum cafe, and heatedly argued over in the museum bar whilst perched upon stools also available at the museum home design store.

The Dada readymade object gave the artist the right to bestow on anything the status of art; actual fabrication of the object was no longer necessary. Thus was dealt the first blow to the criteria of craftsmanship and originality that had previously defined a work of art. The success of the Pop artists, and most importantly Andy Warhol, not only added images from the mass media to this repertory of readymades, but also created the possibility for the artist to be a living star.

The relation of today's art to consumer society is perhaps even more complicated than that of the Pop artists. The subject now is not a product pulled from a grocery shelf, but art itself as a product for sale. Appropriating techniques of commerce and advertising for the content, mode of fabrication, and presentation of the work, artists are playing with the strategies of both the business and art worlds that have combined forces in so many ways over the past decade.¹²⁷

Jacob's comments are indicative of a broader sweep in thought regarding contemporary artistic practice and theory. Pop art has recently been positioned in art theory as a harbinger of a new form of cultural logic, specifically as ushering in new forms of representational practice in which formerly distinct categories of expression such as art and commercial promotion, are interbred. The emergent cultural offspring of these new representational practices, christened the "postmodern", are characterized by this transgressiveness between formerly distinct categorizations. As for the immediate implication for contemporary artistic practice that recognizes itself as postmodern, Best and Kellner suggest that,

One key general characteristic that unites the various postmodern movements in the arts is that they are implusive and dedifferentiating. This is to say that they renounce, implode, deconstruct, subvert, and parody conventionally defined boundaries between high and low art, reality and unreality, artist and spectator, and amongst the various artistic media themselves.¹²⁸

This movement of dedifferentiation that characterizes the postmodern movement in the arts, a liberation borne of vast uncertainty, has released art as

¹²⁷ Mary Jane Jacob, "Art in the Age of Reagan: 1980 - 1988" in Catherine Gudis [Ed.] A Forest of Signs (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1989), 20.

¹²⁸ Steven Best & Douglas Kellner, The Postmodern Turn (New York: The Guilford Press, 1997), 135

how postmodern cultural formations manage this paradox while ultimately reproducing capitalist hegemony. Part of the complications arising from such a contradiction would seem to stem from the fact that the bourgeois subject can not be neatly done away with tout court. Quite the contrary, it is a necessary, albeit problematic, component of the system of democratic capitalism. As Terry Eagleton elaborates,

The centered, autonomous human subject is no clapped-out metaphysical fantasy, to be dispersed at a touch of deconstruction, but a continuing ideological necessity constantly outstripped and decentered by the operations of the system itself. This hangover from an older liberal epoch of bourgeois society is alive and kicking as an ethical, juridical and political category, but embarrassingly out of gear with certain alternative versions of subjectivity which arise more directly from the late capitalist economy itself.¹³⁰

The apparent incongruencies between these "versions of subjectivity", however, do not manifest themselves as sites of volatile contradiction from which antagonistic content may issue, or within which fissures in the rationalized administrative model of the social are revealed. Perplexingly, the state of affairs today confirm in part Herbert Marcuse's 1964 thesis on what he terms "one-dimensional society," a social order constituted and fixed entirely upon an all-absorbing one-dimensionality of surface appearance. In such a society, wrote Marcuse, any depth hermeneutic is impossible,¹³¹ while erstwhile antagonistic categories of meaning peacefully co-habitate in apparent indifference to their contradictory identities,

The absorbent power of society depletes the artistic dimension by assimilating its antagonistic contents. In the realm of culture, the new totalitarianism manifests itself precisely in a harmonizing pluralism,

¹³⁰Terry Eagleton The Ideology of the Aesthetic (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1990), 377

¹³¹That is, a hermeneutic that assumes an "underlying truth" beyond the appearance of surface manifestations and that would, in Marcuse's scheme of things, constitute a second dimension in readings of the social. This general notion is later picked up on and elaborated towards a logical finality in the work of Jean Baudrillard who nails the coffin shut on any possibility of a depth hermeneutic with characteristically ostentatious aplomb and disregard.

where the most contradictory works and truths peacefully coexist in indifference.¹³²

The cultural circumstances of what Marcuse calls "harmonizing pluralism" and what thinkers of the postmodern might also reasonably call an "affirmative heterogeneity of discourse", demand new modes of self-reflexive subjectivity. The individual attempting to orientate, to place themselves within frames of meaning imposed by cultural formations characterized in "harmonizing pluralism", can no longer rely on those traditionally accepted structures of relational meaning founded on the hierarchical organization in modernist discourse and thought. The self-reflexive subject confronted with one-dimensional or postmodern harmonizing pluralism must now cognitively orientate themselves to forms of cultural experience wherein relational meaning is structured on a horizontal field of relative "harmonizing pluralism", as opposed to the vertical and linear ordering of distinct categories characteristic in modernist thought and cultural formation. And in many ways this de-stabilization holds the promise of discursive liberation for many social identities previously marginalized to silence in the rigid categorizations of modernism. Once constrained to modes of subjectivity appropriate to the individual's place within categorical grouping (gender, race, class, religion, sexual orientation, etc.,) the contemporary subject is afforded a relative fluidity amongst a plurality of modes of subjectivity, choosing from the plethora of behavioral models offered to contemporary social actors. In this sense, every representation of being is also a recommendation of a "way of being". This discursive liberation, however, is exclusively just that: a liberation of discourse, of sign and representation, the stuff of the one-dimensional society. In actual material terms, inequality and

¹³² Herbert Marcuse One-Dimensional Man (London: Ark Paperbacks, 1986), 63

prejudice may be rife yet in the discursive terms of signification and representation, anything and everything are equally tolerated.

What nonetheless remains hierarchically ordered, be you a de-centered subject adrift in a wash of discursive pluralism or not, is monetary value. The potential promise offered the contemporary subject in a cultural field characterized by a harmonizing pluralism unfortunately does not extend into the logic of economic value. 5 dollars, yen, lire, etc. is only relative to 500 dollars, yen, lire, etc. in that it is valued as less; capitalist relations continue fundamentally unaltered at the economic base. This is not to explain away the significance of this catalogue of emerging cultural experiences dubbed postmodern and the immediacy with which they resonate in many a daily life as so much false consciousness perpetrated solely by the interests of capital facing a crisis of cultural exhaustion. Again, the "truth" of any situation may be elusive and unconfirmable, but it does not follow that the real impact of certain perceivable "truth effects" should be considered invalid or otherwise unworthy of critical attention. As Jameson soberly comments, "The point is that we are *within* the culture of postmoderism to the point where its facile repudiation is as impossible as any equally facile celebration of it is complacent and corrupt."¹³³

Let us take, as an initial point from which the above considerations may be drawn out and elaborated upon, Warhol's return to cultural preeminence during the early 1980s and the ensuing developments in advertising stratagems that initiate tactics of interpellating consumers within modes of subjectivity that significantly enough recall the cool ambivalence of Warhol circa 1960s. Just as

¹³³ Jameson, Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic..., 62. There is a growing feeling, at least amongst North American academics, that the "postmodern" is done with and that we are now into something new, although the mapping of this new cultural terrain remains to be completed in many areas. This notion will be returned to with consideration to Koons. For now I think it important to recognize that what has been identified as characteristically "postmodern" cultural forms continue to manifest themselves in the observations that commercial mass media continues to make about itself - presumably on behalf of the spectator.

the New York art world of the 1960s witnessed a marked collusion between the worlds of business/advertising and art with the appearance of pop, we see the same marked collusion, albeit in a more diffuse form, at the turn of the 1980s¹³⁴. While Warhol figures significantly in both periods, the "Warholian" mode of subjectivity resonates greater as an abstract model of empathic identification for subjects confronted with the emerging postmodern cultural formations of the 1980s. Warhol's ambivalence, originally received in a cultural context in which any notion of a generalized representational crisis was in comparative infancy, is taken as an absence; a pointedly removed absence which leaves space open for the possibility of reading ironic or critical distance. Under postmodern cultural formations, this cool ironic passivity becomes represented as the appropriate mode of subjective response in which individuals are invited to identify with and from which to take behavioural cues. This will be discussed in detail below, although first a few words merit consideration regarding the socio-cultural context of the New York artworld circa 1980.

As Mary Jane Jacob recounts in the exhibition catalogue for "A Forest of Signs", the early eighties witnessed a boom in the art market that made fertile ground for the hyped emergence of previously unknown artists. Her example of Julian Schnabel serves to indicate the frenzy of commerce and instant cultural recognition that awaited several young, and then relatively unknown artists at the time,

In February 1979 an amazing event happened in the art world: a twenty-nine-year old artist named Julian Schnabel had his first one-person exhibition at the new Mary Boone Gallery in SoHo and was *instantaneously* a success. All of the paintings, priced between \$2,500 and \$3,000, were sold even before the show opened. With this one example it became possible for a young artist to rise from complete oblivion to cultural stardom. It became possible for a young artist to command high prices and to have a "retrospective" or major survey

¹³⁴ An economic period marked by corporate expansion due in part to the initial implementation of "supply-side" Reaganomics.

show within few years of appearing on the scene, an honour heretofore reserved only for artists in their fifties or sixties.¹³⁵

This young generation of artist celebrities, including Schnabel, Keith Haring, Jean-Michel Basquiat, Francesco Clemente¹³⁶, socially ingratiated themselves to Warhol while their own career maneuvers recalled his cool and unapologetic philosophy of art market and mass media manipulation toward personal careerist interests. The various and media-prolific citations to Warhol occur during a period in which certain assumptions of art criticism and theory, as with many of the scholastic humanities disciplines, were becoming destabilized by the giddy promise of shifting paradigms of interpretation introduced by postmodern thought. An increasing number of cultural critics and academics struggled to articulate the characteristics of this "postmodern turn" in cultural production, to lend some semblance of coherence to this conception of a "postmodern condition" to use Lyotard's phrase.¹³⁷ Within these cultural circumstances, Warhol's timely return to cultural preeminence can quite reasonably be positioned as exemplary of certain aspects of postmodern cultural formations, a notion perhaps popularized with greatest effect in Jameson's highly regarded 1984 essay, "Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism." Jameson's citing Warhol's "Diamond Dust Shoes," contrasted with Edvard Munch's "The Scream", as indicative of a new form of cultural logic at work illuminates the connection between Warhol, his performative negation of the artist as expressive and self-determining subject, and a characteristic attribute of contemporary subjects increasingly faced with

¹³⁵ Mary Jane Jacob, "Art in the Age of Reagan: 1980 - 1988", 15

¹³⁶ Schnabel, for example, painted Warhol in 1982 for his "Portrait of Andy Warhol", while Basquiat and Clemente both collaborated in several works with Warhol in 1984. Micheal Husband's group portrait of the (all male) New York "art stars" taken in 1986 at the arty New York night-club "Area", shows Warhol flanked by associates and friends including Haring, Mapplethorpe, Chia, Basquiat, Schnabel, etc. all apparently having a toast to themselves.

¹³⁷ See Jean François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition : a report on knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984)

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emerging postmodern cultural formations, something Jameson identifies as the "waning of affect." For Jameson, Munch's "The Scream" can be read as positing that,

...expression requires the category of the individual monad, but it also shows us the heavy price to be paid for that precondition, dramatizing the unhappy paradox that when you constitute your individual subjectivity as a self-sufficient field and a closed realm, you thereby shut yourself off from everything else and condemn yourself to a prison cell without egress.

Postmodernism presumably signals the end of this dilemma, which it replaces with a new one. The end of the bourgeois ego, or monad, no doubt brings with it the end of the psychopathologies of that ego - what I have been calling the waning of affect. But it means the end of much more - the end, for example, of style, in the sense of the unique and the personal, the end of the distinctive individual brush stroke (as symbolized by the emergent primacy of mechanical reproduction). As for expression and feelings or emotions, the liberation, in contemporary society, from the older anomie of the centered subject may also mean not merely a liberation from anxiety but a liberation from every other kind of feeling as well, since there is no longer a self present to do the feeling.¹³⁸

Considering Jameson's above comments in light of Warhol's highly performative artistic persona, marked as it is by ambivalent detachment and a near complete deference to the "primacy of mechanical reproduction" in his work, the connections between the "Warholian" mode of subjectivity and the primary characteristics of Jameson's "postmodern subject" are immediately evident. The Warholian and the postmodern subject have anesthetized themselves against both the agonies and intensities experienced by the self-determining monad of the modernist tradition. There seems to be a general cultural ambiance of affective and narrative exhaustion under such conditions, manifested in the subject in what Jameson terms the "waning of affect." Best and Kellner further elaborate on this "waning" of affective involvement.

...the neurasthenia of the modern condition has given way to a widespread feeling of emptiness and blankness, as though the modern mind, addicted to cocaine, had taken massive doses of lithium to come

¹³⁸ Jameson, Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic..., 15

down and cool out. Coolness, blankness, and apathy become new moods for the decelerating, recessionary postmodern condition in an age of downsizing and diminishing expectations. According to Jameson, the alienation of the subject in the modern era, which required depth of feeling and a critical distance between the subject and the objective conditions of its life, has been absorbed, as expressive subjectivities mutate into fragmented selves devoid of psychological depth and autonomy.¹³⁹

What is absent from the subjective response to those things identified by Jameson, Best and Kellner (amongst others,¹⁴⁰) as characteristically postmodern forms of cultural experience is the sense of depth or perspective through which a critical distance between the subject and the objective, experiential conditions of existence is rendered possible. It is also precisely this critical distance that Warhol's performative artistic persona playfully effaced, much to the scandalized horror and perturbation of conservatively-oriented art critics writing in the 1960s.¹⁴¹ Indeed, the polemics directed at pop art and at Warhol in particular at the time can be considered as addressing very real and genuine concerns in the clarity of hindsight. In eschewing autonomy for automation at the level of artistic production and foregoing impassioned engagement for detached ambivalence in his highly performative artistic persona, Warhol undermines the necessary conditions that allow for the concept of artistic expression in the first instance. As Jameson explains,

The very concept of expression presupposes indeed some separation within the subject, and along with that a whole metaphysics of the inside and outside, of the wordless pain within the monad [bourgeois subject] and the moment in which, often cathartically, that "emotion" is then projected out and externalized, as gesture or cry, as desperate communication and the outward dramatization of inward feeling.¹⁴²

¹³⁹ Best and Kellner, *The Postmodern Turn*, 134

¹⁴⁰ To name but a few, see the work of Steven Conner, Mike Featherstone, Richard Rorty, Linda Hutcheon, Arthur Kroker and Scott Lash for discussions relevant to postmodern cultural formations and subjectivity.

¹⁴¹ For a concise and engaging discussion of these initial objections held by established art critics at the time see, Peter Selz, Henry Geldzahler, Hilton Kramer, Dore Ashton, Leo Steinberg, Stanley Kunitz. "A Symposium on Pop Art". *Arts*, April 1963, 35.

¹⁴² Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic...*, 15

Warhol himself repeatedly claimed to be without this psychological or emotive depth, to be, quite to the contrary, a subject entirely constituted on the surface of appearance, "If you want to know all about Andy Warhol, just look at the surface: of my paintings and films and me, and there I am. There's nothing behind it."¹⁴³ Of course, Warhol's professed position of removed ambivalence excuses him from being considered anyone or anything's dupe, i.e., he is not really "there" to cheat in the first place. However, it must also be considered that adopting this "cool distance" further excuses Warhol from any responsibility of actively or critically engaging with the socioeconomic conditions of daily existence, hence accusations originally leveled at Warhol and pop art in general of polluting the semi-autonomous and often socially combative sphere of art with ambivalent concessions to the "vulgar banalities" of mass capitalism's ever-expanding field of commodification. For those thinkers attempting to fix discourse around emerging "postmodern" cultural formations several decades later, pop art, and Warhol in particular, are taken as definitive registers of dedifferentiating transformations in cultural production that pre-figure and inaugurate the postmodern turn proper. It is not until the latter half of the 1980s, however, when mass advertising industries begin to represent characteristically postmodern cultural formations as a means of differentiating brand names and hailing jaded and cynical viewers armed with TV channel remotes, that the "Warholian" mode of subjectivity becomes positioned as the appropriate, even desirable and fashionable, posture from which an appropriate (non-)engagement with the social is established.

The postmodern "crisis in representation" (brought about in large part by the steady development of the mass media and advertising industry itself,) presented advertisers of the 1980s with a fresh challenge. Advertising relies on

¹⁴³ Gretchen Berg, "Andy : My True Story," Los Angeles Free Press (March 17, 1967), 3

a process Louis Althusser terms interpellation, a "hailing" or appellation ("hey, you!"), in which the individual being addressed recognizes themselves to properly be that subject who is being communicated to¹⁴⁴. Acts of communication require this initial recognition on the receiver's part before they submit the interpretive labor necessary to the creation of meaning. When communication addresses individuals as subjects, individuals must identify in some way with the terms of subjectivity constituted in the form and manner by which they are being addressed. Advertising texts must make this successful identification with the anticipated spectator/consumer in order that the spectator be invited or enticed to empathize with the subjective gratifications on offer in the mediated form of the commodity or service being pushed. This is precisely where the "do-it-yourself" aspect of advertising comes in, as Judith Williamson explains,

You have to exchange yourself with the person 'spoken to', the spectator the ad creates for itself. Every ad necessarily assumes a particular spectator: it projects into the space in front of it an imaginary person composed in terms of the relationship between the elements within the ad. You move into this space as you look at the ad, and in doing so 'become' the spectator, you feel the 'hey you' 'really did' apply to you in particular.¹⁴⁵

In a two-fold process, the individual completes the significance of the advertising text as the text simultaneously positions the individual in their recognition of self as the potential subject constituted within the terms and manner of address. It is this mode of socially desirable, and thus enviable, subjectivity - fetishized in the commodity and/or service offered - which is

¹⁴⁴ "...ideology 'acts' or 'functions' in such a way that it 'recruits' subjects among the individuals...by that very precise operation which I have called *interpellation* or hailing, and which can be imagined under the lines of the most commonplace everyday police (or other) hailing: 'Hey, you there!'

Assuming that the theoretical scene I have imagined takes place in the street, the individual hailed will turn around. By this mere one-hundred-and-eighty-degree physical conversion, he becomes a *subject*. Why? Because he has recognized that the hail was 'really' addressed to him, and that 'it was *really him* who was hailed' (and not someone else)." Louis Althusser, Essays on Ideology (London: Verso, 1984), 48

¹⁴⁵ Judith Williamson, Decoding Advertisements (London/Boston: Marion Boyars, 1978), 50

actually being sold to the individual spectator. Advertising thus creates a spectator who is both the consumer and, in a sense, the product being consumed. In an operation of quasi-magical transference that drives the social logic of consumption, being seen and recognized with the commodity/service in question socially enables an identification with that certain mode of subjectivity through and within which the advertising text addresses the individual. This presumably desirable "quality of being" is thus articulated through the social display of certain consumption habits which is, in turn, voraciously consumed by the envious eye of the other. To be envied is to be noticed, recorded, to be affirmed, "In a society where conditions of anonymity fertilize the desire "to be somebody," the *dream of identity*, the *dream of wholeness*, is ultimately woven together with the desire to be known; to be visible; to be documented, for all to see."¹⁴⁶ This necessary function of interpellation remains central in contemporary advertising although a significantly new, pseudo-self-reflexive awareness in the terms and manner through which spectators are addressed has steadily become a new industry standard over the past decade or so. Accordingly, new modes of self-apprehension assume influence in the production of the representational truth effect.

By the mid-1980s it was becoming apparent that previously effective tactics for successfully interpellating individual viewers as consumers of a given product had become decidedly out of gear with the decelerating and self-reflexive cultural ambiance of postmodernism. If anything, the strongest reaction provoked by tried and tested advertising techniques was viewer resentment, now easily expressed by a quick flick of the remote channel zapper. As Goldman and Papson describe the situation,

¹⁴⁶ Stuart Ewen, *All Consuming Images: The Politics of Style in Contemporary Culture*, (New York, Basic Books, Inc., 1988), 98. Ewen also speaks of this as the desire "to be an image that someone else experiences."

After nearly 40 years of watching ads, viewers had grown too acclimated to advertising's routinized messages and reading rules. Continual consumer positioning provoked viewer resentment and hostility. Savvy, media-literate viewers now present advertisers with a challenge. Bored and fatigued, these viewers restlessly flip around the channels in search of something that will momentarily arrest their attention and fascination.¹⁴⁷

A growing familiarity with advertising's formulaic positioning techniques coupled with the sheer expanse and visual clutter of mass advertising provokes non-compliance in spectators who reject the over-familiar forms of interpellation and spitefully refuse being positioned or "manipulated". This "saturation crisis" had been brought upon the industry by the industry itself in the escalating game of hyped one-up-manship and competitive brand differentiation, e.g. the "Cola Wars". The solution?; several innovative advertising firms in the U.S. such as Foote, Cone and Belding, Chiat/Day, and Weilden & Kennedy began producing advertising texts that attempt to recuperate viewer criticisms within the ads themselves through incorporating forms of self-reflexive criticism, an innovation that is eventually incorporated within industry standards. If advertising formerly had the dual function of selling the particular commodity as well as the logic of the entire system of commodity exchange itself, these new advertising texts continue to sell the particular commodity but now sell it packaged with a self-reflexive critique about the entire system of commodity exchange itself,

Ironically, the trends in 1980s TV advertising parallel the theoretical critiques of mass culture dating from the late 1940s. Some advertising campaigns from 1986 to 1989 tried to reverse the critiques leveled against advertising by incorporating those critiques.... By the late 1980s advertising agencies were responding to the cultural crisis tendencies spawned by an advertising industry dedicated to hyping sign values and commodity aesthetics. As it grew more difficult to sustain product and image differentiation, this leading edge of advertisers sought to take advantage of viewer antipathy toward advertising by turning criticisms

¹⁴⁷ Robert Goldman and Stephen Papson, Sign Wars, 56

into positioning concepts. Criticism has thus been converted into a series of competing stylistic differences.¹⁴⁸

In recuperating the critiques of mass advertising into mass advertising texts themselves as a means of differentiating the advertisement from the cluttered and over-populated firmament of mass media, advertising effectively implodes the space of critical distance. The signs of critical distance are hereby substituted for critical distance itself, along with everything else that once may have been directly lived but has now been directly replaced by its representation (to paraphrase Debord.) Abstracted into commodity-signs as such, critical distance is absorbed as another freely-circulating style or posture (i.e., a "positioning concept") replete with corresponding sign-value to be appropriated and socially displayed according to the individual consumers own lifestyle "preferences". This operation of commodification, which reifies subjective human process into a generally abstracted "thing" (objects/signs), has long attracted criticism for its insidious encroachment into the spaces of human intimacy. As Timothy W. Luke elaborates,

As individuals accept this unrelenting colonization of their private and public lives by commodification, many of life's most intimate situations are increasingly expressed passively and contemplatively through these endlessly circulating and evolving representations. For example, "love" is actually practiced by many as reenacted advertisements for diamonds, greeting cards, laundry soaps, life insurance, or prepaid funeral plans. Many individuals' sense of culturally appropriate action and personal identity begins, in large part, on advertising story boards and survives as a psychic urge to buy more consumer goods. These corporate-designed scripts for personal emotional expression are voluntarily self-imposed on intimate human relations not only to express emotions but also to give closure in cultural practice to corporate marketing plans.¹⁴⁹

It is not a large leap to suggest that at this stage of the process advertising now regularly incorporates a reified version of this process of achieving critical

¹⁴⁸ Robert Goldman and Stephen Papson, Sign Wars, 57

¹⁴⁹ Timothy W. Luke, Screens of Power, 27 As the currently running television ad for Hallmark Cards suggests, to flip a greeting card over to confirm it is a Hallmark brand card (even before you open the inside!) is to demonstrate "you care and appreciate the best."

awareness against commodification as a further commodity up for mass consumption.¹⁵⁰ In other words, if you are repelled that people voluntarily impose corporate-designed scripts for personal expression, then there is a corporate-designed script for you to live out your antagonistic distance. In this process the alienation, or anomie, manifested in the modernist bourgeois subject - usually experienced as a struggle between the individual's autonomy and the encroaching determinism found in the social logic of the commodity structure - becomes superficial sign-value, an adornment that bespeaks of a pseudo-authenticity, or a fashionable badge of identity flashed at the door to gain admittance to certain social totem groups. Alienation is thus employed as a function of consumer identification with the "individuated authentic", the ideological necessity of democratic capitalist societies.

For its own part, advertising that self-reflexively incorporates the critiques against its own alienating effects as a tactic for positioning viewers operates at the vanguard of the continual process of recuperating and absorbing the socially marginal or antagonistic into the symbolically charged economy of sign-value. The signs of social marginality and antagonism are coded in conventional representation to signify spaces of individual authenticity and are eagerly consumed and displayed as fashion, style and attitude statement.¹⁵¹ It

¹⁵⁰ A recent campaign for Sprite soft drinks immediately springs to mind. Sprite's "Image Is Nothing - Thirst Is Everything - Obey Your Thirst" campaign includes a TV ad in which a young, black urban male addresses the audience in a clipped "no bullshit" voice (the "black urban Rap" style here signifying raw authenticity) with an itinerary of forms of "false consciousness" that can (complicitly) only deserve our mocking scorn and derision. "a soft drink is not a magic potion, a status symbol or a badge that says who I am," etc.. The voice is accompanied by a fast-paced montage of fragmented image and hyper-kinetic camera work (swish-pans, extreme close-up). The barrage of fragments cuts and lingers on the final image of a Sprite bottle as the street-wise narrator concludes, "Image is nothing. Thirst is everything. Obey your thirst. Drink Sprite."

¹⁵¹ This is, of course, a nearly identical process to the institutionalization of the socially combative, fiercely individualistic statements of avant garde art. The cry against a disappearing authenticity and the damning accusations leveled at bourgeois society eventually succumb to a process of institutionalization, canonized as modernist master-works and standardized in academic curriculums and cultural institutions alike. As an aside, it is interesting to speculate whether this is what Raymond Williams alluded to when he suggested that advertising is the last refuge of

is an insidious operation that brings critical distance to the surface of appearances, immediately and indiscriminately accessible, yet in a form emptied of any specific socio-political engagement that may have catalyzed and characterized the original antagonistic stance. To all intents and purposes, it may indeed appear that the available forums for criticizing the texts of mass media and indeed, the "social status quo" itself, are far more accessible to a general populace now than at any other time following WWII. Yet, as Baudrillard warns, there is a functionality in this apparent liberation that reproduces the present conditions of production and ultimately protects the relations of power that sanction those conditions of production. "In this system, the "liberation" of needs, of consumers, of women, of the young, the body, etc., is always really a *mobilization* of needs, consumers, the body.... It is never an explosive liberation, but a controlled emancipation, a mobilization whose end is competitive exploitation."¹⁵² In this instance, we can add the critique of the system itself as an apparent "liberation" that is, in actuality, a mobilization "whose end is competitive exploitation" at the hands of the very system one adopts a critical stance toward. Of course, such a system would prove ineffective if there was no real promise of pleasure or affective gratification to be derived from the individual's active participation and acceptance of being interpellated in such a manner. The problem here is that it is not "all a bunch of crap" - a common if

modernism (see Tony Pinkey's introduction to The Politics of Modernism: Against the New Conformists (London, Verso, 1989).

¹⁵² Jean Baudrillard, For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign. (St. Louis: Telos Press Ltd., 1981), 85. This is, incidentally, the same general operation that Marcuse termed "repressive desublimation" in which pseudo-forms of previously prohibited social relations are "liberated" in the interests of reproducing the hegemonic relations that ultimately sustain dominant power relations. As Herman and Chomsky suggest in Manufacturing Consent: the Political Economy of the Mass Media (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988), every effective power structure will include within itself its own opposition. Through such means, the dominant power relations can set the form and the limits of "reasonable" opposition within socially proscribed parameters. Real social antagonism is neutralized in this desublimation of socially antagonistic practices as the seductive signs of social antagonism take the place of antagonism proper. Social antagonism is thus reduced sign-value which is immediately reconciled with the ever-circulating sign-values of the fashion and market mechanisms.

misguided sentiment amongst those who deride mass media advertising, - but that these advertising texts successfully address real individuals with real basic social needs, albeit in a manner that re-routes and channels the gratification of those needs into commodity solutions. In short, advertising in the last half of the 1980s commodified the knowledge of the manipulatory effects of advertising in absorbing critical distance into the field of potential sign value. As Goldman and Papson observe, advertising

now attempts to create an empathetic relationship with the viewer by foregrounding the constructed nature of the text. Such positioning gives the viewer status, by recognizing the viewer as a holder of cultural capital, someone who has knowledge of the codes. By positioning the viewer in this way the advertiser appears to speak to the viewer as a peer. Reflexivity exposes the metalanguage of ads. Current advertising practices try to turn the self-reflexive awareness of advertising codes into an object of consumption, into a sign the viewer can clothe herself in and thereby use to indicate a certain immunity from the manipulative effects of swallowing too much code.¹⁵³

The reflexivity of the advertising text still hails the individual but it does it in terms of the metalinguistic, that is, at the level in which the subject of discourse is the discursive relationship between the speakers.¹⁵⁴ To appearances it is a kinder, more openly honest advertising that does not patronize, does not condescend, but respects the critical intelligence of the spectator. Indeed, critical awareness on the spectator's behalf becomes a required prerequisite in completing the meaning of many an advertising text. Yet it calls the individual to a paradoxical game of self-reflexivity, employing cynical self-awareness to the manipulatory tactics at its disposal as a manipulatory tactic in itself. Meanwhile, the focus on a self-reflexive commentary about the manipulatory tactics at the disposal of some advertisers also seem to act as a distraction from the actual

¹⁵³ Robert Goldman and Stephen Papson. Sign Wars, 74

¹⁵⁴ As in, "Hey look...we know and you know that advertising is ridiculous, a load of crap, an annoyance. But its business, you know. Hey...we know it, and we give you credit for knowing it to. So we aren't going to be fake and manipulate you. We are, however, offering you an exclusive opportunity to get a basic credit card that isn't just a load of crap (wink wink, nudge nudge...").

and on-going implementation of these tactics, or, in the least, to “excuse” it and neutralize any real critical intervention.

As an example of this self-reflexive trend in advertising texts, let us take a recent television ad campaign for AGF Mutual Funds. AGF is a Canadian corporation that offers retirement savings and investment plans to supplement other forms of income during the years following retirement. The ad opens on a shot of a luxury yacht cutting forward through the waves as the introductory music theatrically surges in triumph. The ad cuts to a mid-shot of a white-haired, tanned, Caucasian male (in his 60s?), a colourful blue pull-over tied jauntily around the shoulders of his immaculate white clothes, sunglasses hung around his neck on a cord. The man stands in the foreground before the yacht’s wheel, behind him 2 children recline in deck chairs, dressed all in white and wearing sunglasses. Behind the children, at the yacht’s stern, sits a woman dressed identically to the man although she appears to be at least 20 years his junior. All the figures behind the man appear motionless as he addresses the viewer. The spoken text runs as follows,

Man. You know, 38 years ago I had a dream. And now, thanks to AGF Mutual Funds, I’m living it. That dream?...to be an actor in retirement commercials.

This woman? [cut to shot of the woman mugging coyly to the camera]...not my wife!

The grandkids? [cut to shot of motionless kids sunning on deck chairs]...not mine!

And the dog?[cut to a shot of a large black dog sitting up near the bow]...Hollywood!!

[the previous 3 lines are spoken with a growing sense of incredulous glee on the man’s part.]

Yes, AGF has helped me achieve my retirement dream, right boy?...[the dog barks in answer as the man throws his head to the side and belly laughs with obvious delight.]

Male Voice-over. Meet your dream. AGF, what are you doing after work?

The man who addresses the viewer is clearly aware of the artificiality of his representation, indeed, he gleefully revels in it. His retirement “dream”, born 38

years ago (i.e. circa 1960,) is to be an actor (the envied model of subjectivity) in the artificially perfect world represented in the traditional retirement commercial. And now, if we are to take him at face value, he has apparently achieved that goal. He is the actor in an AGF Mutual Fund ad we are currently watching. The perfect artificiality of it all is presented in a self-reflexive manner, as self-evident fakery, that once critically recognized affords the "actor" indulgence in the ironic artificiality of the representation as a framework for enacting hedonistic pleasure. In short, the interpellative agent in the ad, the man who addresses "us", fully recognizes the Hollywood nature of his dream, his desire, and delights in the performative enactment of it, apparently unconcerned that it can only be enacted within the illusionary confines of stereotyped role-play and advertising narrative. The ad thus recuperates viewer criticisms about the artificiality of advertising representations of the "golden years" of retirement¹⁵⁵ and re-casts them in a playfully ironic, self-reflexive manner. This is where everything tends to get a bit sticky. The AGF ad brings the "backstage secrets" downstage and center in having the man openly acknowledge the performative artificiality of the ad itself and his own status as the "actor in a retirement commercial." The ad foregrounds the illusionary nature of its own representation. The problem is, in Rachel Bowlby's words, that, "nothing separates the illusion which is an illusion from the illusion which is only the illusion of an illusion."¹⁵⁶

For the individual successfully interpellated by these forms of self-reflexive advertising, the interpretive labor of critical awareness has already

¹⁵⁵ A representation traditionally characterized in advertising by images of healthy, robust elderly couples adorned in comfy bright pastel "active wear" generally behaving as though they were compulsively forced to enact a "second childhood". In this promotional artificiality, money is no object (especially not if you invest in, say, AGF Mutual Funds), and retired couples are regularly represented as wandering around the manicured golf greens of Florida as though they were rehearsing for a Sunday afternoon stroll in the pastoral splendor of Heaven itself.

¹⁵⁶ Rachel Bowlby, *Shopping with Freud* (London, Routledge, 1993), 10

been played out in the text. An identification is made between the individualized, yet always generally applicable, model of subjectivity that the text "projects" out into the reading space of the imagined viewer, and the individual who willingly steps into the space, and the role, of the viewer being hailed. As I have suggested, these projected models of subjectivity (being both media-amplified representation and performative recommendation), are largely characterized by a cool and detached ambivalence that the Warholian mode of subjectivity is renowned for. The type of subjects that these advertising practices project into the coded "reading space" in an attempt to interpellate the target audience are largely characterized as a jaded, cynically self-reflexive, media-savvy individual whose best defense against potential manipulation is a detached, affectively divested stance of passive contemplation. This is the performative tactic prefigured in Warhol summed up quite nicely in the recent media culture catch-phrase, "Whatever...".

Consider the circumstances, however, of the subject acculturated primarily through exposure to a culture commodified, produced and reproduced in televisual modes.¹⁵⁷ Faced with a plurality of hyper-reflexive and fragmented discourse taken in during the socially isolating act of interfacing with the "public" screen, the postmodern subject is set adrift without any reliable sextant to find true bearing. Afloat in possibility, yet paralyzed by option as such, to make a sincere commitment to something requires a drastic reduction in the open field of subjective "possibilities". As Kuspit comments, "Integrity of conviction comes

¹⁵⁷In a report conducted by the Education, Culture and Tourism Division of Statscan Canada, it was reported that in 1994 Canadians watched an average of 22.7 hrs of television a week (approximately 3.2 hrs a day.) This figure reflects only the time spent watching television as a primary activity, not a secondary activity (i.e., television on while doing something else.) The report further cited that 98% of Canadian households had a television set and indeed 49% of households had more than one set. (see Canada's Culture, Heritage and Identity: a Statistical Perspective 1995 Edition.) Goldman and Papson report that in the US., "99% of all households have a television and it's on an average of 7 hours a day per household." (see Robert Goldman and Stephen Papson, Sign Wars, 69.) Such figures only indicate the degree to which television has established itself in North America as the hegemonic medium of communication.

to seem an absurd self-limitation, inhibiting protean change, that is, "self"-expansion in terms of the existing plurality of modes of style and meaning."¹⁵⁸ The modes of possible subjective response may have multiplied explosively, conferring upon the subject a new mobility and fluidity, but at the same time subjective responses have been "flattened" and distributed across a horizontally-ordered surface of appearance as fragment and quotation, "bytes" if you will, that can be assembled into a personalized collage of aesthetically informed experiences, the sum total of which informs a sense of self.¹⁵⁹ Integrity of conviction becomes not only inhibitive of subjective mobility, it also suggests a certain ignorance of manipulation; you have been "taken in" by something, caught unaware, duped (often the fate of negative models of identification in self-reflexive media, i.e., those without critical knowledge of the media codes and manipulation, opposed to "you".) What, after all, is the point of being anything when everything is offered as instantly "be-able"? (depending, of course, upon your supply of disposable income). Warhol, as an absence made glamorously conspicuous by his inclusion in the discursive frames surrounding the subject / art relationship, provides a celebrated performative template for the subject overwhelmed by promotional stimulus and predictable value-hyping: a subject that reflects upon itself and on social realities in terms of image and performativity, and who refuses appearing integrally committed to any cause over concern of self-limitation and/or appearing to others as an unsophisticate, or worse yet, as a "sucker."

¹⁵⁸ Donald Kuspit, The New Subjectivism, xvi

¹⁵⁹ "With the bourgeois market in style.... images become -- more and more -- a mark of individual, autonomous achievement. They become property, possessions, things that reflected upon the person who owned them, more than the intricate web of power and obligation that constituted society. Where images and things had once connoted one's place within an immutable network of social relations, they were now emerging as a form of social currency in an increasingly mobile commercial world." Stuart Ewen, All Consuming Images, 29.

Audiences for advertising are now given the option between being interpellated by a form of "honest fakery", the self-reflexive or metalinguistic text, or a form of "fake honesty", traditional, formulaic advertising text. Given the prevalence of critically self-reflexive and performative elements in advertising and in postmodern cultural formations in general, it seems that "honest fakery" has steadily become the hegemonic norm for successful interpellation.¹⁶⁰ Projecting an attitude of detached ambivalence from the ubiquitous and deceptive artifice of capitalist social relations becomes positioned as the "common sense" subjective response to actual social conditions. It provides some sense of immunity for the subject against social deception and manipulation in cultural formations characterized by a disorientating "harmonizing pluralism". I wish to suggest that this sense of immunity against the totalizing tendencies of artificial social relations in turn provides for an individuating sense of self-integrity in one of the few socially viable options left for self-integrity. Indeed, the itinerary of modes of subjectivity you have not been duped into identifying with informs the terms through which self-apprehension occurs to the same degree as the modes of subjectivity in which one does find identification with. The Warholian, "blank slate" mode of subjectivity, bereft of the discursive and affective "pathologies" that so plagued the Abstract Expressionist and modernist subjects in general, emerges as the historical model of subjectivity which may have provoked cultural outrage during the 1960s but is now considered seminal in pre-figuring the way the subject now lives under multi-national capitalism within emergent postmodern cultural formations. During this phase in the production of advertising texts, the

¹⁶⁰ There are many levels of signification here; the text that interpellates on the self-reflexive, metalinguistic level ("honest fakery") includes the formulaic knowledge of "fake honesty" as the primary point of reference. In turn it can be said that the appearance of "honest fakery" is in itself a tactic of a new level of deception, that it is used as another form of "fake honesty". Every good liar should be familiar with this principle.

spectator projected into the ad's reading space is often characterized by playful ambivalence and a type of "seen it - done it" cynicism. The "blank slate" not only provides against manipulatory positioning, active participation in conforming to, or committing to, anything through which you may be positioned is withheld, but emulating the "Warholian" blank slate grants the subject the passive fluidity necessary for taking advantage of the dizzying plurality and possibility of roles offered under postmodern cultural formations. It has also proven key to the successful interpellation of postmodern subjectivities as consumers, a necessary and on-going requirement of a healthy capitalist economy as every good Keynesian economist will assure you.¹⁶¹

Recalling that artistic expression remains the designated category of social activity for performatively articulating and constituting an individuating sense of impatience with the lived social order and in light of the contradictions inaugurated by the bourgeois humanist/capitalist social order, the uneasy relationships between the categories of art and commerce/advertising begin to clarify themselves. It would seem that while the categories of art and commercial advertising may lay claim to ends that are ultimately irreconcilable with one another, the means through which those ends are met have become nearly indiscernible from each other. For the subject standing before the art work or the advertisement, the cognitive processes at work are similar in both instances. Consider this passage from Donald Kuspit concerning his take on the fundamental appeal of art to the subject,

¹⁶¹ Nowhere will you see this tactic of interpellating cynical consumers used to such a degree and ubiquity as in advertising targeted at the increasingly affluent demographic of young consumers. Take, for example, the recent Canadian launch of "Diversity", a hip new "environmental retail space" for the chronically un-hip Eatons Canada, with a promotional campaign (aimed at 14 - 22 year old consumers) that sets up dialectical contradictions only to resolve them in their ambivalent slogan, "Whatever". The stylized mode of self-apprehension projected into the reading space before the Diversity advertisements invite successfully interpellated individuals to identify with this "Warholian" mode of ambivalent subjectivity. In personal correspondences, many individual educators have suggested that the adoption of these ambivalent modes of subjectivity infused with a "seen it, done it" cynicism are the source of many a pedagogical nightmare.

The primary appeal of works of art is that they symbolically do the imaginative work of analysis and reintegration of the self for us, or catalyze it in us through our identification with them. They give our decomposition and recomposition of the psyche socio-aesthetic form, and acknowledge its inner necessity. Thus works of art acquire general human significance because of their therapeutic, "suggestiveness," "contagion."¹⁶²

Assuming Kuspit is on to something here, it isn't difficult to imagine the above description written in reference to the primary appeal of much contemporary advertising. Substituting the word "advertising" for "art" does not really disrupt the relevant applicability of the passage. Without the categorical separation that distinguishes art from commercial advertising in the terms and manner in which they are meaningfully contemplated, art and advertising are interchangeable insofar as they effect similar cognitive processes for the subject interpellated into the space before them. If we understand the appeal and influence of advertising to be in symbolically enacting the "imaginative work of analysis and reintegration of the self", and suggesting a socio-aesthetic form for the acknowledgment of "decomposition and recomposition of the psyche" then standing before an ad for the Gap effects the same process of suggestive contagion that Kuspit suggests as the primary appeal of art. The main difference is that the advertising narrative routes this psychic movement toward a completion that involves the consumption of a commodity whereas art ostensibly retains an air of refusal against the "social vulgarities" of profit-driven commodification in the manner in which it is meaningfully contemplated. Therein lay the grounds for modernist art and artist to lay claim to an authenticity beyond the confinement and prejudices inflicted by the social order.

Periods of cultural and categorical de-differentiation as exemplified in pop art of the 1960s and the postmodernism of the 1980s, disrupt, amongst

¹⁶² Donald Kuspit, The New Subjectivism: Art in the 1980s (UMI Research Press: Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1988), 405

other things, this relation of difference between art and commercial advertising. What is retained and promotionally employed by advertising as a categorical value, if only in terms of sign-value, within the blurred mergers of commercial and artist spheres is art's claim to both privilege and provide for the individuated authentic. As for the category of art, it does not vanish as a result of collusion with the capitalist logistics that both enables and undermines its categorical autonomy. Under postmodern cultural formations within multi-national stages of capitalism, the undermining of the semi-autonomy of art and culture results in an intense diversification and diffusion of art and culture into everything else. As Jameson puts it,

to argue that culture is today no longer endowed with the relative autonomy it once enjoyed as one level among others in earlier moments of capitalism... is not necessarily to imply its disappearance or extinction. Quite the contrary; we must go on to affirm that the dissolution of an autonomous sphere of culture is rather to be imagined in terms of an explosion: a prodigious expansion of culture throughout the social realm, to the point at which everything in our social life - from economic value and state power to practices and to the very structure of the psyche itself - can be said to have become "cultural" in some original and yet untheorized sense. This proposition is, however, substantively quite consistent with the... diagnosis of a society of the image or the simulacrum and the transformation of the "real" into so many pseudoevents.¹⁶³

This prodigious expansion of "things cultural", contingent with the thesis that the directly lived has been steadily subsumed by its own mediated representation (a "society of the spectacle" as Guy Debord referred to it), aestheticizes all social categories in the image or representation. As Andy Warhol has been quoted, "I guess...it'll all get so simple that everything will be art."¹⁶⁴ The political, the ethical, the private and cognitive all come under an aestheticizing

¹⁶³ Jameson, Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic..., 46

¹⁶⁴ Andy Warhol, quoted in Peter Benchley, "The Story of Pop" reproduced in Steven Madoff (Ed), Pop Art: a Critical History (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 153

influence of representational awareness in a society of the image. Hence, Luke asserts, the practice of traditional aesthetics has been displaced in the plurality,

While there continues to be aesthetic production, spinning on virally, radiantly, fractally in the continually recycling of past and present styles, there are no grounds for articulating anything like traditional aesthetics. Art circulates continually at top speed, but a bizarre mix of contradictory styles - neo-geometrism, neo-abstraction, neo-expressionism, neo-representational, neo-primitivism, neo-modernism - coexist amidst nearly complete indifference. Everything has an aesthetic dimension, everyone is transfigured by aestheticizing processes, everywhere is beset by the aesthetic orgy of all representational and anti-representational possibilities.¹⁶⁵

The de-differentiated expansiveness of aesthetic possibility and transfiguration that characterizes postmodern cultural and social formations disrupts the categorical integrity required for the meaningful contemplation of traditional aesthetic practice as semi-autonomous from social and economic determinants. "Art" and aesthetic transfiguration are everywhere, everything offers a socio-aesthetic stylization for the "analysis and reintegration of the self", that is, everything offers stylized modes and terms through which individuals are interpellated into certain forms of self-apprehension.

¹⁶⁵ Timothy W. Luke, "Aesthetic Production and Cultural Politics: Baudrillard and Contemporary Art" in Doug Kellner [Ed.] Baudrillard: A Critical Reader (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1994), 219

CHAPTER 4

KITSCH GOES TO ART SCHOOL: JEFF KOONS AND POST-CYNICISM

As ads adopt a more cynical attitude to appease viewer apathy, do they move the audience further toward cynicism? We suspect that these maneuvers to counter viewer alienation further contribute to a generalized crisis in the sign-production industry. Surely these ads do nothing to dispel the pervasive climate of cynicism that defines the public sphere. In fact, the cynical attitude becomes the virtual prerequisite to the possibility of gaining interpretive pleasure from these ads. But what comes after cynicism?¹⁶⁶

In the artworld discourses surrounding Jeff Koons, comparisons drawn between the artistic practices of Koons and Andy Warhol are rife. Usually such comparisons touch upon both Koons' and Warhol's relationship to commercial mass culture in their respective work, suggesting that in some way each artist embodies the highly promotional culture we currently live within. Certainly their careerist aspirations reveal similar desires for the recognition and influence promised in fame. As Koons rather frankly puts it, "I want to be as big an art star as possible."¹⁶⁷ Like Warhol, Koons successfully exploits and is exploited by mass media, the primary means of social acclaim. Discursively amplified as such, both Warhol and Koons can be attributed with effecting significant "truth effects" on artworld discourse. Unlike Warhol, however, Koons does not withhold, or attempt to thwart any association with, a private individual. Warhol's performative enactment of complete self-submission and consequent self-negation, in accord with the logistics and mechanisms of promotional mass media retains a space of ironic distance or detachment. There is still the idea in Warhol's silence that this is all an elaborate put-on in which the denouncement

¹⁶⁶ Robert Goldman and Stephen Papson, Sign Wars, 114

¹⁶⁷ Meg Cox, "Feeling Victimized? Then Strike Back: Become an Artist" Wall Street Journal, 13 February 1989, sec. A.

is infuriatingly deferred. With Koons, even this space of ironic distance is performatively erased. Any certainties regarding whether Koons is “putting us on” or if he is indeed “for real” become extremely difficult to arrive at. Claiming mass media as the basis on which his art and personal life is founded, Koons performatively invests in public mass media as a site of private articulation and personal advancement with all the disarming sincerity and earnestness of a wide-eyed innocent.

I'd like to suggest that while Warhol may provide the performative template for individual modes of self-apprehension within post-modern cultural formations, it is Koons who suggests the next stage and offers some suggestion regarding “what comes after cynicism”. As post-modern cultural formations throw traditional representational practice deeply into question, Warholian ambivalence assumes a certain cachet in the ongoing interpellation of individuals as consuming subjects. It seems certain, however, that detached ambivalence, too, will reach an eventual saturation point and experience a gradual waning in effectiveness as an interpellative or positioning strategy.¹⁶⁸ Individuals repeatedly positioned in terms of cool ambivalence will eventually tire of greeting existence with the ambivalent disinterest suggested in the ubiquitous cultural catch-phrase, “whatever”. The signs of this are already beginning to be manifest as generalized interpellative strategies within mass media begin to address a less jaded subject as the *latest* tactic of brand differentiation. If we take the cultural representation of postmodern subjectivity to be broadly characterized by a type of discursive and affective exhaustion

¹⁶⁸ Effective hegemony does not present itself with the dead-weightedness of a “thing” but is rather an on-going process of continuous re-configuration and movement. Insofar as this thesis touches upon the hegemonic effects of the individual’s interpellation into certain social modes of self-apprehension, these modes must be understood as existing in a state of continual “hegemonic evolution”. Furthermore, the style and fashion cycles, in which projecting an “attitude” assumes central purchase, demand ever-fresh configurations of aestheticized expression and fashionable new attitude. The eventual revelation of the new, “hot ticket” is expected, and in a sense, accepted before the fact.

(Jameson) informed by a sense of deep uncertainty in representational practice, it seems necessary in considering the "beyond" of postmodernism to ask where the re-investment of affective and discursive life will occur. After the deep suspicion and cool ambivalence solicited by postmodern cultural formations, where and how are passions to be re-invested? More specifically, what are the performative models of self-apprehension provided through which affective and discursive re-investment is socially realized and acknowledged? I believe Jeff Koons, the "paragon of a successful artist, 1980s style,"¹⁶⁹ provides a fruitful source from which to begin considering these somewhat perplexing questions.

Despite the similarities between Warhol and Koons, there is an immediate and significant difference between the two. Namely, Koons is verbose and carefully articulate where Warhol would remain silent. Indeed, he is a veritable wellspring of sound bites. Koons eagerly posits his opinion, investing his public statements with personal revelations of the type that Warhol remained mute about even unto death. Indeed, Koons is forthcoming in claiming that the pith of his art is communication, "Art is communication - it is the ability to manipulate people. The difference between it and show business or politics is only that the artist is freer."¹⁷⁰ As Koons understands it, effective communication (i.e., communication that "penetrates mass consciousness"), must adopt a populist vocabulary. In Western culture, it is the universal vocabulary of salesmanship and commercial mass media that has established itself as the most effective means of penetrating contemporary mass consciousness. For Koons, art, if it is to have any social or political resonance, must adopt these means of communication or risk obsolescence.

¹⁶⁹ Robert Rosenblum "Notes on Jeff Koons". introduction to Jeff Koons. The Jeff Koons Handbook, 12

¹⁷⁰ Jeff Koons quoted in Angelika Muthesius [Ed.] Jeff Koons . 80

...if artists do not assume responsibility to start to become great communicators, there is no room left for them in communication. There are computers which store information better than art work, and they communicate much faster; advertising has assumed a role of manipulation; and the entertainment industry has also assumed the role of seduction and manipulation. And if artists do not regain their stance, and communicate to people, I don't see there being any possibility in the future of any activity even called art. You will just have entertainment, and you will have advertising. And people will look back, and they will say, "But I heard at one time there was a profession called art."¹⁷¹

Hence, Koons embraces, like Warhol before him, the communication techniques and strategies of commercial mass media and promotional culture.¹⁷² In this manner, Koons hopes to have the platform and means from which he may effectively penetrate mass consciousness, "At one time, artists had only to whisper into the ear of the King or Pope to have political effect. Now they must whisper into the ears of millions of people."¹⁷³ For Andrew Renton, such statements suggest that Koons' project is one of administration,

Apart from the conception of the work, his [Koons] role is one of communication, and of conveying his ideas and schemes to others who will execute them for him. The studio becomes an office with the highest technology Apple computer and a fax machine with fifty-four shades of gray. Communication and administration are the new art.¹⁷⁴

If Warhol assumed the position of floor manager in his Factory, Koons is upstairs in the office on the phone, spinning the media and negotiating with contractors.¹⁷⁵ Koons' professed intention of empowering himself and art in general, through effective mass communication and the familiar vocabulary of promotional culture is ultimately that which establishes the significant

171 Jeff Koons quoted in Andrew Renton, "Jeff Koons and the Art of the Deal: Marketing (as) Sculpture" , 23

172 The term promotional cultural is originally developed by Andy Wernick in Promotional Culture: Advertising, ideology and symbolic expression (London: Sage Publications Ltd., 1991). Wernick employs the term to identify what he understands to be a rhetorical form diffuse throughout contemporary culture and found in advertising practice (as understood in its most generic sense.)

173 Jeff Koons, The Jeff Koons Handbook, 37

174 Andrew Renton, "Jeff Koons and the Art of the Deal: Marketing (as) Sculpture" ,24

175 In this aspect, Koons is to the artworld what Madonna, or one of his professed heroes, Micheal Jackson, is to the world of pop music.

discrepancies between the projects of Warhol and Koons. As Koons himself elaborates, "To me, Andy presented Duchampian ideas in a manner the public was able to embrace. Where I differ is that Warhol believed you could penetrate the mass through distribution and I continue to believe you penetrate the mass with ideas."¹⁷⁶ In other words, Warhol relied on the mechanisms of mass distribution and repetition inherent to the system of commercial mass media to effect a truth, to penetrate mass consciousness. The actual content, or "idea" of that which is repeatedly distributed is secondary, itself altered in meaning or import through the very mechanisms that mass distribute it. Warhol makes the dare that not only is content or "idea" secondary, it is moreorless irrelevant to cultural reception and as such, I suppose, only worthy of ambivalent response. This, it seems to me, is the gist of Warhol's entire point. His dead-pan deference to the mechanisms of mass media and of artworld discourse produced significant cultural meaning around Warhol despite his provocative negation of the self and of any individuated ideas that self may have. As Baudrillard puts it, this is an ideology of powerlessness against socio-economic determinants, but one in which the individual, Warhol, demonstratively apprehends himself under such conditions of powerlessness with wishy-washy, "gee, whizz" ambivalence in direct opposition to the combative social impatience that broadly characterizes modernist art and artist.

Koons, on the other hand, does not cloak himself in ambivalence but presents himself as though acting in good-faith as a generous and sanguine narcissist cum art world saviour.¹⁷⁷ If mere insertion into the mechanisms of mass culture were ironically declared by Warhol to be an end unto itself, for

¹⁷⁶ Anthony Haden-Guest "Interview - Jeff Koons" in Angelika Muthesius [Ed.] Jeff Koons , 24

¹⁷⁷ Koons' outrageously grandiose proclamations only confirm this impression of narcissism. "My art and life are totally one. I have everything at my disposal and I'm doing what I want to do. I have my platform, I have the attention, and my voice can be heard. This is the time for Jeff Koons." Quoted in Angelika Muthesius [Ed.] Jeff Koons . 154

Koons they allegedly provide only the means, or the platform, for what is really the issue; effective communication, presumably about something really worth hearing about. In the spirit of pragmatism and opportunism, Koons claims communication by the most effective means possible as his artistic *raison d'être* *barr none*. "I am completely adaptable. I will adapt to any situation in order to communicate."¹⁷⁸

The "Koons phenomena" (the art objects produced, the discourses of reception, and Koons himself,) really took off when Koons' Banality show opened simultaneously in New York, Chicago and Cologne late in 1988.¹⁷⁹ Having commissioned 3 exact copies be made of each of the 18 pieces for shows, Koons' Banality show sold out in triplicate, grossing over \$5 million US for the then 32 year old Koons and planting his name at the tip of many an (often sharp¹⁸⁰) artworld tongue. Koons' own comments reveal a careerist strategy at work here. Money earned from his stint as a commodities dealer on Wall St. initially funded Koons' ambitious art projects. The work in earlier shows often sold for much less than the cost of production,¹⁸¹ but they advanced Koons' career nonetheless by virtue of their inclusion within influential collections (e.g., the 'taste-making' art collection of advertising mogul Charles Saatchi).¹⁸² As Koons offers for explanation,

¹⁷⁸ Jeff Koons, The Jeff Koons Handbook, 35

¹⁷⁹ In the same order, the respective galleries were the Sonnabend Gallery, the Donald Young Gallery, and the Galerie Max Hetzler.

¹⁸⁰ "Koons...is not exploiting the media for avant-garde purposes. He's in cahoots with the media. He has no message. It's self-advertisement, and I find that repulsive." Rosalind Krauss quoted in Brian Wallis "We Don't Need Another Hero: Aspects of the Critical Reception of the Work of Jeff Koons" in Jeff Koons (San Francisco: San Francisco MOMA, 1992), 28

¹⁸¹ The solid bronze "Aqualung" from Koons' 1985 show, Equilibrium, cost a reported \$20 000 to produce. Koons sold it for \$4000, of which the gallery took half for a total loss of \$18 000 on a single piece.

¹⁸² Koons draws an analogy between the deliberated placement of his works within certain collections and the opening of a franchise. You want to open on a busy street corner, not in a neighborhood that no one visits. For further reflection of the influence on artworld hype and market price exercised by Saatchi see Richard W. Walker "The Saatchi Factor" ArtNews, January 1987, 117 - 21.

When I made my Equilibrium work, I placed the tanks for three thousand, and I even made some works that I took a loss on. My interest in art has always been just to be an artist, and my interest in the market has only been for political reasons - to be able to have a platform to communicate with people from. When I made the Banality works, and they had certain prices, what I was trying to do is tell people that you must take this work seriously. And the way the public normally views the seriousness of a work-object is by its value. I was telling them that you must take this as seriously as a Kiefer painting because its going to cost you the same amount.¹⁸³

Of course it follows that Koons must also be taken as seriously as Kiefer in terms of artistic recognition and media coverage (it worked). The Banality show, largely featuring sculptures of the type of kitsch figurines found in airport souvenir shops yet enlarged to monstrous scale and rendered in porcelain and polychromed wood, established Koons' art star firmly in the cultural firmament. I will take this show and Koons' follow-up, Made in Heaven, as the immediate points of reference for the following discussion. Notwithstanding due attention to particular individual works in each show, I agree with Daniela Salvoni's suggestion that the meaning derived from Koons' art is also,

...generated from the interlacing of different works and their differing aspects. Since the whole is more than the accumulation of discrete works, it is as though each work comes into its own only when it is suffused with the impact of other works. That meaning stems from a cluster of mutually contagious pieces is confirmed by the fact that Koons creates *bodies* of works, each with a title.¹⁸⁴

For these reasons I have selected illustrations showing the work in installation when possible and will refer to Koons' exhibitions - as Koons himself does - as thematically unified bodies of work.

¹⁸³ Anthony Haden-Guest "Interview - Jeff Koons" in Angelika Muthesius [Ed.] Jeff Koons (Cologne: Benedikt Taschen, 1992), 34

¹⁸⁴ Daniela Salvoni "Jeff Koons's Poetics of Class" in Jeff Koons (San Francisco: San Francisco MOMA, 1992), 19



fig. 4. Banality Installation, Sonnabend Gallery, New York, 1988

Koons, never one to pass-over an opportunity to comment upon and discursively frame himself, has declared considerably high ambitions for his Banality show,

Banality was about communicating to the bourgeois class. I wanted them to remove their guilt and shame about the banality that motivates them and which they respond to. Maybe it's a woman holding a watermelon on her shoulder or whatever, but they respond to dislocated images, to banal images. And I wanted to remove their guilt and shame so they can embrace what motivates them and what they respond to - to embrace their own history so that they can move on and actually create a new upper class instead of having culture debase them. And they would start to respond to or have beliefs in things that they have truly experienced, what their own history actually is.¹⁸⁵

Although Koons had alluded to a class conscious politic in comments regarding his previous exhibitions (1986's Luxury and Degradation and Statuary.) it is with Banality that Koons first claims to be directly addressing a bourgeois audience with the benevolent if outlandish intent of removing bourgeois guilt and shame. Koons, providing the performative exemplar of this, unashamedly embraces the faux-baroque kitsch he reproduces in his work as the stuff of his own history, that which has informed his experiences and, presumably, his sense of self. Koons further understands his position as artist to be in the

¹⁸⁵ Anthony Haden-Guest "Interview - Jeff Koons" in Angelika Muthesius [Ed.] Jeff Koons . 28

service of the bourgeois class, i.e., that which comprises the vast majority of artworld patrons and buyers. This, however, does not subjugate Koons to the whims of bourgeois taste and fashion, rather, “When I say I’m at the service of that class, [I mean that] it’s my power base, that I am able to be in a position to assume responsibility of leadership. It’s not just to be a court jester there.”¹⁸⁶ Koons’ artworld rhetoric is peppered with these allusions to assuming a position of leadership, a leadership that will not only rescue art from marginality and social inconsequence, but which will effect a type of “healing” of the guilt and shame experienced by the bourgeois class when confronted with the debased and debasing kitsch and banality that for Koons actually constitutes a large part of our origin. Accept your class, your experience and upbringing, and “Embrace your past” as Koons puts it...



fig. 5 Stacked, Jeff Koons, 1988



fig. 6 Amore, Jeff Koons, 1988

Partly appropriated from existing kitsch figurines and tacky postcard reproductions, the original 18 “official”¹⁸⁷ pieces in Banality initially confront

¹⁸⁶ Jeff Koons, quoted in Andrew Renton, “Jeff Koons and the Art of the Deal: Marketing (as Sculpture)”, 24

¹⁸⁷ I say official in that the production of meaning in Koons’s Banality show is not limited exclusively to the works in the exhibition. Specifically, I am referring to the series of advertisements in artworld publications that preceded the opening(s) of the show; each featuring Koons himself rather than any of his actual art works. In subsequent catalogues and publications that feature Koons, these advertisements are now presented as part of the legitimate Koons oeuvre and as integral components to the Banality thematic. These advertisements and the production of meaning they effect will be addressed in some detail below.

spectators with what appears to be the grotesquely distended contents of Grandma's curio hutch. Like the appearance of Lichtenstein's pop images magnifying comic-strip frames in the contemplative space of the art gallery, Koons' bombastic kitsch is meaningfully resituated in the reading space of art. Unlike Lichtenstein, however, who always maintained the distance of "anthropological fascination" and the possibility of irony in his work, Koons, to all foppish appearance, makes the Kierkegaardian leap of faith into the seamless surfaces of kitsch and banality. Repeatedly emphasizing his sincerity and his desire for effective communication, Koons denies any ironic distance in the relational space between himself and his kitschified work, "Everybody grew up surrounded by this material. I try not to use it in any cynical manner. I use it to penetrate mass consciousness - to communicate with people."¹⁸⁸ This, Koons provocatively suggests, is who we are and where we came from - an upper middle-class with bourgeoisie aspirations. To deny that is to be burdened with shame and guilt, to leave one's self open to debasement at the hands of one's own culture, one's own true history. As Koons both insists and provides the performative exemplar for, this "truth" must be embraced in the spirit of generosity, not with detached ambivalence (which always provides an out, a possibility of critical distance), if his intended audience is ever to move forward, to create a new upper class. In Koons' own hypnotic rhetoric (significantly enough, addressed to the personalized "you" of his audience),

that's inside you, and that's a part of you. Embrace that, don't try to erase it because you're in some social standing now and you're ambitious and you're trying to become a new upper class. Don't divorce yourself from your true being, embrace it. That's the only way that you can truly move on to become the new upper class and not move backwards.

The difference here between Koons and Lichtenstein, or Koons and Warhol for that matter, stems largely from performative considerations.

¹⁸⁸ Jeff Koons, The Jeff Koons Handbook, 98

Lichtenstein and Warhol both leave the possibility of “backstage secrets” intact in their performative expressions, Lichtenstein overtly and Warhol, although problematically, through his ambivalence. This is, in part, informed by the pop artists' perceived effect of subverting the then official tenets of post-war American art, of abstract expressionism and Greenbergian formalist discourse, with both their work and, particularly with Warhol, in the negation of any self-articulated, personal expression in his artistic persona. Pop's immediate irreconcilability with the then dominant tenets of the post-war artworld provided a context of reception in which a reading of subversive intent is easier to arrive at. When Koons appears on the scene 25 years later, the discursive context within which art is received is considerably different, casting Koons' project within a considerably different assemblage of meanings. In terms of performativity, we might say that this entails a significant alteration in the terms through which the practice of art becomes meaningfully staged and consequently, contemplatively received.

Additionally, and of equal significance, are the differences in meaning inherent in Warhol and Koons' choice of role notwithstanding the similarities in the means employed by both to socially promote that role. Warhol's performative tactic was to remain an enigmatic cipher; in constant circulation within,¹⁸⁹ and in absolute deference to, the structures of cultural production and promotion. Koons is just as willing to insert himself into the structures of cultural production and promotion, yet he maintains, contrary to Warhol's ambivalent negation of self, that he has something important to say; that he is “for real” in some way that Warhol is not. D.S. Baker draws the useful analogy between the

¹⁸⁹ Even if this means publishing your own society paper to keep your name circulating in appropriate circles, as Warhol did with his Interview magazine during the 1970s and early 80s.

relationship of Warhol to his film "superstars" (i.e., Holly Woodlawn, Viva, Joe Delasandro, etc.,) and the relationship of Warhol to Koons.

the superstars embodied the self-promoted stars, who weren't merely actors and actresses, but embodied actualization of their own fantasies, "acting" as themselves in Warhol's films...Unlike Warhol, the ailing asexual albino, the superstars were able to be created, transformed by Warhol into reified superstars. The movement from Warhol to superstar parallels the slight shift in position that allows Koons to transgress Warhol's Pop and take it a step further in order to negate the boundaries between appearance and reality, art and commodity, surface and depth.¹⁹⁰

Following Baker's argument, we might say that Koons engages in a type of auto-reification so complete that it tends to erase itself. The very criteria which enable a distinction to be drawn between the reified and the "authentic" are themselves eclipsed once the field of reification and commodification expands over the entirety of social life. This, it seems to me, is the performative space from within which Koons means to generate meaning(s). As Baker further contends,

Koons, by stepping in and actually being (in real life) the well-spoken, good-looking sex symbol media superstar that the awkward Warhol could never have been makes a decisive step towards radically altering Warhol's position. Koons' position eradicates the depth and distance from commodity culture. As Superstar, as real capitalist (a former stockbroker), as real playboy with sex object (see Koons' *Made in Heaven*), Koons inverts Warhol's position. Instead of being the alienated artist who mimics commodity relations, Koons himself becomes the authentic reified creation, a Superstar. In doing so, he negates any distance from celebrity and the culture industry. Where Warhol could merely declare that he was all surface, it is Koons who officially becomes homogeneous with commodity society - pure surface.¹⁹¹

In effect, Koons appropriates more from commodity culture than the banal subject matter and techniques of reproduction, presentation and distribution that Warhol does. Koons appropriates commodity culture as the ontological basis of

¹⁹⁰ D.S. Baker "Jeff Koons and the Paradox of a Superstar's Phenomenon"

¹⁹¹ D.S. Baker "Jeff Koons and the Paradox of a Superstar's Phenomenon"

the self, the stuff by which his class-based experiential history is constituted. Koons, selling himself as an artist if nothing else, is in effect reifying and commodifying a certain constellation of terms, or modes, for self-apprehension in much the same manner that advertising texts aspire to. Yet contra the movement in advertising texts toward interpellating individuals as self-reflexive yet cynically ambivalent consumers along the lines of Jameson's "Warholian" postmodern subjectivity, Koons renounces any space of critical removal and appears wholeheartedly to make discursive and affective investments in the superficiality of appearance, the banal, the pre-processed. Irony, Koons declares, has no place in his art, "A viewer might at first see irony in my work, but I see none at all. Irony causes too much critical contemplation."¹⁹² Against an aesthetics of irony, Koons advocates adopting the aesthetic practices of the Catholic Church and its deployment of visual excess over aesthetic refinement in communicating to the masses. His later works (see *fig. 6*) often incorporate the visual flourishes and ornate stylizations of Baroque and Rococo design; an aesthetic that, outside the church, finds its contemporary manifestation usually limited to the type of kitsch figurines liberated from the shelves of airport souvenir shops by Koons in his Banality show. Koons offers that his inclusion of the Baroque is to manipulate and seduce, to affect a sense of economic security and comfort in the spectator,

I've tried to use materialism to seduce the viewer and to try to meet the needs of the viewer, just like the church uses materialism. Every industry uses it, but the church is the great master and manipulator of materialism. If somebody walks into the church and they're hungry and they do not feel secure with their own economic position in the world, they're not in a position to have a spiritual experience. So the church uses the Baroque and the Rococo, you just go in there and you feel that you're participating in social mobility. This is how the Baroque and Rococo were used; so

¹⁹² Jeff Koons, The Jeff Koons Handbook, 33

that the public felt their needs were being met. I've always tried to do the same thing in my work.¹⁹³

This is all in keeping with Koons' vision of a future in which art will again assume importance, in this case functioning solely as a means of support and security. "Art can, and should, be used to stimulate social mobility. I envisage the formation of a total society where every citizen will be of blue blood. In such a society the individual will exist in a state of entropy or rest, and will inhabit an environment decorated with object art that is beyond critical dialogue."¹⁹⁴ One half utopian Jetsons, one half gestalt therapy.

Having discursively cast his intentions in such a manner, it seems somewhat appropriate that Koons hones in on the aesthetic legacy of what Greenberg famously critiqued as unapologetic kitsch. After all, kitsch, as Greenberg wrote in 1939, is the phenomenon "destined for those who, insensible to the values of genuine culture, are hungry none the less for the diversion that only culture of some sort can provide."¹⁹⁵ As I write 60 years later, the influence of postmodern cultural formations, pushed in part by an escalating sense of representational crisis brought about by the commercial industries of sign-production themselves, has done much to seriously destabilize and call into question Greenberg's "values of genuine culture." For Jameson's postmodern subject, suspended in plurality and indifference and insensible to grand narratives like "genuine culture", kitsch would seem to be the predetermined lot for satiating the hunger for cultural distraction. This, I believe, is the notion played out with ironic indifference by Warhol; the man who unsuccessfully aspires to a state of mechanistic programmability and detachment. For Koons, however, what Greenberg disdainfully calls kitsch is the

¹⁹³ quoted in Jeff Koons (SFMOMA), 99

¹⁹⁴ Jeff Koons, The Jeff Koons Handbook, 31

¹⁹⁵ Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" in Art and Culture. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), 10

prime constituent of experiential realities. Like a good therapist, Koons implores the audience of his Banality show to then embrace their kitsch past, affectionately, free from guilt or shameful feelings, in order to progress forwards. As far as adopting a vocabulary for effective mass communication, Koons could hardly do better. As Greenberg observes, kitsch possesses instant appeal, initiating instant, albeit crass, communication in a universal vocabulary appropriate to a "culture of the masses."¹⁹⁶ Koons assumes an audience not only fluent in this universal vocabulary of kitsch but one in which the language of kitsch is the language of their private histories.

Koons' running commentary on his own work (examples of which are cited above), besides inviting commentary, are also key to Koons' administrative overseeing of communication. Presented alongside photographic reproductions of Koons' work in published catalogues, the commentary itself operates as part and parcel of the entire Jeff Koons Show.

Koons' commentary operates as metafiction. What he is trying to do...is not only pre-empt misinterpretation, adverse criticism and disbelief, but also to engender new meanings for his work at every turn....Koons' enterprise is so sophisticated that in his commentary he creates a banalization and a complex exegesis at once.¹⁹⁷

This post-conceptual sloganeering, as Daryl Chin points out, is also a presentational format common in contemporary advertising. "The format [photo image with written text] is derived from advertising; in fact it is another form of advertising, but the context of art galleries and museums makes it "art," in the sense of high art."¹⁹⁸ In this case, it is Koons as consummate salesman selling his art, his vision, and, in the final instance, himself as art object. Cast as such, his comments need be taken as a hybrid between explication and self-

¹⁹⁶ Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch", 19

¹⁹⁷ Andrew Renton, "Jeff Koons and the Art of the Deal: Marketing (as) Sculpture" , 28

¹⁹⁸ Daryl Chin, "From Popular to Pop: The Arts in/of Commerce" Performing Arts Journal, N. 37, January 1991, 6

promotion. In fact, just about all of Koons' careerist moves to date can be understood in terms of self-promoting performance art. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the full page advertisements Koons took out in artworld publications ostensibly to promote his Banality show, and later, to a greater degree, in his subject matter for Made in Heaven.

Not one of the advertisements for Koons' Banality show actually displays any pieces from the show. In fact, the title of the show is nowhere to be seen. In its place, Koons' name, in large, clean, corporate type, is emblazoned across the top of each advert. The object on promotional display in each of the 4 different ads is Koons himself, each casting Koons in outrageously staged contexts as he preens about affecting expressions of sanguine benevolence. Respectively, the ads show Koons as kindergarten teacher, smiling patiently with chalk in hand as children swarm around him and a chalk board upon which is written "exploit the masses" and "banality as saviour"; Koons' smiling face wedged between a pig and piglet; and Koons smugly seated in a crested robe before a changing tent, flower-wreathed seals flanking him on either side like bodyguards.¹⁹⁹ And lastly, this one, originally appearing in Arts in America,

¹⁹⁹ It should come as no surprise that Koons has commentary on each of these adverts. in the same order as they are listed, Koons has this to say about each respective advert.

"The Artforum ad shows me in front of a blackboard indoctrinating very young children - kindergartners and first-graders - children really too vulnerable for such an indoctrination into my art. I really wanted to direct that sense of vulnerability to the Artforum readership, the people who hate me, to make them grit their teeth and hate me even more because I was taking away their future. I was getting at their future, the youth of tomorrow." Jeff Koons, The Jeff Koons Handbook, 92

"I was there with two pigs - a big one and a little one - so it was like breeding banality. I wanted to debase myself and call myself a pig before the viewer had a chance to, so that they could only think more of me." Jeff Koons, The Jeff Koons Handbook, 90

"It was really about assuming leadership, and declaring myself king. And even though the subjects of this world of mine may be just these seals, these protectors of mine, I was still king of my world." Jeff Koons, in Angelika Muthesius [Ed.] Jeff Koons, 101



fig. 7 Art Magazine Ad 1988-89

Koons, face covered in heavy make-up, hair styled a little too perfectly, plays the artworld messiah come to save us all, despite temptation, by baptizing us in the banal to use Koons' own phrase. The ads themselves appear overtly performative, staged, as Koons' own commentary confirms.

It was kind of playing the role of saviour, but instead of being a donkey, being this miniature horse, it's being very sexual. And there's two girls there - one's offering me cake, and the other's holding the neck of the horse. It's very phallic, it's open. But the girl offering me the cake, that's very much like the aristocracy saying it's like the temptation of Christ, like, "Jeff, we are very clever, and here we offer you anything you want, Just work with us, and you'll have anything you want." And I'm looking off in the other direction, and looking at these flowers, just kinda thinking about love, and in a way, rejecting that temptation, knowing it's there. Or it could be this girl offering me virginity...what [do] I do, being in the role of the saviour? Like what do I want for myself? I mean, am I in this for sex, and money?²⁰⁰

These art magazine ads are exemplary of the self-promoting performativity that sits at the center of Koons' artistic enterprise. As Renton points out, what compounds the meaning of these ads is that they are now taken as artworks in themselves,

²⁰⁰ Andrew Renton, "Jeff Koons and the Art of the Deal: Marketing (as) Sculpture", 29

these advertisements are now available in a deluxe edition of photolithographs, in an embossed box. The commoditizing agent, a hitherto unchanged catalyst in the equation, becomes the commodity itself. So successfully have these pieces been integrated into the officially designated Koons canon that we may now find them being used as illustrations, examples of Koons' work, within the pages of art magazines. The difference now, of course, is that they are functioning *gratis*.²⁰¹

The ads becoming artworks themselves not only suggest the self-perpetuating nature of the artworld market, they also function as immodest declarations of Koons' intention of assuming leadership in this self-enclosed art system and corroborate notions that Koons, as brilliantly promoted artist and as enviable model of subjectivity, is the primary object of his own art.

It is not until Koons' following and undereniably most scandalous show to date, Made in Heaven, that he makes a decisive leap and officially becomes his art, blurring all distinctions between art, reality, commodity, private and public. Made in Heaven (1990 -91) exhibited large images and life-sized statues depicting the carnal union between Koons and his then future wife, Ilona Staller, amidst disneyfied ceramic puppy dogs and kitschy flower arrangements recalling Koons' Banality show. At the time, Staller herself had garnered international notoriety not only as one of Italy's top pornography stars, but furthermore by successfully running and holding office as Rome's parliamentary constitute.²⁰² Koons claims he first contacted her because he himself was interested in getting involved with the pornography industry. The eventual outcome of that contact resulted in apparent mutual infatuation and the Made in Heaven project, originally envisaged by Koons to include not only the karma sutra inspired art show, but a full feature-length movie. The following billboard,

²⁰¹ Andrew Renton, "Jeff Koons and the Art of the Deal: Marketing (as) Sculpture", 28

²⁰² Her career as politician for the Italian Radical Party included allowing potential voters to fondle her breasts on the hustings, and, at the time of the Gulf War conflict, making an official offer to have sex with Saddam Hussien on the condition that he release any hostages.

affiliated with the Whitney Museum's 1989 "Image World" exhibition, appeared in downtown Manhattan to promote the upcoming Koons show/movie,



fig. 8 Made in Heaven Billboard, 1989

Unfortunately (?!), the movie plans were scrapped, but in the Aperto section of the Venice Biennale during the summer of 1990, 4 pieces entitled Jeff And Ilona (Made in Heaven) depicted Staller and Koons engaged in nuptials against what Robert Rosenblum described as a "cinemascope baroque universe".²⁰³ The outraged cries of "pornographic exploitation!" and the titillated interest that is inevitably raised by such accusations only gathered steam when the show opened at New York's Sonnabend Gallery later that year in a larger, much more sexually graphic, installation. Again, Koons plays the role of art healer. "I wanted to take this vocabulary of embracing your class and make it more wide. Not just to a bourgeois class but to a much wider audience. I was trying to deal with people's desires. Also, I think it was presenting the idea of the chameleon - that if one emulates what one wants to be, one can become that."²⁰⁴ Denying pornographic intent with claims professing an expression of spiritual reunion and "sex with love" (which is "not pornography",) Koons again ascribes a function of cathartic psychic purging to his work. Stepping up the purple rhetoric

²⁰³ Robert Rosenblum "Notes on Jeff Koons", 25

²⁰⁴ Anthony Haden-Guest "Interview - Jeff Koons" in Angelika Muthesius [Ed.] Jeff Koons . 29

machine a notch, he claims that, "I had to go to the depths of my own sexuality, my own morality, to remove fear, guilt and shame from myself. All of this has been removed for the viewer. So when the viewer sees it, they are in the realm of the Sacred Heart of Jesus."²⁰⁵ Scandalously enough, it is in images socially coded as dangerously close to profanity that Koons makes claims for the sacred.



fig. 9 Jeff Koons, Ilona on Top (Rosa), Installation, Sonnabend Gallery, New York, 1991

There is something else of particular significance in Koons' comments regarding subjective mobility and malleability, "the idea of the chameleon" as he puts it. To be something, Koons suggests, one merely need emulate it. The effect of truth lies in the performance of it as the actor eventually becomes indistinguishable from the mask s/he is wearing. To be a celebrated artist, to be a successful stockbroker, a playboy superstar, or a leader, one need only be able to successfully emulate and effectively communicate that and, to all intents and purposes of truth effect (seeing as capital "T" truth is beyond our recovery), you are it.²⁰⁶ Remove your guilt and shame about it and embrace it with good-natured opportunism. Invest your passions in it.

²⁰⁵ Jeff Koons, in Angelika Muthesius [Ed.] Jeff Koons, 136

²⁰⁶ The mind reels to try to imagine the effect of the AGF Mutual Funds advert described above with the protagonist recast as the disarmingly sincere Koons delivering the same lines.

Koons' performative recommendation is one that suggests itself as indicative of the direction the interpellative mechanisms of the culture and advertising industries are headed. Essentially, Koons provocatively advocates a re-investment of affective and discursive passion, yet one cast at a level of mimetic efficiency grounded in the individual's experiential history as constituted exclusively through commodity-mediated reality. This level of reality/truth effect Koons projects his passions onto might very well be compared with Baudrillard's²⁰⁷ notion of hyper-reality; a representational form that neither mirrors nor distorts reality, but a representation of reality that masks the fact that there is no longer any reality being represented. When social realities become the preserve of mass-mediated simulations and models, as Baudrillard claims they have, the constraints of reality are foregone,

once liberated from their respective constraints, the beautiful and the ugly, in a sense, multiply: they become more beautiful than beautiful, more ugly than ugly. Thus painting currently cultivates, if not ugliness exactly - which remains an aesthetic value - then the uglier-than-ugly (the 'bad', the 'worse', kitsch), an ugliness raised to the second power because it is liberated from any relationship with its opposite. Once freed from the 'true' Mondrian, we are at liberty to 'out-Mondrian Mondrian'; freed from the true naïfs, we can paint in a way that is 'more naïf than naïf', and so on. And once freed from reality, we can produce the 'realer than real' - hyperrealism. It was in fact with hyperrealism and pop art that everything began, that everyday life was raised to the power of photographic realism.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁷ Baudrillard's work enjoyed significant influence on New York's artworld discourses during the latter half of the 1980s. As Timothy W. Luke comments, "Baudrillard's work on simulation, seduction, and hyperreality in the 1980s reverberated strongly among various artist communities, while it also enjoyed an enthusiastic reception in the art criticism network. On one level, this can be attributed to Baudrillard's personal celebrity, but, on another level, these influences also can be chalked up to a growing awareness of how the highly charged televisual and cybernetic imagery now driving the processes of informationalization is affecting aesthetic awareness." "Aesthetic Production and Cultural Politics: Baudrillard and Contemporary Art" in Doug Kellner [Ed.] *Baudrillard: A Critical Reader*, 209.

Others are less generous in recognizing Baudrillard's contribution, "The equivocal expression of Baudrillard's morality and reality make it difficult to judge the substance of any influence he may have on artists, but he does supply them with words to play with." Michael Compton, "Pop Art II - Jeff Koons & Co."

²⁰⁸ Jean Baudrillard *The Transparency of Evil: Essays on Extreme Phenomena* [trans. James Benedict] (New York: Verso, 1993), 18

I'd like to suggest that it is on this level, what Baudrillard calls photographic realism, that Koons suggests his public and personal life operates. Freed from the constraints of its opposite, Koons' apparent sincerity is pitched at this level of photographic realism, the more sincere than sincere. For a spectator knowledgeable to some degree of artworld discourses, Koons' show of sincerity presents a bit of a problem. It is difficult to say whether his "Beaver Clever"-like investment of affective and discursive passion indicates an absence of irony or the presence of some supreme irony that distinguishes itself in no longer, ironically, appearing as ironic. The collaboration between Koons and Staller in Made in Heaven, for example, seems on the surface a media stunt made in publicist's heaven; Koons - "Ilona and I were born for each other. She's a media woman. I'm a media man. We are the contemporary Adam and Eve."²⁰⁹ What is immediately dismissable as a publicity stunt, however, leads to Koons - all along professing the sincerity of his intentions - not only marrying Staller, but having a child with her (their son, Max) before eventually separating not long after.²¹⁰

This is what is refreshing yet disarming about Koons. On one level he appears to approach art and his own life with the level-headed pragmatism of an media opportunist, yet he does so in a show of apparent sincerity, openly investing his discursive and affective passions in it and claiming mass commercial culture as the basis of his, and his audience's, true experiential history. And in some regards he is very successful, financially and otherwise. Like Warhol before him, Koons seems to have the knack of presenting subject matter that resonates effectively with his audience's individuated yet class-

²⁰⁹ Jeff Koons, The Jeff Koons Handbook, 140

²¹⁰ A development that reportedly devastates Koons. As Tony Parsons relates, "I called Koons at his home in Munich...He sounded like a man who was trying to be brave after his marriage had just fallen apart. There was real sadness in his voice. It did not surprise me. This is what you have to understand - Jeff Koons is for real." "Art Forum" Arena, Autumn 1991.93

based experiential histories. Not only that, but seen as a model of a certain mode of self-apprehension,²¹¹ Koons appeals because he appears to offer terms of self-apprehension that enable him to act outside of the generalized cultural ambiance of ambivalence, indecision and cynicism introduced by a postmodern crisis of representation. In effect, Koons suggests and attempts to demonstrate what may be understood as a willing suspension of disbelief in a period of cultural production characterized by a generalized suspension in disbelief.

The concern in whole-heartedly subscribing to this, and one which Koons entirely omits in his own discourse, lies in what amounts to be the evident inability of recovering any basis of truth outside the sphere of capitalist social relations should we follow Koons' example. I assume that this is the origin of guilt and shame in Koons' schemata; this holding on to feelings of self inauthenticity based in models of self-apprehension which are particular to a set of cultural formations that have long since outworn their original individual applicability.²¹² Hence Koons' therapeutic prompting to accept what you truly respond to, to re-invest yourself and move forward without guilt or shame. Yet in casting his constitution of self exclusively at the mediated level of commercial mass culture, Koons denies a subject capable of achieving any critical distance from the truth effects of mass culture for the subject has become the sum of mass cultural truth effects experienced. In aspiring to officially become surface, Koons furthermore shifts the effect of his truth to a perceptual level - the stuff of mass-mediated reality, the spectacle - where things do not change but the appearances of them do. Considering the present cultural circumstances,

²¹¹ Koons's phatic role is constituted not only in being meaningfully contemplated in a category privileging the construction of meanings around an expressive, individual, artist, but also through his willingness to submit himself (his image) before the mechanisms of mass media and mass representational truth effect.

²¹² Except, of course, in their role as alibi for ideological reproduction.

informed as they are by the on-going reproduction of social relations under the governing logic of capitalist commodification, can it really be thought prudent to abandon the possibility of achieving critical distance from the effects of a governing social logic of capitalist commodification as Koons performatively implies we do? After all, we might ask Koons, are there never any real reasons for feeling shame and guilt?

CONCLUSION

Both Warhol and Koons have been discursively and representatively positioned in the many arms of the cultural industry as salient examples of postwar artist/celebrities. This hybrid categorization arrived at from grafting celebrity to artist, is part and parcel of a broader postwar cultural process in which celebrity is increasingly appended to many a discursive category; a development never as evident as in recent years. Today, commercial mass media is populated by a steady stream of various celebrity politicians, celebrity dogs, celebrity families, celebrity scientists, cooks, murderers, journalists, porn stars, judges, victims, etc.. Propelled by the expansion and pseudo-democratization of accessibility to the mechanisms of mass representation and reproduction, individual needs for recognition and affirmation become increasingly channeled towards attaining some degree of celebrity status. In a society in which "Everything that was directly lived has moved away into a representation."²¹³ if you are not a celebrity of sorts, you are consigned to a life of pale anonymity amongst the greater masses of similar "nobodies". The thirst created for individual recognition, to be a *somebody* - often manifested as an aspiration to fame²¹⁴ - both drives the industry of celebrity and casts celebrity as the idealized state of being, conferring upon it the status of ideal behavioral model that contemporary subjects are then invited to identify with. The celebrity artist is the most observed of all the observers.

Whether Warhol and Koons are self-declared artists who also happen to be celebrities, or self-declared celebrities who happen to be artists is

²¹³ Guy Debord, Society of the Spectacle, 1

²¹⁴ Ask any North American kindergarten student what they would like to be when they grow up and more often than not the reply will entail being famous for whatever it is they do, i.e., a famous inventor, doctor, actor, business owner, etc., over merely being a good inventor, doctor...etc..

inconsequential to the mass discursive production of truth effect around the two figures. What compels a fascination with both Warhol and Koons, is that they performatively suggest new (radical?) terms and manners of self-apprehension by dint of the manner in which "Warhol" and "Koons" are discursively positioned and meaningfully received as both celebrities and artists.

In both cases, however, the mode of self-apprehension in the proffered behavioral model problematizes the concept of a private individual of the socially impatient, self-determining model constituted in characteristically modernist forms of social institution and cultural production. Warhol effects a negation in presenting himself as an absence made highly conspicuous through the context of his meaningful reception. Denying the existence of any private individual, Warhol claims he is all surface, and indeed that contemporary truths are exclusively derived from mass representation and sublime, mechanic repetition. Koons effects a similar problematization, not so much in negating the concept of a private individual, but in suggesting that the private individual (i.e., himself,) is homogenous with the surface of mass representation. Koons steps into that space of pointed absence left by Warhol through which ironic readings are possible, and actually appears to become surface, not just claiming it for one's self in absence. Accordingly, irony, so Koons claims, has no place in his project. Irony creates a sense of critical distance, which in turn leads to feelings of guilt and shame over that which Koons means to suggest actually constitutes a vast part of his audience's experiential history. Holding on to outmoded notions of the individually authentic as constituted through modernist discourses which have little to do with lived experience and the constitution of personal histories under contemporary cultural formations, leaves individuals prone to feeling debased by the kind of mass-cultural experiences that actually constitute and inform who

they are, and to which, Koons claims, they truly respond. Individuals must accept and utilize this - as Koons provides a behavioral model for - in order to move onward and establish something new or to otherwise risk reproducing feelings of debasement at the hands of one's own constitutive, experiential history. And in such social orders mediated by forms of mass culture, to aspire to expression (to effect a truth) requires securing exposure in the mediums of communication most effective in the mass-production of truth effect. There is something of an appealing pragmatism in this approach that, coupled with Koons' own discursive framing of his work as being benign in intent and executed in generosity, tends to solicit charitable readings of Koons' project. Nevertheless, it is difficult to receive Koons' performative recommendation without reservation when Koons is read in light of suggesting new interpellative strategies that reproduce capitalist social relations while containing the contradictory tensions arising from capitalism's own social operations.

Koons' abridgment of the distance that once marked Warhol's absence may indeed forfeit ironic distance and further suggest that his actions are (refreshingly) undertaken without ironic cynicism. But it also entails the forfeiting of the individual subject capable of adopting an impatient or combative stance against social constraints. In casting the foundation of his self-constitution in the mass-representational truth effects of commercial media representation, Koons leaves behind the possibility of recovering any subject position outside the massive body of capitalist social relations from which critical perspectives are enabled. Irony may have no place in Koons' project, but nor does the possibility of developing a critical praxis of everyday social relations under capitalism unless it comes in commodified form as stylized gesture, as decontextualized sign-value. In a mass-mediated order of social reality constituted in and through the ubiquitous flow of indefinitely reproducible images, Baudrillard's

hyperreality or Debord's society of the spectacle, mass representations that establish truth effects need have little, if any, relation to actual material and economic reality, although the alibi remains. After all, it is on this terrain of mass-representational truth effect that the mediated signs of material, economic and social reality replace the directly lived actuality of material, economic and social realities for a vast number of individuals. The hyperreal representation precedes and informs the lived actuality of experiences.

The problem seems to be in the degree and scope of Koons' apparent auto-reification, his willingness to be consumable pre-casts his integration into the logistics of capitalist consumption²¹⁵. Koons takes it one step further, however, by claiming always to have been pre-cast as such, declaring his experiential history and personal life as being exclusively constituted in commercial mass media, in advertising and consumption. And this, I'd like to posit, is highly suggestive in terms of the direction in which consumer interpellation into post-cynical modes of self-apprehension will take once consumers grow weary of being largely addressed in terms characterized by a jaded ambivalence.

It seems that the contradiction initiated and reproduced in capitalist social relations between the bourgeois conception of the autonomous subject and the driving logic of capitalist commodification can not be reconciled when stated as such. One approach to neutralizing potentially volatile points of contradiction is to discursively reposition those terms of contradiction. Accordingly, in order to maintain social hegemony during a period of rapid expansion and reorganization of capitalist relations, commercial mass-media have in essence effected a re-articulation of the terms and manner through which individual self-

²¹⁵ I make the assumption that, in Koons' view, consumption is an integral part of effective communication and should be pragmatically accepted as such should you have the aspiration of "penetrating mass consciousness."

apprehension occurs in collusion with the social reproduction of capitalist social relations. As the advertising industry discovered during the 1980s, jaded and cynical spectators suffering from over-saturation and over-familiarity with formulaic advertising texts can be successfully interpellated as consumers when interpellated as discursively postmodern subjectivities (i.e., detached from the hype, self-reflexive, cynical, ambivalent - "Warholian", in effect.) This finds its hegemonic effectiveness in the ambivalence that allows for both the acceptance of capitalist social relations and the accompaniment of its alienated denial. The effectiveness of this interpellative strategy, however, and the truth effects that it creates are already showing signs of over-saturation and immanent collapse. Koons suggests the direction of the next stage of interpellative strategy and the next phase of re-articulating the terms and manner of self-apprehension in accord with the on-going hegemonic reproduction of capitalist relations. Koons provides the performative suggestion for a "post-" postmodern subjectivity and for the reinvestment of sincerity, this time around articulated exclusively on a level of mass-representationally effected truths. Discursive and affective passions do indeed make a return, but only in the form of the representational signs of discursive and affective passions, now rendered homogenous with the visual surface of promotional mass media and the increasing primacy of social truth effect generated therein.

Recently, several commercial feature-length films have taken the theme of human existence in self-contained realms of fabricated realities as their central narrative. In recently released films such as The Truman Show and The Matrix, the story of the respective protagonists is followed as they come to the growing realization that the everyday reality they experience and by which they are subjectively constituted is actually built on a complex structure of deception

and artifice. In both these films, the respective awakening of the protagonist to the fabrication of their reality prompts an individual resolve to escape - to recover a true state of being beyond the constraints of an experiential reality founded in artifice.

This type of noble sentiment may make for a ripping cinematic narrative, but I believe it detracts from the real issue at play. Rob Grant and Doug Naylor's science-fiction work, Better Than Life, seems to strike much closer to the actual mark. Part of the Red Dwarf series featuring the trials and tribulations of Dave Lister (the last human being alive) Better Than Life tells the tale of Lister's brush with the highly addictive virtual reality game "Better Than Life" (BTL). BTL's hardware consists of a headband whose cranial probes secure a synaptic interface with the players, allowing the wearer to experience a virtual reality in accordance to their own inner-most desires and longings. The thing about the game, and the reason it has been outlawed in the fictional world of Red Dwarf, is that the game program hides its own presence from the players memory at the onset of play. Consequently, "game-heads" have no idea whether they are experiencing the virtual reality of the game or the reality they left behind once the headbands were secured and the game commenced. If someone else attempts to remove the headband during play, the player dies instantly of shock. The only way to leave the game is to realize first that you are in the game and then voluntarily decide you wish to leave, to cease playing in imaginary circumstances. Thus far, nobody has been known to exit the game. Consequently, game-heads usually die in time, their inert real bodies waste away and atrophy as their consciousnesses are busy experiencing the delights and pleasures of their own, virtually manifest, inner desires.

Naturally, Lister and his companions enter the game, each ostensibly to retrieve another who has become caught in the game's self-effacing artifice and

bring them back to embodied "reality". After spending several months in the reality of the game, Lister comes to the realization that he and his companions are actually in a BTL game²¹⁶. His moment of lucidity, however, is squandered. Realizing that his perfect reality is but a game, and that his actual body lies wasting away elsewhere, Lister has the opportunity to leave the game but chooses not to, putting it off for just one more evening in his personally sculptured paradise. And his impetus to exit gradually wanes, forgotten as Lister's one final evening flows into the following days, weeks, months.

Lister's situation suggests a danger much more socially pertinent than that represented in either The Truman Show or The Matrix. The protagonists in the latter texts respond to the knowledge that their realities are fabricated by resolving to escape the constraints of artifice in order to once again recover a state of real, or authentic, existence. Lister, however, even though he is fully cognizant of the fact that the reality he experiences is a fabricated artifice generated by BTL, nonetheless actively decides to remain in the game, hooked on the hedonistic and affective gratifications provided as the game interfaces with and virtually realizes the desires and longings of his psyche. It occurs to me, regardless of an admitted attraction felt, that this is very close to the game that Koons plays. If we suspend our disbelief in the manner that Koons suggests, subscribing to his vaguely therapeutic ethos of admission, do we not run the risk of being haunted and eventually brought down by the part of us left behind in some willfully forgotten material circumstance?

It seems to me that this suggests a very real concern in that which Koons is advocating. It is not necessarily so that individuals are consciously unaware to the artifice fabricated in mass-media representation, but rather, like Lister and

²¹⁶ Lister's android servant has been tending to the inert "real time" bodies of the BTL gamers, and scratching messages of warning into Lister's forearm (i.e., U=BTL.) The pain and markings manifest themselves on Lister's otherwise perfectly healthy virtual body, leading to Lister's lucid realization of his situation.

Koons, they willingly make personal investments in mass-mediated truth effects because of the social and affective gratifications promised therein. It may openly be fiction, but it is a fiction in which active participation promises affective gratification and hedonistic satisfaction. It is also, Koons persuasively suggests, the only game in town - the terrain where social truths are exclusively realized.

On a slightly more promising note, perhaps Koons does suggest a way out of the dominant "postmodern" cultural ambiance of detached ambivalence. The willful suspension of disbelief that Koons appears to practice might also be re-directed to a practice of art, back to the idea of art holding the possibility of a "great refusal" as Marcuse says. If we allow that truth is experienced as a product or effect of being attached to a certain discourse, technology or institution, not as an unmediated perception of a particular state of being, the possibility arises of creating effects of truth. If art is to continue to act as an alibi for on-going hegemonic social reproduction - why shouldn't its promise be taken at absolute face value rather than regarded with ironic contempt and ambivalence? And if it is indeed the case that the structures of cultural production are ultimately determinate in artistic production rather than the expressive convictions of this supposedly self-determining individual, as Baudrillard argues, then that contradiction between art's promise and the immanence of current social realities that deny it may become a site of tension, of potential change. Maybe the whole idea of art is a dead end to begin with? - then let it appear as such, a dead end. Or perhaps it is possible to discursively create fictions that serve us in ways in which we are currently impoverished and to willfully suspend disbelief in the fictions that that help us live in the world rather than those that allow us merely to survive. Given that art remains a category of human activity offering at least the promise of expressing impatience or antagonism toward a social order, it would seem a wasted

opportunity to turn our backs on such a promise, regardless of how faint it may currently seem.

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