



Reading Room:
A Journal of Art and Culture

TRANSCENDENTAL POP

ISSUE/02 2008

Reading Room: A Journal of Art and Culture

TRANSCENDENTAL POP

ISSUE/02 **2008**

*Edited by Christina Barton,
Natasha Conland and Wystan Curnow*

Supported by

THE MARYLYN MAYO FOUNDATION

Published by the E. H. McCormick Research Library

Reading Room is a refereed journal of art and culture published annually by the Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki's E.H. McCormick Research Library.

ISSN 1177-2549

Editors:

Christina Barton
Natasha Conland
Wystan Curnow

Managing editor:
Catherine Hammond

Editorial board:

Len Bell, Peter Brunt,
Jan Bryant, Robert
Leonard, Allan Smith,
Morgan Thomas

Editorial advisors:

Bruce Barber, Gregory
Burke, Rex Butler,
Lee Weng Choy, Tony
Green, Chris Kraus, Terry
Smith, Nicholas Thomas,
John Welchman

Proof reader:

Jo Crichton

Photographer:

John McIver

Design:

www.inhousedesign.co.nz

Printers:

GEON, Auckland

Contact

An order form and information for contributors is available online at: www.aucklandartgallery.co.nz/research/journal

Subscription rate (1 issue per year, includes postage and handling):
Within New Zealand \$25
Overseas \$40

Or write to the
Managing Editor at:

E.H McCormick
Research Library
Auckland Art Gallery
Toi o Tāmaki
PO Box 5449
Auckland
New Zealand

Email:

library@aucklandartgallery.govt.nz

Phone:

+64 9 307 7714

Fax.:

+64 9 302 1096

Web:

www.aucklandartgallery.govt.nz

© Auckland Art Gallery
Toi o Tāmaki .

This journal is copyright. Except for reasonable purposes of fair review, no part may be stored or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic or mechanical, including recording or storage in any information retrieval systems, without permission in writing from the publishers. No reproductions may be made, whether by photocopying or other means, unless a license has been obtained from the publishers or their agent.

Cover image:

Eric Baudelaire
Sugar Water 2007
Video still
72 min HD projection
Courtesy of the artist and
Elizabeth Dee, New York

Contents

- .04 Foreword
- TRANSCENDENTAL POP**
- .05 Introduction
- .08 Eric Baudelaire's *Sugar Water*, the Deleuzean
Event, and the Dispersion of Spectatorial Labour
Tan Lin
- .28 Andy Warhol and the "Religious" Dimension
of Contemporary Art
Rex Butler
- .46 The Enigmatic Playground: *Zidane* and *Deep Play*
Natasha Conland
- .64 The Surface No Longer Holds: Affect, Powerlessness
and Obscene Fluctuations of Meaning in New Occult Art
Lars Bang Larsen
- .81 **COLOUR PLATES**
- .88 Darren Sylvester: In Step with the Real World
Daniel Palmer
- .106 Slow Dance: Douglas Gordon's *24 Hour Psycho*
Morgan Thomas
- .122 Break on Through to *This Side*: David Hatcher's Dialectics
David Craig
- .138 The Burdens of Imaging: Kamrooz Aram's Painted Elsewhere
Aram Moshayedi
- ARCHIVE**
- .151 My Only Child: Picture of Warhol
Gavin Hipkins
- .170 Archives Become Him: The Giovanni Intra Archive
Robert Leonard
- .186 *Graphic Works by Edward Ruscha* at Auckland City Art Gallery
Ron Brownson
- .196 Staff Research, Presentations and Publications: 2007
- .198 Contributors



Foreword

Marylyn Mayo as
a child with her
mother Mavis Mason

“Transcendental Pop” is the second issue of *Reading Room: A Journal of Art and Culture*, founded to provide a forum for new writing and an outlet for research from the home of the E. H. McCormick Research Library at Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki.

The journal is the result of the combined efforts and goodwill of a great many talented and busy people. I’d particularly like to thank the editors for their superb work on this issue: Christina Barton, Director of the Adam Art Gallery at Victoria University of Wellington, Natasha Conland, Curator Contemporary Art at the Auckland Art Gallery, and Wystan Curnow, Professor of English at the University of Auckland. I’m also indebted to our editorial board and peer reviewers who gave their time so generously. Local and international contributors have produced some remarkable new essays on the theme of the journal, and New Zealand artist Gavin Hipkins has developed a new body of work, *My Only Child: Picture of Warhol*, especially for this issue.

Reading Room’s continuation is due to the generous support it receives from the Marylyn Mayo Foundation, which was established by Dr John Mayo to benefit a number of causes including the advancement and wider appreciation of the visual arts. The journal is dedicated to the memory of Marylyn Mayo and her mother, Mavis Mason. Born and raised in New Zealand, Marylyn Eve Mayo had a lifelong interest in education, law and the visual arts. Her academic career established her as a legal pioneer in Australasia; in 1989 she became the Foundation Head of the newly established Law School at James Cook University in Townsville, Australia. Her mother, Mavis Mason, was an artist and studied painting with one of New Zealand’s most celebrated artists, Colin McCahon. She imparted her interest in art to Marylyn who collected contemporary New Zealand art throughout her life. *Reading Room* is a tribute to their shared love of art and dedication to education and academic excellence.

Catherine Hammond, Managing editor

Introduction

Natasha Conland, for the editors

In selecting the theme for this issue of *Reading Room* the editors did not set out to find consensus. Even penning the word “transcendental” in the company of Pop incites speculation and doubt. How, if at all, were writers (and ultimately readers) to respond to the demands of this word and its aspirations? Could its teasing and paradoxical placement in front of Pop – the art movement best known for celebrating the banal and common-place – ever succeed in pinning down a shift in the contemporary condition? How could one contemplate going *beyond* whilst imaging the here and now, especially given that transcendental experience must, by definition, exceed the visible? Such are the contradictions, that we were unsure how writers would respond to the possibility of a paradox within contemporary art’s absorption of Pop; whether they could or would argue for depth to be inserted back into surface.

Our motivation for this tango of opposites stems from a recognition of the continuing influence of Pop, but in particular that which Warhol inspires, especially the body of critical writing that has placed him at the centre of a history of imaging mass society and its consciousness. Recognising that it is primarily Warhol’s defence of surface, flatness and blankness – the characteristic qualities embedded in art’s relationship to the everyday: the real – that has been absorbed and referenced by subsequent generations of artists, we wanted to press further, to examine more precisely what aspects of Warhol’s strategy remain live and engaging for artists today. Which is the Warhol they reason with, the impenetrable or the broken? Is it the Warhol who cannot fall apart, or the Warhol who cannot fall together? Or, as Rex Butler writes in his essay *Andy Warhol and the “Religious” Dimension of Contemporary Art*, is it “the very ambiguity of intent which is somehow critical”? If we agree with Butler, that what the post-Warholian generation gains after post-modernity is an image which is not sceptical, critical or disillusioned – in a word neither modern nor postmodern – then Warhol offers this generation something that is not part of its auratic decline, ironic mistrust or “decrepitude”.

Yet, more than once in the journal Frederic Jameson’s description of the “waning of affect”, an argument which describes the postmodern era’s conversion of all into surface, is mentioned. What becomes clear is that when writers

point to contemporary art's absorption of the cultural conditions of late capitalism or the culture of spectacle and consumption, they are describing artistic tactics and strategies which seek a way out of the "excess" of the image to which our society is bound. Maintaining Warhol's lack of irony and continuing to accept the conditions of image saturation postmodernism has defined, they tackle what we might describe as the image's alterity; which suggests this generation remains attuned to the insights and conditions of late capitalism, in particular its criticality.

Variouly throughout the texts, artists are described as creating abundant excesses, gaps, affective turns and a surreal present, which then requires the spectator to engage with an image that is rendered somehow delirious. Close attention is paid to the way these artists use devices of fragmentation (Morgan Thomas), emotional inflection (Daniel Palmer), or extended duration (Tan Lin), all of which demand more from the viewer, thus casting them beyond the anonymity of the mass subject. These devices pressure the image to the point of indeterminacy, to regain a role for individual subjectivity within the mass, or to create areas of ambiguity or confusion within the image.

On the whole, in considering whether indeterminacy leads to transcendence, or allows resistance to a pervasive mass culture, most authors remain (perhaps rightly) circumspect. The possibility of transcendence *from* image culture *via* image making is not easily contended. Instead, (like their artistic subjects) these writers invariably create room for speculation, without leaving the ground as it were. In most of the essays art's use of the popular is coupled with a description of the "space" for the artist and spectator's activity within a flattened spectral frame. As Tan Lin describes in his essay on Eric Baudelaire, this is "when capital puts our sense and our subjectivity to work". What this *space* means or how it behaves is pictured differently within both texts and works or art – but at best it proffers an alternative (either in practice or interpretation) to the present order of the market economy which Warhol so famously celebrated. This *space* lacks definition, allowing for experimentation with ideas that are preposterous to either postmodern criticality or the spectacle of the real, such as a non-ironic occult practice, baroque fragmentation, or liminality.

Is this broken surface a reinvestment in modern depth and affect? Or does a reinvestment in depth and "affective" imagery regenerate the conditions of the image? Does this space become a means of critiquing the dominance of the mass from within, by its defamiliarisation or by offering some kind of plausible renewal of mass/shared experience? These are the questions being asked. A case is not made for transcendence *from* the spectacular, rather, that there are experiences and sensations which are typically its precursors – freedoms, repetitions, disorientations, dislocations, motions, emotions – which are ultimately activating conditions *for* the image. They generate an expectation for its potentiality beyond easily determined capital.

Andy Warhol
*Big Torn Campbell's Soup
Can (Vegetable Beef)* 1962
Synthetic polymer paint
on canvas
182.9 x 136 cm
Kunsthaus Zurich
© Andy Warhol Foundation
Licensed by VISCOPY,
Australia, 2008



Fig. 1
Eric Baudelaire
Sugar Water 2007
Video still
72 min HD projection
Courtesy of the artist and
Elizabeth Dee, New York



Eric Baudelaire's *Sugar Water*, the Deleuzean Event, and the Dispersion of Spectatorial Labour

Tan Lin

Eric Baudelaire's *Sugar Water*, a 72-minute film, explores the cyclic eruptions and dissipations of a traumatic "event", rendered as four discrete photographic images that depict the stages of a car being fire bombed on a Parisian street. The four static photographs are pasted by a professional sign poster in chronological sequence in a Métro station in Paris and the film records the bill poster's activity in a single, unedited take (Figs. 1–5). By appending the name "Pte. Erewhon" to the station (appropriated from Samuel Butler's satiric novel, itself an inversion of the word "nowhere"), Baudelaire's film evinces "the desire called utopia" that Fredric Jameson locates in science fiction. Against such fragmentary dystopian desires, the film offers up an equally fleeting trace of the "actual": an unedited film documentation of four photographic images as they are distributed by an advertising/image system in the Parisian Métro. The posting of the images has its own set of pre- or post-effects, or to be more precise, a lack of effect on the commuters who pass through the station and barely notice the images of what appears, depending on the moment, to be either an episode of violence cued to recent racial disturbances and rioting in Paris, stills from a Hollywood film, a terrorist attack, or an advertisement for Peugeot. The images, given their ambiguous content and open-ended framing, are inseparable from the muted or non-existent reactions of the various commuters, who appear to be suspended in a history-less timeframe or perceptual limbo marked by both continuity and rupture and characterised by an estrangement from events. *Sugar Water*, with its meditations on the temporality of traumatic events, at once shocking and ashocking, in a post-9/11 era, raises questions about the dissemination, duration and ultimately perception of historical events in a media-saturated era, an era where events and spectators' perceptions of them exist simultaneously as both photo-journalistic images and cinematic images from Hollywood films.

On the face of it, Baudelaire's film is a straightforward documentation in the day of a life of a Parisian bill poster and the commodified images he traffics in. The film functions as a digitally filmed re-enactment or apparition of a theatre of memory, and it is useful to outline the staging of the piece. To create the film, Baudelaire located the camera on the platform where it remained for the duration of the filming. The film was shot with a Panasonic P2, a camera developed for the broadcast news industry. Because it uses solid state memory (flash cards) in place of tape, it bypasses some of the limitations inherent in tape based video, and allows for more rapid offloading and distribution of video as data files. In Baudelaire's case the video was shot in DVCPRO-HD format directly onto a hard-drive and edited on *Final Cut Pro*, with color alteration with Adobe *After Effects*. The camera was positioned so that the viewer can see the bill poster in the foreground, and a set of stairs (to the platform) in the background. This is the set of stairs that most of the commuters enter and exit from. There are thus three blind spots, which serve as staging areas for the 16 actors Baudelaire employed: one behind the camera, one at the head of the stairs, and one camera left, in the general area where the train comes in and passengers board. There are no hidden passageways or "backdoors" through which the passengers might travel. Thus, everything passes before the lens of the camera and is subject to a certain verifiability. Sound effects were edited in later. In addition to the Métro sounds, Baudelaire inserted a cover of Johnny Cash's cover of Sting's "I Hung My Head." The music is heard when the subway doors open and like the cyclical recurrences that mark the comings and goings through the station itself, the music is hard to fix (in terms of attribution), to locate physically (no musicians are ever seen), or to make out clearly, so that the musical soundtrack comes in and out of focus, moving from foreground to background, and traversing various genres as well as musical eras.

As the film begins, the viewer first sees a man, wearing a work suit and carrying a ladder, enter an empty Parisian Métro station. He stands in front of a billboard covered with blank blue paper and begins to methodically post an image of cars parked on a Parisian street. The image is laid out in eight discrete squares, beginning with the upper left and ending with the lower right so that the image is assembled in the rapid, labour-intensive way that an actual sign poster in Paris would. But then, instead of leaving and moving to the next billboard, he repositions his ladder in front and begins posting a second image, this one of a car exploding, over the first image. After posting the second image, he begins the cycle anew, pasting up an image showing the same car in flames. Fourteen minutes later, he pastes a fourth image of the charred remains of a car over the preceding image. His method of posting each image does not vary in terms of method or compositional order, nor does the time it takes him to complete the work. After the fourth image has been posted, the bill poster pastes over it with the blue sheets that the film began with. The film then loops again without titles or credits. The posting of images suggests a chronological sequence as well as an endless erasure of the image-events which comprise it.

While the bill poster labours, commuters in the Métro station go about their business. They wait for a train, distractedly look toward the tracks, carry a baguette, engage in small talk, read. A few glance at the bill poster in passing but most do not notice the images being posted or the bill poster. The commuters walk up and down the platform, some towards the exit and some presumably towards the opening doors of a train, although Baudelaire provides only the sound effects of a train entering a station. Over the course of the 72-minute film, the same commuters recur on numerous occasions, sometimes walking into the station, sometimes walking to board the train, sometimes with their back to the camera and walking toward the exit, sometimes standing on the platform in between the camera and the stairs, and sometimes facing the camera as they walk down the platform to a point behind the camera. A young couple enters the station as the sign poster is putting up the second frame of the first image and the couple returns at approximately the same moment in the bill poster's pasting up of the second, third and fourth images. In this way, actions appear contradictory: regular and random, at some moments rigidly scripted, and at other times accidental. These actions do not appear as literal occurrences so much as approximations. Larger circulation patterns are repeated with minor variations so that patterns that appear one moment evaporate the next. In this way, memories seem to develop on top of other memories, and this endless process of remembering, re-remembering and mis-remembering is given literal embodiment as a series of displacements in what might be termed the field of memory; the film generates the feeling that the memories one is having are not quite one's own. *Sugar Water* in this sense functions as a Sartrean "transcendental field". In his 1937 article "The Transcendence of the Ego", Sartre, according to Deleuze, elaborated on his idea of "an impersonal, transcendental field, having the form neither of a personal synthetic consciousness nor subjective identity – the subject, to the contrary, always being constituted."¹

Memories of events, like the patterns they create, come and go. With one exception, the characters in *Sugar Water* wear the same clothing and repeat similar gestures, so that over time one has a memory not so much of specific details but a memory contour of a very general and repetitive cycle of actions with minor alterations of behavior, a kind of procession of human vagueness marked by brief moments when we seem to recognise particular human individuals. Such moments, rather than congealing instants into a recognisable narrative, suggest the dispersion of memories into events or what Deleuze terms "the agonizing aspect of the pure event."² At various moments, watching *Sugar Water* calls to mind certain activities of looking back at one's own life. Was one reading Queneau's *Exercices du Style* last Thursday when one boarded the Métro, or was it the preceding Tuesday? The actors' entrances and exits are choreographed, though not precisely, to the actions of the bill poster as he cycles through his work. One of the actors looks at her watch as she walks in front of the camera. She looks at a book a few minutes later, but there is no way to





Fig. 2
Eric Baudelaire
Sugar Water 2007
Video still
72 min HD projection
Courtesy of the artist and
Elizabeth Dee, New York

definitively say that the second action followed the first. As Badiou notes of Deleuze's event, "The [pure] event is always that which has just happened and that which is about to happen, but never that which is happening."³

Sugar Water invites comparison and contrast with a number of Andy Warhol's films that explore ideas having to do with duration, indeterminate timeframes, mechanistic conceptions of the human, and the non-events or non-happenings that punctuate indeterminate durational experiences. In *Sleep* (1963) for example, Warhol filmed the poet John Giorno engaged in what might first appears to be a continuous and unedited "performance": a protracted period of inactivity, i.e. sleep, that is surprisingly active in terms of both Giorno's restless movements on the bed, alterations in lighting, and other flickering moments of disturbances staged across an endlessly ambient state of supposedly unaltered meditateness. But the disturbances and non-continuities are not confined to in-camera moments. When completed, *Sleep* ran to five hours and 21 minutes.⁴ Although it is sometimes mistakenly assumed to be a single take of unedited footage, it is in fact the result of numerous splices and re-used sections of tape, making the film at once chronological and fragmentary, with the cuts between spliced sections at times jarringly irregular and excruciatingly and literally repetitive at others.

In *Sleep*, as Pamela Lee notes, "what appears continuous is discontinuous."⁵ Or as Warhol succinctly put it, the time in his movies was "actually faked".⁶ Branden Joseph remarks that although it appears to be a "single, uninterrupted static shot ..., *Sleep* proves infinitely more complex, its five and a half hours made up of twenty-two separate close-ups of Giorno's body, multiply printed and then spliced together into variously repeating sequences."⁷ *Sleep*, unlike *Empire*, is continuous and unspliced; both were filmed at 24 frames per second and projected at 16 fps, creating a hallucinogenic slow motion that resembled the passage of actual time but was actually one third slower than the events filmed. By altering the film's projection speed, Warhol altered the spectator's perception of events and the passage of time, creating a rift between filmic and real time, a rift that anticipates Baudelaire's photographic/filmic crossover. In any case, Warhol's films suggest both the continuous, linear and unedited passage of time, as well as unending stasis and absence of narrational progress. Joseph notes of *Sleep*: "viewers find themselves caught within a time frame that refuses to advance."⁸ *Empire* and the *Screen Tests* are, at the experiential level, unrelentingly on-going and linear as well as static and repetitive, directed as much to things that are not happening as things that are.

In *Sugar Water*, a number of impossible or unlikely scenarios erupt that work more openly to destroy notions of continuity, and though these scenarios are understandable given the context of the physical staging areas and blind spots, they are not immediately comprehensible in terms of narrative conventions that the film sets up. For example, a young couple enters and walks past the

camera, to wait (presumably) on the station platform for the next train. A few minutes later, the sound of a train pulling into the station is heard, and the viewer sees the same couple walk with their backs to the camera and depart the station without presumably ever having got onto the train. Such occurrences are numerous and, although not immediately noticeable, accumulate and suggest that beneath the illusion of a linear, chronological filmic recording of events, a number of the actions that are occurring are not occurring in the space of a seven minute wait on a Métro platform, but instead *are* cyclical and repetitive actions taking place over a period of weeks or months and spliced together at some later point in the editing room. This is precisely the effect communicated by the bill poster who would not post over an advertisement he had just posted. In this sense, a set of expectations converges on the film's durational trajectory, some conditioned by cinematic techniques, others by advertising cycles and conventional film narratives, and some by forgetfulness or mis-remembering. In comparison with Warhol, the time is not actually faked; however, it *looks* like it has been.

With its various and overlapping time cycles, *Sugar Water* is an exercise in what can and cannot be remembered accurately. Does the woman with a baguette enter once or twice during the bill poster's posting of the second image? How many times does she reappear per scene, as say compared to the young couple that usually (but not always) follows her. In addition, a number of incongruent time cycles appear superimposed upon the activities of the platform: the diurnal schedule of a bill poster, a five or six week advertising cycle, the day-in-and-day-out schedules of various commuter and 20-something flâneur types, and the schedule of the Métro's arrivals/departures. These time cycles punctuate, like clockwork or the blinking Metropolitan Life Tower in Warhol's *Empire*, each bill posting at the midway point and near the end of each bill posting scene. If the piece is on a straight temporal run, then a number of different clock times would seem to be running concurrently. Moreover, each of these overlapping cycles works to further disperse recollection into a durational space resistant to both memory and narration, where memory is regarded not so much a function of retrieval but of frequency, where remembering something again is as distinct as remembering something the first time. Among the interesting issues posed by both Warhol and Baudelaire is: what does it mean to remember something twice?

The actions of the commuters and bill poster do not appear to be solely continuous and linear but instead appear contained or framed by *both* cyclical and chronological cycles, i.e. they communicate both repetition and variation, and motion and stasis, with the distinction between the two difficult to discern. What emerges from this set of cyclical disjunctions is a species of false memory on the spectator's part, where what we remember does not seem to jibe with what we saw (a few minutes ago), where distinctions between true and false, theatrically staged and digitally altered, and past or present seem impossible to grasp and

possibly irrelevant.⁹ In this sense, Baudelaire works to transform a still image, regarded as a discrete entity linked to a specific moment in time, into something that can only be understood as part of a whole, changing durational process that is subject to increasing distraction and forgetfulness, as well as to mis-framing¹⁰ and appropriation for widely divergent political and economic ends. The first image of the car could be read as an advertisement, the second and third as digitally-produced stills from a Hollywood post-production company, and the final image could possibly be regarded as a photo-journalistic image. Yet no legible chronology, ideology, language, or medium-specific representational system frames the various images sufficiently. As Baudelaire notes, no photojournalist has been able to capture the exact moment of a car exploding – only its aftermath. Yet everyone believes they have seen cars exploding based on movies they have seen. Likewise, each character in *Sugar Water* appears multiple times as a kind of serial or repeating image, doing roughly the same thing when he or she reappears. The characters appear in a cycle of time that suggests what Fernand Braudel termed *la longue durée*, those rhythms of time that change little over the course of months and years but that admit of minor, daily variations, those “events” occurring “in the margin of traditional history.” In *Sugar Water*, the *longue durée*, which for Braudel was still a function of history, is explicitly rendered as cinematic experience. As in Braudel, such endless actions are prone to the inertia and forgetfulness that mark the large forgotten expanses of history that Braudel associated with “pre-industrialized economies”¹¹ and that Baudelaire transfers into an eternal, post-9/11, endlessly filmic present.

But if the actions of the characters appear apparitional in their cyclical repetitions, much in the manner of Deleuzian time-images, they also betray, in their automaton-like reappearances, what Pamela Lee has termed “a *seemingly* literal relationship to time”.¹² This temporal framing brackets the linear, real-time unfurling of specific actions: rummaging through a purse, asking someone the time, running to catch a train etc. For example, one woman enters eating a baguette. When she appears again, she is eating a baguette, but the baguette is shorter. Most actions are thus both cyclical and recurring as well as chronological and changing from instant to instant, but the overall effect of the film is to suggest the static, cyclical and only slightly changing nature of daily life, a succession of what Deleuze termed “any instant whatever”. Against this, of course, is set the remarkable set of changes or what Deleuze terms “privileged instants” suggested by the four images of a car being bombed.

From a Deleuzian standpoint, *Sugar Water* documents the interpenetration of “privileged instants” (*les instants privilégiés*) and “any instant whatever” (*l’instant quelconque*) that Deleuze saw as the defining quality of cinema in our era, a cinema in which images do not bear a merely mimetic relation to matter but exist as a continual and unending process of movement within it. *Sugar Water* can be regarded as occupying a position between what Deleuze terms a “move-



Fig. 3
Eric Baudelaire
Sugar Water 2007
Video still
72 min HD projection
Courtesy of the artist and
Elizabeth Dee, New York

ment-image” and a “time-image”, as well as between American and European cinema. Briefly restated, Deleuze argued that the movement-image characterised the first, classic phase of Hollywood filmmaking and defines a practice conducted under the reign of the sensory-motor apparatus, wherein all images are linked to actions in a causal/linear manner and time is understood as a function of a particular physical location. Thus time is subordinated to the space out of which an action is carved. Characters perform acts that respond to particular occurrences in the present and all actions in turn are related to their place in a narrative that rationally frames and organises each event into a fabric of past, present and future. Examples in *Sugar Water* of movement-images might include those transitions within the film where continuity is evident, as in the shortening of the baguette, the purposeful walking down a platform, the continual rustling through a backpack or purse to find something, and the changing times that are recited when one passenger asks another for the time of day. In contrast, the time-image, according to Deleuze, is associated with all those situations where narrative and linear structure drop away and an “incommensurable” gap or interval opens up between images: “The cut, or interstice, between two series of images no longer forms part of either of the two series: it is the equivalent of an irrational cut, which determines the non-commensurable relations between images.”¹³ As a result of these irrational cuts, empty, directionless, depersonalised spaces, variously termed non-spaces or “any-space-whatevers” (*espace quelconque*) begin to appear. Following the work of the anthropologist Marc Augé, Deleuze locates such spaces in airport terminals, waiting rooms, and subway stations, spaces which people move through in order to get somewhere else. Unlike Augé, who regarded such spaces as de-singularising, Deleuze regarded such spaces as open-ended locales:

[...] a perfectly singular space, which has merely lost its homogeneity, that is, the principle of its metrical relations or the connection of its own parts, so that the linkages can be made in an infinite number of ways. It is a space of virtual conjunction, grasped as pure locus of the possible. What in fact manifests the instability, the heterogeneity, the absence of link of such a space, is a richness in potentials or singularities which are, as it were, prior conditions of all actualization, all determination.¹⁴ (*Cinema 1*, 109)

In a deliberate echo of Deleuze, *Sugar Water* offers up a hallucinatory *and* literal intercalation of days into what is first perceived as a calendrical sequence. The film intercalates moments of actualisation and difference and discontinuity within the overall flow of sameness that characterises the day-to-day and year-to-year lives of the commuters, those twenty-first century flâneurs who appear in *Sugar Water* as unmoored and affectless pedestrians on the Pte. Erehwon Métro platform. However, it is precisely the gaps in their behaviour, the accidents and inconsistencies in their appearance or actions during the film’s running time that serve to jog the temporal scheme and create fissures or gaps in what might otherwise appear to be merely a continuous fabric of time.

What emerges in short are various and unpredictable “privileged instants”, shot through with recognitions of pronounced singularity, difference and identity. “The privileged instants ... are still any-instant-whatevers: to put it simply, the any-instant-whatever can be regular or singular, ordinary or remarkable”, (*Cinema 1*, 6) and to be extracted they demand a new form of spectatorial labour. For the spectator, it is hard to place individual’s actions in any clearly localisable space or time, and notions of past, present and future seem irrelevant to describe their existence. Deleuze references Jacob Epstein, who likens the shot to a cubist painting:

Epstein has the most deeply and poetically extracted this nature of the shot as pure movement, comparing it to a cubist or simultaneist painting: ‘All the surfaces are divided, truncated, decomposed, broken, as one imagines that they are in the thousand-faceted eyes of the insect-descriptive geometry whose canvas is the limit shot ... For the perspective of the outside he thus substitutes the perspective of the inside, a multiple perspective [...]’ (*Cinema 1*, 23)

In Deleuzian fashion, Baudelaire regards the shooting of a film much as Jacob Epstein regards the shot, as a perspectival shift in an on-going temporal process. Thus Baudelaire describes the process of creating *Sugar Water* as a photographic/cinematographic transfer between an initial negative exposure and a positive (print). The film *Sugar Water* functions as the “positive” whereas research of the commuters’ various gestures and habits functions as the “negative”:

Each actor had a small set of stage directions (actions to repeat, motivations, a mini role description based for the most part on actual activities and attitudes observed by myself and my first AD Laure Vermeersch during the preparation of the film. We went out for hours on subway platforms, noted behaviours, selected activities, and scripted the film that way – as with many other projects of mine, observations of reality serve as the source for recreated reality. To take a photographic metaphor, I like to think of these observations of the real as a kind of “negative” used when I print the “positive” in the film.¹⁵

Such cross-overs mark the project. *Sugar Water* is staged like a theatre piece and then filmed to reveal cinema’s operations. And yet it does what virtually every Hollywood film does: it creates a series of orchestrated illusions. Such a process is allegorised in the activity of the sign painter. Because each of the four still images is manually assembled from eight fragments, *Sugar Water* documents how a cinematic illusion is created, that is as a composite of still images played at a speed that erases the frame disjunction, so that again Baudelaire employs a manual and somewhat anachronistic method (wheat pasting) of image dissemination to stage a cinematic effect that is discontinuous and fragmentary, as well as repetitive and cyclical. Here Baudelaire’s choice of actors suggests that



Fig. 4
Eric Baudelaire
Sugar Water 2007
Video still
72 min HD projection
Courtesy of the artist and
Elizabeth Dee, New York

he conceives the *distribution* of images in *Sugar Water* as inseparable from economic cycles involving varying forms of production and circulation. He hired professional and non-professional actors to play the various Métro goers, but used an actual Parisian sign poster as the main character, once again complicating the relation between events and their representation, between the professional labour of the bill poster and the unpaid, flâneur-like activity of various young people, and between actors and non-actors who are employed in various ways to produce what at first appears to be a single, coherent illusion. In this sense, the manual work of the bill poster is the labour that allows the spectator to see the image decompose into its constituent parts.

Baudelaire does a number of things to subvert our expectations of image production as it relates to specific mediums and to create a number of barely visible disruptions on the surface of his filmic practice. Where Warhol worked to create the illusion of filmic continuity Baudelaire works mainly to puncture such an illusion. Since it is unlikely that a Parisian bill poster would re-paste over an advertisement immediately after pasting it up, the viewer assumes that the film is comprised of five different events, filmed at different times of an advertising cycle, and later spliced into a single continuous film. Yet the film was actually shot in a single take and is thus absolutely faithful to events as they transpired, at once continuous and coterminous with events themselves. Baudelaire thus creates a cinematic effect, the illusion of time passing in an edited film, by staging it as a theatrical performance piece and then filming it so that the cinematic illusion created via editing, is, at it were, contained completely in the performance. As in his earlier staged photographic work *The Dreadful Details* (2006), the various events or actions staged by the actors and non-actors would seem to have been altered from the inside out in order to conform to certain cinematic conventions. The abandoned station that Baudelaire employed as his set is frequently used by film crews, and the four stills were digitally altered by a post-production company. The actors exist not within any clearly defined narrative progression but in some sort of interval, some gap between the performance of their actions and a spectator's perception of those actions. They are produced by and within the space of cinematic conventions. In its deliberate staging and production of surreal recurrences and hauntings, *Sugar Water* suggests the most dystopian of filmic and literary genres, science fiction, as well as the utopian forms of thought that underlie them. *Sugar Water* is, in this sense, a "flattened" species of science fiction located in a surreal and unlocalisable present that is regarded as a cinematic post-production effect and is marked by what Jameson described as "the waning of affect."¹⁶ Like Warhol's various *Screen Tests* and his movie *Inner and Outer Space*, *Sugar Water* documents the manner in which images are formed or constructed in and across specific media formats and though time, though Baudelaire, in a departure from Warhol, shifts the focus from the simultaneously generic and idiosyncratic conditions of individual portraiture¹⁷ in a media age (where everyone will be famous for 15 minutes) to the more general and dissipated conditions of event

processing in a post-media age, an age marked by an unceasing broadcast stream of information as well as the loss of medium specificity. Such a structural model of distracted, cross-platform appropriation articulates the general and even generic processing of events in a post-9/11 era, regarded as an endless succession of vaguely cinematic images. Thus, although *Sugar Water's* immediate frame of reference is the more recent racial tensions to strike France and the aftershocks of 9/11, the film is more accurately described as framing a series of surrounding and even generic events, rendered as images, that are both connected to and disconnected from any singular event, linked to both Parisian and global disruptions, and thus difficult to get hold of and think about in a single-minded way. Likewise, the recurrences that mark the film would appear to occur on different planes: on the one hand the recurrences of the commuters suggest activities dating from say last week, and on the other, the recurrence of a bill poster whose appearance suggests a mode of image distribution dating from the nineteenth century. In this regard, *Sugar Water* is at once an illustration and embodiment of the dissolution of an event across and into discontinuous historical eras, physical surroundings and modes of consciousness. *Sugar Water* creates what might be termed a dedifferentiated media solution where what Deleuze termed “the communication of events”¹⁸ is fashioned from the continuous feed between still photography and moving image. This inversion makes ambiguous the manner in which the filming was done and calls into question the continual pressures on the part of the spectator to make narrative out of the fragmentary recurrence of individual still frames. As a mirror-like deconstruction of the processes of image production and meaning making, *Sugar Water* addresses that condition where everything “opens itself up to the infinity of predicates through which it passes” and every event is doubled:

[...] the question here is about the double structure of every event. With every event, there is indeed the present moment of its actualization... But on the other hand, there is the future and the past of the event considered in itself, sidestepping each present... It has no other present than that of the mobile instant which represents it, always divided into past-future, and forming what must be called the counter-actualization.¹⁹

Because *Sugar Water* creates a schizophrenic space that contains the staging of both a theatre piece and a film, as well as the recurrence of a bill poster and a young artist carrying an artist board, the film holds some possibility for revolutionary potential, able to exist, as Deleuze and Guattari note, both “*hors-classe*” and beyond bourgeois subjectivity.

It is important to ask from where does the commuters' lack of engagement, their estrangement from images, usher. Or to put the question somewhat differently, is the film ever able to answer that question that Deleuze posed in *Anti-Oedipus*: “How does a delirium begin?” and can such delirium be made to inhabit the spectator's position, where it might produce the intensive labour

akin to Deleuze's blacksmith or, the spectator to Duchamp's *Rotoreliefs*, or alternately, to Baudelaire's bill poster? Without answering this question, it is useful to state that Baudelaire's mechanical staging of the variable and fleeting circuits of memory implies that the commuters' predicament is a function of being "in between" worlds, labour practices, and events. Perhaps most significantly for the viewing of the film, the actors are choreographed between overlapping representational systems: on the one hand, the filmic production and circulation of images, and, on the other, an almost theatrical and haptic advertising system that involves the wheat pasting of photographic still images by a Parisian bill poster in a Métro system dating from 1900. It is not an accident that most of the commuters do not see the bill poster, though he is in plain sight, for the bill poster exists as a form of nostalgia directed to the future, to test the illusion-making principles of the filmic medium itself in a science fiction parable about a creature from another world in time. Although he anchors every scene and its cyclic repetitions, he is largely invisible, a bit of the human performing something that lies just beyond the realm of the mechanical, a bit of the anachronistic and labour-intensive that revives the haptic potentialities of the image construction itself. He posits, as Fredric Jameson notes of Deleuze's nomadic blacksmith, a "relationship to the singularities, the contingent 'events' of raw material."²⁰ Here the raw material is no longer iron but the image, subject to varying degrees of fetishisation. Deleuze's bill poster is part automaton, but he is also human, in a way that the commuters on the Métro, who are *less* regimented in their daily lives, also appear to be less human and less connected to the events around them.

What then does the spectator see? *Sugar Water* transfers the bill poster's illusion-making activity to a place both inside and outside the film or, that is, in a place where the film image intersects and becomes indistinguishable from the matter of the world: in the lives of various social actors, in an advertising system, in a bucket of wheat paste, and in a dispersed spectatorial position itself, which has been externalised in certain cinematic modes of production *and* internalised by the various actors – all this occurring in an era when, as Jameson noted, "everything in our social life – from economic value and state power to practices and the very structure of the psyche itself – can be said to have become 'cultural' in some original and unauthorized sense."²¹ *Sugar Water* is easy to watch but hard to grasp in its entirety or as a completed experience structured by the feelings, and this point is reinforced by the endless looping of the film, which functions as a kind of estrangement from the limited arrangements and choreographed things of the world that the filmmaker, using a camera designed for the news industry, records.²² In this sense, the actors as well as the spectators to such actions and news events are partly resistant to what Jonathan Beller has termed the "cinematic mode of production,"²³ a condition where every action performed is subject to extraction of surplus value, when "capital puts our senses and our subjectivity to work 24/7"²⁴ and where the viewer's current labour is expended in decoding the cinematic apparatus of concealment

itself in search of various failures of logic and memory. Taken in this regard, *Sugar Water* is a filmic parable, a bit of theatre-less script, a new media history painting, a performance piece, and a quasi-sensationalist bit of FX conjuring. It appears as something unspecific to any single genre or distribution platform, marked by a displaced allegorical function, and imbued with false memory. As one watches the film, various disruptions and accidents surface, forcing the viewer to ask, were the actors performing differently the last time I saw them or am I mis-remembering what they did (or did not) do? In this, *Sugar Water* offers up another pattern, a generic variation of a life, where memories do not correspond exactly to past experience but to a present moment that is constantly being reconstituted out of the past and where repetitions are, to rephrase Deleuze, “differential”. Deleuze notes of forgetting: “When we cannot remember, sensory-motor extension remains suspended, and the actual image, the present optical perception, does not link up with either a motor image or a recollection image which would re-establish contact. It rather enters into a relation with genuinely virtual elements, feelings of déjà vu or past in general (I must have seen that man somewhere), fantasies or theatre-scenes (he seems to play a role that I am familiar with). In short, it is not the recollection-image or attentive recognition which gives us the proper equivalent of the optical-sound image, it is rather the disturbances of memory and the failures of recognition. That is why European cinema at an early stage confronted a group of phenomena: amnesia, hypnosis, hallucination, madness, the vision of the dying, and especially nightmare and dream.” (*Cinema 2*, 54-5)

It is at these moments that a space for a new spectatorial labour might be said to emerge as a dispersed spectatorial body, a labour of and in images. A “problem” of memory finds its technological analogue in the contemporary digital production of film as well as in the more ancient theatrical staging of cinematic effects within a film. Such technological analogues multiply throughout the film, encompassing both the bill poster’s and the digital programmer’s hand. Both could be said to operate magically and across temporal registers and both could be said to attempt to place or locate the labour of creating a utopia in a space that is at once nowhere and everywhere, in a new kind of spectatorial work space, a space where as Beller argues, images labour *as* capital. In *Sugar Water* such diverse practices take part in a process wherein our own memories and their formation are themselves concealed from us by certain technologies of production and then revealed as false memories, or what Benjamin described as images “distorted in the state of resemblance”.²⁵ Such memories are linked as much to Hollywood as the films of Andy Warhol.



Fig. 5
Eric Baudelaire
Sugar Water 2007
Video still
72 min HD projection
Courtesy of the artist and
Elizabeth Dee, New York

1. Alain Badiou, "The Event in Deleuze," trans. Jon Roffe, *Parrhesia: A Journal of Critical Philosophy* no.2 (2007): 37-44. This text, "Levenement selon Deleuze" appears in Alain Badiou, *Logiques des Mondes* (Paris: Seuil, 2006). <http://www.lacan.com/baddele.htm>. Eric Baudelaire's film is named after Bergson's description of sugar water. In *Creative Evolution*, Bergson notes: "I must wait for the sugar to dissolve; it is in the experience of vision and waiting, when my duration blends with that of the world, that the intuition of a moving reality emerges." This passage is referenced by Deleuze in chapter 1, from *Cinema 1*, 9.
2. Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 63. On Baudelaire's connection to Deleuze, see Pierre Zaoui "On the Communication of Events," from a text about the exhibition *Circumambulation*, Elizabeth Dee Gallery, June 2007, http://baudelaire.net/works/sugar_water/PDF/Zaoui_Text.pdf
3. Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, 63.
4. In the months preceding the filming, Warhol had announced his intention of making an eight-hour long movie, but technological limitations made realising a full eight-hour film difficult. According to Callie Angell, the Bolex camera he employed was "capable of shooting only four-minute lengths of film," making a long film difficult if not impossible to produce. Warhol himself remarked afterwards that "I find editing too tiring." In Callie Angell, *The Films of Andy Warhol, Part II* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1994).
5. Pamela M. Lee, *Chronophobia* (Boston: MIT Press, 2006), 280.
6. Angell, *The Films of Andy Warhol*, 16.
7. *Sleep* would remain the most edited of his films as well as the most repetitive, in terms of its reuse of particular segments. Likewise, in *Empire* (1964), where his avowed intention was to "see time go by," Warhol filmed the Empire State Building beginning slightly after sunset and continuing till 2:30 in the morning, using a rented Auricon camera mounted on a tripod. The Auricon enabled Warhol to shoot 50-minute segments and thus create a longer film that required less editing.
8. Branden Joseph, "The Play of Repetition: Andy Warhol's *Sleep*," *Grey Room* 19 (Spring 2005): 28. Joseph notes: "As time passes, recognition and anticipation take over, making it increasingly difficult to examine details: one waits for known changes to recur instead of noticing new occurrences." Contrast this reading with that of Henry Geldzahler, as cited by Joseph: "...we find that the more that is eliminated the greater concentration is possible on the spare remaining essentials. The slightest variation becomes an event, something on which we can focus our attention. As less and less happens on the screen, we become satisfied with almost nothing and find the slightest shift in the body of the sleeper or the least movement of the camera interesting enough." (26). It is likely that both readings are operative in Warhol, as they are in Baudelaire. On the affective space opened up by long, boring, static passages of Warhol's film work, see Jonathan Flatley, "Allegories of Boredom," in *A Minimal Future? Art as Object 1958-1968*, ed. Ann Goldstein (Los Angeles: The Museum of Contemporary Art, 2004): 55-76. "By mimicking the lack of affect that one might feel toward the everyday world of things and images...., Judd and Warhol's works allows boredom, which is the basic structure of feeling of late capital, to come into existence as such. And then something interesting happens: a different boredom emerges, one that ... [allows for] an emotional openness that is the condition of possibility for being affected and transformed...." (53).
9. On the splitting of Warhol's films into various planes or events, a position that anticipates Baudelaire's and that connects Warhol's notion of repetition with Cage's, see in particular, Branden Joseph, "The Play of Repetition: Andy Warhol's *Sleep*," *Grey Room* 19 (Spring 2005): 22-53. Vis-à-vis *Empire*, Joseph notes: "...the viewer's attention divides between the nearly motionless depicted image and the fleeting passage of film grain that push processing and the flashes and flares that occurred in developing have rendered extremely visible. The effect is of a temporal and material splitting: the flame-like lights of the Empire State Building and the dot of light on the Met Life tower appear as one layer, temporally slowed, while the grain of the film stock appears to cascade across the screen more quickly—the eye on this 'level' being attuned to the actual speed of projection—like a heavy rain or a flowing, celluloid stream." (28).
10. Warhol accomplishes something similar in his *Screen Tests*, where the initial sitters in the series were told not to move and in so doing came to resemble still photographs, albeit photographs rendered in the more fluid and durational medium of film. Although it is beyond the scope of this article, *Sugar Water* also plays on the differences between film and the televisual, what Anna McCarthy terms "the seemingly instantaneous temporality of live transmissions, but also the routine and redundant cycles of the broadcast day, the endlessly repeating programs that play on the CNN Airport Network..." See "From Screen to Site: Television's Material Culture, and its Place," *October* 98 (Fall 2001): 97.
11. Fernand Braudel, *The Structures of Everyday Life: The Limits of the Possible*, trans. Sian Roberts (New York: Harper & Row, 1979): 27.
12. Pamela M. Lee, *Chronophobia*, (Boston: MIT Press, 2004): 279.
13. Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time Image* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 213. All future references are contained within the text.
14. Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement Image* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986): 109.
15. Eric Baudelaire, e-mail to author, January 18-20, 2008.
16. Jameson's examination of science fiction and utopianism is to be found in *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (New York: Verso, 2007).
17. Callie Angell, *Andy Warhol Screen Tests. The Films of Andy Warhol Catalog Raisonné, Volume 1* (New York: Abrams, 2006), 12. Angell notes both the hybrid nature of the *Screen Tests*, as well as the conscious experimentation that characterised Warhol's production: "Balanced on the borderline between moving and still image, part photography and part film, part portraiture and part performance, the *Screen Tests* were conceptual hybrids, arising, like much of Warhol's work, from the formal transposition of idioms from one medium to another." (14).
18. Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, 174.
19. Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, 151.
20. Fredric Jameson, "Marxism and Dualism in Deleuze," in *A Deleuzian Century?*, ed. Ian Buchanan (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 28.

21. Fredric Jameson, *Post-Modernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press 1991), 48.
22. The FAQ site for the Panasonic P2 lines of cameras reads as follows: "Panasonic is...promoting "ING," or IT-based news gathering, as the next logical step in field reporting, not only in the form of tapeless cameras, but also in treating video as data throughout the processes of acquisition, post-production and distribution."
" <http://www.pzinfo.net/pzfaq.php>.
23. Jonathan Beller, *The Cinematic Mode of Production* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2006).
24. Steven Shaviro, *The Pinocchio Theory*, <http://www.shaviro.com/Blog/?p=561>.
25. Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 205.

Fig. 1
Damien Hirst
For the Love of God 2007
Platinum, diamonds
and human teeth
17.1 x 12.7 x 19.1 cm
© the artist
Photo: Prudence Cuming
Associates Ltd
Courtesy Jay Jopling/
White Cube, London



Andy Warhol and the “Religious” Dimension of Contemporary Art

Rex Butler

We might begin here with Damien Hirst’s *For the Love of God* (2007), described by critics as the first work of twenty-first century art (Fig. 1). It is a skull covered with some 8601 diamonds, originally costing £14 million and eventually sold for £50 million. Early commentators have seen the work as inspired by Aztec or Mexican reliquaries, or as coming out of the long Western tradition of *memento mori* or *vanitas* paintings. These references are undoubtedly present, but they pale into insignificance next to the sheer economic scale of the work: the massive investment Hirst undertook in making it and the enormous return he realised upon selling it. Indeed, because the sums involved are so large, the piece can seem more like a real-world financial transaction than an old-fashioned work of art. What one buys when one buys the work is more than anything its physical substance: buying the work *is* like buying diamonds. And yet there is also a profit realised. It is this profit that we might call the “artness” of the piece. But, exactly because we can calculate so accurately the difference between how much Hirst paid for it and how much he sold it for, this artness is not anything outside of the material or financial embodiment of the work. It is not something without price or measure. It shines out of the work indissociable from its materiality, like the indefinable sparkle of diamonds, which would not exist without their setting. Paradoxically, then, at the same time as the work most seems a function of real-world economics, it also appears as a pure embodiment of art: its art is its profit, just as its profit is its art. What grins out there – not like a smile without a cat but like a smile somehow *appearing through* the cat – is the very value of “art” itself.¹

For the Love of God comes at the end of a whole series of similar works. Although in its purity, its deathlessness, its immortality, it might appear opposed to other of Hirst’s pieces, it is in fact entirely continuous with them. Think, for example, of

Hirst's recent *The Tranquility of Solitude (For George Dyer)* (2006). Across three vitrines, we have a recreation of Francis Bacon's famous triptych depicting his lover George Dyer vomiting into a washbasin in the act of committing suicide. But in the Hirst, instead of a mere painting of flesh, we have real bodies presented to us. Dyer is played by a series of skinned and flayed sheep that rear back and plunge forward in an uncontrollable spasm. Instead of a toothbrush and razor on the washstand, we have sharpened and glistening knives. Hirst has not just learnt from Bacon the concentrating power of his parallelograms, but seeks to complete Bacon's great painterly project. Bacon speaks in his *Dialogues* of his desire to make paintings that "convey directly" rather than "conveying through illustrating"; that come across "directly onto the nervous system", rather than through a "long diatribe in the brain".² We might say that Bacon wants not so much to paint flesh as for his paint to *be* flesh. And in Hirst this ambition is realised. We see it not just in his vivisected animals, but in those works where he unleashes real-life biological processes, such as *A Thousand Years* (1990), in which flies breed in a rotting cow's head, or *In and Out of Love* (1991), in which butterflies hatch and die within the specially re-created conditions of an art gallery. Again, we cannot but be reminded of Bacon's ambition for his work to be constantly in the process of coming about, to "have a life completely of its own".³ In this regard, it is appropriate that the definitive exhibition of YBAs (Young British Artists) was called *Sensation*. It would be to refer at once to sensation in the sense of media sensation – the pop or tabloid world that the YBAs both make work about and compete for attention within – and sensation in the sense of bodily sensation. In both cases, it is to speak of the work's desire to circumvent the intellect, criticality, the appeal to art history – all of those things that characterised the previous period of postmodernism, against which the work reacts. Instead, in wanting to make work that is accessible, non-cerebral and participates in mass culture, the YBAs aim for an unprecedented *literality* in their work, for something that may no longer be art as we have grown used to it.

Perhaps the most obvious example of this attitude is Hirst's notorious shark in a tank, *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living* (1991). Of course, in one way we cannot but see the work as a readymade. Hirst introduces an apparently non-aesthetic object into the art gallery, thus raising the question of what is and is not art. But this is to miss the real point of the work. It is not some otherwise banal object that is transformed by being put into an art gallery, but an affectively charged creature that breaks down the boundaries between art and life. It is not something that can be purchased from a shop and is exchangeable for any number of others, but something that has to be caught in the wild and is the stuff of our worst nightmares. The horror of this shark with its mouth open wide approaching us is unmediatable, unrepresentable, unsubstitutable. If we were in fact to construct a genealogy for the work, we would point to someone like Joseph Beuys, who similarly attempted to bring about a form of life within the gallery – reviving, Frankenstein-like, inert objects with imaginary electricity – and who stood



Fig. 2
 Jeff Koons
Made in Heaven
(Dirty - Jeff on Top) 1991
 Oil inks on canvas
 228.6 x 152.4 cm
 Courtesy Jeff Koons
 and Gagosian Gallery

against the whole passing over of artistic responsibility to the viewer. And the only contemporary equivalent to Hirst is Jeff Koons. It is undoubtedly strange to think, but perhaps the real counterpart to Hirst's shark is Koons's *Puppy*, made the following year in 1992. Indeed, if we wanted to put our finger on that moment in art when postmodernism ended and what we might call the *contemporary* began, we would say it was some time around 1990 with this shark and this dog. Before then, Koons was making what we would call readymades, undoubtedly Warholian in inspiration, featuring such objects as frying pans, vacuum cleaners, life jackets and basketballs. They are obviously parodies of aesthetic taste, of the kinds of distinctions with which we invest both consumer objects and works of art. The titles of the vacuum cleaner pieces (1981–6), for example, *New Hoover Deluxe Shampoo Polisher* and *New Hoover Convertible, New Shelton Wet/Dry Double Decker*, remind us in their seriality and manufactured differences of Warhol's *Campbell's Soup Cans* and their similarly absurd proliferation of flavours.

All of this changes with *Puppy* and with the work that appeared the year before, *Made in Heaven* (1991, Fig. 2). In *Made in Heaven*, Koons stages a sequence of hardcore pornographic tableaux with his then-wife, the Italian porn actress Ilona Staller, ending with Koons's penetration and visible ejaculation, as the genre demands. If we can put it this way – and as Koons makes clear in his public statements on the work – what is figured there, what the true subject matter

is, is the overcoming of a certain irony. In hard-core pornography – and it is this, needless to say, that defines it – there is absolutely no faking it. A male erection and orgasm is perhaps one of the few human functions that cannot be done in two minds. And a pornographic film at its most basic is simply the documenting of this act. In this sense – and this is the programmatic aspect of the work – *Made in Heaven* precisely marks a break with postmodernism, which before all else is an art of ironic performance. By irony in art, we mean an art that says one thing while doing another. It is an irony that we see at every level of postmodernism, from the work's relationship to its subject matter to its relationship to its technique. It is this irony that characterises all of postmodernism, despite its supposed variety of styles and eclecticism of references.⁴

Now this irony that characterises postmodernism goes against any simple understanding of the “death of the author” and “birth of the reader”. Rather, what is played out in the work is the *problem* of deducing its authorial intention. It is not that there is no apparent intention, but that there is always another intention. The author is behind the work, not in it (and, of course, the forerunner of all of this is Duchamp with his idea of the work of art as a “rendez-vous with the future”). Again, Koons breaks with this in *Made in Heaven* by inserting himself in the most literal way possible in the work, by not withdrawing behind it. His orgasm there operates as the pure and irrevocable evidence of his intention. It is (or at least this is the pornographic code he plays on) the literal expression of his feelings. This is undoubtedly the meaning of Koons's stated ambition – reminiscent of Bacon and Hirst – to communicate directly with his audience: “A viewer might at first see irony in my work, but I see none at all. Irony causes too much critical contemplation.”⁵ And this first of all implies a lack of meaning in the work, because the very definition of meaning in art today is the possibility of another, secret meaning behind the obvious one. Postmodernism inherited from modernism the necessity to be critical, but this criticality operates not through any formal difficulty or estrangement, but through the ironic emptying out of conventional forms. In contemporary art, however, there is no longer this critical distance. There is nothing that distinguishes the work from the form or medium it inhabits. The work *is* and is not *about* what it represents. And without this distance between the work and its subject matter, we too are unable to attain any distance upon it by attributing to it meaning. We can no longer comment on its form, its art-historical pedigree or anything else that would allow us to break its spell.

It is in this context that we might turn finally to Andy Warhol. Warhol, of course, is generally seen as the great forerunner to postmodernism, the privileged heir and successor to Duchamp. It would certainly be necessary to trace the movement from Warhol's original reception in Germany in the mid-1960s in terms of the Frankfurt School to his eventual canonisation in America in the 1980s in terms of postmodernism, which in many ways is its (farcical) repetition. And this conception of Warhol as somehow “resistant” to his culture is played out in a

psychoanalytic idiom today, with such writers as Hal Foster and Richard Meyer.⁶ In all of these approaches, Warhol is understood not merely as critical of, but also at times as complicit with, the system of commodities and consumerism. But it is this *ambiguity itself* that is understood to be critical. And it is this ambiguity that it becomes the task of art criticism to decipher, and that renders the work explicable. To take just one example of this, let us read the ambivalence that marks the contribution of Benjamin Buchloh to the catalogue of Warhol's 1989 MoMA Warhol retrospective. In a first moment, Buchloh writes: "[Warhol's] practices vehemently celebrated the destruction of the author and aura, and of artistic skill."⁷ But then, almost immediately after, he qualifies this: "Within this moment of absolute loss, Warhol uncovered the historical opportunity to redefine (aesthetic) experience."⁸ It is an undecidability that is emblematised by the "smile" that is one of the long-running motifs of Warhol's art, from the vacant beam of Marilyn to the fixed grins of his celebrities to the sly smirk of Warhol himself. Today, however, we would argue that it is this undecidability that is absolutely decidable; does not have any critical value, forcing us to decide where we stand in relation to the work, but is something we remark upon neutrally from a distance. We are no longer interpellated by the work, but are in a critically self-reflective and ultimately uninvolved relationship to it. It is part of a general cynicism, an attitude of "I know very well... but all the same", that characterises contemporary capitalism. It is a smile we see passed on, in an even broader and more obvious form, in Koons's series of *Advertisements* (1988–89).

For a long time, this has been our image of Warhol and of the legacy he has left art. He inaugurates and generalises a logic of what the German art critic Wolfgang Iser calls "with it and against it".⁹ Warhol at once puts forward certain values and withdraws them. His authorship hovers over the work like a ghost, always opening up another twist or another interpretation, so that every interpretation of the work becomes what the work is *about*.¹⁰ (Perhaps camouflage would be another figure for this in Warhol's work.) And, as we say, not only is this logic persuasive in its ability to make art legible; it is in a sense unavoidable. It is this irony that constitutes the very definition of art today, what separates it from other kinds of objects.¹¹ But over the past 20 years, since Warhol's death in 1987, a different Warhol has emerged. It is Warhol not as the inspiration for a generation of postmodernists, but as standing *against* them. It is Warhol as the precursor not of the artists who immediately came after him, but of such contemporary artists as Koons, the YBAs and the Japanese Superflat maestro Takashi Murakami. We can see the beginnings of this shift in a series of studies that emerged after his death that emphasised the personal, autobiographical elements in his work, the fact that it was about subjects that existentially engaged him: death, the possibility of an afterlife, the fear of being alone. We are thinking here of such books as Wayne Koestenbaum's *Andy Warhol* (2001), which spoke of Warhol's preoccupation with time and memory, and *Possession Obsession* (2002) edited by John W. Smith, which detailed Warhol's compulsive hoarding of objects as a way of warding off mortality.¹² But we

might also think of Hal Foster's "Death in America", which, although typically seeing Warhol's work as ambivalent, nevertheless through the psychoanalytic concept of "trauma" sought to bring out its affective, non-discursive nature. We might even mention here the excellent 2002 BBC documentary, *Andy Warhol: The Complete Picture*, which paid unprecedented attention to Warhol's business dealings and the commercial nature of his artistic empire, again putting him in the realm of the literal and material.

But this change in attitude towards Warhol is perhaps best summed up in a book published in 1998, *The Religious Art of Andy Warhol* by Jane Daggett Dillenberger. The book is small and modest, and its actual analysis of Warhol's art desultory, but it is tremendously suggestive in opening up new ways of thinking about Warhol's work and the changes that have taken place in the art world since his death. The book begins with a kind of biographical "revelation": that throughout his life Warhol was religious. Not only did he attend church regularly, but his family background was deeply steeped in the ceremonies and icon-worship of the form of Byzantine Catholicism found in Slovakia.¹³ And, as "evidence" for this religious dimension of Warhol's work, Dillenberger devotes much of her text to a discussion of the last paintings Warhol made before he died, *The Last Suppers* (1986–7), based on the 1498 Leonardo masterpiece commissioned for the refectory of Santa Maria della Grazie in Milan. Warhol's series includes works that reproduce Leonardo's original largely intact (*The Last Supper*, 1986), works that overlay the original with commercial brand names (*The Last Supper (The Big C)*, 1986), works that reproduce the original many times (*60 Last Suppers*, 1986) and works that reproduce only part of the original many times (*Christ 112 Times*, 1986). Warhol is said to have worked intensively on the series throughout the last two years of his life, inspired by the opportunity to exhibit his version on the opposite side of the square from the original for the opening of a new commercial art gallery in Milan. Of these *Last Suppers* and their place within Warhol's oeuvre, Dillenberger writes:

In these last paintings, the cool and distanced artist abandoned his mask. Warhol finally created paintings in which his secret but deeply religious nature flowed freely into his art ... In these *Last Supper* paintings, Warhol reprinted Leonardo's mural, recreating it and making it accessible to twentieth-century sensibility, widening its meaning beyond the particularities of Christian belief to a more encompassing, universal affirmation.¹⁴

But for all of the novelty of Dillenberger's reading, there are undoubtedly limits to her argument. Chief among these is the reduction of the "religious" in Warhol's work simply to a matter of iconography. Although she speaks well of the place of *The Last Suppers* in Warhol's oeuvre and the role religious icons and images played in his family background, she ends up restricting the religious to a matter of *content* in Warhol's work, without considering how it might also be a matter of *form*. For example, of *The Last Supper (Dove)* (1986, Fig. 3), one of the

series that lays a number of advertising logos on top of Leonardo's original, Dillenberger writes: "Dove in word and image is familiar from Dove soap packages, and GE from packaged light bulbs: electricity and soap, thus power and cleanliness."¹⁵ And of the inclusion of a price tag of 59¢ in the work, she writes: "The 59¢, which even in 1986 when Warhol did this painting, would not have bought much, may refer to a devalued currency and devalued religious image, which are here juxtaposed."¹⁶ In other words, by remaining on the level of the iconographic, and following a reading of the works as "montages", Dillenberger is essentially only able to see the two parts of the work in some kind of "critical" relationship with each other. And even when Dillenberger *does* consider the form of *The Last Supper* works, the way that, for example, in *60 Last Suppers* or *Christ 112 Times* Warhol repeats the image, she is only able to put the usual alternative to them, which is to ask whether they are affirmative or negative concerning their subject matter. Or, rather, she is able to see the work only in terms of one of those alternatives, for she decides that Warhol's procedure in this particular case is *affirmative*: "As the viewer steps back from these larger paintings, it is the mysterious power of their beauty that is experienced."¹⁷ But the question must be asked – and this is why within this logic the two alternatives are inseparable – why Warhol in this series is positive in his attitude towards *The Last Supper*, whereas when he added the price tag he was sceptical? Why is the repetition he subjects the image to here not to parody it or rob it of its auratic power, as it has been argued to do with regard to the *Campbell's Soup Cans* (1962) or the *Electric Chairs* (1964)? Once this "critical" procedure is unleashed, once Warhol's work is understood as in any way *about* Leonardo's original (even as the conscious continuation of its historical legacy), then these two alternatives are always present, inseparable from one another.

The ultimate problem with Dillenberger's analysis is that, although she breaks with the idea of the death of the author, she simply substitutes for it the previously forbidden version of the author as creator. Warhol's works are read as demonstrations of his extraordinary sensibility and technique, if not genius. And all of this functions – although Dillenberger does not quite realise it – as a way of *distancing* Warhol from his images, of rendering them subject to his mastery and control. As Dillenberger writes towards the end of her book, in a passage that is typical of many:

In these last paintings the formerly cool and distanced artist finally created paintings in which his concealed religiosity flowed freely into his art. Technically he achieved a freedom and a virtuosity that are analogous to the mastery seen in the late work of some Renaissance, Baroque and nineteenth-century masters.¹⁸

But, in fact, if there is anything distinctively religious about Warhol's work, we would say that it is exactly its *lack* of artistic intervention, the absence or impossibility of any technique in relation to them. His work is not a matter





Fig. 3
Andy Warhol
The Last Supper (Dove)
1976
Synthetic polymer
paint on canvas
302.3 x 668 cm
© Andy Warhol Foundation
Licensed by VISCOPI,
Australia, 2008

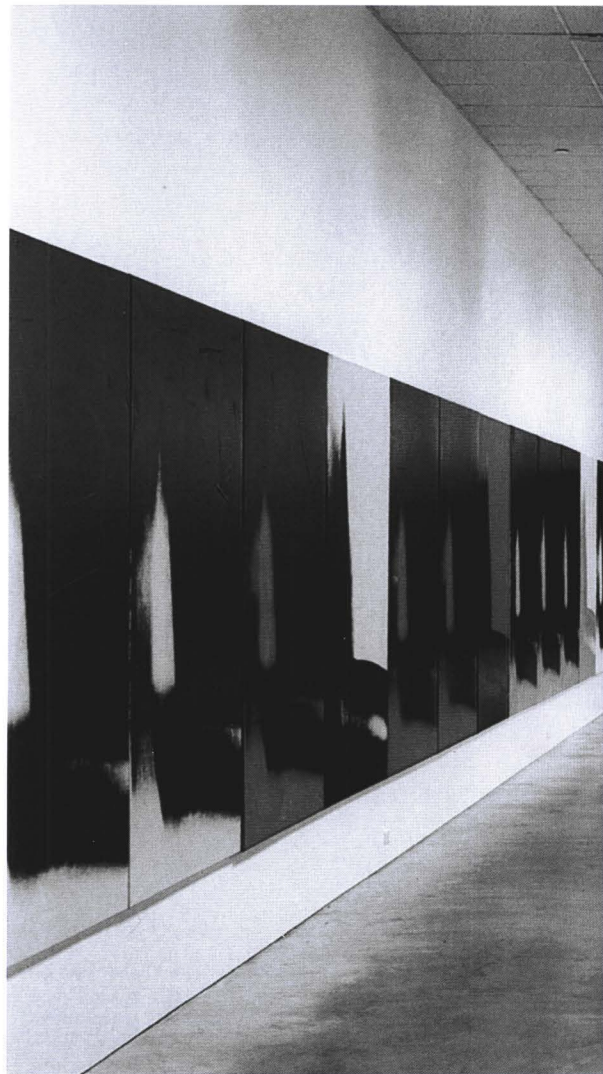
of enunciation but of *annunciation*. It is not a question of any technique applied to his images because there is no distinction possible between his images and how they came about. It is the Incarnation and not the Passion that is the true miracle of Warhol's work.¹⁹ We might think here, for instance, of Warhol's *Shadows* (1978, Fig. 4), which are often exhibited in a large, room-sized installation, much as *The Last Suppers*. They are based on a photograph that Warhol took one evening of a shadow in the corner of his studio. As Warhol's studio assistant at the time has said of the process of turning the photographs into paintings: "[After converting the image to acetate and blowing it up], contrary to popular belief it is the background that is painted first... The photograph is always intact and it lies on top of the painting."²⁰ That is, beyond any iconographical reading the works may receive – they are funereal, premonitory, a lingering at life's borders – what is most striking about them is that they function like a kind of double of the process that brought them about. The silkscreens that made them are themselves photographic shadows: indexical equivalents and not iconic representations of shadows. As a result, it is as though these shadows are a kind of silkscreen, as these silkscreens are a kind of shadow. And looking at them mounted along a wall, the effect is like nothing so much as the individual cells of a strip of film, the other great medium in which Warhol worked, which of course is also an indexical recording or impression of its subject on a photo-sensitive surface.

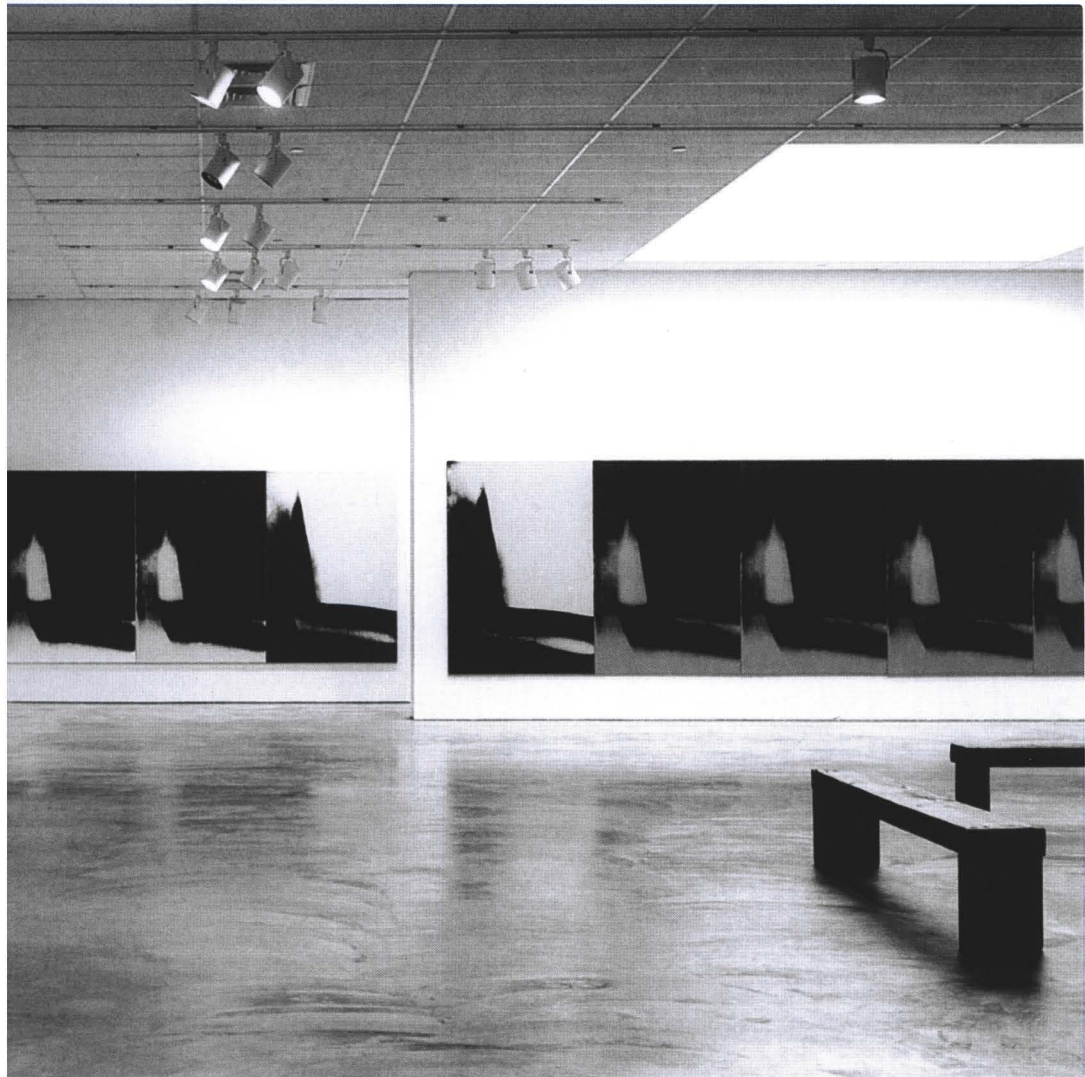
That is – and this goes against Dillenberger's argument for a kind of artistic mastery – what characterises virtually all of Warhol's output is a quality familiar from the ancient religious discussion around images. It is *acheiropoiotos*, which literally means made without hand. In Warhol's work, images make themselves without the mediation of the artist. There are not only the photos, the silkscreens and the films, but the early advertising works made from blotting and pressing, the *Oxidations* or *Piss Paintings* (1978), the *Rorschach Tests* (1984) and even the *Silver Clouds* (1966), on which there are meant to be no fingerprints and which precisely float free from any authorial control.²¹ Indeed, running throughout Warhol's entire output of celebrity portraiture is the idea of certain particularly photogenic or charismatic faces which Warhol simply had to record without any intervention on his part (again, the uncanny aspect of Warhol's paintings and photos of famous people is that, like the series of *Shadows*, they are already, as it were, photos and what we are looking at in effect is a photo of a photo). In his ambition of an *acheiropoietic*, self-generating art, Warhol was following several artists of his time, for example Jackson Pollock, and opened up the possibility for several in the future, for example Gerhard Richter. But he also thereby connects himself – and this is what Dillenberger does not see, for all of her speaking of the way that Warhol belongs in some kind of lineage with the Renaissance and Baroque – with a long tradition of religious art. There are a whole series of speculations by early Church writers such as Tertullian and St John of Damascus on the possibility of images that do not work through iconic or even finally mimetic means, and whose very

non-resemblance to God is the only way of indicating the presence of the divine in a fallen world.²² And there are also a whole series of moments in Renaissance painting, for example the marble at the end of the colonnade in an *Annunciation* (1470) by Piero della Francesca or the blotches of the red flowers in a *Noli Me Tangere* (c. 1438–50) by Fra Angelico, that attribute a special power to indexicality.²³ In these moments we see evidence not of the artist's mastery but of his hand seeming to follow the paint or of the object appearing to bring itself about. It is something like this that is to be seen in the well-known Veronica's veil, and beyond that in all religious icons: the fact that the image actually is a trace, containing the material presence of its subject matter.²⁴ (And it is not by coincidence that two of the works that Warhol decided to remake in his *Details of Renaissance Paintings* series (1984) were Piero's *Madonna and Child and Saints* (1472–4) and Leonardo's *Annunciation* (1472–5), both of which address in their way the miracle of Incarnation. In both, Warhol wagers that, despite – or perhaps even because of – their unrecognisability, something of the original shines through, something of its spirit persists.)

This strange power of presence attributed to the image can be seen in another way in Warhol's work. It is remarkable when one looks at Warhol's films just how often the actions depicted in them are of a real, non-performative nature. Of course, one of the things aimed at, especially in the early experimental films, was a kind of spontaneous, unscripted, documentary feel – we couldn't, after all, imagine our contemporary *Big Brother* reality TV show without Warhol – but it is more than this. What we have in these films is a series of bodily actions that take us back to the famous paradox raised by Diderot in his *Paradox of the Comedian* as to whether an actor can legitimately fake emotions. We witness in Warhol's films not only, as in Diderot's text, tears and anger, but also eating, kissing, sleeping, cutting hair, injecting drugs, all the way up to – and here, of course, we might recall Koons – male erection and intercourse. In this light, the notorious film *Blow-Job* (1963) is very interesting. Although we do not actually see the act of fellatio and ejaculation there, Warhol's point is that the face of the man on screen is its indexical equivalent: his twitchings and grimacings are as unreproducible as the spasms and spurts of pornography. Warhol's films, it could be said, ultimately aspire to the status of documentary, which is also to say that they are not so much aesthetic as religious in inspiration. (And, again, the silkscreens and later photos and tape recordings of celebrities are of a piece with this. The photos of our contemporary celebrities, as every reader of a gossip magazine knows, are our contemporary version of holy relics, containing in them something of their magical presence. And especially revealing in this regard is Warhol's infatuation as a young man with Truman Capote, whom he obsessively drew and to whom he wrote a letter requesting a personal item he had touched. And even the *Do-It-Yourself Paintings* (1962) and *Dance Diagrams* (1962) take on new meaning in this context: more than some version of the death or absence of the author, they aim to have the spectator enter the image, bodily to move or affect them. They seek to address or interpellate the spectator in a kind of "Hail Mary", to have them literally enact or perform the image.)

Fig. 4
Andy Warhol
Shadows 1978
Installation view,
Warhol Shadows
Richmond Hall,
The Menil Collection,
Houston, 1987-88





It is in fact in terms of a whole other economy of the image that we must understand Warhol. It is the image not as sceptical, critical, disillusioned, in a word, modern. Warhol is not part of the general “decrepitude of the image” that initiates the twentieth century in art: the decline of the aura, the conscious relationship to art history and the acknowledgement of the museum. Against this, there are three other registers of the image that Warhol explored and sought to find a commonality between, which are to be found in religion, advertising and pornography. They represent three regimes of belief in the image, a credibility extended not to some external referent but to the image itself as referent. As opposed to the whole postmodern reading of Warhol as an artist of the simulacrum, of a generalised irony or banality, we have Warhol as an artist of the literal, faith and embodiment. A film of two people kissing *is* two people kissing. A photo of a celebrity *is* the celebrity. A silkscreen of Marilyn *is* Marilyn. Perhaps the principal reason behind Warhol’s choice of *The Last Supper* as subject matter is that it foretells the miracle of the Eucharist. Christ at the table with his hands opened wide gesturing towards the wine and bread prefigures the whole liturgical ceremony of transubstantiation whereby the wine is Christ’s blood and the bread his flesh. (It is undoubtedly this “blood” in the form of red or pink paint that is the medium in which Warhol seeks to immerse a number of his *Last Suppers*.) The original *Last Supper*, we must not forget, was painted for a refectory, in which this Eucharistic moment was replayed at every meal; and Leonardo’s image is famous for the way that, due to a too-rapidly receding perspective, it seems to thrust the body of Christ out into the space of the spectator. At this point, the work is no longer a representation of Christ but a *presentation* of him. It refers to nothing anterior but is the thing itself. Its subject seems miraculously to detach itself from any contact with its support. Index becomes icon, touch becomes sight, flesh becomes spirit. The miracle of the Incarnation takes place every time we take an image for reality.

We might return, to conclude here, to Hirst’s *For the Love of God*. There is, obviously, a religious aspect to the work. Its original viewers at White Cube’s Mason’s Yard had to queue up before they were ushered into a small, dimly lit room, like the faithful at the showing of an icon. And the title, too, from an exhibition called *Beyond Belief*, also suggests a religious element. But what does it mean to say *For the Love of God*? Why does Hirst give his work that name? We would say that it is precisely a votive offering to God, an attempt to make an equivalence to Him, to give form to His gaze upon us. This is the traditional role accorded to religious icons: to allow a certain crossing of gazes, a gaze that descends from on high and a gaze that looks up from below. And this has usually entailed an “impoverishment” of the image, an effort to *subtract* it from the realm of visibility so that it is able to point somewhere else. We would say, however, that since Warhol, the strategy of a number of artists has been exactly the opposite: they do not subtract but *add* visibility to a world that increasingly lacks it, a world full of images in which there is nothing to see. The example Joshua Delpech-Ramey gives in a recent essay taking up the idea is the over-



Fig. 5
Hans Holbein the Younger
The Ambassadors 1533
Oil on oak
207 x 209.5 cm
National Gallery, London

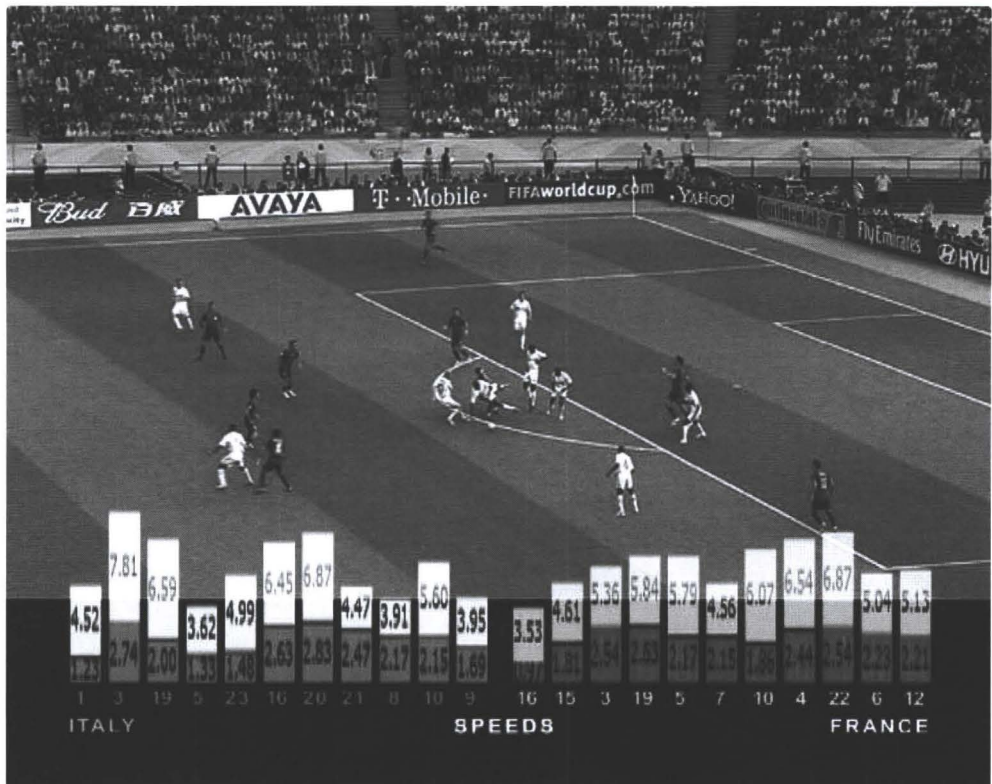
whelming materiality of the image in Warhol's *Brillo Boxes* (1964), which refer to nothing else beyond themselves: “We see the Brillo Box for the first time as a work of art because in the gallery we have mostly forgotten that Brillo is only one possible brand of steel-wool pad. Seeing the Brillo Box in the gallery, the fact that *those* colours in *that* font present *that one object* becomes a moment of sublime apprehension.”²⁵ It is an excess of the image over its referent that is not transcendent but what Delpech-Ramey describes as “somehow more immanent than these images are to themselves”.²⁶ It is something indicated by what he calls a “halo”, which traditionally was only added to beings that were already perfect or complete in themselves.²⁷

It is something like this halo that we see in Hirst's *For the Love of God*. The scintillation of the diamonds there, which gives them an extra physical presence, as though they were reaching out into our space, seizing us before we have a chance properly to see them, does not refer to some other dimension. It is rather, in that way we have tried to describe, an excess occurring within *this* dimension. At the same time as the work declares that this world is all that there is – the reminder of which would be the figure of death – an uncanny excess is produced, as though the whole work were itself surplus or super-numerary. It would be the severing of the ties of the work to any external

referent, the fact that it does not allude to anything else, that would produce the possibility of it being worth more than itself, more than what was paid for it.²⁸ It is as though in its absolute materiality it cannot be seen directly but only from the side. In this it would remind us of the famous anamorphic skull in Holbein's *The Ambassadors* (1533), which similarly seems to float free of the canvas and occupy the same space as the spectator (Fig. 5). This skull, it is said, also stands in for a certain gaze: that of the spectator from the back of the canvas that allows the picture's illusion of three-dimensional space.²⁹ In other words, this skull represents nothing, but embodies a certain absence, seeks to take the place of that *creatio ex nihilo* that produces symbolic reality. And with this *creatio ex nihilo* we return to one of the fabled origins of art as the representation of a certain nothing in the form of a pot. It is a pot, of course, made with the hand of the artist; but it soon comes to seem as though no one was needed to make it, as though it brought itself about.

1. Of course, we could analyse here the whole machinery that produces the "value added" of Hirst's work: his and the gallery's publicists, his cultivation of an artistic persona, the rumours about the price paid for it (which are apparently not even true). But, even taking all of this into account, there is still a certain excess produced. Or, to put this another way, none of this is actually able to explain how this surplus value is created. It is this enigma we try to follow here.
2. David Sylvester, *Interviews with Francis Bacon* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1997), 18.
3. Sylvester, 17.
4. For the operation of this irony across a series of seemingly incommensurate art practices (Sherrie Levine's appropriations, David Salle's figuration, Cindy Sherman's photographic self-portraits and German Neo-Expressionism), see the examples listed in Rex Butler, "Two Warhols," in *Andy Warhol* (Brisbane: Queensland Art Gallery, Pittsburgh, Penn.: The Andy Warhol Museum, 2007), 64–5.
5. Jeff Koons, *The Jeff Koons Handbook* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1992), 33. On this post-postmodern assumption of authorial intentionality, Koons says: "I am for the return of the objective, and for the artist to regain the responsibility for manipulation and seduction" (33).
6. For an English-speaking example of the Frankfurt School position on Warhol, see Rainer Crone, *Andy Warhol* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1970). For the psychoanalytically inflected reading of Warhol's work as "resistant," see Hal Foster, "Death in America," in *Return of the Real: the Avant-Garde at the End of the Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996); and Richard Meyer, *Outlaw Representation: Censorship and Homosexuality in 20th-Century American Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).
7. Benjamin Buchloh, "Andy Warhol's One-Dimensional Art: 1955–66," in *Andy Warhol: A Retrospective*, ed. Kynaston McShine (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1989), 57.
8. Buchloh, 57.
9. Wolfgang Max Faust, "Du haste keine chance. Nutze sie! With It and Against It: Tendencies in Recent German Art," *Artforum* (September 1981).
10. For an excellent analysis of this strategy, see Jean Baudrillard, "The Conspiracy of Art,": "Of course, all of this mediocrity claims to transcend itself by moving art to a second, ironic level. But it is just as empty and insignificant on the second as on the first level. The passage to the aesthetic level salvages nothing; on the contrary, it is mediocrity squared. It claims to be null — 'I am null! I am null!' — and it truly is null", in *The Conspiracy of Art* (New York: Semiotext(e), 2005), 27.
11. We might even say that this "irony" is the basis of the distinction Arthur Danto makes between Warhol's *Brillo Boxes* and a real Brillo Box. See for Danto's major statement of this *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace: A Philosophy of Art* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981) especially 56–7 on the "self-consciousness" of art, and 125–6 on the distinction between content and form as analogous to the distinction between object and interpretation.
12. See Wayne Koestenbaum, *Andy Warhol* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2001); and Stephano Papi et al., *Possession Obsession: Andy Warhol and Collecting*, ed. John W. Smith (Pittsburgh: Andy Warhol Museum, 2002).
13. Dillenberger writes: "The Carpatho-Rusyn Church's liturgy and form of worship derive from the Byzantine tradition, wherein a heightened veneration is accorded to visual images; the religious icon, which engages the viewer, having a function equivalent to scripture, for the icon mediates between the believer and the holy person represented by the icon", in *The Religious Art of Andy Warhol* (London: Continuum International, 2001).
14. Dillenberger, 99.
15. Dillenberger, 92.
16. Dillenberger, 93.
17. Dillenberger, 117.
18. Dillenberger, 117.
19. And here we might think of the whole "man who wasn't there" aspect of Warhol's persona: his human absence or indifference, his refusal to choose or express aesthetic preferences, his claims not to have done his work himself. On this, see the chapter "Labour," in *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol (From A to B and Back Again)* (London: Pan Books, 1976).
20. Dillenberger, 63.
21. For an overview of the various non-manual techniques at play in Warhol's work, see Rainer Crone, "Form and Ideology: Warhol's Techniques from Blotted Line to Film," in *The Work of Andy Warhol*, ed. Gary Carrels (Seattle: Bay Press, 1989).
22. For a survey of these arguments, see Mosche Barasch, *Icon: Studies in the History of an Idea* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1995); and Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997). And on this notion that the abstract is figurative, we might think here of Warhol's *Camouflage* and *Rorschach* series, in which abstract shapes are representations of real things. (Thank you to Tom Sokolowski for this point.)
23. On this, see George Didi-Huberman's *Fra Angelico: Dissemblance and Figuration* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), especially 19–22 and 138–40.
24. It is notable that there exists a so far unreproduced self-portrait by Warhol as the image of Christ on Veronica's veil. It is also interesting to speculate how much the self-portrait of Warhol seen on the far wall through the glass door on the ground level of the Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh reproduces the presentation of the image of Christ on the sudarium beneath its glass casing.
25. Joshua Delpech-Ramey, "The Idol as Icon: Andy Warhol's Material Faith," *Angelaki* 12, no.1 (April 2007): 92.
26. Delpech-Ramey, 91.
27. Delpech-Ramey, 90.
28. Delpech-Ramey writes: "The temporary disorganisation [brought about by cutting off signs from what they stand in for]...is what enables the brand, the idol or the star to be present in excess of its market value, at least for as long as we are bewitched by its (displaced) placement in the gallery, the place we did not expect to find it", (92–3). To use Delpech-Ramey's Zizekian terminology, we might describe the severed head of Hirst's *For the Love of God* as an "organ without a body".
29. See on this Keith Broadfoot, "Perspective Yet Again: Damisch with Lacan," *Oxford Art Journal* 25, no.1 (2002), especially 86–9.

Fig. 1
 Harun Farocki
Deep Play 2007
 Video still from
 12-screen installation
 Channel 1: live feed with
 bar graphs of player speed
 Courtesy Matthias
 Rajmann, Harun Farocki
 Filmproduktion



The Enigmatic Playground: *Zidane and Deep Play*

Natasha Conland

Televised sport is one of the most watched and analysed forms of moving image, capable of capturing vast global audiences and producing broadcasting deals worth billions. Yet sport's appeal within the sphere of art's production and reception seems slight, despite the engagement of Pop and post-Pop practice with subjects of mass cultural interest. Those artists interested in the subject of sport have typically figured it as an abstraction, a narrative, appropriated motif, personality or still image, but rarely have they tackled its total form: from the live match to its mass distribution and broadcast. It was notable then that two works of moving image, both constructed from a 90-minute game of football, were released in the year from mid-2006 to mid-2007. Douglas Gordon and Philippe Parreno's film *Zidane: A 21st Century Portrait* (2006), and Harun Farocki's 12-screen video installation *Deep Play* (2007) formed parentheses around the significant occasion of the 2006 FIFA World Cup (an event that attracted an estimated 26 billion viewers).¹ Each work follows a specific match: *Zidane* the Spanish League Real Madrid versus Villarreal CF game on 23 April, 2005 at the Santiago Bernabéu Stadium; and *Deep Play*, France versus Italy in the 2006 World Cup final at the Olympic Stadium, Berlin. The subject and form of both works is ostensibly the live game itself and the form of its most familiar representation, a sequence of filmed images. They are both constructed from real-time footage taken of these games – Gordon and Parreno using 17 synchronised cameras, and Farocki primarily using existing broadcasts and interpretive media of the live game (Fig. 1). In both cases the match itself is essentially unadulterated; however, through their handling, this most familiar format, the “real time” live game, is made unfamiliar to the point that it no longer tells the narrative of the match.

In both *Zidane* and *Deep Play*, the artists renew art's relationship to the popular by utilising Pop's characteristic preoccupations – with celebrity, the screened image, real-time portraits, and the commonplace – while at the same time

destabilising their very familiarity. The effect is not just to renew the mass phenomenon of sports viewership, but rather to suggest that the form of live football might offer something new about the individual's relationship to the mass. While quite different in form and intention, both works are directed towards "revealing" the enigma within the surface of their found format. Here, while sport can be understood as a "proxy" for the mass, and while an attempt to "figure the mass" is possibly still a compelling prospect for these artists, the peculiarly Warholian denial of individual subjectivity is not apparent.² Instead, sport allows a conversation between the individual and the mass to play out as a readymade analogy for dialectics in both art and life.

The task of both works is the adoption of the televisual form of football as it exists today, itself a radically different vehicle from the form familiar to audiences 20 years prior. This form now more than ever describes mass participation in the visual image, and in turn, the increasingly visual medium of the game of football. Furthermore, in their differing ways, Gordon and Parreno using film cameras and Farocki using existing footage and technology, they disrupt the known experience with an unfamiliar subjectivity – either of the players, the viewers, or the artists – and this too is mutable. Rather than reaffirming an equation between the screened image and its passive absorption, both works inject alternative understandings of the game through the rearrangement of its form in the first instance, and second, through the allusion to the psychological condition of the performing subject (Gordon and Parreno) and its viewership (Farocki). What is fascinating in their appropriation of the televisual format of live football, is that rather than reflecting on the domination of mass spectacle and its form over the game, they negotiate this play between the individual and the collective, something seemingly not possible (or desirable) within art's best-known expression of the popular, Warhol's Pop.

Gordon and Parreno and Farocki all apply devices of structural dislocation to the live format in order to split its typically sequential narrative. They dislocate the familiar linearity of the 90-minute game, in *Zidane*, by training the cameras onto this one player to the exclusion of most other components of the match plot; and in *Deep Play* by splitting the game's real-time play into 12 forms of visual interpretation. The effect is that the viewer's attention stays within the medium of its retelling rather than negotiating the information related to the original match. So, while the features of the originating match – timing, players, stadium and pitch – remain in place, the moving image format used to unfold the 90-minute sequence of time is radically altered. In both works, the game is split and fractured to the point that any singular reading of its ingredients (or even establishing what those are) is frustrated.

The most radical effect of television coverage in the post-war era was the creation of a new collective experience and memory of the game. This came



Fig. 2
Harun Farocki
Deep Play 2007
Video still from
12-screen installation
Channel 7: simulation
of Zinedine Zidane
from live feed
Courtesy Matthias
Rajmann, Harun Farocki
Filmproduktion

prior to the economic impact of television on the game of football at the end of the twentieth century.³ Writing on the globalisation of football, David Goldblatt has argued for the new levels of socio-cultural “collectivity” which television offered the sport:

These moments of virtually blanket participation in the high points of the international football calendar offered some of the most powerful and poignant moments of imagined community in post-war Europe, opportunities for the nation, albeit physically dispersed, to gather and fathom the meaning of its own identity.⁴

By 1970, with the arrival of colour television, and its dispersal across Europe, key matches were attracting tens of millions of viewers, audience numbers which would only continue to grow,⁵ with football now counted as the world’s most popular sport.⁶ Not only that, but technological advances to the live broadcast, like the slow-motion replay which made its appearance in Europe in 1967, greatly affected the televised analysis of the game.⁷ Television allowed audiences to become familiar with players in a way that was only partially possible in the pre-war era. Goldblatt argues that television accentuated the primacy of the visual experience of the game in an era of new formal, technical and tactical advances, accentuating “the flow based in motion, on the continuous making and breaking of patterns and spaces”.⁸ The 1960s until the end of the 1980s was the era of the football player and club professionalism; form prevailed over commerce prior to the heightened and intensified commercialisation that emerged at the approach of the millennium. Players themselves signified new freedoms of form and play while becoming cultural icons and national representatives.

It is revealing that the French national Zinédine Zidane features in both matches and works of art (Figs. 2 and 3), as does the event of his “red card” dismissal from both games. Zidane himself is a contemporary superstar of football, one of the most televised players from the first division European league, and is known for, amongst other things, the historic projection of his image on the Arc de Triomphe, Paris, following the 1998 French win in the final of the FIFA World Cup. Gordon and Parreno had 17 film cameras located around the pitch, trained on Zidane, collaging together a range of shots of his face and body in action at mid to close range. In *Deep Play*, Zidane’s now infamous red carding is synchronised and reassembled across the 12 screens, creating the impression of the sheer mass of information, imagery, business and attention to this one action.

If “the familiar” is our shared experience of the game as a televised representation, the experience of the mass, “the unfamiliar” is the experience of the individual. In both the Gordon and Parreno, and Farocki works, a tension is set up between the individual and the mass, whether that is through forced concentration on a single character in *Zidane*, or the sense of loss we experience in *Deep Play*, which shows the individual players’ actions to be systematised to the point that their form is rendered robotic. Both works appear to tease out or isolate one from the other. One of the most historically important effects of Pop was the peculiarly Warholian fusion of public and private subjectivity. Warhol once famously countered: “It’s just like taking the outside and putting it inside, or taking the inside and putting it on the outside.”⁹ Discussing Warhol’s comments, and marrying them with his serial presentation of mass-produced items and his attempts to picture the tastes and values of mass America, art historian Hal Foster has argued that despite the impossibility of figuring the mass subject, Warhol did so by depicting its proxies. He evoked this mass subject “through its objects of consumption” and/or “through its objects of taste”.¹⁰

It is this collapse of the modern dialectic between individual and mass subjectivity, that artists have since adopted, exploited and understood as one of Warhol’s most significant contributions. This point is emphasised in the roundtable *Artforum* (October 2004) hosted on the influence of Pop by a subsequent generation of artists. In it, Tim Griffin comments that “the most powerful neo-Pop art underscores the ways in which subjectivity itself is conditioned by, or better, displaced into, the pop-cultural media”.¹¹ In other words, like Warhol, artists of the post-Pop generation continue to subscribe to the flattening out of subjectivity into the mass. What was not explored in the roundtable however, was what happens in the absorption of Pop devices and subject matter by artists, who then explore a separation of Pop’s form from its effect. So, the representation of subjectivity within the forms of mass society, for example, may have a different overall effect than the flattening Warhol intended in statements such as: “I want everybody to think alike... Russia is doing it under government. It’s happening here all by itself.”¹² Jeff Wall hints at this frustration himself in the roundtable, commenting, “It now seems both

orthodox and obligatory to assume that serious art is inseparably bonded to events and forms of mass culture, but artists (the apparent subjects of ‘artistic freedom’) are free not to be so bonded.”¹³ It is tempting to see the figure of Zidane in Gordon and Parreno’s film, or “the players” at large in Farocki, as an analogy for the possibility (and restriction) of “free” individual subjectivity within mass society, as represented by the game’s structure, parameters and systemisation. In this sense, the figure of the player is also analogous to that of the artist himself operating within the constraints of art’s own system of production and reception.

I

From the opening shots of *Zidane* we are made aware of the commingling of surface and depth. The film opens with a familiar widescreen and a number of givens typical of the live play format. First is an establishing shot showing the players in the distance on the pitch and indistinguishable from each other – let’s call this “total play”. Overlaying this image is the muffled secondary recording of a commentator recounting the game in Spanish – it is the acoustic readymade, constant, linear and driven by visual information. Enter a text panel with one key locatable fact, the date of the match – Madrid, Saturday, April 23, 2005. During the development of this establishing information, even preceding the titles and the Universal Studios logo, a line of text appears at the bottom of the screen. This silent narration begins on a black screen: “From the first kick of the ball, until the final whistle...”. The artists have set up an interior voice for the course of the film, which disconnected from the action, speaks abstractedly of a psychology in relation to the game, an “eye of God” view. It continues, “Who could have imagined that in the future, an ordinary day like this might be forgotten or remembered?” This soliloquy is freed from direct reference to the action of the game, and in a formal sense, words are literally laid over the images of crowds and play, impervious to the action of the game.

The footage of “total play” and the Spanish commentator’s voice gradually dissolve into a pixelated screen, over which the final stream of text appears. The text bleeds into the title graphic ZIDANE, whose fine sans-serif letters merge to a monogram signature (with remarkable similarity to that of sixteenth-century artist Albrecht Dürer).¹⁴ Action continues underneath the pixelated screen, but is discernible only as flickering light and colour under the gridded surface. As the camera pulls out of this extreme close-up, “total play” comes back into focus, reception fails, serving to remind us that we are watching the surface of a screen. The first cut from play is to a mid-shot of Zidane, and in this moment the noise of soundtrack and Spanish commentator is also cut, isolating Zidane with the noise of the crowd. A pattern is set for the film at large in which both Zidane, and this interior monologue, are detached from real-time play yet moving to its sequence. The question of a subject for this monologue emerges. Clearly these statements belong to the language of subjectivity rather than commentary. They are tangential thoughts on the experience of football

Fig. 3
Douglas Gordon
and Philippe Parreno
*Zidane: A 21st Century
Portrait* 2006
Film still
Courtesy Yvon Lambert
Gallery, Paris, New York



rather than the specifics portrayed in the visual imagery, leaving their subject outside the action. Due to the camera's attention and the film's title the viewer inevitably ascribes the monologue to Zidane himself; however, enough uncertainty remains that an enigmatic force inhabits these words. Associated with an authored work of art, it's also possible that this speech represents the "voice" of the artists, a means of layering commentary over image and action.

A compositional device emerges to distinguish the game as explicitly screened, from the portrayal of Zidane who slips in and out of second-generation imaging. Although we are constantly reminded that Zidane is also screened within the context of the televised and broadcasted game, the accompanying monologue establishes a consciousness, which serves to give him a dimension beyond the pure reportage of "common" broadcast. Zidane's subjectivity continues to weave in and out of "interior/exterior" points of view (Fig. 3). He is part-mass, part-individual in the context of the film. His constructed image is

revealed as early as six minutes and 30 seconds into the film, when we cut to the back view of the directors' heads, as they watch the black-and-white live feed of the game coming into their monitors, manipulating the lens and perspective from a distance. For most of the game, the cameras cover Zidane in an unfamiliar range of positions and locations. In fact the only perspective they do not (or cannot) deliver, is Zidane's own point of view via the lens of his "window onto the world" – this is evoked by other means.

In his 2005 survey of Pop, Foster points to a critical aspect of Pop's historical impact in Lichtenstein's deployment of his signature dotted "screen". These dots were Lichtenstein's manually painted reference to mechanically reproduced imagery – the printing code devised by Ben Day to create reproduction via gradations of shading. Foster points out, in reference to critic Michael Lobel, that Lichtenstein had a "relaxed" attitude to this balance of hand and mechanical processes in his work. He makes the point that (unlike Warhol) Lichtenstein reasserts a degree of "artistic subjectivity" within his process, valuing the process of "re-composition". Forty years after what Foster describes as Lichtenstein's "radical" act, his "structural superimposition of cartoons and commodities with exalted painting",¹⁵ Gordon and Parreno re-employ Lichtenstein's screen as a constructed form and readymade idea, this time with a screen more familiar to today's audiences: the television and large-format LED screen. Their gesture is both "in reference to", and quite literally, the utilitarian means for reproducing the game. They too emphasise the picture "as an already screened image", but in itself this is no longer a radical act. While it is possible to read this reference as an ironic quotation (a key device in much Pop work), what is new in Gordon and Parreno's "screen", is that it points less to the surface, "a telling sign of a post-war world in which everything seemed subject to processing through mechanical reproduction",¹⁶ and more to a shifting field. The screen itself is a field where the commingling of surface and depth is apparent. Depth is constructed as a visual device in the opening passages of the film through a series of actions visible beyond the screened image. Under extreme close-up, the pixels have formed an open-weave green, red and yellow grid, through which the artists introduce a character portrait with a subjectivity.

Locating the familiar, then making it "other", is something common to both Douglas Gordon and Philippe Parreno's previous work. Gordon's borrowing of pre-existing Hollywood films, and Parreno's objects and characters produced for a mass audience, are both typically re-utilised and unsettled from their original idiomatic function. Russell Ferguson has pointed out that Gordon's long-standing utilisation of films that audiences are very familiar with, enables him first to engage then divert audiences to another plane, "confident that our very familiarity with them will offer quick access to the somewhat different place he wants to put us".¹⁷ This transportation out of the familiar and into another place is largely suggested through the distortion of our shared experience of time, either

through slowing (*24 Hour Psycho*, 1993 and *5 Year Drive-By*, 1995) or splitting (*Through a Looking Glass*, 1999). In *Zidane*, the image of Zinedine Zidane, the game, and the vehicle of moving-image reportage, are all familiar surfaces from which the artists explore the alterity of existing form. Gordon and Parreno's 17 cameras follow the game's sequence – the 90 minutes from “the first kick of the ball” – but this duration becomes an open parameter from which the artists distort the normal run of play. The key events of the game, its narrative plot of kicks, penalties, goals, injuries, are displaced by the excessive engagement with Zidane. The direction of time itself, usually told through the movement of the ball from start to final stop, is replaced with close-ranging attention to a single character and the extraneous information in that character's immediate vicinity. This attention is interrupted with wide-screen shots of the game's action, stadium lights, the stairwell, news footage, but such is the preoccupation of the camera with this one subject, that this additional information is relegated to support material. Zidane himself becomes an abstraction, not a still in time, but a man isolated from time in this multi-part collage of small actions (Col. pl. 3).

Ferguson had referred to the distortions of time typical in Gordon's early work as “anti-theatrical”¹⁸. He was making the point that although they unfold over time, and in a literal sense can be construed as “theatrical”, their break with traditional narrative device means we experience them in the present. In doing so, he drew upon art historian Michael Fried's well-known discussion of the “theatrical” experience generated by art of the late 1960s. Significantly, Fried wrote one of the first published reviews of *Zidane*, and similarly, responded to the work by locating a return to an anti-theatrical mode. In the review, Fried outlines the qualities of absorption the artists give their main character in *Zidane*. For Fried, absorption lies in the tradition of modern portraiture, in which the sitter appears to be unaware of the viewer or artist, and thereby affords an overall sense of “naturalness” and “truthfulness” in character.¹⁹ However, Fried also points to an important difference: “Zidane's participation in the match is not depicted as involving a total unawareness of everything other than the focus of his absorption – in particular, an unawareness of being beheld that has been the hallmark of absorptive depiction.”²⁰ Fried highlights the fact that Zidane could not have been unaware of the crowds of attention, the television coverage, and the presence of the artists' 17 cameras; and that the viewer is made palpably aware of this attention through the course of the film. Zidane's awareness of this attention is exposed through the monologue, the use of distinctive cinematic devices (such as the distilled soundtrack of the crowd accompanying close-ups of the footballer, the narrow depth of field used to bring both Zidane and the crowds simultaneously in focus, and the space between them flattened out). Fried describes what he calls a “persuasive representation of absorption and the apparent consciousness of being beheld... that is no longer simply one of opposition or complementarity”,²¹ the creation of an inner life which is played out knowingly and distinguished from the beholding mass.

What Fried sets up in his review through this reading of absorption and anti-theatrical effect in *Zidane*, is another assertion of the subject's co-existence yet separation from the mass. The question is whether in the scope of the film, Zidane's subjectivity or "inner life" is allowed to transcend its beholders? Or, does it sit within the shifting ground of the screen? In an interview following *Zidane's* release, Gordon says, "As much as we've spent all this time with him and looked at his face for years, he still remains unknowable."²² Nor were the artists short of material – the quotes and text used in the film are based on conversations they had with Zidane in meetings 45–90 minutes long prior to filming the game.²³ With as much attention as they can throw at this character – in the nexus of his professional life and in real-time action – he is nonetheless portrayed as an enigma. By asserting both the strength of his audience and mass spectacle alongside his subjectivity, which remains unknowable, Gordon and Parreno reclaim something of the potential for transcendence in this subject, beyond the "flatness" of the screen.

II

In the catalogue entry for Harun Farocki's work *Deep Play* at *Documenta XII*, the writer states: "It is common knowledge that football is our life. And, just like life, we are always trying to improve our grasp of it."²⁴ This smooth correlation between football and life, albeit society, is perhaps a touch reductive. This is society rendered as highly systematised, adversarial and goal-driven, not to mention refereed by a single decisive adjudicator. However, the form of the game offers broad parallels of individual and group efficacy within a system. In both the Farocki and Gordon and Parreno works, the viewer is affected by a structural re-emphasis which separates out the mechanics of individual and collective cooperation: in *Zidane*, when the individual becomes predominant; and in *Deep Play* more or less the reverse, when overt systematisation is the overriding experience of the game (Col. pl. 4). Perhaps if too simplistic as an allusion to society's systemisation, the analogy nonetheless reflects upon the artists' attempts to find form for the notion of "free-choice" within a set of abstract conventions.

To a large extent, the story of the systematisation of the collective game, and the resultant pressure on the individual player and their formal capability is reflected in the recent history of European football. The economy of football changed radically in the era that these two works were produced, having considerable impact on its primary form of representation – television. If players were still in charge of "meaning making" during television's first appearance in football, things were to change dramatically towards the end of the twentieth century.²⁵ The totality of football was radically affected by the privatisation of television, from more-or-less complete state control in the post-war period to mass commercial competition for live and exclusive coverage. Subsequent deals for television rights introduced further competition, the switch from analogue to digital broadcast, internet broadband and



Fig. 4
Harun Farocki
Deep Play 2007
Video still from
12-screen installation
Channel 1: visualisation
of players' bodies (human
kinetics software)
Courtesy Matthias
Rajmann, Harun Farocki
Filmproduktion

mobile phone deals further expanded the economy of football. Its popularity as a broadcasted form is ever increasing, to the point that it is now possible in some regions to watch football 24 hours a day and miss some without a recording device.²⁶ The related impact on the associated businesses of advertising and sponsorship due to the exposure potential of brand identities has continued to have an impact on the sport, with the possibility for players to earn more from advertising and endorsements than football.²⁷ Clubs themselves have developed corporate identities, brands, and competition for players, extending well beyond national boundaries and cultural ideologies. Their core business has diversified beyond the game, in keeping with twenty-first century economic models: “What were once the unintended repositories of a local patriotism, collective identity or neighbourhood solidarity became consciously designed icons, signifiers of aspirational values and symbols of identity that could be purchased rather than inherited, learned or felt.”²⁸

Farocki's installation *Deep Play*, captures the effluence of this diversification in its sheer expanse, and charts the shift from player form to the competitive environment of image representation. The visual pattern of individual versus group activity in *Deep Play* is also secondary to the visual analysis of the game (Figs. 4 and 5). Our first impression is of the spectacular excess of information, and a surplus of analysis well beyond the commonly available stream feeding into our living rooms. In *Deep Play*, variant records of the game are edited from a mass of different technologies, which are then represented through 12 individual channels. These are all synchronised to show the game in a variety of “real time” representations. The synchronisation allows us to compare “from first kick to final whistle”, the array of broadcasts and analysis both human and computer operated, from mapping to wire and 3D animations, back-room analysis, control-booth camera operators, and the statistical analysis of player speed, direction and dominance. Further to the sheer spectacle of information,

is disconcerting enough that even during its installation at *Documenta XII* audiences typically gravitated towards the screen with the most complete rendition, the most recognisable form.

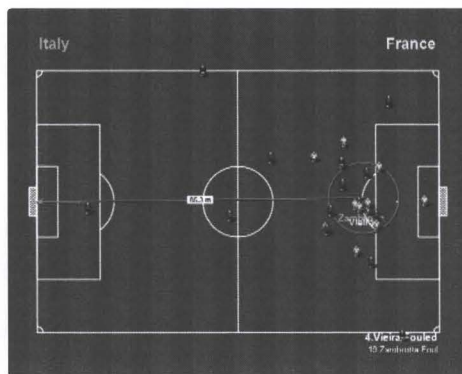
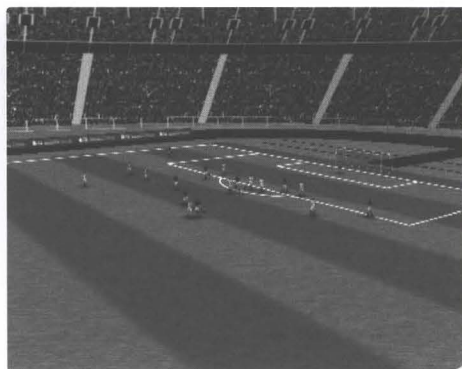
Furthermore, Farocki's presentation of the game as multi-channelled, analysed and "operated", changes the emphasis and perception of the footballers from active to passive players. The "work" is still done by the players but they are diminished within the installation by the size of the pitch on the screen, their proportionate representation across the installation's 12 channels, and the overlaying systems of analysis, all of which reduces our focus on the individualism of their play. These sportsmen, once the key to football's "innovation" are rendered as components of a larger system of football's corporatisation and consumption.²⁹ However, the representation of non-sporting human activity is no less "free". Channel 10 in the installation records two men in a back-of-house room, who watch the live feed of the game, manually mapping "the game" and direction of the players and providing notation for statistical analysis (Fig. 6). Their activity and expertise carries very little mystique, rather the room has the appearance of a nondescript control booth and an unhealthy working environment. They rarely change expressions or positions as they watch, an exception is during Zidane's headbutt, which takes them by surprise, releasing impromptu laughter. For the viewer, the moment reveals the empathy of the gaming parlour, their laughter a kind of praise for redirected (and therefore mastered) play. Equally, Farocki's footage of a group of football trainers analysing the match, has as much "theatre" as a boardroom, their discussion serves to remind us of the myriad of streams of second-hand interpretation that the game will elicit. The bulk of the action or work, is pictured as behind the "screen", in the intelligence of the software programmes which generate live interpretative material on the game – as spectacular when it fails as when it replicates the real action.

The other channel which reveals Farocki's own hand in the imaging of the game, is his footage of the exterior of the Olympic Stadium, Berlin, and home of the infamous 1936 Olympics (Fig. 9). Filmed from the neighbouring Corbusier building, and accompanied by sound recordings from local police radio, the footage is a single take using a still camera centred on the stadium for the duration of the game, and it occupies an entire channel during the installation. The only "information" added to the footage is a timer written into the top right of the image indicating the duration of the match taking place inside. The sunset fades behind the stadium in this channel which offers a view of the game well beyond the wide-angles and establishing shots, and outside the broadcasters' live feeds, visual and analytical attention. It also evokes a point of view for the artist behind the lens, removed literally from the action, but metaphorically emancipated from the systems of "making sense" of the exchange of play. This is the lacuna which Farocki himself creates and operates within, a position of more-or-less objective distraction. There is an interesting parallel here between the role he establishes for this channel, and that of the figure of Zidane in

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT
Figs. 6–9
Harun Farocki
Deep Play 2007
Video stills from
12-screen installation
Courtesy Mattias
Rajmann, Harun Farocki
Filmproduktion

Gordon and Parreno's film, as the emancipated or "free" other ready to course in and out of the game where necessary or desirable.

Farocki's concerns as a filmmaker and writer since the late 1960s have seen him tackle a range of subject matter, both discursive and analytical in an examination of systems of control – both societal and image-based. His films typically use a montage of found and existing imagery in essay or documentary format. Farocki has described the type of readymade imagery he uses as "operational".³⁰ This is informational imagery, raw streams of data without replays, pre-edits, or camera changes, and without recourse to high-definition cameras, but orientated towards the necessary means to collect or generate information, the form itself is of a kind destined to be destroyed. In his two-channel work *Eye/Machine* (2002), Farocki created a similar montage of imagery which illustrated the extraordinary capacity for visual technology to provide intelligence, but in this instance with graver purpose. *Eye/Machine* opens with footage taken from the viewfinder of a laser-guided missile, and includes images from a camera mounted on a missile's warhead, as well as



demonstrations of warheads being manufactured. Alongside these he inserts images of intelligent machines developed for more mundane civilian use, and images of more conventional factory production.

Farocki shows us images most of us don't even know exist, seemingly in order to force a confrontation with unseen aspects of society's production. A text panel in the video states: "industrial production abolishes manual labour/ and also visual work/ the machines perform the tasks blindly", and later states that new technology no longer operates blindly, "imagine a world of autonomous machines". Farocki asks us to face aspects of mechanised society with the same traumatic force that Warhol encouraged in his infamous statement "I want to be a machine",³¹ but while Warhol attempted to absorb this condition through the process of art's production, Farocki appears to recognise the distance the viewer has from this image of mechanisation. He asks us to "imagine... ", and thereby compare reality with the image as it is experienced.

Farocki is currently involved in creating a "catalogue" or archive of "filmic expressions" from the post-industrial civilisation and its technologies, a collection that will re-evaluate this range of image production outside the realm of the aesthetic.³² He has said, "You don't have to search for new images, ones never seen before, but you do have to utilize the existing ones in such a way that they become new."³³ It is this ability to "imagine" on the part of his audience, which Farocki requires in order to re-evaluate the existing into an altogether different effect beyond the real as we know it. But also, like the artist, Farocki requests a liberated role for the viewer, beyond given or known parameters. Importantly, despite *Deep Play*'s activation of smart technology, information and image analysis, none of the sources are capable of verifying (or imagining) "insight" into play. The best they can do is show and analyse. The title *Deep Play* is both literal and ironic. It is an account of the range and depth of variables at this event, while expressing an ironic sense of loss – a kind of arrested development – in our quest for something akin to the resolution of the game. Instead this excess leaves glaringly open the real questions of motivation, ability, and outcome, the kinds of unanswerable questions that drive players (and fans) to superstition.

III

Rather than positing further analysis or hypothetical answers, Farocki persists in the gap between imaginative viewing and artistic interpretation. This is also space created by Gordon and Parreno's monologue in *Zidane*. These might be viewed as openings in the surface where the viewer might project their interpretation, speculating on subjectivity outside and inside the common, flat and familiar. It is this gap in seamless knowing, between the collective and the individual, or screen and received information, which generates speculation, freedoms, distraction and superstition. This deliberate enigma is structured *as if* these artists require a viewer to generate activity of their own in this

space. The concept of “active interpretation” is discussed by Jacques Rancière in his essay on the relationship between theatre and spectatorship, “The Emancipated Spectator”. The notion of active interpretation has an affinity with these two works, but also to the act of watching football itself. Rancière calls for “spectators who render their own translation, who appropriate the story for themselves, and who ultimately make their own story out of it. An emancipated community is in fact a community of storytellers and translators”.³⁴ This notion of “active spectatorship” is relevant not only for the viewers of *Zidane* and *Deep Play*, but also for the artists themselves as they bend the theatre of football into a narrative of disassociative and new meaning beyond the originating idiom.

Football itself is filled with superstition, on the part of players and their audiences, and even at professional league level, rituals and procedures are followed to temper doubts and fears.³⁵ It is speculation which feeds narrative exceeding fact, and beyond the known variables of rules, players, referees and so on. As Dutch Footballer Jan Mulder said about the loss of the Dutch national team to Germany in the final of the World Cup in 1974, “We are still talking about the great team that lost *because* they lost. If they’d won, it would be less interesting, much less romantic.”³⁶ David Winner’s book, on the rise and fall of Dutch football, is precisely that search for the mystery behind what made “total football”, the new Dutch style which emerged in club football of the 1960s. In his enquiry he points to the prevalence of a new breed of youth culture in the Netherlands of the 1960s, in which “the appeal of magic” was a defining factor “in a city that was so busy with practical matters”.³⁷ Winner describes a football that is anti-establishment and playful, and about players putting pressure on the form of football to fulfil its revolutionary potential. He describes the liberating force of football in a post-war period, in which “bodily virtuosity” and “playing seriously” had an impact on the medium of sport.

Within existing parameters, economic and socio-political realities, is it still possible for the individual to introduce new form and in turn integrate this form within the collective? In other words, even if the very rules that make the game provide little doubt on what is and isn’t football, what can an erroneous action or a new direction in play open up, and how (if at all) is reinvention possible? The growing popularity beyond the economic incentives and wider historical and social significance of the game is still difficult to explain. If anything, Gordon and Parreno’s and Farocki’s attention to the medium of football at this moment in time is an attempt to answer what lies behind this popularity including the different pressures on the sport, its celebrity and expanded broadcasting. Gordon and Parreno’s muscular portrait of Zidane is arguably a realignment of pre-corporate values, where the attention of the camera and audience was invested in the innovations and motion of play; while Farocki’s revelation of the networks both in front of and behind the

screen charges the viewer to imagine the contextual field of the game. In both cases, the sequence of player in motion remains a powerfully captivating force which competes with all manner of distracted and dislocated attention (Fig. 10).

In the 2006 FIFA World Cup final, Zinedine Zidane's headbutt of Italian player Marco Materazzi, created a sporting enigma. Zidane was known for his short temper on the pitch, but had in effect already announced his retirement from football, so disciplinary measures were likely to be meaningless. Seen in context as his last game, this action in the 110th minute during a tied match was by the rules and expectations of the game a perplexing act. His motivations for this violent conclusion are ambiguous. In the final remarks of Gordon and Parreno's film, the silent monologue concludes in an equally ambiguous fashion during a close-up of Zidane, "Sometimes magic is very close to nothing at all. Nothing at all." In a recent article on the Palestinian youth team's tour of Britain, Morad Fareed, the US-born striker remarks, "Football is one of the very few institutions that Palestine has to compete, to show our statehood, to be on the world stage."³⁸ Fareed's remark carries the strongly held aspiration and desire for transcendence from the social that motivates many players in second-league nations. Towards the end of his career, but before the action for which he is now infamous, this reference to magic can be interpreted in two ways. Either, the magic (of sport) inevitably rests in the banal, Zidane's twilight awakening to the futility of the kind of hope Fareed expresses; or magic lies precisely in the banal, because it is in these small measures, in the nature of motion and action, in which transcendence lies.

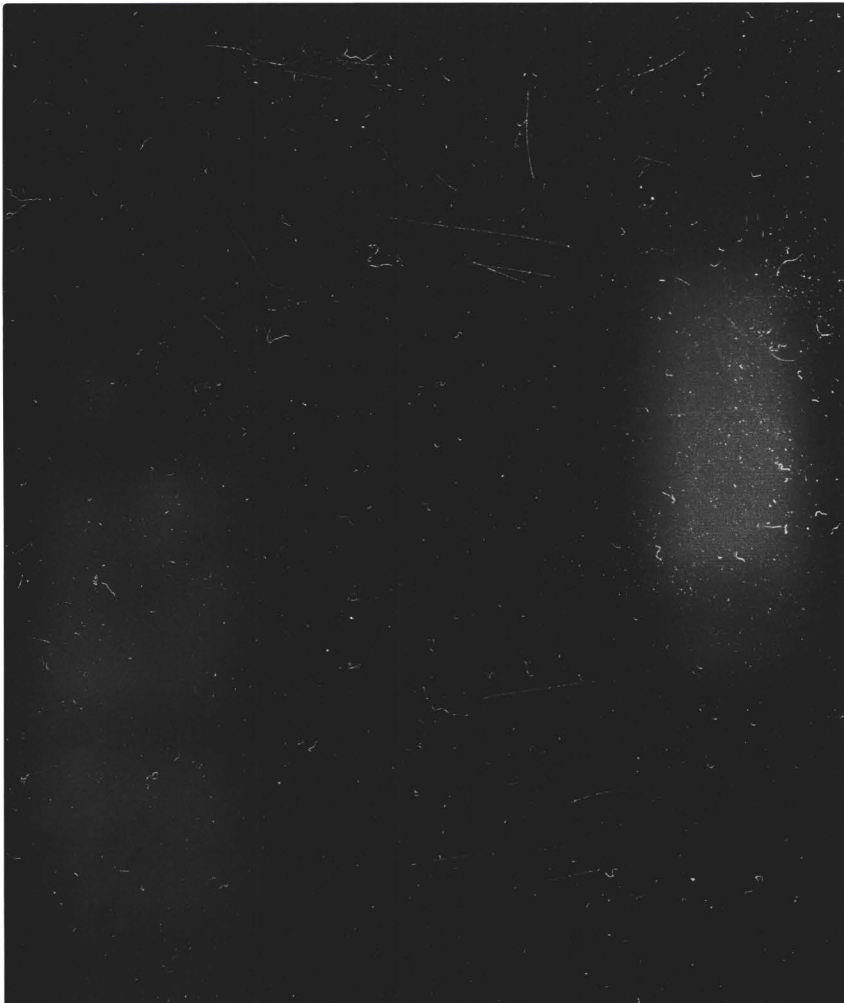
1. FIFA World Cup and Television, "FIFA, 2006," http://www.fifa.com/mm/document/fifafacts/ffprojects/ip-401_06e_tv_2658.pdf.
2. The terms and discussion of a "proxy" for the mass, and "figuring the mass" runs through Hal Foster's writing on Pop and Warhol, in particular see *Return of the Real: Art and Theory at the End of the Century* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1996), *Pop* (London: Phaidon, 2005) and Hal Foster et al., *Art Since 1900 Modernism, Antimodernism and Postmodernism* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2004).
3. David Goldblatt argues that the single greatest effect of television on the game of football was its impact on our collective experience and memory of the game. David Goldblatt, *The Ball is Round: A Global History of Football* (London: Penguin Books, 2007), 398.
4. Goldblatt, 403.
5. Goldblatt, 403.
6. Eric Dunning, "The Development of Soccer as a World Game," *Sport Matters: Sociological Studies of Sport, Violence and Civilisation* (London: Routledge, 1999), 103.
7. Goldblatt, 402.
8. Goldblatt, 401.
9. Andy Warhol in Gretchen Berg, "Andy: My True Story," *Los Angeles Free Press*, March 17, 1963, 3, cited in Foster, 31.
10. Foster, 31.
11. Jack Bankowsky et al., "Pop After Pop: A Roundtable," *Artforum* xiii, no. 2 (October 2004): 172.
12. Andy Warhol interviewed by Gene Swenson (1963) in *Pop Art Redefined* ed. Suzi Gablik and John Russell (London: Thames and Hudson, 1969), 116.
13. Bankowsky, 294.
14. Albrecht Dürer's well-known etching *Melancholia* depicts the artist in symbolic repose for thought and creative disposition.
15. Foster, 27.
16. Foster, 28.
17. Russell Ferguson, "Trust Me," in *Douglas Gordon*, ed. Russell Ferguson (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2001), 39.
18. Ferguson, 15.
19. Michael Fried, "Absorbed in the Action," *Artforum* xiv, no. 1 (September 2006): 335.
20. Fried, 335.
21. Fried, 398.
22. Vicky Allan, "Mirror on Zidane's Flaw," *Sunday Herald*, October 1, 2006.
23. Allan 2006.
24. Rachel Riddell et al., *Documenta 12* (Kassel: Documenta and Museum Fridericianum, 2007), 242.
25. Goldblatt, 405.
26. Goldblatt, 686, citing changes in football coverage in Italy.
27. Goldblatt, 682, cites "In 2005 David Beckham earned more than two-thirds of his Euro25 million annual income from something other than playing football."



28. Goldblatt, 683.
29. Goldblatt, 405–6, notes that in the post-war era, players were “cast as a new kind of cultural icon... Football was more rationalised and professionalised than commercialised. The innovations were in coaching, training, tactics and internal organisation rather than the invention of new revenue streams.”
30. Christa Blumlinger, “Harun Farocki: Critical Strategies,” *Parachute: Contemporary Art Magazine* (July–September 2003): 112–125.
31. Andy Warhol in Gablik and Russell, 116.
32. Blumlinger 2003.
33. Harun Farocki in Cathy Lebowitz, “To See or Not to See: Relying Almost Exclusively on Found Footage, German Independent Filmmaker Harun Farocki Explores Today’s Pervasive Use of Surveillance Devices and ‘Smart’ Technology in Both War and Peace,” *Art in America* (September 2002): 124–5.
34. Jacques Rancière, “The Emancipated Spectator,” *Artforum* xiv, no. 7 (March 2007): 280.
35. David Winner gives an account of the peculiarities and pre-match rituals of the Dutch team Ajax, in *Brilliant Orange: The Neurotic Genius of Dutch Football* (London: Bloomsbury, 2000), 42.
36. Jan Mulder in Winner, 115.
37. Winner, 14.
38. Ian Herbert, “New UK Visa Rules Halt Palestinian Youth Football Tour,” *The Independent* (London), August 10, 2007.

Fig 10.
Douglas Gordon
and Philippe Parreno
*Zidane: A 21st Century
Portrait* 2006
Film still
Courtesy Yvon Lambert
Gallery, Paris, New York

Fig. 1
Joachim Koester
The Magical Mirror
of John Dee 2006
Black and white
photograph
26 x 34 cm
Courtesy of the artist



The Surface No Longer Holds: Affect, Powerlessness and Obscene Fluctuations of Meaning in New Occult Art

Lars Bang Larsen

I

“There is a way of seeing that does not rely on the eyes ...”¹ Not blessed with the gift of second sight himself, the English scientist John Dee hired a necromancer, Edward Kelley, to provide him with images from the otherworld. In his tranced state Kelley conversed with demons and angels who spoke of a lost language called Enochian. As Joachim Koester writes, once initiated into the supernatural realm, Dee began to map out, “a mental landscape with numerous celestial cities inhabited by angels, and, further out, beyond four watchtowers, swarms of demons”.² The black mirror and crystal ball used by Dee and Kelley 500 years ago, during the seven years of séances it took them to transcribe Enochian, now sit in a glass case in the British Museum. “Here,” writes Koester, “the imperial architecture of the museum is reflected in miniature by the crystal ball, while the visitor’s gaze is greeted by a dark absence when it encounters the mirror. A blank surface that, although mute, seems to emanate a narrative persistence not unlike a photograph.”³ Koester’s photograph *The Magic Mirror of John Dee* (2006, Fig. 1), a close-up photo of the mirror, shows minute scratches that worm across its surface and turn its depthlessness into an infinite starry night. Mute and obscure, yet persistently driving us to look for new and hidden meaning.

The paranormal – with its associated, quasi-erotic heightening of the senses – taps into our emotions, hopes and fears, and since the Enlightenment it has surfaced at intervals, like a shadow trailing the light of modern reason. Its most comprehensive cultural manifestation was the outbreak of those post-romantic

societies of the last half of the nineteenth century, such as Madame Blavatsky's Theosophical Society, Aleister Crowley's Golden Dawn, and, continuing into the twentieth century, Rudolf Steiner's influential Anthroposophy. The most recent wave before our own times was without doubt the 1960s, a decade whose millennial expectations often surfaced in the cultivation of mystic worlds – from astrology to Tolkien – and in a quest for “alternative” lifestyles.⁴ In terms of media, we have moved far from Dee's black mirror, one need only observe today's numerous TV shows offering clairvoyance, soothsaying and celebrity ghost stories. The popularity of occult consumerism in recent years suggests the occult's wide-ranging appeal well beyond goths and pulp aficionados. It would seem that the insight of Louis Pauwels and Jacques Bergier, in their 1960's bestseller *The Morning of the Magicians*, has become commonplace:

Trends of thought that escape the notice of the trained observer; writings and works to which the sociologist pays scant attention, together with social phenomena that he considers too insignificant or too ‘odd’ to worry about, are perhaps a surer indication of events to come than facts that there for all to see and the openly expressed opinions and general trend of thinking which cause him serious concern.⁵

No wonder there is a big market for the unseen. As Guy Debord predicted in *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle* (1988), we now hover in a kind of limbo where no real development or change can take place because society represses the past and fears the future. With the war in Iraq and the impending threat of ecological disaster, the period since 2001 is perhaps the first moment in history since the Vietnam War that harbours a global sense of tragedy. In such circumstances, the power structure of the western cultural canon has opened itself up to critical attack. The question is how to strike, though, as the canon's current incarnation is a peculiar hybrid between religion and the rationalism prescribed by the Enlightenment, an unprecedented ontology of metaphysics and logistics. Logistics describes global culture's restlessness, through the effects we receive from the delocalisation of power and its instant forms of distribution; metaphysics, the return of the transcendental through mobilisations of fear, by which the mood of populations are being controlled or mediated (fear of inner and outer enemies, the cultural other), and the way religion permeates public space and discussions about class, culture, science and education in the form of fundamentalism and confessing politicians and community leaders.

Through contemporary artists' use of the unseen we might also begin to glimpse cracks in the logic of the spectacle and the post-cold war notion that there is no outside to the present order. For Debord the spectacle was of a bureaucratic-capitalist kind: as he put it, capital accumulated to such a degree that it becomes an image. However, the situation has changed, for one thing because of the return of the transcendental in the form of fear and religion. The present order has blocked reason out and is busy producing its own,

negative outside as a way to control its inside. The battle, then, takes place in twilight zones at the limits of global culture that serve as passages and ideological supply areas for new bio-political forms of control.

Clearly, one aspect of the new occult art is satirical. It grimaces at the obscurantism of a bureaucratic capitalism which, in an almost Pavlovian way, seeks to create new, conditioned responses in citizens and consumers. But there is no way to construct a stable counter-image of this transcendental, bureaucratic-capitalist hegemony, since it itself thrives off mediating differences. Beyond that, therefore, I will argue that much new occult art is not only a line of flight but also concerns a speculative reorganisation of the sensory and the social sphere.

For the 1986 exhibition *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890–1985* at the Los Angeles County Museum, curator Maurice Tuchman offered the term “spiritual” to cover the various practices that had inspired early modernists such as Kasimir Malevich and Wassily Kandinsky. Today, the word “spiritual” is so mired with connotation that I have opted instead for the term “occult” to denote a variety of practices that don’t hang on obsolete contemplative values. The initiated may not agree with lumping together belief systems as diverse as Satanism and Paganism under the singular heading of the occult. However, it is my intention simply to point to the common features these systems share as esoteric and paranormal agencies in today’s art. Moreover, I am writing as a non-expert whose fascination for the occult comes from popular culture rather than from the lore of initiated practices. However, Tuchman’s curatorial effort remains unique; even if its investigation of modernism’s relation to unorthodox forms of spirituality was medium-specific and pegged on painting, it opened up a field of research that had largely been untouched by art history and thereby helped to reintroduce and contextualise marginalised artists, such as Hilma af Klint. Working in isolation and allegedly under instruction from the spirit world, the Swedish artist arrived at an erotically charged, abstract pictorialism with striking similarities to the continental avantgarde. For example she painted a series of monochromes literally at the same time as Kasimir Malevich declared that “God is not cast down” and executed his red, white and black squares.

II

The genre of occult art has come a long way since the halation of photographic plates and painters working on directives from the spirit world. Its new forms eschew the bohemian pretensions of their predecessors; if they seem to take themselves and the genre less seriously, the challenges they put to the ruling order are just as informed by a consciousness of the ideological battlefield on which they are engaged. To this end they follow the occult into those areas of the popular culture in which it is currently operative or take it into areas where it is currently not. The playfulness, and the deliberate ethereality and frivolity even, of such manoeuvres, when not weighed down by nostalgia or irony, may





Fig. 2
Centre for Tactical Magic
Scout Launch
2005 (ongoing)
Mixed media
Installation view
Courtesy Center
for Tactical Magic

produce new ways of seeing and new channels for communication and cultural action. Despite the fact it often renegotiates the visible through the felt and intuited rather than what is seen, current occult art does not withhold from its spectator the occasion for cultural analysis or hermenutic engagement.

Take, for example, the extravagant art activism of the Berkeley-based Center for Tactical Magic (CTM), founded by Aaron Gach. CTM aims to activate latent energies and redirect existing tensions in the name of positive social transformation. Addressing power on “individual, communal and transnational fronts”, CTM offers workshops in extra-sensory perception as well as know-your-rights awareness, and puts its Tactical Ice Cream Unit – an ice cream van painted in the anarchist colours and equipped with communications technologies and, of course, ice cream – at the disposal of grassroots activists to allow them to obtain independent news services (Fig. 2).⁶ CTM continues a tradition of tough frivolity developed by 1960s U.S protest group the Yippies, utilising their organisational rationality they attack the sticky ideological ectoplasm of post-9/11 paranoia. That is, while CTM swears by unorthodox knowledge forms (from ghost machines to psychobotany), the ways in which these are employed in the public sphere are pragmatically enabling and materialist in orientation. In a similar vein, testing the limits of “neutral technologies”, are CTM’s sessions in Marxist past-life regression. In these you are guided to your most recent working-class incarnation or shown how to use your astral body to visit off-limit areas such as the Pentagon or the White House. Exploring one of the last unregulated public spaces – the astral plane – participants transcend time and space to uncover the unrealised socio-political potential of their former selves. Rather than counteracting paranoia with new states of unity and balance, CTM’s tricks and actions question who has the *best* paranoia.

In fighting societal reaction with tactical obscurantism, there may lie a possibility for reintroducing historical gravity into the phantoms of the present transcendental bureaucratic-capitalist order. According to the artist Søren Andreasen, a phantom abolishes the difference between imagination and reality and presents itself in their place. This is a chief characteristic of our culture which “[...] is chiefly concerned with its own production. It is a culture that has itself as its own ideal, and which reproduces and circulates this ideal. A culture that through the constant repetition of itself finally ends up beyond any notion of ‘real’ or ‘fantastic’.”⁷

Moral high grounds stand to fall in anti-authoritarian projects like CTM, and the art world’s declamatory projects are also implicitly deflated. We have heard of “the linguistic turn” and even of “the social turn”, but which theorist would announce a “telepathic turn” in contemporary art? In the same way, staples of art criticism like “debunking the white cube” and “deconstructing spectatorship” don’t even begin to address what is at stake in *Spiritualistic Séance Sermon* (2005), a performance by the Swedish artist Stig Sjölund in collaboration with

Fig. 3
Stig Sjölund
(with Birgitta Tholander)
Spiritualistic Séance
Sermon 2003/2005
Performance
documentation, 2005
Courtesy of the artist



the medium Birgitta Tholander (Fig. 3). In *Spiritualistic Séance Sermon* Sjölund and Tholander offered to make contact with deceased friends and family members of the audience. Seated on a stage in an auditorium, Sjölund channelled “incoming energy” towards Tholander, who passed on messages from the dead, animals included. The apparent eagerness of those “on the other side” to get in touch with the living was met with enthusiasm by the more emotionally raw members of the audience, who were given small quotidian warnings (“Emma! You really need to change those tyres on the car”) or sent messages of comfort; typical reminders that things don’t end with death. In the strange ecstasy of this performance, Tholander’s voice bound the living to the vast community of the dead.

Sjölund describes his rationale for working with the paranormal as a matter of curiosity, that with this kind of practice he would be able to address new audiences beyond the professional and cultured ones. It is through the occult, for artists like Sjölund, that art can communicate broadly in ways that go beyond the scope of artistic codes. Some will argue that Sjölund’s art thereby comes close to entertainment; something he would probably gleefully accept. His work is based on the defiance and anti-snobbism that, at least for a short while, was part of Pop art’s declaration of popular culture as a utopia. At the same time, he engages a dimension of entertainment that resists domestication. Perhaps this sensibility links his practice to folklore, described as a “spiritual adventure”, by historian and philosopher Ananda Coomaraswamy,⁸ but Sjölund’s would be a kind of non-exclusionary folklore (or folk-pop). Seen from this perspective, enrolling the occult in art may simply be an egalitarian way of addressing the question of belief, by employing discursive channels that are not coded by the systems and hierarchies of world religions. The person asking to get in touch with her dead is solely defined by the relation her desire has towards an absence. This displacement of cultural and religious belonging dissolves the basis of current populisms and fundamentalisms.

In his seminal essay “The Inoperative Community” (1983) Jean-Luc Nancy states that “loss” is constitutive of a community which is defined by engagement in an always unfinished working through of its own identity, a community of *others*: “The genuine community of mortal beings, or death as community.”⁹ In this way, a community of absence can be founded on the search for a place where the memory can be kept alive, by sharing and describing that memory as that which cannot be mastered. The community of absence can be imaginary and even optimistic, when individuality is left behind to invent a social self with and among others. As Nancy states, “the individual is merely the residue of the experience of the dissolution of community”.¹⁰ Community is what happens to us *after society*. At the time of Nancy’s writing, we were witnessing the imminent fall of the Soviet empire and Western leaders’ disavowal of the existence of society; today, it is a neo-liberalism whose operational principle is to polarise populations.

III

Occult imaginaries and productions of space make for a way “to go out of this world” as it were, or gain distance from it, by the exploration of communicative forces on an inter-subjective and communitarian level. Thereby contemporary occult art identifies imaginaries and types of spatial production whose range go beyond that terrain of the “real”, that may be mobilised by capitalism, displacing the notion of the “spectral”, which has been a metaphor for all that is pseudo and non-substantial in capitalist society since it was first adopted in nineteenth-century literature. In such political analyses, usually of a Marxist nature, it is understood that the negativity and fraudulence of the spectral in a socially changed world can be displaced to reveal an authentic reality. However, the question is: how much is gained by denouncing capitalism as unreal? Not because capitalism is not fake, but because it is clearly highly operative as such. Rather, then, we should examine how immaterial economies and their modalities of transmission become part of material everyday experience. This points to a new organisation of capitalism that goes beyond the surface as the critical locus of the modern and postmodern eras’ culture of display and consumption. The surface tension that articulated modernity from Manet to Warhol no longer holds.

Replacing the visual metaphor of the spectral and steering towards the embodied notion of *affect*, the power critique implicit in the new occult art has a very direct relationship with (human) energy. Affect (or what Hannah Arendt, Michel Foucault and Giorgio Agamben have called “bio-politics”), is a key term to describe how advanced capitalism administrates society by using life itself as its resource. This is obvious in a technological world where money is made by the ways in which we are hooked up to one another through electronic and digital spheres of exchange. Indeed, affect is not seen but most definitely felt—via sensory perception, the expressive and emotional activities that comprise our subjectivity; our spontaneity and enthusiasms. As immediate modes of sensual response, characterised by an accompanying imaginative dimension, affect describes our ability to produce and consume in ways that we invest our desire and creativity. This is what is called immaterial production, yet the effects are far from ethereal when disincarnate intelligences claw into our bodies in a force field where reality and representation are separated. The affective turn taken by the new occult art thereby subverts existing tropes of alienation. Think of what Frederic Jameson called the “waning of affect”, by which he argued that the late capitalist world had converted everything into surface.¹¹ Instead, we are more likely witnessing an ideological *increase* of affect by inhabiting states of heightened psychosomatic preparedness. We need to develop forms of understanding that can gauge and articulate the predicament we face as depths of subjectivity are turned into property. Since the medium of transcendental bureaucratic capitalism is our nervous systems, the question is, what gratifies and excites us, or makes us anxious, and lies at the same time within and without the limits of the physical body.¹²

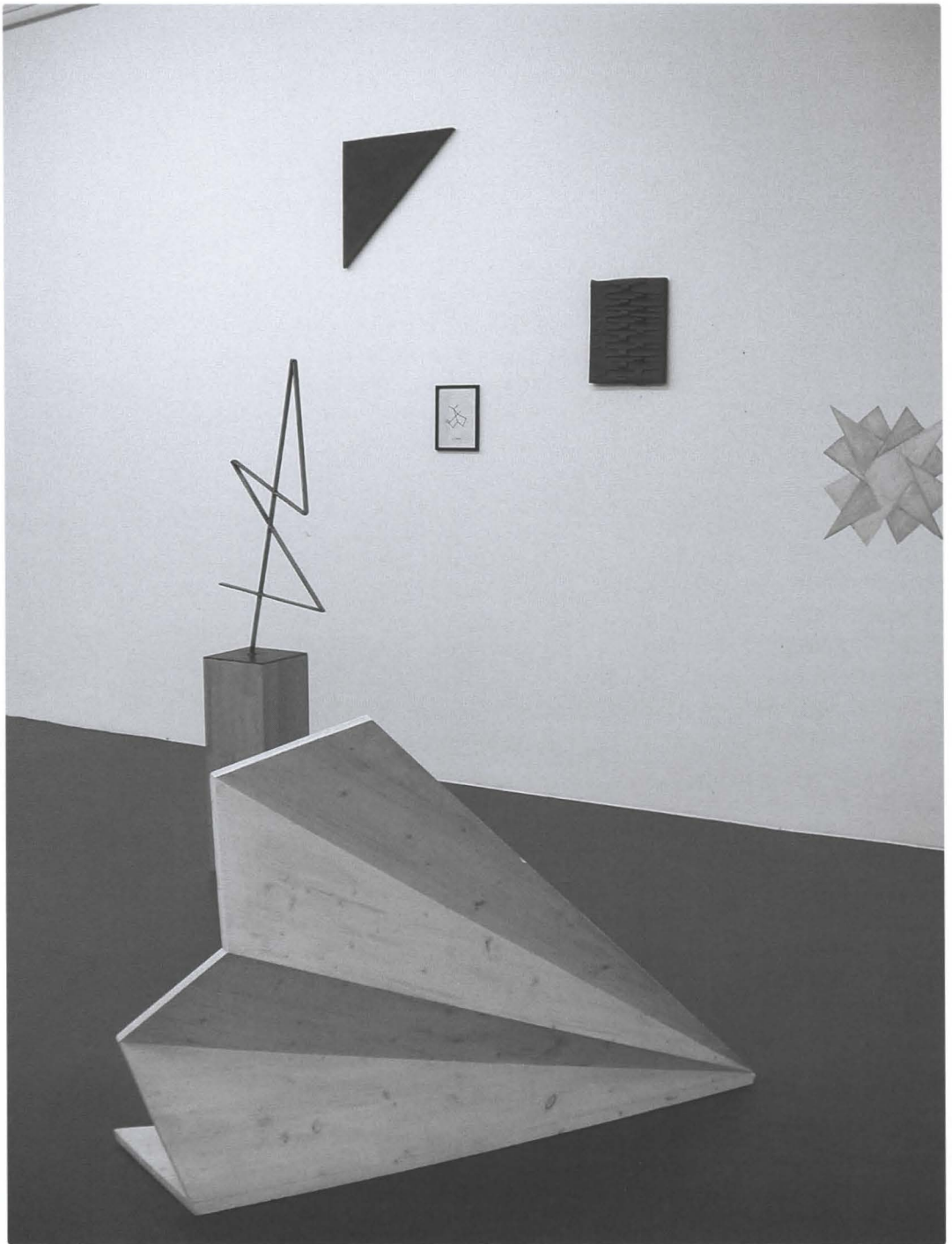


Fig. 4
 Maria M. Loboda
*The Grand Conjuraton
 of Lucifuge Rofocale* 2006
 Wood, goat skin, steel,
 ribbon, camphor,
 verbena, brandy,
 gold-plated walnuts
 Dimensions variable
 Courtesy of the artist

IV

Perhaps not everybody would like to have their self-understanding as reasonable beings tested by an occult art work. Yet art on the edge of the real and the rational is nothing compared to the extent that advanced capitalism resonates in our nervous systems. According to Adorno, the occult connects what was hitherto unconnected – the living and the dead, the meaningless and the significant.¹³ In a world where distance is annulled, the new occult artists are in a sense doing nothing that is not already taking place in the synchronicities and transmissions of the information economy. However at the same time the new occult art urges us to reorganise the sensorial in a meeting of the idealistic (in the sense a-rational, counter-empirical) and disastrous (as in modalities that concern desire and death). The wish to bring back some soul in a world of logistics is filtered through this deep-rooted libertarianism.¹⁴ Generally speaking, the potential of such art forms is – apart from their anti-disciplinary and bio-political aspects – their viral potentiality that does not shy away from enabling analyses on micro and macro-levels, connecting fleeting emotions and impalpable communities with societal architectures and planetary forms of organisation. Of course, the mix of idealism and the disastrous is a potentially fatal one. The scepticism that is also part of contemporary artists' work with the occult is perhaps a contention that these practices are best located in art's discursive procedures, in which it is assumed that emotions and ecstasies don't exist unaccompanied by self-reflexivity.

Following in the spirit of Sigmar Polke's painting *Higher Powers Command: Paint the Upper Right Corner Black!* (*Höhere Wesen Befahlen: Rechte Obere Ecke Schwarz Malen!*, 1969), occult procedures do not only make for subject matter, they can also become methodology. For example, the German/Polish artist Maria M. Loboda followed a fourteenth-century recipe for a Satanist anti-love spell in her work *The Grand Conjuraton of Lucifuge Rofocale* (2006). According to the spell, in order to get a loving couple to separate, you need fine steel, white wood, green ribbons, camphor, brandy, half gold-plated walnuts, verbena and goat's skin. Presenting

the spell as an installation, Loboda articulated its ingredients in the established formats of modern art, arriving at a suite of objects that testify to the occult's opaque materiality: an inscrutable triangle of goat's skin, to a large wooden floor sculpture reminiscent of an Arts and Crafts version of a Tony Smith; to the innocent-looking pair of walnuts on which the spell was cast (Fig. 4). *The Grand Conjuration* unbalances formalism through revolting, ritual instrumentality. Contrary perhaps to appearances, these objects are not autonomous and self-referential but are instead over-determined with meaning to a degree that is sure to prompt a shudder, in expectation of devilish influences. The work augments formalism *in extremis* by hyperbolically charging the form's specificity and thereby assuring the form's meaning beyond language. Happily for the world's lovers, it remained a post-conceptual artwork as Loboda never activated the spell.

There is a sense of intimacy in the scruffy tactility of this work, as well as in the ritualised forms of looking that convey obscene fluctuations of signification on a backdrop of nothingness. The occult artwork has been *touched* or *seen* – by something or someone – before its gaze falls on you. It encourages you to acknowledge those that went before you and those after you who will see, and be seen, by this image. Often the starting point may just be laughing together: the bodily release inherent in falling together in the appreciation of rites and vocabularies that culture has deemed abject, and thereby achieving a sense of sharing or initiation – if only in fleeting intimacy. Using Joseph Beuys's term, this is a kind of *soziale plastik* that attempts to rethink the forms and terms upon which society as a social organism is founded. But it does so opaquely and through hedonist-embodiment rather than a pedagogical, organisational transparency, and it concerns “meaning and loss of meaning, legibility and illegibility, not merely the visible”.¹⁵ Formalism rejected “realistic” representation in favour of representation as realisation. However the pure form also appeals to pure objective perception, and hence to a transcendental subject.¹⁶ *The Grand Conjuration* acknowledges that occult art, qua art, must flicker between its promise of magic and transformation and what is simply indexical, self-identical (gold-plated walnuts, verbena, goat's skin ...). The work encourages belief in promises of transcendence by the hermeneutic riddle it poses: the purity of the sculptural ensemble's forms that is so emphatically charged that it can only be transcendent, while this belief is at the same time kept in check by the work's inevitable tilting back into the evident banality of its attempts at dramatisation. However, it cannot be a criticism of an artwork that it doesn't work; and these fluctuations of meaning are the expressivity of an art form that acknowledges signification's dependence on the modalities of affect.

When artists promote radical alterity, the potential of the unknown is acknowledged as a productive force. As we have seen, this also concerns what we cannot experience individually. For his 2006 exhibition *Kraft der Erde* (Energy of Earth) at the Frankfurter Kunstverein, Arturas Raila continued his work with groups who are not usually represented in art spaces – in this case a community of

Fig. 5
 Arturas Raila
 From the series
 "Power of the Earth"
 2005–2007
 C-type print
 Courtesy of the artist



Lithuanian esoterics, worshippers of pre-Christian mythologies (Col. pl. 1). The project pivoted around two geo-energy experts, Vaclovas Mikailionis and Vilius Gibavicius who, together with Raila, mapped the earth's energy fields in the centre of Frankfurt. The mapping – done by walking around with a vibrating metal hoop – produced a new space in the city, defined by positive and negative energy nuclei. Raila used the patterns of energy to create parameters within the gallery space, hanging his photographs of the pagan community's ceremonies in the Lithuanian countryside according to the distribution of mystic power lines. *Kraft der Erde* was a community-specific art project that didn't take the form of activist empowerment but instead staged the co-existence of different paradigms: geo-energy versus conceptual art; planetary balance versus the white cube's isolation; pastoral views versus the technological city (Col. pl. 1, Figs. 5 and 6). As Raila acknowledges, the notion of the occult is not ideologically innocuous. Nazism's anti-human policies, for instance, were based in part on a mystification of energy (the "Aryan force").¹⁷ An artistic use of the occult must therefore counteract immunisation, and make space for what is marginalised. This also reflects back on the project itself, and on Raila's role of mediating

Fig. 6
Arturas Raila
From the series
"Power of the Earth"
2005–2007
C-type print
Courtesy of the artist



the social difference of the pagan community. The beholder is provoked to take an active part vis-à-vis this alterity: does Raila's mediation constitute a society consisting of a mainstream of minorities, or is it an isolating focus on society's outsiders?

The new occult art is an attempt to reintroduce embodied processes of signification that may unsettle serialised codes of privatised efficiency and mass-mediated forms of consensus. We can also admire it for the underdog sensibility with which it scavenges Western culture's rubbish bin for material. "The infinite arrives barefoot on this Earth" wrote the Dada painter and poet Jean Arp, a statement that sums up occult art's a-spectacular potential for power critique – its unheroic, nonsensical disobedience – and the pathos with which it recognises the appearance of ephemeral states of becoming, and of states of powerlessness – loneliness, mortality, and loss. This is the playful fatality that artists use to redraw art's limits, with a view to the realisation of new outsiders.

1. Joachim Koester, "The Magic Mirror of John Dee," in *Messages from the Unseen* (Malmö: Lunds Konsthall and Veenman Publishers, 2006), 145. John Dee appears as the spiritual counsellor of Queen Elizabeth I in the recent film *Elizabeth: The Golden Age* (Working Title Films / Universal Studios, 2007). A shorter version of this essay has previously been published in *Frieze Magazine* (April/May 2007): 115–119.
2. Koester, "The Magic Mirror of John Dee."
3. Koester, "The Magic Mirror of John Dee."
4. It is important that nineteenth-century spiritualism was part of broader social movements, for example in the struggles for equal rights. For two books on the how the occult provided a platform for a kind of proto-feminism, see Ann Braude's *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women's Rights in Nineteenth Century America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989) and Alex Owen, *The Darkened Room. Women, Power and Spiritualism in Late Victorian England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).
5. Quoted from Gary Lachman, *Turn Off Your Mind. The Mystic Sixties and the Dark Side of the Age of Aquarius* (New York: Disinformation, 2001), 394. Lachman's book is a detailed but unsystematic overview of what he calls the decade's taste for "giving in to strange powers".
6. www.tacticalmagic.org.
7. Søren Andreasen in *Phantom*, exhibition catalogue, ed. Søren Andreasen and Jesper Rasmussen, (Copenhagen: Charlottenborg Udstillingsbygning, 2006), 7.
8. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, *Figures of Speech or Figures of Thought* (London: Luzac and Co., 1946). Quoted from Joseph Campbell's foreword to Maya Deren's *Divine Horsemen. The Living Gods of Haiti* (New York: Documentext, 2004, 1953), xi.
9. Jean-Luc Nancy, "The Inoperative Community," (1983), in *The Inoperative Community*, ed. Peter Connor (Minneapolis University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 15.
10. Nancy, 3.
11. Fredric Jameson, "The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," in *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1992).
12. Scott Lash and Celia Lury address a different aspect of this kind of distributed being in the way things come alive in capitalism's animism — "things themselves that do the mediating" (84). In the introduction to their book *Global Culture Industry*, they quote Alfred Gell's anthropology of art: "[Alfred] Gell suggests that there is a long-standing anthropological pre-occupation with the 'ostensibly peculiar relations between persons and things (in) which (things) somehow "appear as", or do duty as, persons.' This preoccupation may be found in anthropological studies of 'primitive cultures' [...], magic [...], and exchange [...], and is further developed by Gell himself in his own theory of art which 'considers objects as persons'. In the work of sociologist of science and technology Bruno Latour [...] there is a similar concern with the agency of objects or 'actants', as he describes them. As the study developed, we too came to think of our objects as having a life. We were using an anti-positivist, a *humanist* method: but what was involved was a humanism of the inhuman." Scott Lash and Celia Lury, *Global Culture Industry* (London: Polity Press, 2007), 20.
13. Adorno saw no big potential in the uses of the occult. In his "Theses Against Occultism" he portrays it (in a way that might connect to the Benjaminian concept of the aura) as a function of the fetishism of commodities in the form of "menacingly objectified labour (that) assails (the occultist) on all sides from demonically grimacing objects". Adorno's critique is also informed by the way he constructs a homology between occult and totalitarian terror, symptomatic of "an unconscious compulsive projection of a subject decomposing historically if not clinically." However as the threat of totalitarianism as such has waned, it is this decomposition that the new occult art derives its energy from: an (anti-) rationale which enables the cannibalisation of the demonical grimacing of culture. (Theodor W. Adorno, "Theses Against Occultism," in *The Stars Down to Earth*, ed. Stephen Crook (London: Routledge, 2002), 173–4).
14. This is in the spirit of the Devil's helper in Mikhail Bulgakov's classic novel *The Master and Margarita* (ca. 1937), who, faced with the Soviet bureaucracy, scoffs "I don't belong to any 'organisation'".
15. Stephen Bann wrote this about concrete poetry, not occult art, however the relevance for our purposes is striking (Stephen Bann ed., *Concrete Poetry: an Anthology* (London: London Magazine Editions, 1967), 11.). Interestingly, Berjoui Bowler states that the first concrete poems had connections to the "magical and then the mystical impetus to shape texts, poems in the shapes of things. [...] The Greeks named such writing *technopaegnia*. Simas of Rhodes (third century BC) made poems in the shapes of ax, egg, wings." (Quoted from Craig Saper, *Networked Art* (Minneapolis University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 78.).
16. Here I am relying on Craig Saper's discussion of formalism. Saper, 83–84.
17. A lesser known example of attempts at fusing politics with occult ideologies are the Russian Biocosmists, a group of poets and scientists who in the years following the Russian revolution argued that socialism, in the name of historical equality, took it upon itself to fight the injustice of death by engineering eternal life: Unlimited human life in cosmos — an issue that they took Marx to task for never having dared to cogitate. It is perhaps no surprise that as a political movement biocosmism never developed into something whose detrimental effects could even remotely compare to those of Nazism's criminal politics, although some of its proponents also saw it necessary create a superman and weed out the weak from society. The "father of modern rocket science" (56), Konstantin Ciolkovskij, who started the research that became the Soviet space programme, was a biocosmist who wrote about "living and happy atoms" (63) and theorised about the disinfection of planet Earth in preparation of mankind's immigration into space. (Boris Groys, Michael Hagemeister and Anne von der Heiden ed., *Die Neue Menschheit. Biopolitische Utopien in Russland zu Beginn des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2005).

Col. pl. 1
Arturas Raila
From the series
"Power of the Earth"
2005–2007
C-type print
Courtesy of the artist

OVERLEAF:
Col. pl. 2
Kamrooz Aram
*The Gleam of the
Morning's First Beam* 2005
Oil and stickers on canvas
213.4 x 304.8 cm
Courtesy of the artist and
Wilkinson Gallery, London







Col. pl. 3
Douglas Gordon and
Philippe Parreno
*Zidane: A 21st Century
Portrait* 2006
Film still
Courtesy Yvon Lambert
Gallery, Paris, New York





Col. pl. 4
Harun Farocki
Deep Play 2007
Video still from
12-screen installation
Channel 7: simulation
of live feed
Courtesy Matthias
Rajmann, Harun Farocki
Filmproduktion





Col. pl. 5
Darren Sylvester
*If All We Have Is Each
Other, That's OK* 2003
Lambda print
120 x 90 cm
Courtesy of the artist,
Sullivan & Strumpf Fine
Art, Sydney, Johnston
Gallery, Perth and William
Mora Galleries, Melbourne

Col. pl. 6
Darren Sylvester
*Everything in Life Depends
on Yourself* 2000
Digital print
120 x 134 cm
Courtesy of the artist,
Sullivan & Strumpf Fine
Art, Sydney, Johnston
Gallery, Perth and William
Mora Galleries, Melbourne



Darren Sylvester: In Step with the Real World

Daniel Palmer

Anyone who thinks my work is a critique of
consumerism is out of step with the real world.
– Darren Sylvester¹

Australian artist Darren Sylvester is known for his carefully staged and digitally cleansed colour photographs of young models in everyday urban social situations. One of his most iconic images, *If All We Have Is Each Other, That's OK* (2003), depicts three teenage girls grinning and laughing while sharing a meal of KFC (Col. pl. 5). They wear identical blue singlets and one has braces. The junk food is spread out on the table, their cheeks are burning red and they all seem self-absorbed in their happiness. It is a perfectly banal scene, and yet the work's title unsettles the image, complicating a simple reading of the work as a parody or mere imitation of the false promises of advertising. We assume the title is the sentiment of the young girls, and yet it is surely not something they would say in this situation. In a related image, *The Object of Social Acceptance Is To Forfeit Individual Dreams* (2003), a group of sultry youths gather in front of a house wearing Gap clothing as if posing for a fashion spread (Fig. 1). Here, given the ominous title, we seem to be in the realm of critique – but a critique of what, exactly?

Many of Sylvester's images appear to be making a comment on social conformity, particularly as it applies to the young and aspirational middle class. Critics – myself included – have been inclined to read Sylvester's images as a critique of the superficial inanity of advertising. The artist, however, clearly sees his work differently.² When pressed, he claims his work has nothing to do with an appropriation of advertising, nor a critique of its insidious ideological



Fig. 1
Darren Sylvester
*The Object of Social
Acceptance Is To Forfeit
Individual Dreams* 2003
Lambda print
120 x 120 cm
Courtesy of the artist,
Sullivan & Strumpf
Fine Art, Sydney,
Johnston Gallery, Perth
and William Mora
Galleries, Melbourne

manipulations. On the contrary, he claims that if his work appears to use the language of advertising this is simply because he likes his image-world to look perfect. In other words, there is apparently no irony behind Sylvester's embrace of the unblemished consumer culture he depicts. In this sense, he is almost unique among Australian artists who engage with consumer culture: he stands outside both the mode of postmodern critique and even its more recent shift to cool indifference, realigning the position of art in relation to mass culture more broadly.

This question of interpretation is at the heart of this essay, which takes Sylvester's work, words and persona as an instance of a new Pop sensibility. For despite our efforts to overcome the authority of author, the figure of Sylvester-the-artist is crucial to understanding his work as a whole. Indeed, while no artist is the final arbiter of their work's interpretation, Sylvester's persona forces itself onto our critical readings in such a pervasive manner that it becomes something like a working strategy. Sylvester's public talks and interviews, for instance, are performances in themselves (as I was reminded when preparing this essay).³ In public talks, he dramatises the story of growing up in Wagga Wagga, a country town in New South Wales, and completing a degree in photography and graphic design before escaping south to the city of Melbourne.⁴ With disarming directness, and a calculated wit, he recounts tales of a life as the son of a bank manager and his salvation by the music of The Smiths and eventually the Carpenters. In addition, Sylvester quite literally performs in some of his works, and – while his work is not strictly autobiographical – their titles may be interpreted as performative translations of the personal experience he draws on.⁵ Finally, Sylvester is a flamboyant character within the Melbourne art scene, and this, combined with the ambiguously intimate nature of his work, serves to emphasise his persona within the interpretation of his work. In this sense, Sylvester's quasi-confessional work both accepts and exploits the myths on which the art world economy is based.

I will argue in this essay that both in the work itself and in his public statements, Sylvester presents his art as a kind of counselling practice. Yet the titles and accompanying texts of the work present a view of human nature that might be characterised as fatalistic and existentially resigned. Specifically, the works imply that humans behave in predictably selfish and stupid ways, and the best we can hope for is momentary happiness, particularly in relationships. Increasingly, underlying all his work, are the themes of meaninglessness and mortality. While these existential themes are something of a constant for artists, if hardly in fashion in contemporary art practice, Sylvester explores them through various romantic clichés. The gravity of the themes is nevertheless remarkable for an artist whose work is said to look like advertising, and whose precise practice appears very far removed from what we would normally think of as expressive or anguished.

Controlled, Concise and Packaged

I wouldn't say I'm a creative person. I like to organise, to have things under control.

–Darren Sylvester⁶

Sylvester works in a variety of media, including video and sculpture, but the backbone of his practice is photography. As already indicated, his large colour photographs belong to the now familiar directorial paradigm; that is, they appear as narrative tableaux. Specifically, Sylvester's regular working process involves a systematic distillation of emotional experience into stories – typically highlighting the unreliability of emotional relationships – which are then condensed into a single line that becomes an all-important title. The image comes later, often sketched and storyboarded several times before the final photographic production begins. Until recently, Sylvester did not even own a camera, and a heavy year of production might see a maximum of six images produced. As one might expect from this refined process, nothing is left to chance and the photos are, in the artist's words, “controlled, concise and packaged”.⁷

Relationships and emotional states are the primary themes of the images, which are littered with youthful and generically attractive middle-class models. Most are the artist's friends, although some paid models are selected from talent databases available through agency websites. However, because they are not professional actors their “performance” is often not entirely convincing. This is important, because the effect is to underline a sense of the characters' discomfort and inertia: they appear alienated not only from the people surrounding them but even more dramatically from themselves. Blair French, in what is undoubtedly the most sophisticated account of Sylvester's work to date, describes the models as:

[...] posed in detached, quasi-narrative scenarios that above all suggest modes of fundamental societal alienation, whether it be in terms of the functioning of corporate ‘culture’, our relationship with forms of technology that ever increasingly relieve us of the burden of traditional human tasks, or the staging of interpersonal relationships in terms of mannered disconnection or mutual allegiance to brands and shared rituals of consumption.⁸

French concludes by suggesting that Sylvester is engaged in “a form of photographic anthropology (a performed anthropology) of contemporary life”.⁹ He suggests that this condition is characterised by “the hyper-atrophy of subjecthood” and a “sense of an absolute dependence upon the fabrication of self-image”.¹⁰ Indeed, practices of bodily self-maintenance appear frequently in Sylvester's photographs, along with mirrors, narcissism and suggestions of

Fig. 2
Darren Sylvester
Just Death Is True 2006
Lightjet print
90 x 120 cm
Courtesy of the artist,
Sullivan & Strumpf
Fine Art, Sydney,
Johnston Gallery, Perth
and William Mora
Galleries, Melbourne



self-doubt. Other works evoke anxieties about aging, such as *Just Death Is True* (2006), which features a young woman with a face mask, who is on the telephone and lying on a bed (Fig. 2).¹¹

We are not asked to feel sympathy for these people. As Russell Storer puts it, “the generically attractive subject operates a cipher, avoiding individuality. The onus is on the viewer to insert her or his own personal emotional response.”¹² French speaks of “a sort of theatre of social dysfunction that encapsulates a deeply felt sense of aloneness experienced by individual youthful subjects”, and points out that “these, above all, are images of being alone”.¹³ French is ultimately critical of what he reads as Sylvester’s “formulaic” mode of relation to his subject, its mere confirmation of “our current means of

presenting and assessing self-image”.¹⁴ But, unlike most critics, French is self-reflexive about his own “expectation of criticality”, and careful not to “foreclose on the possibility that Sylvester’s images also touch a nerve with audiences – speak to real experience – exactly because of [their] heightened sense of cool self-absorption”.¹⁵ This latter possibility represents what might be called the therapeutic potential of Sylvester’s practice.

Sylvester’s images depict stylised scenes from everyday life in a typical Western city. Office and car interiors feature prevalently, while retro-furnished apartments and groovy cafes could be straight out of *Wallpaper** magazine. Importantly, the cast of subjects are not only attractive and middle class, they are also often androgynous and overtly multicultural. Asian and black models have featured in Sylvester’s images since his 1999 exhibition *London Paris Tokyo New York* (Fig. 3). Likewise, Sylvester prefers generic sites (avoiding locations that might identify a place), and uses international brands and props (often purchased through eBay).¹⁶ In a curious development of the well-known “provincialism problem” diagnosed by Terry Smith, Sylvester’s ambition is for the image to appear global, rather than local: “I stopped wanting to do outdoor shots because they are too Australian... so now I do the outdoor shots indoors... The aim is always to keep it universal, to relate to everybody.”¹⁷ An exception to this – an image of two hooded figures against a snowy mountain in Canada, *Let Hopes and Dreams Be Things We Can Achieve* (2005) – was chosen because it reminded Sylvester of the Paramount picture logo, which he believed would make it easier for “everyone to relate to”. The studio environment enhances the artifice of the images, as well as entirely removing the element of chance through elaborately constructed sets and carefully controlled lighting.

Consumer items feature heavily in Sylvester’s work. As he suggests: “Often a banal object – such as a bottle of facial exfoliate, boxes of fast food, an iPod, mobile phones with cameras – can bring some sense of completion – happiness – if only for a short while, and I think that’s the best we can hope for.”¹⁸ At the same time, a number of his images feature uncomfortable or slightly uncanny encounters with media and communication technologies. This was a pre-eminent theme in his early work – as for instance in *No Longer Exposed To Problems Or Tension* (1999), a young girl lost in the private bubble of listening to a CD Walkman, or *To Help Each Other Physically Is To Help Each Other Emotionally* (2000), showing an anonymous set of hands clutching a Game Boy console (Fig. 4). Several images feature models on the telephone, such as *If Only We Could Do What We Wanted To* (2000), and *Faceless, Anonymous and Nothing* (2005), with its anonymous silhouette against a night cityscape. Computers and laptops appear in several other images, and Sylvester has even produced twin sets of computer mice, cast as bronze sculptures (*Dead Mice*, 2005). Wholly inconclusive, such work appears to betray an underlying anxiety about the socially alienating effects of technologies, while simultaneously embracing their role.

Fig. 3
Darren Sylvester
London Paris New York
Tokyo 1999
4 Lambda prints
100 x 100 cm each
Courtesy of the artist,
Sullivan & Strumpf
Fine Art, Sydney,
Johnston Gallery, Perth
and William Mora
Galleries, Melbourne



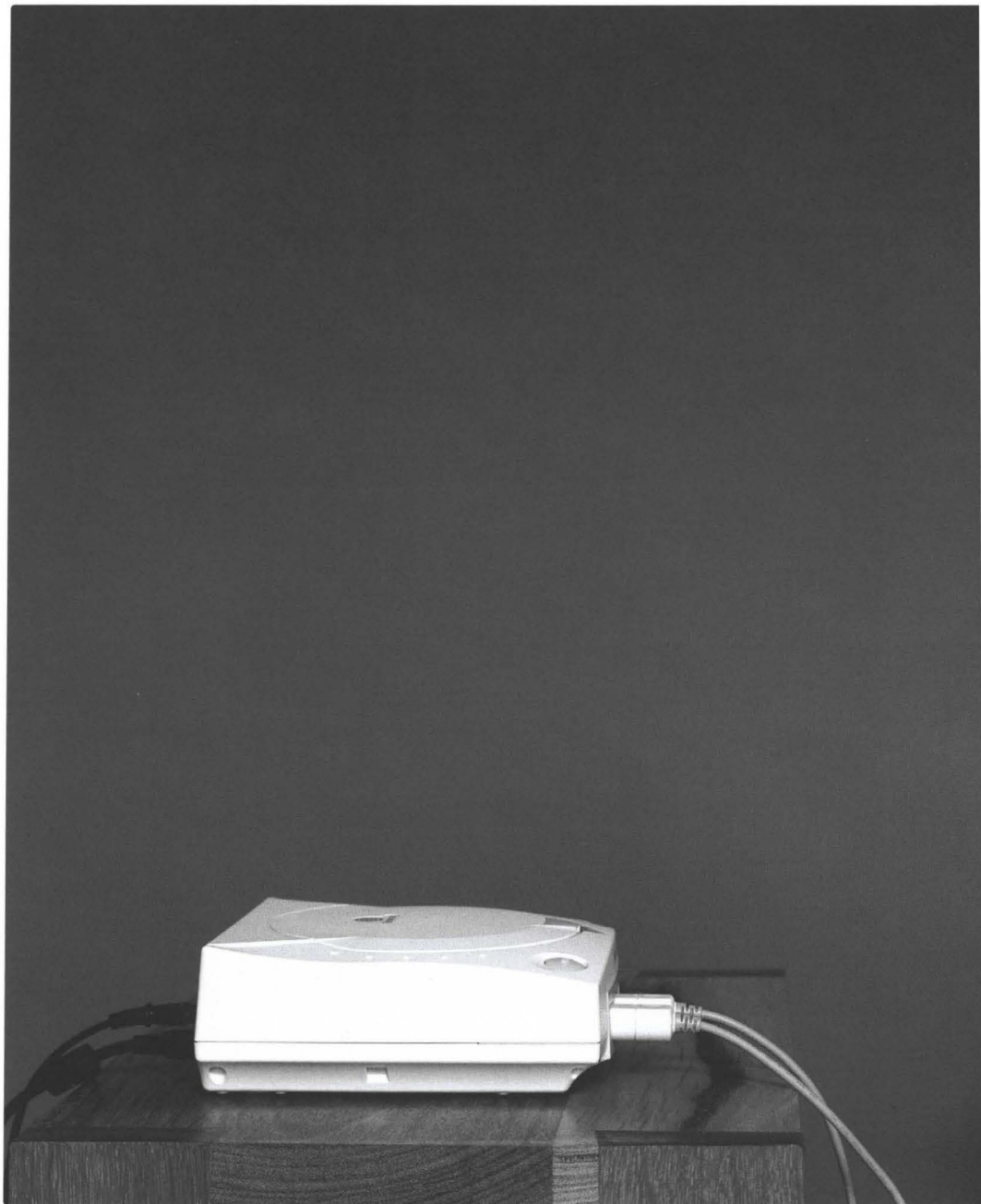




Fig. 4
Darren Sylvester
*To Help Each Other
Physically Is To Help Each
Other Emotionally* 2000
Digital print
105 x 150 cm
Courtesy of the artist,
Sullivan & Strumpf
Fine Art, Sydney,
Johnston Gallery, Perth
and William Mora
Galleries, Melbourne

Universal Love Action

The photos are like nuggets of emotion, like pop songs.

–Darren Sylvester

Sylvester is fundamentally a storyteller. He often includes his own short stories in his exhibition catalogues, and has worked on several film scripts. The stories he tells are invariably simple middle-class tales of disappointment in love and other relationships, as well as the pressures of modern-day work. In the photographs, the role of the titles is clearly crucial to the process of evoking a narrative of emotional intensity. But just as the acting is sometimes strained, the titles are often awkwardly long phrases – more like underlined diary entries. Their frequently strange grammar also seems to indicate that they are excerpted from something bigger. Thus, contrary to the traditional function of the photographic caption – to delimit the meaning of a work to its specific action and place – Sylvester’s titles evoke an ambiguous narrative. But it is often unclear whose voice belongs to the titles. Is it the internal dialogue of the characters in the image, the voice of the artist, or society’s admonitions? While sometimes sounding like the corporate “we” of advertising, others are more reminiscent of the bittersweet stuff of self-help mantras, soap operas and pop songs.¹⁹

Perhaps spurred on by the title, Russell Storer suggests that *Everything in Life Depends on Yourself* (2000) – an image of a smart young woman at the chic Adelphi hotel – shows “a moment of epiphany, borne out by her pose of tense expectancy and her faraway look” (Col. pl. 6).²⁰ Storer speculates that the woman, who wears a crisp white shirt, is “successful and beautiful, on a work trip – perhaps preparing for a morning meeting – and has required a moment of reverie to regain her self-confidence”.²¹ In short, Storer invents a plausible emotional account, as if the still image were plucked from a film. But the ideology of self-reliance expressed in the title is ambiguous, and the character’s inertia and blank screen of her open laptop might suggest a darker narrative to her vacant stare. A contemporaneous work, *The Performance Wage Cannot Motivate Me Any More* (2000), staged in a corporate boardroom, is one of several images that seems to question the values of the labour system. However, Sylvester’s work is not presented in political terms, but as an emotional narrative that is both a little pathetic and sad, loose enough to facilitate responses ranging from identification to amusement.

The artist says, “I want my work to act like a pop song. The meaning should be simple and universal. It should be about an emotional life common to everyone.”²² Sylvester – who has been a member of a pop band and has also performed solo gigs – often sounds like a pop star or movie actor when he talks about his work: “If a viewer goes ‘I experience that too’, then it’s successful. I want it to reach everybody.” In visual art, the aspiration is reminiscent

of Andy Warhol, who famously said in 1967, “Pop art is for everyone.”²³ Recall also Warhol’s fascination with Coca-Cola, which he believed was a fundamentally democratic drink:

What’s great about this country is that America started the tradition where the richest consumers buy essentially the same things as the poorest. You can be watching TV and see Coca-Cola, and you know that the President drinks Coke, Liz Taylor drinks Coke, and just think, you can drink Coke too. A Coke is a Coke and no amount of money can get you a better Coke than the one the bum on the corner is drinking. All the Cokes are the same and all the Cokes are good.²⁴

Sylvester’s celebration of normalcy is more melancholic but seemingly no less sincere in its innocence. Asked where he found the inspiration to stage the girls eating KFC he replied: “I’ve always had such a great time when eating KFC with friends. I realised that when you’re in a good mood, then nothing else matters, and everything is OK for that moment.”²⁵

If Sylvester’s still images aspire to the global intelligibility of multicultural models and branded signifiers, several of his non-photographic works take this logic even further. A video shot in the Melbourne IKEA store showed Sylvester in an IKEA uniform giving out free ice creams: *If I Only Ever Do One Good Thing in Life, This is It* (2006). This work is so far unique in Sylvester’s practice, as a public action that intervened in the real world, and yet helps to clarify his idiosyncratic ideology. Rather than a parody of IKEA’s clever ploy to keep kids happy, Sylvester’s relational performance appropriates the act and makes it heroic. Without a hint of irony, he says, “When I went to IKEA it seemed ridiculous that they had the ice creams so cheap, and I thought: I could make everyone feel good.” Performed anonymously as if it were a regular corporate gesture, the most we can say is that it seems to express a longing for social interaction. And in this case, the title of the work refers directly to Sylvester’s agency as an artist: as he explains, “I wanted to do a good deed, holding hands with the company.”

I Care for You (2001/7), a large abstract painting made up of blocks of colour, appears to have been motivated by similar desires. The importance of this work to the artist’s project is clear, since an original 2001 version was remade in 2007 in a more elaborate form (Fig. 5). The “painting” is constructed from individual panels of clear Perspex with different shades of acrylic spray-painted onto the reverse. Its significance is entirely contained in the logic behind the surface. Basically, Sylvester derived the choice of colours in the work from the well-researched hues of the Clinique global skincare range. Make-up colours were scanned into the computer, and a local hardware store matched the colours. The artist explained:

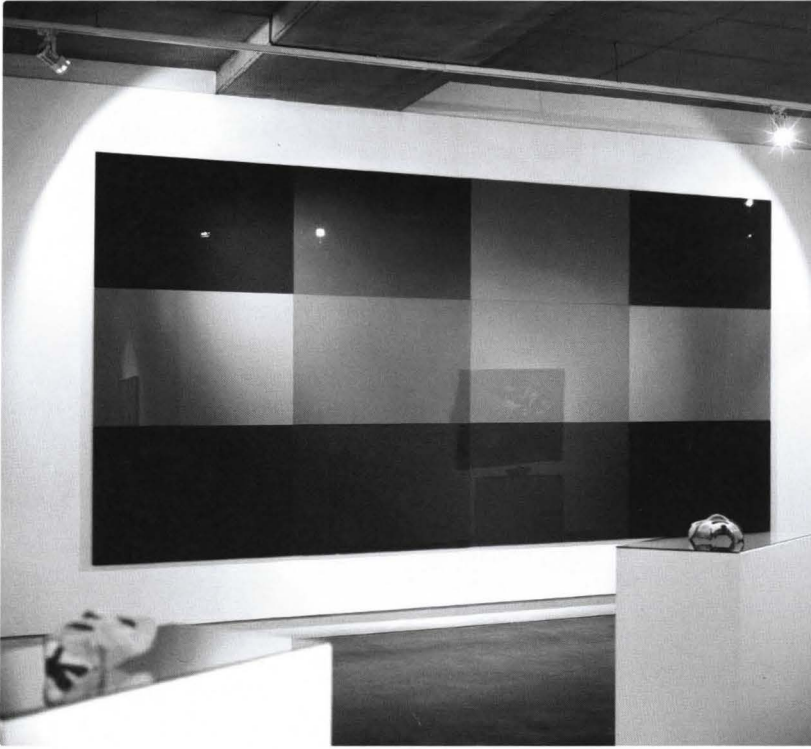
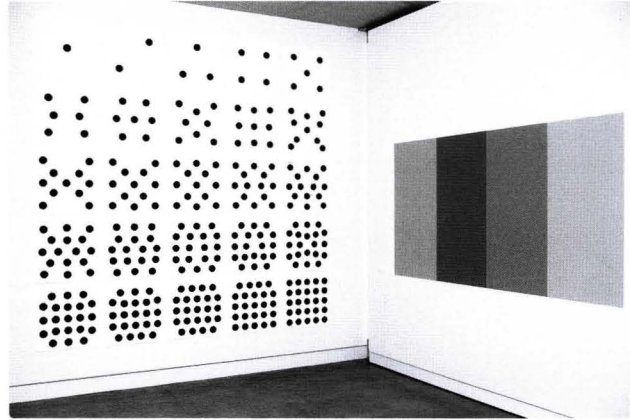


Fig. 5
Darren Sylvester
I Care For You 2007
Acrylic paint based on
Clinique colour surge
eye shadow super
shimmer, superfit
makeup foundation
and colour surge butter
shine lipsticks, acrylic
240 x 480 cm (12 panels)
Courtesy of the artist,
Sullivan & Strumpf
Fine Art, Sydney,
Johnston Gallery, Perth
and William Mora
Galleries, Melbourne

I wanted to do a painting but didn't want to mix colours and wanted the paint to look good ... and I knew that Clinique had already mixed colours that looked great. So I contacted them, they gave me their make-up and I had it colour-matched. The colours of the painting are exactly the same as you get in the [Clinique] store.

To add to this quasi-indexical reference, the grids of colour are arranged to represent a face: the top section of the final image are chosen from the eye-shadow range, the middle section from the foundation and the bottom section from lipstick: "like a huge digitised head – eyes, skin and lips – abstract". Once again, Sylvester's ready-made painting would seem to parody the pretensions both of abstract painting and the cosmetics industry. High modernism, of course, used the monochrome and the grid in order to allow art to transcend the ideological function of representation. Thus Benjamin Buchloh, for instance, reads Andy Warhol's use of the monochrome as "a complete devaluation and inversion of one of the most sacred modernist pictorial strategies", a negation of its

Fig. 6
 Darren Sylvester
A Life Falls Apart
Without Order 2001
 Installation view at
 William Mora Galleries,
 Melbourne showing
Ideal Standing Position
for Elevators 2001 and
I Care For You 2001
 Courtesy of the artist,
 Sullivan & Strumpf
 Fine Art, Sydney,
 Johnston Gallery, Perth
 and William Mora
 Galleries, Melbourne



metaphysical element.²⁶ Sylvester devalues the grid even further and yet maintains that he is “purely genuine”. In a classically Warholian statement, he says: “I’m not expressing anything with this, other than to just make something look good. It’s like make-up, it’s a completely surface art work. It even reflects back on you.” His idea is that “the painting would automatically look great to us ... and you’ll always look good in front of this picture. You’re smothered in colours that look good on everybody.” Hence the title, and its mock concern.²⁷

A series of wooden masks shown on a line of mirrored plinths alongside *I Care For You* in 2007 also initially appears to critique the beauty industry. Inspired by the voodoo-like appearance of advertisements for various “youth-giving masks” – as he put it – Sylvester purchased a range of international beauty mask kits from eBay. Taking the whitening and moisturising masks – with their strange circles and cuts that fit over the face – he and his studio assistant carefully carved out the wood with the help of a computer grid,

angle grinder and chisel. The resulting objects were then given the absurd names of their original products (thus *Inner Signal Rejuvenate*, *Cosme Decorte All Cellriser* and so on). In his review of the exhibition, Robert Nelson suggested that the work “deconstructed the beauty salon”, a reading encouraged by the mirrored plinths which cast hovering skull-like shadows onto the ceiling. Nelson, like most critics, is looking for meaning and morals. And Sylvester himself says that “each artwork is like a little morality tale”. But the artist speaks of an existential concern for time’s passing, and claims that a critique of the beauty industry was never a consideration at all.²⁸

The Look of Advertising?

Among the earliest work that Sylvester exhibited in Melbourne were light-boxes with their titles overlaid directly onto the photographic images themselves. They were shown in a solo exhibition in 1998 at 200 Gertrude Street in Melbourne called *Life Together*, held when Sylvester was only 24 years old, and introduced many of the themes that continue to resonate through his work. The images included an interior of a retro Mercedes (*New Love Is Pleasure*, 1998), an airport (*Don’t Stop Us*, 1998) and a hospital corridor (*One Day Will Be Our Last Together*, 1998). Another work, *Bizarre Love Triangle* (1998) (the title borrowed from a New Order song), showed three graphic renditions of the human figure, one with a briefcase. Sylvester was trained as a designer and a photographer, and he works on a regular basis designing catalogues for other artists and galleries, such as the Centre for Contemporary Photography. While he makes a clear separation between his design career (“a job”) and his art (“work”), his design skills have emerged in several other light-hearted works that eschew photography for more graphic devices, such as *I Care For You* and *The Ideal Standing Position for Elevators* (2001) – 25 acrylic squares, arranged in a 5 x 5 grid, with black dots that shifted from dice-like formations to abstract arrangements (Fig. 6). Sylvester’s design skills are also apparent in the glossy catalogues he produces for his own exhibitions.

While Sylvester’s catalogue essayists have sometimes sought to move the discussion of his work away from advertising, it is one thing to point out that Sylvester does not intend his work to be a critique of advertising, and quite another to suggest that it does not resemble its look.²⁹ The style of Sylvester’s images – with their beautiful people, slick imagery and sloganistic titles – are familiar to us from consumer culture. Sylvester confesses: “That must just come from me... the product of a ferocious magazine-reader that I am.” Admitting he is drawn to the work of US fashion photographer Steven Meisel he says: “The works often look... like post-advertising.”³⁰ By this we might assume he is referring to a form of existentially infused commodity branding, which has become a consistent feature in his work. As well as the various works already mentioned, Sylvester had produced images featuring Subway rolls (*Your First Love Is Your Last Love*, 2004), Starbucks (*Our Future Was Ours*, 2005), Dunkin’ Donuts (*Don’t Call It Love If They Don’t Love You*, 2006), and a can of

TAB soft drink (*My Baby Message Me*, 2006). Fast food, in particular, serves to establish an everyday connection with viewers, and stands for instant gratification in the face of deeper, unfulfilled desires. In 2005 and 2006 almost every photograph showed a lone figure in a state of emotional loss using a branded product. He says: “My work shows how a banal object can sometimes hold some great significance on a given occasion.”³¹ In a curious semiotic play, he has even played with characters whose names come to resemble brands, such as the two smokers *Philip and Morris* (2003). Similarly, in *Don't Substitute a Life to Satisfy Mine* (2007), the name of a packet of American breakfast cereal, Cheerios, serves to underline a break-up narrative.

Needless to say, critics have not always reacted favourably to images that so conspicuously mimic the procedures of advertising. Peter Timms observed a “campy wit” but took the work’s “patronising irony” as an instance of contemporary art’s engagement with the “superficial manifestations of consumer capitalism.”³² In a similar spirit, in his review of Sylvester’s solo exhibition in 2007, Robert Nelson wrote: “The problem with Sylvester’s work is that to realise the youthful fantasies disseminated by advertising, the photographic work attempts to look slick and life-stylish, to the point that the artist seems to identify with the vacant content. He celebrates the dumb passivity of gorgeous models whose skin is perfect and who have nothing to do.”³³ Not dissimilarly, in a review of Sylvester’s work in 1999, I suggested he was a saboteur of advertising.³⁴ Such critical responses are equally inadequate to the extent that they all assume a moralistic content to the work, which is either too obvious, not clear enough, or simply – as in my case – a projection. As we have seen, Sylvester is not *setting out* to critique advertising, even if its glossy realm provides him with a visual language readily translatable to his ambiguous and sentimental imagery, and even if the resulting images might look askew.

Spectacular Complicity?

I don’t think my work is very intellectual at all – it’s all very basic.

–Darren Sylvester³⁵

To better understand Sylvester’s work, and its curiously sentimental response to spectacle, we need to unearth the legacy of debates around Pop art. Since the 1960s, Pop art has looked to mass culture for themes, materials and production terms. Artists have made use of the seductive images and production methods in order to bring them back into the implied, or assumed, critical space of art. In this way mass culture has been held up for critique. But while Sylvester’s art is fully engaged with mass culture – and in certain respects continues the Pop quest to explore the possibility of authentic experience under mass consumerism – his work does not participate in the oppositional legacy of the twentieth-century avant-garde. In this sense it is part of a trajectory that Johanna Drucker

identifies in her 2005 book, *Sweet Dreams: Contemporary Art and Complicity*, in which defiance has been replaced with complicity.³⁶ Simply put, Drucker's main thesis is "that the critical frameworks inherited from the avant-garde and passed through the academic discourses of current art history are constrained by the expectation of negativity. Fine art should not have to bear the burden of criticality nor can it assume superiority as if operating outside of the ideologies it has long presumed to critique."³⁷ Artists and critics alike, she argues, exist in a "condition of complicity", and as a result, older critical traditions – especially those inherited from the Frankfurt School – are woefully unable to adequately address their work. In short, the expectation of critical negativity constrains our readings.

Drucker's diagnosis certainly resonates with the critical reception of Sylvester's work. Australian critics, preferring to see art as an alternative to the business of life as usual, have tended to expect irony and critique. Sylvester's appropriation of an advertising look is interpreted as a strategy for analysing the consumer world and holding it to account. For his part, Sylvester appears to ridicule such mass cultural anxiety on the part of critics. Thus, in the gap between Sylvester's intentions and the work's critical reception, it is no longer a question, as it has been for Warhol scholarship, of asking whether Sylvester is a deadpan social critic or innocent celebrant. Questions of good and bad faith, or moral integrity and self-awareness – which as Drucker notes are "intertwined with the entire history of modernity" – are simply misplaced.³⁸ Nor is there any "traumatic realism" in sight.³⁹ Instead, it is simply their ambiguousness – their coolness and cloying intimacy – that gives Sylvester's best works their allure.

What Thierry de Duve has said of Warhol's work might also be said of Sylvester's: "it promises nothing; it testifies."⁴⁰ But what does his work testify to? What is the alternative to reading it, contra Sylvester, as a detached commentary on contemporary middle-class life and its false promises of fulfilment? Is it the tantalising possibility that Sylvester's work is nothing more than a mirror to the sheer banality of contemporary sensibility? After all, the emotional condition of pop music, to which the artist aspires, is indeed a sublime form of nihilism. And yet, Sylvester's forlorn characters and "is-that-all-there-is?" sentiment seems borne of the uncertain chasm between belief and cynicism. Thus, regardless of what the artist claims about his work, despite his own blithe acceptance of the state of things, I would argue that his depictions of a wholly self-absorbed social class remains an implicit critique. While not exactly a "critique of consumerism" – and more interesting because of it – Sylvester's uneasy combination of advertising-style imagery and Pop existentialism is an outcome of the culture of individualised intimacy under neo-liberal capitalism. At the risk of sounding out of step with this "real world", Sylvester's strongest works – we might call them "image-texts" – must be read as poetic records of the peculiarly emotionless "affect bubbles" generated by early twenty-first century media culture.

1. "Darren Sylvester in conversation with Alasdair Foster," *Photofile* 80 (Winter 2007): 19.
2. At a time when it is more customary for artists to leave their work open to multiple critical interpretations, Sylvester's comment that "Anyone who thinks my work is a critique of consumerism is out of step with the real world" is unusually controlling. Effectively, the artist proposes that the correct reading of the work is available only to those "in step" with the real world. By extension, the ideal viewer of Sylvester's images is not the critic — who is, conventionally at least, critically detached from society — but the average person who is immersed in the world.
3. Unless otherwise stated, all quotes from the artist are drawn from an interview conducted at William Mora Galleries on September 12, 2007.
4. Sylvester studied at Charles Sturt University in Riverina, an agricultural region of southwestern New South Wales.
5. In *Darren, You Got Us Into This. You Get Us Out* (2000) — featuring a lonely small tent, illuminated from inside, within a tall pine forest — he insinuates himself into an obscure narrative suggested by the title. *You Should Let Go Of A Dying Relationship* (2006), two video performances of Kate Bush and David Bowie performing "Wuthering Heights" (1978) and "Heroes" (1977) is even more oblique. Why this "dance-off" between Bush and Bowie? Sylvester says they are just clips he admires, and ones that enabled him to explore cross-dressing, while he used himself "simply as a control thing...a challenge and a puzzle to copy the dance moves". If these restaged video clips now seem like a temporary departure, they also reveal an overt dimension of self-portraiture to his practice — and an artist prepared to play with his public identity.
6. "Darren Sylvester in conversation with Alasdair Foster," 21.
7. "Darren Sylvester in conversation with Alasdair Foster," 19.
8. Blair French, *Out of Time: Essays Between Photography and Art* (Adelaide: Contemporary Art Centre of South Australia, 2006), 39.
9. French, 39.
10. French, 39.
11. As Juliana Engberg has written of work that draws a parallel with the advertising and fashion world: "Ultimately there appears to be a kind of narcissism here. And of course an affectation of boredom that hints at both a societal insufficiency of lived experience and an insufficiency of self. Fashion advertising works to promote desire and unrequitedness simultaneously...supermodernity is a state of alienation amidst the mirror of chrome, glass and reflection that characterises our exterior and interior spaces." See Juliana Engberg, "Say What!?", *Photofile* 65 (May 2002): 37.
12. Russell Storer, "Look at Me," *Photofile* 65 (May 2002): 8.
13. French, 40.
14. French, 42.
15. French, 40.
16. Sylvester's practice of buying props from eBay first became apparent in *Don't Lose Yourself in Tomorrow* (2004), an uncharacteristic video that explored Pikachu, one of the creatures from the world of Pokemon, from the perspective of a Japanese child — based on a news report of an incident of mass seizures in 1997.
17. Terry Smith, "The Provincialism Problem," *Artforum* 13 (September 1974): 54–59.
18. "Darren Sylvester Interview with Kate Rhodes," in *Remote Control: Contemporary Photomedia*, exhibition catalogue (Melbourne: National Gallery of Victoria, 2005), 29.
19. Sylvester's *No Fun No More* (2006) even restages the black-and-white photograph that appears on the cover of the Joy Division album *Closer* (1980), one of the most depressive albums ever released.
20. Storer, 8.
21. Storer, 8.
22. "Darren Sylvester Interview with Kate Rhodes," 29.
23. Andy Warhol quoted in Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Andy Warhol's One-Dimensional Art," in *Neo-Avant-garde and Culture Industry: Essays on European and American Art from 1955 to 1975* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), 467.
24. Andy Warhol, *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol: From A to B and Back Again* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975), 101.
25. "Darren Sylvester Interview with Kate Rhodes," 28.
26. Buchloh, 488.
27. Clinique supplied their make-up for free, both in 2001 and 2007, and for Sylvester's 2001 exhibition *A Life Falls Apart Without Order*, were "at the opening for colour coaching and skincare advice".
28. In this sense the masks appeared as death masks. Indeed, many of his recent works take time and mortality as a central concern. *All You Need To Know You Knew Early* (2007) depicts an older woman involved in a TV interview, while *Time Has Life's Meaning* (2007) features a young couple in a photo-booth ("two people who inevitably won't be together in the future"). Describing these works, Sylvester sounds like an adolescent discovering existentialism: "Time creates meaning in life because it's the only thing we can't stop...memories give life meaning." A similar melancholy pervades an image of a group of friends lying on a rug at night gazing at the sky, *Forgotten And Alone But Trying* (2007): "I wanted them to be gazing up into the wonder, thinking about the cosmos, life and themselves...You feel small and insignificant but at least we're all trying." Likewise an image of a surgeon at a hospital, *Who You Are Or How I Meet You, I Don't Know* (2007), which Sylvester describes as a note to his future doctor. Arguably, these more complex narratives are more difficult to decode and hence less successful.
29. See Nick O'Malley's essay in *God Only Knows What I'd Be Without You* from 2000 and Anthony Carew essay in 2007.
30. "Darren Sylvester Interview with Kate Rhodes," 29.
31. "Darren Sylvester Interview with Kate Rhodes," 29.
32. Peter Timms, "Excruciating Minutia," *The Age*, August 9, 2000.
33. Robert Nelson, "Darren Sylvester," *The Age*, September 5, 2007.
34. Daniel Palmer, "Darren Sylvester: London Paris Tokyo New York," *Frieze* 47 (July–August 1999): 110–11.
35. "Darren Sylvester Interview with Kate Rhodes," 29.
36. Johanna Drucker, *Sweet Dreams: Contemporary Art and Complicity* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2005).
37. Drucker, 247.
38. Drucker, 250.
39. Hal Foster proposes the psychoanalytic notion of "traumatic realism" as a way to short circuit what he considers the *simulacral* reading of Warholian Pop as superficial and impassive versus a *referential* view of Warhol, advanced by critics like Thomas Crow, who push Warhol to political engagement. Foster suggests we must accept both projections as accurate, of Warhol "as referential and simulacral, connected and disconnected, affective and affectless, critical and complacent". See *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), 128–9.
40. Thierry de Duve, "Andy Warhol, or The Machine Perfected," trans. Rosalind Krauss, *October* 48 (Spring, 1989): 6.

Fig. 1
Douglas Gordon
24 Hour Psycho 1993
Video installation
Dimensions variable
From *Psycho* 1960,
dir. Alfred Hitchcock,
Universal Pictures ©
Universal.
Installation view: MoCA
at Geffen Contemporary,
2001-2002
Courtesy Douglas Gordon
and Gagosian Gallery.
Psycho 1960, dir. Alfred
Hitchcock, Universal
Studios © Universal.



Slow Dance: Douglas Gordon's *24 Hour Psycho*

Morgan Thomas

"Magic is sometimes very close to nothing." The line is from a recent film by the artist Douglas Gordon (made with Philippe Parreno). In the context of questions of the legacy of Pop in contemporary art, it makes a revealing counterpoint to Andy Warhol's famous statement, "I want to be a machine". Thinking of Warhol, one cannot but be aware of a push to negate every transcendentalism associated with art's history. Thinking of Gordon, an artist working very much in the wake of Pop, it seems that a certain mobility between subjective and objective, transcendental and material, high and low, surface and depth, overtakes the Warholian desire-to-be-machinic. The line (from *Zidane, A 21st Century Portrait*) sends us into a universe that is at once "Pop" and "magical", one where a re-animation of the art object overtakes the parodic flavour of so much post-Pop art. If "magic" conveys this re-enchantment of the artwork, Gordon's ongoing concern with the interplay between a highly manipulable "machinic" vision, physicality, spectatorship and movement could be said to imply a reflective engagement with the "transcendental" conditions that structure contemporary life.¹ Can Gordon's work, with its distinctive, even Baroque mobility and elasticity, then help to clarify the seemingly paradoxical notion of "transcendental Pop" with regard to contemporary art?

The idea of "transcendental Pop" has force in the current situation because it vividly evokes a certain inflection of Pop art occurring in the work of many contemporary artists – an inflection of the logic of repetition that lies at the heart of Pop. For the past 15 years, from *24 Hour Psycho* (1993) to *Zidane* (2006) and beyond, Gordon has made, among other things, a series of film- and video-based artworks that exemplify this rethinking and replaying of Pop repetition in contemporary art. Looking here at what is still probably Gordon's best-known artwork, *24 Hour Psycho*, I suggest that it is this logic of inflection – repetition *as* inflection – that provides the most useful way to grasp the Baroque turn that Pop takes in Gordon's case, and perhaps also in the work of other artists working along similar lines.

24 Hour Psycho takes the slippage between cinema and video as its point of departure. The first showing of *24 Hour Psycho* took place at the Tramway exhibition space in Gordon's home town, Glasgow, in 1993. Using a rejigged VCR, a radically slowed-down video version of Alfred Hitchcock's 108-minute-long *Psycho* (1959) was projected onto a translucent free-standing screen in a darkened gallery space, set up so that both sides of the screen, the image and its verso, could be seen. Gordon's slowed-down version ran for roughly – not precisely – 24 hours. Gordon's video version altered the speed of the film from 24 to two frames per second. Two later presentations of *24 Hour Psycho* are also worth noting. On 28 February 2004, as part of a Gordon retrospective, the Hirshhorn Museum organised "All-night *Psycho*", an all-night party featuring DJs and live music along with a screening of *24 Hour Psycho*. Viewers registered in advance and were provided with shower caps and toothbrushes to take in to the screening – oddly, given that the famous shower scene, which lasts an hour in Gordon's version, features neither of these things. For some time, and most recently in venues including the Musée d'Art Moderne in Paris and San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMoMA) in 2007, Gordon has exhibited an ongoing installational work with the apparently casual title *Pretty much every film and video work from about 1992 until now. To be seen on monitors, some with headphones, others run silently, and all simultaneously*. The installation, "classified as a single work", according to SFMoMA, is made up of 50 of Gordon's film and video works, including *24 Hour Psycho*, presented not as projections but as video played through an assortment of monitors of various sizes and shapes (one for each work), placed on shelves, stands or on the floor, with the titles of specific works within the work given as wall text. The types of monitors used and their arrangement in a given space change from show to show.² In these recent versions, *24 Hour Psycho* adopts a more modest, perhaps self-effacing mode of self-presentation, one that recalls idioms of Minimalist installation and sculpture.

What to make of this slowing down of a classic like *Psycho*, this merest, or idlest, of gestures? Among other things, it is a gesture instituting what is now widely seen as a contemporary classic: a canonical 24 hours in the art of the 1990s and beyond, with a literature accumulating around it and – perhaps surprisingly, given its re-run or structurally derivative character – a cult value of its own (the work, as one writer comments, is seldom seen but everywhere cited). The different repetitions of *24 Hour Psycho* feed the aura.

There is something irresistible about the choice of *Psycho* as a point of origin or master-text. From the time of its release, Hitchcock's film – its title almost a nick-name for the word itself – has been seen as something of a primer in psychoanalysis: the ultimate instance of cinema *as* psychoanalysis, if not the perfect dream-space for the psychoanalyst or film theorist. If *Psycho* is like a parallel text for Freudian and post-Freudian understandings of modern subjectivity, a work of interpretation psychoanalysing the normal face of

this subjectivity and the (“psycho”) truth or horror behind it, what does that make *24 Hour Psycho* in its wake? During a round table discussion on image projection in the journal *October*, Hal Foster suggests that the effect of works by Gordon is usually that of “shattering the ‘persona’ of the cited film”. Foster speaks of a “hystericization of film” and of a possibly unconscious “use” of psychoanalysis in Gordon’s work; he goes on to suggest that the work sets out to elicit a “hysterical response” from its viewer.³ Christine Ross, writing on performativity in contemporary video art, treats the relation between Hitchcock’s film and Gordon’s video work in different yet still distinctly psychoanalytical terms. Ross argues that *24 Hour Psycho* enacts *Psycho*’s epochal “representation of the loss of the authoritarian paternal figure at the heart of contemporary polymorphous subjectivity”, rendering this loss present through an activation of “perceptual and memory dysfunction” rather than through recourse to spectacle or narrative.⁴ If, for Ross, during *24 Hour Psycho*, there is usually “nothing to see”, such a “nothing”, or “formlessness”, in effect represents this loss of authority and performs a critical function in its treatment of social norms and the fact of their attenuation.

These readings call attention to how *24 Hour Psycho* relates to *Psycho* in particular – and psychoanalysis in general – yet what is also striking is the extent to which they replay by now well-established lines of argument concerning appropriation in art as pre-eminently a strategy of cultural critique. For Ross, it seems, Gordon takes the message “behind” *Psycho* further than *Psycho* could, conveying it to the viewer in a manner that is “performative”, more keyed to the corporeality of the viewer’s response. The work of critique is thus present in both Hitchcock and (more radically) in Gordon’s work and is directed at general social and cultural tendencies and shifts. With Foster, this critique turns more sharply back on its model. In keeping with his notion of a “critical postmodernism”, Gordon’s work, according to Foster, “breaks up the illusion” that remains embedded in the work it cites; it de-mythologises the work. Writers including Rosalind Krauss, Craig Owens and Foster himself made analogous claims for artists like Sherrie Levine, Louise Lawler, and others associated with the label “appropriation art” during the late 1970s and 1980s. Behind the positions and strategies developed by these critics and artists, the long shadow of Andy Warhol – and Warholian Pop – is unmistakable. Indispensable source of these artists’ use of appropriation and subsequent discourses on art as an activity of cultural critique, demythologisation and subversion – and frequently invoked by Gordon himself in relation to his work – Warhol could be seen, alongside Hitchcock, as a second master-text or father-figure for *24 Hour Psycho*. With *24 Hour Psycho*, one could say, Gordon finds a way to synthesise two key strands of Warhol’s body of work: the repetitive replication of “ready-made” and often iconic popular cultural images in the screen-prints; and, more conspicuously, the manic idleness and slowness that are the defining traits of long-haul films like *Empire* (1964) and *Sleep* (1963). (Gordon even comes up with his own version of the former work in his *Bootleg*

Empire.) Here it should not escape us that – in different ways, certainly – for writers like Foster, Annette Michelson, and Thierry de Duve, Warhol’s work figures as a kind of primal scene for an analysis of the “rupture”, or double-break, that announces the cutting edge of a critical postmodernism: a break, on one side, with modern aesthetics and its ideals, and, on the other, with the visual apparatus of the “culture industry”.

Let me recall a few fragments of these analyses. First, Thierry de Duve on Warhol as the “machine perfected”:

[Warhol] knew not only how to behave as a painting machine, but also as a filming machine, a printing machine, a recording machine, and as the cash register of the art market. He perfected the modern desire to be a machine in displaying its retrospective meaning and in making explicit that the perfect mapping of the aesthetic field onto the field of political economy coincides with monopoly capitalism. [...] His cinema plays out the bland dreams of 1950s Hollywood only to materialize the terror that the Hollywood of the '20s still knew how to signal. One doesn't take on the existence of the perfected machine, one doesn't turn into a camera or a tape recorder, without also taking on the existence of all machines and above all those that kill: the electric chair and the graves-on-wheels of the car crashes.⁵

Second, Annette Michelson on Warhol’s “intervention”, in particular with regard to the work of Stan Brakhage (who disliked Warhol’s films):

[Warhol’s films] generate another kind of temporality, for they take, as it were, their time, the distended time of contemplation and expectation [...] Warhol’s parody of the film industry stands, nevertheless, as a powerful gloss on the Frankfurt School’s analysis of the culture industry. To reread that text is to recall to what degree it focuses upon film production as the paradigmatic mode of the culture industry, and how sharply its critique is directed at what we now see as the construction and positioning of the spectator.⁶

What Michelson names the “rupture within filmic practice” achieved by Warhol’s pre-1968 Factory cuts, then, not only against the subjectivist “filmic perpetual present” of Brakhage (and others), but also the spatiotemporal organisation of narrative that informs “industrial cinema”. Warhol is no longer Brakhage, nor yet Douglas Sirk, but precisely their difference.

And thirdly, Foster, writing on Warhol’s “response to the postwar society of the spectacle, of mass media and commodity signs”, his judicious “selection” of “moments when this spectacle cracks”:

Different kinds of repetition are put into play by Warhol: repetitions that fix on the traumatic real, that screen it, that produce it. And this multi-

plicity makes for the Warholian paradox not only of images that are both affective and affectless, but also of viewers that are neither integrated (which is the ideal of most modern aesthetics: the subject composed in contemplation) nor dissolved (which is the effect of much popular culture). [...] Such is the subject-effect of his work, too, and it resonates in some art after pop as well: some photorealism, some appropriation art, some object art today. In other words, there is a genealogy of traumatic realism, and it has surfaced strongly in the present.⁷

In certain respects, these reflections on Warhol perhaps tell us all we need to know about Gordon's work. The genealogy tying Warhol to recent forms of appropriation, the psychoanalytical framing of the irruptive power of repetition, the crossing of avant-gardism and film as paradigmatic cultural form, the brilliance and ruthlessness of a truly "machinic" art, the logic of "rupture". Consider this comment from Gordon: "I like the idea that a rupture or a perversion of a large system can occur through the focus on ambiguous detail, and that this can alter the whole fabric of society."⁸ Beside the demand for detail, Gordon's statement voices a grand ambition, appealing both to critical and a psychoanalytical understandings of art's potential (as "rupture" or "perversion"). We could recall Ross's view of Gordon's work as a subversive dissolution of the visual forms and norms of power in contemporary society. From another point of view, we could think of recent examples of artworks using the moving image to create a comparable interplay between a grand vision and (like Gordon) a "focus" on small detail in the citation of different art-historical precedents and visual styles: Eve Sussman's *89 Seconds at Alcázar*, for example, with its elaborate enactment of the staging of Velasquez's *Las Meninas*, or Matthew Barney's *Cremaster* series, returning in detail – and, as with Gordon, on an epic scale – to the visual intricacies of everything from the appurtenances of Masonic ritual to the ornamental excess of Baroque Prague. With Gordon, as with Sussman or Barney, we could then be witnessing an extended replay of the appropriative strategies advanced, after Warhol, by artists like Sherrie Levine and critics like Foster during the late 1970s and 1980s – perhaps, in all three cases, a more nostalgic replay of those strategies.

All these precedents and points of comparison no doubt offer crucial contextualisations of the basic rationale of *24 Hour Psycho*. Gordon is in a way, from one point of view, yet another post-Pop or post-post-Pop artist, one who comes close – very close – to the general profile of appropriation art and the critical and art-historical arguments that have accompanied and supported it. Yet I would suggest that there is another way to look at Gordon's work that these approaches miss. What makes *24 Hour Psycho* compelling? Unlike Barney, Gordon does not offer a spectacle. There is none of the historicist concern with verisimilitude that informs Sussman's meticulous re-enactment. The use of quotation does not have to do with a critical mastery of the original or of the "myth" of originality as such, as has been said of Levine. It would be more meaningful to say that

Gordon enshrines the “illusion” of Hitchcock’s film than to say, as Foster does, that he “breaks it down”. The illusion is exactly what remains, what lingers, in Gordon’s slowing of *Psycho*. Perhaps, then, *24 Hour Psycho* is compelling just insofar as it detains us, holds us – for five minutes, five hours, whatever – in this lingering that happens from “within” the body of the film itself, and that reaches out to draw us in – to embrace us. *24 Hour Psycho* is a beautiful algorithm of fascination and of how fascination perpetuates and extends itself.

One way to think about this fascination is to consider the ambiguous ontology of the work. What is it? In an essay on Gordon, the writer Nancy Spector mostly opts to refer to Gordon’s artworks using the moving image as “films”. In a footnote, Spector acknowledges that Gordon’s “found-film footage is actually transferred to video for its presentation and generally shown in continuous loops”, yet offers the point that “the work so clearly references the cinema” as her reason for referring to it as film.⁹ The counter-argument to this reasoning, taking the work as structurally bound up with video technology – as it surely is in the case of *24 Hour Psycho* – which makes it relatively easy to slow the film and watch it repeatedly, is also problematic. In the Spring 2003 *October* round table to which Foster contributed, *24 Hour Psycho* is considered under the heading of “The Projected Image in Contemporary Art”, yet by this time Gordon was already exhibiting the work, along with others, on monitors installed in different ways in exhibition spaces – a significantly different mode of presentation. “Video installation” loses the umbilical connection with cinema but is less restrictive than “video projection”. Yet again, there is no reason why *24 Hour Psycho* could not be shown using DVD technology. A further complication is the soundtrack, so pivotal to the suspense and drama of the original *Psycho*. In some presentations the sound is silenced; in others it remains in partially muted form, necessarily lurching, muffled and no longer graspable, having to compete with the ambient sounds in the place where it is played.

Two aspects of this elusive ontology – leaving aside the difficult question of whether there *is* a work – nevertheless stand out. First, there is the way *24 Hour Psycho* plays on the fluidity and transferability that condition how we now look at film and video, and film as video (or as television, or DVD). The second is how the presentational forms of *24 Hour Psycho* take advantage of the no less slippery relation between what is in the frame – as a “virtual” or seemingly immaterial and unlocatable presence – and the place or space that it fleetingly occupies. The freestanding screen at the Tramway, for example, and in other video projections of *24 Hour Psycho*, was translucent; the projection was a back-projection. You could walk around the video image and see it in reverse on the other side of the screen (Figs. 1 and 2). On one side you could move close up to the screen and see your shadow. (Such a presentation calls for a certain kind of screen – a thin, finely perforated screen, like a mesh. The play of “material” and “immaterial” presence, of virtuality and physicality, of location and



Fig. 2
Douglas Gordon
24 Hour Psycho 1993
Video installation
Dimensions variable
From *Psycho* 1960,
dir. Alfred Hitchcock,
Universal Pictures ©
Universal.
Courtesy Douglas Gordon
and Gagosian Gallery.
Psycho 1960, dir. Alfred
Hitchcock, Universal
Studios © Universal.

dislocation, thus unfolds in the grain of the image, enabling the light to pass through the screen and make itself visible on the other side. In an almost painterly manner – one might think here of Gordon’s declared interest in Abstract Expressionism, in particular the work of Barnett Newman, with its relatively flat and thinly painted yet differentiated zones of colour – this mode of presentation simultaneously intensifies two seemingly opposed aspects of the projected video image as screen and surface: its ephemerality or *kinesis* and the physical presence that “holds” it in time and space.)

Another way to relate to the work in this context: you could walk away, join the bystanders, leaving it as a radiant presence somewhere off in the distance. Installation shots of screen-projected versions of *24 Hour Psycho* look like nightclubs with their inevitable widescreen televisions. The Hirshhorn’s “All-night *Psycho*”, turning the work into the occasion for a party, with DJs playing in its vicinity, plays up this aspect of *24 Hour Psycho* – this sense in which it remains a remote force, or force-field, even as it lets go of the spectator or seems to invite the spectator’s movement away from it. A different situation arises in the ongoing multi-part installation *Pretty much every film and video work from about 1992 until now ...*, where a loop of *24 Hour Psycho* runs together with 49 other works by Gordon, playing simultaneously on differently sized and shaped monitors installed in various ways in given settings. In this case it is sometimes the physical presence of the work that is accented – its sculptural as well as installational elements, its co-presence with other related works playing alongside it. You will probably not move away into the distance in responding to this situation, yet your eyes are likely to wander from one screen to another. You are aware of the work and distracted from it, looking at it or retaining a residual consciousness of its concurrent continuation while not looking at it.

24 Hour Psycho appears, then, to thrive on playing both background and figure, just as it encourages movements of advancing and receding, distraction and attention, mobility and immobility, on the part of its audience. There is a banality about all this: like Gordon’s slowing-down of his source material, the chameleon-like quality of *24 Hour Psycho* echoes contemporary viewing habits tied to more general historical movements, including the development and diffusion of video and other visual technologies (the VCR made it possible to record or replay a video again and again, pausing and fast-forwarding at will; we speak of being glued to the television, or it remains on in the background while other things are going on; we alternate across multiple windows and applications open on the desktop).

Yet what is remarkable is how the banal, quotidian dimension of *24 Hour Psycho* coincides with the seemingly inhuman patience that informs the work in all its manifestations: somewhere in the middle of all the movements it engenders, the drawn-out freefall of the film-video continues regardless. We “catch” or

are drawn into this slow – endless – unfolding for a while, but can finally never keep up with it. We have seen *24 Hour Psycho* already, speeded up, any number of times (on late-night TV, on DVD); but in seeing it, for a while, we also see that we will never have seen it, that we cannot and will never be able to see it all. Although for some commentators, thinking about this work in more formal terms, the structure of *24 Hour Psycho* is essentially that of a loop, a consideration of this interplay between virtuality and physicality, between the work's elusive "body" and the occasions or places of its viewing, suggests a different logic at work: that of a spiralling outward and inward, a "spacing" that occurs both inside and outside the frame of the screen or monitor. If *24 Hour Psycho* unfolds as a fractal repetition that is and is not *Psycho* – the staggering of the frame-by-frame movement is discernible, like a film with a stutter – in the same way, the intervals during which we look at it and our inability to completely see it, like the party or the darkened gallery space where it plays, are and are not *24 Hour Psycho*: a work constructed precisely so that its excess, and these limits that are functions of this excess, might be encountered.

In a recent essay entitled "Absorbed in the Action", Michael Fried has commented on the centrality of the thematics of "absorption" in Gordon's and Parreno's *Zidane*, linking his interest in the film to other works by Gordon including the video work *Déjà Vu* (2000).¹⁰ For Fried, this absorption is especially evident in, or on, the face of Zinédine Zidane during much of the film – a face that looks absolutely focused on what is happening, on his part in the match taking place. Fried does not pursue the question of the role of absorption in other works by Gordon here. Still, it is possible to think of how the implacable "focus" (a word Gordon also uses) that *24 Hour Psycho* turns on the "detail" of *Psycho* could be construed as a case of the absorption that is associated with aspects of modern pictorialism in Fried's writing and that typically distinguishes itself from the dispersed and situational (or "theatrical") *mise-en-scènes* of Minimalism and installational art in general (where, for Fried, in contrast to effects of "frontality" or "presentness" in artworks that would "absorb" the beholder, the work rhetorically effaces or absents itself, depending upon the viewer's engagement for its realisation).¹¹ In a way, this characterisation of *24 Hour Psycho* seems very apt. Yet does it not also miss something in the work: for example, a certain structural co-implication of continuity and interruption, attention and distraction? Let us not forget its "real-time" or durational aspect – the durational "presence", at once literalist and theatrical, of Minimalist artworks is what Fried found so bothersome in the essay "Art and Objecthood" – underscored in its title, as if the work were like a 24-hour pharmacy or supermarket. What is striking in *24 Hour Psycho* is how theatricality and absorption never cease to converge and how their convergence sets in motion the spiralling movement of the work. (And in fact Fried, in his essay, ends up speaking of a "sliding" between theatricality and absorption in *Zidane*, taking the film as an illumination and exploration of a "new relationship" between two terms he had kept in opposition to one another in earlier writings; absorption, personified in Zidane, nevertheless remains the



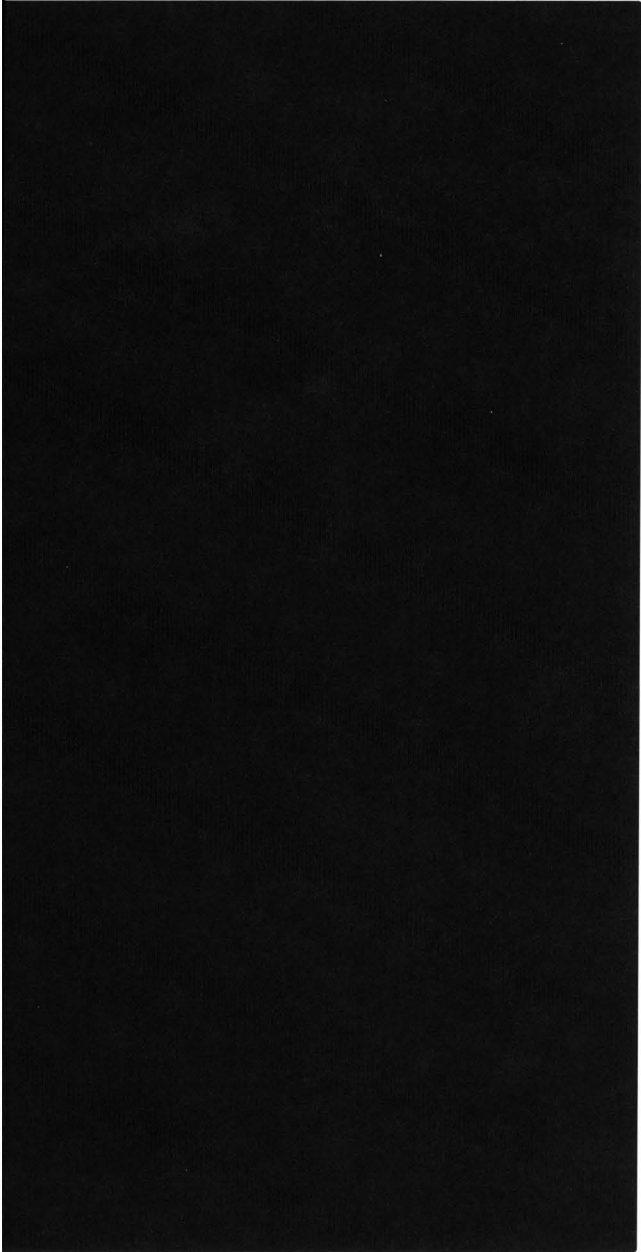


Fig. 3
Douglas Gordon
24 Hour Psycho 1993
Video installation
Dimensions variable
From *Psycho* 1960,
dir. Alfred Hitchcock,
Universal Pictures ©
Universal.
Courtesy Douglas Gordon
and Gagosian Gallery.
Psycho 1960, dir. Alfred
Hitchcock, Universal
Studios © Universal.

dominant term in his analysis.¹²) Its field of force, as I have suggested, acts through a certain spacing – a stream of details that do not add up, an imbrication of focus and loss of focus, of action and inaction, of presentness and the limits of presentness. The work's fascination lies in this play between absorption and theatricality – how each inflects the other – that it constantly opens up. Fascination might then be one name for the “modulation” or “transformation of inflection” where absorption and theatricality meet.¹³

In Gilles Deleuze's *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, “modulation” and the “transformation of inflection” are traits of the Baroque, defined functionally, more than in a rigidly periodising sense, in terms of its operation of producing folds. Following Leibniz, Alexander Koch and others, Deleuze takes inflection as the “genetic element” of the fold or curve that “passes through an infinite number of points and never admits a tangent at any of these points” and “envelops an infinitely cavernous and porous world, constituting more than a line and less than a surface”.¹⁴ Inflection is “weightless” since it is “not yet in the world” but is the world – or its beginning or transformation – *as* fold.¹⁵ The fold is a mobilisation of space and substance, matter and force, that in a sense has no outside. Unfolding, from this point of view, is only to fold in another way; the space around the curved figure is as much part of the curve as the figure itself. It too is mobilised, activated.

The key Leibnizian figure exemplifying the communication and movement between heterogeneous regions that, in Deleuze's account, characterises these Baroque traits of folding and inflection is the Baroque house. Such a communication occurs in the continuity and connection, or fold, between the lower floor, with its windows and horizontal extension, associated with materiality and sensation, and the sequestered upper level, preserve of abstraction, immateriality, the soul, also understood as a fold, as “full of folds”. The pictorial organisation or architecture of Caravaggio's paintings sometimes operates in a similar way: the draping in the upper reaches of the scene becomes the place of an allegory of epiphany that relays and resonates with what is happening below. It is significant that, in contrast to Renaissance art, in general the valorisation of the upper or the high in Baroque aesthetics does not move in the direction of a summit but appears as a scene of suspension, of elevation and “elation”, not as an end but rather as continuity – seen, for example, in the trance-like state of Bernini's Saint Teresa, who, as Deleuze notes, gazes up towards the light, not at the angel with his arrow in front of her. Here the fold works not only according to a logic of movement and transformation (or inflection) overriding the opposition between positive and negative, not only according to a presumption of co-extension and connectivity. It implies a logic of differential repetition, seriality and complication, setting up the possibility of communication between different zones or fields of force. As in the case of the closed room of the Baroque house, the fold, as Deleuze conceptualises it, makes possible a *certain* interiority – a certain autonomy or coherence of

the “inside”. It is this provisional coherence that allows it to communicate with the exterior, to harmonise with it without being subsumed by it. There are “folds between folds” in “this complex system of interactions”. Deleuze’s account of the Baroque inflection allows us to point to a different understanding of *24 Hour Psycho* – one where it can be read as an inflection that sets in train a series of further inflections, a “complex system” of transformation and interaction. Consider once again, for example, how this work inflects Hitchcock’s film, seen as trail-blazing with regard to its levels of violence and horror. To a significant degree, this violence is muted or dissolved altogether in Gordon’s version, where the fast cutting of the original film loses its momentum and where the intense drama and narrative power of Bernard Herrman’s score is effectively neutralised. In contrast to *Psycho*, *24 Hour Psycho* is in a certain sense a long take – a “film” without internal cuts. It is a curve that “does not admit tangents”. The complex effects of this are apparent in the shower scene (Fig. 3). There is in fact remarkably little manifest physical violence in this scene; the score and editing do most of the work in pushing us to imagine and fear it. (It was filmed over a seven-day period, using 70 different camera set-ups for 45 seconds of footage making up just part of the scene.) What is left of this in Gordon’s work? Here, as in other scenes in the film, the stilling of cinematic movement, itself a movement, preserves the brilliant pictorialism (another form of framing) at work in Hitchcock’s famously precise story-boarding of this and all his films. It is as if we are back at the beginning of the making of *Psycho*. The serial moments of its genesis return. We find ourselves in the presence of the illusion in all its brilliance. Deleuze:

But the essence of the Baroque entails neither falling into nor emerging from illusion but rather *realising* something in illusion itself, or tying it to a spiritual *presence* that endows its spaces and fragments with a collective unity. [...] Prey to the giddiness of minute perceptions, they endlessly reach presence in illusion, in vanishment, in swooning, or by converting illusion into presence... The Baroque artists knew well that hallucination does not feign presence, but that presence is hallucinatory.¹⁶

In addition to this, interspersed with this, one could say that Gordon discloses another violence behind and within the violence we might attribute to *Psycho* and the horror genre. Instead of the violence that seeps into Hitchcock’s film through its editing, in the cutting from one shot to another and how this is timed, Gordon elasticises the film, giving us a “minute perception” of the “cut” between each frame – a fleeting sense of the very point of inflection, of the violence of apparition itself.

What of the Baroque predilection for weightlessness and elevation? In *The Fold*, Deleuze considers not only artists like Caravaggio, Tintoretto and El Greco, but traces an extension or inflection of the Baroque beyond the Baroque – for example, in Mallarmé’s writing, in particular with the Mallarmean figure

of the fan, and, most interestingly in this context, in the artist Tony Smith's famous account of his experience driving along the New Jersey Turnpike late one night before it was completed – an experience that in effect announced the end of his work as a painter while also marking a pivotal moment in art and critical debate on art. "It was a dark night and there were no lights or shoulder markers, railings or anything except the dark pavement moving through the landscape of the flats," Smith writes. He continues:

The road and much of the landscape was artificial, and yet it couldn't be called a work of art. On the other hand, it did something for me that art had never done. At first I didn't know what it was, but its effect was to liberate me from many of the views that I had had about art. It seemed that there had been a reality there that had not had any expression in art.¹⁷

According to Fried in "Art and Objecthood," Smith's description of his experience distils the "literalist" and "theatrical" attitude at the core of Minimalist theory and practice, with its valorisation of the situation over the object. (Fried does not consider the possibility that Smith's account could be read as a tale of absorption.) On the other hand, in his brief gloss, Deleuze picks out the interaction between the divergent zones or fields of force in play in this situation: "the sealed car speeding down the dark highway"¹⁸ (one can think as well of the dramatic, even baroque tenor of Smith's writing: "It was a dark night..."). Smith's description, in Deleuze's treatment, speaks of a transformation of the Baroque in a world that now moves towards divergence and dissonance "without resolution", a world where "a vertical harmonic can no longer be distinguished from a horizontal harmonic".¹⁹

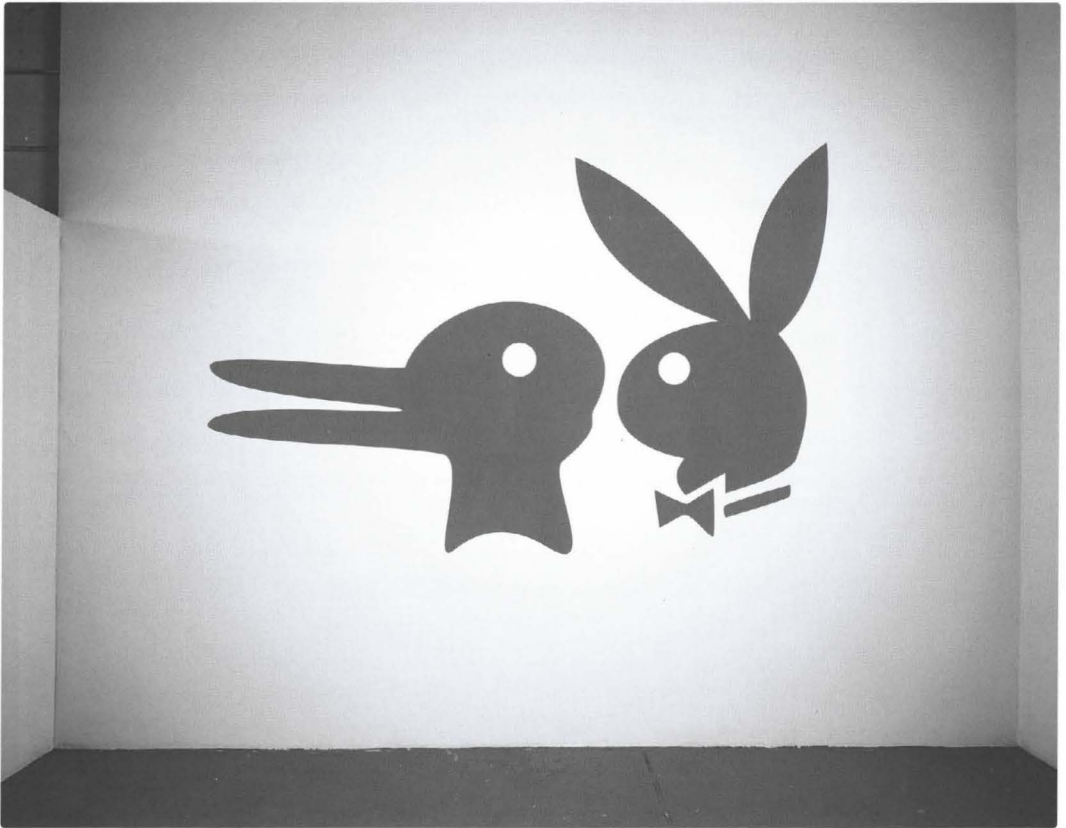
More than it does Warhol, *24 Hour Psycho* evokes Smith's description of his drive, a dream (for Smith, a reality) of continuity and delimitation, closure and extension, a "high" experienced as an emphatic horizontality, an unfolding in time that involves at once the feeling of a certain suspension and the sensation of a technologically determined velocity. In the same way, in *24 Hour Psycho*'s relation to *Psycho*, there is not a negation but a prolongation, a distension, a *suspension* of the suspense. The work delivers a baroque, trance-like epiphany for the classic horror film. The actors in *24 Hour Psycho* look blissfully weightless as they lift a paper, move around a room, or fall, as if participating in an extremely slow, carefully choreographed and fascinating dance. Their stillness is also an infinite elasticity.

For some, *24 Hour Psycho*, in its "buoyancy" (to use Deleuze's word for the effect of the surfaces of Caravaggio's painting), may seem to do little more than drift along in a retro vacuousness, merely repeating, in a leisurely manner, the blind, additive structures and psychoses of techno-capitalism. It is almost as if the work resonates too well, too smoothly, with current realities – including those of a hypothetically "connected" and mediatised new world order and its

relation to everyday life. But the fascination of *24 Hour Psycho* lies not in what it says about these realities but in what it does with them. *24 Hour Psycho* plays on the ways changing modes of sensation and receptivity in our present connect with “transcendental” or quasi-transcendental conditions, and on how the materials and forces shaping this present are themselves mobile, caught in multiple sequences of inflection and differentiation. In the world that it summons, a world that prizes an intensified everyday-ness that is neither parodic, nor anthropological, nor naively “literalist”, but fascinating, inflection is the infinity we have. Somewhere – everywhere and nowhere – Janet Leigh, or her body double, is always taking a shower.

1. My thanks to Ana Cardoso, João Simões and Joseph Tanke for their comments during the writing of this essay. In this way Gordon's work appears to leave itself open to the application of the word “transcendental” in both its colloquial usage, where it is associated with the mystical or the spiritual, and its more precise usage in a Kantian tradition in philosophy where “transcendental” is applied to a word (e.g. “knowledge,” “aesthetic”) to indicate a consideration of its conditions of possibility. Terms like “quasi-transcendental” and “transcendental empiricism” reflect the move to historicise or fictionalise this Kantian use of the word, simultaneously holding on to Kant's usage and leaving his *a priori* conception of the transcendental behind.
2. The Musée d'Art Moderne's version of the installation had a retro look; the videos were shown on small 1950s- or 1960s-style TV monitors arranged haphazardly, without seating, in a small area of a gallery in the museum, with works by other artists close by. In the SFMoMA version, the monitors were matte black and were set up more formally around the walls of a darkened room set aside for the installation, with lounge seating in the middle, suggesting a cross between a TV room and a movie theatre.
3. Hal Foster, “Round Table: The Projected Image in Contemporary Art,” *October* 104 (Spring 2003): 84. See also George Baker's contribution to this round table for a different perspective on Gordon's video work.
4. Christine Ross, “The Insufficiency of the Performative: Video Art at the Turn of the Millenium,” *Art Journal* 60, no. 1 (Spring 2001): 31.
5. Thierry de Duve, “Andy Warhol, or, The Machine Perfected,” *October* 48 (Spring 1989): 13–14.
6. Annette Michelson, “‘Where is Your Rupture?’ Mass Culture and the *Gesamtkunstwerk*,” in *Andy Warhol*, ed. Annette Michelson (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London: MIT Press, 2001), 106–7.
7. Hal Foster, “Death in America,” in Michelson, 75. Foster appears to reject the notion of a contemplative temporality in Warhol advanced by Michelson.
8. Douglas Gordon, quoted in Michael Darling, “Love Triangulations,” in *Douglas Gordon*, ed. Russell Ferguson (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, 2001), 84.
9. Nancy Spector, “a.k.a.,” in Ferguson, note 21, 149.
10. Michael Fried, “Absorbed in the Action,” *Artforum International* 45, no. 1 (September 2006): 332–5, 398.
11. Fried distinguishes “presentness,” considered as a moment, from durational “presence.”
12. Fried, “Absorbed in the Action,” 398.
13. Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, trans. Tom Conley (London and New York: Continuum, 2006), 17.
14. Deleuze, 16–17.
15. Deleuze, 15–16.
16. Deleuze, 143.
17. Tony Smith, quoted in Michael Fried, “Art and Objecthood,” in Fried, *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 158–159.
18. Deleuze, 157, note 4, 187–88.
19. Deleuze, 157.

Fig. 1
David Hatcher
Ludwig and Hugh 2004
Flourescent pigment
on wall
Dimensions variable
Studio view, Los Angeles
Photo: Gene Ogami



Break on Through to *This* Side: David Hatcher's Dialectics

David Craig

In the long aftermath of Pop and postmodern art practice, a number of contemporary artists are finding ways to reinvest the favoured objects and modalities of these practices with new salience. This salience, be it political or transcendental, must, it seems, emerge from the raw materials and formal methods of previous practice: ironic appropriations, preoccupations with surfaces, sign-commodification, polysemic referentiality, and the reinvestment of object objects and contexts with some kind of renewed status.

At first glance, the prospects of this project seem slim. Warholian surfaces, for example, as points of departure for finding meaning or achieving transcendence or breakthrough, seem unpromising. It is an article of intent in their producer's very manifestos that notions of depth or privileged transcendence were to be irreverently disassembled, made shallow and populist; the high and deep brought flat and low, and narratives of progressive breakthrough denied their transcendental *telos*. An art, then, that takes on postmodern surfaces and returns their ability to be liminal is critically addressing itself to some of postmodernism's most significant residual achievements. Whichever returns to some kind of non-ironic, unexhausted transcendence such practice can offer, deserve investigation, both for method and for plausibility.

This essay considers the work and practice of peripatetic New Zealand-born artist David Hatcher.¹ This is work which, like that of many other contemporary artists, has gone to considerable lengths to explore the possibilities offered by critically re-examining modern and postmodern archives. Until recently, the aims of this exhaustive project have been assiduously, almost painstakingly achieved. More recently, however, there are signs of a different kind of outcome, something perhaps more akin to the "Pop transcendentalism" variously evoked in this journal issue.

David Hatcher's work, I will argue, has enacted a dialogical, indeed dialectical movement, wherein the critical insights, formal processes and familiar content of Pop and postmodern art practice are reflexively redeployed to interrogate both modern and postmodern forms and concepts. This practice has been primarily directed at the authority of high modern and postmodern representational and formal regimes, and at questioning the auspices under which international formalisms claim global hegemonic status. This critical dialectical process has, until recently, issued in a series of shows enacting a rational/ critical endgame, wherein the now all-but-exhausted semiologies he appropriates are invited to, in Hatcher's words, "stare down their fate",² a fate apparently not at all far from nihilism. Rather than enacting a final denial, however, this critical enquiry I suggest, is best understood in terms of Theodor Adorno's concept of negative dialectics,³ wherein rigorous dialectical interrogation and reduction ultimately yields an arid yet still significant remainder, itself a basis for the furthering of the critical project. The ultimate endpoint of such practice is, then, neither a transcendental breakthrough, nor a celebration of carnivalesque Pop, but something residual and exhaustively derived, existing in a rigorously material world of critical enquiry and bone-dry wit.

In David Hatcher's 2007 installation, *Semantic Bliss*,⁴ however, an entirely different kind of prospect emerges. Here, while still retaining some elements of the formal and Pop modalities from his previous practice, the artist appears to have realised a much more socially expansive (and unexpectedly happy) world of aesthetic possibility, wherein the popular (and in particular what I describe as the "primary popular") becomes a basis for a kind of transcendence, which this essay will somewhat paradoxically characterise as "anti-transcendental". In the context of his earlier work, this represents an exiting of rational deconstructive dialectical practice, and a breakthrough beyond the jaded commodity and artistic facsimile. However, this is a breakthrough not into some transcendental beyond, but back into a world of primary sociality and engagement on *this* side of things.

This essay explores these two sides to David Hatcher's recent work and the dialectical space between them. It travels with him on what he calls "a tightrope walk between a concentration on mindless formalism and the question of political or social efficacy in art",⁵ tracing a course back through pre-modern, modern and postmodern history, in order to arrive at a closer discussion of *Om Message* (2007) and *Semantic Bliss*, two works representing the dialectical nexus of his current practice.

The Transformation of Symbols

Hatcher's work appears at the end of a long trajectory wherein different periods of Western art have framed symbolic and mystic transactions very differently indeed. This trajectory saw substantive symbols transformed in turn into secular metaphor, commodity sign, and postmodern logo.

Its processes involved emptying of symbols and complexification of metaphoric and other secular associations. Both Pop and postmodern appropriations and elaborations involved ironic and iconoclastic re-positioning, irreverent pastiche, and a seeming deferral to the seductions of consumer society.

This constituted a considerable fall from grace. In a pre-modern era of substantive symbolism and heaven-on-earth Christendom, ideal forms apparently offered a real and immediate entrance to the ideal realm: the form literally embodied the ideal; the bread and wine literally were the blood and body of Christ. Symbols not only embodied, they performed, constituting a primary reality; power-imbued, signs were the means by which the world could be conquered. The cross, for example, was the symbol not of death and defeat, but of an already existing triumphal kingdom, which merely awaited eschatological unveiling.

The hollowing out of such symbols into mere protestant metaphor engendered a much more secular world, wherein the presence of the spiritual was removed to an idealised realm of transcendental concepts. Symbols, including sacramental bread and wine, became mere memory aids designed to evoke a prior inner transaction. Crucifixes and landscape crosses lost their magical powers in the present, now symbolising a deeper individual journey beyond the physical, best expressed in a series of propositional beliefs or dispositions of the "soul". Symbols, in this cosmology, were merely superficial features which gestured beyond; they themselves were not the material means *to* the beyond.

In this protestant realm, the efficacy of metaphors to literally *meta-phor* – to change (perception or ontic reality) by carrying or moving (the senses, the analysis) through imagery – has seemed increasingly tenuous. As rational belief in Christian systems has broken down; core metaphors and their common iconic forms have seemed at increasing risk of becoming depleted and exhausted. This exhaustion nonetheless opens up a number of possibilities for transcendence. Here, in classic mystic method, paradox enables exhausted forms to serve as liminal (or *threshold*) entry points into another world beyond the rational. Through perseverance and repetition in the face of exhaustion they are recuperated to *ask*, *beg*, or finally *insist* on a relation between surface appearance, shallow metaphor, and profound truth. Despite their assumed breakdown, symbols may not be finally exhausted; they might still serve as a window to the transcendental, exactly because of their ultimately dumb resistance.

A process akin to this fraught but fruitful tiring of metaphors is recognisable in aspects of David Hatcher's recent work. Trawling the various historical, metaphorical and symbolic associations available, Hatcher follows twentieth-century art into its perverse war of attrition with signs, relentlessly interrogating their formal properties within an increasingly radical set of modern art contexts. Here, Hatcher's progress tracks alongside the interrogative process which

characterised much of the modern, where secular, non-iconic forms were invested with spiritual weightiness. Intensely aware of his formal sources, Hatcher invokes the examples of Malevich, Mondrian, Rothko, Newman and Motherwell to repeat a particular range of forms and abstract surfaces, and through them press the possibilities of some kind of revelation beyond.

Hatcher's emulation of high modernism, however, comes after the post-modern has intervened. Postmodernism presented as a playful but nonetheless aggressive affront to the transcendent claims of modernist formalism. Its surfaces, as Jameson pointed out,⁶ and Warhol made patently clear, made depth look suspect, redundant even. Postmodern approaches could appropriate and deploy Surrealism without the subconscious; classicism without the religious and political conservatism, mass culture populism without the demagoguery. Cheap pastiche provided a kind of immanent critique of consumerism itself, but emphatically not one that pointed to any world beyond. Certainly in Warhol and others there were moments of celebration in Pop consumption. But there was also a certain nihilism at work, in the serial debasement of everything into commodity play. Pop's materialist criticality fell short of offering any high ground to or from which to move back to humanism or transcendentalism.

In more recent practice, it is not merely high modern or low popular forms that are exhausted: rather, it is possible to entertain the proposition that modernist formalism is *itself* exhausted. This is signaled by the myriad ways in which the rationalist ambitions of modernism are eroded. Here, the abject, the defiled, the broken-down, the composted arise, suggesting the return of the suppressed others of both high modernist formalism and postmodern appropriation and pastiche. Here, a Pop transcendentalism oriented to Warhol's canon of surfaces and shallow reproductive technique might signify the unexpected return of postmodernism's transcendental other, paradoxically through the very forms which were supposedly the vehicles for its negation. Here again, the breakthrough to the mystic is through the exhaustion of the formal, but this time this exhaustion is in all of formalism's dimensions, modern and postmodern alike. Perhaps here, to speculate broadly, release from the tyrannies of formalism has in some Pop transcendentalist practice turned into a ribald, polymorphous re-indulgence in the very mystic dimensions formalism sought to either discipline (that is formalise) or simply erode.

David Hatcher's address to this history of semiological debasement and popularisation certainly occurs at its current nexus: after, that is, much of the emptying and dissemination has happened, and after a number of possibilities for post-Pop practice have opened up. Rather than taking Pop iconology or erstwhile canonical modernist form as his starting point for critical engagement, however, his recent work has reached back for another kind of archival engagement. Delving into some of the more obscure elements of late modernist

practice, and recognising in these a germ of his wider critical engagement with formalism, he has attempted to both resuscitate and critically re-address a number of them, typically using what this essay recognises as a little understood dialectical process to do so. What I intend to show is that Hatcher's appropriative strategies address high modernist and postmodern modes of practice, but reject any easy transition into mysticism via exhaustion or open-ended play. Instead, they signal some kind of return or breakthrough, not into an immaterial transcendental domain, but to a recuperation of some other kind of reality equally beyond formal exhaustion.

David Hatcher's Dialectics

Crucial to Hatcher's process of critical exhaustion and reinvestment is his mode of dialectical play. Hatcher's work has often embodied a dialogics, wherein two or more meaningful objects are placed in some relation to each other, and that relation interrogated for further meanings. Such dialogics need signal no transcendental dimension: they can simply involve basic social communication and relationality. Yet often in Hatcher's work this dialogical dimension becomes more formally dialectical, pointing beyond the mere content of the dialogue and towards larger philosophical questions of resolution and truth. On occasion, they become almost classically dialectical, in the sense that the two elements or dimensions not only enter into a critical, interrogative dialogue with each other, wherein each questions the nature of truth revealed by the other, but also proposes contradictory but ultimately logically connected truths. Crucially, however, Hatcher's dialectical practice is not a transcendental or idealist one, but one grounded in a more material and critical dialectics I suggest has strong affinities with the "negative dialectics" of Theodor Adorno.

Historically, dialectical relations typically contain both critical interactive dimensions and the prospect of some kind of resolution, which might constitute a synthesis or breakthrough which could take the dialogue beyond the simpler and partial truths initially adopted by the dialecticians and higher rational closure. Crucially for the argument of this essay, dialectical relations also embody a technique for pressing towards rational exhaustion, often through the revelation of paradox and apparently irresolvable contradiction, and for subsequently revealing what ideal or other value might be left once such rational exhaustion is reached.

Dialogical, indeed dialectical relations are not difficult to find in this work. Sometimes, they are made especially explicit, as in *Ludwig and Hugh* (2004, Fig. 1). Here, Wittgenstein's duck-rabbit (itself a philosopher's symbolic object lesson about the ambiguity of meanings and the uncertainty of sign-concepts) is opposed to Hugh Hefner's Playboy bunny logo. Here, the semiology of modern philosophy (albeit a philosophy well aware of the complex everyday complicities of concepts) is juxtaposed with a tacky commodity sign, turned on its head, to signify its lowly materialist status. The two forms do not

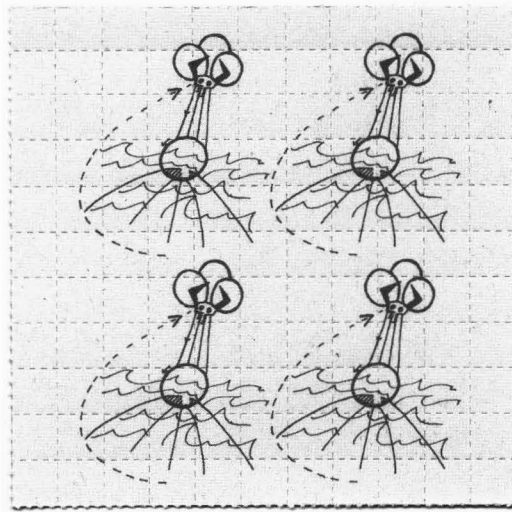
connect; no transcendental synthesis seems possible, yet we see them side by side as strangely equivalent. Questions as to what the two signs might say to each other are inevitably raised, alongside questions as to what kind of synthesis or remainder might emerge from the meeting of these signs. Rendered equivalent by both being presented in the same shocking pink, they belie their Pop playfulness to pose answers that are both complex and grim. The fate these images stare down is surely their mutual incapacity, as well as their respective locking into a dialectical relation from which little of certain significance seems likely to emerge.

This bringing down and exposure of both previously privileged and clearly inadequate conceptions and closures has a long history. Classical Socratic dialectics was a debating method used by skilled rhetoricians to deconstruct the positions of opponents and to turn the other's argument literally on its head, to the point where the opponent could be accused of holding two contrary or contradictory positions. This negative, deconstructive dialectics could, in the hands of the rhetorically skilled but unethical sophists, reduce any proposition to mere relativism (that is literally, to mere sophistry), and thus open the door for a wider cynicism or even nihilism in relation to truth. A more ethical Socratic dialectics would press and extrapolate on an opponent's logic to the point where it fell apart and its contradictions were revealed, for here, nonetheless, some kind of unforeseen truth might emerge.

This more positive dialectics eventually became associated with the high idealism of Hegel and his populisers, and ultimately with aspects of social Darwinism and Fascist politics.⁷ In this world view, especially in its popular formulations, the whole of history was an enactment of a series of dialectical progressions, with antithetic elements (thesis and antithesis) pressing towards higher syntheses through a series of oppositions and struggles. Ultimately, through this dialectical comprehension and transcendence of the contradictory elements of rational and material orders, a more total and complete state of affairs would emerge, cosmologically as well as socially and politically.

Marx famously set out to turn this ideal-bound dialectical historicism on its head with his notion of dialectical materialism, which saw historical materialist relations of production set in dialectical opposition to the forces of production, capital and its embodiment in technology. Subsequent Marxist analysis, including that of the Frankfurt school and in particular Theodor Adorno, took this dialectical materialist mode of enquiry as its starting point. Crucially for Adorno, this involved a de-privileging of the concept or ideal in the dialectical relationship. Rather than the concept or ideal representing the ultimate reality towards which all else pushed, Adorno stressed the inadequacy of the ideal or concept in relation to the material object. Accordingly, whatever was left over from Adorno's dialectics would not be transcendental or ideal, but materially relational.

Fig. 2
 David Hatcher
*Classic Hits: Deleuze
 & Guattari* (excerpt
 from the *Oedipal
 Manoeuvres in the
 Dark* project) 2006
 Perforated print on
 100% acid free
 recycled paper
 5.7 x 5.7 cm
 Courtesy Starkwhite,
 Auckland



To this end, Adorno mounted a relentless attack on what he called “the untruth of identity thinking”, where, to simplify, concepts and objects are seen as identical; or, in Adorno’s terms, where the concept exhausts the thing conceived and thus becomes a total ideological replacement for the object.⁸ In this identity thinking, the concept and the object form a total – even totalitarian – whole, wherein no room exists for other, more critical ways of considering either the truth or the object. Such thinking, he pointed out, enabled the kinds of “blood and soil” identification between the German people and their land that gave rise to Fascism, and led ultimately but directly to Auschwitz. In the face of this grand political positivism, Adorno produced a simple, yet equally total dialectical doctrine, specifically describing how the object could not go into the concept without leaving a remainder. No concept, in other words, could entirely comprehend or exhaust (and thereby transcend) the object it represented. Any conceptualisation, then, would leave other, non-identified elements behind. And it was in the moment where this heterogeneous, negative “other” “collides with its limits and exceeds itself”⁹ that the crucial seeds of critique and anti-totalitarian political action were to be found.¹⁰

Any adequate “art (and philosophy) after Auschwitz”, a more careful reading of Adorno’s dictum suggests, must explicitly move beyond the kinds of representational practice that could lead to the absolute(ist) identity (or “absolute reification”) of concepts and objects, blood and soil, ethnicity and (superior) humanity.¹¹ This notion of the remainder and the dialectical critique it offered to identity thinking became central to Adorno’s negative dialectical practice, a mode of enquiry subsequently recognised as anticipating French deconstructionism.¹² Negative dialectical method, then, like classical

Socratic dialectics, could be used to interrogate any conceptual frame, demonstrate its inadequacy in relation to the material world of objects and history, and at the same time reveal its complicity in ideological projects which sought to comprehend the world within identity thinking frameworks, such as capitalist (or indeed socialist) narratives of universal progress and freedom. Such negative dialectical method could be deployed widely; no object or related concept existed which could not be dialectically unpacked in this way. All power relations involving naming and characterising within ideal or narrative schemes could be disassembled, and the discursive power of their proponents revealed and undermined at the same time.

What exactly constituted the remainder was often left as an open question: but it represented something of the material that was irreducible to the ideal: something always necessarily beyond the concept, and thus something always making further demands of the conceptual. When seen in relation to the dominant conceptual or object elements in focus, the remainder might appear somewhat thin, residual, and perhaps of little consequence. Thin and residual or not, it represented something of enormous value simply in the way it pointed to the limits and exhaustion of both dominant schema and systemic dispositions, and of simple ideal or transcendental ways out of ongoing dialectical realities. In contradiction, then, to a mystic transcendentalism which used near or apparent exhaustion as stepping-off point for mystic transcendence, this negative dialectics worked to turn near exhaustion into a means for further critical enquiry based in the nature of the things themselves. Here, in the inexhaustibility of the remainders, something emerged despite the immediate and active presence of dominant discursive and other relations; what remained, however, was an element of materiality, not idealism. It *was* something which pointed beyond, and to a breakthrough, but typically in the most mundane and material ways.

Dialectical Manoeuvres in the Dark

Returning to David Hatcher's work, what he calls his "higher modernism" has seen the artist enacting dialectical transactions between the various elements at play, as evidenced, for example, in *Ludwig and Hugh*. Here, he addresses the elements both on their own modern terms, and in terms of the multiplicity of possible relationships they can now have with various modalities of postmodernism and its post-formal aftermath. Here, the kinds of closure hegemonic formalism imposed are an especially savoured target, due no doubt to Hatcher's origins in New Zealand where, despite the country's isolation, imported modernist ideology still had an extraordinary hegemonic effect. In this context, sifting through a "compost"³ of formalism for this artist now involves endless replication and repositioning of logico-philosophical emblems. Scanning and recombining in a search for greater meaning, he recreates a series of weird and apparently empty symbiotic relationships between Pop, ironic and higher symbolisms. In all these

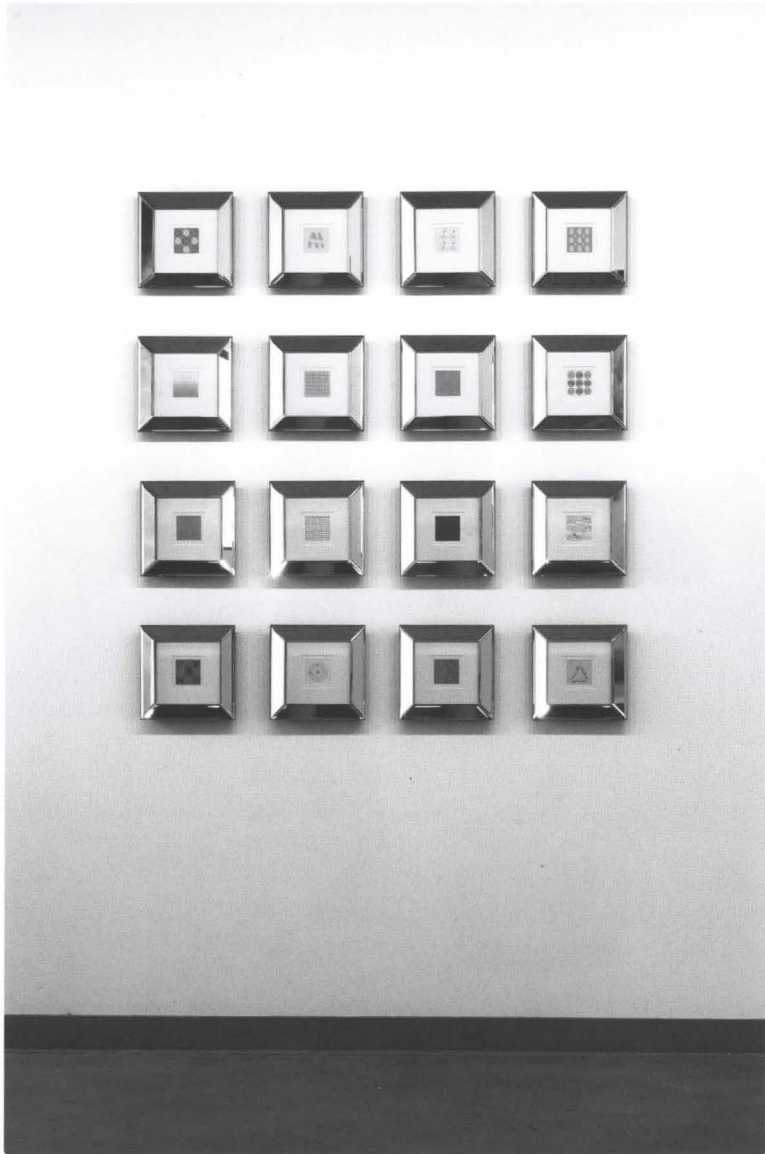


Fig. 3
David Hatcher
Classic Hits (excerpts from
the *Oedipal Manoeuvres
in the Dark* project) 2006
Perforated prints on 100%
acid free recycled paper
5.7 x 5.7 cm each
(unframed)
25.4 x 25.4 cm (framed)
Installation view, UCLA
Wight Gallery, Los Angeles,
2006
Photo: Gene Ogami

interrogations, however, the question of what remains after the deconstructive dialectic process is complete seems to me to be essential.

In recent work, such as his ongoing series *Oedipal Manoeuvres In The Dark*, Hatcher has trawled art and philosophy and their symbolic/ formal intersections and found a range of devices and conceits: Wittgenstein's duck-rabbit; explanatory figures and drawings by Deleuze and Guatarri, Bergson and a host of others, which he archives and then draws on to produce decals: mere surface decorations that are easily stored and transferred digitally (Fig. 2). In his *For Real* show (Starkwhite, Auckland 2005), he printed a range of these symbols onto LSD tabs and presented these in store-bought mirrored frames. In this new relation, the symbols seemed opaque, at risk of being absorbed into the vortices of other kinds of experience: the seedy world of drugs and the alternative market of their illicit circulation. Now packaged in highly exchangeable commodity form these symbols were brought low by their association, the "high" ambitions of philosophical enquiry to seek answers to ineffable questions were rendered just another "high" – no more than chemically induced escapism. Trading on the value of altered states as an easy route to transcendence, they relegated philosophical thinking to the bargain basement (Fig. 3). In negative dialectical terms, the object gets the better of the concept here. The commodity and the drug substance seem more substantive than the high modern philosophical symbols, and the world of commodity signs seems more significant than the world of modern philosophical thought. If these commodities are all but exhausted by their object status, the philosophical signs now also seem reduced to this.

Here, however, rather than slipping immediately into nihilism, Hatcher's work joins the wider contemporary re-exploration of the political economy, moving beyond Baudrillard's notions¹⁴ and back into the more directly material relations between commodities as capitalised objects and the basic construction of meaning. For Hatcher, as for Marx, this commodity moment is the progenitor of the ideological and semiological one, rather or at least more than vice versa. The real significance, however, of this move back towards considering a politics of commodities is, in this work, obscure. Does selling some "remaindered" commodities at bargain-bin prices constitute any substantive political gesture or practice? Or does it signal a rejection of any sense of a remainder of unrealised, undermined value, by pointing to (and here coming extremely close to adopting) a kind of commodity nihilism latent in capitalist production?

One thing for certain, like much of Hatcher's work, it operates with a clear sense of how the system works, in part by making a formal virtue of the constraints of a "weightless economy". Hatcher is used to working in different places and achieves a highly mobile practice by making use of either the strategies of cyber transfer¹⁵ or of site specificity. His works can be sent from anywhere and printed locally; they manifest momentarily on walls and ceilings. Their lightweight

Fig. 4
David Hatcher
Om Message
Installation view,
Mystic Truths, 2007
Courtesy Auckland Art
Gallery Toi o Tāmaki



status is a self-conscious condition of their existence. Small and thin, on one level they hardly register. On another, as they travel they bear an extraordinary weight of complex dialectical meaning: aesthetic, philosophical, and existential.

Negative Dialectics in Practice: *Om Message*

David Hatcher's processes have thus enacted a number of dimensions of what we might recognise as a negative dialectical practice. The relentless interrogation and deconstruction of meaning through juxtaposition proceed towards the exhaustion of their objects. The fact that Hatcher's works do not ultimately arrive at exhaustion is only however slight comfort: the still-vital questioning impulse itself often seems to be all that is evident as remainder. Critical nihilism, the ultimate negation of meaning via endless interrogative practice, rarely seems far away. Presumptive high modernist displays of symbolic meaning are broken down; what, if anything, is broken through into remains defined only in complex aporia.

Hatcher's wall painting *Om Message* for Auckland Art Gallery's *Mystic Truths* exhibition (2007) enacted a particularly apposite negative dialogue. This show evidenced a wider resuscitation of interest in transcendence achieved via Pop and various post-formalist means.¹⁶ Hatcher's installation, however, appeared to set off in an entirely different direction. Occupying a single room which formed a threshold to the show, it offered all who entered a piece of unsolicited cautionary from Wittgenstein: "Do not attempt to analyse your inner experiences" (Fig. 4). Onto a wall painted an unappealing brown (the colour achieved when all pigments are combined in equal measure), Hatcher adhered some decals that looked like disembodied cartoon bubble heads.

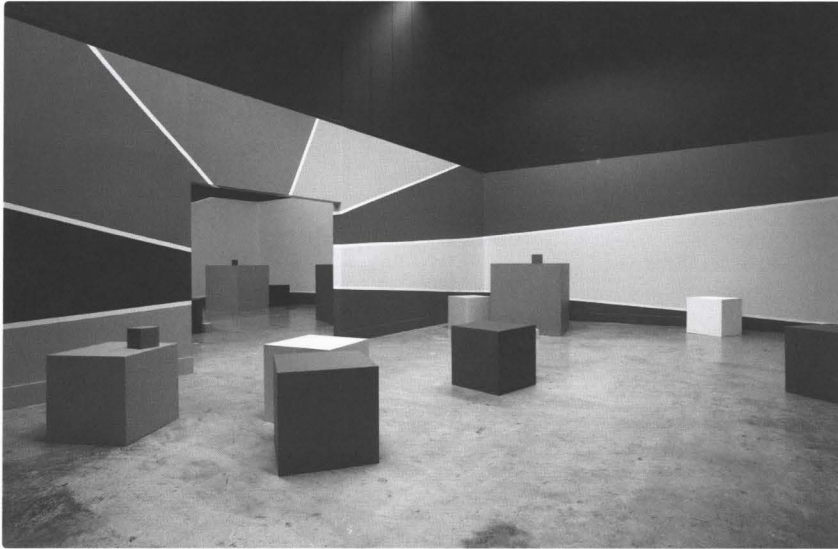


Fig. 5
David Hatcher
Semantic Bliss 2007
Installation detail
Courtesy Govett-
Brewster Art Gallery

These appeared to be thinking bubble thoughts, manifesting as miniature versions of the same bubble shape. Some, in good deconstructive fashion were turned (literally) on their heads. Staring emptily in no particular direction, this introspection quickly exhausted itself in mere serial repetition. Thought was conveyed as circular, with no obvious escape. These bubble heads signalled an aporia or epistemic *cul-de-sac*. Installed like a kind of Ichabod¹⁷ figure at the entrance to art's temple, the installation could be read as telling gallery goers that despite the show's promise, no mystic truths would in fact be revealed inside.

Thus the installation provided a sharp counterpoint to what mystic experience routinely promises, which is a liminal access to another world. Paradoxically – and here the images enacted much the same paradox as the show's signature piece: Bruce Nauman's neon: *The true artist helps the world by revealing mystic truths* (1967) – those prepared to surrender introspective rationalism might find something inside: what, however, was in good mystic manner left entirely undefined. In the end, there was some small relief in the fact that the viewer was able to escape, simply by walking on to the other parts of the show – the aporia, in other words, detained only briefly, but it was an aporia nonetheless. Appropriately, it was a kind of failed one: the remainder of the show retained its promise.

The Positive Dialectic? *Semantic Bliss*

Hatcher's 2007 installation *Semantic Bliss* (2007) at the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery in New Plymouth, however, turned many of these same elements once more on their heads. The work was seen by the artist and a number of long term Hatcher observers as something of a breakthrough, moving beyond the kinds

of critical *cul-de-sacs* and rage at the closures of formalism of previous works. Here, however, we need to consider exactly the nature of this breakthrough, and how, in terms of the work itself, the breakthrough is achieved.

In form the installation enacted a basic dialogical relation through its presentation across two spaces. These were, similarly, though not identically, decorated, and connected by a low opening in the wall that divided them. Moving between the two spaces, viewers themselves enacted a liminal and dialogical engagement, but one that seemed suspended because both spaces shared basic elements. Certainly there was no question of progression through dialectics: thesis and antithesis here had not yet emerged into significant contradiction, and the whole offered a kind of happy, relatively timeless and a-historical synthesis (Fig. 5).

Symbolic and high philosophical complexities were seemingly banished from these spaces and replaced by painted walls and objects referring in the first instance to a state of childhood innocence. The sunrise aurora of colours most easily associated with the nursery was the principle feature of the design. This eschewed formalist abstraction for a more fundamental sign language. Associations, for example, with *de Stijl* were possible, but they seemed quickly redundant, and perhaps beside the point. The paint formed a thin skin around the walls of the gallery; not a surface to penetrate but a veneer that created its own ambiance.

Here too, analysis of inner experience was discouraged by simple, practical means. Whereas in *Om Message*, the aporia emerged after a reflexive/ deconstructive process, here thoughts, in immediate consort with actions, were pulled into a surface reality of pre-rational primacy. Inner and outer experience – action, sense, thought – merged in non-linear fashion, without any clear sense of progress or discovery, into some primary, sub-rational order. Resisting the kinds of endgame rational deconstruction described in this paper, this situation's emphasis was on basic physical action and sensation – moving through space, rearranging the simple geometrical forms that were scattered throughout it – sensing and especially doing, rather than thinking was the first requirement. Here, in sharp contrast with *Om Message*, the colours and the shapes *themselves* provided a way of avoiding too much rational analysis of inner or indeed outer experience, by engaging in something more physical, sensual and social.

The “bliss” in *Semantic Bliss* was thus presented as a-historical, even a-temporal: perhaps apolitical. In fact, there were references well beyond a bliss bounded by a mystic solipsism. The show invoked a kind of primary spatial social order, most especially by referencing the coloured cuisinere rods used in early childhood learning of mathematics and, in local usage, of the Māori language.¹⁸ Many of the cubes were large enough to require collaboration to move them around, stack them up, or otherwise dispose them in the exhibition space. This

evokes the primary sociality of cooperation. Here, what any viewer did in the space had implications for everyone else involved, or entering. This evocation of accountable sociality too, it seems, was a part of the breaking through.

Like all returns to innocence, however, it has come via experience, and draws on that: the work looks back to various aspects of modernism's history and attitude, including de Stijl, and early modernism's radical progressive politics.¹⁹ What happened here, though, was a challenge to re-learn the basic language of modernism, and to see it for the radical and utopian project it was, and for the potentials it embodied, at least pre-Auschwitz. All of which means that, surface appearances notwithstanding, innocence is probably not the right word for where we arrive: rather, as Hatcher suggests, it is a kind of looped return to bliss.

If, in work made before and after *Semantic Bliss*, Hatcher's negative dialectics pressed to the point of near exhaustion, *Semantic Bliss* struck out in a different direction wherein the elements were anything but exhausted. Here, it was not persistence in exhaustion which pointed to something beyond, but rather a sudden and complete embrace of elements which were radically affirmed as nascent, still fresh and capable of further development. At the same time, however, the show's basic, non-progressive dialogical form raised questions about how urgent or necessary that kind of developmental progression is. Here, it was possible to view the show in a kind of eternal loop of movement back and forward, a dialectic within which neither critical distancing nor rational exhaustion were being promoted or referenced. Here, concept, object and remainder were all basically undifferentiated. Neither space, nor colour, nor form were exhausted, and a kind of suspension or delay of the jading process and its distantiating object lessons seemed possible.

The artist succeeded in creating a happy world which nonetheless contains a series of sharp object lessons about what matters, each drawn from and relevant to realms of experience, not just of innocence. The show, then, might be considered in negative dialectical terms, as the remainder of experience: the outcome of deep, bitter and almost cynical thinking, nonetheless finding a number of basic elements of the human and the lived to combine to suggest an alternative set of conclusions, and, even perhaps a possible better world. Knowing the intense negative dialectical background to this work makes accusations of naivety seem implausible. The possibility, however, that this represents some kind of really tenable alternate social order is perhaps equally hard to sustain.

Finally, however, it is not the negative dialectical moments which prevail in *Semantic Bliss* but the unexpected positive ones. In a synthesis of simple primary forms and modes of behaviour not yet freighted with excessive theory, Bliss, rather than the play of opposites, is where this work left us, brought about by a combination of elements of extraordinary freshness and promise, especially given the process which brought them to that point.

All this might suggest that the world proposed was a transcendental one, entirely removed from the mundane, and pitched back into an historical time zone of hypostasized innocence. But, to conclude, this would be to discount the show's insistence on referencing basic learning, primary objects, essential sociality. In fact, the world constructed breaks through only via what are ultimately anti-transcendental means, involving basic material object and social relations. To the significant extent to which the dialectic resolved itself, in other words, it was in a movement into the social, the material, and the relational. This is, then, very much an anti-transcendental mode of Pop transcendentalism: a Pop transcendentalism, in other words, remaining ultimately on *this* side of the liminal divide.

The author would like to thank the editors of *Reading Room*, in particular Natasha Conland and Christina Barton, for their critical responses and significant editorial advice in the preparation of this essay for publication.

1. David Hatcher describes himself as "an artist and nutritional psychiatrist based in Berlin, Los Angeles and Puhoi [north of Auckland, New Zealand]". He has, however, also spent considerable spells in Malmö, Sweden, and in Christchurch and Taranaki, New Zealand.
2. Artist's personal communication, July 2007.
3. Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E.B. Ashton (London: Routledge, 1973).
4. This installation was the outcome of the artist's residency hosted by the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth, New Zealand.
5. Artist's personal communication, March 2007.
6. Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991).
7. What is popularly called Hegelian dialectics (i.e. the thesis/ antithesis/ synthesis pattern and its evolutionary cosmological historicism) is largely Pop (and ultimately political) simplification and totalisation, which in its formulaic version owes more to Fichte than Hegel. Hegel proposed his own negative dialectical principle and analytic method termed "sublation", wherein dialectical moments negate but also renew each other endlessly.
8. Adorno, 5.
9. Adorno, 5.
10. In practical political terms, for example, the word Jew used in relation to a historicist narrative of Aryan racial transcendence simply did not exhaust its subject: whatever the word Jew referred to, something (or indeed someone) more existed beyond what the concept and its narrative ideology suggested.
11. Elaine Martin, "Re-reading Adorno: The "after-Auschwitz" Aporia," *Forum*, issue 2 (Spring 2006), <http://forum.llc.ed.ac.uk/issue2/index.html>.
12. Frederic Jameson, *Late Marxism, or, Adorno: The Persistence of the Dialectic* (New York and London: Verso, 1990).
13. Natasha Conland, "The Oedipus Compost," *Broadsheet* 36 no. 2 2007, 115–117.
14. Jean Baudrillard, *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign* (St Louis: Telos Press, 1981).
15. Danny Quah, "The Invisible Hand and the Weightless Economy," Discussion Paper (London: London School of Economics and Political Science, Centre for Economic Performance, 1996).
16. Pop or plural anti-formalist mysticism was on display in a number of other artists' work in the Auckland Art Gallery's 2007 exhibition, *Mystic Truths*. These include: Liz Maw's kitsch realist cartoon portraits of godlike sex-babes and hunks; Mungo Thomson's bumper stickers mixing the famous Bruce Nauman quote on the role of the artist in revealing mystic truths with a mode of representation most memorable for its reminder that the Goddess is alive, or that Jesus loves you; Mikala Dwyer's installation, *The Hanging Garden*, mixing plastic bagged trees with both money and mysticism, and AP Komen and Karen Murphy's installation, mixing the mundane touristic with the mystic. Other recent shows tracking similar phenomena have included *Strange Powers* organised by Creative Time New York (July–September 2006), the small-scale group show *Future Primitive* at UKS, Oslo (April–May 2007), the film series *Okkult — Filme zur Spuk und Psychokinese* in the Hamburger Kunsthalle (June 2007) and the upcoming show on *New Spiritualism in Art* scheduled to be on view at the Centre Pompidou, Paris, in Spring 2008. For further discussion, see A. Demeester "As Certain as Can be: A Case-Study in Pop Sociology," in Natasha Conland, *Mystic Truths* (Auckland: Auckland Art Gallery, 2007).
17. Ichabod was an Old Testament figure, a child named by his mother on the day the Ark of the Covenant was taken from the temple: his name warns that "the glory has departed" from the temple, and those entering should abandon hope of encountering it.
18. It should be noted that in New Plymouth for the duration of the show Hatcher had the staff learning Maori on a regular basis as a collective endeavour.
19. C. Wilk, *Modernism 1914–1939: Designing a New World* (London: Victoria & Albert Museum, 2006).

Fig. 1
Kamrooz Aram
Mystical Visions
Undetected by Night Vision
Strengthen the Faith of the
Believers and Make their
Enemies Scatter 2007
Oil and stickers on canvas
213.3 x 304.8 cm
Courtesy of the artist and
Wilkinson Gallery, London



The Burdens of Imaging: Kamrooz Aram's Painted Elsewhere

Aram Moshayedi

We are living, I reckon, through a terrible moment in the politics of imaging, envisioning, visualizing; and the more a regime of visual flow, displacement, disembodiment, endless available revisability of the image, endless ostensible transparency and multi-dimensionality and sewing together of everything in nets and webs – the more this pseudo-utopia presents itself as the very form of self-knowledge, self-production, self-control – the more necessary it becomes to capture what imaging can be.

– T.J. Clark, *The Sight of Death*¹

The role of the image has continued to plague those engaged in the whole-hearted pursuit of painting as a form of political resistance. How these strange objects come to function in the current image climate, one may never know. But, in spite of this lack of clarity, there are those committed to revealing the potential in the radical act of creating a world onto canvas (or any other given surface). We continue to toil, as T.J. Clark has so aptly pointed out in his recently published diaristic account of two pictures by Poussin exhibited together at the Getty Museum in Los Angeles. And, although passages like the epigraph above – that speak to the politics of sustained looking and sustained engagement with image-making – elicit such a negative response (as those from Arthur C. Danto, who contested in his review of the book in *Artforum* in February 2007 that Clark's endeavour did little to further our understanding of the relationship of painting to politics), it seems that few publications in recent years have addressed the problem of painting's persistence of picture-making to such lengths as Clark's *The Sight of Death*.

Despite figures such as Clark and Danto, who commit themselves to the critical cum phenomenological potential of this visual form, there continue to be strains of painting received by critical, academic, and consumer audiences that are both resistant to, and symptoms of, what Benjamin H. D. Buchloh has, borrowing from Adorno, referred to as the “dialectic of consumption”, that defined modernist art. Buchloh has argued, for instance, “To be suspended between high art’s haughty isolation (in transcendence, in resistance, in critical negativity) and the universally pervasive mass cultural debris of corporate domination constitutes the founding dialectic within the modernist artist’s role.”² In so far as painting has continued to provide a particular space that is contemplative and resistant in its very being in the world – often in spite of itself, and no matter how spectacular or complicit with the market it as a form may become – it seems that painting is far from dead, no matter what its detractors may have claimed long ago. Recent tendencies in painting have thrust us back to this moment of the great divide, to a time in which political resistance and aesthetic transcendence present themselves in tandem as viable options for an otherwise troubled visual landscape. All of this leads us back to a question posed by Yve-Alain Bois so long ago; that is, is *painting* still possible?³ And if we have in fact been threatened, yet again, with the “end of painting”, in light of the critical arena’s preoccupation at the turn of this century with relational aesthetics and dialogical practices, then what does one make of the form’s resilience and newly articulated politics?

I was reminded of painting’s funereal march while reading a profile on myth-maker artist and provocateur John Currin in a recent issue of the *New Yorker*. Not until the end of what proved to be a self-indulgent exploration of sexism, conservatism and aggression (think Currin’s response to the controversy in 2005 surrounding the depiction of the Prophet Muhammad in a series of Danish cartoons: “O.K., they’re terrible-ass cartoons from a quality standpoint, but the idea that those thugs get offended and we just acquiesce, that was the most astonishing display of cowardice,” continuing that “That’s when it occurred to me that we might lose this thing – not the Iraq war but the larger struggle”),⁴ were the political stakes of such a practice properly revealed. Despite their lurid appeal and oft critical disapproval, Currin’s images of buxom blondes, contorted and elongated female forms, and scintillating scenes of the heterosexual male’s lesbian ideal have as little to do with their content as such gestures might let on. Currin’s position is that of the trickster, and to fall for such a prank – sheathed in the artist’s claims for the historical and cultural perseverance of pornographic imagery – is to miss the point of what is behind the “veil”. In light of Currin’s a-political practice, one might ask what does a form such as painting have to offer when it is prone to the most egregious of deceptions? Both lauded and loathed by critics, painting of this nature presents the very aesthetic-political conundrum that defines the difficult birth any image has into this world. Why are images given life, and why does one voluntarily choose to make an image at a moment such as this?

Currin's profile in the *New Yorker* comes to its head at the conclusion, when the reader is left with three proverbial reflections dealt by the artist to the author Calvin Tomkins over the course of their stint: "The meaning of the painting is what you do with your hands", and "The way things are painted trumps everything else", and finally, "So much art now doesn't want to look like art, but painting can't help it".⁵ It is with the last of these statements in particular that Currin argues for painting's inability to transgress its status as art, surprisingly bringing the role of the painted image to the fore. Assuming, as he does, that painting inherently provides an aesthetic experience, we are forced to ask ourselves, in light of this, whether we like it or not, does painting potentially lose its power or its bearing in the world when it is no longer considered to be art? For this, I turn again to T.J. Clark, who insists upon a dialectic that separates high art (be it "in transcendence, in resistance, in critical negativity") from the logic of market capitalism, stating:

I believe the distance of visual imagery from verbal discourse is the most precious thing about it. It represents one possibility of resistance in a world saturated by slogans, labels, sales pitches, little marketable meaning-motifs. To see the distance narrowed day by day, and intellectuals applauding the narrowing in the name of some wholly illusory "transition from the world of the word to that of the image" – when what we have is a deadly reconciliation of the two modes, via the utter banalization of both – this is bitter to me.⁶

Rather than clumsily align one particularly decadent and tawdry tendency in painting with Clark's reactive brand of aesthetics as a vehicle for political resistance, I instead hope to show that the very *bringing into the world* with which painting must contend is reason enough for this visual form to bear the burden of a milieu that has continued to forget to feel and see, and that has opted instead to touch and glance.

Painting in an American context, its history handed down from European modernism, has always had to contend with its social function, or lack thereof. In an arena that has always relied upon high culture's utilitarian end, both before and after the Second World War, or, before and after *New York stole the idea of modern art*, painted images have always been expected to occupy their given locales, and speak to social and political strife from within their secured, intimate environments. Even at their most provocative and confrontational, paintings here have bore the heavy burden of communicating exterior social phenomena from within an interior space. This has been the shadow under which painting's life, its death, and the debate surrounding its political function has largely been cast. Present within this discourse, however, are discoverable histories that provide new models for understanding the visualisation of politics in culture, of which have been previously rendered invisible by critical oversight and Procrustean narratives of artistic production since



Fig. 2
Kamrooz Aram
Blazing Glory 2007
Oil on canvas
152.4 x 136.1 cm
Courtesy of the artist and
Wilkinson Gallery, London

1945. Just as encounters with painting have been corralled by the current image climate – dependent on the clear distinctions between public and private life – the scope in any given approach must expand to include contexts in which painted images play a large part in the formation of their given public sphere, making room for critical models equipped to address the roles these visual phenomena play beyond mere exhibitionary contexts.

When our encounter with painting is limited by the frames imposed by architectural white cubes, the public nature and social function of the form are rarely given adequate room to effectively shine through the very materials that make an image of this world. For as Maurice Merleau-Ponty once remarked in a series of lectures delivered over the airwaves of French national radio in 1948, “painting does not imitate the world, but is a world of its own”.⁷ It is only since the history of easel painting (and the slow-moving revolt against it in to the twentieth century), governed by the architectures of experience, that we have truly lost sight of the worlds embedded within images. There remain, however, occasions that paintings resonate the conditions of their making and reveal the processes of their internal world view, despite the places in which they are experienced – the places in which they are presupposed to merely imitate, simulate, and represent far-off places. When these traces do seep through their iconographic and allegorical Trojan horses, and transcend their given context, the encounter is something close to the very experience of warfare, and we are thrust once again to the place of politics.

In early 2007, New York-based artist Kamrooz Aram exhibited a recent body of painting situated as much within the debates surrounding the delicate intersection of aesthetic experience and political commitment as within the fraught history of image-making in post-revolutionary Iran. Aram’s relationship to Iran – where he was born in 1978 amid the political turmoil that ascended to the Islamic Revolution one year later – has been taken up by most writers who have addressed, at no matter what length, his paintings and drawings. When Aram debuted a suite of works in 2004 entitled “Beyond the Borders, Between the

Trees”, Holland Cotter wrote in the *New York Times* of the “Mongol-style clouds” and “military camouflaged patterns”, stating that the latter, in particular, “introduce an obvious hint of realpolitik”; in 2005, Roberta Smith made note in the *New York Times* of Aram’s “sly, lush recyclings of decorative and religious Persian, Chinese, and Christian motifs”; and in November of the following year, Sarah Bayliss addressed at length the mixture of Iranian and American imagery in Aram’s paintings and drawings, pointing to such references as Persian miniatures and rugs, video game imagery, Renaissance painting, military symbols, and Shi’ite religious posters of the variety found in coffee shops throughout Iran.⁸ But to revisit paintings such as those exhibited in Aram’s most recent series, of which included *Mystical Visions Undetected by Night Vision Strengthen the Faith of the Believers and Make their Enemies Scatter* (Fig. 1) and *Blazing Glory* (Fig. 2) (both 2007), iconographic descriptions, such as those above, fail to sharpen any understanding of how these images come to emanate their worlds contained within. To interpret these paintings at the level of iconography is to lose site of their public nature, and to thus rob them of their political potential. In an example such as *Mystical Visions Undetected ...*, the mixed symbols of Iranian and American visual cultures, although political in nature, obscure the lost publicness that haunts these paintings in the most material sense.

In one brief mention of Aram’s series from 2007, Negar Azimi remarked that the drawings and paintings “engage with the delicate creation of visual traditions – whether mythical, political, or spiritual – through symbols”.⁹ While this held true for many of the works on display, it becomes necessary, in spite of this, to address these images not as confections of the mythical, political, or spiritual worlds they convey, but rather to address them as painted material substances within a history of world-making from which they, as images, have been displaced. The lost visual traditions to which Azimi refers have as much to do with the materiality of painting as they do with the contradictory visualisations of mysticism and violence in the histories that interest Aram.

To encounter a painting such as *Mystical Visions Undetected ...*, one might make note of a contradictory visual landscape, in which the tensions between illumination and darkness, visibility and invisibility are rendered with reference to tactical night vision technologies and the tropes of mystical imagining in both Christian and Islamic historical contexts. In an image such as this, Aram’s natural progression through earlier painting techniques becomes apparent: the cloud swirls appropriated from miniatures appear in such early works as *The Battle of So and So* (2004, Fig. 3); the motifs derived from Islamic geometric patterns originate in works like *Longing* (2001, Fig. 4); the astral bursts consume an image such as *The Gleam of the Morning’s First Beam* (2005, Col. pl. 2); and the camouflage-landscape cross-section carry over from works such as *Making the Desert Bloom* (2003, Fig. 5). The paradox of vision and of the rendering of spiritual phenomena through the application of paint is taken up by Aram in this large canvas, spanning 10 feet in length and as intimate as it is monumental.



Fig. 3
Kamrooz Aram
The Battle of So and So
2004
Oil on canvas
152.4 x 233.6 cm
Courtesy of the artist and
Wilkinson Gallery, London

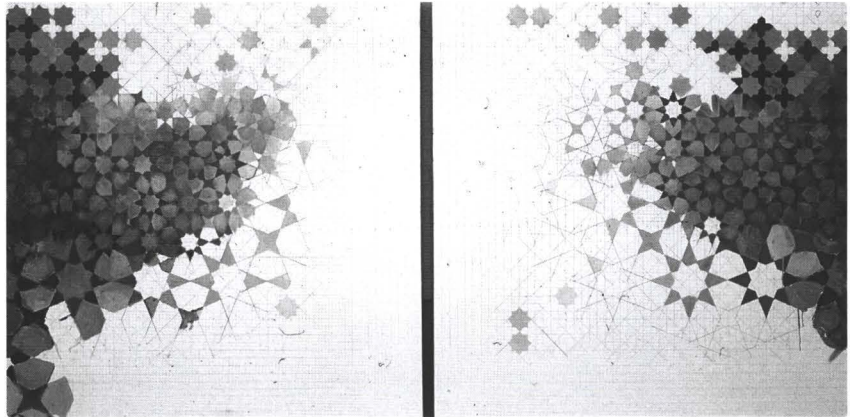


Fig. 4
Kamrooz Aram
Longing 2001
Oil on canvas
137.1 x 284.4 cm
Courtesy of the artist and
Wilkinson Gallery, London

Embedded within the looseness and formative drips that make up this image's painted technique are perceptual shifts in scale that defy not only the logic of iconographic intelligibility, but of spatial orientation. In so far as the study of symbols and of style can grant only a limited access to an image such as *Mystical Visions Undetected ...*, we are forced to ask what do we really learn of our position in the world when such contradictions are introduced to the visual field, and what is lost when a painted image is surrendered to vision and to the tropes of legibility, or, plainly, what goes unnoticed by vision?

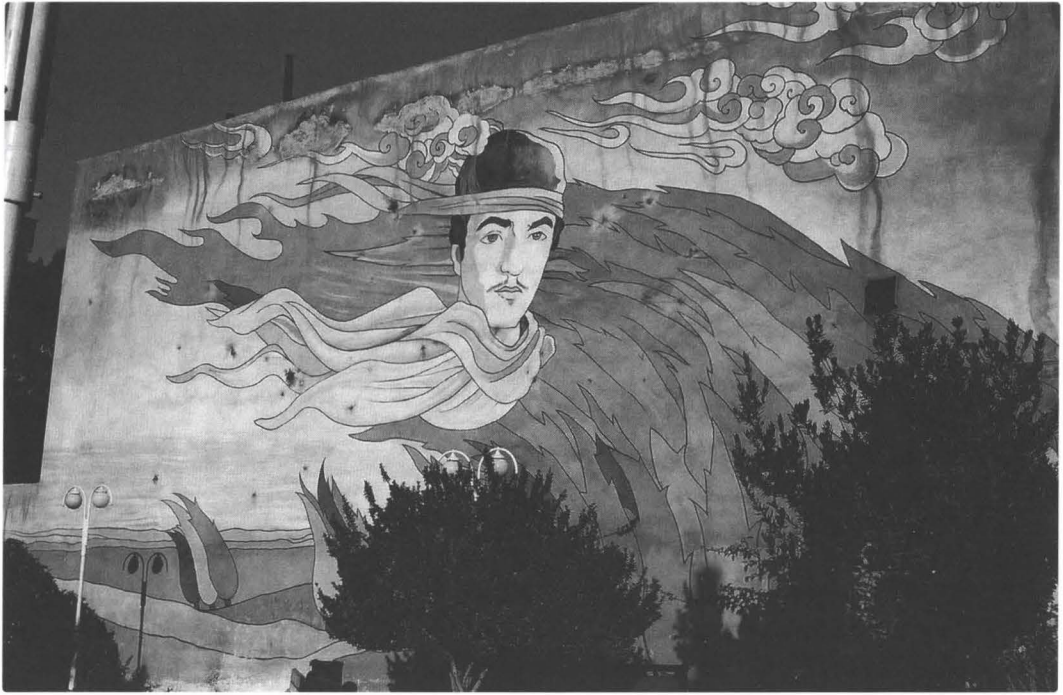
Even if it has been the performance of its own demise, the death of painting in this country has had to do with the protected places in which the form was left to reside. Aram's canvases have as much in common with the domestic interior worlds referenced by carpet patterning and floral decoration as they do with the politics of the public sphere and the natural world. The traces left by these



Fig. 5
 Kamrooz Aram
Making the Desert Bloom
 2003
 Oil on canvas
 167.6 x 134.6 cm
 Courtesy of the artist and
 Wilkinson Gallery, London

realms are revealed by the ways in which Aram's paintings slowly unravel and deteriorate from within, their colours fading, streaking and bleeding into one another as though at the mercy of natural weather conditions. But even beyond these constructed signs of wear, Aram's is a public art that speaks to painting's place as that which is of architecture and a violent birth into the world, articulating this relationship, as it were, from within the very walls that confine it. W.J.T. Mitchell has continued to be particularly influential in the discussion surrounding this violence within public art, whether physical or symbolic, having pointed out three basic forms that are helpful for understanding how publics can be constructed even from within the private spaces of aesthetic experience. He concludes on this point in his seminal essay "The Violence of Public Art: *Do the Right Thing*", that "an image can be a weapon of violence without ever being used as a weapon; it may represent violence without ever exerting or suffering from it".¹⁰ Similarly, the violence evoked by Aram's *Blazing Glory* exists not in the cosmic explosion depicted by the radiating light emanating from the painting's central figure, but in the effacement and deterioration that the image has worked into its very being in the world. *Blazing Glory*, like much of Aram's work, is a gesture of political art making through a tension between the isolation of aesthetic experience and the processes of world-formation to which it, as an image, must ascribe. The tension contained within images such as these reside in their ability to signify, through decoration and ornament, the environments of domestic life haunted by the social structures of the public sphere.

It is only since the experience of painting has been confined to interior spaces that perceptions of its radicality as a form have disappeared. *Mystical Visions Undetected ...* and *Blazing Glory* are two examples in which Aram reveals the social and political terrain of the public sphere from within painting's otherwise deadening context – a context in which the ability to perceive an image is given fully over to vision; in which the communicability of an image's properties is constricted; and in which the debates surrounding the form find the most comfort when restricted to notions of imitation and simulation of the outside world.



Throughout Tehran and much of Iran the painted images of fallen martyrs have come to define the experience of public life in the wake of a tumultuous history of Islamic Revolution (1979) and the Iran–Iraq War (1980–88). Religious and political murals that range in content from scenes of battle to glorified portraits of the afterlife of those who sacrificed themselves for the cause of the Islamic Republic create a landscape in which the public life of the painted image dominates (Figs. 6-8). These images of communal suffering and the loss of life in the name of “Holy Defense”, are bred out of a time described by Michel Foucault, who experienced the atmosphere surrounding Ayatollah Khomeini’s return from exile first hand, as a willingness to “Let Iran bleed, to make the revolution strong”.¹¹ The visual culture that has continued to emerge around death and political violence speaks to the very public nature lost by painting’s slow retreat towards private life. Although these painted images represent the visual regime of the Iranian state, we are here reminded of what was once painting’s political potential, and its ability to interface with a social body. It is in the internalisation of this logic, if even detached from its principles, that Kamrooz Aram’s painting is truly public in its scope.



Figs. 6–8
View of public murals
commissioned by the
Islamic Republic of Iran's
Ministry of Culture
(Tehran, 2005).



However, any comparison of Aram's work to the murals that occupy much of the Iranian public sphere would be disingenuous and misleading. Furthermore, as compelling as it may be to point out similarities in Aram's canvases to examples of political mural painting in Tehran, in so far as both share in a logic of the visualisation of the supernatural and of the pairing of natural and ethereal phenomena, to bring forth these associations at the level of iconography would be a further disservice to our understanding of how either set of images operate. As with the existing body of critical literature that has attempted to thus far frame Aram's practice in the context of more domestic visual traditions along the lines of symbology, a reading that draws forth a veritable empire of signs from a public domain defined by painting runs a similar risk of being bound by the essential logic of descriptive frameworks. Whatever the references or cues that may be wrested from a painted image's proposed silence, meaning – if it is meaning that we can glean – comes from what has been rendered invisible, from what has gone unnoticed by vision. While iconographic roadmaps can often take one no further than the places of allegory, or places in which narrative templates come fully stocked with one-dimensional themes, it becomes fully necessary to

redefine our encounter with painted images in order to get at the very heart of *what imaging can be*. Attempts made to decode the array of cultural signifiers that largely make up Aram's visual vocabulary rob these painted images of their political nature as aberrations from the existing image flow, because when an image has been contained by the limitations imposed by allegory it is capable of serving only as a displacement of the death, the trauma, and the social politics of far-off places, rather than as a site of these experiences unto itself.

The images that make up Aram's series "Night Visions and Revolutionary Dreams" do more than represent the tropes of revolutionary life and turmoil, they act as political bodies unto themselves, obstructing and deterring the transparent readability sought after by the imaging regimes that control the current battle over images and over our perceptions of the War on Terror, of radical Islam, and of the West's relationship with the Middle East more generally. These are the burdens upon which painting is born into this world, a proposed "image war" that has continued to occupy much critical debate. It is in this light that I am again reminded of John Currin's take on the outcry that followed the publication of cartoons depicting the prophet Muhammad in Danish newspapers in late 2005, of which, as cited above, he relayed to Calvin Tomkins of the *New Yorker*, "That's when it occurred to me that we might lose this thing – not the Iraq war but the larger struggle." While some paintings come to internalise the present conditions imposed upon images and our very relationship to the wars being waged abroad, others conjure delusions of a larger struggle as if the conditions of warfare are natural occurrences. It has historically been painting's duty to reveal these tensions, and some, like Kamrooz Aram, are better equipped than others to bring the political places of painting to the fore.

1. T.J. Clark, *The Sight of Death* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 121.
2. Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, "Andy Warhol's One Dimensional Art: 1956–1966," *Andy Warhol*, ed. Annette Michelson (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001), 2.
3. See Yve-Alain Bois, "Painting: The Task of Mourning," in *Endgame: Reference and Simulation in Recent American Painting and Sculpture*, ed. Yve-Alain Bois et al. (Boston: Institute of Contemporary Art, 1986).
4. Calvin Tomkins, "Lifting the Veil: Old Masters, Pornography, and the Work of John Currin," *New Yorker*, January 28, 2008, 61.
5. Tomkins, 67.
6. Clark, 122–3.
7. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Art and the World of Perception," in *The World of Perception*, trans. Oliver Davis (New York: Routledge, 2004), 96.
8. Holland Cotter, "Art in Review: Kamrooz Aram," *New York Times*, March 19, 2004; Roberta Smith, "KA/VH: RA/AG," *New York Times*, March 18, 2005; and Sarah H. Bayliss, "East Meets West Meets East," *ARTnews* 105, no. 10 (November 2006): 162–4.
9. Negar Azimi, "Kamrooz Aram Night Visions and Revolutionary Dreams," *Bidoun: Arts and Culture from the Middle East* 9 (Winter 2007).
10. W.J.T. Mitchell, "The Violence of Public Art: Do the Right Thing," in *Art and the Public Sphere*, ed. W.J.T. Mitchell (Chicago: University Press, 1992), 38.
11. Michel Foucault, "Is it Useless to Revolt?" in *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution: Gender and the Seductions of Islamism*, ed. Janet Afary and Kevin B. Anderson (Chicago: University Press, 2005), 263.

ARCHIVE

My Only Child: Picture of Warhol

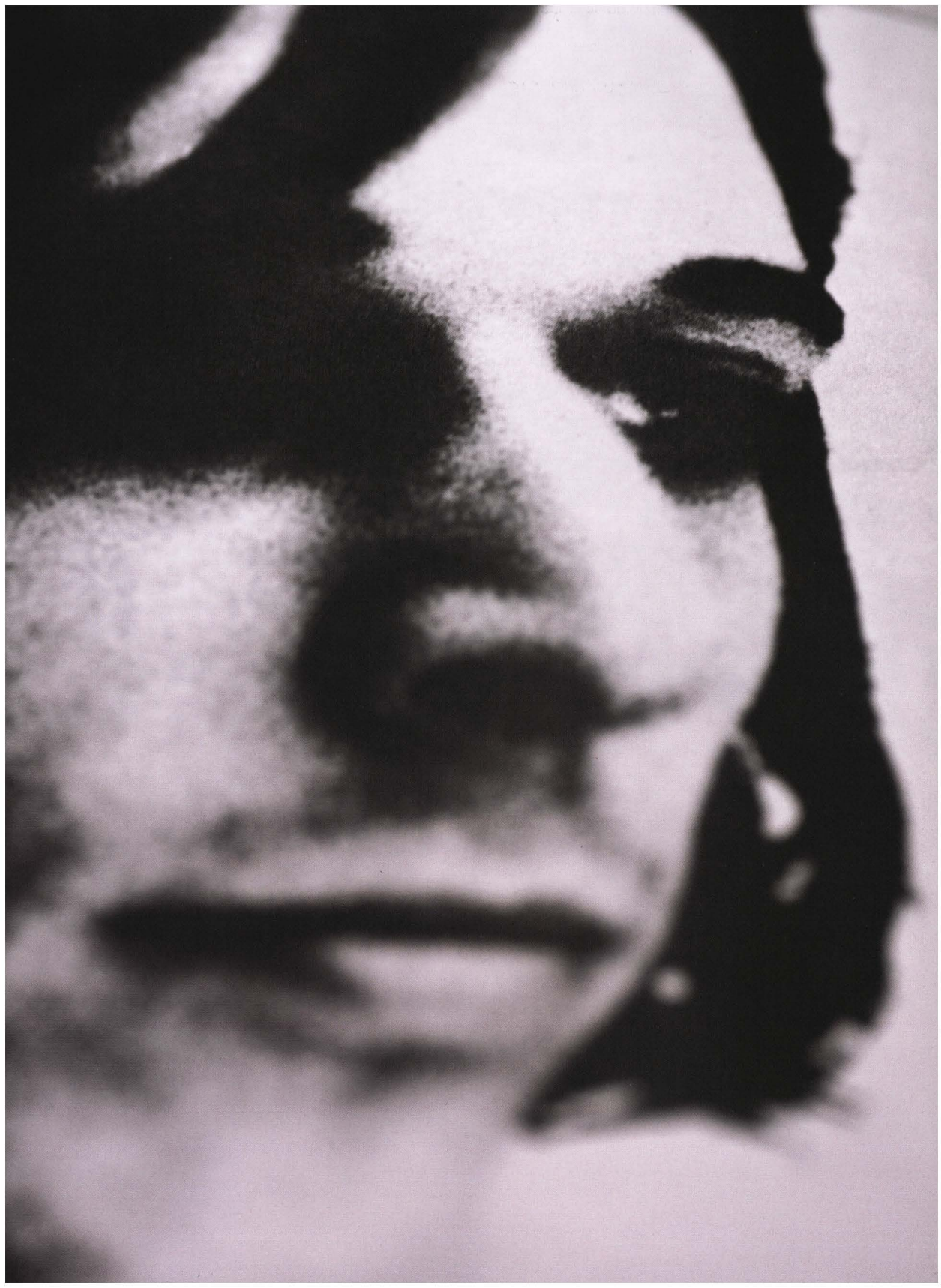
Gavin Hipkins



















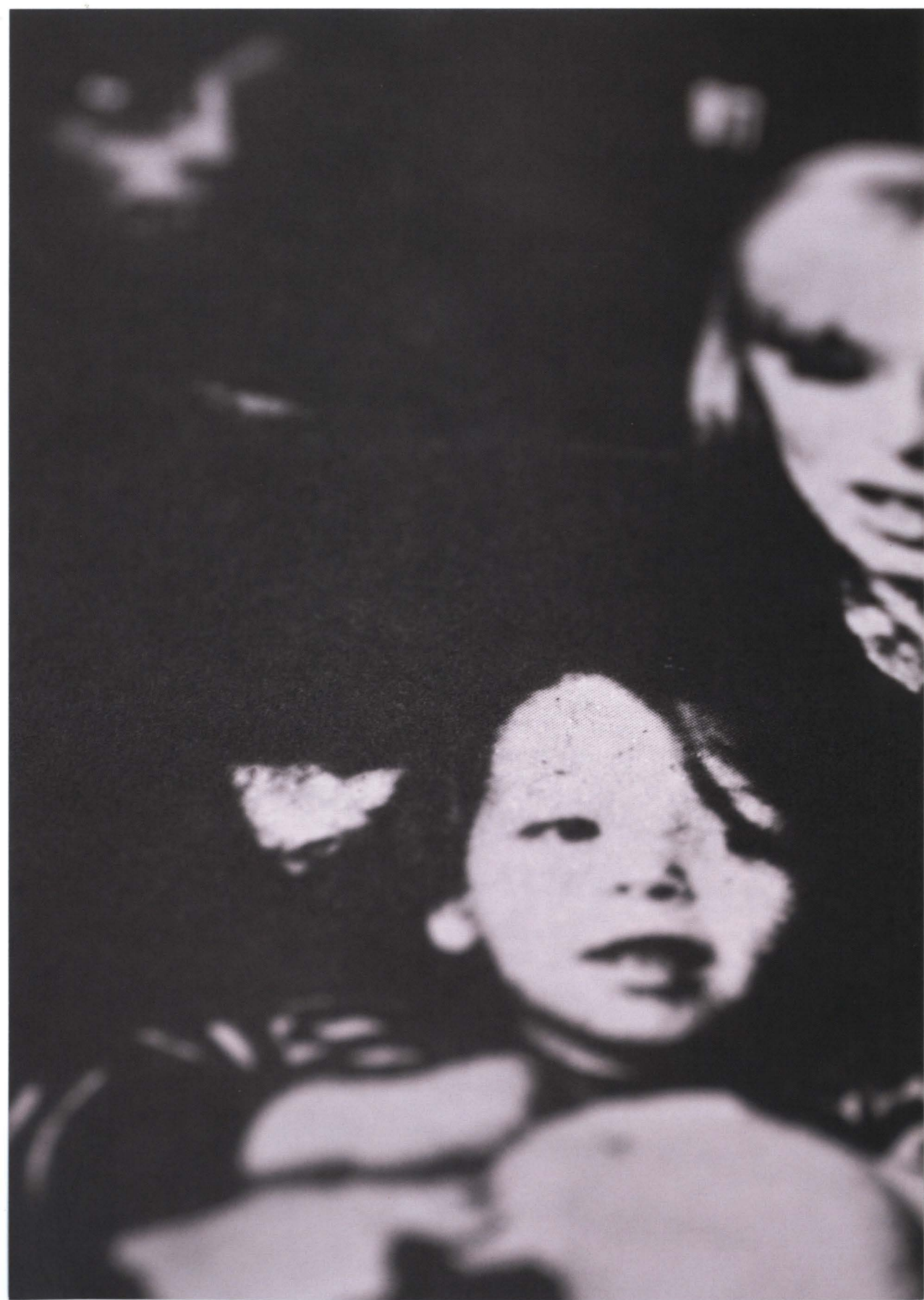


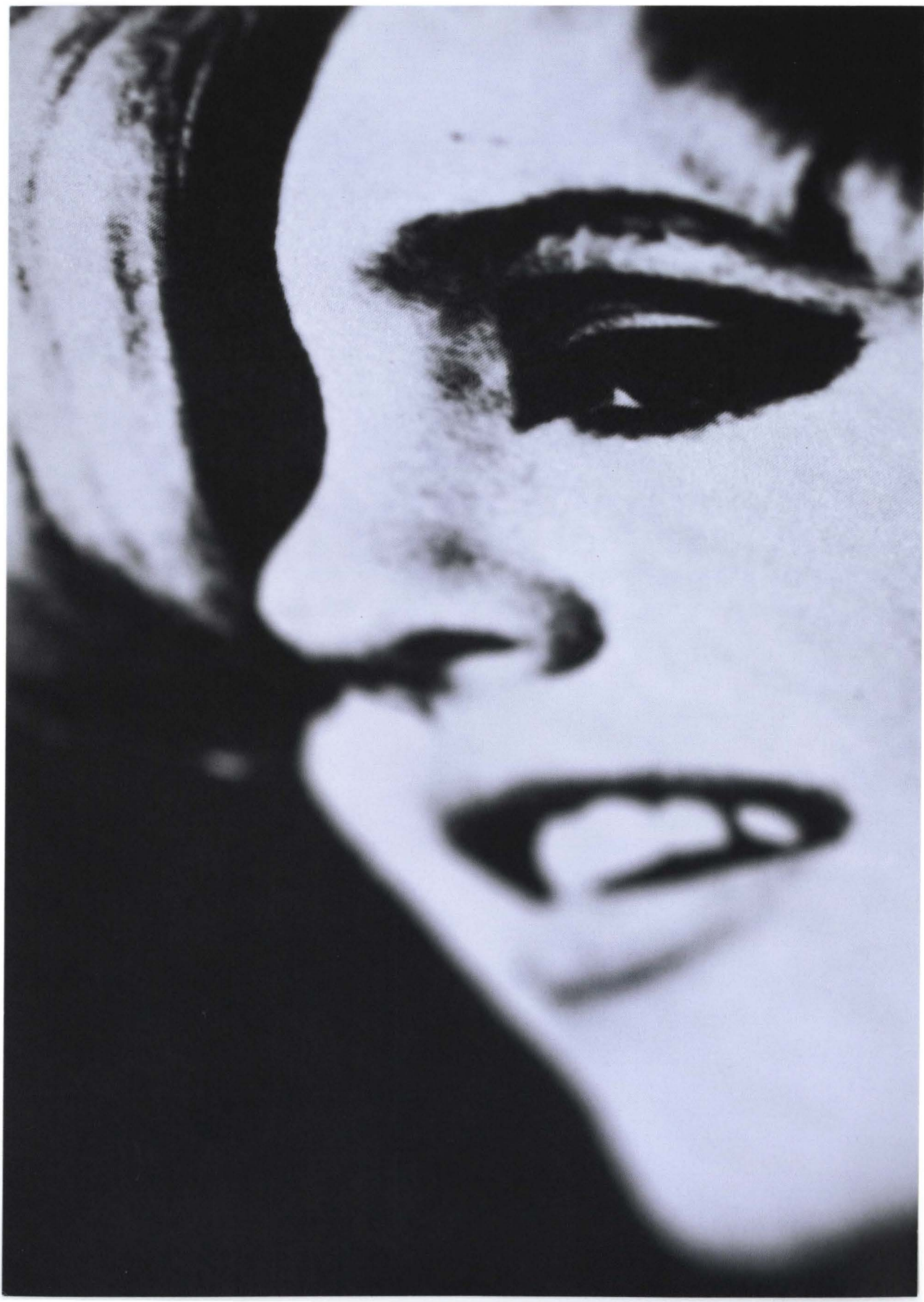












*The morning small
 Too small to fill their ways with breathing
 The evening tall
 — Nico, "My Only Child",
 from the album Desertshore (1970)*

A signed copy of *Andy Warhol's Index Book* (1967) was gifted to the Auckland Art Gallery's E.H. McCormick Research Library in the late 1980s, acknowledging its status as one of the first libraries in the Southern Hemisphere to subscribe to *Interview* magazine. The *Index* itself has striking popup cardboard features found within selected spreads (Hunt's tomato paste can, portrait of Lou Reed on vinyl, caricature of medieval castle battle scene...), however my response to the invitation to document this book was to ignore these extrusions. Rather, I have been compelled to read the *Index* as family album, and in the process, emulate Warholian strategies in order to reflect on those all too familiar intimacies and pathologies of the original black and white grainy snapshots.

After my first year of art school, at the age of 19, I took a six-week trip to New York City with a couple of school buddies. We stayed with their Irish relatives in that

part of the Bronx, and less credible, in the upstate middle-class suburb of Pearl River. This was 1987 and in that post-crash, brisk winter I was fortunate to catch the Warhol retrospective at MoMA, where there was a distinctive seamlessness between store merchandise and gallery displays. I bought souvenirs of gold Marilyn badges and distributed them to painting and photography students back home.

After the badges were gone, I was left with one special postcard of the wounded Drella (hybrid of Dracula and Cinderella) that was late Warhol, frail and approaching death. To preserve the funerary solemnity of embalmed genius, I purchased a portrait-sized white frame with gold trim for the postcard and have since kept this *memento mori* on my office or studio bookshelf as one would keep a precious portrait of a grandfather, or, for that matter, a picture of a beloved only child.



**Archives Become Him:
The Giovanni Intra Archive
Robert Leonard**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
August 15 1985

Further details:
Contact: Giovanni
AK 641-925

NEGATIVE CREEPS DEBUT IN AUCKLAND 1

The Negative Creeps will be making their debut public performance at the NORML concert in the Auckland University Cafeteria, on Thursday 15th August 1985; the show commences at 7:30 p.m.: \$5 public, or \$4 for NORML members.

Negative Creeps are a theatrical group who concentrate on experimental and "primitive" music, drama, and filming. Negative Creeps, a five-piece group whose average age is n-n-n-nineteen, are:

Rylliar	- Guitar / Vocals
Ilmara	- Percussion / Vocals
Jack	- Bass
Richard	- Drums
Angus	- Percussion / Vocals

Inquiries about Bookings can be sent to The Fluorescent Cat Co-op, P.O. Box 3189, Auckland.



Giovanni Intra died on 17 December 2002 in New York. He was only 34. In his short life he wore a number of hats in the art world, in New Zealand and later in America. In the early and mid-1990s, he was a fixture on the New Zealand art scene, making a major contribution as an artist, writer and gallerist. Last year the E.H. McCormick Research Library received a substantial deposit of material pertaining to his New Zealand years from his mother Barbara Intra. This archive rounds out our understanding of the artist and will provide fertile soil for researchers.

Intra studied at University of Auckland's Elam School of Fine Arts, finishing his BFA in 1990 and his MFA in 1993.

He was a precocious student. His work first developed out of an unlikely marriage of punk and religion. He had been in a punk band called the Negative Creeps. And in 1989 he visited India, where wayside shrines fascinated him. On returning he started producing votive objects out of cheap materials: fragments of paper, tin foil, ribbon, wax, lace, sequins, found images. He showed these talismans in ritual accumulations, sometimes arranged on the floor and sometimes pinned to the wall in clusters in the manner of New Zealand artist Richard Killen's cut-outs. Part order, part chaos, his shrines celebrated religion's dark side: destruction, annihilation and fetishism. One was dedicated to American punk novelist Kathy Acker.



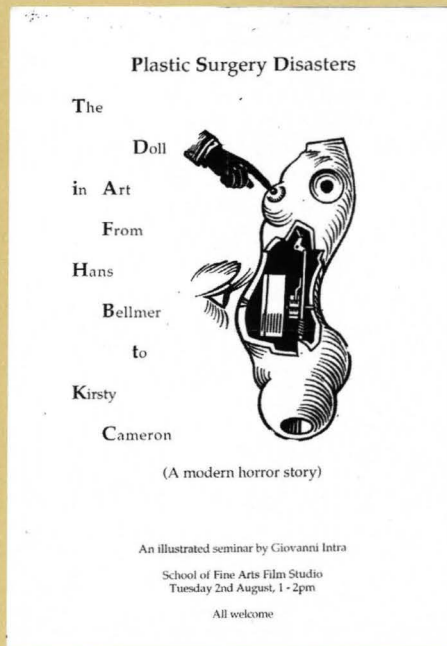
c. 1989

By the end of 1990, Intra had jettisoned the Indian references and was creating reliquaries of punk attire and gestures. His evacuated "studded suit" (*Untitled*, 1990) recalled Joseph Beuys' felt one, but could not have been more different, merging fetish fashion and religious fetish. He displayed Doc Martens, a studded wristlet and a razor in a glass case, suggesting a time capsule, a memorial to punk's passing (*Lifestyle Morte*, 1991). He photographed a hand giving the "fingers", spit on glass, and open mouths with tongues supporting pins and pills.

A voracious reader, Intra gobbled up Greil Marcus's *Lipstick Traces* (a "Secret History of the Twentieth Century", which traced punk's descent through Situationism back to Surrealism) and Dick Hebdige's *Subculture: The Meaning Of Style* (a Marxist reading of subcultural aesthetics). But he ended up turning to Georges Bataille, the French dissident Surrealist and librarian-pornographer. As he explained in his 1993 MFA dissertation *Subculture: Bataille, Big Toe, Dead Doll*:

In Bataille the *sub* is not so much a 'culture' but an area of philosophical aggression: the field of 'excremental philosophy', heterogeneity, and transgression. This is what I term subculture, thus relating Bataille's ideas to contemporary manifestations, in particular punk ... Bataille's low can be found in the abject manifestations of culture; pornography, unlimited proletarian revolution, automutilation, madness, excess and extreme ecstasy (eroticism, religion, spillage): what opens onto the unthinkable, in short, the *impossible*. Subculture, then, is a kind of offal, a waste product of the homogeneous system, a commodity produced but unaccounted for, an unplugged abyss in culture.¹

Intra paid homage to Surrealism. His *Blood Mobile* made of suspended pieces of blood-red glass (1992) nodded to Hans Bellmer, while his over-engineered tableau *Corps Humain* (1992) quoted Rene Magritte. It was through Surrealism that Intra became obsessed with medicine and hallucination. His article



1994

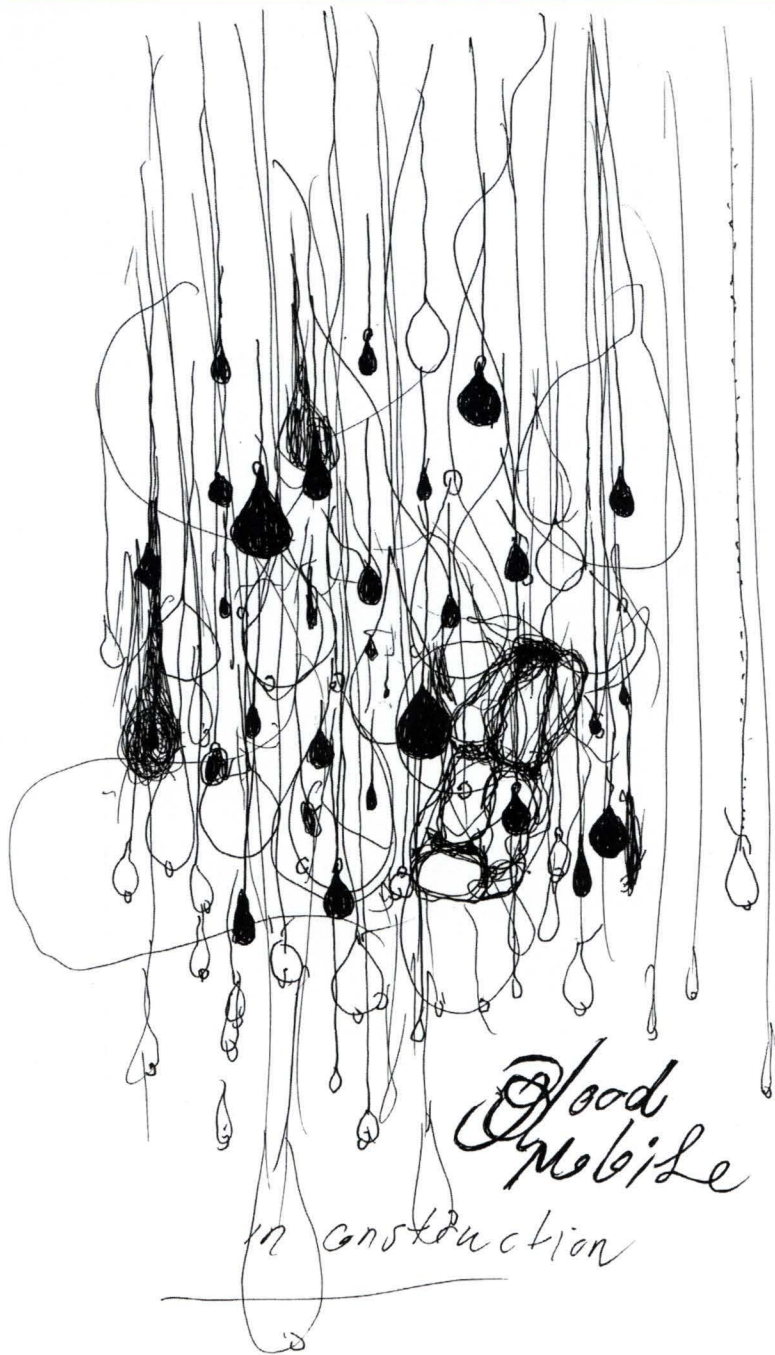
"Discourse On The Paucity Of Clinical Reality" traced Surrealism's conception back to a World War I field hospital and the young neuropsychiatric intern Andre Breton's chance encounter with a deluded soldier certain the war was an elaborate fiction.² Intra was also interested in Bataille-collaborator, photographer Jacques-André Boiffard, whose photographs of big toes and gaping mouths were informed by medical photography.

Intra used medical materials and processes throughout his work. With Vicki Kerr, he remodelled Teststrip gallery, curving walls, ceiling and floor together, painting it white and dousing it with disinfectant. Conflating gallery and operating theatre, they called it *Waiting Room* (1993). He sterilised a still life of vegetables, fruit and surgical disposables using cobalt 60 irradiation in *Corpus Delicti* (1993), and asked his audience to "perv" at a video of a tomographic scan of a human pelvis through a security peep-hole in *Scopophilia: Jacques-André Boiffard* (1993). He sequestered a rat loaned from the

University of Auckland's medical school behind an epidermal wall of pink fibreglass batts for an ArtSpace art-and-science theme show (1994). He apparently also made paintings with spermicide.

Intra wanted to expose a perversity underpinning the assertively rational medical business, transforming it "in bouts of necrotic flanerier", hoping to make "medical use-value glisten with the perverse thrill of ulterior motive".³ He wrote: "We begin where the epistemological figures 'disease', 'trauma' and 'malady' lose their clinical specificity; where medical textbooks are nothing but recipes for perversion and atlases of anatomy are all the better as collage material."⁴

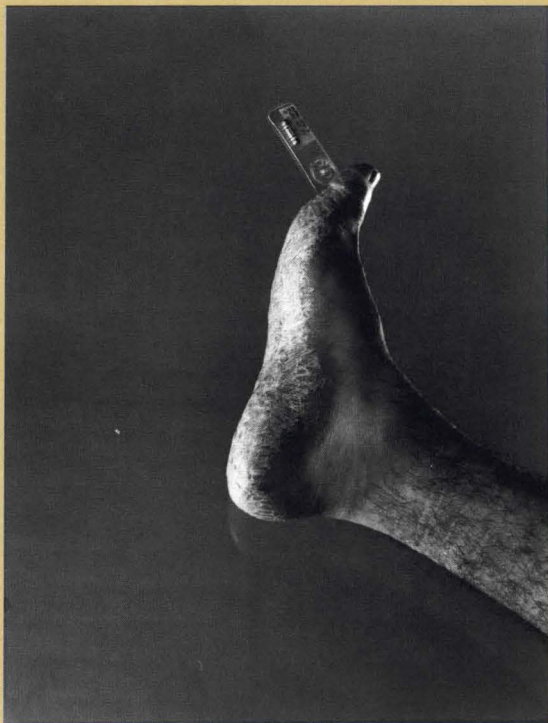
Medicine (today's truth) and religion (yesterday's truth) came together in *Unrequited Passion Cycle* (1993), a collaboration with New Zealand writer Stuart McKenzie. Playing off the thought that medicine had replaced the Church as the source of hope and miracles and truth, Intra made 14 photo-



Good
Mobile

in construction





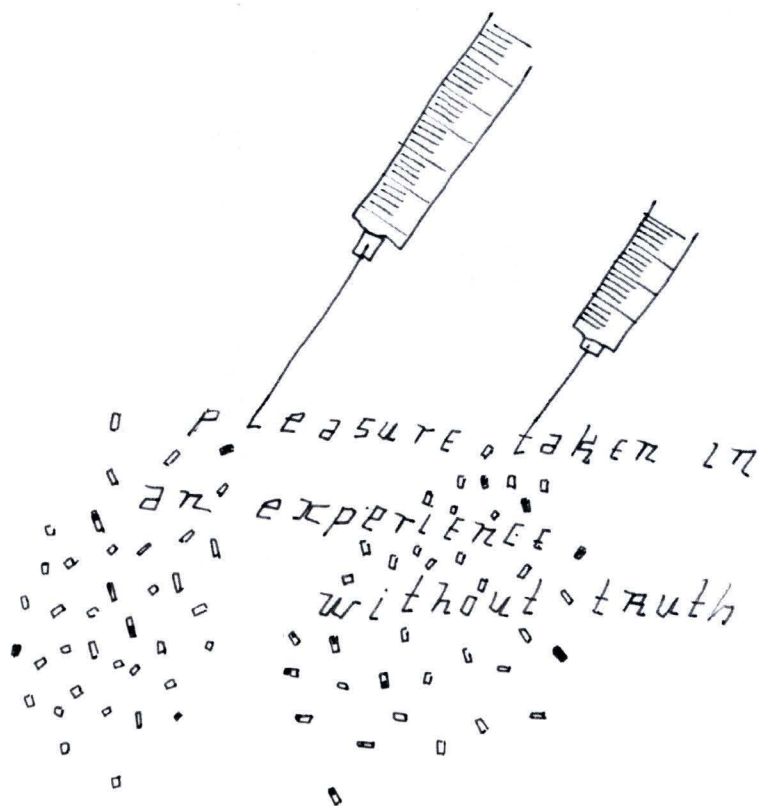
XII: *Best After 33AD*
From the series
Unrequited Passion Cycle
1993
C-type print

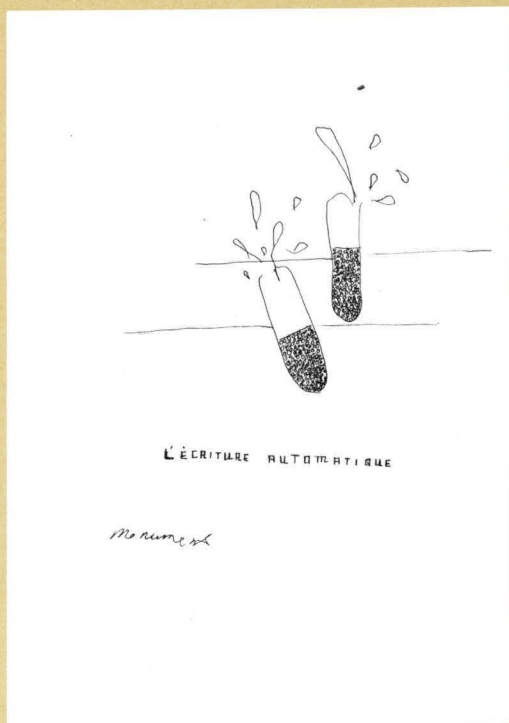
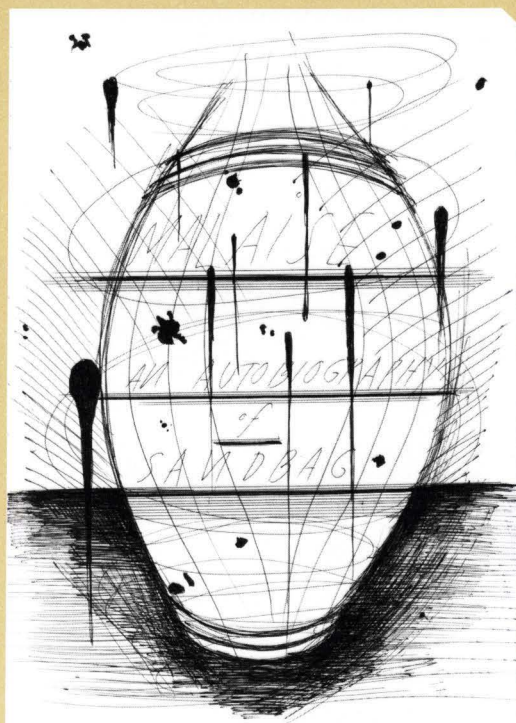
graphs illustrating McKenzie's irreverent alternative slogans for the Stations of the Cross (including "Male Pin Up" and "Cross Dresser"). Intra represented the slogans with medical supplies (a catheter, a drip, spermicide, band aids) photographed floating above a transcendental blue background, suggesting an antiseptic sublime. Intra explained: "I responded to the Passion Cycle like a mad doctor, putting a contemporary medical perspective on it – if Christ turned up at Auckland Hospital on a Saturday night what would happen to him?"⁵

Intra's assault on medical science's presumption to objective truth was ultimately literalised in acts of vandalism. He started smashing up optical technologies – cameras mostly, but also a microscope and a computer monitor – coyly describing these works as "disarticulated readymades". For *The Way Doctors See* (1995) he spread the remains of

30 trashed cameras across the floor in a vandalistic orgy. The installation *Hospitals* (1995) at Manawatu Art Gallery in Palmerston North recalled a ransacked clinic. He also created x-rays of cameras, intact and smashed, perversely folding technology's gaze back on its own demise, as if he could see through it. To me the x-rays had a psychedelic quality, recalling the ultimate scene of Michaelangelo Antonioni's *Zabriskie Point*, where a modernist house and its consumer contents are blown up in glorious slow-motion in a way that seems to cross-reference a scientific experiment and a drug trip.

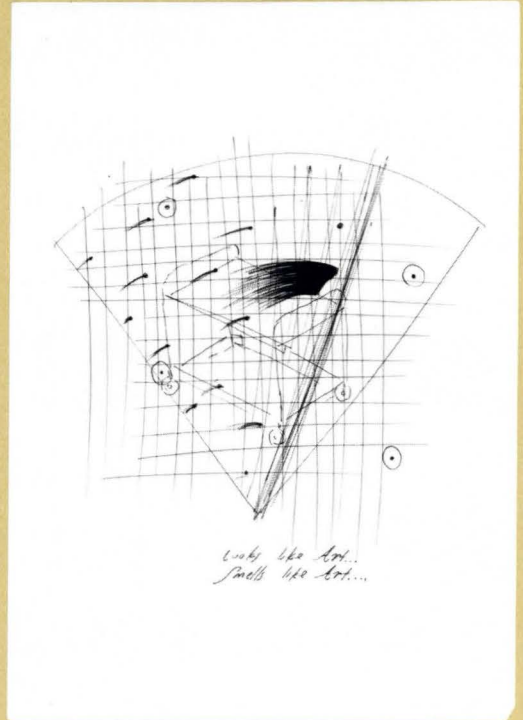
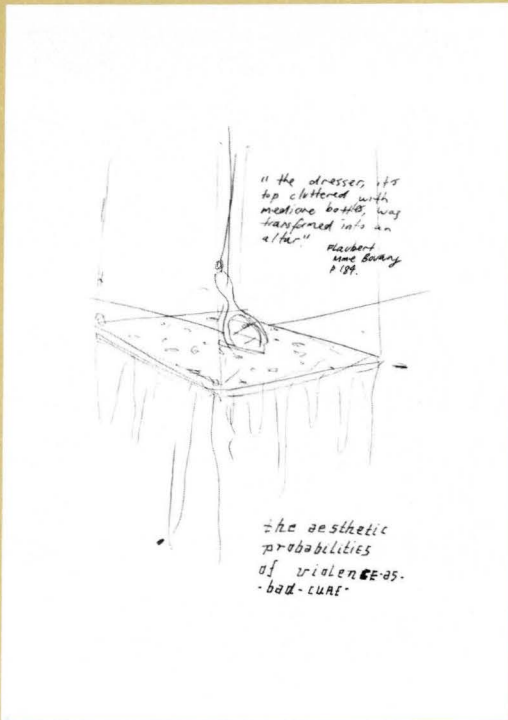
Drawing was always important for Intra. He drew incessantly to gather and trial ideas. His adolescent "pencil case" aesthetic made a feature of lettering, for instance juxtaposing refined copperplate script with corny ghoulish dripping-blood lettering. In 1993 Intra's drawing found epic expression in a cycle of





massive works on paper, originally hung edge to edge as a mural. These handmade billboards mind-mapped his diverse concerns: punk bands (Jonestown Olympics), Dadaists and Surrealists (Picabia, Magritte and Bellmer), philosophers (Derrida), medical and recreational drug use. One of the loveliest, *Clinic Of Phantasms*, offered a constellation of pills in a trippy Clairmontesque conflation of internal and external reality. It is now owned by New Zealand's national museum, Te Papa.

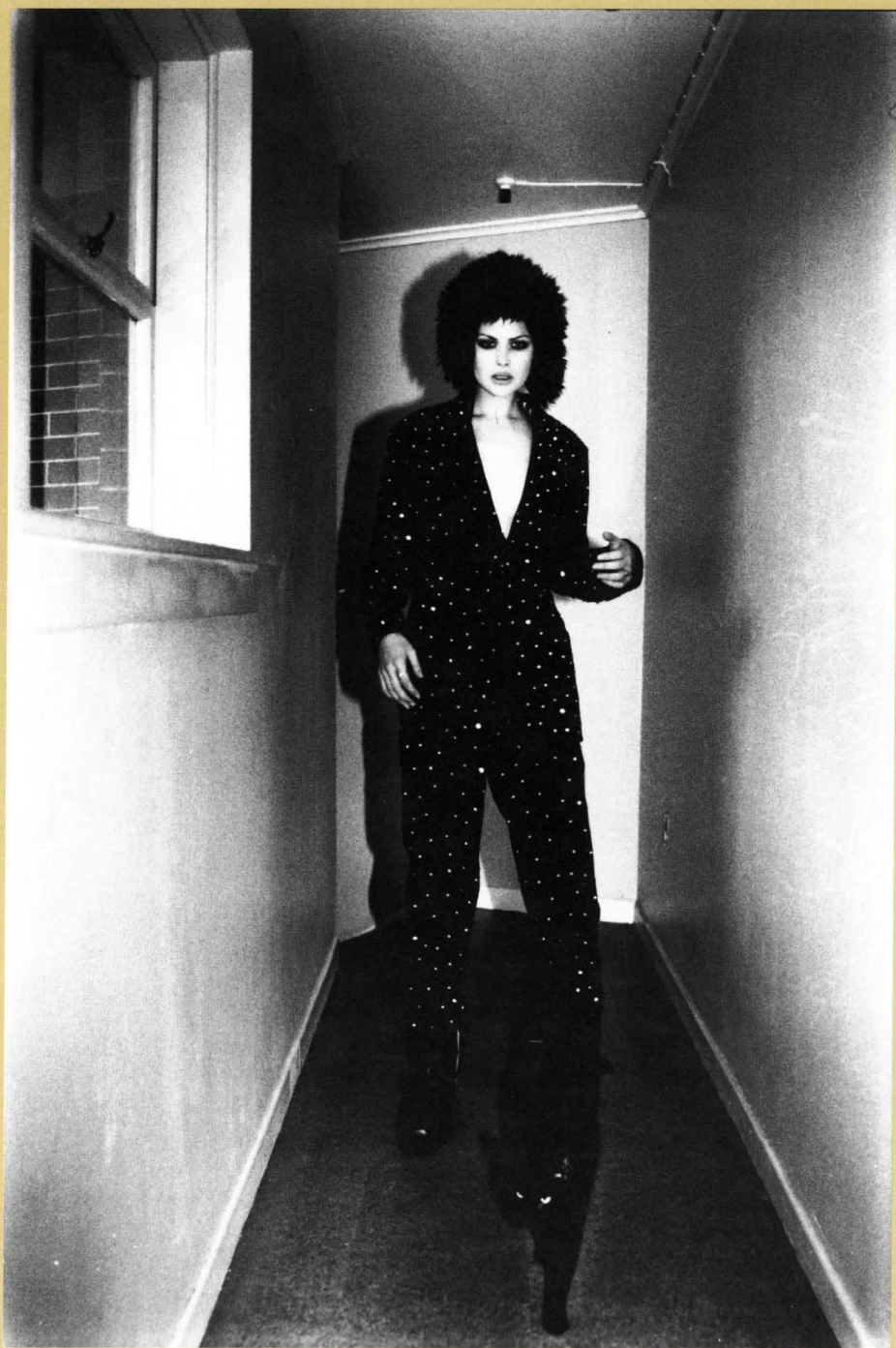
The last works Intra showed in New Zealand, at Auckland's Anna Bibby Gallery and Wellington's Hamish McKay Gallery in 1996, also developed out of his drawing. With their white inscriptions on black grounds, they recalled Colin McCahon's late text paintings. In place of scripture, Intra opted for, what William McAloon called "a conspiracy of fantasies"⁶, being peppered with Artaudisms, cryptic druggy neologisms, paranoid tags and in-jokes: "Colombianizacion", "Panadology" and "Hollyweird".



Intra gathered these small inane *l'art brut* nocturnes in elaborate ensembles, arranged on base lines suggesting city skylines, bar graphs and books on shelves, as if to mock the very semblance of order or closure.

Intra was also one of the founders and key players in the influential artist-run gallery Teststrip, a critic and curator. These activities played into his wider inquiry. He co-opted *Stamp* magazine as a platform for his writing early on, later graduating to the mainstream

art press. Epitomising the idea of the artist-writer, his writing and curating picked out things in other artists' works that interested him. "Mental Health In The Metropolis" repositioned John Hurrell as a Situationist; "A Case History: Tainted Love", a catalogue essay on Fiona Pardington, focused on medical photography and perversity; his show *Everyday Pathomimesis* linked artists around the theme "studies in the disarticulation of disease".⁷



Wearing Giovanni Intra's
studded suit, 1994
Originally shot for *Planet*
Styled by Kirsty Cameron
Photo: Monty Adams

Intra was always destined for greater things. He was befriended by Sylvere Lotringer, the publisher of *Semiotext(e)* and prominent Los Angeles academic, while he was visiting New Zealand with his partner, expatriate New Zealander Chris Kraus. In 1996, Intra left for L.A. on a Fulbright Scholarship to study at Art Center College of Design, in Pasadena, where his teachers would include Lotringer, Mike Kelley and Stephen Prina. In L.A. he effectively stopped working as an artist and focused on writing. He rapidly became a prominent art critic, contributing to major journals like *Artforum*, *Flash Art* and *Tema Celeste*. However, he was most visible in the Australian magazine *Art and Text*, for which he began writing while in New Zealand. It had also relocated to L.A. around the same time. In 1999, with his friend Steve Hanson, who also worked at the Art Center library, Intra started a low-key artist-run space, China Art Objects. It quickly became an influential dealer gallery through featuring collaborations between emerging and established L.A. artists and giving first shows to artists who subsequently became important. Intra was just getting started, but he was already a success. When he died Roberta Smith wrote an obituary in the *New York Times* and *Frieze* did a two-page story.

With Intra's death New Zealand lost not only a close friend but also a key link to the international art world. He had become a conduit for information and opportunities, facilitating connections both ways for

artists and curators, into and out of New Zealand. Like many at the time, I wondered what might be done to pay tribute to Intra. At that stage his work as an artist was effectively mothballed. He had left it in storage and had not been attending to his profile as an artist. Out of circulation, the work was no longer part of the current discussion, but had not entered into history either. Should it now be celebrated as a key aspect of New Zealand art of its time or seen as a sidebar story at best? Actually, you could go either way. It was certainly easy to forget how crucial Intra had been to his moment, how he had brokered new ideas into the New Zealand discussion. His work also shared strategies, images and interests with important contemporaries, among them Luise Fong, Gavin Hipkins, Denise Kum, Daniel Malone, Fiona Pardington, Ava Seymour and et al. He even did a collaborative work with Michael Parekowhai, who went through Elam sculpture with him. He was part of a scene.

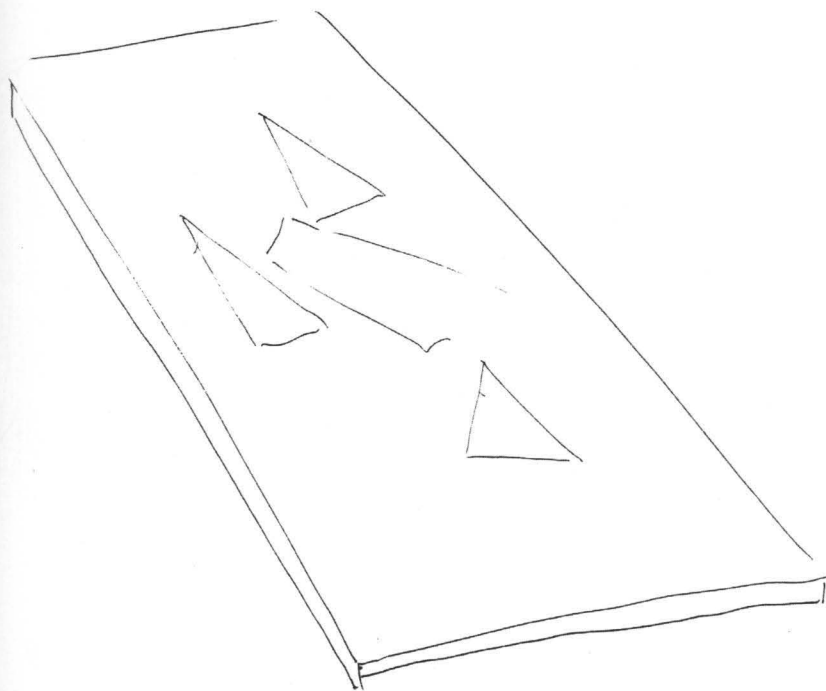
When Intra died I was about to start a new job, as curator of contemporary art at Auckland Art Gallery. My first task was to curate an exhibition from the Chartwell Collection, which included one of Intra's "conspiracy" paintings. I decided to focus on eight canonical figures in New Zealand art, all well represented in the Chartwell and the Gallery collections (et al., Peter Peryer, Bill Hammond, Julian Dashper, Michael Stevenson, Jacqueline Fraser,

The Way Doctors See
1995 (detail), 30 smashed
cameras; reconstructed
by Gavin Hipkins for
Nine Lives Auckland Art
Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, 2003



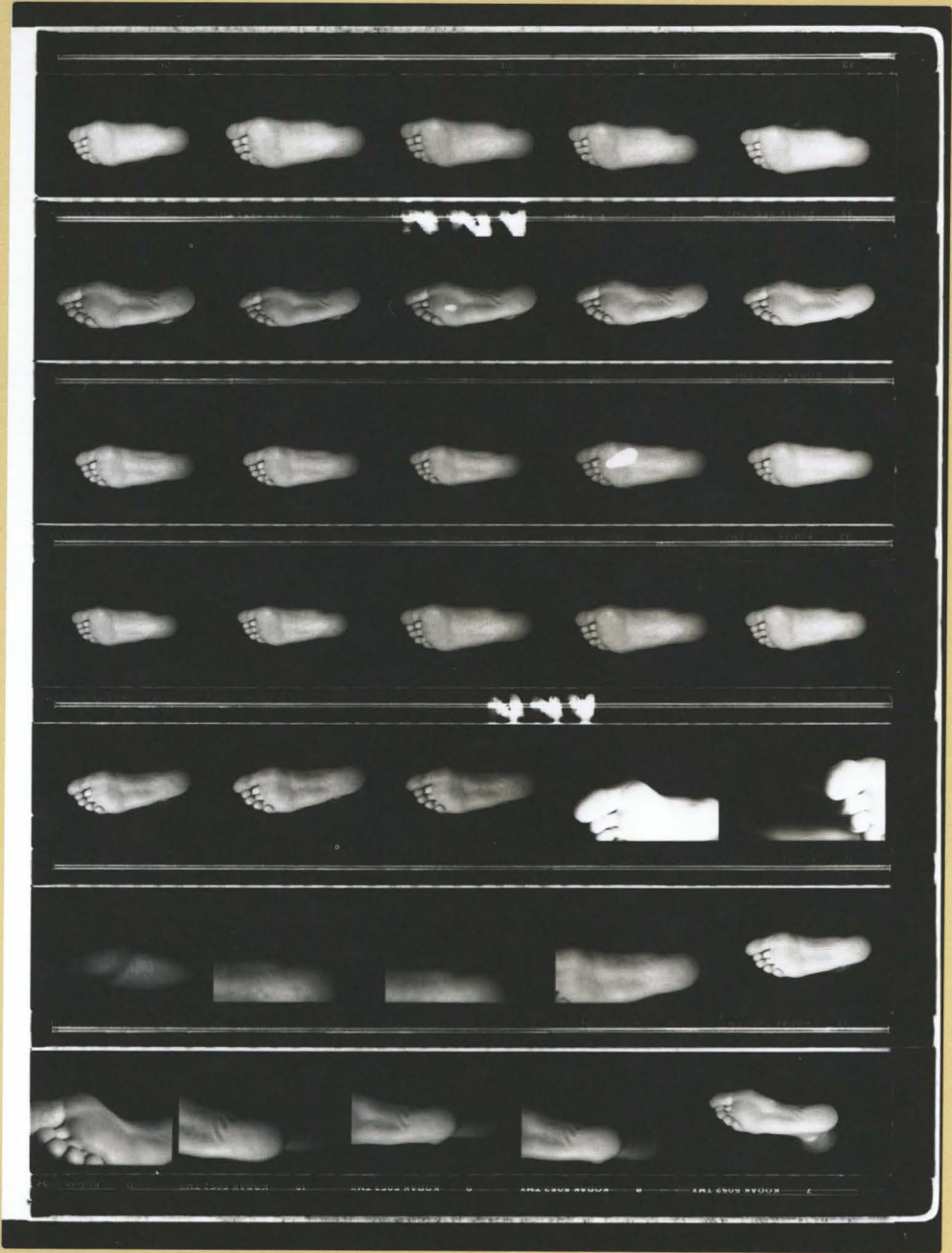
John Reynolds and Michael Parekowhai), plus Intra. At that stage, the Gallery owned nothing of Intra's, but quickly acquired the studded suit, jointly with Chartwell. While the other eight artists were represented with works from the two collections, I built a mini-retrospective of Intra's works drawing extensively on loans and reconstructions. It seemed a provocative idea, to locate Intra — an artist of ambiguous standing — in the mix of these more recognised figures. To brand the show I used Monty Adams' image of a female model wearing the studded suit from a fashion spread in *Planet*.⁸ I called my show *Nine Lives*, in reference to the nine artists surveyed but also to Intra's demise, and the fragility of artists' lives and reputations. Conveniently, a black cat appeared in Adams' image.

Assembling the Intra part was rushed, but it seemed important to do something quickly. I had trouble finding works. A key early piece, the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery's *Nature Morte* (1990), was too fragile to travel, so I couldn't represent the beginning of the story, those ritualistic Indian works. Two works were completely replicated: the etched mirror piece *An Excellent Fetish* (1991) from photos and *The Way Doctors See* from a description and with the help of Gavin Hipkins. For *Scopophilia: Jacques-André Boiffard* I installed Intra's video of a pelvis behind a security peep-hole in a wall painted medical green. I matched the paint colour perfectly to a slide documenting the original installation, although someone told me it was way off. I struggled to find out which way up the x-rays went.



frozen surface
photographed.

the sea: antiseptic
frozen antiseptic after
C.D. Friedrich's
sea of ice



Of course, when you do a show of an artist who has just died there are always people close to them with a vested interest in telling you that you got it wrong. Interestingly, at the *Nine Lives* opening, Intra's friends, lead by Ava Seymour, stomped through *The Way Doctors See*, further dispersing its camera scraps through the space in an impromptu happening. Someone said this was necessary because Hipkins and I had installed it too prissily – although Intra could be very elegant with his installations. Someone else said the work should be on a carpet, confusing the work we re-presented with another, *The Enchanted Garden of Childhood* (1995). Intra's circle's vandalistic participation seemed to be part of a grieving process.

Doing *Nine Lives* brought home to me what it means to curate a contemporary artist's work after they die, where you can't ask them what they did or why, where you are limited by shaky memories and the limited documentation to hand.⁹ So I was thrilled when I heard that Barbara Intra had deposited her son's papers with the Library. They would have been so helpful to me when I was making *Nine Lives*.

Going through the boxes, Intra's project came to life for me again. Intra placed huge importance on his often scruffy, scratchy drawings, binding photocopies of them into volumes, thesis-style. There were lots of drawings, flicking out ideas for *Blood Mobile* and other installations of "disinfected minimalism". I particularly loved one unrealised idea, for a photograph of a reconstruction of Caspar David Friedrich's famous ice floes in frozen savlon. There was a swag of photographs: shots from travels through India, snapshots of parties and friends, images of works and shows, plus primary material for photographic works, including the 4x5 negatives Ann Shelton shot for *Unrequited Passion Cycle*. There was a clunky early art school video work, and a VHS tape of Intra playing with the Negative Creeps.

The archive shows how Intra's writing developed in conversation with his practice as an artist. It contains what appears to be an awkward university assignment on Anish Kapoor (which may relate to Intra's Indian-inspired work) and reviews done for Alberto Garcia-Alvarez's Elam art criticism class. There are miscellaneous published reviews and articles including some of his early pieces for *Stamp* magazine; a bound

copy of his MFA dissertation (plus drafts, notes and reference materials); and correspondence with Barbara Blake over "Germ-Free Adolescence", the interview they did for *Art New Zealand*.

The correspondence is also amusing. Call it schadenfreude, but I enjoyed reading Intra's mock-pompous responses to his critics, especially one letter sledging Justin Paton after a damning review. Paton's review must have been more than compensated for by something else I found: a fax from Rosalind Krauss expressing interest in considering an Intra essay for *October*. The archive also provides ample evidence of Intra's sheer determination, particularly during his push to get to L.A., with him constantly writing to solicit support. He was someone who could make things happen.

Pouring over all this stuff afforded me a new understanding of Intra's intellectual and artistic evolution. I could see how his inquiry unfolded through the prism of his very distinct concerns and sensibility. I could see how he fed his project philosophically and practically on anything and everything to hand. It is fitting that an artist who owed so much to archives should now become one.

We apologise for the paucity of caption information. Many items in the Intra Archive remain to be identified and dated.

1. Giovanni Intra, *Subculture : Bataille, Big Toe, Dead Doll* (Thesis (MFA), University of Auckland, 1993), 2.
2. Giovanni Intra, "Discourse on the Paucity of Clinical Reality," *Midwest 7* (1995):39–43.
3. Intra, "Discourse on the Paucity of Clinical Reality," 40.
4. Giovanni Intra, "Studies for the Disarticulation of Disease," *Everyday Pathomimesis* (University of Canterbury School of Fine Arts Gallery, 1995), n.p.
5. Barbara Blake, "Giovanni Intra: Germ-Free Adolescence," *Art New Zealand 70* (1994):72.
6. William McAloon, "The Self and Other Inventions," *The Chartwell Collection* (Auckland, N.Z.: Auckland Art Gallery, 1996), n.p.
7. Giovanni Intra "A Case History: Tainted Love," *Tainted Love* (Sue Crockford Gallery, Auckland, 1994), n.p.; Giovanni Intra "Mental Health In The Metropolis," *Midwest 6* (1994):39–40.
8. *Planet 13* (Winter 1994): 71.
9. I must apologise for errors in the *Nine Lives* catalogue: fancifully imaging Intra's vandalised technologies included watches; assuming the x-ray prints to be gelatin silver prints; miscataloging *The Way Doctors See* as *How Doctors See*; etc.

The Information Man

It would be nice if sometime a man would come up to me on the street and say 'Hello, I'm the information man and you have not said the word "yours" for 13 minutes — you have not said the word "praise" for 18 days, 3 hours and 9 minutes. You have not used the word "petroleum" in your speech for almost four and a half months, but you wrote the word last Friday evening at 9.35 pm and you used the word "hello" about 30 seconds ago'.

This information man would also have details as to the placement and whereabouts of things. He could tell me possibly of all the books of mine that are out in the public that only 17 are actually placed face up with nothing covering them. 2,026 are in vertical positions in libraries, while 2,715 are under books in stacks. The most weight upon a single book is 683 pounds and that is in the city of Cologne, Germany in a bookshop. 58 have been lost; 14 totally destroyed by water or fire; while 216 could be considered badly worn. A whopping 319 books are in positions between 40 and 50 degrees and most of these are probably in bookshelves with the stacks leaning at odd angles. 18 of the books have never been opened, most of these being newly purchased and put aside momentarily. Of the approximate 5,000 books of Edward Ruscha that have been purchased, only 32 have actually been used in a directly functional manner: 13 of these have been used as weights for paper or other things. 7 have been used as swatters to kill small insects such as flies and mosquitoes and 2 have been used in bodily self-defense. 10 have been used to push open heavy doors (probably, since they are packaged in 10's one package was used to push open one door). 2 were used to nudge wall pictures into correct levels, while one was used as a wiper to check the oil on an auto dipstick. 3 are under pillows. 221 people have smelled the books' pages, probably most of these on the original purchase.

3 of the books have been in continual motion since their purchase over 2 years ago, all of these being on a boat near Seattle, Washington.

Profanity used to discuss the books is as follows: 312 people have used profanity in criticizing them, while 435 people have used profanity in praising them. (This last high figure probably due to the fact that profanity is no longer used to necessarily condemn things.)

It would be nice to know these things.

ED RUSCHA

Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art, Journal, 1975

Ed Ruscha
Page from exhibition
catalogue
*Graphic Works by
Edward Ruscha*
Auckland City Art Gallery,
1978

Graphic Works by Edward Ruscha
at Auckland City Art Gallery
Ron Brownson

Graphic Works by
Edward Ruscha
 Exhibition catalogue cover
 Auckland City Art Gallery,
 1978



Ed Ruscha outside
 the Auckland City
 Art Gallery in 1978
 Photograph
 E.H. McCormick
 Research Library
 Auckland Art Gallery
 Toi o Tāmaki



“He likes words”.
 — Andrew Bogle¹

Ed Ruscha’s text “The Information Man” was reprinted as an artists’ afterword in the catalogue to his 1978 exhibition *Graphic Works by Edward Ruscha* at the Auckland City Art Gallery.² The piece was published to give the New Zealand audience, to whom Ruscha’s practice was largely unknown, an insight into his taxonomic, and humorous, way of thinking. At nearly 150 pages, the catalogue was substantial by the Gallery’s standards at the time. The ambition of the exhibition’s curator, Andrew Bogle, was to produce a publication that would have significance beyond New Zealand shores and be important for the artist himself.³

Much the same could be said in relation to Bogle’s aims for the exhibition. In 1978, Ruscha was the most widely known of the West Coast American Pop artists but had not yet had a major international exhibition. The Minneapolis Institute of Arts and the Albright Knox Art Gallery had both prepared Ruscha shows, in 1972 and 1976 respectively, and both were accompanied by publications, but these exhibitions were not shown outside America. With *Graphic Works by Edward Ruscha*, “Auckland City Art Gallery... scooped the world by staging the most comprehensive show yet [of Ruscha’s work],”⁴ Bogle’s curatorial “confidence” was to believe that he could organise a

**A FEW
PALM
TREES**

EDWARD RUSCHA
1971

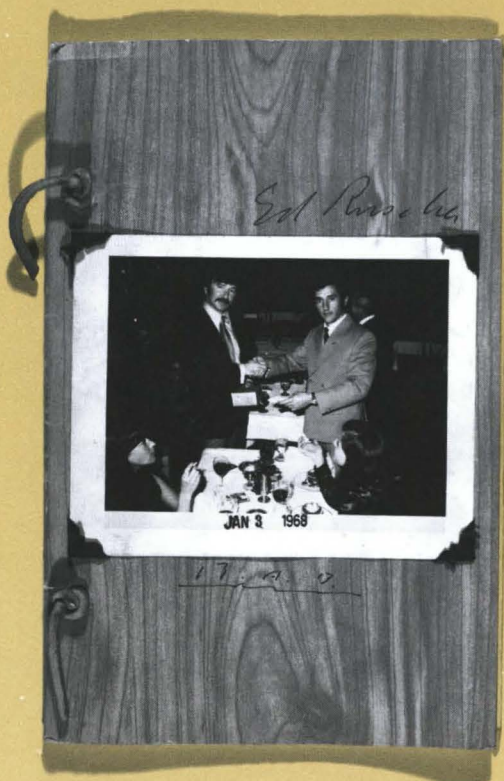
TWENTYSIX

GASOLINE

STATIONS

LEFT TO RIGHT:
Ed Ruscha
Cover of artist's books
A Few Palm Trees 1971;
*Twentysix Gasoline
Stations* 1963;
*Some Los Angeles
Apartments* 1965;
Business cards 1968,
Auckland Art Gallery
Toi o Tāmaki, gift of
the artist, 1978

SOME LOS ANGELES APARTMENTS



major profile of a contemporary American artist at a local public gallery in New Zealand. Bogle worked closely with Ruscha, and together they chose to focus on the artist's graphic work: his prints, drawings, and books, and to show his films *Premium* and *Miracle*. With 96 works on display, the exhibition provided Auckland's visitors with two decade's of artwork from one of California's leading Pop artists.

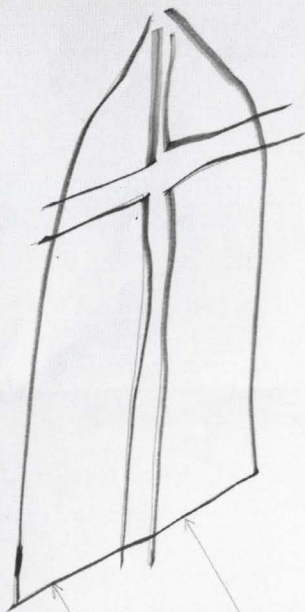
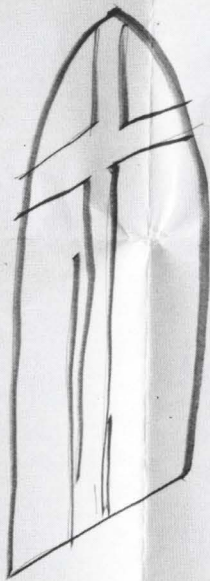
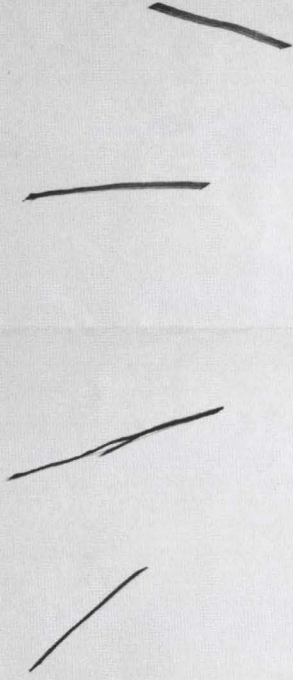
As a curator, Bogle recognised Ruscha's work as trenchant and perceptive, without losing the quality he described as the way "Ruscha's work is able to be enjoyed and understood by everyone."⁵ In a press release for the exhibition he noted:

... Ruscha is an exponent of a sparkling realism and all his images are infused with a warm

sense of humour which makes his work approachable by people of all ages. As Ruscha says 'If anyone speaks English he can understand my works without a lot of difficulty, but there are idioms peculiar to America that may confuse someone from India about my work, otherwise it's easily understood.'⁶

Bogle had first encountered Ruscha's art in the 1972 travelling exhibition *The State of Californian Painting*,⁷ and was already familiar with Ruscha's witty and provocative colour lithograph *OOO* that Anne Kirker, the Gallery's first Curator of Prints and Drawings, had purchased for the Auckland City Art Gallery in 1975.⁸ In her time at the Gallery Kirker had reinvigorated the collections of contemporary graphic art. Bogle, who gained the position after Kirker's move to

ALL
BLACK
BACKGROUND
BLEEDS 4 SIDES



PRINTS
WHITE

POS. DRAWING FOR
LINE DRAWING (NOT REVERSE)
TO BE REVERSED OUT OF
ASH BLACK BACKGROUND
(DRAWING PRINTS WHITE)

OMIT BLUE LINES
ON ORIGINAL DRAWING
(ART WORK ON LINE)
NOTE PAPER

PRINTS
WHITE

GOOD
SMYTH???

ANDREW
COULD THE
POSTER
BACKGROUND
LOOK LIKE
THIS ???
VERANISH ???
DON'T PRINT
SILKSCREEN
USE OFFSET

ALL
BLACK
BACKGROUND
BLEEDS FOR
DRAWING
AND LETTERS

ANDREW
PRINT IN ANY
BRIGHT YELLOW

SEE XEROX ATTACHED
FOR TYPE STYLE
(STYLIC MEDIUM
ABOUT #8 pt.)

ALL LETTERS PRINT
YELLOW ON BLACK
BACKGROUND
(REFERS THEM OUT OF
BACKGROUND AND
PRINT YELLOW)

AN EXHIBIT OF WORKS BY EDWARD RUSCHA AUCKLAND CITY ART GALLERY AUG. 15 SEP. 8, 1978

OCT. 1

Ed Ruscha
 Design for
 exhibition poster
Graphic Works by
Edward Ruscha
 Auckland City
 Art Gallery, 1978
 E.H. McCormick
 Research Library
 Auckland Art Gallery
 Toi o Tāmaki

the National Art Gallery in Wellington, was a print-maker himself and also recognised that acquiring graphic art was the means by which the Gallery could affordably add contemporary art to its collection. The Ruscha exhibition led to a major gift by the artist to the Gallery including a number of his artist's books and prints.⁹

Ruscha and Bogle carefully planned the design of the exhibition. Ruscha had a background in graphic design and advertising, and his consciousness of the presentation of his work was evident in all aspects of the exhibition. His detailed input included the design of the *Graphic Works* poster, as well as significant involvement in the installation of the show. All Ruscha's drawings and prints were floated in hand-made aluminium frames, which had been specially extruded, then welded and finally buffed and polished by hand. Ruscha's decision to utilise aluminium frames contrasted with the Gallery's then current fashion for MoMA-influenced unstained light wood frames for showing graphic art. Ruscha specified the exact design and appearance of the metal frames which he used before on previous occasions in America but which was then unknown in New Zealand. Ruscha hung his books from the ceiling with almost invisible nylon wire. This allowed his books to appear to float in the

Gallery space, while also inviting viewers to flip the pages. The concertina-like and mural-scaled book, *Every Building on Sunset Strip* (1966) did not look like a book as much as a miniature concertina of real estate images. The *Stains* portfolio (1969) appeared to be as much a box, which contained 75 loose-leaf samples of forensic evidence as a portfolio of prints. The work's 75 different stains were taxonomic in their representation of well-known American brands: *Brer Rabbit* Molasses, *Hershey's* Cocoa Butter, *Tree Top Pure* Apple Juice. The portfolio's box was lined with white silk, itself stained with a smidgeon of the artist's blood. Ruscha broke expectations and delighted gallery goers by mixing everyday organic and inorganic pigments, and by not permitting viewers to "see" all the art. For instance, *Muscle Relaxers* (cat. no. 69) has three floating tablets with their nifty little shadows drawn with gunpowder and pastel.

Ruscha's arrival in Auckland to install the show was enthusiastically reported in the local media.¹⁰ His "hands-on" approach and generosity of spirit certainly seemed to appeal to New Zealand sensibilities. Reviewers focused on Ruscha's deadpan humour and his experimental use of materials. Auckland-based art historian and critic Leonard Bell wrote of the significance of the exhibition to a local audience:



The artist assisting
with the installation
of *Graphic Works*
by *Edward Ruscha*
Auckland City
Art Gallery, 1978
Photograph
E. H. McCormick
Research Library
Auckland Art Gallery
Toi o Tāmaki



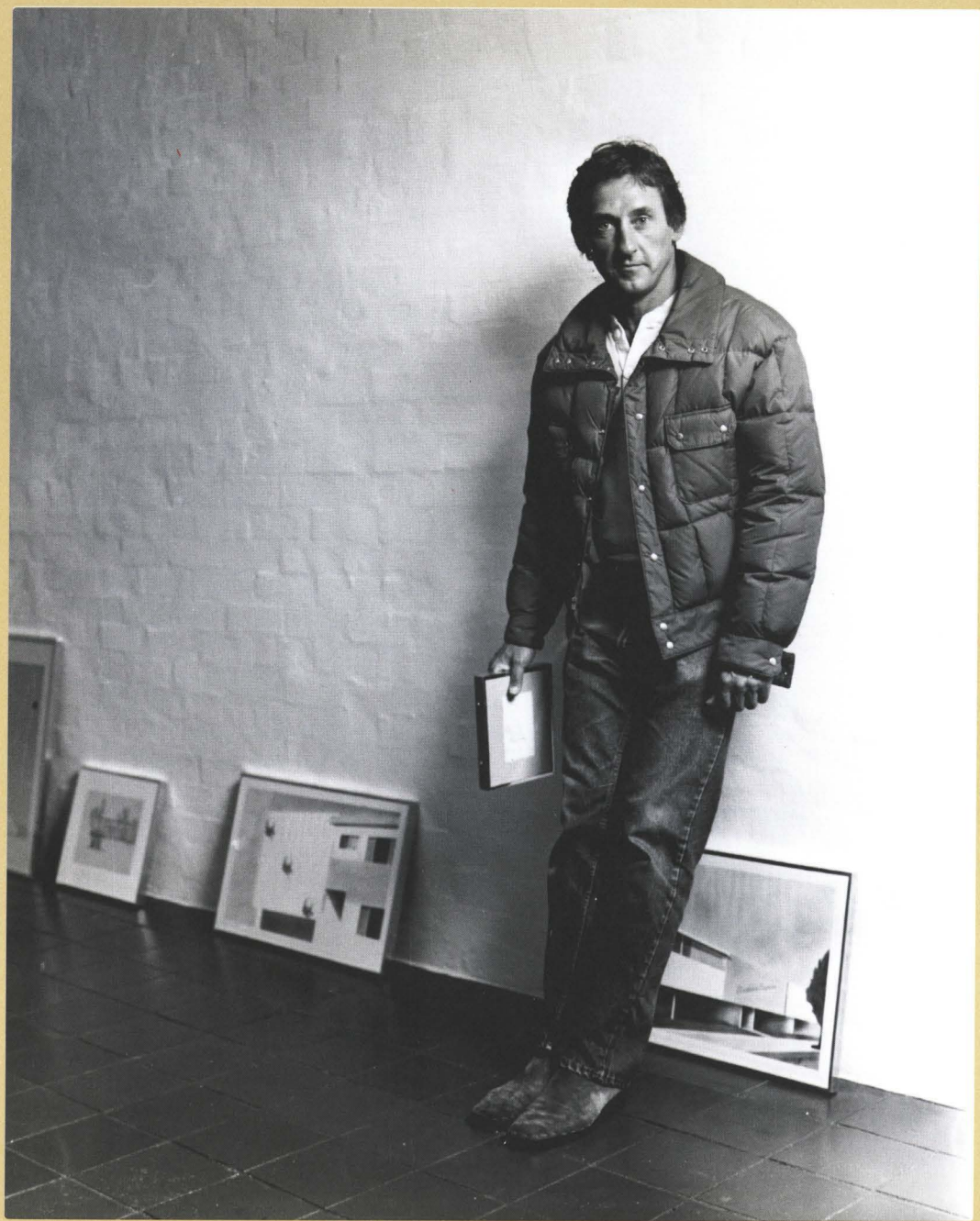
Ruscha is a hard man to pin down with a neat, art history label. What makes his art so important and the exhibition a “must” are the inventiveness of his imagery, the superb technical quality of his drawings and graphics and his ability to make us look afresh at the words and objects of the 60s and 70s cityscape.¹¹

Meanwhile, local artists like Denys Watkins and Greg O’Brien found inspiration in the show of Ruscha’s work. Watkins’ recently recalled:

I myself was greatly interested in the exhibition — primarily because of its graphic context, that is drawing and prints, also to be able to see the drawings (pastel and charcoal, gunpowder)

rendered with those old time (now), advertising art studio techniques, using this context to construct, simple unexplained associations, with such dexterity and style... I guess taking the form of sign-making (my term for people who make images) from language and the everyday, the cool crisp detached world of publicity and content.¹²

Looking back, *Graphic Works by Edward Ruscha*, was a prescient exhibition for the Auckland City Art Gallery. Ernest Smith, Director, noted in his foreword to *Graphic Works* that he believed both the exhibition and the catalogue marked a new stage in the development of the Gallery. It initiated a template of how to present solo exhibitions by



contemporary international artists and, through its success, assisted the Gallery in its own surveys of local contemporary artists.

Thirty years on, Ruscha remains an important artist for the Auckland Art Gallery. His painting *Love Chief* (1986) purchased by the Gallery in 1989, was the central work in a 2007 exhibition of the same name. The description of *Love Chief* in the Auckland Art Gallery's *Guide* sums up Ruscha's specific contribution to Pop art:

His subject-matter and presentation have always been about bringing something peripheral, bland, banal or incomplete into centre stage, and transfusing it with poetic melancholy. Ruscha has turned all of his advertising agency and publishing house knowledge into the production of fine art, rather than commercial art. Such distinctions, however, will always remain blurred because of Ruscha's love of mass media culture, his hypnotic attachment to a world of signs to live by and drive by, to impersonal messages which calm, cajole or seduce with cryptic elegance.¹³

1. Andrew Bogle, *The Graphic Works by Edward Ruscha* (Auckland, N.Z.: Auckland City Art Gallery, 1978), 13.
2. "The Information Man" was originally published in the *Journal of the Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art*, no. 6 (June–July 1975): 21.
3. Bogle said at the time that he thought Ruscha trusted the Gallery to organise the exhibition because of the favourable presentation he was offered: "We are producing a 150-page catalogue with duo-tone illustrations and several colour plates and it is so comprehensive it could become the major international reference catalogue for Ruscha's works." *Auckland Star*, July 20, 1978. Dagny Corcoran, Director of Art Catalogues in Los Angeles, California's premier distributor of art publications, recognised that *Graphic Works* would be a unique research resource on the artist but was unable to sell it because the unit cost to her would not deliver any profit.
4. "Scoop Show for City Art Gallery," *Auckland Star*, July 20, 1978.
5. "Original, Versatile, Witty – Free," *Auckland Star*, July 20, 1978.
6. "Auckland City Art Gallery Ed Ruscha Exhibition, 26 August to 1 October 1978," media release held in the exhibition file, E.H. McCormick Research Library, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki.
7. *The State of California Painting* was organised for the Govett–Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth by Robert Ballard and Michael Walls, 1972. The exhibition was shown at the Auckland Art Gallery from October to December 1972. Ed Ruscha did not contribute a painting; instead he supplied his 1971 drawing *Spoil* made with gunpowder and pastel.
8. Ed Ruscha, *OOO*, colour lithograph, printed from one plate in light green and one stone in dark green, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, purchased 1975 (1975/41).
9. Ruscha gifted 14 of his artist's books and 8 of his prints to the Auckland City Art Gallery in 1978.
10. "'Cool School' Artist Here," *North Shore Times Advertiser*, August 17, 1978.
11. Leonard Bell, "Spreading the Word," *New Zealand Listener*, August 26, 1978.
12. Denys Watkins, email correspondence with author, February 26, 2008.
13. *Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki: The Guide* (Auckland, N.Z.: Auckland Art Gallery; London: Scala Publishers, 2001), 118.

The artist in the
Graphic Works
by Edward Ruscha
exhibition during
installation
Auckland City
Art Gallery, 1978
Photograph
E. H. McCormick
Research Library
Auckland Art Gallery
Toi o Tāmaki

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki
Staff Research, Presentations And
Publications 2007

Ron Brownson

(Senior Curator, New Zealand and Pacific Art)

"Hammond's Humaniforms," in W.D. Hammond: Jingle Jangle Morning, ed. Jennifer Hay, (Christchurch: Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetu), 50–59.
"Alexander Shaw's 1787 Book of Tapa Samples Collected during James Cook's Three Pacific Voyages," paper presented at the annual meeting of the Auckland Institute and Museum Costume Section, Auckland, March 10, 2007.

"W.D.Hammond's Wonderful and Terrifying Worlds," lecture at Christchurch Art Gallery, Christchurch, September 12, 2007.
Tautai Contemporary Arts Trust. "Le Folauga – Contemporary Pacific Art." <http://www.lefolauga.co.nz>.

Natasha Conland

(Curator, Contemporary Art)

"The Oedipus Compost," Broadsheet 36, no.2 (2007): 115–117.
"Eve Armstrong: What's-for-Profit?" Object 53 (2007): 32–35.
Mystic Truths, exhibition catalogue, (Auckland: Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, 2007).
"Paint Head," in Four Times Painting, ed. Christina Barton, (Wellington: Adam Art Gallery, 2007), 19–20.
"Judy Darragh," "Saskia Leek," "Dane Mitchell," "Francis Upritchard," in Speculation, ed. Brian Butler, (Auckland: Venice Project and JRP/Ringier, 2007), 205.

"Public Art," lecture at "Flower Tower: Symposium on Locational Identity," Stavanger, Norway, November 27, 2007.

"Venice Biennale," presentation at the one day symposium on the Venice Biennale, Auckland University of Technology, Auckland, November 16, 2007.
Symposium Moderator for turbulence 3rd Auckland Triennial, Auckland Art Gallery, Auckland, March 10, 2007.

Jane Davidson

(Assistant Curator)

Managing Editor, turbulence 3rd Auckland Triennial, (Auckland: Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, 2007).

Sarah Hillary

(Principal Conservator)

Co-authored with Thomas J.S. Learner and Rachel Rivenc, "Traction Reaction: Severe Deterioration of Household and Paving Paints Used by Colin McCahon," in AICCM National Conference, "Contemporary Collections", Preprints, ed. Amanda Pagliarino and Gillian Osmond, (Brisbane: AICCM, 2007), 84–96.
Co-authored with Thomas J.S. Learner, "A Painter's Paradise: The Materials and Techniques of Colin McCahon," in Modern Paints Uncovered, ed. Thomas J.S. Learner, Patricia Smithen, Jay W. Krueger and Michael R. Schilling, (Los Angeles: Getty Conservation Institute, 2007), 280–281.
"Guido Reni St Sebastian Mackelvie Trust Collection,

Auckland Art Gallery: Condition and Technical Analysis," in *The Agony and the Ecstasy Guido Reni's Saint Sebastians*, ed. Piero Boccardo and Xavier F. Salomon, (Milan: Silvana Editoriale, 2007), 98–99.

"Traction Reaction: Severe Deterioration of Household and Paving Paints Used by Colin McCahon," paper presented at the annual meeting for the Australian Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Material (AICCM), Brisbane, Australia, October 17–19, 2007.

"Introduction to Painting Conservation," lecture presented at classes in "Heritage Conservation in Aotearoa," Auckland, University of Auckland, September 11, 2007.

"Painting Conservation," lecture presented at classes in "Heritage Conservation in Aotearoa," Auckland, University of Auckland, September 13, 2007.

Mary Kisler

(Mackelvie Curator, International Art)

"Agostino Carracci or Lavinia Fontana? The Attribution of *Portrait of a Lady with a Dog* at the Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki," *Journal of New Zealand Art History* 28 (2007): 37–52.

"Guido Reni *St Sebastian* Mackelvie Trust Collection, Auckland Art Gallery," in *The Agony and the Ecstasy Guido Reni's Saint Sebastians*, ed. Piero Boccardo and Xavier F. Salomon, (Milan: Silvana Editoriale, 2007), 94–97.

"Paul Nash," "Henry Moore," "John Tunnard," in *Modern Britain 1900–1960: Masterworks from*

Australian and New Zealand Collections, ed. Ted Gott, Laurie Benson and Sophie Matthiesson, (Melbourne: National Gallery of Victoria, 2007), 190–191.

"Planning and Process re the Auckland Art Gallery exhibition, *Passion and Politics: Two Centuries of British Art*," lecture presented at class in Art History, Auckland, University of Auckland, April 4, 2007.

"Dragged Kicking and Screaming into the Present: The British Modernist Collection at Auckland Art Gallery." Paper presented at symposium on National Gallery of Victoria exhibition, *Modern Britain 1900–1960: Masterworks from Australian and New Zealand Collections*, November 17, 2007.

Ngahiraka Mason

(Indigenous Curator, Māori Art)

"Reflection and Reconciliation: *Pakeha Now!* at Nelson," *Art New Zealand*, 125 (2007): 38–42.

"Tu Tu Ana Te Pueha: To Seek, To Know, To Resolve," *Art New Zealand*, 124 (2007): 54–57.

"Interview with Reuben Paterson," in *News from Islands*, ed. Aaron Seeto, (Campbelltown: Campbelltown Arts Centre, 2007), 48.

James Ormsby: Maoriqami, exhibition catalogue essay (Auckland: Whitespace, 2007).

David Reeves

(Senior Registrar)

"Bubble, Bubble, Toil and Trouble." *ARC (Australasian Registrars Committee) Journal* 55 (2007): 32–35.

Contributors

Ron Brownson is Senior Curator New Zealand and Pacific Art at Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki.

Rex Butler is senior lecturer in the School of English, Media Studies and Art History at the University of Queensland. His most recent publications are *Slavoj Žizek: Live Theory* (Continuum, 2005) the edited anthology *Radical Revisionism* (Institute of Modern Art, 2005).

Natasha Conland is curator of contemporary art at the Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki. She writes regularly on contemporary art for journals and catalogues in the Asia Pacific region, significant recent curatorial projects include group exhibition *Mystic Truths* (2007), the *SCAPE Biennial of Art in Public Space* (2006), *CAFÉ 2*, Busan Biennale, South Korea (2006), and et al.'s *the fundamental practice* for New Zealand's representation to the Venice Biennale, (2005).

David Craig is senior lecturer in Sociology at the University of Auckland. His research focuses on political economy, institutionalised form and social outcomes in contexts including the arts. He has written about travelling culture and formalisms in articles including "Antipodean Anti-turbulence in Art and Political Economy" in the 3rd Auckland Triennial *turbulence* catalogue (Auckland Art Gallery,

2007); and "Post Fordism, Neo Trekka-ism" in Michael Stevenson, *This is the Trekka* (Creative New Zealand, City Gallery Wellington, 2003)

Gavin Hipkins is a Wellington-based artist. He lectures in Photography and Fine Arts at Massey University.

Robert Leonard directs Brisbane's Institute of Modern Art. He was formerly curator of contemporary art at Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki.

Lars Bang Larsen is writing a Ph.D. at the University of Copenhagen about the global spread of 1960s psychedelic art and culture. He contributes to *Afterall*, *Artforum* and *Frieze*, and has co-curated exhibitions such as *Pyramids of Mars* (2001), *The Invisible Insurrection of a Million Minds* (2005) and *Populism* (2005).

Tan Lin is the author *Lotion Bullwhip Giraffe* and *BlipSoak01*. Lin is the recipient of a Getty Distinguished Scholar Grant and a Warhol Foundation/Creative Capital Arts Writing Grant to complete a book on the writings of Andy Warhol. A book of cultural criticism entitled *Plagiarism/Outsource: A History of the Search Engine* is forthcoming from Zaesterle Press.

Aram Moshayedi currently lives in Los Angeles where he is a Ph.D student in the department of art history at the University of Southern California, and assistant curator at LAXART.

Daniel Palmer is a lecturer in the Theory Department of the Faculty of Art & Design at Monash University. He has written extensively on contemporary Australian art in journals such as *Art & Australia*, *Broadsheet*, *Photofile* and *Frieze*, and is the co-author with Blair French of a forthcoming book on Australian photography.

Morgan Thomas teaches at the School of Fine Arts, University of Canterbury, New Zealand, and writes on aspects of post-war and contemporary art. Forthcoming essays include "Studio Vertigo: Mark Rothko" (NAI) and "Complicities: Abu Ghraib, Contemporary Art and the Currency of Images" (Melbourne University Press).

Reading Room is a journal of art and culture
published by the Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki's
E. H. McCormick Research Library.

TRANSCENDENTAL POP
ISSUE/02.08

Contributors Ron Brownson, Rex Butler, Natasha
Conland, David Craig, Gavin Hipkins, Lars Bang
Larsen, Robert Leonard, Tan Lin, Aram Moshayedi,
Daniel Palmer and Morgan Thomas.

Writing on Kamrooz Aram, Eric Baudelaire, Harun
Farocki, Douglas Gordon, David Hatcher, Damien
Hirst, Giovanni Intra, Joachim Koester, Arturas Raila,
Ed Ruscha, Darren Sylvester, Andy Warhol and more.



THE MARYLYN MAYO FOUNDATION