

ENDGAME

REFERENCE AND SIMULATION
IN RECENT
PAINTING AND SCULPTURE

YVE-ALAIN BOIS

THOMAS CROW

HAL FOSTER

DAVID JOSELIT

BOB RILEY

ELISABETH SUSSMAN

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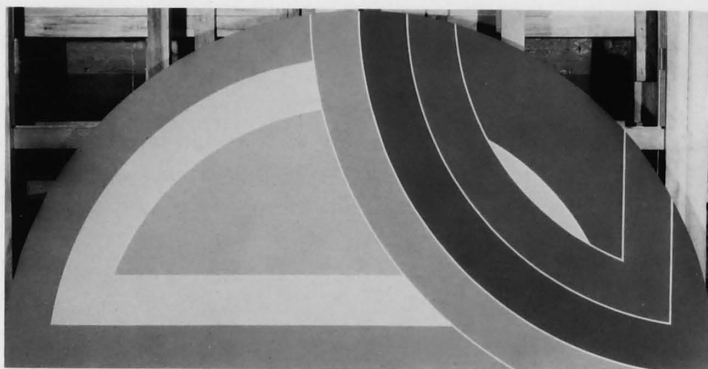
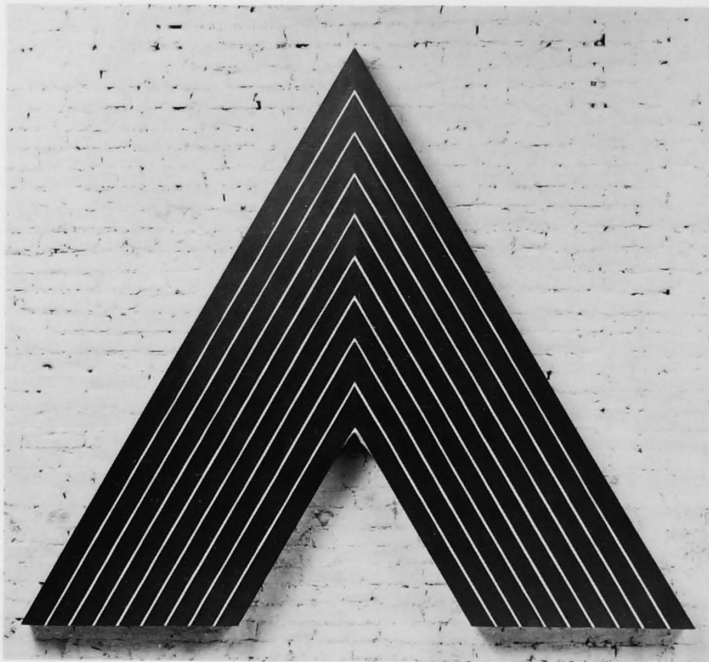
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Frank Stella, *Sieve Bawn*,
1964, metallic powder in
polymer emulsion on canvas,
77 × 81½"; Private collec-
tion — Photo Courtesy Leo
Castelli Gallery, New York.
Photo: Rudolph Burckhardt.

Frank Stella, *Protractor Vari-
ation XIV*, 1968, fluorescent
acrylic on canvas, 60 × 120";
Photo Courtesy Leo Castelli
Gallery, New York.



The Return of Hank Herron

T H O M A S C R O W

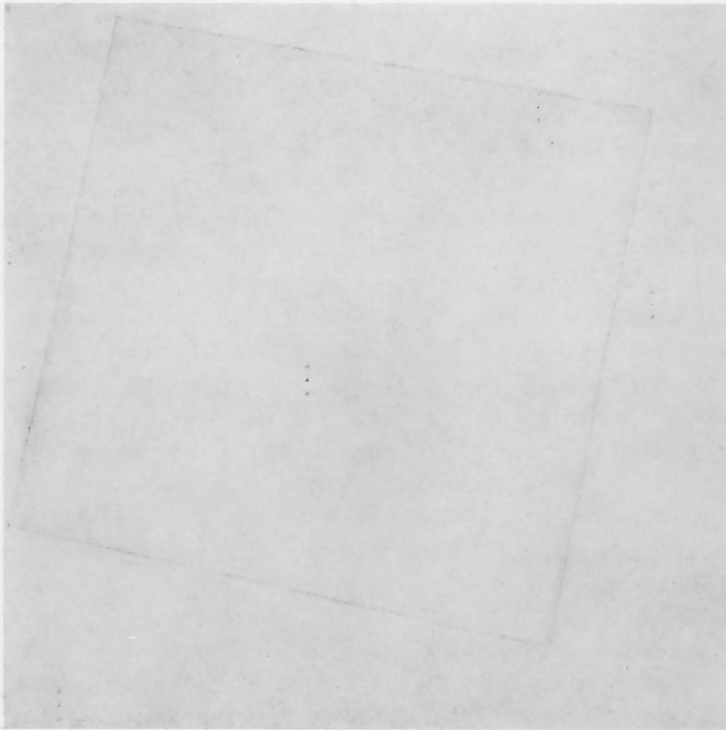
In the early 1970s, the extreme involution of late modernist painting and the large philosophical claims that surrounded it were the objects of a sly parody. One of the authors was and remains an important historian of earlier modern art. Consistent, however, with its deadpan self-effacement as satire, the parody was published under the pseudonym of "Cheryl Bernstein" and included, with no indication as to its fraudulent status, in a widely-consulted anthology of writings on conceptual art.¹ An editor's introduction provided Cheryl Bernstein with a plausible biography appropriate to "one of New York's younger critics" ("... born in Roslyn, New York... she attended Hofstra University before taking her M.A. in art history at Hunter"), including a promised monograph in progress. Her text is entitled "The Fake as More," and its ostensible subject is the first one-man show by "the New England artist Hank Herron," whose exhibited work consisted entirely of exact copies of works by Frank Stella.

Bernstein's review is effusively laudatory. Herron, she argues, is in fact superior to Stella in the final analysis, in that the copyist has faced up to the hollowness of originality as a concept in later modernism. Herron's replicas leave behind the fruitless and atavistic search for authenticity in artistic expression, accepting, as Stella himself cannot, that modern experience of the world is mediated by endlessly reduplicated simulations or "fakes". While their appearance exactly matches the originals, the replicator's canvases more powerfully manifest the material literalness and relentless visual logic for which Stella had been celebrated. Because Herron had removed the unfolding of that pictorial logic from any notion of biographical development (he had duplicated ten years of Stella's work in one), he had exploded the romantic vestiges still clinging to the formalist and utopian readings of modern art history. Progress in art is closed off by this higher critical apprehension that the record of modernist painting now exists as another congealed image, one among the myriad manufactured simulacra that stand in for the "real" in our daily lives.

In recounting the thought experiment contained in “The Fake as More”, I have modified its terminology somewhat. The philosophical references in the text are to the intellectual glamor figures of the fifties and sixties: Heidegger, Sartre, Wittgenstein, Merleau-Ponty. I have inflected its language — without, I hope, betraying its ingenious invented logic — in the direction of what today is loosely called “post-structuralism”. The death of the author as it has been postulated by Barthes and Foucault, the triumph of the simulacrum as asserted by Baudrillard, are ideas that enjoy wide currency among younger artists and critics in the mid-eighties. Despite her older theoretical terminology, however, these ideas are fully present in Cheryl Bernstein as well.

One only has to juxtapose quotations to discover the closeness of fit between early-seventies satire and present-day practice. Sherrie Levine is the contemporary artist most celebrated for her replication of canonical photographs, drawings, and paintings. The author of an admiring 1986 profile of her career, wrote the following on the subject of her painstaking copies after Schiele, Malevich, and Miró:² “By literally *taking* the pictures she did, and then showing them as hers, she wanted it understood that she was flatly questioning — no, flatly undermining — those most hallowed principles of art in the modern era: originality, intention, expression.” This is Bernstein in 1973:³ “Mr. Herron’s work, by reproducing the exact appearance of Frank Stella’s entire *oeuvre*, nevertheless introduces new content and a new concept . . . that is precluded in the work of Mr. Stella, i.e. the denial of originality.” Peter Halley, a frequently-published critic as well as a painter, expresses his high regard for Levine’s copies by quoting from Baudrillard:⁴ art, states the latter, has been overtaken by “esthetic reduplication, this phase when, expelling all content and finality, it becomes somehow abstract and non-figurative.” Bernstein speaks of Herron’s duplication of Stella’s work as “resolving at one master stroke the problem of content without compromising the purity of the non-referential object as such.”⁵

The referent is in theoretical bad odor these days, and that last catchphrase of modernist formalism fits the new mood very neatly. After lying virtually unnoticed for more than a decade in the pages of the late Gregory Battcock’s *Idea Art*, “The Fake as More” is having its day. References to it have lately turned up in print⁶ and in artists’ conversations, but not, so far as I have been able to detect, with any recognition of its status as parody. (The authors, of course, were fair to their readers and planted clues to its falsity, starting with the common three-syllable names, rhymed surnames, and further play on the name of baseball player Henry “Hank” Aaron.) Hank Herron is understood to have exhibited his purloined Stellas just once and then disappeared. It does not in fact matter very much whether he is believed in as a shadowy precedent for Levine, Mike Bidlo, or Philip Taaffe. What is striking is that a knowing, imaginary send-up of sixties modernism has come true in art that is now being taken very seriously indeed. Whether they practice direct appropriation or not, the artists included in *Endgame* acknowledge affinities between that strategy and their own practice.



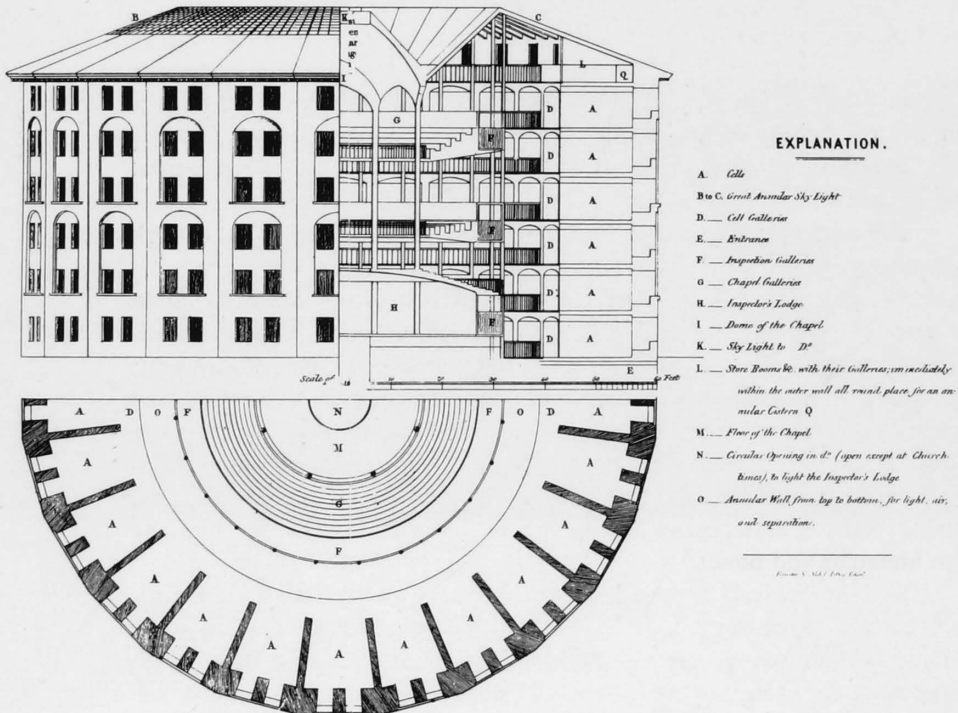
Kasimir Malevich,
*Suprematist Composition:
White on White*, (1918?),
oil on canvas, 31¼ × 31¼";
Collection, The Museum of
Modern Art, New York.

Barnett Newman, *Vir Heroi-
cus Sublimis*, 1950–51, oil on
canvas, 7'11¾" × 17'9¼".
Collection, The Museum of
Modern Art, New York. Gift
of Mr. and Mrs. Ben Heller.



Jeremy Bentham's design for
 a Panopticon prison, 1791
 (Works, IV, 1843).

*A General Idea of a PENITENTIARY PANOPTICON in an Improved, but as yet, (Jan. 23^d 1791), Unfinished State.
 See Postscript References to Plan, Elevation, & Section (being Plate referred to as, A^o ?).*



“The Fake as More” converges, with contemporary practice not only because of its theme of replication, but also because of renewed attention to the record of late modernism on the part of younger artists. Taaffe, for example, has exhibited obsessively crafted homages to Barnett Newman; Levine has most recently shown (non-appropriated) paintings organized around grids and stripes. Halley, in his critical writings, has independently mapped Herron territory, praising Levine’s replicas and finding the most important antecedent for his own work in Stella.⁷ Looking back to Malevich, Newman, or Stella has been a way for these artists to reject the mannered painterliness and overheated iconography of the “post-modernist” episode that preceded them. They have aligned themselves with the modernist record, but there can have been no easy passage back to that position. And their imaginary precursor can tell us something important about this return.

“The Fake as More” is a thoroughly unsympathetic attack, displaying more than a tinge of philistinism, on the inwardness of modernist practice and on its claims to pose serious ontological and epistemological questions. Next to the work of a Ryman or a Marden, the authors imply, one might as well elevate to the same stature what is to them the mindless act of replicating Stellas: plug in the standard language of furrowed-brow criticism and it works as well as the average encomium in *Artforum*. When self-reflexivity can be persuasively imagined, and half-persuasively justified, as the deadening trap of identity, the modernist project is surely over: that is the ultimate message of the text. There is in fact an unstated link between Cheryl Bernstein and the mid-seventies group Artists Meeting for Cultural Change. Behind the parody is the assumption that art, by being stripped of its larger tasks of representation in the social world, has been left in a state of pathetic debility.

The artists represented in *Endgame* think along similar lines, though they evidently draw quite different conclusions in doing so. They agree that modernist painting and sculpture, in progressively isolating themselves from the work of representation, failed to attain any compensating purity and fullness of presence. Or, if abstract art once had served as a haven of authentic experience in a visual world dominated by meretricious distractions and seductions, it can no longer serve that function. Advanced art, they say, was indeed emptied out during the 1960s. But Halley, for example, will go on to argue that art was thereby purged of its bygone, unattainable ambitions, whether social or metaphysical. In the process, it was freed from its complicity with hierarchy and power.⁸

To make this leap, he and others draw equally on Foucault and Baudrillard. The geometric clarity found in De Stijl, Constructivism, or sixties color-field painting is tied, via the writing of the former, to the linear order of the Panopticon, the coercive surveillance and regimentation of the classical prison or asylum.⁹ With Foucault, they see the Panopticon as the model for a pervasive order of discipline established during the Enlightenment and secured by the industrial and bureaucratic regimes of the nineteenth century. Thus Halley contests, as did the Left in the art world during the last two decades, “the curious claim that geometry constituted neutral form, which was advanced by Minimalism and sixties formalism.”¹⁰ The moves in Halley’s thinking at this point are somewhat difficult to follow. It is the geometric sign, he states, “that

the managerial class reserves to communicate with itself," all the more today considering the centrality of data bases, computer modelling, and instantaneous financial and information transfers within the global economy.¹¹ Thus by reviving linear, hard-edged design, these new artists are confronting a mode of production (and ideological reproduction) on a par with the mass-media images that occupied some of their older peers. Halley argues that his painting, and the abstract art he admires, can address those whose material and status interests are served by the superficial image economy, but can escape at the same time any crippling complicity with those interests. In the act of replication, he states, "content is negated, the act of production is purified."¹² He evokes an almost ritual cleansing, like baptism, a symbolic repetition in which an old form of artistic selfhood is extinguished and sin is purged.

In 1939, Clement Greenberg, then at the height of his powers as a theorist if not as a visual critic, argued that an art resolutely concentrated on the problems generated by its own particular medium would escape exploitation either by commerce or by the terrifying mass politics of the day.¹³ Through the sacrifice of narrative and eventually figuration of any kind, he maintained, the visual arts would be strengthened in the areas that remained exclusively theirs. The new abstraction turns that argument on its head: art survives now by virtue of being weak, a condition signalled in the ritual sacrifice of the artist's authorial presence. Weakness was the gift of the 1960s, of the drastic reduction of pictorial and sculptural incident, followed by the assaults of the conceptual artists on the hallowed status of the object itself. So debilitated, the art of late modernism has been freed from its own history and made available, like the liberated signifiers of advertising and commercial entertainment, to endless rearrangement and repackaging. Thus there is a perception of direct descent not only from the "Pictures" generation, the mass-media appropriators of the later 1970s (Levine and Jack Goldstein straddle the line between that group and the new abstraction), but also from Warhol and Pop. By the ironic means of replication and simulation, a young artist who wishes to return to abstraction can place his or her work in relation to the last important episode in that kind of art, while simultaneously preserving a safe distance from any of its intimidating claims to authority. From this derives the current dim glory of Hank Herron; a mockery of mainstream art's perceived sterility in the early 1970s has been transformed, through these artists' words and works, into a kind of celebration.

SHERRIE Levine has described her recent stripe paintings as being about "the uneasy death of modernism."¹⁴ One is grateful for the qualifier "uneasy" in that remark, and her paintings seem to me the most worried and complex in reference of those under discussion here. Especially successful are the framed plywood panels with the knothole plugs painted gold or white, pictures that deftly refer both to Max Ernst's natural-history variant of Surrealism and to historical forms of painting on wood. She rejects oil and uses casein, a binder related to egg tempera, while the glass in the frame implies a fragility of age underneath. Thus her reflections on the extinction of the easel painting involve a gesture back to pre-Renaissance traditions of devotional imagery, to a time when painting seems to have been able confidently to articulate a culture's shared beliefs.



Max Ernst, *Demolishing a Wall*, plate 21 from the portfolio *Histoire Naturelle*. Paris, 1926. Collection, The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of James Thrall Soby.

Sherrie Levine, *Gold Knot #1*, 1985, metallic paint on plywood, 20 × 16"; Courtesy Baskerville + Watson, New York. Photo: Earl Ripling.



The line of argument associated with the new abstraction of course rests on the assumption that painting in our time has largely lost that power. Where Levine makes the comparison with the past by means of subtle visual associations, Halley has made the point explicitly in his writing.¹⁵ The large scale and aggressive figuration of Neo-Expressionist painting were to him a mistaken attempt to restore the traditional forms of power in art, mistaken because that restoration inevitably produces an art of nostalgia for the traditional forms of power in society. The paradox in this position, however, seems to me this: while these artists are asserting a condition of non-difference between high art and the general economy of sign production, at the same time, art is being increasingly distinguished as a privileged sign by the actual behavior of that economy. Wracked as they have been by inner doubt, loss of vocation, painful self-consciousness, and the nearly complete erosion of their old representational purposes by photographic and electronic media, "serious" painting and sculpture appear to be ever more valued, patronized by an ever larger, more aggressive, and more sophisticated clientele. Art may have been overtaken by the universal commodity form, but it is clearly a commodity with a difference that makes all the difference.

By almost any objective measure, the art world has gained in intensity of activity, cultural visibility, and power over the last ten years. Whole new districts, Soho in the 1970s and the East Village since 1982, have had to be created to accommodate the expansion of the marketplace. The number of New York galleries showing new art has increased by an order of magnitude. Corporate collecting has grown immensely, adding its weight to the heated competition among individuals to acquire substantial accumulations of the newest art (often the stimulus is the fear that it will soon be priced beyond their reach). It is routine to hear of young, relatively untried artists having waiting lists and of collectors eagerly buying uncompleted work on studio visits. Art consultants and other forms of middlemen proliferate. A new nightclub in lower Manhattan feels the need to employ a highly-credentialed and presumably very expensive curator of art on its permanent staff. This is one manifestation of the widespread feeling that artists have taken over much of the glamor that used to belong to rock musicians (Woody Allen was behind the times on this subject in *Hannah and her Sisters*). Certain schools, such as Cal Arts, have begun to function as efficient academies for the new scene, equipping students with both expectations and realizable plans for success while still in their twenties. Those with a stake in the latest art lament, with some undisguised satisfaction, that the museums and old-line galleries have been superseded as arbiters of success by a network of newer collectors, corporate consultants, and artist-dealers. The size and dynamics of the new art economy have outgrown the old institutional channels.¹⁶

If indeed advanced painting and sculpture have been as emptied and debilitated as we have been led to believe, then it would follow that they must possess immense reserves of strength, of residual capacity to command interest, in order to sustain the enormous growth of the last decade. Or, if art had lost certain kinds of power, it has been given others and in larger measure. We may in fact be living in an era in which art has been empowered as never before.

These kinds of comparative historical judgements are of course tricky to make. In many respects, it would seem obvious that far greater visible power was tied up with art production in the past. I have written elsewhere, concerning a new class of patron in mid-eighteenth century France, that ambitious painting constituted for them "an irreplaceable status indicator."¹⁷ The phrase could apply just as well today, but a collector of our own time would find it impossible to make the state speak directly on behalf of his cultural interests. His eighteenth-century counterparts succeeded in installing themselves at the center of the official apparatus of patronage, where they were able to arbitrate, on behalf of the absolutist state, the most important decisions concerning the conduct of serious art. One reason, however, that they were able to advance to this position (I am speaking of Tournehem and Marigny, the uncle and brother of the Marquise de Pompadour) was that at the time it was not thought to be worth very much. Serious patrons of art represented a small minority within a French elite largely indifferent to contemporary painting and sculpture, except as it filled their needs for portraits and decorative overdoors. Reading through the French cultural press of the period or in the private journals of important society figures, one encounters a striking absence of attention to artists or works of art. Playwrights, poets, novelists, actors, dancers, carnival charlatans are discussed with great frequency, but references to painters and sculptors are rare. The great Salon exhibitions in the Louvre generated their own specialized literature, but the surviving diaries and correspondence of the time accord them scant mention. The system of state patronage itself had been virtually moribund for a half-century. Louis XV, whose reign extended from 1715 to 1774, was never persuaded that he needed a serious program in the visual arts, and whatever meager support they received was sacrificed at any reversal in the monarchy's precarious financial fortunes.

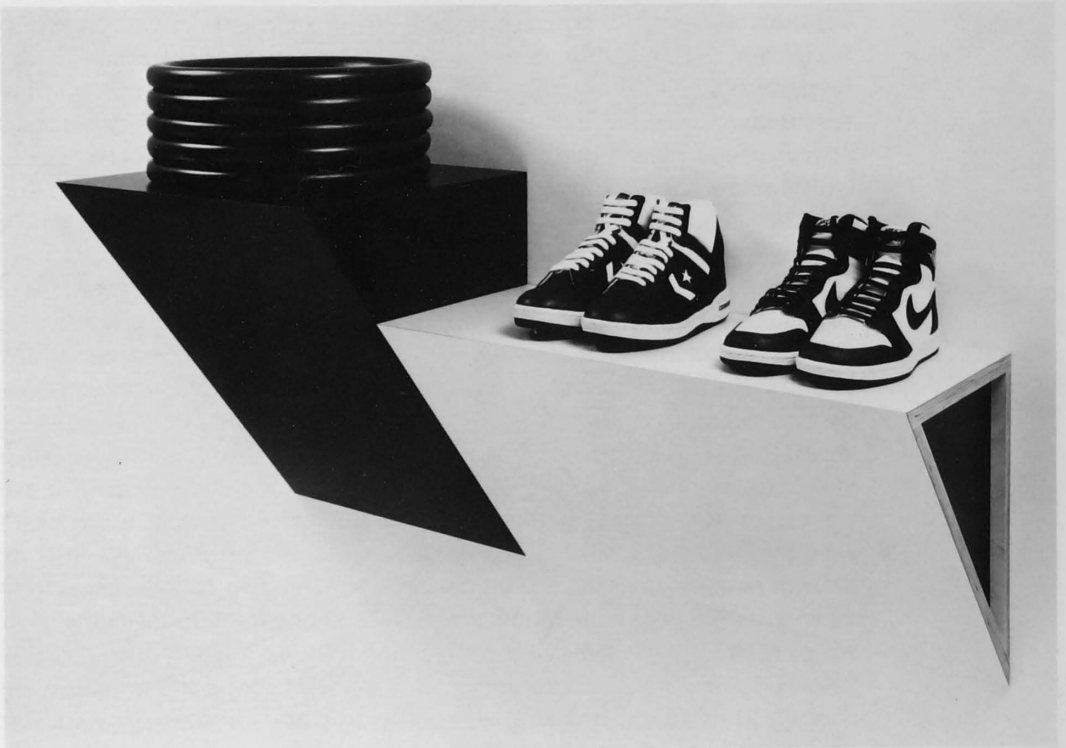
I am citing the French Old Regime partly because it is the historical period that I know best, but also because it was one in which art might be thought to have been most richly invested with confidence, power and prestige. It was after all the immediate heir to the cultural programs of Louis XIV and Colbert, who had set about the construction of Versailles and other monuments to the Crown with just that end in view. The best art of the eighteenth century has immense intrinsic authority; this was the epoch that produced Watteau, Chardin, Fragonard, Pigalle, Houdon, Greuze, and David. But at the same time, it was a period in which the argument had to be made over and over again that the visual arts as a *category* represented a serious intellectual pursuit. Nor did that argument ever command anything like universal assent among the educated population. A special and unique achievement, like that of Watteau or David, could create great excitement to be sure. When an artist had something revelatory to say, when he found ways to represent previously latent perceptions and structures of feeling, an audience was ready to respond. But in the absence of such exceptional art, the crafts of painting and sculpture became matters of decidedly secondary cultural importance.

We live in an era in which the authority of art as a category is no longer open to question. The younger artists of the 1980s enjoy a climate of opinion in which they need not give form to any narrative or idea of shared importance in order to be regarded with the utmost seriousness by an international audience of thousands (whose economic power is far out of proportion to its numbers). The average collector, a banker or corporate executive, can plausibly be asked to make a large mental and material investment in, say, a copy after a photograph of a Malevich or a recreation of the discredited kitsch exercises of Op art. By no means all of them will, but anyone who truly wants to be a player in the new game will entertain the idea of doing so. (The *New York Times* has already instructed its readers (June 3, 1986) that the artists included in *End-game* are the ones to pay attention to now.)¹⁸ Leaving aside the ultimate worth of these works, I would suggest that the automatic deference accorded them requires an enormous faith in visual art as a category of experience, one that earlier eras would scarcely recognize.

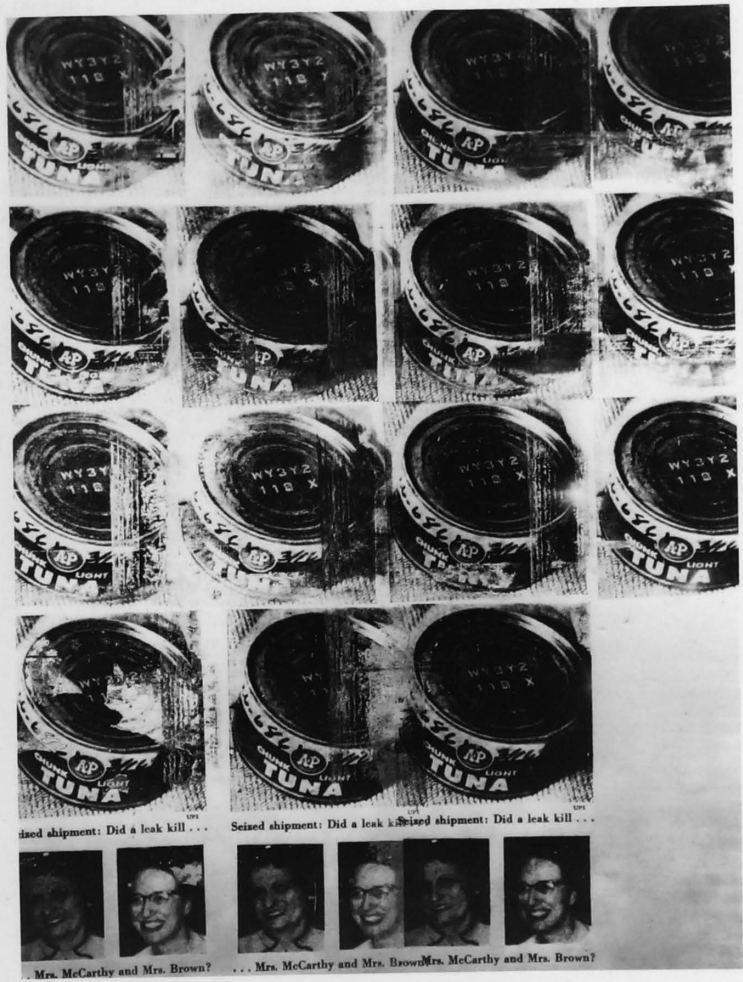
The question of belief is of course central to an understanding of twentieth-century modernism, much of which, in searching after metaphysical harmonies, mythic archetypes, or undiscovered depths of inner experience, approaches a religious vision. But these earlier ambitions tended to be anything but cool and self-effacing in outward aspect. They required heroics because artists had gone on imagining an audience before which art continually needed to demonstrate its efficacy. The heroes of modernism imagined resistance and worse: indifference. If these artists anticipated such reactions with displays of resistance or indifference to their audience beforehand, they thereby acknowledged in spite of themselves that the artistic enterprise remained ever in need of justification.

The displacement of subjectivity in the new abstraction, its evasions of the burdens of originality, are an attempt to obviate all that or, rather, to respond to circumstances in which efficient reproduction of the category "art" is sufficient to command attention. By comparison, Neo-Expressionism looked backwards to older artistic habits. It tugged at your sleeve; it begged to be noticed, while its traffic with vernacular forms, unvarnished private fantasies, and plain ugliness always gave it the capacity to offend — despite its evident international success. Neither motive is apparent in the new art, which may recycle old forms but only to do away with old attitudes. The smooth, clean surfaces and crisply defined motifs, the manufactured look, the eclectically borrowed geometric motifs are meant, on one level, to make the autobiographical posturing of the last generation seem slightly silly and quaint. In narrowing artistic mimesis to the realm of already existing signs, these artists simply accept, with a serene kind of confidence, the distinction between what the modern cultural economy defines as art and what it doesn't. The self-sufficient validity of the art object is no longer, as it was in the best moments of modernism, hard-won, wrested from an "encroachment on the territory of the non-aesthetic and a continual skirmishing with its power" (the phrasing is Charles Harrison's).¹⁹ Even the Neo-Expressionists still believed that that was the central task of modern painting. By contrast, the sheer, unquestioned difference in coding between art and non-art becomes the primary meaning of this new art, all the more so in that such distinctions are claimed to have been

Haim Steinbach, *no wires,
no power cord*, mixed media
construction, 28½ × 46½
× 18½"; Collection of
Elisabeth and Ealan
Wingate; Photo Courtesy
Carpenter + Hochman
Gallery, New York.



Andy Warhol, *Tunafish Disaster*, 1963, 112 × 82";
Private Collection — Photo
Courtesy Leo Castelli
Gallery, New York. Photo:
Eric Pollitzer.



superseded in the extinction of modernism. What is unwittingly but unequivocally signified is the triumph of the empty category on which the current empowerment of art depends.

IT is a standard dismissal to say that a new tendency or movement in art is actually old, that it has all been done before. The art of replication is of course one way deftly to outflank that reaction. In the case of the new abstraction, the possible criticism remains, however, that it is not as old as it wants to be, that too close a fit with the immediate conditions and demands of its own time will prove to be its principal shortcoming. The proposed priority of Warhol, for example, is open to challenge, and I want to take up that issue as a more concrete conclusion to this essay.

That priority has been, once again, influentially stated by Baudrillard:²⁰ "Art can become a reproducing machine (Andy Warhol), without ceasing to be art, since the machine is only a sign. . . . Art and industry can then exchange their signs." I find this, like much else in Baudrillard, somewhat obscure, but the drift is clear enough. It comes from the same passage, cited above, that Halley used in his praise of Levine's replicas. But if this reading of Warhol has proved useful to the painters, it fits even more closely the strategies of sculptors like Jeff Koons and Haim Steinbach, particularly the work of the latter. Steinbach makes his choices of displaced objects from a range of generally inexpensive, accessible items, some with middle-class cachet (smart trays from Conran's), some with youth-culture appeal (fancy high-top basketball shoes), some kitschy ("lava lamps"), and some virtually characterless (drug-store digital clocks). The artist undeniably has an eye when he goes shopping and when he presents his purchases on their immaculately Formica-faced shelves. There seem to me, further, to be rich possibilities in these pieces for activating (*pace* Baudrillard) the social differences among commodity signs and for discovering unexpected affinities across boundaries. Arresting and revealing combinations do crop up in his work, but they are intermittent and subordinate to a more neutralizing impulse. What he asserts in his art is an equivalent distance from "the real" manifested in all his chosen objects. As consumer desire is channeled and abstracted by the mass-produced surfaces of these diverse products, so their appropriation allows him to subsume their different origins and uses into new codings of shape, color, and texture. They are all the more abstract in that the artist's hand has been excluded from their making.

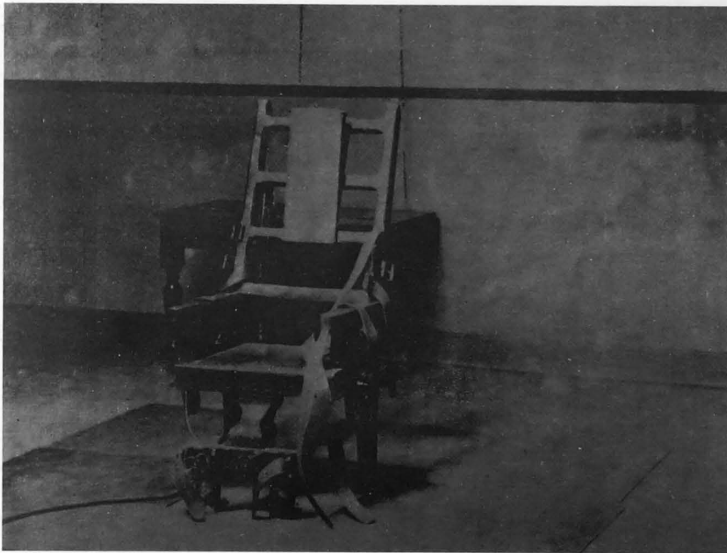
It is the common understanding of Warhol that his intentions in the early 1960s were similar. And that understanding was very much the intended effect of his famous pronouncements of the time, the professions of distance from and indifference to the images he mechanically reproduced on his canvases. It would be hard to recall another artist who has so effectively controlled the subsequent interpretation of his work. That cool and abstracted stance is bound up with his enormous success (he is undoubtedly the most famous artist of his time), as it seems to be with the rapid rise of the young artists under discussion here. Let me, however, state my thesis baldly from the start: rather than being about the numbing substitution of mass-produced images for feel-

ing or the extinction of self in serial repetition, the best pictures are about the imagination of pain and suffering. Those meanings, I admit, seem almost too overt to be taken seriously, the horrific automobile crashes, suicides, race riots, and electric chairs, repeated over and over again. And they keep company with the apparently anodyne icons of soup cans, Coke bottles, and movie-star lips. But it is precisely in thinking about the possible interconnections between the images of catastrophe and the images of consumption that another Warhol can be seen behind the dandyish pose.

In 1963, for example, the year after he had established the Campbell's soup label as the nearest thing to his own corporate logo, he did a pair of pictures entitled *Tunafish Disaster*. These are, understandably I think, lesser known works, but feature the repeated images of a similar object, an A&P-brand can of tuna. The contents of the can in this instance were suspected of having killed people, and the newspaper photographs of the victims are repeated below those of the deadly containers (another smaller picture is titled after the names of the victims). The pictures commemorate in their way a moment when the supermarket facade of safe and abundant provision of packaged food was exploded. Does Warhol's rendition of the disaster render it safely neutral? I think not, no more than it would be possible for an artist today to address the recent panics over tampering with non-prescription medicines without confronting the kind of anxiety they express. In this case, the repetition of the crude images forces attention to the awful banality of the accident and the tawdry exploitation by which we come to know the misfortunes of strangers. But they do not for those reasons mock attempts at empathy, however feeble. Nor do they in fact direct our attention to some peculiarly mid-twentieth-century estrangement between the event and its representation; the misfortunes of strangers have made up the primary content of the press since a press has existed. The *Tunafish Disasters* take an established feature of Pop imagery, established by others as well as by Warhol, and push it into a context decidedly other than that of consumption. We do not consume the news of these deaths in the same way that we consume the safe (one hopes) contents of a can.

Following this reading, one can make a further link to the several series using photographs of automobile accidents. These commemorate events in which the supreme symbol of consumer affluence, the American car of the 1950s, has ceased its existence as an image of pleasure and freedom to become an instrument of sudden and irreparable injury. Does the repetition of the *Five Deaths* or *Saturday Disaster* cancel attention to the visible anguish in the faces of the living or the horror of the limp bodies of the unconscious and dead? We cannot penetrate beneath the image to touch the true pain and grief, but their reality is sufficiently indicated in the photographs to force reflection on one's limited ability to find an appropriate response. As for the repetition, might we just as well understand it to mean the grim predictability, day after day, of more events with an identical outcome, the levelling sameness with which real, not symbolic, death erupts in our experience.

These are simple ideas I am talking about, but their very lack of sophistication gave Warhol an elemental set of concerns that abstraction and irony had



Andy Warhol, *Electric Chair*, 1967, acrylic and silkscreen enamel on canvas, 54 × 73"; Photo Courtesy Leo Castelli Gallery, New York. Photo: Bevan Davies.

Andy Warhol, *Jackie*, 1964, silkscreen on canvas, 20 × 16"; Private Collection — Photo Courtesy Leo Castelli Gallery, New York. Photo: Eric Pollitzer.



foreclosed for everyone else. Worry over their simplicity and moralism may have encouraged the artist to retreat further behind his persona of deadpan cool. There is only one set of pictures where Warhol's interpreters have identified an emotional response to his subject matter.²¹ These are the Jacqueline Kennedy series in which press photographs of her public mourning are placed on canvas alone, in pairs, in serial repetition, and in multiple juxtaposition with pre-assassination photographs of a smiling Jackie. Somehow the crude, second-generation stenciling, the utter familiarity of the images, have not been an impediment to shared emotion in this one case, and I expect that this is because everyone who saw those events on the screen had a developed set of feelings to bring to the pictures. But once we have admitted the sentimental reading of the Kennedy series, then we are free to extend a similar reading to those anonymous occasions for mourning discussed above. Or to another kind of political death. The famous empty electric chair makes its appearance in a 1963 series entitled *Disaster*, and that title makes the bridge between it and the slaughter of innocents in the plane and car accidents. It is worth reminding ourselves that the early 1960s, following the execution of Caryl Chessman in California, were a period of heightened agitation against the death penalty. The partisan character of the image is literal and straightforward, as Warhol is wont to be, and that is what saves it from mere morbidity.

It would risk overbalancing this essay to extend the discussion to further examples of Warhol's work, though I think it could easily be done. The pictures of Marilyn Monroe begin to appear in the same year as her unhappy death, and it would have been a callous viewer who could have forgotten that fact in 1962. The meaning of Warhol's project is not to be found in the sources of his eclectic imagery, not even in formal terms. The photograph of the electric chair, for example, is not precisely a "media" or commodity image, nor does serialization succeed in rendering it so. Moreover, Warhol's sensitivity to pictorial order is surely the equal of Rauschenberg's in the latter's use of the photo-silkscreen technique. (In two recent exhibitions of sixties' art, the Whitney's *Blam* show and the Sonnabend collection at Princeton, the Warhols were a tonic to the eye, looking stronger and more coherent as pictures than almost anything else on the wall.) Warhol has to be seen in a far more traditional fine-art context, and there is a decidedly original *auteur* behind the paintings. His cool is hard-won and contradictory. One meaning of his art may well be the imprisonment both of knowledge and of artistic resources within the confines of received images, but his prison had windows.

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1. "The Fake as More," in *Idea Art*, ed. Gregory Battcock, New York, 1973, pp. 41-5.
 2. Gerald Marzorati, "Art in the (Re)Making," *Art News*, (June 1986), p. 91.
 3. Battcock, pp. 42, 44-5.
 4. Peter Halley, "The Crisis in Geometry," *Arts*, (Summer 1984), p. 115; quoting Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations*, trans. P. Foss et al., New York, 1983, p. 151.
 5. Battcock, p. 42.
 6. See C. Carr, "The Shock of the Old," *The Village Voice*, (30 October 1984), p. 103.
 7. See Halley, "Frank Stella and the Simulacrum," *Flash Art*, (February / March 1986), pp. 32-5.
 8. Halley, "Crisis," *passim*.
 9. The key text is Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. A. Sheridan, New York, 1977.
 10. Halley, "Crisis," p. 112.
 11. Halley, "Crisis," p. 115.
 12. Halley, "Crisis," p. 115.
 13. See Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," and "Towards a New Laocoon," in F. Frascina, ed., *Art after Pollock*, London and New York, 1985, pp. 21-46.
 14. See Marzorati, p. 96.
 15. Halley, "Crisis," p. 115.
 16. See "Mythologies: Art and the Market. Jeffrey Deitch Interviewed by Matthew Collings," *Artscribe International*, (April / May 1986), pp. 22-6; Douglas C. McGill, "The Lower East Side's New Artists," *New York Times*, (3 June 1986), p. C13.
 17. See Thomas Crow, *Painters and Public Life in Eighteenth-Century Paris*, London and New Haven, 1985, pp. 104-133.
 18. See McGill, p. C13.
 19. Charles Harrison, "Sculpture, Design, and Three-Dimensional Work," *Artscribe International*, (June / July 1986), p. 62.
 20. Baudrillard, p. 151.
 21. See for example John Coplans, *Andy Warhol*, New York, p. 52.