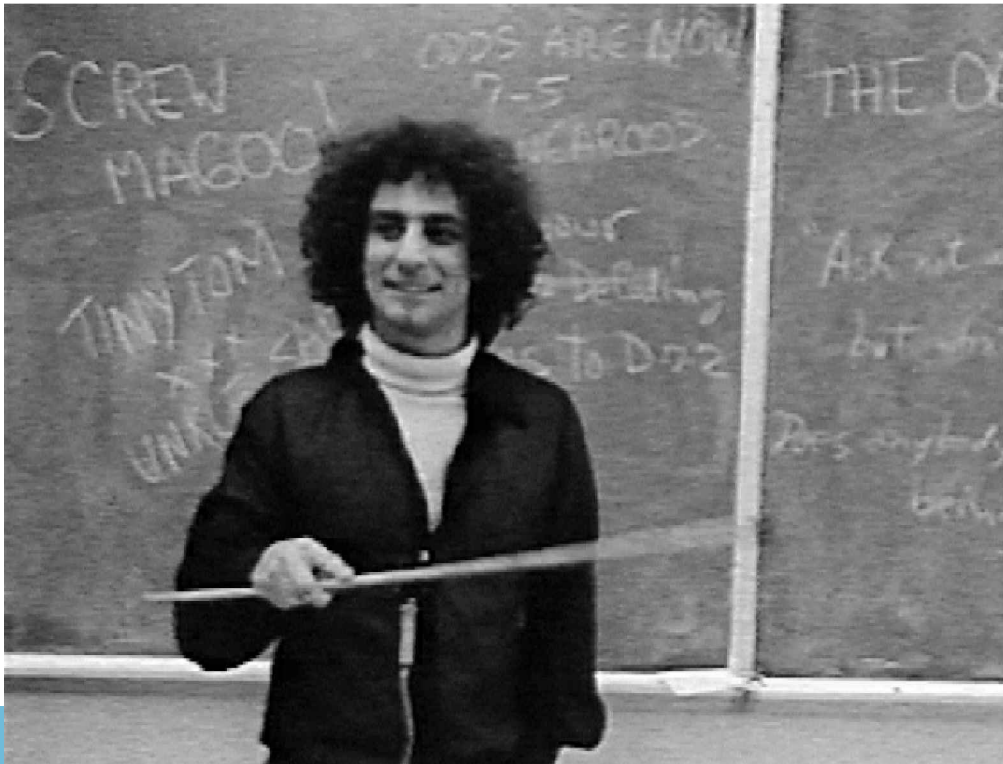


Film still of Abbie Hoffman, 1969.
From Morley Markson, *Growing
Up In America*, 1987.



Yippie Pop: Abbie Hoffman, Andy Warhol, and Sixties Media Politics

DAVID JOSELIT

In his 1968 manifesto, *Revolution for the Hell of It*, Abbie Hoffman wrote:

Did you ever hear Andy Warhol talk? . . . Well, I would like to combine his style and that of Castro's. Warhol understands modern media. Castro has the passion for social change. It's not easy. One's a fag and the other is the epitome of virility. If I were forced to make the choice I would choose Castro, but right now in this period of change in the country the styles of the two can be blended. It's not guerrilla warfare but, well maybe a good term is monkey warfare. If the country becomes more repressive we must become Castros. If it becomes more tolerant we must become Warhols.¹

Castro and Warhol: what strange bedfellows! And indeed Hoffman hints at a queer union—why else would he explicitly label Warhol a “fag”? But for Hoffman, the yippie activist who built a movement by capturing free publicity on TV, the nature of this fantasy is genealogical not erotic.² In their combination of radical politics and a ruthless understanding of media culture, yippies are indeed the legitimate progeny of Castro and Warhol. What is puzzling and exhilarating in Hoffman's pairing is the political distinction he draws between his two progenitors: “*If the country becomes more repressive we must become Castros. If it becomes more tolerant we must become Warhols.*” The first half of this prescription is ordinary enough. When times are bad, activists use force. But the second part is mystifying. Warhol—the paragon of indifference and passivity, the celebrity groupie and ambitious art world operator—is held up as a model of politics appropriate for “tolerant times.” In this essay I will reflect on this surprising assertion. I will try to understand Hoffman's declaration by sketching out what a Warholian politics might be and why it is particularly well-suited to “tolerant times.”

Before I turn to Warhol, I need to establish Hoffman's understanding of media politics. And for this there is no better source than Hoffman himself. Yippie actions were premised on soliciting and addressing the media through what Daniel Boorstin famously called pseudo-events. The pseudo-event, as Boorstin

put it in 1961, “is planted primarily . . . for the purpose of being reported or reproduced. Therefore, its occurrence is arranged for the convenience of the reporting or reproducing media. Its success is measured by how widely it is reported.”³ Yippie leaders consolidated their movement primarily by producing outrageous events that would be broadcast widely on TV and other media. Hoffman’s notorious 1967 action of dropping money onto the trading floor of the New York Stock Exchange from the visitor’s balcony caused a paroxysm of greed among the traders, who snatched up dollar bills as eagerly as they would have normally garnered stock options or pursued market information.⁴ In other words, Hoffman developed an *image* of capitalist greed that would play well on the evening news. Profoundly influenced by the grassroots political theater of the Diggers of San Francisco, Hoffman orchestrated flamboyant street theater for the television camera. The apogee of this strategy occurred with yippie protests at the 1968 Democratic convention in Chicago and Hoffman’s ensuing conspiracy trial, where he used his own body to provoke media attention, notoriously “desecrating” the American flag by wearing a shirt with its pattern during congressional hearings following the protests.⁵ Here is Hoffman’s brilliant analysis of yippie media activism, also drawn from the 1968 book, *Revolution for the Hell of It*:

The commercial is information. The program is rhetoric. The commercial is the figure. The program is the ground. What happens at the end of the program? Do you think any one of the millions of people watching the show switched from being a liberal to a conservative or vice versa? I doubt it. One thing is certain though . . . a lot of people are going to buy that fuckin’ soap or whatever else they were pushing in the commercial.

What would happen if a whole hour were filled with a soap commercial? That’s a very interesting question and I will speculate that it would not work as well, which means that not as much soap would be sold. It’s only when you establish a figure-ground relationship that you can convey information. It is the only perceptual dynamic that involves the spectator.

Our actions in Chicago established a brilliant figure-ground relationship. The rhetoric of the Convention was allotted the fifty minutes of the hour, we were given the ten or less usually reserved for commercials. *We were an advertisement for revolution.*⁶

Here is a contradiction almost as startling as the marriage of Castro and Warhol. Hoffman adopts the TV commercial as a model for radical politics and thereby appropriates the mode of

communication of precisely those corporate structures he was intent on destroying. Indeed, Hoffman is emphatic in linking activism with advertising, as when he writes, “We are living TV ads, movies. Yippee! There is no program. Program would make our movement sterile.”⁷ Hoffman’s analysis of information as an opposition between figure and ground is clearly indebted to the cybernetic theories of Norbert Wiener, widely popularized during the sixties. According to Wiener, information emerges as a *pattern*, which could stand out from the entropic noise of unmediated experience. Similarly, perceptual psychology has demonstrated that form is discerned through an optical distinction between a figure (a pattern) placed against a ground. Indeed, Hoffman’s choice of the figure/ground metaphor is consistent with his image-oriented brand of activism, which combines textually based information theories with a sophisticated image politics. So far, so good: Hoffman applies information theory to the visual medium of TV and concludes that the commercial is the information, while the programming is nothing but its ground. As he proclaims, “Do you think any one of the millions of people watching the show switched from being a liberal to being a conservative? I doubt it.” This is an incisive analysis of what counts for information in television. According to Hoffman, it is the *commercial*—that which is ostensibly secondary—that is the primary quantum of communication in this medium. And, indeed, his analysis accords well with the facts of how commercial broadcast television emerged in the late 1940s and 1950s. In this first era of widespread programming, TV shows were conceived as little more than lures intended to draw viewers in for a sales pitch. In the early years of television, advertising agencies were primarily responsible for conceiving and producing programming. Even after this direct association was loosened, the advertiser retained significant indirect influence, as well as veto power on what could be broadcast.⁸ It may justly be concluded, then, that as Hoffman argues, the primary information delivered by television is the commercial message.

Hoffman’s analysis of television may be absolutely correct, but a vexing problem remains regarding his exuberant elision of advertising and activism. How can the commercial be turned against its usual purpose of exalting consumer life and its values? To put it succinctly, how does one make *advertisements for revolution* that resist being recoded as radical chic? The answer to this question leads to a second concept central to Wiener’s study of cybernetics. In his 1950 book, *The Human Use of Human Beings*, he wrote, “It is my thesis that the physical functioning of the living individual and the operation of some of the newer communication machines are precisely parallel in their analogous attempts to control entropy through feedback.”⁹ In human bodies

as in computers, feedback loops serve to regulate functioning and behavior through the exchange of information. Communication is inherently dynamic in that the response to a message conditions the next message, and so on and so on. Transfers or relays of information occur not just through the construction and dissemination of patterns but through their dynamic metamorphosis under the stimulus of interchange. But in commercial television, feedback is illusory. There is little if any dynamic exchange between the corporations that produce television and the spectators who consume it. In *Guerrilla Television*, a fascinating book authored by Michael Shamberg for the Raindance Corporation in 1971, the hegemony of commercial media is analyzed, and a range of guerrilla responses are proposed. Shamberg argues that while the business of television is directed toward engineering consumer demand and consolidating political complacency there is nothing inherent in TV technology that requires it to function in this manner. On the contrary, the portability of the video camera and its capacity to simultaneously record and replay make it technologically suited to informational feedback rather than the simple dissemination monolithic ideological messages. Shamberg identifies at least two modes of activism that can facilitate media feedback. First, he recommends developing an underground media that would shadow network TV and redress its inadequacies. Second, he acknowledges the strategies of activists such as Hoffman who seize time within mainstream media in order to inject resistant content into it. Here is his analysis of this approach:

In Media-America, our information structures are so designed as to minimize feedback. . . . This makes for incredible cultural tension because on the one hand people cannot ignore media evolution, while on the other they require feedback for psychological balance. The result was the 1960s: every conceivable special interest group, which was informationally disenfranchised, indulged in a sort of "mass media therapy" where they created events to get coverage, and then rushed home to see the verification of their experience on TV.¹⁰

There is a certain snideness in this passage, but also a prescient diagnosis that representation within the media is a fundamental psychological need in a culture whose public life is deeply rooted in television. In Shamberg's view, activists like Hoffman conduct "mass media therapy" in which what is repressed in network TV returns as *commercials for revolution*.

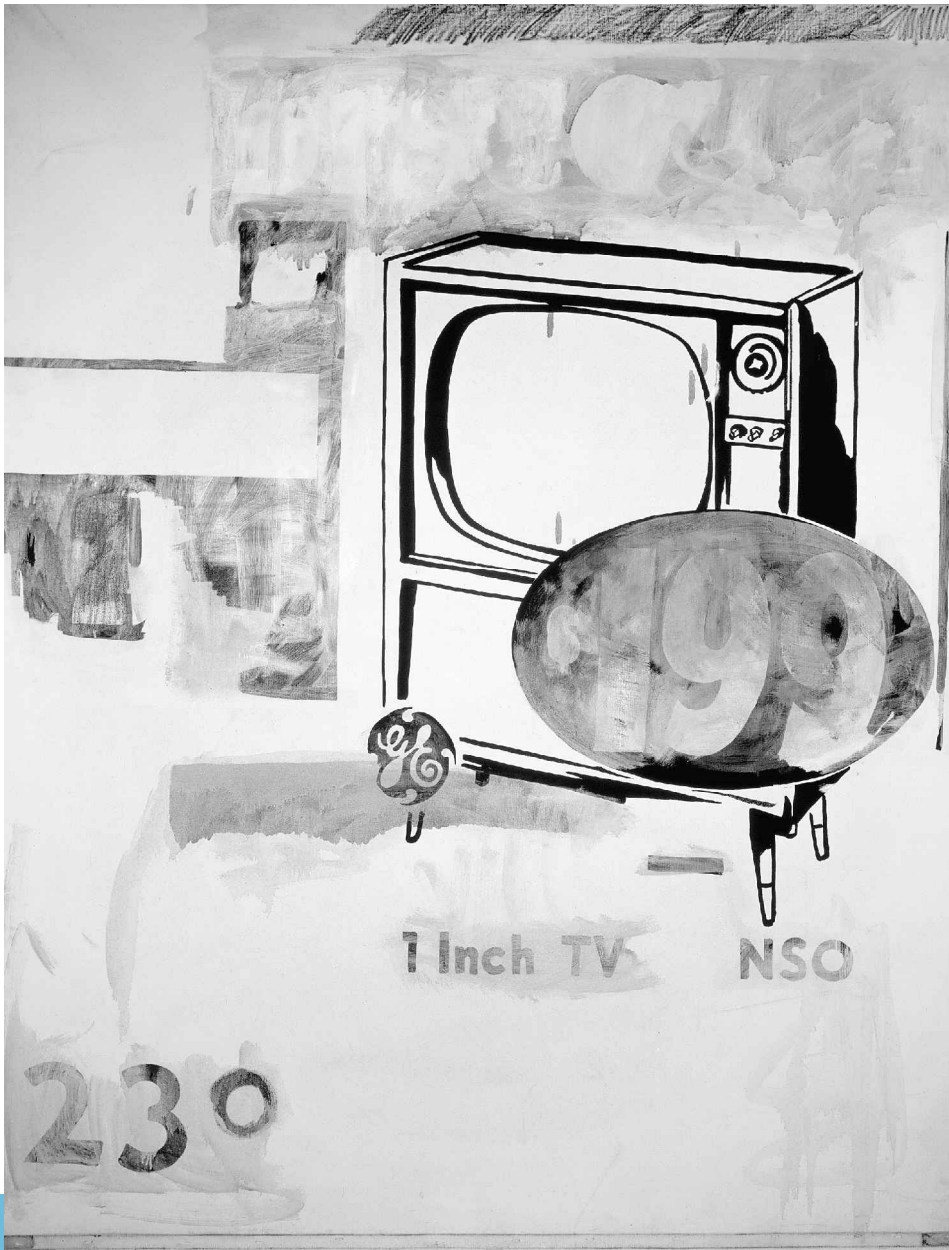
Shamberg's analysis suggests how yippie media activism serves the salutary purpose of reestablishing feedback loops within the petrified networks of commercial TV. His phrase, *informationally disenfranchised*, encompasses the kernel of yippie media theory: that forms of disenfranchisement that have been at stake

in revolutionary struggles throughout history—namely economic and political oppression—are refigured during the 1960s as an *informational poverty* within a media economy. This shift transformed politics in the 1960s and has continued to do so to this day, when both conventional politicians and opposition groups must be telegenic in order to communicate their goals. But it is important to be cautious about too easily eliding economies of survival and economies of information. The overlap between them is significant, but they are not congruent to one another. Indeed, the gap between producing outrageous pseudo-events and accomplishing significant social change is suggested by Shamberg in another passage from *Guerrilla Television*: “The last thing you want to do is get a lot of publicity every which way. Abbie Hoffman thinks he’s getting his message across by going on the Dick Cavett show, but as somebody (John Brockman actually) once said: ‘The revolution ended when Abbie Hoffman shut up for the first commercial.’”¹¹ This last phrase, in juxtaposition with Hoffman’s advocacy of “commercials for revolution” suggests a tension, fundamental to the yippie program, between affecting media content on the one hand and its form on the other.¹² If the yippies change the message of the commercial by selling revolution instead of soap or automobiles, they nonetheless risk leaving the structure of network TV intact. This is what is meant by criticizing Hoffman for “shut[ting] up for the first commercial.” As the yippie leader himself understood, to be part of the program instead of making oneself a commercial for change was to risk losing one’s message altogether.

Hoffman thus faced a dilemma: the success of his media interventions brought him from the margins of public attention to the center—to *The Dick Cavett Show*. In his important book *The Whole World is Watching*, Todd Gitlin traces an analogous dynamic in the media coverage of the SDS (Students for a Democratic Society) during the 1960s. Gitlin argues that mainstream media always attempts to defuse the force of oppositional politics by reducing radical leaders to stereotypes such as the raving drug addict or the starry-eyed hippie, which serve to invalidate their substantive messages.¹³ The challenge of media activism is thus the nearly impossible task of producing telegenic but oppositional content while resisting absorption within the institutional framework of TV. Andy Warhol’s media projects emerge precisely from this dilemma. Warhol’s art adopted the *content* of commerce through its appropriation of commodities and celebrities, but it simultaneously dismantled the institutional *forms* through which these objectified products circulate. It did so by scrambling the stable figure/ground relationships—between commercial and program, for instance—that Hoffman’s media activism often left intact. A simple example is Warhol’s early Pop painting *TV \$199* (1960), in

which a television set is rendered within the partially obscured field of an advertisement for itself. As the painting's title implies, the ties between television and money are impossible to dissolve. And yet, by veiling the reproduced ad with brushy fields of white paint, Warhol recodes it as an aesthetic object, suggesting an alternating current of commerce and art. Here the figure/ground relationship between the analytical content promised by art, and the commercial language of advertising is not allowed to settle down into stable oppositions, and this rhetorical instability is mirrored by the optical instability of the painting in which no one element is allowed to emerge as primary. The issue, as modernist critics have argued to other ends, lies in the charged unde-

Andy Warhol, *TV \$199*, 1960.
Oil on canvas, 62¼ x 49½". ©
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Society (ARS), New York.



credibility between figure and ground.

There's nothing accidental in Warhol's representation of a television set. He had strong and prescient opinions about TV, many of which accord well with Hoffman's. Before considering how these attitudes manifested themselves in Warhol's multimedia projects of the mid-1960s, like his *Exploding Plastic Inevitable* and his book *a: a novel*—I wish to survey the artist's writings on TV, particularly his amusing and sometimes withering remarks in *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol (From A to B and Back Again)*, which, while published in 1975, is rooted in attitudes developed in the 1960s. Abbie Hoffman declared in 1968 that yippies were “living TV ads, [or] movies,”¹⁴ and for Warhol the confusion between experience and spectatorship—between *being* a movie and *watching* a movie—was axiomatic. On the first page of *The Philosophy* he wrote, “A whole day of life is like a whole day of television. TV never goes off the air once it starts for the day, and I don't either. At the end of the day the whole day will be a movie. A movie made for TV.”¹⁵ This confusion between mediated and unmediated experience is pushed further in his famous statement about waking up after being shot in 1968:

Before I was shot, I always thought that I was more half-there than all-there—I always suspected that I was watching TV instead of living life. People sometimes say that the way things happen in the movies is unreal, but actually it's the way things happen to you in life that's unreal. The movies make emotions look so strong and real, whereas when things really do happen to you, it's like watching television—you don't feel anything.

Right when I was being shot and ever since, I knew that I was watching television. The channels switch, but it's all television. When you're really really involved with something, you're usually thinking of something else. When something's happening, you fantasize about other things. When I woke up somewhere—I didn't know it was at the hospital and that Bobby Kennedy had been shot the day after I was—I heard fantasy words about thousands of people being in St. Patrick's Cathedral praying and carrying on, and then I heard the word “Kennedy” and that brought me back to the television world again because then I realized, well, here I was, in pain.¹⁶

This extraordinary passage contains two important reflections on experience in a media culture. The first is Warhol's conviction that “TV” and “life” mutually derealize one another. The shifts in this passage are dizzying. At one moment Warhol asserts that mediated perceptions are more real than lived ones, more emotionally powerful and vivid and a moment later he declares that,

on the contrary, it is the media that exemplify the deadening of affect to which he is so morbidly sensitive. This contradiction erupts in a single sentence quoted above: “The movies make emotions look so strong and real, whereas when things really do happen to you, it’s like watching television—you don’t feel anything.” Perhaps Warhol is drawing a fine distinction here between movies and television (a possibility well worth entertaining),¹⁷ but in a larger context he suggests a kind of infinite regress where emotional dissociation is both produced and reproduced in rebounding reflections between media and life, life and media. His 1968 “novel” *a* is a brilliant demonstration of this derealizing effect.

The novel was one result of Warhol’s infatuation with his tape recorder, a machine he referred to as his “wife.”¹⁸ The concept was to record the adventures of Factory habitué and superstar Ondine over the course of a speed-induced twenty-four hour binge of talking and partying. (In reality more than one session was required.) The text, some 450 pages in length and largely transcribed from the tapes by two teenage typists, is astoundingly incoherent, like listening to the soundtrack of a television show without seeing the picture. Here’s a brief passage from a heart-to-heart conversation between Ondine and Edie Sedgwick who is identified by the letter T:

T—And y’know. And I have to start again. And each time it, it’s a little harder. But each time you have more equipment. (Pause.) Each time there’s more equipment. T—But Ondine, you’re such uh . . . I’m just the opposite of it too. T—But . . . I’m just the opposite of it. As as nice as I am, there’s a stupid and unbelieving . . . T—I know. Do you know I don’t believe in things.¹⁹

This is one of the more dramatic passages. Drugs certainly rendered these conversations desultory. But this notwithstanding, the brilliant accomplishment of *a* is its demonstration that experience escapes mechanical reproduction. In the novel the aural surface of life is detached and allowed to float free: the transcription of experience suffocates it. And this leads to the second important point in Warhol’s passage about being shot: for him, the exit from the wonderland of televisual disorientation was through the insistent physicality of the body, through pain. He concludes his meditation by stating, “and then I heard the word ‘Kennedy’ and that brought me back to the television world again because then I realized, well, here I was, in pain.”

The body as a site of kinesthetic experience—of pain—and the body as an object of mechanical reproduction were deliriously confounded in Warhol’s collaborations with Lou Reed and John Cale’s band, the Velvet Underground. Warhol saw the Velvets for

the first time in 1965, and through 1966 he promoted them in a series of ruckus multimedia presentations eventually known as the Exploding Plastic Inevitable or EPI.²⁰ The EPI was by all accounts a wildly disorienting palimpsest of feedback loops. Little remains of these events except for a few powerful photographs by Billy Name and others, a film by Ron Namuth that exists in only one print, and the vivid accounts of those who were present. It was typical for two or three films to be projected at all times onto the band and these often included footage of the performers themselves. There were strobe and light shows which included dancers onstage shining lights directly at the audience. In addition to the band, members of the Warhol retinue, including Gerard Malanga and Ronnie Cutrone, invented spontaneous S/M dramas on stage, and sometimes the filmmaker Barbara Rubin would plunge into the crowd with her own camera and lights, making the audience itself a spectacle. In other words, a circuit of media feedback was established in which the line between performing oneself and becoming an image was perpetually crossed and recrossed. In a beautiful metaphorical summation of this experience, Jonas Mekas suggested in 1966 that strobe light could lead a dancer to perceive him or herself transmogrified into film. He stated, “You become a particle, a grain of the movie. Maybe that’s what it is. We are cut by strobe lights into single frames, to eight frames p/s or whatever the strobe frequency is, on and off.”²¹ This powerful experience of media feedback, in which one may transit in and out of the “space” or “grain” of the film, was mirrored by the Velvets’ music, which was characterized by shrill and assaultive feedback noises that engulfed the listener in an environment of sound.

The Exploding Plastic Inevitable therefore embodied Warhol’s

Exploding Plastic Inevitable
at the Dom, New York, 1966.
Photo: Billy Name.



model of media spectatorship in which television, film, and kinesthetic experience mutually derealize one another. As Sterling Morrison, one of the Velvets, remembered regarding a performance in New Jersey: “At Rutger’s [sic] we were all dressed entirely in white. The effect with all of the films and lights projected on us, was invisibility.”²² Here is the converse of Abbie Hoffman’s manipulations. Yippies sought the position of *figure* in their media interventions, whereas in the Exploding Plastic Inevitable the band served as a mobile *ground* for mechanically reproduced figments—sometimes of *themselves*—playing across their bodies. How can this contradiction be resolved with Hoffman’s statement that in tolerant times “we must become Warhols?” Indeed, we know from Hoffman’s biographer, Jonah Raskin, that the yippie activist saw the Exploding Plastic Inevitable at the Dom on St. Marks Place and that he “reveled” in its “total assault on the senses.”²³ Hoffman knew that certain kinds of direct political action required the insertion of new messages—new figures—within conventional TV programming. But perhaps he also realized that John Brockman’s accusation regarding his “good manners” on *The Dick Cavett Show* cut to the heart of the political challenge of “tolerant times.” Tolerance means allowing Abbie Hoffman on TV, but the price of his appearance there was the consolidation of a stereotypical persona crafted by the corporate media, whose avatar in this case is Dick Cavett. In other words, the political struggle with regard to tolerance lies not in destabilizing governments but in destabilizing the forms of subjectivity that are the foundation of all governance—both public and personal. This, of course, was a fundamental tenet of the New Left, and it is precisely what is at stake in Warhol’s EPI. Jonas Mekas understood this in 1966 when he wrote:

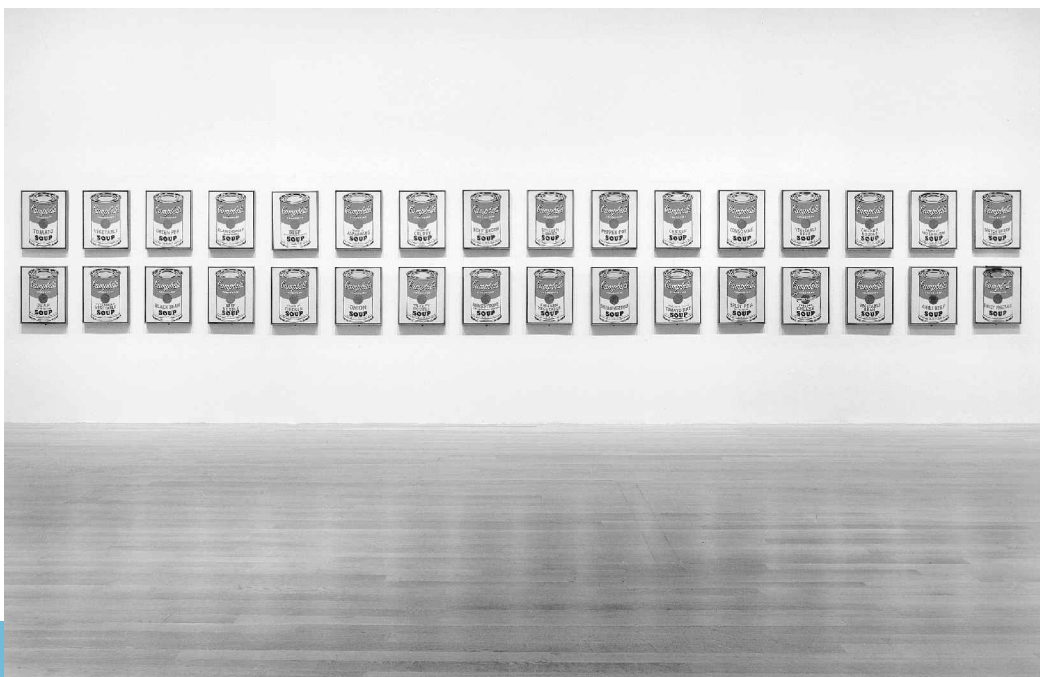
The strength of the Plastic Inevitables, and where they differ from all the other intermedia shows and groups, is that they are dominated by the ego. Warhol has attracted toward himself the most egocentric personalities and artists. The auditorium, every aspect of it—singers, light throwers, strobe operators, dancers—at all times are screaming with screeching, piercing personality pain. . . . In any case, it is the last stand of the ego, before it either breaks down or goes to the other side.²⁴

It couldn’t be said any better. Andy Warhol is right for “tolerant times” because he calls forth and shatters the ego, because he stages its “last stand.” One of the deepest and most unsettling legacies of the 1960s is the sometimes violent, sometimes ecstatic revelation that the ostensibly private arena of the self had become a public battleground. Warhol understood this condition not only in terms of psychology and politics but also in terms of form: the

shattering of an ego is always a shattering of figure/ground relationships. What, after all, is an ego if not a figure standing against the ground of the unconscious or, alternately, the ground of socially constructed and media-generated identities. It is this profound disruption of both the “contents” of subjectivity and its form that Hoffman must have recognized as Warhol’s political promise for “tolerant times.”

I have argued that the EPI served to destabilize subjectivity by submitting the ego to a mode of media fission in which, bombarded by its multiple representations, the self is fatally undermined. Multimedia installations are well suited to such a scrambling of psychic figure/ground relationships, and, indeed, Warhol claimed that his embrace of filmmaking after 1963 signaled a shift in focus from conventional art objects like paintings to a practice of recording interpersonal relationships on film. As he declared in *Popism*, his memoir of the 1960s, “Art just wasn’t fun . . . anymore; it was people who were fascinating and I wanted to spend all my time being around them, listening to them, and making movies of them.”²⁵ This statement suggests a sharp break between Warhol’s art of the early 1960s and his wholesale adoption of film in 1965—the same year he met the Velvet Underground. But in his early Pop paintings Warhol had already challenged the nature of objects in a manner analogous to his shattering of subjectivity in the Exploding Plastic Inevitable. Even in ostensibly straightforward works like his 1962 series of Campbell’s soup cans, the commodity is divided against itself. In the most frequently reproduced of these images, the soup cans are shown head on, optically flattened so that the spectacular rendering of a brand name eclipses the product’s particular qualities as food. As in many of Warhol’s paintings, the ontological origin of the commercial thing

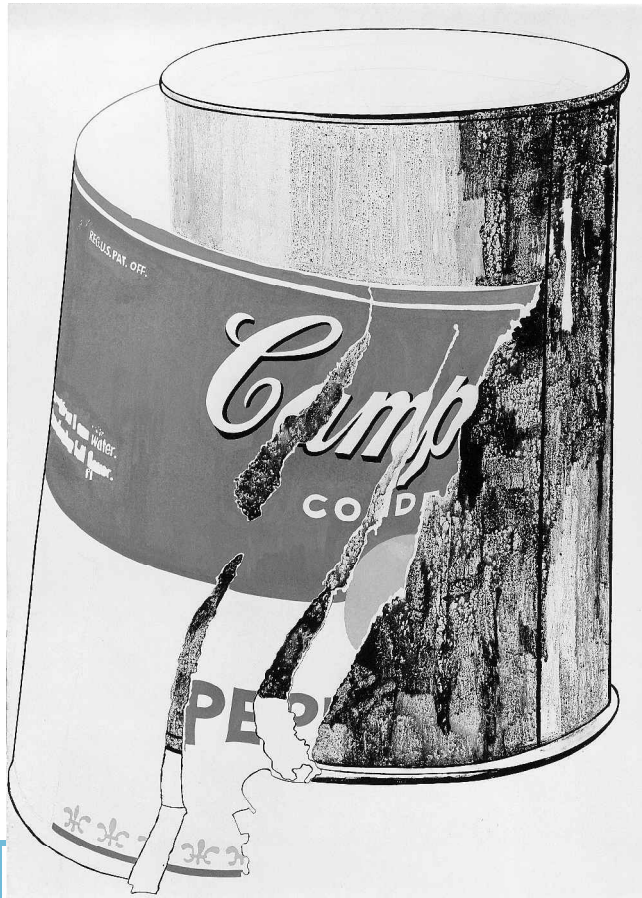
Andy Warhol, *Campbell’s Soup Cans*, 1962. Synthetic polymer paint on thirty-two canvases, each 20 x 16". The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Irving Blum; Nelson A. Rockefeller Bequest, gift of Mr. And Mrs. William A.M. Burden, Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Fund, gift of Nina and Gordon Bunshaft in honor of Henry Moore, Lillie P. Bliss Bequest, Philip Johnson Fund, Frances Keech Bequest, gift of Mrs. Bliss Parkinson, and Florence B. Wesley Bequest (all by exchange). Photograph © 2001 The Museum of Modern Art, New York. © 2002 Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts/ Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, New York/™ Licensed by Campbell’s Soup Co. All rights reserved.



is identified as a spectacular image.²⁶ And yet, in a number of works dating from the same year, such as *Big Torn Campbell's Soup Can (Pepper Pot)*, the distinction between a commodity's nature as an image and its material use-value is made explicit and even traumatic. In this painting the label is torn off the can, revealing the blunt, undifferentiated metal cylinder which contains its unit of processed food. In *Big Torn Campbell's Soup Can* the spectacular appliqué is literally alienated from its referent, but even in the untouched soup cans, this alienation is conveyed through the complete engulfment of the product by its packaging. Pop art is founded in such dualities in which Campbell's soup, for example, may simultaneously circulate as an image of American family values within the spectacular economy of the media and as an inexpensive processed foodstuff on the shelves of every supermarket. Just as Warhol's EPI dramatized a model of *subjectivity* in which kinesthetic experience is always on the verge of transforming into mediated experience, his model of *objectivity* developed years earlier, established an analogous alternating current between the commodity as a representation and the commodity as a use-value.

My argument is this: Warhol reinvents a strictly *optical* quality of modernist painting—its destabilization of figure/ground relationships—by identifying its extraoptical dimensions within a postmodern media-saturated consumer society.²⁷ What is particularly fascinating about Warhol's exploration of an expanded field of figure/ground relations is his refusal to limit his investigation to any one strategy, such as the ego-shattering multimedia experience of the EPI or the bifurcation of commodities in his Pop paintings. On the contrary, in the same month as the EPI's run at the Dom in the East Village, the artist opened an exhibition uptown at the Leo Castelli Gallery in which he addressed analogous questions within painting by making works of art which were "all figure" on the one hand and "all ground" on the other. The Castelli show included two rooms. In the first was a flotilla of *Silver Clouds*, reflective pillows filled with helium which shifted in space as visitors walked through and around them. As always, Warhol's analysis of

Andy Warhol, *Big Torn Campbell's Soup Can (Pepper Pot)*, 1962. Synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 71¾ x 51¼". The Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh, PA. Founding Collection, Contribution The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Inc. © 2002 Andy Warhol Foundation/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/™ Licensed by Campbell's Soup Co. All Rights reserved. Photo: Lockwood Hoehl.



his own work is hard to improve upon. He told Alan Solomon in a 1966 interview on CBS:

Since I didn't want to paint any more, I thought . . . that I could give that up and do the movies. And then I thought that there must be a way that I have to finish it off, and I thought the only way is to make a painting that floats. And I asked Billy Klüver to help me make a painting that floats, and he thought about it and he came up with the . . . the silver—since he knew I liked silver he thought of the silver things that I'm working on now—and the idea is to fill them with helium and let them out of your window and they'll float away and that's one less object . . . to move around.²⁸

With his accustomed deadpan Warhol precisely identifies two ways of killing off painting: first by making something that floats, a figure with no ground, and second by making an object which is dispensable, which will float out the window: an object that is, paradoxically, “one less object . . . to move around.”

In the second room at Castelli Warhol installed his *Cow Wallpaper*, consisting of a reproduction of the head of a Jersey cow, repeated in Day-Glo pink on yellow, produced as wallpaper and installed by professionals. If the *Silver Clouds* liberated painting as a figure, then *Cow Wallpaper* embodied the persistent fear expressed by modernist critics like Clement Greenberg that abstraction could collapse into the decorative function wallpaper, a ground without figure.²⁹ Warhol's particular genius in the Castelli exhibition was to show how the disruption of stable figure/ground relationships ultimately caused painting, as a discrete object, to drain away or explode into space, just as the EPI had done with its overlapping films and flashing lights.

Andy Warhol, *Silver Clouds*.
Installed at the Leo Castelli
Gallery, New York, 1966. © 2002
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the Visual Arts/Artists Rights
Society (ARS), New York.



Art historians have particular competencies and skills, including the capacity to identify and interpret optical relations between a figure and its ground.³⁰ If conducted as little more than a resurrection of modernist pieties, discussions of such questions will justly be ignored with a yawn. But if we—like Andy Warhol and Abbie Hoffman—rethink our critical vocabularies and allow them to migrate into areas of vital concern, such as an exploration of how power and identity are secured through images and the visual worlds they constitute, then we, like the best of the artists we study, will find ourselves with much to contribute to the social and political debates of our time.

Andy Warhol, *Cow Wallpaper*.
Installed at the Leo Castelli
Gallery, New York, 1966. Serigraph
printed on wallpaper. © 2002
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Society (ARS), New York.



Notes

1. Free [Abbie Hoffman], *Revolution for the Hell of It* (New York: Dial Press, 1968), 59. Hoffman's surprising conjunction of Warhol and Castro is not unprecedented. In 1965 Warhol, along with his collaborator, "screenwriter" Ronald Tavel, made a movie called *The Life of Juanita Castro*, loosely based on the diaries of the revolutionary's sister which had recently been published in *Life* magazine. Later, in 1970, Gregory Battcock published an essay that compared Castro's stance toward democratizing education to the complex politics of Warhol's art. See Gregory Battcock, "The Warhol Generation," *Other Scenes* 4, no. 9 (November 1970), reprinted in Battcock, ed., *The New Art: A Critical Anthology* (New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., 1973), 21-28.

2. For an excellent account of Hoffman's media politics, see Aniko Bodroghkozy, "Every Revolutionary Needs a Color TV": The Yippies, Media Manipulation and Talk Shows," in *Groove Tube: Sixties Television and the Youth Rebellion* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 98-122. David Farber's account of the 1968 Democratic Convention in Chicago provides one of the most exhaustive histories of the development of Yippie activism. David Farber, *Chicago '68* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

3. Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America* (New York: Vintage Books, 1961), 11.

4. This action took place in August of 1967, before the official birth of the yippie movement in early 1968, but it is nonetheless exemplary of their subsequent strategies. For an account of the event, see Jonah Raskin, *For the Hell of It: The Life and Times of Abbie Hoffman* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 114-115.

5. Hoffman was charged with conspiring to cause a riot along with Rennie Davis, Tom Hayden, David Dellinger, Bobby Seale, Jerry Rubin, Lee Weiner, and John Froines.

6. Hoffman, 133-134.

7. Hoffman, 80.

8. For an excellent account of the relationship between advertisers and programming in early television, see Erik Barnouw, *The Sponsor: Notes on a Modern Potentate* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978).

9. Norbert Wiener, *The Human Use of Human Beings: Cybernetics and Society* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1950), 26.

10. Michael Shamberg and Raindance Corporation, *Guerrilla Television* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1971), 12.

11. Shamberg and Raindance Corporation, 27.

12. Farber analyzes this contradiction in "Inside Yippie!" in *Chicago '68*, 211-225.

13. Todd Gitlin, *The Whole World Is Watching: Mass Media in the Making and Unmaking of the New Left* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980).

14. Hoffman, 80.

15. Andy Warhol, *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol (From A to B and Back Again)* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975), 5.

16. Warhol, *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol*, 91.

17. Indeed I think Warhol was acutely aware of the differences between film and television, not only on account of their different visual characteristics but also due to their distinct modes of presentation: theatrical on the one hand and domestic on the other. Some of these distinctions are elaborated in his double-screen film *Outer and Inner Space* (1965) in which Edie Sedgwick "performs" before a television monitor carrying videotape of her own image. For discussions of the relationship between film and television in Warhol's work see Callie

Angell, "Andy Warhol, Filmmaker," in *The Andy Warhol Museum* (Pittsburgh: The Andy Warhol Museum, 1994) and Branden W. Joseph, "Nothing Special: Andy Warhol and the Rise of Surveillance," in Thomas Y. Levin, Ursula Frohne, and Peter Weibel, eds., *CTRL [SPACE]: Rhetorics of Surveillance from Bentham to Big Brother* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002), 119–133. Angell discusses *Outer and Inner Space* in *CTRL[SPACE]*, 278–281.

18. Warhol, *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol*, 26.

19. Andy Warhol, *a: a novel* (New York: Grove Press, 1968), 116.

20. According to David Bourdon's clear account, the early chronology runs as follows: Warhol first appeared with the Velvet Underground and Nico at a meeting of the New York Society for Clinical Psychiatry in January, 1966. In February he presented Andy Warhol, Up-Tight at the Cinematheque in New York. In March performances occurred at Rutgers University in New Jersey and the University of Michigan. Then, in April, the Exploding Plastic Inevitable emerged in its run at the Dom, a big meeting hall on St. Marks Place in New York. The EPI later traveled to Los Angeles and San Francisco. For the purpose of this essay I'm drawing accounts from different moments of the Velvet Underground/Warhol collaboration in order to describe its visual mechanisms. See David Bourdon, *Warhol* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1989), 218–237.

21. Jonas Mekas, "Movie Journal," *The Village Voice*, 16 June 1966, 27, 29.

22. Victor Bockris and Gerard Malanga, *Up-Tight: The Velvet Underground Story* (London: Omnibus Books, 1983), 28.

23. Raskin, 85.

24. Jonas Mekas, "On the Plastic Inevitables and the Strobe Light" (26 May 1966), in Mekas, *Movie Journal: The Rise of a New American Cinema 1959–1971* (New York: MacMillan, 1972), 242.

25. Andy Warhol and Pat Hackett, *Popism: The Warhol '60s* (New York: Harper and Row, 1980), 113.

26. Such a marriage of objects and information was theorized by the French situationist Guy Debord in his important 1967 book *The Society of the Spectacle*. Debord opens his text with the powerful assertion that, under modernity, experience is translated into representation: "The whole of life of those societies in which modern conditions of production prevail presents itself as an immense accumulation of *spectacles*. All that once was directly lived has become mere representation." Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone Books, 1994), 12.

As Debord's analysis suggests, he understood the spectacle as a new form of capital whose value inheres in the ideological envelope of packaging and advertising rather than in a particular use-value. Indeed, Debord's spectacle might be said to supplement Marx's distinction between use-value and exchange-value with a third term: *image-value*. By saturating objects with representational meanings—or what might be called lifestyle associations—spectacles accomplish the endless reproduction of social relations under late capitalism. The function of the commodity is thus fundamentally bifurcated. On the one hand it panders its own quantum of desire—the desire for beauty, or status, or speed. But on the other hand it functions as a unit of ideological DNA, spreading the values of consumer society like a virus—*representing* them over and over again. While this ideological labor is enormously abetted by the mass media, Debord's concept of spectacle should not be conflated with communication technologies. The spectacle saturates every late modern object and institution. And just as Hoffman understood the primary informational value of the commercial over and above the television program, Debord asserts the ideological centrality of the spectacle. He writes, "as the advanced economic sector directly responsible

for the manufacture of an ever-growing mass of image-objects, the spectacle is the *chief product* of present-day society,” 16.

27. I have made a similar argument with regard to the modernist quality of flatness in my essay “Notes on Surface: Toward a Genealogy of Flatness,” *Art History* 23, no. 1 (March 2000): 19–34.

28. Andy Warhol, 1966 CBS interview with Alan Solomon, quoted in Rainer Crone, *Andy Warhol* (New York: Praeger, 1970), 30.

29. Clement Greenberg wrote of Jackson Pollock, “As before, [Pollock’s] new work offers a puzzle to all those not sincerely in touch with contemporary painting. I already hear: ‘wallpaper patterns,’ ‘the picture does not finish inside the canvas,’ ‘raw, uncultivated emotion,’ and so on and so on.” Clement Greenberg, “Review of Exhibitions of Worden Day, Carl Holty, and Jackson Pollock,” *The Nation*, 24 January 1948; Clement Greenberg, *The Collected Essays and Criticism. Volume 2: Arrogant Purpose 1945–1959*, ed. John O’Brian (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 201.

30. For a very suggestive essay, albeit one with rather different conclusions than my own, on how art historians can rethink their disciplinary skills in terms of current methodological challenges, see Thomas Crow, *The Intelligence of Art* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

