

Estera Milman:

Pop, Junk Culture, Assemblage, and the New Vulgarians

Dada tried to destroy, not so much art, as the idea one had of art, breaking down its rigid borders ... humbling art ... subordinating its values to pure movement which is also the movement of life
5 ...Was not Art (with a capitol A) taking a privileged position on the ladder of values, a position which made it sever all connections with human contingencies. Tristan Tzara, "Dada vs. Art," 1953¹

In 1953, Marcel Duchamp organized *Dada 1916—23*, a retrospective exhibition of two hundred and twelve historical Dada works for the Sidney Janis Gallery in New York. Tristan Tzara's "Dada vs. Art" manifesto was reproduced in the poster/catalogue for the show. The tissue-paper-thin, oversized flyer
10 was then crumpled into a ball. Were they so inclined, visitors to the Janis exhibition could retrieve a copy of the "catalogue" from a large wastebasket located in the gallery. Luckily, a few uncrumpled "posters" survived and have since entered both collections of Dada and Neo-Dada materials. Tzara's manifesto would, in the early 1960s, be cited by William C. Seitz as an essential link between historical Dada and contemporary composite, or assemblage art² and, soon thereafter, be refashioned
15 by George Maciunas into an "Art [versus] Fluxus Art Amusement" polemic, wherein the collective's master of ceremonies describes Fluxus as "the fusion of Spike Jones. Vaudeville, gag, children's games and Duchamp."³ Tzara had served as historical Dada's primary impresario and was, in the late forties and early fifties, in the midst of an angry battle with Dada cofounder, Richard Huelsenbeck who was then living in New York City and working as a psychiatrist and part-time artworld provocateur.

Legend has it that in the late Summer/early Fall of 1947, Harold Rosenberg, Robert Motherwell
20 and John Cage were looking over Huelsenbeck's shoulder he was busily editing and refurbishing his *En Avant Dada: 1920* into a debate between Poe and Dada in preparation for its inclusion in the proto-Abstract Expressionist journal, *possibilities I*. Huelsenbeck's excerpted personal history insistently defines the Dadaist as a man of action, an individual "who has fully understood that one is entitled to
25 have ideas only if he can transform them into life—the completely active type, who lives only through action, because it holds the *possibility* of achieving knowledge [emphasis mine]"⁴

In 1965, Motherwell would recall: "In the mid-forties ... I was editing "Dada" proofs of Huelsenbeck's which ultimately appeared in the anthology as "En Avant Dada." It was a brilliant
30 piece ... Harold came across the passage in the proofs in which Huelsenbeck violently attacks literary esthetes, and says that literature should be made with a gun in hand, etc. Harold fell in love with this section, which we then printed in the single issue that appeared of 'Possibilities [sic].' Harold's notion

¹Tristan Tzara, "Dada vrs Art," reproduced on the poster/catalogue for Marcel Duchamp's exhibition, *DADA 1916—1923* (New York: Sidney Janis Gallery, 1953), n.p.

²William C. Seitz, *the Art of Assemblage* (New York: Doubleday, 1961), 39.

³For an in-depth discussion of Maciunas' strategic recomposition of Tzara's polemic, see Estera Milman, "Historical Precedents, Trans-Historical Strategies, and the Myth of Democratization, in Milman, ed., *Fluxus: A Conceptual Country* (Providence: Visible Language, 1992).

⁴Richard Huelsenbeck, "Poe and Dada: A Debate, "*possibilities I* (Winter 1947): 42.

of action derives directly from that piece.”⁵ As was projected in *possibilities I*, Huelsenbeck’s history of the World War I era movement appeared in its entirety in Motherwell’s influential *The Dada Painters and Poets: An Anthology* (1951). Although Motherwell has stated that his editorship of the anthology
35 was initially undertaken to “teach himself Surrealism [for which] Dada was the older brother,”⁶ it was historical Dada that would capture the imagination of the next generation of radical artmakers.

Rosenberg’s pivotal, anti-formalist essay, “The American Action Painters,” wherein the critic asserts that “at a certain moment the canvas began to appear to one American painter after another as an arena in which to act ... what was to go on the canvas was not a picture but an event,” was
40 initially published in the December 1952 issue of *Art News*.⁷

The piece would eventually accrue mythical status and enter mainstream artworld discourse as a precursor to “new directions” of the 1960s. As is evidenced in the following citation, the essay also clearly distinguishes the cultural critic’s position from that of his primary mid-century rival, Clement Greenberg. Rosenberg writes: “The New American painting is not “pure” art, since the extrusion of the
45 object was not for the sake of the aesthetic. The apples weren’t brushed off the table in order to make room for perfect relations of space and color ... In this gesturing with materials the esthetic, too, had been subordinated ... what matters is the revelation contained in the act.”⁸ Although most readers assume that “The American Action Painters” was authored as a theoretical armature for Jackson Pollock, the piece was actually written with Willem de Kooning in mind. Allan Kaprow recalls that
50 although he had read the piece when first it appeared in print, it was not until 1956 that Rosenberg’s propositions would deeply permeate his thinking. Kaprow was then composing his eulogy to Pollock. Soon after “The Legacy of Jackson Pollock” appeared in *Art News* in October, 1958, Kaprow ran into Rosenberg at a cocktail party and was purportedly chastised by the critic for having “literalized” the “American Action Painters.”⁹ It is unlikely that Rosenberg took the time to clarify the extent to which his
55 own thinking was indebted to Huelsenbeck.

Kaprow studied composition with Cage at the New School for Social Research from 1957 through 1959 and dates the realization of his first “Happening” (a term he is credited with having invented and which he associates with the blurring of art and life) to his participation in Cage’s classes. Interestingly, in 1947 Cage’s more conservative colleagues had deridingly aligned him with
60 other “ultra-progressive, Neo-Futurist” composers.¹⁰ By the late 1950s and early 1960s, the composer would be criticized for his “Neo-Dada” affinities. In the mid 1960s, Kaprow would, in turn, be temporarily relegated to the margins of mainstream American artworld discourse based on his then understood affiliations with the “European Neo-Surrealists.” In response, the artist now brushes aside the proposition (as regularly cited in mainstream art history textbooks) that Happenings are

⁵Max Kozloff, “An Interview with Robert Motherwell,” *Artforum* 4.1 (September 1965): 37.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Harold Rosenberg, “The American Action Painters,” *Art News* 51, no. 8 (December 1952): 25.

⁸Ibid., 26.

⁹Conversation with the artist, February 4, 1996

¹⁰See Estera Milman, “Futurism as a Submerged Paradigm for Artistic Activism and Practical Anarchism,” *South Central Review* Vol. 13, nos. 2-3 (Summer/Fall 1996).

65 descended from Surrealism, and insists instead that they have more in common with Dada and
Futurist soirees.¹¹

Huelsenbeck's history of Dada, as published in *possibilities*, also provided a clearly stated critique of
the institution of art and of its corollary myth of artistic privilege, offering instead the vision of a form of
cultural practice fluent in the vocabularies of the mass media and integrated into life itself: "To make
70 literature with a gun in hand had for a time been my dream ... The philosopher in the garret was
thoroughly obsolete—but so too was the professional artist, the cafe literature ... These men of the
spirit sat in circles, painted their little pictures, ground out their verses, and in their whole human
structure were hopelessly deformed, with weak muscles, without interest in the things of the day,
enemies of the advertisement, enemies of the street, of bluff, of the big transactions which every day
75 menaced the lives of thousands. Of life itself."¹² These sentiments would be echoed in Walter
Benjamin's seminal essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1936) and in
Lawrence Alloway's iconoclastic British pop manifesto, "The Long Front of Culture" (1959), to cite but
two examples. Interestingly, Benjamin references historical Dada directly, whereas Alloway does
not.¹³ In his 1959 polemic, the British critic proposes that the humanist's traditional role as "taste giver
80 [and] opinion-leader [was by mid-century] clearly limited to swaying other humanists and not to
steering society," and that having "lost their grip on public values," humanists had been superseded by
the mass media.¹⁴ In language that bears an uncanny resemblance to early Futurist and Dada dogma,
the critic continues: "The missile and the toaster, the push-button and the repeating revolver, military
and kitchen technologies, are the natural possession of the media—a treasury of orientation, a manual
85 of one's occupancy of the twentieth century."¹⁵

According to Alloway, who is credit with having coined the phrase in the mid-fifties, "Pop art"
[uppercased P; lowercased a] initially referred "approvingly to the products of the mass media" and
was coterminous with the rubric "Popular art."¹⁶ At their inception, neither term referred to a form of
artistic production that borrowed its imagery from mass culture; rather, both delineated the actual
90 products of the mass media themselves, artifacts held in high esteem by members of the British
Independent Group (IG) of which Alloway was a founding member. Interestingly, those products of the
mass media deemed most valuable by the British Pop circle were "made in America" and, as such,
stood in opposition to then prevalent anti-American opinion in Britain.¹⁷ When Alloway's manifesto,

¹¹Conversation with the artist.

¹²Huelsenbeck, *Poe and Dada*, 41-42.

¹³For this author's discussion of the direct relationship between Benjamin's propositions and aspects of
historical Dada and of parallels between Benjamin's thesis and Alloway's, see Estera Milman, "Pop Art/Pop
Culture: Neo-Dada and the Politics of Plenty," in Dudley Andrew, ed., *The Image in Dispute* (Austin: The
University of Texas Press, 1997).

¹⁴Lawrence Alloway, "The Long Front of Culture," in *Modern Dreams: The Rise and Fall and Rise of Pop*
(Cambridge, MIT Press, 1988), 32-32. The essay first appeared in *Cambridge Opinion* no. 17 (1959).

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 33.

¹⁶Lawrence Alloway, *American Pop Art* (London: Collier Macmillan, 1974), I. Alloway opens his
introduction to this volume by making reference to Robert Watt's "Addendum to Pop" (1964 and 1971).
Watts' piece was an attempt to copyright the words "Pop Art" in anticipation of taking the term off the
market. Legend has it that Watts disapproved so strongly of the New York artworld's response to Pop that
he withdrew his works from the Castelli Gallery and situated himself firmly within the overtly utopian Fluxus
collective.

¹⁷Lawrence Alloway, "The Development of British Pop," in Lippard, ed., *Pop Art*, 32.

95 “The Long Front of Culture,” appeared in *Cambridge Opinion* it was “illustrated” by a cover of the British edition of the *Science Fiction Quarterly* from the early 1950s, replete with a comics-adventure-style, muscle-bound, futuristic superhero/combatant carrying a scantily dressed, unconscious woman and backgrounded by a burning vanquished city. The cover further lured potential nuclear-age consumers with the promise of access to a compendium of “brand new stories,” including “No War Tomorrow,” “Righteous Plague” and “Atomic Bonanza.” In his credo, Alloway further asserts:

100 The abundance of twentieth-century communications is an embarrassment to the traditionally educated custodian of culture. The aesthetics of plenty oppose a very strong tradition which dramatizes the arts as the possession of an elite ... However, mass production techniques, applied to accurately repeatable words, pictures, and music, have resulted in an expandable multitude of signs and symbols. To approach this exploding field with Renaissance-based ideas of the uniqueness of art is crippling. Acceptance of the mass media entails a shift in our notion of what culture is. Instead of reserving the word for the highest artifacts and the noblest thoughts of history’s top ten, it needs to be used more widely as the description of “what a society does.”¹⁸

110 By the time Seitz mounted his influential *Art of Assemblage* exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art (New York) in October, 1961, the sub-heading “Dada and Neo-Dada” could comfortably be positioned amongst “Picasso, Braque, and Gris,” “Futurism,” and “Surrealism,” under the heading “The Liberation of Objects.” In his forward, Seitz (then MoMA’s Associate Curator, Department of Painting and Sculpture Exhibitions) acknowledges that his exhibition could perhaps more aptly have been entitled “The Art, Non-Art, and Anti-Art of Assemblage” in view of the fact that although “a majority of works included are unquestionably works of art, others were fabricated expressly to dispel an aura of authority, profundity, and sanctity.”¹⁹ In his chapter “Dada and Neo-Dada,” the curator/historian asserts that the method of assemblage is inconceivable without Dada and that, like their early Twentieth-Century precursors, contemporary assemblagists work within an alternating, anti-hierarchical current: “Physically, [the assembler’s] raw material is the random assemblage of the modern world in which nature and man are thrown together in often tragic and ludicrous, but fertile and dynamic, disarray: the crowded city, the split level suburb, the “moon shot,” the picture magazine, the summit conference, the television western. Dada awakened senses and sensibilities to the immense multiple collision of values, forms, and effects among which we live, and to the dialectic of creation and destruction, affirmation and negation, by which life and art progress.”²⁰

125 Composed of two hundred and fifty composite constructions, collages, readymades, and assemblages, MoMA’s *Art of Assemblage* was both an impressive historical retrospective attempting to interface shared concerns among Cubism, Futurism, historical Dada, and Surrealism, and a ground breaking showcase for a broad cross section of international contemporary manifestations of this legacy; a legacy understood to be most transparently embedded in the “Neo-Dada” spirit. Seitz is insistent that the tradition of assemblage “from Cubism and Futurism, Duchamp and Schwitters, to the present” was inherently urban²¹ and credits Alloway, as the most eloquent spokesman for composite art, making particular note of the critic’s recent coinage of the term “junk culture,” which had just

¹⁸Alloway, “The Long Front of Culture,” 31.

¹⁹Seitz, 6.

²⁰Ibid., 38-39.

²¹Ibid., 73.

recently appeared in print in the London-based *Architectural Digest*. Alloway writes: “Junk culture is city art. It’s source is obsolescence, the throwaway material of cities, as it collects in drawers, cupboards, attics, dustbins, gutters, waste lots, and city dumps... Assemblages of such material come to the spectator as bits of life, bits of the environment. The urban environment is present, then, as the source of objects, whether transfigured or left alone.”²²

Deliberately international in scope and intention, *The Art of Assemblage* cast a wide, inclusive net around contemporary composite art, assemblage, and the collage environment. As a result, works by North American and/or North American-based practitioners of the newly defined medium were comfortably, and appropriately, positioned alongside their international counterparts. As would be expected, Lee Bontecou, John Chamberlain, Robert Indiana, Edward Kienholz, Marisol, Motherwell, Louis Nevelson, Richard Stankiewicz, and Esteban Vicente (whose works are currently on view in the *Circulo de Bellas Artes*’ galleries) were counted among Seitz’s representative assemblagists. In addition, Jasper Johns was represented by an encaustic open book, aptly entitled “Book” (1957) and reminiscent of Duchamp’s “Unhappy Readymade” of 1919; Robert Rauschenberg by “Talisman” (1958) and “Canyon” (1959), the latter soon to become one of the artists’s signature combines. Rauschenberg’s combines, as reproduced in *the Art of Assemblage* exhibition catalogue, were flanked by one position statement by the artist (wherein he insists that he attempts to “act in the space between art and life”) and another by Cage: “As the lady said, ‘Well, if it isn’t art, then I like it.’ Some (a) were made to be hung on a wall, others (b) to be in a room, still others (a + b).”²³ *The Art of Assemblage* also included De Kooning’s paradigmatic “Study for Woman” (1950), an oil on paper sketch to which he had appended a colored, mass produced photo-engraving of Marilyn Monroe’s iconic mouth, which Seitz explicates by noting that “in his totally committed battle between pure art and the street, [de Kooning] intensified the interest in ‘pop culture’—in the expendable art and literature that became so important as subject for [Robert] Rauschenberg, Johns, [Bruce] Conner, and so many subsequent, but less skillful painters and assemblers.” He added that “de Kooning’s adultuerative gesture may have had an effect not unlike Picasso’s in 1912.”²⁴ It is important to note that in his perhaps inadvertent slip of the pen, Seitz’s hierarchical reference to “skill,” (or more precisely, his perceived lack thereof) stood in diametric opposition to the Duchampian “anesthetic” as well as to historical Dada’s expansionist polemics. More interesting still for the issues here under discussion is the curator’s use of Alloway’s term “pop culture,” which would have little in common with the yet to be formulated new rubric “American Pop Art.” For Seitz, “pop culture” was coterminous with “junk culture.” As an overtly defensive modernist New York museum culture (specifically Seitz’s own base of operation, the Museum of Modern Art) embarked on its strategic construction of an Americanized Pop Art idiom in mid-December of the following year, most of Alloway’s most radical original propositions, as these were voiced in 1959 and 1961, respectively, would be submerged by the impending modernist institutional tidal wave.

²²Alloway cited in Seitz. The critic’s definition of the term “junk culture” had just appeared in *Architectural Design* (London) vol. 31, no. 3 (March 1961): 122.

²³Ibid., 116.

²⁴Seitz, 74.

It is in Seitz's final chapter, under the heading "Attitudes and Issues," that the forthcoming battlefield for the identification of the American successor to Abstract Expressionism is inadvertently sketched out. In it, the exhibition curator makes note of concurrent "developing viewpoints,"²⁵ and it is here that Kaprow's "happenings," alongside events and art actions orchestrated by Jim Dine and Claes Oldenburg at the Reuben Gallery take pride of place. Seitz also references the yet to be consolidated Fluxus community which he describes as a whimsical adjunct to current interest in popular culture whose constructions are composed of "balls, boxes, and playing cards designed to be manipulated or reassembled by the spectator who is invited to participate in a "childlike sort of game."²⁶ Importantly, in one lengthy paragraph, Seitz fortuitously distinguishes among the soon to be marginalized March Gallery group (or NO!art collective) on the one hand, and the soon to be franchised Common Object artists (or American Pop Art tendency), on the other.

The vernacular repertoire includes beat Zen and hot rods, mescaline experiences and faded flowers, photographic bumps and grinds, the *poubelle* (i.e., trash can), juke boxes, and hydrogen explosions. Such subjects are often approached in a mystical, aesthetic, or "arty" way, but just as often are fearfully dark, evoking horror or nausea: the anguish of the scrap heap; the images of charred bodies that keep Hiroshima and Nagasaki before our eyes; the confrontation of democratic platitudes with the Negro's disenfranchisement; the travesty of the Chessman trial. Indeed, in the United States, a network of artists could be identified who, quite independently and with no political affiliation, incorporate or represent in their work flags, shields, eagles, and other symbols of democracy, national power, and authority, with mild amusement or irony, with unconcealed resentment and scatological bitterness, or simply as totally banal images.²⁷

Within a year, irrevocable lines of demarcation would be drawn between what Seitz understood to be two equal, yet diametrically opposite, sides of the coin. The sociopolitically active NO!art collective would be relegated to the margins of mainstream American artworld discourse whereas Seitz's parallel, New York-based network of artists whose work incorporated "flags, shields, eagles, and other symbols of democracy, national power and authority," would be poised for entry into the big time.

Dada must have something to do with Pop—it's so funny, the names are really synonyms. Does anyone know what they're supposed to mean or have to do with, those names? Johns and Rauschenberg—Neo-Dada for all those years, and everyone calling them derivative and unable to transform the things they see are now called the progenitors of Pop. It's funny how things change. I think John Cage has been very influential, and Merce Cunningham, too, maybe ... Who knows? Maybe Jap and Bob were Neo-Dada and aren't anymore. History books are being rewritten all the time. Andy Warhol, "What is Pop Art?" 1963²⁸

Although rarely discussed at length in our contemporary mainstream art historical literature, the term "Neo-Dada," by the late 1950s and throughout the 1960s, encompassed the work of Cage and his disciples Johns and Rauschenberg, Assemblage Art, Environments, Happenings, The New Realism, Common Object Painting, participants in the Fluxus collective, the New Vulgarians, the overtly

²⁵Ibid., 87.

²⁶Ibid., 89.

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸G. R. Swenson, "What is Pop Art, I," *Art News* 62:7 (November 1963): 61.

political, March Gallery Group who coalesced under the self proclaimed “NO!art” banner,²⁹ and to whom Seitz referred above, and, at least at the outset, the works soon to be canonized by the artworld under the new rubric, “[American] Pop Art,” among a host of others. For the most part, the Neo-Dadaists were practitioners of the “interarts” who attempted to challenge lines of demarcation among media, the visual and performing arts and literature. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, these particular forms of cultural production were deliberately positioned outside of how normative critics and historians were organizing America’s cultural canons and knowledges. As such, they were an anathema to a modernist artworld agenda-bound to the custodianship of high culture. Some of these younger artists were committed to humbling art, subordinating its hierarchical values to everyday life, and challenging the myth of artistic privilege; their weapons of choice were the cerebral, the Duchampian anesthetic, and humor. As such, they were indeed forerunners of the great divide between Abstract Expressionism and what is now defined as the conceptual and intermedial arts. Others continued to maintain some of the same utopian convictions that had informed the production of many members of the Abstract Expressionist circle: a belief in art’s ability to transmit raw and unmediated direct experience and to liberate the individual. Conversely, a select few openly positioned their art activities in the space between art and political action. Within the coexisting neo-Dada landscape, there were authentic, self described art cultures and/or counter cultures that did share many operational strategies with historical Dada (and/or Futurism, Surrealism and International Constructivism). Some of these self described communities of artists and anti-artists, poets and eventists, even went so far as to defend the early-Twentieth-Century utopian conviction that art was capable of changing life itself. Others were content to settle for less grandiose, yet nonetheless utopian, convictions. However, despite the diversity of their responses to the sociopolitical realities of their shared historical present, these younger artists, with very few exceptions, shared the Abstract Expressionists’ uncompromising hostility toward the oppression of modernist institutions, a defining principle not commonly addressed in either formalist narrative histories that laud the “triumph” of mid-twentieth-century American painting, or those that attempt to categorize and organize Abstract Expressionism’s diverse, multifaceted roster of successors.

Composed of multiple, intersecting, cross-national artists’ networks, Neo-Dada was, first and foremost, a fluid, global art culture. Charter members of one collective or circle regularly overlapped with fellow travelers from another. This transactional interfacing of actions and art events is perhaps best exemplified in the “correspondence art” activities of Ray Johnson who, having studied at Black Mountain College in the 1950s, initiated his broad-based, artist communications network soon thereafter. Although Johnson made occasional forays into the Fluxus community, he is best known for his initiation and orchestration of the New York Correspondance [sic] School, (a pun on the “New York School,” among other things) and for the iconoclastic drawings and eccentric collages that he disseminated to “friends” via the Postal Service. Kaprow regularly collaborated with Cologne-based

²⁹Legend has it that it was F. T. Marinetti’s insistence that the Italian Futurists be segregated from other Modernists that led to their exclusion from the 1913 Armory Show in New York (the point in time when European Modernism invaded the United States, in force). Similar preconditions resulted in NO!art’s visible absence from the current exhibition, despite the fact that representative works had been included in the preliminary curatorial check list for *America and the Theatre of Modernism*. Readers interested in learning more about this still active, anarchic collective can turn to the German-language exhibition catalogue *NO!art* (Berlin: *Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst*, 1995) and to Estera Milman, *NO!art and the Aesthetics of Doom* (Evanston: Mary and Leigh Block Museum of Art, 2001).

Wolf Vostell, who called his own events of the 1950s and 1960s “*De-Coll/age* Happenings.” In keeping with Neo-Dada’s expansionist aesthetic, both Vostell and Kaprow were fellow travellers in the NO!art collective and in the Fluxus community. Warhol would maintain direct ties with the artistic
 245 counterculture through his friendship with Maciunas and with filmmaker and critic Jonas Mekas, founder of the Film-Makers Cooperative (where Warhol went to screenings just prior to initiating his own filmmaking career) and later, with correspondence artists Buster Cleveland and Guglielmo Cavellini, among a host of others. Mekas too crossed in and out of the Fluxus circle, as did performance and conceptual artist, Yoko Ono and her partner, the pop music icon, John Lennon.
 250 Oldenburg, who would make a seamless transition from his experiments with assemblage, environments and happenings into the ranks of Pop Art’s hard core, would nevertheless intermittently maintain his affiliation with Fluxus.

Allan D’Arcangelo, who would come to be counted as a member of the Pop Art orbit, also crossed over into the NO!art collective. So too did Yayoi Kusama, whose 1964
 255 assemblage/environment, “The Driving Image Show,” was highlighted in Kaprow’s alternative art history text, *assemblage, environments and happenings* (1966), under the subheading “Obsession.”³⁰ Housed for some decades in the NO archives, D’Arcangelo’s “Icarus” (1962), on view in the *Circulo De Bellas Artes* galleries, continues to be exhibited alongside works by other NO!art affiliates, whereas his “Untitled” (1964) is indicative of his Pop Art alter ego. In response to worldwide
 260 denunciation of the United States following the failed, CIA supported Bay of Pigs Invasion, D’Arcangelo and NO!art cofounder, Sam Goodman, jointly mounted “Car Event/Peace Demonstration” (1961), the earliest art-based, anti-war street provocation of the so called decade of dissent. The cultural intervention was replete with children in death masks and adult activists portraying President Kennedy and Premier Khrushchev and later accrued mythic status within the
 265 D’Arcangelo family. Kusama’s “infinity net” paintings, of which “No. F” (1959-61) is an example, were precursors to her large scale phallic “accumulations” (first shown at the Green Gallery, in New York, in 1962, alongside works by Robert Morris, Oldenburg, James Rosenquist, George Segal, Richard Smith, and Warhol). They also preceded her expanded, room-sized, phallic environments which the artist first exhibited the following year, under the NO!art banner. The artist concurrently transformed
 270 her infinity net repertoire into non-objective collages of obsessive, repeated rows of mass produced labels, and her “Air Mail Stickers” (1962) would later be cited as a direct precursor to Warhol’s “repeated rows of soup cans, money, green stamps, and photographs.”³¹ In November, 1968, at a point in time when artistic activists, New Left student resisters and other counterculture radicals were understood to be cut from similar cloth, Kusama would mount her own masked guerilla theatre event
 275 at the entrance to the Board of Elections in New York.

Unlike contemporaneous manifestations of the Neo-Dada orbit, Pop was primarily an artworld construct, constituted by the contemporary North American museum world, critics and art historians who used, as a template, the Nineteenth-Century modernist myth of the isolated artist who, in

³⁰ Allan Kaprow, *assemblage, environments, & happenings* (New York: Abrams, 1966). Kaprow’s book is cited in the bibliography for the 1961 *the Art of Assemblage* exhibition as a work in progress, then entitled, *Paintings, Environments, and Happenings*. Portions of the manuscript had previously been published in the catalogue for the Jackson Gallery’s *New Forms -- New Media* (1960).

³¹ Lucy Lippard, “New York Pop,” in Lippard, ed., *Pop Art* (Great Britain: Thames and Hudson, 1966), 75.

280 response to a zeitgeist, to something “in the air,” suddenly and without any historical baggage, “hits upon a [new] common style by accident.”³² Warhol would later recount:

285 One of the phenomenal things about the Pop painters is that they were already painting alike when they met. My friend Henry Geldzahler, curator of twentieth-century art at the Metropolitan Museum before he was appointed official culture czar of New York, once described the beginnings of Pop this way: “It was like a science fiction movie—you Pop artists in different parts of the city, unknown to each other, rising up out of the muck and staggering forward with your paintings in front of you.”³³

As the Pop Art cannon was excerpted from the diverse, broad-based, international Neo-Dada consortium, special effort was expended to guarantee that the works could be read as apolitical, and that the newly anointed successor to Abstract Expressionism would be marketable as hard-core
 290 American. Ironically, by rejecting all works that exhibited transparently political, new realist and/or social protest agendas and choosing instead to concentrate on stylistic affinities evidenced in a subset of open-ended, single image paintings and constructions, the artworld inadvertently permitted an authentically iconoclastic roster of fluent entrepreneurs of sign production to invade its hierarchical enclave. Although the “common style” singled out by the artworld for canonization was not offered by
 295 its practitioners in service of a determinate ideological structure, it was also not intended to defend the uniqueness of art. To the contrary. Its practitioners were attempting prove that art was *capable* of functioning as one communicative system within the myriad system of which the postindustrial information age was constructed. For the soon to be canonized hard-core Pop artists, it was far less a question of the democratization of the arts through breaking down boundaries between art and culture
 300 at large (an ultimately elitist assumption-- life, after all, does not usually ask to be integrated into art), than it was a heroic assertion that the artist could actively participate in the construction of culture’s complex visual lexicon. By the mid-1960s, a mature, hard-core Pop idiom would enter the contemporary art historical literature as something “special to America,”³⁴ in particular to the New York and Los Angeles artworlds, in descending order. Although great care would be taken to
 305 disassociate American Pop from its contemporaneous, continental European affiliates, as well as from its European modernist and/or anti-modernist historical precursors, Pop’s intertwined nationalistic and stylistic boundaries would, by 1966, sometimes be stretched far enough to encompass affluent “Anglo-Saxon society,”³⁵ *per se*, but no further. This process of Americanization was already in full play by December 13, 1962, when the MoMA hosted its *Symposium on Pop Art*.

310 *****

315 [The phenomenon of pop art, neo-Dada, New Realism, or whatever we finally agree to call it] seems to be about the real world, yet appears to its audience to be sanctified by tradition, the tradition of Dada. [It fraudulently] makes itself dependent upon something outside art for its expressive meaning, and at the same time makes itself dependent upon the myths of art history for its aesthetic integrity ... But [the new art] does, of course, have its connections with art history. Behind its pretensions looms the legendary presence of the most overrated figure in modern art:

³²Lippard, “Introduction,” *Pop Art*, 10.

³³Andy Warhol and Pat Hackett, *POPism: The Warhol '60s* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1983) 3.

³⁴Lippard, “Introduction,” 11.

³⁵Lippard, “Europe and Canada,” in *Pop Art*, 173.

Mr. Marcel Duchamp. It is Duchamp's celebrated silence, his disavowal, his abandonment of Art, which has here—in pop art—been invaded, colonized and exploited.

Hilton Kramer, "A Symposium on Pop Art," 1962³⁶

320 Hilton Kramer was counted among the select group of critics, curators, art writers and other artworld insiders who participated in MoMA's *Symposium on Pop Art*. As such he played a leading role in the New York museum world's begrudging, yet nonetheless public, christening of what would soon be hailed as *the* new movement of the moment. Dore Ashton, Geldzahler, Stanley Kunitz, and Leo Steinberg also participated; Peter Selz, MoMA's Senior Curator of Painting and Sculpture Exhibitions, 325 moderated. A transcript of the symposium was published as a special supplement to *Arts Magazine* in April 1963. Like the majority of his co-participants, Kramer was not a benevolent godfather. At this point in time, "pop art" [still lowercased] was still a fairly amorphous artworld construct. By the time Warhol's aforementioned tongue-in-cheek response to the question "What is Pop Art?" appeared in *Art News* in November of the following year, the new rubric had acquired the appropriate, hierarchical 330 capitalization, and the artworld-constructed "new School" was poised for its inclusion in art history's fluctuating compendium of its contemporary top ten. Within a few years, Warhol would be counted as the first of what Lucy Lippard would call "The New York five, in order of their commitment to [Pop Art's] principles," followed, in descending hierarchical order, by Roy Lichtenstein, Tom Wesselman, James Rosenquist, and Oldenburg.³⁷

335 Review of the transcript for MoMA's *Symposium on Pop Art* provides a rare opportunity to observe the transparency of the New York artworld's agenda as it embarked on a process of codification and deliberate Americanization. It also illuminates the extent to which the new art forced MoMA to defend its "role" as validator. Discussion repeatedly returned to the principles of selectivity and value employed as a museum of modern art "sifts" quality, the relationships between power plays 340 and the art market, and concepts of "low art ... non-art ... and 'failed' art."³⁸ In other words, despite Alloway's British pop propositions, most of the participants concurred that the primary issue at stake was whether or not American pop was *legitimate* art and, if it was, through the application of which sets of aesthetic criteria would some of it actually accrue status as "great art."

In his introductory comments, as these appeared in *Arts Magazine*, Selz puts on record that 345 MoMA's Department of Painting and Sculpture Exhibitions had organized the symposium to address a phenomenon that had spread quickly from coast to coast and explains that conference organizers "chose the term 'pop art' because it seems to describe the phenomenon better than a name like New Realism, which has also been applied to such divergent forms as Germany's *Neue Sachlichkeit* of the twenties and France's *Realités Nouvelles* of the forties." Having disaffiliated the new [American] art 350 from the taint of any debts owed to "old Europe," the curator proceeds: "The term neo-Dada was rejected because it was originally coined in the pejorative and because the work in question bears

³⁶"A Symposium on Pop Art," Special Supplement, *Arts Magazine* 37:7 (April 1963): 38.

³⁷Lippard, "New York Pop", 69.

³⁸"A Symposium on Pop Art," 44.

only superficial resemblance to Dada, which it should be remembered, was a revolutionary movement primarily intended to change life itself.”³⁹ Selz further recounts:

355 I introduced the evening by presenting a number of slides, including window displays and
billboards taken by Russell Lee for the Farm Security Administration in the thirties; these, although
they were documentary in purpose, are similar to some of the new work when presented in this
context. Limiting myself only to *American* [emphasis mine] practitioners of this art, I showed slides
of relevant work by Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns, by the so-called sign painters Roy
360 Lichtenstein, Robert Indiana, James Rosenquist, Andy Warhol and Wayne Thiebaud, by those as
diverse as Claes Oldenburg, Peter Saul, James Dine and Tom Wesselmann, as well as by artists
whose sculptures and assemblages are only iconographically related to pop art: H. C. Westerman,
Edward Kienholz, Niki de St. Phalle and Marisol.⁴⁰

Selz’s decision to open the symposium proceedings with Lee’s Depression-era photodocumentation
of popular culture in the United States may appear, on the surface, to mirror Alloway’s expansionist
365 British pop assertions that “Pop art” and “Popular art” were coterminous. However, Selz’s traditional
assumptions about the uniqueness of art were very much in play throughout the proceedings as the
senior curator attempted to regain his own privileged status (and that of the institution he represented)
as “taste giver [and] opinion leader.” In 1961, Seitz (who, it should be noted, was Selz’s junior within
MoMA’s institutional hierarchy) had rightly celebrated the internationalism that was inherent to the new
370 art he was then championing. From the outset, MoMA’s symposium on pop art was intended to serve
as confirmation that the playing field had been narrowed to American practitioners of another new
idiom. The event was further designed to reinstate New York City’s Museum of Modern Art as the
epicenter of the artworld. In September of 1962, Walter Hopps had orchestrated *The New Painting of
Common Objects*, the first museum exhibition of what was soon to be called American Pop Art, for the
375 Pasadena Art Museum, in California. By December of that year, MoMA had little choice but to enter
the discourse.

In 1961, Alloway had shifted his base of operations from the London Institute of Contemporary
Art to the Guggenheim Museum in New York where he assumed a senior curatorship. The critic
served as witness to, and active participant in, the codification of the American Pop Art canon. In
380 March of 1963, three months following MoMA’s *Symposium on Pop Art*, yet one month prior to the
appearance in print of the transcript of the event, Alloway’s *6 Painters and the Object* opened at the
Guggenheim. The exhibition was a showcase for Dine, Johns, Lichtenstein, Rauschenberg,
Rosenquist, and Warhol, most of whom were to maintain their pride of place in Alloway’s own
retrospective history of American Pop Art which would appear in print in 1974. Interestingly, works by
385 five of Alloway’s six paradigmatic Object Painters were also counted among the nine images Selz
selected for publication in the April 1963 special supplement to *Arts Magazine*. Notably, the photo-
credits for the *Arts Magazine* illustrations provide a topography of the then in place, and highly
successful, New York City gallery network for the new art: Martha Jackson Gallery (Oldenburg),
Castelli Gallery (Lichtenstein), Sidney Janis Gallery (Dine), Stable Gallery (Warhol), and Green
390 Gallery (Rosenquist).

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰“A Symposium on Pop Art,” 36.

In 1959 and 1962, respectively, Selz had mounted two of what Alloway would deridingly call “pro-expressionist figure revival” exhibitions at MoMA.⁴¹ As American Pop Art was codified, much effort would be expended distinguishing among Nouveau Realisme and the so-called, American “Neo-Surrealist” Assemblagists, and Pop. Nonetheless, there was a general consensus that neither the French New Realists and their North American Assemblage affiliates, nor the Pop Art circle, were interested in the “new figuration.”⁴² Although MoMA’s senior curator was obviously not the most fluent spokesman for the art under discussion, it is nonetheless from within Selz’s introductory December 13, 1962 slide show that the Pop Art orbit would soon thereafter be reified. Conversely, the curator’s initial hierarchies, as described in *Arts Magazine*, would be shuffled and reshuffled as this ongoing process of canonization progressed.

After the heroic years of Abstract Expressionism a younger generation of artists is working in a new genre of American regionalism, but this time, because of the mass media, the regionalism is nationwide, and even exportable to Europe, for we have carefully prepared and reconstructed Europe in our own image since 1945 so that the two kinds of American imagery, Kline, Pollock and De Kooning on the one hand and the pop artists on the other, are becoming comprehensible abroad. — Henry Geldzahler, “A Symposium on Pop Art,” 1962⁴³

As Assistant Curator of the Department of Painting and Sculpture Exhibitions at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Geldzahler was the only other museum world insider who participated in MoMA’s symposium on pop art. Although his presentation appeared, on the surface, to be user friendly and directed toward a broad-based, educated art public, his prepared statement was peppered by an overtly self-serving artworld subtext. Unlike his senior colleague at MoMA and the symposium’s other participating panelists, Geldzahler was not only a fluent spokesman for the new art under discussion, but a very active insider within the cluster of artists soon to be canonized. The curator opened his presentation with the assertion that the phenomenon of pop art was inevitable: “The popular press, and especially *Life Magazine*, the movie close-up, black and white, technicolor and wide screen, the billboard extravaganzas, and finally the introduction, through television, of this blatant appeal to our eye into the home—all this has made available to our society, and thus to the artist, an imagery so pervasive, persistent and compulsive that it had to be noticed.”⁴⁴

Ironically, in the fall of 1948, at precisely the point in time when the two loose-knit communities of painters eventually canonized under the rubric “Abstract Expressionism” were giving up on the European Modernist project, *Life Magazine* had convened its own “Round Table on Modern Art” at

⁴¹In his curatorial introduction for *New Images of Man*, Selz would insist that “these images do not indicate the ‘return to the human figure’ or the ‘new humanism’ which advocates of the academies have longed for, which, indeed they and their social-realist counterparts have hopefully proclaimed with great frequency, ever since the rule of the academy was shattered. There is surely no sentimental revival and cheap self-aggrandizement in these effigies of the disquiet man.” Peter Selz, *New Images of Man* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1959), 12. Conversely, footnote 4 of Alloway’s chapter “Signs and Objects” reads: “Two representative proexpressionist figure revival texts are: Peter Selz, *New Images of Man* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1959) and *Recent Painting USA* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1962).” Alloway, *American Pop Art*, 128.

⁴²Lippard, “Europe and Canada,” 174.

⁴³“A Symposium on Pop Art,” 37.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*

MoMA. The transcript of this dialogue among “fifteen distinguished critics and connoisseurs” appeared in print in the October 11, 1948 issue of the magazine. On the 11th of April 1949, *Life* published its
 425 infamous, tongue in cheek breakdown of what it called “the three basic categories of a new U.S. social structure,” under the title, “HIGH-BROW, LOW-BROW, MIDDLE BROW ,” and on August 8, 1949, its
 “JACKSON POLLOCK: Is he the greatest living painter in the United States?”⁴⁵ While it is not clear that Geldzahler was aware of these fourteen-year-old publication events, there is little question but that he would have been familiar, not only with Alloway’s much cited published propositions about the
 430 new art, as these regularly appeared in the artworld literature, but also with the curator’s then in process, Common Object exhibition project at the Guggenheim. However, although Geldzahler opened with the assertion that the contemporary artist was but one member of a society whose collective visual data was mass media constructed and disseminated, his primary intentions stood in diametric opposition not only to Alloway’s expansionist aesthetics, but also to the then Guggenheim-
 435 based curator’s seniority within the hierarchical structure of New York museum culture.

In 1969, as senior curator of the Metropolitan’s newly established Department of Contemporary Arts, Geldzahler would mount the retrospective blockbuster, *New York Painting and Sculpture: 1940—1970* (an exhibition whose scope is mirrored in the *Circulo de Bellas Artes* current *America and the Theater of Modernism: Artistic Discourse, 1945—1980* exhibition). In his curatorial essay for the
 440 show, Geldzahler recounts:

No movement in the history of American art was named and received more quickly. A year after it hit the galleries and magazines, I had an air conditioner installed in my apartment. An Andy Warhol painting of six Marilyn Monroes was leaning against a wall. “What’s that, Pop Art?” the air-conditioner man asked. Can you imagine a similar situation in 1950, asking of a Jackson Pollock,
 445 “What’s that, Abstract Expressionism?” For one thing, Pop Art was literally named before it began (Lawrence Alloway coined the phrase for certain English painters in the late 1950s), while the art of Pollock, Kline, and de Kooning was called Action Painting, New York School Painting, and still other names before it settled down as Abstract Expressionism.⁴⁶

Interestingly, the parenthetical reference to Alloway, as cited above, is the only mention made of the
 450 critic anywhere in Geldzahler’s curatorial essay. Reference to Alloway’s ground breaking *Six Painters and the Object* is visibly absent. In addition, Alloway’s only credit in Geldzahler’s “Selected Bibliography” for the *New York Painting and Sculpture* exhibition is an entry for his rival’s 1966 Guggenheim exhibition catalogue, *Systemic Painting*. In addition, although Geldzahler lists ten entries under the bibliography’s subheading “By Motherwell,” *The Dada Painters and Poets: An Anthology* is
 455 not among them. Most curiously, the rubric, “Neo-Dada” appears but once in Geldzahler’s index and only because the term is imbedded in Clement Greenberg’s “After Abstract Expressionism” (1962), a slightly revised version of which is reproduced in its entirety, in the Metropolitan catalogue alongside Rosenberg’s “The American Action Painters.”

During his December 13, 1962 public presentation at MoMA, Geldzahler acknowledged that the
 460 artworld was mistrustful of the new art because it was “readily acceptable.” From his position as a bona fide custodian of culture, the curator believed that, prerequisite to the artworld’s ultimate

⁴⁵See Bradford R. Collins, “*Life* Magazine and the Abstract Expressionists, 1948 -- 51: A Historiographic Study of a Late Bohemian Enterprise,” *Art Bulletin* no. 73 (June 1991).

⁴⁶Henry Geldzahler, *New York Painting and Sculpture: 1940 -- 1970* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1969), 35.

evaluation of whether or not pop art was “great art,” it first had to acknowledge that the new art’s subject matter and techniques were legitimate. And so he proceeded to argue. In an attempt to further facilitate this process of potential legitimization, the curator proposed that (despite the
465 common body from which pop’s imagery is drawn) individual pop artists retained not only their unique status as high culture’s anointed imagemakers, but also their mythical individuality through choice of color, composition, brush stroke, and hardness of edge. First and foremost, he insisted that, as an artworld-based expression of contemporary sensibility, pop “grew naturally out of the art of the recent past.” In his attempted validation of pop art as legitimate heir to the tradition of great American
470 painting, Geldzahler proposes that the new art was stylistically aligned with the single image, large scale painting of Ellsworth Kelly, Kenneth Noland, Ray Parker and Frank Stella. Having lauded these affiliates of Lichtenstein, Warhol and Rosenquist as the “best and most developed post-Abstract Expressionist painting,” Geldzahler further extends his chronology back to Barnett Newman. After the prerequisite reference to Duchamp (and, in this case, to Johns), the curator defines pop art as a “new
475 two-dimensional landscape painting [that surprisingly looks nothing at all like] the new humanism some critics were so eagerly hoping for.”⁴⁷ In 1969, Geldzahler still persisted in his insistence that Pop Art was a new kind of American landscape painting. The curator would also continue to critique advocates of the failed “new humanism”:

480 There were critics in the fifties crying for a return to the figure, for a “new humanism” What they were hoping for was something comfortable and recognizable, a resuscitation of the art of the past veiled in the flaying brushstrokes of Abstract Expressionism. When they got their new figuration, it was not the tortured humanism of the post nuclear world for which they were longing but an art based on billboards, comic strips, and advertising. These critics cried “foul” and they cried it hard and long.⁴⁸

485 Oddly, even as late as 1969, when the cultural revolution of the decade of dissent was in full play, the newly appointed head of one of the United States’ premier encyclopedic museums of art still felt authorized to insist that the tortured humanism of the post nuclear world had, in the early 1960s, been a far more comfortable proposition for the artworld than was the stylistic revolutionary break with the abstract expressionist past evidenced in works by the emerging Pop Art circle.

490 Contemporary cultural historians, including this author, have posited that the romantic revolution of the 1960s represents the legacy of early twentieth-century utopian anarchic radicalism which, in turn, encompassed a loose-knit international collective of contemporaneous cultural avant-gardes then associated with anarco-individualism. Duchamp, in his New York avatar, was counted as an active member. Cage would later call his own form of cultural radicalism “practical anarchism.”⁴⁹ The very
495 infrastructure of the international Neo-Dada consortium (broadly described) conforms, almost to the letter, to these prerequisite defining principles. Of the participants in MoMA’s symposium, Dore Ashton (who, in 1967, would actively participate in the organization of the Artists and Writers Protest the War in Vietnam’s *Angry Arts Week*, the largest cultural protest since the 1940s) was the most closely aligned with this burgeoning new lyrical left. Conversely, her agenda was more directly affiliated with

⁴⁷ Ibid., 37.

⁴⁸ Geldzahler, *New York Painting and Sculpture*, 35-36.

⁴⁹ See Milman, “Futurism as a Submerged Paradigm.”

500 the romantic idealism evidenced in Selz's 1959 assertion that the new figuration was informed by "the mechanized barbarism of a time which, notwithstanding Buchenwald and Hiroshima, is engaged in the preparation of even greater violence in which the globe is to be target,"⁵⁰ a different proposition than Cage's proclamation that the eradication of lines of demarcation between art and life (and among media) can be read as evidence that society is in transition and as confirmation of the practicality of anarchy.⁵¹ Ashton opened her prepared statement for MoMA's symposium on pop art with a reminder to her peers that Alloway had insisted that the original status of the mass produced objects to which the term referred be maintained and that "assemblages of such material come to the spectator as bits of life, bits of the city," here inadvertently referencing Alloway's definition of "junk culture," as this has been cited in Seitz's the *Art of Assemblage*. She further cites

510 Alloway's assertion (as this had recently appeared in print in reference to Dine) that pop is "an antidote to idealism." It is important to note, however, that Ashton is by no means entirely supportive of either Alloway's propositions or of the particular sub-set of neo-Dada that had here been singled out for discussion. To the contrary, Ashton argues in defense of metaphor, bemoans the fact that the art under discussion was removed from the tradition of social protest and was instead "an art of capitulation."⁵²

Kramer's caustic and witty presentation was offered as a defense of "art (and life itself) against the dishonesties of contrived public symbols and pretentious commerce." The critic wishfully celebrated what he posited was the new art's inadvertent emancipation of the critic, who was now free to confront a class of objects which are "art by default, only because they are nothing else,"⁵³ Having acknowledged that he, personally, did not like pop art as painting, Leo Steinberg nonetheless sincerely applauded the work under discussion for its provocation of the fundamental question "Is it art?" The art historian/critic proposes a School of Paris/Triumph of American Painting/pop art overview of twentieth-century responses to the slogan *Epater le bourgeois*. Accordingly, the first stage of this trajectory opens at the turn of the century and continues through the 1930s "when it was pursued chiefly by the Surrealists"; the second stage, during the "heroic years" of Abstract Expressionism in New York, marks a shift in strategy when artists opted to ignore the bourgeois ("They don't want us, we don't want them."); during the third phase, marked by Lichtenstein and his colleagues, the strategy again shifts and the artists begin to "out-bourgeois the bourgeois."⁵⁴ Stanley Kunitz's presentation to the symposium audience was more manifesto than paper. The poet proclaimed pop art to be no more than a "nine day's wonder," that mirrored a mass culture induced, "do it yourself" tidal wave capable of making "a pro out of a dubber." His unmitigated indignation was evidenced (to cite but two notable

⁵⁰Selz, *New Images of Man*, 12. For example, in 1969, Ashton (who had not been willing to do so in December, 1962) offered her commendatory, aposteriori recollections of the NO!art collective: "I think of the environment of Tenth Street in those days; the attraction the March Gallery had for social dissidents of varying stripes; the obvious political pressures. Betrayals everywhere. What could the lessons of the concentration camps have meant really, when atrocities in the Korean War went on and on. And on to Vietnam." Dore Ashton, "Merde Alors!" (1969) in Boris Lurie and Seymour Krim eds., *NO!art: Pin-Ups, Excrement, Protest, Jew Art* (Berlin: Editions Hundertmark, 1988), 54.

⁵¹John Cage, "The Future of Music," *Silence:Lectures and Writings by John Cage* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1961), 296.

⁵²"A Symposium on Pop Art," 39.

⁵³Ibid., 38.

⁵⁴Ibid., 40.

examples) in his assertion that “an ideal history of art [would, by necessity, now] have to be written by a master of comedy,” and his stated apprehension that the rampant, “rapacious historicity” that had infected “traditional conservators of values,” was forcing them to succumb to the “tyranny of the avant-garde.”⁵⁵

Despite Selz’s introductory assertion to the contrary, a third of the dialogue during MoMA’s December 13th 1962 symposium on pop art was committed to distinguishing the new art from historical Dada. Interestingly, even by 1966, when the first histories of American Pop Art began to appear in print, the battle to disassociate Pop from its early presupposed affiliation with the Neo-Dada orbit, was not as yet won.

Just because Duchamp has been influential in the formation of the Pop attitude is no reason to call the current trend Neo-Dada. The publication of Robert Motherwell’s anthology *Dada Painters and Poets* in 1951 affected only a few artists directly— notably Johns and Dine—and it has been over-emphasized as a crucial event. Only the bastard New York brand of Dada (1914—21)—significantly Duchamp’s—used motifs at all similar to Pop’s. In addition, several writers have handed on the misconception that Dada was a political movement, saying this marks the difference between Dada and Pop. On the contrary, only in Berlin during 1918—21 were the Dadaists politically active, although by nature they were always anti-political and anti-social in commonly accepted senses ... Dada’s real contribution to modern art, and therefore, indirectly, to Pop, was that it opened wide the doors unlocked by Cubism [doors that led to] an ‘anything goes’ freedom of materials and subject matter. — Lucy Lippard, *Pop Art*, 1966⁵⁶

Lippard opens her essay “New York Pop” (1966) with the assertion that she “admit[s] to only five hard-core Pop artists in New York, and a few more on the West Coast and in England.”⁵⁷ Singling out Johns as the point of departure for New York Pop, Lippard then attempts to distinguish among what she calls, the subjugation to a “foreign aesthetic,” that she felt informed Rauschenberg’s “Neo-Surrealist” assemblages (that “acted ‘in the gap between art and life’”) and Johns inherently American challenge to this European tradition (as he proceeded to neutralized this gap).⁵⁸ For the author, Assemblage was a much misunderstood, “secondary phenomenon” that straddled John’s breakthroughs and hard-core Pop. Furthermore, Lippard, disdainfully describes Assemblage as representative of “junk culture,” on the one hand, and as fundamentally “Neo-Surrealist” (and thus representative of the European New Realist tradition rather than American impulses) on the other.

Lippard’s 1966 anthology, *Pop Art* (with contributions by Alloway, Nancy Marmer, and Nicolas Calas), was one of the earliest histories of Pop Art to appear in print and has since become a standard text for undergraduate art history students. Published two years prior to the now venerated feminist critic’s self-professed politicization, the book is an historiographic time capsule. Lippard opens her anthology with the assertion that “Pop Art is an American phenomenon that departs from the cliché of

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶Lippard, “Introduction,” *Pop Art*, 20-22.

⁵⁷Lippard, “New York Pop,” 69.

⁵⁸Ibid.

big, bold, raw America that became current when Abstract Expressionism triumphed internationally.”⁵⁹
 Arguing that Pop Art was disaffiliated from European tradition, and that “the mature Pop idiom is
 570 special to America—particularly New York and Los Angeles,” Lippard proceeds to contradict herself
 as she continues: “Hard-core Pop Art is essentially a product of America’s long-fined, big-breasted,
 one-born-every-minute society, its advantages of being more involved with the future than with the
 past. Iconographically, however, there were a great many precedents—European as well as
 American—for Pop subject matter. Some fifty years had passed since the seeds of Pop were sown by
 575 Cubist collage; in retrospect it is amazing that commercial subject matter had not been ‘discovered’ as
 the total basis for fine art long before this.”⁶⁰

Lippard’s willingness to cede patrimony to French high modernism, while concurrently, and
 vehemently, fighting to disassociate her subject from the other side of the early twentieth-century
 modernist coin, is deserving of special note. Conversely, in his forward to the *Fluxus Codex*, Jon
 580 Hendricks (a founding member of the Guerilla Art Action Group—one of the most politicized, art-
 based collectives of the anti-Vietnam War resistance, fellow traveler in Fluxus, and member of the Art
 Workers Coalition) argues that Fluxus was a successor to a subversive counterculture initiated in
 opposition to the “neo-Fascist,” McCarthyist 1950s. The author then proceeds to provide a select
 listing of historical precedents for a number of North American-based subsets of the international Neo-
 585 Dada consortium: “These precursors, in broad terms, were Futurism, Dada, and Russian
 Constructivism. Though elements of each had become generally accepted, the essence of each
 remained taboo in the late 1950s and early 1960s when several experimental movements were
 struggling against the high tide of academic abstraction.”⁶¹ As could be expected, Cubist collage was
 not counted among these activist historical models.

The cover art for paperback editions of Tod Gitlin’s *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage*
 juxtaposes a Campbell’s Condensed Beef Noodle Soup can and numerous other media icons of the
 period including Presidents Kennedy, Johnson and Nixon, the Beatles, Jimmy Hendricks, Bob Dylan,
 Mod fashion, images of the victims of the Vietnam conflict, Martin Luther King and the civil rights
 movement, and the anti-Vietnam War resistance, among others. The Campbell’s Soup Can is not the
 595 pristine ready-for-sale symbol of “capitalist realism”⁶² usually associated with Pop, but an open, jagged
 edged, junk culture alternative. Gitlin was one of the early presidents of Students for a Democratic
 Society (S.D.S) and is credited with having helped shape the student activism of the so-called
 “supercharged decade of resistance.” In his memoir/cultural history, the author discusses what he
 calls “[the pre-Vietnam War resistance] old New Left,” which “later turned the motor of the mass
 600 student movement of the late sixties.”⁶³ Gitlin posits that this small community of young, university-
 based radicals understood there to be a “missing generation of the Left—the Old Left [having] been

⁵⁹Lippard, “Introduction,” *Pop Art*,” 9.

⁶⁰Ibid., 11.

⁶¹Jon Hendricks, *Fluxus Codex* (New York: H. N. Abrams, 1962), 22.

⁶²I am here appropriating Nancy Marmer’s descriptive term. Nancy Marmer, “Pop Art in California,” in Lippard, ed., *Pop Art*, 147.

⁶³Tod Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (New York: Bantam Books, 1993), 26.

shattered by McCarthyism and the Cold War.”⁶⁴ Because there were few radicals of the previous decade “who might have served as exemplars,” his transitional generation looked to underground channels of resistance, in particular, to the sexual libertinism of the Beats. According to Gitlin, “with
605 left-wing politics in a state of collapse, most of these oppositional spaces were cultural--ways of living, thinking, and fighting oneself free of affluent consensus.”⁶⁵

It was precisely one such underground channel of resistance that Seitz had identified in the last chapter of his 1961 *the Art of Assemblage* exhibition catalogue, and it would be to this same collective of art activists that Lippard would turn in 1966 and, by so doing, inadvertently construct a paradigmatic
610 “other” for the New York Pop Art tendency. Coincidentally, a parallel, West Coast example of all that Lippard argued Pop was not, would be lauded in her own Pop Art anthology.

In her preface to *Pop Art*, Lippard explains that each of the contributors “has a decidedly different background and approach; our points of view often conflict, and no attempt has been made to reconcile them.”⁶⁶ This diversity of perspective is evident in Nancy Marmer’s chapter on “Pop Art in
615 California,” wherein the author distinguishes among Southern California’s “hot-rod world, with its teenage rites, baroque car designs, kandy-kolors [and] its established conventions of decorative paint techniques” and Northern California’s Beat Culture legacy,⁶⁷ citing the melding of these disparate sub-cultures as the direct precursor to indigenous California Pop. The distinction between Lippard’s agenda and Marmer’s is most transparently illustrated in the latter’s observation that West Coast Pop
620 is indebted to “the ironic, Dadaistic anti-aestheticism that emerged in San Francisco in the mid - 1960s”⁶⁸ (an already lively interest in which she argues was stimulated by the Pasadena Art Museum’s Duchamp retrospective in 1963) and in the author’s poetic and laudatory reference to Kienholz:

The ambivalent nostalgic damning of vistas of the 1940-ish Americana typical of the Beat poets is also at the heart of the *Assemblage* tableaux constructed by a major Los Angeles proto-Pop artist,
625 Edward Keinholz, who, since the mid-1950s, has transformed motifs and bits from American urban folk lore (e.g., the automobile as passion pit, or the John Doe family, the abortion underground, patriotic sentiments as household decor) into bizarrely gothic allegories of decay, human contamination, and the psychic disorders underlying banality. He has a moralists eye for shocking juxtaposition; found objects, scarred by abuse and squalid in their detail, are combined to tell
630 pointed anecdotes. A typical piece of mythicizing was his seamy replica of an infamous 1943 bordello, ‘Roxy’s,’ oppressive in its period furnishings, skull-headed madam, decayed working girls, MacArthur-portrait decoration, and the proliferation of horrific minutiae.⁶⁹

One subtext that runs below the surface of Lippard’s essay, “New York Pop,” is her ongoing dialogue with specific propositions offered by panelists who participated in MoMA’s *Symposium on Pop Art*.
635 The author references Geldzahler and Leo Steinbeg, draws solid lines of demarcation between the Pop attitude and the sentiment, sensitivity and anecdotalism of the so-called humanist school,⁷⁰ paraphrases Ashton, and methodically, and for the most part respectfully, cleanses Selz’s preliminary

⁶⁴Ibid., 27.

⁶⁵Ibid., 28.

⁶⁶Lippard, “Introduction, *Pop Art*, 7.

⁶⁷Marmer, “Pop Art in California,” 140.

⁶⁸Ibid., 144.

⁶⁹Ibid., 141-142.

⁷⁰Lippard, “New York Pop,” 73.

check list of all artists not affiliated with Pop's hard-core. In this, she pays special attention to Dine, whom she identifies as his own one-man, "non-Pop paradistic current."⁷¹ Sandwiched between her
 640 lengthy explication of distinctions among the Kaprow circle, the Neo-Surrealist Assemblage movement, junk culture, and other non-Pop tendencies, and her delineation of Dine's single-handed divergence from the Pop attitude is the following disclaimer:

A second non-Pop vein which specializes in social protest, should be mentioned, if only to dispel
 645 confusion by placing it properly outside Pop Art ... these assemblage, or 'Doom,' artists are the political satirists that Pop artists are not. They are all that Pop is not, and proclaimed themselves 'anti-Pop' in February 1964. They are anguished, angry, and hot where Pop is cool, detached, and assured. They omit nothing from their conglomerations of trash, paint, collage, and objects, whereas the Pop artists omit almost everything from their direct presentation, and they are essentially pessimistic where Pop is optimistic ... Their objects, designed to shock, are heavily
 650 dependent on ban-the-bomb horrenda—"bloody" and dismembered dolls, crushed toys, primitive sexual fetishes, sado-masochistic *National Enquirer* photographs, girlie magazines ... Belligerently romantic, as a group they come as possible to Neo-Dada as is possible today. Their actual source is post-Abstract Expressionism—particularly Kaprow and Rauschenberg.⁷²

Lippard illustrates her reference to the "anguished, angry and hot" NO!artists with a full page
 655 reproduction of Goodman's "The Cross /The Bomb" (1960/61), backgrounded by some of the collective's ban-the-bomb polemics. The reproduction of Goodman's assemblage/installation is flanked by a half-page panel in which Dine's "Shovel" (1962) is juxtaposed with Duchamp's iconic early twentieth-century prototype, a ready-made snow shovel entitled, "In Advance of the Broken Arm."

There is little question but that the writing of history is a form of cultural production that is, by its
 660 very nature, constitutive of power. Lippard's own contributions to her *Pop Art* anthology, and in particular her chapter "New York Pop," attempted to narrow the playing field by codifying both the roster of primary players and the very specific stylistic devices through which the depth of their hard-core commitment to the Pop idiom could be verified. In the process, the young author compiled a
 665 narrative history dependent upon the formalist apolitical values of so-called late-modernism, on the one hand, and on the artworld's unwavering commitment to the Americanization of its anointed successors to the triumph of mid-century American painting, on the other. Because hegemonic canons are embedded transparently in (and disseminated widely through) the "textbook" and/or its "trade" equivalent, Lippard's *Pop Art* provides telling evidence of the impact of this historiographic
 670 process upon Pop as well as on Pop Art's neo-Dada affiliates. Interestingly, Lippard's aforementioned, dismissive (yet nonetheless insistent) reference to Motherwell's *Dada Painters and Poets* would later resurface in mainstream art history textbooks. For example, in his chapter "Beyond Painting and Sculpture," Norbert Lynton, author of the much used survey, *The Story of Modern Art*, mentions (albeit as an aside) that many contemporary manifestations of performance art "could individually be shown
 675 to have antecedents of a sort ... with the Futurist and Dadaists' soirees."⁷³ Conversely, in keeping with his normative role as custodian of the formalist canon, the author argues that works classified as being "beyond painting and sculpture" were not attempting to negate art. Toward that end, Lynton

⁷¹Ibid., 82.

⁷²Ibid., 102-3.

⁷³Norbert Lynton, *The Story of Modern Art* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1980), 318.

offers the following seemingly eccentric repudiation: "Whatever infection Robert Motherwell's book on Dada generated in obscure places, it was received in 1951 as an exceptionally interesting piece of history, an account of strange, often nonsensical, and sometimes foolish things done a long time ago when the world was very different."⁷⁴

Lippard dates her own politicization to her travels to Argentina and, in particular, to her interactions with the Rosario group, who, in November 1968, staged a cultural intervention in conjunction with labor union protests in Tucumen. In *Six Years: The dematerialization of the art object*, she recounts that, like many of her artist colleagues, she came to her politicization through Minimalism,⁷⁵ and further credits her transformation to an ongoing friendship with Sol LeWitt. In a fall, 2003 interview that appeared in *Bomb Magazine*, LeWitt attempts to distinguish the trajectory of his activities from those of Pop Art and Fluxus (and thus from Cage, what he understands to be the Duchampian aesthetic, and historical Dada). LeWitt also presents a synopsis of his own recollection of the process by which the lines of demarcation between Minimalism and Conceptual Art were eventually drawn. In the process, he notes: "The 60s were awash in politics and revolution. Not only in art of course, but feminism, racial equality and opposition to war. I, like almost all the artists I knew, was involved in all of these movements and was politically left-oriented."⁷⁶ It is important to note that LeWitt has here not made an important distinction between the early 1960s, the second half of the decade and, in particular, its closing years, for it was not until the latter part of the decade, and well into the seventies, that contemporary artistic activism and other forms of counterculture radicalism came up from underground and entered mainstream artworld discourse.

Gregory Battcock's series of critical anthologies: *The New Art* (1966), *Minimal Art* (1968), and *Idea Art* (1973) among others, provides a road map that leads from Pop, to Minimalism and on to Concept Art. In his animated and laudatory, 1969 essay/pro-NO!art manifesto, "Anti-Art and Outlaw-Art" (authored, in part, in response to the May 1968 Paris student/worker rebellion, and informed by Battcock's admitted theoretical indebtedness to Herbert Marcuse), Battcock posits that the NO!art collective predicated most of the recent aesthetic and conceptual problems in the New Art, whereas Pop Art and Minimalism were but establishment approved, styles within the mainstream of Western art and the Western artistic heritage:

Now, when we look back at and contemplate the mainstream of modern art during the 1960s we may find that much of what the decade was all about was predicated by the artistic presentations of the March Gallery group—which included, more or less, Boris Lurie, Stanley Fisher, Yayoi Kusama, Ferro, Jean-Jacques Lebel and from time to time other artists ... There is little indication that the Pop-artists were, in the main, completely aware of the very real repressive nature of the capitalist military and industrial alliance ... They appear to have claimed simply that they were engaged within the artist's traditional function as witness to the actualities of social and material environment. [Therefore, Pop Art is] a style well within the mainstream of Western art and the Western artistic heritage. Minimal art, the other major art style of the decade, remains, like Pop Art

⁷⁴Ibid., 319.

⁷⁵Lucy Lippard, *Six Years: The dematerialization of the art object* (New York: Praeger, 1973), viii, now out of print. The book was later reissued by The University of California Press.

⁷⁶"Sol LeWitt by Saul Ostrow," *Bomb Magazine* (New York 2003) <http://www.bombsite.com/lewitt/lewitt.html>

715 an “establishment” art form ... What the March group NO!Artists of the early sixties did was to introduce and begin the deritualization process in art.⁷⁷

Battcock posits that the NO!art collective realized a unique and significant form of anti-art/outlaw-art that was authentically situated outside the realm of art, and that it was this very accomplishment that persists in distinguishing the March group from the mainstream. The critic further notes that Marcuse
720 had pointed out that the graffiti of the Paris May Rebellion “was anti-art because it was entirely spontaneous and was not conceived with a deliberate artistic intent.”⁷⁸ Ironically, other observers have noted that numerous quotes appropriated directly from proclamations by members of the World War I era Paris Dada circle were counted among the very graffiti to which Marcuse refers.

In 1974, the Art Workers’ Coalition’s “Artists’ Poster Committee” (A.P.C.) put out an artists’ call
725 in support of the Attica Brothers’ Legal Defense Fund. The works donated were placed under the custodianship of the committee in order to accrue funds for the legal defense of the grievance rights of minority prisoners. Included in the one hundred or more responders to the call was a diverse, cross-section of artists whose works are installed in the *Circulo des Bellas Artes*’ galleries: Carl Andre, D’Arcangelo, Dan Flavin, Morris, Nevelson, Oldenburg, Rauchenberg, Ad Reinhardt, Larry Rivers, and
730 Stella. The posters and other artifacts assembled in response to this call to action chart the New York artworld’s reaction to the political crises of the Vietnam era and the militant civil rights movements of the late sixties and early seventies. These included posters and ephemera associated with the Artists and Writers Protest the War in Vietnam and the Angry Arts Week (organized by the Artists and Writers Protest in 1967), Art Strike, and the 1970 *People’s Flag Show* at the Judson Memorial Church.⁷⁹
735 Although primarily composed of images that were designed to directly influence public opinion, donations also included representative works by socially conscious artists who chose instead to commit more recognizable artistic production to political causes. The latter position was exemplified by a signed “raffle” ticket by Andre, which had initially been included in the 1972 Benefit for Civil Liberties at the Castelli Gallery in New York. The former position was perhaps most powerfully represented in
740 the Artists’ Poster Committee’s iconic, mass produced poster, *Q: And Babies? A: And Babies.*, realized in response to the My Lai massacre. Originally intended for distribution in collaboration with the Museum of Modern Art, the poster was instead distributed by the international artworld when MoMA withdrew its affiliation. Subsequent copies were printed by the lithographers union and many of these included the following explanatory statement signed by the Art Workers’ Coalition: “This

⁷⁷Gregory Battcock, “Anti-Art and Outlaw-Art,” (1969) in Krim and Lurie, eds., *NO!art*, 82. By 1974, even Rosenberg would be willing to address NO! in print. The critic opens his brief essay in support of the collective with a reference to Warhol’s “innocuous” disaster images and a less than subtle critique of Greenberg (his formalist rival). Rosenberg posits that the NO! artists were the legitimate heirs of Dada, distinguishes their activities from the “post-dada [production] of Raushenberg, Lichtenstein and other housetrained kittens,” and insists that collective anticipated *Documenta V* by a decade. Harold Rosenberg, “Bull by the Horns” (1974) in Krim and Lurie, eds., *NO!art*, 91-92.

⁷⁸Battcock., 83.

⁷⁹The collection also included ephemera that tracks the subsequent arrest of the “Judson Three” (Hendricks, Faith Ringgold, and Jean Toche) for flag desecration. According to a subsequently declassified FBI “Revolutionary Activist” file on Toche, “the church was filled with freak-out visions of the American flag, a panorama of put-downs for the flag wavers. There were flags with blood on them, flags whose stripes had become prison bars, flags whose stars were arranged in the shape of a swastika.” The New York Civil Liberties Union’s appeal on behalf of the Judson Three’s first amendment freedom of expression rights electrified the New York artworld.

745 poster was originally cosponsored by the Museum of Modern Art. On December 18, 1969 trustee William Paley forbid the museum to associate its name with this poster. Do the trustees approve of the massacre?”

Included in the benefit sale were a group of original works from *The Attica Book Portfolio*, published by the Black Emergency Cultural Coalition in collaboration with Artists and Writers Protest
750 Against the War in Vietnam. Interestingly, two very different images were proposed for reproduction on the poster for the Attica Legal Defense Benefit. The first was a hard edge, systemic painting by Stella; the second, an in-your-face, inflammatory photomontage entitled, “A Decade of Political Posters by American Artists,” submitted by Hendricks, a founding member of the A.P.C. Notably, it was Stella’s submission that eventually appeared on the official “Attica Defense Fund” poster.

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