

ESTERA MILMAN:

## "NO!art" and the Aesthetics of Doom

5 *A second non-Pop vein, which specializes in social protest, should also be mentioned, if only to dispel 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.*  
10 *Belligerently romantic, as a group they come as close to Neo-Dada as is possible today.*

Lucy Lippard, "New York Pop"<sup>1</sup>

15 *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!"<sup>2</sup>

Lucy Lippard's attempted delineation among the activities of the socio-politically engaged "Doom," or NO!artists, and their Pop flirt contemporaries was published in one of the earliest anthologies on Pop flirt. Edited by Lippard prior to the venerated feminist scholar's self-professed politicization, the book first appeared in print in 1966 and has since become a standard text for undergraduate art history students. Activist critic and art historian Dore Ashton's far more supportive aposteriori recollections of NO!art's March Gallery manifestations were published a scant three years later. Lippard had illustrated her reference to these "anguished, angry, and hot" assemblage artists with a full page reproduction of Sam Goodman's circa 1960/61 *The Cross*. Goodman's "conglomeration of trash, paint, collage and objects" is flanked by a half-page panel in which Jim Dine's cool and assured *Shovel* of 1962 is juxtaposed with Marcel Duchamp's iconic early twentieth-century prototype, a "ready-made" snow shovel entitled *In Advance of the Broken Arm*. Lippard's reference to NO!art encapsulates the mainstream artworld's then in-place, predominantly anti-political agenda, Ashton, who in the early 1960s had herself been a player in the institution of art's construction of a depoliticized successor to abstract Expressionism, acknowledges, from a 1969 perspective, that "the proto-theories" of the March group were subsequently refined in the work of socio-politically engaged contemporary "artists who renounced easel painting and sculpture in favor of actions,

<sup>1</sup> Lucy R. Lippard, "New York Pop," in *Pop Art*, ed. Lucy Lippard (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd., 1966/1988), 102-103.

<sup>2</sup> Dore Ashton, "Merde Alors!," (1969), in *NO!art: Pin-ups, Excrement, Protest, Jew Art*, ed. Boris Lurie and Seymour Krim (Berlin/ Cologne: Edition Hundertmark, 1988), 54.

events and ephemera."<sup>3</sup> She further recollects that when first she encountered the work of Boris Lurie and the March group, she had recognized an emergent "subculture of dissent."<sup>4</sup> "In 1960, then, I saw Boris Lurie's collages, with their frequent allusions to the concentration camp he had once inhabited, and their open indictment of popular American culture. I also saw other members of the March group in 'The Vulgar Show' and recognized the themes (atom bombs, concentration camps, contaminated milk, lynchings in the South, commercial sex, professional mass killers)."<sup>5</sup>

Members of the NO!art co-operative aggressively responded to the aftermath of Buchenwald and Nagasaki, the ensuing atomic terrors of the Cold War, and the period's Janus-faced obsession with conflicting representations of women as suburban homemakers, on the one hand, and mass media icons and/or sex workers on the other. They did so at a point in time when such overtly politicized production was an anathema to the artworld. As a result, for the last forty years, their actions and cultural interventions have been relegated to the margins of art historical discourse in the United States. *"NO!art" and the Aesthetics of Doom* is the first North American retrospective exhibition devoted to the investigation of this pivotal, yet subsequently marginalized, mid-century collective of artists and poets. This exhibition also attempts to redescribe New York City's Tenth Street Galleries of the late 1950s and early 1960s as more than a comfortable proving ground for the descendants of Abstract Expressionism. By concentrating on the 1959 through 1964 iconoclastic activities of the "NO!art" co-operative or "Doom" artists of Tenth Street's March Gallery (and soon thereafter of the uptown Gallery Gertrude Stein), the project hopes instead to provide an introduction to a radical subculture of dissent, which despite its absence from the art historical canon, historically served as an authentic link among Action Painting, a politicized (yet little acknowledged) manifestation of Beat culture, Assemblage, Environments, Happenings, and that particular subset of neo-Dada that has come to be canonized under the rubric "[North American] Pop Art".

This exhibition and its concurrent publications and symposia are also offered as a challenge to prevailing misunderstandings about the interrelationships among artistic activism, social consciousness and personal expression within the context of the purportedly apolitical, mid-century North American artworld. *"NO!art" and the Aesthetics of Doom* is further committed to the excavation of a long repressed memory of the New York artworld's complex response to the aftermath of Hiroshima and Auschwitz, those "terrible twin symbols of manmade mass death"<sup>6</sup> that signalled the end of the Old Left at the same time that they permeated the childhood and adolescent consciousness of what was to become the New Left of the Student resistance to the Vietnam War. The project is an opportunity to bring to light and re-examine an important body of work, which, due to its complex relationship with both Pop and with what we have since come to call "the Holocaust" has been long overlooked. Although "NO!art" was initially understood to be a very real player in the

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> This term is used by Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (Boston/ New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1999), 112.

cultural politics of the period, the collective is largely absent from the North American art historical literature. "NO!art" and the Aesthetics of Doom promises to rectify this omission at a time when the North American art public has begun to question the conventional narrative of post-war modernism.

70 As is confirmed in Lippard's circa 1966 observation that is cited in the epigraph for this essay, by the middle of the decade, NO!art had come to represent a set of inverted, paradigmatic defining terms for Pop. In her definition of the "Doom" artists as a collective of specialists in social protest who were all that Pop is not, the critic confirmed that the overtly politicized discourse of NO! had been abandoned in favor of a domesticized (and very deliberately de-radicalized) version of its  
75 more accessible Neo-dada cousin. Ironically, by the close of the decade, NO! came to be understood (by a select subset of sophisticated artworld insiders) as having served as a precursor to then contemporary re-emergent instances of artistic radicalism and sociopolitical activism. For example, by 1969, not only would Ashton argue that NO! had served as an important source for "such recent vogues as the anti-form arts," but Gregory Battcock would posit that the group represented  
80 an important and unrecognized artistic direction that predicted recent and conceptual problems in the "New Anti-Art and Outlaw Art."<sup>7</sup> Ten years after NO! proclaimed itself to be "anti-Pop," the pivotal anti-formalist critic, Harold Rosenberg, became yet another vocal advocate of the collective and challenged the artworld to take on the recovery of "NO!art" into the canon.<sup>8</sup> "NO!art" and the Aesthetics of Doom is offered as a belated acceptance of Rosenberg's circa 1974 challenge.

85 It could be convincingly argued that Boris Lurie was (and continues to be) the most unrelentingly confrontational of NO!art's three founding fathers. The artist has stated that, from its initial consolidation in late 1959/early 1960, the NO!art collective consciously rejected normative aesthetics and "introverted" formalism in an attempt to integrate personal and social protest into a so-called "new form [that was] dependent to some extent on Dada, on violent expressionism, street art [and] graffiti."  
90 He also declared that, in their rejection of pure form, the Doom artists shared a number of working models with Beat poetry.<sup>9</sup> For Lurie, a prerequisite for membership in the group was a willingness to collectively "burn bridges" and thus cut off any possibility of retreat.<sup>10</sup> In a circa 1970 interview, conducted at a point in time when socio-political activism was once again lauded by the artworld and when opposition to censorship of the arts had become acceptable, if not fashionable,  
95 the artist further recalled that when he and his co-conspirators in NO! had made their "rebellion" (within a context far less conducive to socio-political artistic activism), they were very much aware that they were taking chances, that a real break had been made, and that they had "distanced [themselves] from those who had taken the road which was permitted or accepted as correct at that time."<sup>11</sup> There is little question but that Sam Goodman and Stanley Fisher (the collective's co-

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<sup>7</sup> Gregory Battcock, "Anti-Art and Outlaw Art," (1969), in *NO!art: Pin-ups, Excrement, Protest, Jew Art*, 82-84.

<sup>8</sup> Harold Rosenberg, "Bull by the Horns," (1974), in *NO!art: Pin-ups, Excrement, Protest, Jew Art*, 90-91.

<sup>9</sup> In, Kathy Rosenbloom, "Tape Recorded Interview with Artist Boris Lurie," circa 1972. *The Art World in Transition*, Archives of American Art, manuscript version, 9.

<sup>10</sup> Rosenbloom interview, 10.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

100 organizers) were in agreement that membership involved taking very real social risks. To varying degrees, so too did some, although not all, of the collective's fellow travelers: Rocco Armento, Isser Aronovici, Herb Brown, Allan D'Arcangelo, Erro, John Fischer, Dorothy Gillespie, Esther Gilman, Gloria Graves, Allan Kaprow, Yayoi Kusama, Susan Long, Jean-Jacques Lebel, Lil Picard, Michelle Stuart, Richard Tyler, Wolf Vostell, Stella Waitzkin, and Ray Wisniewski, among others. To date,  
105 Lurie, Goodman, and Fisher's bridges have as yet to be reconstructed. Some of their collaborators remain positioned on the margins of contemporary artworld discourse; others have entered the mainstream.

Thomas B. Hess of *Art News* was counted among the few mainstream art critics courageous enough to champion the "Doom" artists during their so-called "collective period"<sup>12</sup> with which this  
110 exhibition deals. In an essay/manifesto entitled "Boris Lurie and Sam Goodman" published in the fall of 1962 by the *Galeria Schwarz*, Milan, Hess argued that NO!art's two co-founding iconoclasts were "true Social Realists [who unlike Guttuso, Siqueiros, Lorjou, Refregier and other traditional Social-Realists of the Left did] not sneak Cold-War messages into smooth aspics of Style."<sup>13</sup> Although published in Italy, it is important to note that the critic's propositions, as asserted in this  
115 piece, stand in direct opposition to then-prevalent Cold War, mainstream New York artworld discourse; instead, Hess' authorial voice seems to owe more to the rhetoric of Beat culture than to *Art News* "style." Hess describes his subjects as "Citizen Artists" who had shifted their base of operations from the studio to the ideological arena and applauds their rejection of "accepted academic table manners" as well as their transposition of "the latest idioms of New York Action Painting" into  
120 direct protest. Interestingly enough, the critic further asserts that unlike Robert Rauschenberg, Allan Kaprow, or Claes Oldenburg who "use the lace of garbage in formal poetic ways," Lurie and Goodman "comment on the disgrace of society with the refugee material of society itself-fugitive materials for fugitives from our great disorders - our peripheral obscenities, our garbage, our repulsive factory-made waste-matter."<sup>14</sup> Two months after Hess' essay appeared in print, it would be  
125 come clear that the critic had backed the wrong team.

A detail of Lurie's *Lumumba is Dead*, spans the lower quarter of the cover of the September/October 1962 Gallery Schwarz exhibition catalogue. The frieze is composed of a series of photographs of the artist's ever present "grimied Pin-up nudes (the erotics of the underprivileged)."<sup>15</sup> One of these large bare-breasted women is flanked by graffiti which promises to clarify "WHY

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<sup>12</sup> The "collective period" is Lurie's own descriptive term of choice for the 1959-1964 collaborative activities of NO!art participants. For Lurie and a host of younger artists who continue to take up the banner, NO! remains active into the present.

<sup>13</sup> Thomas B. Hess, "Boris Lurie and Sam Goodman," in *B. Lurie, S. Goodman* (Milan: Galleria Schwarz, 1962), np. This assertion was adamantly rejected by the NO!artists. See, for example, Michelle Stuart's opening remarks in her essay/manifesto, "NO Is an Involvement," *Artforum* 2 (3) (September 1963): 36. "These men are first of all artists, protesting artists, but no social realists. One finds no rigid messages or standard discipline here. They are suggesting, experimenting, rebelling, in an essentially romantic manner. The romantic's job is not to purify but to intensify, not to resolve but to stimulate."

<sup>14</sup> Hess, np.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

130 CUBA HATES US" and by a segment of a press photograph of disaster; another by a small swastika and a photomontage of a bikini clad model collaged over a portrait of a religious Jew. A close-up of Goodman's Moment of Truth, a war-game/assemblage composed of a makeshift table, chessboard and two armies of "atomized" toy soldiers and miniature dolls, is positioned above

135 *Lumumba is Dead* is repeated on the inside cover of the catalogue, beneath a reproduction of the full photomontage on canvas. Hundreds of snippets of dismembered Pin-up nudes revolve around the large swastika that serves as the image's central element; so too do smaller swastikas and Segments of text which refer to Patrice Lumumba's torture and murder on the one hand, and to Lurie's then-growing dissatisfaction with the North American artworld, on the other. More Pin-ups

140 and a detail of the oversized central swastika flank the Italian language Version of Hess' essay, which opens the Schwarz catalogue. Lurie's introductory statement for this publication includes the almost unnecessary explication that NO!artists believe that "in a time of wars and extermination, aesthetic exercises and decorative patterns are not enough."<sup>16</sup> Goodman's statement opens with an epigraph (attributed to one A. Shmuck, Creepsville, N.J.), which reads, "I'll shoot the first person

145 who tries to enter MY fallout shelter." In its insistence that Doom artists are "concerned with happenings, «real» happenings. **ART WITH BALLS!!**," Goodman's free-association-prose manifesto speaks the language of in-house artworld politics. In its declaration that "Old soldiers never die, they just «ATOMIZE»," the piece concurrently makes tongue-in-cheek reference to the prevailing Cold War terrors of the real world.<sup>17</sup>

150 The 1989 photomontage that serves as "cover art" for paperback editions of Todd Gitlin's *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* juxtaposes a Campbell's Condensed Beef Noodle Soup can against numerous other media icons of the period; there are no references to NO!. In his memoir/cultural history, Gitlin discusses what he calls the early or "old" New Left of the early Sixties, the pre-Vietnam New Left, itself "ignited by the civil rights movement [which] later turned the motor of

155 the mass Student movement of the late sixties."<sup>18</sup> The author notes that this small community of young, university-based radicals believed there to be a "missing generation of the Left"—the Old Left had been shattered by McCarthyism and the Cold War, and there were few radicals of the previous decade "who might have served as exemplars for the next generation."<sup>19</sup> He recalls that his transitional generation looked to underground, apolitical channels of resistance, in particular, to

160 the sexual libertinism of the Beats. The author recounts that "with left-wing politics in a state of collapse, most of these oppositional spaces were cultural-ways of living, thinking, and fighting one-

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Hess used these rather poetic descriptive terms when referring to Lurie's ever-present Pin-ups. From our current, politically correct perspective, Lurie's Pin-ups are considered, by some, to be unacceptable, even when they are not juxtaposed with photodocuments of genocide. For example, at the eleventh hour, one of his mid-1950s girly-picture photomontages on canvas was withdrawn from the Whitney Museum of American Art's 1995 exhibition, *Beat Culture and the New America: 1950-1965*.

<sup>18</sup> Tod Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (New York: Bantam Books, 1993), 26.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 27.

self free of the affluent consensus."<sup>20</sup> Although Gitlin addresses the "antipolitics" of most of the early New Left's self-proclaimed cultural "elders," he credits Beat Culture's attack on sexual taboos as having served as an important basis for the early New Left at the same time that he acknowledges the existence of other "tiny bohemia's of avant-garde culture and political dissonance."<sup>21</sup> 165 Conversely, in her 1969 recollections of the March group, Ashton is insistent that at a time when "even Allen Ginsberg could be found swilling fine Scotch in [Park Avenue] havens," the NO!artists were understood to epitomize social protest and political indignation; their primary target was a "society which could contemplate [art] while crimes of unspeakable dimensions were being executed every day."<sup>22</sup> 170 It is unlikely that Gitlin (who at the time was in residence in Cambridge, Massachusetts) was aware of the then concurrent cultural politics of NO!. As a result, the author has here, perhaps inadvertently, passed over one pocket of resistance, which not only maintained very direct links with his generation's self-proclaimed "enclave of elders," but also served as one of Beat Culture's overtly politicized, visual counterculture affiliates.

175 In 1960, Stanley Fisher, one of NO!art's founding fathers, served as editor/publisher and contributor to the anthology *Beat Coast East*, which reproduced details of Lurie's 1959/60 photomontage on canvas, *Liberty or Lice*, alongside contributions by Jack Kerouac, Elaine de Kooning, Allen Ginsberg, LeRoi Jones, and Claes Oldenburg, among others. Seymour Krim, editor of *The Beats* (an anthology of "Beat Generation" prose and poetry) and editorial director of *Nugget* magazine, was 180 one of NO!art's vocal fellow iconoclasts. Krim would continue to serve as a primary spokesman for the group and, in 1988, would coedit Lurie's anthology, *NO!art: Pin-Ups, Excrement, Protest, Jew art*. In his October 1963 introduction to the NO! Show, mounted at the Gallery Gertrude Stein on 81st Street in New York, the poet acknowledged that although he understood there to be "an unmistakable connection" between *Nugget* and NO!art, the magazine, as a mass market production, 185 had not as yet been courageous enough to go "the lengths of artists like Boris Lurie and Sam Goodman;" instead, *Nugget* could only "subvert hollow tradition and dullness by easy stages." Krim also asserts that in their aggressiveness and individualism, Fisher's "shrill siren-warnings [and] the obsessive phallic imagery of Yayoi Kusama" far surpass the kinds of subversions offered in his own Beat Culture-affiliated *Journal*. The poet warns his readers that NO!art's primary intention is to "be 190 a savage experience," arguing that the artists are thus deserving of the viewers' respect, even as they may "recoil or [be] angered by the calculated extremism of some of the work." Krim carefully attempts to delineate degrees of extremism or "brutal effort to cope with a brutish environment" that are evident to his eye among the production of the diverse artists who had contributed to the show. He singles out Allan Kaprow's work as being cool, calculated and classic, and thus an exception to the rule; 195 Esther Gilman's Christ imagery, Michelle Stuart's "sado-masochistic portraits" and Kusama's "orchard of penises" are deemed closer in intention, but nonetheless relegated to an arena of "female sensibility" that sits outside the author's own direct experience. It is to Lurie, Goodman,

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

Fisher and Richard Tyler that Krim turns for exemplars of "work that hits you like a rock hurled through a synagogue window." The poet continues, "'A match skating in a urinal!' was Hart Crane's almost chaste image of disgust 30 years ago; now it has multiplied into these bashed-in TV sets, girlie pinups next to concentration camp mass graves, in short the unedited film strips of the contemporary id which usually end up in the mind's waste-paper basket."<sup>23</sup> As is evidenced below, Krim's introduction to the NO!show further provides a deliberately belligerent, insider's definition of the cultural production of the male members of the collective that presages, yet nonetheless mirrors, Lippard's reference to NO!art as all that Pop was not.

*They use every handy esthetic device (collage with mixed technique, overprints, what Boris Lurie calls a "simultaneity of attack") that will torpedo the eye and rape your soul of clichés. They are a band of rapists in a sense, impatient, unsparing, open-flied and ready for action - "hot" pop artists out for copulation rather than cool ones doing doodles before a mirror.*<sup>24</sup>

A year later, an expurgated (and somewhat misunderstood) excerpt of Krim's aforementioned championship of "'hot' pop artists" appeared in Edward T. Kelly's *Art Journal* article, "Neo-Dada: A Critique of Pop." Kelly was valiantly attempting to reinvest diverse forms of neo-Dada (including the specific sub-set that had come to be associated with the redescribed rubric "Pop Art") with what he perceived to be a culturally critical intentionality that crossed then-recently imposed lines of demarcation among the newly canonized and the soon to be historiographically disempowered.<sup>25</sup> Although Kelly recounts that it had been suggested that "the Pop Art movement itself was inspired by an attempt to make NO Art [sic] a more palatable commodity for a public willing to invest in satiric games,"<sup>26</sup> he was not simply serving as champion for the politically engaged collective. This is evidenced in the author's repeated critique of propositions offered by panelists during a December 1962 Symposium mounted by the Museum of Modern Art, an event that marked the ascendancy of

<sup>22</sup> Ashton, 54-55.

<sup>23</sup> Seymour Krim, poster announcement for the *NO Show: Rocco Armento/Stanley Fisher/ Esther Gilman/Sam Goodman/Gloria Graves/ Allan Kaprow/Kusama/Boris Lurie/J. -J. Lebel/ Michelle Stuart/Richard Tyler*. Organized by Lurie, the NO SHOW was mounted at the Gallery: Gertrude Stein, 24 East 81 Street, New York, N.Y., October 8 through November 2, 1963. I find the list of participants to be particularly interesting in view of the fact that Allan Kaprow originally told me that his own participation in NO!art was "sort of accidental" and that he only contributed to the collective's initial Tenth Street phase. More telling yet is the fact that Yayoi Kusama has recently gone out of her way to erase all reference to NO! from her recent resurrection within the mainstream artworld. Krim's poster/manifesto is reproduced in *NO!art: Pin-ups, Excrement, Protest, Jew Art*, 22-24, as is the Beat poet's 1971, "Epitaph for a Canadian Kike, Or a Part of the Sam Goodman (b.1919-d. 1967) Story."

<sup>24</sup> Krim, poster announcement.

<sup>25</sup> Edward T. Kelly, "Neo-Dada: A Critique of Pop Art," *Art Journal* XXIII: 3 (Spring, 1964): 194. Kelly reproduces only the very last clause of this proclamation, and makes the assumption that Krim is here comparing NO!art to Abstract Expressionism rather than Pop. Of the relationship among NO!art, Pop, and Dada Kelly writes, "As to whether Pop Art 'bears only superficial resemblance to Dada,' I do agree, but solely on formal and iconographic grounds. If we investigate the deeper meanings of Pop and NO, and their more ultimate purposes ... the relationship to Dada becomes quite clear." *Ibid.*, 196.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 194.

the rubric "pop art" over the pre-existing, broader descriptive term, "neo-Dada."<sup>27</sup> Although Ashton had served as one of the most knowledgeable of the five participants in MoMA's 1962 Symposium on Pop Art, NO!art was not discussed. That this was the case is perhaps understandable in view of the fact that MoMA curator Peter Selz opened the proceedings by declaring that the term neo-Dada had been rejected, in part, because the new art under discussion bore but a "superficial resemblance to Dada, which it will be remembered, was a revolutionary movement primarily intended to change life itself."<sup>28</sup> In his defense of NO! in *Art Journal*, Kelly was surely very much aware that he was participating in a broader cultural debate and that his opponents were the then-dominant conservators of hierarchical value and normative idealistic aesthetics.

The extent to which the institution of art initially felt threatened by what was then understood to be neo-Dada's very real critique of the artworld's inherently anti-political, formalist assumptions is evident throughout the transcript for MoMA's Symposium on Pop Art, as well as in numerous articles on the new art in the contemporary art press. For example, the January 1963 issue of *Art International* was dominated by a set of articles discussing "The New Realists, Neo-Dada, Le nouveau réalisme, Pop Art, The New Vulgarians, Common Object Painting, and Know-nothing genre." Critic/historian Barbara Rose opened "Dada Then and Now," the lead essay in the issue, with the observation that although no one could possibly believe that World War I era European Dada was still a vital "art style [emphasis mine]," the term had been resurrected in an attempt to describe the production of such disparate contemporary artists as Robert Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns, Jim Dine, Claes Oldenburg, Allan Kaprow, Tom Wesselmann, Robert Whitman, Robert Indiana, James Rosenquist, Roy Lichtenstein, Andy Warhol, and Wayne Theibaud.<sup>29</sup> Rose continues: "Anti-art, anti-war, anti-materialism, Dada, the art of the politically and socially engaged, apparently has little in common with the cool detached art it is supposedly to have spawned."<sup>30</sup> Persistently describing neo-Dada in formalist, "pro-art" terms, the author attempts to correct what she describes as "popular misconceptions" that the "new Dada is an art of social protest" and that it is "anti-art."<sup>31</sup> Through its repeated reference to "a cool and detached art," "Dada Then and Now" celebrates the codification of the art establishment's chosen set of defining principles for North American Pop Art. Conversely, through its rejection of a coterminous set of descriptive terms then applied to neo-Dada—anti-art, anti-war, anti-materialism (in other words, those characteristics prerequisite to an art of social and/or political protest), the essay confirms the initiation of the historical disempowerment of the more overtly radical proponents of what was considered at the time to be a "new humanism," and for which NO!art served as paradigmatic model.

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<sup>27</sup> An edited transcript of the MoMA symposium appeared in print some months later. See, "A Symposium on Pop Art," *Arts Magazine*, 37:7 (April 1963). For an in-depth analysis of the ramifications of this event see, Estera Milman, "Pop Art/Pop Culture: Neo-Dada and the Politics of Plenty," in *The Image in Dispute: Visual Cultures in Modernity*, ed. Dudley Andrew (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1995), 181-204.

<sup>28</sup> "A Symposium on Pop Art," 36.

<sup>29</sup> Barbara Rose, "Dada Then and Now," *Art International* 7:1 (January, 1963): 23.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.



Although it is generally assumed that rigid lines of demarcation between those artists who entered  
 255 the contemporary canon and those whose affiliations remained with the artistic counterculture of  
 the period were clear cut, it is not that simple. For example, in 1961, North American critics could  
 not help but have aligned Oldenburg's artistic production alongside that of many of his co-  
 participants in what would soon thereafter come to be called American Pop Art, with "happenings,"  
 "new realism," "common object art," and "the new vulgarians," all of which were coterminous with  
 260 the hotly debated rubric, "neo-Dada." Within a few short years, however, Oldenburg would make an  
 almost seamless transition from his early "messy" experiments with environments and happenings  
 into the ranks of the purportedly cool and apolitical, newly codified North American Pop Art canon.  
 Nonetheless, it is important to note that he would intermittently maintain his affiliation with the "un-  
 derground" long after his position in the mainstream was secure. Although not a central member of  
 265 the Fluxus branch of the neo-Dada international community, Oldenburg was regularly counted  
 among the movement's participants. So too was Kaprow, whom Lippard would describe in 1966 as  
 the father of "Happenings,"<sup>32</sup> and Cologne-based, "decoll/age" artist Wolf Vostell (with whom  
 Kaprow would sometimes collaborate). Both Kaprow and Vostell were also counted among the  
 ranks of fellow travelers in NO!art. Vostell would later insist that, in the early sixties, Warhol "ran  
 270 around New York taking in everything" and subsequently incorporated Fluxus artist Jackson  
 McLow's ideas about the new cinema into his own film production.<sup>33</sup> Although listed as the first  
 "hard-core Pop artist" in Lippard's 1966 compilation of the "New York five,"<sup>34</sup> Warhol would con-  
 tinue to maintain contact with the underground through his long-standing friendship with filmmaker  
 and critic Jonas Mekas and with George Maciunas, Fluxus' primary impresario. During a 1963 in-  
 275 terview on the topic, "What is Pop Art,?" Warhol discussed his own image making in tongue-in-  
 cheek terms that can not help but bring NO!art, and in particular, Boris Lurie's simultaneity of attack  
 and pin-ups, directly to mind. When asked by G. R. Swenson to discuss his "Death" pictures, War-  
 hol begins by making reference to cherry bombs, bloody crowds, "Death in America," his *Electric  
 Chair* series, car wrecks, suicide pictures, decapitations and exploded body parts reproduced in the  
 280 Inquirer, and plane crashes. The artist then continues:

*My next series will be pornographic pictures. They will look blank; when you turn on the  
 block lights, then you see them - big breasts and... If a cop came in, you could just flick out*

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<sup>32</sup> Lippard, 74.

<sup>33</sup> Wolf Vostell, "No Blood ... Please ...," reproduced in *NO!art: Pin-ups, Excrement, Protest, Jew Art*, 18. Individuals interested in Warhol's relationship to Fluxus should look, for example, to Jonas Mekas' *Film Culture* #45 (1968) and to his 1992 film *Scenes from the Life of George Maciunas*, which premiered as part of the film festival portion of *Fluxus: A Conceptual Country. Conversely, In and Around Fluxus: Film Festival and Fluxfilm Environments* (curated by Mekas) recreated a film evening mounted at Maciunas' proto-Fluxus, AG Gallery in 1961, an event which included the screening of the late Ray Wisniewski's *Doom show* (1960).

<sup>34</sup> Lippard opens her chapter on "New York Pop" with the following assertion: "There are so many misconceptions about what is or is not Pop art that for the purpose of the following discussion I should say that I admit to only five hard-core Pop artists in New York, and a few more on the West Coast and in England.... The New York five, in order of their commitment to these principles, are: Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein, Tom Wesselmann, James Rosenquist, and Claes Oldenburg." Lippard, 69.

*the lights of turn on the regular lights - how could you say that was pornography? But I'm still practicing with these yet.*<sup>35</sup>

285 By 1966, Lippard could comfortably close her brief reference to "the old March Gallery group"<sup>36</sup> with the assertion that it is "a febrile dispersiveness about Doom productions (irate manifestos, exhibitions titled 'The Vulgar Show,' 'the Doom Show,' 'The Involvement Show,' 'The No Show'), which fatally weakens them despite their devotion to admirable causes."<sup>37</sup> Two years earlier, Kelly had proposed that it was the overt violence evidenced in NO!art that had impeded the collective's  
290 accrual of the "giddy success enjoyed by Pop Art."<sup>38</sup> In his attempt to validate this proposition, the author referenced yet another of Krim's intentionally combative, in-house presentations of the collective's public face.

*Writing in the poster-announcement for the "NO Show," Seymour Krim, editorial director of Nugget magazine, cites the essential qualities of NO as: "art that screams, roars, vomits, rages, goes mad, murders, rapes, commits every bloody act it can to express only a shred of the human emotions that lie prisoner beneath the sanitary tiles here in adman's utopia."*<sup>39</sup>

In 1971, at a point in time when artistic activists, New Left student resisters and other countercultural radicals were understood to be cut from similar cloth, Emanuel K. Schwartz and Reta Shack-  
300 knove Schwartz published a somewhat eccentric, yet nonetheless insightful, collaborative essay on "NO-ART" in *Leonardo*. The psychoanalyst/artist team insisted that (in direct reaction to the McCarthy era) the 1959-64 movement "gave leadership to later cultural developments; such as, unisex; underground films and press; demonstration = confrontation; art of the streets and, finally, open violence and rebellion in the streets (Paris 1968)."<sup>40</sup> Although the authors make brief refer-  
305 ence to formal "resemblances" among NO! and Dada, it is to NO!art that they turn when discussing what they describe as the "aesthetics of protest," and it is the "NO-artist" whom they identify as the

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<sup>35</sup> Andy Warhol cited in G.R. Swenson, "What is Pop Art?," *Art News* 62:7 (November 1963): 60-61. In 1989, under the sub-heading "Common Iconography," Benjamin Buchloh argues that "rather than search for iconographic sources for Warhol's work, it seems more appropriate to recognize the degree to which post-war consumer culture was a pervasive presence. It appears to have dawned on artists of the fifties that such images and objects had irreversibly taken control of visual representation and public experiences." The author chose Lurie's exhibition *Les Lions* as one paradigmatic precursor to "images that Warhol himself subsequently chose as key figures of his iconographic program," and illustrates his observation with a lengthy citation from Bill Manville's "Boris Lurie, March Gallery, Images of Life," *The Village Voice* (June 16, 1960): "exciting disturbing nightmares of paintings, montages cut out of magazines and newspapers, images of our life held together on canvases, with paint ... HomeMade Southern Style Instant Frozen Potatoes Less Work for You Tomato Juice. Obsessively repeated throughout the paintings, girls ... Marilyn, Brigitte, Liz and Jayne, the sweet sticky narcotics that dull the brain ..." Manville, cited by Buchloh, in *Andy Warhol; A Retrospective*, ed. Kenaston McShine (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1989), 52.

<sup>36</sup> Lippard, 102.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>38</sup> Kelly, 194.

<sup>39</sup> Krim cited in Kelly, 194.

<sup>40</sup> Emanuel K. Schwartz and Reta Shacknove Schwartz, "No-Art: An American Psycho-Social Phenomenon," *Leonardo* 4 (1971): 248.

paradigmatic "social critic."<sup>41</sup> After citing a number of venerated examples of art-specific critiques and condemnations of society that had entered the art historical canon, the authors posit that "the NO-art group, however, turns the audience off perhaps because these artists 'act out' the action and esthetic distance between observer and the art object is lost."<sup>42</sup> This proposition that brings to mind Harold Rosenberg's pivotal 1952 anti-formalist essay, "The American Action Painters," wherein the critic insisted that the innovation of Action Painting was to dispense with representation in favor of enactment.<sup>43</sup>

In 1974, Rosenberg himself authored a brief essay in support of NO!art that opens with a reference to Warhol's "innocuous" disaster images and a less than subtle critique of Clement Greenberg, Rosenberg's formalist rival. The author describes the NO! artists as the legitimate heirs of Dada, distinguishes their activities from the "post-dada [production] of Rauschenberg, Lichtenstein and other housetrained kittens," and insists that Lurie, Goodman, Fisher, et al., anticipated *Documenta V* by a decade.<sup>44</sup> The essay closes with a set of belligerent indictments directed against the institution of art, and in particular, the discipline of art history. Although this statement was presented as an appendix, it bears an uncanny resemblance to Hess' 1963 propositions that appeared in the Gallery Schwarz exhibition catalogue and to the "irate" in-house manifestos that Lippard condemned in 1966 as one of NO!art's fatal faults.

*1. Will NO! Art be coopted by art history? - 2. Does it seek cooption? - 3. Will shit multiples be produced by Marlboro, Pace and Castelli to commemorate this episode of art history? - 4. Will a retrospective shit show be sponsored by the National Endowment for the Arts and the New York State Council for the Arts? - 5. If not, is this omission a falsification of art history? - 6. What about other artists who have existed but have been omitted from art history?*<sup>45</sup>

Rosenberg's challenge makes overt reference to Goodman and Lurie's NO-Sculpture or Shit Show, mounted at the Gallery Gertrude Stein in 1964, an event that captured the imagination of the New York artworld and continues, to this day, to serve as a symbol of uncompromising, mid-1960s anarchic, artistic radicalism. In 1969, Ashton described this exhibition, "in which excrement was the sole agent," as the March group's final statement.

*This was a statement of the nihilistic, anarchic values that the sub-culture had long been generating. As is always the case with the morally indignant, the potential for pathos is strong, and so is the potential for annulment. Many converged in a pact of mutual disgust in the mid 1960s, and it was this mutuality that exhausted itself, as once dada had*

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 250.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 251.

<sup>43</sup> Harold Rosenberg, "The American Action Painters," *Art News* 51/8 (December 1952): 27.

<sup>44</sup> Rosenberg, in *NO!art: Pin-ups, Excrement, Protest, Jew Art*, 91-92.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 92.

340 *exhausted itself, making way for revised values. Merde alors! A final, incontrovertible statement which cuts off any further discourse.*<sup>46</sup>

It is important to note that Rosenberg had not openly championed the NO! artists during their active, collective period. Instead, he chose to do so in retrospect, after the cultural upheavals wrought by the Vietnam War. Peter Novick, author of the recently published, provocative book, *The Holocaust in American Life*, argues that it was not until the Vietnam era that the Holocaust moved to the center of North American consciousness and was recast as a "bleak emblem for an age of diminished expectations."<sup>47</sup> Gitlin (one of the early presidents of Students for a Democratic Society and co-organizer of the first national demonstration against the Vietnam War) provides a parallel perspective on the interrelationship of the Holocaust and Vietnam that impacted certain members of the incipient New Left. He recalls that in the aftermath of Auschwitz, "a spiritual gulf opened between generations."

350 *One might even surmise that some [of our parents'] guilt was later fought out over Vietnam, that the Jewish Cold Warriors of the Fifties and early Sixties were dead set on stopping Communism precisely because they had failed to stop the Nazis— whereas to me and the people I knew, it was the American bombs which were the closest thing to an immoral equivalent of Auschwitz in our lifetimes. When the time came, we jumped at the chance to purge ourselves of the nearest thing to the original trauma. And then atrocities committed by innocent America rang the old alarms— even if the parallels were drawn too easily, overdrawn, with crucial differences obscured.*<sup>48</sup>

Rosenberg is counted as perhaps the most radical of those mid-century cultural critics who had earlier maintained membership in what Gitlin calls the Old Left. In response to imperatives of the onset of the Cold War era (and a decade prior to the consolidation of the March Gallery group), Rosenberg served as a primary spokesman for the apoliticization of North American art, as is evidenced in a 1947/48 statement that appeared in his influential editorial preface for the proto-Abstract Expressionist Journal, *Possibilities I*. In place of organized socio-political activism, the critic argued for the liberation of the individual.

*Naturally the deadly political situation exerts enormous pressure. The temptation is to conclude that organized social thinking is "more serious" than the act that sets free in contemporary experience forms which experience has made possible ... Once the political choice has been made, art and literature ought of course to be given up. Whoever*

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<sup>46</sup> Ashton, 56.

<sup>47</sup> Novick, 112.

<sup>48</sup> Gitlin, 25.

370           *genuinely believes he knows how to save humanity from catastrophe has a job before him*  
                   *which is certainly not part time.*<sup>49</sup>

Although cultural theorists and historians have recently rediscovered Rosenberg's "Does the Jew Exist: Sartre's Morality Play about Anti-Semitism," which was originally published in *Commentary* 7, no. 1 (January 1949), throughout the late 1940s and early 1950s, Rosenberg concurrently authored  
 375 a series of little discussed essays and reviews that also appeared in *Commentary* and in the Zionist Journal, *Jewish Frontier*. Within these, he made numerous, overtly activist references to the Jewish world wiped out by the Nazis and argued against martyrdom and passivity, calling instead for acts of personal resistance. Rosenberg did so at a point in time when public discussion of this monumental carnage was, for all intents and purposes, taboo and as one component of his unrelenting  
 380 struggle against totalitarianism. Ironically, as is evidenced in one such statement that initially appeared under the title, "Jewish Identity in a Free Society" in *Commentary* 9, no. 6 (June 1950), the critic's battle against orthodoxies and totalitarian philosophies, including nationalism, were not so far removed from his championship of the new American Action Painting: "People freely choose to subject themselves to totalitarian disciplines in order to be something - perhaps even more, how-  
 385 ever, in order to quiet the anguish of *possibility* [emphasis mine]."<sup>50</sup>

In his 1988 editorial preface to "the first [self] published collection of essays" on the collective, belligerently entitled, *NO!art: Pin-ups, Excrement, Protest, Jew-Art*, Lurie describes the movement as having occupied "the strategic juncture where artistic production and socio-cultural action meet."<sup>51</sup> The artist further insists that "the origins of NO!art sprout[ed] from the Jewish experience, struck  
 390 root in the largest Jewish community-New York, a product of armies, concentration camps, Lumpenproletariat artists."<sup>52</sup> Novick provides an explication of a number of important aspects of the socio-political context to which NO!art responded and to which Lurie refers above. For example, the author recounts that 1945 marked the point in time when evidence of the horrors of both the  
 395 Nazi death camps and the American-induced carnage of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were revealed in all their grizzly detail to the general public. Novick asserts that although Auschwitz and Hiroshima were initially understood by some to be "terrible twin symbols of manmade mass death,"<sup>53</sup> few individuals were capable of addressing both—Auschwitz came to represent the past; Hiroshima, in turn, became emblematic of the present and future realities of potential nuclear devastation. He further argues that, because of revolutionary changes in international alignments during the early  
 400 years of the Cold War era, Jewish officialdom calculated that public discussion of what would later

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<sup>49</sup> Editorial Preface, *Possibilities 1: An Occasional Review* (Winter 1947/48). Although this statement is signed by both Rosenberg and Robert Motherwell, two of the periodical's four editors, it is generally credited to Rosenberg.

<sup>50</sup> Harold Rosenberg, "Jewish Identity in a Free Society," in *Discovering the Present: Three Decades in Art, Culture and Politics* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1973), 262.

<sup>51</sup> Rosenberg, in *NO!art: Pin-ups, Excrement, Protest, Jew Art*, 13.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> Novick, 112.

come to be called the Holocaust was actively obstructive.<sup>54</sup> As a result of these Cold War inhibitions, from the late 1940s through the 1950s, the Nazi carnage became "a private, albeit widely shared, Jewish sorrow."<sup>55</sup>

405 Although visibly absent from the discourse of contemporary Holocaust studies, in the early 1960s the NO! artists had, in fact, been understood by their more than a little disconcerted contemporaries as a collective whose self-conscious identity was formed significantly by then-prevalent fears of pending nuclear devastation, on the one hand, and by the genocide of Nazi Europe, on the other. In a circa 1973 statement entitled "Shit NO!," Lurie recalled that at precisely the point in time when members of the collective believed "that the world of the fifties had been done with, buried, silence  
410 and cover-ups of that period irrevocably terminated, the [Adolf] Eichmann trial powerfully reviving suppressed material preferred to be forgotten by most, had also ruptured the death and silence and fear and conformity of the Cold War and post-war period of repression."<sup>56</sup> Novick concurs with Lurie's aforementioned recollection that the early 1960s marked a loosening of Cold War culture. The author further argues that this period concurrently marked the loosening of previous constraints  
415 about publicly addressing what was soon to enter public consciousness in the United States under the rubric, "the Holocaust."<sup>57</sup> Novick is insistent that one of the primary catalysts for this shift was Eichmann's capture in Argentina and his subsequent trial in Jerusalem. He further explicates that not only did the Eichmann trial mark the point in time when the word "Holocaust" first came to represent the destruction of European Jewry, the trial itself was received as a warning against the  
420 constant threat of totalitarianism and as emblematic of "man's inhumanity to man."<sup>58</sup> Novick also posits that response to the trial was intensified by the ensuing controversies surrounding the appearance in print of Hannah Arendt's book, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*.<sup>59</sup>

Eichmann's capture and trial were widely covered by the New York City media, while these events  
425 were news. Arendt (who herself had escaped Germany in 1933) was *The New Yorker's* correspondent to the Eichmann trial in 1961. It is important to note, however that Arendt's controversial book did not appear in print in the United States until 1963. That same year, *The New Yorker* committed the entirety of its February 16, 23, March 2, 9, and 16 issues to her reportage of the trial. These simultaneous publication events "coincided" with what contemporary historians and essayists of the  
430 reception of the Holocaust in American life have identified as the point in time when the term "Holocaust" entered common circulation in the United States.

Lurie was incarcerated as an adolescent in the Riga prison camp and subsequently transported to the Lenta, Stutthof, and, finally, to Buchenwald's Magdeburg labor camp. Although Goodman was

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 85.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>56</sup> Boris Lurie, "Shit NO!" (1970), in *NO!art: Pin-ups, Excrement, Protest, Jew Art*, 59.

<sup>57</sup> Novick, 127.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 134.

first to appropriate photodocumentary references to the deathcamps into his NO! assemblages, it  
 435 was Lurie who would lead the NO!art collective's excavation of some of the very "cover-ups" that  
 had permeated the everyday realities of post-war North America in the latter half of the 1950s. That  
 he was delegated this position by members of the group is understandable in view of the fact that it  
 was he who had the most direct, first-hand experience of the deliberate repression of "material  
 preferred to be forgotten by most" that had confronted many a new immigrant who, having survived  
 440 the death camps and carnage, found themselves silenced by a new set of complex (and some-  
 times conflicting) early Cold War era agendas. In the immediate wake of the arrest and subsequent  
 1961 trial of Eichmann in Jerusalem (and some two years prior to the publication of Arendt's book),  
 Lurie and his immediate circle expanded their already powerful repertoire of confrontational and  
 disturbing collaborative works and actions to encompass images and assemblages that served as  
 445 direct responses to the long suppressed horrors of Nazi genocide across Europe.

Gitlin opens *THE SIXTIES: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* with reference to the media's portrayal of  
 Cuba's revolutionary upheavals. Toward this end, the author offers his senior-year memories of the  
 black and white footage of the celebratory overthrow of Batista's dictatorship that briefly interrupted  
 Guy Lombardo's News Year's Eve broadcast, on or around midnight, at the turning of 1959. He  
 450 recounts that for him and his Bronx High School of Science contemporaries, the image of young,  
 bearded, victorious Cubans in fatigues "read redemption—a revolt of young people, underdogs,  
 who might just cleanse one scrap of earth of the bloodletting and misery we had heard about all our  
 lives."<sup>60</sup> This event loosely coincided with the initial consolidation of the March Gallery into a focal  
 point for artistic activism, and a few months later, Lurie and March cooperative member Rocco  
 455 Armento traveled by car and ferry to Cuba.

According to Gitlin, in the late fifties and early sixties, many in the incipient New Left understood the  
 Bomb to be a "shadow hanging over all human endeavor."<sup>61</sup> Gitlin further recounts that, for Jewish  
 adolescents in particular the Bomb was not the only grim underside of post-war affluence.

*The Nazis were not so long ago defeated, and Hitler was the most compelling of all  
 460 bogeymen. "Camp" did not mean only a place to go for the summer. Protective parents  
 were reluctant to remind us, but rumors and images and random facts did seep into our  
 consciousness. Photos of camp survivors, not yet stereotyped, floated through popular  
 culture like stray bones, and lodged, once in a while in our collective throat.<sup>62</sup>*

It was these very photographic stereotypes of cadavers and survivors that would enter the visual  
 465 arsenal of the NO!art collective in the early 1960s; the most unsettling of these images and artifacts  
 juxtaposed these media representations of almost incomprehensible human suffering against other  
 mass media icons, pin-ups, beauty and movie queens, and pornography.

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 144.

<sup>60</sup> Gitlin, 2.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 24-25.

470 Recounting that he and other Jewish members of his adolescent community thought of themselves as "survivors [who had not] suffered in the flesh,"<sup>63</sup> Gitlin is nonetheless clear that his recollections predate popular usage of the term "the Holocaust." He explains that he and his friends instead understood themselves to be participants in the aftermath of a catastrophic "mangled piece of history, incomprehensibly real, unique to the twentieth century: our century."<sup>64</sup> Similar distinctions are made by Phillip Lopate in his highly controversial essay, "Resistance to the Holocaust."

475 *When I was growing up, we never spoke of a Holocaust; we said "concentration camps," "the gas chambers," "six million Jews," "what the Nazis did." It might seem an improvement over these awkward phrases to use a single, streamlined term. And yet to put any label on that phenomenal range of suffering serves to restrict, to conventionalize, to tame. As soon as the term "Holocaust" entered common circulation, it made me uncomfortable... In my own mind I continue to distinguish, ever so slightly, between the disaster visited upon*  
 480 *the Jews and "the Holocaust." Sometimes it almost seems that "the Holocaust" is a Corporation headed by Elie Wiesel, who defends his patents with articles in the "Arts and Leisure" section of the Sunday New York Times.*<sup>65</sup>

In his numerous, standing-room-only public presentations, Wiesel regularly recounts a truth that he shares with most survivors of the Holocaust. He explains that, for survivors, the ultimate horror  
 485 rests not with the awareness of the guilt of the perpetrators, but instead, with the silence of the spectators. It is Lurie's unmitigated attack on the spectator that has always invested much of his work with its inherent power, and it is in the artist's persistent juxtaposition of the mass media's icons of the liberation of the death camps (and of other atrocities) with imagery of the sex industry that he most successfully breaks down the spectator's resistance. By so doing, he concurrently  
 490 treads on the now-in-place cultural taboo, "the axiom of the uniqueness of the Holocaust and its corollary, that comparing anything to the Holocaust is illegitimate, indeed indecent."<sup>66</sup>

In a 1963 *Artforum* article on the collective, NO!art member Michelle Stuart writes that Lurie's "large collage-transfer-paintings swirl in a frenzy of flesh... filled with the lace-pantied, balloon-breasted nudes, Venuses and Harpies at once, which Signal the distortion of values in our society." The  
 495 artist continues:

*Since 1948 Lurie has incorporated unaltered pinups of our wench world from Tinker Bell to cinema aristocracy, as well as total ad objects such as Heinz Bean cans, prophesying later cans and later queens. Signs and photos of violence and injustice pattern these pinup*

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Phillip Lopate, "Resistance to the Holocaust," *Portrait of my Body* (New York: Anchor/Doubleday, 1996), 90-91.

<sup>66</sup> Novick, 14.



500 *echoes of Eve which at once become obsessional private fantasies and symbols of the  
wholesale bacchanals of death with which we are familiar.*<sup>67</sup>

Lurie's initial post-war attempts to record his adolescent, first-person experiences made use of formal devices associated with the production of a number of other artists who had "suffered in the flesh," yet survived the concentration camps. Soon thereafter, the artist crossed a line that placed his work outside our normal expectations of the iconography of "victimhood." He never stepped  
505 back over this self-delineated boundary. As his large scale photomontage on canvas, *Lumumba is Dead*, indicates, by the early 1960s, the artist was already fluent in his far more disconcerting juxtaposition of lace-pantied Venuses and Harpies with signs and symbols of violence and injustice. Lurie concurrently began to incorporate the mass media's photographic "evidence" of the liberation of the concentration camps into his visual reifications of wholesale death. Initially these images  
510 were private constructions that he was somewhat reticent to exhibit.<sup>68</sup> It was Goodman who first provided him with access to these already stereotyped photodocuments. During the war, the Toronto-born artist had served in the film branch of the Canadian army and, in the mid-1950s, he presented Lurie with an envelope filled with press photographs. At the time, Lurie set Goodman's envelope aside because he purportedly did "not want to get involved with the subject matter."<sup>69</sup> For  
515 some time, these photographic documents sat fallow, surrounded by snippets of Lurie's ever-present "erotics" of the "underprivileged" and by family photographs that he had managed to smuggle out of the camps. According to the artist, it was only later that a chance occurrence in his studio resulted in his first juxtapositions of photographic depictions of mass market sex and genocide. These later came to be known as his "Buchenwald-collages".

520 While it is clear that *Flatcar Assemblage, 1945, by Adolf Hitler*, Lurie's 1961 "rectified ready-made," is far from benign, its impact on the receiver is dependent upon the viewer's fluency in internal art-world discourse. It is only through an insider's awareness that the title of the work makes overt reference to the very Duchampian models which served as primary paradigms for most of the neo-Dadaists that the full power of the appropriation hits home. In this case, it is Lurie's juxtaposition of  
525 "art speak" and genocide that empowers the work. Conversely, through its "alteration" via the insertion of one of the artist's "'girly' pictures, America's home-grown brand of pornography,"<sup>70</sup> the revised *Railroad Collage* of 1963, which the artist keeps tacked to the wall of his apartment, becomes blatantly unacceptable even to the less than artworld fluent receiver and remains so some thirty-seven-odd years after its initial realization.

530 This distinction can further be illustrated by comparing another of Lurie's photomontages on canvas to an assemblage by Goodman, both of which make overt reference to the Eichmann trial. Despite the fact that these works have been assigned dates of completion by the artists that presage the

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<sup>67</sup> Michelle Stuart, "NO Is an Involvement," 36.

<sup>68</sup> Letter to the author, September 6, 2000.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

simultaneous publication of Arendt's reportage of the trial (and Lurie's insistence that he did not encounter these publications until well after they appeared in print, and had instead followed the media's reportage of the trial while the event was in progress), each shares an uncanny relationship to one of her observations.<sup>71</sup> In *The Banality of Evil as well as in Eichmann in Jerusalem-* (The New Yorker, February 16, 1963), Arendt recounts two very specific incidents that occurred during the trial, one of which served as subject for Lurie's *Lolita* of 1962 (frontispiece), and the other for Goodman's *Eichmann Remember* of 1961. Arendt reports that at one point in the proceedings an uncharacteristically exasperated Judge Landau finally felt compelled to ask the accused what he *could* remember, since he seemed unable to recall the discussions at the Wannsee Conference, which had purportedly dealt with the various methods of killing. In another instance, she contemplates a behind-the-scenes, everyday event that, in its retelling, is even more terrifying. When the young Israeli police officer who was charged with watching over the accused's emotional well-being gave him a copy of Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* for recreational purposes, Eichmann indignantly returned the novel because he found it to be "unwholesome." As was also the case for her reportage of Judge Landau's question, Arendt's account of Eichmann's puritan response to *Lolita* was embedded in her own contemplations about the deeply troubling interrelationship of mass murder, genocide, and cultural clichés.

From our present perspective, Goodman's *Eichmann Remember* can be read as representative of powerful, yet "acceptable," response to the Holocaust; in fact, were we to decontextualize the work, it could fit comfortably within what followers of artworld fashion have come to call the "Maus syndrome" (a reference to Art Spiegelman's contemporary Holocaust-related work, which, in turn, is informed by his very direct, personal relationship to Holocaust survivors).<sup>72</sup> What makes the Goodman ground-breaking is the context in which it was produced, a point in time that coincides with the Eichmann trials in Jerusalem yet predates the period when the term "Holocaust" infiltrated mainstream discourse. At the time of its construction, the work would have been received as an in-your-face subversion of a long-in-place cultural taboo. There is little question that the intentionality that informed the construction of the triptych is authentic; so too is its maker's indignation. Goodman's assemblage juxtaposes snippets of defaced portraits of the accused with photodocumentary imagery of the ovens, mounds of cadavers and the post-liberation "sanitization" of the death camps

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<sup>70</sup> Gertrude Stein referred to Lurie's Pin-ups as such in her introductory essay for the artist's Spring 1966 exhibition at her gallery.

<sup>71</sup> Lurie recently confided in me that, in retrospect, he was sorry that he never met Arendt and recounted that he had been with Rosenberg as the critic was on his way up to her apartment, but had inadvertently chosen not to join them.

<sup>72</sup> In 1973, Art Spiegelman won a Pulitzer Prize for his comic book retelling of his father's survival of the Nazi camps. I am here not attempting to challenge the artist's authenticity, and am instead referring to the plethora of contemporary attempts to re-present and package the "Holocaust" for public consumption. Readers not familiar with the current, heated discourse surrounding our own present's attempts to memorialize the genocidal destruction of European Jewry should look, for example, to Tim Cole's *Selling the Holocaust: From Auschwitz to Schindler, How History is Bought, Packaged, and Sold* (New York: Routledge, 2000). In his new introduction to this second edition, Cole differentiates his position from that presented by Peter Novick in *The Holocaust in American Life* and distances himself from propositions argued by Norman G. Finkelstein in his

with toy skeletons and his "signature" burnt baby-dolls. In her contemporaneous Artforum essay, Stuart described Goodman's desecrated toys as "frightening reminiscences of the charred bodies of Hiroshima and Auschwitz."<sup>73</sup>

565 Goodman's triptych can be understood as either reminiscent of official Jewry's strategic commitment during the first post-war decade to universalize the Nazi carnage and thus frame it as being coterminous with all forms of prejudice, or as a precursor to the Vietnam era's reinvention of the Holocaust as a bleak emblem for an age of diminished expectations. However, as happenstance would have it, within the current realities of the Americanization (or institutionalization) of the Holocaust, Goodman's Eichmann Remember can easily be recast as an occasion for its viewers to identify with its depicted victims and thus acquire "the warm glow of virtue that such vicarious identification brings."<sup>74</sup>

I would argue that unlike *Eichmann Remember*, Lurie's *Lolita* maintains its status as an "unacceptable" visual critique of genocide and carnage, and that it is the photomontage's relentless unacceptability that attests to its first-person authenticity. Because *Lolita* leaves the spectator with little room for aesthetic distance or vicarious release, it is as confrontational today as when first it was composed.<sup>75</sup> Ironically, on formal grounds, the image is far more direct in presentation than is Goodman's "conglomeration of trash, paint, collage and objects." Instead, *Lolita* is "cool, detached, and assured" and thus conforms, almost to the letter, with many of the artworld's codified prerequisites for Pop. Conversely, by juxtaposing two iconic cultural clichés, Lurie's *Lolita* concurrently mirrors Arendt's own deeply troubling contemplations of the banality of evil.

In *The Holocaust in American Life*, Novick notes that, above and beyond early Cold War political pressures, in the late 1940s and 1950s, official American Jewry had strategically chosen to downplay the Nazi atrocities in order to counter the "Jew-equals-victim" equation and its parallel-perception that Jewish life was cheap. This agenda is mirrored in Rosenberg's late 1940s critique of Jean-Paul Sartre's *Anti-Semite and Jew*. Rosenberg argued that, in their preference for resistance over passivity, Jews remember many things besides martyrdom. He critiqued Sartre's refusal to offer the Jew "a choice in action,"<sup>76</sup> and accused him of equating the "Jew" with the "prisoner," or even more precisely, with the concentration camp inmate.

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highly controversial, anti-Zionist book, *The Holocaust Industry: Reflections on the Exploitation of Jewish Suffering* (London/New York: Verso, 2000).

<sup>73</sup> Stuart, 36.

<sup>74</sup> Novick, 13

<sup>75</sup> It is important to note that Lurie's work evidences the same unmitigated fury when he addresses violence that is not specific to his own personal transaction of horror - for example, in his visual response to the Attica massacre (which far-surpassed the indignation of other members of the Art Workers Coalition) or to his Che Guevara Mat of 1972, a "welcome mat" appropriation of the famous poster which juxtaposes the iconic face of the revered revolutionary with the romantic, much cited assertion, "Let me say at the risk of seeming ridiculous, that the true revolutionary is guided by great feelings of love."

<sup>76</sup> Rosenberg, "Sartre's Jewish Morality Play," in *Discovering the Present*, 281. Rosenberg's very deliberate use of italics in the sentence "*but Sartre is not offering a choice in action*," is indeed thought provoking. For scholars of mid-Twentieth-Century North American modernism, on the one hand, it raises a number of as yet

590 *The concentration-camp vision of beginning one's life anew within a situation imposed by others is primary in Sartre's metaphysics. It has a traumatic fixity in him; it also inspires him. I suspect it came upon him with the force of a religious conversion during the Occupation. It is the Sartrian situation, decorated with a "no-exit" sign, and inhabited not by "concrete syntheses" but by the watched and the watchers, the prisoners and the guards.*

595 *Sartre's Jew is a personification of the man in the camp, and it is as a concentration-camp drama that his study of the Jew hangs together.<sup>77</sup>*

It is important to stress that, in much the same way that Lurie refused to conform to what Rosenberg asserted was Sartre's Jewish victim/concentration camp prisoner metaphysics, his work has little in common with our own period's revised expectations of victimhood. In the introduction to his informed critical history of the institutionalization of Holocaust memory in the United States, Novick convincingly argues that there has since been a fundamental shift in attitude toward victimhood from "status all but universally shunned and despised to one often eagerly embraced." He insists that, as sensitivity has replaced stoicism, the "cultural icon of the strong, silent hero [has been] replaced by the vulnerable and verbose antihero... the voicing of pain and outrage is alleged to be 'empowering' as well as therapeutic.<sup>78</sup>

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In her early 1970s "Tape Recorded Interview with Boris Lurie" Kathy Rosenbloom posits that NO!art had served as an "avant-garde of the counterculture."<sup>79</sup> In so doing she implies that NO! represented a hybridization of the historical avant-garde's utopian mission and the counterculture idealism we have come to associate with the cultural and sociopolitical rebellions of the mid to late sixties. Nothing could be further from the truth. To the contrary, during their historical "collective period," Lurie and his colleagues were outspoken respondents to a confluent set of dystopian realities. They also found themselves trapped in a kind of time warp. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, NO! was an authentically subversive subculture of dissent. As such, its members offered an open indictment of popular North American culture, broadly described; they attacked sexual taboos, imminent nuclear annihilation, affluent consensus, and artworld pretensions with equal, uncompromising directness, at a time when such actions were an anathema to the artworld. As a result, they were written out of mainstream discourse and subsequently relegated to the margins of the English-language art historical literature. Even more troubling to their original historical present was their persistent reference to both Hiroshima and Auschwitz, those terrible twin symbols of

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to be discussed questions about both his editorial preface to *Possibilities I* and his watershed 1952 essay "The American Action Painters." For those who are involved in current "re-readings" of Anti-Semite and Jew, it might be deserving of note that Rosenberg is here mirroring Sartre's own decision to use italics in his statement "the authentic Jew makes himself a Jew in the face of all and against all."

<sup>77</sup> Rosenberg, "Sartre's Jewish Morality Play," 283.

<sup>78</sup> Novick, 8.

<sup>79</sup> Rosenbloom interview, 12.

620 their persistent reference to both Hiroshima and Auschwitz, those terrible twin symbols of man-made mass death.

Because they chose to incorporate visual evidence of long suppressed memories of the latter in their visual arsenal at a point in time that immediately presaged the loosening of restrictions surrounding this subject matter, Lurie, Goodman, and Fisher did indeed realize that they were burning their bridges.

625 Some four decades after the close of the March Gallery group's collective period, NO!art's first North American retrospective exhibition is being mounted within the context of our new millennium's universalization of the Holocaust into a moral reference point for culture at large. It seems particularly fitting, however, that NO!art's historical resurrection should further coincide with the intensification of a new, heated debate concerning our period's concurrent apoliticization of Holocaust memory. At his volume's close, Novick warns his readers of some of the dangerous ramifications of our period's now in progress transformation of "victimhood" into a catalyst for communal therapy:

635 *The politicizing of the memory of the Holocaust is often deplored. But collective memory, when it is consequential, when it is worthy of the name, is characteristically an arena of political contestation in which competing narratives about central symbols in the collective past are disputed and negotiated in the interest of redefining the collective present. In the United States, memory of the Holocaust is so banal, so inconsequential, not memory at all, precisely because it is so uncontroversial, so unrelated to real divisions in American society, so apolitical.*<sup>80</sup>

640 During its historical collective period, NO!art epitomized the point of confluence among artistic action, social protest and political indignation. Although everything realized under the cooperative's official banner was, by definition, a contestation, Lurie's photomontages and constructions that refer to his adolescent experience in the concentration camps are the most confrontational; they are bereft of even a semblance of aesthetic distance and thus serve as visual equivalents of the survivor's abhorrence of the silence of the spectator. Because they have little in common with the traditional iconography of victimization we have come to associate with visual representations of Holocaust memory, they are as unnerving today as they were forty years ago. Presenting these radical images and artefacts, a number of which must be counted among the twentieth century's most powerful and troubling visual indictments of man's injustice to man, to a contemporary North American public is one major challenge of this exhibition. Conversely, it is in their persistent refusal to be tamed, their unmitigated "inappropriateness," and their resultant inability to serve as conventionalized symbols of that phenomenal range of suffering we have labelled "the Holocaust," that their inherent power lies. Discussion of these works is thus further offered as evidence of the suppression of one long-lost, consequential competing narrative (authored from within a very real

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<sup>80</sup> Novick, 279.

655 arena of sociopolitical contestation); that is to say, as food for thought, not only for the exhibition's art public, but also for contemporary cultural historians who have begun to critique the institutionalization of Holocaust memory in the United States.

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