



ANDY WARHOL BY ANDY WARHOL



ASTRUP FEARNLEY MUSEUM
OF MODERN ART

ANDY WARHOL BY ANDY WARHOL

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SKIRA

Cover

Big Electric Chair, 1967

Back Cover

Self-Portrait (Fright Wig), 1984

On the flaps

Mao Wallpaper, 1974

Screen print on wallpaper
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Collection, The Andy Warhol
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Gerard Malanga prepping up to silkscreen a *Brillo* box
Archives Malanga, 1964

¹ This title is a play on Jean Baudrillard's essay "The Mirror of Production," in Mark Poster (ed.), *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988.

² Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*. New York: Hill & Wang, 1982, p. 59.

³ Ileana Sonnabend quoted by Paul Taylor in "The Last Interview," *Flash Art*, April 1987, reprinted in Kenneth Goldsmith (ed.), *I'll Be Your Mirror: The Selected Andy Warhol Interviews*. New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 2004, p. 387.

⁴ This is a pun connecting the word "pop" used in pop art and derived from the word "popular" with a common slang term for fizzy drinks. From an Andy Warhol interview with a small art journal. "Pop Art? Is it Art/A Revealing Interview with Andy Warhol," *Art Voices*, December 1962, reprinted in *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁵ Fredric Jameson, *Late Marxism: Adorno, or the Persistence of the Dialectic*. London: Verso, 1990, p. 113.

⁶ This is, above all, an art-historical narrative developed retrospectively to describe the relationship between the original avant-gardes and their reinterpretation by artists in the 1960s such as Warhol. See Peter Bürger's *Theory of the Avant-Garde*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984, Michael Shaw, trans.; Benjamin Buchloh's "The Primary Colors for the Second Time: A Paradigm Repetition of the Neo-Avant-Garde," *October*, 37, summer 1986, pp. 41–52.

Imagine an aesthetic . . . based entirely (completely, radically, in every sense of the word) on the *pleasure of the consumer*, whomever he may be.²

For Andy, everything is equal.³

Question: What does Coca-Cola mean to you? Warhol: Pop.⁴

Mass Culture and Historical Trauma

They have nothing to say about fascism who do not want to mention capitalism.⁵

Andy Warhol has been identified as a figure of crisis within art history from every critical direction and faction. This crisis is always connected to an account of radical changes in the cultural economy at large. Warhol is symptom and symbol of the total commodification of social life and experience under advanced capitalism. In a sense, he has become the brand logo of post-modernism, the trademark for art's irreversible fall from the realm of history and aesthetics into the system of market exchange.

How Warhol came to represent the collapse of the boundary between artistic creation and mass production, aesthetic reception and consumerism must be traced to the historical context from which he emerges, which is that of American modernism. The experiments in collective practice and the integration of art and life that characterize European modernisms from dadaism to Bauhaus, cubism to constructivism, had been undermined by history itself, as personified by Hitler, Stalin, and Franco. Ideals of collective production, social enfranchisement through participation in artistic culture, and the political agency of creative practice were ultimately stillborn into a time of tyrannies.⁶ The form of modernism that emerged in America during the 1940s in response to this pattern was specifically constructed to avert a similar totalitarian occupation of culture, the seemingly inevitable evolution of liberatory socialism into a violently oppressive nationalism.

Fascism and Soviet Communism readily co-opted "popular" art and its modes of consumption. The rhetoric of America's leading modernist critic of the period reflects a fear of allowing such mass access to art and thereby opening it up to politicization. Clement Greenberg's category of "kitsch" is key to understanding the importance for American modernism of the opposition between avant-garde and popular art. Greenberg put forward this category in 1939 to account for the new status of the "popular" as an inauthentic form of art that was no longer

emerging from within distinct cultural traditions. Rather, the popular had become a mass market generated by America's entertainment industry in which social identity in the form of products and fashions was sold to the everyday consumer.⁷ For a range of critics from Greenberg to Harold Rosenberg, this American phenomenon of cultural self-definition via consumerism was tantamount to an infrastructure for totalitarianism, a system of access to and determination of the social will that could easily shift from the context of Hollywood and Sears to that of political violence. America's culture industries delivered people to the corporate power of advertisers, but the same system of mass culture also held the potential to deliver them to the political power of an autocratic regime. American modernist theorists proposed that advanced fine art had the potential to create authentic human experience and transcend the cultural forces of both politics and commodification. The experience of art for Greenberg relied upon the categories of taste and quality and, for this reason, it could be a resource of cultural distinction in both senses of the word—its highest achievements and, most significantly, the ethical capacity for judgment. This exercise of judgment stands for the agency to intervene within culture, for a mechanism of rational discernment that preserves some function of social independence over and against the operations of political authority and commercialization. Greenberg's retrenchment to this primary irreducible condition of Enlightenment humanism—of *cogito* as aesthetic judgment—was a radical means of contesting the expropriation of subjecthood by mass culture, be it through the forces of the market or the State. For Rosenberg, the means of attaining this authenticity were the opposite of Greenberg's.⁸ It was an artist's experiments with process, performance, and physical engagement that produced direct, genuine experience and agency. Rosenberg's model for resistant art was based on acts of endurance and encounter. While mid-century American modernist theory encompassed disparate definitions of advanced practice, it was largely united in a rejection of mass culture.

The failure to distinguish between the European tradition and the American cultural context marked Theodor Adorno's judgment in a way that Benjamin Buchloh parallels decades later by insisting on an evaluation of a uniquely American artist through the lens of reconstruction Europe. The standard Eurocentric account begins with the pre-war avant-gardes and their proposal of a new anti-bourgeois subjectivity constructed in opposition to the Enlightenment tradition of the "centered," "unified" subject. This post-Enlightenment subject is self-consciously riven with social and psychic contradictions. Its culture is one of upheaval, of the recognition of uneven social effects, which manifests most broadly in the European socialist revolutions. This subject is a failure, its proposed culture discredited by nothing less than a period of annihilation. After 1945, there is only a vacuum, an interval of traumatic vacancy within which the market of reconstruction—literally the rebuilding of cities and economies—is the only producer of subjectivity. Given this condition of demolished paradigms—both Enlightenment and Revolutionary—post-war identity can be thought of only in terms of market culture. This post-war subject is a bourgeois cipher that generates and receives cultural identity through commodities. National tradition and cultural history have been invalidated by Fascism (or strategically liquidated by Communism). The "interior" of this subject is a site of loss, of alienation and nostalgia, and it is open to domination. Above all, it is a European subject, a bombed-out shell that becomes a container for ideologies of consumption and their contents: American popular culture and products, the American reconstruction of cities, markets, and images of self. The market-produced subjectivity of post-war reconstruction yielded distinct versions of a consumer bourgeoisie. It is clear that Europe can be described as replacing bomb rubble with American products and it is significant that many of Warhol's early collectors and advocates were German.⁹ The European account of the end of history in 1945 does not translate to the American reception of the war as one of victory, pros-

⁷ Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" (1939) reprinted in John O'Brien (ed.), *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism, Volume 1*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988.

⁸ Harold Rosenberg, "The American Action Painters," *Art News*, 51/8, December 1952, p. 22.

⁹ Germany was a center of pop art collecting, pioneered by Karl Ströher and Peter Ludwig. On November 27, 1970, after a Parke Bernet auction heavily influenced by German bidders, the *New York Times* ran the headline "American Pop Really Turns On German Art Lovers."

perity, and paternalistic humanism. The America that formed Warhol was not marked by traumatic amnesia and, indeed, America's triumph in modernist art was yet to come.

*"Mass art is high art"*¹⁰

Paul Taylor: What about your transformation from being a commercial artist to a real artist?

Warhol: I'm still a commercial artist.

Taylor: Then what's a commercial artist?

Warhol: I don't know—someone who sells art.¹¹

The overdetermined historical moment of American modernism in which aesthetics became political ethics explains the reading of Warhol as destroying the distinction between "high" and consumer culture. But what features of Warhol's work can explain this considerable claim? What has Warhol done within the modern art tradition to bring about his identification with the break-up of the given cultural and artistic logic of value? Why is he associated like no other artist before or since with the collapse of avant-garde practices into the larger system of commodity consumption? The notion that it is the subject matter of Warhol's works that makes them commensurate with commodity objects cannot explain their power. The history of the historical modernist avant-garde is defined by the integration of mass-produced materials and commercial signs into works of high art—think of the newsprint, collage elements, and found objects that link cubism and Duchamp's readymades of the 1910s to Johns and Rauschenberg of the 1950s. It is not the image content of Warhol's paintings of Coca-Cola, Campbell's Soup, and Hollywood stars that threatens to dissolve the boundary between artwork and commodity, aesthetic experience and mass consumption. What causes a crisis in the status of the art object in Warhol's work is the unprecedented assimilation of original and reproductive media at every level. Painting, printing, and photography are fully conflated in each register of the work—concept, process, and format. Warhol's mode of silkscreening poses a complex set of challenges to the model of self-contained integrity for the medium of painting and, by extension, to the values American modernist criticism as a whole. This mechanical mode of printing transfer via a photographically rendered image is the antithesis of the historical tradition of painting, the unique relation of hand, eye, and canvas that lies behind each mark. In order to situate the scandal of Warhol's silkscreen process in larger cultural terms, it is necessary to foreground the contemporaneous modernist understanding of art as a crucial reserve of historical consciousness, agency, and meaning that is abstracted and erased by the equivalency system of commodity exchange. Based in European critiques of the effects of industrial production on traditional models of self and social authority, the American analysis of mass culture presented by Greenberg was structured around the precept of preserving modes of authentic experience against ideological co-optation. To privatize and encrypt such encounters as those between the audience and objects of high art was to resist the expropriation of aesthetic judgment into mass consumption, be it of politics or products. For modernist theorists, the model of independent, differentiated modes of experience produced an individual subjectivity and a collective culture resistant to totalization. This impulse to differentiation is the fundamental formula for the American modernist approach to art: the reduction of each medium to its defining conditions and the categorical separation of these conditions from those of all other media. The exemplar of advanced painting for various factions within American modernism was Jackson Pollock. For Greenberg, Pollock's drip canvases from the years around the turn of the 1940s to the 1950s were prolegomena of the material and conceptual parameters of painting. For Rosenberg, they were

¹⁰ Statement by Andy Warhol from a 1985 interview. See "Andy Warhol: The Artist and His Amiga" an interview with Guy Wright and Glenn Suokko reprinted in Kenneth Goldsmith (ed.), *I'll Be Your Mirror: The Selected Andy Warhol Interviews*, *Op. cit.*, p. 339.

¹¹ Andy Warhol interviewed by Paul Taylor. See "The Last Interview," *Flash Art*, April 1987, reprinted in *Ibid.*, p. 387.

manifestos of authentic engagement, sites of transformation, and recovered individuality. To segregate each medium formally or performatively was a means of insuring against equivalency and exchangeability, the logic of the consumer market. The collapse of contradiction and difference that occurs in the total integration of painting and photography in Warhol's art is the primary force of dedifferentiation that allows art historians to define him as destroying the distinct object status of art and its singular mode of experience. By fusing the materials, processes, and formats of mechanical, mass-produced photography and crafted, unique paintings, Warhol is read as also dissolving the boundary between aesthetic reception and commodity consumption. That is the radical and irreversible act his art performs.

Since the Enlightenment encyclopedists, but with mounting urgency under expanding capitalism, the modernist mission of investigating knowledge itself—the critique of reason—has taken the form of delimiting discrete categories of experience and practice, of skill and cognition based in the isolation of defining conventions. This process of specification and characterization among modes of knowledge depends upon a relation to the lived social context and this relation is one of oppositional duality: high/low, original/reproduced, authentic/alienated, analytic/commodified. Insofar as Warhol is aligned with the dissolving of contradiction, his project is not merely a dead-end negation or collapse of the modernist dialectical model, but rather the historical assertion that the economic and cultural order based on defining differences between objects and experiences is no longer valid.

The way in which Warhol integrates serial photographic transfer and paint on canvas is key to understanding his role in the integration of art production into the mass-culture industries of commerce and entertainment. Earlier avant-gardist practices had appropriated machine-made materials and mechanically reproduced imagery into the picture field as fragments of an external reality imported as elements of assemblage into a pictorial space. Warhol's silkscreening process, however, fully collapsed and imbricated the photographic with the painted surface. Fabric treated with light-sensitive emulsion replaces paper as the support for the exposure and transfer of a photographic negative. This initial stage of the silkscreen preparation already represents a violation of the separation of media prescribed by Greenberg insofar as the screen fabric is an intermediate surrogate for the painting's canvas. The stages of transition from camera to final artwork cannot negate the persistence of a trace of the real within the simulation of painted representation. The photographic image has jumped from its initial state as a record of the physics of light and shadow at a moment in time, has multiplied through mass circulation as a printed reproduction in advertisements and newspapers, and, finally, has embedded itself in paint as the unique production of an artist. This trajectory from photograph to painting, copy to original, public to private, mass consumption to artistic creation is recorded in the artwork itself, pressed onto its surface in the form of Marilyn or a mugshot.

Warhol's use of the grid format and serial printing reinforces this assimilation of the logic of mechanical reproduction and distribution into that of artistic craft. The initial reception of his product grids, such as the soup cans and Coca-Cola bottles, was that the painting depicted store displays, the row upon row of identical goods stacked on supermarket shelves. The multiple screen-printed fields from the early 1960s fall into the category of grids governed by the principle of additive seriality. This arithmetic logic is clearly invoked in the titling of many of his early works, including some in this exhibition, such as *210 Coca-Cola Bottles* (1962), and the multiple-canvas work *Sixteen Jackies* (1964).

There is no pictorial structure independent of the component images laid down in rows as separate screen printings. The grid is not a positive framework, but rather the unused, surplus, or remnant space unconsumed by the printed units. The picture space is therefore loaded

with its contents in a mode analogous to filling a refrigerator or placing objects in a cabinet. The paintings themselves become mock mass-consumers, acquisitive, and banal.¹²

The final violation of the model of artistic agency posed by Warhol's silkscreening process is that painted representation is divorced from a motivated touch, from the embodied subjectivity of the artist and the historical repertoire of traditions and skills that it conveys. The gesture in Warhol is the drag of the squeegee blade within the silkscreen frame, and the action is as likely to be performed by Warhol's studio assistants as by the artist himself. Warhol's "brush-stroke" mimics the simple automated movements of an industrial press or the repetitive action of an assembly-line worker. For American post-war modernism, painting in particular had a crucial role in preserving the independence of aesthetic consciousness. In the intimacy of the artist's process and the viewer's reception, painting represented the possibility of externalizing and communicating an authentic subjective experience. In a sense, painting was symbolic of an enduring and transcendent humanity in opposition to the totalizing and dehumanizing forces of politics and mass-production, war and fashion, ideology and entertainment.

The Absolute Commodity

[I]nstead of avoiding alienation, art had to go farther in alienation and fight commodity with its own weapons. Art had to follow the inescapable paths of commodity indifference and equivalence to make the work of art an absolute commodity.¹³

The theorist who links Warhol most directly to a fundamental rupture in cultural history is Jean Baudrillard. Many art historians have read Warhol's work as symbolic of the shift from a society of production and objects to one of consumption and images,¹⁴ but for Baudrillard Warhol does not merely illustrate or describe this transformation; his work is its active performance. In his collapse into one plane of photography and painting, consumer goods and the luxury object, serial production and artistic process, Warhol is enacting what Baudrillard identifies as a leveling of all forms of meaning and experience under advanced capitalism. If Warhol breaks down the differences between representation and reproduction, real and copy, he is simply making art that reflects the state of total equivalency that exists in the larger cultural economy where goods, values, relationships, and identities are abstract and interchangeable. How is this level of dedifferentiation between all registers of practice and subjectivity possible? For Baudrillard, it is not simply that social life has become fully fused to mass consumption and that the circulation of knowledge, experience, and authority are now simply replaced by the circulation of commodities. This is an oversimplification similar to the idea that Warhol's art represents commercial culture only at the level of iconography, of product logos, and of film stars. Instead, there is a structural homology between mechanical reproduction and painting in Warhol's artistic process that demonstrates the dissolving of boundaries in the social economy at large.

Baudrillard's analysis of consumption is the key to understanding both Warhol's art and the historical changes it exemplifies. The Marxist formula of production and consumption as opposing terms no longer holds. In advanced capitalism, the only formative practice is consumption. However, contrary to its definition in traditional industrial models, "Consumption is eminently social, relational, and active rather than private, atomic, or passive."¹⁵ While material and cultural values now exist on a level plane of interchangeable signs, abstracted from their functional contexts, they are still deployed to construct social relations and identities. This is not difficult to understand when we consider the ways in which such intangibles as happiness are readily quantified, commodified, and displayed through products. For Baudrillard, the status of objects is a fundamental reflection of a political economy. Under late market capitalism,

¹² The assemblage work in this exhibition, *Silver Coke Bottles* of 1967, is therefore the logical extension of an earlier work also on view, the painting *210 Coca-Cola Bottles*, from 1962.

¹³ Jean Baudrillard, *The Conspiracy of Art*. New York/Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2005, p. 99.

¹⁴ See in particular the following: Benjamin Buchloh, "Andy Warhol's One-Dimensional Art," in *Andy Warhol: A Retrospective*. New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1989, and Benjamin Buchloh, "The Andy Warhol Line," in Gary Garrels (ed.), *The Work of Andy Warhol*. Seattle: Bay Press, 1989; Thierry de Duve, "Andy Warhol; or, the Machine Perfected," *October*, 48, spring 1989; Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1991; and Peter Bürger, "Theory of the Avant-Garde," in *Theory and History of Literature, Volume 4*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984.

¹⁵ Arjun Appadurai (ed.), *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986, p. 31.

where goods and practices gain value only through the process of exchange, objects have no natural, inherent value based on their function. They derive their meaning and worth only from their relational positioning within the social code, which is itself a system without any underlying or external motivations or causes: “Marketing, purchasing, sales, the acquisition of differentiated commodities and object/signs—all of these presently constitute our language, a code with which our entire society *communicates* and speaks of and to itself.”¹⁶

This disengagement of experience from the real describes Baudrillard’s infamous theory of the simulacra, the replacement of presence with appearance and the object world with intersecting streams of images and money. What we take to be agency, purpose, and use motivated by our intentions, by our production of ourselves and our lives, is instead a matrix of codes that we *consume* as functionality, need, and fulfillment. This disconnection between object and meaning has important implications for art in that if lived experience itself no longer reflects the real, the idea of representation as we have known it until now—as the mirroring or mediation of reality—is impossible. For Baudrillard, representation means our experience of the world, individual and collective identity, and all social relations. Once the idea of objective conditions supporting this field of “images” is withdrawn, all that is left is the simulacral reflection, an artificial imitation of the vanished real and copies for which no original exists.

Within the universe of objects, the artwork has an exceptional role in that it is the limit case of commodification, the cipher of pure exchange. It is not that the artwork exceeds the commodity due to some unique quality that sets it apart. That was the dream of depoliticized American modernism—that art and aesthetic experience might be held in historical reserve against the larger social forces of ideology and mass culture. In Baudrillard’s account, there is no space outside of the sign system of the social, no separate register of authenticity or human truth exempt from market exchange. The concept of aesthetic value as an ideal or transcendental quality is merely an “alibi” for denying art’s commodity status. The formula of aesthetic value mythologizes the art object, setting it above the relations of consumption that define all other aspects of material and social life under global capitalism. The “sign-value” of the artwork is absolute and reflexive; its function as class spectacle and its circulation in the market fall away as it condenses into a fetish. If there is a void where the real used to be, a feeling of vertigo that suggests there is nothing beneath the surface of mobile and arbitrary images and meanings, Warhol activates this void in the sense that his art enacts the disappearance of the real, demonstrating the process whereby signs of presence and lived experience are abstracted into depthless, interchangeable images. For Baudrillard, Warhol’s art inhabits this moment of loss and marks this absence: “the ‘truth’ of the contemporary object is no longer to be useful for something, but to signify; no longer to be manipulated as an instrument, but as a sign. And the success of pop . . . is that it shows it to us as such.”¹⁷ Many of the works in the present exhibition can be read through this account of the disappearance of the real and the total relativity of symbolic value. Whereas by 1919 Marcel Duchamp already understood the Mona Lisa to exist almost exclusively as a small mass-produced copy that could be defaced without consequence,¹⁸ for Warhol she is simply a transferable image with no substance outside of the event of printing. Therefore she is used as the indifferent material for an exercise in experimenting with synthetic paint colors, the acidic artificial hues of cyan, yellow, magenta, and black that combine in all industrial printing machines to approximate the full color spectrum (*Mona Lisa*, 1963). In *Blue Liz as Cleopatra* (1963), the title is a visual product description, implying that the painting is a commodity that might be available in a range of colors, like a dress or a car. The depicted figure exemplifies the loss of authentic identity and presence. The movie star represents the subject-as-product, here further erased by appearing in costume—declaring, in essence, that the self

¹⁶ Jean Baudrillard, *The Conspiracy of Art*, *Op. cit.*, p. 48.

¹⁷ Jean Baudrillard, “Pop—An Art of Consumption?,” in *Post-Pop Art*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989, p. 39.

¹⁸ Duchamp’s 1919 “assisted ready-made” *L.H.O.O.Q.*, consisted of the addition of a graffiti moustache and beard on the face of a color lithographic reproduction of da Vinci’s *Mona Lisa*. For his 1965 New York retrospective (where Warhol met the creator of the readymade), Duchamp returned to this art-historical icon. Andreas Huyssen explains Duchamp’s reply to Warhol’s *Mona Lisa* paintings and the critical response that resulted: “As invitations to the opening, [Duchamp] sent out one hundred post-Warholian *Mona Lisas*. They depicted a *Mona Lisa* without moustache and goatee on the backside of a playing card bearing the title *Rasé L.H.O.O.Q.* ‘Through this reconstruction of her identity the *Mona Lisa* has as a matter of fact completely lost her identity,’ the critic Max Imdahl commented.” See Andreas Huyssen, “The Cultural Politics of Pop,” in *Post-Pop Art*, *Op. cit.*, p. 55. Baudrillard, in turn, connects the famous expression of Leonardo’s unknown model to her modern commodification: “a ‘certain smile’ is one of the *obligatory signs* of consumption . . . Ultimately, in this ‘cool’ smile, you can no longer distinguish between the smile of humor and that of commercial complicity. This is what also happens in pop art—after all, its smile epitomizes its whole ambiguity: it is not the smile of critical distance, it is the smile of *collusion*.” See Jean Baudrillard, “Pop—An Art of Consumption?,” *Op. cit.*, p. 44.

has become the consumption and performance of readymade images. Works that depict national symbols as exchangeable commodities, as brand images equivalent to corporate logos, are the most direct in presenting the collapse of cultural relations and politics into consumer ideologies. Works like *Race Riot* (1963), *Sixteen Jackies* (1964), *Atomic Bomb* (1965), and *Big Electric Chair* (1967) all share the status of test cases in demonstrating the loss of the real. If, as Baudrillard explains it, Warhol's art exposes as a void the ground of reference and meaning that we assume supports our material world, our experiences, and our desires, then his dedifferentiation between images of commodities and images of death and trauma is the logical conclusion of his project. Thus, for Baudrillard, "pop signifies the end of perspective, the end of evocation, the end of witnessing, the end of creative gesture, and, not least of all, the end of the subversion of the world and of the malediction of art."¹⁹ Finally, works like *Mao* (1972), *Vote McGovern* (1972), *Statue of Liberty* (1963), and *Hammer and Sickle* (1976) could be read as manifestations of Greenberg's personal apocalypse, the total assimilation of art into the regimes of mass-culture and paintings that stage this assimilation as spectacle. Warhol's conceptual process demonstrates the equivalency of value between all categories of experience. Specifically, he shows the shift of experience and agency in late capitalism to modes of consumption. Baudrillard's thesis that there is no transcending or undermining the plane of consumption on which signs and commodities circulate, detached from any grounding in the real, nature, human need, or unmediated use, is posited against the dialectical forces and structural hierarchies of a century of Marxian social theory. In his explanation of Warhol's work as the critical display of this condition, Baudrillard explains Greenberg's crisis: "What happens when you no longer have a system of values suitable for judgment, for aesthetic pleasure?"²⁰ What happens is Warhol.

At the same time, Warhol defies the traditional modernist rule that consumption cannot be oppositional, that it cannot have a critical or disruptive function within society. The assumption is that with the collapse of contradictions between canvas and camera, original and copy, artistic aura and fashion, there is no outside to consumption from which a subversive intervention might be staged. The fallacy of this reading lies in its reductive definition of consumption as an inactive and submissive process. Art history does not characterize other forms of reception in this way, as foreclosing resistance and dissent. It is the ideological alignment with mass culture that has for so long disqualified consumption from being explored as a mode of cultural construction or agency. For Baudrillard, "consumption is a collective and active behavior, a constraint, a morality, and an institution. It is a complete system of values, with all that the term implies concerning group integration and social control."²¹ Artworks, a category of objects that exist beyond the pretences of need, use, or inherent value, are not empty or meaningless as indexes of the social. Rather, they must be read "as goods whose principal use is *rhetorical* . . . goods that are simply incarnated signs."²² What Warhol's art demonstrates is a shift from the political economy of production to the economy of signs, or more specifically, the manifestation of all production as the play of signs. No activity or object is exempt from this state of abstraction and exchangeability and works of art in fact register this process most clearly, making visible the notion that "the necessity to which they respond is fundamentally political" and only political.²³ Theorists of this new model of reality as pure surface find in Warhol a reflection of this image culture and the historical consciousness it creates. His art does not foreclose or exhaust the capacity for critical intervention within society; it does, however, destroy entirely the humanist myths of unmediated experience and natural values that still haunted modernism. Warhol's signature silver paint serves as a mirror that faces the mirror surface of our own flat world, but rather than showing a shiny void, we can see in it a "field of play that is specifically the field of consumption."²⁴

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 35.

²⁰ Jean Baudrillard, *The Conspiracy of Art*, *Op. cit.*, p. 61.

²¹ Jean Baudrillard, "Consumer Society," in Mark Poster (ed.), *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings*, *Op. cit.*, p. 21.

²² Ibid., p. 38.

²³ Arjun Appadurai (ed.), *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, *Op. cit.*, p. 38.

²⁴ Jean Baudrillard, "Consumer Society," in Mark Poster (ed.), *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings*, *Op. cit.*, p. 44.

18. Silver Coke Bottles, 1967

