

The Threat of Nuclear Winter: The Art Historical Perspective

by
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Biography of Jenni Pace Presnell:

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Today I will explore Jeffrey Rubinoff's insight on the End of the Age of Agriculture. I begin by quoting this insight:

"The domestication of animals is believed to have begun 13,000 years ago. However, with crop cultivation 9,000-10,000 years ago, a large majority of the population was required to be bound to the land. Cultivation leads to the first continuously settled villages and to civilization itself.

Security and continuity, rationalized by predictable food production, originated specialized political, civil, religious, and military institutions. Institutionalizing a warrior class was the most dangerous necessity of this social sea change. If the military were not directed outward, it would threaten the stability of the non-military institutions. Thus, a constant state of war became inevitable, and indeed the history of city-states and empires appears to confirm perpetual states of war.

The feasibility of escalating war has become absurd with the advent of strategic bombing and nuclear weapons. No military institutions can claim to guarantee security of territory.

Moreover, at the end of the age of agriculture only a minute fraction of the population is required to produce the current surpluses of food and thus the fundamental assumptions of the age of agriculture, security of territory as the means to secure food production, must be revised to the era of global vulnerability." ¹
– Jeffrey Rubinoff

Rubinoff suggests that, since the dropping of the nuclear bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, humankind has lived with the constant threat of mutually assured destruction and that this is, in fact, nuclear winter. A consequence of living in this state, he argues, is a widespread conviction that there is no future. The pervasiveness of this attitude fostered an absurd culture and the widespread public embracing of an absurdist avant-garde art in the 1960s.

Reflecting upon my own experience growing up in a center for American weapons development and space exploration, I will consider the processes that fostered public acceptance of the possibility that there is no future.

I will then turn to exploring the consequences of nuclear winter in the art world, considering how the public's expectations for art were radically influenced by the presentation of Pop art at the nuclear-themed New York World's Fair of 1964-5. By the Fair's end, Pop art had evolved from one of several avant-garde possibilities to *the* autonomous visual expression of the 1960s. The four pop artists whose work was exhibited there had developed new methods to produce a visual language that, according to Rubinoff, reflected this absurd culture.

¹ Jeffrey Rubinoff, "End of the Age of Agriculture." <http://www.rubinoffsculpturepark.org/coi.php>

This analysis will touch on a second of Jeffrey Rubinoff's insights, in which he argues that artists must be accountable to art history, not the absurd culture, if we are to understand the present reality.²

To conclude I will consider how visual art, the art market, museum programming and arts education evolved to reflect this absurd culture. I will briefly consider the current state of the art world and elaborate Rubinoff's call for a way forward that is possible through art created in accordance with a mature conscience and held accountable to art history. In times of acute stress, artists have the potential, as he has demonstrated in his own body of work, to evolve consciousness and envision a future.

"There is no madness like nuclear madness." This sentence marked the opening of an editorial in *The New Yorker*, not in 1962 or 1982, but just last month, in April 2009. As commentator Steve Coll suggested, the fact that North Korea's Kim Jong II had finally made good on his promise to test a prototype missile that might one day reach Alaska, and that his rocket had petered out over the Pacific, was of little consolation. Perhaps the more imminent nuclear threat, or one among many such threats, is posed by the nuclear smuggler A. Q. Khan. Mr. Khan administers his own web site from Pakistan. Meanwhile, in Iran, Ahmadinejad is running a reelection campaign steeped in nuclear nationalism.³

As Coll reminds us, while President Obama struggles to remain optimistic in the wake of Wall Street's implosion, two unfinished wars, both of which threaten to last a generation, rising unemployment and the death of large sectors of the American economy, the old, familiar threat of nuclear winter is still with us. Only now, we know for certain that several of the known actors in the nuclear theater are completely willing to abandon the script. Once again, as "Dr. Strangelove" demonstrated so absurdly, "There's no madness like nuclear madness," indeed.⁴

The nuclear non-proliferation regime has, as Coll suggests, reached its most fragile state of disrepair in perhaps twenty years. Some twenty more nations have entered the pantheon of nuclear weapons powers, including South Africa, Taiwan, South Korea, Brazil and Argentina among others. The exact number of A.Q. Khans remains unknown at this time.

Additionally, the number of Middle Eastern states that have begun to develop nominally peaceful capabilities, likely out of fear of Iran.

In Prague, President Obama announced his support for the abolition of nuclear weapons, following Ronald Reagan and Henry Kissinger before him. Even in a hard-to-conceive world where major and minor powers alike willfully abandon nuclear weapons and redefine strategic policy, as Jeffrey Rubinoff has argued, we are faced with the hard fact

² Ibid, <http://www.rubinoffsculpturepark.org/coi.php>

³ Steve Coll, "No Nukes" in *The New Yorker* (April 20, 2009).

⁴ Ibid.

that, in consideration of the burgeoning world population, so-called peaceful uses for nuclear energy will become a necessity for the developed and developing world. Unless we make “the turn” to understand this systems and how it is administered, we will continue to inhabit an absurdist world, defined by nuclear winter.

The toll of living with this threat has been a central concern of artists since the detonation of the first atomic bombs that ended World War II. The first generation of artists to address the unprecedented level of devastation that brought the war to a close and would, purportedly, serve as an agent for lasting peace, were the Abstract Expressionists, chiefly Jackson Pollock (*Autumn Rhythm*, 1950), Barnett Newman (*Vir Heroicus Sublimis*, 1950-51) and Mark Rothko (*No. 3/ No. 13: Magenta, Black, Green on Orange*, 1949).

They deemed naturalism and representation in painting to be aesthetically and morally inadequate to cope with these horrors. They drew from a deep knowledge of art history to produce works that pushed to complete abstraction, asserting that this was their way of rejecting the horrors committed in the name of peace. In the wake of the new realization that man now possessed the ability to destroy all life, these artists sought to forge new spaces of introspection and reflection, all the while maintaining a critical dialogue with art history. They looked to past examples of artists who addressed contemporary events, including Francisco Goya (Plates 31 and 39 from *The Disasters of War*, 1810-20) Theodore Gericault (*Raft of the Medusa*, 1819) and Pablo Picasso (*Guernica*, 1937). The Abstract Expressionists built on this history to express a changed reality shaped by new and more devastating forms of warfare.

Pollock, Newman and Rothko proclaimed their opposition to scientism and technologism, as well as addressing another pressing matter of their time—wage labor alienation. As David Craven has suggested, these artists made a decisive break from pre-war modernism, which glorified technology and the “machine age”. As voiced by Meyer Schapiro, the Abstract Expressionists advocated for a critical appraisal of technology “not as an end in itself”, but as an “awesome force no better or worse than the system of political economy that used it”. Schapiro extended this analysis, suggesting that these artists shared the conviction that, instead of “automatically producing new social relations, technology is itself often reproductive of the social relations manufactured by the established order controlling the design, use and deployment of this technology...”⁵

Jeffrey Rubinoff has suggested that, in times of crisis, artists have a moral imperative to remain accountable to art history in order to expand human consciousness. If artists do not meet this imperative, he has theorized, there is a great risk that the human consciousness will atrophy. With the specter of nuclear winter, there is an acute imperative for artists to develop new knowledge, particularly to understand the work of the “gatekeepers” of the military industrial complex. Artists who remain mired in the

⁵ David Craven, “Abstract Expressionism, Automatism and the Age of Automation,” in *Pollock and After* 2nd edition. Ed. Francis Frascina. New York: Routledge (2000), p. 242.

absurdist culture are unable to address the true crisis at hand. A couple of notable attempts by contemporary artists to address these concerns while remaining rooted in the culture of absurdity include: Damien Hirst (*The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living*, 1991) and Jake and Dinos Chapman (*Gigantic Fun*, 2000 and *Detail of Sex*, 2003).

Rubinoff suggests that the generation that followed the Abstract Expressionists, a group of artists who became widely recognizable as Pop artists, abandoned their moral imperative. Instead of being accountable to art history, they claimed to represent the absurdity of culture in ironic terms. This theoretical stance formed the foundation of Postmodernism, a body of concepts that still dominates the majority of art studio curricula, art historical inquiry, the art market, museum collecting and exhibition policies, and, of most concern to Rubinoff, it seems to dictate the agendas of most contemporary practicing artists.

If we are to envision a way forward for contemporary practicing artists and arts educators, we must return to the point at which, according to Rubinoff, culture became absurdist. He suggests that mainstream culture was inherently reshaped by the expansion of the North American military industrial complex in the aftermath of World War II. This is a topic with which I am intimately familiar, having grown up in towns dominated by the defense industry and as the daughter of an aerospace engineer. But, this massive machine is notoriously difficult to describe or even locate, no doubt due to the vagaries of systems engineering. If we are to understand, as Rubinoff insists we must, the people who have made “the turn”, we must understand the development of military industrial system within the context of systems engineering.

On October 1, 1945, the US War Department announced in a press release that it had accepted custody of seven defected German rocket scientists for a temporary stay. The brief memo assured that these technical experts would be “used for appropriate military projects...”⁶

Led by Wernher von Braun, these scientists had developed the German V-1, a liquid fuel cell cruise missile that terrorized London, Paris and Antwerp in the final months of war in Europe. Traveling at 3,500 miles per hour and smashing through the sound barrier, the missile was capable of hitting targets hundreds of miles away. The team also developed the V-2 ballistic missile (earlier called the A-4) and liquid-fuel rocket engines for aircraft and the supersonic Wasserfall anti-aircraft missile. In retrospect, Von Braun professed that his primary interest in rockets was for space travel. He later recounted that his response to the news of a successful bombing raid on London in 1944 was, “The rocket worked perfectly except for landing on the wrong planet”.

⁶ Dennis Piszkiwicz, *Wernher Von Braun: The Man Who Sold the Moon*. Westport: CT: Praeger (1998), p. 7. Quoted from “Marshall’s Roots,” www.msfc.nasa.gov/general/history.html

Just as World War II drew to a close, the V-2 ballistic missile offered a preview of a new kind of weapon that would change the nature of war and define post-war politics and culture. Perhaps the most telling fact about the V-2 rocket is that more people are thought to have died during its production under slave labor conditions at Nazi concentration camps than were killed by it as a weapon.

Amazingly, the team that was responsible for so much bloodshed in England and Europe, would start afresh in the United States and in very short time, change humans' view of the universe and man's potential within it.

While it might seem impossible to fathom such an abrupt shift, from working under Hitler to promoting the necessity of rearmament to post-war America, the rocket scientists professed that little had changed. They were still civilians working to develop rockets for the army. They were accustomed to carrying out orders, regardless of their master.⁷ In my experience, this attitude pervades the civilian military industrial complex. In fact, in a community where 9 out of 10 people seem to work for the Defense Department or a government contractor, I have never met anyone who claimed to be doing anything other than simply carrying out orders. In every case, the designer or mathematician admits having access to only a tiny component of a massive project that may not be in production for years.

In the United States, Von Braun's team was tasked with training military, industrial and academic personnel to design, construct and operate rockets and guided missiles and to investigate the military and research applications of rockets. The scientists first set up their operation in White Sands, New Mexico, where they reassembled and test-fired V-2 rockets that had been seized in Germany. To justify their role in the program, the US Army portrayed the scientists as allies in what was hinted to be an ongoing war against Communism. Von Braun soon became an influential military advisor, even outlining plans for a refueling station in the sky en route to the moon.⁸

In 1947 the American government, advised by military warriors, along with the leading industrialists in several fields, outlined what persists as a permanent policy of readiness for imminent air war. Testifying before President Truman's Air Policy Commission, these men outlined a unified message. The commission report, *Survival in the Air Age*, stated that "This country, if it is to have even relative security, must be ready for...a possible World War III", continuing with the assertion that this war would be concentrated in the air".⁹

The commission recommended that the US government develop a massive "air armada" over four years. The major financial magazines, including the *Wall Street Journal*, lavished praise on the plan. For any who might criticize it, as Beers noted, *Survival* offered this:

⁷ Ibid, p. 11.

⁸ Ibid, p. 15.

⁹ David Beers, *Blue Sky Dream: A Memoir of America's Fall from Grace*. New York: Doubleday(1996), p. 9.

“Self-preservation comes ahead of the economy”.¹⁰ Of course, the career warriors, politicians and industrialists whose testimony formed the commission report stood to profit mightily from this new national policy. Its assertion, that what’s good for the aircraft industry was essential for the survival of America, has effectively dictated domestic and foreign policy for six decades.

In 1948, Truman increased Pentagon aircraft spending by 60 percent. The Korean War, which was waged from 1947 to 1951, provided, Beers suggested, a “handy harbinger” of World War III. The aircraft workforce, which was highly trained and technologically expert, nearly doubled in that period. By 1957 it doubled again to one million. With a population just over 170 million, more than 1 in 200 Americans was involved in this sector, which had eclipsed even the auto industry by this point. In this period, the money directed to research and development of aircraft technology steadily increased, with 90% of the funding coming from the taxpayer.¹¹ As manufacturing and other blue-collar jobs were declining, the technologically elite aircraft industry was hailed as a model for reshaping the American workforce.

A major component of this new program was the permanent relocation of Von Braun and his staff to Redstone Arsenal in Huntsville, Alabama in 1950. I grew up near there, surrounded by images of rockets soaring through the blue sky (as Beers has noted, rockets are always pictured this way) and discarded rocket boosters dotting the major roads. In Huntsville, Von Braun developed and refined intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) for the army. His Redstone Rocket was used for the first live nuclear ballistic missile tests conducted by the United States, and the Jupiter-C, a modified version of the Redstone, was used to launch the West’s first satellite, Explorer 1, in 1958.

By the late 1950s, these one million aircraft workers, mostly college educated engineers, mathematicians, chemists, physicists and systems managers, thrived in a new culture that, as David Beers described so perfectly, even had its own language, a *technicalese*, that, to fluent speakers like my dad, probably seems to capable of saying everything necessary.¹² Instead of trying something until you find a solution, for example, you “exhaust the various possibilities”. Instead of “figuring it out” you “troubleshoot successfully”.¹³ As planes and weapons systems became more complex, so did the language.

The various players in this new system were organized and administered by systems engineers, a new field developed in the 1940s to encompass and manipulate increasingly complicated systems. This new theoretical approach to management relied heavily on statistical analysis to control complex projects that differ greatly from the sum of their parts.

¹⁰ Ibid, p.9.

¹¹ Ibid, p. 10.

¹² Ibid, pp. 6-7.

¹³ Ibid, p. 7.

The knights of post-war America, by and large, were not career militarists, but rather, they sat at metal desks and wore clip-on badges, working either for the Defense Department or one of an ever-growing number of military contractors including The Lockheed Corporation, Boeing and General Electric. As David Beers has illustrated, the large majority of the aeronautical workers did not realize that their country was easing into the Cold War, and that they'd spend their careers preparing not for a war in the sky played out between dueling fighters, but for a war atomic war, in which the enemy remained forever unseen and victory would mean complete annihilation. I estimate that the majority of these workers, like my dad, were titillated by visions of the future, in which their rockets would be used for space exploration.

Von Braun propelled this notion through a series of articles in the *The Huntsville Times* and, for a national audience, *Collier's Weekly*. Beginning in 1950, when the article "Dr. von Braun Says Rocket Flights Possible to Moon" appeared in *The Huntsville Times*, von Braun worked to popularize the idea that space travel was possible in the near future. By 1952, the titles of his articles had become assured of a future in space: "This is how we shall go to the moon."¹⁴ In subsequent publications, many of which were illustrated by the space artist Chesley Bonestell, he outlined plans for a manned space station to be used for observing Earth and as a platform for lunar and Martian expeditions. These essays promoted the necessity of research and engineering, focusing on their application as a means of ensuring American security against the Soviet Union. Von Braun also did many television interviews in support of these ideas and acted as a consultant on space-themed films released by Walt Disney and other studios. For these reasons, the government and the defense industry came to regard Von Braun as their best "salesman".

The first truly palpable sign of World War III's inevitability trespassed into American airspace on October 4, 1957, thus beginning the "space race" and the "space age". On that date, a 23-inch aluminum sphere weighing just 84 pounds was launched by the Soviet Union. *Sputnik* quickly set a new template for the Cold War arms race and transformed the aircraft industry into "aerospace".¹⁵ Von Braun joined the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) upon its formation in 1958 as a response to *Sputnik*. In that capacity, Von Braun was the architect of the Saturn V launch vehicle that propelled the Apollo spacecraft to the moon. It should also be noted that in December of that 1958, America's first nuclear power plant came on-line, thus initiating the age of the so-called "peaceful atom".

Despite the very obvious challenge that *Sputnik* issued to the United States, one that would seem to justify an even greater concentration of resources in aerospace research and development, then-President Eisenhower did not support this approach. The career warrior was adamant that America must wage the Cold War, but he wanted to take a

¹⁴ Piszkiwicz, pp. 76-77. This line opened Von Braun's contribution to second the *Colliers* issue devoted to space, published October 18, 1952.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 18.

conservative financial approach.¹⁶ For Eisenhower, nuclear technology was the obvious way forward because it could be very affordable. He proposed that America could ring the Soviet Union with nuclear-armed bombers and convince the world that he was prepared to drop them at the sign aggressive maneuvering. Eisenhower envisioned this as a cheap alternative to maintaining a large, conventional military presence around the world.

In one of the great ironies of this era, the “greatest warrior of all,” as Rubinoff has called him, Eisenhower worked to reduce military spending, meanwhile investing in the foundations of aerospace. This effort was not, however, born out of military zeal, but the desire to promote a cheaper alternative.¹⁷ The flaw in his strategy, as Beers argues, is that it worked too well. At least on the national stage, the Soviets expressed a solemn belief that the United States was willing to engage in what came to be called “strategic” war with nuclear bombs, even the new hydrogen bombs that were a thousand times more powerful than the early atomic weapons. The theory was that this arsenal would back up America’s doctrine of “massive retaliation” against Soviet ground gains. By the mid-1950s, both countries were pouring millions into refining and allegedly perfecting intercontinental ballistic missiles that could deliver their H-bombs to the middle of any land mass.

Eisenhower despised this build-up, called the ICBM race, because it became so expensive, and because it expanded a class of workers for whom he professed disdain. He branded new terms to describe this aerospace workforce (the “scientific-technological elite”) and the parties involved in driving this new economic beast (“the military industrial complex”). He was particularly concerned that public policy might fall captive to the culture of the technocrat.

Eisenhower fretted to a group of reporters: “When you see almost every one of your magazines, no matter what they are advertising, has a picture of the Titan missile or the Atlas...there is almost an insidious penetration of our own minds that the only thing this country is engaged in is weaponry and missiles.” He mourned the values that he predicted would be superceded by this technocratic culture: the “end of self-dependence, self-confidence, courage, and readiness to take a risk.”¹⁸

As Michael Smith has demonstrated, amid the many applications of technology that emerged between 1945 and 1960, the ideas of “outer space” and “the atom” were perhaps the most “dramatically and pervasively portrayed”. The government and private

¹⁶ Beers, p. 19. Beers noted that Eisenhower was dismayed by the effect that Truman’s re-armament plan had on the national budget, in which almost two-thirds of resources were devoted to defense spending. Stressing that this sort of expenditure actually posed a threat to national security, Eisenhower joked that the Joint Chiefs of Staff “don’t know much about fighting inflation.” Despite his forceful assertion that “this country can choke itself to death piling up military expenditures just as surely as it can defeat itself by not spending enough for protection,” by the late 1950s, few of the power brokers in the government and aircraft industry were willing to contemplate another option.

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 19.

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 20.

industry worked in concert to saturate postwar mass culture with celestial and nuclear imagery, carefully and systematically linking the two. Comic books, mainstream resources on science, as well as manufacturers of textiles and house wares, linked the “orbital” model of the atom and diagrams of the solar system. Everywhere, attention was focused concurrently on “the infinite vastness of outer space and the tiniest particles of matter”.¹⁹

On November 7, 1957, *Sputnik II* was launched into orbit. Eisenhower was deeply troubled by the implications of this six-ton vehicle carrying a dog, and the further concentration of American resources that it prompted. Four days later, the president felt it necessary to remind the nation:

There is much more to science than its function in strengthening our defense...the peaceful contributions of science—to healing, to enriching life, to freeing the spirit—these are [its] most important products...and the spiritual powers of the nation---its underlying religious faith, its self-reliance, its capacity for intelligent sacrifice—these are the most important stones in any defense structure.²⁰

Eisenhower outlined his gravest warning against the development of a “permanent military industrial complex” on January 17, 1960, just days before he left the presidency. Conceding the defeat of his ideal, he attempted to rally an “engaged [American] citizenry” to serve as the only effective defense against the newfound, “misplaced” power of the defense lobby. An excerpt from his nationally televised address follows:

A vital element in keeping the peace is our military establishment. Our arms must be mighty, ready for instant action, so that no potential aggressor may be tempted to risk his own destruction.

Our military organization today bears little relation to that known by any of my predecessors in peacetime, or indeed by the fighting men of World War II or Korea.

Until the latest of our world conflicts, the United States had no armaments industry. American makers of plowshares could, with time and as required, make swords as well. But now we can no longer risk emergency improvisation of national defense; we have been compelled to create a permanent armaments industry of vast proportions. Added to this, three and a half million men and women are directly engaged in the defense establishment. We annually spend on military security more than the net income of all United States corporations.

This conjunction of an immense military establishment and a large arms industry is new in the American experience. The total influence -- economic, political, even spiritual -- is felt in every city, every State house, every office of the Federal government. We recognize the imperative need for this development. Yet we must not fail to comprehend its grave implications. Our toil, resources and livelihood are all involved; so is the very structure of our society.

¹⁹ Michale L. Smith, “Making Time: Representations of Technology at the 1964 World’s Fair,” in *The Power of Culture: Critical Essays in American History*, Eds. Richard Wightman Fox and T.J. Jackson Lears. Chicago: University of Chicago Press (1993), p. 230.

²⁰ Beers, pp. 21-22.

In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist.

We must never let the weight of this combination endanger our liberties or democratic processes. We should take nothing for granted. Only an alert and knowledgeable citizenry can compel the proper meshing of the huge industrial and military machinery of defense with our peaceful methods and goals, so that security and liberty may prosper together.

Akin to, and largely responsible for the sweeping changes in our industrial-military posture, has been the technological revolution during recent decades.²¹

At this juncture, it is necessary to return to Rubinoff's insight on the End of the Age of Agriculture. As he suggested, and the old warrior Eisenhower confirmed, "the feasibility of escalating war ...[became] absurd with the advent of strategic bombing and nuclear weapons."²² As the United States became increasingly focused on the escalating Cold War with the Soviet Union, an unprecedented level of government and private effort was focused on the development and application of nuclear technology, and carefully balancing the promise of increased power in many forms with the threat of total annihilation.

In 1960 John F. Kennedy was elected president with the promise to send a man to moon and return him safely to earth within the decade. In April of 1961, Yuri Gagarin became the first human to orbit the earth. The United States responded by sending Alan Shepard into space the next month.

In 1962, the Cuban Missile Crisis made the possibility of total annihilation reality. Rubinoff argues that from that point, most American have lived in a state of absurdity, accepting the notion that there is no future. A few well-know artists, including Stanley Kubrick and Joseph Heller, adjusted to this new reality, but most did not. Those who did not, returned to the ultimate example of ironic absurdity, Marcel Duchamp, for a model to subvert the dominant order. As Rubinoff has explained, those artists forfeited any chance that their work would be profound, or would offer people a medium through which to understand the new synthesis that governed their lives.

In the early 1960s, the young artists who opted to dwell in ironic absurdity began to ascend the ranks of the art world. They began producing larger and more pretentious paintings and sculptures that began to sell for high prices. Unlike their predecessors, this group of artists, whose work would be labeled Pop art, was wealthy enough that they were never involved in teaching, perhaps further distancing them from the knowledge base of art history. By and large this group focused on promoting themselves as master

²¹ Dwight D. Eisenhower, "Military-Industrial Complex Speech" (1961). Public papers of the Presidents, pp. 1035-1040. The full text of this speech is reproduced in the Appendix.

²² Rubinoff, "The End of the Age of Agriculture."

artists, and most of them would eventually head up large factory-style studios, co-opting many methods and materials from industrial design production. This group abandoned the hundred year-old notion of “art for art’s sake” and instead went straight for the money. As Thomas Hess later said of this group, “It is hard to think of [one of their] paintings being produced without some plans for its exhibition.” And on this point, the major arts institutions were happy to comply. Working hand-in-hand with art dealers, they manipulated the values with little regard for the inherent artistic value of a given work.

For many reasons, some of which I will outline below, at the moment when the human species would naturally have turned to its artists in order to understand the new reality and to evolve group consciousness. The official art world was becoming irrelevant to needs and concerns of the mainstream public. In the aftermath of the Cuban Missile Crisis, those needs became ever more acute.

The remainder of this presentation will consider how the “medium of absurdity” (as Rubinoff has called it) that pervaded the culture after the Cuban Missile Crisis, overtook the art world, the art market, and dictated the public’s expectations for art and artists. To do this, I will consider the forum in which Pop art was presented to the public for the first time--the 1964/5 New York World’s Fair. There, the innovative products and ideas of the corporate realm, the military and the visual arts intersected under the universalizing theme “Peace Through Understanding”.

Exploring the Fair sheds light on the government and corporate administrators of American lives and their methods for marketing and selling an absurdist vision of the future. I will consider the implications for Pop art within this context, focusing on its increasingly complex relationship with technology, and briefly summarize its rapid assimilation by the public during the run of the Fair.

The 1964/5 New York World’s Fair was the first public forum for the display of Pop art. Architect Philip Johnson, who was in charge of designing the New York State Pavilion and Theaterama, selected works by 10 contemporary artists, including 4 Pop artists—Andy Warhol (*Thirteen Most Wanted*), Robert Indiana (*E.A.T.*), Roy Lichtenstein (*World’s Fair Mural*) and James Rosenquist (*World’s Fair Mural*)—to adorn its outside walls. A leading proponent of the value of a “heroic” avant-garde art within the public sphere, Johnson allotted each artist a heroically-scaled space measuring 20’ x 20’.

I will begin with a brief overview of the Fair’s organization, themes and major displays, focusing particularly on the presentation of technology and visions of the future.

The Fair was not granted international recognition because of the provision that no country could be host twice in one decade, and Seattle had been to site of the 1962 Fair. For this reason, the Soviet Union and Eastern Block countries, along with most Western European countries, declined to sponsor exhibits befitting a true “world’s fair”. Because there was no need to illustrate cold-war ideology, the involvement of the American

government in science and technology exhibits was minimal.²³ This resulted in many blatant and revealing self-promotions by corporate military contractors.

At the time, the government was pouring millions of dollars into educational programs aimed at promoting the idea of “science for science’s sake” to the public and obscuring the ultimate objective of the continued expansion of science and technology for strategic Cold War projects. At this point, prior to the disastrous failures that have plagued NASA in the last three decades, space exploration was widely regarded by the public as noble and heroic. Much as the New World was viewed by Europeans in the age of empire as being a “new Eden”—an arena that was unsullied by human conflict—in 1964 the idea of space exploration existed in the public mind as distinct from military efforts. Since the government was minimally involved in the 1964 Fair, the science exhibits were controlled by corporate sponsors, whose primary focus was promoting and attaching meaning to their products.²⁴

Against the backdrop of the Cold War and the threat of nuclear annihilation, the Fair’s organizers located a convenient means for promoting militaristic and corporate interests in atomic and nuclear power while overlooking the anxieties associated with it.²⁵

At every turn, visitors were faced with images of space and the atom, beginning with the Fair icon, the Unisphere (which had the dimensions of the Earth viewed from 6 thousand miles in space) with its three satellites. The majority of technology-themed displays suggested the domestication of outer space by contextualizing it within familiar experience, and reinforcing the twin themes: “A Millennium of Progress” and “Man’s Achievements in an Expanding Universe.”²⁶

The U.S. Space Park, for example, cosponsored by NASA and the Defense Department, allowed visitors to walk among, touch, and pose beside full-scale models of an Apollo capsule, a Telstar satellite, the “business end of [a] Saturn C-5” moon rocket, a Titan II booster with its two-man Gemini capsule, an Atlas with its Mercury capsule, Scott Carpenter’s Mercury capsule as well as replicas of un-manned modules. Many satellites were on display, including the Mariner II Venus probe, and Syncom, Telstar, Relay and

²³ In contrast, the federal government spent 10 million dollars on the sophisticated science pavilion at the Seattle fair as a response to the launch of Sputnik.

²⁴ Smith, p. 230.

²⁵ In July of 1963, the US, Soviet Union and Britain signed the first Partial Test Ban Treaty, banning atmospheric testing of nuclear weapons. Despite this effort to ensure the population that nuclear power could be harnessed and controlled for the benefit of all, the still-anxious American public was further shaken in November by the assassination of president Kennedy by a former defector to the Soviet Union. In 1964, during the Fair, the slain president’s vision of lunar exploration was rendered even more tangible when Ed White took the first “space walk” while tethered to Gemini 4. Soon after, Ranger 7 dropped onto the surface of the moon and relayed pictures to the satellite Echo 2. These highly detailed images were published in the daily papers. This listing of events that coincided with the Fair was compiled from the Smith and Dickstein readings.

²⁶ Smith, p. 232.

Echo communications satellites, Tiros and Nimbus weather satellites and Explorer and Discoverer research satellites. Thus, as Smith suggests, the “normally unapproachable” massively scaled hardware of space and missile technology was tamed by visitor proximity.²⁷ Inside the adjacent pavilions, audiences could view a selection of moon-travel themed multimedia films. The ride “The Past is Prologue” took viewers from Western scenes with Conestoga wagons to a climax on a “galactic frontier”.

In addition to US Space Park, many states that were home to aerospace researchers, designers and manufacturers commissioned displays that further domesticated these projects. The Missouri Pavilion, for instance, featured the St. Louis-based McDonnell Corporation’s full-sized models of Mercury and Gemini capsules exhibited alongside Lindbergh’s “Spirit of St. Lewis”, thus situating space exploration within a more familiar context of the of aviation history. The huge GM pavilion included a prototype for a space research station featuring a solar space mirror, a lunar vehicle and what was promoted as the “world’s largest” cosmic-ray spark chamber.

Most corporate pavilions built on this theme by anticipating the future in space. The roof of the Kodak building offered a “moonscape” for “family snapshots in outer space” and the American Interiors-sponsored “Moon Room” featured translucent minimalist furniture, perfect for dining in outer space.

Representations of nuclear technology, Smith suggests, “pursued even more emphatically the domestication of a new technology”. GE sponsored “Progressland”, where visitors could witness a “Fusion Demonstration”. The Atomic Energy Commission sponsored “Atomsville, USA” where, according to Fair publicists, youngsters could “activate two dozen simulated nuclear experiments” behind a barricade marked “Children Only”. The favorite attraction were the “pedal driven generators”—stationary bicycles on which the children could compare their energy-generating capacity with that of a nuclear power plant.²⁸ The Office of Civil Defense even sponsored an exhibit on the causes and nature of radiation. Downplaying the risks (of course), the exhibit sought to reassure the public that it was no worse than the usual natural threats.

The luxuriously appointed Underground House promoted the advantages of underground living. Visitors were invited to “dial” the desired levels of electrical sunshine, twilight, moonlight and starlight and to select the geographic and seasonal view outside the underground windows. Promoting the shelter as “the ultimate in privacy”, the designer praised it for providing protecting from all the “hazards of modern living, including pollution, pollen, noise and radioactive fallout”. As Smith suggests, the Underground House exhibit domesticated the bomb and bomb-centric design, by likening thermonuclear war to an annoyance on the level of noisy neighbors.²⁹ In this way, the Fair dispersed a sense of optimism for the wonders and powers of the “peaceful atom”.

²⁷ Ibid, p. 232.

²⁸ Ibid, p. 233.

²⁹ Ibid, p. 234.

Many of the Fair's displays focused on the future and situated the viewer in fantastic, previously uninhabitable environments made possible through new technology. These visions of the future reaffirm Rubinoff's suggestion that the absurdist culture that had dominated since the Cuban Missile Crisis holds no prospect for a future. As Smith notes, it is interesting that, in the context of the 1964 Fair, all visions of the future situated humans in an alien environment that was made inhabitable only by some new invention that was, or soon would be patented, developed and sold by one of the corporate sponsors.

The most detailed vision of the future was presented at Futurama II, the ride featured in the General Motors pavilion. Designed by Norm Bel Geddes, the original Futurama had been a highlight of the 1939 World Fair. Interestingly, it visualized the predicted "highway world of 1960", where elevated superhighways coursed among the skyscrapers populating the City of Tomorrow. This Utopian scheme was adapted from widely known plans devised in the interwar period by Le Corbusier. It was utilized by GM as a means of promoting a future free from mass transit.

The "new" Futurama of 1964 turned away from the earth-bound Utopia of its predecessor. Instead, it promised a look at "the developments that await man in the very near future—predictions solely based on fact."³⁰ The new highways of the future would take voyagers to the far reaches of planet Earth and beyond.

Futurama II took visitors to the moon, Antarctica, the jungle, and the desert, a succession of what Smith calls "techno colonies". All of these alien environs we depicted as being tamed by GM products—refrigerators, automobiles controlled not by individual drivers but central command centers, and nuclear-powered road builders that would make way for new highway systems. This attraction, particularly within the context of this Fair, conveyed powerful messages about the social meanings of technology as Smith demonstrates. Combined, the Fair's many displays promoted a vision of the future that displaced all other possibilities.

The Futurama's techno-colonies promoted the idea that in the future people would live in places that were presently uninhabitable. Smith examined this design choice as a product of the project of "global engineering" ethos that flourished in the United States from the 1930s until the 1960s.³¹ Here the metaphor of the American frontier became solidly linked with technological development.

The principle attribute of this project, was a rhetoric of man's conquest of nature. As the Futurama guidebook promised, "Everywhere you go, you will see man conquering new worlds". The message was that the future existed on "new frontiers" that, through massive

³⁰ Smith, p. 236. Quoted from General Motors, "Let's Go to the Fair and Futurama: NYSF 1964-1965" (guidebook, undated).

³¹ Ibid, p. 239.

effort, could become livable and productive. The road builder, as Smith suggested, also articulated the conquest of adversaries in the marketplace or the world of nations.³²

While this vision conveniently assigned contemporary corporate powers a critical role in future human endeavors, it also sidestepped the problems of the present and the audience's increasing awareness of those problems. The reign of the road-builder, for instance, had already been challenged by the publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* in 1962 and the Wilderness Act was passed in 1964. Ralph Nader had also issued a very public challenge to the safety and environmental hazards of American auto manufacturers.

As Smith suggested, the future-utopian visions of the road builder in the jungle was severely disrupted by President Johnson's Gulf of Tonkin Resolution during the Fair's second season. As the US involvement in Vietnam escalated, Futurama's vision of a new Eden in the jungle seemed perverse as Americans witnessed a wholly new and decidedly un-Edenic view of the jungle.

Futurama and the Fair as a whole also ignored the developing Feminist movement, which had entered the mainstream with the publication of Friedan's *Feminine Mystique* in 1963. The Fair was equally blind to issues of race and class. Of course, Futurama's vision was untouched by the Civil Rights acts that were passed during the Fair's run, as well as the Watts Riots and the assassination of Malcolm X. Johnson's War on Poverty, and the realities that necessitated it, were equally ignored.³³

Bruno LaTour proposed a theory for understanding the process by which scientific discoveries and designs are enclosed in a "black box" that passes the finished product off as inevitable, obscuring other contentions or competing explanations. As Smith has argued, the 1964 Fair exhibitors also adopted what was essentially a "black box" approach to the display of new technology-based products, resulting in "technological determinism". Thus, the human beings behind the machines and the social relations governing the design and production process---the "very substance of technological development"—were obscured.³⁴

According to LaTour, while scientists and engineers are in the process of testing ideas and developing products, they do not and in fact, can not separate the content of their work from its context. But, the design or explanation that overtakes the others and is presented to the public necessarily tries to obscure the process, the choices and the struggle. Thus, the product or design seems to the public to be an inevitable outcome even though many other contingencies were entirely possible. Smith even suggests that as the processes

³² Ibid, p. 240.

³³ Ibid, pp. 242-243.

³⁴ Ibid, pp. 226-227. Smith summarizes the ideas Bruno Latour outlined in *Science in Action: How to Follow Scientists and Engineers through Society*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press (1987).

related to the production of new technologies became more closed in the twentieth century, the depiction of these technologies in public forums also became more closed.³⁵

The implications of this theory for the display of technology-driven development at this Fair is quite obvious. The engineers and designers, Von Braun chief among them, are fully aware of the historical, political and social context in which they are working, and yet they purposely cultivate an outcome that completely whitewashes that context. The display of these inventions at the Fair, and the attempts at normalizing them for the sake of consumption, attempts to further disassociate them from any context, and perhaps most importantly, to remove any questions of the necessity, effectiveness or legitimacy of these programs and their dominance over American life.

I would also like to consider the implications of Latour's theory for design and production process leading to the exhibition of the Pop art displays at the Fair. Is it possible that, in mimicking the modes of factory production, these artists also sought to obscure the artistic process and social context in which their works were produced? We know, based on the many interviews given by this group of artists, that they sought to mystify the creative process and to promote themselves as masters (Warhol and Rauschenberg in particular).

These were not novel in themselves, having been cultivated in Renaissance and shared by artists since that time. What is unprecedented about the Pop artists, though, is that instead of rooting their work in the history of art, by obscuring the context in which their work was produced, they completely disengaged from this history. Despite the fact that their visual language appears to be rooted in popular experience, in mimicking the "black-box" method of industrial design and display, the Pop art presented at the Fair stood apart from the established knowledge base of art history, which is paramount to Jeffrey Rubinoff.³⁶ In refusing to share their knowledge and their approach, the Pop artists resisted the traditional moral imperative for art in times of extreme human difficulty. Pop artists resisted this possibility and adopted the means of the military industrial complex instead. Within the context of the 1964 World's Fair, where Pop art was first presented to the public, it became embedded in the public mind as a component of the "corporate futurism" that was so carefully cultivated by the sponsors for the presentation of new technology---namely space travel and nuclear power.

Smith argues, however, that the process of moving toward closure is not as "elegant or complete" as the model proposed by Latour.³⁷ While designers, particularly the designers of nuclear weapons and other military technology, seek closure, they never fully realize it. If we look to the "users" of these products, we find that they do have the capacity to reshape the artifact.

³⁵ Ibid, pp. 228-229.

³⁶ Rubinoff, "The Importance of the History of Art".

³⁷ Ibid, p. 227.

Rubinoff urges artists to engage actively in oversight, to develop new knowledge in the face of new realities and to transfer that knowledge to an audience that is prepared to accept such information. For him this is the definition of moral imperative for artists, that they approach a body of information at the highest level in order to foster the highest value of interaction. Artists working during the very real threat of nuclear winter that defined the early to mid-1960s, could have adopted the objective of “getting into the brain” of the huge structure of the military industry. Modeled on the “survival sense”, Rubinoff argues that this approach allows humans, guided by artists, to transfer and develop new knowledge in the wake of a new set of realities. This, he argues, is the key to survival.

The threat of mutually assured destruction, as Smith demonstrated, upended existing narratives of conquest. Because Cold War political leaders could no longer openly pursue total military victory over adversaries, each side was forced to describe its arsenals and strategies as “defense” and “deterrence”.³⁸ In this context, he suggests that weapons became most useful for their display value in public forums such as the 1964 World’s Fair. The penultimate contradiction of the nuclear age is that the rhetoric of conquest was revised to describe a strategy of escape.³⁹ Ultimately, as Rubinoff has argued, this “strategy” confirms that there is no future. Futurama’s techno-colonies, as Smith suggested, are actually fallout shelters.

As Kristin Fedders has demonstrated, the Fair also failed to address the public’s growing concern that the increasing automation of human processes by computers posed a serious threat to human intellectual and creative primacy and, perhaps most pressing, to their jobs. In past fairs and expos, as Fedders has summarized, the fine art that was typically on display co-existed uneasily with the latest technologies being promoted. The public held fast to the notion that fine art offered “proof of the unique, creative capacities of humankind, capacities un-superseded by the machine”.⁴⁰

The Pop artists whose work was exhibited in the New York State Pavilion had embraced the mechanization of artistic production beginning in the previous decade. They used commercial materials and techniques such as industrial-quality paint and commercial-style screen printing. They developed huge factory operations involving many workers. Warhol’s infamous declaration that he wanted to *be* a machine summarized the shift in the early 1960s from the modernist vision of the artist at work in an isolated studio to a postmodernist critique of authorship that is implied in the factory model.⁴¹

³⁸ Ibid, p. 243.

³⁹ Ibid, p. 243.

⁴⁰ Kristin Utter Fedders, “Pop Art at the 1964/1965 World’s Fair.” Dissertation in Art History. University of Pennsylvania (2005), p. 22.

⁴¹ Caroline A. Jones, *Machine in the Studio: Constructing the Postwar American Artist*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press (1996), p. xvi.

In this era, Rosenquist and Lichtenstein pronounced a desire to “gear” themselves “like an advertiser or large company” for the production of “industrial painting”. Echoing their interests, Warhol proclaimed his desire to “be a machine” and was admittedly concerned with surface, pursuing the desires of the public buyer as a “consumer”.⁴²

As Jones has demonstrated, the Pop artists purposely moved away from the modernist/Romanticist notion of the single artist at work in the studio. Their idea of the studio in the 1960s was rooted in newly revised notions of Marx’s “technological sublime”, the “sometimes utopian sometimes cynical belief in technology as a pragmatic or aesthetic solution to the problems of the day.”⁴³ Aware of the pervasive “penetration of the technological into human nature,” the young artists of the sixties were compelled to produce iconic imagery that is “indexed” to technology, to the industrial order or the machine. They developed a means of production that “aspires to, or structurally resembles, an industrial process, and/ or a self-presentation on the part of the artist that implies a collaboratively generated technological solution or mechanistic goal”.⁴⁴ Thus, these artists attempted, according to Jones, to “offer a kind of sublimity in both the technological look, and the quasi-industrial production, of their art”.⁴⁵

While we can appreciate the prerogative of these artists to draw on contemporary reality to produce sublime visual works, we must acknowledge the fact that, in the process, they developed a rhetoric celebrating technology’s sublime power over nature.⁴⁶ They did this as Jones suggested, by aligning their art with models of postwar industrial management and a rapidly developing technocratic culture. The artist’s way of knowing the world, and the mode of artistic production, mirrored the processes—and absurdities--of the burgeoning military industrial complex precisely at the time when humanity needed artists to critique it as a means of extending the knowledge base and evolving consciousness.

This enacted new relationships between the artwork, the artist and the public, and prompted an interest in imagery that is instantly recognizable, drawing heavily on advertisements, news clippings, comic books and the new culture of the superhighway. The problem, as Jones outlined, was that, while these artists claimed to be drawing their source material from the “real world,” they only looked as far as the “real world” encapsulated in their own work.

This group of Pop artists exemplify what is still true of postmodernists—that they are, according to Griselda Pollock, “textually construed”—meaning that they are known only through multiple and conflicted readings of their writings and interviews. Thus, there is no possibility of an absorptive, profound experience with Pop art.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid, p. 55.

⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 55.

⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 55.

⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 55.

Initially, fairgoers were either repelled by the Pop art on display, or they considered it an extension of the flashy visual program of the Fair. On the first day Indiana's *E.A.T.* was illuminated, for example, a crowd lined up underneath it expecting fast food service. This was a certifiable instance of modern art establishing a connection to modern life, but of course, unless the public acknowledged *E.A.T.* as art, it can't really be counted.

In his failure to include any cues to aid the public's comprehension of these installations as art, Johnson and the art world in effect abandoned the masses of the Fair. As Fedders suggested, when left to their own devices, the majority of people inevitably choose the simpler, commercialized pleasures that were so readily available.⁴⁷ When situated within the context of the Fair for its public debut, Pop art became one consumer choice among many. This possibility was anticipated and even embraced by the contributors.

In an interview with Rosenquist, Gene Swenson summed up the art world's projection that the public would not be able to discern the Pop art exhibited at the Fair. He stated: "You worried some about the painting for the New York State Pavilion at the World's Fair, that it would be dwarfed by some hundred-foot bridge [projected on the large, outdoor screens] on the Kodak building." Rosenquist responded: "The picture at the World's Fair had a relation to the rest of the landscape, the huge buildings, the huge pink Kodacolor photographs. That painting had to exist on some other terms than those I usually deal with."⁴⁸

Max Kozloff confirmed that the Fair returned Pop art to its origins in consumer visual culture, removing from the public mind any reference to established art history or any critique of the mechanization of labor or the myth of the artist as creative master:

But one wonders if [Johnson] anticipated the effect of the Lichtenstein or Indiana...and the excellent...Rosenquist, blown up to epic proportions and clarioned outdoors for all to see. Deprived of their intimate gallery atmosphere, the silk-screen-transformed color photographic and billboard montages of the latter two artists are returned to their approximate point of origin, and the displacement which once gave them so much pungency is minimized. These works of art cease to be creative expressions intruding into the world of manufacture, and become instead equivocal flora of that world. An alarming cycle has been completed.⁴⁹

The exhibited Pop art was unpopular with the Fair-going public, which instead craved the classics on display in the Spanish (*Goya's Clothed Maja*) and Vatican (*Michelangelo's Pieta*) Pavilions, works that Jeffrey Rubinoff would consider to be the ultimate example of profound expression by an artist of mature conscience.

⁴⁷ Fedders, pp. 48-9.

⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 49. Quoted from G.R. Swenson, "F-111: An Interview with James Rosenquist" in *Partisan Review* 32 (Fall 1965), p. 595.

⁴⁹ Quoted by Fedders, p. 50. From Max Kozloff, "Pop on the Meadow," in *Nation* 199 (13 July 1964), p. 17.

The mass media largely overlooked the negative public reception for Pop art at the Fair. Instead, reviewers including Peter Benchley for *Newsweek*, lavished their praise, encapsulating Pop art within the excitement, energy and sensationalism of the Fair. Mashun suggests that the media saw itself reflected in this interpretation of Pop art. It was this aspect of Pop that was readily absorbed into mass culture towards the end of the Fair.⁵⁰

Calling Pop a “mass psyche” and suggesting that it had “captivated the Great Society, thrived on its prosperity and exploited its restlessness,” Benchley elevated this quotation from Warhol as exemplary of Pop’s aims: “Intellectuals still hate Pop. Average people like it. It’s easier to understand.”⁵¹

Benchley equated Pop art with comics, including the televised version of *Batman*, that had by 1966 spawned many countless bat-and-cape sets, bottles of bubble bath and “bat-to-school” themed supplies. Amazingly, by 1966, many major manufacturers had set up divisions of “pop style”.

Benchley enthusiastically promoted Pop as tool of escapism from “a complex, computerized, nuclear-ized world.” “Today,” he urged, retaliation “is collective, and the button-pusher is buried deep in the ground”.⁵²

And, severing any preconceived expectation that Pop art should or could be profound, that it might contain insights to be valued by future artists, Benchley concluded: “in a society that is so kinetic, so fickle, so impermanent, it is unlikely that any of today’s pop values will remain for long.” Benchley signed off with this profession by Warhol: “I guess it’ll all get so simple that everything will be art”.⁵³ By 1966, as Fedders demonstrated, mainstream had culture rapidly assimilated Pop art, anointing it the defining art movement of the 1960s.⁵⁴

Echoing Rubinoff’s asserting that the artist must possess a broad knowledge base and refer to art history in order to develop profound works for his or her own time, Thomas Hess argued in 1963 that the quality of Pop art’s connections to other art must be tested. “Great painters,” he wrote, “are chosen by their ancestors...Their commitments to history have the strength of the inevitable.” Pop artists, he wrote, “make a trivial contact with the past,” by “pick[ing] up a background as if they were gourmets of ideas.”⁵⁵

⁵⁰ Carol Anne Mahsun, Ed., *Pop Art: The Critical Dialogue*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Research Press (1989). p 167.

⁵¹ Peter Benchley, “Special Report: The Story of Pop,” in *Newsweek* (April 25, 1966). Reprinted in *Pop Art: The Critical Dialogue*, Ed. Carol Anne Mahsun. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Research Press (1989), p. 168.

⁵² *Ibid*, p. 174.

⁵³ *Ibid*, p. 174.

⁵⁴ Fedders, p. 9.

⁵⁵ Thomas Hess, “Pop and Public,” in *Pop Art: The Critical Dialogue*, Ed. Carol Anne Mahsun. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Research Press (1989), p. 109.

Hess also suggests that Pop developed with a “clockwork logic from the assumptions of abstract expressionism (i.e. Art can be Anything),” and that the quality of its connections to art history is “artificial and eclectic. Influences are picked with the nonchalance of punching a button on a jukebox.”⁵⁶

Considering a work from Andy Warhol’s *Death and Disasters* series of which *13 Wanted Men* is a part, David Moss described one example of Pop art that referenced art history and still contains no profound insights.

In his insightful analysis of Warhol’s evolution from painting to silk screening in the early 1960s, Moos demonstrated that the artist valued this medium because it afforded new opportunities for extending the Cubists’ experiments conflating flatness and depth, and then magnifying this effect. (For an example, see *Optical Car Crash* of 1962.) The image and the overall effect, thus, “[spill] into and [connect] with the space of the viewer”. Warhol valued the process as an opportunity to comprehend the “methods and meanings” of collage, and to “dissolve himself into painting, to metaphorically be both the object and the case shadow.” Moos suggests that the choice of subject matter related to violent death, “chimes ideally with his painterly technique, exploiting flatness to paradoxically articulate depth,” whether all subject matter “tumbles into focus through this arch trope of difference conducted on a smooth plane, pure presence versus absence, persona versus death”.⁵⁷ While Warhol does refer to art history in this example, the outcome is merely a simulation of surface effects.

If we accept this reading, it becomes clear that Pop art did not function to extend consciousness. Nor was that Warhol’s interest. As Rubinoff has suggested, Pop art, the newly re-formed art market and museum world, as well as the new educational curricula engendered by postmodernism, deny the artist’s imperative to extend consciousness. Pop art, in the context of the Fair and as it quickly circulated to a mass audience, was essentially regressive. For all the reasons and in all the ways discussed here, Pop artists failed to address the threat of nuclear winter. Their virtual autonomy in the 1960s and the long-lasting resonance of their ideas and methods, have lead to atrophy. The Pop artists failed to evolve new institutions after 1962, and their ideas have perhaps never been more deeply entrenched than they are in 2009. Today, as when Hess was writing on Pop art in 1962, “the sole requirement of a work of art is intent; what the artist says, goes.”⁵⁸

There would seem to be great value in Hess’s likening of Pop art and its “cool attitude towards tradition” to the immensely popular Salon art of the later 19th century. Like Pop art, officially sanctioned artists such as Bougereau and Bonheur claimed that their work was a function of the demands of a new audience, thus reversing the historical

⁵⁶ Ibid, p. 109.

⁵⁷ David Moos, “Andy Warhol, Painter,” in *Supernova: Stars, Deaths and Disasters: 1962-1964*. Ed. Douglas Fogle.. Minneapolis: Walker Art Center (2006), pp. 33-37.

⁵⁸ Hess, p. 109.

formulation: "GOD-to-ARTIST-to-PUBLIC."⁵⁹ In the pop factory and salon studio, as Hess suggested, the creative energy runs from the audience to the painter.

Hess offered a valuable interpretation of Pop art in this light. He suggested that they, like the 19th century salon artists, simultaneously work against and stimulate the "most vital pictorial traditions of their time". It is because they are distracted from the content of their art by the psychological implications of its subject matter that they memorialize the everyday, emphasizing its suggestions of fetishism. Both have a fondness for jokes and both evoke sentiment for the recent past, projecting, on the whole, a sense of a contented present.⁶⁰

As Lichtenstein said, "In parody the implication is the perverse, and I feel that in my own work I don't mean it to be that. Because I don't dislike the work that I'm parodying...The things that I have parodied I actually admire."

Art Historian and Humanist Peter Selz wrote that, as a teacher in the 1950s, during and after the McCarthy period, he noted the prevailing attitude among students was one of "apathy and dull acceptance." In that period, he often wondered what sort of art would be produced by those students, whom he described as responding to questions of "Why?" or even "No!" with "Great, man!" Considering the work produced by the Pop artists in the early 1960s, Selz wrote that he was not surprised "to see that some its members have chosen to paint the world just as they are told to see it, on its own terms. Far from protesting the banal and chauvinistic manifestations of our popular culture, the pop painters positively wallow in them."⁶¹

In light of the dominant interpretations of Pop art—that is subverts all that is crass and commercial in society by exposing and commenting upon it—it is imperative that we consider Hess's reading. The rhetoric of "problematization" and subversion dominates artist statements today. For those of us who question whether art really accomplishes these ends, we must be aware of recent history and art history in particular, in this era that, as Rubinoff suggests, is governed by the assumption that there is no future.

Rubinoff posits that the Pop artists and their descendants evade their social responsibility as artists, and neglected to evolve new models and new institutions in the aftermath of 1962. Donald Kuspit confirms that Pop art is not progressive and is in fact reactionary, evading the responsibility that "at first glance it seems to show".⁶²

⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 110.

⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 110.

⁶¹ Peter Selz, "The Flaccid Art," in *Pop Art: The Critical Dialogue*, Ed. Carol Mahsun. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Research Press (1989), p. 80. Reprinted from *Partisan Review* (Summer 1963).

⁶² Donald Kuspit, "Pop Art: A Reactionary Realism," in *Pop Art: The Critical Dialogue*, Ed. Carol Mashun. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Research Press (1989), p. 206. Reprinted from *Art Journal*, vol. 36, no. 1 (1976), pp. 31-38. p. 204.

He described the process through which pop art is created and experienced.

Pop art...first makes itself apparent as a communication of media cliché images rather than fine art ideas. However, its use of the media cliché image gives that image a spontaneous fine art--"higher"—meaning. The spectator, who initially viewed the media cliché as telling a kind of truth about the real world or at least in some sense corresponding to it, finds that "truth" hypostatized, raised to seemingly absolute status, by pop art's location of it in a fine art context. Pop art gilds an already gilded lily, seemingly making it sterling gold. Instead of enlightening the spectator by debunking the media cliché image as an instance of false consciousness, pop art gives it back to him writ large, with the sanctity of an art aura around it, as through it were an icon—the image over the altarpiece of commercial society. This generates some shame and self-preservative amusement ("camp"), some minimum irony at one's own expense: it is strange to see everyday idols in a position of overt power, exhibited for "esthetic" appreciation as well as information. But on the whole such exhibition causes no trouble, stirs no souls to their depths, except among the self-styled cognoscenti of the art world, the "purists" or esthetes who still want an exclusive culture, not realizing that their culture is as much a social disguise as popular culture, perhaps even more so.⁶³

Pop art, Adorno argues, furthers the "standardization of consciousness" by society, a process that Kuspit described as "its attempt to master our inner life for its own purposes". Paralleling Rubinoff's description of our contemporary dilemma, in 1976 Kuspit quoted Lawrence Alloway's discussion of Vincent Van Gogh's belief that clichés are "instruments of the standardization of consciousness as well as the form and content of such consciousness". While these clichés do bind us together, Kuspit argued that they are controlled thoughts or modes of thought control—"stereotyped ways of viewing reality, and as such false to its process". He wrote that, "they inhibit our penetration of social and personal reality, and repress our recognition of it. They restrict our search for its meaning to prescribed paths, and deny us any critical insight into its purposes." Or, as Allan Kaprow once asserted, "...publicity can in its own way create an equally magnificent image of a Buick as the Church once created an image of God."⁶⁴

In the early 1960s, Hess labeled museum officials, collectors and the art media as an "overeager audience of communicators" on art, suggesting that they work in unison to produce a "phony crisis" on the American scene. These professionals insisted that the profound issues of the day, particularly that of life in the aftermath of the bomb as treated by the Abstract Expressionists, had been resolved. Their "vulgar" reaction, he warned, would harm younger artists by "obscuring the nature of the real crisis which every painter must face in our society if he is to find his identity".⁶⁵

Mid-century thinker Herbert Read confirmed Rubinoff's insight on art as a biological phenomenon, which Karun Koernig has extended at this Forum. Present as a characteristic of the human race since soon after the species "emerged from obscurity," Read argues that art, "the skill required to give meaningful shape to human artifacts", was one of the

⁶³ Ibid, p. 206.

⁶⁴ Ibid, p. 208.

⁶⁵ Hess, p. 108.

agencies of that emergence".⁶⁶ The immediate purpose of the creative effort, he argued, was the:

...refinement of man's powers of perception and discrimination, and this purpose was achieved by an ever-progressive apprehension of the subtleties of form....any movement in history that leads to a dulling of the sensibilities, to a relaxation of the consciousness of form, is a retrograde movement, leading to the decline of human civilization. And that, I believe, is the present threat to our civilization.⁶⁷

Writing in 1965, Read expressed great concern that art has always been a vital mode of symbolic discourse. He considered the work of most Pop artists to be anti-art, not art, that was devoid of both symbol and discourse. Thus, he argued, there is no art. Read, like Rubinoff, considered it a betrayal of sacred trust to ignore this fact.

Read acknowledged the "genuine arts" of his day that were "engaged in a heroic struggle against mediocrity and mass values," warning that until the processes of standardization, destruction and disintegration are halted, art remains at risk of losing, of dying.

Jeffrey Rubinoff has been engaged in this heroic struggle for more than three decades, working here on Hornby Island to forge a future. For interested artists and arts educators, he provides a valuable model for cultivating a broad knowledge base and remaining accountable to art history. This allows him, through his work, to provide effective criticism of contemporary history and to initiate the evolution of novel institutions that are greatly needed at the present. By opening the Park to the public and initiating dialogues such as this one, he allows others the benefit of these insights.

⁶⁶ Herbert Read, "Disintegration of Form in Modern Art," in *Pop Art: The Critical Dialogue*, Ed. Carol Mahsun. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Research Press (1989), p. 89. Reprinted from *Studio International* (April 1965).

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, p. 90.

APPENDIX

Military-Industrial Complex Speech, Dwight D. Eisenhower, 1961

Public Papers of the Presidents, Dwight D. Eisenhower, 1960, p. 1035- 1040

My fellow Americans:

Three days from now, after half a century in the service of our country, I shall lay down the responsibilities of office as, in traditional and solemn ceremony, the authority of the Presidency is vested in my successor.

This evening I come to you with a message of leave-taking and farewell, and to share a few final thoughts with you, my countrymen.

Like every other citizen, I wish the new President, and all who will labor with him, Godspeed. I pray that the coming years will be blessed with peace and prosperity for all.

Our people expect their President and the Congress to find essential agreement on issues of great moment, the wise resolution of which will better shape the future of the Nation.

My own relations with the Congress, which began on a remote and tenuous basis when, long ago, a member of the Senate appointed me to West Point, have since ranged to the intimate during the war and immediate post-war period, and, finally, to the mutually interdependent during these past eight years.

In this final relationship, the Congress and the Administration have, on most vital issues, cooperated well, to serve the national good rather than mere partisanship, and so have assured that the business of the Nation should go forward. So, my official relationship with the Congress ends in a feeling, on my part, of gratitude that we have been able to do so much together.

II.

We now stand ten years past the midpoint of a century that has witnessed four major wars among great nations. Three of these involved our own country. Despite these holocausts America is today the strongest, the most influential and most productive nation in the world. Understandably proud of this pre-eminence, we yet realize that America's leadership and prestige depend, not merely upon our unmatched material progress, riches and military strength, but on how we use our power in the interests of world peace and human betterment.

III.

Throughout America's adventure in free government, our basic purposes have been to keep the peace; to foster progress in human achievement, and to enhance liberty, dignity and integrity among people and among nations. To strive for less would be unworthy of a free and religious people. Any failure traceable to arrogance, or our lack of comprehension or readiness to sacrifice would inflict upon us grievous hurt both at home and abroad.

Progress toward these noble goals is persistently threatened by the conflict now engulfing the world. It commands our whole attention, absorbs our very beings. We face a hostile ideology -- global in scope, atheistic in character, ruthless in purpose, and insidious in method. Unhappily the danger it poses promises to be of indefinite duration. To meet it successfully, there is called for, not so much the emotional and transitory sacrifices of crisis, but rather those which enable us to carry forward steadily, surely, and without complaint the burdens of a prolonged and complex struggle -- with liberty the stake. Only thus shall we remain, despite every provocation, on our charted course toward permanent peace and human betterment.

Crises there will continue to be. In meeting them, whether foreign or domestic, great or small, there is a recurring temptation to feel that some spectacular and costly action could become the miraculous solution to all current difficulties. A huge increase in newer elements of our defense; development of unrealistic programs to cure every ill in agriculture; a dramatic expansion in basic and applied research -- these and many other possibilities, each possibly promising in itself, may be suggested as the only way to the road we wish to travel.

But each proposal must be weighed in the light of a broader consideration: the need to maintain balance in and among national programs -- balance between the private and the public economy, balance between cost and hoped for advantage -- balance between the clearly necessary and the comfortably desirable; balance between our essential requirements as a nation and the duties imposed by the nation upon the individual; balance between actions of the moment and the national welfare of the future. Good judgment seeks balance and progress; lack of it eventually finds imbalance and frustration.

The record of many decades stands as proof that our people and their government have, in the main, understood these truths and have responded to them well, in the face of stress and threat. But threats, new in kind or degree, constantly arise. I mention two only.

IV.

A vital element in keeping the peace is our military establishment. Our arms must be mighty, ready for instant action, so that no potential aggressor may be tempted to risk his own destruction.

Our military organization today bears little relation to that known by any of my predecessors in peacetime, or indeed by the fighting men of World War II or Korea.

Until the latest of our world conflicts, the United States had no armaments industry. American makers of plowshares could, with time and as required, make swords as well. But now we can no longer risk emergency improvisation of national defense; we have been compelled to create a permanent armaments industry of vast proportions. Added to this, three and a half million men and women are directly engaged in the defense establishment. We annually spend on military security more than the net income of all United States corporations.

This conjunction of an immense military establishment and a large arms industry is new in the American experience. The total influence -- economic, political, even spiritual -- is felt in every city, every State house, every office of the Federal government. We recognize the imperative need for this development. Yet we must not fail to comprehend its grave implications. Our toil, resources and livelihood are all involved; so is the very structure of our society.

In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist.

We must never let the weight of this combination endanger our liberties or democratic processes. We should take nothing for granted. Only an alert and knowledgeable citizenry can compel the proper meshing of the huge industrial and military machinery of defense with our peaceful methods and goals, so that security and liberty may prosper together.

Akin to, and largely responsible for the sweeping changes in our industrial-military posture, has been the technological revolution during recent decades.

In this revolution, research has become central; it also becomes more formalized, complex, and costly. A steadily increasing share is conducted for, by, or at the direction of, the Federal government.

Today, the solitary inventor, tinkering in his shop, has been overshadowed by task forces of scientists in laboratories and testing fields. In the same fashion, the free university, historically the fountainhead of free ideas and scientific discovery, has experienced a revolution in the conduct of research. Partly because of the huge costs involved, a government contract becomes virtually a substitute for intellectual curiosity. For every old blackboard there are now hundreds of new electronic computers.

The prospect of domination of the nation's scholars by Federal employment, project allocations, and the power of money is ever present and is gravely to be regarded.

Yet, in holding scientific research and discovery in respect, as we should, we must also be alert to the equal and opposite danger that public policy could itself become the captive of a scientific technological elite.

It is the task of statesmanship to mold, to balance, and to integrate these and other forces, new and old, within the principles of our democratic system -- ever aiming toward the supreme goals of our free society.

V.

Another factor in maintaining balance involves the element of time. As we peer into society's future, we -- you and I, and our government -- must avoid the impulse to live only for today, plundering, for our own ease and convenience, the precious resources of tomorrow. We cannot mortgage the material assets of our grandchildren without risking the loss also of their political and spiritual heritage. We want democracy to survive for all generations to come, not to become the insolvent phantom of tomorrow.

VI.

Down the long lane of the history yet to be written America knows that this world of ours, ever growing smaller, must avoid becoming a community of dreadful fear and hate, and be instead, a proud confederation of mutual trust and respect.

Such a confederation must be one of equals. The weakest must come to the conference table with the same confidence as do we, protected as we are by our moral, economic, and military strength. That table, though scarred by many past frustrations, cannot be abandoned for the certain agony of the battlefield.

Disarmament, with mutual honor and confidence, is a continuing imperative. Together we must learn how to compose differences, not with arms, but with intellect and decent purpose. Because this need is so sharp and apparent I confess that I lay down my official responsibilities in this field with a definite sense of disappointment. As one who has witnessed the horror and the lingering sadness of war -- as one who knows that another war could utterly destroy this civilization which has been so slowly and painfully built over

thousands of years -- I wish I could say tonight that a lasting peace is in sight.

Happily, I can say that war has been avoided. Steady progress toward our ultimate goal has been made. But, so much remains to be done. As a private citizen, I shall never cease to do what little I can to help the world advance along that road.

VII.

So -- in this my last good night to you as your President -- I thank you for the many opportunities you have given me for public service in war and peace. I trust that in that service you find some things worthy; as for the rest of it, I know you will find ways to improve performance in the future.

You and I -- my fellow citizens -- need to be strong in our faith that all nations, under God, will reach the goal of peace with justice. May we be ever unswerving in devotion to principle, confident but humble with power, diligent in pursuit of the Nation's great goals.

To all the peoples of the world, I once more give expression to America's prayerful and continuing aspiration:

We pray that peoples of all faiths, all races, all nations, may have their great human needs satisfied; that those now denied opportunity shall come to enjoy it to the full; that all who yearn for freedom may experience its spiritual blessings; that those who have freedom will understand, also, its heavy responsibilities; that all who are insensitive to the needs of others will learn charity; that the scourges of poverty, disease and ignorance will be made to disappear from the earth, and that, in the goodness of time, all peoples will come to live together in a peace guaranteed by the binding force of mutual respect and love.

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