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'A Sign of Good Taste': Andy Warhol and the Rise of Brand Image Advertising

Anthony E. Grudin

In the slums ... the closer colors are to the rainbow, the more enticing they are.

—Louis Cheskin, Color Research Institute[1]

The working-class connotations of Warhol's very earliest pop paintings have long been recognised: 'crudely anonymous, out-of-date, tasteless trash', as Kirk Varnedoe memorably described them.[2] The 'brand image' artworks, by contrast — the neatly reproduced soup cans, cola bottles, and detergent boxes that Warhol began to make late in 1961 — have traditionally been interpreted as marking a shift from class-specific to universal imagery.

Hence, for Varnedoe:

> In choosing the Campbell's Soup cans in particular, Warhol moved out of the expressionist grunge of tabloid vulgarity towards the commonplace banality of middle-class commodities, and into a zone of commerce where time stood still. . . . As Warhol's later comments about Coca-Cola make clear, such consumables seemed to provide a steady common denominator of experience across every age and class (42).

This interpretive dichotomy — between works referencing 'tasteless trash' and those derived from 'common denominator[s] of experience across every age and class' — has been both seductive and misleading; it has allowed Warhol's interpreters to find in his mature pop works a universal Americanism that has proved compatible with a variety of critical viewpoints. This article will argue that, while Warhol's key motifs during this period aspired to universality, they clearly did not attain it immediately. The brand images Warhol borrowed — the so-called 'national' brands, advertised and distributed nationwide under brands owned by their manufacturer or distributer, like Coca-Cola, Campbell's Soup, and Brillo — were, during the late 1950s and early 1960s, being targeted specifically at working-class consumers, who were thought to be less likely than their wealthier and more educated peers to succumb to the growing appeal of 'private' or generic brands (products advertised by their retailer rather than their manufacturer or distributor, and produced and distributed without the benefit of national advertising). Thus, although some of Warhol's borrowed brands — Coke, Campbell's, Brillo, and Heinz — may now have reached a stage of perceived American ubiquity, this was not the case in the early 1960s when Warhol made them central subjects of his art. The classed specificity of these brands was widely reported in the contemporary discourses of marketing, and would likely have been familiar to anyone who, like Warhol, had established a position of prominence within the field during this period.[3] Understood in its context as an embattled and strategically active category, the brand image

1. Paraphrased in Vance Packard, *The Hidden Persuaders* (Van Rees: New York, 1957), p. 120.

2. Kirk Varnedoe, 'Campbell's Soup Cans, 1962', in Heiner Bastian (ed.), *Andy Warhol: Retrospective* (The Museum of Contemporary Art: Los Angeles, 2001), p. 42.

3. See Victor Bockris, *Warhol: The Biography* (Da Capo: New York, 2003), pp. 88, 100, 114.

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sheds new light on Warhol's early pop work and its cultural reception. Likewise, Warhol's reconfigurations of these brand images reframe the strengths and weaknesses of an ambitious marketing strategy that remains powerful and pervasive to this day.

The invisibility of the social history of Warhol's brand image motifs has underwritten the most ambitious and influential readings of his work.[4] Again and again, across a variety of political and hermeneutical frames of reference, we are told that Warhol's motifs appealed to 'everyone', or that they rendered the problem of class irrelevant. For Arthur Danto, art and the everyday became visually indistinguishable in Warhol's brand image art because it 'redeemed the signs that meant enormously much to everyone, as defining their daily lives'.[5] For Fredric Jameson, Warhol's work epitomised a new era of postmodern superficiality, since, 'There is . . . in Warhol no way to complete the hermeneutic gesture and restore to these oddments that whole larger context of the dance hall or the ball, the world of jetset fashion or glamour magazines'.[6] For Benjamin Buchloh, Warhol's achievement is to have demystified the idea of the artist: 'one important quality of Warhol's work . . . is its capacity to suspend the traditional function of iconographic representation, cancelling out traditional iconographic readings. There is a degree of randomness, arbitrariness in the various objects that are chosen'.[7] Mary Anne Staniszewski puts the point even more sharply: 'Pop represents the language of images circulated within the mass media where all sense of origin and concrete substance dissolves'.[8]

While Warhol's recent commentators have tended to emphasise the ubiquity and universality of the branded image, some of his earliest critics took the specificities of his subject matter more seriously. As is often the case, pop's harshest critics were sometimes best able to pinpoint its underlying connotations; their responses were lodged early on, while pop's acceptability and worthiness for exhibition were still in question. Reviewing Lawrence Alloway's 'Six Painters and the Object' exhibit at the Guggenheim in 1963, Barbara Rose rejected Roy Lichtenstein's paintings in the following terms:

> I find his images offensive; I am annoyed to have to see in a gallery what I'm forced to look at in the supermarket. I go to the gallery to get away from the supermarket, not to repeat the experience.[9]

On Rose's account, pop's context was all too apparent; there was something overbearing, aggressive, and decidedly unfamiliar about the supermarket and its wares. The specific logic behind Rose's aversion to the world of the supermarket was left unspoken in her article, but her anxieties were shared by other prominent critics. Speaking in 1962 at a symposium on pop art, Hilton Kramer voiced his displeasure with pop's consequences:

> Its social effect is simply to reconcile us to a world of commodities, banalities, and vulgarities – which is to say an effect indistinguishable from advertising art. This is a reconciliation that must – now more than ever – be refused, if art – and life itself – is to be defended against the dishonesties of contrived public symbols and pretentious commerce.[10]

Kramer's use of the term 'reconcile' is noteworthy: pop was reconciling its audience with commercialism, just as advertisements did. Like Rose's, Kramer's world was still at odds with this commercialism. His reference to advertising's 'contrived public symbols' directly contradicted future claims for the ubiquity and universality of these images, implying instead that they had

4. There have been a few exceptions: see Mark Francis, 'No There There or Horror Vacui: Andy Warhol's Installations', in Martin Schwander (ed.), *Andy Warhol: Paintings 1960–1986* (Hatje: Stuttgart, 1995), p. 67; John Roberts, 'Warhol's "Factory": Painting and the Mass-Cultural Spectator', in Paul Wood (ed.), *Varieties of Modernism* (Yale University Press: New Haven, 2004), p. 357; and Mary Harron, 'Pop Art/Art Pop: The Warhol Connection', *Melody Maker*, 16 February 1980, p. 21: 'Warhol's soup cans stood for everything that was trashy, disposable and mass-produced in American life'.

5. Arthur Danto, *Beyond the Brillo Box: The Visual Arts in Post-Historical Perspective* (Farrar Straus Giroux: New York, 1992), p. 41. See also Michael J. Golec, *The Brillo Box Archive: Aesthetics, Design, and Art* (Dartmouth College Press: Hanover, 2008).

6. Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Duke University Press: Durham, 1991), pp. 8–9.

7. 'Discussion', in Gary Garrels (ed.), *The Work of Andy Warhol* (Bay: Seattle, 1989), p. 127. In recent years, scholarly investigations of the racial and sexual dimensions of Warhol's production have dramatically enlivened questions of audience and iconography, but they have thus far concentrated on Warhol's more anthropomorphic motifs (see particularly Richard Meyer, 'Warhol's Clones', *The Yale Journal of Criticism*, vol. 7, no. 1, 1994, pp. 79–109, and Anne Wagner, 'Warhol Paints History, or Race in America', *Representations*, vol. 55, Summer, 1996, pp. 98–119); brand image artworks have remained mostly outside of their purview. In his 'Modes of Disclosure: The Construction of Gay Identity and the Rise of Pop Art', Kenneth E. Silver makes the crucial point that Warhol's 'class origins and his sexual preferences could be expressed in one utterance, for on the common ground of "camp," that is to say in popular culture, the working class and the homosexual meet' (in Russell Ferguson (ed.), *Hand-Painted Pop: American Art in Transition, 1952–1962* (The Museum of Contemporary Art: Los Angeles, 1992), p. 198). See also Jonathan Flatley, 'Warhol Gives Good Face: Publicity and the Politics of Prosopopoeia', in Jennifer Doyle, Jonathan Flatley, and José Esteban Muñoz (eds), *Pop Out: Queer Warhol* (Duke University Press: Durham, 1996), pp. 101–33.

8. 'Capital Pictures', in Paul Taylor (ed.), *Post-Pop Art* (MIT Press: Cambridge, 1989), p. 168.

9. Barbara Rose, 'Pop Art at the Guggenheim', [1963]; reprinted in Steven Henry Madoff (ed.), *Pop Art: A Critical History* (University of California Press: Berkeley, 1997), p. 84.

10. Peter Selz and others, 'A Symposium on Pop Art', *Arts*, vol. 37, no. 7, April 1963, pp. 38–9.

11. Other critics had only vaguely been able to ascribe a class identity to these new images and objects. Max Kozloff described pop as 'the pinheaded and contemptible style of gum chewers, bobby soxers, and worse, delinquents', ('"Pop" Culture, Metaphysical Disgust, and the New Vulgarians', *Art International*, March 1962, pp. 35–6), while Sidney Tillim identified the class of the objects for sale in Claes Oldenburg's *The Store* as 'no higher than middle' ('Month in Review: New York Exhibitions', *Arts Magazine*, February 1962, pp. 34–7).

been produced by one group in order to appeal to another while appearing universal. Rose's and Kramer's rejections of pop art can plausibly be chalked up to snobbery and art-world elitism; in this case, however, snobbery and elitism, registered before pop had been completely accepted into the art world, seem to have helped these critics to see the implications of the pop iconography more clearly than did many of their peers.

It was the poet Stanley Kunitz – speaking at The Museum of Modern Art in New York alongside Kramer and sharing his antipathies towards the symposium's subject – who was best able to sum up the social dimension of pop's imagery and the stakes of its obsession with the American supermarket:

> Pop art rejects the impulse towards communion; most of its signs and slogans and stratagems come straight out of the citadel of bourgeois society, the communications stronghold where the images and desires of mass man are produced, usually in plastic (42).

Like Kramer, Kunitz emphasised the falseness of pop's chosen motifs, their dissimilarity to true communication or 'communion'. But Kunitz's description stood out among the early responses to pop and to Warhol because of its willingness to introduce the notion of class strategy into its interpretive framework.[11] Kunitz, who had worked as a newspaper reporter and as an editor at H. W. Wilson, was able to see the true strategic import of pop themes and preoccupations. In Kunitz's formulation, pop derived its themes from imagery produced within 'the citadel of bourgeois society', a 'communications stronghold' that manufactured 'the images and desires of mass man'. The 'signs and slogans and stratagems' pop appropriated *belonged* neither to the working nor the vaguely defined 'middle classes', nor could they unproblematically be attributed to the bourgeoisie. Instead, during the late 1950s and early 1960s, they could best be understood as produced by one class – the bourgeoisie – and targeted directly at another – the working class, Kunitz's 'mass man'. The key arena for the offensive Kunitz described was the American supermarket, and the key commodity was the national brand.

The Function of the Brand Image

It turns out that the advertising industry's own understanding of brand images during the 1950s and early 1960s was far closer to Kunitz's and Rose's than to Danto's or Buchloh's. For all their perceived ubiquity today, brand images were, by the late 1950s, being described by their creators as both deeply vulnerable and fundamentally targeted and manipulative.

Writing in 1957, William D. Tyler laid out the formidable strengths of the brand image approach:

> This is advertising that sells by implanting a *literal* image in the consumer's mind. A visual image. A *picture*. . . . The lettering on the Colgate toothpaste carton says Colgate so distinctively that the word need not be read. These are visual images that are 'branded' into people's mind.

Tyler's is one of the frankest descriptions the brand image received during this period; the passage seems to call forth a new world of subliminal advertising, to which all would be susceptible. But the article culminated in a series of arguments that distinctly narrowed the reach of this audience:

> In the bewildering maze of today's advertising, an imposing percentage of Americans look at our advertising without consciously seeing it.... It can be argued that these are dull, unimaginative clods whose emotions cannot be stirred by pictures, words, or song. ...But these same people have to go to the food store and the drug store and select branded merchandise off the shelf just like other people. How do they do it? [...] They reach out with their hand and pick up the package with the brand name they feel familiar with – the one they feel right about – the one they know or think they know. These are the forgotten people – forgotten by advertising, that is.... They *want* to play follow-the-leader. That way they know they will not go wrong. How can they do it? They can do it if the advertising they do not consciously look at dins into their minds a simple, memorable, repetitive visual symbol of that brand name enough times so that it becomes part of their daily living, one of those familiar talismans on which they can rely rather than making independent decisions (164-5).

The passage is remarkable both for its frankness and its condescension. Ironically, there are clear echoes of Vance Packard's *The Hidden Persuaders* throughout, which had been published to wide acclaim only six months earlier. But where Packard's book condemned the advertising industry for 'subliminally' manipulating its consumers, Tyler's article represented one of the industry's leading lights bragging to his peers about the depths and breadths of this manipulation.[12] It is critical to recognise that, for Tyler, there was absolutely nothing neutral or transparent about a brand image; it was something consumers 'know or think they know', a 'talisman' that bypasses or short-circuits the consumer's ability to make 'independent decisions'. Yes, as Danto argued, this image 'becomes part of their daily living', but only through force, through non-conscious and manipulative exposure and repetition. On Tyler's view, the brand image was meant to simulate and ultimately to replace the work previously done by circuitries of social experimentation and emulation; instead of 'following-the-leader', the branded consumer followed a mark that had been imprinted in her mind through repetition. The universality so often ascribed to Warhol's chosen motifs was, in his own time, actively being produced, disseminated, and disguised as a fact of life, a socially determined tradition. To treat these motifs retroactively as unproblematic is to refuse to see their history and their function in their own time.[13]

But there are other important facts to glean from Tyler's description. The question of class – the different economic classes of consumers and the different ways to target them – did not appear explicitly in Tyler's argument, although it was implied throughout. The paragraphs just quoted focused on 'the forgotten people', 'dull, unimaginative clods' who were 'not bright enough to be convinced by our most cogent sales arguments'. But even 'clods' needed *something* from the products they buy: 'they need this feeling of reassurance and familiarity.... They want to play follow-the-leader. That way they know they will not go wrong'.

These final phrases – in many ways, the proposition of the article as a whole – call to mind a discourse that may already have been familiar to Tyler in 1957, and that was to become very widely propagated in the following years. Tyler's claim – that some consumers derive their social standing from the familiarity of brand name products – became the key conclusion of research being funded and disseminated by Macfadden Publications, Inc., a company that produced magazines like *True Story, True Romances*, and *True Experiences* for an almost exclusively working-class audience.[14] Where Tyler only implicitly identified the disadvantaged consumer as being most susceptible to the brand image, Macfadden Inc. explicitly singled out the working-class consumer as the solution to what they called 'the battle of the brands'. A closer look at the

12. On the subject of advertising as manipulation, and its relation to pop art, the artist Dan Graham has suggestively remarked that 'America of that time, for that generation, was officially liberal, permissive. It congratulated itself on having stopped the fascist countries and in moving beyond that period. But consciously there was a troubling thought that these fascist structures had actually infiltrated mass psychological subliminal consciousness through advertising. I think Pop art was alluding to this...' 'Dan Graham Interviewed by Ludger Gerdes', in Alexander Alberro (ed.), *Two-Way Mirror Power: Selected Writings by Dan Graham on His Art* (MIT Press: Cambridge, 1999), p. 71.

13. The new prominence of the brand image was briefly addressed by the Independent Group architectural critic Reyner Banham in 1961: 'BRAND IMAGE (OR HOUSE STYLE). During the 1950s, it became the practice in all large industrial concerns to inculcate into the minds of the public a recognisable style to identify their products or services.... Where unification of style ... was undertaken as part of an advertising campaign it was called 'fixing the brand image" ('An Alphabetical Chronicle of Landmarks and Influences, 1951–1961', originally published in *Architectural Review*, vol. 130, July 1961, pp. 43–8. Reprinted in Foster and Francis (eds), *Pop: Themes and Movements*, p. 213).

14. See Ann Fabian, 'Making a Commodity of Truth: Speculations on the Career of Bernarr Macfadden', *American Literary History*, vol. 5, no. 1, Spring 1993, pp. 51–76, and Shelley Nickles, 'More is Better: Mass Consumption, Gender, and Class Identity in Postwar America', *American Quarterly*, vol. 54, no. 4, December 2002, pp. 581–622, which addresses the influence of Macfadden's class-based arguments on industrial design.

15. Throughout most of the analysis that follows, I have chosen to discuss the ways in which brand images were marketed to working-class consumers without extensive discussion of these consumers' gender. My research has found that, although some of the discourses of marketing during this period conceptualised their working-class targets as women or 'wives', their arguments and analysis privileged class over gender. The differences between women – and class differences above all others – were what counted for the success of national brands. And, while some analyses did focus specifically on working-class women, other prominent versions, like those of Tyler and Pierre Martineau did not; Tyler's 'dull, unimaginative clods' were not gender specific. A 1957 study entitled 'The American Male... On Ascendancy as Force in Food Purchases', claimed that 40% of food shoppers were male, and that the men were 'much more prone to impulse buying than women' (June Owen, 'Food: Did I Buy That?' *New York Times*, 31 May 1957, p. 32). As Vance Packard put it in *The Hidden Persuaders*, 'Apparently the only people who are more prone to splurging when they get in a supermarket than housewives are the wives' husbands and children' (p. 111). In 1968, Jean Baudrillard made the intriguing suggestion that 'what we are seeing very generally today is the *extension of the feminine model to the whole field of consumption* . . . . Entire classes are thus fated, in the image of Woman (who, as Woman/Object remains emblematic of consumption), to *function* as consumers' (*The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures* [trans. by Chris Turner, Sage Publications: Thousand Oaks, 1998], p. 98). Baudrillard's argument could potentially bridge the gap between the arguments presented in this essay, which focuses on class, and the work of scholars like Cécile Whiting and Andreas Huyssen who have emphasised 'the gendered difference between high art and mass culture' (Whiting, 'Borrowed Spots: The Gendering of Comic Books, Lichtenstein's Paintings, and Dishwasher Detergent', *American Art*, vol. 6, no. 2, Spring 1992, p. 19).

16. 'A & P Supermarket advertisement', *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 9 September 1956, p. 27.

17. Carl Spielvogel, 'Battle of Brands Growing Fiercer', *New York Times*, 11 November 1956, p. 185.

18. Fred Farrar, 'Store Display Ad Group Eyes Sunny Trend', *Chicago Tribune*, 14 October 1963, p. C8.

19. Peter Bart, 'Advertising: Competing with House Brands', *New York Times*, 12 November 1962, p. 45.

20. Bart, 'House Brands', p. 45.

21. Peter Bart, 'Advertising: Blue Collars and Brand Names', *New York Times*, 14 August 1961, p. 34.

Macfadden argument reveals Tyler's dysphemisms for what they were: a way of describing the working class and their supposed vulnerabilities to advertising without directly naming them.[15]

Battle of the Brands: Class Strategies

From a twenty-first century vantage point, where brands seem to have colonised every area not just of consumption and production and leisure, but of life itself, it is hard to imagine a relatively recent moment when the brand strategy was in crisis. And yet such a crisis was widely reported in the late 1950s, and would have been familiar to anyone – like Kunitz, Warhol, or Tyler – who had recently worked in the fields of news, media, or marketing. The perceived problem, in the mid- to late 1950s and early 1960s, was that national brands were losing significant ground to their private brand competitors. A 1956 A&P Supermarket advertisement from *The Chicago Times* is indicative of this trend; the full-page ad, listing dozens of items, includes only one national brand image: Campbell's Soup, soon to become one of Warhol's favourite motifs.[16] A *New York Times* article from 1956 entitled 'Battle of Brands Growing Fiercer: Retailers Using Own Labels to Bolster Their Profits and Foil Discounters' described the situation as follows:

> The battle of the brands is intensifying.
> Arrayed on one side are manufacturers with well-established national brands. Opposing them are retailers with their newer but rapidly gaining private brands. The fight for sales is sharpest in department stores and supermarkets. . . . The new stress on private brands is attributable to the fact that retailers are desperately striving to improve their dwindling profit margins.[17]

The article's glum tone echoed the advertising industry's overall response to the rise of the private brand. Madison Avenue had a significant vested interest in the success of national brands; in many ways, the fate of these brands was a verdict on the effectiveness of advertising: ' . . . many people in advertising, particularly in the agency and media fields, look upon the trend with a certain amount of alarm (mainly because one of the biggest factors setting private brands apart from name brands is the fact that they are not heavily advertised, if at all) . . . '.[18] According to a 1962 *New York Times* article, '[the] extraordinary growth of private label products has caused concern among advertising agencies and the success of these products has forced many makers of brand name goods to reduce prices and curtail advertising budgets to meet competition'.[19] The president of Compton Advertising, Inc. was cited in the article as claiming that, in one major chain store, generic labels accounted for 85% of orange juice sales and 33% of instant coffee and light-duty detergent sales. The same article cited the president of Seagram and Sons, who promised to send a letter to every Seagram employee requesting that in the future she purchase only 'well known advertised brands', and to encourage other executives to forward the same request to their own employees.[20]

At the height of this perceived crisis, Macfadden Publications launched an ambitious advertising campaign advancing an alternate solution. Instead of continuing to throw good advertising money after bad, Macfadden proposed that national brands think more critically about the constituencies they intended to target. The Macfadden campaign began with a bang on the morning of 14 August 1961, when 'a score of [advertising] space salesmen . . . set out on visits to leading advertising agencies carrying lunch pails ["a symbol of the blue collar working class"] instead of attaché cases'.[21] The basic thrust of

Macfadden's theory of working-class buying habits was straightforward: Working-class customers – Tyler's 'dull, unimaginative clods', Kunitz's 'mass men' – could be relied upon to value national brands, where their middle and upper class counterparts could not. Macfadden justified this hypothesis with two interrelated arguments: working-class consumers were willing to pay more for national brands both because they valued the status accrued thereby, and because they were not sufficiently educated to recognise that advertising was deceptive, since nationally branded and privately branded products were qualitatively indistinguishable.

> The blue collar person depends on brands as status symbols.... Unlike the white collar wife, the working class wife is not suspicious of advertising as a 'hidden persuader'. She prefers and wants to lean on the security she gets from buying national brands.

The *Times* solicited opposing viewpoints, but these did little to undermine Macfadden's case. Macfadden ended up with the last word: 'there are 26,000,000 working class housewives in the United States, and they control 57.5 per cent of total discretionary spending ... "This is a vast new marketing frontier and we are going out and exploiting it" [Robert L. Young, Vice President of Macfadden Publications]'.

Macfadden supplemented its lunch pail campaign with a remarkable series of fullpage newspaper advertisements that ran through most of 1961 and 1962 – the very moment when Warhol was first producing and exhibiting his brand image artworks. The first such advertisement (Fig. 1) – which appeared on the same day in the *Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and the *Chicago Tribune* – featured a large picture of a breaking wave, captioned 'Surging ahead', and asserted that 'Macfadden's expansion program is founded on one widely unrecognized, yet now fully documented truth: *middle-class communications media, especially middle-class magazines, do NOT effectively reach the mass consumer. ...* This is Macfadden's conviction: the battle of the national brands will be won or lost depending on the attitudes of *mass*, not middle-class, consumers'.[22]

This bold claim was reinforced in at least four more full-page ads, each titled with a provocative headline and then filled from margin to margin with three columns of densely packed text. The headlines spoke directly to the anxieties surrounding national brands: 'Can Advertising Block Sales?' (12/20/61, 68) (Fig. 2); 'The Quality Revolution – New Hope for National Brands' (3/7/1962, 72); 'Who Needs National Brands?' (4/11/1962, 88); 'Which Half of the Market Needs National Brands?' (5/16/1962, 84). The accompanying texts reiterated and expanded the lunch pail campaign's key points. Macfadden's recommended class strategy was juxtaposed to conventional marketing, which promised that 'classes sell the masses': 'advertise to the people at the top and the masses will follow'.

> That's where the trouble started.
> The masses don't follow. Not anymore. The mass consumers, America's working class – the newest consumer sales phenomenon on the U.S. marketing scene – picks its own path....
> ... a great myth has been perpetrated upon America's business community. It goes: *Influence flows downward from the people in the upper levels to the masses in the middle and lower levels.*
> Nothing could be further from reality.[23]

Having established the independence of working-class consumers from upper class influence, the advertisement proceeded to its main point:

22. 15 May 1961 in the *New York Times*, p. 32; *Wall Street Journal*, p. 11; *Chicago Tribune*, p. C6.

23. *New York Times*, 20 December 1961, p. 68.

Fig. 1. Macfadden advertisement, *The New York Times*, 15 May 1961, 32.

The best news of all is the attitude towards nationally advertised brands. In the face of a sharp rise in retailer brand [e.g. private brand] competition, the wife of working class America looms as a massive ally for the national manufacturer.... Middle class shoppers, with their higher cultural level, are secure in their buying judgments – hence, have no qualms about buying private labels. Working class women, on the other hand, are less sophisticated, less certain.

Many products are unfamiliar to them because heretofore they couldn't afford to give them a second thought. As a result, these women want to lean on the security derived from buying a brand name that is nationally advertised by a company they know will stand behind its brand. Moreover, to wage-earner women – unlike their middle class opposites – the national brand is a status symbol. '(White collar wives, as you may know, seek status elsewhere – e.g., country clubs, foreign cars and trips to exotic vacation lands.)'

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The question of the empirical accuracy of Macfadden's claims is in some ways beyond the scope of this article. The advertisements were clearly biased; their express goal was to sell advertising space in publications with an established working-class readership. The claims they made in the service of this goal are broad and difficult to verify. But a few things about the ads are clear: first, they were supported by empirical research. Macfadden's claims relied heavily on the findings of Social Research, Inc. (SRI), a Chicago-based firm. SRI's findings were cited repeatedly in Macfadden's ads, one of which offered its readers a free copy of a Macfadden-issued paperback edition of SRI's *Workingman's Wife*, a 'penetrating analysis of the working-class wife'.[24] Second, they were well distributed and immensely visible. It would have been difficult to be involved in the world of Madison Avenue advertising during this period – as Warhol was – and to have been unaware of the Lunch Pail campaign, or of the series of full-page advertisements in *The New York Times* and *Wall Street Journal*. Third and most important, the Macfadden campaign seems to have been successful in drawing national brand advertising to their magazines.[25] Put another way, whether or not Macfadden was right in claiming that working-class consumers preferred national brands for the reasons cited, they managed to convince the manufacturers of these national brands to market their goods to this specific audience. One Macfadden advertisement cited a 35% rise in advertising lineage for the company's 'women's group' publications in the first quarter against an overall downward trend in women's magazine lineage.[26] The *Times'* follow-up article cited Macfadden's vice president and advertising director as claiming that the ad linage for the company's 'women's group' of magazines in 1962 would be up 28% over 1961. The *Times* ran a third report eight months later, in June of 1962, which informed the public that, as a result of its success, the Macfadden campaign 'had scrapped its grey pails and substituted gold ones'.[27]

A survey of the advertising pages in Macfadden's magazines from the late 1950s and early 1960s confirms the prominence of brand name goods. The first sixteen advertisements in the June 1958 issue of *True Story* all featured nationally branded commodities, as did every full-colour advertisement in the issue (Fig. 3). (Interestingly, the back pages of these issues were still dominated by the drab black-and-white advertisements upon which Warhol based his earliest pop artworks.) The full-colour advertisements touted cosmetic and grocery items, and almost all followed the same basic pattern: a large, vivid photograph of the advertised item in use, accompanied by a textual description, and a picture of the item in its branded package in the lower right-hand corner. In each case, the model and her enjoyment of the product were intended to draw the viewer's attention, and the accompanying text to explain the product's virtues, but the branded image in the lower right-hand corner was the page's last word, the mnemonic device recommended by Tyler and meant to be retained until the consumer had reached the proper aisle in the grocery store. Many of Warhol's key brand images of the early 1960s were borrowed from this same style of advertisement.[28]

Would Warhol have been aware of these arguments when he painted the Campbell's Soup cans? Their relevance to his work clearly does not depend on proving that he was. The Macfadden campaign had gained enough prominence during this period to be considered an important factor in these works' reception. The confluence between Tyler's 1957 article, the numerous newspaper accounts of a national brand crisis, and Macfadden's 1961–62 campaign suggests that these ideas had achieved a wide audience

Fig. 2. Macfadden advertisement, *The New York Times*, 20 December 1961, 68.

24. *New York Times*, 16 May 1962, p. 84. Quotes from the study's working-class subjects confirmed this view: 'I have a tendency to go toward name-brands. I think they stand behind their things better.' [. . .] 'I don't trust off brands. Too many of them might not be good. I want the people who sell me something to back up the brand' (Lee Rainwater, Richard P. Coleman and Gerald Handel, *Workingman's Wife* [Oceana Publications: New York, 1959], p. 166).

25. Peter Bart, 'Advertising: A Shift for Dristan', *New York Times*, 27 June 1962, p. 51.

26. *New York Times*, 11 April 1962, p. 88.

27. Bart, 'Advertising: A Shift for Dristan', p. 51.

28. This is true of one of the two early *Coca Cola* works, *Peach Halves*, and the Mönchengladbach type *Campbell's Soup Cans*. See *Catalogue Raisonné*, figs 23–4, 27, 28, 60, 63.

Fig. 3. Surf advertisement, *True Story*, June 1958, 25.

within the advertising and media industries. Throughout these accounts, supermarkets were repeatedly emphasised as one of the most volatile arenas for brand competition. Warhol's classic brand image artworks borrowed exclusively from supermarket products; this is the primary shared feature of the Brillo boxes, soup cans, cola bottles, six packs, and coffee labels. At the very least, then, the crisis of the brand image has to be recognised as an important contributing element in the reception of Warhol's work, and in its broader historical context.

That said, a strong case can be made for Warhol's awareness of these issues. Warhol worked as an illustrator for *The New York Times* from 1955 through October 1962, a period that included every major Macfadden article and advertisement, as well as scores of other articles on the national brand

'crisis'.[29] Furthermore, the specific brand images that Warhol chose to borrow during the early 1960s were directly implicated in the 'battle of the brands. The Warhol *Catalogue Raisonné* lists seventy-two brand image paintings made during the period from 1961 to 1963. Of these, two-thirds (fourty-eight) were derived from the Campbell's Soup label. Roughly one-fifth (fifteen) were derived from Coca-Cola advertising. The remaining works are split among Martinson Coffee (six), Schlitz beer (one), Del Monte canned fruit (one), and Pepsi-Cola (one). Although not all of these brands were directly cited in the discourses surrounding the national brand crisis, the most prominent were, and all were affected by the shifting marketing and sales strategies that characterised this period. Coca-Cola and Campbell's Soup, Warhol's two most iconic and familiar brand motifs, were both actively involved during the 1950s with projects to improve the images of their brands. Del Monte had initiated a similar project. Martinson and Schlitz, by contrast, were attempting during this same period to transfer previously high status brands into a working-class market.

Of all Warhol's brand image motifs, Campbell's Soup is the most closely linked to the battle of the brands. In his interview with *The New York Times* on the occasion of the first day of the lunch pail campaign, Macfadden Inc.'s vice president and advertising director used Campbell's to illustrate his fundamental point:

> The middle class wife feels free to serve any kind of private label soup, for example, but the working class wife derives status and confidence by serving Campbell's Soup.[30]

In many ways, Campbell's perfectly exemplified the national brand problem: a food that had never been particularly valued for its quality was now being sold on the basis of status. Writing in the *Journal of Marketing* in 1958, Clarence Eldridge, Campbell's ex-vice president of marketing, described this method of advertising as 'Franchise Building', and traced its roots to the Nazi theory of propaganda: 'This kind of advertising seeks to exploit, in a perfectly legitimate manner, the Nazis' hypothesis (unfortunately, in that case, perverted to evil use) that "if you tell it often enough, long enough, it will be believed." As applied to honest advertising claims, this principle is perfectly sound – and as a matter of fact is the *fundamental basis* for practically all "franchise building" advertising'.[31] Eldridge used Campbell's Soup as his first example for the necessity of franchise building. It was Campbell's image as a cheap food that necessitated this endeavour: 'the notion of soup as something that is merely inexpensive, or convenient, or filling must be destroyed, and a new concept put in its place' (250).

Although its product was not directly mentioned in the Macfadden campaign, the Coca-Cola Company also seems to have been well aware of the potential benefits of marketing their product to working-class consumers by emphasising the status its consumption supposedly bestowed. The company's *Annual Report to Stockholders* of 1956 even announced that the company had added a second product slogan in order to further emphasise status over taste, or rather to conflate one into the other:

> Wherever Coca-Cola is present, in any land or climate, it is a sign of good taste. The special enjoyment and pleasure which one realizes from the unique taste of Coca-Cola is always our chief product distinction. At the same time, the special status of Coca-Cola as a social amenity of distinctive prestige is recognized by hosts and guests everywhere. 'So good in taste ... in such good taste'. Coca-Cola is liked for itself, as well as for its significance. It is always A SIGN OF GOOD TASTE.[32]

29. Warhol's final illustration for the *Times* seems to have run on 26 October 1962 (Marylin Bender, 'Shift to Low Sneakers Still Plagues Mothers,' p. 48).

30. Bart, 'Blue Collars', p. 34.

31. Clarence E. Eldridge, 'Advertising Effectiveness: How Can It Be Measured', *Journal of Marketing*, vol. 22, no. 3, January 1958, p. 249, emphasis original.

32. *Coca-Cola Annual Report to Stockholders, 1956* (The Coca-Cola Company: New York, 1956), p. 7.

33. *Coca-Cola Annual Report.*

34. Mark Pendergrast, *For God, Country and Coca-Cola* (Basic Books: New York, 2000), p. 259. The other brand images Warhol chose to borrow for his work were reliant on similar strategies. Martinson coffee originated as an up-market brand. But by the early 1950s, with instant coffee sales reaching 17% of total coffee consumption, Martinson began to market a low-cost brand. By the time Warhol borrowed the Martinson label, the company was effectively using the built-in prestige of an established label to sell cheaper coffee to poorer consumers. See Mark Pendergrast, *Uncommon Grounds: The History of Coffee and How it Transformed our World* (Basic Books: New York, 1999), pp. 198, 240–1. Schlitz beer effected a similar transformation. Marketed in the 1920s in upperclass magazines like the *New Yorker* for its purity (see, for instance, *The New Yorker*, 28 February 1925, p. 97), the brand was, by the 1950s, widely identified with working-class consumers.

35. Greil Marcus, 'No Money Down: Pop Art, Pop Music, Pop Culture', unpublished manuscript; printed in Foster and Francis (eds), *Pop: Themes and Movements*, p. 210.

36. Angus Maguire, head of contemporary art at Bloomsbury Auctions, cited in Dalya Alberge, 'Move over Picasso. Mass appeal pushes Warhol to the top of art market', http://entertainment. timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/ visual_arts/article1723156.ece; [accessed 2 February 2008.]

37. Leon Kraushar quoted in Zinsser, *Pop Goes America*, p. 28.

38. It is why scholars can still generalise Warhol's 'classic sixties imagery' as the 'opium of the American middle class' (Trevor Fairbrother, 'Skulls', in Gary Garrels (ed.), *The Work of Andy Warhol*, p. 101), or as 'seeking the desires of the consumer' (Caroline Jones, *Machine in the Studio* [University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1996], p. 189).

The *Annual Report* described the transition from exchange and use value to sign exchange value as being driven by class aspirations. Good taste (the taste of the soda) became 'good taste' (high-status taste) when consumers were encouraged to value Coke less for how it tasted or made them feel, and more for what it represented – what it was 'a sign of' – and how its purchase was seen to improve their social status. The 1957 report came close to recognising this project's inherent paradox: Coke was at once 'a social amenity – a sign of good taste' and 'the most popular refreshment beverage in the world'.[33] The drink's exclusivity was fundamentally illusory, and could only be maintained through advertising. In this way, Coke was able to establish an imaginary distance between its product and its chief competitor, Pepsi-Cola, which 'was plagued by its past image as a lot of drink for little money – oversweet bellywash for kids and poor people'.[34]

'Think Rich. Look Poor'. Brand Image Borrowings

Up to this point, this article has defended a fairly straightforward thesis: rather than being ubiquitous and transparent, the national brand images that Warhol borrowed in his artworks of the early 1960s were designed and mobilised to target working-class consumers. If this much is established, important interpretative questions remain: do the specific histories and strategies of Warhol's borrowed brand images contribute to the meaning of the works in which they appear? Were these histories and strategies made visible in Warhol's work, or did his work ultimately assist in their disappearance? Writing on pop, Greil Marcus has argued that

> there is … very little true pop visual art: very little that actually tells stories of and in the modern market, that does not keep its distance – its distance from the images it seizes, its distance from the noise it seeks to replicate, its distance from the speed, flash and glamour it wishes to capture and contain: its distance from itself.[35]

Were Warhol's artworks able to tell stories of the modern market, or did they ultimately keep their distance, and turn these stories into empty signs?

The first thing to acknowledge is that Warhol's brand image artworks *did* eventually help to turn their motifs into empty signs. They did this by moving images of the cola bottle and the soup can out of the magazine and the grocery store and into the bourgeois art gallery and museum, thereby assisting in the 'universalization' of imagery that had previously been considered as having limited socioeconomic appeal. The works' quick and comprehensive incorporation into the Western canon, the ramping up of the Warhol myths, the artist's seemingly complete capitulation to the demands of profitability in his later work, and his contemporary crowning as the supposed 'most important international artist of the 20th century' have all helped to universalise the appeal of the brand image, as have the manifold attempts to quarantine Warhol's work in a depoliticised neo-avant-garde tradition.[36] As one of Warhol's early collectors put it, 'The only reason you'll know they're art is because they're in my house'.[37] This is a real consequence of Warhol's work; it may be embarrassing to his admirers, but it should not be disregarded.[38] This universalisation certainly has not been overlooked by the companies whose images Warhol borrowed; they have been quick to recuperate the value he added to their brands. The recent Warhol exhibit at the Coca-Cola headquarters in Atlanta, where a cease and desist letter sent by Coke's lawyers to Warhol in the 1960s was on display, is

only the latest milestone in this history. As Peter Schelstraete, Coca-Cola's global brand director, put it recently, 'Andy Warhol was one of our best brand directors'.[39] The work done by Warhol's artworks in the actual universalisation of the brand image should remind us that the process of commodity universalisation has and continues to have its moments of relative strength and weakness. Warhol's work should not be mistaken as merely a reflection of – or on – the spread of commodification and spectacularised society; it needs to be recognised instead as having made a specific and timely contribution to those processes, whether or not it did so intentionally.

And yet this impertinent universalisation cannot be isolated as the sole legacy of Warhol's brand image borrowing. The consistent and immediately recognisable style of his brand image artworks is by no means neutral or transparent. Instead, it responded eloquently to an unprecedented development in the history of American culture: the production and distribution of a readymade visual vocabulary targeted at the working class. Two key general elements of Warhol's style, long recognised by commentators, are illuminated by – and in turn, illuminate – the specific history of the branded image and its strategic targetings. The first is these works' apparent reverence for the images they borrow and duplicate. Warhol's brand image artworks were the first major artistic attempt to make these images their exclusive subject matter. The works are large and formidable; they assert the importance of their motifs, their adequacy as independent subjects for representation. Warhol is alone among the artists of this period in his ability to resist the temptation to reduce the brand image to one component in a larger drama.[40] In Warhol's work, the drama inheres solely in the brand image itself, and in the possibility of its reproduction.

This drama of reproduction forms the second key element of Warhol's style. Brand images were neither appropriated (in the sense of being directly imported as material, as in the work of Paolozzi, Johnson, or Vostell) nor drawn in Warhol's work; they were inaccurately reproduced with mechanical techniques. Its 'slurs and gaps and mottlings and tics' set Warhol's work apart from that of his contemporaries, who tended, when they adopted brand images, either to appropriate their motifs directly (as in collage), to reproduce them in an impeccably slick style, or to emphasise the artist's hand in their depictions.[41] As James Rosenquist put it in 1964, 'One thing, though, the subject matter isn't popular images, it isn't that at all'.[42]

Attempts to read these works as appropriations too often fail to account for their blatant and consistent divergence from their actual motifs. Even the cleanest works, like *Coca-Cola [3]* (1962), are haunted by ghost lettering and shaky script.[43] Some of the imperfections in the *Campbell's Soup Can* works are relatively subtle: contours always slightly shaky and inconsistent, lines that should be parallel and are not, transparently hand-made and irregular lettering. But a glaring inconsistency occurs at the centre of *every* early 1960s *Campbell's Soup Can*: the engraved gold medallion from 'the Exposition Universelle Internationale' is always left either blank or, in rare cases, unfinished (Fig. 4). In place of the medallion, designed by J. C. Chaplain for the 1900 Exposition in Paris, the works have a blank gold circle, which varied in hue from work to work, and often retained faint but legible brushwork. Through this absence, the product's old-fashioned seal of quality and authenticity is rhetorically revealed to be irreproducible. These distinct and irreducible imperfections can be identified throughout Warhol's work, and should probably be recognised as a defining element of his style; they

39. http://abcnews.go.com/Entertainment/wireStory?id=3131074; [accessed 5 February 2008.]

40. It bears repeating that other artists' interest in brand images anticipated or coincided with Warhol's. British and European pop and décollage artists like Jacques de la Villeglé, Raymond Hains, Eduardo Paolozzi, Richard Hamilton, Peter Blake, Wolf Vostell, Derek Boshier, David Hockney, and Mimmo Rotella included brand images in their art – variously through appropriation, reproduction, and depiction – but these images were always integrated into a larger whole, brimming with metaphor or facture or both. American painters, photographers, and filmmakers like Rudy Burckhardt, William Klein, Ray Johnson, Larry Rivers, Tom Wesselmann, Ed Ruscha, Billy Al Bengston, Allan D'Arcangelo, William Eggleston, Gary Winogrand, and Lee Friedlander also brought the brand image into their art during this period, but they too used these images as one element of a larger narrative or metaphor.

41. Kirk Varnedoe, 'Campbell's Soup Cans', p. 43. Warhol almost never worked with ready-made appropriations during the 1960s. Exception are the *You're In* series, a group of silver painted Coca-Cola bottles produced by Warhol in 1967, and *Bomb '67*, a silver-sprayed air force practice bomb from the same year.

42. G. R. Swenson, 'What is Pop Art, Part II', *Art News*, February 1964, p. 64.

43. The ghost lettering is visible under the cropped 'Coca-Cola' script, but only when viewed in person or in excellent reproductions.

Fig. 4. Andy Warhol, *100 Cans*, 1962, Oil on canvas, 182.9 × 132.1 cm. Collection Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, NY. Gift of Seymour H. Knox, Jr., 1963. © 2010 The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Inc. / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

44. David Antin, 'Warhol: The Silver Tenement', *Art News*, vol. 65, no. 4, Summer 1966, p. 59.

45. Marian Christy, 'Andy Warhol Doesn't Trust You', *Boston Sunday Globe*, 7 February 1971, p. 76A.

are, as David Antin put it in 1966, the 'precisely pinpointed defectiveness that gives [Warhol's] work its brilliant accuracy'.[44]

Compelling precedents for these two stylistic elements exist in Warhol's prolific and inventive advertising illustrations of the mid-1950s. The I. Miller shoe advertisements, which Warhol worked on throughout most of the second half of the decade, are particularly instructive in this regard. The recurrent subject of these advertisements is shoe fetishism, but primarily of a commodity rather than a sexual type. Shoes are treated in these ads as the key actors in various dramas, and are continually depicted as more interesting and vital than their human counterparts. In one ad (Fig. 5), two 'Little Black Silk Shoes' take centre stage before a bevy of waiters and bellhops, who seem to be serving the shoes rather than the woman who wears them. In a striking series of four ads, each published on a separate page of the same day's paper, a 'female' and a 'male' shoe are shown in the early stages of a romance (Fig. 6). (As Warhol would put it to an interviewer in 1971, 'One fur coat talks to another fur coat'.[45]) As in the brand image artworks, overvaluation is half of these images' effectiveness. But a second drama is

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Don't go away without a **Little Black Silk Shoe!** For all its delicate air, this tireless traveler will grace teas, theatres, restaurants from here to Brussels—from now till '59! I. Miller's tapestry-toed black silk crepe, superbly soft, 31.95. Matched handbag, 17.95*. From a Collection of silks by I. Miller, Evins and Ingenue beginning at 19.95. **I. Miller**   *Plus 10% tax

Fig. 5. Andy Warhol, I. Miller advertisement, *The New York Times*, 24 August 1958, 93.

46. Andy Warhol, *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol*, p. 150.

constantly layered under the first. Here, the action is reproductive: can this quivering, amateurish, irregular line possibly hold itself together long enough to render the delicate and elegant contours of a 'copper colored calf pump'? The answer is never seriously in doubt: the line is always only flirting with failure, never actually risking it. This flirtation with mess and imperfection endows the images with whimsy, and sets Warhol's work apart from that of almost every other illustrator working in this period. The competitors are polished and precise by comparison, and therefore completely bereft of the rhetoric of desire mobilised by Warhol's line.

A second important precedent for these stylistic elements is Warhol's homoerotic work of the mid- and late 1950s. In these drawings, the virtuoso quality of his line is often enlivened by a subtle wavering, which seems to suggest a psychological strain. This tension between virtuoso-erotic communion and the imperfections of visual reproduction is activated in Warhol's *James Dean* drawing (Fig. 7), from 1955, where the perfectly smooth line of the dead figure's sculpted chin intersects the brick wall in the background, against which the figure's upturned car has come to rest. Where the contour of the neck and chin are effortless and elegant, the brick wall — here the sign both of death and, in its relationship with the figure's chin, penetration — is defined by irregularity and imperfection. The presumed regularity and precision of the wall's geometrically regular form serve to highlight the faultiness and irregularity of its reproduction. Penetration is attached, in this image, not just to death but also to the impossibility of visual reproduction. But this impossibility is also figured — melodramatically in the tree with its imperfect little heart-shaped leaves — as a sign of distance and desire. The line stalls and awkwardly blots; it seems to get stuck at certain moments, as though too consumed with looking at the image — too overpowered by it — to reproduce it smoothly. 'I can't understand why I was never an abstract expressionist', wrote Warhol, 'because with my shaking hand I would have been a natural'.[46]
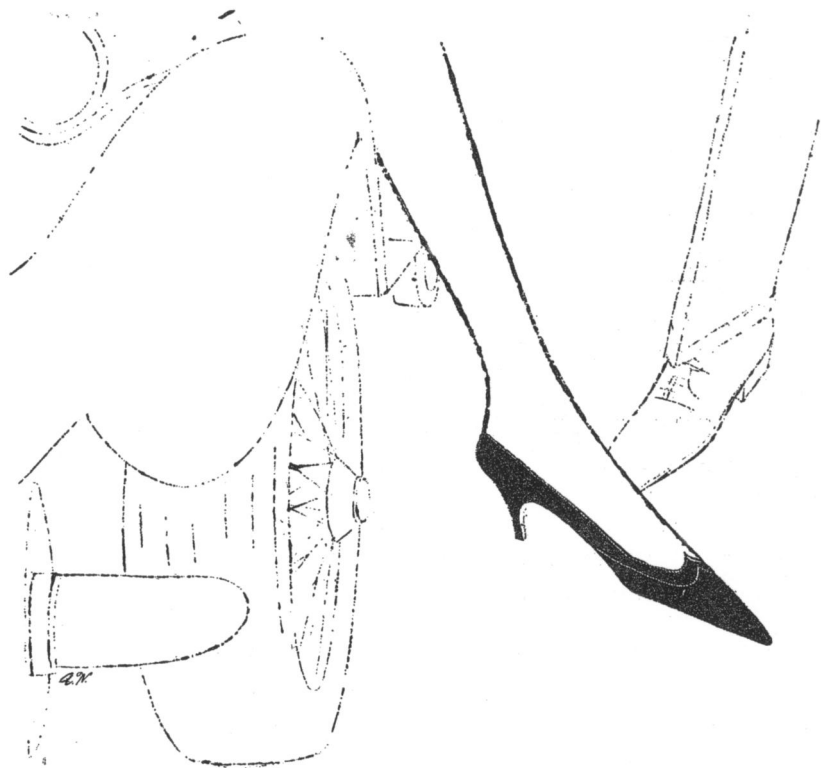
Cordova... by Millerkins... our rich new daytime red, as darkly gleaming as a man's cordovans... and as invaluably neutral. The heart neckline pump, neat and narrow on a mid-high heel, 17.95. Exclusive I.Miller

New York • Washington • Philadelphia • Baltimore • White Plains • Rochester • Atlantic City • Salon at: Abraham & Straus, Brooklyn; L. Bamberger, Newark

Fig. 6. Andy Warhol, I. Miller advertisement, *The New York Times*, 16 October 1955, 95.

47. George Klauber, cited in Bockris, *Warhol: The Biography*, p. 90.

To return to Antin's formulation, defectiveness produces accuracy in Warhol's work – pop and pre-pop – because it is mobilised stylistically as a marker of subjective desire and objective desirability. Read as the subjective remnant of the artist's hand, the irregular, quivering contour line demonstrates the anxieties of looking and of visual reproduction. It signals – rhetorically or indexically – the intensity of the artist's efforts to reproduce, and their eventual succumbing to the forces of attraction and desire. Simultaneously, however, the defections of the contour line attest to the perfection and irreproducibility of the motif, which is presented – in and through this reproductive defectiveness – as being beyond the reach of visual reproduction. Reproductive defectiveness thus connotes both a rhetoric of subjective desire and a structural iconoclasm; the two connotations are complementary and mutually reinforcing. Desire and desirability – perfection of the motif and imperfection of the reproductive process – enliven each other in neat circuitries.

When this stylistic device was applied in the homoerotic drawings to a man's image of a beautiful man, it signalled both the attractiveness and the difficulty of attaining homoerotic union: 'Kiss me with your eyes' was apparently one of Warhol's favourite expressions.[47] When it was applied to a high-end shoe, it signalled the intense desirability – again, the attractiveness and the relative difficulty – of attaining the beautiful luxury commodity. In both instances, Warhol's stylistic approach was effective but by no means groundbreaking, in
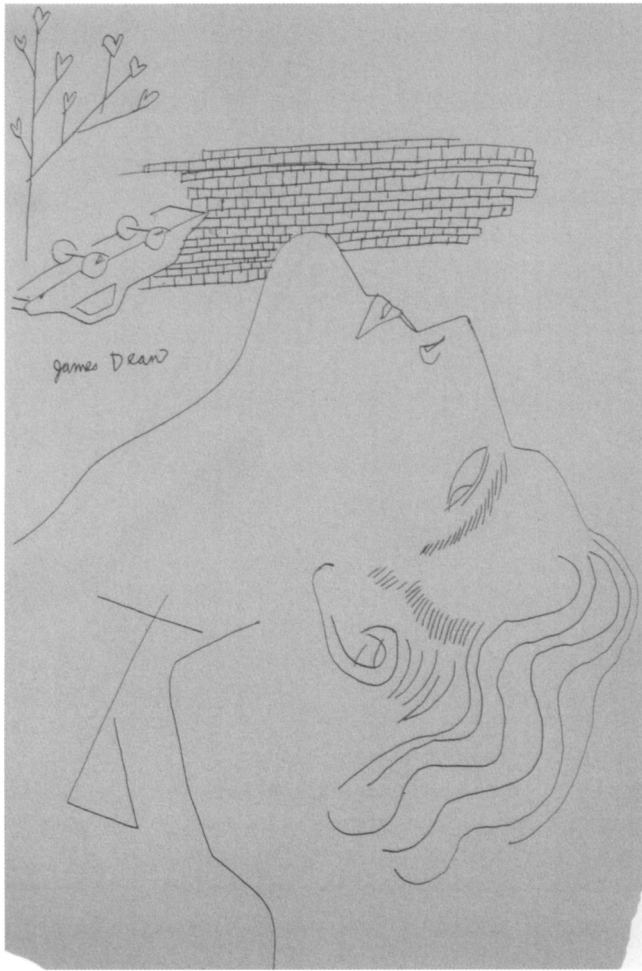
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Fig. 7. Andy Warhol. *James Dean*, 1955. Ball-point ink on tinted paper, 44.8 × 29.8 cm. The Brant Foundation, Greenwich, CT. © 2010 The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Inc. / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

part because luxury goods and beautiful bodies have long been recognised as highly desirable.[48] But when this stylistic strategy was applied to the mechanically aided reproduction of a schematised and disposable image of a cola bottle or a soup can, it signalled something entirely new in fine art: a subject who could somehow value the image of a soup can or a cola bottle enough to want desperately to reproduce it.[49] Like the aspiration to mass cultural participation, during the late 1950s and early 1960s, this intense attachment to brand images was widely identified with working-class consumers. With the brand image artworks, Warhol upped the stakes on this aspiration, by consistently foregrounding the impossibility of visually reproducing these images even with the aid of the best available consumer-grade creative technologies – opaque projectors, photostatic copies, and eventually silkscreening, photography, film, and video.[50] It is here that Walter Benjamin's 'The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility' could have real bearing on Warhol's project, except that from this angle – and in contrast to the way this comparison is usually deployed – it is Warhol who critiques and illuminates Benjamin.[51]

48. Ben Shahn's line drawing style has long been recognised as an important precedent for Warhol's blotted line technique (see Patrick S. Smith, *Andy Warhol's Art and Films* (UMI Press: Ann Arbor, 1986), pp. 248–9), while Benjamin Buchloh has pointed out that his 'decadent style' borrows directly from Aubrey Beardsley, Jean Cocteau, and Charles Demuth ('The Andy Warhol Line', in *The Art of Andy Warhol*, p. 53).

49. Mary Anne Staniszewski makes a related point regarding the relationship between Warhol's 1950s sketches of Elvis, and his Elvis paintings of the early 1960s: 'In the Fifties sketch, the artist's fetishism is directed at Elvis Presley; in the Sixties, it is redirected to the system of repetition and exchange that creates cultural codes' ('Capital Pictures', in *Post-Pop Art*, p. 166). One goal of this article has been to make this fetishism specific and historical.

50. As William S. Wilson pointed out in 1968, 'Silk-screening makes repetition part of the meaning of the image.... Warhol repeats these images until repetition is magnified into a theme

Fig. 8. Advertisements, *True Romance*, May 1958, 123.

of variance and invariance, and of the success and failures of identicalness. The silk-screening... is used sloppily by Warhol, allowing sentiment and lack of sentiment, care and carelessness, to jostle together' ('Prince of Boredom: The Repetitions and Passivities of Andy Warhol', *Art and Artists*, March 1968, pp. 12–15; reprinted in *Pop Art: A Critical History*, p. 291).

51. For readings of Benjamin's relevance to Warhol, see Rainer Crone, *Andy Warhol* (Praeger: New York, 1970) and Andreas Huyssen, 'The Cultural Politics of Pop', in *Post-Pop Art*, pp. 45–77.

52. Benjamin had his own concerns about commercial film: 'In western Europe today, the capitalist exploitation of film obstructs the human being's legitimate claim to being reproduced. Under these circumstances, the film industry has an overriding interest in stimulating the involvement of the masses through illusionary displays and ambiguous speculations' ('The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility [Third Version]', trans. by H. Zohn and E. Jephcott, in Howard Eiland and Michael Jennings (eds), *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, 1938–1940* [Belknap Press: Cambridge, 2003], p. 263).

The utopian possibility of mechanical reproduction was, for Benjamin, the possibility of a truly common and open cultural sphere.[52] This is the great promise of the newspaper, where everyone can be an author, but also of the camera, the tape recorder, the projector, and the silkscreen.[53] Still and movie camera sales were booming in the late 1950s, and manufacturers were paying special attention to their down-market models.[54] The back pages of Macfadden's magazines were littered with ads for photographic services; the June 1958 issue of *True Story* had eight such ads in its final seventeen pages – promises of cash for baby photos; a service that converted snapshots and negatives into enlarged oil paintings – sharing space with 'POEMS WANTED', 'BANISH UNWANTED HAIR', 'The Opposite Sex and Your Perspiration' (Fig. 8).

'The Gong Show': Manufactured Alienation and Failure as Spectacle

This article has argued that the images of desire mobilised in Warhol's classic pop artworks were fundamentally class specific, and that their relationship with the class to which they were marketed was troubled and contradictory; the point has been to de-universalise the brand image, and to reconstruct the history of its origins. But, in this same spirit, it is crucial to remember that the working class itself was by no means homogeneous during the 1960s, and that the desires and frustrations inscribed in Warhol's work were themselves not just classed, but racially specific as well. The 'working class' referred to by most advertisers and targeted by the vast majority of advertising campaigns during this period was implicitly white. A closer look at the evidence reveals that the reasons for this exclusion were at least as strategic as they were discriminatory. Appearances to the contrary, the post-war US advertising industry recognised the African-American working class as a substantial and desirable market. Nevertheless, the logic of working-class consumerism dictated that it would be counterproductive to engage this market directly. Instead, marketers viewed the African-American working class as being doubly afflicted by the doubts and insecurities that characterised their white counterparts; advertising directly to their interests was thus judged to be counterproductive.[55]

Like the working class, African-American consumers were thought to be more susceptible than their more privileged counterparts to the status supposedly conferred by the branded commodity. Brand attractiveness and social insecurity, whether racial or economic, went hand in hand, and one insecurity could compound another:

> The Negro...will spend much more money on food, clothing, appliances, automobiles, and other items in order to help overcome his insecurity neurosis. The result has been that Negro standards of living in many categories of goods are a match for white standards. When matched on an income level, the Negro standards are often higher, particularly when it concerns something he can wear, use himself, or consume personally.[56]

The social realities of this so-called 'insecurity neurosis' were fleshed out in more detail by Marcus Alexis:

> It has been claimed that Negros spend more for food and clothing than do whites in the same income bracket, because discriminatory housing practices preclude equal opportunity to enjoy better dwellings.... This phenomenon is of great importance to

> many sellers. It is a product of the institutional setting which may not change for some time.[57]

The argument is both logical and breathtakingly cynical: American traditions of racism and discrimination were seen to render the African-American community an especially easy target for consumer goods, a target so easy that advertising for it would be redundant. As a 1965 article in the *Journal of Marketing* put it,

> The once prevalent stereotype that Negroes were uninterested in, or incompetent to judge, the quality of goods has long been displaced – with the contrary image now of Negroes being extremely interested in quality, and being even more concerned with the symbolic value of goods than are whites (2).

Where working-class 'insecurities' were, during the 1950s, mainly socially and economically enforced, racial 'insecurities' were implemented not just socially and economically but juridically as well. Alexis and *Sponsor* and the *Journal of Marketing* all seemed quite comfortable in their claims that these circumstances – an 'institutional setting which may not change for some time' – constituted a boon for American advertisers. For the advertising industry, the institutionalised racism of the post-war period sustained a class of African-American 'super-consumers', so desperate for the status conferred by objects that they rendered directed advertising superfluous.

Testifying before New Jersey's Lilley Commission on the Newark riots of 1967, Amiri Baraka confirmed the ubiquity of white advertising in African-American communities: 'The poorest black man in Newark, in America, knows how white people live. We have television sets; we see movies. We see the fantasy and the reality of white America every day'.[58] But, as pervasive as white advertising was, the actual attainment of the products on offer was another matter. Baraka put the point bluntly in his poem 'BLACK PEOPLE!' published in December of the same year: 'What about that bad short you saw last week on Frelinghuysen, or those stoves and refrigerators, record players, shotguns, in Sears, Bambergers, Klein's, Hahnes', Chase, and the smaller, joosh enterprises? You know how to get it, you can get it, no money down, no money never. . . . All the stores will open up if you will say the magic words. The magic words are: Up against the wall mother fucker this is a stick up!'[59] Institutionalised racism was, during the post-war period, explicitly recognised and celebrated by the advertising industry as a special opportunity for brand-image marketing; the frustration and violence this situation produced should never be misidentified as merely aesthetic.

Writing in 1965, Guy Debord described the Watts riots in the following terms:

> The Los Angeles rebellion was a rebellion against the commodity. . . . Like the young delinquents of all the advanced countries, but more radically because they are part of a class totally without a future, a sector of the proletariat unable to believe in any significant chance of integration or promotion, the Los Angeles blacks take modern capitalist propaganda, its publicity of abundance, *literally*. They want to possess *immediately* all the objects shown and abstractly accessible because they want to *use* them. . . . Through theft and gift they rediscover a use that immediately refutes the oppressive rationality of the commodity, revealing its relations and manufacture to be arbitrary and unnecessary. . . . People who destroy commodities show their human superiority over commodities.[60]

There is no denying that Warhol's work from the early 1960s fell far short of 'the *potlatch* of destruction' described by Baraka and Debord. Where the Watts and Newark rioters destroyed and repossessed concrete objects, Warhol's work

53. I examine the force of these promises at greater length in my dissertation *Television Dreams* (Berkeley, 2008).

54. See Donald C. Bacon, 'Camera Makers Automate, Simplify Picture Snapping, See New Lines as Spur to Sales', *Wall Street Journal*, 30 March 1959, p. 5; and Thomas O'Toole, 'Photography Industry Expects Sales To Hit High in '58 Despite Recession', *Wall Street Journal*, 8 April 1958, p. 4.

55. Harold H. Kassarjian, 'The Negro and American Advertising, 1946–1965', *Journal of Marketing Research*, vol. 6, no. 1, February 1969, pp. 36, 39.

56. 'The Forgotten 15,000,000. . . Three Years Later', *Sponsor*, vol. 6, 28 July 1952, pp. 76–7; cited in Alexis, 121.

57. Marcus Alexis, "Pathways to the Negro Market," *The Journal of Negro Education*, vol. 28, no. 2 Spring 1959, p. 121;.

58. Cited in Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic* (Alfred A. Knopf: New York, 2003), p. 377; Cohen's discussion of this period is particularly insightful. See also James Smethurst, '"Pat Your Foot and Turn the Corner": Amiri Baraka, the Black Arts Movement, and the Poetics of a Popular Avant-Garde', *African American Review*, vol. 37, nos. 2/3, Summer–Autumn 2003, pp. 261–70.

59. Cohen, p. 377.

60. Guy Debord, 'The Decline and Fall of the Spectacle-Commodity Economy', [1966], in Ken Knabb (ed.), *Situationist International Anthology* (Bureau of Public Secrets: Berkeley, 1989), p. 155.

61. Sterling McIlhenny and Peter Ray, 'Inside Andy Warhol', *Cavalier*, 1966; reprinted in Kenneth Goldsmith, Reva Wolf and Wayne Koestenbaum (eds), *I'll Be Your Mirror: The Selected Andy Warhol Interviews: 1962–1987* (Carroll & Graf: New York, 2004), p. 97. To my mind, the great precedent for Warhol's studied indifference is not Duchamp, but rather Manet's barmaid at the Folies-Bergère: 'if one could not be bourgeois – if that status was always pushed just a little further out of reach – then at least one could prevent oneself from being anything else: fashion and reserve would keep one's face from *any* identity, from identity in general. The look which results is a special one.... Expression is its enemy, the mistake it concentrates on avoiding at all costs; for to express oneself would be to have one's class be legible' (T. J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life*, rev. ed. (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1999), p. 253).

62. *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol*, pp. 78, 145.

63. Josh Eells, 'So You Think You Can Sing?' *Blender*, October 2007, p. 90.

haltingly reproduced their associated images; where the rioters presented an ardent and ambitious challenge to the world of commodities, Warhol's provocations were always tinged with doubt and insincerity; where the rioters were fuelled by racial and working-class frustration and hopelessness, these motivations became at least partially rhetorical in Warhol's work – they were used to draw crowds and sell paintings, not to tear down Los Angeles. But, for these same reasons, Baraka's and Debord's descriptions are deeply relevant to Warhol's project. Throughout the early 1960s and beyond, Warhol's work pretended to take the 'publicity of abundance' literally, at least as it applied to images. Warhol's contemporary culture promised and emphasised cultural reproducibility, even as it simultaneously blocked it. For the first time in American marketing, it was the literal image being marketed, not the product, nor its quality, nor even the connotations it was promised to carry. These images were artistically produced – designed, drawn, painted, and printed – but they were not intended to be reproduced artistically. Their trajectory was specific and unidirectional: from the drawing board to the supermarket to the cupboard. Even as the spectacle of cultural productivity was increasingly being marketed, true aesthetic feedback occurred only as consumption; designs that failed to sell might be discontinued or altered. In his work, Warhol made a show of cashing in on these promises. He effectively made a (highly successful and lucrative) spectacle out of his purported distance from spectacular productivity. The paradoxes inherent in this strategy account for the strange arc of Warhol's career, his works' lasting power and ambivalence. This ambivalence penetrated every aspect of Warhol's persona: the notoriously ill-fitting wig, the almost imperceptible voice, the 'inanimate' handshake.[61] And it is equally visible in Warhol's aphorisms, where cultural accessibility and egalitarianism are constantly being held out as false promises, pleasant but impossible dreams:

> I'm confused about who the news belongs to. I always have it in my head that if your name's in the news, then the news should be paying you. Because it's *your news* and they're taking it and selling it as their product.
> There should be supermarkets that sell things and supermarkets that buy things back, and until that equalizes, there'll be more waste than there should be.... We all have something, but most of what we have isn't saleable, there's such a preference today for brand new things. People should be able to sell their old cans, their old chicken bones, their old shampoo bottles, their old magazines. We have to get more organized.[62]

These utopian visions are always presented in Warhol's work and writings as dreamy impossibilities. The entertainment value lies in the pathetic inability actually to attain the visions of accessibility and equality that are trumpeted. In this respect, Warhol's work clearly set the precedent for the spectacles of cultural failure that are today so dominant: the *Gong Show/American Idol* model of culture, where the appeal lies in the contestants' inability successfully to reproduce the cultural ideals they emulate, and in the merciless criticism they almost invariably receive from 'celebrity judges'. Through this process, cultural failure is spectacularised and converted into cultural success. *American Idol* is, in the words of one contemporary magazine, 'the country's great uniter, bringing together rich and poor, blue state and red, Gershwin-loving grandmas and text-happy tweens – a rare instance of cultural consensus in an increasingly fractured age'.[63] Instead of being sold only the spectacle of their possible participation in mass culture, consumers are today simultaneously consoled by the spectacle of their peers'

inability to actually achieve this same participation.[64] Once or twice a season, a contestant survives the ordeal and graduates to stardom. But, increasingly, it is the breathtaking failure that garners the most attention. Just as the domain of spectacularised life has expanded – from wanting and buying things to wanting to participate and to be integrated into the spectacle oneself – so has the range of people to whom the spectacle can be expected to appeal; one no longer needs to be poor and uneducated to believe deeply in the glamour of a life surrounded and defined by flat, empty, and irreproducible signs.[65] In outlining the logic of this strange alchemy, and its function as a mode of class domination, Warhol's work provides an essential window onto the origins of our contemporary cultural environment.

One final question: Why would Warhol's ventriloquisation of the working class have resonated so strongly in the art world of the early 1960s? What would this voice have had to offer for a class of patrons who in many ways had little in common with the world of brandlovers, TV-watchers, and comic-readers? As T. J. Clark has shown in his work on Abstract Expressionism, the bourgeois class in the second half of the twentieth century faced the difficult problem of disguising rather than accentuating its difference from the social strata beneath it.[66] On Clark's account, the American bourgeoisie can only preserve real power – economic power – by sacrificing symbolic and cultural power to its subordinates, and thus placating them: 'the bourgeoisie's great tragedy is that it can only retain power by allowing its inferiors to speak for it: giving them the leftovers of the cry for totality, and steeling itself to hear the ludicrous mishmash they make of it – to hear and pretend to approve, and maybe, in the end, to approve without pretending'.[67]

In the 1940s and 1950s, the beneficiary of this cultural shift was the Abstract Expressionist movement, which seemed to epitomise the petty bourgeois character: its 'overstuffed, unctuous, end-and-beginning-of-the-world quality' (401). This article has argued that, by 1960, the need to downgrade and declass the American cultural voice had become more pressing. Ideological strategies of consumerism and cultural participation were deployed to address this situation, promising consumers that social mobility was a matter of acquiring properly branded commodities, and that the common culture would always welcome the contributions of its audience. But where consumerism and the promise of participation functioned mostly in the realm of mass culture, pop art (and in a different way, minimalism) took up the challenge in the realm of fine art, giving ever more déclassé voices a chance to achieve cultural prominence. In Warhol's work of the early 1960s, these voices are mobilised both through the reproduction of motifs that were commonly thought to appeal strongly only to working-class audiences (the same objects and images being marketed to these audiences as status symbols), and through the works' pronounced struggle actually to reproduce these motifs, a troubled striving that also constitutes an implicit denouement of the promises of working-class cultural participation.

64. For a fascinating discussion of the problem of cultural emulation, see Julian Stallabrass, 'What's in a Face? Blankness and Significance in Contemporary Art Photography', *October*, vol. 122, Fall 2007, pp. 71–90.

65. Writing in the *Washington Post and Times Herald* in 1959 under the headline 'Norms of Middle Class Slipping', Malvina Lindsay claimed that 'The adolescent level is the place where lower-class culture is reported diffusing itself most successfully into the middle-class community.... The middle class itself seems generally unaware of this threat. This may be because of the popular assumption that no well-defined and widely different cultures exist in this democratic country. It likely is also owing to the middle class' complacent faith that it is the unchallenged cultural dean ("boss" in lower-class language) of American society and does not need to cherish and promote its standards' (14 May 1959, p. A22).

66. For a corroborative reading, See Bonnie H. Erickson, who argues, contra Bourdieu, that when it comes to cross-class professional relationships, 'Domination alone... cannot be enough. Company rulers must coordinate and motivate the efforts of all ranks in the company, and this calls for shared culture to smooth relationships across class boundaries. Culture that has little or no correlation with class is a necessary part of class relationships' ('Culture, Class, and Connections', *The American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 102, no.1 July 1996, p. 221).

67. T. J. Clark, 'In Defense of Abstract Expressionism', in *Farewell to an Idea* (Yale University Press: New Haven, 1999), p. 389.