

DAMAGED GOODS

Desire and the Economy of the Object



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Ken Lum
Allan McCollum
Haim Steinbach

Brian Wallis, *Adjunct Curator*

THE NEW MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART

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DAMAGED GOODS: Desire and the Economy of the Object
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Louise Lawler, *Arranged by Donald Marron, Susan Brundage, Cheryl Bishop at Paine Webber, Inc.*, 1982. Black and white photograph, 17¼ x 23¼".

FOREWORD

While the role of the object has been a critical one in the history of modern art, it occupies an even more central place at present, in an era dominated by advanced technology. Instant information storage and transfer, the telecommunications industry, and the rapid growth and increasing importance of advertising have changed the nature and meaning of the object in contemporary society as a whole, as well as in the arts.

“Damaged Goods” addresses some of the issues raised when the object is viewed in a variety of contexts, all of which reflect upon its role and value within the artwork itself. The essays each discuss the question from a specific point of view, and add to the continuing critical debate concerning postmodernism as a whole.

My thanks to Adjunct Curator Brian Wallis, who organized the exhibition, to Deborah Bershad and Hal Foster for their contributions to the catalogue, and to the staff, volunteers, and interns who helped bring the exhibition to fruition.

We are grateful to the Institute of Museum Services, the New York State Council on the Arts, and the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs for their continued support of our programs. Above all, we are grateful to the artists in the exhibition, whose work has provided us with a fresh opportunity to see ourselves and the society we live in.

Marcia Tucker
Director

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Today the structure of consumer society is fractured. The object—the once vaunted commodity that formed the core of consumerist desire—no longer appears to hold center stage in economic relations. Supplanted in part by new technologies and new, non-tangible commodities based largely on image and information transfer, the object may seem to have outworn its usefulness. The French theorist Jean Baudrillard has suggested, for example, that we no longer consume objects for their use, but for their abstract qualities. The abstraction of the consumer object has been achieved through the spectacular effects of advertising, display, and presentation—strategies which are directed more at motivating the viewer’s desire for consumption than at demonstrating the utilitarian properties of the object. This exhibition seeks to raise some fundamental questions regarding the shifting state of economic and social exchange and to suggest ways in which the work of certain artists and critics have addressed these issues. Inherent in the work of the artists included is the necessity for change, not only within the overcommercialized environment of the artworld but in economic conditions in general.

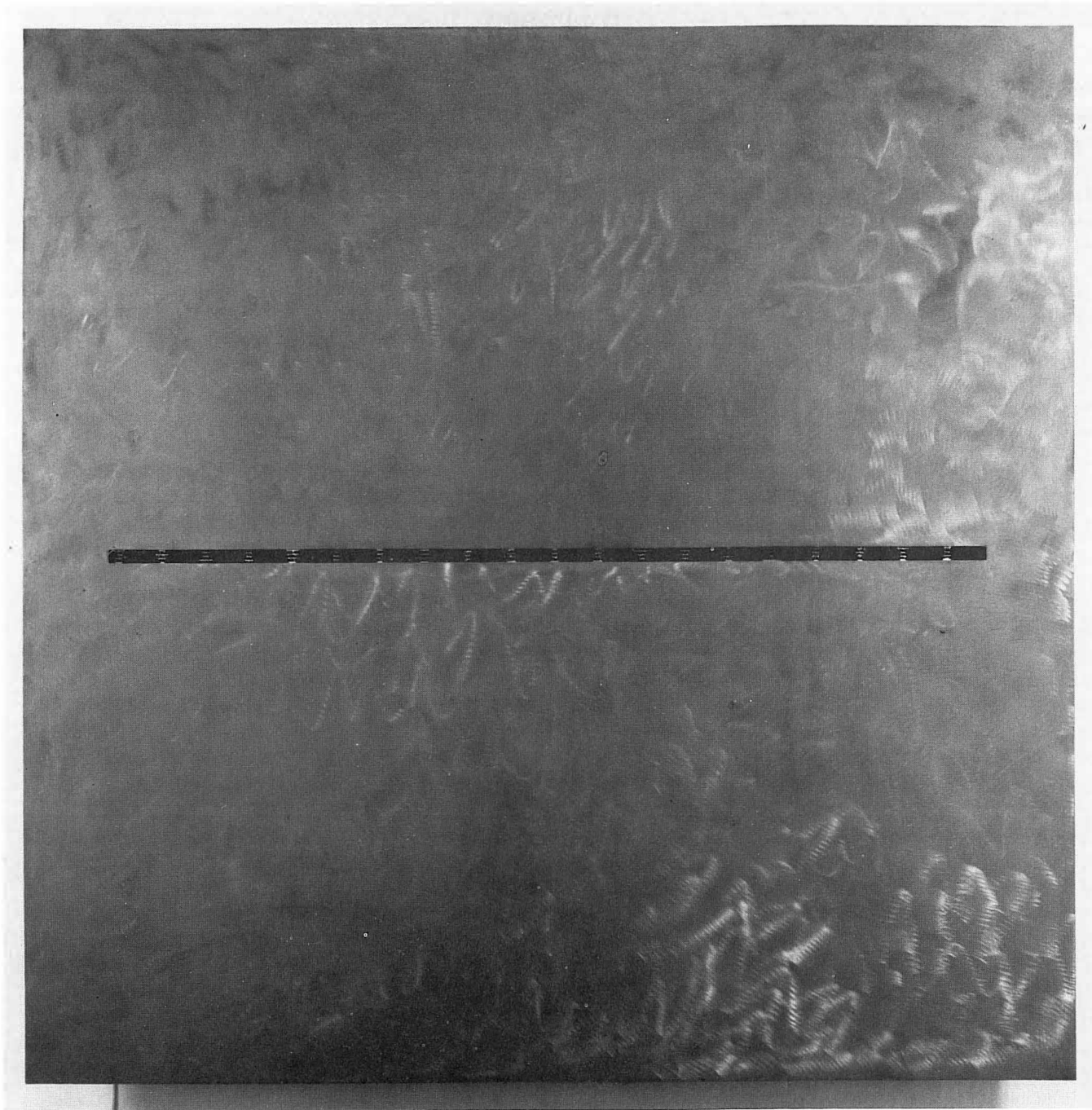
This exhibition would not have been possible without the ten artists involved, not only their participation in this exhibition, but their investigations over the past several years. For their suggestions, insights, and critical contributions to this exhibition I would like to thank Judith Barry, Gretchen Bender, Barbara Bloom, Andrea Fraser, Jeff Koons, Justen Ladda, Louise Lawler, Ken Lum, Allan McCollum, and Haim Steinbach. As with all exhibitions, *Damaged Goods* has been a collaborative enterprise involving work by a large number of remarkably dedicated and good natured

contributors. I would like to thank the critics who contributed essays to this catalogue, Hal Foster and Deborah Bershad. Under extreme deadlines, both provided significant essays of great insight into this complex subject.

At the Museum, I have received tremendous support and advice from my curatorial colleagues, Marcia Tucker, Lynn Gumpert, and Bill Olander. Crucial to the realization of this project were Marcia Landsman, who provided patient and understanding supervision of all aspects of the catalogue, and Claire Dannenbaum, who handled a tremendous number of details and research assignments with skill and expediency. In addition, Lisa Parr organized and administered many technical aspects of the coordination of the exhibition and John Jacobs contributed a heroic effort in managing the complicated installation of the exhibition against all odds.

I am extremely grateful to the many extraordinary individuals who have generously contributed goods and services to the exhibition. In particular, I would like to thank Phil Mariani, who undertook the arduous typesetting of this catalogue; Conrad Gleber and the staff of Conrad Gleber Printing, who contributed materials, labor, and their very special skills to the printing of the catalogue; Katy Homans and the staff of Homans/Salsgiver, who offered the loan of their studios for the catalogue production; Wendy Wolf of Talbot Typographics, who undertook critical typesetting work with impossible deadlines; and Maud Lavin, who offered crucial editorial advice and encouragement. Thank you all.

Brian Wallis
Adjunct Curator



Gretchen Bender, **Total Recall Series**, 1985. Steel, laminate, and fluorescent light.

THE PERVERSION OF THE VISUAL

Gretchen Bender

WE LIVE THE MEMOREX LIFE IN PREPARATION FOR ACCEPTING EXPANDED MENTAL, EMOTIONAL, AND PHYSICAL VISUAL CONCEPTS. THE SHORT-CIRCUITING OF REALITY BY THE MEDIA NO LONGER APPLIES. THE SHORT-CIRCUITING OF THE MEDIA BY REALITY NO LONGER APPLIES. WE MANIPULATE THE MANIPULATIONS OF 'REALITY'; SKILLFULLY DEPICTING A SOCIETY ALREADY LIVING OUTSIDE ITS OWN REALITY. THIS DOUBLE-DISTANCING ALLOWS A CRITICALITY THAT FREES US TO EXCHANGE ONE PRESENT TENSE FOR ANOTHER. THE PRESENT CONTAINS OPTICAL TOOLS TO IGNITE INNER EXPANSION THROUGH EXTERIOR MANIPULATIONS. ARTISTS WHO CARRY A BELLIGERENT KNOWLEDGE OF THE PRESENT MAKE NEW TECHNOLOGIES LOOK LIKE OLD ART. WE RUN INTERFERENCE PATTERNS IN ORDER TO PERCEIVE STRUCTURES; IN ORDER TO TRANSCEND THEM; IN ORDER TO EXPLORE FASCISMS. BY SHORT-CIRCUITING REALITY, OUR CULTURE AT LARGE PARTICIPATES IN ITS OWN DISMANTLING. NOT ONLY IS THERE THE STRUGGLE FOR MENTAL SURVIVAL IN ADAPTING TO THE FUTURE, THERE IS THE RUSH TO SECURE THE POWER OF MENTAL EXPANSION. THE CULTURE ACCEPTS THE PRESENT THROUGH SPECIAL EFFECTS: THEATRICAL SPECIAL EFFECTS, AND OPTICAL SPECIAL EFFECTS.

1984



Allan McCollum, **Perfect Vehicles**, 1986. Acrylic and enamel paint on solid-cast hydrocal, each 20½ x 8 x 8".

PERFECT VEHICLES

Allan McCollum

I have observed that a common vase becomes an art object upon the suspension of its utility; that is, it is filled with meaning and value only after it is emptied of its substance. Thus its privileged status must be maintained according to a tacit agreement amongst the social body (a body, perhaps, represented by the vase itself): that the object should not be used for what it was intended.

That more modern type of object—the “Fine Art” object—seeks to transcend this clumsy and fragile contingency by purporting to be without utility in the first place; it claims to exist in a world by itself. To admire a work of Fine Art, therefore, one need not self-consciously restrain oneself from the exercise of productive labor; nor need one continually remind oneself of one’s tacit agreements, one’s social contracts. The appreciation of Fine Art, in fact, barely requires one to acknowledge the existence of other people at all.

In light of these truths, one might say that the Fine Art object is the precise opposite of the vase-turned-art-object, in that it is used *exactly* for what it was intended. Such is the triumph of Fine Art.

With my newest work, I feel I have solved the tiresome problem of having to remember not to fill the vase. My *Perfect Vehicles* carry no risks of any regressions to usefulness: they are cast in plaster, and are thoroughly, irredeemably solid, all the way through.

In extinguishing absolutely the possibility of any recourse to utility, I mean to accelerate the symbolic potential of the *Vehicles* toward total meaning, total value. I aim to fashion the most perfect art object possible.

Is this not a perfectly scientific and modern approach? After all, a work of Fine Art needs only to function as a *signal*, a signal directing one to lapse into a particular state of mind, a state which one reserves especially for one’s aesthetic adventures. To the degree that one is a connoisseur, one needs only the subtlest of cues to blithely slide into a heightened blend of one’s receptivities, into that familiar and narcissistic state of exaggerated susceptibility and associativeness. It is thus to the artist’s advantage that he learns to trigger one’s elevation in the most economical way possible, and to usher one’s sensual, emotional, and symbolic worlds toward tentative affiliation in a purely physical object which exists quite-apart from oneself, and well away from any real human relation.

Shouldn’t I be able to isolate this signal, and reproduce it with the sparest of means? Then my objects could exist as pure *potential*, with no superfluous meaning or value other than that which they may accrue in relation to our aesthetic pleasures. Is it not my role as an artist to reproduce—and repeat at will—that psychic effervescence associated with the unrepeatable and perfectly unique timeless moment in which the rest of the world simply fades away?

As an artist, I will repeat this signal, like a flashing beacon. I will rehearse my position, over and over, as a gesture to you, in and of itself. I will construct for you a world of fabulous substitutes for what is already a world of substitutes. I will muster the world for your review, and I will make you the object of the world’s address.

As for me, I will disappear into the parade of things.

My objects salute you.

(DIS)AGREEABLE OBJECTS

Hal Foster



Installation view of “Exhibition of Surrealist Objects,” Galerie Charles Ratton, Paris, 1936.

The economy of the art object today—political, libidinal—how can we possibly understand it? One way to begin is to sketch several redefinitions of the object in modern art—the modernist encounter with the tribal artifact, the dadaist proposition of the readymade, the surrealist invention of “objects of symbolic function,” and the minimalist and pop experiment with serial forms and images—with the hope that they might illuminate contemporary positionings of the work of art. This sketch will be idiosyncratic and schematic, more speculative than historical, but already two principles might be extrapolated: each of these redefinitions involves a contradiction between economies of the object, and each is informed by a type of fetishism.¹

For the modern artist in the imperialist metropolis, the “primitive” artifact was an object of intense ambivalence. By and large, cubists and fauves incorporated this object into modernist painting and sculpture. This aestheticist regard surely marked an advance over its evolutionist use as trophy or specimen, but it also completed the imperialist violence done to the artifact. For abstracted into form and redefined as art, the “primitive” object was stripped not only of content and context but also of ambivalence—ambivalence as a sign of cultural otherness, to be sure, but more as an object in a very different economy of the object, an economy of ritual, symbolic exchange, and the like.²

Now the formal interest alone of this African mask or that Oceanic figure is not enough to explain its deep attraction for the moderns. The “magic,” “immediacy,” “power” of the “primitive” object—were these not, in part, a function of its *difference*, as an object involved in ritual and symbolic exchange, from a cultural system determined by exhibition and capitalist exchange? In other words, was its attraction not, in part, its suggestiveness that (1) modern art might (re)claim a ritual function or cult value, and (2) the modern artist, made marginal in the bureaucratic world of monopoly capitalism, might (re)gain a shamanistic centrality to society? Given capitalist relations, this of course could not be (the possibility was at once critically utopian and corruptly ideological), nor could the precapitalist object retain its ambivalence in an economy based on equivalence. And so the tribal “fetish,” which represented a different social exchange just as the moderns aspired to one, was “fetishized”—its difference disavowed—into another kind of “fetish” altogether, the magical commodity.

In other words, the fetishism that is found in the economics of precapitalist societies arises from the sense of organic unity between persons and their products, and this stands in stark contrast to the fetishism of commodities in capitalist societies, which results from the split between persons and the things that they produce and exchange. The result of this split is the subordination of men to the things they produce, which appear to be independent and self-empowered.³

The Duchampian readymade underscored this commodity fetishism (by which, in the famous analysis of Marx, people and things exchange semblances: social relations take on the character of object relations, and commodities assume the active agency of people). In the context of the gallery or museum, the readymade suggested that the autonomous work of bourgeois art is fully fetishistic—both in the Freudian sense (i.e., it functions as a compensatory substitute that disguises or disavows its material reality) and in the Marxian sense (i.e., relations between art and society, artist and public, are presented as relations between art works). But, more, the readymade demonstrated allegorically that the work of art in capitalist society cannot escape the status of a commodity.

This now-familiar position originally rendered the readymade an object of great ambivalence. For if the tribal artifact in the metropolis opposed the capitalist form of sign exchange with a precapitalist form of symbolic exchange, so the readymade contradicted the preindustrial craft of traditional art with the industrial production of modern commodities. Out of this contradiction came two provocative propositions: on the one hand, the supposed autonomy of art was shown to be subsumed by market forces; and, on the other hand, the need for art defined by use rather than by exchange was espoused. This by no means covers the historical range of the readymade model, but it does suggest that its redefinition of the art work proceeded from a critical juxtaposition of contradictory economies of the object.

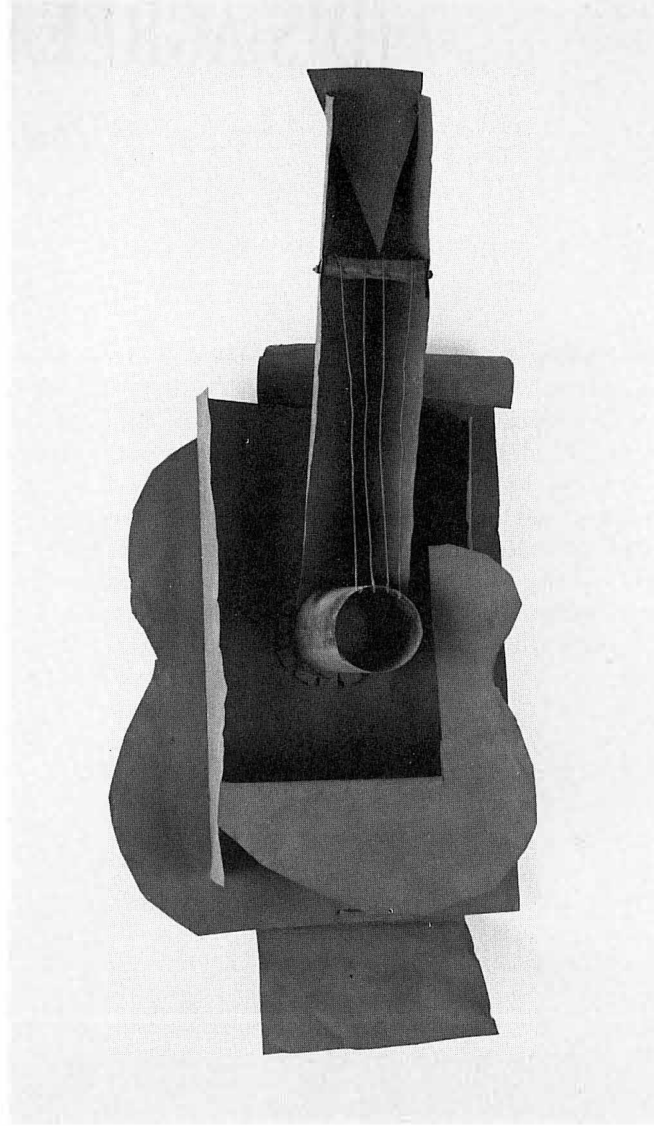
The surrealist object was most explicitly an object of fetishistic ambivalence, but least explicitly its ambivalence was also a function of different economies in contact. It is well known that the surrealists were obsessed with castration anxiety and its fetishistic defense: the oscillation, in surrealist photography alone, between castrative portraits of women and fetishistic im-



Mask. Grebo. Ivory Coast or Liberia. Painted wood and fiber, 25½" high.

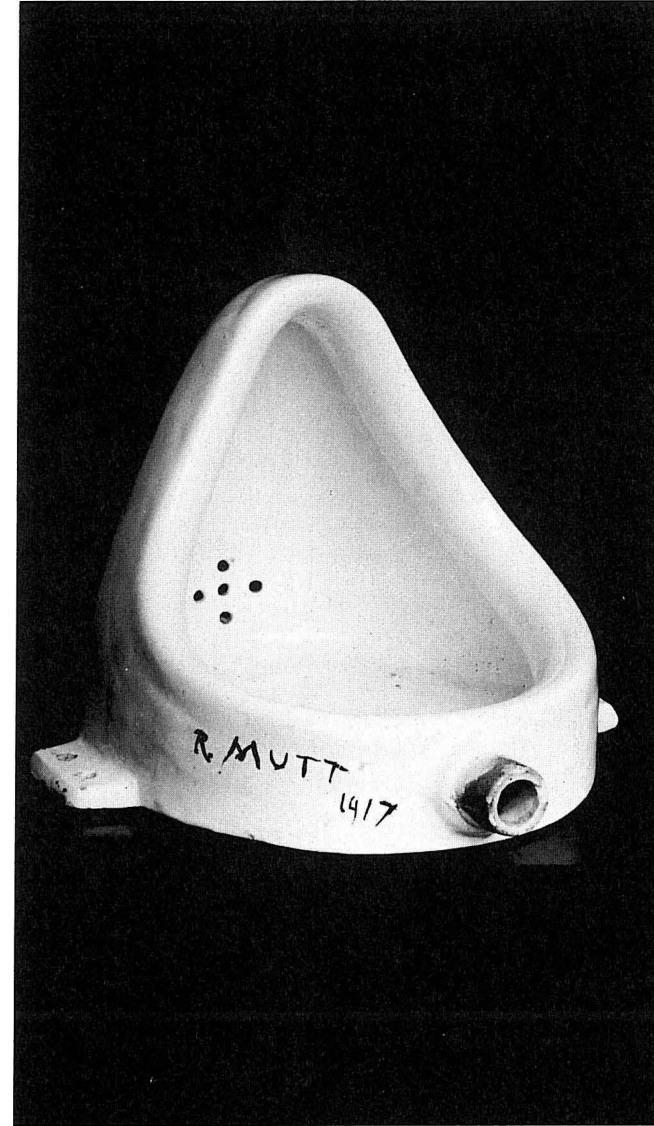
ages of nudes is evidence enough.⁴ Such fetishism informed the many kinds of surrealist objects too, even or especially the purely found ones. The classic example, recounted by Breton in the first pages of his *L'amour fou*, is his discovery, in a flea market, of an old slipper spoon (a wooden spoon with a little boot as a base). As an answer to a jingle (*cendrier Cendrillon*) that had riddled Breton at the time, this "Cinderella ashtray" was taken by him as a revelatory sign of his desire for love—consciously so, perhaps, given its conjunction of Freudian fetish (slipper) and surrealist emblem of woman (spoon).

If this suggests the "libidinal economy" of the typical surrealist object, what was its "political economy"? The slipper spoon was an object of artisanal labor—a crafted thing out-



Pablo Picasso, **Guitar**, 1912. Sheet metal and wire, 30½ x 13¾ x 7¾". The Museum of Modern Art, New York; gift of the artist.

moded (literally placed in a flea market) by the spread of industrial production. Could its service as a sign of a repressed wish or an obscure desire be related to its status as a vestige of a displaced social formation or an overcoded economic mode? In other words, could the surrealist concern with *the uncanny*—with familiar images, objects, or events made strange by repression—be connected to the Marxian concern with *the nonsynchronous* (the term is Ernst Bloch's)—with the uneven development or "repression" of means and relations of production? The revelatory objects and epiphanic places of the surrealists were indeed those "of a not yet fully industrialized and systematized economy."



Marcel Duchamp, **Fountain**, 1917 (2nd version, 1951). Ready-made: porcelain urinal on its back, inscribed in black paint. Sidney Janis Gallery, New York.

Thus what prepares these products to receive the investment of psychic energy characteristic of their use by Surrealism is precisely the half-sketched, uneffaced mark of human labor, of the human gesture, on them; they are still frozen gesture, not yet completely separated from subjectivity, and remain therefore potentially as mysterious and expressive as the human body itself.⁵

This remark by Fredric Jameson elaborates a perception of Walter Benjamin, who, in "Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia" (1929), celebrated the surrealists as "the first to perceive the revolutionary energies that appear in the 'outmoded'."⁶ Though faded now, this image still holds.

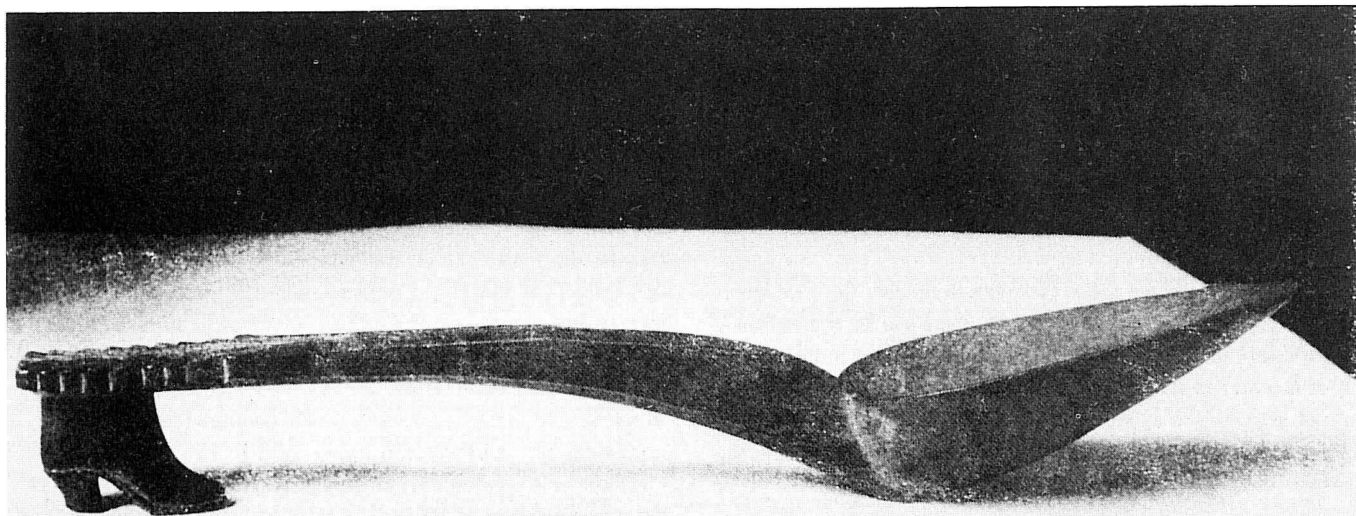
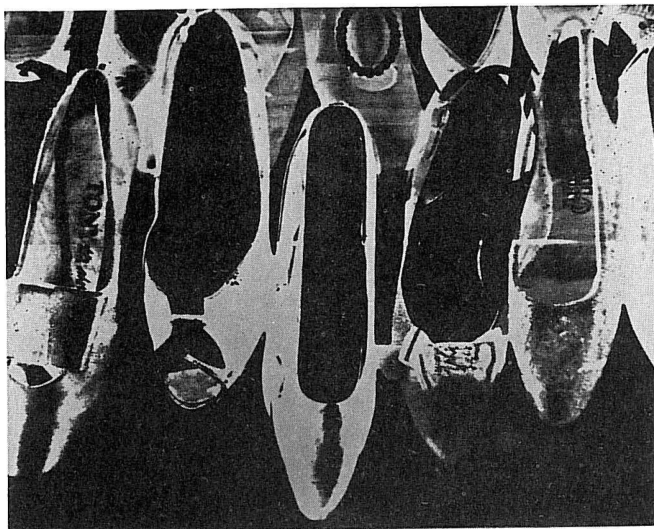
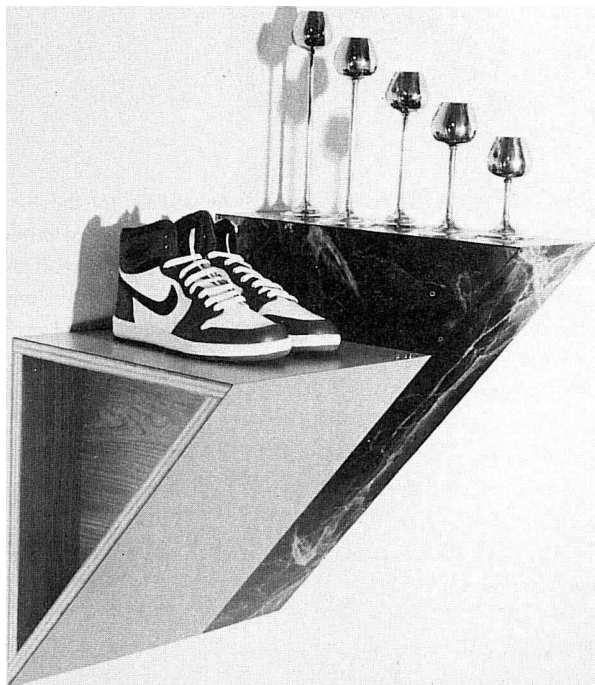
For the surrealists did collide "the wish-symbols" of the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie (which *its own* forces of production had turned into "ruins") with the reality principles of the twentieth century, and the effect of this collision was, in part, to turn these symbols into talismans of "dialectical thinking" or "historical awakening"—to redeem these ruins as texts of a "profane illumination, a materialistic, anthropological inspiration." Thus the surrealist object: an image, a thing, a place, evocative of the uncanny and the nonsynchronous, that combines, as on Lautréamont's dissecting table, different economies of the object.

Today, however, this moment or mode is totally superseded, or so Jameson has argued:

We need only juxtapose the mannequin, as a [surrealist] symbol, with the photographic object of pop art, the Campbell's Soup can, the pictures of Marilyn Monroe, or with the visual curiosities of op art; we need only exchange, for that environment of small workshops and store counters, for the *marché aux puces* and the stalls in the streets, the gasoline stations along American superhighways, the glossy photographs in the magazines, or the cellophane paradise of an American drugstore, in order to realize that the objects of Surrealism are gone without a trace.⁷

For Jameson, the consumerist products of this late-capitalist moment—the moment of pop and minimalism—are without depth: "all libidinal investment in such objects is precluded from the outset";⁸ even historicity is threatened with eclipse. Despite the insistence on the external in pop and minimalism, this formula is flawed (in the society of the spectacle "libidinal investment" is not "precluded"—it attaches to surfaces of all sorts). But Jameson does posit here a socioeconomic break in which pop and minimalism *are* involved—again, as more or less reflexive instances of both a new contradiction between economies of the object and a new form of fetishism in art.

These new conditions—fetishistic and contradictory—can be described roughly as follows. In minimalism, the fetishism is one of new materials (e.g., plexiglass, aluminum, formica) and techniques (e.g., industrial fabrication, serial production) that, though aesthetically nontraditional, are hardly neutral—they are "specific," as Donald Judd argued, but "specific" to an advanced industrial society.⁹ In pop, this fetishism of the techni-



(Above) Found object (slipper-spoon) belonging to André Breton; photograph by Man Ray, published in Breton's *L'Amour fou* (Paris, 1934); (top left) Haim Steinbach, **related and different**, 1985, mixed media, 36 x 20½ x 20", The Saatchi Collection, London; (top right) Andy Warhol, **Diamond Dust Shoes**, 1980, acrylic and silkscreen with diamond dust on canvas, 70 x 90", Leo Castelli Gallery, New York.

cal is superadded to a fetishism of the code¹⁰—a fetishism of the system of commodity-signs (typified in Warhol by the Campbell's Soup cans) which position us as fetishistic consumers of "choice" (i.e., of marginal, artificial difference). In pop and minimalism, then, the contradiction between economies of the object is one between a subjective model of high art, reasserted by abstract expressionism, and a serial mode of commodity-sign production, prepared by late capitalism.

Structurally, this collision is similar to the one forced by the Duchampian readymade, and in fact pop and minimalism do take up the readymade paradigm. However, they put it to dialectically different uses: whereas pop considers the readymade thematically, minimalism treats it abstractly, as a way, "one thing after another," to avoid relational composition.¹¹ But to what order does this one-thing-after-another-ness tend except to work in a series, to serial production (the minimalist industrial object, the pop silkscreen simulacrum)? Indeed, it is only with minimalism and pop (or maybe the Rauschenberg "combines") that serial production is made *consistently integral* to the technical production of the work of art. It is finally this, much more than the mass-cultural content of pop, that makes this art approach the status of everyday objects. And it is finally this, much more than the antianthropomorphism of minimalism, that severs this work not only from the subjectivity of the artist but also from the representational model of art.

Almost since the Industrial Revolution a contradiction has existed between the craft basis of high art and the industrial order of social life. With minimalism and pop this contradiction is almost collapsed (as in Warhol's "I want to be a machine"). In fact, both minimalism and pop reflect the penetration of industrial modes into spheres (such as leisure, sport, and art) previously somewhat preserved from them.¹² And yet, even as minimalism and pop exhibit aspects of an industrial logic, they announce aspects of a serial logic. For in serial production a degree of difference between images or commodities is allowed. In fact, it is difference—artificially produced—that we consume. This logic of differences and repetition structures the minimalist and pop work: it integrates them (like no other art before) into our systematic world of serial objects, images, people; and, being general to both high and low art forms now, it redefines the lines between modernism and mass culture.¹³

Given this new moment in the high/low dialectic, the readymade paradigm must be rethought. Despite reports of its total

acculturation, the anarchistic critique of the readymade can be extended to the late-capitalist economy of the sign (as the work of Louise Lawler suggests). However, in "cute-commodity" art (e.g., Haim Steinbach, Jeff Koons), its critical articulations are sometimes lost. As with the bronze ale cans of Jasper Johns, the bronze basketballs of Jeff Koons play the high/low ambivalence of the readymade both ways—and right into the ground. This collapse may be programmatic; nevertheless, the positioning of the art object here ingratiate more than disrupts. It does not critically repeat "the devaluation [of the object] to the status of a commodity"¹⁴ so much as capitalize on it.

But if this new stage of the art/commodity dialectic is one concern of contemporary artists, another is the new prominence of informational or postindustrial elements in our economy. And this is a similarly vexed issue, subject to repressive uses on the right and defeatist readings on the left. For Jean Baudrillard,¹⁵ resistance to this communicational regime is futile, for it goes beyond even such controls of the society of the spectacle as image fascination and sign fetishism. Although we can reject the idealist vision of Baudrillard (to say nothing of the postindustrial paradises of Daniel Bell and Gary Hart), late capitalism clearly has reconfigured its economies. And in this configuration (in which commodities can flow digitally as information), the art object will no doubt be transformed. If artists are to explore this moment, then like the critical moderns before them they must articulate its conflicts—the contradictions between its constituent economies.¹⁶ At the same time they will likely partake in whatever new fetishistic trap is laid for the subject by this system—for however penetrated by technoscience and however recoded as information, the body and the object will remain in this new regime as sites of first memories and last resistances.

NOTES

1. This list excludes far more than it includes. For an analysis of the productivist "object" see Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "From Faktura to Factography," *October*, no. 30 (Fall 1984): 83-119; and for a critique of the Bauhausian "object" see Jean Baudrillard, "Design and Environment" (1972), in *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, trans. Charles Levin (St. Louis: Telos Press, 1981), pp. 185-203.

2. The concept of “symbolic exchange” is drawn from Baudrillard, who in turn derives it from Bataille. For its relation to “primitivism,” see my “The ‘Primitive’ Unconscious of Modern Art,” *October*, no. 34 (Fall 1985): 45-70, reprinted in my *Recordings: Art, Spectacle, Cultural Politics* (Port Townsend, Wash.: Bay Press, 1985).

3. Michael T. Taussig, *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), p. 37.

4. See Rosalind Krauss, *L'Amour fou* (Washington, D. C. and New York: Corcoran Gallery and Abbeville Press, 1985), and my review-essay “L'Amour faux,” *Art in America* 72, no. 1 (January 1986): 116-129.

5. Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), p. 104.

6. Walter Benjamin, “Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia,” in *Reflections*, ed. Peter Demetz (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1978), p. 181. Some of the phrases that follow are quoted from the last pages of “Paris, Capital of the 19th Century,” also in *Reflections*.

7. Jameson, *Marxism and Form*, p. 105.

8. Ibid.

9. Karl Beveridge and Ian Burn, “Don Judd,” *The Fox*, no. 2 (1975): 129-142. The reference is to Judd’s “Specific Objects” (1965). For the concept of a minimalist “fetishism” I am indebted to Buchloh, “Constructing (the History of) Sculpture,” in *What is Modern Sculpture?*, ed. Margit Rowell (Paris: Musée National d’Art Moderne, 1986).

10. See Baudrillard, *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, p. 92.

11. See Rosalind Krauss, *Passages in Modern Sculpture* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1977), p. 250. My discussion of pop and minimalism is developed in “The Crux of Minimalism,” forthcoming, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles.

12. As the economist Ernest Mandel has argued, late-capitalist society is thus thoroughly industrial, not purely postindustrial. See Mandel, *Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1978), p. 387.

13. See Craig Owens, “Allan McCollum: Repetition and Difference,” *Art in America* 71, no. 8 (September 1983): 130-132.

14. Buchloh, “Allegorical Procedures: Appropriation and Montage in Contemporary Art,” *Artforum* 21, no. 1 (September 1982): 43-56.

15. In his writings Baudrillard has traced these transformations specifically in terms of different economies of the object. In *Le Système des objets* (Paris: Gallimard, 1968) Baudrillard begins to theorize serial production; here he first proposes that it is difference (i.e., the difference between serial commodities or images, not the substance, meaning, or use of any one) that we compulsively consume (cf. the surrogate art works of Allan McCollum). In *La Société de consumma-*

tion (Paris: Gallimard, 1970) Baudrillard elaborates this concept of consumption as “an active manipulation of signs” into a theory of consumption as the production of “sign-exchange value” (cf. again the work of Louise Lawler). In *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign* (1972) this is in turn developed into a critique of both Marxism and structuralism as symptoms (not sciences) of the capitalist logic whereby expressions and entities are abstracted, fragmented, fetishized. Here Baudrillard argues that a “fetishism of the signifier” governs the consumer-society citizen: “That is to say that the subject is trapped in the factitious, differential, encoded, systematized aspect of the object. It is not the passion (whether of objects or subjects) for substances that speaks in fetishism, it is the *passion for the code*, which, by governing both objects and subjects, and by subordinating them to itself, delivers them up to abstract manipulation” (p. 92). (Much critical art involved in allegorical appropriations is informed by this fetishism, exposes even as it deconstructs its “abstract manipulations.”)

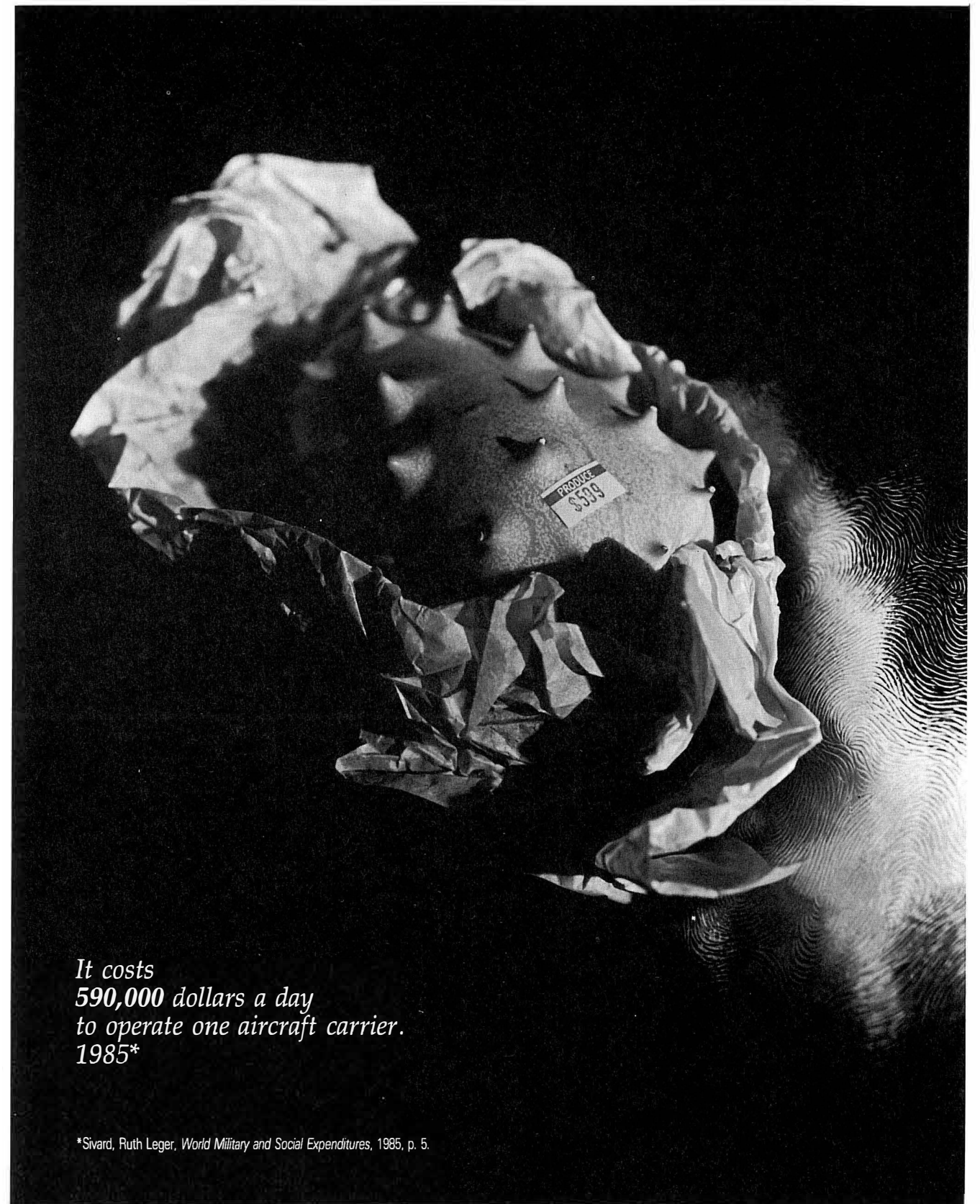
Today, Baudrillard proclaims in his apocalyptic way, this is mostly obsolete:

There is no longer any system of objects. My first book contains a critique of the object as obvious fact, substance, reality, use value. There the object was taken as sign, but as sign still heavy with meaning. In this critique two principal logics interfered with each other: a *phantasmatic logic* that referred principally to psychoanalysis...and a *differential social logic* that made distinctions by referring to a sociology, itself derived from anthropology (consumption as the production of signs, differentiation, status and prestige)...

In a certain way all this still exists, and yet in other respects it is all disappearing. The description of this whole intimate universe—projective, imaginary and symbolic—still corresponded to the object’s status as mirror of the subject, and that in turn to the imaginary depths of the mirror and “scene”...The oppositions subject/object and public/private were still meaningful...

But today the scene and mirror no longer exist; instead, there is a screen and network. In place of the reflexive transcendence of mirror and scene, there is a nonreflecting surface, an immanent surface where operations unfold—the smooth operational surface of communication. (“The Ecstasy of Communication,” in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster [Port Townsend, Wash.: Bay Press, 1983], pp. 126-127.)

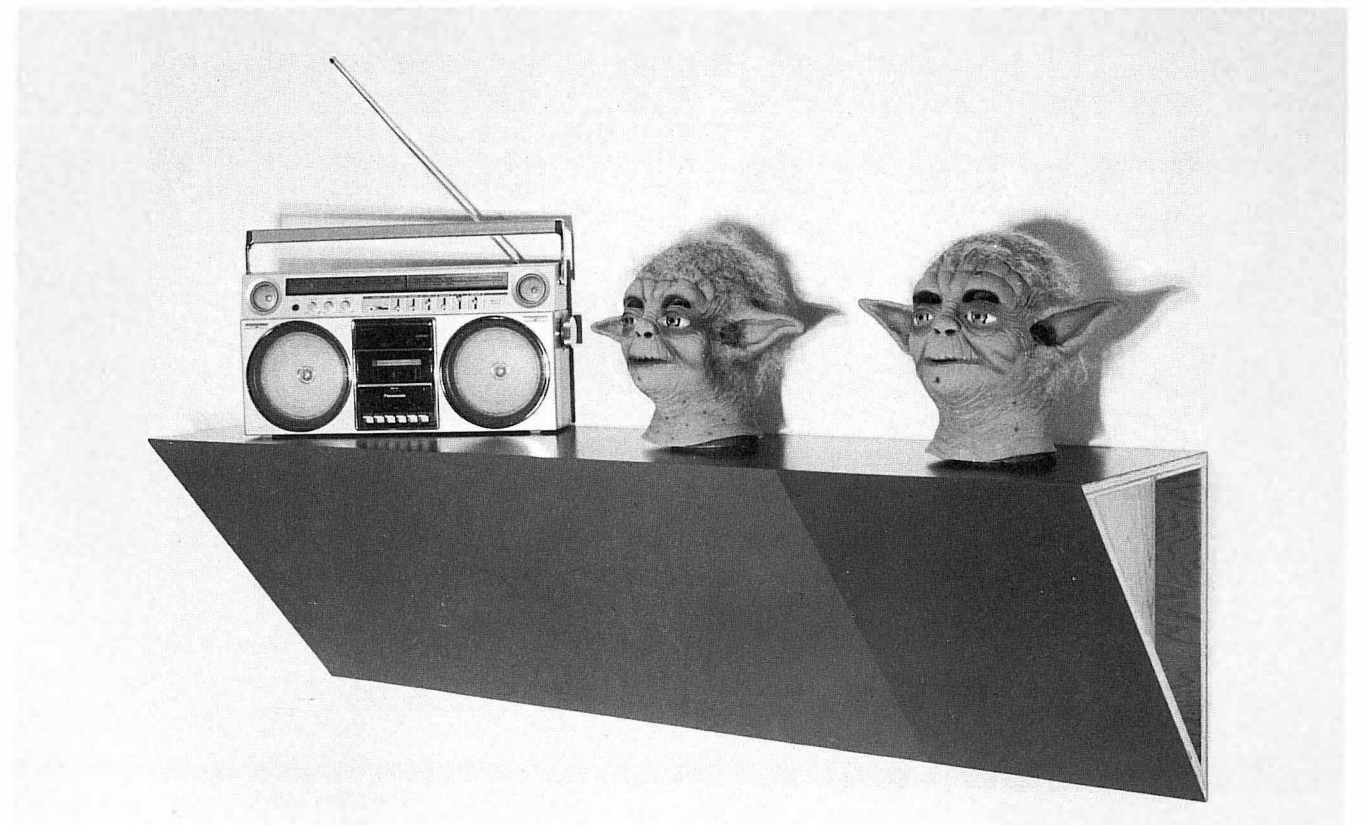
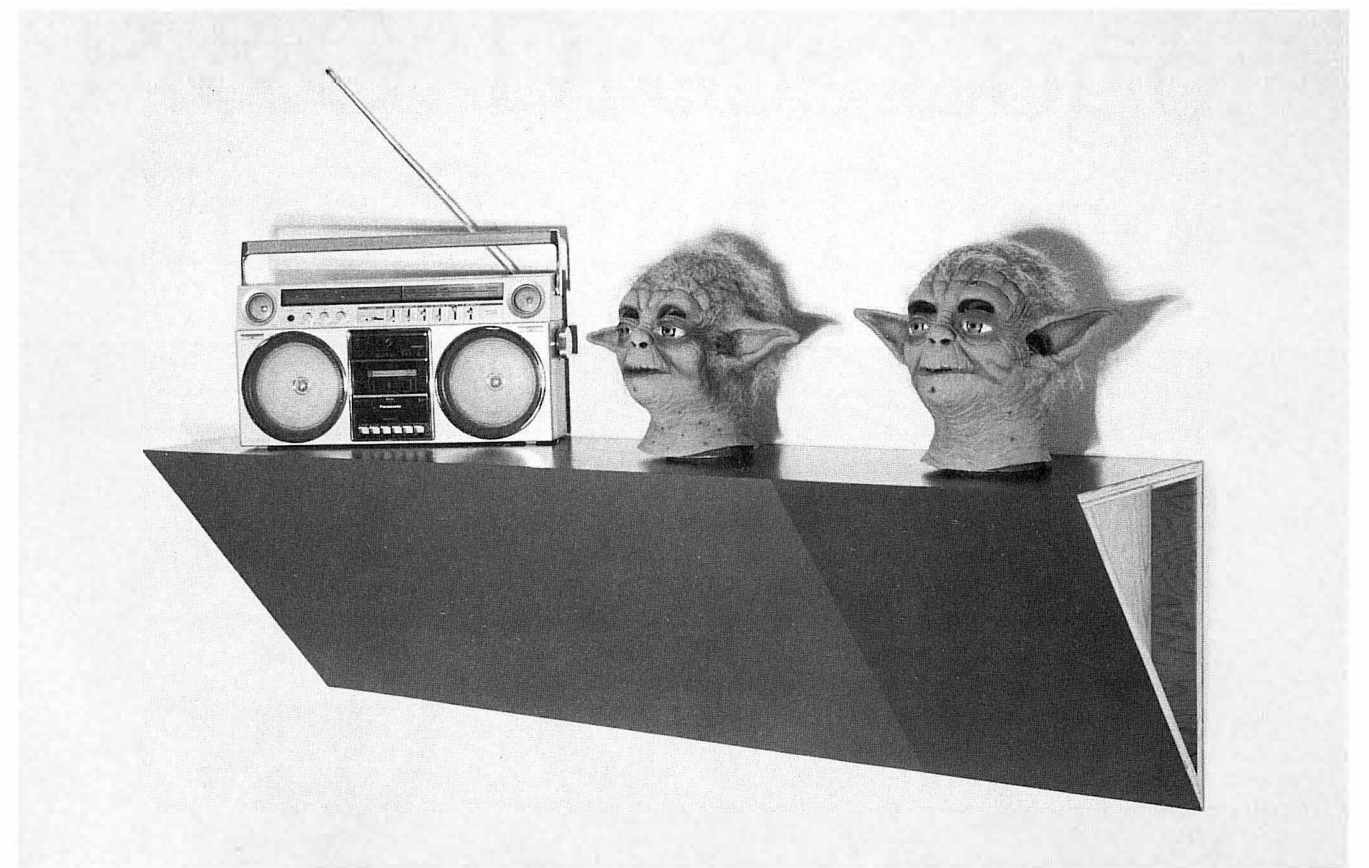
16. For an important analysis of such emergent contradictions, see Jonathan Crary, “Eclipse of the Spectacle,” in *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation*, ed. Brian Wallis (New York and Boston: The New Museum of Contemporary Art and David R. Godine, 1984), pp. 283-294.



*It costs
590,000 dollars a day
to operate one aircraft carrier.
1985**

*Sivard, Ruth Leger, *World Military and Social Expenditures*, 1985, p. 5.

Introducing
something
most car
companies
don't make
anymore.



P.&G. Drops Logo; Cites Satan Rumors

Man in Moon Loses a Job

By SANDRA SALMANS

The Procter & Gamble Company, whose moon-and-stars trademark had been said by a nationwide rumor campaign to be the mark of the Devil, announced yesterday that it was removing the century-old design from its products.

The giant consumer products company, perennially the largest national advertiser and one of the most skillful marketers, had conducted a futile, five-year effort to dispel the notion that the company was in some way associated with Satan.

Company Will Use Symbol

The trademark will be eliminated over several years, as packages are redesigned. The logotype will remain, however, on Procter's letterheads and on its corporate headquarters in Cincinnati.

"We're hoping that removing the logo will end the confusion in consumers' minds," said Carol Taylor, a spokesman for P.&G. "We're not bowing down to pressure," she added. "There seems to be little advantage to having it on products. As we've added more information, the trademark has gotten smaller and smaller."

While Procter sought to play down the change with its typical diffidence, marketing experts saw it as a rare case of a giant company succumbing to a bizarre and untraceable rumor.

"It's certainly one for the books," said Clive Chajet, chief executive of Lippincott & Margulies, a company that designs corporate images, including logotypes.

Procter recently set up a toll-free number, 800-354-0508, for inquiries about the trademark.

P.&G.'s trademark, which shows the Man in the Moon and 13 stars, began as a crude cross around 1850, used by dock workers to identify the company's Star brand candles. The cross evolved into a star, then a clus-

ter of stars representing the original 13 colonies. The Man-in-the-Moon profile — "Well, it was just a popular fancy at that time," explains the recorded message on the toll-free number — was added later and the logotype was registered in the United States Patent Office in 1882.

Since 1980, mostly anonymous rumors have sprung up in various parts of the country, contending that the design is a symbol of Satanism and Devil worship and urging people to boycott Ivory Snow, Pampers, Duncan Hines and dozens of other well-known Procter brands.

Claims in Fliers

Some circulars have noted that, when a mirror is held up to the logotype, the curlicues in the man's beard appear as 666 — the sign of the Antichrist. Other fliers have contended that Procter executives said on the Phil Donahue or Merv Griffin talk shows that the company tithes to Satanism.

Procter is not the only company to be victimized by strange rumors. In the past, it has been whispered that McDonald's put worms in its hamburgers and that Life Savers' Bubble Yum contained spider eggs. Some people have seen a Communist connection in the bent-elbow, clenched-fist symbol of Arm and Hammer, the baking soda.

But the rumors about Procter and the Devil have been extraordinarily persistent. By mid-1982, Procter's consumer services department — whose separate toll-free telephone number is printed on every Procter product — was getting 15,000 queries monthly about its relationship with the Devil. ("I'd like to explain at this time that first of all, we are not connected to any Satanic church or organization whatsoever," the recorded message says.)

The company, after years of trying to ignore the rumor, mounted an aggressive campaign to defend itself. It hired two investigative agencies to try to trace the sources of the rumors. It filed libel suits against six people for spreading "false and malicious" rumors. The suits were settled out of court when the defendants retracted their statements. The number of queries dropped by half.

Rumors Re-emerge

But the rumors, which had begun on the West Coast and shifted to the South, continued to crop up in new parts of the country. Last week, at a news conference in New York to deny the stories, Procter said that it was getting 5,000 calls a month, 60 percent of them from New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania.

Defending Procter from the rumors cost the company "in the hundreds of thousands of dollars," Miss Taylor, the Procter spokesman, said yesterday. While there is no way to measure the rumors' impact on consumers, she added, "we're sure it has affected sales." She added that the company "will continue to fight the situation on all fronts."

Mr. Chajet declined to speculate whether the trademark's removal would solve Procter's problems. But he suggested that they might never have arisen.

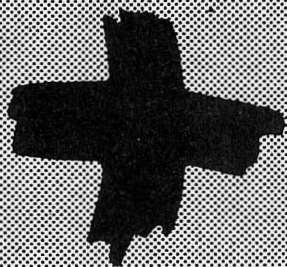
"Logos in those days were designed to be decorative," he noted. "There was no thought given to their usefulness. Today, they strengthen a company's planned communication effort." Procter's plight, he said, "was indicative of a company that hasn't paid much attention to its corporate identification."

So should Procter have had an identification instead of its moon-and-stars?

"That is the company identification," Miss Taylor said.

How Procter & Gamble's Symbol Has Changed

1851



1882



1902



1920



1932

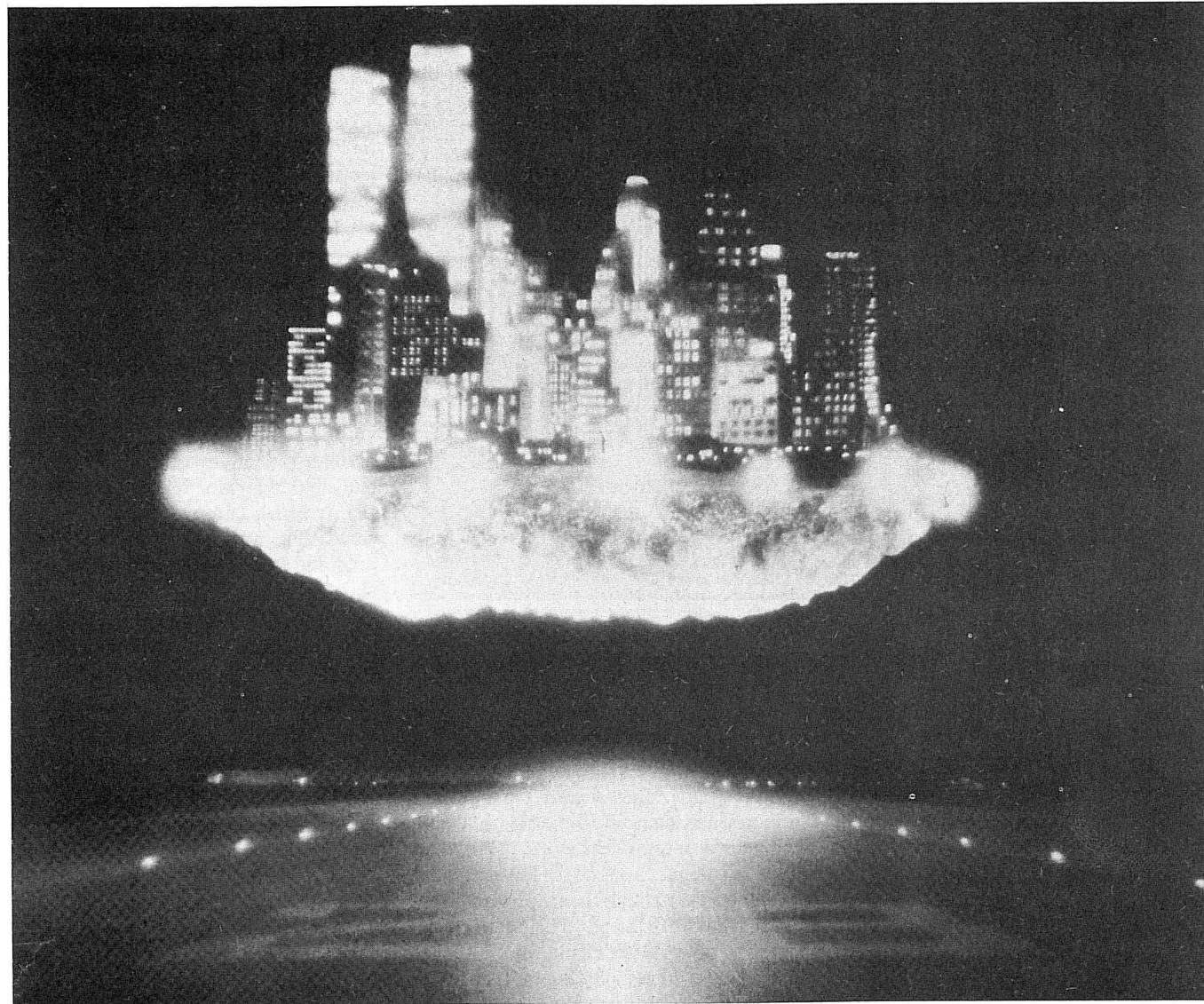


Source: Eyes on Tomorrow
by Oscar Schisgall
©1981, Doubleday

The New York Times / April 25, 1985

A PRODUCT YOU COULD KILL FOR

Brian Wallis



Saatchi & Saatchi, still from **Manhattan Landing**, 1983. Commercial advertisement, color video tape, 90 seconds.

What fascinates us is always that which radically excludes us in the name of its internal logic or perfection: a mathematical formula, a paranoid system, a concrete jungle, a useless object.

—Jean Baudrillard, *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*

Anything that impairs global communications is in fact impairing trade. Information and trade are intertwined and inseparable.

—Philip H. Geier, *A View from the Top: The Importance of Managing Global Communications*

Second for second, surely the most spectacular filmic experience of recent years is the 90-second television commercial *Manhattan Landing*, produced in 1983 for British Airways by the London-based advertising firm Saatchi & Saatchi. Over the horizon appears an apparition: the entire island of Manhattan has been uprooted from its geographical setting and is airborne, approaching with its immense, twinkling skyline intact. Equipped with massive headlights and space-age propulsion, Manhattan passes overhead like a silent space station, bound for London's Heathrow Airport. Above London suburbs Manhattan attracts the amazed stares of stereotypic Britons momentarily distracted from their stereotypic British activities. Airport runway lights appear and the massive island jets in for a landing. A closing graphic shows a globe exploding with rays connecting London to all points in the world.

Though presented as extraordinary, the scene is a familiar one, drawing directly on the forms and associations of similar scenes from science fiction adventures such as *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*. This familiarity does not diminish the ecstatic drama of the advertisement, however, but instead testifies to the widespread appeal of sheer technical virtuosity. A triumph of special effects, *Manhattan Landing* delineates our special fascination with certain characteristics of new technology: speed, scale, brilliance, simulation, and raw technological power. Despite its generic science fiction trappings, *Manhattan Landing* is also a summary of real concerns in representation, focusing attention on the seductive lure of the simulated object

and on imagemaking which certifies the obliteration of real time and real space.

Beyond these formal, visual accomplishments, however, at the time of its release, *Manhattan Landing* also signified a critical economic encounter: the advent of global advertising. For the first time, an identical advertisement was available for broadcast in 46 different countries, with a voiceover in one of 34 different languages. Heralded in the *New York Times* as “Opportunities for World Brands,” the global advertising scheme envisioned by Saatchi & Saatchi was seen by them as an inevitable development. Their full-page advertisement argued that,

“At the same time as demography is converging, television and motion pictures are creating elements of a shared culture. And this cultural convergence is facilitating the establishment of multinational brand characters. The worldwide proliferation of the Marlboro brand would not have been possible without TV and motion picture education about the virile rugged character of the American West and the American cowboy—helped by increasing colour TV penetration in all countries.”¹

For Saatchi & Saatchi, the world is already becoming more homogeneous through the repetition and proliferation of the signs of culture, therefore it is inevitable that people in various cultures could be induced to want the same brands and products. In partial contradiction of the standard advertising strategy of targeting audiences, global advertising suggests that the penetration of the image is so deep and so effective that it has evacuated cultural distinctions among local consumers; the smart company would therefore market the same product with the same images to various markets. As Thomas Levitt, marketing professor at Harvard and the genius behind the Saatchi & Saatchi strategy, asserts, “the global company will shape the vectors of technology and globalization into its great strategic fecundity. It will systematically push these vectors toward their own convergence, offering everyone simultaneously high-quality, more or less standardized products at optimally low prices, thereby achieving for itself vastly expanded markets and profits. Companies that do not adapt to the new global realities will become victims of those that do.”²

This totalized strategy of global marketing is predicated not only on the saturation potential of any image, but also on a radically restructured world economy. The “crisis” of global economy stems in large part from the decline of United States superiority in Western political and economic order, and was prominently signalled in the early 1970s by a collapse in financial domination (the revocation of the gold standard) and a fundamental defeat in politico-military supremacy (the victory of nonconventional warfare in Vietnam). The oil crisis of 1973, which pointed to the complete supercession of the bipolar model of global politics (U.S.-U.S.S.R.), and the rise of supranational organizations of international power (particularly the World Bank, the IMF, and the multinational corporation), further clarified the reduced nature of United States economic power and more generally, suggested a decline of world capitalism.³

Although all manner of commentators have therefore theorized the dawn of a “postindustrial society” beyond the laws of classical capitalism, the Marxist economist Ernest Mandel has argued instead that this new economic structure is in fact a more complete stage of capitalism.⁴ This third stage of capitalism (following market capitalism and monopoly or imperialist capitalism) Mandel calls “late capitalism” and he associates it with the rise and total penetration of consumerism and multinational capitalism. “Late capitalism,” Mandel stresses, “constitutes generalized universal industrialization for the first time in history. Mechanization, standardization, over-specialization and parcellization of labour, which in the past determined only the realm of commodity production in actual industry, now penetrate into all sectors of social life.”⁵ These routines of industrial production have entered not only into more and more remote markets, but also into the individual psyche, affecting and influencing the structure of everyday life. For, along with the “generalized universal industrialization” has come a thorough penetration of advertising into every level of social life.

Advertising succeeds in structuring desires and consumptive habits as the extension of the industrialization process. For inevitably advertising has at least three functions: first, to sell a product; second, to sell an ideology or generalized value system to which the producers of the product subscribe; and third, to conceal the actual labor processes required to produce the product. In other words, advertising proceeds by a series of abstractions, abstractions which remove the product (object) from

its material or unsavory context and project it outward toward its audience in the form of a sign. By simulating reality or the world as we know it, advertising overlays onto our image of that world the particular motivations and belief systems of the advertisers. Locally this may be of little consequence, but extrapolated to the international level, this type of global advertising serves to disintegrate difference, consolidate economic and political control, and institute universal standardization.

Thus, *Manhattan Landing* seems poised precariously on the lip of the future. This advertisement with its dematerialization of space, time, and gravity, with its spectacular demonstration of the fluid acceleration of the image, with its instant transfer to 46 countries throughout the globe should stand as evidence of the withering away of the commodity and its replacement by an international image market based in the media and generated by telecommunications and information transfer. Indeed, the French theorist Jean Baudrillard has announced that, “There is no longer any system of objects,”⁶ but rather—according to him—a world governed entirely by reproduction (rather than production) and by simulation of the real. But what can this mean, for certainly we live in a world of commodities, of consumer goods, merchandise, and commerces, in which economic exchange is also—still—an aspect of social exchange? For Baudrillard and others, the object is superceded because it has been surpassed as the dominant structural element in politico-economic commerce. What Fredric Jameson calls “the waning of affect” also refers to the loss of emotional investment in the object (a loss which precludes expressionism), which is characteristic of our time. But if these theorizations of the demise of the object as the vital core of capitalistic production are true, then how can we regard the continued circulation of objects and commodities? How could this understanding of the social function of objects relate to a larger understanding of shifting social, economic, and political relations? And, finally, in what ways might this shifting structure of capital effect our everyday lives, particularly the intimate relations of objects and desires?

These questions form the basis for a large discussion to which this exhibition can only be a partial response. “Damaged Goods” does not attempt to define a new role for the object in society, but rather to address aspects of our psychological attraction to the object and to examine the context in which those desires are structured. In general, the artists in this ex-

hibition address the strategies and the deployment of consumerism at a historical juncture when consumer culture is itself being questioned. For some artists, this involves the production of “false objects,” works which resemble functional commodities, but which are mute, imperfect, useless. For others, their response is formulated in terms of an analysis of the system which supports the circulation of objects, that is, forms of display, advertising, presentation, and distribution. But both of these approaches investigate ways in which the object in contemporary economic relations is both inadequate and imperfect. Today the object or product is transformed into a desirable commodity through a panoply of advertising and marketing devices, but is itself hollowed of use or meaning, atrophied in deference to the supplements of presentational devices and props. It is this constructed object, distilled from its own aura and bearing no relation to “Nature” or to “the Real,” which Baudrillard describes as “simulated.” The simulated object, according to Baudrillard, is eviscerated of substance, but projected outward on a colossal scale; object as product, commodity, and object of desire, the simulated object is today inadequate to its promise. Images and codes no longer refer to “an original” but to one another, and it is the image-sign or more precisely the *system* of signs which fascinate us, which we desire. That we now desire the fetishized image, the artificial object, is suggested by recent advertising which more and more emphasizes “lifestyle” rather than a particular product (often only “casually” mentioning the brand) and removes utility from prominence as the criteria for purchase. Thus, in a series of recent Nike ads for a new line of sportswear, famous sports stars are simply shown in large color photographs (one, of Dwight Gooden, is twenty stories tall), with no advertising copy and only a small Nike logo. More than just an innovative ad campaign, this device points to the supercession of the object as the centerpiece of capitalistic exchange and its replacement by an order of signs and signifying devices.

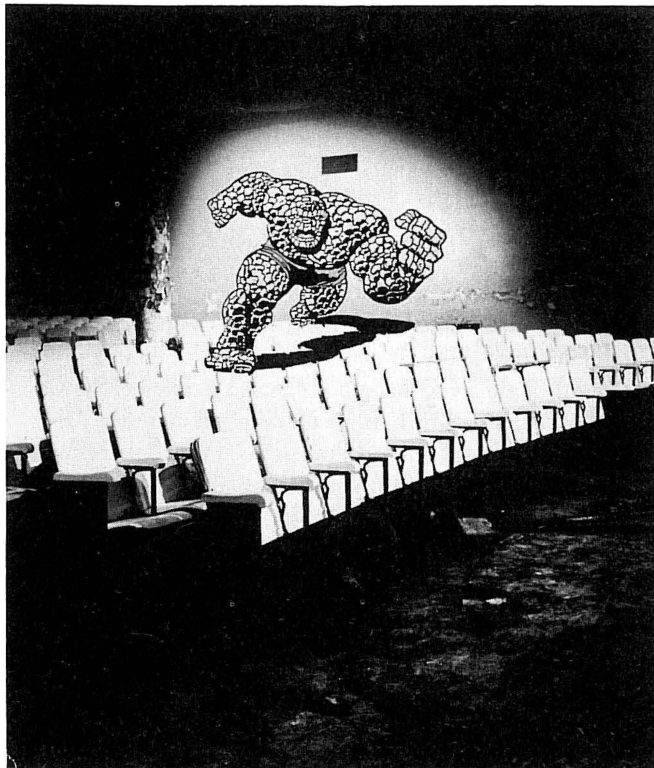
The method by which inherently neutral objects are endowed with desirable and hence marketable qualities depends both on the abstraction of the commodity character of the object (through brilliant finish, bright colors, enlargement, repetition, accumulation), and on the physical and psychological siting of the subject in relation to the object (through architectural devices, lighting, decorative props, and furniture). It is this second aspect—the positioning and control of the shopper/

viewer—which is the focus of Judith Barry’s work. Trained in both architecture and in film theory, Barry is interested in the psychological effects of this predetermined location of the viewer. This is an issue which has been raised in film theory because of the necessarily fixed vantage point of the spectator, but in her essay “Casual Imagination,” Barry considers the experience of shopping as related to the cinematic one, though even more highly manipulated.⁷ For in the department store, the shopper is both a voyeur and a discoverer, passing through a highly orchestrated environment designed to govern circulation and to heighten the shopper’s consumptive urges. In a similar way, her videotape *Casual Shopper* (1983), foregrounds the manner in which social exchanges are embedded in the architecture of everyday life, through mirrors, signage, windows, displays.

Many of the same psychological exchanges and manipulative cues are structured into exhibition designs as well, so in her design for the present exhibition, Barry has attempted to delineate the more subtle psychological narratives which are imagined for museum spaces. Her strategy is “to problematize the role of the spectator, [creating] ‘by means of design,’ an active participation rather than a passive viewing.”⁸ This rupture of the apparent transparency of the exhibition space has both theoretical and theatrical precedents (which Barry locates in the exhibition designs of El Lissitzky and Carl Akeley, master of the dioramas of the Museum of Natural History); in each case these works draw attention to the “effects” which are created and which structure the transaction between (art) object and (viewing) subject.

In a somewhat different way, Justen Ladda also describes the spectator’s perfect positioning by the product, for all his works employ a rigid system of perspective. In his works, images (often derived from mass culture, such as *The Thing* or Durer’s *Praying Hands*) are often projected onto other objects in such a way that the complete image is visible from only a single vantage point. In constructing *The Thing*, for instance, a fragmented image of a comic book character was painted on the seats of an auditorium in an abandoned school in South Bronx. Viewed from various angles, the painting on the seats made little sense, but once the single “proper” sightpoint was reached, the complex visual puzzle fit together to form a unified image which seemed to hover menacingly in the dark space.⁹

Ladda’s work is not about the illusionistic trickery of such



Justen Ladda, **The Thing**, 1981. Latex, tempera, enamelac on auditorium chairs, 9 x 15 x 45'. P. S. 37, New York.

constructions, however. Rather it is about the psychological and perceptual organization of the viewer. For this reason, Ladda is fascinated by the structure and siting of commercial advertisements. His installation for this exhibition derives part of its title, *True Gold*, from a recent and notorious advertising campaign for cigarettes (a typical strategy of this campaign called for the installation of dramatically lit bus stop ads with the tagline, “True Gold—Born Rich,” in several of the poorest neighborhoods in New York). The installation, a sort of prelude to the exhibition as a whole, dramatizes the seductiveness and absurd theatricality of much advertising. The seemingly anthropomorphic pedestals, arranged in processional rows, gesture toward the entrance, while spotlights illuminate the glowing golden objects they support: molded jello. With wry humor and decorative paraphernalia (such as the red carpet runner), Ladda makes clear the psychological calculation with which advertising addresses and directs the viewer. Focusing particularly on the dematerialization of the object, the jello-centric installation *...and now this... (True Gold—born rich)*, demonstrates the abstract theatricality of the system of advertising, where the motive is to produce an “effect.” This effect is not the superabundant realism Roland Barthes called “the effect of reality,” but the hollowed-out effect of simulation. The attraction is not a product or an object of use or value, but merely a mood on the rise.

Barbara Bloom also examines the structuring of mood or ambience as a way of manipulating desire, particularly as this mood is structured around images of absence, longing, or threat. Working in a variety of forms and media (film, photography, installation, books, design), Bloom develops ways in which to simultaneously represent and reproduce the conventional form of commercial seduction. In her film, *Diamond Lane*, for example, the quintessential come-on—the film trailer—provides the form to suggest a narrative about potential success (“...in the almost empty Diamond Lane the traffic flows at great speeds...”). The film is a trailer for a nonexistent “original.” It offers a variety of oblique scenes which create only the fragment of a story and thereby constitutes an unfulfillable promise of completion. At the same time this five-minute trailer was released an extensive publicity campaign was carried out for *Diamond Lane*.

For Bloom it is important that these works function in total complicity with the context they seek to challenge. Thus, her works are generally public and often are indistinguishable “real” versions of those objects. As she says, “In all my work ‘seeming’ and ‘appearing as if’ play a large role. In making works within the chosen medium, I attempt to have the work look like normal products made within that form. I remain true to the ‘rules’ of the particular medium, thus producing a poster which looks ‘like’ a normal commercial poster, a film trailer which appears ‘like’ a normal trailer, a book cover ‘like’ a regular book cover. But this looking ‘like,’ this chameleonic means of achieving my purpose is, on the surface, a first impression. The images, often through irony, offer commentary upon the medium in which they are placed and cultural images (clichés) in general.”¹⁰ This general strategy of operation *within* the medium being critiqued—common to all the artists in this exhibition—reflects not only an inability to function critically outside of the medium or system, but also the signal importance of penetrating, inhabiting, and degrading the functional core. By taking elements of inducement—posters, advertisements, film trailers, book jackets—as her medium, Bloom distinguishes those ostensibly marginal cultural by-products as the central forms which shape our consciousness and our social environment.

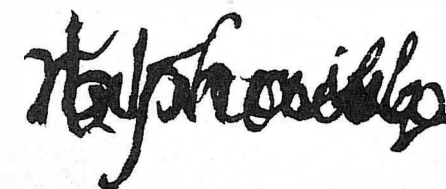
The works of Barry, Bloom, and Ladda, then, suggest certain ways in which the consumer is already controlled, not by the object, but by the social context in which the object is situated. As channels of desire, these architectural spaces with their props and images serve to map our fundamental striving for coherence and order, to fill in for absence and lack, and to encourage the satisfaction of libidinal proclivities through the consumption of material goods. But Andrea Fraser’s works look at another type of marginal social manipulation: the pedagogical supplement. She has fabricated, for example, books, posters, polls, art criticism, and, in this exhibition, docent tours, all in a self-conscious attempt both to identify how these fully accredited devices function as covert bearers of meaning, but also

to challenge the institutionalized authority of the artist (as commodity) and the value-laden art object. Her book, *Woman 1/ Madonna and Child, 1506-1967*, for example, functions as both an artists’ book (relatively inexpensive and easily distributed) and a parody of a lavishly produced museum brochure. In fact, the texts—excerpted from actual museum catalogues on the work of Raphael and Willem de Kooning—demonstrate how an ostensibly “neutral” art history constructs a stereotypical and condescending view of both women (the subjects) and artists (the producers).

Despite its specific art world references, Fraser’s work should be taken as a study of the dissemination of “mass culture” as a product. For the formal systems which she examines are those which mediate between the specialists of high culture and the general public. In this exhibition, for instance, her work consists simply of a docent tour, conducted weekly, and calling attention to not only the artworks but also the institutional setting and the device of the tour itself. Guided tours of art exhibitions are increasingly routine, but despite the creation of a new mass audience for art, their form has not substantially changed. As Fraser says, “More often than not the docents employed by the museum are not themselves authorities on the work at hand. Rather they are conduits of conventional opinion briefed by the curatorial staff.”¹¹ In this way such public information merely reconstitutes and reinscribes a conventional wisdom, maintaining the autonomous structure of the art historical system with its linear progression of masters and masterpieces. Fraser disrupts this easy acceptance with a counternarrative which points explicitly to the non-art objects in the space, highlighting their essentially invisible role in the structure, production, and consumption of art and art information.

In this respect, nearly all of the artists in the exhibition seek to demonstrate the relationship between their art and exchange functions in the “real world.” This is most explicit in the works of Haim Steinbach and Jeff Koons, primarily because they utilize actual products—relatively unaltered—in their sculptures. But these works are not simply readymades, for they involve careful attention to the formal qualities, number, color, and subtle economic codings of the objects they present. Both Koons and Steinbach make clear that these objects of popular culture (rug shampooers, desk clocks, Halloween masks, basketballs, toilet brushes) are not simply random forms of kitsch, but are conceived by their manufacturers as strategically marketed products. Although not generally perceived as “design objects,” the products they use are extraordinary examples of a compromise between productivist values (clean, efficient design and mass distribution) and consummativist desires (variety, innovation, color difference, standardization of quality, and newness).

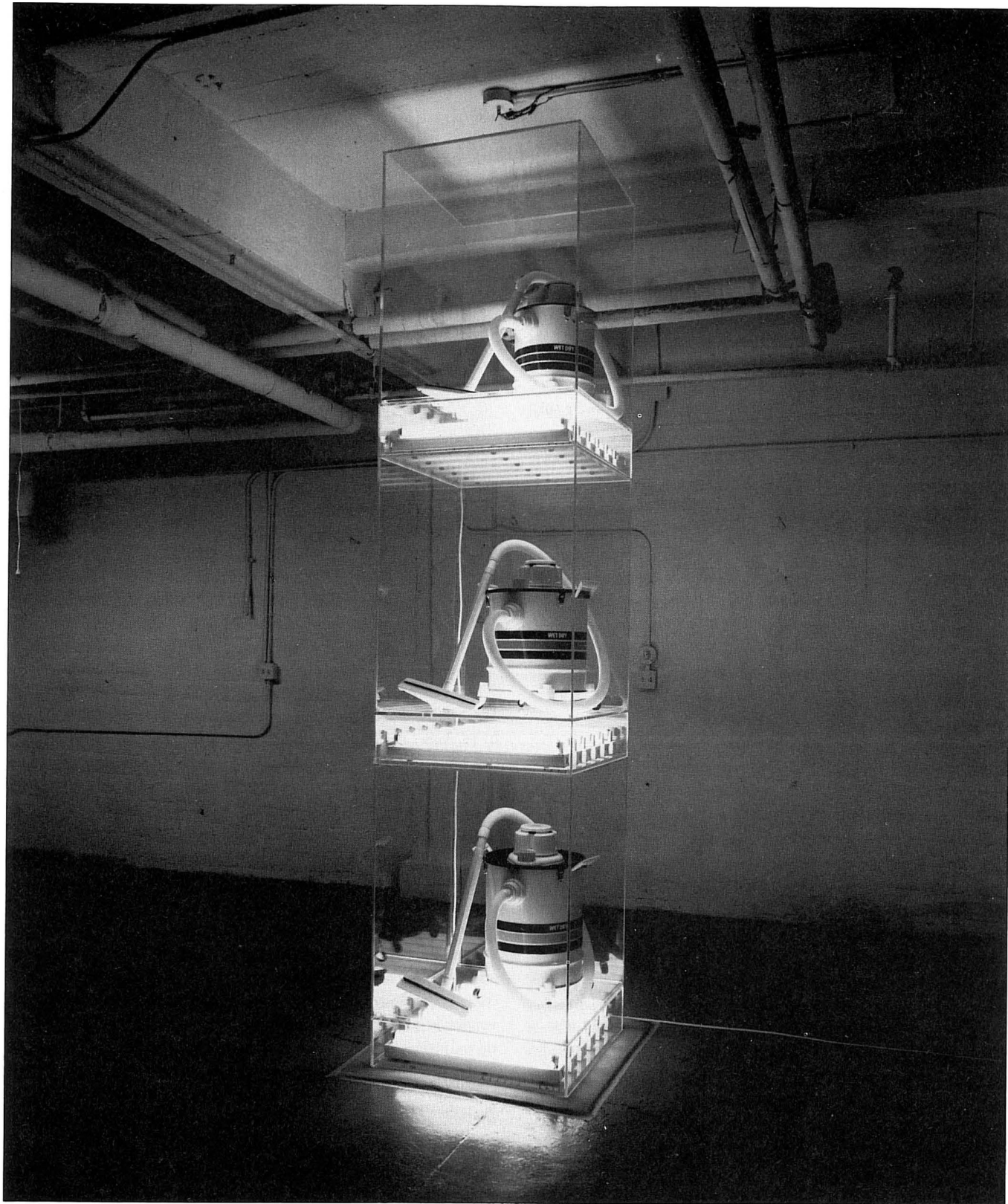
For Koons the principle abstraction which advertising constructs for the object is newness. Advertising presents newness as always-present, when in fact experience and use present



Andrea Fraser, **Woman 1/Madonna and Child, 1506-1967**, 1984. Offset printed book, 11 x 8½".

newness as always-lost. An object that can retain its newness—which can be preserved, sealed, encased—can sustain desire. This is the utopia which advertising projects (as in Koons’s *New! New, too!*) one in which the elusive “new” is blended with other forms of abstraction (color, surface sheen, scale) to suggest something which is desirable, yet unattainable. In his early works, such as *New Sheldon Wet/Dry Tripledecker*, Koons uses actual products—rug shampooers—which he adds on to by encasing them in plexiglas. This creates a double distancing, simultaneously protecting the object’s brand-newness from use and removing or entombing the object. By making the original object unattainable, Koons preserves the denial which lies at the heart of the consumer’s desire. Not wanting to violate the seal of newness and at the same time trapped by a craving to own, possess, and manipulate the object, the consumer is caught in an oscillating closed-circuit of attraction and frustration. In these encased works and in the later works—such as basketballs floating in fish tanks or cast bronze life preservers and life rafts—Koons accentuates the distancing or removal of the object by emphasizing the tactile quality of the objects. Changes of weight, material, surface, density, and gravity serve to remove or contradict the touching or handling generally associated with the urge to consume.

If Koons’s work is about the distancing and denial which is fundamental to strategies of consumption, Steinbach’s work is



Jeff Koons, *New Sheldon Wet/Dry Tripledecker*, 1982. Mixed media, 124 x 28 x 28". The Saatchi Collection, London.

far more about the all too pervasive availability and proximity of all objects. Steinbach dramatizes the overproduction of late capitalism, in which there is a product for every need and in which even toilet bowl brushes are designed as if destined for the Museum of Modern Art Gift Shop. Steinbach's works demonstrate Baudrillard's claim that the functionalism of the Bauhaus has now invaded all aspects of life. For, by their repetition, use-less design, and proud mounting on minimalist shelves of formica, these objects testify to the functionalist urge toward rationality. Positioned soberly enough, these objects nevertheless scarcely conceal an impish humor. For they are not the cool, efficient objects of the Bauhaus, but are more like the opposite: surrealist objects, disquieting and seemingly irrational objects which flagrantly deny any function. Thus the objects which Steinbach selects are, taken together, not simply "cute commodities," but are objects which reveal fissures or slips in the system, objects which are odd or awkward or over-produced, and objects which when isolated and repeated become both humorous and nightmarish.

Steinbach is concerned to suggest the rampant ubiquity of certain products, a hyperproduction which is nevertheless made strange through recontextualization. But whereas Steinbach shows how the familiar is made unreal, Allan McCollum stresses the familiarity of the unreal. McCollum makes devices which he calls "surrogates" or "vehicles." These are generally plaster casts of a specific, generic cultural form, such as a picture frame or a vase. These devices are not attempts to *be* pictures or vases, but are decoys, designed to elicit the desires for possession, meaning, and appreciation which accrue to culturally sanctioned objects. McCollum's work suggests that it is the sign of the object or artwork to which the viewer responds. By reproducing the minimal components of the work of art, McCollum hopes to construct a (pseudo)scientific method for gauging attraction and desire.

The vase-like "vehicles"—even more than the surrogates—suggest the multiple readings of these essentially abstract forms. The vehicles take the general form of a Chinese vase (perhaps?), but they also suggest figures, military formations, candy jars. Each suggestion has a latent attraction which is emphasized by the brilliant, enamel, candy-colored surface. But if the vehicles function as stand-ins for a certain meaning individually, collectively they assume quite different levels of meaning. Installed—as in this exhibition—with one hundred copies varying only in color, these works provide a wry (or frightening) introduction of the serial mode of production into the genial cottage industry of artmaking. But, more than this, the vehicles stress certain immutable abstractions in the structure of desire: repetition, difference, and vast accumulation.

Ken Lum employs the repetitiveness of mass production in quite a different way, for his work consists—in part—of sculptural installations based on modular furniture units. These he assembles in geometric formations, often like Minimalist sculptures, at times closing off access to the seating altogether. This

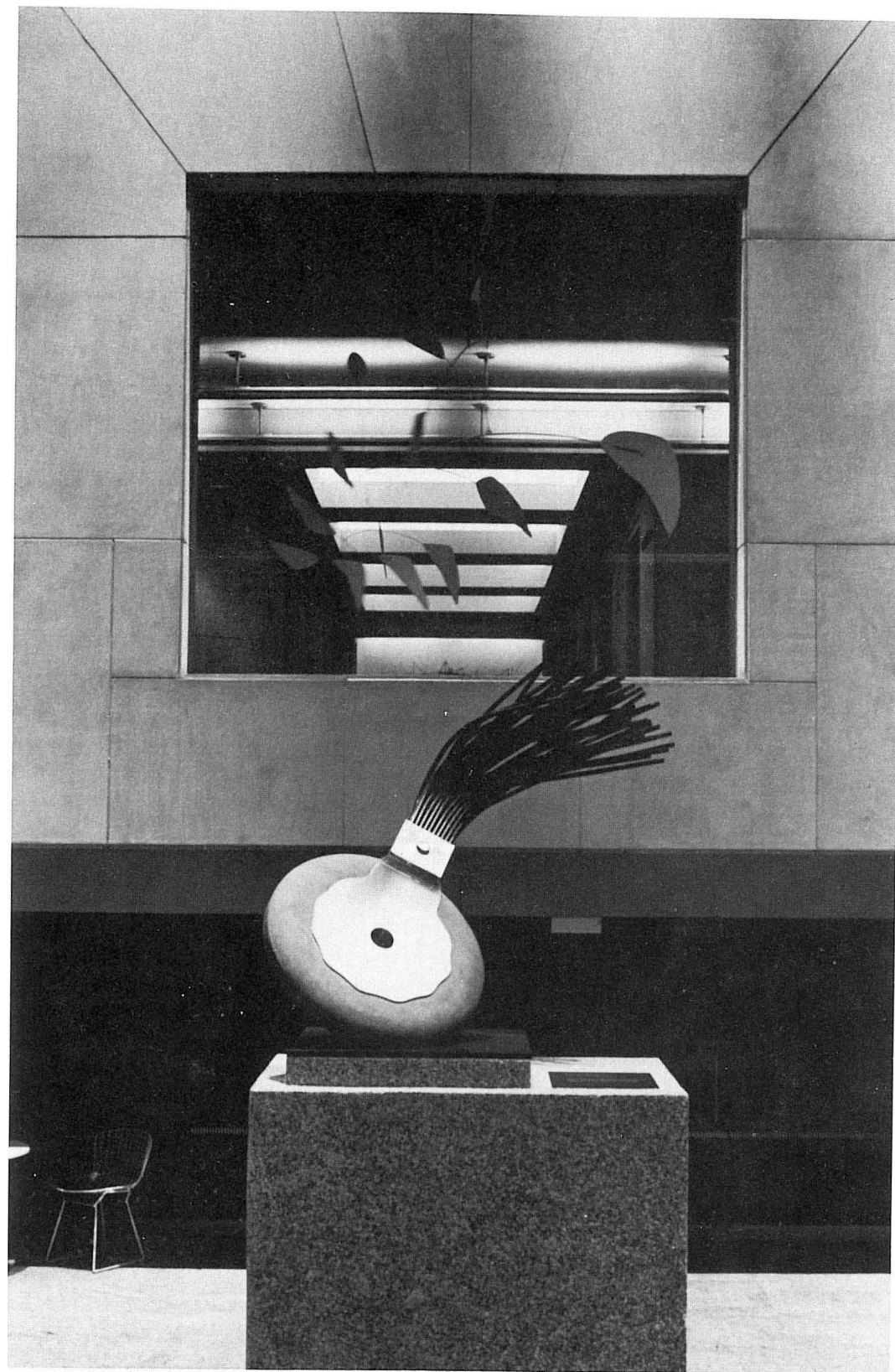


Ken Lum, *Sculpture for Livingroom/Public Lounge*, 1978. Installation of furniture, dimensions variable.

type of seriality run amuck suggests a system which has become dysfunctional—though with a complete appearance of rationality. This same type of tension between convention and demented regulation is evidenced in his *Portraits* series, in which studio portraits of friends or acquaintances are linked with abstract logos which certify or commodify their names. Through the modular conformity and inward-facing of the furniture and the proximation of portraits and logos, Lum suggests the ways in which the serialization, standardization, and parcellization of objects not only serve as inducements to behavior, but also as representations of behavior.

This mobile positioning of parts, this relative interchangeability, this overlapping of sign systems suggested by Lum's works is exaggerated and extended in the works of Gretchen Bender. Working in various media, Bender has attempted to confront what she calls "the perversion of the visual." This is represented in her video *Dumping Core*, for instance, as a constant reiteration of special effects and computer graphics—all derived from television commercials and trailers. The perversion of the visual is the way in which international image industries—movie studios, advertising agencies, television stations, the media—are capable of assigning an equivalency of neutrality to an image or concept. The switching back and forth of abstract graphics or the equalized representation of appropriated images on a single surface are similar gestures aimed at "describing the potential technological reduction of all images to a single digital code."¹²

Against this technological reduction, Bender offers an ironic series of works entitled *Total Recall*. Consisting of sheets of rolled steel, approximately three feet square, these works feature a strip of film running through the center. On these illuminated filmstrips are featured the titles of every new film of 1985. One of the works, however, displays just a single title, set off by star bursts: REVOLUTION. Bearing even more irony than the other works in the series, REVOLUTION accentuates



Louise Lawler, *Calder, Franzen, Oldenburg*, 1983. Black and white photograph, dimensions variable.

the extent to which all critical activity—all “revolution”—today must be read in quotation marks. In a world dominated by international flows of information and reproduction, in which images are turned into object and objects into images, in which commercialism and economic exploitation are rampant, the very concept of resistance is rendered suspect.

Not surprisingly, many of the artists in the exhibition have investigated the psychological nature of consumption and display in reference to art collectors, both private and corporate. Many of Louise Lawler’s works, for example, represent the ways in which artworks are presented in corporate collections, particularly as they are displayed and protected as assets (with appropriate plaques, labels, and guards). Similarly, her photographs of works in collector’s homes suggest that the owner will often install the work of art with an eye toward recreating the desire which first motivated the purchase. Lawler’s works both participate in and comment on this seemingly invisible issue of installation of works in museums, galleries, corporate headquarters, and private homes. At the same time her photographs always refer outward to the broader economic and social conditions which structure these environments. For instance, in an installation entitled *Interesting* (1984), at Gallery Nature Morte, Lawler suggested ways in which the architecture and signage of the gallery—in relation to the artworks—could carry specific ideological meanings and cues. In the gallery space, she had the word “Interest/ing” painted on the main wall as a type of logo. To the right, photographs of Japanese toys were installed, and to the left was a long, lacquered shelf like one might find in a bank machine vestibule. This simultaneous emphasis of the gallery space as a waiting or holding area and as a site of economic exchange was extended by the wall text which told the fable of a dog with a bone who, seeing his reflection in the water, tried to grab the other dog’s bone and lost.

What photographs might suggest by their siting and image/text relations is further indicated by Lawler’s work in this exhibition, an installation entitled *Two Editions*. This work again alludes to both the specific habits of the consumer or collector and to a larger economic issue. Playing on the pun, two additions, the work contrasts the sumptuous with the mundane, the color photograph with the black and white, the funding for military procurement with the funding for health care services. The work signals an attempt not only to intervene in a system of

economic disequilibrium, but moreover, an attempt to pinpoint the motivations behind such disparities, which exist among both governments and collectors.

As Louise Lawler’s photographs suggest, the art object—that specialized form of consumer object—occupies an increasingly significant role in the environment of corporate power. Drawing together the already converging vectors of image reproduction, information transfer, and the circulation of simulated representations, art has in many ways come to *represent* corporate business. Employed in promotional literature, exhibition sponsorship, and interior design of corporate headquarters, contemporary art (in particular) has come to signify for the corporation many of the images it seeks to present: humanist ideals, good taste, quality, and enduring value. For the global corporation, contemporary art has *become* advertising.

This utilization of the superficial and abstract meanings of art parallels in many ways the abstraction of commodities central to contemporary advertising. This conceptualization, spectacularization, and emptying-out of both art and the consumer object in the global market go hand in hand; each supports and reflects the other. And it is this adjacency of art and object in the service of promotion and advertising which may explain, in part, the growing interest in contemporary art of many advertising executives. Indeed, most recently Charles Saatchi, of Saatchi & Saatchi, a powerful collector of contemporary art, and Philip H. Geier, chairman of the Interpublic Group of Companies, a holding company of advertising agencies, have begun to acquire works by several of the artists in this exhibition.¹³

Thus, just as the bourgeois society of the modernist era seemed capable of assimilating the most outrageous or radical developments of modern art, so now the global advertising and business community seem able to acquire and potentially seal off works which seek to critique or at least draw attention to the economic and social systems they encourage. It is a thorny issue, and one which is critical to the role of artists today, for it signals not only an artistic problem, but a more general theoretical and strategic question of how one might structure opposition to totalizing structures and controls.

The artists in this exhibition seek to operate at the core of the economic system, to signal its weakness through sly

BROKEN

Barbara Bloom

complicity. These works may legitimately be called “damaged goods” for, while on the surface they appear to valorize the brilliance and perfection of new consumer objects, they harbor an ambivalence, one which inserts doubt, introduces humor and absurd overproduction, dramatizes display, and provokes questions. Moreover, in refusing to adopt conventional artistic modes or traditional materials, by utilizing the marginal and supplemental devices of institutions, by overemphasizing and eroticizing the formal qualities and presentations of their work, these artists question the conventionalized assumptions of the systems they inhabit. In so doing they suggest new strategies for the social consideration of the production, promotion, and exchange of all manner of objects.

NOTES

1. The Saatchi & Saatchi advertisement entitled “The Opportunity for World Brands,” was printed in *The New York Times* on June 3, 1984. For more on Saatchi & Saatchi see, in particular, Myron Magnet, “What Makes Saatchi & Saatchi Grow,” *Fortune* (March 19, 1984): 46–56; Sandra Solmans, “Saatchi & Saatchi’s Buying Binge,” *The New York Times*, July 14, 1985, pp. F1, F21; and Don Hawthorne, “Saatchi & Saatchi Go Public,” *Art News* 84, no. 5 (May 1985): 72–81. In an effort to extend their concept of global advertising, Saatchi & Saatchi has also made a bid to become the largest advertising agency in the world. This effort was successful on May 6, 1986, when Saatchi & Saatchi signed a merger agreement with Ted Bates Worldwide, making their total billings \$6.5 billion (1985). See Philip H. Dougherty, “Saatchi & Saatchi Deal For Bates Agency Seen,” *The New York Times*, May 7, 1986, p. 1, D6, and Steve Lohr, “Uppity Pups’ At Saatchi Helm,” *The New York Times*, May 13, 1986, p. D4.
2. Theodore Levitt, “The Globalization of Markets,” *Harvard Business Review* 61 (May-June 1983): 102.
3. For a useful analysis of the “crisis” in world economy, see Samir Amin, Giovanni Arrighi, André Gunder Frank, and Immanuel Wallerstein, *Dynamics of Global Crisis* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1982).
4. The term “postindustrial society” is generally associated with Daniel Bell and other neoconservative writers and suggests that contemporary economy is based on the production of services rather

than the production of consumer goods. Mandel opposes this point of view in *Late Capitalism* (London: New Left Books, 1978). Also see, Fredric Jameson, “Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism,” *New Left Review*, no. 146 (July-August 1984): 53–92; Jacques Attali, *Les trois mondes* (Paris: Fayard, 1981): 342–364; and Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

5. Mandel, *Late Capitalism*, p. 387.
6. Jean Baudrillard, “The Ecstasy of Communication,” in *The Anti-Aesthetic*, Hal Foster, ed. (Port Townsend, Wash.: Bay Press, 1983): 126–134.
7. Judith Barry, “Casual Imagination,” *Discourse*, no. 4 (Winter 1981–1982): 4–31.
8. Barry, “Dissenting Spaces,” in this catalogue, p. 49.
9. On Ladda’s *The Thing*, see Walter Robinson, “The Thing in the South Bronx,” *Art in America* 70, no. 3 (March 1982): 135–137.
10. Barbara Bloom, statement, in *Alles und noch viel mehr: Das Poetische ABC* exhibition catalogue for the Kunstmuseum Bern, April 12–June 2, 1985, pp. 984–985.
11. Andrea Fraser, unpublished statement.
12. Jonathan Crary, “Gretchen Bender at Nature Morte,” *Art in America* 72, no. 4 (April 1984): 190.
13. On the recent relation of this work to the marketplace, see Douglas C. McGill, “The Lower East Side’s New Artists,” *The New York Times*, June 3, 1986, p. C13; and, for a related phenomenon in abstract painting, see Hal Foster, “Signs Taken for Wonders,” *Art in America* 74, no. 6 (June 1986): 80–91, 139.

In an unfamiliar city, where I was attending some international event, I was invited, via via, to a party. Quite exhausted from the previous days and nights of work, and after several attempts at starting or responding to others’ efforts to start conversations, I found myself in the kitchen, talking with the only person I vaguely knew there.

The topic of our conversation I’ve since forgotten, but I do remember him saying something about the anthropological research our host was working on at the time. At a certain point, I dropped the glass which I’d been holding in my hand throughout the conversation. Either someone passing through the small kitchen had nudged my arm, or, just as likely, forgetting that I had anything in my hand (perhaps a neurological disturbance accompanying fatigue and tension), I had simply opened my hand and let the glass drop.

Immediately, my conversation partner was on his knees cleaning broken glass off the floor. I was also cleaning up the glass when one of the pieces entered my hand. It must have hit an artery or vein because, before I realized it, blood was squirting all over the kitchen.

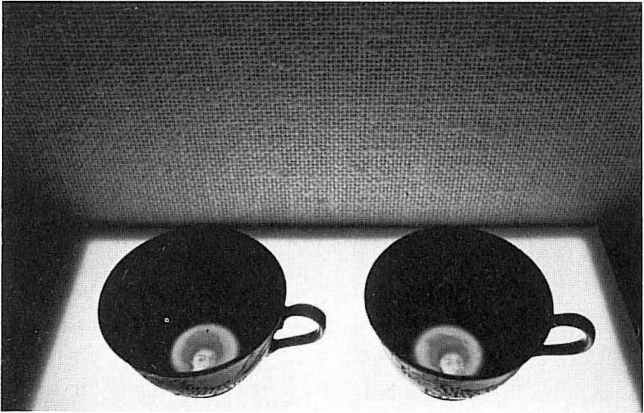
My conversation partner changed jobs and along with several others in the kitchen began cleaning up the blood. I unsuccessfully attempted to remove the glass, the culprit, from my hand. And though I wasn’t in pain, the stuff was firmly lodged in my hand and the blood was still flowing strongly

when our host sauntered into the kitchen. Assessing the chaos, standing a foot or so away from me, he raised his wine glass to his mouth, took a generous bite out of it, chewed slowly, and swallowed. With this act, the commotion in the kitchen came to a standstill. Having gotten our attention, and in the respondent surprise and silence, he took a step toward me, unwrapped the towel from around my hand (another vain attempt at stopping the blood flow), and raised my hand to his lips.

I, of course, expected a gallant and comforting kiss on my wound. But much as with his wine glass from moments before, he bit down hard on my hand; and before I had time to respond with a yell, the piece of lodged glass popped out and the bleeding began to subside. Startled, we, the people in the kitchen (now having become a We, united through our common experience), stood and looked at our host.

With a smile, and a sympathetic drop of blood on his lips, having restored order to his kingdom, he said to me (the shaman addressing me, and through me his entire audience), in his best, accented English: “FOR EVERY AILMENT THERE IS AN IMAGE THAT CURES IT.” I relaxed. He had broken the ice. The perfect host. His girlfriend entered the kitchen and, standing by the open freezer, refilling the ice bucket, said to him, “Not your glass eating routine again! Fritz, will you help me with the ashtrays?”

* * *



Barbara Bloom, **Two Porcelain Cups** (detail from the installation, **The Gaze**, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam), 1985.

I had invited this critic to a screening of my film. I didn't know her personally, but I knew that she had been supportive of my work in the past.

During the screening I saw her leave.

After several days of hesitation, the curiosity became too much, and I called her. In a coolish tone, she suggested that we "meet for lunch."

At lunch:

She was outraged by my film.

Disappointment, I could understand. Criticism, I had worked on learning to accept. But outrage came unexpectedly. I tried to understand the basis for her rage, tried to figure out what she had admired in my past work, what she had expected. To be perfectly honest, I couldn't understand what she was talking about. And assuming that this was due to some defense mechanism on my part, I tried even harder to understand her. Singular words, even some phrases made sense. But by the time she got to the end of her sentences (sprinkled generously from her Marxist, Structuralist, and Semiotic vocabulary lists), I had lost the thread of her argument. My confusion was punctuated by an active inner monologue, questioning whether I was really doing my best to understand.

A double intimidation was taking place. The first due to her attack on my work. The second because I didn't understand this avalanche of words that comprised her attack.



Barbara Bloom, *The Gaze*, 1985. Color photograph, dimensions variable.

In an attempt to give our conversation a more positive twist, I asked her what her favorite films were. Hopefully, my question wouldn't sound too much like: "Seen any good movies lately? Read any good books lately?" Hopefully, my question would solicit an answer with a simple sentence structure: a list of proper nouns.

To my delight and surprise, I both understood her answer, and shared a very similar list of favorite films. Having found our taste in films to be compatible, I grabbed at our common denominator in an attempt at gluing our rather fractured communication. This gluing process took the form of detailed descriptions of what I consider to be ecstatically beautiful moments from these films.

With pleasure, I spent some time on these precious fragments from our films-in-common, and, my motor still going strong, I strayed off to details from films not yet mentioned. I began to describe a detail from Wim Wenders's film, *Der Amerikanische Freund* (which I consider to be one of the most beautiful film moments ever, even though I don't rate this as one of his best films by far—but more on that subject later). With great satisfaction I called up this fragment:

A framemaker and painting restorer who suffers from a chronic blood disease, is made to believe (for complicated reasons) that his disease is much more serious than he had thought and that he will soon die. He is anonymously offered a large sum of money and security for his family if he will agree to murder a "mafialike" figure in another city.

He is confused as to why, of all people, he has been approached to commit such a crime. And though upset by the news about his health and shocked by the amount of money offered him, he refuses to even consider the matter. He throws the anonymous letters away and hangs up the phone on the propositioning caller.

Alone in his workshop, restoring a frame, he carefully and skillfully picks up a piece of gold leaf with a knife. Absorbed in his thought, he "absentmindedly" drops the gold leaf on to his hand. Playing with this material, so familiar to him, deep in thought, he blows the gold on his palm. Just then the telephone rings, and after letting it ring a long time, he answers: the golden palm of his hand making contact with the receiver. At the moment of their impact, both the viewer and he know that it is the caller with

the murder proposition, and that this time he will accept the offer.

It is not a simple symbolism, his golden hand (the money, his greed) touching the telephone (the propositioner).

The beauty of the scene is in that the character realizes the obvious symbolism at the same moment the viewer does. He fights a silent battle with it, furious with himself that he has let the image take on any meaning at all. It's a losing battle. He gives in and accepts his complicity.

She interrupted, asking, "How can you remove a fragment from its context, as though that detail speaks for the whole?" She *hated* *Der Amerikanische Freund*. Why cite a detail from that, his worst film?

This was a question I understood, and I was mentally working on an answer to it (the potency of detail being a subject matter I'd thought a lot about). But her rage was fired again, and before I knew it she was bombarding me with more questions, the meanings of which were disintegrating into that all too familiar unclarity that seemed to plague our conversation.

"Do you realize the implications of using diamonds as a signifier?" From the whole slew, that's the only question I can still recall, probably because much of what I had been thinking about for over two years (in the making of the film we were "discussing") was precisely about the diamond as signifier.

I was thinking about an answer when still more questions were fired at me. It was then that my neurological system took over/conked out, and the heavy glass mug of iced tea fell out of my hand.

She stopped in mid-sentence. Maybe she thought that I had *thrown* it down, shattering safety glass under the table.

Maybe I had.

At any rate, there it was, a pile of diamondlike glass chunks and melting ice cubes under the table. The slice of lemon kissing her toe.

I was looking at it, noticing how the cut glass and ice beautifully refracted the light, when I heard her voice, in all its squeekiness, say, "Well, I think nothing."

I knew one thing for sure, that I didn't understand that statement. Not at all. Applying the self-criticism of which I am certainly capable, I wondered if I'd been so absorbed in my glass and melting diamonds that I'd missed the lead up to this sentence.

In seconds time I scanned my memory for any clues to the meaning of her comment; I found none.

All of this time my gaze stayed on the crystals. Finally I looked up at her, straight in the eye, and asked, "What?" (This was my first open admittance of confusion.) She said, "I think nothing." I'd heard it right the first time (a real consolation). The expression on my face gave her the cue that an elaboration was needed. She continued, "You asked me what you should do about the broken glass, and I think nothing."

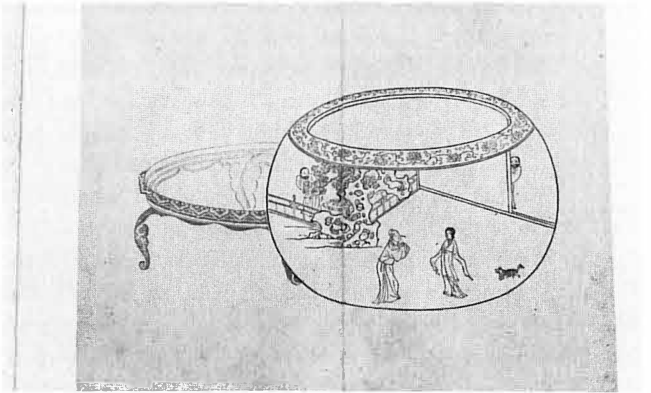
I was about to argue that I hadn't asked anything about the broken glass, and that she was imagining things. Or, I was about to be convinced that I had indeed asked her about the broken glass. But the diamond pile on the floor, catching my attention again, made me realize that what we had here was exactly one of those fragments, those details, those freeze frames which stand for, and illuminate the whole.

Try to explain that.

* * *

In Japan, a broken cup, bowl, or plate can be repaired with a special lacquer. This pottery, not attempting to cover up its history, is distinguished by cracks proudly colored gold. In this act, history is accepted and glorified.

Value, as we know it, is reversed.



Min Chi-chi. *Chang chün-ju enters the cloister garden of the young lady Hüang-miang, servant to the beautiful Ying-yin*. Chinese block print.

SIGNS OF DIFFERENCE

Deborah Bershad

The fact of being conquered by something that one does not know sometimes has formidable consequences, the first of which is confusion.

—Jacques Lacan¹

From “you’ve got the look” to “the smell of it,” sexuality and consumerism are now irrevocably linked. Even the outdated phrase “damaged goods”—equating woman’s loss of virginity with a loss in market value—clearly expresses the close relationship between sexuality and consumerism under capitalism. Presented daily with a multiplicity of bodies, parts of bodies, and objects, an ever-changing array of words and images, the inanimate seduces us. Television, newspapers, magazines, billboards and window displays remind us that the erotic object is no longer necessarily the body of the other. We’re feeling good, “alive with pleasure” when we buy.

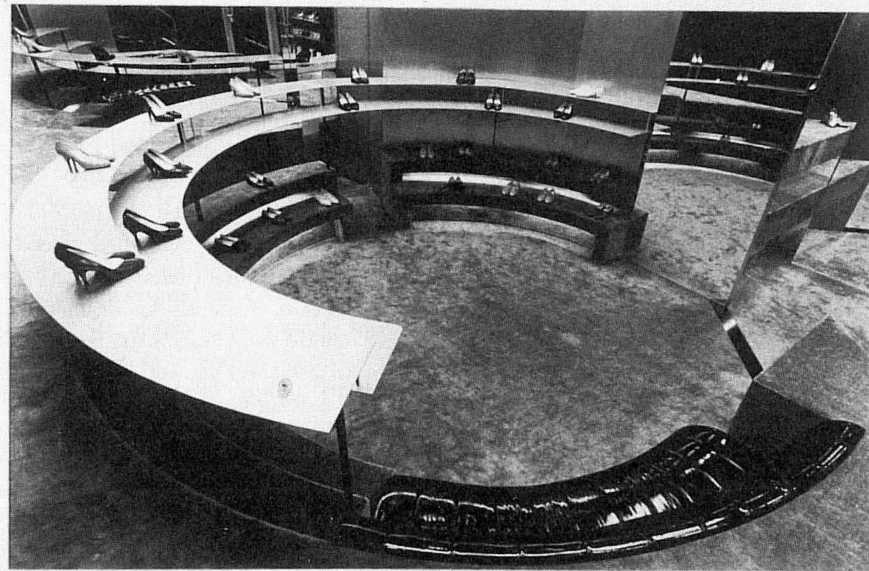
The commodity is thus an object that circulates in both the libidinal and social economies. As such, it has a particular significance to artists and critics concerned with the interrelationship between developments in both the capitalist economic system and the subject under capitalism. The eroticization of the commodity or “commodity fetishism” has become the point where theories of subjectivity, such as psychoanalysis, and critiques of capitalism, such as Marxism, might intersect. For the fetishist’s libidinal investment in the object, when paralleled with the consumer’s monetary investment in the commodity, suggests the pathological nature of commodity fetishism.

What, then, is the connection between fetishism and consumerism? Can we speak of analogous structurings of desire in relation to the object? According to Freud’s now classic account of fetishism,² “obsessive devotion” to the object on the part of the fetishist is not a function of the object’s value. Rather, the seductive power of the fetish resides in its peculiar relation to the castration complex. Early childhood theories of sexuality do not account for sexual difference between mother and father: both parents are endowed with absolute power and authority. Thus for the very young child the mother is “phallic”—an uncastrated woman. The mother, primary caretakers in most societies, satisfies the child’s demands; as the phallic mother, she is seen as all-powerful and all-providing. During the process of maturation the child gradually becomes aware of socio-sexual restrictions and distinctions. Infantile polymorphous

sexuality is limited and specifically channeled through a series of traumatic experiences, each of which is characterized by loss or separation (for example, weaning and toilet training). The castration complex is therefore one in a series of traumatic losses experienced by the adult; however, as the inscription of the subject’s adult, genital sexuality, it is of especial importance. To be a man or a woman, to assume an already established position in a social configuration, demands the inhibition and sublimation of forbidden, infantile, incestuous desires. This prohibition, instituted by the castration complex, is the basis for the interhuman exchange of sexual objects. Hence the castration complex plays a pivotal role in the establishment of social order and sexual difference.

With the development of the castration complex, the loss of the (male) child’s own penis, his vulnerability to castration, becomes a dreaded possibility. Fetishism is a response to that possibility based upon the child’s narcissistic relationship to his own genitals.³ It should be noted that actual sexual difference—the existence of both the vagina and the penis—does not figure in the child’s comprehension of sexuality. Anatomical distinctions are initially unknown and irrelevant. Furthermore, it is only upon the acquisition of the castration complex that these distinctions are interpreted by the child as symbolic of social and sexual differentiation. The sighting of the female genitals as an absence of the maternal phallus thus occurs within the given social structure of the castration complex. During this sighting the child focuses upon a particular attribute or object, often related to the traumatic sighting, which stands for that which is “missing.” Through the provision of a substitute object for the mother’s absent penis, what is (not) seen is disavowed. By displacing desire onto the substitute object, the child clings to an infantile belief in the phallic woman. Castration is denied, even as it is known.

Fetishism thus affords the subject a unique position in the societal structuring of desire. It reduces difference in the Real⁴—anatomical difference and Symbolic difference—the split of castration, to signs of difference—fragments or attributes of the body. As a substitute for the absent penis, the fetish facilitates the subject’s belief in two contradictory thoughts—the woman is castrated and the woman is not castrated. The elevation and eroticization of the fetish is an attempted evasion of castration, of social and sexual difference: the phallic woman is an imaginary construct, and as such, is a



Barbara Bloom, *Fascination*, from the installation, *The Gaze*, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, 1985. Color photograph, dimensions variable.

mirror-image of the subject's Imaginary uncastrated self.⁵ Yet this evasion is only partial. The fetishist's choice of object—shoe, glove, fur, rubber—is unconsciously allied to the sighting of the female genitals. Fetishism is the product of the subject's response of disavowal to the threat of castration. The fetish, whose foundation is the disavowal of reality, is a sign without a real referent. As a substitutive object, it refers to a (missing) Imaginary organ, an organ with simply a psychic reality. On the other hand, the fetish is the mark or index of sexual identity and difference, referring obliquely to that which is denied.

This discussion of fetishism intimates that commodity fetishism is not simply an overvaluation of or excessive investment in the object. Certainly overvaluation accounts for specific aspects of consumerism and marketing. The libidinal investment in the object is aroused and heightened in various ways. Colorful packaging and container designs enhance the visibility of the object and signal its "individuality" among a vast array of products. Multiple wrappings, which delay access and consequently delay satisfaction, connote the precious nature of the object. The object, when purchased, must be "perfect" or undamaged. It is devalued and placed on sale if ripped, stained, scratched, or simply irregular, even if these minor flaws will not effect utility. Overvaluation is therefore adequate as a description of specific aspects of the fetishistic relationship to the object. Yet any explanation of commodity fetishism must encompass the commodity's relation to the societal structuring of desire. Commodity fetishism is not the result of packaging and marketing which creates false needs and imposes them upon an unwitting consumer. For if an analogy is to be drawn between fetishism and commodity fetishism, the latter must also be analyzed as a compromise between instinct and reality. Like fetishism, commodity fetishism must be understood as a structuring of desire in response to the threat of reality; that is, a position assumed in order to preserve the subject's narcissism in the face of the demands of everyday life.

One aspect of the commodity fetish is of especial significance in relation to the fetishistic position. The decisive attribute of the commodity fetish is its lack of imperfection. This lack of imperfection, the wholeness of the object, is the guarantor of monetary value, the abstract expression of societal worth. Glossiness, smoothness, completeness, purity—the object should be untouched by others, its wrappings unbroken. Bearing no trace of its past, or of the complex of human actions that

created it, the object appears upon the shelf without reference to its prior record.

The removal of all apparent traces of process is the eradication of the object's history.⁶ As such, the removal of these traces denies the reality of social conflict; the reality of the conflicts between labor and capital experienced by the subject. In this way, the commodity fetish offers an escape from conflict through the denial of reality; like the fetish, the commodity fetish is produced by an act of disavowal. The struggles and contradictions of the everyday, the manifold frustrations of a way of life predicated on the accumulation of goods, are momentarily dispelled by libidinal investment in and identification with the commodity fetish. The act of purchasing, the acquisition of the object, is thus the means by which the subject not only possesses wholeness, but experiences wholeness. It could be argued that the motive force of this erotics of the object is the subject's desire to preserve an Imaginary sense of plenitude in the face of real and social restrictions and prohibitions. Hence, while certain attributes of the desired object may be invariable, within this dynamic no object is irreplaceable. For the allure of the object depends in large part upon its abstractness. As substitute for the body split by castration, as a sign of difference, the fetish must possess specific characteristics—it must be a type of object (the classic examples being the shoe or the glove) or made of a special material (typically, fur or rubber). Yet the value of the fetish depends on its signifying function, its utilization as a mark of difference. It signifies for the subject in relation to an entire network of signs: as one among an array of potentially differential signifiers.

Similarly, the commodity fetish is deployed within a series or grouping of objects. While advertising and packaging may signal the singularity of the object, display techniques present the object in conjunction with others. The seductive impact of the commodity fetish accordingly resides both in the presentation of its phallic singularity and in its association with a complete system of objects. The fascination exercised upon the subject by the commodity fetish is due, in large part, to this attraction to the system. The anxiety-provoking threats and contradictions are reduced through abstraction to a complete complex of accessible objects. This complex demotes difference to available alternatives within a full closed system. Through the presentation of a series of commodities, difference—between objects, between bodies—becomes a question of "personal"

choice. But choice is simply the rationalization of a perverse attraction to the internal perfection of the system of objects. The completeness of the system, like the smooth, gapless body of the phallic woman, evokes desire. Commodity fetishism is thus a fetishism of the system.

Consumption is therefore incomprehensible as the simple acquisition and use of an object. Consumption is the consumption of a system. It is the abstract sign-nature and the systemic totality of the commodity, over its material qualities, that determine the fetishistic attitude. Hence the perceived shift from an economy based on the production of commodities and the circulation of those commodities, to an economy based on the circulation of information, is no more than the logical development of commodity fetishism. While the universality of such a shift in economies is debatable, it is evident that an economy founded on the flow of information or exchange of abstract signs falls well within the theoretical parameters of commodity fetishism.

The totalizing systematization of commodity fetishism is, however, in some ways secondary to the process of disavowal, a process of psychic defense particular to both fetishism and psychosis. It is secondary temporally, as the fetishistic position is an outcome of the act of disavowal. But it is perhaps theoretically secondary as well in arriving at an understanding of the effects of commodity fetishism. For while the abstract coherence of the commodity fetish accounts for its allure, it is through disavowal that the fetishist's peculiar relation to reality is secured.

Fetishism is a special instance of disavowal, as the fetishist both disavows and acknowledges reality. Two incompatible positions—the woman is (not) castrated, the commodity is in/outside history—are maintained through the splitting of the ego, the means by which two methods of defense co-exist: one (disavowal) directed towards reality, the other towards the instinct (the latter possibly leading to neurotic symptoms). There is no compromise between the two; both positions are believed

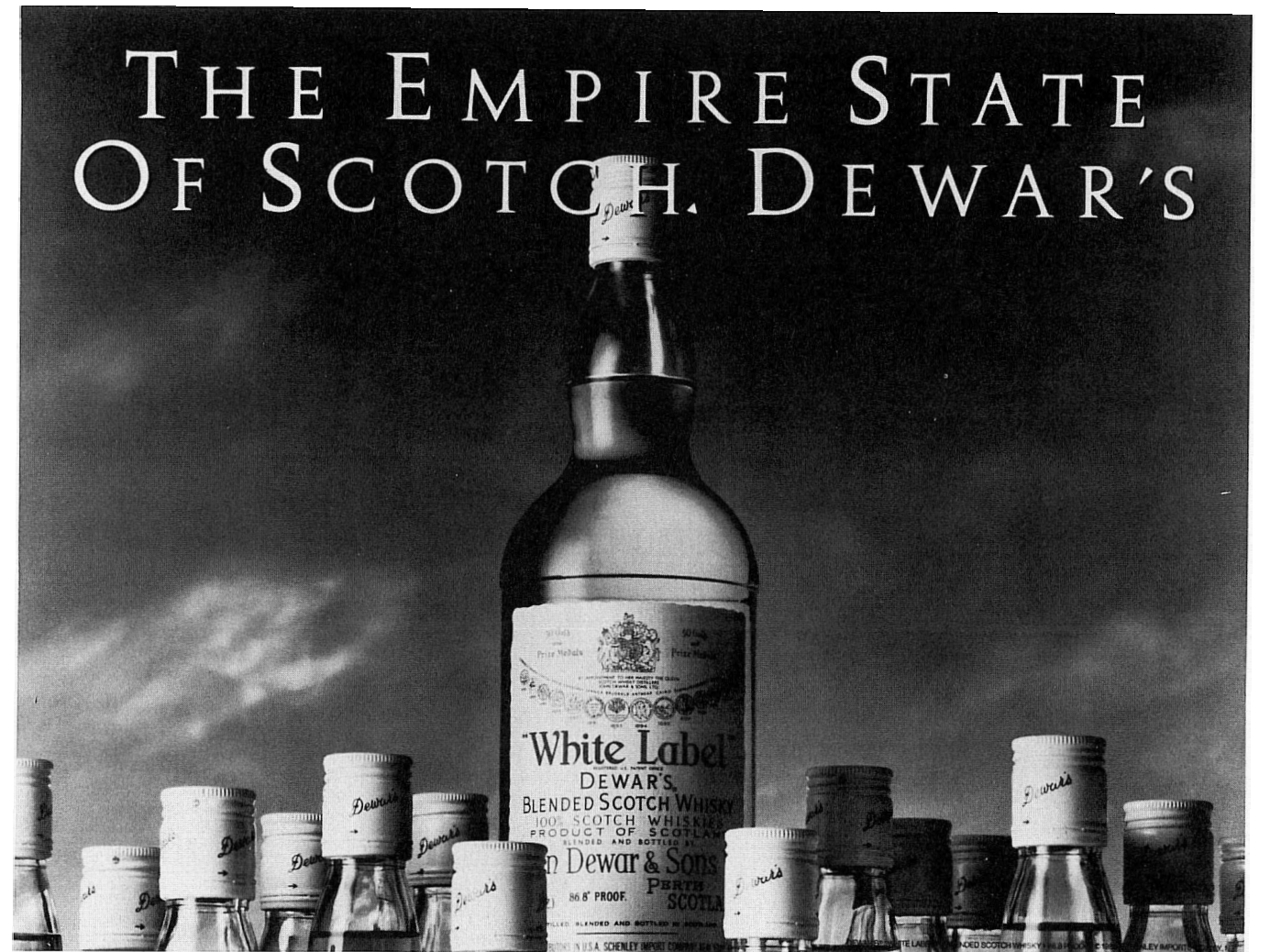
in, though they are fundamentally contradictory. Fetishistic perversion is thus not a loss of the self in an object, but a multiplication of selves—a gain in satisfaction through adherence to a delusional reality that accommodates infantile belief. This delusional reality is abstract coherence, the hallmark of the commodity fetish. The splitting of the ego enables the fetishist to consequently accommodate the exigencies of reality, while at the same time obtaining satisfaction from the commodity fetish. The price to be paid for this satisfaction, the cost of this delusion is not yet known.

NOTES

1. "From Interpretation to the Transference," in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, translated by Alan Sheridan (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1973), p. 253.
2. Sigmund Freud, "Fetishism" (1927). *Standard Edition*, vol. 21, pp. 152-159.
3. Fetishism is accounted for by Freud only in relation to the male subject. Female fetishism would require identification with a male position.
4. See *The Four Fundamental Concepts* for a brief definition of the Lacanian registers of the Real, Imaginary, and Symbolic.
5. Jacques Lacan's concept of the Imaginary, a register of thought whose nucleus is the "mirror-stage," is essential for an understanding of the process of identification as a mis-recognition of the self, and the implications of this process. The Imaginary is not a phase which is outgrown by the subject. It is the level or dimension of psychic processes concerned with the ego and its images. See "The Mirror-Stage Psychoanalytic Experience," translated by Alan Sheridan in *Écrits: A Selection* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1977), pp. 1-7.
6. In the case of the object that incorporates imperfection ("organic" or "natural" products, or "handwoven" cloth are examples of this type of object), this imperfection is deliberate, and is marketed as an indicator of the object's uniqueness rather than appearing as a defect.



Jeff Koons, *Aquí ... Bacardi*, 1986. Oil ink on canvas, 46 x 60".



Jeff Koons, *The Empire State of Scotch, Dewar's*, 1986. Oil ink on canvas, 46 x 60".

THE FOLLOWING PAGES ARE TO BE FILLED IN BY YOU. PLEASE ANSWER EACH OF THE QUESTIONS BY PLACING AN "X" IN THE APPROPRIATE BOX.

The following questionnaire is an adaptation, for the present context, of a survey on exhibition brochures recently conducted by the Museum of Modern Art in New York. The survey was produced and processed by a marketing research agency that has studied consumer response to products ranging from candy bars to cosmetics, films to flashlights.

Listed below are the five ways museums provide information for their visitors. For each of the five ways please indicate whether you:

- A. Are familiar with that type of informational device
- B. Whether you generally like that type of device
- C. And the rank of order of liking the devices. The device you like most should be given the number 1. The device you like least should be given the number 5.

	A. Familiar With		B. Like or Not		C. Rank Order (Write In Numbers 1 through 5)
	Yes	No	Do Not Like	Like	
Explanatory wall labels/signs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Brochures	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Recorded Tours (An audio aid used while seeing an exhibition)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Audio Visual Orientations (films/slides with sound/video tapes for viewing before seeing an exhibition)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Gallery Talks (lectures/tours in the exhibition area)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Catalogues	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____

	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree
Provided information on key works of art in the exhibition	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provided information on how color, line, shape, materials, scale, etc., help you to look at the work	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provided information on the materials and techniques used to create the works	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provided information on the cultural/political context of the work	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provided information on the life of the artist	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provided quotations by the artist about his work	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provided information on the intentions of the artist	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provided information on how the artist's works compare to other artists	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provided explanations of the art history terms used	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Written in general with vocabulary that was easy to understand	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Written in sentences that were easy to follow	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Written in sentences, each containing a clearly defined idea	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provided the right amount of information	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	Important	Neither Important Nor Unimportant	Unimportant
Information on key works of art in the exhibition	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Information on how color, line, shape, materials, scale, etc., help you to look at the work	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Information on the materials and techniques used to create the works	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Information on the cultural/political context of the work	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Information on the life of the artist	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Quotations by the artist about his work	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Information on the intentions of the artist	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Information on how the artist's works compare to other artists	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Explanations of the art history terms used	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Written in general with vocabulary easy to understand	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sentences that were easy to follow	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sentences that each contain a clearly defined idea	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Information as short and to the point as possible	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

- Which of the following is most appropriate for the business of marketing?
- 1. "Turn the other cheek?"
 - 2. "A Box in the Warehouse is Worth Two on the Shelf."
 - 3. "If a man should build a better mousetrap, the world will beat a path to his door though he lives in the woods."

R-r-right! Better mousetrap... that's the whole story!

Take adding machines for example. Adding machines bumped along with slow but steady growth since 1888 when William Seward Burroughs got his patent. But in 1971, enter the Mousetrap... the semi-conductors took over from the ratchets, cogs and springs... and in 1972 almost five million units were sold for business and personal use. By 1973, the new market was apparent—seven million units in the personal market alone... In 1974, 13 million personal calculators were sold.

Another example from the Mouse Trap Hall of Fame:

The radio market matured as home entertainment in the quarter century leading up to 1950. Then, superseded by the television, it started to slide to senility. Enter the transistor—the personal, portable mousetrap that made the market burgeon all over again. Compared to 25 years ago, today there are five times as many radios as there were back then—more than twice as many radio stations—and three and a half times more is spent in radio advertising.

That putting your money where your mousetrap is.

What makes a better mousetrap?

It's a product that offers a new dimension of performance. Something extra... something better... a product that reaches out and touches people who've been ignoring the old model.

When a new and different Mousetrap comes along, something happens to the entire market... it expands. More people—people in undreamed-of numbers—decide that what they've got to have is... that better product.

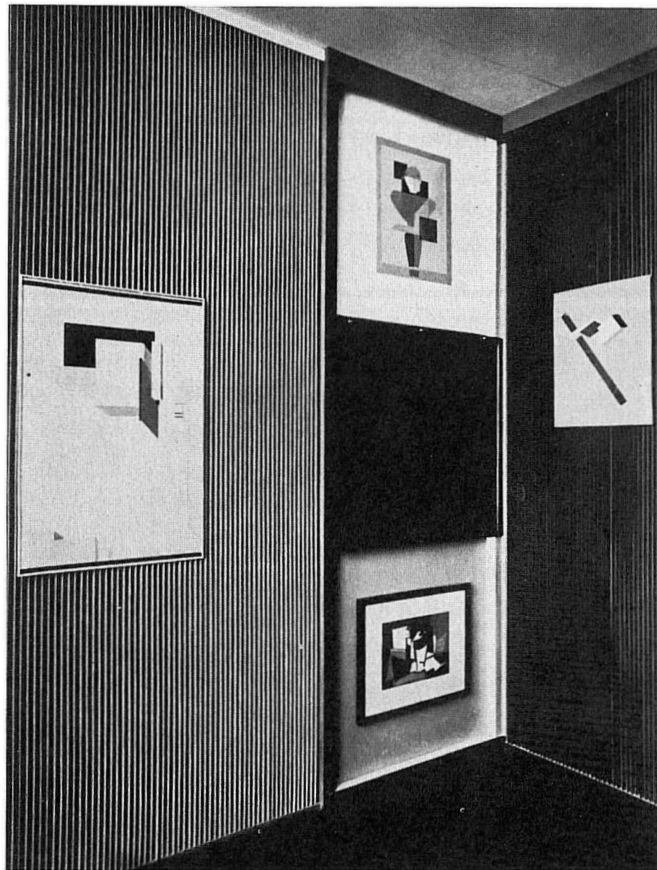
The Mousetrap market is the expandable market... the growth market that a truly forward-looking company is constantly seeking.

DISSENTING SPACES

Judith Barry

Space: That which is not looked at through a key hole, not through an open door. Space does not exist for the eye only: it is not a picture; one wants to live in it.

—El Lissitzky, “Proun Space” (1923)

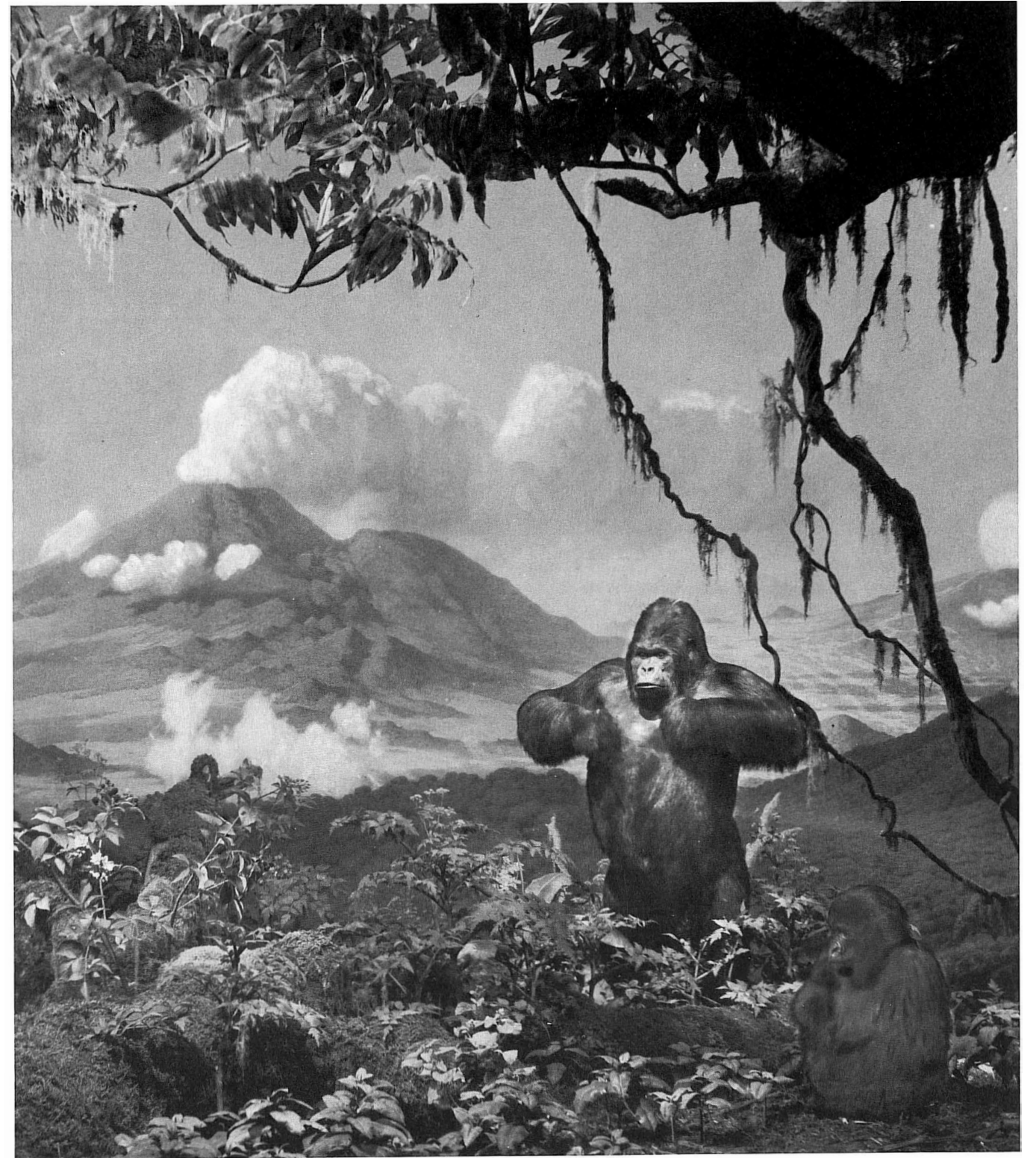


El Lissitzky, **Cabinet of Abstract Art**, 1926. Installation view of **Demonstration Room** showing works by Lissitzky, Schlemmer, and Marcoussis. Hannoversches Landes Museum, Hannover.

In his manifesto for the *Proun Space* installation at the Great Berlin Art Exhibition of 1923, El Lissitzky related his function as an exhibition designer to his artistic practice and to his desire, in the Proun series, to establish an “interchange station between painting and architecture,...to treat canvas and wooden board as a building site.” From these early investigations (later somewhat transformed by the Revolution), Lissitzky developed an approach to exhibition design that sought to problematize the role of the spectator, to create “by means of design” an active participation rather than a passive viewing.

In one of his most famous exhibition designs—the *Demonstration Rooms* for the International Art Exhibition in Hannover and Dresden in 1926—Lissitzky was faced with the problem of how to display an overwhelming amount of work in a rather small and intimate space. His solution involved the use of thin wooden strips attached to the wall at 90° angles and in vertical rows; these strips were painted white on one side and black on the other and mounted against a grey wall. From one vantage the wall appeared white, from the other side it appeared black, and when viewed from the front it seemed to be grey. Thus, according to Lissitzky, the artworks were given a triple life. In addition, the paintings were double hung on a movable panel system so that while one of the two was visible, the other could be partially seen through the perforations of the sliding plate. In this way Lissitzky claimed to have achieved a solution whereby the specially designed room could accommodate one and a half times as many works as a conventional room. At the same time, only half of the works could be seen at any one time.

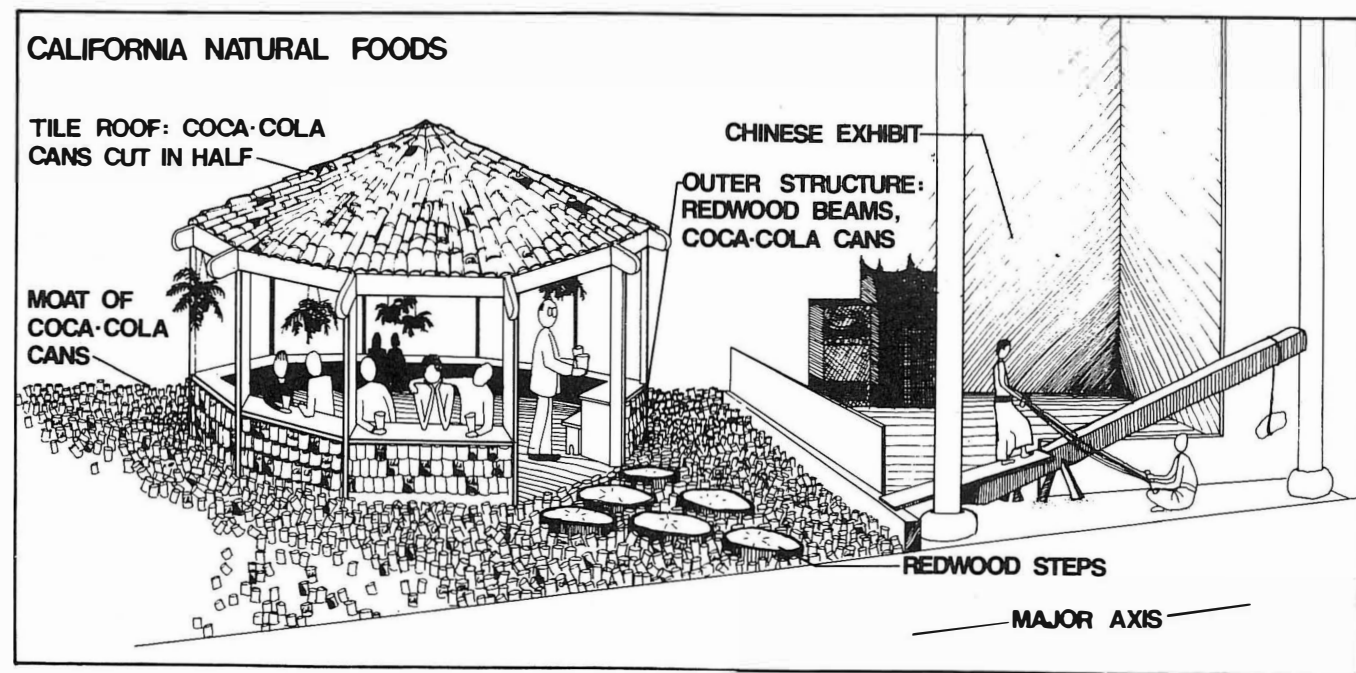
We might compare Lissitzky’s method to that other exhibition/display system which reached its apogee in the 1920s: the life-size diorama. Most notoriously instituted in the Museum of Natural History, the diorama is perhaps best characterized by Carl Akeley’s famous gorilla group diorama completed in 1926. There it is the spectacle itself (in this case the spectacle of “nature” and “wildlife”) that must be duplicated and recreated in such a way that the viewer might experience simultaneously the power of domination as well as the surrender of belief. At the same time, the quest for greater and greater verisimilitude had already culminated in the development of the cinema apparatuses, so that in one sense at least the dioramas of the Museum of Natural History point to a relative loss of power instilled in the object.



Carl Akeley, **Gorilla Group Diorama**, 1921. As installed at the Museum of Natural History, New York.



Department store, San Francisco, 1980.



Judith Barry, *Installation Drawing*, 1980. Ink on paper, 16 x 24".

Previously, the Victorian era—the historical juncture of both industrialization and psychoanalysis—had produced a fetishization of the domestic object leading to the design of specific cabinets enclosed in glass for display. But the exotic and fetishized objects, often collected from foreign lands, also referred to another tradition of display: the spoils of war. In “Greco-Roman” times, displaying what had been taken in conquest had taken on various meanings since “bounty” was exhibited not only to nobility, but also to commoners and slaves. Those who lined the streets gazed in awe at power conquered, brought home through possession, and served up as symbolic consumption. This dramatic exposition of the conquered object, surely the beginning of fetishism as developed in Freud’s reworking of the myth, leads to a reconsideration of possession: as in, who is possessed and who is not. The humanistic object lies in waiting, ready to grab hold, to snare, anyone who will dare to look. Medusa’s head or Eurydice or the Gilded Calf: one can come close only to transgress.

But possession can take another form, that of a refusal or denial as in the case of functionalist design. Most utopian movements in design have tried to strip the object of its symbolic powers, as though the power of utility could somehow restrain the object’s power over us. But, as Robert Venturi points out, functionalism was only symbolically functional: “It represented function more than resulted from function.” Exhibition design, particularly in relation to objects, is deeply symbolic—it can rest on no other ground.

So we have the two poles of exhibition design: the theatrical, as in Akeley’s gorilla group diorama; and the ideological, as in the constructivist *Demonstration Room* by Lissitzky. Both reflect a desire to present situations in which the viewer is an active participant in the exhibition. And as Benjamin Buchloh points out, historically this incorporation of the viewer was symptomatic not only of a crisis in the representation(s) of the modernist paradigm, but also a crisis of audience relations “from which legitimation was only to be obtained by a re-definition of its relations with the new urban masses and their cultural demands.”

Increasingly, these cultural demands were resolved under the sway of another kind of exhibition design, one designed not simply for display, but rather one designed specifically for consumption, to cause an active response in the consumer, to cre-

ate an exchange. This is the situation of the retail store. For it is in these spaces, in which one lives and works and through whose media apparatuses one is enculturated, that we find the congruence of the theatrical and the ideological, to my way of thinking the culmination of exhibition design.

To develop his practice to be something other than just a way to move the eye through space, to make the spectator actually inhabit the space, Lissitzky had to produce an architectural effect. But for Lissitzky this was only an effect (as Buchloh notes, a shift in the perceptual apparatus), without a call to action, without a change in the social institution itself.

On the other hand, Georges Bataille, writing in *L’Espace*, declares that space is discontinuous—the product of the engagements of forces, the void through which the threatening gestures must be exchanged. Yet all resistance does not necessarily occur in space; rather it takes place through the agency of discourses, discourses that mark, channel, and position the body through and in other perspectives (read as representational systems). One challenge, then, most certainly is to confront the supremacy of the eye/I (no accident that homonym in English!).

How to force a confrontation? If architecture embodies our social relations, then presentational forms (including staging and lighting devices from the theater, opera, and Las Vegas, as well as more obvious museological techniques) must refer to ways in which we wish to experience these relations. One confrontational tactic not yet tried is the subversion of the wish for closure, possession, and gratification. One way to do this might be to make threatening the assumed neutrality of the exhibition space itself.

In the design for the exhibition “Damaged Goods,” the metaphor of delayed gratification is an appropriate one to describe the effects produced by these objects on the would-be consumer. Many of the display systems used in this exhibition design are constructed to force the spectator/consumer into various possible subject positions, to make the viewers spatially as well as visually aware of their location, a location that might be disruptive, jarring, and unsettling, and which might produce a kind of uneasiness. Given these conditions, the exhibition becomes the set for a play with objects; this is not the way we live, but may allude to something else.



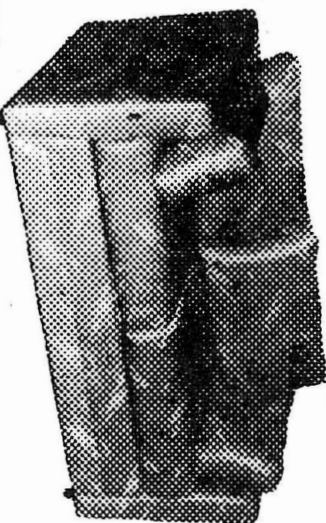
Ken Lum, *Line*, 1986. Installation of furniture, dimensions variable. Ydessa Gallery, Toronto.

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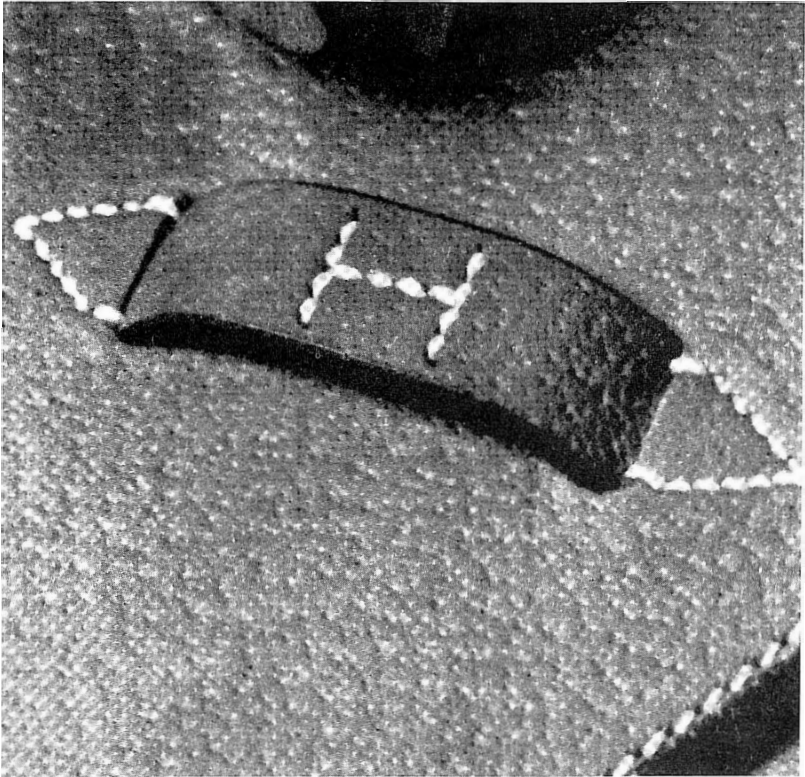
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Height precedes width. Unless otherwise indicated, all works are courtesy of the artist.

Judith Barry
Installation design for Damaged Goods, 1986

Getchen Bender
Total Recall Series, 1985-1986
Mixed media installation

Barbara Bloom
The Arena (Subject/Object), 1985
Black and white photographs, display case, shoes
95 x 140 cm

Barbara Bloom
The Adventurer, 1985
Black and white photograph with ink
100 x 150 cm

Barbara Bloom
Set, 1986
Mixed media installation with objects, size variable

Barbara Bloom
Drawings, 1985-1986
Each 70 x 100 cm

Barbara Bloom
Calendar, 1985

Andrea Fraser
Gallery Talk
Saturdays at 3:00 p.m., June 21 - July 26, 1986

Jeff Koons
New! New too!, 1984
Billboard
123 x 272"

Jeff Koons
New Sheldon Wet/Dry Tripledecker, 1982
Vacuums, acrylic, fluorescent lights
124 x 28 x 28"
The Saatchi Collection, London

Justen Ladda
...and now this... (TRUE GOLD—born rich), 1986
Installation with fourteen pedestals 1 x 1 x 4', arms and hand cast from life, yellow jello on glass cake stands

Louise Lawler
Two Editions, 1986
Installation with ten photographs (five black and white, each 29 x 24"; five color, each 24 x 29"), plus text

Ken Lum
Amrita and Mrs. Sondhi, 1986
Color photograph on enamelled vacu-form, plexiglas relief
40 x 90"
Courtesy Ydessa Gallery, Toronto

Ken Lum
Olner Family, 1986
Color photograph on enamelled vacu-form, plexiglas relief
56 x 90"
Collection Marshall Webb and Herbert Bunt, Toronto

Ken Lum
Jantzen Family, 1986
Color photograph on enamelled vacu-form, plexiglass relief
68 x 68"
Courtesy Ydessa Gallery, Toronto

Ken Lum
Square, 1986
Installation of furniture
Dimensions variable

Allan McCollum
Perfect Vehicles, 1986
100 pieces, acrylic and enamel paint on solid-cast hydrocal
Each 20½ x 8 x 8"

Haim Steinbach
announcing something, 1986
Installation with variable components

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