

***Gossip Pop: A Performative Investigation of the Role of Pop  
in Contemporary Art Practice***

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## Abstract

By broadening and redefining “pop,” this thesis intends to demonstrate pop’s potential to be considered in a manner that is productive for and applicable to contemporary art theory and practice. The research will be presented as a final survey or diachronic exhibition that will demonstrate the development of the series of *Gossip Pop* performances and exhibitions, together with a written exegesis. The practical component of this research will consist of writing, producing, performing and exhibiting a series of interdisciplinary visual artworks in a range of gallery contexts under the pseudonym or label *Gossip Pop*. These works, utilising visual and linguistic appropriation, repetition and performative methodologies, are constructed within the confines of their own self-contained *Gossip Pop* genre, which mimics the tropes of capitalist production and consumption, taking “pop” as an antecedent.

“Pop” is broadly defined for the purposes of this project and will be considered in the exegesis in three ways. Firstly, pop will be considered through aspects of the contemporary understanding of popular culture, as this pertains to ideas of mass media communication, specifically celebrity culture and gossip, drawing on the context of late capitalism and the intensification of the form of the commodity. Secondly, pop will be contemplated in relation to the theory and practice of the art historical movement “pop art,” with a particular reference to the work, life and philosophy of Andy Warhol. Finally, the notion of “pop music” as the subject (and methodology) of visual art will be examined, with a focus on two major international exhibitions, *Sympathy for the Devil: Art and Rock and Roll since 1967*, curated by Dominic Molon for the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, September 29, 2007 to January 6, 2008, and *Rock-Paper-Scissors*, curated by Diederich Diederichson for

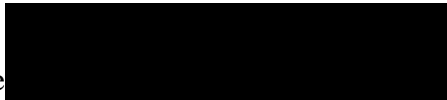
the Kunsthaus Graz, Vienna, 30 June to 30 August, 2009. These notions of pop provide the framework for speculation regarding the role of pop in respect to the epistemological, communicative and socio-political potential for contemporary art practice, including: the productive implications or effects of the “performative” visual artwork, the connotations for (and) ideologies of spectatorship, and conjecture regarding the highly contingent role or position of the artist. This speculation is supported by examples of contemporary art practice that explicate or illuminate aspects of my own work.

*This creative project comprises an exhibition (70%) and exegesis (30%).*

## Declaration

“I, Sue Dodd, declare that *Gossip Pop: A Performative Investigation of the Role of Pop in Contemporary Art Practice* contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this exegesis and exhibition are my own work.”

Signature

A solid black rectangular box used to redact the signature of Sue Dodd.

Date March 20, 2013

## Acknowledgments

There are many people whose help has been invaluable. In particular, I'd like to express my deep gratitude to my supervisors: Dr. Jane Landman and Dr. Barbara Brook.

For their individual assistance, encouragement and support for my creative project *Gossip Pop* and exegesis I would also like to gratefully acknowledge the following people: Kim Donaldson, John Brash, Kylie McFarlane, Dr. Bronwyn Cran and Dr. Megan Campbell.

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Finally, for their unconditional support and love I would like to acknowledge: Joan and Brian Dodd, Phil Dodd and Andrew Bare.

## List of Publications and Awards

### Education

Master of Arts by research in Fine Art, RMIT University, Melbourne (1998-2000)  
Bachelor of Fine Art Honours, (First Class) RMIT University (1997)

### Awards

Funding Recipient: Arts Victoria Community and Cultural Development (2006/7)  
Australia-China Council, (2006) Australia Council for the Arts—New Work (2005),  
City of Melbourne New work (2005), Arts Victoria International and Cultural  
Exchange (2001), RMIT Postgraduate Research Award (2001), Studio Residency  
Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces (2004/5).

### Exhibitions/Performances

#### Selected Solo

- 2010** *Shangri-La*, Techno Park Studios, Melbourne, *Turn On Tune In*, w Kim Donaldson, Techno Park Studios, Melbourne.
- 2009** *Watch Me Buy Me*, ACMI, Melbourne.
- 2007** *Westspace East*, Plastic Kinetic Worms, Singapore, *Inventory: On Op Shops*, Living Museum of the West, Melbourne.
- 2006** *Gossip Pop*, Satellite Opening, Shanghai, *Gossip Pop*, Glamour Bar, Shanghai, *Gossip Pop*, Artist's Party Opening for Artist's week, Adelaide International Festival, Adelaide, *Starf\*ckers, rockpigs & arterarti*, The Tote, Melbourne,
- 2005** *Next Week's Boring Surprise*, Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces, Melbourne, *The Reality TV Tour*, Canberra Contemporary Art Space, Canberra, *Gossip Pop*, Art After Dark, Andy Warhol Exhibition, NGV International, Melbourne, *Pop Vs. Death*, L'Oréal Melbourne Fashion Festival, The Croft Institute, Melbourne, *Starf\*\*ker*, Monash University Museum of Art and VCA Gallery, Melbourne
- 2004** *Gossip Pop*, Res Artis Program, ACMI Screen Gallery, Melbourne, *More Gossip Pop*, Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces, Melbourne, *Gossip Pop*, Fitzroy Town Hall, Arts Launch of L'Oréal Melbourne Fashion Festival.

#### Selected Group

- 2013** *Technopia Tours*, Art Stage, Singapore, *Moving on Asia: towards a New Art Network 2004-2013*, City Gallery, Auckland, *Move on Asia: Video Art in Asia*, 2002-2012, ZKM, Karlsruhe.
- 2012** *This Is Not A Love Song*, Anna Pappas Gallery, Melbourne, *Pursuit*, Delhi Art Fair, *Significant Others*, Anna Pappas Gallery, Melbourne Art Fair, Allotment (Birmingham/Berlin/Beyond) Mac Birmingham, *Radio Alice*, Margaret Lawrence Gallery, VCA, Melbourne, *Technopia Tours*, StudioVisits, Berlin

- 2011** *Future Possible*, Margaret Lawrence Gallery, VCA, Melbourne, *Panoply*, curated by Death Be Kind, Sawtooth ARI, Launceston, *Move On Asia*, (touring exhibition) Casa Asia, Madrid/Barcelona and LABoral, Gijon.
- 2010** *The End of Video Art*, *Move on Asia*, Para/Site Art Space, Hong Kong, *Zumba & Goliath*, Technopark Studios, *My little opening*, Hells Gallery, Melbourne.
- 2009** *The End of Video Art*, *Move on Asia*, Alternative Space Loop, Seoul, Korea, *Synaesthesia*, (performance) ACMI, Melbourne, *Intermission* (performance) for Melbourne International Film Festival, Ding Dong Lounge, Melbourne.
- 2008** *One of Us Cannot Be Wrong*, Centre for Contemporary Photography [CCP], Melbourne, *You Don't Have to Call It Music*, The Toff, Melbourne, *Sound from the Choir Loft 1*, AC [Institute Direct Chapel Unlimited], NYC, NY, *Girls, Girls, Girls*, Carlton Club, Melbourne, *Contemporary Australian Video@ICA*, Private Screening, ICA, London, *United Artists* (Performance), Palais Theatre, Melbourne, *What is (Australia Like)?* FABS, Warsaw, Sub-urban Video Lounge, Rotterdam and Directors Lounge Video Festival, Berlin.
- 2007** *Relentless Optimism*, Carlton Club, Melbourne, *OOMPH*, Canberra Contemporary Art Space, Canberra, *Good Morning!! City Noise:Sound Art Project*, Galeri Soemardja (ITB), Bandung, *Anxious Bodies* Plimsoll Gallery, University of Tasmania, PROJEKT Video Art Archive, PICA Touring Project, Western Australia.
- 2006** *show show*, Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces, *Satellite*, Australian Pavillion, Shanghai, *Anxious Bodies*, Linden Centre for Contemporary Arts, Melbourne, *Feminist Actions*, Spacement, Melbourne.
- 2005** *A Portable Model Of...*, Plimsoll Gallery, University of Tasmania, Hobart and Latrobe Regional Gallery, Morwell, *Gertrude Studio Artists*, Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces, Melbourne, *More Boring Video Art*, Vuspace, Victoria University, Melbourne.
- 2004** *2004: Australian Culture Now*, (Exhibition and performance), The Ian Potter Centre, NGV Australia, *And Something More*, (Performance) Australian Centre for Photography, Sydney, *Pink Spunk*, Performance, Loop, Melbourne, *Can't Talk Right Now*, The Shed, Melbourne, *Sad Pastie*, Bar 303, Melbourne, *Projekt Video Catalogue*, The Physics Room, Christchurch, *OuttakeOut*, The Physics Room, Christchurch

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Dude...,” *Photofile*, Winter 2005, Radio Interview/Live Performance, Julie McCrossin (presenter), Life Matters, *ABC Radio National* 11.05.05, Din Heagney, “Gossip Pop,” *Pagesonline*, April 2005, Peter Anderson, “Honk4Art,” *Australian Art Review*, Issue 6, 2005, Edward Colless, “Hot Gossip,” *Australian Art Collector*, Issue 30, Oct-Nov 2004, Radio Interview, Nicole Foote (producer), *TripleJ* 2004, “2004: Australian Culture Now” with guests Jason Smith and Kelly Gelatly (curators), *Sunday Morning*, *ABC Radio National*, 20.06.04, Max Delany, *Performance, Pop and Video: The work of Phillip Brophy, Guy Benfield and Sue Dodd*, Hatched’04 Symposium, Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts, Andrew Frost, “The Next Generation,” *Australian Art Collector*, Issue 28, April-June, 2004, Radio Interview, Madeliene Randall, *ABC Overnight* 14.03.04, Radio Interview/Live Performance, Vikki Kerrigan (presenter), The Deep End, *ABC Radio National*, 11.03.04, Lucinda Strahan, “Disrobing Celebrity with a Microphone,” *The Age*, 06.03.04, Radio Interview/Live Performance, Red Symonds (presenter) Breakfast, *774 AM*, ABC, 05.03.04, “Two Dimensional Paris a Right Little Popsicle”, *MX*, Ben Swinnerton (photography), 02.03.04.



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## Introduction

*A word has a hundred heads.*

—Proverbial (German)<sup>1</sup>

The title of one of my early solo exhibitions, *Word with a Hundred Heads* indicates some core preoccupations relevant to the project *Gossip Pop*. The art work consisted of an installation of magazine cut-outs of celebrities dissected as sensory organs: anonymous hands, ears, eyes, noses, and mouths. These were arranged into long lines on the walls, floor and ceiling of the (otherwise) empty gallery space. Because the individual cut-outs were so tiny, at first glance it looked like the gallery was crawling with ants seeking a way in or out. The work addresses and acknowledges both the desire for and the (im)possibility of a work of art to communicate collective concerns in a meaningful way to a mass audience. I wanted to find a way in and out of art. I wanted people to like art. I wanted to please the crowd. I wanted to communicate. I wanted to be effective.

The following investigation presents the *Gossip Pop* creative project as a theoretical proposition or experiment. The knowledge it produces is the result of an intuitive process by its maker that seeks to provide a range of levels of meaning for the viewer to engage with, but does not anticipate a unified or singular response to these questions. As a speculative endeavour it raises questions, but it does not seek to answer them. It is a descriptive provocation to thought and response, rather than a didactic statement or collection of orderly information. It is highly subjective, coming

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<sup>1</sup> David Crystal and Hilary Crystal, eds, *Words on Words: Quotations About Language and Languages*, (London/New York: Penguin Books, 2000): 37:52

from the highly subjective position of an artist and is then interpreted subjectively by the viewer.

There are four assumptive principles in operation regarding the work of art that may assist to explicate my thinking regarding my practice throughout this exegesis. These principles can be outlined as follows:

***The work of art operates within a given art context.*** The sphere of operation for the work of art is the gallery or museum and its vehicle is the exhibition. This context is assumed when I talk about the *Gossip Pop* project and is crucial to the way it is understood, that is, as a work of “fine art” or “contemporary art.” *Gossip Pop* is most usually presented as an interdisciplinary installation or as video and sound work in a conventional gallery setting. Therefore, it is usually seen by individuals who are present for the purpose of experiencing contemporary art, and are able to interact or engage with the work at their own time and pace. Although *Gossip Pop* has been performed live for a group audience, this has for the most part been within the gallery or museum context or if not, for an art audience outside the museum but within a clear fine art context.<sup>2</sup> However, when I refer in general to an audience for the *Gossip Pop* work, I am referring to the conventional mode of experiencing art in the exhibition form at a gallery or museum.

***A work of art exists within a unique and particular temporal frame and operates within a situational and relational field.*** The exhibition is a particular art format that occurs within the gallery. As a ritual, the exhibition is an accepted socially constructed convention that can be considered separate from the external socio-economic order of societies but that at the same time relates to and is situated therein but

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<sup>2</sup> For example at the Artists Party for the Adelaide Festival of the Arts

always within the contained parameters of its particular operation as art. These fields are not fixed and therefore the meaning of a work of art changes over time. But such changes will depend on the individual work of art and its relations to specific historical contingencies. Like fashion, some works belong to a time and place. When we discuss historical works of art, such discussions include the given situational and relational field they belong to. The work of art, particularly when it is constructed using a time-based medium like film or music, also operates within its own time. Viewers might watch an entire work of art, or they might only watch part of it. This needs to be accounted for when making time-based works of art. A series of works of art is also part of the continuum of practice of an individual artist and within this relational and situational field, further meaning can be gleaned. An artwork out of context can be extremely difficult to decipher.

*The work of art creates knowledge.* This knowledge is a particular form of knowledge that differs from traditional “authorised” knowledge. Unlike popular knowledge it is not completely unauthorised. It is authorised by the artist. But the authority it has is limited to the field in which it operates—art—which is separate to other fields of knowledge, be they popular or traditional. Art has its own language, dialects, jargons and vernacular. It is considered in the art historical field of knowledge to which it belongs. Art is speculative. In this manner it has similarities to theory or theoretical propositions. But a work of art is not a fact. It cannot itself be true or false. It is always already a construction. However, within the hypothetical sphere of its constructed operation, and according to the rules and systems contained therein, perhaps truth/false statements can be made.

***The artist and the work of art are both separate and not separate entities.***

As a product made by an individual or a small group, a work of art is tied to its maker/s in the way that a mass-produced and authored product is not. It reflects the experience and concerns of its maker. It is a repository for these concerns but once made, it fixes these concerns within its materiality. It is a one-off item. An artist whose work of art is performance, or who performs in an art work or uses images of herself, or actions, or words in the art work becomes a part of the work of art but the person him or herself is not the work of art. The difference between an artist depicting another or depicting selves or incorporating another or incorporating selves is that when an artist self-depicts they are mirroring the agency of the authority that has “authorised” the decision-making process that led to their inclusion in the materiality of the art work. They are using themselves as a form of material.

## **Methodology**

In order to understand the manner in which I address and reference the creative project *Gossip Pop* throughout this exegesis, it is important to clarify the project’s practical methodology with a basic outline. For the most part, *Gossip Pop* is produced according to the following basic methods:

Step 1. Take the text from a celebrity gossip magazine article and change it into a song or lyric format.

Step 2. Create backing music by adding beats and melody.

Step 3. Practise song with vocals. Record one version with vocals, one without.

Step 4. Create a video backing. This could use images from the same magazine article or from several magazine articles of the pertinent celebrity subject.



Step 5. Then video a performance singing the song and superimpose it in front of the backing like a music video. Add backing sound with vocals. Or perform the song live to backing song in front of a projection of the backing video.

Step 6. Incorporate either of the above two completed results into an art exhibition. At this stage add objects such as posters, a stage, a range of screens, monitors or projections, silver tape etc.

Step 7. Exhibit/Perform

In regard to the above steps, it is significant that the art mediums the project utilises are not restricted to a specific genre such as installation, video, sound or live performance. This is by no means a radical break - most contemporary art projects are interdisciplinary or “cross” mediums.<sup>3</sup>

## **The Performative**

“The performative” is a key term and descriptor of the methodology of the investigation underway and thus needs to be considered and defined in some detail. I am indebted to Dorothea Von Hantelmann’s *How to Do Things with Art*, a work she describes as a potential “manual for artists,” for my understanding of the performative and how it relates to the *Gossip Pop* project.

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<sup>3</sup> For notions of interdisciplinarity in contemporary art practice see references such as Rosalind Krauss, *A Voyage on the North Sea: Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 2000) wherein she distinguishes between postmodernism, an indulgence in capital enterprise, and what she calls “differential specificity” as the potential for the salvation of an artistic realm. See also, the writings of including Nicolas Bourriaud, *Postproduction*, (New York: Lucas and Sternberg, 2002) and Nicolas Bourriaud, *The Radicant*, (New York: Lucas and Sternberg, 2009).

The title of Von Hantelmann's book is a play on John Langshaw Austin's seminal lecture series *How to Do Things with Words*,<sup>4</sup> in which he addresses "the performative or reality-producing capacity of language."<sup>5</sup> Von Hantelmann traces the term "performative" from this inception through to later influential deployments in the work of Jacques Derrida and Judith Butler in order to "restore [its] methodological precision" and "make it productive for and within the discourse on visual art." She explains how the term has become a key word of academic art discourse and is often reductively deployed to mean "performance-like," and applied to a range of practices that reference "staging, theatricality and mise-en-scène."

Von Hantelmann bases her definition of the performative on two theoretical premises. Firstly, that "there is no performative artwork because there is no non-performative artwork" and secondly, that the "notion of performativity has nothing to do with the art form of performance."

The first premise utilizes Austin's seminal reference to the "act-like character of [spoken] language" which demonstrates how under certain conditions "signs can produce reality" and notes that a "clear-cut distinction cannot be made between a constative (descriptive) and a performative way of speaking."<sup>6</sup> Von Hantelmann applies this principle to visual art arguing that every art work has a reality-producing dimension:

In this sense, a specific methodological orientation goes along with the performative, creating a different perspective on what produces meaning in an

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<sup>4</sup> John Langshaw Austin, *How to Do Things with Words: The William James Lectures delivered at Harvard University in 1955*, ed. J.O.Urmson, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1962) in Von Hantelmann, Dorothea. *How to Do Things with Art*, Zurich/Dijon: JRP Ringier/Les presses du reel, 2010): 17.

<sup>5</sup> Von Hantelmann, *How to Do*, 17.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 18.

artwork. It means to recognize and bring into discourse the productive, reality-producing dimension of, in principle, any work of art. What the notion of the performative brings into perspective is the contingent and difficult to grasp realm of impact and effects that art brings forth both situationally, i.e. in a given spatial and discursive context, and relationally, e.g. in relation to a viewer or a public. Consequently, we can ask: What kind of situation does an artwork produce? How does it situate its viewers? What kinds of values, conventions, ideologies, and meanings are inscribed into this situation? Art's performative dimension signifies art's possibilities and limits in generating and changing reality.<sup>7</sup>

*Gossip Pop* should be considered in light of this premise focusing on what it *does* rather than what it *says*. It has a form that is familiar to the public. It looks like a music video or a pop band. It looks like popular culture, *not* fine art. The delivery of the performance is similar to how one would imagine a singer or a band to perform: posing, dancing, gesticulating in rhythm to the song and the lyrics. The overall effect demonstrates a serious effort to entertain. As indicated above, the songs, for the most part, reconfigure the prose and imagery of gossip magazine articles. Like pop songs, they are set to music and performed. The tunes are simple, repetitive and catchy.

Von Hantelmann's second premise draws on Butler's canonical definition which stresses "the power of social conventions that empower the speaker but also relativise the impact of the individual's intentions."<sup>8</sup> Butler draws on Derrida's concept of "general iterability [as] the principle by which fundamental societal parameters—such as identity and gender—are produced and reproduced

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> See Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex,"* (New York: Routledge, 1993) and Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative,* (New York: Routledge, 1997) in Von Hantelmann, *How to Do*, 18.

in and through the actions of the individual.”<sup>9</sup> This produces reality “precisely because it derives from conventions that it repeats and actualizes [and] as no act of repetition is identical, it contains not only reproductive but also differentiating or deviating moments,” and thus has the potential for actions directed towards change. *Gossip Pop* is reiterative in several ways. It repeats the familiar mode of pop music. It repeats the stories of tabloid gossip. It repeats the visuals and appropriations of pop art. In repeating the commercial performance of song it references karaoke, or the dreams of aspiring pop idols. But, crucially, it is not the product of an industrial and commercial system. It is the product of an individual and in this authorial and contextual shift, *Gossip Pop* demonstrates that the machinations and repetitions of fame and celebrity-focussed media can be themselves repeated and refigured. It demonstrates that these forms can, and do operate within the fine art context. In these operations and interventions *Gossip Pop* tests the limits and operations of the meaning conveyed by context. It interrogates both social expectations for art and for popular culture.

Von Hantelmann goes on to contrast the form of Performance Art with this model of performativity, explaining how the former is “linked to the individual... and the singular, autonomous act” and “strive[s] to break with the fundamental conventions of art... and the social systems of the museum and the market.” The latter—performativity—“refers to a non-autonomous and non-subjectivist idea of acting... only thinkable *within* the constitutive and regulative structure of conventions.” In Butler’s account these conventions relate to the extant hegemony of the wider socio-political world. She states that

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<sup>9</sup> See Jacques Derrida, “Signature Event Context,” *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. by Alan Bass, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982) 307-330 in Von Hantelmann, *How to Do*, 21;ft.10

there is “simply no such thing as an outside” and “the idea of a radical break with conventions *must* fail and is therefore uninteresting.” Von Hantelmann argues that the “conventions of art’s production, presentation and historical persistence... are co-produced by any artwork – independent of its respective content—and... that it is precisely this dependency on conventions that opens up the possibility of changing them.” She writes, “[w]ith this notion of performativity we can, for example, concretise how every artwork, not in spite of but by virtue of its integration in certain conventions, “acts.” ”<sup>10</sup> *Gossip Pop*, by dealing with the conventions of the wider world via testing the way popular culture communicates, is only effective as an experiment within the conventions of art and the context of art’s communication—a tiny petri dish in the labyrinthine art lab.

## Structure

The scope of this performative investigation of the role of pop in contemporary art practice is deliberately broad. For example, the notion of pop implies, as well as an art movement, a music genre, a subculture, a particular history, progress and ideology of Western capitalist production and consumption and a state of being. Aspects of the role of pop will be addressed in each chapter in different ways.

Chapter One is where the exegesis most directly addresses broader research about gossip and establishes it as a fundamental *modus operandi* for human communication, expressing our desire to “know.” Pop culture, the notions of gossip

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<sup>10</sup> Dorothea Von Hantelmann, *How to Do Things with Art*, (Zurich/Dijon: JRP Ringier/Les presses du reel, 2010), 19-20.

and celebrity culture will be explored with a consideration of what constitutes knowledge in these fields and how it operates. The idea of authority, of authorising agency, the role of the artists, of pop culture as pop knowledge, the connection of life and work in the neo-liberal bio-political context and the role of the market will all be discussed. It will also speculate upon the way pop knowledge operates as knowledge production. This chapter will contextualise the material or content for the *Gossip Pop* work—the utilisation of narratives and imagery from popular celebrity culture.

Chapter Two is focussed on relevant aspects of the pop art movement and framed by the notion of “reification,” and associated recognition theories proposing this confusion of people, objects and social relations as a significant factor for understanding of *Gossip Pop* and contemporary art practice. A brief summary is made of Theodor Adorno’s influential critique of the “culture industry” including a mention of Greenberg’s seminal definition of kitsch. Then after considering the etymology of pop, it looks at the groundbreaking *This is Tomorrow* exhibition by the Independent Group. A primary focus in this chapter, however, is the discussion of Andy Warhol with particular regard to his contemporary ubiquity, his connection to the market and the operating principles of his art practice. The chapter concludes by re-evaluating reification and recognition in light of the Warhol ethos.

Chapter Three is where the exegesis will tackle the important role of pop music within my contemporary art practice as both medium and “pose.” It will discuss a significant gossip music ritual from folk culture and establish a connection between Warhol’s pop “lifestyle” and pop music relevant to the *Gossip Pop* project. It will examine contemporary visual art practice that utilises pop music with reference to two key international exhibitions. Analysis of individual art works from these exhibitions

by five artists or collectives will expand on the inferences about the *Gossip Pop* project that are made throughout and clearly situate the work within an established contemporary art mode.

## Chapter One

### Pop Culture: Gossip and Celebrity Gossip

*By “market-reflexive gestures,” I mean reflection upon market activities from which the individual making the gesture does not exclude himself.... Decisively, the market-reflexive gesture does not claim absolute distance from market events. Its point of departure, one might say, is consciousness of its own compromised position – but at the same time admitting its deep involvement in the market, such a gesture also attempts to counter it ... [and] ... address market conditions in terms of their potential to change. ... But in fact, it is not gestures or artworks themselves that act in a market-critical manner. Instead, it is the viewer who interprets certain gestures as market reflexive, even anti-market. Market reflexivity is always a matter of attribution and interpretation. And every interpretation contains an element of projection and wishful thinking. ... An artwork certainly can send out signals of market reflexivity, but it requires a viewer who is receptive to its message.*

*—Isabelle Graw, High Price: Art Between the Market and Celebrity Culture*

### Introduction

We are situated in a complex global order shaped by neo-liberal forces. Artists, utilising the antecedent of pop art, are increasingly commenting on the market and the commodity in ways that are inclusive of the life and role of artists and authors in light of the understanding of gossip/celebrity culture advanced in Warhol’s life and work.



The “disproportionate pervasiveness of celebrity,” to use Graeme Turner’s phrase,<sup>11</sup> has, in part, spawned the *Gossip Pop* project, a performative fiction whose products or commodities—that is, songs, music videos and live performances—are appropriated from the imagery and texts of the mass media celebrity culture, with a special focus on gossipy tabloid magazines such as *New Weekly (NW)*. The *Gossip Pop* project directly incorporates the persona of artist/producer into the product (as lead singer, band member and/or fan). These artworks inevitably are reliant for their meaning and impact on an assumed shared tabloid vernacular amongst the audience or viewer—a general familiarity with the faces and names and stories of the celebrities referenced in the artworks. However, more importantly, they rely upon a sophisticated awareness of the repeated constructions and conventions of media pop culture that convey celebrity stories and produce the celebrities themselves, feeding and shaping collective epistemophilic desires<sup>12</sup> and the machinery of the drive for “fifteen minutes” of fame.<sup>13</sup>

An important purpose of this chapter is to clarify the association that I feel resonates between the potential for speculative knowledge production in the arena of celebrity and gossip and the arena of art production (its ontology and epistemologies). Both can be identified as industries or markets with socio-political implications as both blur the line between life, the individual and the product or commodity via reification—a term addressed in Chapter Two. The cultural divide between art, considered high brow or elite, and celebrity, considered low brow and mass-produced, is obvious. Nevertheless, within the capitalist schema, art and gossip could be

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<sup>11</sup> Graeme Turner, *Understanding Celebrity* (London/New Delhi:Sage/Thousand Oaks, 2004), 3.

<sup>12</sup> Patricia Mellencamp, *High Anxiety: Catastrophe, Scandal, Age and Comedy* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992), 156.

<sup>13</sup> Already apocryphal, Andy is amused by how misquoted this iconic phrase is on Thursday July 1978, approximately 11 years after it was first attributed to him. See Andy Warhol, *The Andy Warhol Diaries*, Pat Hackett, ed. (New York: Warner Books, 1989), 156.

considered as analogous in regards to their “surplus value.” The term “surplus value” is deployed loosely in the context of contemporary commodified culture, where notions of “non-surplus” value are so hard to define, and where questions of *value* are relative and ideological. The sense in which surplus value is ascribed to gossip and celebrity culture versus art by society and culture differs, and this issue, amongst others, is a key distinction that the *Gossip Pop* work seeks to address and comprehend.<sup>14</sup>

In investigating the association between pop culture and art, I am drawn to works that question the assumption of an extant dichotomy between the market conditions inherent for contemporary art production and contemporary art’s production of meaning or knowledge. Art theorist and historian Isabelle Graw’s *High Price: Art between the Market and Celebrity Culture* highlights key points in this regard. Graw defines the current wider socio-political and economic context as a neo-liberal bio-economy that equates life with work, and looks at celebrity culture as a defining theory of the time. Concomitantly, she examines Warhol as an example of an artist who exemplifies the notion of “market reflexivity,” by which she means the blurring between the domains of “life” and “work.” This notion encompasses conjecture upon the role of the artist and the related celebrity culture context. Whilst Graw’s work interrogates contingent knowledge production in visual art, *Knowledge Goes Pop* by feminist cultural and media studies writer Clare Birchall posits gossip itself (along with conspiracy theory) as a particular form of knowledge production, one which questions notions of epistemological authenticity. Birchall addresses the

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<sup>14</sup> See approach to surplus value in art by Diedrich Diederichson, who uses the term *Mehrwert*. Amongst the more straightforward reasons he ascribes to art’s “exceptional status” as surplus are, firstly, its autonomy, secondly, because it is an “ally of desire” and, finally, that it is, unlike the rest of life, “full of meaning.” In Diedrich Diederichsen, *On Surplus Value in Art: Reflections 01*, Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art (Berlin/New York: Sternberg Press, 2008), 23.

notion of the knowledge economy and defines popular knowledge and the distinction between this type of knowledge and knowledge *per se*. Furthermore, Birchall connects gossip's speculative endeavours to the deconstructive, theoretical investigations of cultural studies, emphasising the parallel "risks" of both in generating or "depositing" new ideas into the present with the aim of some form of subsequent future (epistemological) "return."

Making further conceptual connections between this kind of "speculative" knowledge and art production, the meaning of the *Gossip Pop* project will be contemplated in regard to the kind of knowledge produced in the celebrity arena and the effect of artwork that is materially inclusive of the role of the artist will be considered. A series of singular acts, products, artworks, exhibitions and performances, *Gossip Pop* is a DIY,<sup>15</sup> bespoke, handmade "commodity" rather than a mass production. It raises and explores the following questions for the viewer:

- How authentic can a work of art that borrows from celebrity culture be? How does the notion of authenticity affect the knowledge produced? What is the status/purpose or relevance of notions of authenticity in a work of art?
- If I, the artist, become a part of the work how does the role I am playing (as commodity and commodified) affect the work?

Whilst only partial and self-interested, an examination of theories of gossip, celebrity gossip, pop knowledge production and the market is within the scope of this exegesis, as part of its remit to survey and define key aspects of my enquiry, ones that resonate and contextualise aspects of my creative practice that have hitherto been

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<sup>15</sup> This term is used broadly to denote "do-it-yourself," and DIY culture, which encompasses the non-mainstream activities associated with independent art, music and film.

largely intuitive. To this end, the following section addresses the current socio-political–economic context, as defined by Graw, and will include Graw’s definition of the art market, and its connection to the artwork.<sup>16</sup> In a brief foray into media studies and social linguistics, I supplement Graw and Birchall’s analyses of celebrity culture and gossip, in order to investigate specifically the notions of gossip and celebrity around which my creative work centres in regards to aspects of content and form.

## **The Marketplace**

One of the intuitive drives for my creative work is my reaction to the pervasiveness of consumer capitalism, in particular gossip and celebrity culture, which have both anaesthetising and stimulating effects on our desires and actions in the world. My work reiteratively poses the general question: how does one live and make artwork in a world that values the economic and material over more philosophical, political and spiritual concerns, and what does this imply for meaning, assuming that we aim to live meaningful, ethical and fulfilled lives?

Graw identifies our prevailing contemporary ontology or “heteronomy” as “neo-liberal,” a system that, according to Ulrich Bröckling, “aims to regulate all social relations and ties between people via market mechanisms.”<sup>17</sup> What was formerly considered private, for instance, social relationships or the body, is now subsumed under the economic pressure to optimise via self-imposed regimes, such as cosmetic interventions, diet, surgery and exercise. Graw further contends that these

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<sup>16</sup> See Isabelle Graw, *High Price; Art Between the Market and Celebrity Culture*, trans. Nicholas Grindell, (Berlin/New York: Sternberg Press, 2009).

<sup>17</sup> See Ulrich Bröckling, *Das unternehmerische Selbst. Soziologie einer Subjektivierungsform* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2007), 76, in Isabelle Graw, *High Price*, 158.

pressures are internalised, to the point that even though we may be aware that they are suspect, we continue to implement them “against our better judgment.”<sup>18</sup> This reflects a turn (rather than a radical break, as the conditions are not new) towards “biopolitics,” a term derived from Foucault’s notion of biopower to describe regimes and systems aimed at the management of people’s lives.<sup>19</sup> Thomas Lemke refers to biopolitics as the “political economy of life,” “meaning that life is not only politicised, but also economised.”<sup>20</sup> She writes:

Foucault ... always emphasised that biopolitics functions primarily by stimulation and not by submission or discipline. It is the power, as Foucault put it, to “make live or let die.” Those who die are abandoned to their fate, while attention is fully focused on the form we give to our lives. ... [Muhle states that] Foucault’s main aim was to distinguish biopolitics from sovereign power by referring to its non-repressive impact on life ... exert(ing) its influence indirectly, prompting people to give a particular form to their lives of their own accord.<sup>21</sup>

Graw proposes that the “bio-political context” is foundational for many theorists, such as Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, for whom “the production of capital converges ever more with the production and reproduction of social life itself.”<sup>22</sup> Graw connects this trend to the historical convergence of the personal with the political since the 1960s and further cites the blurring of the binaries of the public and private spheres, leisure and work and the traditionally male-dominated realm of production and female realm of reproduction. Like many media studies scholars, I see

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid. *High Price*, 158.

<sup>19</sup> See Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1, An Introduction* (Toronto/New York: Random Books, 1978/1990), 140–141; 143–144.

<sup>20</sup> See Thomas Lemke, *Biopolitik* (Hamburg: Junius, 2007), p. 9 in Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Isabelle Graw, *High Price*, 158–159 and citing Maria Muhle, *Eine Genealogie der Biopolitik, Zum Begriff des Lebens bei Foucault und Canguilhem* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2008), 9.

<sup>22</sup> Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 402 in Graw, *High Price*, 159.

in such accounts of biopower a strong link to the disciplinary or regulatory threads in celebrity culture within our everyday discourse.<sup>23</sup> Graw's argument, I think, is that individual personal "life," ambiguous though the term "life" may be, is now a commodity, or open to commodification, in very many ways. "We," the ordinary subjects of this late capitalist system, routinely enact this commodification in our normal lives—it is what we all do.

Hence, celebrity culture—cultivated, watched and consumed—becomes a logical extension of our own acts because it performs these collective acts of commodification of all aspects of life via particular recognisable individuals, symbols or simulacra for their audiences, in the discursive, public and social spheres. Celebrity culture has become, like the internalised drives to self-optimisation, utterly familiar (despite our better judgment). In other words, I suggest, celebrities do what we ourselves all do, but in an optimised way. At the same time, celebrities, privileged with the time and money to enact self-improvement to a high degree, do not stand only as examples and images of what is achievable, given luck, talent, time and money. Their lives simultaneously demonstrate the fundamental futility and emptiness of these endeavours, portraying that image does not insulate one from unhappiness, obsession, aging, addiction, loss, illness, loneliness, or any of the everyday vagaries of life and fate.

In some standard approaches, art-as-authenticity offers an epistemological alternative, as far from the so-called complicit and tawdry scripts of celebrity culture as one could imagine. Graw designates to "art" the status of "commodity" whilst emphasising its special character—split as it is between symbolic value and market value. The symbolic value of art rests on "the fact that it expresses an intellectual

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<sup>23</sup> There are further highly relevant ramifications for art and the artist.

surplus value ... an epistemological gain that cannot be smoothly translated into economic categories.”<sup>24</sup> Indeed, she defines the art market as “highly differentiated and multi-dimensional.” The commercial art market, including galleries, dealers, art fairs, auctions, consultants and art banks, and the knowledge art market, for instance, institutions, museums, large-scale exhibitions, symposia, books, journals and other publications, comprise territories with their own distinct value systems, languages and codes, that, nevertheless, overlap and extend, increasingly, into each other’s realms.<sup>25</sup>

Graw wonders if “an insistence on an idealistic approach to art proves to be good for business.” She states:

[T]he balancing act performed by the artwork as commodity between price and pricelessness is considered the matrix for the double game played by those who banish the market to an imaginary outside while at the same time constantly feeding it.<sup>26</sup>

Paradoxes and double games abound. Graw’s declared position is both idealising and anti-idealistic. She refuses to believe in a “mythologic unity” or exaggerated special status for art whilst at the same time acknowledges the high degree of epistemological potential for “some art practices.”<sup>27</sup> What is noteworthy here to my line of thought is the position Graw takes as an authority who can distinguish between whether an

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<sup>24</sup> Graw, *High Price*, 6.

<sup>25</sup> One of a plethora of examples that comes to mind of the manner in which the commercial art market is focusing more and more on the “non-commercial” activities of the knowledge market is the recent programmed series of free talks by The Centre for Contemporary Arts, a national research centre of Nanyang Technological University (NTU), at Art Stage Singapore 2013, the large-scale commercial art fair for the region.<sup>25</sup> These talks brought in respected critics, theorists and artists rather than collectors and dealers, not to discuss prices of individual works or engage in commercial activities, but, rather, the theoretical issues raised by the works at the fair. Curators also took guests on independent guided tours around the fair, with each curator picking up and focusing on particular conceptual threads according to their own interests and expertise.

<sup>26</sup> Isabelle Graw, *High Price*, 10.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

epistemic potential exists, or not, within a work of art. By saying “some,” she makes a qualification that means that works of art exist that do not produce knowledge—or knowledge of any value—and is stating that she, as an authority, is able to distinguish these from the ones that do. I would venture the proposition that for artists, epistemic values are (intuitively) conferred in their own work by their own authority, and epistemic potential is, furthermore, implicit in a wide range of ideologies, activities, objects and images in the world that inspire artists—for me, obviously, within celebrity culture. Notions of authority and authorising agency recur as a key theme in this chapter. However, the ultimate authority lies with the viewer. A viewer who is, as the opening quote suggests, not “receptive,” will either not recognise value or decide that none exists.

### **Is Gossip Wrong?**

Basically, gossip is talk about others, and celebrity gossip in tabloid magazines such as *NW* is rarely respectful or kind. A recurring trope in *Gossip Pop* is the reification and repetition of recurring tropes in celebrity gossip, such as the accusatory “You’re Too Fat!”<sup>28</sup> In this and other iterations I do not intend my replication to carry the derogatory force of its tabloid source. However, as noted meaning ultimately resides with the audience and so some deliberation about the fundamental ethics of my relaying of a communicative mode that trades in exaggeration and intrusion, impossibly contradictory bodily policing (Too Fat! Too Thin!), and revelation and disgrace is clearly required.

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<sup>28</sup> In the *Gossip Pop* video *UR2fat*.



Emrys Westacott defends forms of gossip that contain “no deliberate lies.”<sup>29</sup> Westacott accounts for the widespread condemnation of this discourse mode by citing fundamental values embedded in our ethical culture, such as “don’t tell tales,”<sup>30</sup> “do unto others as you would yourself,” “mind your own business,” “don’t treat others as a means to one’s own ends” and “don’t damage reputations.” In each of these statements, the concern is that the act of gossiping is somehow spiritually unhealthy and falls short of the consideration of what constitutes a good or beautiful life—in other words, a shallow waste of time.<sup>31</sup>

Westacott proposes that gossip can indirectly promote good and provide pleasure for participants. He lists the guilty pleasures of gossip, including *schadenfreude*, smugness, titillation and feelings of power. However, other, more worthy, pleasures include:

- catharsis—the release of negative feelings such as anger, envy or bitterness;
- solving mysteries—unravelling complex rationale for behaviour; and
- enjoyable learning—achieving a deeper understanding of human beings in general, and the individual character traits, motivations, actions and relationships of both people we know and public figures.

Westacott also catalogues the indirect benefits of gossip as: improving our understanding of social reality, facilitating the operation of social institutions,

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<sup>29</sup> Emrys Westacott, “The Ethics of Gossiping,” *International Journal of Applied Philosophy*, 14 (2000), 72.

<sup>30</sup> One of the Torah’s 613 commandments “Do not go up and down as a talebearer amongst your people,” Leviticus 19:16 in *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

fostering intimacy between people, counteracting secrecy and enforcing social mores, and ultimately concludes that “there is nothing *necessarily* wrong with gossip.”<sup>32</sup>

In this account, Westacott reminds us of the embeddedness of a fundamental curiosity in Western philosophy by quoting Aristotle’s famous “all men by nature desire to know.”<sup>33</sup> Feminist cultural studies scholar Patricia Mellencamp makes much the same point—of mediated gossip—by quoting the irreverent celebrity icon Joan Rivers: “Inquiring minds want to know.”<sup>34</sup> Both authors are highlighting the notion of gossip as intrinsic to human nature: both to “knowing” and “being.” Through researching primates, psychologist Robin Dunbar has speculated that language in early humans evolved as a substitute for practices of bodily grooming, which play an essential role in cementing social bonds and group cohesiveness. Language primarily enabled individuals to achieve a better understanding of members of their group, thus implicating gossip, or talk about other people, as the oldest topic and form of conversation.<sup>35</sup> The etymology of gossip is derived from “god” and “sib,” the old English terms for godparent, implying an origin linked to a familial duty of care. So, if gossip is a historically benign way of knowing (yet of unverifiable ethical provenance) what is the value of the unauthorised knowledge produced?

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>33</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Book 1, Chapter 1, accessed February 15, 2013, <http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/metaphysics.1.i.html> Also quoted in Westacott, “Ethics of Gossiping,” 83.

<sup>34</sup> Mellencamp, *High Anxiety*, 155.

<sup>35</sup> See Robin Dunbar, *Grooming, Gossip and the Evolution of Language* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996).

## Survey of Gossip

*One thing I've always liked to do is hear what people say about each other – you learn just as much about the person who's talking as about the person who's getting dished. It's called gossip, of course, and it's an obsession of mine.*

—Andy Warhol, *POPism*

In considering the cultural politics of gossip, one of its most outstanding features is its undeniable ubiquity. In the arena of popular culture, the university, government or the economy, and whether delivered or received face-to-face or via the mass media, gossip's effects and the knowledge it produces are inescapable. As to the veracity of that information, or, indeed, a verifiable source, these are inherently and always questionable. If we consider gossip, as Dunbar suggests, to be a key social communicative mode, it is unsurprising that gossip has serially colonised emergent communication technologies: from the telegraph to blogs, chatrooms, websites, social media, Facebook, Linked in, Twitter and so forth. Whilst gossip—being “in the know”—has always had some value in trade, gossip has evolved into a monetisable form. It is no wonder that the “illegitimate” knowledge gossip reveals—or fabricates—contributes to highly profitable industry.

The economic importance of gossip, as a form of currency in the “knowledge economy,”<sup>36</sup> is evident in the impact of rumours on the stockmarket, or in driving sales in the film and music industries. Gossip, in some cases, is actively encouraged as a communication mode by corporate managers, one that facilitates organisational

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<sup>36</sup> Clare Birchall, *Knowledge Goes Pop: From Conspiracy Theory to Gossip* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2006), 167.

health and may influence major political decision-making.<sup>37</sup> Today,<sup>38</sup> the Internet and smart phones allow increased access to the gossip industry, including scope for specialisation and interactivity, for example through comments, shares, blogs, Likes and Tweets.

Clare Birchall outlines the academic treatment of gossip by identifying two opposing trends: the more established approach which saw gossip as a negative social force, and, more recently, the positioning of gossip as an essential part of group maintenance and management.<sup>39</sup> On the negative side, the scriptures of Islamic, Jewish and Christian faiths all contain dire warnings about the evils of gossip, whilst historical accounts of similar warnings in literature also abound—the metaphor of the “evil tongue” recurring frequently throughout. Gordon notes the focus during the seventeenth century on the behaviour of women, even to the extent of cautioning against the dangers of exposing children to the tales and rhymes of their nannies and nurses.<sup>40</sup> Gossip content was also generally deplored in the field of Western philosophy, on the grounds that it was emotional rather than informational and, therefore, “repugnant to the rationalist conception of knowledge that we have inherited from the Greeks and that has dominated Western thought since the seventeenth century.”<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> See Gail Collins, *Scorpion Tongues: Gossip, Celebrity, and American Politics* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007).

<sup>38</sup> Whilst by no means new, reaching back, for example, through the history of print such as the newsheets of Restoration Grub Street and the gossip columns of Hollywood journalism. See, for example, R. Wilkes, *Scandal: A Scurrilous History of Gossip* (London: Atlantic Books, 2002), James Sutherland, *The Restoration Newspaper and its Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) and Jennifer Frost, *Hedda Hopper's Hollywood: Celebrity Gossip and American Conservatism* (New York/London: New York University Press, 2011).

<sup>39</sup> Birchall, *Knowledge*, 96.

<sup>40</sup> Jan B. Gordon, *Gossip and Subversion in Nineteenth Century British Fiction: Echo's Economies* (Oxford: MacMillan, 1996), 37 in *Ibid.*, 101.

<sup>41</sup> Robert F. Goodman, “Introduction,” in Robert F. Goodman and Aaron Ben-Ze'ev, eds, *Good Gossip* (Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 1996), 6, in *Ibid.*, 103.

In law, great emphasis is given to definitions of hearsay and its inadmissibility in legal proceedings unless under exceptional circumstances (e.g. dying utterances or the evidence of children). Gordon writes, “the procedural exclusion of hearsay evidence would suggest a prejudice against unregulated orality in Western jurisprudence.”<sup>42</sup> Birchall further draws on Mellencamp’s consideration of the legal effects of gossip in respect to allegations of slander, negative talk or opinion. The publishing or broadcasting of such forms of negative talk and celebrity gossip frequently strays into the territory of libel. A distinction also seems to be made between unrehearsed and scripted utterances, with the former deemed acceptable as spontaneous opinion or slander, whilst the latter, presumably because it is composed in advance, and *in writing*, as libel. As Birchall notes, this is further complicated in the US by the tension between the right to freedom of speech on the one hand and protecting citizens against defamation on the other.<sup>43</sup> Mellencamp identifies authorship at the crux of the issues of ethics, social value and currency, which is relevant to my concern regarding the paradoxical notion of gossip as knowledge with “unauthorised” authority:

It would appear that for both the law and academia, the most troubling aspects of modern media are the lack of clearly defined object status (the tangible commodity as a product) and the dilemma of discerning authorship. Or, argued positively, the law charts the move from a culture of single, precious, ontological objects created by individual authors or artists to a culture of multiply [sic]

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<sup>42</sup> Jan B. Gordon, “Hearsay Booked: Fugitive Talk Brought to Justice,” in S. I. Salamensky, ed., *Talk, Talk, Talk: The Cultural Life of Everyday Conversation* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001): 210 in *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>43</sup> Birchall, *Knowledge*, 103.

mediated artefacts created by diverse and dispersed systems of authorship, moving from paper/print to electronics, from single to collective authorship.<sup>44</sup>

Conversely, the positive academic treatments of gossip counter many condemnations arguing that gossip is “fundamental to the functioning of all human collectives.”<sup>45</sup> Birchall draws particular attention to the anthology of essays contained in *Good Gossip*.<sup>46</sup> These argue the anthropological position designated to gossip as a “normative” socialising process and further propose gossip’s “special usefulness for subordinated classes” or alternative culture in its potential for an alternative discourse from that of the dominant culture or public life.<sup>47</sup> Hence, in that it “offer[s] passive resistance to many forms of power,”<sup>48</sup> gossip is portrayed as subversive.

Mellencamp’s *High Anxiety: Catastrophe, Scandal, Age and Comedy* takes up discussion of the relationship between these two gossip modalities and provides us with a valuable survey of gossip with particular attention to mediated gossip that derives from popular culture. She considers gossip as an archaic form or “symptom of another era,” with links to the uncivilised, grotesque body of Bakhtin’s Rabelaisian carnivalesque on the one hand, and Freud’s experience of the “uncanny” on the other, seeing gossip as “old, rude and noisy.”<sup>49</sup>

Mellencamp notes that Patricia Meyer Spacks’ project concerned redeeming the debased status of gossip. Spacks revalues gossip as a feminine discursive mode, which is highly participatory and which through narratives and open-ended exchange

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<sup>44</sup> Mellencamp, *High Anxiety*, 188.

<sup>45</sup> Nicolas Emler, “Gossip, Reputation, and Social Adaptation,” (1994), 117 in Goodman, *Good Gossip*, in Clare Birchall, *Knowledge*, 105.

<sup>46</sup> See R. F. Goodman and A. Ben-Ze’ev, eds, *Good Gossip* (Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 1996).

<sup>47</sup> Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Gossip* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 46, in Birchall, *Knowledge*, 106.

<sup>48</sup> Goodman, “Introduction,” 5, in Birchall, *Knowledge*, 106.

<sup>49</sup> Mellencamp, *High Anxiety*, 156.

is capable of creating intimacy, undermining power and serving eroticism. Spacks' analysis of gossip, however, as Mellencamp points out, "depends on the lack of a [mass] audience"<sup>50</sup> and so we return to the dichotomy that has structured discussion in this chapter. For Spacks, the kind of gossip which is amenable to this positive revaluing is interpersonal exchange between two or three people. In private, in a context of trust: "The presence of even a single observer would change the conversation's character: no longer true gossip, only a simulacrum."<sup>51</sup> Mellencamp sums up Spacks' positive take as viewing gossip as "a crucial form of solidarity [with] subversive implications."<sup>52</sup>

Yet, as I have already foreshadowed, Spacks' account disdains the kind of gossip purveyed by popular culture that obsessed Warhol and is a focal point for *Gossip Pop*; that is, "idle talk"<sup>53</sup> and the simulated intimacy of the tabloid confessional. Mellencamp glosses Spacks as describing tabloid gossip as uncontrollable and incalculable—a gossip of blunted awareness. "*People* [the magazine] and its shady relatives ... imitates and debases social functions of oral gossip ... correspond[ing] ... rather precisely to prostitution."<sup>54</sup> Whilst acknowledging her postmodern and feminist resurrection of women's gossip as a good critical project, Mellencamp points out that the moral bipolarity of Spacks' argument values a *sanctioned* gossip of daily life and the dominion of the hermeneutic code of the (genteel/personal) private over the performative or proairetic code of the (crass/mass) public sphere.

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<sup>50</sup> Spacks, *Gossip*, 11; 3–4, in Mellencamp, *High Anxiety*, 178.

<sup>51</sup> Spacks, *Gossip*, 3–4, in *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> Spacks, *Gossip*, 12, in *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> Spacks writes that: "[A]gainst valued gossip (or the real), whose function is creating intimacy is set idle talk (the simulacrum), wherein gossip's consequences are uncontrollable and incalculable: This is gossip of "blunted awareness."" Spacks, *Gossip*, 3–4, in Mellencamp, *High Anxiety*, 178.

<sup>54</sup> Spacks, *Gossip*, 67–68, in Mellencamp, *High Anxiety*, 177.

For Mellencamp, mediated gossip is “a paradigm of neo-Fordism ... a fallout of franchise culture — of information, services, leisure, work and therapy” and “free content” for the burgeoning technologies of the communications media. “Gossip,” she says, “transforms personalities into raw capital.”<sup>55</sup> The confessional and therapeutic tropes of mediated gossip and affect are considered by Mellencamp within the everyday discourses of biography, the news and television as narratives that, though fundamentally authorless, may become authorised over time, but remain, nevertheless, untameable, unpredictable, paranoid and rhizomatic in nature — “crazy connections with their own rules and logic.”<sup>56</sup>

The tensions of this gossip binary that sets folk against popular culture, driven perhaps by the distain for the commercial implications of mediated gossip are questioned by Mellencamp. Clare Birchall also enters into debate about the value of popular and mediated knowledge and urges reformulation of the, by now outdated, polarity of popular culture as either mass or folk. She proposes instead that popular knowledge is both local and global, homemade and mass produced—“a pragmatic, social tool *and* an entertaining, pleasurable practice or product.” Noting the impossibility of locating “authentic” sources of popular knowledge she rejects the idea of determining value based on archaic notions of individual authorship:

[T]he commodification of popular knowledge and the effect of exporting it to new contexts should not be considered as a simple act of cultural imperialism or appropriation, but as a process of proliferation often secured by the self-replicating structure of popular knowledge itself. Gossips, for example, are never sated. The revelation of secrets (true or untrue) does not satisfy—the desire to

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<sup>55</sup> Mellencamp, *High Anxiety*, 155–156.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.



reveal or receive simply gets deferred elsewhere, searching for new material in an endless exchange of signifiers parading as signifieds.<sup>57</sup>

Furthermore, Birchall objects to the way these analyses, whilst acknowledging the social importance of gossip and its challenge to official culture, configure gossip as outside of official knowledge, thus keeping what she argues is the spurious opposition between gossip and knowledge intact. Gossip, she contends, is rather a constitutive necessity, “at the heart of cognition, conditioning any history of knowledge or claim to knowledge put forward within the socio-cultural sphere.”<sup>58</sup>

### ***Gossip Pop and Celebrity Gossip***

My creative practice is embedded in celebrity culture and this exegesis aims to share some of my speculations or assumptions about the significance of celebrity in dialogue with cultural studies theory in this field. So far in this chapter I have focussed on gossip as a mode of interpersonal discourse, a commodity form and as knowledge and I now turn to think more directly about *Gossip Pop*’s own consumption and rearticulation of such forms.

The everyday play of discourse, secrets and desires shared via the communicative exchange of celebrity gossip is an experimental yet safe zone because of its triviality and disposability. In this realm, where “Like” (the Facebook tick of approval) is an adequate justification and opinions are always in flux, it could be speculated that the consumption of celebrity gossip is a process that is an end in itself, and, in this way, proposes a metaphor for aspects of contemporary art practice. My

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<sup>57</sup> Birchall, *Knowledge*, 24.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

creative practice is embedded in celebrity culture and this exegesis aims to share some of my speculations, or assumptions, about the significance of celebrity in dialogue with cultural studies theory in this field. Of particular interest to me are the time-based distortions, the cyclic nature of the information and the constant repetition. Mellencamp, quoting Andrew Ross, writes “[G]ossip is soon “outdated, spent, obsolescent, or out of fashion,” an ecology of production, which, like Elvis, Marilyn, and Liz, paradoxically also recycles detritus, refusing obsolescence. Thus, like pop, gossip “contains messages about the *historical* production of the material conditions of taste.”<sup>59</sup>

Celebrity culture, in the mass media public sphere, provides us with shareable stories about life, both public and private, divided into issues and events considered to be of significance that, via their dissemination, become a part of the knowledge of the global social collective. These stories, distinguished from fairytales, myths or religion by their supposed “reality,” are, like these iconic narratives, riddled with familiar patterns and repetitions. *Gossip Pop*’s song titles from headlines, including *Yoyo Diet Queens*, *Fears for Spears*, *Stars without Make Up* and *Is it True?*, are instantly recognisable to magazine readers as typical examples of the cyclic repetitions of the celebrity gossip magazine article. The stories are conveyed not only in language, but, and primarily I would argue, in images. As Mellencamp notes, “staging an epistemophilia as much as a scopophilia, the desire to know along with the desire to see.”<sup>60</sup> Debord’s definition of the spectacle as “a social relation between people that is mediated by images” is also applicable here.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Andrew Ross, *No Respect: Intellectuals and Popular Culture* (Great Britain: Routledge, 1989), 151. in Mellencamp, *High Anxiety*, 156.

<sup>60</sup> Mellencamp, *High Anxiety*, 156.

<sup>61</sup> Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (London: Rebel Press, 2005), 7.

These images are likewise highly repetitive and cyclic. The repetition occurs both within individual pages of particular magazine editions, articles or photo-narratives and over weeks, months and years as the same celebrity subjects are depicted in a seemingly endless parade of replayed situations. Big stories are strung out over time as crumbs of new detail are added. Yet, the mass media stories constantly refer back to ageless archetypal narratives and recurring or favourite tabloid themes. This creates a constant feeling of *déjà-vu*—another teenage train-wreck, another shock divorce, another wedding or funeral. As Turner notes, modern celebrity, as media representation, is a “discursive regime,” and “understanding it demands close attention to the representational repertoires and patterns employed.”<sup>62</sup>

A key thread of my discussion of the culture of celebrity gossip in this chapter has been the way it is cited as emblematic of the fundamental inauthenticity or constructiveness of the contemporary realm.<sup>63</sup> Daniel Boorstin describes celebrity as the domination of the “human pseudo event,” the persona fabricated for and by the media and evaluated primarily in terms of media visibility for its scale and effectiveness, rather than for objective criteria of worth, such as real achievements or value.<sup>64</sup> The human pseudo event reveals obsession with the image, surface and simulation, and for Boorstin implies a culture removed from and disinterested in reality or substance.<sup>65</sup> This is the familiar elitist position, reminiscent of Adorno and Greenberg, redolent with distaste for the populist concerns of mass culture, which I will discuss in more detail in Chapter Two. Other critical positions in media studies condemn Western culture as dominated by the machinations of the publicity and

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<sup>62</sup> Turner, *Celebrity*, 8.

<sup>63</sup> See Bob Franklin, *Newzak and News Media* (London: Edward Arnold, 1997), in Turner, *Celebrity*, 3.

<sup>64</sup> Daniel Boorstin, *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America* (New York: Atheneum, 1971), 57 in Turner, *Celebrity*, 5.

<sup>65</sup> “Preceding arguments about postmodernity by several decades, but driven by the opposite of postmodernism’s reputed relativism,” in Turner, *Celebrity*, 5.

promotions industry, blaming the commercial imperatives of advertising for spawning a popular culture based on generic “bad faith”<sup>66</sup>

For me, this implies that inherent in the public commercial sphere is a general and fundamental disbelief in the truth of the goods, services and lifestyles depicted. There is an endemic “spin” or “hype” that depicts commodities including celebrities as bigger, better and more fabulous than the actual thing. As consumers, we expect the fabrication, the constructedness and the trickery. We understand that what is promised in this realm will never be fulfilled and know that our expectations will seldom be met. Unlike eating the grey shrivelled up hamburger that was so juicily depicted in the promotional image, our consumption of the celebrity tabloid sells us the dream, thus allowing our expectations to remain fantasies. It is not a contradiction that the figures with whom we interact are seen simultaneously as significant for the natural, innate qualities they express via the media—that is, their authenticity—and, at the same time, as Turner contends, are offset as “objects of belief, desire or aspiration” by equally powerful discourses that highlight their constructedness or falsehood. In this realm we are allowed to see the glamorous star without makeup, the “real burger,” because rather than being duped, we are complicit. This engagement is not just about, in Gamson’s words: “instructions on the art of distinguishing truth from artifice.”<sup>67</sup> Part of our fantasy is the weighing the evidence that proves and supports our knowingness of the dream *as* only a dream. The emphasis, to use

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<sup>66</sup> Andrew Wernick, *Promotional Culture: Advertising, Ideology and Symbolic Expression* (London: Sage, 1991), in Turner, *Celebrity*, 16.

<sup>67</sup> Joshua Gamson, “The Assembly Line Of Greatness: Celebrity in Twentieth-Century America,” (2001): 259–282, in *Popular Culture: Production and Consumption*, Lee Harrington and Denise Bielby, eds (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001): 270 in Su Holmes, “Off-guard, Unkempt, Unready?: Deconstructing Contemporary Celebrity in *heat* Magazine,” *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies* 19 (2005), 25.

Mellencamp's incisive analogy to airports and TV, is on "anticipation as much as ... the payoff ... the *form* more than the content ...."<sup>68</sup>

For some, the celebrity phenomenon reflects a sociological shift in contemporary culture. This viewpoint assumes a diminishment of direct social contact that is addressed and compensated for by increasing interaction with the "para-social" dimension; that is, engagement with constructed media personae (or with fictional characters) across an unbridgeable social distance.<sup>69</sup> "In effect," writes Turner, "we are using celebrity as a means of constructing a new dimension of community through the media."<sup>70</sup> The boundaries between the public and private worlds are blurred within the revelations of the celebrity media, and the revelations that are most privileged are those concerning the private or "veridical" self.<sup>71</sup> This emphasis could support the assumption that the diminishment of social interactions is particularly significant on an intimate or personal level, and I wonder whether a dimension of the "para-personal" supplements the para-social in a contemporary context, where even personal relationships and personality itself are mediated by technologies such as social media.

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<sup>68</sup> Mellencamp, *High Anxiety*, 175.

<sup>69</sup> Chris Rojek, *Celebrity* (London: Reaktion, 2001): 52 in Turner, *Celebrity*, 6.

<sup>70</sup> Turner, *Celebrity*, 6.

<sup>71</sup> "Celebrity status always implies a split between a private self and a public self. The social psychologist George Herbert Mead argued that the split between the *I* (the "veridical self") and the *Me* (the self as seen by others) is the human condition ... in Western society. Rojek, *Celebrity*, 11.



Figure 1 Andy Warhol, *Marilyn*, 1967.

Cinema studies writer Richard Dyer's early and influential work on the semiotics of stars demonstrated that the meanings produced by star personae are the result of a complex and precarious interaction between these representations and the specific social and cultural concerns of the associated historical times. For example, the enigma of Marilyn Monroe (see Figures 1 and 2) "is not only a story of the professional cultivation of her persona as a star, but also of the discursive and

ideological context within which that persona could develop.”<sup>72</sup> This is readily evident in the example of celebrity superstars, like Marilyn, Elvis and Michael Jackson, who, by enduring as figures of mass adoration, have emerged as “timeless” icons, which ironically translates into endless recycling by the media machine.<sup>73</sup> A recent example of this is the TV series *Smash*, in which actresses vie for the coveted starring role of Marilyn Monroe in *Bombshell*, an imaginary musical based on her life. The part is won by a young actress, who, ironically, recently won *American Idol* in “real” life. Also of note is the current production by *Cirque De Soleil* titled *Michael Jackson: The Immortal*.

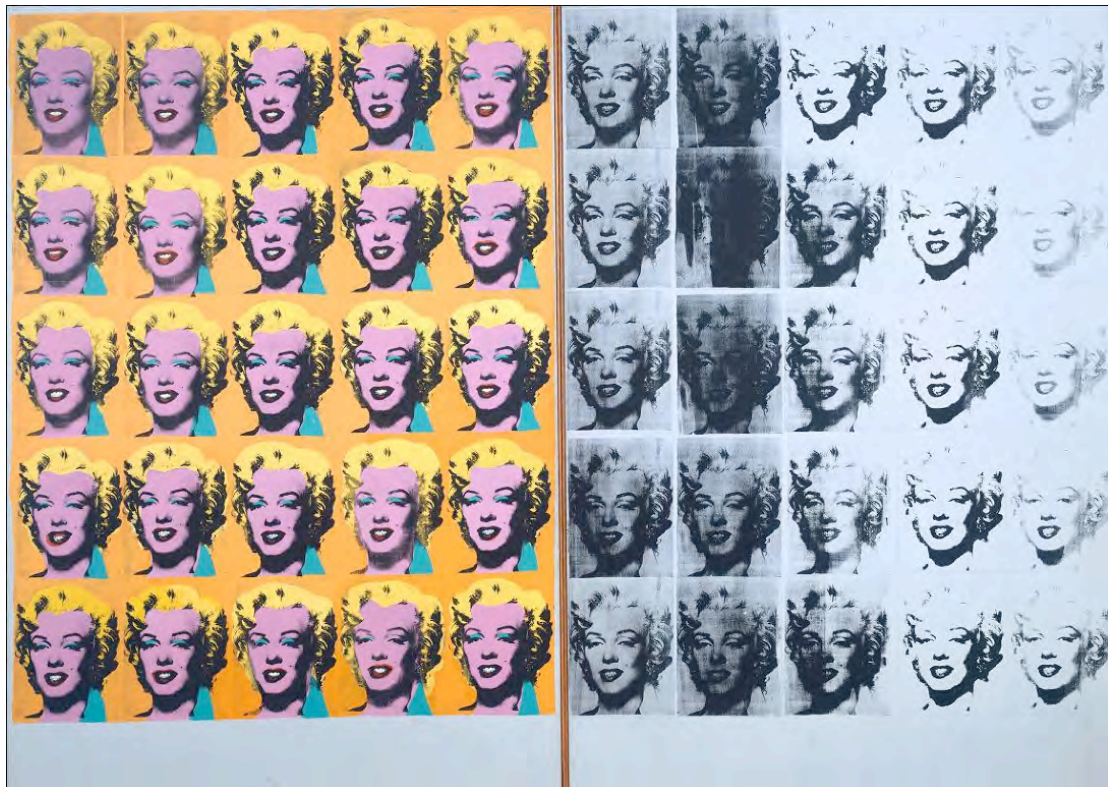


Figure 2 Andy Warhol, *Marilyn Diptych*, 1962.

<sup>72</sup> See Richard Dyer, *Stars* (London: BFI, 1979/1998) and Richard Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society* (London: Macmillan, 1986) in Turner, *Celebrity*, 7.

<sup>73</sup> The term “superstars” is used in a subversive manner by the Factory retinue of Andy Warhol. We will interrogate this notion in Chapter Three.



Although fandom is necessarily discriminatory in its object choices, matters of taste, culture and individual celebrities are not emphasised by the *Gossip Pop* lexicon. Although patterns emerge, these prioritise and reflect media prominence rather than indicating a selection process undergone via my artistic choices.<sup>74</sup>



Figure 3 Andy Warhol and Keith Haring, *Untitled (Madonna, I'm Not Ashamed)*, 1985.

<sup>74</sup> For example, there are several “songs” about Britney Spears (e.g. *Fears for Spears* and *UR2fat*).



The *Gossip Pop* project has always focussed on the particularly “trashy” magazine *NW*<sup>75</sup> for its primary source material or gossip fodder. This references and reiterates the art historical lineages whereby usage of the magazine or newspaper for compositional or collage material within visual art iconography, particularly within pop art (see, for example, Figure 3), is almost cliché. However, this choice is also an issue of logistics and materiality. The magazine is cheap and readily available. It is a physical object that can be cut, pasted and reconfigured. Typical of the so-called supermarket tabloids, it is temptingly located near checkouts where women (it is assumed) can conveniently purchase the magazine along with their weekly groceries.

Published by the now global ACP,<sup>76</sup> *NW* magazine has a circulation of 155,150 and a readership of 529,000. Its core target group is women aged 18–34. According to an online article, “The Power of Magazines,”<sup>77</sup> primary readers spend an average 43 minutes reading their weekly issue, demonstrating an impressive engagement with the material. The article describes *NW* as:

The hot title in the weekly magazine market and the only one targeting the young trendy woman, who loves the best celebrity glamour, gossip and entertainment news. With the latest print deadlines *NW* is able to publish the most current celebrity pictures of any magazine. That’s why our readers flock to buy *NW* every Monday – for their dose of the most up to the minute celebrity news.<sup>78</sup>

This statement makes an important temporal point about the gossip idiom: their currency is reliant on their contemporaneity (as is the case for pop art, which I will

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<sup>75</sup> Other imagery and iconography can be incorporated. Television imagery and collage material from pop music sources have also been used along with “background” or scenic or abstract elements and objects.

<sup>76</sup> ACP was formerly the Australian Consolidated Press, sold by Fairfax in September 2012 to the Bauer Media Group, a European multinational media company based in Hamburg, Germany.

<sup>77</sup> “The Power of Magazines,” New You National Media Kit, accessed February 13, 2013, <http://newyounationalmediakit.com/2013/01/the-power-of-magazines/>

<sup>78</sup> “NW,” Australian Consolidated Press, accessed January 3, 2009, [www.acp.com.au](http://www.acp.com.au).

explore later). Their moment of greatest impact or revelation is in the present, when the story breaks, although some stories may linger, should they prove intriguing or popular enough. Thus, the discourses are historical and should be read as constantly in process.<sup>79</sup> The ubiquitous dissemination of the information, via multiple media forms and informal exchange, is reliant on ongoing audience or consumer desire to obtain the latest news. Indeed, when interviewing readers of a similar UK magazine, *heat*, Feasey notes the particular significance of being the “first in the know.” The associated cachet and empowerment derived from knowing the freshest, most contemporaneous news drives the consumption of the celebrity gossip products and also allows the reader the pleasure of disclosure in the associated social discussions and engagement around the current content or latest gossip.<sup>80</sup> I would argue the need to be, and to demonstrate being, up-to-date even outweighs the content value of the information itself.

Furthermore, it could be argued, individual past issues of hardcopy magazines such as *NW*, typically consumed and discarded, archive a particular moment in time, history and process, in what is otherwise an ephemeral, cyclic and repetitive media, constantly updated and refreshed. The utilisation of this content as material for an artwork is a kind of transformative archiving, and I tentatively claim that by preserving, recoding or elevating such gossip information into a context traditionally designated as embodying durable artistic value, my practice fixes the tabloid throwaway moment in some way. One could speculate that it becomes a point of relativity within, borrowing from the terms of literary criticism, a temporal field containing both diachronic and synchronic qualities.

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<sup>79</sup> Su Holmes, “Off-guard,” 22.

<sup>80</sup> Rebecca Feasey, “Reading *heat*: The Meanings and Pleasures of Star Fashions and Celebrity Gossip, *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies* 22 (2008): 687–699; 691.

Much of the *Gossip Pop* material is out-of-date already. The video *Starf\*\*ker*, for example, refers at one point to the Paris Hilton sex tape, which she made with Rick Salomon. The related lyric states: “Yo Rick, what’s it like being in Paris?” This is too outdated now for the reference to make much sense. In another verse of the same song a mention of a model from Melbourne who alleged an affair with David Beckham has also become obscure. These lyrics now operate in a different, more cryptic way. This does not diminish their effectiveness for me, and I remain very interested in the various changes that occur over time. For instance, in contrast, the opening lyrics of *Starf\*\*ker*, which sample Bill Clinton’s infamous statement: “I did *not have sexual relations* with that woman” remain highly recognisable.

The play and subsequent emphasis upon the temporal differences between art and the ephemera of everyday are evidenced strongly in Warhol’s media-derived works created from found magazine/newspaper clippings of celebrities, such as *The Twenty-Five Marilyns*, 1962, and *Single Elvis*, 1964, or from headlines, such as *129 Die in Jet*, 1962 (see Figure 4), or the “shocking” *Death and Disaster Series*. Gene Swenson writes of this complex temporal distortion:

Warhol’s repetitions of car crashes, suicides and electric chairs are not like the repetition of similar and yet different terrible scenes day in and day out in the tabloids. These paintings mute what is present in the single front page each day, and emphasise what is present persistently day after day in slightly different variations. Looking at the papers, we do not consciously make the connection between today’s, yesterday’s, and tomorrow’s “repetitions” which are not repetitions.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Gene Swenson, “What is Pop Art? Interviews with Eight Painters,” *Art News* 62 (1963): 24–27; 60–63.



Figure 4 Andy Warhol, *129 Die in Jet*, 1962.

As I have shown, the *curiosity* driving the consumption of celebrity gossip is often imagined as equal in unworthiness to the triviality of the information itself.<sup>82</sup> However, it is a mistake to trivialise these stories, or to recoil from their highly personal issues. The “familiar stranger,”<sup>83</sup> who is the celebrity, is experiencing

<sup>82</sup> See, for example, *Theorizing Fandom: Fans, Subculture, and Identity*, Cheryl Harris, Alison Alexander, eds (New Jersey: Hampton Press, 1998).

<sup>83</sup> Todd Gitlin, *Media Unlimited: How the Torrent of Images and Sounds Overwhelms Our Lives* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2001): 22 in Turner, *Celebrity*, 3.

familiar human events. Commonly experienced affect—through comedy, tragedy or triumph—is repeated in the lives of the celebrities, each time reinforcing, undermining or replicating common experiences.

In terms of mediation, the gap between celebrity and ordinary selves is narrowing, as we document and publicise both the significant and trivial events in our own lives via social media and the Internet whilst avidly consuming those from our expanding virtual social networks. The technological advances in communication also mean instant and pervasive accessibility to information and images of celebrity. For the media, the exponentially expanded arena for content, in the highly convergent environment where cross-platform delivery has become standard, the manufacture and trade in celebrity has become a lucrative commercial opportunity for media organisations of all kinds.<sup>84</sup> In contrast, the almost nostalgic construction of *Gossip Pop* utilises “old-fashioned” technology and formats—the magazine, the “green-screen,” the music video even—demonstrating both its status as art and its separation from the commercialised commodity mode and form of gossip today.

### **The Artist Celebrity: A Legend in Her/His Own Artwork**

Isabelle Graw, making a contentious link across the apparent binaries of art and celebrity culture, suggests that “the figure of the legendary artist can be viewed as the original model on which celebrity is based.”<sup>85</sup> Futurism, Russian Constructivism and Surrealism are examples of avant-garde art movements that championed the connection between art and life, but in the context of the modernist period this was

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<sup>84</sup> Turner, *Celebrity*, 9.

<sup>85</sup> Isabelle Graw, *High Price*, 14.

directed towards the ivory tower model of the artist. The biopolitical emphasis can be found commonly in biography-heavy artist monographs that stress the “legend” of the artist, blessed with talent, leading an exceptional life.<sup>86</sup> Today, the artist is considered to represent the self-realised, self-actualised creative entrepreneur.

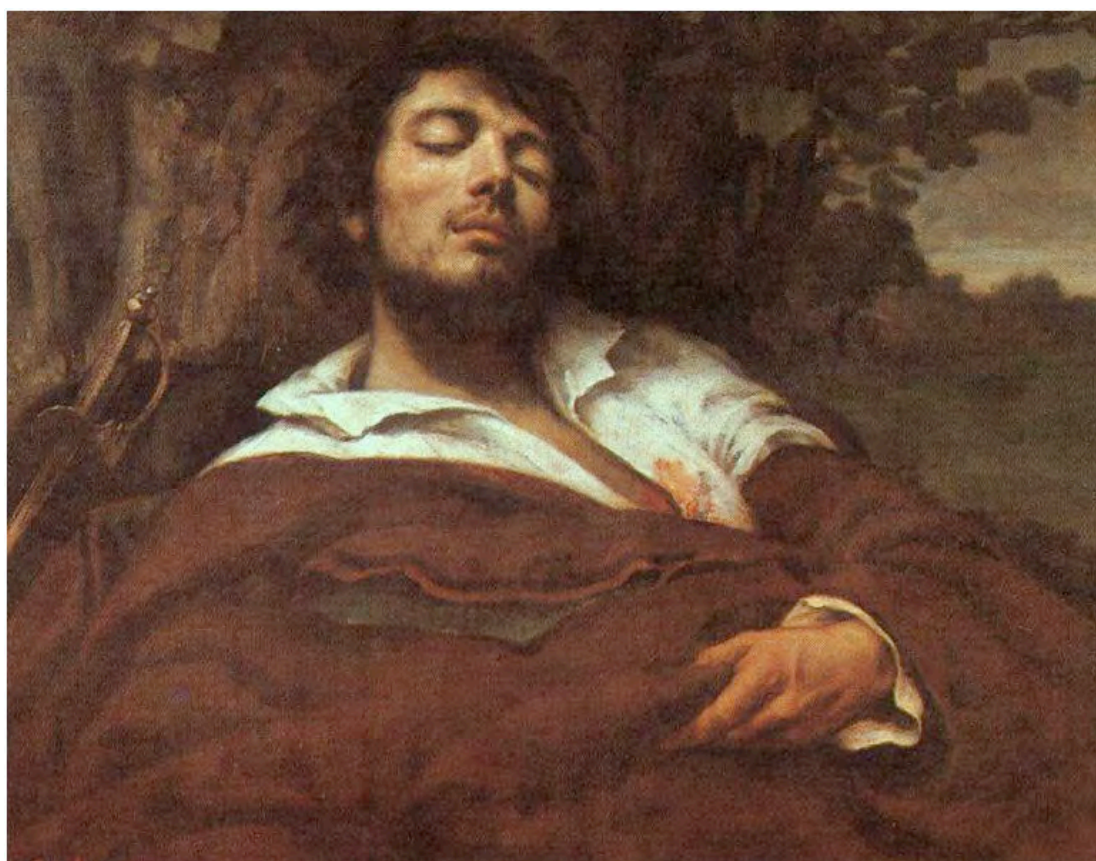


Figure 5 Gustave Courbet, *The Wounded Man*, between 1844 and 1854.

Graw makes a key distinction between celebrities and artists, the latter of whom she sees as having the epistemological advantage or potential of a product that circulates independently of their person. It is because of this caveat that Graw perceives for art and artists the possibility of shaping the relationship between person and product in ways that reflect on (or reject) the conditions of celebrity culture, “a

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 160 and see Ernst Kris and Otto Kurz, *Legend, Myth and Magic in the Image of the Artist: A Historical Experiment* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1934/1979), 3.

system in which individuals are rewarded for successfully marketing their lives or what the media takes for their lives.”<sup>87</sup> She states that performance art is an exception, because the artist *does* in this instance become a part of their product.<sup>88</sup> However, to my thinking, the opposite is true. The inclusion of the artist in the product actually *increases* the investigative possibilities and the potential for exploring the celebrity culture domain of today. Furthermore, it could be argued, it is a contradiction when Graw uses the genre of self-portraits to demonstrate the way artists self-market and communicate an artistic self image, and refers to Courbet’s paintings, including *Self-Portrait (Man With Pipe)*, 1848–1949, *The Wounded Man*, 1844–1954 (Figure 5) and *The Desperate Man*, 1843, in terms of “self-dramatization.” While Graw writes the following in regard to the issues above, I consider it equally applicable to a range of works where artists utilise themselves:

A pose is struck and simultaneously exposed to ridicule, as Courbet always seems to be slightly mocking it. In other words, his self-portraits reveal an artistic position that takes art seriously as a realm of possibility, but without believing in it unconditionally. Any pose is dubious – while it aims for credibility, it should never be fully trusted.<sup>89</sup>

This hints at the nature of the artistic investigations possible around the role of the artist in this highly contingent and complex field. How do we distinguish between what is a pose and what it not? What is to be trusted and what is not? Any creative artistic precepts are necessarily speculative, and so this chapter now returns to Birchall and the potential possibilities for gossip and pop knowledge that she formulates.

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<sup>87</sup> Isabelle Graw, *High Price*, 14.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 164.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 199.

## **Gossip + Art + Theory = Speculation**

*To make something out of nothing is gossip's special creativity*

—Birchall, *Knowledge*

Birchall contends that all theory is speculative. It is difficult to condense Birchall's thinking, but I shall attempt to summarise some of the main points in this section. My reason for doing so is that these points become relevant to and productive for thinking about the function and role of the artist and the work of art and how meaning is generated by the work of art, particularly in consideration of my own artistic practice, which makes and, indeed, embodies a direct connection between these fields.

After situating and defining speculation in a normative sense in the realm of cultural studies, Birchall highlights the way theory posits or deposits something into knowledge formation with the hope of some potential but not guaranteed, future return. To speculate is:

to engage in the buying or selling of commodities or effects in order to profit by a rise or fall in their market value; to undertake, to take part or invest in, a business enterprise or transaction of a risky nature in the expectation of a considerable gain.<sup>90</sup>

Birchall uses this economic definition metaphorically to apply to theoretical speculation in the broader ideological sense.

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<sup>90</sup> Birchall, *Knowledge*, 112.



This resonates with the metaphor of interruption described by Stuart Hall in his paper “Cultural Studies and its Theoretical Legacies.” In considering the way various theories affected the development of the field, he writes:

Some of these theoretical developments came as it were from outer space: they were not all generated from the inside, they were not part of an inner-unfolding general theory of culture. Again and again, the so called unfolding of cultural studies was interrupted by a break, by real ruptures, by exterior forces; the interruption, as it were, of new ideas, which decentered what looked like the accumulating practice of the work.<sup>91</sup>

Similarly, for Birchall, “an interruption posits something unexpected, something which the existing paradigm cannot easily subsume even while it might have given rise to it.”<sup>92</sup>

Jean-François Lyotard, Jacques Derrida and the critical method of deconstruction are also influential to Birchall’s thinking, because of the way they analyse how “discourses and forms of knowledge are marginalized by dominant forces ... as Derrida writes, ‘judging what permits judgment, of what judgment itself authorizes.’”<sup>93</sup> Continuing with her economic analogy, she cites Derrida’s contention that:

Everything begins with the transfer of funds, and *there is interest in borrowing*, this is even its initial interest. To borrow yields, *brings back*, produces surplus

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<sup>91</sup> Stuart Hall, “Cultural Studies and its Theoretical Legacies,” in *Cultural Studies*, Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson and Paula Treichler, eds (New York Routledge, 1992), 277–294, 282.

<sup>92</sup> Birchall, *Knowledge*, 113.

<sup>93</sup> Jacques Derrida, “Force of Law: The “Mystical Foundation of Authority,””, trans. Mary Quaintance, in Gil Anidjar, eds, *Acts of Religion* (London/New York: Routledge, 2002), 231, in *Ibid.*, 30.

value, is the prime mover of every investment. Thereby one begins by speculating, by betting on a value to be produced as if from nothing.<sup>94</sup>

Following Birchall's train of thought, gossip has become a dominant model of knowledge exchange, particularly interesting I think when considered in light of emerging technologies. Gossip "becomes normalised through our frequent encounters with knowledge that cannot ... be traced to an ultimate authority."<sup>95</sup> Birchall's own piece of gossip, which explores a link between gossip and the UK's decision to engage in the Gulf War, demonstrates how this kind of knowledge enters into political discourse. This raises further questions of legitimacy, authority and authorisation and the commensurate functions of "authorising" institutions, like universities and museums, which, after all, are based on knowledge production and contributing to the knowledge economy. Yet, the idea of legitimacy can be regressive. Lyotard, in *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*, writes:

Authority is not deduced. Attempts at legitimating authority lead to vicious circles (I have authority over you because you authorize me to have it), to question begging (the authorization authorizes authority), to infinite regression (x is authorized by y, who is authorized by z), and to the paradox of idiolects (God, Life, etc., designate me to exert authority, and I am the only witness of this revelation).<sup>96</sup>

Gossip, Birchall concludes, should be recognised as:

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<sup>94</sup> Jacques Derrida, "To Speculate – on "Freud,"" *The Postcard: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980/1987), 384 in *Ibid.*, 116–117.

<sup>95</sup> Birchall, *Knowledge*, 127.

<sup>96</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*, trans. George van Den Abbeele (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1983/1988), 142 in *Ibid.*, 139.

undecidability, it forces us to decide what is and what is not knowledge at every step of the way. And this decision making process is one possible description of politics. It is part of the work of an ethical and responsible analysis of culture.<sup>97</sup>

In relation to the *Gossip Pop* work, if I as practitioner concede to the epistemological potential for art practice, then this undecidability, which forces the viewer to decide, is an advantage. Utilising gossip/celebrity culture raises the speculative stakes, forcing participatory decisions about what is and is not knowledge, and prompting exploration of the rationale and limits of ethics and responsibilities, in what is an already precarious and highly volatile game of contingent and subjective meanings concerning art and the role of the artist.

## Conclusion

The *Gossip Pop* artwork addresses an imagined “knowing” audience and aims to enable a playful engagement with existing celebrity gossip “texts” from a variety of perspectives. The knowingness implied by the *Gossip Pop* project also encourages a heightened awareness of the complex complicity, as consumers and producers, of celebrity culture and art, within the capitalist consumption production system. Adorno calls this the “culture industry,”<sup>98</sup> and this term is explored in more detail in the following chapter.

As contemporary art practice, *Gossip Pop*, although drawing both its raw material/content and output/form (products) from popular or mass culture, operates paradoxically, by producing a version of market resistant (or reflexive) works. It

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<sup>97</sup> Birchall, *Knowledge*, 150.

<sup>98</sup> See Theodor Adorno, *The Culture Industry* (New York: Routledge, 1991).

generates works that fail to *clearly* operate either as fine art commodity *or* as mass cultural commodity. Likewise, the role of artist/performer depicted as subject/narrator in the works is clearly *neither* creative genius nor celebrity entertainer. By its inherent nature and form, the *Gossip Pop* project enacts an irreverent submission to the market forces and identificatory “guilty” pleasures of pop culture and implicates the act of illicit exchange that occurs between the anonymous media and the anonymous reader or viewer consuming celebrity gossip—as Dean MacCannell says, “a mediated form of sightseeing.”<sup>99</sup>

For the participants or spectators, the artwork repeating the celebrity gossip further aims to be experiential, repetitive and inconclusive. Inconclusiveness inheres in the potential for critical misunderstanding and misinterpretation within the *Gossip Pop* project, which is simultaneously and paradoxically resistant and submissive to conventions of both art and popular culture. Its self-conscious reification of the artist, producer, celebrity, fan, audience and product is also fundamental to the project’s investigative rationale. The risk or precariousness involved, I have come to realise, is an essential part of the project’s tension. *Gossip Pop* defines, explores and expands the possibilities and limits for new (literal and figurative) conceptual spaces for contemporary artistic knowledge production and reception, and the concomitantly implied role of the artist, by engaging with the paradoxes and tautologies of the mass communication or mass market celebrity pop behemoth.

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<sup>99</sup> Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (New York: Schocken Books, 1976), 47–48.

## Chapter Two

### Pop Art

*What parades as progress in the culture industry, as the incessantly new which it offers up, remains the disguise for an eternal sameness; everywhere the changes mask a skeleton which has changed just as little as the profit motive itself since the time it first gained its predominance over culture.*

—Theodor Adorno, *The Culture Industry*

*[The transformation of art into merchandise] has accelerated to the point at which artistic and commercial values are superimposed. And if we are concerned with the phenomenon of reification then art will be a particular instance of that phenomenon – a form of tautology.*

—Marcel Broodthaers, *To Be bienpensant...or Not to Be. To Be Blind*



Figure 1 Marcel Broodthaers, *La Tour Visuelle* [The Visual Tower], 1966.

## Introduction

Following on from Birchall's conclusions regarding the crucial role of gossip or pop knowledge in the formation and legitimation both of identities and of what counts as "real knowledge" and its implications for theoretical speculation, I turn to a contextualising examination of the concept of reification and consider how developments in this concept

have informed the way we understand knowledge formation in thought and, in turn, how this applies to the work and reception of art. The speculation surrounding the notion of reification, as Broodthaers notes with characteristic prescience in 1975 (see introductory quote), seems particularly appropriate to the *Gossip Pop* investigation, which could be regarded as dealing with the phenomenon of the “thingification”<sup>1</sup> of celebrity and celebrity culture and, furthermore, its relation to “pop,” the practice of art and the role of the artist and spectator. Broodthaers’ *La Tour Visuelle* (Figure 1) implies as much an object looking at a subject as a subject looking at an object—personally, I have always confused the two. “Look at me,” this artwork seems to cry, “I’m looking at you and I’m only a thing.”

Seminal to my development as an artist was becoming aware of the performance art exhibition and associated publication *Out of Actions*,<sup>2</sup> as it crystallised what for me was a self-evident truth—that art comes “out of actions.” Whether art is performance or not is of little consequence. When I look at a work of art, no matter what it is, I always imagine its making—the physical and conceptual acts seem embedded in its materiality. Thus, for me, the artist and the art object are co-dependent. I see all art as “inscribed” with the care and personality of its creator. I am highly attentive to the artist via “their” art object. I ponder over their (and its) character, their (and its) intentions, their (and its) emotional state. Whilst aware that this is always “undecidable,” it intrigues and engages me. I “feel” art too. Art moves me. It is pleasurable. Otherwise, I wouldn’t be doing it. I must believe that others, the audience, “feel” art too, and that their understanding of it

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<sup>1</sup> See Sven Lütticken, “Art and Thingness, Part Two: Thingification,” *e-flux journal* 15 (2010), 1–9, accessed July 3, 2011, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/art-and-thingness-part-two-thingification/>.

<sup>2</sup> See *Out Of Actions: Between Performance And The Object, 1949–1979*, eds Paul Schimmel and Kristine Stiles, The Museum of Contemporary Art (Los Angeles: Thames & Hudson, 1998).

unfolds over time. Yet, it is just a “thing”—but a special thing indeed. How can a thing communicate when it is only a thing? The pop art movement represents, for me, the inauguration of a truly contemporary ontology, where reification, the “thingification” of people, objects and social relations, is endemic. This chapter, while by no means a comprehensive historical survey, aims to examine pop art, including some of the conditions of its emergence, with a focus on Andy Warhol. First, however, I briefly explore the concept of reification and some of the ways in which contemporary social philosophy repositions the concept beyond its traditional Marxist usage.

## **Reification**

There has been considerable recent theoretical interest in the idea of reification or “thingness.” Reification is defined with a negative connotation as:

the error of regarding an abstraction as a material thing, and attributing causal powers to it—in other words the fallacy of misplaced concreteness. An example would be treating a model or ideal type as if it were a description of a real individual or society. In Marxist theory, reification [an effect of the structural character of capitalism] is linked to people’s alienation from work and their treatment as objects of manipulation rather than as human beings.<sup>3</sup>

However, Mario Perniola epitomises the contemporary move to undo or at least problematise the binaries that inform such traditional definitions:

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<sup>3</sup> Gordon Marshall, “Reification,” *A Dictionary of Sociology* (1998), accessed December 11, 2013, <http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1O88-reification.html>.



To give oneself as a thing that feels and to take a thing that feels is the new experience that asserts itself today on contemporary feeling, a radical and extreme experience that has its cornerstone in the encounter between philosophy and sexuality ... It would seem that things and the senses are no longer in conflict with one another but have struck an alliance thanks to which the most detached abstraction and the most unrestrained excitement are almost inseparable and are often indistinguishable.<sup>4</sup>

In the sphere of social philosophy, Axel Honneth revisits, questions and redefines the Marxian analysis of commodity fetishism, reification or *Verdinglichung* (literally “thingification”),<sup>5</sup> as expounded in Lukács’ *History and Class Consciousness*.<sup>6</sup> Axel Honneth suggests that for Lukács reification produces an object–subject dichotomy resulting from social (dis)order in contemporary capitalism:

[Reification] signifies a type of human behaviour that violates moral or ethical principles by not treating other subjects in accordance with their characteristics as human beings, but instead as numb and lifeless objects – as “things” or “commodities.”<sup>7</sup>

This “thingification” impacts on the position of spectators/observers and reduces all transactions to ones of calculated profit/loss. This then becomes the characteristic position of all members of capitalist society:

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<sup>4</sup> Mario Perniola, *The Sex Appeal of the Inorganic* (New York/London: Continuum, 2004), 1, in Hito Steyerl, “A Thing Like You and Me,” *e-flux journal* 15 (2010): 3, accessed August 16, 2010, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/a-thing-like-you-and-me/>.

<sup>5</sup> Lütticken, “Art and Thingness: Thingification,” 1.

<sup>6</sup> Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness* (1923), trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1971), in Axel Honneth, “Reification: A Recognition–Theoretical View” (The Tanner Lectures on Human Values delivered at University of California, Berkley, March 14–16, 2005), 92, accessed November 13, 2011, <http://www.tannerlectures.utah.edu/lectures/atoz.html>.

<sup>7</sup> Honneth, “Reification,” 94.

In the constantly expanding sphere of commodity exchange, subjects are compelled to behave as detached observers, rather than as active participants in social life, because their reciprocal calculation of the benefits that others might yield for their own profit demands a purely rational and emotionless stance. At the same time, this shift of perspective is accompanied by a “reifying” perception of *all* relevant situational elements ... [which] may be appraised only in accordance with how their quantitative characteristics might make them useful for the pursuit of profit. This kind of attitude becomes “second nature” when it develops through corresponding processes of socialization into such a fixed habit that it comes to determine individual behaviour across the entire system of everyday life.<sup>8</sup>

Honneth, however, rejects Lukács’ insistence on the purely social formation of reification and emphasis on the primacy of rationality. He further speculates that all forms of reification are due to pathologies of intersubjectively-based struggles for recognition with an emotional origin. He introduces the term “interaction,” drawing on Dewey’s criticism of the spectator model of knowledge,<sup>9</sup> suggesting that “our emotionally saturated practical dealings with the world provide the basis for all rational knowledge.” Giving primacy to emotion in human development, Honneth writes: “the stance of empathetic engagement with the world, arising from the experience of the world’s significance and value, is prior to our acts of detached cognition. A recognitional stance therefore embodies our active and constant assessment of the value that persons or things have in themselves.” Furthermore, for Honneth,

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>9</sup> John Dewey, *Experience and Nature* (New York: Dover, 1958), in *ibid.*, 111.

our actions do not primarily have the character of an effectively neutral, cognitive stance toward the world but rather that of an affirmative, existentially coloured style of caring comportment ... Human behaviour is distinguished by the communicative stance achieved when taking over the perspective of another person.<sup>10</sup>

This, of course, has important implications for certain performative operations and art objects involving people.

To back up his assertions, Honneth refers to the cognitive development of children, specifically the “nine-month revolution,”<sup>11</sup> when children develop the capacity to perceive objects in “an impersonalised, objective way” via recognition, for which emotional attachment is crucial, to their “psychological parent” or loved “attachment figure.” This allows children to point out objects, to respond to others’ attitudes towards objects and, via “playing,” to “gradually grasp the fact that familiar meanings can be uncoupled from their original objects and transferred to *other* objects, whose new borrowed function can then be creatively dealt with.”<sup>12</sup> Theodor Adorno recognises this essential link between human cognition, the act of thinking and “libinal cathexis” with “the archetype of love” in *Minima Moralia*, stating the aphorism that “a person does not become a person until it imitates other persons.”<sup>13</sup> The Heideggerian notion of “care,” or “the act of taking over the perspective of another person and the resulting understanding of the other’s reason for acting,”<sup>14</sup> is also significant. Interpersonal communication is thus

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<sup>10</sup> Honneth, “Reification,” 110–111; 114.

<sup>11</sup> Tomasello, *The Cultural Origins of Human Cognition* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), 61, in *ibid.*, 115.

<sup>12</sup> Honneth, “Reification,” 115–116.

<sup>13</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections From Damaged Life* (London/New York: Verso Books, 1984), aphorism 99 in *ibid.*, 117.

<sup>14</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996): 96–98, in *ibid.*, 108.

based on recognitional stances as well as cognitive acts.<sup>15</sup> It could be considered that reification can and does take place, and, indeed, is tied to logical or analytic thinking, but is informed by the initial (and then incorporated) qualitative emotional response or interaction “in which all of our knowledge is always already anchored.”<sup>16</sup>

Thus, to extend Honneth’s analysis to art, an emotionless view of the world is not possible and should not be ascribed to the perception of an object such as an art object. The implication is that reification is always incomplete, a habit or behaviour, a process that is tending to a result. Significantly, for the development of *Gossip Pop*, and linked to ideas of performativity, “habits” depend on repetition. Honneth’s reworking of the concept of reification—crucially his insertion of emotion, recognition and interaction as integral rather than antithetic to reification as process—offer useful entry points to the interpretation of *Gossip Pop*.

### **Interconnectedness**

This reinsertion of originary emotion into the current redefinitions of reification allows for the collapse of the thing/person division that Perniola (see page 64) celebrates, which is summed up by Honneth as the “complex situatedness of praxis in the world.”<sup>17</sup> The ontological and epistemic notions constructed by Honneth when considered in relation to

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<sup>15</sup> Stanley Cavell, “Knowing and Acknowledging,” in *Must We Mean What We Say?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976): 238–266, in Honneth, “Reification,” 122.

<sup>16</sup> Honneth, “Reification,” 126.

<sup>17</sup> Sven Lütticken, “Art and Thingness, Part Three: The Heart of the Thing is the Thing We Don’t Know,” *e-flux journal*, 16 (2010): 1–9, accessed July 3, 2011, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/art-and-thingness-part-three-the-heart-of-the-thing-is-the-thing-we-don%E2%80%99t-know/>.

the field of art raise many speculative possibilities. Art historian Sven Lütticken quotes W. J. Thomas Mitchell's words:

if we grant that a work of art is both more and less than other types of things, this should not be regarded as an incentive to exacerbate and fetishize those differences, but rather as a point of departure for analysing the complex interrelationships of artworks with these other things—and for examining certain works of art as problematizing and transforming this very relationship.<sup>18</sup>

In reference to certain socially-engaged contemporary art practices, including various versions of Martha Rosler's *Garage Sale* project,<sup>19</sup> Lütticken places the artwork "in a network that is social and political, not merely one of signs." Such projects, he writes are "interventions into our society's production of (in)visibility."<sup>20</sup> Further to this notion, Rancière proposes via his rethinking of Schiller<sup>21</sup> a far more radical proposition:

Art can become life. Life can become art. And art and life can exchange their properties. These three scenarios yield three configurations of the aesthetic, emplotted in three versions of temporality. Each is also a variant of the politics of aesthetics, or what we should rather call its 'metapolitics'—that is, its way of

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<sup>18</sup> W. J. Thomas Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 112, in Sven Lütticken, "Art and Thingness, Part One: Breton's Ball and Duchamp's Carrot," *e-flux journal* 13 (2010): 1, accessed July 3, 2011, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/art-and-thingness-part-one-breton%e2%80%99s-ball-and-duchamp%e2%80%99s-carrot/>.

<sup>19</sup> Lütticken refers to the artwork by Martha Rosler, "Travelling Garage Sale" (1977), in *Martha Rosler: Positions in the Life World*, ed. Catherine de Zegher (Cambridge MA/London: MIT Press, 1998), unpaginated section in Lütticken, "Art and Thingness: The Heart of the Thing," 3.

<sup>20</sup> Lütticken, "Art and Thingness: The Heart of the Thing," 3.

<sup>21</sup> Friedrich von Schiller, *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*, trans. Elizabeth M. Wilkinson and L. A. Willoughby (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967 [German original, 1795]) in Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, edited and translated by Steven Corcoran (New York/London: Continuum, 2010), chapter 9.

producing its own politics, proposing to politics re-arrangements of its space, refiguring art as a political issue or asserting itself as true politics.<sup>22</sup>

My aim in introducing the seductive and satisfying rationalisations of Rancière, before proceeding to pop art, is to highlight the preconceptions experienced when thinking about pop art and to emphasise what I consider possibilities for a reconsideration and expansion of the field of operation for the knowledge production and reification processes inherent in the cognition of pop art and, thus, contemporary art practice. I do not presume a revision of the pop art movement as a whole. My thinking regarding pop art follows not only my (intuitive) “likes” but constitutes an attempt to investigate and describe the relational influence this work has had for my creative practice without stipulating *exactly* how and why: for example, are Warhol’s “things” commodities or people? And is Warhol a “thing?” In doing so, I would at the same time like to address the critical oppositions between the binary positions of the simulacral and relational art historical readings of pop (see page 97) and suggest—as in Honneth’s reconsideration of the process of reification/recognition—that there is more to the “thing” than meets the eye ...

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<sup>22</sup> Rancière, *Dissensus*, 119.

## Pop Art



Figure 2 Andy Warhol, *Marilyn Monroe's Lips*, 1962.

There is a wealth of research material about pop art. It is, I would contest, by far the most well known and universally “liked” historical art movement at the time of writing and also the subject of thousands of scholarly articles, commentaries and monographs dating from its instigation up until the present time. Pop, it seems *is* wildly, hugely, popular—so popular that there is some sense of fatigue in regard to any serious critical investigation of it (Figure 2).<sup>23</sup> My *Gossip Pop* work has always been attracted by the popular and the cliché as both subject and object (for example, my obsession with celebrity) and the snide undertone of contempt, where pop art and Warhol is concerned, fascinates me. If something is popular, or common, or “liked” does that mean it has less intrinsic value, is “dumb” or is “too easy”? Why is pop art so popular? Does pop enact reification? This chapter will discuss these questions via an investigation of the beginnings of pop art and

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<sup>23</sup> Warhol’s *Marilyn Monroes Lips* (figure 2) epitomises for me the cacophony of conflicting “voices” and opinions concerning pop.

some of the philosophical attitudes to popular culture that are both contemporaneous with its emergence and contemporary.

Pop art, the art movement of popular culture, was centred in the transatlantic<sup>24</sup> capitals of consumer culture developed in the West after 1945.<sup>25</sup> Pop art's recognised "classical period," dating from 1956 to 1968,<sup>26</sup> is considered to exist in the interval between the decline of modern art and the rise of post-modernism.<sup>27</sup> Capitalism and the modern avant-garde, Dada in particular, are the historical preconditions of the emergence of pop art and its historical context.<sup>28</sup> The etymology of the word "pop," shorthand for "popular," notes it is an example of onomatopoeia, the sound of a minor explosion that doesn't cause real harm, like a balloon bursting—or the American teenage slang for father. The largely fatherless Warhol, who for Martin Murray was an exemplary figure in "the transatlantic trajectory of the modern avant-garde that began in Dada and ended in pop,"<sup>29</sup> points out both the movement's avant-garde "forefather" and its meaninglessness: "The name sounds so awful. Dada must have something to do with pop—it's so funny, the names are really synonyms. Does anyone know what they're supposed to mean or have to do with, those names?"<sup>30</sup> The multiple allusions of pop are highly evocative but I contend that the term pop primarily functions as a label without a fixed meaning. Its indeterminate nature is perhaps a key to its fascination.

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<sup>24</sup> Martin Murray, "Nothing happening: Warhol and the Negative Dialectics of Subversion," *European Journal of American Culture* 24 (2005): 62

<sup>25</sup> Hal Foster, "Survey" in *Pop*, 16.

<sup>26</sup> Francis, "Preface" in *Pop*, 11.

<sup>27</sup> Foster, "Survey," 19.

<sup>28</sup> Murray, "Nothing happening," 62.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Andy Warhol quoted in Gene Swenson, "What is Pop Art? Answers from Eight Painters, Part I," *ARTnews* 62 (November 1963), 24–27; 60–63.



## Culture Industry and Kitsch

Pop art has been interpreted as anathema to the legacy of pre-war modernism, in particular in the highly regarded critical theories of sociologist, philosopher and musicologist Theodor Adorno and art critic Clement Greenberg. Both condemn mass culture as being detrimental to the concerns and welfare of the avant-garde, often, as Murray points out, “cast[ing] capitalism and modern artistic experimentation as antagonistic.”<sup>31</sup> Adorno’s contempt for popular culture is well known.<sup>32</sup> He coined the phrase “culture industry”<sup>33</sup> to replace the notion of “mass culture” in order to preclude its interpretation as a contemporary form of popular art that “arises spontaneously from the masses.”<sup>34</sup> For Adorno, the culture industry generated products “tailored for consumption by masses ... intentionally integrat[ing] its consumers from above.” He writes:

To the detriment of both it forces together the spheres of high and low art, separated for thousands of years. The seriousness of high art is destroyed in speculation about its efficacy; the seriousness of the lower perishes with the civilizational(sic) constraints imposed on the rebellious resistance inherent within it as long as social control was not yet total. Thus, although the culture industry undeniably speculates on the conscious and unconscious state of the millions

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<sup>31</sup> Murray, “Nothing Happening,” 63.

<sup>32</sup> Infamously his widely debated interpretation notion of “jazz.” For Adorno’s views on jazz see Theodor Adorno and George Simpson, “On Popular Music,” *Studies in Philosophy and Social Science* 11 (1941): 17–48; and Theodor Adorno, “Perennial Fashion—Jazz,” in *Prisms*, trans. Samuel and Shierry Weber (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1967), 119–132.

<sup>33</sup> With Horkheimer see Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, ed., Edmund Jephcott, trans. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), 94–136.

<sup>34</sup> Theodor Adorno, *The Culture Industry* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 98.

towards which it is directed, the masses are not primary, but secondary, they are an object of calculation; an appendage of the machinery. The customer is not king, as the culture industry would have us believe, not its subject but its object  
....<sup>35</sup>

Adorno adopts the Marxist negative perspective of reification discussed above (see page 51). He identifies reification as an effect of popular culture and his fury is evident in his castigation of the way “servile intellectuals ... from the so-called sociology of communications” point to the culture industry’s great importance “for the development of the consciousness of its consumers”<sup>36</sup> and the harmlessness of its products—“pocket novels, films off the rack, family television shows rolled out into serials and hit parades,”—which they assert democratically respond to a demand, and provide “standards for orientation.” For Adorno these intellectuals, “cowering in the face of its monopolistic character” are ignoring “the vacuous, banal or worse” manifestations of the culture industry and failing to provide “reflection on its objective legitimation.” He writes that the “categorical imperative” of the culture industry “proclaims: you shall conform, without instruction as to what; conform to that which exists anyway, and to that which everyone thinks anyway, as a reflex of its power and omnipresence ... conformity has replaced consciousness.”<sup>37</sup> The “substitute gratification” the culture industry provides cheats its consumers “out of the same happiness which it deceitfully projects.”<sup>38</sup>

The reflections of Adorno regarding the culture industry are rooted in the broader context of the failure of Marx’s classical “evolutionary schema” and the false belief that

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 98–99.

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

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 106.

society will be free when “capitalist forces of production” are no longer controlled by “capitalist relations of production.” This “attempt to unify and integrate history” into a “naïve narrative of ... progress” makes Marxist doctrine “complicit with its object.”<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, Adorno actually implies “that the culture industry’s effective integration of society marks an equivalent triumph of repressive unification in liberal democratic states to that which was achieved politically under fascism.”<sup>40</sup> In his introduction to Adorno’s *Culture Industry*, Bernstein notes: “Culture is no longer the repository of a reflective comprehension of the present in terms of a redeemed future; the culture industry forsakes the promise of happiness in the name of the degraded utopia of the present. This is the ironic presentation of the present.”<sup>41</sup> Adorno’s theories, continues Bernstein, have been used by proponents of postmodernism—who have positively re-evaluated the potential and character of popular culture—as a “negative image” against which “their claims for a democratic transformation of culture can be secured.” This is because his theories, by calling for a continuation of the modernist art project and “perceiving only manipulation and reification in the products of the culture industry, appear to proscribe the transformation of culture in an emancipatory direction.”<sup>42</sup>

However, to dismiss Adorno’s thinking, which is a radical political exposé of the capitalist condition, would be ludicrously short-sighted. Adorno’s positioning of culture as an integrated component of the capitalist economy—a unifying and pacifying industry obeying the same rules of production as any other producer of commodities—remains highly relevant today as an important wider context in which to consider art production.

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<sup>39</sup> J. M. Bernstein, “Introduction,” in Adorno, *The Culture Industry*, 3.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 1.

His caustic observations about the regressive effects of the culture industry, in particular the differences between “pseudo-individuality and individuality, pleasure and happiness, consensus and freedom, pseudo-activity and activity, illusory otherness and non-identical otherness,”<sup>43</sup> are also constructive and insightful. I would suggest Adorno’s analyses of these terms provide a fruitful starting point for a retrospective critical consideration of the nature of engagement with culture (or the culture industry) that both pop art and contemporary artists explore and exploit.

At roughly the same time or just prior to when Adorno was developing his theories regarding the culture industry, another seminal critic of popular culture, the art theorist Clement Greenberg, was also lauding high modernism and the exclusivity of the avant-garde as the future of art. Greenberg’s groundbreaking essay “Avant-Garde and Kitsch”(1939)<sup>44</sup> became an influential example of the so-called elitist attitude to art that, it could be speculated, throughout the 40s and 50s, set the context for the emergence of pop. Greenberg describes the connoisseurship enabling the spectator to be attentive to the avant-garde artwork as accessible only to members of the ruling class.<sup>45</sup> Of popular culture or “kitsch” he writes:

the new urban masses set up a pressure on society to provide them with a kind of culture fit for their own consumption. To fill the demand of the new market, a new commodity was devised: ersatz culture, kitsch, destined for those who, insensible to the values of genuine culture, are hungry nevertheless for the

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>44</sup> Clement Greenberg, “Avant-Garde and Kitsch,” in *Art in Theory 1900–1990*, eds. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 543, in Boris Groys, “Art and Money,” *e-flux journal* 24 (2011): 3, accessed August 4, 2011, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/art-and-money-2/>

<sup>45</sup> Groys, “Art and Money,” 3.

diversion that only culture of some sort can provide ... Kitsch, using for raw material the debased and academicized simulacra of genuine culture, welcomes and cultivates this insensibility. It is the source of its profits. Kitsch is mechanical and operates by formulas. Kitsch is vicarious experience and faked sensations. Kitsch changes according to style, but remains always the same. Kitsch is the epitome of all that is spurious in the life of our times. Kitsch pretends to demand nothing of its customers except their money – not even their time.<sup>46</sup>

Greenberg championed Abstract Expressionists such as Jackson Pollock and “art for art’s sake.” Abstraction ostensibly removed the “what” of the artwork to reveal its “how.”<sup>47</sup> According to Groys reading of Greenberg, it is at this point that art ceases to be a matter of taste:

In this sense, one can say that, as a modern technique, avant-garde art is, generally autonomous – which is to say, independent of any individual taste ... The ideal spectator of avant-garde art is less interested in it as a source of aesthetic delectation than as a source of knowledge and mastery.<sup>48</sup>

So what does the “new” pop art, incorporating “kitsch” as gleefully as it does, expect of the everyday spectator from the “new urban masses”? Has the power of the culture industry’s ideology resulted in, as Adorno states, “conformity replac[ing]

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<sup>46</sup> Clement Greenberg, “Avant-Garde and Kitsch” (1939), in Clement Greenburg, *Art and Culture* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973), 10.

<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, Groys makes some interesting points, including that the avant-garde Greenberg refers to both the artists and art product. Kitsch, in contrast, is the inferior cultural product of capitalism. The truly elite of capitalism (the rich and powerful) support kitsch along with the masses. The avant-garde, however, are supported by the bourgeois, without whom they could not survive (“connected by an umbilical cord of gold”), Groys, “Art and Money,” 3.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 4.

consciousness?”<sup>49</sup> for both artists and spectators? Or is it a case of the unstoppable and relentless incorporation of that ideology *into* consciousness that Adorno references when he states: “[t]he phrase, the world wants to be deceived, has become truer than had ever been intended.”<sup>50</sup> However, if we think laterally, and with some irreverence, couldn’t Adorno’s definition of pseudo-activity encapsulate both methodology and subject for the work of pop art? Adorno’s jazz fan—who “pictures himself as the individualist who whistles at the world but what he whistles is its melody”<sup>51</sup>—could describe the *modus operandi* of a pop artist, with the caveat, perhaps, that the astute pop artist *is* acutely aware of his or her predicament and, in fact, *this predicament itself* is expressed in the artwork.

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<sup>49</sup> Adorno, *The Culture Industry*, 104.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>51</sup> Theodor Adorno, “On the Fetish-Character in Music and the Regression of Listening” (1938), in *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, ed. Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt (New York: Continuum, 1990), 270–279, in *The Cultural Resistance Reader*, edited by Stephen Duncombe (London/New York: Verso, 2002), 298.

*This is Tomorrow*

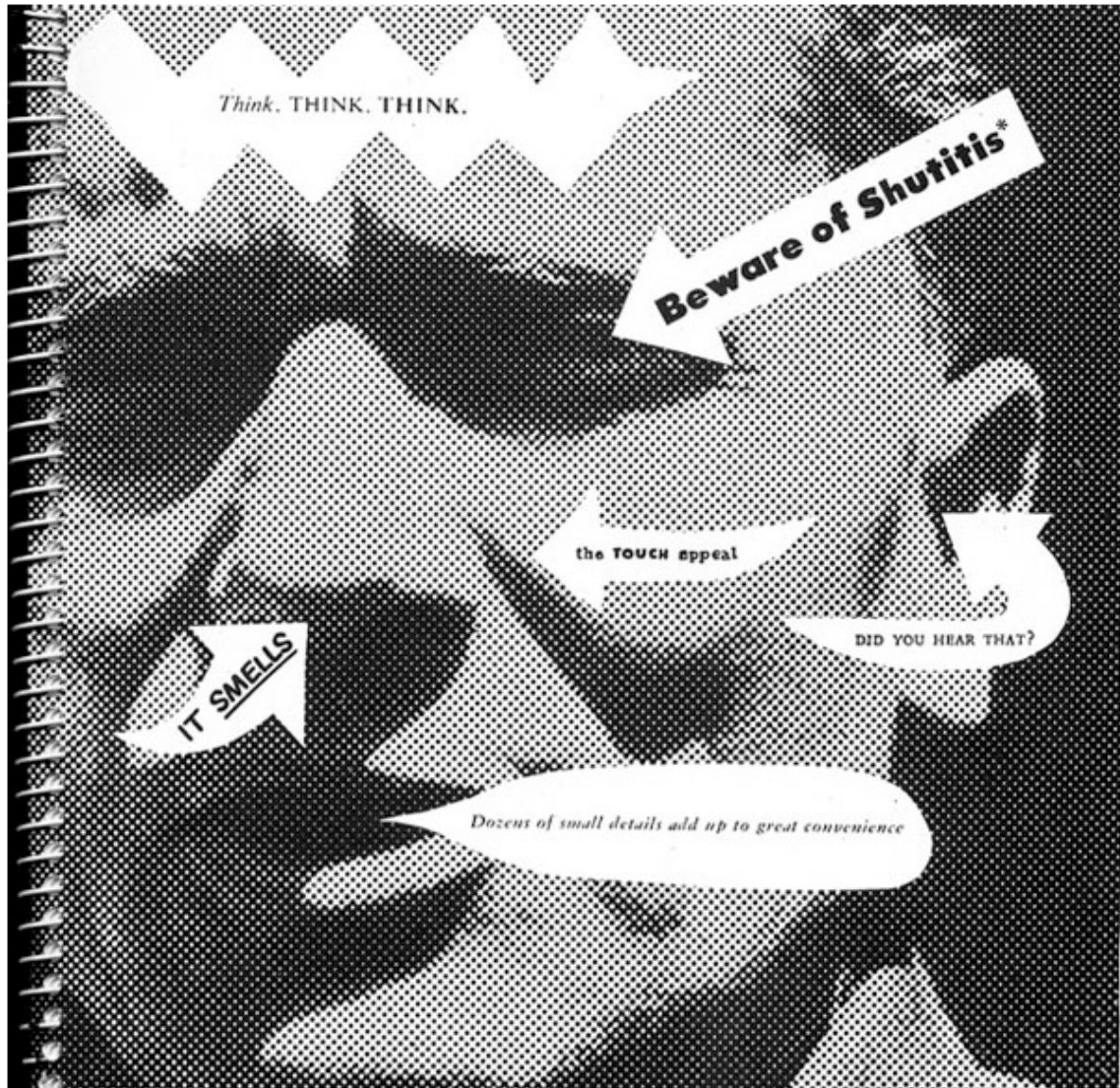


Figure 3 Page from *This Is Tomorrow* catalogue, unpaginated.

*Tomorrow may only be extrapolated on the basis of certain assumptions about the practical accepted reality of today and yesterday. At a point in human affairs where the actual nature of such reality as traditionally evidenced by the senses is under question, to depict tomorrow in the guise of today's artefacts, perceived and embroidered according to our present assumptions about their relevance to man,*

*becomes pointless. ... we are concerned simply with underlining the discrepancy between physical fact and perception of that fact, and the ways in which this discrepancy may be so magnified by traditional attitudes and assumptions as to obscure the significance of the factual reality.*

—Richard Hamilton, John McHale and John Voelcker, *This Is Tomorrow*

The term “pop” originally referred to popular culture in general, and was first used in an art context in the early 1950s by the Independent Group (I.G.), a dissident movement of artists, architects and critics operating within the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London.<sup>52</sup> The group formed as an informal laboratory dedicated to cultural research focused on the effects of technology, science and the media via a series of private seminars and public exhibitions. The exhibitions were cross-disciplinary, collaborative displays of found objects and images, where the ideas discussed by the group in the seminars were put into practice. The most famous of these exhibitions, arguably auguring the commencement of pop art, was the groundbreaking *This is Tomorrow*, which elucidates some of the ideas that were so important to pop’s ideology (Figure 3).

Lawrence Alloway’s catalogue introduction for *This is Tomorrow* announces the primary aim of the exhibition. It was “devoted to the possibilities of collaboration between architects, painters and sculptors” and was “to oppose the specialisation of the arts.”<sup>53</sup> Twelve interdisciplinary groups were formed to present art projects in

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<sup>52</sup> Foster, “Survey,” 16.

<sup>53</sup> Lawrence Alloway, “Introduction 1,” *This Is Tomorrow*, Catalogue, edited by Theo Crosby, First published 1956, Reprinted on the occasion of the exhibition *This is Tomorrow*, (London:Whitechapel Gallery, 9 September 2010 – 6 March 2011, 2010): unpaginated.



“antagonistic co-operation,” and he points out that: “[t]he independent competing groups do not agree on any universal design principles.” He continues:

Common to all groups is a suspension of the supposed purity of their respective specialisms which enables them to aim at simultaneous mastery of several channels of communication. The traditional opponent of the purity of art is the Gesamtkunstwerk, the totalwork – such as Wagnerian opera. However, in this exhibition, there is the desire to experiment in various channels without submitting to the idea of a synthesis in which the separate contributions are sympathetically bound together. On the contrary, here different channels are allowed to compete as well as to complement each other, just as, it was suggested, the members of antagonistic cooperative groups compete.<sup>54</sup>

The final exhibition display, with its independently produced components, was conceived as one environment. According to Alloway:

An exhibition like this [is] a lesson in spectatorship, which cuts across the learned responses of conventional perception. In *This is Tomorrow*, the visitor is exposed to space effects, plays with signs, a wide range of materials and structures, which, taken together, make of art and architecture a many-channelled activity, as factual and far from ideal standards as the street outside.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.



master	your	context	and	the	rest
symbols	and	channels	shall	be	added unto
	you				
cult					object
	you				
culture					hero
	you				
end					product
	you <sup>58</sup>				

The reference to likes and dislikes is an important clue to the emerging nature of pop art. The “you” repeated in the final lines like a bass drum beat emphasises the oscillation between object and subject that so informs this investigation. Is the viewer simultaneously cult object, culture hero and end product *and* a style, commodity or thing?

<sup>58</sup> Reyner Banham, "Introduction II," *This is Tomorrow*, Catalogue, unpaginated.



Figure 4 Richard Hamilton, *Just What Is It That Makes Today's Homes So Different, So Appealing?*, 1956.

Created for *This is Tomorrow*, Hamilton's *Just What Is It That Makes Today's Homes So Different, So Appealing?* (Figure 4) is collaged from various popular magazines. It was reproduced in black and white for posters promoting the exhibition and also appears in the catalogue. It is essential to this discussion because of its status as a pop art icon and cliché, but it is also extraordinary as a playful projection of the future. Uncannily, Hamilton did, indeed, create here a prescient visual index of the major concerns to be explored in the pop art movement, like advertising, mass communication,

technology, science fiction and entertainment. However, what draws my focus are the male and female subjects—objects and/or “things”—organised into an idealised domestic setting and an idealised (hetero)sexual relationship. They seem to pre-empt the kind of hyper-sexualised, hyper-real celebrity relationship so commonplace to us now (à la Brad and Angelina, Kim and Kanye etc.). The woman holds and points one of her giant breasts, as if in offering, towards (we cannot help but imagine) the man’s giant penis—famously obscured by a giant phallic lollypop (not just candy, but candy on a stick!) and emblazoned with the word “pop.” Like a porn set, or a video screen, action or a narrative is implied. What has just happened? They took off their clothes. What is about to happen? Wait and see! They seem to be so aware of and relishing their “pose.” They show us how cool, and how silly, it is to be an object: to be “an image.” To me, they operate within the same field of “knowing” as Broodthaer’s eyes (Figure 1), eliciting or soliciting and emphasising the conceptual consumption of art as a communicative exchange requiring active participation.

In a letter written a year after the *Tomorrow* show Hamilton articulated what has become the definitive definition of pop art—notice how he employs the headline form: “Pop Art is: Popular (designed for a mass audience). Transient (short-term solution). Expendable (easily forgotten). Low cost. Mass-produced. Young (aimed at youth). Witty. Sexy. Gimmicky. Glamorous. Big business. This is just the beginning ...”<sup>59</sup> Hamilton stated: “My ambition was to be multi-allusive ... I wanted to get all of living into my

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<sup>59</sup> Richard Hamilton, Letter to Alison and Peter Smithson, January 16, 1957, in Foster, “Survey,” 15.

work.”<sup>60</sup> This stated intention, towards inclusivity, is iterated when the I.G. theorises that culture is no longer a hierarchical pyramid of “high” and “low” art but a horizontal “continuum” of cultural practices.<sup>61</sup> The “native” utilisation of American films and magazines in *This is Tomorrow* by the I.G. countered the elitist model of civilisation and the academic status of modernism, and constituted a return to: “the only live culture we knew as kids.”<sup>62</sup> This signals the replacement of traditional localised “folk” culture by American pop as the basis for a new common culture.<sup>63</sup> Nathan Gluck is quoted as saying regarding pop art:

You know, at one time, when the movement first got started, [Warhol] wanted to call his stuff “commonist painting.” Meaning, it as common ... I know there was this plug about “commonist art” because they were going to paint common things, but “pop” stuck and it never got off the ground, and of course, it sounded like “communist.”<sup>64</sup>

It is not surprising that Hamilton’s ideology of pop is widely misunderstood as a clarion call for “dumbing down.”<sup>65</sup> However, Alloway’s introduction, with its entreaty for audiences to think and interpret the work freely, outside of the confines of received wisdoms or even the “obscuring ... traditional attitudes and assumptions,” referred to by

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<sup>60</sup> “Art Obituaries: Richard Hamilton,” *The Telegraph*, September 13, 2011, accessed September 25, 2011, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/culture-obituaries/art-obituaries/8760860/Richard-Hamilton.html>.

<sup>61</sup> Lawrence Alloway, “The Long Front of Culture,” *Cambridge Opinion* 17 (1959), in Foster, “Survey,” 20.

<sup>62</sup> Reyner Banham, “Who is this Pop?,” *Motif* 10 (Winter, 1962–63): 13 in Foster, “Survey,” 20.

<sup>63</sup> This tendency is interesting in light of current theories of globalisation and hybridisation.

<sup>64</sup> Nathan Gluck quoted in *Warhol: Conversations about the Artist*, edited by Patrick S. Smith (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1988), 67, Brief discussions of the term can also be found in Wayne Koestenbaum, *Andy Warhol* (New York: Viking, 2001), 63; Blake Stimson, “Andy Warhol’s Red Beard,” *The Art Bulletin* 83 (September, 2001): 527–47; and Caroline Jones, *The Machine in the Studio* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996): esp. 204–205, in Jonathon Flatley, “Like: Collecting and Collectivity,” *October* 132 (2010): 71–98.

<sup>65</sup> “Art Obituaries,” *The Telegraph*.

Hamilton and his working group, seems to me to imply something different, and something that does not necessarily indicate a diminishment of intellectual engagement but rather a broadening of access to that engagement and an acknowledgment of the value of a range of engagements. It signifies for me a change of emphasis—a clarion call for *participation*.

The theory outlined in *This is Tomorrow's* catalogue resonates with Jacques Rancière's contemporary philosophy regarding spectatorship. He writes of the audience, whether "in a theatre, in front of a performance ... in a museum, school or street, ... [as] only ever individuals plotting their own paths in the forest of things, acts and signs that confront or surround them." For Rancière, the collective power shared by spectators "is the power each of them has to translate what she perceives in her own way, to link it to the unique intellectual adventure that makes her similar to all the rest in as much as this adventure is not like any other." His notion of the "emancipated spectator" rests in the belief that spectatorship is neither passive nor active, but is, rather, our normal situation. He continues:

We also learn and teach, act and know, as spectators who all the time link what we see to what we have seen and said, done and dreamed. There is no more a privileged form than there is a privileged starting point.<sup>66</sup>

This is in keeping with Warhol's ideology that everything should be the same. Note that his "everything" does not distinguish between commodities and people but is inclusive of

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<sup>66</sup> Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, trans. Gregory Elliot (London/New York: Verso, 2009): 16–17.

all “things.” The “equality of access to culture”<sup>67</sup> that pop culture advocated could be linked to the equality of consumption of commodities in the capitalist system. In contrast to the dire totalising effects of capitalism, Adorno laments, Warhol writes of equalisation:

What’s great about this country is that ... the richest consumers buy essentially the same thing as the poorest ... the president drinks coke, Liz Taylor drinks Coke, and just think, you can drink Coke too. A Coke is a Coke and no amount of money can get you a better Coke than the one the bum on the corner is drinking. All the Cokes are the same and all the Cokes are good.<sup>68</sup>

An avid collector of commodities, Warhol was also a “people collector”<sup>69</sup> and yet the reification I suggest is implicit in this activity does not preclude the ideological belief that not only is every “thing” equal, but that what people do, their perceptions and actions, are also of equal value or worth. “The Pop idea, after all,” he writes “was that anybody could do anything.”<sup>70</sup>

The theoretical and artistic manifestations of *This is Tomorrow* not only signified an altered dimension for the hierarchies of culture, as Alloway argued, “[But] a free ranging and flowing “continuum” of mass media. To live in the present was to accommodate oneself and one’s creativity to this fact.”<sup>71</sup> This continuum of pop art also

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<sup>67</sup> Murray, “Nothing happening,” 81.

<sup>68</sup> Andy Warhol, *From A to B and Back Again: The Philosophy of Andy Warhol* (London: Picador, 1975), 96 in *ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> Stephen Shore and Lynne Tillman, *The Velvet Years: Warhol’s Factory 1965–67* (New York: Thunder’s Mouth Press, 1995), 45 in Flatley, “Like,” 72.

<sup>70</sup> Andy Warhol and Pat Hackett, *POPism: The Warhol Sixties* (Florida: Harcourt, 1980), 169.

<sup>71</sup> Lawrence Alloway, “Personal Statement,” *Ark* 19 (1957), reprinted in Richard Kalina, ed., *Imagining The Present: Context, Content, and The Role of The Critic* (New York/London: Routledge, 2006), 51–53 in Julian Meyers, “Living in the Long Front,” *Tate Research Publications*, accessed August 8, 2012, <http://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/living-long-front>.



signified a different way of thinking about time. The situational and relational effects of pop art, the expanded fields of high and low, demanding as they do a participatory shift of perception and spectatorship, place the subject in a field where, it could be speculated, the future is somehow contained *in* the present—this *is* tomorrow. Warhol defines this speculative shift thus:

The moment you label something you take a step—I mean, you can never go back again to seeing it unlabeled. We were seeing the future and we knew it for sure. We saw people walking around in it without knowing it, because they were still thinking in the past, in the references of the past. But all you had to do was *know* you were in the future, and that's what put you there. The mystery was gone but the amazement was just starting.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 50–51.

## Andy Warhol



Figure 5 Warhol in New York's Stable gallery, 1964, amid the Brillo box sculptures.

*Andy negated pretty much anything philosophers have said about art. And it is fairly easy to understand how: Nothing that the Brillo box and Andy's Brillo Boxes have in common can be part of the definition of art, since they look – or could look – absolutely alike. What makes something art must accordingly be invisible to the eye ... Andy's various challenges to what philosophers and others have said that art is pale in comparison with the grocery boxes. Since he has found an example of a real object and a work of art, why can't anything have a counterpart that is a work of art, so that ultimately anything can be a work of art? That means at the very least a new era of art in which artworks cannot be discerned from real things, at least in principle – what I have called The End of Art.*

—Arthur C. Danto, *Andy Warhol*

Andy Warhol, his life *and* work, compellingly argued by Isabelle Graw as inseparable,<sup>73</sup> and as previously stated, provide an important art historical context and art production precedent without consideration of which contemporary art experiments such as *Gossip Pop* cannot be understood. Warhol's "pop" attitude of "liking everything" (and *using* everything), his engagement with and production of celebrity (both for himself and others in his work), his addiction to collecting and conspicuous consumption, and his enduring commercial and popular success, indeed, his ongoing *ubiquity* in globalised "culture," have made him a figure of contention, often derided by intellectuals as ethically compromised: a poster child for the evils of consumer capitalism and the erosion of high culture. Warhol's pervasive "viral" oeuvre, extending as it did from the modernist "elitist" avant-garde (frequently represented as anti-capitalistic), was able to popularise and exploit the "incendiary cultural force" of pop via what Martin Murray terms a "negative dialectic of subversion"—one that is both intellectual and anti-intellectual, opposed to and in league with "the two apparently contradictory, but complicit, historical phenomena: capitalism and the modern avant-garde."<sup>74</sup> Arthur C. Danto, philosopher and art critic, credits Warhol with a radical redefining of the form of the "question" of art: from "What is art?" to "What is the difference between two things, exactly alike, one of which is art and one of which is not?" For Danto, Warhol's *Brillo Box* exhibition of 1964 provoked a philosophical epiphany that heralded the symbolic death of art—the exact

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<sup>73</sup> Graw situate(s) "Warhol's practice within a neoliberal market ideology and a biopolitical agenda that politicises and economises "life"" (in the environment of the Factory "a highly mediated affair") and, whilst differentiating between the role of the visual artist and the celebrity, considers "Warhol's practice as displaying a high awareness of what it means to become one's own product" in the context of celebrity culture, "the social form that propagates neoliberal values and correlates with the biopolitical turn." in Isabelle Graw, "When Life Goes To Work: Andy Warhol" *October* 132 (2010): 99–113.

<sup>74</sup> Murray, "Nothing happening," 61–63.

point at which the mythical art historical timeline is broken and sent spinning into everyday life.<sup>75</sup>

Warhol's work *is* certainly everywhere in everyday life *now* and one could argue a concerted effort is required to consider it beyond the level of cliché. From photography Internet sites like Fotografia, which allows the user to create a personalised instant version of the "Warhol Effect" made famous in the Marilyn portraits, to luxury products like jeans and perfume (it's \$195 for a 3.4 ounce bottle emblazoned with one of Warhol's flower series), the Warhol "brand" is in high demand.<sup>76</sup> The popular figure of Warhol himself represents the epitome of the artist-agent and subject-icon—14 actors, including David Bowie, have played him in numerous movies (Figure 8).<sup>77</sup> Recently, the ArtForum gossip website Scene and Herd announced the unveiling of a larger than life silver sculpture of Warhol in Union Square under which New Yorkers have apparently been leaving "votive" offerings of cans of Campbell soups and Brillo boxes.<sup>78</sup> This iconic contemporary presence, despite a sense of art historical fatigue—when *will* those fifteen minutes elapse?—makes Warhol undeniably extraordinary. Whilst this significance rests upon the artistic production of a pop oeuvre incorporating both life *and* work<sup>79</sup> that utilises and reveals the historical conditions of consumer capitalism, celebrity culture and

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<sup>75</sup> Arthur C. Danto, *Andy Warhol*, (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2009), 23.

<sup>76</sup> The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts in New York made over \$2 million in revenue from licensing alone in 2007. A percentage of the total profits of Warhol's foundation (approximately 11 million per annum) is granted to arts organisations "that support the non-conformist Warhol spirit." In Maria Puente, "Andy Warhol Popping Up All Over the Place: Artist May Be Dead, But Can He Ever Sell," *USA Today*, April 1, 2008, accessed February 28, 2010, [http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/printedition/life/20080401/d\\_warhol\\_strip01.art.htm](http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/printedition/life/20080401/d_warhol_strip01.art.htm).

<sup>77</sup> Marty McAndrews, "Seven Actors Who Have Played Andy Warhol in Movies," *Thought Catalog*, November 20, 2010, accessed April 20, 2011, <http://thoughtcatalog.com/2010/seven-actors-that-have-played-andy-warhol-in-movies/#>.

<sup>78</sup> Rhonda Lieberman, "Father Figure," *Scene & Herd*, New York, April 2, 2011, accessed April 28, 2011, <http://artforum.com/diary/id=27907>.

<sup>79</sup> Graw, "When Life Goes To Work," 103.

the notion of the commodity with devastating insight, it is the humble, adoring, insatiable and morally opaque outlook of the “ordinary” everyday person (albeit in a position of extraordinary privilege and success) that, for me, Warhol truly represents. It is this standpoint—inclusive of a range of perspectives—of fan, spectator, consumer, collector, of one who desires, of narcissist, of gossip, of outsider or of loser even—that is most important, as it unites and redefines what constitutes the notion of artist and audience, celebrity and fan, producer and consumer, subject and object, us and other—just another “thing.”

## Andy and the Market



Figure 6 Tobias Meyer, Worldwide Head of Contemporary Art, Sotheby's (7pm, November 11, 2009) with Lot 22, *200 One Dollar Bills* by Andy Warhol, 1962.

Andy deftly laid the foundation for his ongoing art “business” from his highly successful commercial art beginnings in the fifties through to his transformation as, equally successful, avant-garde pop artist in the sixties and subsequent art career and diversification into a range of, sometimes lucrative, creative activities/industries. In his “philosophy” he writes: “Being good in business is the most fascinating kind of art. During the hippie era people put down the idea of business—they’d say, “Money is bad,”

and “Working is bad,” but making money is art and working is art and good business is the best art.”<sup>80</sup> Throughout his career, he was completely transparent when it came to revealing his pecuniary predilections and it is in response to the “right” question, asked by a “lady” friend, “Well, what do you love most?,”<sup>81</sup> that he makes the first of his highly successful reproducible screen printed works, of money.<sup>82</sup> In *200 One Dollar Bills*, 1962 (Figure 6)<sup>83</sup> and other successive paintings (in less literal ways), Warhol not only cleverly exploited the connection between the “sacred” art object<sup>84</sup> and its hitherto unspoken commodity or market value, but even saw the potential to profit as a brand himself—in the “love and kisses” modus operandi of his favourite Hollywood stars. For example, in 1966 he took out a classified ad in the *Village Voice* that read: “I’ll endorse with my name any of the following: clothing, AC-DC, cigarettes, small tapes, sound equipment, ROCK ‘N’ ROLL RECORDS, anything, film, film equipment, Food, Helium, Whips, MONEY; love and kisses Andy Warhol.”<sup>85</sup> That he includes “MONEY” as the penultimate of the listed items is, in its irony, well, priceless. It is also noteworthy how Warhol’s endorsement idea pre-empts what has become *de rigueur* for today’s celebrity.

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<sup>80</sup> Andy Warhol, *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol (From A to B and Back Again)* (Orlando: Harcourt, 1975), 92.

<sup>81</sup> Warhol, *POPism*, 22.

<sup>82</sup> Because it was illegal to photograph money, he drew the dollar bills and had the drawings transferred into screen prints unlike the subsequent works in which screens were created from photographs, often taken from newspapers or magazines.

<sup>83</sup> “*200 One Dollar Bills* sold for \$43,762,500 ... There were at least 12 bidders for this painting, encouraged by an enthusiastic Tobias Meyer [Figure 6] who said “It is a masterpiece” when one bidder was deep in thought about continuing. The atmosphere in the room was electrifying.” In Michele Leight, “Contemporary Art, Sotheby’s, 7 PM, November 11, 2009,” *Art Auctions*, accessed February 13, 2010, <http://www.thecityreview.com/f09scon1.html>

<sup>84</sup> Warhol, edited by Jose Maria Faerna (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1997), 20.

<sup>85</sup> Warhol, *POPism*, 190.

At the time, this sell-out manoeuvre of Warhol's was apparently also motivated by necessity—due to his “giving up painting to concentrate on people.”<sup>86</sup> Subsequently, there were so many people hanging around the factory that he was hoping to solicit financial support for them.<sup>87</sup> He even encourages his “superstars” in more direct forms of solicitation when he “began to feel they were depending on me too much for money.” He advised Eric Emerson: “You’re Entertainment: don’t give it away! People like things more when they have to pay for them .... In short, I was telling him, ‘Hustle.’”<sup>88</sup> This further demonstrates how for Warhol the line between person and product was blurred—if your self was sellable, why not sell it? Warhol writes; “Art just wasn’t fun for me anymore; it was people who were fascinating and I wanted to spend all my time being around them, listening to them, and making movies of them.”<sup>89</sup> In accordance with the economic model of supply and demand, the manoeuvre turned out to be an astute business tactic, as it increased the art market value of his paintings and art objects by simultaneously making them scarce *and* boosting his (person) and their (product) avant-garde credibility (cultural capital). As Graw points out, this mixture of resistance to the market and commercial opportunism was a salient feature of Warhol’s work.<sup>90</sup> So, it can be concluded that Andy liked money and Andy liked people. In this case, liking people made him money. However, did he exploit them to do so? Or, did he exploit everything?

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 143.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 190.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 269.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 143.

<sup>90</sup> Isabelle Graw, *High Price: Art Between the Market and Celebrity Culture* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2009), 186.



## Andy Likes Things: Everything and Everyone



Figure 7 Andy Warhol, *Screen Test: Ann Buchanan*, 1964.

*[A] properly reflexive work of art can never be only about its status as art, about “art itself.” Since art’s apparent autonomy is socially conditioned, the obverse of its heteronomous inscription in a global capitalist economy that penetrates into ever more realms of life and parts of the planet, the work of art’s self-reflection is a sham if it is not potentially about everything, and every thing.*

—Sven Lütticken, “Art and Thingness: The Heart of the Thing”

“Liking” things was a facility Warhol used as process and philosophy with, as Jonathan Flatley writes, “potentially far-reaching aesthetic and political implications.” Flatley sees in Warhol’s “promiscuous liking” an “utopian impulse ... an attempt to imagine new, queer forms of emotional attachment and affiliation.”<sup>91</sup> Flatley, like Douglas Crimp, Marc Siegel, Jennifer Doyle and others, provides what Hal Foster neatly sums up as the *referential* reading of Warhol “advanced by critics based in social history who relate the work to diverse phenomena ... [as] a document tied to the world,”<sup>92</sup> as opposed to the *simulacral* reading by critics such as Barthes, Foucault, Gilles Deleuze and Jean Baudrillard: “to propose that the world of Warhol is nothing but image, that Pop images in general represent only other images ... a copy without an apparent original in the world.” In this simulacral account, Foster writes, “referential depth and subjective interiority are [also] victims of the sheer superficiality of Warholian Pop.”<sup>93</sup> Whilst subscribing intuitively towards the referential position, the simulacral cannot be discounted. Warhol seemed to agree: “If you want to know all about Andy Warhol, just look at the surface of my paintings and films and me and there I am. There’s nothing behind it.”<sup>94</sup> Naturally, as Graw points out, “statements made by artists must always be taken with a grain of salt,”<sup>95</sup> and, in regard to statements, Warhol produced a dazzling array of oft-quoted written material, including his “philosophy,” *From A to B and Back*

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<sup>91</sup> Flatley, “Like,” 72.

<sup>92</sup> Foster, “Survey,” 29.

<sup>93</sup> Foster states that the artwork “ranges from the extraordinary to the bathetic.” He is particularly offended by the Death series; “when Warhol repeated photographs of gruesome car crashes or poisoned housewives in the exalted space of such [Pollock/abstract expressionist] painting it was scabrous and remains so forty-plus years later.” in *ibid.*, 28.

<sup>94</sup> Andy Warhol quoted in Gretchen Berg, “Andy: My True Story,” *Los Angeles Free Press*, March 17, 1963, 26 in Foster, “Survey,” 28.

<sup>95</sup> Graw, *High Price*, 99.

Again, his account of the sixties, *POPism*, and his phonebook-sized posthumously produced *Diary*.<sup>96</sup> This collection of writings provides a gamut of material written in a way that is highly accessible for non-traditional art audiences whilst referencing art theoretical concerns in a decidedly gossipy, intimate, conversational and informal tone—sweeping statements about art are given the same weight as food preferences or shopping trips.

To me, these statements “play” with language whilst creating a highly effective method of communicating meaning on many levels simultaneously—they operate like “gossip.” This is in line with the intentions for my *Gossip Pop* work via the utilisation of gossip “trivia” from the media. The triviality of the medium provides an opportunity for endless open-ended metaphorical allusions that draw attention to the way we receive, process and understand meaning and engage with the world. Jonathan Flatley, quoting Warhol’s well-known 1963 interview with Gene Swenson, points out Warhol’s play with multiple meanings of “like,” “alike,” and “liking” and explores a range of possible philosophical implications inherent in these words.<sup>97</sup> It is my observation as a teacher that in developing the ability to effectively analyse art, the self-awareness and observation of the processes implicit when we “like” is a powerful tool in the education of emerging artists.<sup>98</sup> As artists train, they learn to discriminate finely between their intuitive “liking” of things, or a just as relevant *disliking* of things, and a critical or “objective” analysis. As practitioners become more experienced in creating their own works, and begin to

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<sup>96</sup> See Andy Warhol, *The Andy Warhol Diaries*, edited by Pat Hackett (New York/Boston: Warner, 1989).

<sup>97</sup> See Flatley, “Like,” 71–98.

<sup>98</sup> In art education, when trying to identify the particular aesthetic sensibility of a commencing student, we often ask them to find an artwork that appeals to them. When we ask them to tell us *why* they like this particular artwork the standard answer is more often than not; “I don’t know. I just *like* it.”

understand the challenges and complexities of the production process, they usually, but not always, develop a congruent respect and appreciation for other artistic creations that is separate from or regardless of personal or other judgments of “taste.” It could be argued that this facility of the experienced or trained artist can, ultimately, result in “liking” everything—on the surface identical to the positive naïve or untrained response but, in fact, a conscious, and what often becomes habitual, negation of the process of “liking” and the unconditional positive affect that implies—an indifference necessary for analysis and a kind of deliberate reification.

When Duchamp (whose work was greatly admired and avidly collected by Warhol) bought a shovel in New York in 1915, on which he wrote “in advance of the broken arm,” he states that “the word “readymade” came to mind to designate this form of manifestation.”<sup>99</sup> For art, this was risky—potentially destroying the difference between an everyday object and the work of art. Could art now be just a table or a blank piece of paper? This worried Greenburg.<sup>100</sup> Duchamp describes his “happy idea” in his 1961 lecture “Apropos of “Readymades,”<sup>101</sup> indicating that the text on the object was intended “to carry the mind of the spectator to regions more verbal.” He is careful to establish:

that the choice of these “readymades” was never dictated by aesthetic delectation.

This choice was based on a reaction of visual indifference with at the same time a total absence of good or bad taste ... In fact a complete anaesthesia.

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<sup>99</sup> Marcel Duchamp, “Apropos of “Readymades,” (lecture at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, 19 October, 1961) in *Art & Artists* 4, (July 1966), 47; reprinted in *Salt Seller: The Writings of Marcel Duchamp (Marchand du Sel)* eds Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973): 141–2 in *Appropriation: Documents of Contemporary Art*, ed. David Evans (London/Cambridge, Mass.: Whitechapel Gallery/The MIT Press, 2009): 40.

<sup>100</sup> Lüttiken, “Art and Thingness: Breton’s Ball,” 1.

<sup>101</sup> Duchamp, “Readymades,” 40.

These points indicate Duchamp's scorn of "the retinal" or facile visual pleasure in art reacting against classical aesthetics, in which the notion of good taste was connected to pleasure.<sup>102</sup> However, this also points towards a key difference between Duchamp and Warhol, particularly in regard to the *Brillo Boxes*, which, of course, owe a legacy to the readymade. As Danto reveals, the *Brillo Boxes* "are beautiful. My wife and I have lived with one for years, and I still marvel at its beauty. Why live with dull anesthetic objects? Why not objects as beautiful as *Brillo Boxes*?"<sup>103</sup> Beautiful objects provide pleasure. They are pleasurable for the viewer. Duchamp demonstrates his awareness of this dangerous potential in his lecture. "I was aware at the time that for the spectator, even more than for the artist, art is a habit forming drug, and I wanted to protect my "readymades" against such contamination."<sup>104</sup> So was Duchamp scared we would get addicted to art? Is "like" a form of addiction? Are we addicted to Warhol? If we are, whose fault is it, ours or Warhols?

Indeed, Warhol's aforementioned interest in people not only involved filming them, observing them, having them work for him, or providing them with a platform, but he simply found them all beautiful. As Flatley points out, he had a "principled opposition to singling out some beauties as opposed to others, remarking that "I've never met a person that I wouldn't call a beauty" and if "everybody's not a beauty then nobody is."<sup>105</sup> Like them, he also wished his own desire for fame could be realised.<sup>106</sup> He made them (and himself) subjects and objects. He treated them (and himself) as commodities.

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<sup>102</sup> Danto, *Andy Warhol*, 56.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>104</sup> Duchamp, "Readymades," 40.

<sup>105</sup> Warhol, *The Philosophy*, 61–2 in Flatley, "Like," 89.

Consider this in light of the “amazing quote” shared by Hito Steyerl from Thierry de Duve and Rosalind Krauss that encapsulates what I perceive as the limits of a purely simulacral reading of Warhol:

To desire fame—not the glory of the hero but the glamour of the star—with the intensity and awareness Warhol did, is to desire to be nothing, nothing of the human, the interior, the profound. It is to want to be nothing but image, surface, a bit of light on a screen, a mirror for the fantasies and a magnet for the desires of others—a thing of absolute narcissism. And to desire to outlive these desires there as a thing not to be consumed.<sup>107</sup>

If he was a mirror, how could Warhol merely reflect his “superstars”—when he glorifies them—not only making them famous, but immortal in his work. You only need watch some of his films for evidence of this. Warhol’s static camera substitutes for his point-of-view. Fixed and transfixed, it emphasises the viewing process for the audience. The minimal intervention or lack of narrative or editing (editing is, after all, an attempt to cut or reconfigure reality, which Warhol would have found unnecessary) forces the viewer into a passive spectatorship, like looking out of a window. At the same time, this creates an alternative way of seeing that emphasises active observation, and documents the subjects and their actions with voyeuristic intensity. A simple gesture can seem loaded with meaning or you lose track of meaning completely in a rambling monologue and become only aware of a mouth moving and the sound of babble.

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<sup>106</sup> See for example “Everyone always reminds me about the way I’d go around moaning, “Oh, when will I be famous, when will it all happen?” etc., etc., so I must have done it a lot.” in Warhol, *POPism*, 104.

<sup>107</sup> Thierry de Duve and Rosalind Krauss, “Andy Warhol, or The Machine Perfected,” *October* 48 (1989): 4, in Hito Steyerl, “A Thing Like You and Me,” 7.

The stunning black and white *Screen Tests* (Figure 7), for example, made between 1964 and 1966, that document both key Factory members and those passing through<sup>108</sup> are starkly lit. The “testee” sits silently until the roll of (shown slowed down) film runs out. These artworks are not only astounding for their sense of timelessness—through their imperviousness to becoming dated they *prove* the mobility of the contemporaneity of pop over time—but for the extraordinary beauty, vulnerability, indifference, humour, awkwardness or boredom they catalogue, capture and preserve. Although the artworks reference the commercial star making and selection tool of Hollywood, the willing participants from the Factory crowd are not performing to a script—their only direction was to sit for three minutes and look at the camera—but they *are* probably hoping they have—that oh so elusive—star quality. The *Screen Tests* are, indeed, tests—testing for what the camera can capture *beyond* the image.

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<sup>108</sup> Over 500 were made



Figure 8 David Bowie as Andy Warhol in the movie *Basquiat* (1996) directed by Julian Schnabel.

The point I would like to make in conclusion of this chapter returns the investigation to the notion of reification, or confusing objects and things. Although one could argue on some level that the performers in the *Screen Tests* are “objectified,” this objectification is clearly not devoid of feeling. The men and women filmed are obviously feeling. The film conveys feeling. I feel something when I watch the films. To accuse them via Warhol of being “nothing of the human, the interior,” as De Duve and Krauss do so lyrically, is absurd. Precisely what is most successful about these films is their emotional impact—the humanity they convey. Steyerl writes, in her brilliant essay *A Thing Like You and Me*, “How about siding with the object for a change? Why not affirm it? Why *not* be a thing?”<sup>109</sup> In the past, to become a subject was always desired because of the emancipatory potential implied therein and, conversely, “to be an object was

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<sup>109</sup> Steyerl, “A Thing Like You and Me,” 3.



bad.”<sup>110</sup> Steyerl argues that actually to be an object is to be an image, in its material manifestation. To be “nothing but image” falsely implies detachment and non-participation. Why not, instead, “participate” in being an image—participate with its material aspect “as well as within the desires and forces it accumulates”<sup>111</sup>—participate with the image as “thing,” rather than “struggle over representation.” On the one hand Steyerl posits the idea of the damaged thing/image, not Benjamin’s shell-shocked angel staring down at the rubble of history, but the rubble itself (“we are this pile of scrap”<sup>112</sup>): and on the other the perfect posthuman icon, David Bowie, a “hero”/image/thing “[whose] immortality no longer originates in the strength to survive all possible ideals, but from its ability to be Xeroxed, recycled, and reincarnated. Destruction will alter its form and appearance, yet its substance will be untouched. The immortality of the thing is its finitude, not its eternity.”<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Thierry de Duve and Rosalind Krauss, “Andy Warhol, or The Machine Perfected,” *October* 48 (1989):4 in *ibid.*, 7.

<sup>111</sup> Steyerl, “A Thing Like You and Me,” 4.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.



Figure 9 Dean and Britta perform in front of a screen test of Ann Buchanan at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, 2011.

I would like to make a short final addendum to this chapter, in light of the pop music and other related Warhol issues we will be discussing in the next. Warhol's *Screen Tests* have enjoyed a recent reincarnation as a series of multimedia events by the duo Dean and Britta, *13 Most Beautiful: Songs for Andy Warhol's Screen Tests* held in conjunction with the exhibition *Regarding Warhol: Sixty Artists, Fifty Years* at The Metropolitan Museum of Art and many other locations internationally (Figure 9).<sup>114</sup> A selection of thirteen of the Screen Test films were screened with new live musical accompaniment by a four-

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<sup>114</sup> "Dean and Britta—13 Most Beautiful: Songs for Andy Warhol's Screen Tests," The Metropolitan Museum of Art, accessed September 1, 2012, <http://www.metmuseum.org/events/programs/concerts-and-performances/dean-and-britta>.

member ensemble and was subsequently released as a DVD “package” that I bought absentmindedly on Amazon, without realising it wasn’t just the films. Frankly, I was dubious about the idea of this project. It represented for me an art world and art market “incorporation” that could only be a pale imitation, cleaned up and sanitised, cashing in on the subcultural frisson and the chaotic and experimental shock that Warhol’s multimedia events epitomise for me, but without any of their authenticity. I stubbornly resolved to watch the entire DVD without sound. But then I accidentally heard the music, and in no way did it detract from or diminish the work for me. The “newness” of the films, as I describe above, seem to allow a collaboration *with* the “new.” This new thing created, this hybrid, is both young and old, old and new. Authenticity be damned—I listened to the whole thing. And you know what? I liked it. Because we know Warhol liked everything, we know he would have liked it too.

In this chapter, relevant aspects of the movement of pop art were framed by the investigation of reification that I propose is significant to pop art and contemporary art practice and, specifically, to the *Gossip Pop* project. Importantly, we looked at Honneth’s recognition theory, which demonstrates that the reifying process does not preclude an emotional response to the object. In fact, this recognition or “care” is representative of an emotional attachment to people and is inherent in the reification process. The negative views of Adorno and Greenberg about popular culture contextualised the historical period preceding pop art and were reconsidered in light of the pervasive nature of the culture industry and “the degraded utopia of the present.”

Emphasising the active role of the viewer, and the reifying implications of pioneering and defining pop “thinking,” the exhibition *This Is Tomorrow* was surveyed

and linked to Warhol's perception of the equalising effects of popular culture and, as a subtext, pop time. Warhol, whose "popular" presence infiltrates our investigation of pop throughout the exegesis, was surveyed. Of particular importance were his blurring of art and life, his commercialised and commodified ubiquity, his reification of products and people and his notion of "like" with its inferences of pleasure. In conclusion, I offered his *Screen Tests* as demonstrations of how the reifying effect does not preclude an emotional or pleasurable response and, thus, propose that Warhol's work operates in an effective manner that transcends its interpretation as (affect-less) simulacra or (affect-less) thing. The chapter concludes that being a thing, or an "image" of a thing, (albeit damaged and finite) is a significant "pop" (and contemporary) way of being.

## Chapter Three

### Pop Music

*Pop music represented the historic moment in which the aesthetic judgement that had imposed a distance between art as an institution and the culture industry could no longer be maintained in all seriousness.*

—Dirck Linck, *Rock-Paper-Scissors*



Figure 1 “Artist As Rock Star,” *Time Magazine* (cover), September 15, 2008.

## Introduction

This chapter will discuss how *Gossip Pop*, through its appropriation of a pop brand or musical “band” format coheres with significant and ongoing strands of practice and preoccupation within contemporary art. Numerous visual artists are referencing pop or rock music in their works in a variety of ways: conceptually, materially and methodologically. Popular associations between the identity of the artist and the

identity of the rock star, demonstrated by *Time*'s cover of Damien Hirst (see Figure 1), are commonplace. The multifarious interpretive potential pop music offers for the artwork, artist and art audience are rich and significant. The context of easy familiarity by which pop music is integrated into everyday life indicates a longing on the part of art for some of pop's effortless communicative immediacy, effectiveness and popularity.

The performative manner in which the *Gossip Pop* work is delivered is borrowed from pop music familiarised and internalised. The performance is a performance of a generic pop star. The poses are absorbed from my personal cultural history and experiences—an immersion in the pop music culture of TV shows like *Countdown* and hours spent listening to music. The youthful dream of talent or fame, “starring” in the bedroom and adored by countless fans imagined through the mirror as manifested in *Gossip Pop* is the private made public yet again—a public embodiment of a (self-indulgent) fantasy. However, is it only the implied desires for fame and the precocious amateur performance of amateur material that are exposed—a questioning of what comprises the distinction between the professional and the amateur or what constitutes quality? Does pop music, as the foreword to the exhibition *Rock-Paper-Scissors* states, primarily allow artists “the possibility of experimenting with dilettantism at the highest level and showing up virtuosity as trivial?”<sup>1</sup> These aspects of inquiry are, indeed, present in the *Gossip Pop* work, but the bigger picture is considerably more complex.

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Pakesch, “Introduction,” Diedrich Diederichsen and Peter Pakesch, eds., *Rock-Paper-Scissors: Pop Music as Subject of Visual Art*, catalogue, Kunsthaus Graz, (Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walter König, 2009), 7.

This chapter will begin by speculating on the potential social effects of pop music using the historical example of the ritual of rough music, which combines “gossip” with music in folk culture in order to both enact and resolve tensions over acts of social transgression. Furthermore, I shall propose that the stylistic requisition of pop music by visual art, its borrowing of the stance or “pose” of pop music, can be traced from the performative ethos of Warhol’s pop art lifestyle. This is evidenced by the “superstar” or celebrity system developed at the Factory, as well as associated multimedia events such as the *Exploding Plastic Inevitable*, which I shall demonstrate were highly influential to the development of pop music performers and audiences. The investigation will then proceed to an examination of the work of visual art and artists and *Gossip Pop*. The above issues will be considered in light of a general understanding of pop, extending discussion of the notion of the performative, the contemporary understanding of celebrity, and the associated potential repercussions for authorship and identity within the creative works of the contemporary artist.

It should be noted that the musical terms “pop” and “rock” or “rock and roll” are used interchangeably, and in a rather broad and loose manner in this chapter. For my purposes, the generic “pop” label, is applied with some abandon to music *I* define as popular, commercial music—commonly known, available and readily consumed by society in the “West”—focusing on US and UK-based pop artists and relays between art and pop music in the West. This scope is based on my own experience, both as an artist and someone with a personal interest in the field, rather than the knowledge of a musicologist or other expert. I acknowledge that this definition of pop music may be somewhat idiosyncratic. It should be noted, of course, that this labeling of the music discussed does in no way negate the acknowledgment of its complex epistemic value.



Just as pop art was also scorned by the advocates of the avant-garde, pop music is considered by Adorno and others from a Marxist tradition as low brow, being of little intellectual challenge or worth and, therefore, as highly complicit in the “fascism” of the capitalist consumer system (see Chapter Two). More recent theorists exploring the unassailable influence of pop music on art and society include Van M. Cagle, Richard Meltzer, Greil Marcus, Simon Frith, Paul Morley and Diedrich Diederichsen (theorist and curator of the exhibition *Rock-Paper-Scissors*). Their work is representative of a field of massive intellectual and theoretical scope, and, once again, it needs to be noted that my approach, rather than attempting to survey or summarise this scholarly field, will focus in on references specifically pertinent to my investigation.

The work of Van M. Cagle in *Reconstructing Pop/Subculture: Art, Rock and Andy Warhol*<sup>2</sup> is of particular interest to me as he traces a lineage directly proceeding from Warhol’s pop art “lifestyle” to pop music from *The Velvet Underground* (comprising at the time Lou Reed, John Cale, Sterling Morrison, Maureen Tucker and Nico) to Iggy Pop, Alice Cooper, David Bowie and so forth, into a wider field of pop music practitioners. Cagle draws on the arguments of subculture theorists such as Hebdige and Clarke, who influentially proposed that subcultural style contains radical and emancipatory potential, the effects of which, however, are diluted and diminished by incorporation into the mainstream. Cagle argues that the incorporation of the stylistic elements of the pop music style defined as “glitter” by its associated subculture or fans filtered through into mainstream popular culture and audiences *without* the attendant compromise that subculture theory often infers. This

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<sup>2</sup> See Van M Cagle, *Reconstructing Pop/Subculture: Art, Rock and Andy Warhol* (California/London/New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1995).

demonstrates discursive possibilities for the *Gossip Pop* project, which utilises these incorporated mainstream signifiers both as raw material and investigatory basis for art production.

In order to situate, contextualise and differentiate the *Gossip Pop* work within and from what is a well-established critical oeuvre, examples of contemporary art practice and theory selected from two thematically-relevant, recent international exhibitions will be examined. *Rock-Paper-Scissors: Pop Music as Subject of Visual Art* proposes that “[f]or art, the system of pop music is as much a disturbing mirror as a rival event,”<sup>3</sup> whilst *Sympathy for the Devil: Art and Rock and Roll since 1967* references “[t]he relationship between avant-garde art and rock and roll over the past forty years [that] demands a Faustian bargain for both parties.”<sup>4</sup> These exhibitions demonstrate the complexity of the relationship between visual art and pop music that extends beyond a “borrowed excitement,” the 1990s idea of the “cross-over,” or even what could be considered a form of nostalgia on the part of contemporary art practice for the “rebel” avant-garde movements of modernism that sought to challenge and change art. Relevant aspects of this relationship will be examined via the analysis of specific individual exhibits from these shows. The analysis includes comparing and contrasting the strategies utilised therein with how I perceive them to be in operation within my *Gossip Pop* project.

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<sup>3</sup> Diedrich Diederichsen and Peter Pakesch, eds., *Rock-Paper-Scissors: Pop Music as Subject of Visual Art*, catalogue, Kunsthau Graz (Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walter König, 2009), inside front cover.

<sup>4</sup> Domonic Molon, “Introduction” in Kamilar Foreman and Amy Teschner, eds. *Sympathy for the Devil: Art and Rock and Roll since 1967*, Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2007), 8.

## Rough Music



Figure 2 Copy after William Hogarth, “Hudibras Encounters the Skimmington,” (Plate 7). *Illustrations to Samuel Butler’s Hudibras*, 1725–1730.

Rough music (see Figure 2) is a carnivalesque folk ritual that demonstrates a preexisting connection between gossip and what could be described as a form of popular “DIY” music that I broadly equate with relevant aspects of pop music. This connection resonates for me with the logic of the relation I make intuitively explicit in *Gossip Pop* between mediated gossip and pop music. In early Modern English folk culture, “gossips” within small communities were informal social groups, or group of friends, evidently without the derogatory connotations common today, who could enforce norms of socially acceptable behaviour through private censure or, as is

applicable here, public rituals directed at wrongdoers. These public rituals were called “rough music,”<sup>5</sup> also known as “ran-tanning,”<sup>6</sup> a custom wherein the community would make a public procession through the streets to the house of the transgressor and gather to create a noisy cacophony of “rough music.” The historical accounts indicate that a range of instruments improvised from everyday household items were used. A Leicestershire dialect dictionary describes: “Pokers and tongs, marrow-bones and cleavers, warming pans and tin kettles, cherry clacks and whistles, constables’ rattles, and bladders with peas in them, cow’s horns and tea trays” as well as “yells and hisses.”<sup>7</sup>—anything that created loud raucous noise. This clamour was often accompanied by simple song or verse, designed to publicly humiliate the perpetrator with lyrics outlining their deeds:

Ran        a        dan,        ran        a        dan,        ran        a        dan,  
Mrs        Alice        Evans        has        beat        her        good        man;  
It        was        neither        with        sword,        spear        pistol        or        knife  
But with a pair of tongs she vowed to take his life ...<sup>8</sup>

This next case incites victims or other community members to punish the offender, here a wife beater:

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<sup>5</sup> “Noted as “the harmony of tinging kettles and frying pans,” in R. Cotgrove, *A Dictionarie of the French and English tongues* (1611).” E. P. Thompson, “Rough Music Reconsidered,” *Folklore* 103, (1992): 3–26.

<sup>6</sup> Regional terms such as “skimmington,” “riding the stang,” “lowbelling” and “husiting” were also used (Thompson, “Rough Music”), also known throughout wider Europe as “charivari.” Martin Ingram, “Ridings, Rough Music and the “Reform of Popular Culture” in Early Modern England,” *Past & Present* 105 (1984): 79–113. Another historical example worth noting is the way scandalous gossip about the court in pre-revolutionary France, was popularly communicated orally sometimes by songs, the content often made humorous or even obscene. See E. P. Thompson, “Rough Music Reconsidered,” *Folklore* 103 (1992): 3–26; and Martin Ingram, “Ridings, Rough Music and the “Reform of Popular Culture” in Early Modern England,” *Past & Present* 105 (1984): 79–113.

<sup>7</sup> Thompson, “Rough Music.”

<sup>8</sup> W. E. A. Axon, *Cheshire Gleanings* (Manchester, 1884): 330–331, citing Charles Hulbert, *History and Description of the County of Salop* (1828), in *ibid.*, 5.

Now all ye old women and old women kind,  
Get together, and be in a mind;  
Collar him, and take him to the shit-house,  
And shove him over head.

Now if that does not mend his manners,  
The skin of his arse must go to the tanners;  
And if that does not mend his manners,  
Take him and hing him on a nail in Hell.

And if the nail happens to crack,  
Down with your flaps, and at him piss.<sup>9</sup>

In parallel with the majority of pop music bands, the group usually comprised adolescent males. Effigies of the persons concerned would enact the offensive misdeeds to the music and, at the end of the ritual, were symbolically burned or drowned. In lieu of an effigy, young men in the role of the female transgressor might masquerade as the woman concerned. The kinds of behaviour performatively “punished” through rough music most commonly concerned issues of sexual or domestic hierarchy, including child abuse and domestic violence. Remnants of this kind of community censure can be discerned in the rituals of contemporary culture and society, such as street protests—think of the chanting, marching processions and holding of signs and banners—or even virtual collective protests on Facebook’s “Causes” or, more perniciously, the practice of trolling. However, to reiterate, I clearly associate the idea of rough music with rock and roll or pop, with its subversive implications and links to radical subcultures, and, indeed, there are similarities with the simplicity, repetition and uncouth raucousness of the tabloid vernacular, another

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<sup>9</sup> From *Sturton* by Stowe, in the James M. Carpenter collection in Cecil Sharp House, in *ibid.*, 14.

vehicle for censure of the individual. All this could also be argued as evidence of a pre-existing connection between gossip and pop music in folk culture, and, hence, as a way of understanding my contemporary rationale for employing the concept of pop music as a medium or construct and combining it with gossip for the creative component of this project.

An important component of the attraction of visual artists to pop music is the notion of “resistance” plus a certain “street-cred” or authenticity; these are all factors in the decision to appropriate the pop music medium. However, it is the disruptive effect of this rough music that exerts the primary attraction. Rough music was historically utilised to shame the transgressors of social norms, who were embarrassed into correcting their behaviour and forced to pay attention to the public effect of their misdeeds through the public performance or ritual, for which their misdeeds supplied both motivation and internal narratives. When artists like myself appropriate and refigure pop music in the fine art context, like rough music, the sound, like rough music, insinuates itself, as an unruly interruption,<sup>10</sup> an occupation of time and space that cannot be ignored. This, in turn, emphasises and undermines the silent, *visual-ness* of the purely visual—the hushed reverence of the authorising institution or public art museum—thereby presenting an alternative form with which to communicate meaning and question the conventions of knowledge production and reception.

*Gossip Pop* performances and exhibits are electronically amplified,<sup>11</sup> and so are often noisy and loud. They cannot be ignored. They cannot be silenced. The

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<sup>10</sup> The notion of interruption resonates with Halls conceptualization of the effects of new theories. See Chapter One.

<sup>11</sup> This is when performed live. Sound is always an issue in group exhibitions.

microphone is a crucial metaphor here, a visual phallic symbol, a tool and signifier of technology that amplifies the voice beyond the acoustic potential of the body. The lyrics of the *Gossip Pop* songs are drawn from gossip articles refigured into simple repetitive verses (yo-yo diet queens/yo-yo diet queens/yo-yo diet queens/yo-yo diet queens) and set to simple repetitive electronic beats and melodies, all generated with domestically-available DIY sound programs and chanted through the microphone. They function in a manner that parallels the simple lyrics of pop songs, and their simple melodic “hooks.” *Gossip Pop*, like rough music, also often incorporates “effigies” of the celebrities involved in the form of cut-out photographs from the gossip magazines, mounted on icy-pole sticks. Likewise, in rough music, the effigies were often mounted on poles or “stangs,” a “stout pole carried on the men’s shoulders.”<sup>12</sup>

To summarise, the historical ritual rough music was performed by a group of usually younger community members, and communicated private information or gossip, until then secretly known by the community, to publicise a transgression that was deemed too shameful to continue in private. Thus, it enacted gossip via effigies, music and lyrics. It was instigated as a response to a situation, and its purpose was to instigate change, but change in the sense of a return to a collectively-decided moral conformity. The rough music ritual was transgressive, an interruption to the norms of behaviour, but was intended to reinforce or revitalise those same norms. It also involved a high degree of community pleasure.

Rough music could be proposed as a spontaneously generated pop, in the sense that it was a form of entertainment, albeit under the guise of moral outrage (in a

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<sup>12</sup> These were a stout pole carried on the men’s shoulders that could be ridden horizontally also. See Ingram, *Ridings*, 86.

manner reminiscent of the tabloid press). However, a stereotypical pop song communicates an individual or group's personal observations, situations or feelings that have some popular even universal appeal, like a broken heart, in a well-known range of stylistic genres, and is performed by pop stars, individuals or groups, who have a public persona or image, and are themselves celebrities and may thus be the topic themselves of mediated gossip speculations. The pop music industry, like the mediated gossip industry, is primarily for recreation, to entertain or give pleasure to a mass audience. Such music is a highly-mediated commercial endeavour, producing multiple products for consumption and merchandising. It can be both heard live, performed in public in a concert format, or replayed in public contexts, but is most often heard by individuals in private domestic situations.

*Gossip Pop* brings the conflicting purposes and actions of rough music and pop music into an uneasy and precarious alliance. *Gossip Pop* is performed by an artist, in the manner or guise of a (fake) pop star or celebrity, and communicates public knowledge, or gossip that is already public via the mass media and mass audience, about the (alleged) private issues of a public individual or public person or celebrity to the contemporary art audience via the constructions or formats of both pop music and the celebrity gossip industry. It references the commercial endeavours of pop and the communicative endeavours of mass culture gossip. It references the format of performance modalities and multiple productions and merchandising but is actually a singular art object/product/performance, in the sense that it is not industrially or commercially mass produced as a multiple object/product/performance. It references the magazine and the other mediums of gossip communication. It is primarily non-commercial, except in its art market manifestation as a singular art object, and is consumed in the public context of the gallery exhibition by individual



viewers or small audiences. It can only be privately consumed by art collectors. In these chapters I have established that *Gossip Pop* knowingly locates itself in the realms of trashy gossip, commodified art and commercialised pop music—and in this low culture triangulation, *Gossip Pop* is transgressive to the field of art. However, I also think the transgressions can be considered reflexive; that is, reflecting back discourse and sounds to the fields of pop gossip and pop music.

It could be speculated that the transgressive effects of *Gossip Pop* are only in play where it is situated in the field of art, as a cultural act of contemporary art. Utilising the medium of pop as both a performative mode and as a structuring logic, *Gossip Pop* presents only received or mediated information—only received or mediated gossip. It is a fake of a fake of a fake; it interrupts and complicates truth and fiction. It is not just the mirror of pop. It is a hall of mirrors reflecting back on themselves. An infinity effect. An aporia. It questions what a work of art *is*. The *Gossip Pop* work presumes familiarity not only with mass-mediated gossip and pop music, but with an art-specific historical lineage. Of particular relevance to my intuitive understanding of *Gossip Pop* and the investigation underway is the art historical lineage of the Factory “star system” that evolved within Warhol’s pop art lifestyle and, subsequently, affected pop music.

## The Factory Star System

*... it's all fantasy. It's hard to be creative and it's also hard not to think what you do is creative or hard not to be called creative because everybody is always talking about that and individuality. Everybody's always being creative. And it's so funny when you say things aren't, like the shoe I would draw for an advertisement was called a creation but the drawing of it was not. But I guess I believe in both ways. All these people who aren't very good should be really good. Everybody is too good now, really. Like, how many actors are there? There are millions of actors. They're all pretty good. And how many painters are there? Millions of painters are all pretty good. How can you say one style is better than another? You ought to be able to be an Abstract Expressionist next week, or a pop artist, or a realist, without feeling you've given up something. I think the artists who aren't very good should become like everybody else so that people would like things that aren't very good. It's already happening. All you have to do is read the magazines and the catalogues. It's this style or that style, this or that image of man – but that really doesn't make any difference. Some artists get left out that way, and why should they?*

—Andy Warhol quoted in Gene R. Swenson, *ARTnews*

To Warhol, characteristically paradoxical in this statement from 1963,<sup>13</sup> creative agency, the status of the artist, style and image are philosophically homogenised. Everyone is creative and the hierarchical value system imposed on artists and culture is erroneous, as is the hierarchical value system imposed on artistic styles—think of the excess of competing movements flourishing in the wake of pop art, such as

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<sup>13</sup> Andy Warhol quoted in Gene R. Swenson, “Extracts from Interview”, *ARTnews* 62, (New York, 1963), 60-3, reprinted in Jacob Baal-Teshuva, *Andy Warhol 1928-1987*, (Munich: Prestel Verlag, 1993), 131-2 in Evans, *Appropriation*, 41-2.

conceptualism, Op art, Fluxus and so on. He implies that style compensates for lack of quality or skill in the work, and if it were used, copied or followed, everyone would be “pretty good” and get an equal chance to “be creative.” Thus, Warhol divests from the notion of style in general (and this includes artistic style) any deep meaning, equating it with “image” and implying that it is simply a “pose” or effect that can and should be adopted or discarded, like a hairstyle or fashion choice, at will. This is clearly a model that invites a performative mode of participation and (self-authorising) agency. It also challenges the existence of a high/low binary, recalling Lawrence Alloway’s notion of a pervasive and total “ground level for culture” and of a mass audience “composed neither of connoisseurs nor mindless consumers, but of cultural agents ‘specialized’ by their different identities and desires.”<sup>14</sup> Warhol was to intuitively put these ideas into practice at his studio at 231 East Forty-Seventh Street from 1964 to 1967, and in the process create or facilitate a “model” of a star or celebrity system that would be highly influential to pop music, art and the wider culture, and that still resonates strongly today and informs the *Gossip Pop* work.

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<sup>14</sup> Julian Meyers, “Living in the Long Front,” *Tate Research Publications*, Accessed August 8, 2012, <http://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/living-long-front>.



Figure 3 Warhol and Gerard Malanga at the Factory in the sixties heyday of the legendary studio, *The Daily Mail*, January 16, 2012, Getty images.

Warhol had gradually shifted his studio practice into a collective or collaborative mode from the time he employed Gerard Malanga as his assistant (see Figure 3). It was Gerard who introduced him to the emerging clubs and café society of the Village. The A-men, an amphetamine taking crowd, began to come to the Factory when Billy Name was offered a living space there. This, in turn, brought underground models, actors and transvestites. By opening the Factory to these people, Warhol created a locus or gathering point for a random “subculture” with a democratising ethos wherein a celebratory freedom of creative expression was allowed: of difference, of sexual choices, of drug taking, of appearances and of actions.

Warhol was not only fascinated by the people who gathered at the Factory, but his artistic ideas were instigated and developed by talking to the people around him: “whenever I started a new project—asking everyone I was with what

they thought I should do. I still do it. That's one thing that has never changed."<sup>15</sup>

The films produced at the factory demonstrate how attentive Warhol was to the act of observing the individuals and social relationships around him.<sup>16</sup> In a parallel *modus operandi*, Warhol taped "everything," (he called his tape recorder his "wife"<sup>17</sup>)—another method of recording and documenting his extensive and lengthy conversations with people and the relations and situations in which he found himself—the new pop lifestyle, the new pop people, the new pop sensibility. Problems became performative opportunities. He writes:

An interesting problem was an interesting tape. Everybody knew that and performed for the tape. You couldn't tell which problems were real and which problems were exaggerated for the tape. Better yet, the people telling you the problems couldn't decide any more if they were really having problems or if they were just performing.<sup>18</sup>

Warhol, allowed the creative individuals around him to perform, for the camera and tape recorder. His interested yet neutral gaze fostered and encouraged an all-encompassing, highly performative *modus operandi*. This affected the group and the situation in turn. Factory regulars became "superstars" and flourished under the attention, performing life with more and more experimentation, abandon and creativity. Holly Woodlawn, who famously

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<sup>15</sup> Warhol, *POPism*, 21.

<sup>16</sup> As previously discussed in Chapter Two.

<sup>17</sup> "[M]y tape recorder and I have been married for ten years now. When I say "we," I mean my tape recorder and me. A lot of people don't understand that." Warhol, *The Philosophy*, 26.

<sup>18</sup> Warhol, *The Philosophy*, 26.

masturbated with a bottle of Millers beer in the film *Trash* of 1970,<sup>19</sup> wrote of the Factory star system:

All you had to do was hang out, look fabulous, and with the bat of a false eyelash, you were a star ... we *were* fabulous ... No discipline. No struggle. No nothing. And there I was, wallowing in the bliss of having landed my first film role, a role that guaranteed an unforgettable ride on the Warhol gravy train ... Overnight I became a curious phenomenon. A celebrity. A media star. But not your typical Hollywood star mind you. I was a Warhol Superstar, a vixen of the underground. Finally, little Harold Ajzenberg was somebody.<sup>20</sup>

Hanging out and looking fabulous was all about, as I suggested earlier, style and the pose. However, the manner of posing was particular, a form of negation or refusal of the dominant hegemony in which there are parallels to Bakhtin's analysis of the Rabelaisian carnivalesque "turnabout."<sup>21</sup> Links, therefore, can be made between the posing of the Factory and the rough music discussed at the beginning of this chapter. Bakhtin writes:

Negation in popular festive imagery has never an abstract logical character. It is always something obvious, tangible. That which stands behind negation is by no means nothingness but the "other side" of that which is denied, the carnivalesque upside down. ... This is why in carnivalesque images there is so much turnabout, so many opposite faces and intentionally upset proportions.

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<sup>19</sup> This was famously cited by Lou Reed's opening lyrics in "*Walk On The Wild Side*."

<sup>20</sup> Holly Woodlawn and Jeff Copeland, *A Low Life in High Heels* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), 7–8, in Cagle, *Reconstructing Pop*, 215.

<sup>21</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1968/1984), 410–412

He notes that in a description of a charivari (another word for the rough music ritual) of the early fourteenth century as well as the improvisational (mis)use of ordinary objects (like the makeshift musical instruments from kitchen pots and pans) or deliberately defunct objects (like buckets without bottoms), garments of clothing were donned backward. The logic of the turnabout—"no logical negation"—was also expressed in gestures and movements: to walk backwards or to stand on one's head. When enacted, rather than this turnabout cutting off the object or action from the rest of the world, Bakhtin suggests it instead offers a description of the world's metamorphosis, its remodelling, its transfer from the old to the new, from the past to the future. Furthermore, in this "play with negation, the opposition to the official world and all its prohibitions and limitations is obviously revealed. It also expresses the recreative, festive suspension of these restrictions."<sup>22</sup> As discussed previously, while rough music could be used, as Bakhtin describes, for celebration in the form of a temporary interruption of the hierarchy, it was also used as a communal public spectacle to both expose and shame domestic transgression. Thus, it paradoxically combines movements towards and away from rule and order.

In a corresponding manner, the individuals of the Factory each symbolically reorganised "mainstream" objects and fashion in ways that created and expressed their collective sense of otherness. The waif-like and aristocratic Edie Sedgwick, for example, was known for wearing cheap oversized men's t-shirts with black tights and enormous chunky jewellery, and dying her hair silver like Warhol (see Figure 4). The "A-men" wore feathers and sequins, while the "butch" hustlers attired themselves like construction workers or cowboys.

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

Acquiring status in the Factory was about adopting a persona (or multiple personae) through style. To strike a fabulous pose was all that was required for the transformation into a “superstar.”

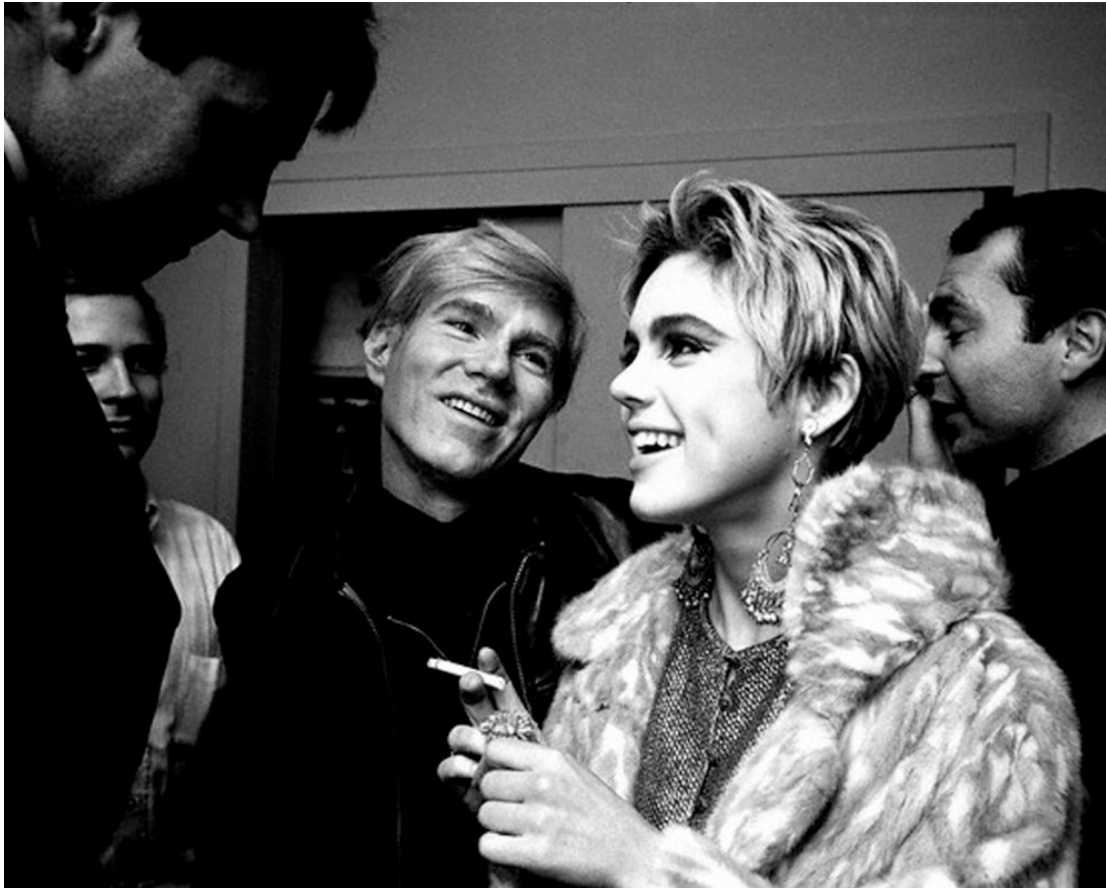


Figure 4 Edie Sedgwick and Andy Warhol circa 1965.

Tensions between internal cliques and hierarchies of the Factory were counter-balanced by the public adulation, huge popularity and the media attention Warhol and his superstars received. “Real” celebrities also came to the Factory to pose with the poseurs. The media was fascinated. And any press was good press! Warhol loved the media attention, both for himself and for his favourites, but cared little about how he was actually portrayed, playing with and subverting interviews and appearances, even sending a double to conduct a lecture tour on his behalf. The pop stunts meant that although Factory participants were often



trivialised as non-serious and commercialised, they had a presence and notoriety.

They were recognised. Koch writes:

With its hierarchies, its stars and leaders and followers, with the aggressive enthralling secret knowledge that outcasts share with one another and the sense of an awful isolation somehow redeemed within those walls, the Factory inverted the traditional subculture's role. While the little world mocked and mimicked the big one, the big world looked on fascinated, making the Factory shine under the spotlight of its attention.<sup>23</sup>

The commensurate relational and situational potential that Warhol facilitated within the Factory was not merely self-serving; it served the participants also. However, Warhol's role in the Factory could be considered ethically contentious. Within the blurred lines between life and work the Factory environment entailed, Warhol, as "the" artist, benefited greatly and the nomenclature of "papa pop"<sup>24</sup> was a vast remove from any conception of a literal fatherly role. Furthermore, the Factory environment should not be considered in isolation from the extant emerging "underground" social scene in New York at the time, in that it tolerated subversive forms and personae, including camp sensibilities of all persuasions. That Warhol encouraged this "scene" into his studio, his work environment, is understandable. The open acceptance of alternative value systems, sexualities, fashions, drugs and unfettered creative expression it offered must have been highly liberating and validating, especially for Warhol, who had always felt different. For him, it was the non-pop world that was repressive and cruel. He writes: "I often wondered, "Don't

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<sup>23</sup> Stephen Koch, *Stargazer* (New York: Praeger, 1973), 6, in Cagle, *Reconstructing Pop*, 213.

<sup>24</sup> Young artist Keith Haring (1958–1990), well known for his calligraphic style of graffiti art, was a "Warhol baby," belonging to a generation that venerated the artist they called "Papa Pop."

the people who play those image games care about all the miserable people in the world who just can't fit into stock roles?"<sup>25</sup>

The appearance of belonging that this burgeoning community offered Warhol must have been particularly imperative for an artist who was not generally accepted by the "high" art world but, at the same time, desperately longed for social recognition and success. It calls to mind an anecdote I read about Warhol at Max's Kansas City, where he hung out with the silver factory crowd and notable members of the flourishing rock and roll music scene, from 1965 when it opened until 1968, when he was shot. Max's was an artist's bar where a who's who among the plethora of art movements that thrived in the late sixties, including Robert Rauschenberg, Richard Serra, Donald Judd, Lawrence Weiner and John Baldessari, conducted lengthy discussions about art. Warhol was a pariah amongst these artists and intellectuals in the front bar, who nicknamed him "Wendy Airhole," and he would "run the gauntlet" to reach the back room where all the "freaks" hung out and where he was king—sitting at the "Captain's Table." In the art world social context, Warhol was, indeed, a "freak" but a "freak" with an alternative social context.<sup>26</sup> The back room at Max's quickly became a VIP area and, like the Factory, a very "performative" space. Midnight until closing time was known as "showtime" and apparently improvised stripteases by guests standing on tables were part of the ambience.<sup>27</sup> The proprietor of Max's, Mickey

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<sup>25</sup> Warhol, *POPism*, 280.

<sup>26</sup> This was a social context that even Warhol's art *friends* had difficulty coping with. In Ivan Castelli's conversation with Warhol about the Factory scene, he says: "Andy, I know a lot of people think it's glamorous over there at your studio, but to me it's just—gloomy. Your art is partly voyeuristic which is completely legitimate of course—you've always liked the bizarre and the peculiar and people at their most raw and uncovered—but it's not so much a fascination for me.... I'd rather see you in a small crowd or just alone like this. I guess I'm just totally embedded in the art community—it's wholesome and I feel comfortable in it." In *ibid.*, 105.

<sup>27</sup> Steven Watson, "The Art of Max's," in Steven Kasher, ed., *Max's Kansas City, Art, Glamour, Rock and Roll* (New York: Abrams, 2010), 11.

Ruskin, interviewed by Danny Fields in the early seventies, had this to say about Warhol:

I consider Andy's most significant contribution that he has managed to take people who are more productive in societal terms, and made them produce for society. I think that's his great, great talent. It's his ability to use other people in a way that's useful to society. He used Max's as that kind of thing. His presence just drew all these people in. He kind of sorted them out and he made them productive ....<sup>28</sup>

Warhol entertained no illusions about the affections of the Factory crowd, who also had a secret nickname for him, "Drella"—a combination of "Dracula" and "Cinderella." He writes:

A lot of people thought it was me that everyone at the Factory was hanging around ... but that's absolutely backward: it was me who was hanging around everyone else. I just paid the rent and the crowd came simply because the door was open. People weren't particularly interested in seeing me, they were interested in seeing each other.<sup>29</sup>

Warhol might have adored stars, but no matter how racy his nylons were under his tight black jeans, he could never be one himself. Nora Sdun notes the basic incompatibility of roles and status—tensions the *Gossip Pop* work intentionally foregrounds. She writes:

[E]ven if he is very famous, an artist is as a person too much of a character to become a star. Despite the possibility of big editions, his work consists

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<sup>28</sup> Mickey Ruskin quoted in Danny Fields, "An Interview with Mickey Ruskin," in Kasher, *Max's*, 37–38.

<sup>29</sup> Warhol, *POPism*, 93.

completely of originals and is more important than he is as a person. Not even Warhol managed to get people to want to be like him.<sup>30</sup>

### **The Factory Goes Pop (Music)**

The impetus for Warhol's large-scale multimedia productions and his cultivation of *The Velvet Underground* emerged from the conditions created by his involvement and participation in the social milieu or pop "lifestyle" that developed around his studio, the Factory. For Warhol, rock music was always important. He played his radio loudly and constantly whilst he worked. He writes:

Henry liked all the rock and roll I kept playing while I painted. He told me once, "I picked up a new attitude toward the media from you – not being selective, just letting everything in at once."<sup>31</sup>

He went as far as forming an artist band along with Jasper Johns, Claes Oldenburg, Lucas Samaras, LaMonte Young and Walter De Maria, but they lasted only about ten rehearsals before disbanding. Meanwhile, *The Velvet Underground*, including John Cale and Lou Reed, were garnering a reputation in Greenwich art circles as exciting experimental musicians "entranced," as Sterling Morrison said, "by the possibilities of creating music that reduced the simple structure of rock and roll to one note."<sup>32</sup> The amplifications of their driving, droning music were accompanied by the dark poetic lyrics conjuring imagery of street life and an alternative underground culture. After

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<sup>30</sup> Nora Sdun, "Pop Music as a Problem for Artists," in *Rock-Paper-Scissors*, 47.

<sup>31</sup> Warhol, *POPism*, 20.

<sup>32</sup> Sterling Morrison quoted in Peter Doggett, *Lou Reed: Growing Up in Public* (London: Omnibus, 1992), 33, in Cagle, *Reconstructing Pop*, 80.

Gerard Malanga heard the *Velvets* play, he invited Warhol, who was looking for a band for a potential nightclub event. Warhol immediately offered the *Velvets* the Factory as rehearsal space and they took up residency in January 1966.

Warhol's famous lecture at the annual banquet of the New York Society for Clinical of Psychiatry in New York provided Warhol with a perfect performance opportunity for *The Velvet Underground*. Particularly relevant to my project, and in a manner reminiscent of rough music, Warhol and his collaborators and entourage created a media event and a powerful multimedia spectacle that demonstrated the potential of art to interrupt social convention and allowed Warhol to combine and layer many disparate aspects of his production, his work and his life, into a kind of haptic *Gesamtkunstwerk*.<sup>33</sup> The success of this event to Warhol was exciting and unparalleled, combining *The Velvet Underground's* abstract amplified sound with Nico singing, Warhol's films *Harlot* and *Harry Geldzahler* projected onto the stage, and members of the Factory, including Gerald Malinga (who performed with his whip) and Edie Sedgwick (dancing). Experimental filmmakers Jonas Mekas and Barbara Rubin simultaneously stormed the room with cameras and bright lights, filming the responses to intrusive questions like: What does her vagina feel like? Do you eat her out? And why are you getting embarrassed?<sup>34</sup> Headlines the next day in the *Tribune* read: "SHOCK TREATMENT FOR PSYCHIATRISTS." Warhol wrote, "I loved it. ... It couldn't have happened to a better group of people."<sup>35</sup>

Although this episode signifies the contemporary praxis of the Von Hantelmann "performative," or the relational and situational potential of art to change

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<sup>33</sup> A total work of art: See Alloway's description in Chapter Two in the "This is Tomorrow" section.

<sup>34</sup> Andy Warhol and Pat Hackett, *POPism: The Warhol Sixties* (Orlando: Harcourt, 1980), 184.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 185.

reality, it occurs outside of or beyond the conventions of art (that is, in the non-art context) in a manner that is historically specific to the time and its development of institutional critiques and anti-art discourses. It is a transgressive and disruptive act that subverts the context, aptly in this case, a symposium of professionals who investigate and theorise the psychological realm of life. Warhol gave them an experience—a performance of being that was conceptual, perceptual and emotional—that in addition to causing shock and surprise (the audience were expecting a lecture by Warhol) also implied a radically different way of producing, communicating and understanding knowledge and meaning. Furthermore, it builds upon the drastic revisions of artistic authorship and authority in favour of the reliance on collaboration and social input, inherent throughout Warhol's oeuvre and consistent with Walter Benjamin's description of the necessary authorial shift from product to production required in order to instigate cultural resistance.<sup>36</sup> This event is cited by Cagle as “a specific form of dissent and disruption within normative structure of communication and mass mediation ... [and] we find [here] a double-edged sense of irony, metaphorical quotes within quotes, and riddle-like dilemmas that are amusing on the surface yet, underneath, decidedly (and deadly) serious.”<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> See Walter Benjamin, “The Author As Producer,” *Reflections*, Peter Demetz, ed. (New York: Schocken Books, 1986), 220–238

<sup>37</sup> Cagle, *Reconstructing*, 2.



Figure 5 Andy Warhol's *Exploding Plastic Inevitable* featuring Nico, at the University of Michigan campus in Ann Arbor.

Building on this event inspired Warhol's expanded multimedia extravaganza the *Exploding Plastic Inevitable*, (see Figure 5) which toured to various large-scale venues between 1966 to 1967. Constructed around one or two sets by *The Velvet Underground* and Nico, the work incorporated five film projectors, often showing

different reels of the same film simultaneously, a similar number of moving slide projectors, whose images swept across the auditorium, four variable speed strobe lights, pistol lights, several mirror balls, as many as three loud speakers amplifying several different records at the same time, and live dancing with props, enhanced by lights that projected large-scale shadows of the dancers onto the walls.<sup>38</sup> An advertisement of the time touts the movies screened as: “*Vinyl, Sleep, Eat, Kiss, Empire, Whips, Faces, Harlot, Hedy, Couch, Banana, Blow Job* etc., etc. all in the same place at the same time.” The same advertisement wryly listed as also available: “refreshments, Ingrid Superstar, food, celebrities.”<sup>39</sup> The impact of this innovative and spectacular event on the sixties audience is difficult to imagine fully, but Larry McCombs’ review published in 1966’s *Boston Broadside* communicates the effect of the sensory extravaganza:

Too much happening, it doesn’t go together. But sometimes it does – suddenly the beat of the music, the movements of the various films, the pose of the dancers, blend into something meaningful, but before your mind can grab it, it’s become random and confusing again. Your head tries to sort something out, make sense of something. The noise is getting to you. You want to scream, or throw yourself about with the dancers, something, anything!<sup>40</sup>

The audience for the *Exploding Plastic Inevitable*, unlike the unwitting psychiatrists, quickly formed “a veritable insider’s club,” interacting with the

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<sup>38</sup> Branden W. Joseph, ““My Mind Split Open:” Andy Warhol’s Exploding Plastic Inevitable,” *Grey Room* 8 (2002): 80–107, 81.

<sup>39</sup> Advertisement for “Andy Warhol’s Velvet Underground and Nico” at 23 St. Mark’s Place [The Dom], in *East Village Other*, April 15, 1966, in Joseph, “My Mind Split Open,” 81.

<sup>40</sup> Larry McCombs, “Chicago Happenings,” *Boston Broadside*, July 1966, in “Scrapbook Vol. 2 Small,” *Warhol Archives* 7, quoted by Joseph, “My Mind Split Open,” 97.



multimedia maelstrom “with a knowing discourse that was satirical and definitely against the grain of austere sensibilities.” They applauded and condoned the “subterranean subcultural media montages.”<sup>41</sup> In *POPism*, Warhol notes how these audiences began to interact and experiment with fashion, “glittering and reflecting in vinyl, suede, and feathers,”<sup>42</sup> and that:

the groups were getting all mixed up with each other—dance, music, art, fashion, movies. It was fun to see the Museum of Modern Art people next to the teeny-boppers next to the amphetamine queens next to the fashion editors. We all knew something revolutionary was happening, we just felt it.<sup>43</sup>

This is evidence of what Frith and Horne describe as pop’s democratising practice and theory: “everyone is an artist ... you don’t need an education to understand it.” “The viewer,” they continue, “becomes the “artist of perception,” no longer requiring the guidance of the art historian or critic.”<sup>44</sup> For the audiences who were receptive to the transgressive experiences Warhol was offering in the *Exploding Plastic Inevitable*, the eclectic “in-crowd” (a public extension of the Factory in-crowd), the occasion contrasted with the mainstream club experience of the day. It elicited a participatory mode of interaction that shared some of the emancipatory social effects of the Factory, a chance to see and to be seen, to holiday for an evening in the Warhol pop lifestyle, an opportunity to adopt the pop pose and temporarily join the carnival/spectacle, to become part of the “rough music.”

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<sup>41</sup> Cagle, *Reconstructing*, 7.

<sup>42</sup> Warhol, *POPism*, 205.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 204.

<sup>44</sup> Simon Frith and Howard Horne, *Art Into Pop* (London: Methuen, 1987), 120, in Cagle, *Reconstructing*, 10–11.

Although the *Velvets* and Warhol parted ways shortly after an abortive *Exploding Plastic Inevitable* booking in LA, Warhol designed and was named as producer on their iconic first album. *The Velvet Underground* were described by rock journalist Lester Bangs as one of the “most dynamically experimental groups in or out of rock.”<sup>45</sup> The combination of the highly theatrical pop art/music event with Warhol’s notion of fame that could result from the self-creation of a particular style and persona (posing), along with the Velvets dynamic pop compositions that discarded narrative in favour of dramatic mood and effect, was highly inspirational to musicians. Cagle draws a direct lineage from Warhol’s highly influential pop lifestyle and multimedia rock events to the genre of “glitter,”<sup>46</sup> whose proponents including Iggy Pop,<sup>47</sup> Alice Cooper and David Bowie, all of whom created highly visual and theatrical personae and had compelling performance styles that were hugely popular.<sup>48</sup> Bowie was particularly chameleon-like in his charismatic and convincing transformations from Ziggy to Aladdin Sane (see Figure 6) to the Thin White Duke. Bowie is also notable for having *started* his career with video—1968’s *Love You Till Tuesday*, and then the iconic *Major Tom* evidencing the not-to-be-forgotten visual aspect at the forefront of the pop music scene.

Cagle surveys and defines the “field” of subculture and subcultural “style” via cultural studies theory, linking them to the broader socioeconomic conditions of

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<sup>45</sup> Lester Bangs, “Dead Lie the Velvets Underground,” *Creem* (May 1971): 46, in Cagle, *Reconstructing*, 93.

<sup>46</sup> It is notable that glitter did not signify a particular genre of music rather a style. The music of the prominent glitter rock stars is quite varied.

<sup>47</sup> Note the direct incorporation of the word “pop” in the Iggy Pop moniker adopted by James Osterberg who saw the Alice Arbour performance of *The Exploding Plastic Inevitable* when he was still in high school. This manner of pop cultural appropriational “entropy” is specifically referenced by *Gossip Pop*, in this instance in the title/name.

<sup>48</sup> See Cagle, *Reconstructing*, 96–116.

capitalist consumerism and the market. Within this context he identifies Warhol's Factory scene, with its cultivation of a highly performative *modus operandi* of "superstars," who lived and worked with and for Warhol and his art, as the formation of an "in there" subculture. Quoting Hebdige, he writes that "youth subcultures ultimately undergo the process of market incorporation," implying that resistance is, therefore, diluted. "[T]he subculture is always rendered powerless as a result of the omnipotent process of conversion."<sup>49</sup> However, he counters this with Clarke's assertion that "those who embrace subcultural trends cannot be ignored because very few young people have the privilege of joining an authentic subculture" and that "we ought to focus on the moment when style becomes available – either as a commodity or as an idea to be copied."<sup>50</sup> It is precisely at this point, the point of mainstream incorporation, that *Gossip Pop* and similar visual art projects are able to address in their work not only the medium of pop music, but the commensurate commodity objecthood and fetishism that this implies. It is not the "authentic" product that is appropriated. It is the already highly-mediated, incorporated product of the everyday, appropriated by the popular audience, whose meaning and signification is interrogated.

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<sup>49</sup> Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Methuen, 1979), 2, in Cagle, *Reconstructing*, 40.

<sup>50</sup> Gary Clarke, "Defending Ski-Jumpers: A Critique of Theories of Youth Subcultures," *On Record: Rock, Pop, and the Written Word*, Simon Frith and Andrew Goodwin, eds (New York: Pantheon, 1990), 81–96; 90, in 2 in Cagle, *Reconstructing*, 37.



Figure 6 David Bowie pictured in his Aladdin Sane persona, 1973.

Cagle's analysis suggests that for Warhol and glitter pop music's main proponents, who "lifted ideas from Warhol and his Factory subculture," incorporation occurred because glitter "transformed the essence of these ideas into a commercial genre," but this transformation occurred without "the form destroy(ing) the intentions of (the) authentic subcultural":

the transformation did little to destroy the original precepts established by Warhol or the Factory subculture. Warhol's social world thus provided the materials through which commercial appropriation could take place; the incorporation

process, however, provided for the formation of a subversive out-there subculture: glitter rockers.<sup>51</sup>

This recontextualisation allowed 1970s mainstream youth to experiment with bohemian conventions: “no matter the background or location of fans, glitter’s most pertinent motifs made possible a collective liberatory reprisal that reversed dominant conceptions of sexuality, mainstream style, and commercially informed fandom.”<sup>52</sup>

He further states:

posing became a regimented form of behavior, with fans providing offstage performances during concerts. In this manner, glitter rock was homological in form – it connected notions of sexual difference with ways to cut up fashion, and in so doing, it provided confirmation that fans could be famous for 15 minutes.<sup>53</sup>

The audience thus enacted the same posing and temporary adoption of personae and turnabout rituals as the famous glitter performers and the Factory crowd.<sup>54</sup> I can see further associations with subsequent pop music genres.

Punk, for example, is an instance of a subculture with blatantly commercial *and* artistic origins. Malcolm McClaren, fashion entrepreneur, manager and creator of *The Sex Pistols* was overt about the situationalist-inspired constructed nature of the subcultural resistance he was instigating. His band was comprised of people who

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<sup>51</sup> Cagle, *Reconstructing*, 47.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

<sup>54</sup> Juggalos (or jugalette) hip hop fans converging around the output of Psychopathic records and The Insane Clown Posse are examples of a contemporary manifestation of this particular type of expressive fandom and subculture. See Brian Raftery, “How Two Outcast Rappers Built an Insane Clown Empire,” *Wired* (2010). Accessed January 12, 2013, [http://www.wired.com/magazine/2010/11/ff\\_icp/all/1?pid=3891](http://www.wired.com/magazine/2010/11/ff_icp/all/1?pid=3891)

could only play the famous “three chords,” the simplest form of song<sup>55</sup> and the kind of “rough music” that anyone who picked up an instrument could, in theory, play. What mattered most was the style that was projected, the effect created and communicated, and the significant participatory potential. These forms inspired many forms of DIY creativity, from fashion expression to garage bands to reality TV pop shows and so on. The convergence of technologies, including the massive and instantaneous potential of the Internet, continues to motivate individual participatory actions like the uploading of amateur video pop to YouTube. Some of these pop music videos, like Justin Bieber’s, “go viral” and result in global stardom. While some are exalted to this fleeting exceptional status, the efforts of the majority are absorbed into a field of signification so dense and complex that it is like a continuous and infinite global version of the *Exploding Plastic Inevitable* performance.

Before proceeding, I would like to reiterate that the point I am making here concerns the connection between the mainstream adoption of the subversive implications of the subcultural milieu of pop despite its marketplace incorporation—from the Warhol ethos that inspired aspects of pop music genres—and the *Gossip Pop* project. The connection is evidenced in the performative “pose” that *Gossip Pop* adopts, which takes up the investigation of the role of pop well after any subcultural subversions have been incorporated and familiarised. There are layers of subversion within the subversions that have both general and specific ramifications for visual art practice. Indeed, the context of visual art and its special commodity status, operating as it does according to its own rules and situation, is key. With this in mind, and before proceeding to the artwork, one of the overarching questions to consider in

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<sup>55</sup> Diedrich Diederichsen, “Intensity, Negation, Plain Language: Wilde Maler, Punk, and Theory in Germany in the ’80s,” in *Sympathy*, 151.

regard to the *Gossip Pop* work, and other works dealing with pop music, is: What critique or affirmation can this work possibly offer? This will be explored further through a discussion of two exhibitions with which *Gossip Pop* has some affinity.

### **Exhibitions: *Rock-Paper-Scissors* and *Sympathy for the Devil***

*[H]ow (so runs the question this generation is raising) can such a thing as artistic authorship be derived at all from this cosmos in all its evolvedness and patchwork quality? How can one think of artistic subjectivity in the context of a discourse environment in which, densely occupied and seemingly devoid of gaps, the hundredth playback of the nth sampled cover version of a karaoke trail retro-ised for the umpteenth time rules?*

—Christian Höller, *Rock-Paper-Scissors*

The oeuvre of pop music as visual art is well established in the practice of individual artists. Christian Höller's catalogue article refers to critical discourses attached to the "brisk two-way trade" between the two domains since the 1960s.<sup>56</sup> Rather than focus on a particular artist to demonstrate how these connections are manifested in contemporary artwork, I have decided to narrow the scope to two recent major international public exhibitions: *Rock-Paper-Scissors: Pop Music As Subject of Visual Art*, curated by Diedrich Diederichsen, at Kunsthau Graz, Cologne from June 6 to

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<sup>56</sup> See, for example, John A. Walker: *Crossovers. Art in Pop/Pop Into Art*. London, New York, 1987; Simon Frith, Howard Horne: *Art Into Pop*, London, New York, 1987; or in German *Kunstforum International* 134, May–September 1996 (*Art & Pop & Crossover*) and Ulrike Gross, Markus Müller (eds.): *Make It Funky. Crossover zwischen Musik, Pop, Avantgarde und Kunst*. Cologne 1998 in Christian Höller, "Air-guitar Playback: The functions of "pop art" authorship," in *Rock-Paper-Scissors*, 57.

August 30, 2009 and *Sympathy for the Devil: Art and Rock and Roll Since 1967*, curated by Dominic Molon at The Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago from September 29, 2007 to January 6, 2008 and The Museum of Contemporary Art, North Miami, from May 31 to September 8, 2008.

To provide some context here of the curatorial premise of these important exhibitions, the introduction to *Rock—Paper—Scissors* usefully defines pop as “hyper-inclusive attraction-logic” and a highly visual medium “spawned by the parallelism of sound and image found in TV programmes, fanzines and record covers” and situates the curatorial premise as follows:

At its heart is a feeling of direct involvement with people rather than musical values. These can function as sex objects or the embodiment of new lifestyles. For art, this form of expression is as much a subject as a rival event. Rock—Paper—Scissors brings together artist whose methods and formulations use pop music’s body politics, knowledge industry and relationship with the world for their own purposes.<sup>57</sup>

Similarly, Dominic Molon, the curator of *Sympathy for the Devil*, emphasises that: “the resulting works of art function best when, to borrow from Bennett Simpson, they ‘[enable] contradictions specific to art itself, rather than simply providing art with a new palatability, theme, or style.’”<sup>58</sup> He cites the “benefit” of art’s admission of rock and roll as “presenting styles and sensibilities to an audience from which it

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<sup>57</sup> “Rock-Paper-Scissors,” *kunsthau Graz, Universalmuseum Joanneum*, accessed February 8, 2012:1, [museum-joanneum.at/upload/file/A-Zettel-SSP-e-KORR\\_1\\_.pdf](http://museum-joanneum.at/upload/file/A-Zettel-SSP-e-KORR_1_.pdf).

<sup>58</sup> Domonic Molon, “Introduction,” *Sympathy for the Devil: Art and Rock and Roll since 1967*, Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2007), quoting Simpson, “From Noise to Beuys,” 8.



increasingly feels alienated,” whilst warning of the potential for “regressive juvenilia” or “the perception of pandering.”

My rationale for the inclusion of practical contemporary works at this juncture is that the works chosen for discussion having already been selected and archived, will represent a critical level worthy of investigation and situate my work within this clearly defined oeuvre. It is my assertion that the works discussed below relate clearly to my creative project conceptually and also in terms of the practical methodologies and mediums employed.

There are some limitations to this approach that should be addressed and that are interesting to reflect upon. I did not see these exhibitions. I am relying on the catalogues for my source material. This is congruent with my creative methodology, which relies on the reception and the reconstruction of materials and ideas in their highly-mediated form. Of course, for Australians, this mode is necessitated vis-à-vis our geographical isolation. We, like the *majority* of the world outside of the art centres of New York, London and Berlin, certainly receive much of our information second-hand and are familiar with many major works of art only via reproduction and written and theoretical accounts. Ah, the delayed gratification followed by the mingled disappointment and elation when confronting influential major works of art in the physical realm for the first time! Although I acknowledge the problems of verification here in terms of traditional scholarship, I am attracted to the idea of misinterpretation and misreading—the potential for a gossip—for something like a legal proceeding based on hearsay. Or a game of Chinese whispers. This issue further foregrounds the important tension between pop knowledge and authority. Is it necessary to see and hear the work first hand? Potentially, the conclusions drawn will

reveal my subjectivity more clearly to myself and others—like a response to a Rorschach test. The process of art practice is inevitably about limitations and making do. That acknowledged so I shall proceed.



Figure 7 Mike Kelley, *Sex, Drugs and Rock and Roll Party Palace*, 2009.

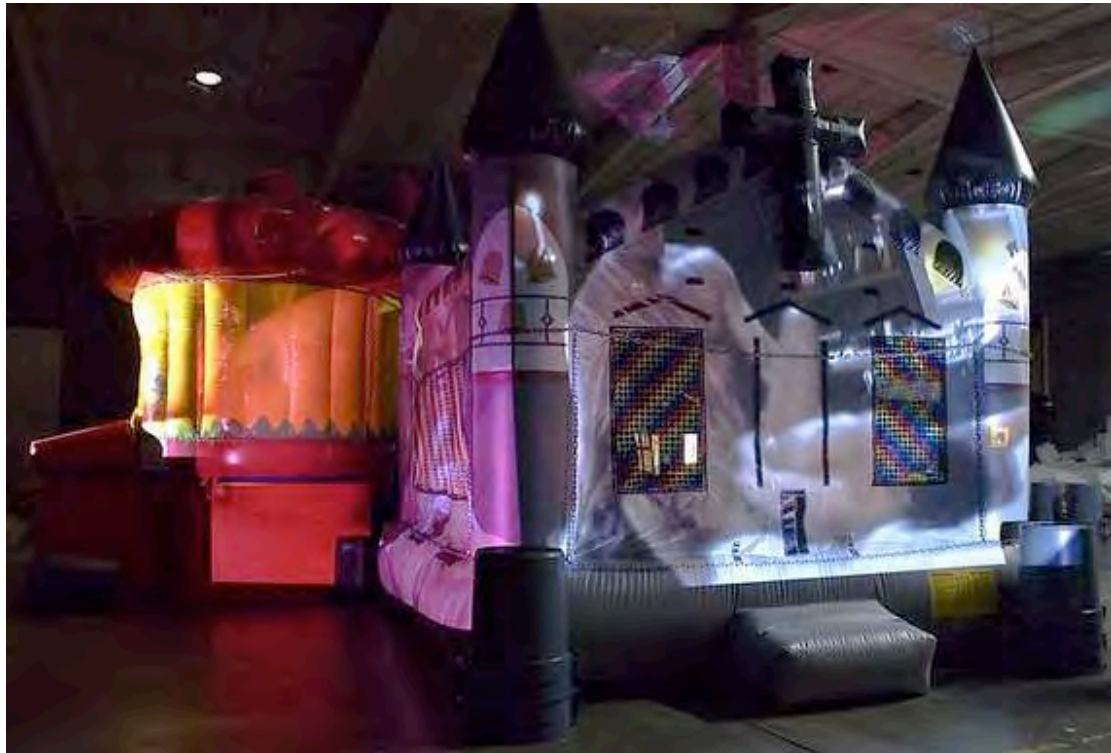


Figure 8 Mike Kelley, *Sex, Drugs and Rock and Roll Party Palace*, 2009.

Mike Kelley's (1954–2012) *Sex, Drugs, and Rock and Roll Party Palace*, 2009 (see Figures 7 and 8) was an artwork exhibited in *Rock-Paper-Scissors*. It consisted of a large bouncy castle, resplendent with a cross like a church, with a gigantic magic mushroom annex, onto which excerpts from porn films were projected. The bright plastic colours diluted the writhing bodies into faint surface scratchings—shadows of desire constructed for the purposes of solitary, furtive masturbation—a synthetic act that parodies love-making just as the inflatable castle parodies solid stone. The bodies writhing in anaesthetised sexual abandon are accompanied by a variety of disorienting sound samples—deliberately boring and repetitive techno beats made with cheap DJ software and directed into particular niches and chambers of the castle. The relentless thump–thump–thump of competing rhythms is reminiscent of a city street packed with clubs and the sensory memory

recalled is that of late nights, drunk and staggering, searching for another party. Encyclopaedic references or lists, including for example an enumeration of all existing psychedelic drugs and lists of composers of soundtracks, were also projected onto the sculptures.<sup>59</sup> These look like checklists of things that have been done or heard—time and experience reduced to items. Things to do. The bouncy castle of consumer culture, fun fairs, fundraisers and children’s birthday parties invite participation and abandon, but only for the *regressions* of youth—no children are allowed due to the explicit content. Thus, it is a negation of play and the party. It invites engagement and simultaneously repels it.

The resulting cacophonous monument to nostalgia could be considered as a direct aesthetic relative of *The Exploding Plastic Inevitable*, as Höller suggests,<sup>60</sup> but, once crucially moved from the participatory social and historical “party” context and into the museum, it loses all logic. The work clearly references the trippy hippy promise of enlightenment and free love posed by the counter-cultural movement of the sixties, an earnestness gently disparaged by Warhol, and also the hedonistic nihilism—the *All Tomorrow’s Parties* attitude—epitomised by the Warhol Factory and the pop lifestyle. But without the life. Without the people. And for me, that’s the point. Kelley seems to create for the viewer the inverse of the idiom “alone in a crowd.” Here, what is emphasised is the isolation of the viewer and the isolation of the artist. It’s like a sad invitation to the party that never was. In this state its emptiness is beautiful yet depressing.

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<sup>59</sup> Christian Höller, “Smelling Sounds, Hearing Images: The promise of tumbling barriers between media,” *Springer/in* 2, 2010:1, accessed February 2, 2012, [http://www.springerin.at/dyn/heft\\_text.php?textid=2328&lang=en](http://www.springerin.at/dyn/heft_text.php?textid=2328&lang=en).

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

However, it would be a different scenario if bouncing were allowed. (museums are known to be uptight about that sort of thing.) If, as a viewer, one bounced, the experience would be quite different, especially if somebody else came into the room. The viewer would find himself or herself not just participating, but becoming subsumed into the work for the second viewer. The second viewer would wonder if the person jumping was part of the work, or a performance, or just someone bouncing. And bouncing forces a rhythm, which would mean the bouncer would be in counterpoint or synchronised with either the techno or the people fucking on the walls outside. Then, the second person might join in, and, suddenly, you have a big squeaking rocking kinetic bouncing “thing,” animated by a chain of participation set off by one viewer that could, potentially, last all day—definitely still not a party, but a distinct second “state” of operation for this object *only possible* through a shift from spectator to producing participant. (I bet Mike Kelley bounced!)

Just as people make a party, in the operational scenarios for this work outlined above, people provide the power, or they don’t. It’s a choice. Although the artist presents the choice, he or she cannot control it. It rests with the viewer.

There is a similar participatory choice for the viewer in *Karaoke Bar*, 2005 (Figure 9), by *Art & Language* with *The Red Krayola*. Formed in 1966, this Marxist-oriented conceptual art group *Art & Language*, in this instance comprising Mel Ramsden, Charles Harrison and Michael Baldwin, worked with Mayo Thompson’s former Texas-psychedelic band *Red Krayola*. The authorship is divided between an artistic group with a title or “brand” and a “real” band. They produced three LPs between 1976 and 1983 featuring political theory as lyrics (by the artists), sung in an

out-of-key deadpan manner, accompanied by backing music with rudimentary instrumentation (by the band).<sup>61</sup>

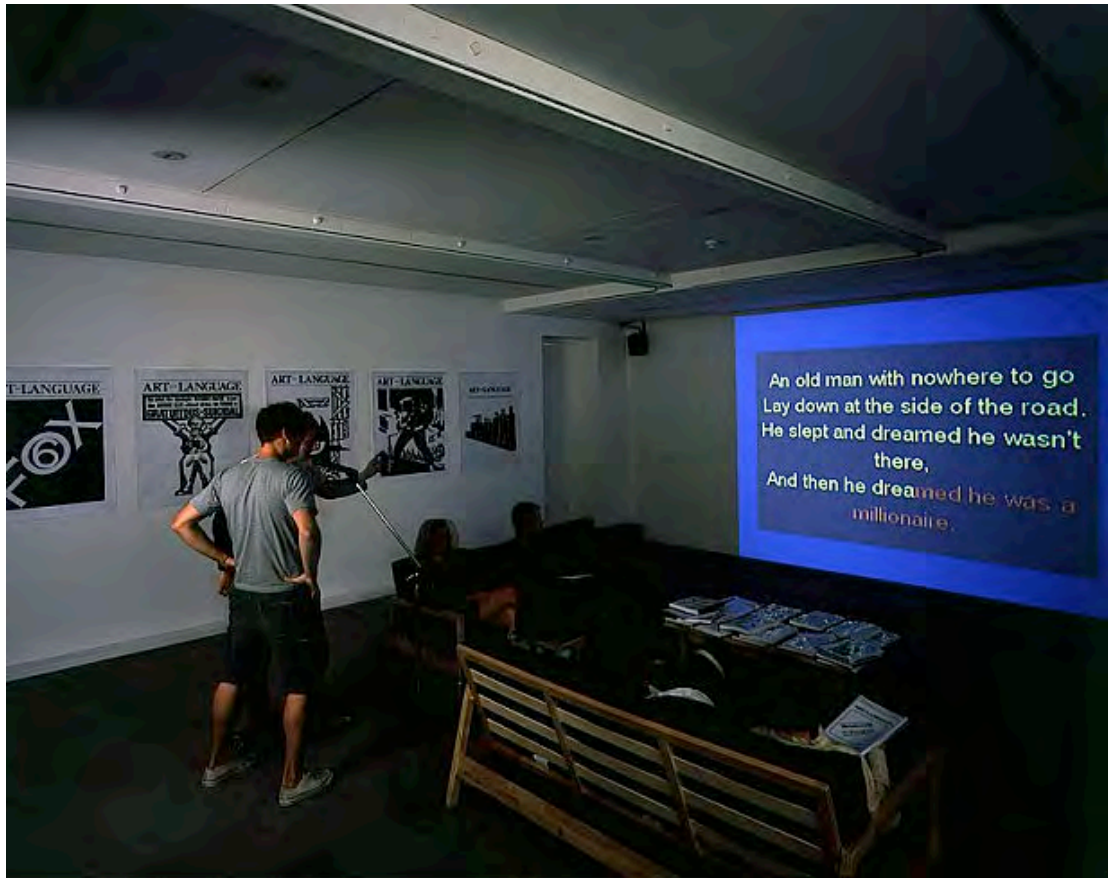


Figure 9 Art & Language with The Red Krayola, *Karaoke Bar*, 2005.

The songs were reworked in this instance as karaoke tracks with the lyrics appearing as text on a large screen. The audience are invited to pick up the microphone and sing along, striking the familiar living room pose of the Singstar or Guitar Hero pop star. “[W]here one normally dreams of occupying the privileged position of a star within the virtual opportunities of one’s own home,” the gallery

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<sup>61</sup> Dominic Molon, “Made with the Highest British Attention to the Wrong Detail: The UK” in Molon, *Sympathy*, 73.

guide states, “one unexpectedly finds oneself in a position of having to advocate in song the controversial ideas of *Art & Language*.”<sup>62</sup> One of the songs suggests:

Don't talk to sociologists ....  
 Social practice has no sociological content.  
 Consider its history.  
 Because of its historical role within bourgeois ideology,  
 The ideology of the ruling class,  
 It can't provide us with an analysis of our conditions of exploitation.  
 This is not a piece of weird and obvious logic, bar room logic.  
 Not an obvious opinion based on the view that you are inside or outside.  
 But you are.<sup>63</sup>

Posters of periodical covers published by *Art & Language* reference the tension between the multiple format and commercial commodity of the magazine and the epistemological production of artists versus the authorised “serious” journal format, such as would be published by an academic institution. These are hung on the gallery wall adjacent to the karaoke screen, with couches and coffee table covered with *Art and Language* publications: a microphone faces the screen. In this artwork, a blatantly political ideology (but one produced by artists) combines with the triteness and disposability of the karaoke form to create a participatory performance mode for the institutional museum context. Rhetorical speech, so often used in politics, is here subverted into pop karaoke, providing an opportunity for amateurs to have their moment in the limelight, but voicing the artist’s concerns.

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<sup>62</sup> *Rock-Paper-Scissors*, 4.

<sup>63</sup> “The Red Krayola – Don’t Talk to Sociologists (from “Corrected Slogans,” 1976),” YouTube, accessed January 12 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OfqNLPvtbE>

In contrast, *Gossip Pop* takes the text from the unauthorised context of pop knowledge—the gossip tabloid—and performs it in a karaoke-like manner. In the *Gossip Pop* work the artist rather than the audience is directly inserted and identified in the work as protagonist, or amateur posing as the pop star, and does not reference the autonomous artists’ constructs of political rhetoric but is reduced to a mouthpiece for the polar opposite. Rather than vocalising ideology, the *Gossip Pop* work vocalises the implied hegemonic influence of the authorless, unauthorised domain of pop. *Art & Language* also infer a commercial mode—publishing—in their title in the same way that *Gossip Pop* infers the pop music mode. Furthermore, the title or label *Gossip Pop* implies both the artist collective<sup>64</sup> signified by the *Art & Language* name and the pop band signified by the “real” band *Red Krayola*—simultaneous activities in a fictional merging of art and pop domains.

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<sup>64</sup> *Gossip Pop* projects often include my brother Phil Dodd who does backing sound and appears in videos—and who has also been in a “real” band.





Figure 10 Cory Arcangel, *Sans Simon*, 2004.



Figure 11 Cory Arcangel, *Sans Simon*, 2004.

Corey Arcangel's work in *Sympathy for the Devil*, *Sans Simon*, 2004, is a video that, like *Gossip Pop*, merges domains and appropriates from pre-existing pop

music sources (see Figures 10 and 11). It does this in a direct and reductive manner via a television broadcast, the screen and his hands. Whilst a Simon and Garfunkel concert plays on TV, he uses his hand to try to obscure Simon. He states that it is basically a video of a performance in his lounge room. “In the *Sans Simon* piece,” he says “there’s no technology, no magic, nothing, not even an edit that people can get stumbled by.”<sup>65</sup> Molon views this work as “subtly commenting on the interpersonal dynamics of a performing duo ... underscored by the fact that in this case, Simon has become the more successful, celebrated, and recognizable of the two.”<sup>66</sup>

The artist’s gesture of intervention in *Sans Simon*, his negating hands, resonate with the idea of art as handmade or the result of an individual autonomous act, and the potency of this act. As it does for *Gossip Pop*, the nature of the work simultaneously situates Arcangel as audience, fan and consumer, as well as creator. *Sans Simon*, like Bakhtin’s carnival turnabout, demonstrates that the opposite of creation is negation, but that these opposites are not binaries but reverses of each other. This simple gesture resonates with emancipatory potential. Here, the viewer, also the artist, chooses not just to not view, but to unmake. It highlights the power behind “choice” at the reception end of creation. Whether to engage or not is a matter of choice. This artistic statement resonates for me with Jean Baudrillard’s celebration of the disappearance of political struggle wherein the only strategic resistance is refusal. He writes:

While the mirror and screen of alienation was a mode of production (the imaginary subject), this new screen is simply its mode of disappearance. But disappearance is a very

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<sup>65</sup> See: Cory Arcangel, “Sans Simon: Cory Arcangel (Single-channel video, 2004, 4:20 minutes, color, sound),” Electronic Arts Intermix (EIA), Accessed November 15, 2012, <http://www.eai.org/resourceguide/exhibition/installation/arcangel/sanssimon.html>

<sup>66</sup> Dominic Molon, “Experimental Jet Set: The New York Scene,” in Molon, *Sympathy*, 18.

complex mode: the object, the individual, is not only condemned to disappearance, but *disappearance is also its strategy*; it is its way of response to this device for capture, for networking, and for forced identification. To this *cathodic* surface of recording, the individual or the mass reply by a *parodic* behaviour of disappearance ... In fact, behind this “objective” fortification of networks and models which believe they can capture them, there passes a wave of derision, of reversal ... which is the active exploitation ... by the object itself of its mode of disappearance.<sup>67</sup>

In *Sans Simon* the identity of the artist, his face and personality and any pose is removed. However, as it is the hands that are the “tools” of the artist, corresponding to the action potential of art, and thus Von Hantelmann’s performative function, in this work they forcefully represent the artist’s persona—in its practical nature as the producer of objects, of “things.” Moreover, the hands, also only visible as black outlines or negatives, negate this role, yet, ultimately, of course, affirm it by making a “thing” from this very negation itself.

By performing myself in the *Gossip Pop* project, I enact not just a “thing” or object or pose, but also a kind of chimera for the collective public, the art audience or viewer, the artist/author, the pop star and the celebrity—a generic signifier for all these roles. Furthermore, I become the material of the autonomous art object. Dirck Linck explains the complication:

In pop music the *man* and the *medium* are one and the same thing. Art is what happens as a creative process between the inseparable two, with one constantly transformed into the other. “Making subject and object identical in the production act” (Hans Imhoff) generates a chimera based neither at the subject pole nor at the medium pole, but is a

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<sup>67</sup> Jean Baudrillard, “The Masses: The Social Implosion of the Social in the Media,” Marie Maclean, trans., *New Literary History* 16 (1985): 577–89; 584.

creature of “in-between.” Pop performativity means playing the self the way you play the guitar. The complication lies in the fact that you can see the guitar.<sup>68</sup>

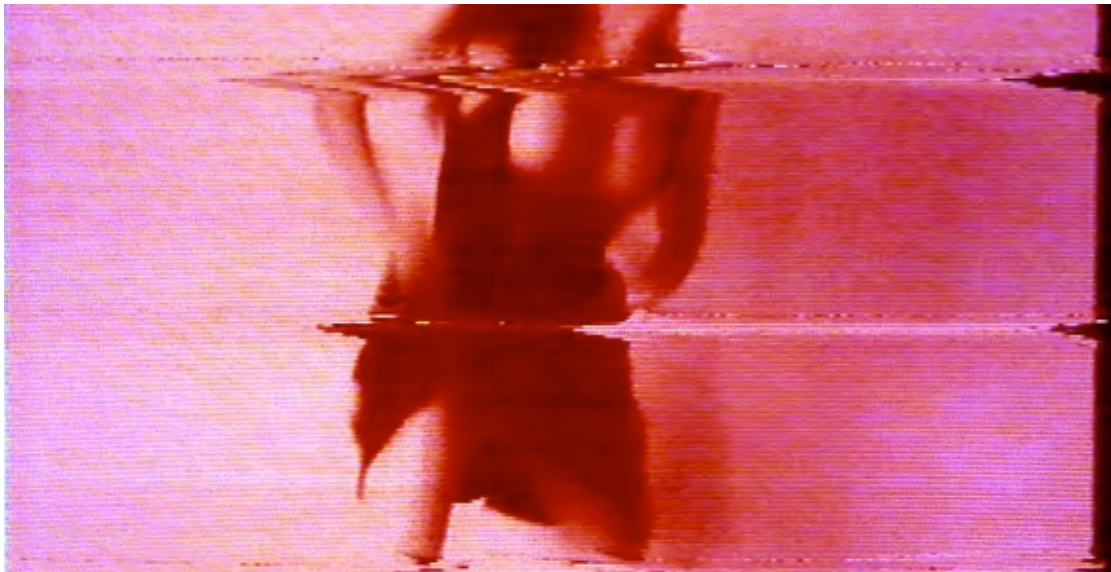


Figure 12 Pipilotti Rist, *I'm Not the Girl Who Misses Much*, 1986.

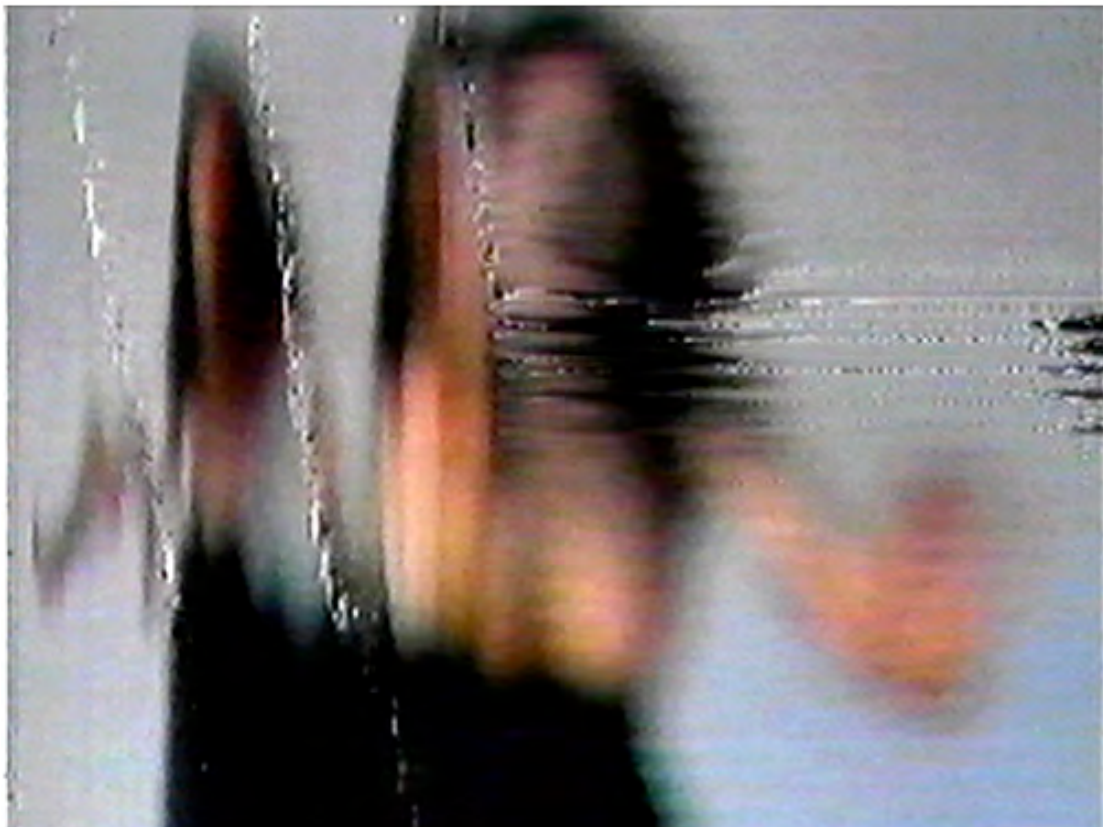


Figure 13 Pipilotti Rist, *I'm Not the Girl Who Misses Much*, 1986.

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<sup>68</sup> Dirck Linck, “...Not A Band Yet, But Well ... Hold Your Breath” Chimeras, Groups, Multiples—Three Reactions to Pop Music Since the 1960s.” In *Rock-Paper-Scissors*, 33.

Pipilotti Rist utilises herself in a similar manner for the two video works she exhibited in *Sympathy for the Devil*:<sup>69</sup> *I'm Not the Girl Who Misses Much*, 1988, (see Figures 12 and 13) and *You Called Me Jacky*, 1990 (see Figures 14 and 15). These works can be historically situated at the time of the ascendance of music video culture via MTV challenging the language of this format, including the characteristic “star-glorification.”<sup>70</sup> Both videos operate like simple staged music videos but with clear distinctions. The technology is crude, deliberately so, with clumsy green screen effects, visual distortions from VHS tape that aesthetically “historicise” the footage (including fast forwarding or speeding up the sound and image) and basic audio. *Gossip Pop*, likewise, deals with the medium of the music video and its commodity status as a multiple and a communicative medium differentiating itself via the traces of the homemade (via dodgy green screen, handmade celebrity cut-outs, crude animation and editing techniques and so forth) that reveal its paradoxical singularity.

In *I'm Not the Girl Who Misses Much*,<sup>71</sup> Rist repeats the lyric: “I’m not the girl who misses much, do do do do do oh yeah,” personalising the first line from *The Beatles’ Happiness is a Warm Gun*<sup>72</sup> by John Lennon: “She’s not a girl who misses much.” The video appears to have been made by filming, editing and then replaying on a monitor, then re-filming and re-editing. This methodology points to careful and deliberate construction, and should not be mistaken for haphazard or random visual effects. Rist moves in and around the video space or frame, wearing a black wig and

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<sup>69</sup> In fact, Rist was one of the artists in the group exhibition I took part in called *One of Us Cannot Be Wrong* dealing with the thematics around constructions of celebrity at the Centre for Contemporary Photography. The curator, Karra Rees, saw clear conceptual links between our works.

<sup>70</sup> Dominic Molon, “Europe Endless: Art and Rock on the Continent” in Molon, *Sympathy*, 140

<sup>71</sup> Pipilotti Rist, “Pipilotti Rist- I'm Not The Girl Who Misses Much,” YouTube, accessed November 13, 2012, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TJgiSyCr6BY>

<sup>72</sup> Dominic Molon, “Europe Endless: Art and Rock on the Continent” in Molon, *Sympathy*, 140.

dress with the neckline pulled down so her breasts are bared, sometimes lunging towards the camera, so there are moments of extreme detail or close-up, ever repeating the one lyric line. The footage and sound is mostly sped up and, at one point, slowed down, making her movements jerky, puppet or doll-like and frenetic or creepily slow, and her voice “chipmunk” high or horror-film deep, respectively. The image is blurred, and degraded, so the figure of the artist and performer (Rist is usually the performer but is hardly recognizable here) becomes generic. What, I wonder, does this woman really look like? She’s reduced to a disturbing symbol or caricature of a woman—all “tits and hair.” Who is she? She could be anyone from a crazed Beatles groupie to Sophia Loren.

A video effect that looks like tearing paper rends the screen diagonally into strips from left to right, completely disintegrating the figure. Then, the picture freezes and the original music is heard, sung by John Lennon, as the figure of the girl reappears but with a striking Yves Klein blue saturation effect edited over the top. Then, the screen it is frozen on some (naturally-colored) close-ups, followed by a fast-forwarded image of a woman getting dressed. There’s some footage of a tree, frozen static, until a black and white and highly-degraded image of Rist’s figure fades to black. At this point, *The Beatles* song abruptly stops on the line “I need a fix cos I’m going down” and the sped up figure of Rist again appears and repeats the line one final time but with altered sound. The audio has been re-recorded with echoing spatial effects and a high-pitched distortion throughout for this final iteration. The overall effect is, for me, emotionally charged, with anxiety, entrapment, hopelessness and loss, although there is also an element of dark humour present, a sarcasm perhaps, underlined by the paradoxical self-assurance and self-awareness implied by a superficial reading of the meaning of the repeated line





Figure 14 Pipilotti Rist, *You Called Me Jacky*, 1990.



Figure 15 Pipilotti Rist, *You Called Me Jacky*, 1990.

In *You Called Me Jacky*<sup>73</sup> Rist lip-syncs (and plays air guitar) to obscure British folk rocker Kevin Coyne’s nostalgic song *Jack and Edna*, “subtly meditating on gender roles by mimicking a male voice singing about a male–female relationship,”<sup>74</sup> recalling the kind of turnabout and transgressive masquerade that so distinguishes the carnivalesque ritual of rough music. At several points she makes mistakes in the lip-syncing, laughs and picks it up again—like an amateur performance. This is a device I use repeatedly in the *Gossip Pop* work, where all the “music videos” are lip-synced. The background is comprised of a series of filmic images, mostly from a train trip. Towards the end of the video Rist appears in glasses and a black dress, Jackie O-like and reminiscent of the Warhol Factory era, to finish the song. The melancholy nostalgia is underscored by the humour and charm of Rist’s delivery.

Both works connect with pop music in so much as Rist has appropriated actual pop or folk songs, both by male artists that deal with gender positioning. The first by implying a relationship between the “girl” and Lennon’s “warm gun” subject and the second, by referencing a relationship from a male subject position of the folk singer. Both clearly comment on the female social role and the complexities of gendered relationships enacting personal revelations or responses to the power dynamics inferred. The personae presented in both works are completely divergent. In *I’m Not the Girl Who Misses Much* Rist signifies a generic, almost unrecognizable sexualised gender object—a hyper-real, overblown hysterical cliché of the feminine. In contrast, in *You Called Me Jacky*, her persona is more assured—detached, relaxed and in

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<sup>73</sup> Pipilotti Rist, “Pipilotti Rist: You Called Me Jacky (Music Kevin Coyne),” YouTube, accessed November 13, 2012, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AGoAPGSdxhM>

<sup>74</sup> Molon, “Europe Endless,” in Molon, *Sympathy*, 140.



control, looking straight into the camera, and delivering her pop song in a convincingly commercial manner that is somewhat decentred by her iffy lip-syncing efforts and occasional “breaks,” where she stops, laughs and then starts again. “It’s not serious,” she seems to be saying, “only a pose. Anyone can do this.”

These complex temporary personae crucially reveal the chimera-like effect of the artist who performs in their work and the extended mediated relationships between music video pop star and audience. They reveal also the inherent and always intrinsic relationships between artist and audience and art object and audience. This is a historical methodology, an established convention of Performance Art, Action Art and Video Art, wherein the person of the artist becomes fused to the artwork and comes to resemble a celebrity, or star since familiarity with the artwork (and artist) implies a familiarity with the living person for the art public. By utilising this convention as a point of departure, contemporary works like Rist’s and *Gossip Pop* interrogate and exploit the limits and operations of celebrity. *Gossip Pop* highlights this imperative by further utilising the actual tropes of celebrity gossip as its subject rather than appropriating “ready-made” pop songs. Furthermore, by creating its own original songs, *Gossip Pop* creates a chimera-like effect for the medium of the pop song itself.

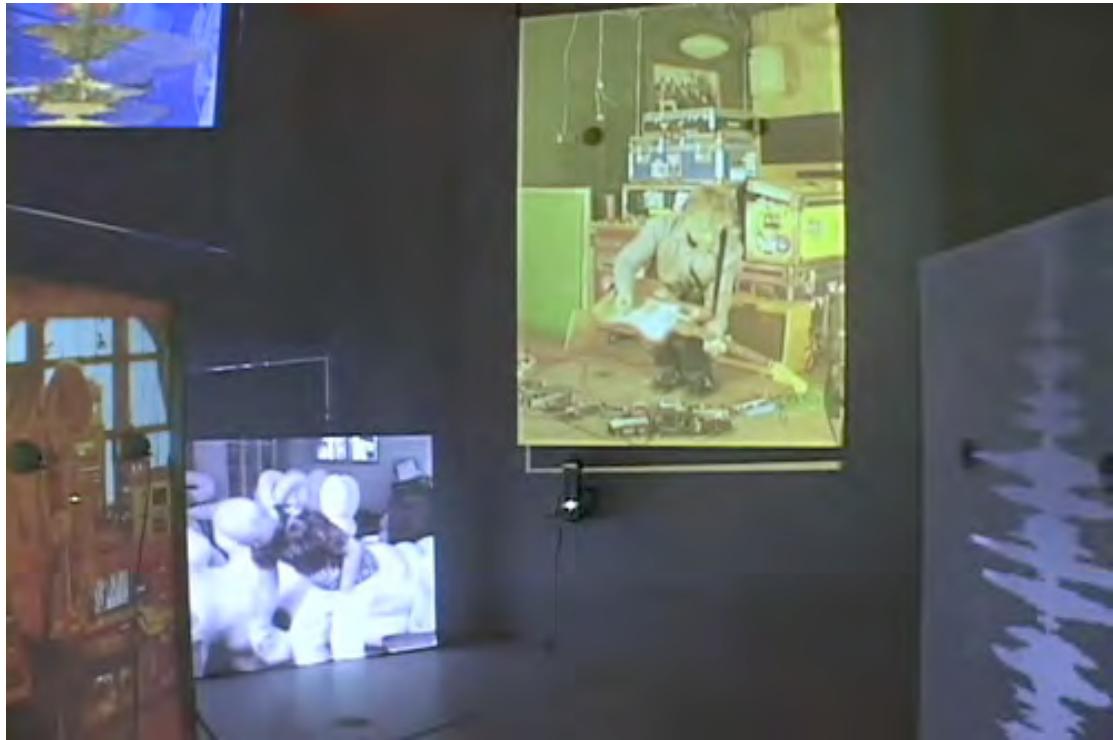


Figure 16 Tony Oursler, *Sound Digressions in Seven Colors*, 2006.

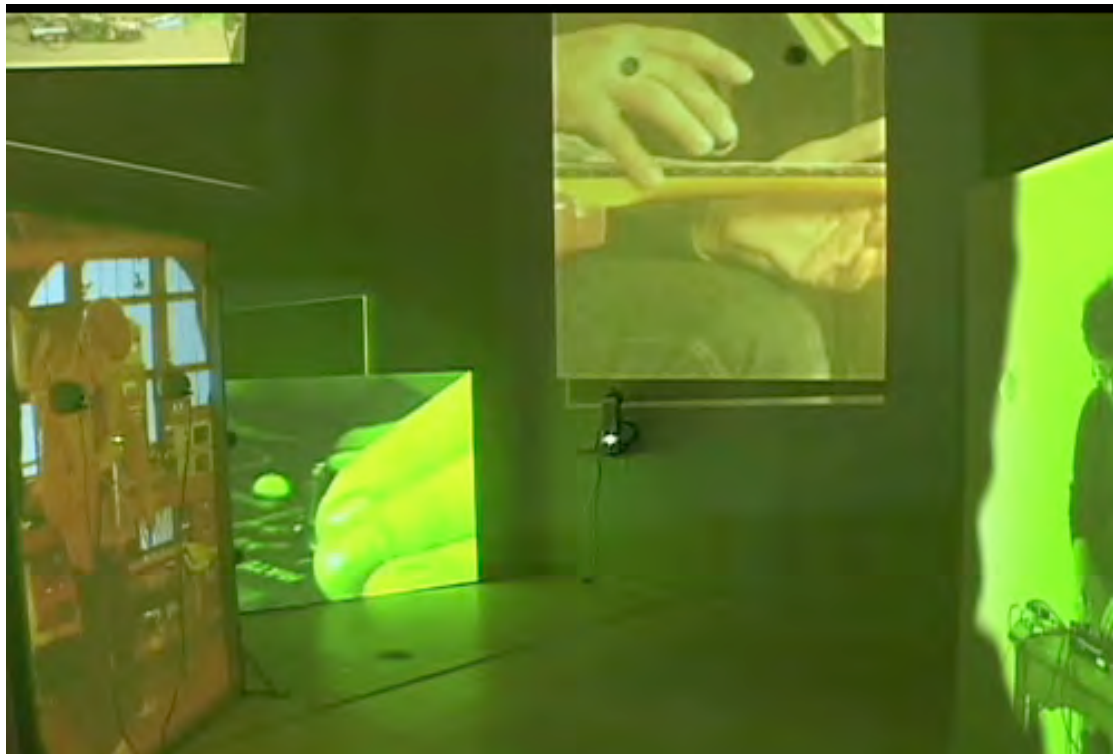


Figure 17 Tony Oursler, *Sound Digressions in Seven Colors*, 2006.

In the exhibition *Sympathy for the Devil*, Tony Oursler presents the work *Sound Digressions in Seven Colors*, 2006 (see Figures 17 and 18). For this work the artist invited seven experimental musicians (Tony Conrad, Ikue Mori, Zeena Parkins,

James Thirwell and Steven Vitiello and Kim Gordon and Rinaldo from Sonic Youth) to perform an improvised work separately for video with the knowledge that the sound would be combined with that of the other musicians but without knowing what each would do, only that they would be mixed with six other players. Each performance and sound work is then projected onto seven large screens, made from plexiglass and aluminium and arranged in a vertical configuration, with some on the ground and some suspended in the space. The videos are treated with simple editing tools, such as primary colour filters, and a wavering transition effect based on a vertical acoustic waveform, and the performances have been further cut so they may appear on several screens simultaneously. The speakers for each of the seven separate audio components are attached to the projection screen, so for the viewer, a spatial acoustic effect would be pronounced as they move through the space.<sup>75</sup>

Tony Oursler has deep connections to music and art enquiry. He worked with Dan Graham on his seminal work *Rock My Religion*, 1980,<sup>76</sup> produced a video for Sonic Youth and formed a band at art school in the '70s and '80s with Mike Kelley called the Poetics. Interestingly, Oursler's website describes this artwork as an "exquisite corpse,"<sup>77</sup> thereby referring to the Surrealist lineage. Certainly, a bricolage effect is achieved, incorporating the element of chance into the randomness of the combinations of sounds and the visuals of the installation. However, the amount of editing of the original performances that can be clearly observed has shaped the

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<sup>75</sup> See: Tony Oursler, "Exhibitions/Installations: Sound Digressions in Seven Colors," accessed November 14, 2012, [http://www.tonyoursler.com/individual\\_work\\_slideshow.php?allTextFlg=true&navItem=work&startDateStr=Feb.%2025,%202006&subSection=Installations&title=Sound%20Digressions%20in%20Seven%20Colors&workId=28#!prettyPhoto\[mixed\]/0/](http://www.tonyoursler.com/individual_work_slideshow.php?allTextFlg=true&navItem=work&startDateStr=Feb.%2025,%202006&subSection=Installations&title=Sound%20Digressions%20in%20Seven%20Colors&workId=28#!prettyPhoto[mixed]/0/)

<sup>76</sup> This work relates punk subcultures to religious sects such as the Shakers. See Dominic Molon, "Experimental Jet Set: The New York Scene," Molon, *Sympathy*, 16.

<sup>77</sup> See: Tony Oursler, "Exhibitions/Installations," Ibid.

experience considerably. The result is a surprisingly gentle atmosphere—a more formal and highly controlled version of the random cacophonous effects of the *Exploding Plastic Inevitable*.

The formal characteristic of this artwork is announced by the title, a clear link to the formal compositional concerns of abstract painting and, thus, to the avant-garde that is cast by art's historical narratives as so despising of pop. Within the institutional museum context this could be considered as emphasising a contemporary versus modern dichotomy or even as an acknowledgement of the end of the battle. However, to me, it signifies the recognition of a pre-existing homogeneity and organising “structure” wherein formal concerns that quantify and allow analysis of works of art are equally applicable to all works of art regardless of genre. It is like a visual art version of what in music would be the score, or written notation. This logic inheres to *all* works of art, including the *Gossip Pop* work, the compositions of which, as portrayed via the screen configuration and installations, are considered and deliberate compositions informed by my training in painting, and can, and should, always be considered as operating structurally as constructed “images.”

The kinds of musicians Oursler has chosen are non-commercial or avant-garde rather than commercial or pop with the result that the individual soundscapes produced are abstract. They are thus, situated to enable the subsequent reconfiguration an overall sense of coherency and unity. More coherency than if he had, for example, used the linear forms of musical narrative and performance common to commercial pop mediums. The video images of the performers, “authentic” avant-garde musicians, are not the usual highly-mediated and posed images one would expect of pop personas and look “everyday” in comparison to their commodified counterparts,

but they are, nevertheless, given the celebrity scopophilic treatment, coloured, made large-scale, iconic and poster-like.

Taken as a whole, this work constructs a virtual production experiment that clearly resonates with the manufactured pop band—a connection similarly explicit in the *Gossip Pop* project—exploiting a lineage implied throughout pop music from *The Sex Pistols* to *The Spice Girls*, and from there to reality TV pop talent quests like *The X-Factor*. Oursler selects his ideal band members and then creates the manufactured circumstance whereby they can perform together, as an autonomous artwork, without any of the complications of collaboration and structure inherent in this process in everyday life. Thus, Oursler's production takes on notions of Benjamin's "author as producer" role,<sup>78</sup> references Warhol's (perceived) Svengali and, at the same time, situates itself in "avant-garde" contrast to the manufactured bands of commercial pop. Of course, in the *Gossip Pop* works I am both my own Svengali and a victim of an abstract construct, an impossible Svengali whose authority is behind the unauthorised dominance of pop culture. This aspect of my work, the hidden authority behind the construct, reveals a sinister side for Benjamin's:

exemplary character of production ... which is able first to induce other producers to produce, and second to put an improved apparatus at their disposal. And this apparatus is better the more consumers it is able to turn into producers, that is, readers or spectators into collaborators.

*Gossip Pop* neither critiques nor affirms this emancipatory or homogenising principle. It simply demonstrates its operation, and presents the result as a work of art. Von Hantelmann outlines an operating principle that can be applied to all the works

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<sup>78</sup> Walter Benjamin, "The Author as Producer," *Reflections*, Peter Demetz, ed. (New York: Schocken Books, 1986), 78

discussed by Kelly, *Art & Language* and *The Red Krayola*, Ourseler, Rist and Arcangel. They imply “wittingly or unwittingly, reflected or unreflected ... excluding and including effects. Further, every inclusion also implies an exclusion, and vice-versa.” They need to be made sense of in light of a “mode of effect” rather than a “mode of reference.” Therefore, they cannot be considered as merely critique or affirmation. What is at the forefront in accordance with this model is:

a transgression from a mode of “saying,” of the sign and its representational function, to a mode of “doing,” to a performative, reality-producing effectiveness that is accompanied by a shift in the way meaning is produced in art.<sup>79</sup>

## Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed some speculative origins of a connection between gossip and pop music, via the metaphor of “rough music.” I have further explored the connection between Warhol’s pop lifestyle or star system inclusive of his multimedia outputs with *The Velvet Underground*, and the wider field of pop music. The ramifications of the incorporation process outlined by Cagle that disseminated the Warhol influence through the commercial popular performances of glitter rock to a broad public audience have been investigated in light of their potential implications for art practices like *Gossip Pop*. I have analysed contemporary artworks exhibited in two major international exhibitions that situate my creative project within an established pop/rock ethos, and explicate the rationale and function of artworks,

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<sup>79</sup> von Hantelmann, *How to Do*, 186.

including *Gossip Pop*, that operate within this entropic, contingent, multifaceted, performative and discursive realm.

## Conclusion

*There is what is announced when I write this for example, even if it is false. Very simply, when I write it and what is produced is that ecstasy that consists in thinking, in order to love it, the impossible. Even if what I am writing is false, well, that fact that I write it, I sing it according to such and such a voice, that I think I am desiring what I cannot know, the impossible, this is what comes to bear witness, right here, if you like, that through falsehood there must be announced what is inscribed as “false” against the “true”...*

—Jacques Derrida, *Voice II*

Derrida’s words encapsulate the anxiety and excitement I feel as an artist and author at this final juncture because what here can be described as true or false? In many ways pop can be wholly encapsulated by its effect. Stick a needle in a balloon, and people will jump. Even though they may not “like” it, they will relish the surprise. This “pop” effect, rather than suggesting a naïve desire to shock or confront, foregrounds an imperative function of art: that the work of art encapsulates a transformative effect and an action, an action that is initiated by the artist and experienced by the viewer. This communicative exchange is the underlying assumption exemplifying the “performative” emphasis of this exegesis.

In order to investigate the performative role of pop in contemporary art practice in light of my creative project *Gossip Pop*, I established the notion of the performative as a *modus operandi* for the action of works of art that incorporate the person of the artist. For the purpose of this discussion, the entropic field of pop was divided into the three relevant and overlapping categories of culture (gossip and celebrity), art and music.

In this discursive investigation I sought to tease out from pop, and particularly from the work of Andy Warhol, those aspects pertaining to the construction of “the



life” or “the self” that most productively help to situate *Gossip Pop* in the context of contemporary art practice. While ranging quite widely, this approach has necessarily excluded some important aspects of my work, for example in respect to fandom, taste and humour, topics that are relevant but exceeded the scope of this short exegesis.

The etymology that defines for pop and gossip the generative roles of father and godparent, respectively, suggests a familial relationship or symbolic genealogy to the processes of reification or “thingification.” As I have demonstrated, deeply embedded within the processes of reification are also aspects of “care” and recognition. Emotional recognition, in Honneth’s revisory account, is learned by the child mimicking the human object of affection, the “carer” or, in my analogy, “pop.” Along with playfully imitative acts of emotional recognition, *Gossip Pop* also inherits the rhizomatic unruliness and “rough music” of gossip and pop. The mimicking of personae *Gossip Pop* enacts suggests performative possibilities for life, the artist and the work of art that include shedding light on the constructs of truth. As Adorno states in *Minima Moralia*:

[T]he untruth lurks in the substrate [sic] of genuineness itself, the individual. If the law of the course of the world is concealed in the [principle of individuation]... then the intuition of the final and absolute substantiality of the ego becomes the victim of an appearance, which protects the existing social order, while its essence is already decaying. To equate genuineness with truth is not tenable.”<sup>1</sup>

Artists as individuals are autonomous agents who create autonomous objects. They reify or “thingify.” Hence they are well situated to play with roles of pop within

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<sup>1</sup> Theodor Adorno, “Gold Test,” *Minima Moralia*, Aphorism 99.

the hypothetical and material construction and conventions of the exhibition and gallery. They do so in a manner that creates situational or relational models (or models of effect or indeed, affect,) that reveal the thingification or fundamental constructedness of the self and propose further opportunities for “play” and (role-play) with and within these constructions.

Whilst pop as a field of knowledge is authorless, and unauthorised, the optimised individual, the celebrity role (role-model) is played out in a mediated sphere that demonstrates the constructedness of life (and of work) and, hence, for *Gossip Pop* and contemporary art, suggests practical methodologies and commensurate production potential. Celebrities adopt and act out a range of roles and are slotted into the revelations, fabrications and recycled scripts of tabloid vernacular. Gossip may well be commercially compromised and regulatory, but are simultaneously unruly and disobedient—a noisy, intrusive and glaring reflection of life through the commodity lens of late capitalism. This paradox is exploited in the *Gossip Pop* project.

Furthermore, *Gossip Pop* is reflecting back these characteristics and paradoxes in a manner that places an important emphasis on undecidability, an undecidability that is inherent within the gossip and pop knowledge discourse and in art practice. As Adorno suggests, by “ feed[ing] on the mimetic legacy [it] take[s] the stigma of the non-genuine on itself.”<sup>2</sup> Hence, it reveals the undecidability or subjectivity inherent in all knowledge production and reception, thereby proposing (authorised) knowledge and theory as inherently speculative. *Gossip Pop* further interrupts the inherent time-base of pop and gossip, taking and freezing a “moment” from its endless cyclic flow. This transformative act demonstrates how art practice can archive, make manifest and

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

generate new meanings for the temporal epistemological constructions of pop role-playing: the social and historical constructs to which they inhere.

I have also demonstrated via an analogy with rough music, the “turnabout” effect of contemporary art practice and pop, exploited in the *Gossip Pop* work, which can potentially replenish and reinvigorate ways of knowing or ways of being, by the negation, reversing or destabilising of ideology and/or hegemony. In this exegesis I have demonstrated the embeddedness of the role of pop in contemporary art practice by utilising and juxtaposing samplings of cross-sections of theoretical, practical and speculative works from different disciplines, in a manner that expresses some of the unorthodox tendencies of my creative thinking.

The intertextuality of its extensive “pop” culture borrowings, the genealogical inheritances, the playfulness, the focus on open speculation—all these elements leave *Gossip Pop* especially open to interpretations about both triviality and import, depending on how these are read by the viewer within the construct of the exhibition format and art gallery. Of course, answers to some of the questions *Gossip Pop* raises are insinuated by the complex historical art lineages this context implies. But these questions also clearly reiterate and productively test some of the central pop art concerns such as Danto’s formulation in regard to Warhol’s *Brillo Boxes*: “why can’t anything have a counterpart that is a work of art, so that ultimately anything can be a work of art?”<sup>3</sup>

At the same time *Gossip Pop* simultaneously incorporates what Duchamp calls “the incapacity of the artist to express his intention in full... the personal ‘art co-efficient’ which is like the arithmetical relation between the unexpressed-but-intended

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<sup>3</sup> Danto, *Andy Warhol*, 23.

and the unintentionally expressed.”<sup>4</sup> The subjectivities implied by the speculative production and reception of art, as stated in the Introduction, cannot be more than descriptive provocations.

To conclude—I’m ready to pop!—pop is used in my work because I feel pop uses me.<sup>5</sup> In seeking to understand pop and the self/s that are constructed by it I produced the *Gossip Pop* project. The duplicitous and multivalent role of “pop” (subject, medium, music, art, celebrity, gossip, object, process, audience, genres and more) that *Gossip Pop* investigates, above all else presents the somewhat utopic and impossible desire for creative work, the art object and the artist’s domain to be both boundless and inclusive.

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<sup>4</sup> Marcel Duchamp, “The Creative Act,” in Robert Lebel, *Marcel Duchamp* (New York:Grove Press, 1959), 77—78.

<sup>5</sup> “Like” could be interchanged with “use” here.

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## **Appendix A**

Please see attached catalogue and thumbdrive for documentation of the *Gossip Pop* project including video, sound, and images.