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High Culture in Low Places: Television and Modern Art, 1950-1970¹

In 1954, on the occasion of its twenty-fifth anniversary, the *Museum of Modern Art* (MOMA) presented an episode of the New York television program, *Dimension*.² Hosted by museum director Rene d'Harnoncourt, this public affairs program served as a promotional vehicle for MOMA's collection of modern art. In the opening sequence, d'Harnoncourt presents a Leger painting and is joined by a professor from *New York University's* art history department.³ While the two men had a distinguished command of the modernist canon, they seemed less certain about how to convey their knowledge over the new medium of live TV. About five minutes into the program, when the professor decides to show Stuart Davis' painting *The Flying Carpet*, he suddenly realizes the canvas is not in the room. Looking embarrassed, he asks the cameraman to move to another gallery space where the painting hangs. Unfortunately for the professor, however, more embarrassment is in store because when the camera moves to the next gallery, it reveals a rather disheveled looking TV floor manager hanging out in front of the painting, smoking a cigarette, so close to the canvas in fact that it appears he is going to burn a hole in it. When the floor manager realizes he is on live TV, he runs out of the frame. The befuddled professor then tries to make the best out of a bad situation and calls the technician back, asking him whether he likes the painting. The technician replies, »Uh, Yeah, I like it, it's big«, to which the Professor remarks, »You can tell us what you really think. Because if you don't like it, you won't be the first person who didn't respond favorably to modern art.«⁴

Today, at a time when Congress turns its back on public TV, it seems especially useful to consider the historical dialogues that have taken place regarding art and education on our national broadcast system. Here, I want to explore these issues by considering the first two decades of television broadcasting, the time when television reached its mature form as a commercial and national medium with one venue – *Public Broadcast Service* (PBS) – serving as its forum for the arts.⁵

Insofar as recent television scholarship has been largely defined as the study of popular culture, critics have tended to stay away from topics that engage the problem of art. Even while there has been important work on issues of taste and »quality« television, there is very little work on television's artistic practices and discour-

ses about art.⁶ Given that television is integral to the foundations of the postmodern blurring of »high« and »low« culture, it is even more curious that recent art historical work and museum exhibits on the fate of modernism and the avant-garde after World War II have been relatively silent on the role that television played in collapsing this great divide. While debates about the postwar status of a distinctly American modern art and its relation to popular culture have circulated within art historical circles, art historians have primarily investigated the art world as the privileged term, giving little perspective on how popular media – especially television – served as a vehicle for the wide scale dissemination of ideas about modern art and its relation to national identity after World War II. Similarly, the recent high and low exhibits at museums such as MOMA and the Whitney consider only how artists used popular culture as a »subject« in their painting; yet there is virtually no understanding of how television used art as a subject.

As Pierre Bourdieu has demonstrated, the value art in a culture is not neutral, but rather a product of the way people in a social formation make distinctions between and among themselves based on notions of »taste.«⁷ These taste distinctions generally are determined by social class and economic privilege, but also by access to »cultural capital« gained through such arenas as education. Constructed through such social differences, art – or what counts as authentic art vs. what counts as kitsch – is never universal across time and space; rather it is deeply historical and subject to change as other kinds of social identities and formations of everyday life shift among populations. Television's various representations of art and its own artistic practices have accordingly changed with larger social and cultural reformations. Here I want to consider how television positioned itself in relation to the meanings of the visual arts – primarily painting – in the first two decades after World War II, during the height of the Cold War.

Television's discourses on art were rooted in the history of European colonialism (especially the art world's ties to Paris), and the perception both here and abroad that the U.S. – while an economic and political superpower after the war – was still a *cultural* colony of Europe. It was the urge to distinguish a new (and typically called, »modern«) American art from European modernism that haunted the screens of American living rooms during the 1950s and 1960s. In the process, television contributed to a redefinition of the American vernacular that was ultimately based on the idea that American modern art was commercial art, with no apologies and no excuses. It is here, in the redefinition of the American vernacular, where the connections to postmodernism seem most clear, especially as they pervade the Pop art scene in the 1960s. Also in the process, there was a curious inversion of the ideological relationships between mass culture and modernism, especially as those terms have historically been associated with feminine consumers and masculine producers respectively. Indeed, as I mean to show, the history of art on television is also a history of cultural politics imbedded in battles over taste that were in turn ultimately based on larger social struggles.

To understand television's role in the redefinition of art in postwar America, it seems important to question, as Andreas Huyssen has, the »great divide« thesis that pits a postwar and increasingly postmodern consumer culture against a prewar, supposedly more political, modernism.⁸ Moreover, it seems crucial to reject at the outset the facile labeling of television as postmodern, a label that is all too often used as if it were an MTV promotional slogan (which it is), and which is thus utterly tautological because it is so characteristically postmodern in and of itself to have a critical term that doubles for an advertising jingle. While there is something different in the air (and on the airwaves) that might amount to a cultural sensibility called postmodernism it is important to explore the ways in which television is, a priori, rooted in the logic of modernism and, in particular, to the marriage between the visual arts and industrial technology so crucial to the modern world of twentieth-century western culture. In the postwar period, television responded to and expanded the definition of modern art – both in the sense of the modern »art for art's sake« movements and in the more avant-garde notion of modern art as a revolutionary tool (or the »art for life's sake« position). To disclose television's role in this process, it seems necessary to understand something of the cultural moment that preceded it, particularly that moment – the 1920s and 1930s – when modern art (in Europe) and commercial art (in the States) shared their first encounters.

Cultural historians have detailed some of the links between American consumer culture and the influx of European modern art and design.⁹ As such research makes clear, the advertising and fashion industries were among the first cultural sites where the public – especially bourgeois women targeted by corporations – encountered modern art.

A fascinating memoir of 1939, written by advertising executive Estelle Hamburger and entitled *It's a Woman's Business*, suggests women were not only the target consumers of this early merger between high and low, but also the producers of it.¹⁰ I want to dwell for a while on this memoir, not only because it suggests the central importance of women in the imagination of the American »modern« – a point to which I shall often return in this essay – but also because it exemplifies in a most explicit way the nationalist impulse that runs through the discourses found on television three decades later.

In this memoir, Hamburger recalls how, during the 1920s, she made her way from a copy girl at Macy's to the head of the advertising department in the more upscale and uptown Bonwit Teller. Once there, Hamburger tried to change Bonwit's image from its eighteenth-century French decorative style and its promise of »classic« fashions to one that spoke the language of the here and now. In the process of this transition, Hamburger found herself at the intersection of consumer culture and modern art.

In her chapter, »What is Modern?« she discusses her 1925 trip to the Paris Ex-

position of Decorative Arts that she said »became the cradle of modern design.« She writes:

»If America did not take ›Modern‹ to France in 1925, Americans brought it home. Only a few understood the objectives in the minds of artists who gave it birth. To American designers of furniture, rugs, fabrics, lamps, china, to creators of American advertising, Modern became a new commercial god.«¹¹

While Hamburger emphasized America's debt to European modern art, it was clear that the American design industry's interpretation of »modern« was also based on its global scavenging of what the business and art world alike deemed »savage« or »ancient« cultures. Hamburger spoke at length of her use of savage and ancient art for modern textile design. She also detailed her debt to the *Brooklyn Museum of Art*, which she ransacked for nativist and primitivist inspirations. Explaining one such campaign she wrote, »In the window with the Bonwit Teller dresses, hats and jewelry inspired by the African Congo were the treasures from the Brooklyn Museum authoritatively documented with explanatory cards.« She goes on to note that when the director of the Brooklyn Museum

»saw this marriage of Congo art with current fashion his pleasure was unbounded. It had been his life's labor to build a museum...[he] had the entire exhibit transferred to the Brooklyn Museum, to illustrate, in connection with his permanent display of the Belgian Congo, how the resources of a museum might be employed to inspire the creative impulses of the commercial world.«¹²

Clearly, the art world of the 1920s had just as much to gain from its relationship with consumerism as did the consumer culture from its links to the art scene (and both, obviously, benefited from their use of what they deemed »savage« cultures as sources for modern design). At a time when museums were already being criticized as »mausoleums of the dead« – that is, spaces that ripped art from its everyday context – and when movements like DADA were promoting »living art«, museum directors could, in one simple stroke, answer to the demands of the art world and also shamelessly pander to the (mostly female) bourgeois public through cross-promotional ties with the world of fashion.

Hamburger's memoir demonstrates that the union of art and industry – high and low – was crucial to the culture of the early twentieth century. Her text maps out a series of relationships between and among art and industry, nationalism and internationalism, modern and primitive, consumer and museum culture, and intellectualism and populism. In addition, given Hamburger's status as a female ad-man, her memoir also suggests a struggle between women and men for control over art, culture, and commerce. These relationships would re-emerge on television – the new shop window on the world – at a time when the meaning of modern art and consumer culture were being renegotiated in important ways.

In the postwar period, the relationship between art and industry were embroiled in a new set of circumstances that revolved around America's pursuit to define itself as a cultural center for the world as it emerged as a global superpower. During the

war »companies made use of art and advertising as a way of keeping their trademarks alive before the public«, a merger that contributed to a popular embrace of art after the war.¹³ This growing public interest in art was spurred in the early 1940s by increased discussion of the arts in popular media, by such government sponsored campaigns as »Buy American Art Week« (aimed to promote the market for US paintings) and by the sale (through credit financing) of famous paintings at Macy's and Gimbles, two of New York's largest middle-class department stores. During the war, art appreciation was positioned as a form of patriotism linked to the defense of American civilization against Nazi barbarism. MOMA and the *Metropolitan Museum of Art* both gained respect by linking their institutions to the war effort. In this context, museum patronage increased significantly. The number of art galleries in New York grew from 40 at the beginning of the war to 150 by 1946, and both public and private gallery sales skyrocketed during the war.¹⁴ These trends apparently continued after the war. In 1962, the *Stanford Research Institute* estimated that »120 million people attend art-oriented events«; that tourism at MOMA was »only outnumbered by the Empire State Building«; and that »attendance at art galleries and museums almost doubled during the 1950s«.¹⁵ According to the Stanford report, the new »cultured American« was in part the result of technology that made possible »first class reproductions« at a »cost many can afford«.¹⁶ To be sure, people in the art world manipulated the new medium of television to this end, appealing to middle-class publics out in the mass-produced suburbs with »free« shows of modern painting.¹⁷

As my opening example suggests, MOMA – a museum renowned for introducing European modernism to the public – was heavily invested in the subject of television. In 1939, the year MOMA opened its West 53rd street building (a starkly modern structure which Alan Wallach calls a »utopian« engagement with the technical future¹⁸), MOMA officials also began to consider television as a technological marvel that might extend the Museum's reach past its newly-built doors. Consequently, in this same year, MOMA became the first museum in the United States to appear on television.¹⁹ In the early 1950s, aided by a three-year grant from the Rockefeller Brothers fund, MOMA established its »TV Project« in order to experiment with in-house commercial television production and to consider how TV might become an art medium in itself. By 1955, TV Project director Sidney Peterson characterized the audience for art programs as decidedly suburban and overwhelmingly female. Borrowing sociologist David Riesman's famous characterization of sub-urbia as the »lonely crowd«, Peterson called the audience for TV art programs »the lonelier crowd«, and on that basis wrote a detailed report which considered the best ways to address suburban housewives.²⁰ Other museums around the country similarly embraced the new medium. In 1954, the *Museum of Fine Art*, Boston wired its building to televise programs (on station WGBH) from all exhibition floors. For their part, the networks encouraged these ties. The NBC Records are full of correspondences from museums, artists, and other groups in the visual

arts. Meanwhile, CBS Chairman William Paley sat on the Board of MOMA and was instrumental in numerous links between that museum and his network. In short, the worlds of museum art and television collided in mutual relations of support, each publicizing and legitimizing the other. As a curator for the *San Francisco Museum of Modern Art* claimed in 1952, »Television programs presented during an eight month period reached approximately 1,500,000 people, or ten times the annual attendance at the Museum.«²¹

Indeed, as the older, urban (and small town) conception of public culture now stretched across the freeway-linked boundaries of city and suburb, as shopping practices moved consumers (and would be museum patrons) from urban »districts« to corporately engineered malls, the museum and the art world in general became increasingly dependent on the new electrical space of television for public relations and the maintenance of its middle-class patrons. It is with regard to all of these issues that television engaged a particular set of discourses on modern art, one grounded in prewar mergers of culture and commerce, but now articulated in terms of the historical moment at hand.

Communists, Ugly Americans, and the Modern Vernacular

The nationalist urge to create a uniquely American form of modern art – both different from European modernism and from the art of the American past – resulted in a series of disputes regarding questions of style and taste that ultimately had to do with cultural imperialism. As Serge Guilbaut has discussed in great detail, debates about the relationship between European modernism (especially its roots in Paris) and a uniquely American form of modern art engaged intellectuals during the Depression, and increasingly during and after World War II »every section of the political world in the United States agreed that art would have an important role to play in the new America«.²²

For the U.S. government, the construction of this art scene had an important role to play both economically and culturally. Since the establishment of the *Department of Cultural Affairs* in the late 1930s, the U.S. government had officially recognized the importance of culture in securing international good will. Despite many humanist intentions, the major strategic focus of these cultural exchanges was the government's desire to counteract the prevailing image of Americans as militaristic, vulgar brutes (or what one book later called »the ugly American«), an image that dominated the European and Latin American imaginations.²³ A major mission of the *Department of Cultural Affairs* – and later, during World War II, the *Office of War Information* – was to counteract this notion of the ugly American and spread a more genteel, peace-loving image of Americans abroad.

After the war, these forays into cultural imperialism were enacted under the Marshall Plan as American media industries and government offices applied poli-

cies of »containment« and searched for new markets for the »Free World« around the globe. Guilbaut shows that the attempts to construct an American art scene, distinct from Paris and situated instead in New York, coincided ideologically with the new »liberalism« that saw Communism as a threat and sought to contain it globally. Modern art and the American avant-garde were nourished by a climate of thought that divorced art from the politics of the thirties and favored the freedom of individual expression that Abstract Expressionism, with its sense of eccentric psychology, especially provided. Eva Crockcroft has detailed the mutually supportive relations between MOMA, MOMA board member Nelson Rockefeller, and the CIA, which together attempted to spread Abstract Expressionism abroad (often unbeknownst to more conservative anti-modernists in Washington).²⁴ At the same time, however, the popular press and the more conservative government officials often scorned modern artists such as Jackson Pollack for their failure to represent subjects that might be commonly understood, and numerous people suspected that such art was itself »unAmerican«.

In both the domestic and global context, these contradictions resulted in a series of struggles over what exactly was meant by the terms American »culture« and American »art«. While various attempts were made to export America's fine arts – painting, opera, dance, etc. – they were often fraught with problems. In 1946, when the State Department put together an international exhibit called »Advancing American Art«, the contemporary paintings chosen for exhibition became the site of public and Congressional controversy as Senator George Dondero of Michigan attacked the work of painters who had once been connected to the Communist party.²⁵ More generally, some critics objected to the »hams and eggs« art chosen for the exhibit on the grounds that the paintings were subversive of American values. At its paranoid extreme, rumors circulated that American abstract artists were working as foreign agents by inserting military maps into their paintings. Then too, in previous decades American art was not always received well on foreign soil, especially in Paris, the capital of modernism. The European art public often saw American »high« art (both performing art and plastic arts) as a cheap imitation of the real thing. (The exception to the rule was avant-garde art, especially Abstract Expressionism and Popism, which both received critical acclaim among cultural elites abroad.) Moreover, high art imports had less value than did U.S. commercial culture for winning the hearts of the more general world population. Ironically, then, despite their status as vulgar and despite the fact that Europeans sometimes deemed them as such, American popular arts often appealed to European audiences (as well as critics) and were thus seen as more viable vehicles than American fine art for the solicitation of international good will.²⁶ The distinctions between high and low were thus enmeshed in Cold War sentiments during the period of postwar decolonialization as Americans searched for a way to rid themselves of their status as a cultural colony of Europe.

In this matrix, television played a key role in distinguishing American from Eu-

ropean modern art.²⁷ As one TV critic writing for the magazine *Saturday Review* asked, »How many of us would like to know how American is American Art? Simple questions like these are effective grist for television ...«²⁸ This issue of national identity was crucial as television sought ways to negotiate the »high« (and typically assumed, communist) world of European modernism with the more all-American popular arts in the States. In the 1950s, when the television medium grew to become the country's central communications medium, these concerns were continually posed on 1950s »prestige« programs including TV specials and such series as *Camera 3*, *Omnibus*, *Wisdom*, *See it Now* and *Person to Person*.

In a 1959 episode of *Person to Person*,²⁹ for example, newsman Edward R.³⁰ Murrow interviews the premier poster boy of World War II, Norman Rockwell, showing his perfect American family and little dog Lolita at home. Addressing Mrs. Rockwell, Murrow says, »You must have quite a decorating problem. Do you keep many of Norman's original paintings on your wall?« Painting thus becomes a domesticated and familial form, much in line with the Office of War Information's use of Rockwell during World War II to symbolize Roosevelt's »Four Freedoms«, which all revolved around the right to private life apart from government intervention. Not surprisingly, then, when Murrow tours Rockwell's studio (also in his home), he points to two of the paintings most notable for this logic – *Freedom of Speech* and *Freedom of Worship*. Making the patriotic message even clearer is the fact that Murrow, in a previous segment of the same episode, interviews Fidel Castro. Although Castro presents himself as a family man (he is with his son and dog, and he even shows Murrow his baby pictures), the unkempt beard, the fact that he appears to be wearing pajamas, his missing wife, and the fact that he is in a hotel room rather than his home, marks him as decidedly outside the American iconography of family life that Rockwell made famous during the war. Thus, the juxtaposition of Rockwell with the Cuban communist leader speaks, not too implicitly, to the debates about American art and communism that circulated at the time.³¹

Still, Rockwell's association with the patriotic art of the wartime past – as well as his own anti-modern stance – made him less than a viable leader in the quest for the American modern. Television thus explored other possibilities, and in the process modern art was often ambivalently presented. On the one hand, as with the Rockwell-Castro program, modern art was often disassociated from its communist and elitist connotations. But on television, modern art was also often distanced from Depression Era social realism, regionalism, and *Works Progress Administration* (WPA)³² federally funded art, as well as the Rockwellesque folksy imagery of the wartime past. Modern art, then, meant progress, but of a distinctly American and popular sort.

A 1955 episode of *See It Now* even more explicitly illustrates this point. Significantly entitled »Two American Originals«, the program was divided into two segments, one which featured artist Grandma Moses; the other jazz great Louis Armstrong. Grandma Moses, who had come to national prominence in the early 1940s,

was famous for her so called »primitive« art that rendered, in a craft tradition, realistic subjects such as houses, pets, and other domestic scenes.³³ For some, she represented the quintessential American vernacular, the term »primitive« assuming a positive connotation here as the art world placed »high« value not only on Moses but other untraditional artists and art forms (for example, children's art, art therapy, and the art of psychotics).

Murrow's interview took place in her humble home studio where her practical arts and crafts aesthetic was most notable through the folksy decor. Murrow asks Grandma, »Have you decided what picture you're going to paint next Grandma Moses?« Grandma replies, »I'm going to try to get into something different...well more, more modern. I've been inclined to paint old scenes, I suppose since I'm old.« To which Murrow retorts, »Or old enough to go modern.«

This curious exchange between the grandmother of American art and television's premier newsmen suggests the ambivalent attitudes toward the old and the new, tradition and modernization, that surrounded the definition of the American vernacular for the postwar world. The figure of Grandma Moses offers a resolution for this ambivalence as she is literally rendered a »modern primitive«. As such, she negotiates the contradictory values of the more traditional American representational art (by which I mean the rendering of recognizable subject matter) and the newer forms of abstraction that often worked to negate subject matter (as, for example, with Jackson Pollack's »drippings« or with Larry Rivers's *Washington Crossing the Delaware* that abstracted portions of this historical scene).

Moreover, as opposed to what President Truman called the »lazy, nutty moderns«, Grandma Moses was distinctly American, a point which was »officially« recognized during the period. Truman said that comparing Moses to the moderns was like »comparing Christ with Lenin«, and President Eisenhower's Cabinet presented him with a specially commissioned Grandma Moses depicting the Eisenhower family.³⁴ In the *See It Now* episode, her nationalism is underscored when Murrow asks her, »Do you ever look at the paintings of a foreign artist?« and she replies, »Some. I never have seen so much. You know I've never been away from home much. Most that I've seen is in pictures.« The exchange clarifies that Grandma Moses is truly an American original, untouched by foreign influence. The meaning of modern is thus construed simply as something contemporary, but it remains quintessentially American.

However, as *See It Now* makes clear, being »American« meant nothing if American did not translate as such abroad. In other words, American art for the modern world was art recognized as such in Europe. One of the reasons Grandma Moses was famous enough to be on *See It Now* in the first place was because she was one of the few American painters that Europeans embraced after World War II. The segment with Louis Armstrong further suggests the »exportability« of American art as Jazz musicians had historically played to adoring audiences in Europe and had migrated there, especially to Paris, since World War I. So too, rather than

being associated with white militaristic »ugly American« masculinity, the black jazz musician had traditionally been treated by Parisians as an artist compatriot.³⁵ In this segment, Murrow follows Armstrong as he plays to adoring audiences in Paris, and he concludes by announcing, »Satchmo is one of our most valuable items for export.« Thus associating Grandma Moses with the kind of popular cross-over appeal of Jazz, *See it Now's* »Two American Originals« is able to suggest that modern American art is popular art with great potential to capture the hearts of the world population.

Although much more consideration of these issues is needed than I can give it here, it seems worth pointing out that the perception of American culture in foreign countries increasingly posed a dilemma for television during the late 1950s and through the 1960s when foreign syndication became a lucrative market. By 1962, the sale of syndicated off-network programs abroad was higher than domestic sales, and in that same year the first private communications satellite, Telstar, was launched. Despite the *economic* gains, however, in the early 1960s the export of television became a subject of concern during Senator Thomas Dodd's hearings on television violence as various parties worried about television's *cultural* ideological effects overseas, particularly with regard to the image of the »ugly American« that violent programs might perpetuate.³⁶ In this context, the more »art and education« that U.S. television could export, the better it would reflect on the nation as a whole and more conducive it would be to convincing people of other nations to join what President Kennedy called the »Free World«.

Kennedy, of course, imbued his presidency with a sense of the higher arts from the start, using television as a key instrument for communicating his sense of taste.³⁷ On the occasion of his inaugural address in November of 1960, he invited Robert Frost to recite a poem. Poetry manifest itself in yet another famous poem which came to provide the reigning discourse on television during the period. I am speaking, of course, of T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* – a poem that perhaps not coincidentally was modernist in nature and written by an American poet who lived in Paris in the twenties. Taking this avant-garde legacy into the New Frontier, Newton Minow, the Chairman of the *Federal Communications Commission* (FCC), called television a »vast wasteland.«³⁸ In his 1961 speech of that title that he delivered before the May 9th meeting of the *National Association of Broadcasters*, Minow argued that television had broken the public trust by offering »a steady diet of sitcoms, westerns, and game shows«, and he recommended more arts and educational television as a remedy.³⁹

For Minow and many others the Vast Wasteland came to symbolize the cultural demise of America through TV, and his speech reoriented the discourse on television from its obsessive interest in family life during the 1950s to a focus on public interest and national purpose. In the context of the new satellite technologies and Kennedy's cold-war zeal for cultural and economic colonialism, television's national purpose was international in scope.

But despite its attempt to make the world safe for democracy, when it came to art, network television still represented America as a cultural colony of Europe. The Camelot presidency drew shamelessly on British and European art history to prove its appreciation of the legitimate arts. Again, the figure of the woman was integral to this endeavor. One of Kennedy's greatest triumphs was to secure the first American traveling exhibit of yet another famous woman – the Mona Lisa – that he got on loan from the *Louvre*. In a television press conference on the subject, the connections between art and international diplomacy are made explicit as Kennedy positions the acquisition of the Mona Lisa as »a reminder of the friendship that exists between France and the United States.«⁴⁰

And, of course, the first lady herself became the camera's favorite modern woman. CBS's 1962 documentary *A Tour of the White House with Mrs. John F. Kennedy* was an attempt to redecorate the nation with a sense of American history as Jackie discussed the need to fill the home with antiques that would speak to American heritage.⁴¹ Ironically, however, while Jackie kept pointing out that everything about the house was American, she nevertheless spoke mostly of British and European design, comparing the east room to the palace at Versailles, talking of Shakespeare and Ancient Greece, and even boasting that the wallpaper, with its scenes of America, was made in France. Moreover, while Jackie went to great lengths to prove that the redecoration was done on behalf of her fellow Americans, her Europhilia emerged in irrepressible ways. When asked whether she thinks »that there is a relationship between the government and art«, or if it is »because you and your just feel this way?« she replies: »That's so complicated. I don't know. I just think that everything in the White House should be the best. The entertainment that's given here. And if it's an American company that you can help, I like to do that. If it's not, just as long as it's the best.«⁴²

Although President Kennedy soon told the audience that the purpose of redecorating was to teach young people to »become better Americans«, Jackie's penchant for European art made her modernization scheme seem altogether foreign. In this regard, Jackie served as a ambivalent figure who skirted the boundaries of a popular celebration of American modern style and the popular mistrust of European art.

From Momism to Popism

As with its presentation of the First Lady, television often represented the idea of modernization through the figure of women art connoisseurs and artists. Sometimes this served a familiarizing function, schooling the public on ways to appreciate the much mistrusted European modernists through representing art as feminine, domesticated, and polite. But, as in *A Tour of The White House*, the attempts to contain modernism within the tropes of an aristocratic »refined« femininity never quite worked because this also posed the threatening presence of Europhile, snooty,

eccentric, excessive, and overeducated elites, even when spoken in the whisperingly demure tones of the charm-schooled Mrs. Kennedy.

More generally, in popular culture »modern« women (aristocrats and otherwise) were decidedly suspect. In fact, the »threat« of the modern woman even achieved the status of a popular theory encapsulated by the term »momism«. First coined by Philip Wylie in his 1941 book *Generation of Vipers*, the term was widely popular throughout the 1950s. American women, Wylie claimed, had become overbearing, domineering mothers who turned their sons and husbands into weak-kneed fools. The book was replete with images of apocalypse through technology, imagery that Wylie tied to the figure of the woman. As he saw it, an unholy alliance between women and big business had turned the world into an industrial nightmare where men were slaves both to corporations and to women at home. In his most bitter chapter, »Common Women« Wylie claimed that women had somehow gained control of the airwaves. He wrote:

»The radio is mom's final tool, for it stamps everyone who listens to it with the matriarchal brand – Its superstitions, prejudices, devotional rules, taboos, muss, and all other qualifications needful to its maintenance. Just as Goebbels has revealed what can be done with such a mass-stamping of the public psyche in his nation, so our land is a living representation of the same fact worked out in matriarchal sentimentality, goo, slop, hidden cruelty, and the foreshadow of national death ...«⁴³

In the annotated notes to the 1955 edition, Wylie updated these fears, claiming that television would soon take the place of radio and turn men into female-dominated dupes. Women, he wrote, »will not rest until every electronic moment has been bought to sell suds and every bought program censored to the last decibel and syllable according to her self-adulation – along with that (to the degree the mom-indoctrinated pops are permitted access to the dials) of her de-sexed, de-souled, decrebrated mate.«⁴⁴ Wylie's hyperbolic ravings testify to Andreas Huyssen's claim that femininity has historically been aligned with mass culture (and its threatening, degraded status), while high art is seen as the prerogative of male elites.⁴⁵ But importantly, when women were represented on mass cultural forms such as television programs, the threat of femininity could just as easily be associated with the foreign (which typically meant communist) threat of both European and American modern art.

Television fiction especially took up these interests, crafting plots around dubious paintings and women out of control. A 1957 episode of CBS's anthology drama *Telephone Time* entitled »One Coat of White« illustrates the point.⁴⁶ In this drama, actress Claudette Colbert plays an American tourist in France who falls in love with Lautisse, the greatest living French artist (a name which a critic for the *Saturday Review* called »a provocative amalgam of the names Lautrec and Matisse«). Lautisse, who hasn't painted in years, refuses to let anyone know his true identity, falls in love with Colbert, and follows her back to her home in Seattle where her grown-up children are »horrified by what they consider to be their widowed mother's middle-aged escapade«. Colbert is torn between her love for her

children and her unsuitable European modernist suitor. The conflict is resolved when the children in Seattle undergo a financial crisis and decide to put the home up for sale. As the *Saturday Review* critic explains:

»The children propose to help its salability by giving its fence a coat of white paint. But Laitisse gets there first and beings to cover the fence's surface with abstract forms which he quite rightly describes as »rather like Miro«. His skill gives the game away naturally, his identity becomes known to the children and the public, and within hours curators of some of the leading American art museums have arrived on the scene and are bidding against each other for sections of the fence at fabulous prices per running foot.«⁴⁷

While »One Coat of White« has a happy ending, the odd couple of the older American housewife and the French modern artist provides the terms of dramatic conflict, asking viewers to decide whether an American woman ought to be engaged with modern art. Moreover, Colbert plays an older woman, and according to the terms of the narrative, her age, even more than her nationality or sexuality, precipitate the crisis.⁴⁸ In this sense, we might say, this older woman represents not just femininity but the American past, especially the recent wartime »patriotic« past that was rendered through images of family life, most notably by Norman Rockwell. This program thus presents its female heroine and her out-of-control desires for French men as a threat to the isolationist and family values of the previous two decades. However, it resolves the dilemma of the American family's place in an increasingly international postwar world by having the French modern artist literally save the American family home.

Other television genres similarly presented housewives as arbiters of modern art, suggesting links between the suspect nature of European modernism and a potentially out-of-control American femininity. A perfect example here is an episode of the situation comedy *The George Burns and Gracie Allen Show*.⁴⁹ Known for her illogical relation to language by way of her famous shaggy dog jokes, Gracie becomes the representative par excellence of the populist scorn for modern art. After going on a gallery tour for a lesson in art appreciation, Gracie decides to try her hand at painting. Misunderstanding the difference between industrial arts and fine arts, Gracie buys supplies from a house painter and decides to make a portrait of George. The painting turns out to be »abstract« despite Gracie's efforts to render her husband in the representational tradition of portraiture.

Predictably, at the end of the episode when Gracie shows the portrait, no one can figure out what the painting is about. One character thinks »it's a yellow cab with the doors open«; another says »no, it can't be...who ever saw a yellow cab with bloodshot headlights and a radish hanging inside«; and a third suggests, »someone threw a lighted cigar on a dying water lily in a stagnant pond.« Although rendered humorously, the point here is that abstraction poses a threat to consensual meaning as no two people in the scene arrive at the same interpretation. In a television genre notable for its attempts to elicit consensual (mass audience) interpretations by staging and then resolving all eccentricities (even Gracie's) within the

»norms« of suburban domesticity, modernism clearly has no place apart from its position of comedic excess – the exact position that Gracie Allen herself always occupies in the program. And in that regard, modernism is literally a woman.

In fact, the episode explicitly makes modern art an issue of sexual difference as Gracie's »screwball« persona and her proclivity for abstraction are countered by George who takes the opposite position of the »hams and eggs« anti-intellectual, anti-modernist, American populist. In one of his weekly monologue segments, George literally walks out of the plot, comes onto the stage to address the home audience, and recalls the time he visited his »highbrow« friend:

»Last time I was at Getz's house he showed me a modern painting he just bought, and he asked me if I liked it. Well, all I could see was some blue triangles on top of a yellow square so I had to be honest. I said, »Bill, maybe I'm old fashioned. I like simple pictures like a little boy and his dog.« He looked at me sort of pityingly. He says, »But George, that's what it is.« Then he told me it was surrealism and that artists that do that kind of work have to paint the way they feel. Well, if you really feel that bad you should stop painting and go to bed.«⁵⁰

In all cases the implication is that no one can understand modern art, and this is not because the art is complex, but rather because it is bad. Typically associated with psychosis (and note that George compares it to feeling bad) and also often compared to children's paintings, modernism becomes »outsider« art, which for populists has no value. In *Burns and Allen*, this wry dismissal is linked to an implicit association of modern art with women and madness – or at least mad-cap comedy.

If *Burns and Allen* treated the eccentric nature of femininity and modern art in comic terms, with the woman artist as the butt of the joke, other programs presented more troubling visions, linking issues of nationalism and modernism to unruly women artists. A perfect example here is an episode of *I Led Three Lives*, a syndicated program that revolved around the life of Herbert A. Philbrick, a counterspy for the FBI who posed as a pipe smoking advertising executive. This episode told the tale of Margaret, a young female art student engaged to Paul, her art school teacher, who supplements his meager earnings as a painter through his day job as an ad man. At the beginning of the story, when Paul visits Herbert to talk over an advertising campaign, he tells Herbert he suspects Margaret is a communist. Margaret, it turns out, is not only a communist spy, she is a modern artist who plants microfilm in her collages. In one scene, when Herbert visits the art school, Margaret asks, »Did you ever see a collage painting before, Herb? Collage is old fashioned but we moderns go in for it when we want to puzzle people.« Then, in more sinister tones she says, »We take little pieces like these ... well they should be pieces of your heart ... Who are you Herb? ... Oh, the man who corrupts commercial artists with money. Do you know what you've done to Paul? You've made him unable to understand my genius.« As opposed to Margaret's interest in modernist collage, Paul and Herbert both express their preference for representational art that has recognizable subject matter (and Herb specifically calls modern art »strange«). In the

end, in the true terms of Momism, it turns out the Margaret has turned communist because she hates her mother.⁵¹ When mother and daughter finally reconcile, Margaret is purged of her communist sins, turns in her modernist collage for a wedding ring, and she and Paul live happily ever after.

This program is interesting not only because of the hyperbolic way it conflates the threat of modernism with the threat of women, but also because it makes the commercial artist into an American hero, a counterspy for the FBI who staves off the communist threat. We might note here that the presentation of the commercial artist as patriot was continuous in many ways with the figure of Norman Rockwell, himself a commercial artist, working for the good of the country. Only for Philbrick – and for the more general notion of American art after the war – the work itself did not deal with themes of patriotism, but rather was simply about products. In fact, the idea that commercial art was not only art, but the true American modern vernacular, became increasingly central over the course of the decade.⁵² This could be seen not only in fantastic tales of communist infiltration, but also in documentaries and women's daytime programs about the arts.⁵³

It is, for example, well demonstrated in two advertising segments of the 1955 *See It Now* episode featuring Grandma Moses and Satchmo. In the first segment, the narrator tells us, »Out of the modern Shulton plant come these two brand new men's products. Old spice electric shave lotion and old spice body talcum.« Like Grandma Moses, old spice mediates the old with the modern. Meanwhile, the commercial, which is rendered in abstract animation, is itself testimony to the fact that television advertising art in the 1950s was one of the central places where American modern design was developed. (In fact, the design journal, *ID*, is full of this kind of abstract TV animation as it was constantly used for network promotional ads and logos like the CBS surrealist inspired eye).⁵⁴ The second commercial underscores the »art« value attached to industry as the narrator tells us that Old Spice is a »real American original« and shows us the »magnificent murals that decorate the lobby« of the Old Spice factory. The camera pans across the mural and displays Old Spice bottles in a kind of gallery setting – as if these products are art objects.

An even more striking example is a 1953 episode of *Omnibus*⁵⁵ that revolves around a visit to the home of the premier Depression-era social realist and regionalist painter, Thomas Hart Benton. Benton is an interesting figure here insofar as his career was itself born of a curious mix of modernism (which he experimented with in art school in Paris) and mass culture (he painted movie sets for *Fox and Pathe* in the 1910s). His art was marked by an admixture of aspects of modern style into realistic subject matter that emerged in regionalist murals depicting slice-of-life scenes, scenes that he intended to be critical of social inequities such as labor exploitation. Despite its ethos of social criticism, Regionalism was itself co-opted by big business such as *Standard Oil*, which saw this art as useful for advertisements. At first Benton eagerly accepted commissions, hopeful about the »possibilities of a fruitful relation between big business and art«. In 1937, *Life* magazine sponsored *Hol-*

lywood, his painting of union workers at *Twentieth Century Fox* (which *Life* ultimately rejected because of its controversial subject matter). In 1941, he made *Outside the Curing Barn* as an ad for *Lucky Strike* cigarettes. But by the postwar period, Benton realized that big business was not interested in art that contained social criticism. He felt that his liaisons with big business had been a failure.⁵⁶ By the time of the *Omnibus* episode, Benton had likewise rejected his connections both to the New Deal inspired WPA funded art and to the modernist artists that emerged from the Depression (especially his former student, Jackson Pollack). Holding onto his regionalist aesthetic, he had moved to the Midwest, a place that he thought spoke to the folksy values of the real America in way that the New York City art world never could.

Given his rejection of both the »art for business« ethos and big city modernism, and given his status as a regionalist painter of slice-of-life scenes, Benton would seem to be the perfect representative of the American vernacular. However, the *Omnibus* episode suggests that the vernacular was itself less easily defined because it presents Benton as a confusing hybrid of folk/high/and mass culture, all sutured together in a family scene. Moreover, if this is supposed to be American, it still depends on two British stage actors, Alistair Cooke (the host of *Omnibus*) and Claude Rains (a family friend) who, by way of their »Britishness« give the program a highbrow feel. At the beginning, Cooke invites viewers into the Bentons' home for a »typical« night of family life among the art set. Rains exhibits some of Benton's work and reads the poetry of Carl Sandburg. Then, after Rains shows Benton's famous Huck Finn lithograph, Benton reads from a Twain novel. Folksinger Susan Reed plays the harp and croons a ballad, and Benton's thirteen-year-old daughter reads from the French novella, *The Little Prince*. Finally, as the whole family gathers in a sing-along, the camera moves to a painting on the wall, and then an off-screen narrator asks, »Have you ever wondered how the pretzel gets so twisted?«

If you are wondering what this question possibly has to do with the likes of Mark Twain, Carl Sandburg, and Thomas Hart Benton, you should be because the answer is not to be found within the logic of enlightenment that the Benton family scene strives to portray. Instead, we are now in the twisted pretzel logic of the advertising community where language can be used for convenience – in this case as a transition from program to ad – rather than as something that – as in Twain, Sandburg, or Benton – strives towards reason. Specifically, the pretzel problem serves as a transition to a commercial for AMF industrial machines that are used in pretzel factories. This juxtaposition of Benton's populist interpretation of the American vernacular with the advertisement's image of pretzels and assembly line technology suggests that even while television presented the great »artists« of the Depression Era and World War II, its commercial nature was fundamentally incompatible with the interpretation of American art proliferated by the Bentons and the Rockwells of the past. Who in the audience would really be able to seriously contemplate the

possibility of the folk and high cultural values that Benton here represented when they were simultaneously asked to ponder the hermeneutics of twisted pretzels?

From Pretzel Logic to Henny Picasso

By the 1960s, the issue of art and its links to commercial television had taken on national importance, with television squarely in the center of the debates. Now, the search for the modern American vernacular was no longer posed as a painter's dilemma that television might help to solve; instead it was posed increasingly as a televisual dilemma worthy of grave national attention.

Although critics in the 1950s had considered how television might become the »eighth lively art«, and while many people at the networks thought about the adaptation of »high« cultural forms such as opera and ballet, and while some even pondered the use of the medium for experimental purposes, by the end of the 1950s the terms of the debate had shifted.⁵⁷ Now people began to wonder what the difference was between commercial television and the visual arts, and that sense of relativism began to make itself felt both in paintings and in television programs.

Widely seen as the onslaught of postmodern sensibilities, such relativism is typically discussed from the point of the view of the art world's scavenging of »low« forms and the art critic's various debates on Pop, Op, Camp, Minimalism, and the like. What needs to be addressed, however, is the blurring of high and low through the lens of the television camera; that is, how television's representations of the modern visual arts gradually shifted focus to the complex mergers among commerce, the »high« arts, and also – in terms of the technological sublime of President Kennedy's »New Frontier« – the »high« sciences of computer technology and global satellite communications.

It is curious in many ways that television's embrace of the postmodern blurring of high and low should take place in the 1960s because this decade was ushered in by a spate of modernist-inspired »Vast Wasteland« rhetoric that in fact tried very earnestly to make distinctions between what was authentic and what wasn't. In the land of Kennedy's New Frontier, this meant not only the arts but also the sciences, which were equally important in Minow's reform agenda.

This goal of making distinctions between real art and science as opposed to commercial pap was, however, quite difficult to achieve in relation to a medium that was all three things at once – a potential forum for the fine arts, a technology produced through and used as a tool for science, and a form of commerce and commercial culture. Moreover, because art, science, and commerce have all, at different points in American history, been viewed skeptically as »artifice« and even sorcery, it was always hard to decide which of these were »authentic« forms of experience and which were »frauds«.⁵⁸

The advent of the Quiz Show Scandals in the late 1950s exacerbated these con-

fusions insofar as what the public had believed to be the hard facts about the arts and sciences that these shows featured were revealed to be the products of fraudulent sponsors who gave contestants answers before the programs. The Quiz Show Scandals and the hearings that ensued made these issues a national dilemma.⁵⁹ While the prosecution claimed commercial fraud, the producers (in their own defense) argued they should not have been expected to tell the truth because television quiz shows never purported to be true to life; they were a dramatic art form that needed to present heightened conflict. The scandals, thus, had the effect of relativizing the difference between television's status as art, science, and commerce as the legal proceedings generated testimony that proved all three possibilities equally viable.

As should be clear from this highly publicized example, television's shifting status between the categories of art, science, and commerce caused considerable confusion and resulted in an array of disparate responses among different groups. For some, like Marshall McLuhan, these contradictions were resolved by privileging the scientific/technical explanation in his essentialist prophesies like »the medium is the message«. According to this logic of technological determinism, television, like all media, are what McLuhan called an »extension of man« – or a kind of technical prosthesis that evolved out the evolutionary thought structures of the human mind.⁶⁰ In the scheme of »the medium is the message«, technology determined aesthetics, and commerce simply didn't matter much. For others, like Newton Minnow, these contradictions were resolved by making distinctions between good and bad taste, between what was authentic art and what was hard (or real) science, as opposed to what was low art, pseudo science, and thus blatantly commercial trash. For others, however, creating distinctions between the high and the low was not the point. This third group resolved the contradiction between art, science, and commerce by turning to a more postmodern attitude that played with uncertain boundaries among the three. This attitude was taken up by two apparently disparate camps whose opposing views were represented by a coastal divide: Hollywood producers vs. the New York art scene. Although this divide between Hollywood and New York was not always geographically coherent (the networks had business offices in New York, and there were, of course, artists and critics on the west coast), the two coasts did come to represent two different attitudes toward the blurring of high and low.

This move from New York to Hollywood represented a new configuration of production styles that had important ramifications for television's cultural forms. By 1953, the major Hollywood film studios, which had initially taken a »wait and see« attitude toward television, became increasingly eager to invest in the new medium. By the end of the 1950s, the common mode of production entailed co-productions between networks (which typically furnished below-the-line licensing costs) and Hollywood studios (both the film studios like Columbia's Screen Gems and TV studios like *I Love Lucy's Desilu*). Rather than sponsoring a single show,

sponsors now bought time in the schedule, thereby spreading their investments across more diverse program offerings.⁶¹

As Mark Alvey has argued, this Studio-Network production system fostered a kind of innovation via product differentiation.⁶² Although the networks and major Hollywood studios like Screen Gems worked with formulaic genres, they also often contracted with independent producers, hoping to produce a variety a programs that might in turn translate into hit series. Although this did not translate into avant-garde experimentation, it did mean that production companies and networks were searching for new looks, especially looks that took prime-time television away from its roots in New York legitimate and vaudeville theater that had been the mainstay of the 1950s live anthology dramas and variety shows (both typically shot in New York). These new looks were produced by turning to the non-theatrical arts including, 1. the literary movements of Beat poetry and intellectual science fiction fantasy (which surfaced respectively in programs like *Route 66*⁶³ and *The Twilight Zone*⁶⁴), 2. developments in popular music (including jazz, but particularly the youth music of folk, rock, and pop), and 3. movements in the visual arts, especially painting, which I am most concerned with here.

The world of the painterly arts embraced television at the beginning of the decade in a ceremonious gesture. One year after Minow's famous speech, in 1962, MOMA held the first TV-Art exhibit. Entitled *Television USA: 13 Seasons*, the show was a retrospective featuring critics who selected the »Golden Age« programs of the bygone era of fifties TV. The program book for *Television U.S.A* noted that television was divided in »two camps«; the industry that is concerned with money and »artists and journalists whose standard of ›success‹ is the degree to which television realized its potentialities as an art form.«⁶⁵ Predictably, given Minow's attack on Hollywood genres and its own geographical setting, MOMA selected the news documentaries, variety shows, and anthology dramas that had been produced mostly in New York studios during the 1950s. *Gunsmoke*⁶⁶ was the only Hollywood dramatic series that made the list. Clearly, for all of these folks, the »vast wasteland« referred to anything west of the Empire State, and especially anything that emanated from Southern California.⁶⁷

Over the course of the decade, MOMA's canon of New York-produced Golden Age plays, documentaries and variety shows gave way to new developments in the visual arts – especially Popism – which seemed to have more in common with Hollywood commercialism than with the fine and performance arts featured in Golden Age formats. In the 1960s, Hollywood commercial television seemed more and more arty as premier Pop artists like Robert Rauschenberg, Andy Warhol, and Roy Lichtenstein turned popular artifacts, stars, and politicians into a painter's (or sometimes silk screener's) medium, thereby flattening out the differences between and among them. Meanwhile, commercial television took an interest in Pop and the new Camp sensibility.⁶⁸ In 1966, ABC adapted *Batman* for television, playing on Popism's visual iconography and pulp fiction themes with a camp awareness of

its own »badness«. ⁶⁹ Moreover, insofar as Pop was notable for its use of bright primary colors, this style (as well as psychedelic art) was particularly conducive to the industry's big push in these years for the conversion to color TV (and not surprising, *Batman* was shot in color). Indeed, programs that worked in the Pop tradition – including, for example, NBC's »in living color« *Laugh-In* (described further on) – also had the advantage of making people want to buy color television sets. ⁷⁰

The fact that television was both »Pop« and popular was not lost to the network promotional department at ABC, which »dual« marketed *Batman* both as a camp parody for adult audiences and as an action series for kids, thereby maximizing ratings. For the adult crowd, ABC even held a posh »cocktail and frug« party for the premier episode which took place at the fashionable New York discotheque, *Harlow's*, with Andy Warhol, Harold Prince (director of the *League of New York Theaters*) and other celebrities attending the event. (Pop icon Jackie Kennedy declined ABC's invitation). After cocktails, the network staged a special screening of *Batman* at the York Theater, whose lobby was adorned with Batman drawings and stickers that sported slogans proclaiming their status as »authentic Pop art«. Guests as the York were reportedly unexcited about the show, but in true Pop style, they cheered when a commercial for corn flakes came on the screen. ⁷¹

As these promotional gimmicks suggest, while Pop artists like Warhol and Lichtenstein borrowed popular iconography to make »art«, the »low« medium of television borrowed Pop's aesthetics of borrowing – in this case essentially using the artist's tradition of the »in-crowd« opening reception as a publicity stunt staged for a *mass audience*. ⁷² While this scavenging act between the »high« and the »low« is now often seen in postmodern criticism to mark the demise of the myth of »authentic« expression, in the 1960s it was typically championed as proof of what many commercial artists had long argued – that advertising and commercial culture were themselves a legitimate »art« form, that ads could be just as authentically expressive as painting could. ⁷³ Even MOMA's »Television USA« 1962 retrospective, which otherwise championed New York produced »Golden Age« formats, embraced the TV commercial as a form of art. Its catalogue for the Television U.S.A retrospective stated, »Almost everything has been tried to create original commercials. As a result, radical avant-garde experiments which would be frowned upon in other areas of television are encouraged in this field.« ⁷⁴ Consequently, Television U.S.A exhibited everything from Brewer's beer to Rival dog food ads as proof of television's avant-garde status.

Several years later, *Television Quarterly*, the journal of the *Television Academy of Arts and Sciences*, agreed. In 1967, it included an article entitled »Be Quiet, The Commercial's On« which endorsed advertisers' »willingness to experiment« and reminded readers that in critical circles commercials were in the same league as cutting edge films and filmmakers:

»Almost every article about Richard Lester dwells on his experience as a director of commercials, and suggests that *A Hard Day's Night* and *Help!* are, techni-

cally at least, extended commercials. David Karp in the *New York Times Magazine*, insisted that television shows are supposed to be bad, and praised commercials and their use of *cinema verité*. Stanley Kubrick is quoted in the *New York Times* as finding »the most imaginative film-making, stylistically,« in TV commercials. Even Herbert Blau, in *The Impossible Theater*, stops to ponder the skill that goes into TV ads.⁷⁵

More generally, *Television Quarterly* promoted this equivocation between art and industry by publishing articles on »taste« and the meaning »culture«. Appearing on a regular basis during the decade, these speculative essays were written by such unlikely bedfellows as France's Minister of State in Charge of Culture, André Malraux and the President of the CBS Broadcast group, Richard W. Jencks.⁷⁶ Once again, in the true Pop aesthetic of the time, television seemed to be the great equalizer between artists and bureaucrats.

Still, for some veteran Golden Age critics who had lived through the sponsor boycotts of McCarthyism and the histrionics of the Quiz Show Scandals, the celebration of commercialism as art was a hard pill to swallow. Many continued to express their preference for the older »Golden Age« formats. However, since these critics also traveled in New York art circles (and had originally been theater critics), they had trouble ignoring the fact that Popism was the latest thing in museums, fashion magazines, and even in the New York theater where *Superman* and *Mad* were both adapted for theatrical presentation. In this context, many of the East Coast TV critics expressed ambivalence towards TV's Pop attitudes. For example, while veteran *New York Times* critic Jack Gould admitted that *Batman* was a »belated extension of the phenomenon of Pop art to the television medium«, and as such might »be an unforeseen blessing in major proportions«, he also cautioned with an ironic wink that Pop art had its own inverted standards, and that *Batman* »might not be adequately bad« when compared to *Green Acres* and *Camp Runamuck*.⁷⁷ Similarly confused about the role of the critic in a television universe where aesthetic hierarchies were turned upside down, a reviewer for the *Saturday Evening Post* claimed:

»Batman is a success because it is television doing what television does best: doing things badly. Batman, in other words, is so bad, it's good. Batman translated from one junk medium into another is junk squared. But it is thoroughly successful and – this troubles critics for whom good and bad are art's only poles – it can be surprisingly likable.«⁷⁸

As such ambivalent commentary suggests, the transition from the theatrical conception of television (both legitimate theater and vaudeville) to a painterly one (which increasingly meant Pop and Psychedelic art) was never smooth or fully achieved. Instead, television seemed caught in a style war that manifest itself in the most curious of ways.

The television variety show is a good demonstration of the problem, if only because it included such a schizophrenic mix of the 1950s »Vaudeo«⁷⁹ aesthetic of variety theater with the newer stylistics. A case in point is the 1967 special *Color Me*

Barbara, which as the title suggests was CBS's rather obvious attempt to promote its color TV system. This TV special took the popular genre of the variety show and turned it into an occasion for the unlikely combination of European modern art and American vaudeville. »Act I« is set in the *Philadelphia Museum of Art*. Barbara takes the role of a French chambermaid who cleans the museum at night. As she stops to contemplate the artwork, the paintings come to life, and Barbara (seemingly a victim of Stendahl Syndrome) projects herself into the canvas. For example, when she arrives in a gallery full of abstract art, Barbara sheds her black and white French maid outfit and reappears in a colorful halter gown that mimics the abstract patterns in the paintings. Dressed as a canvas, she then performs a modern dance routine. In another sequence, Barbara takes a more somber tone. After looking a little too long at a Modigliani painting, she becomes the girl in the picture, enters a set made to look like a Parisian café, drinks a glass of wine, and belts out the French lyrics to »Non C'est Rien«. Obviously recalling the famous »painting come to life« sequence in *An American in Paris* (Minnelli, 1951), the »art into life« conceit not only provided a stage for colorful performance, but also a reason for constant costume changes. In effect, the program doubled as a fashion show in which paintings and haute couture shared the stage.

If »Act I« already provided a mix of the painterly arts with the »live« popular arts of TV song, dance, and women's genres, then »Act II« – which is set in a circus – takes this hybrid form of art and popular culture to its logical extreme. In other words, just in case the museum's largely European collection was a »turn off« for the non-art crowd, the producers provided a true form of Americana. In fact, the program is quite self-reflexive about this. In the opening part of the circus segment, Barbara greets the audience in French. English subtitles appear on the screen. However, her frenchness turns out to be a vaudeville gag as she breaks out of the French language to return to her Jewish-American persona. Now, as she switches back to English, the subtitles turn to French. The circus act, then, neatly undoes all the pretensions of her previous visit with European art. As a whole, *Color Me Barbara* is a perfect example of the networks' aim to present art through vernacular genres and a sense of live performance that would turn modern art into a truly »American« popular form.

While a spectacular example, *Color Me Barbara* was not alone. By the end of the 1960s the weekly variety show updated its »Golden Age« format to make way for the new painterly arts of Pop and Psychedelia. A dramatic case in point is *Rowan and Martin's Laugh-In*. Broadcast from 1968-1973 on NBC (and at the top of the Nielsen ratings⁸⁰ for its first two seasons), it featured a Pop-influenced psychedelic, Peter Max-like set design complete with a brightly colored »Graffiti Wall«. But, the program eclectically mixed the new visual arts with the sensibilities of vaudeville clowns. *Laugh-In* showcased a classic vaudeville couple, straight man(Dan) and baffoonish clown (Dick), and many of its jokes were taken straight from vaudeville. For example, a script for a 1969 episode begins with stage instructions for a

»vaudeville crossover« in which Dan remarks, »If Raquel Welch married Cassius Clay, that would be like bringing the Mountains to Mohammed«. The stage instructions, in true vaudeville fashion, call for »Music: 4 Bars and Into Vamp.«⁸¹

In fact, *Laugh-In* was itself often very self-reflexive about the ways in which Pop and Psychedelic Art were being incongruously mixed with vaudeville. The »graffiti wall«, for example, served as backdrop for cast members who literally »Pop-ed« out of it to tell vaudevillian one-liner jokes. News segments (which were introduced with a vaudeville-type ditty that went »Ladies and Gents, *Laugh-In* Looks at the News«) sometimes included news of Pop art. For example:

DICK: Greenwich Village, New York: Work on Andy Warhol's new underground movie was halted today when the romantic lead, a 300 pound wart hog, died of a heart attack.

(GOLF SWING)

MUSIC: DRUM ROLL⁸²

While the content of the joke was about Pop, the form was clearly vaudeville. One year later, the same basic culture clash was evidenced in a »cocktail party« sequence that includes a bizarre crossover joke that features Dick imitating vaudevillian Henny Youngman's »one like this« stick, as he tells Dan, »I got two pictures in the museum, one like this, one like this.« To which Dan replies, »Oh that Henny Picasso«. The skit closes with an off-screen voice yelling, »Andy Warhol ... Soup's On!«⁸³

As such instances make clear, television was in fact quite self-conscious of its own schizophrenic styles, moving as it was from the 1950s conventions that were developed in New York (and drew on Yiddish vaudeville humor) and toward the 1960s New York-based visual art scene. *Laugh-In* also suggests the move from the association of modern art with femininity per se to an increasing representation of modern art as »queer« – both in terms of the »queering« of generic styles (such as the unlikely merger of vaudeville and Pop art) and in terms of eccentric (if not explicitly queer) masculinity. As Alex Doty suggests, 1950s variety shows hosts, famous for their use of drag and their »straight« man/oddball couplets, always encouraged the possibility of being read queerly.⁸⁴ But in the 1960s, the »sexual liberation« found its way to television, and not only through titillating »swinging singles« love affairs (seen, for example on programs like *Love American Style*), but also through the ambiguous sexuality of the Pop style with its campy heterosexuality (rendered through subjects such as love comics, superheroes, and Elvis) as well as the unreadable sexuality of its most talked about artist, Andy Warhol. *Laugh-In*, famous for its »love in« sexual liberation ethos, included regular jokes about gay couples. One skit, for example, features Tony Curtis (who was well known for his drag performance in *Some Like It Hot*) playing the role of the quintessential Warholian artist, a »flamboyantly dressed« fashion designer/ interior decorator who

was hired by the military to redo the bunks and military uniforms, which of course he does in pink (he says things like, »a pink Marine is a happy Marine«/ and »I see the administration building in a psychedelic chartreuse«). By the end of the skit he and the Marine officer fall in love.⁸⁵ In another episode, a cocktail party skit has the decidedly queer Tiny Tim talking about Fop art on the famous gay beach resort, Fire Island. Following this, cast member Judy Carne comments, »TV's really getting arty – last year we saw the Louvre on Channel 4, and next year you're going to be able to see the Artists and Models Ball on Channel 28.«⁸⁶

While *Laugh-in* linked the figure of the artist to jokes about gay men, more generally television was filled with representations of male artists who were in some way »eccentric«, at least by television's normative sitcom dad standards. This figure of the eccentric male »artiste« served at times to critique the boundaries between art and commercial television itself. In the anthology format, such figures as film auteur Alfred Hitchcock in *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* subverted his own genre and his own means of production. Whereas the 1950s live anthology drama presented itself as family programming brought to you by the »good will« of sponsors like Goodyear and were introduced by erudite hosts like Robert Montgomery, Alfred Hitchcock was an off-beat film auteur known for his penchant for the macabre. What's more, Hitchcock always made fun of the sponsor and the system of commercial TV in general. In this sense, Hitchcock »queered« his own genre, presenting an eccentric masculine »artiste« in place of the paternalistic good will and »polite« theatrical enunciative system of the live anthology drama. This eccentric masculinity was similarly evident in *The Twilight Zone*, which introduced its story every week with a highly stylized sequence featuring TV auteur Rod Serling smoking a cigarette (with attitude) and telling us we were »traveling into another dimension«.

The introduction of eccentric forms of masculinity was apparent not only on these horror and science fiction anthology formats, but also across a wide array of genres. The short-lived detective/crime series *Johnny Staccato*, for example, starred soon-to-be independent film director John Cassavetes as a kind of noir private eye who battled thugs from his headquarters in a New York jazz bar (and jazz music was often featured). Fictionalized »Beat« poets and jazz artists appeared on the series, giving the television public a glimpse of decidedly urbane, avant-garde, lifestyles of the time. While that program was short-lived, early 1960s series like *The Fugitive* (about a medical doctor wrongly accused of his wife's murder) and *Run for Your Life* (about a lawyer diagnosed with a fatal disease and traveling the globe before his certain death) featured homeless heroes who were disenfranchised from the »establishment« and literally »on the run« from civilization.⁸⁷

These the new modes of masculinity – and their relationship to the art world – did not go unnoticed at the time. Critic Joseph Golden, writing for *Television Quarterly*, noted that a host of genres, from the medical drama to the western to the single-dad sitcom, featured widowers as their main protagonists. Analyzing

why women had been relegated to the »video graveyard«, Golden compared television's new »provocative« and »sterile hero« to the »behavioral sterility, so aggressively explored by the European avant-garde in the last decade or so.«⁸⁸ Interestingly, Golden accounted for the new arty hero via Philip Wylie's treatise on momism; he claimed that »the womanless society of television« was in fact women's fault because they had ruled the airwaves for too long with soap operas that portrayed women as »sexually aloof, emotionally eclectic, and morally rock-like« and turned men into »helpless ciphers« or »in the primeval days of television, lovable boob.«⁸⁹ Now, the avant-garde, alienated male hero took revenge against women for their previous broadcast crimes. Thus, at a time when the critical distance between TV and the avant-garde was being blurred, male pop culture heroes in male identified genres (doctor shows, police shows, single-dad sitcoms) were now being reclaimed as high art, largely because they had rejected the »normal« heterosexual coupling of 1950s television.

Perhaps the most literal incarnation of the »queer« artist was a 1967 episode of *Batman* entitled *Pop Goes the Joker* in which the Joker decides to steal Gotham City's famous paintings and replace them with his own Pop art. The Joker enters an art contest staged at the *Gotham City Museum* that has him squared off against equally bizarre artists whose paintings are all spoofs of European or American modern art. After winning, he sets up an art school for rich women who become partners in his art crimes. The Joker's perverse control of the women of Gotham City and their mutual irreverence toward the art of the city fathers is predictably countered by the equally queer Batman and Robin who retrieve the paintings and return them to their proper place.

From hindsight *Pop Goes the Joker* reads as a bizarre inversion of the more »serious« programs that represented museums on American television during the late 1960s. Intended in part as promotional vehicles for its parent company's new RCA color TV sets, NBC news presented a series of »in living color« documentaries that perpetuated the notion of the museum as a space of nationalism. These included documentaries on the *Kremlin*, the *Whitney*, and the *Louvre*. In the 1967 Whitney special, significantly entitled *The American Image*, the nationalist pedagogy inherent in these shows was explicitly stated by host E.G. Marshall who introduced the program saying, »Our story is the story of the artists' search, the search for the American dream«. The search turned out to be a colonialist narrative in which a title card stating »The Land« was followed by close-ups of wilderness paintings after which the camera focused on frontier paintings showing settlers conquering Indians. The program went on to show twentieth-century cityscapes and ended with postwar abstraction and Pop. Despite this colonialist search for an American vernacular, the NBC news division still conceived of America as cultural colony of Europe, a point that is similarly apparent in the 1964 documentary about the *Louvre*. Entitled *The Golden Prison* and narrated by French actor Charles Boyer, this program also presents the national archive through a geographical metaphor of land-

scape. At the outset, Boyer gives the audience a history lesson in Parisian geography, demonstrating through maps that the *Louvre* has been the center of Paris for centuries. He then advises his American audience, »The way to see the Louvre is with a French man.«⁹⁰

Although this kind of nationalist pedagogy was still the dominant discursive mode for representing the museum, it was being challenged at the time by an emergent set of revisionist and/or revolutionary positions toward art and its collection that was encapsulated by critical terms like »anti-art«, terms which suggested that the avant-garde was dead, that all art was fundamentally elitist, and that the only revolutionary position left was to reject art altogether. To be sure, such critics were in historical dialogue with a well entrenched intellectual critique of museums that people such as T. W. Adorno and Walter Benjamin had participated in during the 1930s and 1940s, and which the DADA movement had challenged even earlier with its idea of living art and the Cabaret Voltaire.⁹¹ In the 1960s, art critics went one step further by suggesting that art itself could no longer function as a response to social and political crisis.

The art world's rejection of art dovetailed in complicated ways with the more populist »George Burns« dismissal of modern art on the basis of its inferiority and illegibility. Although both camps argued against »elitism«, the first group imagined art should *ideally* have a revolutionary function (but no longer could), while the second was conservative in nature, hoping to hold onto the kind of representational art that encouraged consensual viewpoints. But precisely because the two opposing camps shared some common ground (their anti-elitism), it was easy for television to conflate these radically opposing views and popularize Pop and other art movements that implicitly challenged representational art. From the point of view of anti-art critics, *The Joker*, for example, could certainly be championed as a revolutionary Dandy who integrated art into his everyday criminal life and sabotaged the city fathers and their elitist canon. Or, from the populist point of view, the Joker could be read as a big joke on the illegible, untalented, and eccentric Pop artists of the times. But, even as these alternative positions on Pop art and popular culture prevailed, the emerging universe of global television was dreaming up its own possibilities in which the aesthetic hierarchies of »high« and »low« art would merge with the new scientific hierarchies of »high« and »low« tech.

Art into Science

In 1967, when E. G. Marshall presented the modern art collection at the *Whitney* Museum in the NBC documentary *The American Image*, he announced that »modernism is born of Einstein« and the theory of relativity. While he was certainly not the first person to put forth this view, the fact that modern art was conceptualized through a scientific revolution was symptomatic of a larger trend in television's re-

lationship to modern art, a trend that was best encapsulated in 1967 when NBC News offered another, very different kind of museum documentary entitled *Bravo Picasso*.⁹²

The first global satellite television program to be produced by the networks, *Bravo Picasso* linked together European modernism, telecommunications science, and American commercialism in what the narrator called »an imaginary museum, a museum without walls. Using man's electronic genius to bring you his creative genius«. Quite different from the previous »pedagogical« representations of museums, *Bravo Picasso* is instead a simple performance of the point of sale. It is an international auction of Picasso paintings that took place in five separate cities: Paris, London, Dallas-Fortworth, Burbank and Los Angeles. Bidders from the different cities competed via satellite for bits of the master's oeuvre. ...

While the program continued with many of the conventions of art education on TV, its focus on the performance of the global sales pitch rendered the national pedagogy seen in programs like the *The Golden Prison* an afterthought. For example, while *Bravo Picasso* told viewers that »the way to see them [Picasso paintings] is with a French man«, in the same passage it also pointed out that the paintings were from eleven different countries, and in any case the spectacle of metropolises interconnected via satellite made the »French-ness« issue dull in comparison. In addition, while the figure of femininity still served to organize the representation of modern painting (Yves Montand stationed in Paris, quotes Picasso saying, »When I love a woman, I don't start measuring my limbs, I love with my heart and my desire«), modernism's objectification of femininity is now undercut by another object relationship – the commodity form – as the program makes a kind of »pretzel logic« transition to an ad for the Avnet company. Standing before one of the many women Picasso »loved« (that is, his famous *Girl in the Mirror*), the narrator says, »Art has many faces. The dictionary says art is the production of more than ordinary significance. At Avnet business is an art«. Avnet (and its co-sponsor RCA) went on to show the new uses for satellite communications, computers, and space science for which these two companies were famous. This transition from a romantic conception of modern art to the art of big business continues with the trajectory of the 1950s, but now takes this merging of high and low away from the quest for the national vernacular and into the global space of high-tech satellite communication.

Meanwhile, making the situation even more uncanny, the celebrity bidder at this global auction was the premier modern woman (and one time representative of the nation), Jackie Kennedy (now Jackie O) who, famous for her utter rejection of fame, bought the painting in absentia on behalf of the Italian Rescue Fund. Lost to the national iconography, the First Lady was transformed into the first home shopper floating somewhere in the cash flow of a global satellite mall.

Indeed, if any one instance can ever be said to precipitate a movement, *Bravo Picasso* signals, I think, the first truly postmodern media event on television. Its

technologically constructed global marketplace, its »no excuses« attitude towards the mercenary nature of art, its utterly irreverent conception of modernism, its First Lady turned superstar consumer, its complete disregard for the »meaning« of the art work, and its dramatization of the work's arbitrary market value – all of this encapsulates the central elements of a television culture that moved away from the Wasteland's modernist rhetoric of nationalism and public culture toward a postmodern sensibility where the nation became a thrift shop for modern art. In *Bravo Picasso*, the modern ideal of the national museum that houses artists who express their »nation-ness« gave way to the postmodern concept of an art mart in global space where the real spectacle is not the work of art, but the staging of the sale of art in the age of satellite transmission.⁹³

Modernism and »Re-education«

If the corporate high-tech world had discovered new global meanings for art, this is not to say that struggles over national culture were no longer relevant. In fact, by the later years of the 1960s, we find an increasingly politicized set of struggles over the racial politics of art, and especially the »whiteness« of the modernist canon. This was witnessed in the considerable protests staged against leading museums (such as MOMA) for their failure to represent artists of color. As a medium of mass communication, television did eventually provide a venue for this struggle over the racial politics of modernism.

Perhaps the best example comes in a 1968 documentary hosted by the then popular TV star Bill Cosby (whose hit series *I Spy* was the first network prime-time series to feature a black hero as a dramatic lead). Entitled *Black History: Lost, Stolen or Strayed*, the program was the first episode of the seven-part documentary series *Of Black America* that aired in the wake of numerous urban uprisings and the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr.⁹⁴ In part, the series owed its place in network history to the legacy of the *Kerner Commission Report* which was issued by the *Commission on Civil Disorders* (a commission created by President Johnson in 1967 to explore the causes leading the urban uprisings). The *Kerner Commission Report* took television to task for its biased treatment of blacks. In response to the report, government officials called in network executives and urged them to devote more coverage to black problems. As J. Fred MacDonald points out, »interest in black problems in the summer of 1968 was unprecedented«.⁹⁵ Championing *Of Black America* as an example of network responsibility, network President Richard Salant told the African American magazine *Jet* that *Of Black America* seeks to improve race relations.⁹⁶ It did so with the corporate sponsorship of Xerox. In the series' first episode, *Black America*, Xerox positions itself as a leader in the field of communication. Reciting the corporate slogan, a narrator boasts, »Xerox. In the business of making it easier for people to understand each other.« Then, corporate

President C. Peter McCullough told viewers that Xerox sponsored the series in order »to help blacks and whites achieve better understanding.«

But the documentary was certainly not just a product of government directives, network agendas, or the good will of the high tech industry. Instead, it should be seen more precisely as part of a longer history of African American activism in and creative contributions to the television medium. Since the 1950s, black theater groups, actors, musicians, and journalists thought of television as a showcase for the black arts, a place that might prove more hospitable than the movies, classrooms, museums, or any other established venue of entertainment and education. Given the then raging protests against the racism of art museums, the »low« medium of television seemed a viable place in which to provide a counter-narrative about modern art. *Black History* positions itself as a corrective to the official sites of culture, narrating the history of racism through a parallel history of art.

The program begins in a forth grade classroom as a black schoolteacher leads students in a rehearsal of the title song from the then popular play, *You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown*. When the song is over, Cosby enters the frame. Directly addressing the home audience, he talks about the way African Americans have been excluded in American history books. The camera then begins to focus on the children's art hanging on the classroom wall. Depicting black explorers, cowboys, soldiers, and doctors, the children's art functions rhetorically to fill in the blanks of the history books that Cosby admonishes. Shortly after this, Cosby discusses the »high culture« to which black contributed. Pointing to works of African artists, he argues that modern artists from Paul Klee to Pablo Picasso »swiped,« (or, he adds, »whatever polite word you want to use«) their images from African traditions. »I mean when you look at this copying, you gotta give us a little more than rhythm, you gotta give us style.« From this Cosby directly goes on to discuss black oppression, summarily stating that America invented the »cruellest slavery in the history of the world.« By juxtaposing the history of art with social and political history, the documentary illustrates the links between cultural expression and racial oppression more broadly.

Cosby makes these links most explicit when he engages in the discourse of art psychology in the next sequence of the documentary. Comparing the art work of black and white children, he introduces a child psychologist who explains that black children's art is generally expressive of their low self-esteem in a racist society. In particular, the psychologist claims that black children's art lacks the realistic detail seen in (what he calls) »normal« children's art. He claims, for example, that »armless people appear three times more frequently in the drawings of black children than those of white«, a fact that he deems symptomatic of the powerlessness that black children feel. Ending on a drawing of a man who has a rope around his neck and is hanging from a tree, the psychologist states, »A child who has this on this mind cannot be a child. A child who has this on his mind could want to burn down cities when he gets older.«

Clearly, the psychological analysis of art is meant to bolster the documentary evidence for the effects of racism on youngsters. But, ironically, these same psychological explanations also work to pathologize black artistic expression. The psychologist values realism as the product of »normal« (read white) children, while any form of abstraction (such as missing arms or missing faces) becomes a sign of disease. In this respect, this psychologist's explanation of abstraction contradicts Cosby's previous claims about »black high culture« and its influence of European modernists. Rather than celebrating abstraction for its links to African traditions, now Cosby adopts the psychologist's view that abstract art is somehow a symptom of childhood depression and/or deviance. He ends the sequence by comparing a black child's realistic drawing of Robinhood to a more abstract (and, at least in my view, quite compelling) portrait, Cosby agrees with the psychological expert, suggesting that the portrait »is a consequence of deformed history.«

Never really resolving this apparent contradiction between psychological discourses that pathologize abstraction and aesthetic discourses that celebrate it, the documentary instead turns to another vehicle of visual culture to illustrate causes for black low self-esteem. Via a long montage of clips, Cosby takes viewers through a parade of mummies, minstrels, and scoundrels that appeared on American cinema screens since *The Birth of a Nation* (D.W. Griffith, 1915). Juxtaposing these with scenes from the then recent film *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* (Stanley Kramer, 1967), the montage implied that more progressive alternatives were available.

Through its documentary rhetoric, *Black History* demonstrates how the visual culture of racism is intricately linked to racial oppression more generally. According to the documentary, the struggle over racism is also a struggle over culture (both art, in its »high« fine art sense, and the mass media). In its own right, the documentary was considered at the time of its airing to be exemplary of the highest form of television art. *The Television Academy of Arts and Sciences* bestowed the much coveted *Emmy Award* on its co-writers, Andy Rooney and Perry Wolf.⁹⁷ Considering the documentary's critique of the racial politics of art, it is no small irony that the two Emmy winners were both white men. Yet, despite the institutional racism apparent in such a gesture, this program and the series more generally are exemplary of the way television did at times serve a positive role in opening up dialogues about the social meaning of art and its relationship to larger struggles.

In the end, *Black History*, and *Of Black America* more generally, were products of competing interests among black artists, network executives, and corporate sponsors from the high tech industry. These competing interests often led to inconsistencies within the text and within the institutions that created it. Widening the spaces for African Americans in the television medium, *Of Black America* nevertheless was also symptomatic of the limitations that people of color encountered when working in a medium that still by and large belonged to white America.

Given the amount of fervour around the collapse of high and low, it is especially ironic that the technological »hardware« that was finally put in place after all these debates was the formation in 1969 of the *Public Broadcasting System* (PBS), funded by the now »old« modern captains of industry like the *Ford Foundation* and committed to the Progressive Era ethos of pedagogy and »uplift« for the masses that had been so central to modernity's museum culture, that had merged by the 1920s with advertising and store design, and which still dominates our commerce-oriented museum culture now.

Within this trajectory, the old ambivalences regarding the nationalist roots of American art resurfaced in programs that still express America's debt to Britishness (*Masterpiece Theater*) and which are sandwiched between more indigenous productions of American documentaries, video art, and the theatrical arts. Rooted in Newton Minow's attempts to restore hierarchies of taste to the Wasteland, yet appearing at a moment when commercial television and the art world were collapsing these hierarchies (and even declaring them commercially unpopular and artistically retrograde), PBS has been forever lost in its struggle to preserve the distinction between high and low, winding up finally in the imaginary and ever narrowing »middlebrow« in its appeals to its private donor-public.

Clearly, this has been exacerbated by the fact that in making such distinctions, PBS, which is after all the creation of private funding organizations and private donors, and is even governed by a federally appointed private corporation (*The Corporation for Public Broadcasting*), has had to pretend to speak disinterestedly for what regulators at the FCC always call the »public« interest. *The Corporation for Public Broadcasting* has historically been troubled by its failures to define what the public is, what they might be interested in, and what the meaning of public art might be. Was PBS a place for experimental artists or simply a second rate transmission of the European and British classics? Would it address a nation of philistines with a deeply condescending form of art education, or would it be a venue for the last wave of a critical avant-garde? Would it give in to corporate censorship, or would its leaders fight for some degree of autonomy from sponsors? Undecided about its own public image and structurally dependent on large funding corporations, private donors, and Congressional dollars, PBS – and the recent funding cuts it suffered – needs to be understood within a genealogy of discourses about the meaning of modern art on television. As my early research on the topic begins to suggest, those discourses have everything to do with implicit and related battles over nationalism, sexuality, race, and class.

By looking at television's historical representation of the arts, this generation of popular culture critics might usefully reinvestigate our own implicit and explicit embrace of popular culture over »high« culture. The scholarly investment in popular television and popular audiences, which itself grew out of the well intentioned

»anti-elitist« critical environment of the 1960s, can nevertheless lead to a troubling complicity with Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich who sees Rosh Limbaugh as the preferred substitute for public television and the public sphere more generally. While I am certainly not advocating a return to Newton Minow's paternalistic attempts to restore a certain form of privileged middle-class »taste« to the Wasteland, and while I am often unhappy with the way public television has turned out, I think it is time to imagine a form of critical engagement that allows us to understand the connections between popular television and the broader visual cultures of modernism/ postmodernism.

It seems particularly important for popular television (and television studies) to engage more with the work being done in video and to think more about why video and television (both the producers and the critics) have remained so detached from one another. Despite all the talk of the mergers between high art and low TV that has been going on since the 1960s, the truth is art and commercialism did not actually merge quite as fully as people seem to believe. Instead, in the late 1960s art was simply reassigned a new word – video – that made it distinct from television. Video and its Portapak technology grew in the art world context of New York and posed a challenge to Hollywood through a resurrection of personal authorship, non-studio work, and a penchant for spontaneity over formula. In critical circles, the logic of the high and low distinction became wedded to medium specificity arguments as numerous critics began a frenzied debate over the essential properties of video vs. television.

Still, in some ways, by posing themselves as counter-television or medium specific, video artists and critics got weighed down by the discursive baggage surrounding modern art on television in the previous two decades. At MOMA's famous 1972 *Open Circuits* conference, which considered the future of television, these medium specificity arguments turned onto the older gendered modernist logic that associated mass culture with women and high culture with men. In his essay for the book that came out of the conference, Gregory Battcock spoke of early television as part of the »mother form« of architecture. Noting new developments in both portable television sets and video aesthetics, he continued, »by moving the television set away from the wall one moved it away from its mother«, and with this move we have a new »era of visual video communication of importance equal to that of the of sculptural communication begun in ancient Greece ...«. ⁹⁸ Through this logic, television was dressed in the cloak of femininity and thus devalued, while video was re-masculinized as a form of »high art« and public culture. In other discussions, however, video art did not fare so well. Like other forms of modern art, video art has been seen as somehow »foreign« to American tastes. Video's connections to the European avant-garde (especially through the French new wave and the work of Jean-Luc Godard) made it susceptible to the populist distrust for modernism exhibited throughout American culture and certainly, as we have seen, on American television. Moreover, during the »hot war« years of Vietnam, the more immediate for-

eign threat was Asia: *Sony* was the company behind the Portapak and its premier artist was the New York-based Nam June Paik. (And, of course, video artists even took on the military language of the war in Vietnam insofar as they were known as »guerrilla« artists.) Ensnared in these gendered and nationalist tropes, the video art world often self-identified by distancing itself from what it perceived to be TV's degraded status, while the public reception of video art increasingly disparaged its artistic aspirations, once more associating modern art with elitism, inscrutability, and even the threat of subversion.⁹⁹

It should be obvious at this point that the contemporary issues surrounding art on television are deeply historical and political in nature, and these historical struggles are neither resolved through nor derailed by a new postmodern sensibility. Rather, the legacy of relationships between modern art and television continues to inform the way we make distinctions among »public« television, commercial television, video art, and even such new technologies as the internet (with its collectors and fan lines) and CD ROMs (which now include interactive museums). Despite my desire to conclude with an appropriately modernist utopian statement about the way these technologies might integrate art into the practices of everybody's everyday lives, it seems disingenuous at best to make such a statement, especially given the complicated politics involved in the prior criticism that has done so. But it does seem important, at the very least, that popular culture critics start thinking seriously about their own relative silence on the state of the arts in television because if we don't speak, you can be sure the people in Washington will.

Notes

- ¹ This essay is a somewhat revised version of an essay by the same title that appeared in: Cary Nelson and Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar, eds., *Disciplinary and Dissent in Cultural Studies*, New York 1996, pp. 313-346. Thank-you to the editors.
- ² Dimension was a public affairs program that ran on a »sustaining« – or non-advertiser supported – basis. It dealt with cultural pursuits and educational fare.
- ³ Note that the gallery »mistake« and the smoking technician were actually written into the script by MOMA. See Dimension, Script, Air Date: 16 October 1954, Series III. Box 18: Folder 3, MOMA Library. The museum's intent was to include an untutored »doubting Thomas« character who might be more like the TV audience. See Untitled notes, ca. 1954, p. 2, Series III. Box 18: Folder 3, Museum of Modern Art Library, Museum of Modern Art, New York (Hereinafter referred to as MOMA Library). See also Sidney Peterson, *The Medium*, p. 103, Series III. Box 14, MOMA Library. The actual episode is available at the Museum of Television and Radio (hereinafter referred to as MTR). Other film and TV documentaries made use of the convention of the »doubting Thomas« character that was dubious of modern art. The professional art critic would then educate this skeptical character, and of course, in the process, the critic would also educate the home audience. This allowed the museum to avoid direct didacticism, in this case making the viewer believe that he/she was more sophisticated than the disheveled cameraman and, thus, more open to modern art. Note as well as that the skeptic was usually a

woman or a working class man. See Lynn Spigel, *Live From New York: Television at the Museum of Modern Art, 1948-1955*, « in: *Aura*, Spring 2000, pp. 1-24. See also my forthcoming book *High and Low TV: Modern Art, and Commercial Television in Postwar America*, Chicago.

- ⁴ MOMA continued to advertise its collection on television. For example, in a joint venture with the television program *Camera 3*, it publicized its show for the 75th anniversary of Picasso, and in another *Camera 3*, museum director Alfred Baar presented a detailed study of the *Guernica*.
- ⁵ PBS, or the Public Broadcast Service, began operations in 1969. It was the result of a long political struggle over the fate of educational television in the U.S. Although educational television existed previous to the formation of PBS, PBS was the first attempt to provide a federally supported network service. PBS was founded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (itself established as a corporation under the auspices of the Ford Foundation, but its maintenance required federal subsidies as well as donor support). PBS has since been funded through a combination of private sector grants, donations, and tax dollars.
- ⁶ In the U.S., scholars have devoted some attention to performance arts such as ballet, the symphony, and theater. See, for example, Brian G. Rose, *Television and the Performing Arts: A Handbook and Reference Guide to American Cultural Programming*, New York 1986. In the British context, John Walker has considered the translation of fine art to television. See his *Arts TV: A History of Arts Television in Britain*, London 1993.
- ⁷ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Dice, Cambridge 1984.
- ⁸ Andreas Huyssen, *After The Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, and Postmodernism*, Bloomington and Indianapolis 1986.
- ⁹ See Neil Harris, *Cultural Excursions: Marketing Appetites and Cultural Tastes in Modern America*, Chicago 1990; T.J. Jackson Lears, *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America*, New York 1994; Terry Smith, *Making the Modern: Industry, Art, and Design in America*, Chicago 1993; Sarah Burns, *Inventing the American Artist: Art and Culture in Guilded Age America*, New Haven 1996; Cecile Whiting, *The Taste for Pop: Art, Gender and Consumer Culture*, Cambridge 1997; Dickran Tashjian, *A Boatload of Madmen: Surrealism and the American Avant Garde, 1920-1950*, New York 1995; Michelle Bogart, *Artists, Advertising, and the Borders of Art*, Chicago 1995.
- ¹⁰ Estelle Hamburger, *It's a Woman's Business*, New York 1939.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 178.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 141-142.
- ¹³ Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War*, trans. A. Goldhammer, Chicago 1983, p. 89.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 91.
- ¹⁵ Stanford Research Institute, Long Range Planning Service, 1962, p. 2, Papers of August Heckscher, White House Staff Files, 1962-63, John Fitzgerald Kennedy Library, Boston, Massachusetts (Hereinafter referred to as JFK Library).
- ¹⁶ Stanford Research Institute, Long Range Planning Service, p. 4.
- ¹⁷ Although the Stanford report did not make this correlation, it is interesting to note that as art became cheaper to see through technological reproductions in mass media, according to the same report, »the price of original paintings rose over 600% in the U.S.« (Long Range Planning Service, p. 4).
- ¹⁸ Alan Wallach, *The Museum of Modern Art: The Past's Future*, in: Francis Frascina and Jonathan Harris, eds., *Art in Modern Culture: An Anthology of Critical Texts*, New York 1992, pp. 282-291. Note, as well, this was the same year RCA debuted its commercial television system at the New York World's Fair.
- ¹⁹ This is reported in Betty Chamberlain, draft of letter to Federal Communications Commission,

ca. 1951, Series III. Box 19: Folder 12.d., MOMA Library.

- ²⁰ Sidney Peterson, *The Medium*. For more on MOMA's TV project and Peterson specifically see my essay: *Live from New York*, and my forthcoming book *High and Low TV*, as fn. 3.
- ²¹ Allon Schoenor, *Television, An Important New Instrument of Mass Education for Museums*, (Speech presented at *The Role of Museums in Education*, Seminar at the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, 27 September 1952, Brooklyn New York), p. 1. The transcribed talk is in the NBC Records, Papers of Davidson Taylor, Box 278: Folder 10, Wisconsin Center Historical Archives, State Historical Society, Madison. (Hereinafter referred to Wisconsin Center Historical Archives). It should be noted that despite these statistics, not everyone in the museum world felt that television had achieved its goal in disseminating art education. In a report for MOMA, Douglas Macagy predicted that »the museum will do for painting what radio did for the symphony,« but at the same time he also remarked, »When compared with radio's achievement in music, television has accomplished next to nothing on behalf of the visual arts, and many wonder why.« See his *The Museum Looks in On TV, 1955*, p. ii, Series III. Box 14, MOMA Library.
- ²² Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art*, as fn. 13, p. 55.
- ²³ The term »ugly American« was coined by William J. Lederer (1958) in his book of that title (New York). I am using it to cover the concept that prevailed at the time, but it should be noted the term itself was not in popular circulation during much of the period.
- ²⁴ Eva Cockcroft, *Abstract Expressionism: Weapon of the Cold War*, in: Francis Frascina and Jonathan Harris, eds., *Art in Modern Culture: An Anthology of Critical Texts*, New York 1992, pp. 82-90.
- ²⁵ See Jane de Hart Mathews, *Art and Politics in Cold War America*, in: *American Historical Review* 81 (1976): 762-87.
- ²⁶ For example, in an interesting case study of U.S. efforts to send American cultural products to Austria during the Cold War, Reinhold Wagnleitner argues that »continental elites were less than impressed with American ›High Culture‹, and the European ›masses‹ were rarely if ever reached by these attempts.« He goes on, »Far more effective in capturing the masses attention, however, were American films and other products of popular culture.« »Consequently«, he continues, »it was not American high culture that won the European ›masses‹, as idealistic, liberal universalists had hoped, but the new-world promise of abundance spread by advertising, movie stars, and popular music which accompanied the greatest propaganda victory of the United States in Europe – the Marshall Plan.« See Reinhold Wagnleitner, *The Irony of American Culture Abroad: Austria and the Cold War*, in: Lary May, Hg., *Recasting America: Culture and Politics in the Age of Cold War*, Chicago 1989, pp. 293-295.
- ²⁷ As Guilbaut suggests, mass media such as radio and magazines had in the 1940s popularized ideas about modern art in America. See his *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art*, as fn. 13, chapter 2.
- ²⁸ Katherine Kuh, *The Unhappy Marriage of Art and TV*, in: *Saturday Review*, 21 January 1961, p. 61.
- ²⁹ *Person to Person* was an interview show hosted by Murrow, who would speak from his studio via remote feed with a celebrity guest who was typically situated in their home. This episode was aired 1 February 1959 and is available at MTR.
- ³⁰ Murrow was the premier celebrity broadcast journalist of the era. His popularity soared during World War II when he broadcast live from battlefields. In the 1950s he co-produced *See It Now*, an often controversial documentary program on CBS. His most famous broadcasts in this period centered around attacks on McCarthyism, and he is often credited with helping to bring an end to Senator McCarthy's »red scare« campaigns against communism.
- ³¹ Note that while Castro would have been conceived as »foreign« and communist at this point, he was not yet widely seen as a »subversive« threat.

- ³² The WPA was founded as part of President Roosevelt's »New Deal« Depression era campaign to infuse federal funding into various aspects of the American economy (including in this case the cultural economy of the arts). Federal support for the arts under the auspices of the WPA also often meant that patriotic themes were part of these cultural projects.
- ³³ Airdate 13 December 1955. The program is available at MTR.
- ³⁴ Karal Ann Marling, *As Seen on TV: The Visual Culture of Everyday Life in the 1950s*, Cambridge 1994, pp. 76-77.
- ³⁵ For a discussion of African American Jazz in Paris since the twenties see Tyler Stovall, *Paris Noir: African Americans in the City of Light*, Boston 1996.
- ³⁶ William Boddy discusses these issues around foreign syndication in his work on the Thomas Dodd television violence hearings. See: *Investigating Video Violence in the Early 1960s*, in: Lynn Spigel and Michael Curtin, eds., *The Revolution Wasn't Televised: Sixties Television and Social Conflict*, New York 1997, pp. 161-183.
- ³⁷ One of the Kennedy Administration's greatest exploits was a closed circuit TV program entitled »An American Pageant of the Arts« that was aired to promote Kennedy's plans for the construction of the National Cultural Center. Produced by Omnibus producer Robert Saudek, the program was broadcast on 29 November 1962 to paying audiences in 100 cities across the country (ticket prices ranged from \$100.00 to \$2.00 according to venue). It included an eclectic mix of musical and comedy acts from the »serious« conductor (and host) Leonard Bernstein, the poet Robert Frost, and »legitimate« actors like Colleen Dewherst to the likes of popular entertainers like Danny Kaye, Gene Kelly, Tammy Grimes, Benny Goodman and Harry Belafonte. For a description see »An American Pageant of the Arts,« 1962, p. 3, Papers of August Heckscher, White House Staff Files, 1962-63, JFK Library.
- ³⁸ Founded in 1934, The Federal Communications Commission is the government regulatory body for broadcasting in the U.S.
- ³⁹ Newton N. Minow, »The Vast Wasteland,« *Equal Time: The Private Broadcaster and the Public Interest*, New York 1964.
- ⁴⁰ A tape of this is available at the JFK Library.
- ⁴¹ The program was simulcast on NBC. ABC did not run the *Tour*, opting instead to feature its police show, *Naked City*. See Jack Gould, Mrs. Kennedy TV Hostess to the Nation, in: *The New York Times* (15 February 1962), p. 18.
- ⁴² A Tour of the White House with Mrs. John F. Kennedy, Airdate 14 February 1962 available at MTR and the UCLA Film and Television Archive.
- ⁴³ Philip Wylie, *A Generation of Vipers*, New York 1955, pp. 214-215.
- ⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 213-14.
- ⁴⁵ Huyssen, *After the Great Divide*, as fn. 7, chapter 3.
- ⁴⁶ Anthology drama series were popular during the 1950s. They were typically produced at advertising agencies with single sponsorship. *Telephone Time* was produced by Bell Telephone. They typically featured different short plays with different stars in each episode. In the early 1950s, The most »prestigious« of these shows ran on the major networks and were shot live.
- ⁴⁷ James Thrall Soby, *Art on TV*, in: *Saturday Review*, 13 April 1957, p. 29.
- ⁴⁸ This theme of the older woman and her liaison with a modern painter was repeated in a 1953 episode of Armstrong Circle Theater entitled »The Secret of Emily Duvane« which is held at the UCLA Film and Television Archive. This episode, which is set in Singapore and deals with a woman and her extremely colonialist-minded husband, is an incredibly rich example of the way older American women are presented as modern primitives.
- ⁴⁹ This domestic sitcom ran from 1950-1958. It starred the popular vaudeville team and radio/motion picture stars George Burns and Gracie Allen. Like other early early sitcoms (for example, *I Love Lucy*), this one featured a »real life« married couple, and it often intentionally blurred their real life with their television personae. This was a particularly experimental pro-

gram. George would step out of his role as husband/character in the sitcom story, literally walk out of the domestic setting and onto a stage where he would take on his vaudeville persona as comic. He then spoke directly into the camera, addressing the audience at home, often commenting on aspects of the sitcom plot and Gracie's »zany« antics. For more on this program see Lynn Spigel, *Make Room for TV. Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America*, University of Chicago Press, 1992, chapter 5; and Patricia Mellencamp, *Situation Comedy, Feminism, and Freud: Discourses of Gracie and Lucy*, in: Charlotte Brunsdon, Julie D'Acci and Lynn Spigel, eds., *Feminist Television Criticism: A Reader*, London 1997, pp. 60-73.

⁵⁰ Gracie Becomes a Portrait Artist After Museum Visit, in: *Airdate*, February 28, 1955.

⁵¹ Michael Rogin discusses the links between communism and momism in American film of this period. See his *Ronald Reagan: The Movie: And Other Episodes in Political Demonology*, Berkeley 1987, pp. 236-271.

⁵² As early as 1945, premier art critic Clement Greenburg, most famous for his opposition between the »avant-garde« and »kitsch,« noted the trend for industry's co-optation of modernism, warning, »We are in danger of having a new kind of official art foisted on us – official »modern« art. It is being done by well-intentioned people like the Pepsi-Cola Company...Official »modern« art of this type will confuse, discourage and dissuade the true creator.«, in: *Nation*, 1 December 1945, p. 604.

⁵³ Daytime programs, for example, showcased modern industrial design for households, and MOMA was itself involved in showcasing its industrial design exhibits on daytime television. For example, when MOMA mounted its »Good Design« exhibit in 1952, the museum staged segments for an NBC morning show. See Lynn Spigel, *Live From New York*, as fn. 3. Later, in the 1960s, commercial design and its status as »art« also became a pervasive theme of television documentaries about Popism. See, for example, *USA: Artists (Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein)*, *Airdate* 8 March 1966 on National Educational Television (NET), and available at MTR.

⁵⁴ It also seems worth noting that cartoon art used for television reviews in major periodicals often employed abstract styles to depict television and television programming. In this regard, through the institution of TV criticism and its links to commercial art, the reading public would have occasion to acquaint themselves with elements of modern design. An article in *Television Quarterly* even compared the editorial cartoon (in both print media and on television) to the French new wave film *Last Year at Marienbad*. See John Chase, *The TV Editorial Cartoon*, in: *Television Quarterly* 6:2 (1967), pp. 4-19.

⁵⁵ *Omnibus* was the longest running and widely acclaimed cultural series on early network TV. It ran from 1953 to 1956 on the CBS network, was then picked up by ABC and finally by NBC until it went off the air in 1961. It featured a mix of theater, music, ballet, literature, poetry, and programs on the plastic arts. It was revived for a short while in 1981. This episode was aired 25 January 1953 and is available at MTR.

⁵⁶ Erika Doss, *Benton, Pollack, and the Politics of Modernism: From Regionalism to Abstract Expressionism*, Chicago 1989, pp. 205-219.

⁵⁷ For a detailed study of the arts on television see Rose, *Television*, as fn. 6.

⁵⁸ Along these lines it is interesting to note that numerous fiction programs thematized the fraudulent nature of art in stories about forgery. One critic pointed out: »The most drastic proof of art's descendent popularity is that it so often supplied the dramatic plot for ambitious TV programs. I don't how many times during the past two years I've watched mystery stories in which the theft or forgery of a painting has been the subject of complicated exercises in skullduggery and sleuthing.« See Soby, *Art on TV*, as fn. 47, p. 29.

⁵⁹ For a good discussion of the scandals and their effect on the television industry see William Boddy, *The Seven Dwarfs and the Money Grubbers: The Public Relations Crisis of US Television in the Late 1950s*, in: Patricia Mellencamp, ed., *Logics of Television: Essays in Cultural*

Criticism, Bloomington and Indianapolis 1990, pp. 98-116.

⁶⁰ Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, New York 1964.

⁶¹ For discussions of these industrial shifts see William Boddy, *Fifties Television: The Industry and Its Critics*, Urbana 1990, and Christopher Anderson, *Hollywood TV: The Studio System in the Fifties*, Austin 1994.

⁶² Mark Alvey, *The Independents: Rethinking the Television Studio System*, in: Lynn Spigel and Michael Curtin, eds., *The Revolution Wasn't Televised: Sixties Television and Social Conflict*, New York 1997, pp. 139-158.

⁶³ *Route 66* featured two young men driving around the country in a corvette, seeking adventure and often helping people in distress. Complete with jazz music theme track, the show presented a decidedly »moral« set of Beat generation heroes, on the road and clearly outside the confines of domesticity. Many episodes paired them with glamorous startlets in t romantic tristes. The series aired from 1960-1964 on CBS.

⁶⁴ *The Twilight Zone* was a science fiction/horror anthology series that ran from 1959-1965. It featured playwright Rod Serling, who had written acclaimed live anthology television plays of the 1950s. Serling also produced and hosted the series, which had a decidedly offbeat and edgy feel, often dealing allegorically with social critiques of racism, the cold war, even the terrors of family life and suburbia. Serling introduced the series against a backdrop of eerie music and stylized visuals that marked the program as clearly different from television's more »mundane« sounds and settings.

⁶⁵ Jac Venza, ed., *Television USA: 13 Seasons*, New York 1962, p. 15.

⁶⁶ *Gunsmoke* was one of network television's first and most popular prime-time Westerns. It was broadcast on CBS from 1955-1971.

⁶⁷ The artistic aspirations of Camelot were also exhibited back in Hollywood where industry people got the city of Los Angeles to front seed money for the Hollywood Museum which was, according to its founders, intended to raise film, television, radio, and recorded music to the status of art.) The Museum Commission was formed by the Los Angeles Board of Supervisors in 1959. The Advisory Council included Desi Arnaz, Jack Benny, Frank Capra, Walt Disney, William Dozier, Jack Warner, Arthur Miller, Ronald Reagan, and Harold Lloyd. The exact wording of the founding document was »The goal is to portray these four communicative arts as having a justification not only as entertainment media but also as important contributions to humanity...the Museum will be of aid in a positive way in overcoming the damaging effect of the constant and growing criticisms of the industries by numerous private and public groups.« See Sol Lesser, Untitled document, 1962, n.p., White House Staff Files, JFK Library. In line with Kennedy's use of art as a strategic force in »free world« rhetoric, the museum promoters sent a telegram to Robert S. MacNamara, secretary of Defense, saying that the mass media represented in the museum would help create better understanding among nations. See Schumach telegram to Robert S. MacNamara, 1963, n.p., Papers of August Heckscher, White House Staff Files, JFK Library. There were ground-breaking ceremonies in 1963, but the museum did not materialize.

⁶⁸ One year before *Batman*, ABC aired the short-lived and still black and white series *Honey West*, a female spy show that inspired by the popularity of James Bond, but also using Pop pulp fiction themes and sometimes Pop iconography. The program played with the »threat« of the modern women and her eccentric visual style, presenting Honey a high tech femme fatale dressed in leopard who kicked, whipped, and even wrestled male enemies. For an analysis of the program see Julie D'Acci, *Nobody's Woman: Honey West and the New Sexuality*, in: *The Revolution Wasn't Televised*, pp. 73-93.

⁶⁹ For more on *Batman* in relation to Pop and Camp see Lynn Spigel and Henry Jenkins, *Same Bat Channel/ Different Bat Times: Mass Culture and Popular Memory*, in: Roberta Pearson and William Uricchio, eds., *The Many Lives of the Batman: Critical Approaches to a Superhero and*

His Media, London: British Film Institute, 1991, pp. 117-146.

- ⁷⁰ The networks had considering exploiting art for the marketing of color TV even before the FCC set color standards in 1952. CBS and NBC had affiliated with MOMA and the Metropolitan museum of art in these early years. The mix of vaudeville/variety show and fine art was present from the start. In 1951, CBS aired it inaugural color broadcast featuring Ed Sullivan, Arthur Godfrey and fem-cee Faye Emerson along with a Renoir on loan from the Met and a Picasso on loan from MOMA. As I detail elsewhere, MOMA's Alfred Barr was nervous about loaning the Picasso to CBS, largely because he feared the network might place the painting next to commercial advertising for Pepsi. See Alfred H. Barr, Jr., letter to Mr. Rickey, 20 June 1951, Series III. Box 19: Folder 12.d., MOMA Library. By 1954, NBC had joined forces with the Met to present its first nationally broadcast color program. The museum used the color broadcast to promote its newly »modernized« building and to court a national audience. See *A Visit to the Metropolitan Museum of Art*: NBC, Script, Air Date: 8 May 1954, NBC Records, The Papers of Davidson Taylor, Box 279: Folder 69, Wisconsin Center Historical Archives. For more on this see my essay *Live from New York*, and my forthcoming book *High and Low TV*, as fn. 3.
- ⁷¹ *Discotheque Frug Party Heralds Batman's Film and TV Premiere* in: *New York Times*, 13 January 1966, p. 79.
- ⁷² It could, of course, be argued that Pop borrowed mass culture's borrowing strategies before this insofar as both film and broadcasting had relied heavily on the fine arts for subject matter, and they both borrowed forms of exhibition from the world of theater and the arts. However, in this case, it seems to me that television now borrowed a particular kind of borrowing strategy from Pop, one that was playfully ironic and self-reflexive. The *Batman* reception was filled with this kind of playful irony and self-reflexivity, as was the program itself.
- ⁷³ In *Fables of Abundance*, T. J. Jackson Lears shows that this debate regarding the status of advertising as art took place as early as the 1890s. See pp. 282-298.
- ⁷⁴ Abe Liss in *Venza*, *Television USA*: 13 Seasons, p. 38.
- ⁷⁵ Gerald Weales, *Be Quiet, The Commercial's On*, in: *Television Quarterly* 6:3 (1967), p. 24.
- ⁷⁶ André Malraux, *The Meaning of Culture*, Address before the French National Assembly, 9 November 1963, excerpted and reprinted in: *Television Quarterly* 3:1 (1963), pp. 44-55; and Richard W. Jencks, *Is Taste Obsolete?* in: *Television Quarterly* 8:3 (1969), pp. 5-21.
- ⁷⁷ Jack Gould, *Too Good to be Camp*, in: *The New York Times*, 23 January 1966, Sec I: p. 17.
- ⁷⁸ John Skow, *Has TV Gasp Gone Batty?* In: *Saturday Evening Post*, 7 May 1966, p. 95.
- ⁷⁹ »Vaudeo« is a term the industry used to refer to variety programs based on vaudeville theater.
- ⁸⁰ The Nielsen Company is the central market research company for U.S. television audience ratings. In the 1960s, the industry relied heavily on this system for the sale of advertising time.
- ⁸¹ *Rowan and Martin's Laugh-In*, Script # 0283-21, Air Date: 24 February 1969, p. 4A, Doheny Cinema Library, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, CA. (Hereinafter referred to as Doheny Cinema Library).
- ⁸² *Rowan and Martin's Laugh-In*, Script #0283-14, Air Date 6 January 1969, p. 27, Doheny Cinema Library.
- ⁸³ *Rowan and Martin's Laugh-In*, Script # 0283-20, Air Date: 17 February 1969, p. 93, Doheny Cinema Library.
- ⁸⁴ Alex Doty, *Making Things Perfectly Queer*, Minneapolis 1994.
- ⁸⁵ *Rowan and Martin's Laugh-In*, Script #0283-25, Air Date: 24 March 1969, pp.194A-194E, Doheny Cinema Library.
- ⁸⁶ *Rowan and Martin's Laugh-In*, Script #0283-20, Air Date: 17 February 1969, p. 92, Doheny Cinema Library.
- ⁸⁷ Meanwhile, in the sitcom form, a subgenre of »fantastic family sitcoms« featured »mundane« men who had suddenly come into contact with aliens. *My Favorite Martian* followed the life of a young journalist who decided to live with a martian (who he called »Uncle Martin« that lan-

ded in his yard. *Bewitched* followed the exploits of the mortal Darren Stephens, an advertising executive who fell in love with , married, and moved to the suburbs with a witch. *I Dream of Jeannie* featured a young handsome astronaut who found a sexie girl genie who became his live-in girlfriend. And *Mr. Ed*, perhaps the most »perverse« of the group, showcased a suburban architect (Wilbur) who had a talking horse. The humor in all these series revolved around the man's attempts to »hide« his decidedly »abnormal« relationships from others. In *Mr. Ed*, for example, Wilbur had to hide his love for his horse from wife, who often seemed jealous of his relationship with Mr. Ed. So too, in series like *Bewitched* and *I Dream of Jeannie*, the male hero was often rendered powerless by supernatural women (In *Bewitched*, for example, Darren was subject to witchcraft spells that transformed him into everything from a miniature man to a pregnant woman). For more on this see Lynn Spigel, *From Domestic Space to Outer Space: The Fantastic Family Sitcom*, in: Constance Penley et al., eds., *Close Encounters: Film, Feminism, and Science Fiction*, Minneapolis 1991, pp. 205-235.

⁸⁸ Joseph Golden, *TV's Womanless Hero*, in: *Television Quarterly* 2:1 (1963), p. 14.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁹⁰ Exact airdate unspecified. Available at MTR.

⁹¹ For a discussion about the history of debates about museums see Daniel J. Sherman and Irit Rogoff, eds. *Museum Culture: Histories, Discourses, Spectacles*, Minneapolis 1994.

⁹² Airdate 5 February 1967. Available at MTR.

⁹³ This new form of postmodern media event, constructed through the merger of science, art, and commerce, was embraced not only by the television broadcasters, but also by the New York New York art world – at least in the pages of one of its premier journals, *Art News*. Writing for the journal in 1971, Alan Kaprow (who was known for his staging of »Happenings«) embraced the television medium as a welcome alternative to the traditions of modern art. He wrote: »That the LM Mooncraft is patently superior to all contemporary sculptural efforts; that the broadcast verbal exchange between Houston's Manned Spacecraft Center and the Apollo astronauts was better than contemporary poetry; that, with its sound distortions, beeps, static and communication breaks, such exchanges also surpassed the electronic music of the concert halls.« Alan Kaprow, *The Education of the Un-Artist, Part 1*, in: *Art News* 69:10 (1971), p. 28. Kaprow was part of the decade's general interest in breaking down high and low aesthetic hierarchies, and taking this to its terminal extreme, he was critical even of the »anti-art« crowd (those people who were against art), and instead championed what he called »non-art« – or media like television that were integrated into everyday life. Later in the essay he predicts that the new »inter-media« environments of computers, video, etc. (what we would call the information superhighway) will be the spaces where this type of non-art takes place.

⁹⁴ In 1967 alone major rebellions took place in Milwaukee, Detroit, Minneapolis, Plainfield, Tampa, Newark, and Rochester. The program is available at MTR.

⁹⁵ J. Fred MacDonald, *Blacks and White TV: Afro-Americans in Television Since 1948*, Chicago 1983, p.140

⁹⁶ Cited in: *Jet*, April 1968, p. 18.

⁹⁷ The Emmy, had, since the early 1950s, been the most widely publicized of TV awards, presented on a nationwide broadcast annually. For more on the history of the Television Academy and the Emmy Award see Lynn Spigel, *The Making of a TV Literate Elite*, in: Christine Geraghty and David Lusted, eds., *The Television Studies Book*, London 1998, pp. 63-94.

⁹⁸ Gregory Battcock, *The Sociology of the Set*, in: Douglas Davis and Allison Simmons, eds., *The New Television: A Public/Private Art*, Cambridge 1978, pp. 21.

⁹⁹ It should be noted that in the early years, there was some popular interest in video art, especially as the work was publicized on NET, PBS, and also some commercial stations. In 1972, *TV Guide* even ran a rather sympathetic article on the video art movement. See Neil Hickey, *Notes from the Video Underground*, in: *TV Guide* (December 9-15, 1972), pp. 6-10.