
DISSERTATION

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By

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Abstract

My dissertation explores the relationship between graphic design and art by investigating their intersection at a pivotal time in their history: the long decade between the 1959 “creative revolution” in advertising and the release of the Massimo Vignelli-designed New York City subway map of 1972. During the course of my examination, I reveal that, far from remaining mutually exclusive, or from engaging in a one-way connection through which high art drew on mass culture, as is often assumed, art and graphic design regularly informed each other’s methods of production.

Although it is well known that artists such as Andy Warhol appropriated advertising imagery, there are also instances in which artists and designers employed street signage to navigate through city streets and artistic compositions, or moments during which both designers and artists undertook to follow unwitting pedestrians, that signal a deeper understanding of the sympathies between design and art strategies than simple visual borrowing. With these aspects in mind, my dissertation involves the work of artists who have not often been discussed in terms of design, such as Robert Rauschenberg, Vito Acconci, Yoko Ono, Gordon Matta-Clark, and Hans Haacke, as well as designers such as Milton Glaser and Peter Chermayeff who debated the efficacy of designed objects in a city of such overwhelming visual stimulation. My research reveals a city in crisis, but one that provided opportunities for artists and designers to develop new
means of improving and disrupting its ways of living. In surveying this time and art and design’s mutual influence, I hope to pose new questions of designed objects as well as of the art world that developed alongside them.
Dedication

For my parents.
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Introduction

When Robert Rauschenberg reminisced about Josef Albers teaching students that their art had to do with “the entire visual world,” he was suggesting an inclusive realm of visual expression from which Albers intended his students to draw.¹ Beyond finding inspiration only in fine art objects, Albers pushed them to look outside the confines of their studios and classrooms and onto the streets where they would be confronted with the visuality of mass culture. Thus, a project such as Albers’ assignment to build a grey scale out of photographs found in a single magazine was intended to hone students’ awareness of the subtlety of the increments between darkest black and brightest white, as well as to attune them to the existence of these subtleties in print materials.² And indeed, printed images were all around them: In a 1966 discussion of Pop artists titled “The Image Duplicators,” Ellen H. Johnson noted that,

Caught in traffic jams, packed in buses, subways, elevators, or spending a quiet evening at home, never has the human being been such a captive of the printed image, constantly changing and endlessly repeated: in books, newspapers and magazines, on the shifting world of the TV or movie screen, the blaring billboards, highway signs, giant lighted ads for hotels, theaters, stores – everywhere pictured products and pictured people beckoning, commanding and


² “With the tremendous increase in pictorial information – through newspaper, magazines, books – we receive a training in the reading of lighter and darker tones of grey as has never before existed. With the growing interest in color photography and color reproduction, a parallel training in the reading of lighter and darker color is on the way.” Josef Albers, The Interaction of Color vol. 1 (New Haven: Yale University Press; The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation, 2009): 13.
assaulting. These are the fields of Suffolk and the Fontainebleau Forest of our painters. 3

In looking closely at these printed images, though, artists like Rauschenberg learned not only that visual inspiration could be found in quotidian objects but that those objects were also the products of aesthetic decision making, that they were designed. Although the visual workings of mass culture have sometimes been met with discomfort by art historians, artists’ engagement with designed objects – their “personal sense of looking,” as Rauschenberg went on to describe it – has a long and significant history. 4 This dissertation proposes to investigate a moment of that history, through an exploration of the interaction between art and graphic design in New York in the years between 1959 and 1972. I shall consider the following questions: What were the art and design problems facing New York in the decade of the 1960s? What did design work look like in response to these concerns, and how did art produced in this time and place “look” to design, referencing its tropes and considering its potentials? Furthermore, how did artists respond to the designed city in which they were making art and designers respond to the changing focus of art? In so doing, I hope to consider more fully the mutual influence of art and design in this pivotal period of their intertwined modes of production.

By most accounts, New York was an unpleasant, dirty, and even dangerous location to live in the 1960s and 1970s. Through a combination of population decline, governmental neglect, and bureaucratic tangles, New York City reverted to a seemingly ungovernable – and unlivable – place. In official, governmental literature as well as the


4 Rauschenberg, as quoted in Tomkins, 198.
popular media, New York was portrayed as a city that was broken. One need only think of films such as *Midnight Cowboy*, released in 1969, and the New York streets it depicts to imagine the depressing sense that the city was in irreversible decline. Even a movie as celebratory as *Manhattan*, made a decade later, pictured streets filled with garbage and a romantic outing marred by mysterious muck dredged up from Central Park’s boating pond. Crime was rampant, manufacturing moved away from the area, public services were cut, an estimated one-in-four lived in the city in poverty, and in 1975, New York City experienced a credit default, plunging the city into financial turmoil. For all intents and purposes, it seemed as though the world was content to let New York die, as exemplified by a famous front-page headline run by the *New York Daily News* after President Ford declared that the United States would not bail out its largest city. The headline read, “Ford to City: Drop Dead.”

Yet within this apparently dying city was developing one of the centers of the visual world. Postwar New York witnessed a consolidation of artistic output and accomplishment that permitted it to rival the art capitals of previous generations.

“Madison Avenue” was shorthand for the advertising industry, as so many of the field’s major firms were headquartered on that thoroughfare; New York’s dominance in the fields of advertising and marketing remains largely unchallenged. And it was precisely because New York City was experiencing so many urban ills that design for civic use – design such as street signage, subway maps, and street furniture intended to ease the ugliness of the sidewalks – was promoted by government officials as a possible solution to the discomforts of living in the city. If artists saw in New York’s problems an aesthetic

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impetus toward even greater disruption and pushing of limits, then designers and advertisers saw a singular opportunity to attempt an urban rescue, or at least to rebrand the city as “exciting” rather than miserable. Seen in this light, New York in the 1960s and ‘70s becomes a center for visual experimentation and testing of boundaries, since the environment was in such disarray and the rules for successful living in the city were already up for reconsideration.

The art world of New York in this period was incredibly broad, encompassing as it did the last expressions of color field painting, Pop art, minimalism, and the beginnings of Conceptual and performance art. Because of this, I will concentrate my primary discussion on artists who had or have a relationship with design. Andy Warhol’s experience in advertising in the 1950s is the best known, as his commercial practices are widely acknowledged to have influenced his work as an artist. While his engagement with design is less discussed, Robert Rauschenberg supported himself for a brief time early in his career by designing storefronts for shops in Manhattan, and Vito Acconci left his art practice at the end of the 1970s for a career in design. In looking at the art that each of these men produced, though, I will not be considering it as design or as the product of a design inheritance (or foreshadowing, in the case of Acconci). Rather, I am most interested in each artist’s engagement with his visual environment and in exploring the logic that each artist’s work shares in common with the systems and methods exhibited by designed objects. Thus, Warhol’s use of photographic images can be fruitfully discussed in terms of advertising’s use of similar imagery; Rauschenberg’s awareness of the way that signposts work has a bearing on the way the viewer might navigate through his Combines and silkscreen paintings; and the grammar and execution
of Acconci’s writings and performances are mirrored in the processes employed by designers to develop sign systems and maps.

In keeping with the focused number of artists considered here, there will be similar touchstone designers who will play larger roles in my discussion. David Ogilvy will feature throughout the first part of the dissertation, as the advertising executive who literally wrote the rules for advertising at mid-century. Responding to such rules will be Saul Bass, best known for his opening titles of Hollywood films, whose work on the film *North by Northwest* will be discussed here, and the firm Doyle Dane Bernbach, which self-consciously disrupted the Ogilvy prescriptions for successful advertising. The firm Unimark International, and its New York-based principles Bob Noorda and Massimo Vignelli, which developed both a subway map for New York City and a plan for Grand Central station signage, plays a significant part in the latter half of the dissertation. In addition, I engage with the thoughts and work of designers and urban planners as diverse as Milton Glaser, Peter Chermayeff, Robert Moses, and Kevin Lynch. Before turning to a quick outline of what follows in the body of the dissertation, I would like to take a look at the trouble “design” caused for critics of modern art, as the suspicion with which the designers mentioned above were held had profound ramifications on the ways their work was understood and the ways that the art of the period, which often engaged design, was received.

*The Problem of Design in the Art of the Twentieth Century*

The suspicion of design’s influence is a thread that runs throughout the discussion of the art of the twentieth century. Undoubtedly because modern art featured instances of
mass culture from its very beginnings (such as the collage elements in Pablo Picasso’s earliest synthetic Cubist constructions), tackling the prevalence of popular art and culture found within fine art has been an unavoidable feature of the critical writing that has attempted to come to terms with that work. Whether in the typographic decisions of F.T. Marinetti’s *Words in Freedom* or the application of Constructivist ideals in Alexander Rodchenko’s advertisements, artists have employed the language of design, in its commercial and civic manifestations, in their work.\(^6\) The return of commercial imagery to Pop art after the heroic abstract efforts of Color Field painters, must have been understood as what Adolf Loos referred to as a “retrograde step” to those critics who envisioned for art an inevitable progression into self-awareness and purity.\(^7\) In this introduction, I would like to examine briefly the history of the fear of design, looking closely at critical writings by Hilton Kramer and Clement Greenberg to explore the first instances in which the word “design” was used as a term of derision in art writing.\(^8\) This derision stemmed from a disdain for the appearance of popular art or popular art strategies in the work of the 1950s and ‘60s (and, in Greenberg’s case, the 1930s and ‘40s), but also involved a rhetorical strategy, in which “design” was equated with fashion and the fleetingness of good taste. I will also explore the issue from the opposite direction, looking at the problem of design writing and history and exploring the


\(^8\) My own interest is in graphic design history and theory. Greenberg and Kramer were using “design” as a catch-all phrase that encompasses industrial, commercial, and graphic design practices and products.
ambivalence designers and design writers express in becoming part of a greater art historical discussion. Through this commentary, I attempt to uncover the prickly situation of design, a form of visual production that both plays to the mass audience of popular culture but whose products are refined to the point of requiring an elite audience to appreciate their subtleties.

The abhorrence of the decorative can be traced back at least as far as to Adolf Loos, whose famous 1908 essay equated ornament with “crime.”\(^9\) The crime of ornamentation is one that Loos terms an abomination of the “evolution of culture.”\(^10\) If to be modern is to be free of decoration, then the ornamental leaves and filigrees of Art Nouveau signaled for Loos a disturbing decline in the capacities of supposedly sophisticated Europeans. According to “Ornament and Crime,” every civilization prior to the nineteenth century was capable of stripping away the decorative elements in their buildings and furnishings; it did not bode well for the people of the nineteenth century that they fell prey to such a scourge. Even more suspicious for Loos is the fact that the scourge of ornament was subsidized by the government, manifesting on official buildings or appearing at fairs, meaning that citizens are kept in a state of servitude to the easy pleasures that decoration can afford.\(^11\) This opiate that blinds people to poor quality and decadence is something that Loos claimed to in his own constructions, favoring a

\(^{9}\) Loos, “Ornament and Crime,” 167-76. The desire for an art that rewards indifferent contemplation is, of course, a Kantian notion of aesthetics, and one that is used particularly by Greenberg in his dismissal of popular art as “kitsch.” See Greenberg, “Avant Garde and Kitsch,” *Partisan Review* 6 no.5 (Fall 1939): 34-49, and reprinted in *Pollock and After*, 48-59.

\(^{10}\) Loos, 167.

\(^{11}\) Ibid., 169.
simplified – yet political – façade that removes the frosting from the cake that is more delicious without it.\textsuperscript{12}

Loos’s idea that the allure of popular art is mistaken by the masses for the more satisfying sustenance of high art is one that is picked up by generation after generation of writer who succeeds him, each in their way arguing for the importance of the high and the wasted calories of the low. In Hilton Kramer’s 1959 review of Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns’ paintings, he indicates that their art works most successfully on “bourgeois feelings,” which yearn for a bit of “decorative nastiness… intended to offend (which is to say ‘delight’)” them.\textsuperscript{13} The Rauschenberg of this review is a “deft designer with a sensitive eye for the chic detail,” a claim that both dredges up Rauschenberg’s recent past as a window decorator for department stores, and neatly dismisses his paintings, as well.\textsuperscript{14}

But why is “designer” the right term for Kramer in this instance? To call Rauschenberg’s paintings and Combines decorative is to move them away from the all-consuming requirements of a reduction to canvas and paint that is found in all-over painting, and indeed, Kramer notes that Rauschenberg includes passages of painting that call to mind the “official good taste” of Abstract Expressionism. The decorative elements in Rauschenberg’s Combines are those parts of the work that are not Abstract

\textsuperscript{12} Whether or not Loos was successful in this attempt (see the yellow window panes in his Villa Müller, for example), or if ornament needed to be abolished for architecture to do its work, remains in question. Ibid.

\textsuperscript{13} “Month in Review,” 49.

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.
Expressionist.\textsuperscript{15} Thus, Kramer sees Rauschenberg’s paintings as uncomfortable conglomerations of pre-approved painting technique and unfortunate intrusion of the stuff of everyday life onto the purity of such painting. Rauschenberg’s screen prints, signs, and other detritus are, for Kramer, literally decoration which covers over the purity of an appropriately abstract painting.

However, “designer” is something else entirely. A designer could be the person to decorate a store window or the interior of an office or home, but a designer might also be one who has designs on art. It is clear that Kramer intends to conflate the terms “decorative” and “designer,” but there are other aspects of the word design to which he is inevitably alluding. If Rauschenberg has designs on art and the art world, then he is the artist for whom it is possible to destroy that world. To “de-sign” is literally to strip away the signal achievement of art.\textsuperscript{16} To be a designer, to have designs on art, is to employ the strategies of mass art to attempt to deconstruct the edifice of art from within. Thus, the “decorative” elements of Rauschenberg’s Combines not only cover the Abstract Expressionist segments of his work, but visually pull them apart, rendering them powerless and therefore mocking what notions of high achievement they might have represented. The designer is nefarious precisely because he is willing to press such slight advantages. It is the art itself that is not taken seriously in a designer’s work, because the


designer is willing to exploit the techniques used to achieve aesthetic pleasure for something that will not repay the effort. According to Kramer, this is not the art that will reward the disinterested gaze, but rather is that which “tickle[s] the eye, to arrest attention for a momentary dazzle.”\(^{17}\) If it is only dazzle that is the aim of the work produced by Rauschenberg, then he is nothing more than a designer, producing work that is easily consumable, that sells itself well, and that is quickly forgotten when the next piece is encountered. It is art that will suffer because of the designer’s focus on dazzle and introducing the viewer to the concept of good taste.

It is this reference to “good taste” and the ways that it can be produced by design that links Kramer’s criticism to that of Clement Greenberg.\(^{18}\) Writing seven years later in his review “Recentness of Sculpture,” Greenberg decries Minimalist sculpture as little more than “Good Design,” claiming that “[t]he continued infiltration of Good Design into what purports to be advanced and highbrow art now depresses sculpture as it does painting.”\(^{19}\) Greenberg’s suspicions about Minimalism are not that it is decorative in the same way that Kramer indicted Rauschenberg’s work, nor that it borrowed popular culture imagery, but rather that its techniques of construction move it away from the evidence of the hand of the individual artist and toward an ethos of the mass production of art.

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\(^{17}\) “Month in Review,” 49.

\(^{18}\) Even though the two writers’ politics are distinctly different. This momentary establishment of strange bedfellows is one of the peculiarities of the dismissal of mass art that is noted by philosophers of popular aesthetics: “This denigration of popular art, or mass culture..., seems particularly compelling since it is widely endorsed by intellectuals of violently different socio-political views and agendas. Indeed, it provides a rare instance where right-wing conservatives and Marxian radicals join hands and make common cause.” Richard Shusterman, “Don’t Believe the Hype: Animadversions on the Critique of Popular Art,” *Poetics Today* 14 no.1 (Spring 1993): 101-2.

of modular elements that can be configured and reconfigured to produce unending trains of barely differing structures: Minimalism was on the “borderlines between art and non-art.”

Greenberg’s distaste for serialism – an inevitable result of the mass production of objects – which he linked to the first step in a degeneration of the decorative toward fashion, turns artists into designers, those cultural producers who only envision a work but do not make it come into being with their own hands. The difficulty with art becoming fashion is that art then becomes merely “a matter of good taste.”

The linking of “Good Design” and “good taste” was not an arbitrary one on Greenberg’s part. In labeling “Good Design” as a proper name, Greenberg was undoubtedly making an allusion to the Good Design exhibitions held by the Museum of Modern Art throughout the 1940s and 1950s. The exhibitions, curated by Edgar J. Kaufmann, Jr. and held both at the Museum as well as at the Merchandise Mart of Chicago, were juried shows intended to showcase the best industrial design products developed or manufactured that year. The installations allowed the objects to be

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20 Ibid., 182.

21 See Donald Kuspit on Greenberg’s three stages of the descent into the decorative: “1. repetition; 2. felicity, which either masks fear for the loss of artistic identity or the absence of an independent artistic identity; and 3. fashion, which makes the art acceptable to standard taste, i.e. makes the art entirely a matter of good taste.” Donald B. Kuspit, Clement Greenberg, Art Critic (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1979): 69. The type designer Fred Smeijers discussed the issue of the label designer signaling a remove of the creator’s hand from a project in the essay “Artisan or Designer.” He notes that the boundaries are not so easily set: “Michelangelo’s frescos in the Sistine Chapel do not have much to do with design, because he himself signed for the actual execution of the project: he was the artist or craftsman. So here we can... leave out the word ‘design’? No, of course not. Michelangelo certainly designed the frescos of the Chapel as a whole. To be a unity. There is no doubt that there was much planning involved.” Smeijers, “Artisan or Designer,” in Type Now: A Manifesto. Plus, Work So Far (London: Hyphen Press, 2003): 23.

22 Kuspit, 69.

handled by visitors, were purchasable at Merchandise Mart and Kaufmann department stores, and provided funding for designers to bring prototypes into the market. The relationship between design and commercial production was clear, yielding popular exhibits that included saleable art objects. In this capacity MoMA’s exhibitions played roles in both sides of the equation “Good design is good business,” moving the museum away from displays intended to promote disinterested reflection of art in the Kantian vein and toward an active relationship between the viewer and the object, as well as the museum and commerce.24

However, in addition to introducing consumers to post-war domestic products, the exhibitions were also intended to ease the visitor/consumer’s relationship with modern visuality. Indeed, a more developed sense of good taste was the raison d’être behind the Good Design exhibitions. In staging these exhibitions, the museum’s aim was, according to its director, René d’Harnoncourt, to raise the level of awareness and acceptance of modern art among the populace. In a speech given to promote the Good Design program in the Midwest, d’Harnoncourt, suggested, “Of every 100 persons who come to the Museum, we estimate that no more than 10 actually accept a geometric abstraction by

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24 Which, of course, manifests in contemporary museums as exhibition gift shops and museum-endorsed commercial items. The axiom “good design is good business” is widely credited to IBM chairman Thomas J. Watson, Jr. who is cited as saying it anywhere from the mid-1950s to his published version in 1975. See Thomas J. Watson, Jr., “Good Design is Good Business,” in The Art of Design Management: Design in American Business, ed. Thomas F. Schutte (New York: Tiffany & Co., 1975): 57-79. The first published instance I have found of it is from 1952, although not attributed to Watson: “It is possible the style revolution [in furniture design] has been prompted by a mass conversion of furniture manufacturers to artistic styling. On the other hand, the head of one large plant summed up the new attitude of the industry by declaring ‘good design is good business.’” The unidentified plant manager does not cite MoMA and Merchandise Mart’s Good Design exhibitions, but it is implied that they were promoting both good taste and desire for products. “Topics and Sidelights of the Day in Wall Street: Changing Design,” The New York Times 17 January, 1952, 35.
Piet Mondrian as valid art[,]… but when principles of good design permeate a home, the occupants tend to be more tolerant, more receptive to new ideas in art.”

Although historians documenting the program are quick to point out that there is no evidence that Good Design “ever effectively served to familiarize the public with modern art,” the stated intention remained. Good Design was not only intended to help the housewife cook or decorate, it was intended to train her to like art. The design theorist Vilém Flusser puts it thus: “In the gap [between the world of the arts and the world of technology and machines], the word design formed a bridge between the two… Hence, in contemporary life, design more or less indicates the site where art and technology (along with their respective evaluative and scientific ways of thinking) come together as equals, making a new form of culture possible.”

Thus, the usefulness of design was not only one of performing mundane tasks: design had a “higher” function, which would inevitably make high art available lower. The idea that art might need design – at least the idea that designers, merchandisers, and museum directors believed that art might need design – is a notion that runs counter to the belief that avant-garde art’s quality and importance is manifest and self-evident in its very make-up.


28 “In turning his attention away from subject-matter or common experience, the poet or artist turns it in upon the medium of his own craft… [B]y no other means is it possible today to create art and literature of a high order.” “Avant-Garde and Kitsch,” 50, 51.
If art is introduced into the common culture via design, it runs the risk, as well, not of the “imitation of imitating,” something expected of the avant-garde, but rather of imitating the traits of popular art.\textsuperscript{29} In Minimalism, as well as in “Pop, Op, Assemblage... and Novelty Art,” Greenberg observes that “the artistic substance and reality... turns out to be in safe good taste. I find myself back in the realm of Good Design,” where these art forms “live.”\textsuperscript{30} To strive for good taste via Good Design is problematic for any art that purports to be serious because it is so dependent on what is fashionable for the season; fashion stems from the decorative and leads art back to design.\textsuperscript{31} Ideally, “high” avant-garde art should be beyond fashion, and therefore untouched by the time in which it was made. It is out of time, and therefore outside fashion, and thus is never “out” of fashion. Design, however, as it deals with (and sometimes even instigates) the look of now and

\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., 50.

\textsuperscript{30} “Recentness of Sculpture,” 184.

\textsuperscript{31} The relationship of design to decoration and fashion also suggests a rhetorical strategy on Greenberg’s part to equate aspects of design and the decorative with women, whereas high art retains an aesthetic forthrightness that is masculine. On Greenberg and the gender issues associated with decoration see Elissa Auther, “The Decorative, Abstraction, and the Hierarchy of Art and Craft in the Criticism of Clement Greenberg,” \textit{Oxford Art Journal} 27 no.3 (2004): 341-64. Greenberg’s art historical tradition is discussed in Nancy Jachec, “Modernism, Enlightenment Values, and Clement Greenberg,” \textit{Oxford Art Journal} 21 no.2 (1998): 123-32. Although not discussed by the authors listed above, this construction is in fact an inversion of the Renaissance understanding of the gender qualities of \textit{disegno} and \textit{colorito}, in which \textit{disegno} (design) took the masculine part and \textit{colorito} (color, as well as matter) took the feminine. If it is the case that Greenberg is exchanging each art historical association for the other, then he is performing a preemptive move to strip design of its “masculinity” so that the assumption can be drawn that design “domesticates” art. In that one of the motives for Good Design is to make modern art palatable to a large audience, one that might feel more comfortable with art once it was broken in by design, Greenberg is justified in his reservations, even if his own sexual politics are not above suspicion themselves. For more on the location of gender characteristics in the \textit{disegno}/\textit{colorito} \textit{paragone}, see Patricia L. Reilly, “The Taming of the Blue: Writing Out Color in Italian Renaissance Color Theory,” in \textit{The Expanding Discourse: Feminism and Art History}, ed. Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (New York: Icon Editions, 1992): 87-100; and Philip Sohm, “Gendered Style in Italian Art Criticism from Michelangelo to Malvasia,” \textit{Renaissance Quarterly} 48 no.4 (Winter 1995): 759-808. A similar tendency has been noted in design criticism, which has a tendency to equate “form” with the feminine and “function” with the masculine: Judy Attfield, “FORM/Female FOLLOWS FUNCTION/Male: Feminist Critiques of Design,” in \textit{Design History and the History of Design}, ed. John A. Walker (London: Pluto; Winchester, MA: Unwin Hyman, 1989): 199-225.
responds to the manufactured needs of today, constantly runs the risk of being ephemeral at best and démodé at worst. This is the “momentary dazzle” to which Kramer refers, or the “one-time surprise” – the “recentness” – that Greenberg contrasts to the ever-present aesthetic delight discovered in avant-garde art. He continues, “Aesthetic surprise hangs on forever – it is still in Raphael as it is in Pollock… Aesthetic surprise comes from inspiration and sensibility as well as from being abreast of the artistic times.” If art finds itself sympathetic with design priorities, if it traffics in good taste and the sensibilities of the mass audience, then art will – circularly – “reveal… in experience a more or less conventional sensibility.”

Therefore, for these two critics, because it is concerned with the aesthetic of daily life and, even more damning, because it fields the possibility of looking dated (even if to use such obsolescence as a spur to new experimentation), design cannot be art. And art that plays with such design sensibilities as ephemerality, mass production, and popular culture is designated with the descriptor “non-art,” as well.

Throughout the period examined in this dissertation, the questions of design’s nefarious influence – and whether the art that engaged with the design of its time could even be art – informed critical response to both modes of visual production.

The issue of ephemerality and “recentness” is taken up by design writers as one of the key reasons why a history of graphic design is so difficult to write. In his introduction to a series of three issues of Visible Language that explored the possibility of a critical history of graphic design, Andrew Blauvelt wrote that,

The distinguishing characteristic of graphic design from both architecture and product design [as well as art] lies in its inherent ephemeral state. The ephemeral nature of most graphic design simply means that many of the objects of study no longer exist and are not normally collected nor [sic] archived. The transitory

32 “Recentness of Sculpture,” 184.
The “presentness” of graphic design suggests that it is dismissed from both angles: both by the art critics who evoke its fashion with suspicion and design writers who note the lack of objects as a reason for the absence of a substantial history of the field. Design is then both threatening and under threat, able to bend high art to its will while disappearing before it can be placed under scrutiny.  

The difficulties of developing a critical history of graphic design did not end with Blauvelt’s interventions in the mid-1990s. Indeed, the plausibility of a field devoted to the history and theory of graphic design continues to be hotly debated. In a recent essay published in the online forum for graphic design, Design Observer, the critic Rick Poynor noted that there is little sustained interest in building both a critical mass of scholars as well as a readership for such a field and cited the deficiencies of the three Visible Language issues as evidence of that:

Perhaps the most striking example of this shortfall is the three issues of Visible Language published in 1994-5, which set out to explore the possibility of new “critical histories of graphic design.” This ambitious project appeared to promise a dawning era of intellectually challenging, revisionist graphic design history writing… but this promise did not come to fruition. Only a minority of the 15 Visible Language contributors went on to make substantial contributions to

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33 Andrew Blauvelt, “An Opening: Graphic Design’s Discursive Spaces,” Visible Language 28 no.3 (July 1994): 208. This first issue of the series was devoted to “Critiques.” The second and third issues, 28.4 (October 1994) and 29.1 (January 1995), focused on “Practices” and “Interpretations,” respectively.

34 There is seemingly little interest in considering graphic design by literary theorists, as well (Marjorie Perloff’s interventions concerning concrete poetry, Futurist typography, and the like are a notable exception). In his book Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation, Gerard Genette considers typography for one paragraph and suggests that a discussion of paratextual elements “is not the place to discuss the history or aesthetics of the art of typography.” Genette, Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997): 34.
According to Poynor, in addition to the ephemeral and often commercial nature of graphic design objects, which prevents them from being seriously considered in a historical or critical context, graphic design is void of a written history because graphic designers themselves shut non-practitioners out of the field. In an assessment of the Visible Language project even Blauvelt, the editor of the issues, retrenched from a call to a broader, more encompassing field of scholarship, citing his belief that it is only designers who have the practical and formal capacities to write a history of graphic design: “The notion of design as a field of study without practical application is unlikely and undesirable. After all, it is the practice of graphic design – no matter how wanting or limiting – that provides the basis for a theory of graphic design… The calls for graphic design to be a liberal art – a quest for academic legitimacy – need to be supplanted by strategies which foster ‘critical making,’ teaching when, how, and why to question things.”

Contemporary Models

In proposing a history of graphic design that would be written only by practitioners, Blauvelt presumes that the readership would be limited to designers


36 Blauvelt notes the use of the term “carpet-bagger” by design writers to describe scholars writing on graphic design from outside of the design profession. Blauvelt, “An Opening,” 208.

themselves. However, there have been several recent examinations into the coincidence of art and design that will prove pertinent to my discussions here and that expand the audience to include artists, art historians, and critics. I believe this to be an important exercise, as the juxtaposition of art and design permits each to inform and critique the other. In this way, we might explore a productive conversation between the two rather than a reductive protection of their respective corners. Michael J. Golec’s *Brillo Box Archive* posits the Brillo Box design as a Foucauldian archive, in which the box itself functions as “an artwork, a mere box, or a philosophical thought experiment,” as its identity wavers between an Andy Warhol artwork, an object designed by James Harvey, and a theoretical position elucidated by Arthur C. Danto. In *The Disappearance of Objects: New York and the Rise of the Postmodern City*, Joshua Shannon places Claes Oldenburg, Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg, and Andy Warhol into a New York in the late 1950s and early 1960s that was experiencing mass-deindustrialization. As New York moved from a factory-driven to a financial center, these four artists gathered the detritus of the city’s recent past into their work. The sympathies between Shannon’s argument and mine are clear, with Shannon focusing more closely on architecture and I on graphic design elements in the city. Whereas Shannon sees artists mourning the loss of the industrial city, though, I have chosen to focus on artists’ productive manipulation of the new mass culture developing in New York in order to explore how strategies of art-making and design-making might have overlapped during these years. Ina Blom’s

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examination, *On the Style Site: Art, Sociality, and Media Culture*, posits “style” – that is, artwork that is produced with a design sensibility and an awareness of contemporary “lifestyle” concerns – as a node of site-specificity in art, opening up critical apparatus to discuss works produced in this mode in ways that are not possible if style is not taken into consideration.\(^\text{40}\) Although Blom focuses on work that has been produced in the past ten years or so, her discussion has already prompted further considerations of the subject, and an interesting incorporation of design into the art historical discussion, as evidenced by the special feature devoted to “Questions of Style” in the September 2010 issue of *Artforum*.\(^\text{41}\) Finally, Grace McQuilten’s newly released study, *Art in Consumer Culture: Mis-Design*, looks at artist/designers working in the overlap between these two fields of visual production.\(^\text{42}\) Like Blom, McQuilten considers art that was made more recently than that of my dissertation, but there are important correspondences, not least in her discussion of the art and design work of Vito Acconci.

Outside of art historical discussions, the recent exhibition at the Museum of the City of New York, *America’s Mayor: John V. Lindsay and the Reinvention of New York*, and its accompanying catalogue, pulled together a rich trove of archival material in the form of press releases, films, and even trash can designs to showcase the different tactics assumed to “fix” New York’s problems in the 1960s and ‘70s.\(^\text{43}\) Although Lindsay’s tenure as mayor of New York City was in many ways considered a failure, his


\(^{41}\) “Questions of Style,” *Artforum* 49 no.1 (September 2010): 254-71, 352.

\(^{42}\) Grace McQuilten, *Art in Consumer Culture: Mis-Design* (Farnham, UK; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011).

willingness to engage artists and designers in projects toward urban improvement will prove vital to my investigation of the time. Such studies of the climate of New York during the period as Miriam Greenberg’s *Branding New York: How a City in Crisis was Sold to the World* will also aid my discussion; the tactic of selling New York as a cultural capital and tourist destination via design strategies such as advertising campaigns was a notable success even as campaigns to improve the city for its citizens faltered.\(^{44}\) Interestingly, though art and design play large roles in these materials, they often do not receive sustained examination, an oversight this dissertation will address.

Where I differ most significantly from the scholars mentioned above is that for my study, design and art are not set up as separate poles. Rather, I discuss them in dialogue with one another, sometimes acting as foils for each other, but often exploiting similar systems and testing the same boundaries. To do so, my research has been informed by Ludwig Wittgenstein’s publications such as *Philosophical Investigations*, *Zettel*, as well as his lectures.\(^ {45} \) Although Wittgenstein’s writings are not the only theoretical models that I have found helpful for thinking through the problems of the art and design work I consider here, the questions of following rules and the language games Wittgenstein explored in these publications prove to be interested conversants with the rhetoric and form of sign systems that I am interested in discussing throughout the dissertation. By following Wittgenstein’s lead concerning rule following, I hope to elucidate the constraints and prospects facing the designers of systems of signs,


billboards, and arrows. Wittgenstein’s use by artists in this period has received only occasional amounts of critical attention, and yet he was cited as an important influence by several artists active at this time, including Jasper Johns, Bruce Nauman, and Robert Morris, all of whom found his consideration of rules and language games to be useful in their own work.46 Wittgenstein has not often been utilized in discussions of the artists and designers under consideration here, though examples from the period, such as Willoughby Sharp’s 1970 exploration of developments in performance art that links Acconci to Wittgenstein, do exist.47 Each artist’s and designer’s work considered here features games of language, instances of following, and an awareness of when the maker is breaking the rules. What is more, the philosopher’s concepts often seem to be used as inspiration or prescriptions, as though the artists were playing with his discussions of games, allowing for an unusual dialogue with his thoughts on rule following and language games that takes the questions raised by these ideas seriously and considers them artistically. In this way, we might see that the artists and designers in the period responded to Wittgenstein’s ideas in ways that uniquely took advantage of the whimsy and playfulness of his prose; artists responded not only to what Wittgenstein wrote but also how he wrote it.

My discussion of art and design, and more particularly art and design that share interests in rules and the use of language and words, has benefitted from a consideration

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of how these two forms of visual production work within Wittgenstein’s concept of “family resemblances.” Although the use of “family resemblances” to discuss a “shared set of practices” in the arts has recently been called into question by Jacques Rancière, who maintains the importance of acknowledging a “disjunction” in art, he nevertheless observes that there is a “surface of equivalence between words and forms [that] proposes something altogether different from a formal game: an equivalence between the forms of art and the forms of everyday living.” It is the equivalence between words, forms, art, and everyday living that I am interested in exploring in this dissertation and indeed that artists and designers at the time understood themselves to be elucidating, either in Rauschenberg’s goal of operating in the “gap between art and life,” or in designers’ attempts to be the “visual interpreter[s]” of the “variety of ‘systems’ – government, transportation, schools, social services – that make the city a functioning, usable environment.” The reference to Wittgenstein here is intended to provide the navigational and conceptual tools to undertake that exploration. Furthermore, by employing the nuances of Wittgenstein’s thought as discussed by Michel de Certeau in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, we can come to understand artists’ and designers’ manipulation of the everyday as instances of political resistance, what de Certeau calls *la
perruque, which permit the players in my discussion to become producers in the city without succumbing to systems of the city, the market, or mass culture.  

Because it has been so little discussed in the art historical literature, it may come as a surprise that artists were so engaged in design practice and designers so aware of movements within the art world at this time, and yet the overlap between art and design in the 1960s was quite prevalent. For example, a look at the lists of speakers at the International Design Conference in Aspen, an important annual event in the design profession initiated in 1951, reveals that such “avant-garde” artists as Nam June Paik, John Cage, and Robert Rauschenberg were invited to share their thoughts about how designers might respond to corporate, political, ecological, and urban issues that arose over the course of the year between conferences. Indeed, we might even say that the shifts in art-making that occurred during the 1960s – the move, for example, from the commercially-derived imagery of Pop art to street-based performance art – are echoed in the evolving focus of designers as well, as the profession responded to public actions, protest movements, and political unrest (the 1973 conference at which Rauschenberg appeared, for example, was devoted to the theme “performance,” for which the artist conducted an “art participation event,” publicly constructing a Combine using junk materials).  

As the critic Reyner Banham notes in his review of the first years of the Aspen conference, the design world experienced an enormous shift in its focus during the 1960s, as it moved from being almost entirely business-focused in the early years of the conference to engaging in a more philosophical discussion of civic problem solving as

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52 De Certeau, The Practice of Everyday Life, 1-42.

the 1970s unfolded.\textsuperscript{54} Counter to the depiction of design as a commercial mono-culture concerned only with salesmanship, design developed along with art an interest in output and products that were intended to be used and that could not be sold. A sensitivity to this nuance within design itself helps us to understand why artists might have borrowed from the “ephemerality” of advertisements to produce objects that were not freighted with the object-importance of high art,\textsuperscript{55} or why a performance artist such as Vito Acconci might refer to his actions on Manhattan’s avenues as “advertising” for himself and his art career.\textsuperscript{56}

The city’s seemingly unfixable problems prevailed to such a degree that John Cage’s 1966 lecture at the International Design Conference in Aspen was titled “How to Improve the World (You Will Only Make Matters Worse).”\textsuperscript{57} The problems of the city seemed to call for drastic action, and thus, during this period, artists and designers responded to the urban condition in innovative ways. Accordingly, I will discuss the “Creative Revolution” in advertising that burst on to the Manhattan advertising community in 1959 with the publication of the first of the Volkswagen Beetle advertisements produced by Doyle, Dane, Bernbach. Advertising’s “Creative Revolution” seemed so because of the sharp break between the aesthetic of the Volkswagen ads and those that surrounded them. Such advertising was also revolutionary, though, because these advertisements played with and broke the


commonly recognized rules of advertising success that had determined the look of commercial publications throughout the 1940s and 1950s. The rules were determined by focus groups and written into law by one of the most prominent advertising executives in the mid-twentieth century, David Ogilvy, as I will discuss in chapter 1, *Designs on 1960s New York: The Image of Pop and North by Northwest*. In fact, Ogilvy’s rules, published in the book *Advertising Directions: Trends in Visual Advertising* as “Standards for Judging the Graphics of Print Advertising,” were employed to judge the efficacy of advertisements, each ad receiving a score out of one hundred, with points deducted for each infraction (such as the inappropriate placement of an advertisement’s headline). Ogilvy’s rules, released in 1959, the same year as the first VW ad, established the boundaries of propriety and effectiveness against which later ads would push.  

By applying these rules to a test case, the storyline and advertising imagery of Alfred Hitchcock’s film *North by Northwest*, we can see how the revolution was carried out. In claiming a Pop sensibility for *North by Northwest*, one informed both by the design and the art being produced at the time, I will be drawing on recent critical writing by the film theorist J. Hoberman, who has begun to explore Hitchcock films as modes of Pop art exploration *avant la lettre*. Hitchcock’s story of an adman whose comfortable life is disrupted by an overthrow of the rules takes the protagonist Roger Thornhill (Cary Grant) from Madison Avenue to Chicago to a climb down Mount Rushmore. Thornhill’s journey, rife with missteps and changes in identity, navigates and obfuscates the rules, only to leave him mystified when the next moves are obscured. Further, in the designer

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Saul Bass’s opening titles and poster for the film, Ogilvy’s rules are bent even as Bass employs an overlay of limits for himself in terms of the typographic grid and a restricted palette. The grid system, isolation, and centered frontality of the photographic imagery used on the film’s poster reflects period discussion in both art and design concerning the importance of the “image” in Pop art and marketing strategies.

Similarly, the Volkswagen ads’ clean layouts, stark black and white photography, and pithy slogans moved American advertising away from the wordy, gushing, illustrative advertisements common in the 1940s and ‘50s, ads whose artistic sensibilities were not in keeping with an urban environment, and toward a smart, streamlined, Pop sensibility. Indeed, as I suggest in chapter 2, *Breaking the Rules with the Beetle: Volkswagen’s Revolutionary Advertising and the Visual Wit of Andy Warhol’s Pop Art*, these advertisements were released at the same time as the art world’s first forays into Pop Art. The dependence of Pop Art on advertising and advertising on Pop Art exploits a relationship in which each side bears equal weight, promoting an exchange in which visual wit and the dynamic relay between viewer and image is found in both art and design. The similarities between the advertisements and the work that Andy Warhol produced at this time are striking, with both featuring strong single images and the deployment of a gridded composition to structure the repeated message and to produce a serializing effect. I will argue in this chapter that Warhol’s Pop art redeployed the strategies of advertisements such as those made for Volkswagen; unlike James Rosenquist’s montages, which played on their likeness to the advertising billboards of the early 1950s, Andy Warhol’s Pop sensibility was not derived from the earnestness of the advertising of the previous generation. Thus, the most essential and influential strains of
Pop, particularly those related to Warhol, could not have developed were it not for the advertising revolution that was being perpetuated in tandem with his earliest Pop works. The Volkswagen advertisements proved so successful that only a few years into the campaign, the company was able to compare the shape of its previously unknown car to another shape “known around the world,” the Coca Cola bottle. Using the Coca Cola imagery as a springboard, I will close the chapter with a reading of the ad’s imagery and the bottle screen paintings of Andy Warhol as well as the Coke bottle Combines of Robert Rauschenberg, which result in the Coca Cola Plan (1958), complete with intimations of advertising’s and Pop art’s urban and world domination.

Admen were not revolutionary heroes for all people, however. Chapter 3, Navigating by the Vernacular Glance: Billboards, Signs, and the Urban Combine, begins by examining the preponderance of billboards in the mid-twentieth century, and the responding anti-billboard movement that endeavored to control their usage and design. Billboards, significantly the form of print advertising for which Ogilvy did not provide design rules because he detested their exploitation of the viewer and the environment, were seen both as eyesores and as public safety hazards. Beauty and wayfinding were imperiled by the installation of too many billboards, although designers also debated the opportunities for individual expression in an overly designed, safe world that would exist without them. It is within this milieu, a New York that experienced the tension between commercial, civic, and artistic images of the city, that Robert Rauschenberg’s Combines and silkscreen paintings insinuate themselves. In Leo Steinberg’s famous essay “Other Criteria,” Rauschenberg’s Combines are described as both maps and billboards, objects that “suggest the ceaseless inflow of urban message, stimulus, and impediment;” taking
up Steinberg’s suggestion, I aim to navigate via Rauschenberg to explore how the artist inserted street signs into his work to trigger our rule-bound visual response to directional and informational signs, which manage the compositions as they would city traffic. In looking at both his visual output as well as his discussions of his work, we discover that Rauschenberg had a subtle understanding of the ways that signs worked in the world, one that anticipated the viewer’s navigation through his pieces and that was sensitive to the complexities of rule following as discussed by Wittgenstein. Thus armed with this understanding, arrows, signs, and guides make appearances throughout the artist’s Combines and screenprints of the 1960s and 1970s and indeed visually reflect the design changes occurring in the city.

The dependence on guides in the art and design of the later 1960s is the focus of chapter 4, *Way-words: Wayfinding by Following Pieces*. In developing the sign system that was to be installed in Grand Central Station, the design firm Unimark International undertook to follow users of the station as they made their way from train to train, train to subway, and train to the outside (and all of these steps in reverse). The practice of following an unknowing pedestrian is common among wayfinding designers, who depend on the mistakes and shortcuts of the people they follow to determine the placement of signs and arrows. This procedure takes on a more sinister quality, however, when the same movements are exploited in an exercise that becomes more akin to a predator stalking its prey, even when the exercise is undertaken for the common good (Notably, Massimo Vignelli, a Unimark principal, has suggested that programs to implement design systems such as signage must be undertaken in circumstances akin to a

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dictatorship, claiming that, “There can be no democracy in something like this. It should be done in terms of imposition.”)\(^6\) In comparing design routine with Vito Acconci’s performance *Following Piece* (1969), I shall explore and critique the ways that artists, designers, and viewers make paths and form systems in their environments. That both Acconci’s performance and the designers’ research remained unproductive (in that Acconci only followed his objects and did not consummate any sort of relationship with them, and that the signage for Grand Central reverted to its confused state even after the designers’ research and recommendations) suggests a logical slippage within following pieces, not least because the target remains at large.

Chapter 5, *What’s the Matter with the Megalopolis?*, brings the dissertation to 1972 and to the crux of New York City’s art and design interactions. 1972 was the year in which two related exhibitions, both of which debated the discomforts of living in the city and posited possible solutions, were installed at the New York Cultural Center in Manhattan. The first exhibition, called “Making New York Understandable,” was an installation devoted to design solutions for New York’s ills. Taking the form of graphic design, industrial design, and urban planning, the exhibition featured many designers that will have been discussed in previous chapters. The design forum grew out of several years of private, corporate, and governmental support for design solutions, notably those sponsored by the mayor’s office, including a “Design In,” which borrowed tactics and graphics from the city’s various experiences with protest movements in the 1960s. One month later, another show was installed: “Making Megalopolis Matter: The Artists Answer.” This exhibition featured several performance and installation artists whose

response to the clarity and desire for order seen in the design show was to argue for a move toward greater display of individualism on the city streets and greater opportunity for chaos. Among the artists included in the show were Yoko Ono, Vito Acconci, Hans Haacke, and Gordon Matta-Clark, whose performances and installations from the late 1960s and early 1970s adhere closely to the look and the logic employed in design systems, such as those proposed by Unimark International. In taking a closer look at some of the work included in these two exhibitions, we can begin to understand that though artists and designers in New York in the 1960s did not mistake themselves for one another, they shared techniques for thinking about and responding to the city in which they lived. Some of the most promising installations in each show ended in squandered opportunities, as gentrification continued to run rampant despite Matta-Clark’s urban interventions, and the clarity offered by Massimo Vignelli’s abstract subway map was faulted for its refusal to grapple with the reality of New York’s topography, streets, and messiness. The strategies exploited by the artists and designers discussed in this dissertation resulted in similar approaches to visual imagery, in responses to the variety of messages intercepted by a person moving through the streets, and in tactics for developing a logic of navigation and pursuit. Ironically, these attempts to make New York a more understandable and commercially receptive place to live often yielded a more menacingly interesting city in which to break the rules.

Chapter 1: Designs on 1960s New York: The Image of Pop and North by Northwest

In the 1962 edition of *Art in America* dedicated to “New Talent USA,” featuring “relatively unpublicized younger artists,” Andy Warhol contributed a startling artist’s comment.63 Whereas most of the artists included in the issue described their process, discussed their work in formal terms, or included a short biography, Warhol provided a statement about America and his work’s position as a reflection of life in the United States. He wrote, “I adore America and these are some comments on it. My image is a statement of the symbols of the harsh, impersonal products and brash materialistic objects on which America is built today. It is a projection of everything that can be bought and sold, the practical but impermanent symbols that sustain us.”64 This brief notice has been read both as a political statement intended by Warhol as a repudiation of the consumer culture in which he found himself, as well as its opposite, Warhol’s denial of the need to insinuate a political message into his work (and, indeed, Warhol’s future embrace of all things consumerist).65 While it may be the case that the statement is both, or neither, what interests me here is Warhol’s use of the term “image” and his insistence on referring to


64 My emphasis. Andy Warhol, “New Talent USA: Prints and Drawings,” *Art in America*, 42. More typical of the artists’ statements included was this paragraph from Claes Oldenburg: “I am fond of materials which take the quick, direct impress of life, such as paper and plaster; also, those materials which, like wire, seem to have a life of their own – socking you back when you sock them. I like to let the material play a large part in determining the form. With material, as with the object, what I seek is a personal exchange. My art is autobiographical and historical; I regard it as all one.” “New Talent USA: Sculpture,” 33.

his image. For, rather than discuss his images, Warhol pointedly used the word in the singular, suggesting that he was not merely referring to his paintings but rather was developing a trademark for himself, a brand by which his consumers would know him because it was his image. In addition to the use of commercial and popular sources, it is this acknowledgment of the image and its importance that links the work of Pop artists such as Andy Warhol to the advertising strategies of the late 1950s and, more specifically, to advertising’s Creative Revolution underway beginning in 1959.

The “Image” in Pop Discourse

At the time of Warhol’s 1962 statement, American Pop art was beginning to coalesce around the figures art historians most commonly associate with the movement, Warhol, James Rosenquist, Roy Lichtenstein, and Claes Oldenburg. But suggestions of Pop had been detected earlier, with Lawrence Alloway in Great Britain dating the first explorations of Pop to Francis Bacon’s 1949 figure paintings, and Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns’ use of quotidian objects and images in their work of the early- to mid-1950s enlisted as first expressions of an American Pop art. However, as the 1950s progressed, Bacon proved himself to be a Pop outlier, as his expressionistic brushwork separated itself from the harder-edged painting associated with Pop, and Rauschenberg and Johns began to be considered “neo-Dada” artists who used found imagery in ways

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66 The reproductions illustrating Arts Magazine’s publication of the “Symposium on Pop Art” held at the Museum of Modern Art included works by Robert Indiana, Claes Oldenburg, Peter Saul, Roy Lichtenstein, James Dine, Robert Rauschenberg, Andy Warhol, and James Rosenquist. A photograph of a gas station sign taken by Russell Lee was also included. “A Symposium on Pop Art: Special Supplement,” Arts Magazine 37 no.7 (April 1963): 45.

that recalled the readymade and Dadaist pranks on art.\textsuperscript{68} In separating Pop art from such earlier, seemingly related work, critics turned to explanations of the image, its reproducibility, and image technologies to suggest what was new in the Pop sensibility, using the word “image” frequently and consistently in the criticism surrounding the emerging genre of Pop art in the 1950s and 1960s.

Perhaps first and foremost, writers used the word precisely because it allowed them to differentiate it from much of the art immediately preceding it, including the major American movement evident in the art world at the time, abstract expressionism.

For example, Henry Geldzahler, speaking at the 1962 Symposium on Pop Art held at the Museum of Modern Art and covered by \textit{Arts Magazine}, contended that,

\begin{quote}
After the heroic years of Abstract Expressionism a younger generation of artists is working in a new American regionalism, but this time, because of the mass media, the regionalism is nationwide, and even exportable to Europe, for we have carefully prepared and reconstructed Europe in our own image since 1945 so that two kinds of American imagery, Kline, Pollock and De Kooning on the one hand, and the pop artists on the other, are becoming comprehensible abroad.\textsuperscript{69}
\end{quote}

Lucy Lippard’s 1966 assessment of “New York Pop,” aimed to clarify that the artists she considered Pop artists, “all employ more or less hard-edge, commercial techniques and

\textsuperscript{68} See, for example, Edward T. Kelly, “Neo-Dada: A Critique of Pop Art,” \textit{Art Journal} 23 no.3 (Spring 1964): 200. Kelly takes up the term Neo-Dada after it was rejected by Peter Selz at the Symposium on pop Art because “it was originally coined in the pejorative and because the work in question bears only superficial similarities to Dada, which, it will be remembered, was a revolutionary movement primarily intended to change life itself.” Selz, “A Symposium on Pop Art,” 36.

\textsuperscript{69} Henry Geldzahler, in “A Symposium on Pop Art,” 37. At the same symposium, Leo Steinberg noted, “The question ‘Is it art?’ is regularly asked of pop art, and that’s one of the best things about it, to be provoking this question. Because it’s one that ought to be asked more or less constantly for the simple reason that it tends to be constantly repressed. We get used to a certain look, and before long we say, ‘Sure it’s art; it looks like a De Kooning, doesn’t it?’ This is what we might have said five years ago, after growing accustomed to the New York School look.” “A Symposium on Pop Art,” 39.
colours to convey their unmistakably popular, representational images.” And though Lawrence Alloway believed that the “first phase” of British Pop art depended on mass cultural, figurative imagery such as that he saw in Bacon, while the “second phase” attempted to “switch from the figurative to an abstract basis,” he allowed that even in its least representational expressions, “the artists of the second phase… shifted their attention to the environment itself. A basic assumption was that perception of the world had changed because of the bombardment of our senses by signs, colour and lights of the mass media.” “Hence,” he concluded, “it should be possible to activate our experience of these scenes, and of objects in them, by means of an imagery that is non-verbal but topical.”

If Pop art marked its difference from the paintings of the New York School because of its tendency toward representation, the very things represented in those images themselves also staked new claims for art. Repeatedly, writers discussing Pop art in the 1950s and ‘60s describe the mass-cultural and mass-media subjects of Pop in terms of images. What is more important, these writers also describe the use of such items as image tactics that showcase the quotidian object and set it apart within the context of the overall composition of a painting or, as part of an artist’s oeuvre, apart from the non-Pop art hanging alongside it in galleries and museums. Alloway described the first British Pop paintings as marking a time when “Bacon began using photographs in his work. A series

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70 Lucy Lippard, “New York Pop,” in Pop Art, 69. Lippard also wrote, apropos of Pop art’s distance from AbEx, that, “Most of us are unmoved by the public and private disasters that touched and enraged artists and thinkers in the 1930’s. After World War II the tear glands of the world dried up from over-use. It is this world for which Warhol is spokesman.” Pop Art, 98.

71 Lawrence Alloway, “The Development of British Pop,” in Pop Art, 44.

72 Ibid., 47.
of screaming heads was derived, partially, from a still from the film *Battleship Potemkin*: the image of the nurse wounded in the eye… Bacon’s use of mass-media quotations differs from earlier uses by painters, in that recognition of the photographic origin of the image is central to his intention.” For Alloway, to see a Bacon was to see its source. But whereas in the past an art that declared its faithfulness to and dependence on its sources might have had charges of pastiche or kitsch leveled against it, Pop’s wholesale adoption of intact images and deadpan display of its allegiances signaled a new movement in art and a new awareness of the everyday in such art. Geldzahler suggested that, “The new art draws on everyday objects and images. They are isolated from their ordinary context, and typified and intensified. What we are left with is a heightened awareness of the object and image, and of the context from which they have been ripped, that is, our environment.”

And Edward T. Kelly described Pop art as exhibiting “the obvious intervention of one who selects and isolates an image or a complex of images for our viewing.”

These writers suggest that Pop art allowed the outside image to retain its integrity and, indeed, even to assert its supremacy in a painting. This permitted Pop to insist on its difference from precedents such as Cubist *papier collé*, for example, that folded collage elements into a greater compositional whole. Viewers who insisted on reading the headlines in a Cubist collage “for [their] content, Kelly proclaimed, “risk[ed] bypassing

\(^{73}\) Ibid., 28.

\(^{74}\) Geldzahler, 37.

\(^{75}\) Kelly, 192.

\(^{76}\) This makes the abrasion of the surface of Bacon’s paintings or the agglomeration of references in a Rauschenberg problematic, which hints at one reason why these artists do not fit neatly into the category of Pop art.
the aesthetic experience.” It also marked Pop’s remove from Dada, which was understood to critique the objects it represented. In contrast, in the early years of Pop’s formulation, critics were seemingly unable to see any critical engagement with the images presented in Pop paintings and, indeed, expressed difficulty moving their own critical faculties beyond the representations themselves. Leo Steinberg admitted at the MoMA Symposium that, “I cannot yet see the art for the subject…; in [Lichtenstein’s] work the subject matter exists so intensely for me that I have been unable to get through to whatever painterly qualities there may be.” Steinberg argued that in Pop art, formal concerns were taken care of as a matter of course: “[S]ince the elements employed in the picture are known and seen to be flat (being posters, cartoons, ads, etc.), the overall flatness of the picture-as-object is taken care of…” and therefore “formal concerns are temporarily masked out. Our eyes,” Steinberg concluded, “will have to grow accustomed again to a new presence in art, the presence of subject matter absolutely at one with the form:” the image of Pop.

This understanding of the move by Pop artists to present an image whole and unadulterated continues in later art criticism and history. Roland Barthes noted that, “Images from mass culture, regarded as vulgar, unworthy of an aesthetic consecration, return virtually unaltered as materials of the artist’s activity. Pop Art… accepts being an imagery, a collection of reflections, constituted by the banal reverberation of the

77 Ibid., 198.
78 Leo Steinberg, “Symposium on Pop Art,” 40.
79 Ibid.
American environment.” He continued, “Pop Art produces certain radical images: by dint of being an image, the thing is stripped of any symbol. This is an audacious movement of mind (or of society): it is no longer the fact which is transformed into an image…, it is the image which becomes a fact.” In his recent book exploring the phenomenon of Pop art, Hal Foster notes that “what was distinctive about Pop painting was its move in composition from juxtaposed parts to given images often treated as wholes.” Foster’s account of Pop is informed by theoretical writings unavailable to the earliest critics of Pop, such as Walter Benjamin’s discussion of the machine-made image in “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility,” in which Benjamin argues for the possibility that photography and film relieve the individual artwork of its “aura.” “Every day,” suggested Benjamin, “the urge grows stronger to get hold of an object at close range in an image… [and by means of stripping the aura from an object via a reproduction] extracts sameness even from what is unique.” Thus, for Foster, this serial reproduction hints at a “paradox” in that, “even as the Pop subject is formed by images and circulated through them, he or she can also be disarticulated by

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81 Ibid., 26.


84 Ibid, 23-4.
images and dispersed through them.85 As the Pop image recycled the popular image, it simultaneously distributed it further and, via this extended propagation, gutted the very success of its impact.

But there is yet one more way that the image of Pop art can be – and was – understood. The use of the term “image” was used to discuss advertisements and advertising design themselves, and in this way not only suggests that such ads put forward images of products but that they establish brands, the images with which the consumer identifies the items that he or she consumes. The advertising image establishes itself as the “fact” that Barthes identified, insinuating itself, seemingly organically and nefariously easily, into the consumer’s understanding as a natural way of life. Pop art reproduced the ad image wholesale because it was designed to be devoured in one sitting. Artists associated with Pop art recognized this and bluntly adopted such strategies as their own. In a 1956 statement published in Ark, the architects Peter and Alison Smithson (associated with the International Group, a collective of artists and architects including Richard Hamilton and Eduardo Paolozzi) called attention to the ad image and its effectiveness at establishing “facticity.”86 Reminding their readers that artists regularly depend on vernacular culture to develop their work (they cite Walter Gropius’ reflections on grain silos and Le Corbusier’s on airplanes, for example), the Smithsons wrote:


86 To the critical viewer/reader, though, the factuality of advertisements would always be viewed with suspicion. In addition to the Smithsons’ admiration for advertising’s efficacy (its success at establishing facts), we might also see the ads and the imagery borrowed from them as facts. See also Aron Vinegar’s reading of “facticity” and the photography of Ed Ruscha, “Ed Ruscha, Heidegger, and Deadpan Photography,” Art History 32 no.5 (December 2009): 858-62.
Advertising has caused a revolution in the popular art field. Advertising has become respectable in its own right and is beating the fine arts at their old game. We cannot ignore the fact that one of the traditional functions of fine art, the definition of what is fine and desirable for the ruling class, and therefore ultimately that which is desired by all society, has now been taken over by the adman.

To understand the advertisements which appear in the *New Yorker* or *Gentry* one must have taken a course in Dublin literature, read a *Time* popularizing article on cybernetics, and have majored in Higher Chinese Philosophy and Cosmetics. Such ads are packed with information – data of a way of life and a standard of living which they are simultaneously inventing and documenting. Ads which do not try to sell you the product except as a natural accessory of a way of life. *They are good "images"* and their technical virtuosity is almost magical. Many have involved as much effort for one page as goes into the building of a coffee bar. And this transient thing is making a bigger contribution to our visual climate than any of the traditional fine arts. 87

Ads that are good images and that exhibit miraculous powers of conversion reverse the aурatic equation established by Benjamin. Now the ads themselves determined what objects possessed aura and, as the Smithsons note, created that aura and disseminated it at precisely the same time. If mass reproduction “extracts sameness even from what is unique,” then advertising’s goal is exactly the opposite: to insert uniqueness for the consumer into the same mass-produced object that any other consumer could purchase and to do so again and again even if the product does not change. That advertising was effective and, in fact, did manage to convince consumers to purchase the same products again and again must have seemed like some sort of magic, as the Smithsons allude. No wonder, then, that Pop artists assimilated and replicated the ad image intact. Even if, in appropriating the image, Pop “disarticulated” that image, it also appropriated the strategy of the ad image, a move that was even more effective.

The Image of Brands and Corporations

That creators and critics in the 1950s and 1960s would use the term “image” to describe the look of Pop art is not surprising: in descriptions of art, the term lends itself easily to a discussion of the subject matter of a painting or even, at times, the painting itself.\textsuperscript{88} However, the use of image to discuss advertising was of much more recent vintage, first gaining sway in business publications in the mid-1950s, in the same time-frame as the article written by the Smithsons. The use of “image” in the title of an article in the \textit{Harvard Business Review} only appeared in 1955, though the term “brand” featured in the publication’s earliest issues.\textsuperscript{89} Similarly, \textit{The New York Times} first employed “brand image” and “corporate image” in 1957.\textsuperscript{90} What is more, the concept of an image was understood as something singular: A brand image focused attention on a consumer product and gave it a public persona; in a discussion of the possibilities of corporate brands published in \textit{Harvard Business Review} in 1958, Pierre Martineau described the “successful brand” as having “psychological meanings and dimensions which are just as real to the purchaser as its physical properties, and in many instances the purely subjective attributes play a far more important role in the brand’s fortunes than do the functional elements. But in every case \textit{the aura} of the symbolic dimensions contributes to

\textsuperscript{88} Even if this use conflates the artwork with what the artwork portrays. This “trap” was discussed throughout the recent publication \textit{What is an Image?} ed. James Elkins and Maja Naef (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2011).


the value and the public estimate of the brand.”  

Thus, in the advertising parlance of the moment, a singular image – albeit one repeated again and again via advertising and commercial reproduction – manifested a brand’s aura, using the very same technology with which the aura of art was dissolved.

Developing a corporate image was more difficult than doing so for individual products, as the goal was to establish public traits for the corporation as a whole that would not compete with the individual brands the company had already marketed. Additionally, the corporate image had somehow to distill the complexity of massive corporations into a single motto, figure, or, indeed, image. Martineau, however, argued that “In law the corporation is a single person; in the market, where products and buyers come together, it can – and should – have a distinct personality.” Thus, according to this way of thinking, the corporation as a discrete entity should be able to convey a single brand message via strategic image maneuvers.

Martineau remarked in his article that “the transition from brand image to corporate image” moved incredibly quickly in the advertising profession, and indeed, the International Design Conference in Aspen, a yearly gathering devoted to design issues in business situations, management settings, and daily life, devoted two conferences to questions of the image: “Communication: The Image Speaks,” held in 1959, and “Design and the American Image Abroad,” held in 1963. In each conference, the expectations of the image were great, as the inclusion of the potential for an “American image” suggests. The industrial engineer Lancelot Law Whyte, at the 1959 conference, called for images

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92 Ibid., 49.
that evoked “grand vistas and extraordinary choices.” He concluded his speech with the lines, “Today the role of the image is not only to evoke past experience but also explicitly to anticipate and suggest possible future achievements. Our greatest need is an image of future greatness.”

However, even among designers there existed critiques of the idea of an overarching, positive corporate (or national) image that could testify to all the activities and employees involved with the business’ affairs. The advertising designer James Real, at the 1959 conference, questioned the plausibility of such an undertaking, claiming instead that a single corporate image constituted a “distortion of the image.” Though Real did not disagree that corporations required advertising and needed to maintain awareness of the way the public perceived the business and its products, he called for transparency and a self-reflective image that would not attempt to distill the complexity of its organization into a too-easily digestible symbol. After all, Real wrote,

The language of vision, like any other language, can be lied in. As many frauds have been perpetrated in Bodoni as by Barnum. The central problem pressing upon the designer is the nature of the image. Is he helping construct an image with decent powers of reflection, or is he building masks behind which the verities and strengths of the free society are slowly eroding away?

It is with these critiques in mind that we might turn again to Warhol’s statement that his own image projects “everything that can be bought and sold, the practical but impermanent symbols that sustain us” and remember that he began his statement with an avowal of his love for America. In his own way Warhol was the image-maker

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94 James Real, “Image or Façade?” in The Aspen Papers, 93.

95 Ibid., 97.
distributing the American image abroad as the 1963 conference advised, and if we see a critique of the products Warhol used as existing in his work, perhaps we might also see his engagement with the philosophies and strategies being developed in advertising design world that existed at the same time. The “picture-as-object”, the “image” of Pop art is one that was also being examined and elucidated in the design of the time. Interestingly, in both Pop art and ad strategy, the image under observation was advertising itself.

*North by Northwest: A Pop Case-Study*

In what follows, I would like to examine an object that took advertising design, advertising strategy, and advertising men as its subject, the 1959 Alfred Hitchcock film, *North by Northwest*. In making a claim for *North by Northwest* as exhibiting the characteristics of Pop art, I follow the film critic J. Hoberman who recently noted that

To directors [such as Hitchcock, among others], motion pictures were not simply dramatized stories but consumer products that – predicated on promotional gimmicks and artfully constructed publicity, trafficking in trademarks and merchandised personalities, including those of the filmmakers – epitomized a particular system. Because their movies were, in essence, self-aware mass-produced consumer products, such filmmakers were, in effect, Pop artists before Pop art.  

If movies are, as Hoberman suggests, “the mass medium,” then they sit somewhere between Pop art and advertising, exhibiting characteristics of each. *North by Northwest* takes advertising as its ostensible subject and therefore acts as a Pop object within the context of this examination. But because “cinema doesn’t give us what we

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want; it tells us what we want,“ the film also serves as advertising, telling its story of its protagonist and “simultaneously inventing and documenting” its way of filmic life. In looking at the ad world of 1959, the rest of this chapter will employ elements from *North by Northwest* and the advertising campaign for the film as signposts for a discussion of the advertising image at the end of the decade. I shall use the trip that the adman Roger Thornhill takes cross country as a metaphor to guide its consideration of the rules to be followed and images to be made when making ads that worked.

In the 1950s, books such as *The Hidden Persuaders* and *The Mechanical Bride* taught readers just how much they were being told to make purchases and decisions that they thought were their own. Following these exposés and portrayals of scheming admen in such films as *The Hucksters* (1947) and desperate admen in books like *The Man in the Grey Flannel Suit* (1955, released as a film in 1956), advertising was due to remake its image. Although seemingly a quiet year for revolutions, 1959 – the year of *North by Northwest*’s release, as well as the Aspen conference on the corporate image – was the year of advertising design’s “Creative Revolution,” one that would see the look of ads change and the earlier rules of advertising strategies broken. However, in 1959 it was

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99 Don Draper, the protagonist of the television program *Mad Men* could be seen as picking up where Roger Thornhill left off, though his world-weariness and assumption of new identities – in this case, stealing the identification and name of a fallen soldier – take Thornhill’s (and Ogilvy’s) role playing to new extremes.

100 1959 was also the year in which the Doyle Dane Bernbach’s ads for Volkswagen were first put into production (the subject of chapter 2), as well as the year that David Ogilvy published his rules for successful advertising (see below). For more on the “Creative Revolution” see Thomas C. Frank, *The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).
unlikely that many advertising creatives – the designers who developed the look of ads, and the copywriters who wrote the text – realized they were about to become revolutionaries, soon to overturn the rules to which they had adhered throughout their careers.

Alfred Hitchcock’s *North by Northwest* was released in the revolutionary year of 1959.¹⁰¹ Starring Cary Grant as the adman Roger Thornhill, the film’s opening scenes anticipate Jerry Della Famina’s advertising movie parody in his memoir *From Those Wonderful Folks Who Gave You Pearl Harbor*:

Most people think advertising is Tony Randall. In fact, they think this business is made up of 90,000 Tony Randalls. Guys all very suave, all very Tony Randall. They’ve been fed the idea from Hollywood that an advertising man is a slick, sharp guy. The people know zip about advertising.

… All of those movies were the same. Scene one, you pan up a New York skyscraper with some of that hokey New York music, then the camera moves into the elevator of the building. [The actor] walks into the building, the elevator starter says, “Good morning, Mr. Suave,” and the elevator door slams shut. Next shot you see the elevator floor dial moving up to 18. [He] gets off the elevator, walks through the office, and the next thing you know he’s screwing somebody. It’s strange, really crazy. That’s what advertising was like in the movies.¹⁰²

As *North by Northwest* begins, Saul Bass’s title sequence (about which more below) dissolves to form the grid of a glass curtain-walled building as manic “New York-Hitchcock” music plays and manic Midtown New Yorkers scurry across the sidewalks (fig.1). Thornhill leaves the expected elevator only to discuss sexual relationships rather than to enact them, and those he does discuss are strained. We can assume that Thornhill is a copywriter, as he is portrayed as a quick-witted man who speaks in slogans (He tells


his secretary he is feeling heavy and dictates a memo: “Think thin,” and later labels himself “The United Nations Killer”) and, contrary to earlier and later portrayals of men in grey flannel suits, he seems blithely comfortable about his role in the commercialism of advertising. ¹⁰³ However, when Thornhill is mistaken for a secret agent being tracked by international Cold Warriors, his conventional life is upended, and he is forced to alter the rules as he goes along. These new systems mimic the changes advertising design was undergoing at the time, and the revolution in advertising is tracked in Thornhill’s trek north and northwest. The world of advertising design in 1959 was one that measured visual success according to strict conventions, that witnessed a turn from painted illustrations to photographic images, and one that was moving increasingly toward a more rigidly geometrical, gridded layout. Thornhill has been discussed as a 1950s Hamlet or as the pinnacle of masculine modernity, but in this chapter I shall take him at his word – “I’m an adman, not a red herring!” – and explore the 1959 advertising design world through him. ¹⁰⁴

_Design and North by Northwest_

Although I would be reluctant to claim that _North by Northwest_ is about design, design elements feature prominently throughout the film; indeed the term “design” is

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frequently used when describing the action within it.\textsuperscript{105} (This is perhaps not surprising, as Hitchcock himself began his career as a title designer for silent films.\textsuperscript{106}) The instances of design range from the use of the recently built United Nations Secretariat building as the scene for the first murder of the movie, to Thornhill’s branding of himself via a logo on his matchbooks (“ROT” in which the O stands for “nothing”) (fig.2), to the profession of Thornhill’s seducer: Eve Kendall is an industrial designer. Thus, design develops as a “micro-system,” as Raymond Bellour would have it, within the plot, pushing it forward, even as its elements act as markers scattered throughout.\textsuperscript{107}

Despite Thornhill’s apparent ease in his commercial role, design is not always used in the film as a means to promote a healthy and happy life, but often serves as a sign for the Cold War enemy. The upright Secretariat building finds its foil in the house/headquarters of Vandamm, Thornhill’s nemesis, which is a sprawling, horizontal, Frank Lloyd Wright/John Lautner post-and-beam construction, ready for its Julius Schulman portrait (fig.3).\textsuperscript{108} The toiletries provided on the train Thornhill takes west to Chicago are functionally streamlined but also so small as to emasculate the hero.\textsuperscript{109} Even

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the décor that is bought in the film serves nefarious ends, as Vandamm passes up Louis XV furnishings at auction and instead bids on a Pre-Columbian statue, in which he will hide the microfilm he attempts to smuggle over the Canadian border. The statue is hollow, making it an ideal storage unit, but it is also in keeping with the acceptable decorative elements of a house built according to Wright’s design specifications.\(^\text{110}\)

In contrast to this commitment to high design, Roger Thornhill’s life as an adman is strictly conventional. He mentions at one point in the film that his first two marriages failed because he was uninteresting, and earlier quips that he has “a mother, a secretary, two ex-wives, and several barmen dependent on [him].” The world of 1950s advertising was itself reliant on the conventions of happy families, market testing to measure the probable popularity of an ad, and extensive copy to sell its products. One of the most successful admen of the era, David Ogilvy, used market research to produce two different sets of rules for advertising design to follow. The first, “How to Illustrate Advertisements and Posters,” taken from his memoir, *Confessions of an Advertising Man*, included such proclamations as, “Abstract art does not telegraph its message fast enough for use in advertisements,” and “One of the most agreeable chores in advertising is selecting pretty girls to appear in advertisements and television commercials. I used to arrogate this function to myself, but gave it up after comparing my personal taste in girls with the taste of female consumers. Men don’t like the same kind of girls that girls like.”\(^\text{111}\) Later in the same chapter, Ogilvy discusses poster design (by which he means primarily billboards), and cautions his readers that “Research has shown that it will communicate faster if you


use strong, pure colors; don’t paint with a dirty palette. Never use more than three elements in your design, and silhouette them against a white background.” More than any other trait, Ogilvy suggests that images in advertising must include “story appeal” in order to snare a potential mark into reading the copy. Once the visual trap was set, the copy could do the rest. Ogilvy’s second set of rules, these written for the New York Advertising Directors’ design competition and published in a 1959 book titled *Advertising Directions*, is even more stringent and subtracts points from visual design if it fails to meet his specifications.

Perhaps the figure in the film most in need of Thornhill’s – and Ogilvy’s – services is the very man for whom Thornhill is mistaken: the nonexistent secret agent, George Kaplan. In contrast to Cary Grant, Kaplan is imagined by the United States government to be short, stocky, and in possession of a dandruff-ridden comb. Kaplan is a man without advertising, who somehow has no idea how to improve his appearance (even his enemies remark how much better Thornhill looks than the man they envisioned). In assuming the role of the spy, at first reluctantly and later intentionally, Thornhill remakes Kaplan in his image, that of advertising’s “Mr Suave,” later to be rethought in the James Bond films as a spy even more self-assured than an adman could be.

This role-playing – of an adman turned spy and spy turned adman – might have been taken from Ogilvy’s own playbook, for he was the inventor of the infamous “Man in

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112 Ibid., 128.

113 Ibid., 116.

114 Ogilvy determined that 46 of the 50 entries were “below average in their ability to communicate,” marking each advertisement down from 100 possible points, and subtracting points for such sins as a “lazy” illustration (-11 points) or the use of a drawing instead of a photograph (-6 points). Ogilvy, “Standards for Judging the Graphics of Print Advertising,” in Advertising Directions: Trends in Visual Advertising (New York: Art Directions Book Co., 1959): 39.
the Hathaway Shirt” campaign, a highly successful series of print advertisements that ran in select publications from 1951 (and exclusively in the *New Yorker* during the first four years of its run) through the 1960s. Ogilvy’s hero played roles, as well. The Man in the Hathaway Shirt was identifiable by two trademarks: his well-fitting dress shirt and a black eyepatch, which Ogilvy bought “for $1.50” at the drugstore on his way to the campaign’s first photo shoot. This “magic ingredient” allowed the model to assume a certain anonymity that equated the mysterious – and obviously inimitable, lest the advertisement’s reader be revealed as completely gullible and ridiculous – power of the patch with the acquirable power of the shirt. Thus, the purchase of the shirt allowed for the achievement of the aspirational eye-patch and all that its image signified. Although first shown at his tailor being fitted for custom-made pants, the Hathaway man later took on other guises:

As the campaign developed, I [Ogilvy] showed the model in a series of situations in which I would have liked to find myself: conducting the New York Philharmonic at Carnegie Hall, playing the oboe, copying a Goya at the Metropolitan Museum, driving a tractor, fencing, sailing, buying a Renoir, and so forth.

The Man in the Hathaway Suit, in all his guises, was the ideal role model for the customer envisioning himself assuming any of these roles.

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115 And in other iterations through the 1990s. For a succinct discussion of the construction of the *New Yorker’s* ideal readership, see John Seabrook, *Nobrow: The Culture of Marketing, the Marketing of Culture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000): 3-44.

116 Ibid., 116.

117 Ibid., 117.

118 It is interesting to consider Euro RSCG/New York’s recent spots for Dos Equis beer featuring “The Most Interesting Man in the World” in light of the Man in the Hathaway Shirt. Though Ogilvy’s creation seems too outlandish to be successful, apparently the aspirational, mustachioed model is still effective. See http://staythirstymyfriends.com for the brand’s television spots as well as for information on Dos Equis’ “The Most Interesting Academy,” at which “Our Scholars enroll in a hands-on program of courses...
The inaugural image depicting the Man in the Hathaway Shirt being measured for pants (fig.4) was immediately related to the headline of the advertisement, which running underneath the full-bleed image, served as a caption to introduce the character (“The Man in the Hathaway Shirt”). This centered title is followed below by three tightly argued and tightly spaced columns of copy, the extent of the tailor’s visible measuring tape held to the Man’s groin nearly equal to the height and width of each column. Thus, the Man in the Hathaway Shirt is master of all he surveys, a man who commands order and respect, and one in front of whom other men bow. Later headlines introduced the copy or elucidated a new design. The Man in the Hathaway Shirt needed no further introduction or, indeed, justification.

Selling *North by Northwest*

While his assumption of Kaplan’s character might be considered Thornhill’s most persuasive ad campaign, the film provides us with no examples of the advertisements Thornhill might have produced. However, by examining Saul Bass’s advertising components for the film – its poster and the title sequence – a picture of advertising design on the verge of revolution can be developed, and we can use them to understand how a designer might have conformed to and rejected advertising restrictions. A member of the first generation of artists to understand the advertising potential of title sequences, and therefore the importance of their design, Bass was a Hollywood poster and title designer whose work for Otto Preminger’s films and Hitchcock’s earlier movies was well designed to improve their nascent interestingness. Eschewing the mundane studies of reading, writing and arithmetic, our courses reflect real world skills such as Command of the Animal Kingdom, Survival in the Modern Era, and Rites of Passage. Popular past courses have included Falconry, Making an Entrance, Staying Alive During Jai Alai, Beardsmanship, and Leather: The King of Materials.”
known and very successful (In his book *Layout*, Allen Hurlburt notes that Saul Bass’s design for Preminger’s 1955 film, *The Man with the Golden Arm*, was the “first time modern graphic design was applied to both the printed promotion and the title animation of a major Hollywood motion picture.”). The poster for *North by Northwest* superficially replicates the formula Bass used for Hitchcock’s previous film, 1958’s *Vertigo* (figs.5,6). In each poster, the colors black, white, and a reddish-orange predominate; each features the film’s male and female protagonists; and each poster presents a spiraling element – circular in the case of *Vertigo* and overlapping, agitating grids in *North by Northwest* – in the center of the design. This spiral, which is appropriate for *Vertigo*, particularly as it relates to that film’s opening titles and their suggestion of the main character’s psychological dizziness, seems for *North by Northwest* at first to be more a formal choice than an integral part of the poster’s make-up. It is in decisions like this, where Bass plays with and diverges from his earlier designs, that his manipulation of the expectations of advertising design becomes apparent.

As noted above, Ogilvy advised that design for billboards utilize “strong, pure colors” and elements “silhouetted against a white background.” A movie poster, somewhere between a billboard and a magazine advertisement in size, might also fall under print advertising rules. Thus, in addition to considering a passing viewer, the designer might also design for a stationary viewer, one flipping through a fan magazine or standing in line waiting to buy tickets. Ogilvy gives these suggestions for print advertising: “Advertisements are twice as memorable, on the average, when they are illustrated in color,” and “Avoid stereotyped situations like grinning housewives pointing fatuously into open refrigerators.”

Bass flirts with Ogilvy’s rules, and thus with the look of 1959 advertising, acknowledging some and stretching others to see how far they will bend. His poster dutifully features illustrations silhouetted on a white background, but in Bass’s restricted palette and in his inclusion of the grimacing single woman pointing a gun at the hero, he parodies pre-Ogilvy formulae for advertising success. In this poster, Bass begins making his own rules, experimenting with the poster format and punning on his own earlier design. The poster is far afield from the Hathaway Shirt strategy, although Roger Thornhill remains as unrumpled as the best Hathaway customer (indeed, his coat does not even come unbuttoned as he falls toward the viewer after being shot). Rather, Bass experiments with two evocative elements – suspension and the grid – that allow him to play with conventional advertising design.

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120 Ogilvy, 120. Original emphasis.

121 One of the press releases for the film stated, “The spies come at you from all directions... run from the cops, killers, secret agents, beautiful women... and see if you can do all this without wrinkling your suit!” Pressbook, as quoted in Steven Cohan, Masked Men, 19.

122 According to Ogilvy’s 1959 graphic standards, Bass is in danger of being ranked “below average in his ability to communicate.” If Ogilvy were to deduct 17 points from Bass’ design because “the graphic
At first glance, Bass’s poster does not appear to be terribly radical. It is of standard size, utilizes poster design’s customary vertical format, and is limited in its palette. However, the tag line alludes to the designer’s strategies: “The master of suspense weaves his greatest tale!” The word “suspense” refers, of course, to Hitchcock’s films and the mystery involved in their plots. We might also, though, use “suspense” to consider the design rules of the poster. Roger Thornhill is suspended in the center of the frame, hanging between the vertigo-grids of the background and the viewer. The viewer familiar with the film knows that Thornhill is only pretending to be shot, and that he falls on a table in the film, but in this advertisement, he is falling into an abyss. This decision puts the viewer in an awkward position vis-à-vis the poster: simultaneously viewing the action upright, alongside Eve Kendall as she shoots Thornhill, and also directly underneath Thornhill, facing him as he plummets; we too are suspended somewhere between the surface of the poster and its grid. Thus, the tag line and the central image are in play, each doubling the other.

Ogilvy was adamant that photography be used for advertisements to signal “new” and “sophisticated,” and his Hathaway ads are reproduced exclusively with photographs (one can imagine that a drawn illustration of the Man in the Hathaway Shirt in an eye-patch could only have been understood as a caricature, rather than appearing as a mysterious presence in a dress shirt). Bass takes this advice and uses photographic technique obstructs itself between the copywriter and the reader,” 4 points because there is “more than one place to begin reading,” 2 points because “the illustration is defaced, e.g. by having the headline run into it,” and 2 points because “the illustration is in any shape other than rectangular,” North by Northwest’s poster might be judged at only 75% efficacy.

123 In his interview with Truffaut, Hitchcock spoke of his own rules for suspense films, a genre he made his own: “A.H.: It’s been my good fortune to have something of a monopoly on the genre: nobody else seems to take much interest in the rules for that form. F.T.: What rules? A.H.: I’m talking about the rules of suspense. That’s why I’ve more or less had the field to myself.” Truffaut, 194.
images in his poster design, but, as with the poster for *Vertigo*, which employs line
drawings of the main characters, his decision to reproduce the fallen Thornhill and
shooting Kendall in grey scale visually blurs the boundaries between illustration and
photograph. Bass’ use of white outlines and highlights further emphasizes the graphic
quality of the images, most particularly in the lines that shoot from Kendall’s gun, which
suggest the speed of the bullets in an almost cartoonish manner, but also further
complicate the suspended time represented here. Her gun has shot, and Thornhill is
falling toward us, out of the poster, but there is no indication if he has already been shot
or is attempting to dodge her bullets.

The decision to use grey scale is interesting to consider when we realize that the
movie itself was filmed in color. ¹²⁴ There was no need, therefore, for Bass to limit his
palette so severely in order to pair the poster visually to the film, and in doing so, he runs
counter to Ogilvy’s prescription for memorable imagery reproduced in color. However,
the black-and-white reproductions allude to two elements of the film. First, although the
movie is filmed in color throughout, when Roger Thornhill is photographed (as in the
newspaper picture associating him with the murder at the UN), his image is reproduced in
black and white. “Grey scale” indicates photography and media imagery in this film,

¹²⁴ Stanley Cavell and Fredric Jameson both discuss color in films, with Cavell stating that black and white
allows for film drama: “It is not merely that film colors were not accurate transcriptions of natural colors,
nor that the stories shot in color were explicitly unrealistic. It was that film color masked the black and
white axis of brilliance, and the drama of characters and contexts supported by it, along which our
comprehensibility of personality and event were secured. Movies in color seemed unrealistic because
issue with this view: “The constitutive relationship between this aesthetic and black-and-white film stock
is harder to argue, except *a contrario*, in its immediate exclusion by colour (whose full equivalent for this
visual plenitude is no longer realism, but the nostalgia image). *North by Northwest*, then, obviously
forestalls ‘realism’ in this special sense, a priori by virtue of its colour, but more substantively by way of its
specific narrativization, which systematically distracts the eye from ontological inspection.” Fredric
Jameson, “Spatial Systems in *North by Northwest,*” in *Everything You Always Wanted to Know about
suggesting that Thornhill has been “shot” both by Kendall’s gun as well as by a photographer documenting his story and emphasizing the suspended movement of a still photograph within the motion of the film. Furthermore, what is significant about the use of grey scale in terms of advertising design and brand building is the fact that Thornhill’s suit, worn throughout the film and noted for its flattering cut, is grey. This visual element that is most closely associated with the character of Thornhill loses nothing in a black-and-white reproduction. The grey suit is a trademark for Thornhill and for what he is, an advertisement for the character “adman.” In this greyness, Thornhill’s suit is an exemplar of “Roger Thornhill – adman,” which doubles the intent of the poster: adman as character and ad/man as a visual embodiment of an advertisement (a man who is an ad), which in this instance happens to be an advertisement for a film.

This duplication, in which the tag line’s “master of suspense” doubles the suspension of the figure, in which the layout and photographs of the poster are meant to be suggestive of the storyline of the film as a whole, and in which the presentation of the adman duplicates the re-presentation of the ad/man, is the peculiar feature of Saul Bass’s advertisement. The mise-en-page interweaves with its mise-en-abyme; the rules of the layout – how the tagline reads, how the photography is used, decisions about color – develop and enable that layout to turn over its very building blocks into an “abyss.”

This abyss is created by the tandem doubling of visual and textual elements, by poster

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125 In addition to being the colors of print media, black and white were also the colors of television, one of the ways that movies separated themselves from television: “Since television was in black and white, more movies would be made in color.” Tino Balio, ed. The American Film Industry, revised edition (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985): 425.

and film, but it is also created by the suspension of Thornhill, floating over the
nothingness that exists between his body and the viewer’s that directly faces him as he
falls. In Fredric Jameson’s words, this outward thrust of Grant’s figure from the poster
mimics the “aggressive movement of the screen towards the audience, space or spatial
features emerging from the screen into the cinema.” 127 This is what makes Bass’s poster
so revolutionary in the advertising world of 1959: there is literally no “place” for this
type of abyss in the universe created by Ogilvy’s rules.

There is even a further instance of suspension, though, in Bass’s decision to
incorporate a still from the film into the lower right-hand corner of the black grid. This is
a bizarre inclusion, seemingly formally unrelated to the rest of the design, oddly
positioned off-center inside the black square behind Thornhill and yet, presumably, in
front of Thornhill’s foot, which is indistinguishable from the dark ground. Both the
central image and the film still are taken from the action of the film (they are not
obviously staged publicity photos), but the still’s rectangular format differentiates it from
the larger image. We read the still as a “real” piece of film, suspended in its action and
taken whole from the reel of film; because of this it reads as ontologically different from
the central image. As Roland Barthes writes in “The Third Meaning,” “the still, then, is
the fragment of a second text [the film] whose existence never exceeds the fragment; film
and still find themselves in a palimpsest relationship without it being possible to say that
one is on top of the other or that one is extracted from the other.” 128 Thus, the still must
be located in an indeterminate place in the poster’s mise-en-page, because it exists


simultaneously within and without the greater film. This is yet another symptom of the layout creating and reacting to the poster’s mise-en-abyme.

The film still features the same characters, Roger Thornhill and Eve Kendall, in profile, kissing each other. In the course of the film, this scene happens twice: once before Thornhill is shot and once after, although the poster’s viewer, if also the movie’s pre-viewer, has no way of knowing which kiss this is (that Hitchcock was willing to kill off his heroine in Vertigo twice undoubtedly provided the “suspense” for which he was known to viewers of North by Northwest). The awkward, stilled kiss, one of the requirements of what Stanley Cavell has termed “comedies of remarriage” features here because North by Northwest is, in fact, a comedy of remarriage, but also because it serves as a foil to the shooting represented in the central image.\textsuperscript{129} As John Stezaker has noted, too, the kiss is “virtually synonymous with cinema itself,” as happy endings conclude with kisses, and film posters advertise these happy endings by reproducing the kisses.\textsuperscript{130} Bass’ poster is in keeping with the convention of reproducing the embrace, but because it is set apart within the layout as a film still rather than as the central image, it also quotes the trope of reproducing the kiss on a film poster.

The kiss, because of its very awkwardness when stilled, is vital to the suspension in design of the poster. Stezaker remarks that the stilled kiss is dangerous because it betrays the simulation of passion that the moving image masks. Indeed, it is telling that Thornhill’s and Kendall’s first kiss in the film is depicted from several angles as the


camera rotates around them, what Stezaker calls a “vortex” of movement, that makes “this encounter with stillness as momentous as possible.” Even if the camera did not move around the actors, however, the treacherously still kisses would have maintained the suggestion of movement in the film because both of them are filmed while Thornhill and Kendall are on speeding trains. The film still in the poster “throws off the constraint of filmic time,” but at the same time plays with the notion of the film’s time, its movement. The film still is a discrete, stable element just as the train berth, or a train window, is a solitary, unmoving compartment; the film still and the train window, in particular, share similar rectangular coordinates. When these components are combined with others of the same typology – a film still followed by more film stills, a train window followed by other train windows – the repetition of their cells creates the illusion of movement. Bass’ poster, then, responds to the use of still images in the movie, such as that of the newspaper photograph of Roger Thornhill, by placing a “moving” image within a still frame.

The rectangle of the film still, moreover, repeats the second essential design element of the poster, which is repeated in the opening titles as well as throughout the film: the grid. This motif is most obviously seen in the poster, where the overlapping grids delineate the space of the poster. The lines of the grids determine the placement of the poster’s lettering, and also develop the “abyss” over which Roger Thornhill’s body

131 Ibid., 120.


floats. Although not completely square – the lines of the grids oscillate, and some are rectangular – they do largely follow the perimeters of the poster’s edges, thus creating spaces within the space. Roger Thornhill’s lay-out reaches from upper left corner to lower right, or in a “north-westerly” direction, and runs counter to the layout of the rest of the design. Everything in the layout seems designed to trip him up: the edges of the grids that are both in front of and behind him; the trajectory of the bullet, which runs chiasmically against his body from upper right to lower left; even the director’s name seems placed so as to suggest that it is Hitchcock who is placing obstacles in the hero’s way all along (as, indeed, he has been). The title is visually puzzling: though it reads “North by Northwest,” the letters at first suggest south and east; instead of faithfully replicating the directions it indicates, the title mimics the topography of Mount Rushmore, where the climactic battle between Thornhill and his enemies takes place. By contrasting the title to the compass that shadows it, it becomes clear that the words of the title do not represent “true” cardinal directions. If anything, the points exist to stab Thornhill if he falls on them, rather than to guide him. And indeed, “north” is not true north, if the square of the poster is to be believed: “north/northwest” is the direction on

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134 The vacillating grids may also be related to another tag line featured on the poster: “VistaVision.” The VistaVision system reconfigured the Hollywood film’s rectangular proportions, allowing theaters to project 35mm film with a greater aspect ratio, thus yielding higher resolution color imagery. This technology was developed by Paramount Pictures in 1953 as a response to the serious competition posed to movies by television – the picture was larger and sharper, which movie executives hoped would bring viewers back to theaters. It proved particularly successful for action films (Star Wars, for example, was filmed using VistaVision, despite the fact that the system had been considered obsolete for several years), and many of the top grossing films from the 1950s and 1960s were filmed in VistaVision. The DVD I have used to research this chapter was pulled from the VistaVision print of North by Northwest. For a period discussion of VistaVision, see Kenneth MacGowan, “The Screen’s ‘New Look’ – Wider and Deeper,” The Quarterly of Film, Radio, and Television 11 no.2 (Winter 1956): 109-30. VistaVision was reconsidered more recently in Christen Yasko, “VistaVision – The Whole Story,” Weltwunder der Kinematographie 4 (1997): 25-35.

135 In this outstretched lay-out, duplicating the points of the compass below him, Roger Thornhill squares the circle, making him a sort of anti-Vitruvian man who is upsetting the workings of the films’ universe.
the compass that points directly up. If Bass is making up layout rules as he goes along, then it is no surprise that Thornhill must do so as well in order to survive in this world. The labyrinth of the poster’s layout suggests the struggle Thornhill will experience in making his way through the plot of the film.

The points of the compass reference Thornhill’s movement across an imaginary map of the United States, beginning in Manhattan, and then relocating to Long Island, Chicago, rural Illinois, South Dakota, and finally back again toward New York. In the geography it traverses, *North by Northwest* becomes the grid of a map – what Tom Conley would call “cartographic cinema” – produced by the rectangles of stills moving vertically as they run through a projector, and the characters moving horizontally, against the path of the film, as they travel across the country.\(^{136}\) This is suggested most blatantly in the famous crop-dusting scene, in which Roger Thornhill is chased by a plane as he waits for a meeting with “George Kaplan” (which has been set up by Eve Kendall: Thornhill has been double-crossed). Again, chiasmic movement becomes important to the structure of the scene. Until this point, Thornhill has only moved north and west; by taking a bus from Chicago to Illinois farmland, Thornhill moves south, thus crossing his own trajectory. Unlike the crowdedness of Manhattan, or the close quarters of the train berth in which Thornhill stays with Kendall, the farmland is barren and enormous, making it clear that Thornhill is on his own, and allowing him and the viewer to see danger coming from a long distance (fig.7). However, because of this openness, there is nowhere for Thornhill to hide. He is pinpointed, almost as if by satellite sighting, in the grid of his surroundings: first, within the overarching grid of the country’s map, then

within the somewhat smaller grid of the plots of land bisected by roads, and then, even more explicitly, within the more finely gridded pattern of the cornfields in which he attempts to hide, desperately trying to escape the crop-dusting plane (fig.8). In The Movement-Image, Gilles Deleuze defines the plane in this sequence as an example of the “demark,” that ordinary effect or prop that serves to effect a narratival turn precisely because of its ordinariness, either because, as here, the crop duster typically seen in farm country is dusting where there are no crops, as a passer-by mentions to Thornhill, or because there is too much of an ordinary thing – like the birds in The Birds – which then turns on the characters. In each instance, the ordinary becomes uncanny. If the plane is a “demark,” then it uses the grid of the scene to “demarcate” Thornhill’s position, following his site in order to track him down. Following the guidelines made by “Kaplan” sets up Thornhill to be hunted; this is the turning point in the film during which Thornhill decides to make his own rules to avoid being trapped again.

It is interesting to consider Saul Bass’ choice of the grid in the opening title sequence precisely because it has been discussed as a potential trap into which modernists might fall. In her 1979 article, “Grids,” Rosalind Krauss notes that in conjunction with the use of the modernist grid, with its “will to silence, its hostility to literature, to narrative, to discourse,” the “fortress [the arts] constructed has increasingly

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137 “Combining geometric simplicity with endless vistas... Hitchcock’s panoptic shot of the evacuated field evoke[s] an emptiness that gives not only spatial but also socio-political shape to the modern city-dweller’s condition. It is in such a space that Thornhill is situated. Constantly moving through horizontal and vertical grids, he finds himself in a series of pitfalls.” Jacobs, 300.

become a ghetto.” However, Krauss continues her discussion by examining why the grid is so attractive to the modern artist, despite its limitations; for the designer, the grid provides both rules and freedoms within those restrictions (the ramifications of which I will explore more fully in the next chapter). In the opening titles of *North by Northwest*, Bass plays in the space between nonconformity and the expectations of the grid.

*North by Northwest* begins with an animated sequence of white horizontal and vertical gridlines running over a bottle-green ground, what Bass claimed was the first animated kinetic typography sequence of its kind (fig. 9). As the lines coalesce, it becomes apparent that they are forming the grid of a glass curtain-walled skyscraper. Once the grid is established, the text of the credits begins running vertically along it as though being borne upwards by elevators before being flown off the screen, while passing white bars suggestive of the counterweights of the elevator’s pulley mechanism slide down toward the ground. The grid is thus both wall and typographic grid, a device that cleverly permits Cary Grant’s name to be displayed larger and higher than his costars’ without drawing attention to the fact (Grant’s name is barely contained by the vertical space within a set of windows, with the lower edge of the letters extending beyond the bottom horizontal of window frames, whereas Eve Marie Saint’s name hovers slightly below and James Mason’s fits compactly within the lines of the same windows).

139 Rosalind Krauss, “Grids,” *October* 9 (Summer 1979): 50. In a 1972 *Artforum* essay on the grid, John Elderfield bemoaned the prevalence of painted grids in the art of the time in terms derived from the modernist critique of art as “good design,” (see Introduction above) stating that, “The majority of grid work ends up not moving but merely pleasant. To take some graph paper, strengthen some of its lines, and start filling in some of the squares can’t really help but produce an attractive effect – but more often than not the result will just be good design.” “Grids,” *Artforum* X (May 1972): 59.


141 The color may reference the façade of Lever House, the first curtain-walled building in Manhattan.
The title of the film follows quickly on the actors’ names and features the words North by Northwest in full capitals with arrows pointing up/north on the initial N and left/west on the final T.

Immediately after the title moves off-screen, the green of the background dissolves into the glass surface of the curtain wall, which reflects the frenetic midtown Manhattan pedestrian and taxi traffic below. With the text and animated bars moving vertically up and down and the traffic and people moving horizontally right and left, another grid is created “three dimensionally.” This three-dimensional overlay echoes the streetscape of Manhattan, in which the grid of the city’s perpendicular plan is pushed upright and mirrored – sometimes literally – in the grids of skyscrapers: “From the start, Saul Bass’ title sequence signals the problematic of three-dimensionality and flatness in North by Northwest as the maplike grid upon which the titles are inscribed gradually dissolves into the three-dimensional image of [Ludwig] Mies van der Rohe’s Seagram Building. Repeatedly in this film, modernist spatial relations produce a striking if momentary, flattening of the depth of field in the image.”

The curtain wall grid, and the reflections therein, contains the disorder of the city, and makes an attempt to navigate the pandemonium in real time, as that time is depicted in its windows. (It is noteworthy that as the reflection in the grid dissolves into a depiction of the street at street level, the

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142 Brigitte Peucker, The Material Image: Art and the Real in Film (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007): 100. Cavell, Keane, and Peucker all identify the title sequence building as the Seagram Building, which was completed in 1958. If this is so, then Bass is pushing his play with our perceptions even further, as the reflections displayed in his titles cannot be replicated in the building as it stands, due to its remove from the street and its elevation on pilotis. Steven Jacobs notes that “Lever House (Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, 1952), the United Nations Headquarters (International Committee of Architects, 1953), and the Seagram Building (Ludwig Mies van der Rohe & Philip Johnson, 1958) – all have been identified erroneously as the office building in the opening shot by several authors.” The Wrong House: The Architecture of Alfred Hitchcock, 299. For more on space in Hitchcock, see Brigitte Peucker, “Aesthetic Space in Hitchcock,” in A Companion to Alfred Hitchcock, ed. Thomas Leitch and Leland Poague (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2011):208-10.
film’s credits begin running horizontally, as if compelled to respond the dynamic of the street and its occupants rather than to the rigor of the grid.\textsuperscript{143} In writing of Mies van der Rohe’s buildings, K. Michael Hays notes that,

Mies insists that an order is immanent in the surface itself and that the order is continuous with and dependent on the world in which the viewer actually moves. This sense of surface and volume, severed from the knowledge of an internal order or a unifying logic, is enough to wrench the building from the atemporal idealized realm of autonomous form and install it in a specific situation in the real world of experienced time, open to the chance and uncertainty of life in the metropolis.\textsuperscript{144}

If the grid of the curtain wall is responsive to the “chance and uncertainty” of the metropolis, then it seems appropriate that this would be the opening setting to Roger Thornhill’s adventure across the grid of Manhattan, the landscape, and the poster advertising his plight.

It must be appropriate, too, that the opening titles’ grid is set at an angle to the screen. Rather than crossing the titles at right angles and developing a plaid that directly faces the viewer, the titles are formed askew to the picture plane and almost immediately form the tell-tale grid of windows. Formally, the decision to do so is obvious: by developing the grid at an angle, Bass refers to a bank of windows receding into space rather than a tartan that sits opposite the viewer, and it sets up the viewer to slide into the space and narrative of the film: “Our minds, as well as our bodies, require some sort of

\textsuperscript{143} In his essay “The Grid: History, Use, and Meaning,” Jack H. Williamson writes of the “tilted grid” that becomes prevalent in post-modern media that, “The ubiquitous use of the tilted grid, evident in magazine ads, posters, television graphics, and other popular media over the last several years, also represents the arational or irrational, because the grid – as a symbol of the field of consciousness – has become disoriented in its detachment from the world, as indicated by its lack of gravitational orientation.” “The Grid: History, Use, and Meaning,” \textit{Design Issues} III no.2 (Autumn 1986): 28.

intermediate zone through which we must pass to effectively enter that state of immersion so the film can do whatever it is that it does.” However, in doing so, Bass also sets the titles at odds with the grid of the screen. Because the grid does not face the movie screen, it does not project fully frontally. This activates all of the corners of the film image, something that could not happen with a stagnant grid, and further animates the animation: the grid cannot be contained and therefore is to be read as continuing off of the screen into “real” space and time (just as Hays suggests Mies’ buildings do). This tells us something about Roger Thornhill: unlike the admen who came before him, he is not oppressed by the restrictions of his position or the demands it makes on him. Rather, his skills as an adman prepare him for success in the unreal world of spying and Hollywood film plotting. He changes the rules of the game by making them up as he goes along. The restrictions of his profession become his liberation, as he adopts and adapts advertising’s strategies to his own devices. Because Thornhill looks at it askance, tongue in cheek, the grid in which he is introduced, works, and travels is not a prison. Ironically, as I shall discuss in the next chapter, it is the typographic grid that will free design, too, from the restraints of mid-century advertising homogeneity.

145 The quote continues: “Bass knew how to bring about this immersion, which allowed the viewer – to borrow a favorite phrase of his – “to hit the ground running,” priming us for the passage between lived experience and that subset of it spent in a darkened theater. Here, lived experience is effaced and a whole other logic takes over. Take the notion of time: our understanding of it, at least on one level, is marked as something that is standardized and quantifiable; film time, on the other hand, is completely elastic and, like any elastic substance, can be put to use in manners both utilitarian and playful.” Jim Supanick, “Saul Bass,” Film Comment 33 no.2 (1997): 72-7. International Index to Performing Arts, http://gateway.proquest.com.
Chapter 2: Breaking the Rules with the Beetle: Volkswagen’s Revolutionary Advertising and the Visual Wit of Andy Warhol’s Pop Art

As explored in the last chapter, the year 1959 was a revolutionary one for design, witnessing as it did the establishment of advertising rules by David Ogilvy in the publication *Advertising Directions*, as well as their explosion by such designs as Saul Bass’s poster and title sequence for the film *North by Northwest*. With his use of suspension techniques and a gridded layout, Bass played with the rule-bound examples of advertising success elucidated by Ogilvy to create advertising design. However, 1959 was not only remarkable because of the production of these two men. The year saw the engagement between the design communities of America and Europe, and their respective styles, manifest itself in competitive fashion, as well as in a new interplay between the international style of German typographic design and “all-American” advertising and industrial design. Perhaps most famously, the notorious “kitchen debate” exchange between Vice-President Richard Nixon and Soviet Premier Nikita Krushchev (held on 24 July, 1959), focused global media attention on American product design, with the Soviet response suggesting that “Our kitchen is just as good.”146 American design was about streamlining, automation, and happy housewives able to cook their family meals at the press of a button. Thus, the ad campaign for the Volkswagen Beetle, which had its

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debut in 1959 and which featured a bumpy, ugly car, attempted to sell to consumers everything that American products and their attendant advertising were telling them to reject. This chapter focuses on the VW campaign and the rules it broke – and made – throughout its surprisingly successful run on “American” values.

**Volkswagen’s Revolutionary Campaign**

In the third episode of the television show *Mad Men*, the protagonist Don Draper examines the “Lemon” advertisement for Volkswagen, the second such ad produced by the firm Doyle Dane Bernbach (DDB) for the car company.\(^{147}\) While Draper’s colleagues, corporate men working in the grey flannel suit environment presumably established for Cary Grant’s Roger Thornhill in *North by Northwest*, mock the ad because of its product, its tagline, and its use of a black and white photograph, Draper quietly observes that this is the vision of the future for their profession: it is a knowing advertisement, self-mocking and witty, that will upend the complacent world of advertising in the late 1950s and 1960s (indeed, later in the same episode, Draper chastises a junior colleague for his reliance on marketing surveys and statistics, numbers by which David Ogilvy swears in his book *Ogilvy on Advertising*\(^{148}\)). By the time the 1960s were over, Volkswagen ads would become the predominant model for the look and feel of advertising.

Although DDB was not yet a large firm by American standards in 1959, it was nevertheless respected by the industry for the creativity of its product, and the *New York*

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Times reported DDB’s winning bid as Volkswagen doing “the expected” in awarding its business to the agency.\(^{149}\) However, the account was not without its difficulties:

Volkswagen was known to have been Hitler’s car company; even the name, a “people’s car,” smacked of European political missteps and suspicious activities in the atmosphere of Cold War America.\(^{150}\) DDB, a Manhattan firm with prominent Jewish principals, was taking a professional risk by accepting the VW account, not least because Volkswagens had traditionally underperformed in the American market. In one of DDB’s 1961 ads for the VW Beetle, the firm acknowledged that in 1949, one of the first years that Volkswagens were available in the US, only two cars were sold. The competition for the American consumer was steep: not only would the Beetle be matched against other import vehicles, but American car companies were strong and overwhelmingly popular.

The truism for American automobile advertising from the early days of the genre was that the consumer wanted big, new, and more. Ads throughout the 1940s, ‘50s, and ‘60s for American cars emphasized their enormous size and accompanying roominess, their speed, and the latest model to be released. Important in American car advertising was the prominence given to the yearly upgrades in each car’s profile, with the major


companies exhibiting their newest releases each fall in Detroit.\textsuperscript{151} American cars of the
time were heavy and gas guzzling, but their decorative accoutrements, such as tailfins
and paint detailing, suggested the speed that was captured in still images depicting the
movement of a racing vehicle with a telephoto lens; even when a car was stopped, its
shape was meant to suggest the speed clocked in photographs (fig. 11).\textsuperscript{152} However,
American car ads were typically not \textit{illustrated} with photographs. Instead, the norm in
the 1950s was to imagine the vehicle as something it was not and could only aspire to be,
a spaceship say, and to paint it, literally, by using painted illustrations for advertisements.
In their focus on velocity, technology, and the space-age future, American car ads were
visually uniform, with only the detailing of each pictured vehicle differentiating one
company’s claim from another.\textsuperscript{153}

The competition between car companies and their models was translated by
advertisements as competition between car consumers. Thus, 1950s ads for automobiles
emphasized families happily living the American dream by purchasing the newest car and
driving it across the country. The ownership of these cars translated to ownership of
space, with one such ad suggesting its car literally “ate” the scenery because it was so fast
and, more telling, so big. Even the enormity of the American West was no match for such

\textsuperscript{151} Thomas Frank, \textit{The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip

\textsuperscript{152} Rowsome, 25.

\textsuperscript{153} The illustrator Bruce McCall worked for Dodge drawing the images for its advertisements until 1959,
when Dodge abruptly moved entirely to ads illustrated with photographs. McCall later parodied 1950s car
ads for the \textit{National Lampoon}, promoting automobiles he called “Bulgemobiles,” with slogans such as “So
All-Fired New They Make Tomorrow Seem Like Yesterday!” Bruce McCall, \textit{The Last Dream-O-Rama: The
behemoths. The conquest of the American landscape via automobile worked in conjunction with the conquest of the suburban neighborhood, with a new stress placed on keeping up with, and then exceeding, one’s neighbors.\textsuperscript{154} Advertisements promised popularity, success, and dominance to those who could keep up with the newest releases.

It was into this market, then, that Volkswagen introduced its Beetle. Small, ugly to 1950s eyes trained to admire chrome and decoration, and resolutely against surface improvements (Volkswagen’s ads suggested that new models only improved the inside of the car, under the hood\textsuperscript{155}), DDB’s challenge was to sell to Americans a vehicle that was completely – and intentionally – the opposite of every automobile they had ever been told they wanted and to convince them that they were not suddenly Nazis or Communists if they did purchase such a car. Although Roland Barthes had suggested earlier in the decade that the Citroën DS represented a “humanized art,” which “obviously turn[ed] away from an alchemy of speed to a relish in driving,” he was writing of a French car built for French drivers.\textsuperscript{156} American cars were built to tame the Wild West, show off muscle, and transport a family in comfort and style. Counter to American practices, Volkswagen had developed a word-of-mouth following, brought home by GIs returning from fighting in World War II, which had seen sales of its cars rise from the fabled two in 1949 to 78,588 in 1958.\textsuperscript{157} Accomplished without the aid of an advertising agency, the

\textsuperscript{154} The Volkswagen ads parodied this pressure to keep up with one’s neighbors in the 1959 double-page spread, “What year car do the Jones drive?”

\textsuperscript{155} See advertisements such as “No point showing the ’62 Volkswagen. It still looks the same” and the discussion below.


Volkswagen sales successes prompted the *New York Times* to report that, “whenever someone asked an advertising man how Volks was doing so well without ads, this was usually a signal for a change of subject.”\(^{158}\) The 1959 campaign for Volkswagen, a $1 million campaign (compared to General Motors’ $185,000,000 spent on advertising in 1957)\(^{159}\) intended to persuade the generic American to purchase a German car with historical ties to Hitler, which an American with intellectual, international, or design pretensions or preferences already owned, while competing with American models newly released every year, faced a daunting task.\(^ {160}\) The ads for such a vehicle could not be simply more of the same.

From the very beginning, Volkswagen ads were understood as turning over the expectations of advertising that had been established in America by admen such as David Ogilvy. A 1962 article in the *New York Times*, written by Peter Bart three years in to DDB’s Volkswagen campaign, carried the headline “Volkswagen Breaks the Rules” and continued:

> Just three years ago, Volkswagen decided to start its first advertising campaign in the United States. As it turned out, the decision was a momentous one, for the campaign that resulted has attracted as much attention, both in and out of advertising, as perhaps any other single campaign of recent vintage. On the surface, the Volkswagen ads would seem to have broken all the rules. After all, it is not customary for an auto manufacturer to call one of its cars “a lemon,” or to urge consumers to “think small,” or to show its autos with a fender knocked off.\(^ {161}\)

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\(^{159}\) Ibid., F10.

\(^{160}\) Volkswagen’s advertising manager, Helmut Schmitz, stated that, “We wanted to start to advertise, not because we were in trouble, but because we wanted to avoid to get [sic] in trouble.” Rowsome, 59.

\(^{161}\) Bart, F12.
And yet this is what DDB convinced Volkswagen to do with its cars. The result was stunning: in 1959, 119,899 Volkswagens were sold in the United States, 177,308 were sold in 1961, and the *Times* article reported that as of May 1962, sales of Volkswagens were already 21 percent above the 1961 level. Even more telling, the article continued, was the fact that, “In 1961 when total auto sales in the United States were down 11 percent, Volkswagen still reported an 11 percent gain.”162 Although Bart suggested that it would have been difficult to determine how much of this success to attribute to Volkswagen’s advertising (he cites the strong word-of-mouth popularity of Volkswagens before the campaign began), he did note that Volkswagen itself seemed to think the ads were incredibly effective and quadrupled its United States advertising budget to $4 million in 1962.163

The two ads that Bart described remain two of the most famous (and reproduced) from the entire campaign. And although they are often discussed in terms of their revolutionary impact, in fact they owe many of their design decisions to David Ogilvy’s work on the Man in the Hathaway shirt campaign. As in the Hathaway images, most of the Volkswagen ads worked according to a strict layout: the image of the car occupies the top two-thirds of the page, and the headline and copy are relegated to the remaining third. In his book *Ogilvy on Advertising*, Ogilvy explained how he determined his first, “perfect” layout:

Readers look first at the illustration, then at the headline, then at the copy. SO put these elements in that order – illustration at the top, headline under the illustration, copy under the headline. This follows the normal order of scanning,

162 Ibid.
163 Ibid.
which is from top to bottom. If you put the headline *above* the illustration, you are asking people to scan in an order which does not fit their habit.\textsuperscript{164}

In their layouts, the Volkswagen ads are entirely respectful to one of DDB’s major competitors. Helmut Krone, the art director assigned the Volkswagen imagery, wrote that “The VW page, 2/3 picture, a small headline under it and then three blocks of copy, was entirely influenced by Ogilvy. The space break-up existed before. It was really Ogilvy that was doing it a great deal and I always admired that man – but I did change a lot about it.”\textsuperscript{165} In their strict adherence to Ogilvy’s layout (which would later be elucidated in terms of a typographic grid), the ads were able to call on their recognizable image as almost a sort of trademark. However, it was what was changed that became important to the success of the campaign.

In the bulk of his design decisions Krone broke from Ogilvy’s examples to develop a Volkswagen visual formula. Krone, a German-born designer, was assigned to the campaign as he was a Volkswagen owner of long standing; he actually thought the car attractive (unlike, apparently, many of DDB’s employees).\textsuperscript{166} Krone estimated that he was one of the first hundred owners of a Volkswagen in the United States and was driving his second VW when given the position.\textsuperscript{167} Thus, he was in a unique position to sell the car, and he did so by infusing Ogilvy’s layout with German design methods. In doing so, he broke the rules that Ogilvy had set out for successful advertising images by

\textsuperscript{164} Ogilvy, 89.

\textsuperscript{165} Challis, 62.

\textsuperscript{166} Although I will be focusing on Krone as the art director of the Volkswagen advertisements, several members of Doyle Dane Bernbach were involved in the campaign: Bill Bernbach and Ned Doyle, the principals; Edward Russell, the account director; Julian Koenig, David Reider, and Bob Levenson, copywriters; Wingate Holmes Paine, the photographer; and George Lois, briefly on the account as an art director. Challis, 58-72.

\textsuperscript{167} Ibid., 60.
using black and white photographs instead of color, sans-serif typography, and a period in his headlines, a punctuation mark forbidden by Ogilvy.

*Images of Volkswagens*

In the Man in the Hathaway Shirt images, the photograph is always reproduced in color, always consumes the top two-thirds of the surface area, and is always presented full-bleed to the edges of the page. Even in Ogilvy’s second “perfect” layout, in which the copy is given more real estate, the image, while taking up less of the vertical span of the page, still extends to the perimeter of the paper. In this way, the image strikes the viewer as the most important element of the ad. With its prominent placement, use of color, and extension, the image dominates the text, which is inevitably smaller, printed in black on white, and compressed into three blocks of copy, the outer corners of which are defined by, and are smaller than, the image above. Although a few Volkswagen advertisements used color, the majority were reproduced in black and white, already distinguishing this car from those multi-colored renderings of families picnicking beside their American automobile. In fact, there were no happy families depicted with Volkswagens in these advertisements. When “owners” were photographed with their VWs, they were just as often to be shown disgruntled as they were satisfied with their cars.169

“Lemon.”, (fig.12) arguably DDB’s most famous advertisement for Volkswagen, purports to show this dissatisfaction, if only to inform consumers that the company was

168 Ogilvy, 87.

169 See such ads as “And if you run out of gas, it’s easy to push.”
as finicky as they were. “Lemon.”’s copy suggests that the reason it is to be disregarded is that it bears a blemish on the chrome trim of the glovebox. The idea of calling one’s own car a lemon is startling. After all, who would buy such a thing? However, the image tells a different story. Here, the car looks perfect, the body is in good shape, and the paint is pristine. If there is a flaw on the interior, the reader would never know. Thus, the copy informs us, it is beneficial to have Volkswagen’s tireless inspectors constantly reviewing their own product for flaws, as the reader or owner may not be in a position to discover them. The lemon itself is shown in a studio photograph, not in motion or in situ on a location, its cast shadow the only thing suggesting that it existed in the same space as the photographer. The image is literally groundless, as would be claims to the superiority of American vehicles over the Volkswagen’s quality.

The moniker “lemon,” though, suggests something more than merely a flawed car. In the copy beneath the lemon, the ad suggests that Volkswagen maintains a “preoccupation with detail,” which is in keeping not only with its inspectors protecting the consumer from an unfortunate purchase, but also alludes to the shape of the car, as well. Unlike attenuated American cars, the Volkswagen is shaped like a lemon, with its arched roof and its protuberant wheel rims and bulbous lights recalling the two ends of a citrus fruit. Thus, the preoccupation with detail is not merely Volkswagen’s. It also belongs to the discriminating viewer who notices the formal resemblance between the car and the lemon.

The observant viewer would have noticed, too, that the car depicted in “Lemon” had already been represented in an earlier ad, “Think Small.” “Think Small.” (fig.13)

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170 The first two paragraphs of copy read, “This Volkswagen missed the boat. The chrome strip on the glove compartment is blemished and must be replaced. Chances are you wouldn’t have noticed it; Inspector Kurt Kroner did.”
utilized the same layout as “Lemon.”, but the photograph was far more radical because the size of the reproduction was drastically reduced, and the image was not centered. Rather, the car was pictured in the upper left corner of the page. In this, the sitelessness of “Lemon.” becomes a starkly empty ground, with a huge expanse of white space between the image of the car and the introduction of text. The groundless car exists within the abstraction of the advertisement, one that can manipulate the size and location of the image to affect its accordance with text. The image literalizes the headline (the car is thought – rendered – small), and when it is finally brought up to a “normal” size, it is only to inform the viewer that there was something wrong with that particular car all along. The gamesmanship extends, then, between the image and its related copy, but also between the different ads themselves. This play between ads separated by months or years would continue throughout the whole of the campaign.

Headlines

Playing as they did a game with the images of the cars, the headlines were incredibly important to the success of the Volkswagen advertisements. It is here, too, that the choice of black and white reproductions becomes important to the effect of the ads because the image and the text are equivalents of one another. In Ogilvy’s Hathaway campaign, the headline serves as a caption to the image above it; it explains what the Man in the Hathaway shirt is shown doing or introduces a new product (“Hathaway revives the striped tartan.”).\textsuperscript{171} The connection between the headline and the image in the Volkswagen ads is often more abstract, although there is equanimity between word and image. Whereas Ogilvy’s headlines explain, DDB’s headlines declaim. In this, we might

\textsuperscript{171} This ad is reproduced in Ogilvy, 79.
say that Ogilvy and DDB separate into the two categories suggested by Roland Barthes for image/text relationships, anchorage and relay. In anchorage, Barthes writes,

the text directs the reader through the signifieds of the image, causing him to avoid some and receive others; by means of an often subtle dispatching, it remote-controls him towards a meaning chosen in advance. In these cases of anchorage, language clearly has a function of elucidation, but this elucidation is selective.\(^{172}\)

Indeed, Ogilvy’s headlines do read this way, instructing the viewer to understand what he has laid out in the image above the text. Thus, even though the viewer sees the image first and the headline only second, these ads work by demanding that the imagery reinforce the headline by illustrating it.

In the DDB’s Volkswagen ads, however, there is something more complex at work. Barthes calls instances like these, in which image and text are equivalent, “the function of relay,” and notes that it

is less common (at least as far as the fixed image is concerned)… Here text (most often a snatch of dialogue) and image stand in a complementary relationship; the words in the same way as the images, are fragments of a more general syntagm and the unity of the message is realized at a higher level, that of the story, the anecdote, the diegesis… While rare in the fixed image, this relay-text becomes very important in film, where dialogue functions not simply as elucidation but really does advance the action by setting out, in the sequence of message, meanings that are not to be found in the image itself.\(^{173}\)

Although Barthes observes that relay is rare in the still image/text combination and exists mainly in film, I would like to claim relay for the efficacy of the Volkswagen images, as their headlines and photographs are in play to push forward a diegetic understanding of the advertisement, one that establishes its own (groundless) space, story, and conclusions.

This is why, then, the black and white imagery of the vehicles is important. Because


\(^{173}\) Ibid., 41.
black and white are the colors of text, a black and white reproduction is relational to the headline and the copy; rather than existing in an exterior space, the ideal Volkswagen narrative lives within the space established by its advertisements.

The headlines and texts of Volkswagen advertisements self-consciously moved away from the prescriptions of Ogilvy in two other, important respects. First, they employed a sans-serif typeface, Futura, when Ogilvy required serifed fonts for headlines and copy. Ogilvy’s aim was legibility, and he suggested (rightly) that large amounts of sans-serif letters are difficult to read. However, Volkswagen’s ads were not only meant to be read; rather, they were developed to provide an experience. In keeping with the relay between text and image, the typeface chosen had to be expressive of the Volkswagen encounter. Thus, Futura, designed by Paul Renner in 1927, was used for Volkswagen because it felt like Volkswagen. Its relationship between a geometric foundation that established a relationship between circles and rectangles, “constructed with ruler and compass,” was matched with its success as a typeface that “composed well as text, over a whole range of sizes,” making it an ideal setting for small amounts of text that mirrored the shape of a lemon-shaped car. Bitstream, a font library, suggests that Futura is “functional yet friendly, logical yet not overintellectual, German yet anti-Nazi... with hindsight the choice of Futura as Volkswagen's ad font since the 1960s looks inevitable.” The face was everything that Volkswagen needed it to be.

174 Ogilvy, 96. Ogilvy was citing typographers such as Jan Tschichold, a strong proponent of using sans-serif typefaces in the correct circumstances.


Futura may also have been used by Krone because it was one of the typefaces suggested by Jan Tschichold in his practice of what he called the “New Typography.” In a statement titled “Elemental Typography” published in *Typographische Mitteilungen*, Tschichold described the purpose of the new typography in terms very similar to the outcome of the Volkswagen layouts:

…In order to make typography serviceable to social ends, it requires the inner organization of its materials (the ordering of content) and their outer organization (the means of typography configured in relation to one another).

… *Inner organization* is the limitation to the elemental means of typography: letters, numbers, signs, rules – from the typecase and the composing machine. In the present, visually-attuned world, the exact image – photography – also belongs to the elemental means of typography.

The elemental letterform is the sanserif, in all variations: light, medium, bold, and from condensed to expanded.\textsuperscript{177} Thus, the importance of using photographs in conjunction with sans-serif fonts is that they are part of the same means of organizing information. The photograph is the “exact image” and sans serif is the elemental (exact) letterform. In *Ogilvy on Advertising*, David Ogilvy quotes Krone citing the design’s ultimate debt to Tschichold and the New Typography of Germany: “I’d like to propose a new idea for our age: until you’ve got a better answer, you *copy*. I copied Bob Gage [an art director with Doyle Dane Bernbach] for 5 years… And Bob originally copied Paul Rand, and Rand first copied a German typographer named Tschichold.”\textsuperscript{178} The irony, of course, is that Krone’s copying was done at the same time DDB was launching an ad mutiny.


\textsuperscript{178} Ogilvy, 88.
The revolution took place in one other typographic decision in the Volkswagen ads, the placement of a period at the end of headlines. This, again, breaks one of Ogilvy’s rules for print advertising. Ogilvy wrote that it was a “mistake to put a period at the end of headlines. Periods are also called full stops, because they stop the reader dead in his tracks.”¹⁷⁹ The use of a headline was dangerous because it offered the ad’s reader the possibility of going no further or permitted them to scrutinize the ad more closely.¹⁸⁰ Volkswagen advertisements used them because they were supposed to be scrutinized. Making a declarative statement such as “Lemon.” or “Think Small.” was an imperative given to the viewers, prompting them mentally to turn nouns into adjectives and then back into nouns. Counterintuitively, perhaps, a full stop permitted the relay between text and image to happen because the punctuation at the end of the headline acted as a hinge between the two elements of the layout.

_Volkswagen Design and Designers_

Because the Volkswagen ads broke the rules consistently and employed the same format to do so, their layouts became visually interchangeable. What was established inside the layout could change, but the gridded format did not. Thus, in breaking the rules, Volkswagen established its own rules, and in one ad cheekily advised readers to follow its well-known guidelines to write their own ads. “How to do a Volkswagen ad.”

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 96.

¹⁸⁰ “Putting a full point in a headline was an act of sedition. It broke the pace and invited inspection – maybe even circumspection – of the statement. Of course this is exactly why Krone used one: he had statements to make which he wanted to be examined. Received wisdom in admaking circles was that this was antithetical to the way advertising worked. Ads should provoke only the emotions and avoid stimulating any of the consumer’s critical faculties.” Challis, 64.
is a two-page spread (another Ogilvy rule broken\textsuperscript{181}) with instructions featured on the left-hand side and the bare typographic grid on the right (fig.14). It is here that the advertisements literally tell the viewer what to do with all VW images, to the point where the viewer could write her own ad. Thus, the viewer is meant to “Look at the car,” and then “Look harder.” “Don’t exaggerate,” “Call a spade a spade,” and “Speak to the reader. Don’t shout. He can hear you. Especially if you talk sense.”\textsuperscript{182} By following the path laid out by the grid, the viewers could virtually become advertising designers themselves.

And it was the design of the ads that set Volkswagen apart. Helmut Krone demurred when prompted to describe the advertisements as design. In a 1990 article, “Advertising Design, Graphic Design, and What’s the Difference?” published in \textit{Print} magazine, Krone stated that, “I felt that Volkswagen was not design. It was anti-design. It was anonymous, as though an art director never went near it. That was my intention.”\textsuperscript{183} However, Nicholas Polites, the article’s author, continues: “Nevertheless, [the Volkswagen campaign] used a grid system and – more unusual for the times – a sans-serif headline,” making the campaign eligible to be discussed as design.\textsuperscript{184} Polites quotes another DDB art director, Gene Federico, as saying, “Design is thought. Every square inch of that Volkswagen ad is consummate thought. Maybe it’s not “designy” in the

\textsuperscript{181} Ogilvy, 91.

\textsuperscript{182} The ad that “talks sense” speaks in measured sentences that end in periods. Unlike the advertisements of the time that were rife with exclamation points, the VW ads did not need to “shout.”


\textsuperscript{184} Ibid., 54.
graphic sense. But in his thinking Krone came up with a graphic form that’s fantastic.”

Even if their inventor did not consider the Volkswagen ads to be designed, they clearly were read that way: iconic print design for an iconic product design.

**The Iconic American Product**

It was because of the success of the advertisements that Volkswagen was able to make another bold statement with a later two-page ad, “2 shapes known the world over.” In this layout, the Volkswagen Beetle is presented frontally to the viewer on the right-hand side of the spread and is paired with a Coca-Cola bottle on the left (fig.15). The first few lines of copy tell the reader why: “Nobody really notices Volkswagens or Coke bottles anymore. They’re so well known, they blend in with the scenery.” Thus Volkswagen ads have achieved their purpose: in making sales to Americans, they have become so popular and ubiquitous that they are American, as American as Coca-Cola. The two iconic, rounded shapes are presented (again) as equivalents, each resting in its own space. Separated by the fold of the magazine and the staples that hold the pages together, but housed simultaneously within the typographic grid of the advertisement, Coke and VW must be read as different products and yet equals, recognized for their shapes and by the knowledge that they will work the same no matter where the viewer is. Like Coke, each Volkswagen is reliable and each Volkswagen is interchangeable. Throughout the DDB campaign, the shape of the Volkswagen was not altered. Thus, parts were easy to come by, it was inexpensive, and “keeping up with the Joneses” was made easy, since every Volkswagen looked like every other Volkswagen. The Beetle was able

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185 Ibid., 55.
to become American because it was democratic. In its very denial of individuality, it allowed its owners to become individually important.

The shape of the Coca-Cola bottle – its intrinsic self-display – was effective in advertising as well as in art, where it famously began appearing in the work of American artists in the mid- to late-1950s. Robert Rauschenberg’s Combine painting, *Coca-Cola Plan* of 1958, displays three Coke bottles mottled with oil paint, a schematic drawing for a proposed painting, and a wooden newel cap within a trophy-sized wooden box flanked by a pair of metal wings (fig.16). The title bluntly refers to the components of the piece, but because it places the words “Coca-Cola” before the plan (reversing the direction in which we might read the elements if we were to examine the Combine from top to bottom, in the manner Ogilvy expected us to), it seems to allude to something more sinister, as though the plan were of the bottles’ devising. And, indeed, that is how the Combine has been read by art historians. Caroline A. Jones sees in the striated newel a shape akin to a globe and postulates that “this Coca-Cola Plan is an ambitious, calculated little package. Riding on the crest of a newly global American commodity culture, its maker cheerfully brandishes a proposal to take over the world.”

Thus, a plan plus Coke equals a plan for world domination (not least because this Combine was one included in Rauschenberg’s exhibition at the 1964 Venice Biennale at which the artist was awarded the Golden Lion).  

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187 See the first chapter of Calvin Tomkins’ “portrait” of Rauschenberg, *Off the Wall*, for more on the Venice Biennale (pp. 1-11). Tomkins reports that one of the bottles from *Coca Cola Plan* had broken in transit, and Rauschenberg had approved its replacement prior to the opening of the Biennale. However, “European Coke bottles were neither the same size nor that same hue as their American counterparts. A
That “Coke culture,” would, in fact, take over the world was much discussed in the criticism surrounding Pop art of the ‘50s and ‘60s (Rauschenberg was often counted among Pop artists during this time). In comparing (new, American) Coke culture to (established, European) wine culture, the British critic David Sylvester declared in 1963 that the culture of Coca-Cola constituted a “set of tribal tastes and customs implying certain values and attitudes and a conception of what life could ideally be.”\(^{188}\) Whereas wine culture meant “inequality,” Coke (Pop) culture established itself as the culture available to anyone.\(^{189}\) Though Sylvester identified within Pop a return to iconography because of its dependence on representation, he was at pains to decipher the significance of the symbols of Pop other than to note that they symbolized themselves. Pop, he declared, was not preoccupied “so much with cult-heroes and cult-objects as with the means of communication by which they are popularized,” with the objects’ self-advertisement.\(^{190}\) The avoidance of cult-objects in favor of mass-produced objects or images of objects that anyone could possess or obtain separated Pop from the art immediately preceding it. And the presence of the quotidian in art, as opposed to the heroics of the truth-seeking artist of the New York School, signaled a willingness to delve into – rather than escape from – the mundane. “I really feel sorry for people who think things like soap dishes or mirrors or Coke bottles are ugly,” Rauschenberg said, “because they’re surrounded by things like that all day long, and it must make them


\(^{189}\) Ibid., 214.

\(^{190}\) Ibid., 218.
miserable.” Rather than be miserable, Pop artists embraced the ubiquity and sameness of products such as Coca-Cola.

It was, in fact, Coke’s very omni-presence and reliability that made it so intriguing to Pop artists. In statements collected in *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol*, Andy Warhol explained the appeal of Coke to him and, by extension, his audiences:

What’s great about this country is that America started the tradition where the richest consumers buy essentially the same things as the poorest. You can be watching TV and see Coca-Cola, and you can know that the President drinks Coke, Liz Taylor drinks Coke, and just think, you can drink Coke, too. A Coke is a Coke and no amount of money can get you a better Coke than the one the bum on the corner is drinking. All the Cokes are the same and all the Cokes are good. Liz Taylor knows it, the President knows it, the bum knows it, and you know it.

Warhol, of course, painted several pieces that feature the ubiquitous Coke bottle. *Coca-Cola* of 1962, famously exists in two versions: one that featured Abstract Expressionistic gestural brushstrokes surrounding the bottle and partially obscuring the Coca-Cola logo, and one that isolated a Coke bottle on a pristine white surface (the isolated bottle was the one that Emile de Antonio advised Warhol to display). In the preferred Coke image (fig. 17), the bottle is graphically rendered in black-and-white in a style that recalls

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193 “At that time, [Emile] de Antonio was an artist’s agent who’d found work for Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg doing display windows. When Warhol made some paintings, he showed them first to de Antonio. These paintings were of Coke bottles and came in two styles. In one, the bottle had the hatch marks that were the *sine qua non* of Abstract Expressionism. In the other, it was stark, unadorned, and outlined in black and white. ‘One of these is crap,’ de Antonio said. ‘The other is remarkable – it’s our society, it’s who we are, it’s absolutely beautiful and naked, and you ought to destroy the first and show the second.’” Jesse Kornbluth, “Andy,” *New York* 9 March, 1987, 42.
diagrammatic drawings and looks forward to Warhol’s silkscreen stencils.\textsuperscript{194} Whereas the first bottle floated indeterminately in a far larger space, the Coke bottle of the second painting fully inhabited its canvas, with top and bottom edges abutting the edges of the painting. The trademarked Coca-Cola logo features prominently and frontally on the label affixed to the bottle and is repeated again on the ground in the upper right of the painting, where it brushes up, back-to-back, against the curving neck of the bottle. The logo painted onto the surface of the canvas is cropped so that only the first three-quarters of the logo is legible, but this hardly matters within the \textit{mise-en-abyme} of the canvas, in which the bottle, the label, and the logo all refer to each other and repeat the same communication: the centrality of Coca-Cola as motif, ad, and object.\textsuperscript{195}

Warhol’s \textit{210 Coca-Cola Bottles}, also of 1962, showcases an early foray into what would become Warhol’s preferred medium, silkscreen (fig.18). On this enormous canvas (82 ½ x 115 inches) Warhol presents the titular two hundred ten bottles in a tightly packed grid, displaying them in seven rows of thirty as they might have been stacked on a supermarket shelf or housed in a cooler. Again we see the diagrammatic Coke bottle outlined in black, but these lines are filled with a brown ink suggesting the drink within. The vagaries of the silkscreening process have resulted in some of the bottles appearing empty or only partly full, as if some thief had quaffed them and


surreptitiously replaced them: Coca-Cola is that irresistible. If the canvas has a message, it is Coke, repeated again and again and again.

Warhol’s early Pop paintings and silkscreens, those that replicate magazine advertisements for nose jobs and trusses, Campbell’s soup cans and Coke bottles, are regularly discussed in terms of their relationship to the advertising and packaging of mid-century America. In their repetition and their straightforward reimaging of these brands, they are seen to recall the “industrial, same-damned-thing-again-and-again repetition of the units… paired, for the viewer, with [a] sense of stagnant stability across decades and generations.” Because of Warhol’s use of “tired” brands that only feature the same product over and over – and because of the fact that “Coca-Cola and Campbell’s Soup, Warhol’s two most iconic and familiar brand motifs, were actively involved during the 1950s with projects to improve the image of their brands” – Warhol’s images of advertising have been associated only with the rear-guard of advertising design and imagery. Indeed, Lucy Lippard notes, in her 1966 essay on Pop, that “the ‘clever’ ads like Levy’s Bread, the pretty ones like Modess, the chic ones like Smirnoff and Volkswagen, and the elegant ones from Vogue or Harper’s Bazaar have not been used, because they have been created by men who can claim to be artists in their own right.”

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(Though she could not foresee his future work in 1966, Warhol would, in fact, depict the iconic “Lemon.” Volkswagen advertisement in a screenprint portfolio series of ads produced in the 1985. True to the fashion of the time, Warhol’s “Lemon” was recreated not in black-and-white, but instead was highly colored.\textsuperscript{200}) Sylvester unknowingly echoed that claim in “Art of Coke Culture,” when he compared Pop to the spaceship-like automobile on American roads, a design that was already losing its popularity thanks in part to the new automobile profiles introduced by the Volkswagen Beetle. Sylvester wrote,

> The suspension of American motor cars insulates passengers from any sense of contact with the road. They feel they are floating along weightless, beyond the reach of gravity. There is a strong allusion to spaceships in the appearance of these cars, an allusion underlined in advertisements current a few years ago in which automobiles were divested of their wheels. But the image of the flying car is more than a day-dream: it corresponds to the way we actually feel when traveling in these cars. The spaceship fantasy is appropriate to the reality – is only larger than life and faster… [Its image] says the Golden Age is now.\textsuperscript{201}

If it is true that Sylvester last saw the advertisements linking cars to spaceships “a few years ago,” then undoubtedly that change was precipitated by the design of the VW ads, which rendered the look of its competitors’ promotional materials old-fashioned, fussy, and stagnant in comparison with the cool clarity of the ugly foreign car.

I would like to argue that Lippard was short-sighted in seeing no relationship between advertising’s Creative Revolution and the paintings that Warhol started to make at about the time of the Coca-Cola pictures and made for the rest of his career. Warhol’s compatriots in American Pop art, James Rosenquist most obviously among them,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{200} “Lemon” was included in a suite of ten prints reproducing ads, movie posters, and logos. Frayda Feldman and Jörg Schellman, \textit{Andy Warhol Prints: A Catalogue Raisonné 1962-1987}, 4\textsuperscript{th} edition (New York: Distributed Art Publishers, 2003): 147.
\item \textsuperscript{201} Sylvester, 214.
\end{itemize}
continued to appropriate 1940s and 1950s print advertisements and billboards in terms of their imagery, their crowded compositions, and their color schemes that recalled the possibilities of mid-century four-color printing. However, Warhol himself eventually forgoes that imagery and, beginning, in the early 1960s, restricts his palette and his format, confining himself to two-color variations of photographic images and gridded compositions. This rethinking of the Pop image – the essential appearance of a Warhol painting in the era of Pop – not only co-opts pictures of and from mass culture, but plays with the methods mapped out by the designers of advertising’s Creative Revolution, the results of which were appearing in magazines at the time of Warhol’s turn to silkscreening and grisaille. Instead of relying on the images of the VW ads, Warhol deploys their strategies.

The New-and-Improved Unchanging Product

In 1962, the same year as the two Coca-Cola paintings discussed above, Volkswagen ran an advertisement that featured no picture (fig.19). A blank space took the place of an image of the car, and the headline read, “No point showing the ’62 Volkswagen. It still looks the same.” The first line of the supporting text assured the potential buyer of the car’s outward mundanity: “No heads will turn when you drive a ’62 Volkswagen home.” As mentioned above, in the first years of its American presence, Volkswagen was resolutely against superficial improvements made to the body of the car, preferring to maintain the same bulbous body of the Beetle in favor of interior improvements (the ’62 Beetle featured, among other things, the first gas gauge in a Volkswagen car). DDB was thus faced with an advertising paradox: how to sell the new
when it looks like the old? The firm’s solution, in a brilliant turn, was not to feature the car at all and instead to refer to the success of its previous iterations via other successful VW ads.

The technique of this advertisement depended on the mutual trust it presumes had been built by the car that was shared between the reader of the ad and the advertisement itself. This trust assumes that the car delivered what the previous ads had promised, and that the consumer believes in them enough to continue to purchase the cars (or to suggest their purchase to others). Volkswagen cars, therefore, offer continuity of quality in any situation; the varied circumstances in which consumers might find themselves offer variety, as well, despite the fact that the look of the car itself has not changed. The fact, too, that the company undertook internal improvements suggests that as long as the Beetle was sold, “it will be of outstanding quality – a quality nevertheless to be always improved.”

Thus, the problem of the “same-damned-thing-again-and-again repetition of the units” was solved not by offering a new product but rather by offering new ads featuring old-looking objects (or not), again and again.

We can see this repetition played out in Warhol’s screen paintings. By the very nature of their medium, the silkscreen paintings have an innate tendency to replicate their subject again and again. According to his own accounts, Warhol “like[d] things to be exactly the same over and over again.”

However, because Warhol was not insistent on exact replication of the printed image, his screen paintings show inconsistencies within themselves, as the different colors are pushed through the screens off-register resulting in

\footnote{Schmidt, 52-3.}

\footnote{Warhol famously ate the same thing every day for lunch: Campbell’s soup. Andy Warhol, as quoted in \textit{Andy Warhol: A Retrospective} ed. Kynaston McShine (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1989): 457.}
blurred images, or as the screens themselves lose pigment and drag less and less paint across the canvas (as we saw in 210 Coca-Cola Bottles).

Furthermore, repetition yields its own results. When asked in a 1963 interview why he began his “Death in America” series that featured newspaper stories and images of car crashes and industrial disasters, Warhol claimed that,

I guess it was the big plane crash picture, the front page of a newspaper: 129 DIE. I was also painting the Marilyn [Monroe, who died of an overdose in 1963]. I realized that everything I was doing must have been Death. It was Christmas or Labor Day – a holiday – and every time you turned on the radio they said something like, “Four million are going to die.” That started it. But when you see a gruesome picture over and over again, it doesn’t really have any effect. 204

Hal Foster has read this remark and Warhol’s “Death and Disaster” pictures as a failed attempt at a mastery of trauma, one that enacts the trauma in the images even as they re-enact it. “In these repetitions,” Foster writes, “several contradictory effects can occur at the same time: a warding off of traumatic significance and an opening to it, a defending against traumatic effect and a producing of it.” 205

It is the very banality of the repetition in Warhol’s work that produces their uncanny effects. Foster reads Warhol’s repetition and trauma through Jacques Lacan and Roland Barthes, identifying the punctum in Warhol’s work in the very casualness with which the traumatic occurrences in Warhol’s sources were observed by viewers within the pictures themselves. 206 But the uncanny effects of repetition occur to us even when the thing repeated is not traumatic. We notice this effect, for example, when we repeat a

204 Warhol, as quoted in Gene Swenson, “What is Pop Art?” ArtNews November 1963, 60.

205 Foster, 113.

206 Foster singles out the passerby who strolls past an impaled car crash victim in White Burning Car III (1963): “This indifference is bad enough, but its repetition is galling.” Foster, 110-20.
word over and over again until it loses any meaning and only sounds like sounds; not to be able to experience such a feeling would be akin to a type of “blindness.” Such an uncanny experience is generated when we observe or encounter the same object or the same experience again and again, even if the object or experience is not unusual in itself; it is the repetition that is notable not the object. Strangely, the Volkswagen ads, and Warhol’s paintings, depend on the reliability of our experiences with repetition and the possibility that we will remark on our passing, or past, interest in the thing repeated. The 1962 Volkswagen might not turn heads when driven home, but the recurrence of the ad – and the multiplication of Beetles amongst cars that are not Beetles – will cause the viewer to note its recurrence, and enact the effect of the advertisement itself.

The Isolation of the Star

David Sylvester observed a similar effect concerning the longevity of movie stars and their reappearance in our lives in “Art of the Coke Culture.” Sylvester wrote of the Los Angeles experience:

Nothing looks built to last. Expendability is everywhere, novelty is everything.

And yet, at a party at Romanoff’s, it was frightening actually to see, what one of course knew, how long the stars had been around. A picture of the scene could have been called An Allegory of the Race between Fame and Time. But the interesting thing was not the intimation that the stars are not immortal gods. The interesting thing was that these embalmed faces were those of still current stars.

207 I borrow the term “blindness,” of course, from Ludwig Wittgenstein’s discussion of “aspect blindness.” “To encounter an “aspect blind” person would undoubtedly be to experience a different kind of uncanniness: “The importance of this concept [of aspect blindness] lies in the connexion between the concepts of ‘seeing an aspect’ and ‘experiencing the meaning of a word.’ For we want to ask ‘What would you be missing if you did not experience the meaning of a word?’ What would you be missing, for instance, if you did not understand the request to pronounce the word ‘till’ and to mean it as a verb, – or if you did not feel that a word lost its meaning and became a mere sound if it was repeated ten times over?” Philosophical Investigations trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, 3rd ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2001): 182⁷.
We talk about the fickleness of fashion, the call for new gimmicks and new faces in the entertainment world. But this is balanced by a need for enduring images. The minor stars can come and go, must come and go: it is part of our fantasy of them that they should be expendable, seasonally sacrificed. The major stars endure – Wayne, Gable, Cooper, Grant, Crawford, Dietrich, etc. There is a longing that the stars should be immortal, and the public tries to ensure that they are. Still they are not immortal, and we want some more interesting relic of them than their footprints at Grauman’s Chinese Theater. We want them preserved in a form that will renew them for us continually, as art does.208

Sylvester’s solution for the preservation of the stars is to encapsulate them in an image, in art. In the previous chapter, we saw that both the art and design of the period of Pop deployed the strategic isolation of an image to craft their subjects. Indeed, the star of North by Northwest, Cary Grant, isolated and suspended against a stuttered grid, counts among those named by Sylvester. In 1959, Grant was fifty-five years old and playing the romantic lead in an action-driven suspense thriller. In 1963, the year of Sylvester’s essay, he starred in Charade, a film in which he constantly remarked on his old age compared to his considerably younger co-star, Audrey Hepburn.

Throughout the first part of this chapter, we have seen that Volkswagen’s advertising strategy reflected that of Pop art and the design philosophies of the day.209 In its ads for the Beetle, DDB regularly featured only the car, often reproduced in a black-and-white photograph, often without context. Though the cars were pictured casting shadows, those shadows were directly underneath them, as though the cars were lit with an even light from above. However, the absence of any sense of a horizon line or even the suggestion of where the backdrop behind the vehicle met the floor meant that the cars were (like Cary Grant) visually suspended. Such an image strategy creates an instant

208 Sylvester, 216.

209 Anthony E. Grudin notes that brands such as Coca Cola and Campbell’s Soup were undergoing brand crises at the time that Warhol painted them, victims of their very success and ubiquity. Grudin, 222-4.
icon, delineating the contours of the figure and exposing any flaws in the profile. No wonder, then, that Volkswagen itself was the first to point out the flaws of the Beetle in “Lemon.”

In his own images of stars, Warhol also established icons. Like his earlier images of consumer goods, Warhol’s stars, when written about, are often considered past their prime or examined as public figures in the midst of personal crisis, be it images of Marilyn Monroe after her death from an overdose or serial reproductions of Jackie Kennedy wearing her blood-spattered clothing after the assassination of her husband. Depicted in tragic moments or in the aftermath of a crisis, they become iconic as a result of the machinations of the publicity machine as well as Warhol’s reproductions. Interestingly, the women painted by Warhol never appear as full-length figures. Perhaps as a result of the source material used by Warhol, in which a close-up of the star was preferred so as to see tell-tale signs of age, agony, or anger, Warhol’s painted women always appear as bust-length portraits. Fully facing the camera or appearing in three-quarter profile, the female stars figured by Warhol are encompassed by the frames of the paintings, seemingly trapped within the edges of their iconicity. Furthermore, Warhol’s women are painted in a variety of hues, and are often identified with the colors of their grounds, *Gold Marilyn* or *Blue Jackie*. In this way, Warhol encapsulates them in a color associated with a moment, as if they were fashion models: Jackie’s blue period, Marilyn’s golden age.

Perhaps because he is male, represented frontally, in full figure, and in a silver reproduction that resembles black-and-white photography, the star image created by Warhol that seems to come closest to the treatment of Grant in *North by Northwest* or the
Beetle in DDB’s ads is that of Elvis Presley, captured in a still photograph from the film *Flaming Star* (1960) (fig.20). In the silver Elvises, Warhol achieves the icon effect via his medium (silver spray paint), the frontal stance of the actor, and Presley’s suspension in the indeterminate space of the canvas. Floating without shadow or horizon line and, in some instances, repeated as many as six times, Elvis manifests himself, in Warhol’s depiction, almost miraculously, “renew[ing himself] for us continually.”

*The Importance of the Grid*

In his depiction of Elvis, Jackie O., and death and disasters, Warhol regularly employed a gridded composition. This is an attribute of the screen used to make the paintings, of course, which contained the master image within a rectangle of mesh. But the grid could easily have been overcome, as it was in Robert Rauschenberg’s screen paintings, which we will examine in the next chapter. Warhol’s grid, then, was deliberate, an element of rigidity in images that accept repetitive imperfections. His use of the grid permits viewers to read the repetitions as repetitions and allows them to perceive the inconsistencies in each individual cell. The gridded composition permits the viewer to read the repeated cells as doubling the image and the missed registration as a doubled-double again.

Interestingly, an examination of the important advertisements produced at the same time as Warhol’s screen paintings reveals that the singular, isolated image is functionally installed in a position on a grid, as well. As becomes clear after looking at

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210 Foster writes that, “As a token of *homo imago*, Elvis updates, for the consumer age, not only the Virtuvian man of classical proportions but also the Muybridgean man of industrial discipline. Implicit here again is a new sense of the ego as projected – i.e., a new sense of identification understood almost cinematically as a projection of an ideal image.” Foster, 257, n.20.
“How to Do a Volkswagen Ad.”, even the simplest advertisement for VW was laid out according to a fairly unchanging typographic grid. The changing size of the image and the alterations in the ads’ copy were the elements that allowed the grid to dissolve, masking the repetitions in layouts from one ad to the next while maintaining a recognizable style that immediately identified the ad as a Volkswagen ad. As with the Volkswagen, what Warhol asked was for the viewer to look, and then to look harder. It was in the hard looking that the secrets of the grid were revealed.

It is not accidental, I believe, that Volkswagen was associated with Coke in the early 1960s, a time when they too were represented in a gridded layout. Within the grid of the advertisement or Warhol’s painting, each car and each bottle was one VW/Coke and the VW/Coke, a single example and the Platonic form. The decision in each instance, then, to use a grid, makes this possible, and, to use Rosalind Krauss’s terminology, both grids work centripetally and centrifugally:

Logically speaking, the grid extends, in all directions, to infinity. Any boundaries imposed upon it by a given painting [or layout] can only be seen – according to this logic – as arbitrary. By virtue of the grid, the given work of art is presented as a mere fragment, a tiny piece arbitrarily cropped from an infinitely larger fabric. Thus the grid operates from the work of art outward, compelling our acknowledgment of a world beyond the frame. This is the centrifugal reading. The centripetal one works, naturally enough, from the outer limits of the aesthetic object inward. The grid is, in relation to this reading a re-presentation of everything that separates the work of art from the world, from ambient space and from other objects. The grid is an introjection of the boundaries of the world into an interior of the work; it is a mapping of the space inside the frame onto itself.211

Because they act on the world (everyone in the world recognizes a Coke or a VW or a Warhol) and are acted on by the world (anyone can have a/the Coke or VW), the formats employed in Warhol’s and Krone’s layouts activate the grid in both directions simultaneously. In Volkswagen’s case, the car is so familiar that its grid does not even need to be filled; the viewers can do that all by themselves. Similarly, this emptiness suggests an interesting reading of the blank panels paired with screened canvases in Warhol’s diptychs. In addition to being bigger and therefore more expensive, the blank panels are empty and are thus able to serve as the ground for the afterimage of Warhol’s imagery. Though a blank should provide visual respite, in the case of a Warhol or a Volkswagen ad, the viewer fills it with the images he has been trained to see there.  

In examinations of Pop art, it has often been argued that Pop artists turned to advertising imagery and strategies as a way of negotiating and negating the modernist Abstract Expressionist gesture. In this scenario, the expressive action of the masculine drip or brushstroke was sublimated by Pop’s smoothness and turn to commercialism. However, this does not actually explain why these artists, and particularly Warhol who knew the advertising world, would adopt commercial strategies as an antidote. After all, 1950s and ‘60s admen were hardly feminists (although a woman copywriter, Rita Wagner, did give the “Lemon.” ad its famous headline, there are no other notable women cited in the story of the VW campaign, and one advertisement for the VW station wagon asked viewers if they “had the right wife for it.”), and Helmut Krone developed

212 Beginning design students are often taught that the high contrast Coca-Cola logo effectively burns the words on consumers’ retinas, so that if viewers stare at the product’s white letters and red ground and then look away, they will see the afterimage of Coca Cola.

213 Challis, 69.
Volkswagen’s ads in a High Modernist style that referenced the Bauhaus and New Typography.\(^{214}\) Alternatively, Pop has been understood as neo-Dada, an art that, in taking the everyday as its subject, looked to undercut art itself. However, as the critical eye grew more accustomed to Pop imagery, the works’ not inconsiderable formal qualities and painterly strengths became evident, and neo-Dada seemed to be an insufficient label for what Pop artists were attempting. In rethinking the Pop strategy, I argue that it may behoove us to return to the ads themselves: perhaps Pop artists looked to advertisements because they were effective, because they seduced, and because they managed to sell products initially perceived as unattractive. David Ogilvy used market testing to ascertain exactly how he could sell the right product to the right consumer; undoubtedly, then, matching the right patron to the right artist could work through similar means. And DDB tapped into an American Zeitgeist that encouraged viewers who were interested in expressing their individuality to purchase of the same unusual-looking, ironically-marketed, mass-produced product. Pop art could adopt the manifesto of an Ogilvy and the wit of a Volkswagen to do exactly the same thing: find an audience for the image product and sell it. This salesmanship technique, borrowed from the seeming effortlessness of successful advertising, told viewers what they wanted even before they were able to recognize it as art.

\(^{214}\) Benjamin H.D. Buchloh has been particularly harsh in his characterization of the relationship between designers and artists, writing, “The triumph of mass culture over traditional concepts of aesthetic transcendence and critical resistance would produce two new types of ‘cultural’ personalities. The first was constituted by the ever-increasing number of admen who would become passionate collectors of avant-garde art (in order to embrace the ‘creativity’ that would perpetually escape them, and in order to possess privately what they would systematically destroy by their own ‘work’ in the public sphere). The second type comprised hundreds of artists relegated to commercial work, such as one James Harvey [the designer of the Brillo Box], who, according to Time Magazine, ‘draws his inspiration from religion and landscapes…. At nights he works hard on muscular abstract paintings that show in Manhattan’s Graham Gallery. But eight hours a day, to make a living, he labors as a commercial artist.’” Buchloh, 468.
Addendum

A reconsideration of Pop and its adoption of advertising imagery may also open up a nuanced understanding of those forms of art-making that self-consciously eschewed the commercial gallery system, performance and conceptual art. Chris Burden’s 1974 performance *Trans-Fixed* (fig.21), in which the artist was crucified to the back of a car, utilized a Volkswagen Beetle in a way most likely never envisioned by its engineers or Doyle Dane Bernbach. When reflecting later on the performance, Burden described the revving of the car’s engine as crying out for him, subsuming his screams into the shrieks of its mechanics, a conflation of man and machine, artist’s statement and sales pitch:

> Inside a small garage on Speedway Avenue, I stood on the rear bumper of a Volkswagen. I lay on my back over the rear section of the car, stretching my arms onto the roof. Nails were driven through my palms into the roof of the car. The garage door was opened and the car was pushed halfway out into Speedway. Screaming for me, the engine was run at full speed for two minutes. After two minutes, the engine was turned off and the car pushed back into the garage. The door was closed.²¹⁵

However, what is compelling to a discussion of Volkswagen’s advertising is that the vehicle on which Burden was crucified is instantly, and unfailingly, recognized as a Volkswagen. Indeed, I have not found an instance when the car has not been identified as a Volkswagen. Thus, in a perverse turn of intention and advertisement, Burden’s anti-commercial, unsaleable act is reaffirmed as an advertisement for Volkswagen, the shape that is so well-known that it blends into the scenery of an anti-commercial act. And yet, because of its enduringly recognizable profile, the Volkswagen advertises itself through its shape, its presence, and its status as the vehicle of choice for anti-gallery performance artists or members of the counter-culture everywhere. The grid of the Volkswagen ads

has spun centripetally out from the shape of the car itself to encompass *Trans-fixed*. And the surrounding, inevitable, advertising has embedded itself centrifugally in the world to be appropriated by those who would shun the system. How to do a Volkswagen ad? Crucify yourself to the car.
Chapter 3: Navigating by the Vernacular Glance: Billboards, Signs, and the Urban Combine

Even though the adman David Ogilvy set out his advice for most advertising design as though it were the last word for the profession, there was one element of mid-century advertising from which he distanced himself: billboards. Writing in his memoir, *Confessions of an Advertising Man* (first published in 1963), Ogilvy stated that, “As a private person, I have a passion for landscape, and I have never seen one which was improved by a billboard. Where every prospect pleases, man is at his vilest when he erects a billboard.” Whether or not he was protesting too much, Ogilvy’s advice for the creation of billboards is significantly more subdued than his prescriptions for print ads meant for newspapers and magazines. It is as though he intended them to look as “vile” as he felt their purpose was. In contrast to his numbered points and deductions for judging print materials, Ogilvy’s rules for billboards run past the reader as quickly as a motorist would pass a sign:

Try to make your poster a *tour de force* – what [Raymond] Savignac calls a “visual scandal.” If you overdo the scandal, you will stop the traffic and cause fatal accidents.

If your poster is aimed at passing motorists – you rascal, you – it must do its work in *five seconds*. Research has shown that it will communicate faster if you use strong, pure colors; don’t paint with a dirty palette. Never use more than three elements in your design, and silhouette them against a white background. Above all, use the largest possible type (sans-serif), and make your brand-name visible at a glance. It seldom is.

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If you will follow these simple directions, you will produce posters which do their job. But I must warn you that you will not endear yourself to connoisseurs of contemporary art. Indeed, you may find yourself pilloried as a yahoo.\textsuperscript{217}

With even the man who wrote the rules for advertising refusing to improve them, billboards, unlike other forms of advertising, did not undergo a revolution in quality in the late 1950s and 1960s. However, with the rise in car ownership and suburban populations, they proliferated nonetheless. Period images of highways depict roads congested with unending chains of billboards, which huddle close to the shoulders of either side of the road (fig. 22). It was these ad-clogged roadways that Ogilvy claimed he wanted to relieve by becoming, once retired, a “vigilante”: “When I retire from Madison Avenue, I am going to start a secret society of masked vigilantes who will travel about the world on silent motor bicycles, chopping down posters at the dark of the moon. How many juries will convict us when we are caught in these acts of beneficent citizenship?\textsuperscript{218} In discussions of his fantasy destruction of billboards, and of the clever, commonsense responses of “ordinary” people to the tyranny of signs that display less wit than surface area, Ogilvy damned the boards’ existence as well as their lackluster aesthetic content.\textsuperscript{219}

\textsuperscript{217} Raymond Savignac was a twentieth-century French poster designer. Ibid., 127, 128.

\textsuperscript{218} Ibid., 127.

\textsuperscript{219} In another book, \textit{Ogilvy on Advertising}, Ogilvy described the condescension with which representatives of commercial interests treated those who opposed the erection of billboards and citizens’ responses to them: “When President Johnson sent the Highway Beautification Bill to Congress [in 1965], the head of one billboard company protested that Johnson had ‘taken a stand in favor of an abstract concept – beauty. Some people like scenery and are interested in it. Others can take it or leave it. There are times when most people would rather look at posters than scenery’… On a Sunday morning in 1958, vigilantes sawed down seven billboards along a highway in New Mexico. Citizens of surrounding areas expressed support for them. One telephone call complained that the vigilantes had not cut down enough billboards, and another that they had frustrated the plan of a large group of citizens who had scheduled a mass burning of billboards for later in the month. The vigilantes were never arrested.” \textit{Ogilvy on Advertising
Ogilvy, of course, was not alone in his hatred of billboards, though he was most likely one of the only vigilantes who was also directly responsible for creating them. In the suburbs and rural areas, the anti-billboard movement was closely associated with women’s clubs, and was belittled by advertisers associations for being little more than women’s concerns, which would emasculate landowners by preventing them from making money in favor of beauty. One professional advertising association made the distinction between men who made decisions and women who wanted everything pretty explicit. In a letter to farmers who owned land contiguous to highways, the Virginia Highway Advertisers Association warned that anti-billboard activists wanted to, “cut off your [farmers’] income by stopping you from renting space for signs. A very small group of people, mostly ladies’ garden clubs and city people… are not interested in your income but only in beautifying the highways at your expense… It is your land and your money. Act now to protect your rights.”

The inclusion in the letter of “city people,” which, along with women was another group that could not understand the economics of the farming life, acknowledged that in urban areas the movement attracted powerful male proponents, such as President Lyndon B. Johnson (who, admittedly, was acting under the influence of his wife, Lady Bird Johnson) and Robert Moses, the head of New York City’s and New York State’s Parks

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systems, the Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authority, the State Power Authority, and New York City’s Construction Coordinator. In a series of articles published in *The New York Times*, Moses played out the various arguments against billboards, permitting a history of the movement to be read in his statements. In 1950, Moses made the “aesthetics” argument, suggesting that,

> We must focus attention on uncontrolled advertising on our highways and decide whether express arteries traversing unspoiled scenic areas and fine architecture are to be exploited or defaced by billboard companies on behalf of selfish and undiscriminating advertisers, or protected for the enjoyment of the people who pay for them. As matters stand, we are in most cases building gasoline gullies running between almost continuous barricades of monstrous billboards.  

In the fight against billboards, however, it quickly became clear that even men such as Moses could not win the argument solely on aesthetic merit, not least because “efforts at civic beauty called masculinity into question.” An anti-billboard argument on aesthetic grounds was, as *Reader’s Digest* reported in 1960, considered, “anti-labor, anti-business, even anti-American.” If the Parks Commissioner could not win the aesthetic war, then safety was the next battle. The safety argument took two tacks: First, a massing of billboards could be considered a “slum,” with all of the racial and economic attributes associated with slums brought to bear on the case. Second, billboards were labeled unsafe to drivers and passengers because they diverted attention from the road to their messages. A 1958 article published by Moses in the *New York Times Sunday*

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222 Gudis, 175.

223 Stevenson, 156.

Magazine was subtitled, “Mr. Moses holds that advertising on the highways is not only unesthetic but dangerous.” Within the article Moses wrote,

[“The billboard boys”] vehemently deny the possibility that billboards, under any circumstances, regardless of size or structure, whether illuminated or not, can endanger the safety of motorists. They produce phony statistics, rigged surveys and pseudo-experts, even confused psychologists, to sell the idea, in the slickest Madison Avenue tradition, that billboards are not a threat to safe driving but, on the contrary, promote safety and longevity because they shock drivers out of the hypnotic trances into which they fall as they blissfully speed along.  

In Moses’s estimation, billboards were not only unattractive, they were also unsightly because they were promoted using all of the tricks that the advertising business deployed to sell consumers items they did not need. In the end it was, in fact, largely because of safety concerns that the display of billboards was forced under certain regulations, including their spacing and the distance they had to maintain from the road. Billboard advertising companies fought back, however, offering free advertising space to politicians during campaigns, a quid-pro-quo arrangement that was brought to elected officials’ attention during the billboard wars. And even though Ogilvy declined to provide much usable advice for the budding billboard designer, the industry supplied its own in the 1958 publication Essentials of Outdoor Advertising. In this, the billboard is portrayed at the unfortunate recipient of unwanted attention, which against the odds must vie for attention with “vehicular traffic, traffic signals or other outdoor designs. To counteract such competition every bit of the poster space must be made to work hard.”

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226 Stevenson, 150.

As acknowledged by the Association of National Advertisers, one of the elements with which the hard-working urban billboard had to compete was directional street signage and traffic signals. The signs-versus-billboards struggle was, of course, waged by signage designers, as well. These designers occupied an interesting, if conflicted, position in this fight. Often the creators of both civic designs and commercial signage and logos, their signs competed against each other in a complex urban gestalt, one in which it was difficult for any single sign to gain visual predominance, as similar rules were being followed, exploited, and broken by the same people. If billboards needed to pack as much information as possible into the parameters of a roadside or wall-mounted sign, then street signage had to make do with providing the most concise information possible on an even smaller footprint.

“Order vs. Disorder”

In 1968, Print magazine sponsored a roundtable discussion between industrial and graphic designers, architects, and a New York City official to debate “Order vs. Disorder” in an urban situation in which street signage, billboards, building façades, and crowds competed for viewers’ attention in the tight canyons formed by the city’s streets and avenues.228 The visual chaos experienced in a New York City that offered few city-mandated environmental controls was at the top of the order in the exchange, with the designers acknowledging that, ironically, the turn away from the aesthetic argument in the billboard wars had yielded a city vista that was now considered unsustainable, not least because it was assumed that aesthetics and safety were mutually exclusive and that

228 The participants were William Lansing Plumb, an industrial designer; August Heckscher, the Commissioner of Parks of the City of New York; Peter Chermayeff, a signage designer; and Milton Glaser, a graphic designer and illustrator.
concern for safety and order was not in designers’ purview. As William Lansing Plumb, an industrial designer and the moderator of the discussion, put it as the conversation began, “This whole question of imposing order and control has… been considered outside the realm of [designers]. The feeling was that these professionals were estheticians dealing with the environment in terms of their art and that they shouldn’t concern themselves with problems beyond esthetics.”

What becomes clear as the discussion in the article moved to consider neighborhoods, advertising, pollution, and the encroaching suburbs, is the ambivalence felt by the participants in the conversation and a skepticism surrounding the validity of “solutions” to the city’s problems. There is concern to establish a certain balance between the legibility of signage, the navigability and safety that presumably follows from the implementation of such successful sign systems, and fear of the resultant creation of a sterile city environment, in which the roughness and visual interest of a vibrant city is smoothed over to create a homogenous, planar surface. August Heckscher, the Parks Commissioner involved in the conversation, stated that he was concerned about the inevitability of a “difficult and complex environment, [in which the] signs are literally all you see; you have to keep your eye on them or you’re lost. But the effect is to obliterate

229 “An Exchange of Views: Order vs. Disorder – and Some Related Matters,” Print XXII no.II (March/April, 1968): 81. The navigation between safety and aesthetics is acknowledged by Peter Chermayeff at a later point in the conversation: “I think one of the problems in government is that there is a very weak rationale behind signing and other design problems. No one really knows as yet how to define what these programs are for. And so we fall back on esthetics. Now, anyone in government who’s in a position of trying to get money and trying to determine priorities for various urban functions probably finds it very difficult to sell Congress or the Administration anything which smacks of pure esthetics – certainly not until such time as other, more critical basic needs have been dealt with first. What we need to do, therefore, is provide far greater clarification and rationalization of problems in the visual environment; these need to be defined so that they can be sold.” Ibid., 85.
the environment.” Although Peter Chermayeff, whose firm was responsible for the redesign of the city of Boston’s subway signage in the 1960s, claimed that once a sign system was put into place and became “legible, you can then break it down into its component parts, and as each of these in turn becomes legible, you have an opportunity – indeed, a need – for personal expression,” his discussants remained unconvinced, uncertain that the same blanket system overlaid on a city fabric as complex and expansive as New York City’s could work for the person on the street without preventing individual interaction with the city’s elements and without impinging on the rights of citizens.

Milton Glaser, another graphic designer involved in the conversation, questioned the notion that signage could be imperceptible enough to permit free exchange to flourish in the urban landscape, noting that the typefaces chosen by designers, in particular, were hardly neutral design elements: “I don’t think Helvetica is invisible, although many people feel otherwise. To me, it has a marked stylistic relationship to a kind of attitude that prevails in certain designers’ work. I think the reason it’s chosen is not because of its legibility, but because of this stylistic attitude [that assumes unquestioning adherence to official signs].” Indeed, even Chermayeff was forced to acknowledge that best

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230 “An Exchange of Views,” 82.

231 Ibid. “Heckscher: The basic problem is how strict a control you impose on design, and whether it’s good to have a single design standard running through a city. Glaser:.... And if so, whose standard is it to be? This is really the crucial question. Who actually gets to do the thing? At what point are the people in power willing to make changes, what kind of changes are they looking for, and who do they finally choose to make the changes?... What seems to happen in the process is that there is always a diminishing of intensity in terms of who you finally get to do these programs, and so the very best people are almost never chosen – the strongest, most inventive people. It’s always the people who are a cut below who are more acceptable.” Ibid., 85.

232 Glaser, as quoted in Ibid., 84.
intentions aside, “what we have now in most cases is no system – no basic grammar from which to start.”

The Grammar of Signs

Chermayeff’s reliance on the metaphor of a grammar is striking, as it goes to the heart of the dynamic between commercial and civic signage: they play similar language games, but they speak differently. One of the difficulties encountered by the anti-billboard movement in terms of monitoring these commercial signs was that their point of visual contact was not the point of interaction with the goods they advertised. This made the regulation of billboards a complex matter. As noted in the pamphlet *A Legal Handbook for Billboard Control*, billboards possessed “an anomalous nature”: “Unlike other urban structures, a billboard is not ‘used’ on the premises upon which it is located. Rather its use derives solely from its visibility to the passerby, both motorist and pedestrian. The question inevitably arises, then, as to which aspect of a billboard is determinative in an attempt to regulate: its physical location, or its visual intrusion into surrounding areas?” Billboards’ visual language was a thorny issue because they could “throw” their voices, making contact with the viewer outside the point of purchase.

Whereas street signage relied on clarity and an exacting installation to be successful,

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233 Ibid., 83.

234 Early in the twentieth century, the Municipal Arts Society was able to sue to remove billboards from residential neighborhoods on the grounds that they were sites of commercial land use and were therefore inappropriate installations in areas zoned for housing. Gregory F. Gilmartin, *Shaping the City: New York and the Municipal Arts Society* (New York: Clarkson Potter, 1995): 236-7.

235 *A Legal Handbook for Billboard Control*, 3. Of course, most advertising works this way by pointing to an absent product via the media (print, television, online). The importance here is that billboards’ salesmanship occurred in public space away from the places where sales were made, leading to difficulty in determining how – and where – to regulate them.
billboards worked exactly because they provoked visual confusion. In the disruption caused by their visual interference – moving viewers’ eyes from the road, from street signs, from an awareness of the street – billboards did their best work.

By insinuating themselves between street signs intended for navigation and safety and the viewer, billboards prevented or slowed down the possibilities of guidance by signage. This is the “grammar” to which Chermayeff referred, one whose rules work best in its repetition, for “only in the system has the sign any life.” In order to be effective, a sign can only point to the next sign. In doing so, sign systems train their users to follow them, leading them point by point and teaching users to expect another sign to indicate a next step. The grammar of signs works in such a way that the signs can say different things (for example, first ONE WAY and then PARK) but still work within the system, as long as the system is reliable, the signs are repeatable, and it does not break down at points in the chain. In his exploration of language games, Ludwig Wittgenstein noted that, “A person goes by a sign-post only in so far as there exists a regular use of sign-posts, a custom.” It is this formation of a custom that billboards aim to corrupt by insinuating themselves and their own grammar into the grammar of street signs.

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237 It is vital, as well, that individual signs within systems belong to the visuality established by that system. If a sign breaks visual continuity, it is difficult for the viewer/user to know whether or not to follow it.


239 Billboards themselves rely on repetition, although it works in a different way. Street signage implies a need for navigation, and thus a viewer who is unfamiliar with the terrain. Billboards’ repetition works on those people who pass by them regularly, for whom constant viewing and re-viewing wears down their defenses. *Essentials of Outdoor Advertising*, 82-4.
Billboards’ explosion of grammatical rules was duly noted by the artist Robert Rauschenberg.²⁴⁰ Writing in a “Note on Painting” that accompanied his 1963 exhibition at the Leo Castelli Gallery, Rauschenberg allowed the words he encountered in signs and billboards on the side of a road to intrude on his own thoughts. He remarked that,

I find it nearly impossible free ice to write about jeep axle my work. The concept I plantatarium struggle to deal with ketchup is oppoed to the logical continuity lift tab inherent in language horses and communication. My fascination with images open 24 hrs. is based on the complex interlocking of disparate visual facts heated pool that have no respect for grammar. The form then Denver 39 is second hand to nothing…. ²⁴¹


²⁴¹ While it is convention to correct Rauschenberg’s spelling and to italicize the words that point to advertisements and signage, I have chosen here to maintain the statement as it was in the original document, so as to illustrate the speed at which signs’ messages are encountered and absorbed by the viewer. It is important that Rauschenberg himself did not differentiate between the text of his statement and the words encountered on the street. Robert Rauschenberg, “Note on Painting, Oct 31-Nov 2, 1963,” in _Robert Rauschenberg_ (New York: Castelli Gallery, 1963) and in _Pop Art Redefined, ed. John Russell and Suzi Gablik_ (New York: Praeger, 1969): 101. The story of Rauschenberg’s experience of the road is recounted in the chronology published in the 1997 retrospective catalogue: “1963. Between October 31 and November 2: Writes ‘Note on Painting’ while on tour in the Southwest with Merce Cunningham Dance Company. The text, which will be published in the anthology _Pop Art Redefined_ (1969), is punctuated with single-word descriptions of sights he sees along the road.” Joan Young with Susan Davidson, “Chronology,” in _Robert Rauschenberg: A Retrospective_, ed. Walter Hopps and Susan Davidson (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 1997): 563.
Rauschenberg claimed for his own imagery a rejection of the logic applied to language; this rejection made it difficult, he claimed, to write about his images using the logical system of words, sentences, and paragraphs. Thus during the course of his statement he permitted its progression to be disrupted by those words that engaged him visually as images via signs.242

While his open-mindedness concerning the continuous reception of outside images and messages was not shared by the anti-billboard movement or by city planners, Rauschenberg’s seeming acceptance of the imposition of signs on his writing process found an analogous response almost a decade later in the writings of Robert Venturi, Denise Scott-Brown, and Steve Izenour. Acknowledging the local “vernacular” that was upheld by billboards (they were “all right”), Learning from Las Vegas reproduced the language from billboards as sentences or poetry available to the receptive viewer.243 However, a period response akin to Rauschenberg’s came from an unlikely ally. Writing in Landscape in 1964, J.B. Jackson praised the intrusion of billboards as implicit acknowledgements that the viewers existed:

242 Signs featured in Rauschenberg’s work throughout his career. The earliest I have identified is a 1951 photograph of a worn stop sign, New York (Stop). Reproduction in Walter Hopps, Robert Rauschenberg: The Early 1950s (Houston: The Menil Collection, 1991): 59. Maps and navigational marks, such as stars, are also common Rauschenberg elements (see, for example, 22 The Lily White, c. 1950 [Hopps, 48] and Mother of God, c.1950 [Hopps, 49]).

The official notices, the announcements of rules and regulations, are not the only ones which give coherence to public life; advertisements, even the lowliest and least artful, play an equally essential role. By reminding us of desires and opportunities, by clamoring for our attention and patronage as if we had not yet made up our minds and were mysterious and uncommitted and infinitely important, they do much to preserve our sense of individuality. We may object to being importuned but we do not object to being recognized.

A community without any signs at all – the dream of many an urban reformer – would be a monolithic, closed community, exuding a kind of super domesticity, with everyone instinctively conforming to unwritten rules and stimuli as in a well-disciplined family. The outsider, the uninitiated individual would be tacitly excluded.244

Counter to a belief that billboards were threatening to individual expression free from the commodity culture they represented, Rauschenberg, Learning from Las Vegas, and J.B. Jackson suggested that the cacophony produced by competing visual stimuli might have been healthy for inspiring creative response to the city.245

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244 J.B. Jackson, “Signs of Life,” Landscape 14 no.2 (Winter 1964/1965): 1. Two recent initiatives have addressed the ubiquity of outdoor advertising in different ways. In 2007, the city of São Paulo banned outdoor advertising, resulting in a city without billboards. Interestingly, though the signs were removed, their armatures remained, rendering the former spaces of advertising ghost billboards. See, for example, Vincent Bevins, “São Paulo Advertising Goes Underground,” The Financial Times, 6 September 2010, http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/5ad26f14-b9e6-11df-8804-00144feabdc0.html#axzz1ssXsRNGo. In 2010, the MAK Center for Art and Architecture sponsored a Los Angeles-wide public art project in which artists were given the vertical spaces of twenty-one billboards to create pieces. “The proposition of the exhibition was that art should occupy a visible position in the cacophony of mediated images in the city. Scale matters in a big city; in order to make a discernible visual impact in the vast sea of signs, we determined that it was important that a large group of works be produced and that they all be on view at the same time.” Kimberli Meyer, “Overview and Acknowledgments,” 8. One of the pieces, contributed by the artist Michael Asher, reproduced Volkswagen’s iconic “Think Small” ad, printed on the left third of a billboard (the remaining space was left blank). In the catalogue essay for the exhibition, Kimberli Meyer claims that, “[T]he presence of an ad inside of an artwork draws a comparison between advertising and art. Voices in contemporary art have claimed that sophisticated advertising borrows heavily from the leading edge of art... Asher’s piece suggests that the exchange is mutual, positing that the ad’s use of white space, its minimalist composition, and the text’s ironic tone in the positioning of its product, all foreshadow developments in art that were still on the horizon in the early 1960s.” Meyer, “Speech in the City,” in How Many Billboards? Art In Stead, ed. Peter Noever and Kimberli Meyer (Nürnberg, Germany: Verlag für modern Kunst Nürnberg; Los Angeles: MAK Center for Art and Architecture, 2010): 17.

Indeed, Rauschenberg continued his own written statement by noting that, “The outcome of a work is based on amount of intensity concentration and joy that is pursued roadcrossing in the act of work. The character of the artist has to be responsive and lucky.” The creative act resides with the artist who responds to urban prompts by developing the next work, but it is also pertinent that such an outcome is “pursued roadcrossing in the act of work.” The very act of navigation is necessary to Rauschenberg for the development of an exploitable, resourceful perspective.

The peripatetic nature of Rauschenberg’s process has been acknowledged from nearly the beginning of his critical reception. This, of course, is partly due to his own writings on his work, which force the issue of his responsiveness to life beyond the studio and to a self-conscious mapping of the spaces in his work. In a brief statement published in *Print* (notably, in an issue concerning the possibilities for different work surfaces and paper qualities available to graphic artists), Rauschenberg said of his use of newsprint laid down on his Combines that, “I began using newsprint in my work to activate a ground so that even the first strokes in a painting had its own unique position in a gray map of words.” In his application of newsprint, Rauschenberg counters the manmade wordscape that existed outside his studio window with a canvas prepared with a readymade “medium” of words. It is the term “map,” though, that has become a touchstone for considering Rauschenberg’s work, most famously in Leo Steinberg’s 1972

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essay “Reflections on the State of Criticism.” In designating Rauschenberg’s work as exhibiting the characteristics of the “flatbed picture plane,” Steinberg uses the artist’s “gray map of words” to identify Rauschenberg’s “picture plane [as] a surface to which anything reachable-thinkable would adhere. It had to be whatever a billboard or dashboard is, and everything a projection screen is, with further affinities for anything that is flat and worked over – palimpsest, canceled plate, printer’s proof, trial blank, chart, map, aerial view.” If Rauschenberg’s works are maps (and billboards!) to be worked over, then they are navigable planes, and navigation by them can take place in “the gap” Rauschenberg identified between art and life.

In considering what navigation by Combine might look like, we may begin by referring to the method John Cage suggested for encountering his essay on Rauschenberg: “[This article] may be read in whole or in part; any sections of it may be skipped, what remains may be read in any order. The style of printing here employed is not essential. Any of the sections may be printed directly over any of the others, and the spaces between paragraphs may be varied in any manner.” The variety and spontaneity that Cage claims for the printer and reader of his essay are significant for the viewer of Rauschenberg’s Combines, as well. In order to make one’s way through them, an

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251 Ibid., 29, 30.


application of the navigational tools included is sometimes necessary. The Combines are
provoking because they seem to allude to imagery and implications beyond the picture
plane, and yet often frustrate coherent readings by seemingly errant inclusions that return
an attempt to find a deeper meaning back to the surface; thus, navigation by Combine is
rife with potential dead ends. While bearing this in mind, I would like to turn to an
examination of several of those works by Rauschenberg that include navigational
elements, be they arrows, signs, or a figure employed as a guide, which conduct the
viewer’s eye through and around the aspects of the works that might act as billboards
would to prevent straightforward progress through the composition (and, indeed, question
the assumption that “progress” must be made at all).

To Follow an Arrow

Arrows recur throughout Rauschenberg’s work, making first appearances as
sketchy inclusions in Combines and eventually adjusting to take the form of printed or
embossed directionals such as might be seen affixed to doors or found in hallways. For
example, the hand-drawn arrow in *Satellite*, from 1955, seems to curve downward from
the pheasant pacing across the top edge of the Combine’s perimeter (fig.23). In doing so,
it mimics the direction of the bird’s beak, while breaking into the horizontal drive of the
bands of color, newsprint, material, and even the imagined strut of the bird.\textsuperscript{254} The
downward-pointing, slightly curved arrow breaks from the parallels found in the rest of
the canvas, uniting them in such a way that the rest of the compositional elements can –

\textsuperscript{254} Other hand-drawn arrows include that found in *Wonderlust* (1957), which also includes a hand-drawn
map of the ”Four Corners,” the states Utah, Arizona, Colorado, and New Mexico, whose boundaries meet
to form a right-angled cross. In Rauschenberg’s Combine, the cross of the Four Corners rhymes with the
grids found throughout the rest of the surface.
or do – not. Rauschenberg’s arrows quickly become even more insistent, though, as the thickness of the shaft and clarity with which they are delineated are increased. The black arrows found on the panels of Stripper (1962) begin at the edges of the canvases and point inward (fig.24). These pieces, unusual in the amount of open white spaces found in their backgrounds, react to the visual compression enforced on them by the arrows traveling in from above and from the left by moving the activity of the compositions into the center of the fields.

Echoes of the paintings and writings of Paul Klee may be found in Rauschenberg’s reliance on these strong, black arrows. In the Pedagogical Sketchbook, published in English translation in 1953, Klee suggested that the use of a hand-drawn arrow is a method for establishing a painting’s scope. “The father of the arrow,” Klee wrote, “is the thought: how do I expand my reach?”

The thick, black arrow activates the canvas in a nuanced way, by dominating, almost springing from as if thrown, the white areas in a painting (as in Stripper). “[The black arrow] forms when a given, or adequate, or actual white receives intensified energies from additive, acting, or futural black… The stress lies on rare specialty as against broad generality… And the arrow always flies in the direction of action.” The directionality of the arrow, its “specialty,” responds to the specificity of the objects or reproductions included in the Combines (the

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255 Although there is no direct evidence that Rauschenberg knew Klee’s arrows, he was instructed at Black Mountain College by Klee’s Bauhaus colleague, Josef Albers. Additionally, Klee is often cited as an influence on Rauschenberg’s companion on his Italian trip in the 1950s, Cy Twombly. See, for example, Jon Bird, “Indeterminacy and (Dis)order in the Work of Cy Twombly,” Oxford Art Journal 30 no.3 (2007): 492.


257 Ibid., 57.
“facts,” as Rauschenberg called them\(^{258}\). As in Klee’s paintings, the decisive arrow is used by Rauschenberg to usher the composition into formation. It compels movement, suggests the effects of gravity, or ushers the viewer to an understanding of the work. Of course, Klee and Rauschenberg were not alone in deploying the arrow to do compositional work. The benefits of suggesting directionality with arrows were much discussed in the design press of the 1950s. A brief article from *The Architectural Review* suggested that, “The arrow might be called the perfect symbol: not only is it universally used and of immediately intelligible meaning, but its irreducible components, barbed head and shaft, lend themselves to an infinite variety of treatment without losing in recognizability.”\(^{259}\) In other words, the arrow was seen as the signage component that could withstand the strenuous monotony of a system and come across unscathed in terms of its legibility, even while evoking a designer’s individual personality.

Although the arrow would be used by Rauschenberg in similar ways throughout his oeuvre, it is in Rauschenberg’s incorporation of actual signs onto the Combine surface that the factuality of sign systems is tested. Rauschenberg’s understanding of the operations of signage displayed a Wittgensteinian interest in the complexities of their logistics.\(^{260}\) For where Wittgenstein emphasized the necessity that signs in a system

\(^{258}\) “Note on Painting,” 101.

\(^{259}\) “The Perfect Symbol,” *The Architectural Review* 112 (1952): 127. The article’s author goes on to illustrate a variety of arrows that permit the designer’s individual expression without losing clarity. Of a straight arrow with a driving diagonal the author writes, “This sort of arrow began with Paul Klee, didn’t it?” “The Perfect Symbol,” 128.

\(^{260}\) As with Klee, there is no direct evidence that Rauschenberg was familiar with Wittgensteinian logistics of signs and grammar; however the similarities in the two men’s discussions are striking and, I believe, warrant attention. Rauschenberg’s friend and companion, Jasper Johns, however, has acknowledged the importance of his own reading of Wittgenstein in the late 1950s and 1960s on his color-game paintings. There is no reason to assume that Rauschenberg would not have made these associations from discussions with Johns and careful viewing of Johns’s work. In his discussion of Johns’s engagement with
repeat in order to achieve their meaning. Rauschenberg employed similar tactics to increase familiarity with his motifs. In a 1968 interview with Richard Kostelanetz, Rauschenberg suggested that, “If someone is working with an unfamiliar kind of image and if you see only one, it looks like a lot of things that it isn’t and a lot of things that it is; but you don’t really understand the direction. In five of those new things you’re more apt to see what they are doing. It’s like signposts; you need a few to know that you are really on the right road.” The sign posts work in two ways in Rauschenberg’s work. Like the other fact-based, readymade elements that were incorporated into the Combines, signs signal a literalness with their presence. They are the outside elements brought in to the work of art, complicating that gap, hovering over the surface by their very other-quality. But simultaneously, the signs also carry with them their iterability, they constantly point to their own referentiality. They are removed, as are all of the readymade elements, from their “natural” habitats, but they are not separated from the tasks they perform in the real world. Like the playing radios or the whirling fans found in other Combines, the signs still work, and the work they do is to help the viewer “really understand the direction.” This makes the Combines to which they are affixed additional links in the chain of their effectiveness.

Wittgenstein, Max Kozloff writes that, “In addition to the very remarkable coincidences in the imagery of the two men, Johns agrees with Wittgenstein that there are no rules common to all language games, and that usage decides the means and ends of an action, and hence its significance. Where he differs from the philosopher, and, for that matter, from his fellow artists, is in pointing this out, externalizing it by arrows, redundant naming of objects, etc.” (41). As I will discuss below, Rauschenberg does in fact employ arrows and signs to literalize the navigation of his Combines, but complicates them in Wittgensteinian fashion. Max Kozloff, Jasper Johns (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc, 1969): 40-1.

261 As above: “Only in the system has the sign any life.” Zettel, §146.

In addition to playing language games and remarking on the literal quality of the readymade object, the signs and the letters on them toy with Cubist strategies of abstraction and their Greenbergian defense. The signs’ letters are among the aspects of abstraction within a Combine’s composition. As Greenberg noted in his essay, “Collage,” letters are abstractions, and therefore lend that attribute to the canvas on which they are arranged (and, indeed, in the Combines in which signs are incorporated, Rauschenberg included collaged letters that are independent from legible words, such as Greenberg advised in an abstract and flat canvas). Greenberg wrote,

The trompe l’oeil lettering, simply because it was inconceivable on anything but a flat plane, continued to suggest and return to it. And its tendency to do so was further encouraged by the placing of the letters in terms of the illusion… The strips, the lettering, the charcoaled lines and the white paper begin to change places in depth with one another, and a process is set up in which every part of the picture takes its turn at occupying every plane, whether real or imagined in it. The imaginary planes are all parallel to one another; their effective connection lies in their common relation to the surface; wherever a form on one plane slants or extends into another it immediately springs forward. The flatness of the surface permeates the illusion, and the illusion itself reasserts the flatness.263

In Rauschenberg’s Combines the signs remain legible; as such they continue to dictate movement around the composition as they suggested correct behavior in the street. They are not only flat and not-flat, their abstraction is authoritarian – almost bossy – in the demands they make of the viewer.

The Mid-Century Traffic Sign in Rauschenberg’s Combines

That Rauschenberg understood the commanding presence of arrows that point, textual signs, and the ways that they function can be seen by briefly turning to his use of a more ambiguous, abstracted, type of urban directional: the traffic light. Traffic lights

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feature in two of Rauschenberg’s Combines, *Untitled (Man with the White Shoes)* (1954) and *Trophy V (for Jasper Johns)* (1962).\(^{264}\) Traffic signals work in conjunction with directional street signs, but their efficacy is entirely dependent on the viewer’s acceptance of convention: if an accident is to be avoided and traffic is to move efficiently, then there is an insistence that drivers and pedestrians must acknowledge and act on the meanings established for each signal’s color (red = stop; green = go; etc., everywhere). However, the meaning remains convention and thus allows room for doubt. It is this doubt that Rauschenberg exploits in these two Combines, not least because one signal is reproduced in a black-and-white newspaper photograph and the other displays both the red stop light and the green go signal at the same time. *Untitled*, Rauschenberg’s first free-standing Combine,\(^{265}\) features two open box constructions, stacked one on top of the other, as well as artifacts from the artist’s life, including family photographs, a newspaper clipping citing his parents’ silver anniversary, and a plaintive letter from his son that includes the line, “I hope that you still like me Bob cause I still love you.” On the frontal approach to the Combine (fig.25) is collaged a large black-and-white image of a man in a white suit, wearing matching shoes (hence the colloquial title *Man with the White Shoes* attached to the Combine). On the verso (fig.26), a pair of white shoes and socks covered in white paint is left in a blackened opening. An iconographical reading of the Combine would inevitably link the trappings of domesticity with an entrapment of the artist by family

\(^{264}\) The red and yellow reflective circles embedded in the surface of *Charlene* (1954) could also be read as a traffic light, but the fact that Rauschenberg incorporated both a working lamp and a mirrored panel into the Combine seems intended to diminish their effectiveness either as lights or as reflectors.

ties, naming the man in white as a “stand-in for the artist himself, who is also represented through a plethora of images that resonate with autobiographical significance,” and associating the removal of shoes with the freedom of the artist’s single life in New York. For our purposes, though, it is the inclusion of the three-paneled photograph of a DON’T WALK traffic sign, a traffic light, and the back of a running man that is most suggestive (fig.27). Although DON’T WALK coincides with the meaning of the brightened top light – i.e. the red light – on the traffic signal included in the reproduction, the man’s sprint away from the signals counteracts their seeming definitiveness. Perhaps this is so because the red light is not red. Rather, in the yellowed decay of a newspaper image, it actually appears as a Wittgensteinian brown light (“‘Brown light.’ Suppose someone were to suggest that a traffic light be brown.”), a practical impossibility that signifies nothing. Thus the running man is within his rights to move because the photographed signal does not communicate what its referent would in the “real” world.

Wittgenstein acknowledged that though traffic signals regulate movement on streets, they cannot prescribe the ideal movements of people or their vehicles. It is


268 And, of course, as will be discussed below, the running man does not run. Rather, he is suspended in his run as the light is suspended in its operation. It is the viewer’s “forecast” that assumes that his posture indicates running and completes his frozen movement.

269 “The regulation of traffic in the streets permits and forbids certain actions on the part of drivers and pedestrians; but it does not attempt to guide the totality of their movements by prescription. And it would be senseless to talk of an ‘ideal’ ordering of traffic which should do that; in the first place we should have no idea what to imagine as this ideal. If someone wants to make traffic regulations stricter on some point or other, that does not mean that he wants to approximate to such an ideal.” Wittgenstein, Zettel, §440.
prescriptions for movements that are difficult to follow through in Rauschenberg’s
*Trophy V (for Jasper Johns),* one of Rauschenberg’s most difficult-to-navigate Combines
(fig.28). Lacking directional arrows or textual signs to go by, the viewer is confronted
with fields of Jasper Johns’s greys and a painted traffic light on the right edge of the
canvas that displays both red and green at the same time. The simultaneous display of
STOP and GO disrupts not only the viewer’s comfort with the functionality of a
quotidian object, but presents a dilemma for the viewer in anticipating movement through
the canvas. Because both green and red are displayed, the viewer cannot predict the
artist’s next move and so travels through the composition in fits and starts, the veils of
foggy grey only complicating matters further. This Combine prohibits what Wittgenstein
called a “*description of the future, a forecast,*” by forcing the viewer’s eye to stutter
back and forth between the traffic light and the X marking the spot below the stenciled
outline of the United States. The only release seems to be through the window set in to
the span of the canvas, but its opening is so slight that squeezing through would be
impossible. In this Combine, the viewer is in an ambiguous grey zone, trapped between
action and stagnancy, without an indication of productive movement provided in either
the form of a pointing arrow or a textual sign that tells the viewer where to go.

Exploiting a viewer’s susceptibility to reading legible words automatically, the
textual signs used by Rauschenberg insistently call attention to themselves as the first

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270 Wittgenstein, *The Blue and Brown Books (Preliminary Studies for the “Philosophical Investigations”)* (Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1958): §56. “One might, e.g., awaken the tension of expectation in a child by keeping his attention for a considerable time on some traffic lights changing their colour periodically. We also have a red, a green, and a yellow disc before us and alternately point to one of these discs by way of forecasting the colour which will appear next. It is easy to imagine further developments of this game.”
things to be looked at in the Combines that include them.\footnote{The key here is an assumption that the signs are legible. As Wittgenstein notes, we do not read signs automatically if they are not in a language we know. Thus, Rauschenberg’s signs “work” for the viewer who reads English and can be seen as more problematic than his use of arrows. See, for example, \textit{Philosophical Investigations}: “[T]here is certainly some uniformity in the experience of reading a page of print. For the process is a uniform one. And it is quite easy to understand that there is a difference between this process and one of, say, letting words occur to one at the sight of arbitrary marks.—For the mere look of a printed line is itself extremely characteristic—it presents, that is, a quite special appearance, the letters all roughly the same size, akin in shape too, and always recurring; most of the words constantly repeated and enormously familiar to us, like well-known faces. —Think of the uneasiness we feel when the spelling of a word is changed. (And of the still stronger feelings that questions about the spelling of words have aroused.) Of course, not all signs have impressed themselves on us so strongly. A sign in the algebra of logic for instance can be replaced by any other one without exciting a strong reaction in us.” “Again, our eye passes over printed lines differently from the way it passes over arbitrary porthooks and flourishes. (I am not speaking here of what can be established by observing the movement of the eyes of a reader.) The eye passes, one would like to say, with particular ease, without being held up; and yet it doesn’t skid. And at the same time involuntary speech goes on in the imagination. That is how it is when I read German and other languages, printed or written, and in various styles.” \textit{Philosophical Investigations}, §167, 168.} Such is the case with \textit{Trophy I (for Merce Cunningham)} (1959). The sign in this instance is not only readable, it is red (the brightest color in the piece and matched by a swath of pigment nearby) and given compositional pride of place in the central horizontal strip of the Combine (fig.29). Hung on two wood panels and justified left, flush with the edge of the frame, the sign in \textit{Trophy I} reads CAUTION WATCH YOUR STEP. There can be no missing the sign (fig.30).\footnote{This is, of course, distinctly different from the \textit{Watch Your Step} sign in \textit{North by Northwest}. Hand-lettered and hung high above the platform at a railway station, it is missed by Roger Thornhill who blunders into his next adventure by meeting Eve Kendall, and most likely often missed by the film’s viewers, as well.} Thomas Crow notes in his essay “Rise and Fall: Theme and Idea in the Combines of Robert Rauschenberg” that, “As no viewer of the piece has ever missed, the found sign reading ‘Caution/Watch/Your Step’ turns the theme of precarious equilibrium and danger of mishap into something of a joke, but such disarming gestures often mask a deeper seriousness – indeed just below the stamped metal sign one finds a newspaper}
photograph of a downed horse and rider that elides the comic with the empathetic.”

Crow acknowledges the easy association made between the sign, the dedicatee of the piece, and the reproduction of Merce Cunningham hung above and to the right of the sign. Without disagreeing with Crow’s analysis of the hazards of missteps, I want to push the reading further by examining the piece more closely. *Trophy I* is broken down into three horizontal bands and, within those bands, into rectangular components. In the center of the composition is a vertical opening through which the viewer can see the wall on which the piece is hung (thus the sign could almost be telling the viewers to mind the gap in addition to watching their step). The gap, though, is not the only vertical in the composition: it is extended at the top by a blackened sleeve and below by a shaft of white paint streaked with black. Thus, the overall compositional structure of the piece is a cross, formed by the right-angle crossings of central vertical and horizontals. This squared-off organization is in fact a very stable – sometimes a very stilted – one, and so watching one’s step because of impending danger is perhaps not the only watching that is necessary in such a climate. Instead, the sign might also be suggesting an awareness of steps: Cunningham’s, the viewers’ own, the steps the artist is making, and the steps made by the constituent residents of the piece around the sign.

The reading of the sign as a joke follows on the assumption, which Crow makes, that Merce Cunningham holds in the photograph “a difficult, barely balanced pose on one foot. This position lends Cunningham the appearance of looking down over a precipice.”

However, in the photograph Cunningham is steady: there is no tell-tale

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274 Ibid.
blurring suggesting movement at his feet, hand, or head (fig.31). What is more, the T-shaped attitude his body has assumed forms yet another compositional cross. Completed by the shirt sleeve that has reached down to intersect with the black of Cunningham’s tights, the Cunningham/sleeve conjunction quarters off the square in which his likeness is included.

Perhaps even more problematic to the reading of precariousness is the fact that in a photographic reproduction, Cunningham cannot fall, whether his balance was shaky at the time the photograph was taken or not. In assuming that Cunningham is the person needing to watch his step, the viewer falls into the trap set by the gap between what is alluded to in the piece and what is in fact depicted. What is more, Rauschenberg’s turn to mechanical reproduction in this Combine reflects what David Wills has identified as the originary technological turn of humankind: the upright stance. Cunningham’s double may look over a precipice, but he might also look at his foil: the reproduction of the fallen horse that is compositionally opposite the photograph of Cunningham (in the lower left below the wooden panels, whereas the Cunningham image is upper right above the wooden panels). In linking the grounded, four-footed, fallen horse to the dancer in full

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275 This is an interesting turn in the move from nature to culture, not least because Trophy I involves painting, mechanical reproduction, and text. Rosalind Krauss writes, apropos of Jackson Pollock’s vacillation between verticality and horizontality (with a nod to Rauschenberg’s Bed [1955]) and in Wittgensteinian terms, “If writing stands to painting at the right angle horizontal to vertical, it does so, as has been remarked, through an opposition of culture to nature, its horizontality removing it from the ‘natural’ upright field of vision to the more culturally processed domain of the written sign. But that there is an axis along which these two planes can always be folded onto one another is a function of what Foucault would call the ‘commonplace’ of representation. What matter ‘pipe’ or [pipe], the language game of representation sets up an extraordinary continuity between the two. And thus it was not hard to see, as in Stenographic Figure for example, that the minute the written scribbles hit any portion of the painting, they were framed and thereby verticalized by that section of the image – becoming the ‘tattoos’ on thigh or chest, the ‘patterns’ on couch or bedclothes, the ‘grating’ on wall or floor. Their supposed horizontality could not defeat the image, it could only join it.” Rosalind Krauss, The Optical Unconscious (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993): 284, 289.
command of his body, manipulating his posture to remain upright on one leg,

Rauschenberg makes a startling connection. Wills writes,

The dorsal turn… refers… to the role played by the vertebral column in the constitution of the human. The figure or pose of our fundamental technological articulation and actualization – the point at which that emerges into visibility – is the upright stance. Anthropological accounts of the emergence of anthropoid species understandably have consistent recourse to that event, to a bending of the spine by straightening it, as a defining factor for the human.276

What if the steps we are told to watch are our steps, those that separate us from others? Those that separate the urban experience from others? Rauschenberg was open to the possibilities redolent in physical expression and how it influenced the way viewers considered his work: “Any physical situation is an influence on not only how you see and if you look but also what you think when you see it.”277 In his inclusion of the written clue, Rauschenberg taps several human traits, the ability to conceive of abstractions, to organize space, to notice patterns: we read the sign. *Trophy I* is perhaps one of Rauschenberg’s most profound statements concerning his own perceptual turn. As Leo Steinberg would have it, it occupies itself with nothing less than “the most radical shift in the subject matter of art, the shift from nature to culture.”278 We are told to WATCH YOUR STEP not only because of the dangers inherent in a city in which the crossing of streets could provide “several moments of genuine terror,” but also because consciousness of those steps permitted reception of the urban environment and thus


277 Kostelanetz, 98-9.

278 Steinberg, 28.
provided the conceptual impetus for the rediscovery of the flatbed picture plane. Walking is so seemingly natural that it happens thoughtlessly; it is only when we begin to watch our steps that it appears unnatural, awkward, and a moment of possibility.

If *Trophy I* included a sign that encouraged a pause, then another Combine, *Black Market* (1961), uses a sign that points (fig. 32). *Black Market* spreads itself over a nearly square canvas, which is again separated into three horizontal bands with gridded elements found throughout the bands. In this Combine, Rauschenberg utilizes the repetition of blocks and the repetition of shapes – notably circles and rectangles – to move the eye through the composition. From the very first, we are placed in a mapping that evokes a city street, in that the Combine occupies a rectangle divided by repeating rectangles. This block, with its evocation of a somewhat unsavory commerce, works as a New York City block does, organizing chaotic elements into rectangular packages, with each section infecting another. In the center of *Black Market* are four metallic clipboards, set out in a horizontal line, numbered via stencil. The first, at the left, is identified as “Book 1” with an arrow pointing to the board, further describing its place in

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281 This idea of the infecting nature of gridded chaos is borrowed from Rem Koolhaas: “Since all Manhattan’s blocks are identical and emphatically equivalent in the unstated philosophy of the Grid, a mutation in a single one affects all others as a latent possibility: theoretically, each block can now turn into a self-contained enclave of the Irresistible Synthetic.” *Delirious New York: A Retroactive Manifesto for Manhattan* (New York: The Monacelli Press, 1994): 97.
line. The numbering of the clipboards and the direction of the ONE WAY sign seem to lead the viewer’s eye inexorably off of the canvas to the right, but for the circles that occupy the upper and lower bands. The circular patterns begin at the upper left with an architectural ornament from a tin ceiling, which is then repeated in two flattened bottle caps and a coiled spring. (These terminate in four rectangular metal cards which move vertically up to the top edge of the canvas, rhyming with the clipboards below. Though distracting from the sign, this is a dead end, as the frame leads the composition to a heavy brown horizontal, which blocks visual escape and weighs the eye back down toward the sign.) The circles in the upper zone continue in the nail heads that attach the sign to the canvas, and the O of the ONE WAY sign. Before following the sign to its end, though, the dirty nail holes in the center of the arrow lead the eye down yet another vertical passage, cushioned by the number 3, and then through an aqua-colored patch of paint, one of the most chromatically saturated areas of the canvas. Moving left horizontally across the lower zone, an X marks the spot of the lower collection of circles, found on the expired license plate hung askew in the lower left corner. The number 9, the 8, the date 1960, and the name of the state, Ohio, all feature the roundnesses needed to mimic the circles above. Oddly, the license plate is hung upside down, the only prominent element in the piece to be so. This is might be seen an example of the horizontal address of Rauschenberg’s flatbed picture plane. Whether encountering it right side up or upside down, the word “Ohio” is legible because all of its letters maintain their visual integrity when read in either direction.

The upside down license plate also serves, though, to move the eye back to the upper register of the composition. The pull in the direction of the ONE WAY sign is
inevitable – the sign points to the right with a triangle that inclines in that direction, but
the sign itself is an arrow that also looks right. Following the sign out of the frame to its
outer edge, we discover a rope tied to the tip of the arrow’s point. The rope leads to a
valise, in which Rauschenberg had placed objects to be traded by the work’s viewers for
other items they considered valuable to the piece (fig.33). The clipboards included paper
on which the viewers were meant to sketch the items, finishing the drawings with a
rubber stamp bearing Rauschenberg’s signature.

Placed as it is against the heavily worked surface of Black Market, the ONE
WAY sign seems to read clearly, with its triangle forcing itself off of the right side of the
canvas, physically reiterating the sign’s directionality. From a design standpoint,
however, the arrow is problematic, and indeed such signs would eventually be replaced in
New York by redesigned signs. The design is too loose to be trustworthy because its
disconnected components leave too much room for misinterpretation. The spacing
between the words is quite wide; this allows for the drill holes that attached the sign to its
post, but its visual flabbiness also permits the written communication of the sign to go
astray. A more compact statement would signal the conviction of its message. In addition,
the black triangle that suggests the directionality of the sign is unconnected to any other
part of the sign. The way to which it points is uncertain (a willful misreading of the
triangle could claim that a triangle points in three directions simultaneously), and the

282 The possibility of an integrated signage system for New York City, as discussed by the designers in Print
in 1968, was one of the topics addressed by Major John V. Lindsay and the New York City Planning
tasked with redesigning the city’s subway signage and map (see the discussion in the following chapters),
was hired to propose new signage for the 53rd Street corridor. It was not put into production. See Jan
Conradi, Unimark International: The Design of Business and the Business of Design (Baden: Lars Müller
thicker white band that separates it from the shaft removes it from the written aspect of the sign. Perhaps most troublesome for the arrow’s success is the thinner white outline that serves as both boundary and body. Laid against a brick or metal building, the shape would likely be clear, but without another, darker outline defining the outer edge of the shape, the thrust of the arrow can be lost. Later ONE WAY signs would remedy this by including a dark outline around the white arrow, and indeed, Rauschenberg may have recognized this problematic feature, as the tip of the arrow abuts the black end of a rectangular piece of wood, providing the declarative stopping point that the arrow cannot offer.

The valise at the end of the arrow’s rope now contains four items that Rauschenberg left permanently as part of the work after acknowledging that the experiment in equal exchange did not work because the items he left were taken and not replaced. We might say that Rauschenberg predicted (or even dictated) this behavior by the shape of the arrow. Pointing only out of the artwork, the arrow does not indicate

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283 In writing of the logic of arrows, Wittgenstein notes that we follow them because we have been trained by experience to recognize their shapes: “Clearly, I can establish by experience that a human being (or animal) reacts to one sign as I want him to, and to another not. That, e.g., a human being goes to the right at the sign “→” and goes to the left at the sign “←”; but that he does not react to the sign “0----l”, as to “←”. *Philosophical Investigations*, §495.

284 Redesigned ONE WAY arrows will feature in Rauschenberg’s silkscreen paintings, discussed below.

285 The objects included in the valise are a photograph of Rauschenberg, a lightbulb encrusted with barnacles, a flashlight, and a folded handkerchief. Joshua Shannon writes, “The exchange here is awkward, frustrated, even doomed. (It has been reported that Rauschenberg, in extending the invitation for viewers to pick up and leave objects, knew that the arrangement would fail.)” *The Disappearance of Objects*, 144. Shannon identifies the ONE WAY arrow as indicating “the work’s circuitry of exchange” (144). I argue otherwise, as a single-direction arrow is meant to leave no option for a reciprocal return; rather, it is the rope tied to the arrow’s tip that provides the possibility of reciprocity between artist and viewer.
reciprocal exchange, but rather a leave-taking away from the work.\textsuperscript{286} Among the objects included by the artist in the box is a photograph of Rauschenberg standing on a New York rooftop, pointing right in the same direction as the arrow (fig.34). This doubling is echoed again in the outline Rauschenberg traced of the photograph (fig.35).\textsuperscript{287} Tellingly, rather than merely drawing the rectangular perimeter of the photograph itself, Rauschenberg includes an outline of his body, including the pointing finger (The other objects are represented only by strict outlines, including the folded handkerchief, which following the logic of the photographic outline, should have had its decorative stripes replicated in the drawing provided by Rauschenberg.). Although seeming to reinforce the direction dictated by the ONE WAY sign, this image can also be read as pointing to another Wittgensteinian logic game. Imagine a case, Wittgenstein writes, “in which a person naturally reacted to the gesture of pointing with the hand by looking in the direction of the line from finger-tip to wrist, not from wrist to finger-tip.”\textsuperscript{288} In this case, such as one could find in a suit-case in a gallery, the viewer might react by turning back to the artist for guidance.

\textit{Guided Travel through Rauschenberg’s Screens}

The need for a guide through Rauschenberg’s picture planes became even more pressing as the artist moved away from Combines to work with screen paintings in the

\textsuperscript{286} We can only assume that the use of a single-direction arrow was deliberate on Rauschenberg’s part. Rauschenberg was not averse to arrows of equivalency, to which the double-pointed arrow in \textit{Dylaby} (1962) attests.


\textsuperscript{288} Ibid., §185.
early- and mid-1960s. Utilizing a technique he learned in Andy Warhol’s studio, Rauschenberg applied photographic images pulled from the pictures morgue at the New York Times or those he took himself to create his new versions of the world. Like Warhol, Rauschenberg applied his images in rectilinear formations, but his haphazard grids broke from the linear, serial repetition of Warhol’s imagery. This different deployment of serial imagery – Warhol’s repeated use of the same picture on the same canvas, and Rauschenberg’s distribution of the same pictures throughout multiple canvases – again points to the difference between the establishment of commercial images and sign-posting. Warhol’s soup cans work like billboards; Rauschenberg’s signs as signs.

However, Rauschenberg’s signs in silk screen are far more complex and confusing than his ONE WAY sign in Black Market could be. Throughout the silk screen series, Rauschenberg used a photograph of a street corner near to his studio (at Pine and Nassau) that featured, on one street lamp pole, the street names, two ONE WAY signs pointing in different directions, and a sign indicating a public shelter, all of which terminate in a stop sign at the base of the shelter sign. In painting after painting this collection of signs is used and reused, turned in multiple orientations, and layered so that the octagonal stop signs circle around a central axis, replicating the cloverleaf street pattern found throughout the paintings, as well. Exploiting the logic of other signs,

\footnote{In praising Warhol’s and Rauschenberg’s visions of New York, as compared to the official “pretty drawings that are the ultimate in mediocrity” produced for the Word’s Fair of 1964-1965, Mildred Constantine, a curator of design and architecture at the Museum of Modern Art, wrote, “Even in the sixties the sights and symbols of New York are constantly the subjects of our posters and paintings. How broad the shifts are as the artists look at the city can be seen in such works as Andy Warhol’s repetitive, striking Statue of Liberty (adapted for a poster for this article) as compared with the Florine Stettheimer, or Robert Rauschenberg’s Overdrive of 1963. Neither neat realism nor idealistic or naturalistic illustration are offered. When literary references appear, their juxtaposition provides a communication of sharp comment and heightens our awareness of the city’s elements.” Constantine, “Visit New York. Visit New York,” Art in America 3 (1964): 128.}
arrows, and directionality he had already used in his earlier work, nearly everything in these paintings points, perpetuating a chaotic interference with the viewer’s attempts to navigate their layouts.

In paintings such as Estate and Bait (both 1963), Rauschenberg populates an environment around the street signs. In Estate, the signs hang from the top edge of the painting or drop like a bomb into the picture with powerfully aggressive strokes of red, white, and orange shooting from the stop sign (fig.36). Their downward thrust seems to knock an apartment building off of its foundation, tipping it to the right (the same building is seen laying on its side slightly lower in the painting). Or perhaps the brushstrokes are the flames surrounding the rocket in the lower left-hand corner as it prepares for lift off. Either way, it is the Statue of Liberty who points up to the sky, and also to the signs. The juxtaposition of a rocket and the sign for a fall-out shelter reminds the viewer that this is the time of the Bay of Pigs, that nuclear war was considered an imminent threat, and that the public shelter to which the sign points was intended as protection against a nuclear bomb. The image of the clock face superimposed on a reproduction of the Sistine Chapel suggests an end of days, with the glass of water repeated in three dimming registers calling to mind the Biblical phrase, “For now we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face.”

The apocalyptic New York was a real possibility in the 1960s and 1970s, and Bait seems to suggest this as well (fig.37). Here, the signs rest on the lower edge of the painting, with the lowest side of the stop sign adjacent to the frame. In this painting the apartment building is whited out, with a starburst – or cloudburst, or Abstract

290 1 Corinthians: 12.
Expressionist drip – resting above it. The water glass opens this time onto an image of a construction worker in a reflective helmet pointing (again) to the right and standing in front of a scaffolded building. What he points to are images of birds in flight seen in right profile, superimposed on a clock and on technical diagrams. In the lower right, the Sistine Chapel again makes an appearance, layered over a doubled print of the construction worker. This composition forces the sign for the public shelter to point to the Sistine Chapel. When discussing the images used in paintings such as these, Rauschenberg indicated to Calvin Tomkins that he liked the image of the construction worker because his pointing hand reminded him of Michelangelo’s rendering of the Creation of Adam.  

Thus, for the artist, the layering of pointing construction worker and Sistine Chapel follows an image logic. And indeed, close examination reveals other places in the painting in which Rauschenberg exposes – even labels – his strategies. An image of a bird is juxtaposed with the clock that indicates “Movement Housing,” gesturing to the next images in the series that feature the same bird in flight. The diagram informs us of a “Surface Adaptation,” surely designating the surface of the canvas, and above the doubled construction scene, of another adaptation, this time a “Double Face.” Throughout, Rauschenberg shows his hand, suggesting an anarchic city as well as a plan of attack, surmounting it all with birds who need not obey the laws of traffic or signs: In a discussion with Calvin Tomkins, Rauschenberg observed, “Look at that… the birds have freed the stop sign.”

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In considering the New York of 1963, though, it is possibly the hard-hatted construction worker who is most evocative (fig. 38). The reflective hat offers its wearer greater visibility, an important thing at a construction site or in a silkscreen painting. These hats were notable in the early 1960s, something on which Rauschenberg remarked in his conversation with Tomkins, as he described his methods of working even when he was in the street:

I’m never not working… I’m very lucky that way. No matter what I do, I feel it’s part of what I’m doing. When I go out on the street, I’m fascinated to see how much higher they’ve built a new building, or how much deeper they’ve dug a hole. Or I notice that the construction workers’ hats are silver instead of orange. New York is so exciting because the edges haven’t got knocked off it… Here you never can predict what you’re going to see when you go out on the street. I don’t think New York is a melting pot at all. Nothing melts here, it all just stands out like a sore thumb.

Rauschenberg’s observation of the silver hats was echoed in other art forms of the time. In the second stanza of “Personal Poem” (1959), the New York poet Frank O’Hara wrote of his preference for a silver-hatted construction worker: “I walk through the luminous humidity/passing the House of Seagram with its wet/and its loungers and the construction to/the left that closed the sidewalk if/I ever get to be a construction worker/ I’d like to have a silver hat please.” The construction worker, the fall-out shelter, the closed sidewalk, the Seagram building: taken together these images reveal not only the unsettling New York of Rauschenberg’s paintings, but also the actual New York that was


294 Frank O’Hara, “Personal Poem,” in The Collected Poems of Frank O’Hara, ed. Donald Allen (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995): 335. In O’Hara’s 1955 review of Rauschenberg’s work, he cited the artist’s “gentle and just passion for moving people.” O’Hara, “Reviews and Previews: Bob Rauschenberg,” ArtNews 53 (January 1955): 47. As an openly gay man, O’Hara develops an almost flirtatious voice with his preference for a “silver hat, please.” Although I have not found evidence for it, I see no reason why there could not have been a similar homosocial attraction for Rauschenberg to the decorative attractiveness associated with a silver-hatted construction worker.
engaged in a love-hate relationship with its built environment. Robert Rauschenberg was living in a city that was deliberately ugly and frightening. In 1963, the Tax Commission of the City of New York levied a tax on the Seagram Building because it was deemed too beautiful. In justifying the tax, the State Supreme Court determined that the extra funds that went into the construction of the “prestige” tower were in fact the equivalent of advertising dollars spent by the company, and therefore the profits made by Seagram should be taxed in the form of higher penalties aimed at the property itself. The Seagram Building was deemed a billboard, and with this ruling any corporate interest to beautify New York was killed. In her opinion piece on the law, the New York Times’s architecture critic Ada Louise Huxtable named it “the latest chapter of the saga, ‘How to Kill a City,’” and went on to write that, “This decision, which establishes a new, drastically increased tax assessment policy for ‘prestige’ buildings, may turn out to be the worst thing to hit the city, architecturally speaking, short of an atom bomb.” The ramifications of the policy were still being felt five years later. In the 1968 conversation between designers included in Print magazine, it was the enforced mediocrity by the Seagram taxation that caused the participants to question, “What is it in the city that prevents excellence from emerging?”

No wonder, then, that when the critic Brian O’Doherty wrote of his experience at Robert Rauschenberg’s 1963 retrospective at the Jewish Museum he remembered that,


296 Huxtable, “Another Chapter in ‘How to Kill a City,’” 107.

297 Glaser, as quoted in “Exchange of Views,” 85.
“the work wouldn’t let me settle down, and I remember feeling uncomfortable that I’d brought my street reflexes in with me. You wanted to look over your shoulder to see if you were going to be run over.”  

O’Doherty labeled the sense of the city that Rauschenberg introduced to painting the “vernacular glance,” forcing the issue of decaying surrounds on polite, museum-going company. In describing a scenario in which the viewers are met on all sides by signs telling them where to go, signs telling them what to buy, and crowds of people and buildings, O’Doherty praised Rauschenberg for “shuffling his signposts” and “level[ing] hierarchies… [so that] a fruitful comparison can be made between the language of Fifth Avenue window dressing and Rauschenberg’s assembling habits.” In writing of Rauschenberg in this way, O’Doherty resuscitated and reconfigured what had been an early critique of Rauschenberg’s work, that professed by Hilton Kramer in *Arts Magazine* in 1959. Recalling Rauschenberg’s early New York employment as a decorator of storefronts, Kramer disparaged Rauschenberg with the epithet “designer” and claimed that the artist’s work had not moved far from his previous commercial work:

Rauschenberg… is a very deft designer with a sensitive eye for the chic detail, but the range of his sensibility is very small – namely from good taste to “bad.” His gaily contrived constructions combine the official good taste of the most epigonal Abstract Expressionism with some decorative bits of nastiness intended to “offend” (which is to say, *delight*) bourgeois feelings. Frankly, I see no difference between his work and the decorative displays which often grace the windows on Bonwit and Teller and Bloomingdale’s… Fundamentally, he shares

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299 Ibid., 82.

300 Ibid., 83.

301 Ibid., 84.
the window decorator’s aesthetic: to tickle the eye, to arrest attention for a momentary dazzle.\(^{302}\)

The momentary dazzle is O’Doherty’s vernacular glance, from both of which Rauschenberg felt the need to distance himself by insisting that looking at his paintings existed in time.\(^{303}\) However, O’Doherty was not maligning Rauschenberg, for in his use of the term “vernacular,” he was deliberately linking Rauschenberg to Dante,\(^{304}\) whose *Inferno* cantos Rauschenberg illustrated just before he began working on the silkscreen paintings and who wrote in *On the Eloquence of the Vernacular* that, “Of these two types of language, the more noble is the vernacular because it was the first to be used habitually by humankind; because the whole world employs it, even though it is divided into different pronunciations and into different words; and because it is natural to us, whereas the other appears artificial instead.”\(^{305}\) Far from denigrating Rauschenberg for the speed

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\(^{303}\) Rauschenberg’s emphasis on the time required of his work is in evidence very early, as in his series of woodcuts titled *This is the First Half of a Print Designed to Exist in Passing Time* (1949). In an interview with Gene Swenson in *ArtNews*, Rauschenberg discussed his concern about the flatness and poster-like condition of his work: “I realized that the details should not be taken in at one glance, that you should be able to look from place to place without feeling the bigger image. I had to make a surface which invited a constant change of focus and an examination of detail. Listening happens in time. Looking also had to happen in time.” Gene Swenson, “Rauschenberg Paints a Picture,” *ArtNews* 62 no.2 (April 1963): 45. See also Thomas Crow, who notes Rauschenberg’s desire to fit his work in to the competitive and serious New York City art world and who cites the O’Doherty essay and its promulgation of an “undiscriminating ‘vernacular gaze’” as problematizing Rauschenberg’s reputation. In his misquoting of O’Doherty (the glance becomes a gaze) Crow seems to be attempting still to rescue Rauschenberg’s reputation. Crow, “Rise and Fall,” 247.


of a common glance, the identification of his vernacular praises him for utilizing a technique that feels completely natural in an urban environment.

Throughout the Dante illustrations, Rauschenberg represented Dante as a towel-wearing Everyman retrieved from the pages of *Sports Illustrated* and Virgil, his guide, as a more shadowy figure. In his later silkscreen paintings, Rauschenberg returned to his use of the Everyman character by positing him as traveler and guide into the difficult cityscape. Like Dante’s strenuous journey, the Everyman figure in paintings such as *Skyway* (1964) moves through landscapes that are difficult to understand, populated as they are with images as diverse as Titian’s *Venus Looking in a Mirror*, a parachutist, a cloverleaf highway design, and three-dimensional diagrams of boxes (included, Rauschenberg claimed, to “heighten the viewer’s intellectual awareness”) (fig.39).

The pointing hand in this painting is John F. Kennedy’s and, significantly, it points – twice – outside of the painting to the viewer, causing a pinging effect into and out of the surface. The Everyman is featured twice, as well, in both the lower and the upper halves of the split canvas, but he is seen more clearly in the lower section. He walks toward a lit traffic signal on top of which is mounted a ONE WAY street sign pointing to the left. His move left runs up the back of Venus and out again through her mirror, across a scene of urban destruction (avoiding the spiked fence surrounding a statue of George Washington, which hangs upside-down from above), across to the right guided by the rightward

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306 This figure is identified as “Everyman” throughout the essays included in *Robert Rauschenberg: The Silkscreen Paintings*, although he is not explicitly associated with the Dante character in Rauschenberg’s illustrations.

307 *Robert Rauschenberg: The Silkscreen Paintings*, 45. Quote taken from Dean Swanson, *Robert Rauschenberg: Paintings 1953 – 1964* (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1965): n.p. The cube diagram is used by Wittgenstein in *Philosophical Investigations* to illustrate “aspect seeing,” in which the viewer may read the image as a three-dimensional box, a line drawing, etc. When we realize that Rauschenberg may have been familiar with Wittgenstein in translation, it is fascinating to consider that he may have been alluding to games of aspect seeing with his goal to “heighten the viewer’s intellectual awareness.”
pointing ONE WAY street sign at the corner of Nassau and Pine, to the loops of the cloverleaf, and back to another Venus looking in another mirror. Although the arrow on the Nassau and Pine sign is that of the type found on Black Market, Everyman’s arrow is of the redesigned variety (fig.40). This later version of the ONE WAY sign no longer takes the shape of the arrow. Rather, it is a horizontal rectangle, outlined in black with a white arrow found within. It was designed to be the orderly component of the disorderly city, the one in which the grammar of signs is regularized in order to permit the individualism that the designer Peter Chermayeff claimed could be achieved in the city in which signage becomes invisible.

But because this figure serves as an Everyman, he does not also possess the characteristics of an individual, and thereby permits the viewer the opportunity to identify with him and follow him into the canvas by assuming his stance. Rauschenberg sees to this by reproducing the man walking away from the viewer on a city street. His back is to the surface of the picture plane, a visual trope that establishes him as akin not only to Dante’s Everyman but also to the Virgil who would lead us into and through the landscape. In his essay O’Doherty compares Rauschenberg’s qualities to many artist forebears, but perhaps surprisingly he also equates him with Caspar David Friedrich in terms of the “overall field,” which “emphasized effect, as various excuses – distance, atmosphere, light, time of day – are used to blur detail, eliminate relational perception, and present a single, immediate experience.”308 If the overall field summons images of Friedrich’s landscapes, then it is Friedrich’s solitary figures who turn their backs to the viewer – the Rückenfiguren – who are called to mind by Rauschenberg’s man.

308 Ibid., 198.
In Friedrich’s paintings a single experience is set into motion by means of placing a figure in a veiled setting, one that is covered in fog, snow, or fading light. Although not consciously connecting Rauschenberg to Friedrich as O’Doherty did, Rosalind Krauss noted the veiled effect produced by rubbing, scraping, and effacing the images in Rauschenberg’s Cantos and silkscreen paintings. The spaces evoked by such veiled imagery are for Krauss those of “dream, of memory, and of the imagination,” unreliable spaces in which the figure occupies an uncertain position. In his study of the Rückenfigur in Friedrich’s paintings, Joseph Leo Koerner explains the complexity of the figure’s situation:

The Rückenfigur in Friedrich occupies… [the] curious place a little further on where the past is made present. He stands before us already there in the place we hope to be. From this standpoint, we occupy his past, the place from which he has wandered. His footprints lead back to us. And yet, from another perspective, the Rückenfigur as a representation of a subjective experience, or even as a painted image, is a trace of the past. He gazes not into his future, but into a now concealed past anterior to his being – the virgin wood, the unpainted surface of the canvas. We, the stream of onlookers who pass him by, are his future. Walking thus forth into a world which is both past and future, the Rückenfigur can show us a vision of having already been in a place never visited before.

Interestingly, the Rückenfigur in Rauschenberg’s work also occupies a site to similar to that of directional signs. Placed regularly, at the very point in a decision where present becomes past in order to lead the viewer into the future, signs exist in a space that will constantly assume they are not there. In a city such as those that Rauschenberg depicts, a

310 Krauss, “Perpetual Inventory,” 114.
311 Ibid.
312 Koerner, 156.
sign or a guide is a necessity even when it presumes to interrupt life in the form of advertisements, traffic, and crowds, momentary stops in the flow of urban existence. Wittgenstein noted that it is in moments such as those depicted by Rauschenberg in his silkscreen paintings, moments during which things run past us, that we ask the questions about the past, present, and future that are brought up by the Rückenfigur:

Looking at… language games, we don't come across the ideas of the past, the future and the present in their problematic and almost mysterious aspect. What this aspect is and how it comes about that it appears can be almost characteristically exemplified if we look at the question "Where does the present go when it becomes past, and where is the past?"—Under what circumstances has this question an allurement for us? For under certain circumstances it hasn't, and we should wave it away as nonsense.

It is clear that this question most easily arises if we are preoccupied with cases in which there are things flowing by us.313

In the temporally indistinct space occupied by the Rückenfigur, Koerner has identified an impulse for a turning back, a possibility for the viewer’s gaze to be reckoned with due to “the recognition that one has been seen... changing all perspectives in our world, ordering it from the privileged position of the other.”314 As the photographic and the silkscreen processes used by Rauschenberg in his canvases are technological turns, there is a further inevitability of a turning back, as the dorsal turn confronts the technological turn, and as the viewer turns her back on the apparatus to meet the close-up face-to-face.315 In the logic of sign systems, it is the sign that is the figure that turns back to face the viewer, meeting the gaze with an arrow or a word – a recognition that one has been anticipated. Robert Rauschenberg’s deployment of signs throughout his Combines

313 Wittgenstein, Blue and Brown Books, §56.

314 Koerner, 157.

315 Wills, 163-7.
and silkscreen paintings works to guide the viewer through his compositions but also to reference the outside world occupied by that viewer. The Combines and silkscreens are strange mirrors of actuality, mixed together and turned over in the artist’s hands (Koerner describes the site of the turn thus: “The structure of the landscape would turn inside out, like a glove too hastily removed by a hand eager to shake the hand of a stranger.”316). It is sites like these that rely on sign systems and guides to enable navigation through the billboards, the architecture, and the inhabitants that brush past the viewer and bump into each other. Signs are vital to Rauschenberg’s work because, as he acknowledged, “You need a few to know that you are really on the right road.”317

316 Koerner, 157.

317 Kostelanetz, 104.
Chapter 4: Way-words: Wayfinding by Following Pieces

If, as we saw in the last chapter, the competition between billboards and street signs in New York City led to a visual cacophony that troubled designers and inspired Robert Rauschenberg’s Combines, the situation was even graver underground. The city’s subway system, one of the oldest in the United States, one of the largest in the world, and one that had been woefully disregarded for much of its life, was notably derided in 1967 by Mayor John Lindsay’s own Task Force on Urban Design as “the most squalid public environment in the United States: dank, dingily lit, fetid, raucous with screeching clatter; one of the world’s meanest transit facilities.”318 This squalid environment was rife with crime, aging trains, and that species of dirt uniquely associated with subways: “a stubborn mixture of steel dust, cast iron, and carbon dosed with a coating of oil on each particle and bound together with human hair.”319 The confusion and decay were partly the result of what had been three privately-owned train systems running according to three separate schedules (the entire system was only taken over by the New York City Transit Authority in 1953 and then by the state-level Metropolitan Transit Authority [MTA] in 1968320), and subsequently the result of neglect by the government after the city and the


320 The three subway lines were the Brooklyn Rapid Transit Company (BRT), the Interborough Rapid Transit Company (IRT), and the Independent Subway System (IND). For a discussion of the history of the
MTA assumed management of the train lines. The subway was, in the Task Force’s eyes, an “undesigned misery,” which it “regarded as the most representative environment in New York. It… remained technology in the raw.” In order to reform the miserable subway, the Transit Authority hired the design firm Unimark International in the late 1960s to undertake passenger flow studies and to propose new designs for the sign systems found throughout the stations. In this chapter, I will examine the ramifications of Unimark’s underground intervention by pairing it with a performance art project of surprising correspondence: Vito Acconci’s *Following Piece* (1969). Bringing the action of signage and the action of artist together in this way permits us to explore the structural similarities, as well as the limitations, of such endeavors as following pieces.

“Undesigned Misery”

The problems of New York’s subway system were quite apparent to those riders and critics beyond government functionaries. Reporting on New York as it prepared for the second phase of the 1964/65 World’s Fair in the *New York Times Sunday Magazine*, the British author V.S. Pritchett wrote that one of his primary recommendations for the improvement of New York would be to “rebuild, repaint, and generally civilize the appearance of the barbarous subway. I would increase and improve the ramshackle public

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321 *The Threatened City*, 12.
transport system…” In response, the Transit Authority released “strip-maps” of the train lines based on London’s Tube Map in 1964, announced a plan for color-coding the subway lines in 1966, and introduced new cars into the system as older trains (some running since the beginning of the lines’ existence) were retired. However, the implementation of these steps was criticized in the press for poor design and for not solving the essential problems of easy identification of the trains within the network and promoting trouble-free wayfinding inside the stations. Indeed, in an essay comparing New York’s subway system to those of London and Milan, the design writer William Lansing Plumb found New York’s so lacking as to have become a self-perpetuating (and self-defeating) “slum” system, and noted that,

A great deal has been written in recent years about how degrading a slum environment is to the human mind and spirit; slum thinking creates more of a slum environment, which, in turn creates more slum thinking, and so on and on in an endless vicious cycle. If there is any part of the New York environment that could be called a slum environment, it is surely the subway.

Plumb’s prescient suggestion for curing the New York subway was to develop an overarching method of signage, visually linking the lines together and supporting ease of

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324 The term “wayfinding,” meaning the various strategies (landmarks, signs, smells, etc.) that humans and animals use to orient themselves to their environment and to navigate through it, was used in planning and design circles as early as 1960 by Kevin Lynch in *The Image of the City*: “Despite a few remaining puzzles, it now seems unlikely that there is any mystic ‘instinct’ of way-finding. Rather there is a consistent use and organization of definite sensory cues from the external environment.” Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1960): 3.

325 “Telling People Where to Go,” 17.
movement within and without the train stations. As he observed, prefiguring the remarks of the Mayor’s Task Force two years later, “there has been little effort made in solving the functional people-flow problems of the system in a coordinated manner – and, of course, people-flow is the only reason for having such a system.” To add weight to his suggestion for subway signage improvements, Plumb described moments at the two busiest train stations, Grand Central and Times Square, in which customers could stand at certain points and see no signs directing them where to go, where signs were “directly contradictory,” and where poorly-lit wayfinding signage was covered by commercial signs and advertising. The issues could be solved by a single design firm implementing a systematic approach, in which the signs would be designed according to usability standards, professionally constructed, and installed at decision-making points. Only under such a regime could the subway rid itself of the “dated, whimsical” signs, which looked like “the efforts of a bad cartoonist with a penchant for hand-lettering [who] produces… the Hiya Folks posters” (fig.41). The “Hiya Folks” posters, hand-painted signs that included such reminders as, “Do you know – that your subway system is the fastest, safest & cheapest mode of transportation in the world today/ Please co-operate/ Buy your tokens for the week,” combined with the decrepit quality of the stations and trains, must have been the sort of visual let-down that the design critic Patricia Conway George had in mind when she wrote in 1965 that,

For the ordinary citizen wary of local politics and unfamiliar with computer technology, the most disturbing aspect of the current uproar over mass transportation is the “reality gap” – the seeming disparity between what he is being promised at election time and what he is likely, several years later, to be

326 Ibid., 15.
327 Ibid.
riding to work on every morning. The artist’s rendering may be straight out of Buck Rogers, but the final design is too often neo-Civil War.\footnote{Patricia Conway George, “Mass Transit: Problem and Promise,” \textit{Design Quarterly} 71 (1968): 3.}

Obviously, the gap between the people-moving promise of the subway system and its physical characteristics was too large. The situation had become untenable, most particularly in a city such as New York, which prided itself on being one of the most forward-looking. “Esthetically,” Plumb concluded, “this material is on the lowest amateur level. Functionally, this is also true. What is strange is that this can occur in the city which is considered the communications capital of the world!”\footnote{“Telling People Where to Go,” 15.}

Perhaps appropriately, then, it was to Unimark International, the Chicago communications firm that had designed the Milan subway system, that the Transit Authority turned as design consultants to the New York subway. Unimark’s New York-based principles, Bob Noorda and Massimo Vignelli, were hired between 1966 and 1968 to produce a wide-ranging plan that would address signage identifying subway lines, appropriate placement of those signs to meet sightlines of customers standing on subway platforms and within trains, and the flow of pedestrians through stations.\footnote{In his thorough study of the deployment Helvetica in the New York subway, Paul Shaw dates the Unimark subway commission to 1967-1968 based on conversations with Massimo Vignelli and by referencing the \textit{Times} article about Unimark’s 53rd Street project (no contracts exist). A \textit{Chicago Tribune} article concerning Unimark’s 53rd Street consultancy quotes Unimark’s vice president and director of marketing, Robert Moldafsky, as stating that “the firm got picked over New York firms mainly because of its work for the New York subway system,” which suggests a 1966 or 1967 commission date. Jan Conradi’s \textit{Unimark International: The Design of Business and the Business of Design} dates the commission to 1966. Paul Shaw, \textit{Helvetica and the New York City Subway System: The True (Maybe) Story} (New York: Blue Pencil Editions, 2009): 38, n.33.; James M. Gavin, “Unimark to Give Cinderella Treatment to New York Street,” \textit{Chicago Tribune} 20 November, 1967, E8; and Jan Conradi, \textit{Unimark International: The Design of Business and the Business of Design} (Baden, Switzerland: Lars Müller, 2010): 151. See also “Mayor Hires Consultants to Study Street Design,” \textit{New York Times} 14 November, 1967, 36.} To accomplish
such a goal, Noorda took his research below street level to examine the source of the problems, the subway trains, stations, their signage, and the methods that each communicated with the other (or did not). In a moniker that is illustrative of both his month spent examining the signage and traffic issues and the filthy underground conditions of the subways he studied, Noorda’s colleagues nicknamed him “the Mole.”

The sign system produced by Unimark would be the first sustained attempt to liberate New York City’s mole-men and –women who had been oppressed by the subway’s wretched conditions.

*The Design of Signs and Their Systems*

Though human beings in urban spaces encounter so many types of signs as to think them unremarkable, wayfinding signage is in fact a peculiar type of “pre-cartographic operation” that conflates the linearity of an itinerary with the gridded, flattened map of orientation and the axonometric, birds-eye view of directionality and city image. It positions the viewer high above the ground surveyed and as a pedestrian back down on the terra firma simultaneously. Unlike a flattened map, the vantage point in signage moves as the viewer moves. It is constantly relative to the person surveying it, and it exists in at least 180 degrees in any direction. Signage consistently exists in the present, which is not to say that it cannot look dated, as Plumb complained of the “Hiya

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331 *Unimark International*, 151.

Folks” signs in the subway, or that it may not pertain to a certain city image, as the designs for New York’s subway system were meant to do, but rather that it is always in use. Signage is in the direction viewers wish to go, remains at the location they left, and by their sides at the same time.

As we saw in the last chapter, the design of signage is critical because it navigates between two extremes: that of being invisible when not needed and highly noticeable when demanded. However, their presence also makes paths visible; hence, the development of the terms “wayfinding” or “wayshowing”, which indicate signs’ dependence on identifiable precedents and the fact that following signage is voluntary rather than predetermined.\textsuperscript{333} It is through signs’ designs that paths are revealed to the viewer/user and that paths can be named. Signage cuts a swath only just perceptible through the buildings and cities in which it is employed and thereby visually establishes that means of navigation exist, for “to design is to cut a trace.”\textsuperscript{334}

Ideally, the primary wayfinding systems used by travelers would in fact be the passages through and among buildings. If architecture is built with occupants’ circulation in mind, then buildings’ features themselves act as wayfinding devices, and distribute people within and between them. However, in the cases of Times Square and Grand Central Stations – to name two of the stations studied by Noorda – the buildings themselves were responding to design issues raised by linking paths to commuter trains, subway trains, and buses to each other and with their passengers. Because these modes of transportation ran on different tracks or on the city streets, and because the tracks were


laid at different times and at different depth levels, the buildings became warrens of
architectural mis-information as they expanded to accommodate all of the additions.
(Thus, a third-year studio architectural project taught by Robert Venturi, Denise Scott-
Brown, and Bruce Adams aptly described the Herald Square subway stop as
“Piranesian,” even going so far as to claim that “Piranesi is too easy.”) To respond to
such challenges, then, Noorda and Vignelli had to employ various research strategies to
identify areas in need of wayfinding signage, to determine how spaces throughout the
subway system were used by the public, and to signal the possibilities of such spaces.

These research techniques, determined in advance and then carried out
underground, emerged as paths to be followed, even as the designers followed them to
determine how the public might follow their signs. An examination of the flow patterns
Noorda observed in his weeks underground reveals something interesting about his
strategy: before making the signs to be followed he followed people through the subway
stations (fig.42), “tracking the paths of commuters in [Times Square, Grand Central,
Broadway/Nassau, Jay Street, and Queensborough Plaza] stations to find the essential
message points – entering/exiting, transferring, etc. – for each sign,” and marking every
moment when a point of decision arose and where every directional mistake was made.

335 The term was suggested in the project of two students in the studio, Herbert Short and Manfred Ibel.
“Mass Communication on the People Freeway: Or Piranesi Is Too Easy,” 52.

336 Shaw, 30. Following a scheme and, more apposite for this discussion, following subjects through spaces
to determine the placement of signage remains a standard method for contemporary designers: “We
always follow a strict scheme. First a site survey – or what is called an ‘expert walk through’ – to get a
feeling and an overview of the key problems.” Paul Mijksenaar, as quoted in Lawrie Hunter, “Terminal
Signage: Buildings Don’t Speak for Themselves, An Interview with Paul Mijksenaar,” Information Design
Understanding an audience involves deciphering their codes.” Ronald Shakespear, as quoted in Leslie
picture of a place we employs lots of different techniques. We trail members of the public, do urban
analyses of the city’s structure, look at their web presence, how the city already communicates. We
Using lines of different colors drawn over the floor plans of station buildings to suggest the various networks of pedestrian movement within stations, Noorda uncovered enormous complexity, revealing a multitude of decision points, hairpin turns, and changed in elevation. Rather than an easy flow through corridors with pedestrian intent taking users in single directions, the stations and existing signage encouraged travelers to move in circles, attempt different directions to find the correct paths, and develop inefficient strategies to achieve their goals of exiting the stations or finding their next train. That the colors associated with different travelers overlapped or doubled-back repeatedly, further suggests the difficulties in navigating the systems. Clearly, the need for instructive and clarifying signage was great.

In conjunction with the traffic flow drawings, and evocatively suggestive of the number of decisions facing commuters using the subway stations, are the tree diagrams that Noorda mapped out for passengers he followed who traveled through the stations. His decision tree for the Times Square station reveals thirty-seven separate instances in which a single visitor descending into the station through a single entrance would need to make a determination of how to travel through the station and which train to take. The tree diagram illustrated in figure 43, begins at a single point and quickly branches out as options multiply in front of the moving traveler. The diagram displays the decisions needed to be made between nine separate lines, each of which also moves in several directions: uptown, downtown, shallowly or deeply into Brooklyn, or into Queens via three different trains. By conflating these diagrams, using the flow patterns dictated by signage literally (turning where no turn would be permitted, tracking an exit sign to a

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explore it through the user perspective.” Mike Rawlinson, as quoted in “Designing a Legible City,” Creative Review, December 2008, 36.
closed exit), and following the everyday users of the system – all while allowing himself to be lost in the process along with those users – Noorda was able to develop a plan for the installation of signage at needed points along the paths throughout the stations.

Following the rules of their research requirement, then, led the designers to follow their subjects. There is a strange push and pull between the positive intended outcome – the safety and security of the viewer/user – and the uneasiness of following and being followed. To “trail” someone (or to be trailed) is undoubtedly helpful in determining that person’s habits and movements in a public space, but in practice it is also unnerving. As the artist Martha Rosler has suggested in her discussion of traveling via subway,

Like most subway riders… I have learned to handle the compacted urban modernity that the subway represents: close collision with utter strangers kept manageable by personal reserve and self-absorption, keeping my own counsel of looks punctuated by homoeopathic doses of practical camaraderie and exchanges of advice (the “face time” that is an elaborate ritual of looking and not-looking, of speaking and silence, of impassive generality and neighborly superficiality). These behavioral strictures, the hallmark of urbanity mapped out by Georg Simmel long ago, are so carefully coded in the subway because of the close quarters. 337

Tracking people through the subway subverts the urbanity of close quarters. Though the “collision” remains entirely possible, it is the rituals of looking that are disrupted: the targeted person’s face is not seen, they are not complicit in the agreements of urbanity.

The need to follow people to develop systems for their safety and ease supersedes the call for “personal reserve and self-absorption.” Instead, absorption is directed outward to another, and the followers move in accordance with the gravitational pull of their prey.

Following Pieces

The notion of pursuing someone to observe his or her public traits was famously acted out as well in Vito Acconci’s performance of the same era, Following Piece (fig.44). It is strange to realize that the New York that produced “Hiya Folks” posters was simultaneously fostering the performance pieces of an artist such as Acconci. In later interviews, Acconci noted that his Following Piece could only have happened in New York because in any smaller city the action would have been interpreted as “aggressive.” The divide between the folksy signage in the subway and the following actions perceived as “normal” that played out in the city’s train stations and streets suggests a bizarre aesthetic disconnect that was developing in 1960s and 1970s New York. The signage of the subway was not only looking amateurish; soon it could be understood as unreadable because of its datedness and disengagement with the visual evolution of the city.

The rules to be followed by Acconci were as follows: “Each day I pick out, at random, a person walking in the street. I follow a different person everyday; I keep following until that person enters a private place (home, office, etc.) where I can’t get

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338 In one Following Piece whose itinerary was reproduced in Avalanche, Acconci notes that he followed his target as “she went down into the IRT subway station, uptown side,” indicating that though the three subway companies had all been taken over by the MTA in 1968, the signage identifying them as belonging to a single system had yet to be undertaken. Vito Acconci, “Following Piece, Street Works IV, Architectural League,” Avalanche 6 (Fall 1972): 31.

339 “It obviously mattered that this was happening in New York. If I had been doing the same thing in some small town, it would have been aggressive. Whereas in the context of New York, it was like handing myself over to someone I didn’t know. Like saying, ‘Take me somewhere.’ It was getting out of yourself, getting carried away by somebody else’s time-space, their choices.” Christophe Wavelet, “Interview with Vito Acconci and Yvonne Rainer,” in Vito Hannibal Acconci Studio (Barcelona: Museu d’Art Contemporani de Barcelona, 2004): 31.
In 1969, Acconci was just beginning his transition from poetry to art-making, and it is important here to consider that what was to be followed first were words. The written instructions led Acconci to the activity of following; they were the guidelines to which he had already committed himself before he began the physical trailing that was to follow. And even before Acconci wrote his instructions, he had received other words telling him a method to follow: Following Piece was sponsored by the Architectural League of New York, whose stipulations were that he “do a piece, sometime during the month, that used a street in New York City.”

In Acconci’s realization of the performance, he followed various subjects for twenty-three days, throughout any public place in New York that his quarry took him. The following actions, originally reliant only on Acconci’s written instructions to himself for proof-of-performance, were later documented through photographic reenactments of the walks. Displayed on large pieces of black exhibition board, photographs of Acconci following were combined with typed itineraries cut out from white paper, maps on which Acconci plotted his and his targets’ movements, and handwritten reflections sketched out in white lettering. Acconci’s written descriptions constantly reinforce the awareness on the part of the artist of the boundaries of urban behavior he is overstepping. Throughout his writings for Following Piece, Acconci places emphasis on the notion that he relinquished his own preferences and decision-making in favor of those determined by

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341 Ibid., 78.

342 “The first pieces I did, in an art context, were activities in the street, activities that only I knew I was performing; some of these were keyed into a performance situation – all of them could be documented later, and hence made public.” Vito Acconci, “Notes on My Photographs, 1969-1970,” in *Vito Acconci: Photographic Works, 1969-1970*, ed. Kate Linker (New York: Brooke Alexander, 1988): np.
the person he followed. In the hand-written documentation of the piece that is displayed with photographic evidence, Acconci writes, “Performance as expression: performance as expressions of someone else’s direction… Placement of performer according to the way one performer can be produced or derived from another: movement as derivation.” In deriving his moves from another person, Acconci absolves himself of decisive action, but also places himself in a position to step into the spot where his target formerly stood.

That a piece developed for the Architectural League did not directly involve architecture, but rather passed through architecture, is not surprising, given that Acconci did not consider himself a stationary monument but rather positioned himself as a peripatetic element within a larger schema. In so doing, he acted instead as one marker in a system of signage. In his notes included in the documentation for Following Piece, he writes, “Elastic system – adjunctive system – participative system – complemented system.” Considering Following Piece several years later in the 1972 issue of Avalanche devoted to his work, Acconci again wrote of his body as such an component: “Fall into position in a system – I can be substituted for – my positional value counts here, not my individual characteristics. (What I wanted was to step out of myself, view myself from above, as an observer of my behavior…)

To view himself from above was to allow himself to be seen from a distance, to map his behavior (as indeed, Acconci included maps that outlined his – and his targets’ – movements). This notion of the need to remove

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343 “Following Piece, Street Works IV, Architectural League,” 31. Robert Smithson similarly described Passaic center as a series of adjuncts, using an etymologically-related term, “adjective”: “Passaic center loomed like a dull adjective. Each ‘store’ in it was an adjective unto the next, a chain of adjectives disguised as stores. I began to run out of film, and I was getting hungry. Actually, Passaic center was no center – it was instead a typical abyss or an ordinary void. What a great place for a gallery! Or maybe an ‘outdoor sculpture show’ would pep that place up.” Robert Smithson, “The Monuments of the Passaic: Has Passaic Replaced Rome as the Eternal City?,” Artforum VI no.4 (December 1967): 51. Thanks to Aron Vinegar for the connection.
oneself so as to look down from above echoes the strategy of Noorda’s design following as well: Noorda followed travelers to catch their movements, only to plot them onto maps (by convention, seen from above) so as to insinuate sign elements into his navigational systems. Acconci’s and Noorda’s shared emphasis on “positional value,” in which they are aware of their relative relationship to the person they followed, permits as well a plotting of the followed subject’s decision making, yielding points on a map for Acconci and signage points throughout stations for Noorda.

Taking this technique of following shared by designer and artist into account, it should perhaps not surprise us that Acconci associated his artistic practice with that of designers. In his 1978 “Double-Spacing (Some Notes on Re-Placing Place)”, he wrote, “I’m here to re-design, re-decorate, a gallery – I’m working as a behavioral designer for an already-defined (pre-behavioral) art public…” His designs on the “pre-behavioral” public were echoed in his attempts to question – and break out of – his own self-absorption (and the habitual structure he had constructed for himself):

My first pieces… were activities in the street: this excursion into the street could be seen as an attempt to leave home, a home shaped by the contact of writing-person and desk-top, through means of paper and pen and defined by the boundaries of light. The sheet of paper, looked down at on the desk, was analogous to the plan-view of a house; going out into the street was a way of literally breaking the margins, breaking out of the house and leaving the paper behind.  

344 And indeed would later abandon his art practice to focus on design strategies. This “abandonment” has recently been challenged in Grace McQuilten, Art in Consumer Culture: Mis-Design (Farnham, UK; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011): 141-80.  

345 Moure, Vito Acconci, 367.  

346 Ibid., 388.
The relationship between the written way and the physical way in Acconci’s performances is complicated by the fact of the piece of paper. After all, Acconci went out into the street based on written instructions to himself. Furthermore, Acconci was interested in exploring what was public about the space in which he traveled: if “public space is an old habit,” then what happens when we consciously abandon our own habits and assume those of someone else? What happens when we decide to follow? Acconci’s example could therefore complicate matters for us somewhat when we once again apply his tactics to designers of signs, and its implications are worth teasing out further. As noted above, the recording of Acconci’s piece includes both the artist/designer’s written instructions and photographs documenting the performance. The accompanying photographs depict Acconci’s steps as he himself is followed by the photographer who captures the back of the artist as he follows the back of his target. Thus, the viewer-of-the-piece follows photographs, which follow Acconci, who follows the target (or, in the case of a designer, a viewer/user). While Acconci’s aim – the subject – is always in view, the subject’s aim is not apparent because the subject necessarily blocks what he or she is looking at or walking toward. This figure, seen from behind, seeing what we see while concurrently obscuring what we can see with his own body, is known as the *Rückenfigur* (see also the discussion in chapter 3). The *Rückenfigur* is, interestingly, an art historical trope whose presence accomplishes several things: the figure doubles the viewer-of-the-piece, making it possible for said viewer to “enter” the painting, photograph, or other image. The *Rückenfigur* also indicates movement inside the image, though the figure itself is paused, thus suggesting an advance from outside the


348 The *Rückenfigur*, from the German, literally translates to “back-figure.”
picture to within, progressing through the environment established by the image, moving down or through pathways identified by the figure. These pathways, what Heidegger identifies as Holzwege, paths in the woods that go individual ways and lead to unknown parts of the landscape, “bring us to the threshold of something never seen before.”

These paths have the possibility of being traversed by the Rückenfigur, and the viewer-of-the-piece can anticipate the figure doing so and watching it move down those paths. However, “what repeats our looking, the Rückenfigur, hides with his very presence the very thing repeated – the gaze of the subject. The hidden eye marks the centre of the loss which we always encounter when we approach the subject in the landscape.”

Perhaps, then, following a target is in fact a problematic way to develop positions for signage, because the follower cannot really know at what object the target was aiming. Signage can point to a way for the viewer/user, but cannot achieve the end-goal nor is itself the goal.

And what if, as Rückenfigur blocks the follower’s view, the follower ends up consuming the view of the figure by overcoming his or her very steps? In this way, the follower surmounts the obstacle of the obscuring figure by coming upon that figure and supplanting it. Acconci noted this possibility in his writings on Following Piece: “Place is a kind of battlefield – the notion that taking a place means taking it away from someone else. Space as domain, space as boundary, space as a kind of power.”

In considering a following piece in this way, we happen once again upon the sheer strangeness of the

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decision to trail and thus to consume. Jean Baudrillard, in discussing Sophie Calle’s own following piece, *Suite Vénitienne* (1979), describes this type of following as a “subtle” murder, consisting of “following someone step by step, of erasing his traces along the way, and no one can live without traces. If you leave no traces, or if someone takes it upon himself to wipe them out, you are as good as dead.”

If, as we have seen, “to design is to cut a trace,” then the abolition of another’s traces via following could become deeply problematic for the logic of signage systems. The murderous inclination identified by Baudrillard is taken from Walter Benjamin: As Tom McDonough has demonstrated, when considering following pieces, our associations inevitably turn to that most infamous of twentieth-century followers, the *flâneur*. In Walter Benjamin’s formulation, the *flâneur* is not merely an “aloof” observer, but is rather a figure “driven by suspicion and longing in equal measure,” and acts as a detective might, following his suspects to discover their motives. This is why, for Benjamin, any path might “lead [the detective *flâneur*] to a crime,” either because the erasing of traces results in the *flâneur* committing his subtle murder or because he inevitably witnesses it. Therefore, McDonough questions Acconci’s motivation in undertaking *Following Piece*: “Was he the detective observing his subject, or was he the sociopath stalking his mark?”

For Acconci himself, the situation was more complicated: he rejected the identification of the artist as a spy, but rather was interested in the idea that the audience of the piece included the

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355 McDonough, 108.
people caught spying. Either way, Acconci acknowledged that his role in *Following Piece* was complicated by the fact that he was a “spectator in a kind of uneasy position: he’s seeing something private, so he isn’t in the ordinary position of a spectator.”

Similarly, the well-intentioned Unimark following piece, designed to create signs for the safety and comfort of commuters, was carried out with an assumption of control on the part of the designers and the concomitant suffocation of individual marks on the system; individual preferences are subsumed in this public system. Noorda’s partner, Massimo Vignelli, described their execution of the following piece and its attendant signage thus:

*The wrong approach is to do it on a democratic basis. There can be no democracy in something like this. It should be done in terms of imposition. There should be studies beforehand, but the moment the proposal is presented, there should no longer be anything to test. Transportation is a service, not a consumer product; there is nothing to test.*

In such fraught situations of trailing and being followed, the detective *flâneur* witnesses acts of privacy being performed in a public setting (i.e. Acconci follows only until the target “enters a private place,” even though the events he witnesses, such as shoe shopping, are carried out with a presumption of privacy), which is what Benjamin acknowledges: “The street becomes a dwelling for the *flâneur*; he is as much at home

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356 “What I’m interested in is the idea of me doing a private activity and other people acting as what you said before, as a kind of voyeur, as a kind of spy.” Achille Bonito Oliva, “Interview with Vito Acconci, New York, 1970,” Encyclopaedia of the Word: Artist Conversations, 1968-2008 (Milan: Skira, 2010): 29. “In *Following Piece* my space and time are being controlled: I’m following a person, but I’m certainly not a spy, I’m being dragged along.” Liza Béar, “... a drift with a drive at the back of its mind: Interview with Vito Acconci,” Avalanche 6 (Fall 1972): 72.

357 “Interview with Vito Acconci,” 29.

358 Massimo Vignelli, as quoted in John Lahr, “The Cities: New York is New York – Alas,” Print 22 (March 1968): 53. Among other things, it is interesting to consider Vignelli’s anti-market testing stance in the light of advertising’s “creative revolution” discussed in chapters 1 and 2.

among the façades of houses as a citizen is in his four walls.”360 The street becomes a dwelling for the flâneur detective, though, when he follows and someone else’s traces are erased, when the target’s habits are subsumed. The paranoiac cycle set in motion by the decision to follow continues.

But perhaps there is a third option for signage, one that takes into account the blocked view that cannot immediately be seen and the absorbed view that the follower will come upon after a moment. This option comes from an awareness of the repetitive gesture, borrowed from others and reconceived by the follower and subsequently by the viewer/user as their own. In an assessment of Following Piece, Acconci noted that, “I can move, in real space… by tying myself into a system (another agent, a conventional situation) outside me. I become an agent (of my own activity) by becoming a receiver (of someone else’s activity).”361 In this system, what was one person’s unique gesture becomes another’s. When the artist or designer shares this gesture, either in a public performance, in documentation, or in visible signs, the gesture becomes communal. In what she calls “performativity” rather than “performance,” so as to distinguish repetitive acts from those that are singular, Margaret Iversen writes that, “‘Performativity’… signals an awareness of the way the present gesture is always an iteration or repetition of preceding acts. It therefore points to the collective dimension of speech and action.”362

The iterative performance, then, is not only conducted by Acconci or the designer. The


362 Margaret Iversen, “Following Pieces: On Performative Photography,” in Photography Theory, ed. James Elkins (New York: Routledge, 2007): 97. As an aside, Photography Theory’s series preface begins with this fascinating ode to theory as sign system: “It has been said and said that there is too much theorizing in the visual arts. Contemporary writing seems like a trackless thicket, tangled with unanswered questions. Yet it is not a wilderness; in fact, it is well-posted with signs and directions.” vii
viewers of the pieces or signs re-iterate the performative, as well, making reading signs or
looking at *Following Piece* the visual equivalent of physical following. This awareness of
looking as following proposes close looking as vital to the endeavor and makes the
viewer conscious of what, in the one of the most widely reproduced documentary
photographs of *Following Piece*, Vito Acconci, the followed, and the viewer-of-the-piece
are heading toward: a sign that reads SIGNS (fig.45).

The sign that reads SIGNS is a startling element of the city landscape in which
Acconci and his target travel. The viewer-of-the-piece has been traveling into the image
for such a way, following followers’ backs, that when the viewer comes upon something
that is turned outward, it stops the eye short. The sign is one of the only objects in the
image that is represented in its entirety. Along with the architecture on which it is hung,
SIGNS is the component in the photograph that faces out, that is presented frontally. It is
the only text in the scene: its dark lettering on a white ground demands to be read and
pushes SIGNS forward visually so that it almost seems to defy the logic of a vanishing
point, making it seem larger than nearly everything in the image. And finally, its
horizontal gash disrupts the vertical progression of follower and followed, and the
regression of linear perspective, in the photographic environment. SIGNS is not a stop
sign, but it does change the direction entirely, as indeed we see Acconci breaking off
from his prey in an adjacent image (fig.46). Everything now comes back at the viewer.

*The Problematics of Signage*

This is the power of a well-placed, or indeed ill-placed, sign. Signage has the
potential to change the viewer/user’s direction, to challenge choice, to show the way. The
presence of signage signals viewer/users’ collective action in subway stations and on city streets, but it also tells the viewers what city they are in. The perspective achieved from the close following of Following Piece is useful in a consideration of wayfinding’s problematics.

Signage systems are present in addition to structures; because they do not exist before the way that they indicate, they are always supplemental to architecture, roads, or monuments, and must be applied to a support of some kind. Therefore, signage swings between use and decoration, between the public and the commercial. If signage is applied to architecture, it runs the risk of being labeled “ornamentation” or “cosmetic,” not least because it is often assumed that buildings and streets are easily navigated by travelers who know the way. The authors of the 1967 report The Threatened City acknowledged as much when they called for a uniform typographic style for New York City signs and noted that, “The matter of style can be shrugged off as cosmetic, but this is short-sighted; instead it is a quick, meaningful way to make a proclamation, a show of determination that the city is taking its visual destiny in hand.”

If the application of a sign to a corridor could be misunderstood as ornament, even worse, then, must be civic signs installed in streets and places such as subway stations, which are mandated by the government. After all, as Adolf Loos suggested, “the epidemic of ornament enjoys state recognition and state subsidy,” which, of course, street signage does. Its development is determined by need, its paths constructed by public use. However, “Art,” Loos continues, “is the product of genius going his own way. His commission comes from

363 The Threatened City, 27.

God. To waste art on objects of practical use demonstrates a lack of culture.”365 Thus removed from individual genius, and certainly not commissioned by God, signage could be seen as “ornamenting” the world, not elucidating it. If civic signs are well designed, sometimes by the same people who design advertisements, how does one differentiate them from the commercial signs surrounding them, whose design is meant to appeal to an instinct beyond mere safety and which are far more proliferate?366 And, what if the city subsidizes their installation by allowing corporations to advertise alongside – or even occasionally on top of, as had been the case in the New York subway – directional signs? If “language is a labyrinth of paths,” as Ludwig Wittgenstein suggests, then the very layout of the city potentially becomes a discordant field of verbal images.367

365 Ibid., “Ornament and Education,” in Ornament and Crime, 186.


367 Ludwig Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, third ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2001): §203. From early in the criticism written about Acconci, an understanding that the artist employed Wittgensteinian language games has been applied to his art. In his 1970 essay concerning the new field of performance art, Willoughby Sharp discussed Acconci’s “concern with this improvement aspect of body works which seem to parallel the learning of language by training, a Wittgensteinian notion.” Willoughby Sharp, “Body Works,” Avalanche 1 (Fall 1970): 17. More recently, Craig Dworkin has also identified Wittgensteinian influences in Acconci’s poetry and critical writing. “Fugitive Signs,” October 95 (Winter 2001): 95. Acconci’s own notebooks do seem to indicate his awareness of Wittgenstein in the period. For example, his statement in the spring of 1971 that “Red is the same word as redness” recalls Wittgenstein’s musings in §239: “How is he to know what colour he is to pick out when he hears ‘red’? – Quite simple: he is to take the colour whose image occurs to him when he hears the word. – But how is he to know which colour it is ‘whose image occurs to him’? Is a further criterion needed for that? (There is indeed such a procedure as choosing the colour which occurs to one when one hears the word ‘….’) “‘Red’ means the colour that occurs to me when I hear the word “red” – would be a definition. Not an explanation of what it is to use a word as a name.” That these passages were also important to Jasper Johns, an influential artist to Acconci, in his color game paintings suggests another level of familiarity for Acconci. Acconci, Notebooks, no.7 (Spring 1971): 1; Philosophical Investigations, §239.
By its nature signage must navigate between the geographic, the pictographic, and the typographic. Signs exist in the city grid and the building matrix, but also impose themselves on those grids, without regard to the image decisions of city planners or architects. A well-spaced word represents the difference between legibility and uselessness, and therefore signage has requirements of uniformity, type size, and type choice that may not be in keeping with the nature of the surrounding environment (thus, a street sign in the medieval section of a town would not closely imitate the carved writing on a Gothic cathedral: it simply could not be read easily from a moving vehicle). But in addition to legibility, signage sponsored by city governments also indicates city mandate. In particular, sans serif typefaces such as Standard Medium, the typeface suggested by Unimark for use in the subway system, and Helvetica, the face with which Unimark is most closely associated, are used in varying frequencies throughout sign systems because of their straight-forward readability and denotation of cleanliness and order. However, and once again we return to the uncanny quality of following pieces and signage, these type choices might also indicate authoritarian control. In an article drawing connections between Acconci’s poetry and his performance pieces, the literary theorist Craig Dworkin recognizes the same disturbing aspects about Acconci’s own words:

To what point have we been conditioned to respond without questioning to an all-too-familiar narrative… and to follow without resistance the trace of signs along a particular path within a discourse network – within architectures of words and things, and words as things. [Acconci writes in Notes on Language], “Oral language numbs. Written language demands…” But at what point do we refuse to participate?  

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369 “Fugitive Signs,” 113.
If written language demands, it does so via the meaning of its words and the way it uses them but also through the way they look. A sentence in capital letters reads more insistently than one set entirely in lowercase letters. A period at the end of a sentence dictates, whereas an ellipsis visually permits a thought to trail off. When paired with the right typeface, the written language in signs is not intended to permit much room for refusal.

In a June 1976 article called “This Typeface is Changing Your Life,” published in *The Village Voice* at a time when New York City’s sanitation vehicles were retrofitted with lettering that employed a Helvetica-based system and Unimark’s Helvetica-derived sans-serif subway maps and signage were beginning to be installed, the media critic Leslie Savan probed her unquestioning acceptance of Helvetica’s simplicity:

Helvetica signs ease us not only through building corridors, but through mental corridors. Ready for any mistaken move in a modern maze, a sign greets us at the point of decision, a mental bell rings in recognition, and down we go through the right chute! A slick-looking sign lubricates our grooves of thought and taste, making the product whose name it bears easier to accept.  

Rather than removing one from the cognitive ruts in which viewer/users might find themselves through force of commuting habit, a well-designed sign might be said to reinforce those tendencies. Using a typeface such as Standard Medium or Helvetica was important to Unimark because their very designs lent them dictatorial undertones. In the *New York City Transit Authority Graphics Standards Manual* released by Unimark for the subway system, Noorda and Vignelli wrote that,

> It is vital that all signs be read easily and understood quickly. This *demands* the consistent use of a distinctive typeface throughout the entire system. Research

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has shown that the most “appropriate” type face for this purpose is a regular sans serif. Of the various weights of sans serif available, Standard Medium has been found to offer the easiest legibility from any angle, whether the passenger is standing, walking or riding.\textsuperscript{371}

The language of the mandatory signs, too, reinforced the demanding character of the signage. Unimark identified three mandatory signs to be included in every station. These signs, noticeable within the overall system because of their smaller, square format and because of their red type on white backgrounds, couched all of their language in the negative: “Clerk not required to accept bills over 5 dollars;” “No littering/ No smoking/ No spitting;” and “Do not lean/ over the edge/ of platform/ enter upon/ or cross/ tracks” (fig.47) These required signs, also notable because their messages do not solely emphasize traveler safety, were intended to “limit… the behavior or action of the passenger” and were meant to be reinforced by their typeface and design.\textsuperscript{372}

But reading signs verbatim as they use language is difficult. SIGNS’ appearance in Acconci’s \textit{Following Piece} points to one of the formal oddities of signage systems: what the viewer/users are heading toward faces them. Thus, signs for the roads on which we travel run next to us, while those onto which we might wish to turn face us directly. Although the following of street signs has become such a convention that this may not seem to be problematic, in terms of their appearance in our mental maps, their placement might be reversed (and therefore, the street we are following is that which is in front or behind us and the street on which we wish to turn appears next to us). In later writings on


\textsuperscript{372} \textit{New York City Transit Authority Graphics Standards Manual}, 80.
Following Piece, Acconci elucidated this conception of facing: “Space is something that passes in front of you or beside you, the kind of space that you see while looking out a car window, looking out a train window, or walking down a street.”

If space is passing in front of or beside travelers, then when signs are read literally, they may not say what they intend to indicate. As passengers approached Unimark’s mandatory signs, would they have read the signage to tell them not to lean over the edge of the platform, enter, or cross the tracks as forbidding all of those activities, or would an earnest reader have only understood the first action as prohibited? After all, the text was not placed horizontally along the sign as a sentence would be written, and no commas were used in the sign. Rather, its design was vertical, and as the prohibition was only iterated with leaning over the platform, a quick look could indeed tell viewers to enter the tracks:

Do not lean
over the edge
of platform
enter upon
or cross
tracks

The ways that the viewer/users read signs may change what the signs tell them, and indeed, literal reading of signs is a technique used to discover faulty signage. The contemporary designer Paul Mijksenaar advises analyzing signage by, “remain[ing] innocent; don’t interpret, but take everything literally: if an arrow on a sign points right, go right and bounce your head against a blind wall, sharing the experience of all the users!”

What it means to approach a designed thing “innocently,” if possible, is a

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matter of debate. After all, to have designs on something implies that the design itself is calculating, even if the intentions are meant only for the good. Apparently, designers must design for all possibilities: if their viewers might see any aspects of a sign – or none of them – then the designer must be prepared for all possibilities.\textsuperscript{375}

Therefore, if we push the innocent reading of signs further, we inevitably begin to uncover some slippage in the logic of following pieces and their products. After all, if we follow signs as we are meant to, placing trust in them to lead us to where we need to go, we can only follow them innocently. If we were to turn around to certify that we are on the correct path, the backs of the signs will not confirm our way for us; in order to know that our direction is right, we must continue on to the next sign. Signs’ assumption that viewers will follow them in one direction was duly noted by Wittgenstein as he considered the question of rule following and breaking: “You approach from one side and know your way about; you approach the same place from another side and no longer know your way about.”\textsuperscript{376} The limitations of Noorda’s tree diagrams is that their very structure – stemming from one point, always making the correct decision, never turning around – cannot permit a mistaken turn or decision, even though the corresponding tracking maps showed subjects regularly making those mistakes.

The difficulty of applying tree diagrams to city planning had been notably critiqued by the architect Christopher Alexander as recently as 1965 in his widely

\textsuperscript{375} Perhaps the most famous example of “aspect-seeing” is Ludwig Wittgenstein’s discussion of Joseph Jastrow’s “duck-rabbit,” in which the duck-rabbit can be titled as such, and seen as a “picture rabbit” or a “picture duck.” In designing signage, designers must produce signs for those viewers who see the duck-rabbit or see it as a picture rabbit (as Wittgenstein writes, a “duck-rabbit surrounded by rabbits”), as well as for those for whom the sign might change aspects as they examine it. \textit{Philosophical Investigations}, pp.165-8.

\textsuperscript{376} \textit{Philosophical Investigations}, §203.
Alexander argued that a tree diagram is logically unable to suggest the complexity of cities because it insists on a top-down derivation of planning and decision-making, as opposed to an organic and messy development of interconnected neighborhoods, new and old development, and multiple modes of transportation. We can observe this in the design of Noorda’s tree diagrams: the diagram uses cladistic arrows, which point only in one direction and which are used in logic systems to suggest the formulation “if/then.” Because of its formal characteristics and its insistent directionality, a viewer would read the diagram consistently as involving if/then queries and decisions, and would assume a causal relationship between their travel need and the train they would take, one that necessarily does not take into consideration the mitigating circumstances of the subway station reality. The decision tree constrains itself by not permitting a change of direction or a new decision, a “fold back,” in which the traveler turns back and begins again somewhere else in the chain or moves laterally across the steps of the diagram. In an if/then chain, there is no opportunity for a “what then?” to occur.

Another look at the documentation of Acconci’s Following Piece can help us to visualize these problematics of if/then following. As discussed above, Following Piece is most often illustrated with images of Acconci’s back as he follows his target. Because it is his back that faces us, we step easily into the role of a follower and visually follow the photograph as it follows Acconci following. However, the same series of photographs that includes the image of SIGNS begins by facing Acconci and his prey (fig.48). In these initial moments of the following, everything is turned around and, though we see the

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377 Alexander’s essay was first published in 1965 in Architectural Forum. It was awarded one of the 1965 Kaufmann International Design Awards and was subsequently published in Design. Christopher Alexander, “A City is Not a Tree,” Design 206 (1966): 46-55.
target walking and Acconci following behind him, the photographer and viewer have not begun their following but instead are encountering the two men head-on. The reason that these images have been so little reproduced seems clear: visually they do not illustrate the concept behind *Following Piece*. Because the viewer and photographer are in front of Acconci and his prey, they are not coming after but rather are preceding the chain. Our understanding of the execution of the piece revolts: How can we witness following if we ourselves do not follow? And how can the target be ignorant of the fact that he has been swept into a serial activity if he observes someone photographing him and the people behind him on the street? The precession of the target in these few photographs changes the documentation of *Following Piece* from active pursuit to the frontality of conventional portraiture. In the images that face Acconci, it is the visual fold back that interrupts the logical flow of *Following Piece*. Acconci’s decision-making has been disrupted, as would Noorda’s decision tree be altered if a traveler changed his or her mind and turned back to look at the path already traveled.

*Why Follow?*

Furthermore, what about the viewer/user who has designs on designs, one whose purposeful deconstructions or misreadings of signs are a form of theoretical scrutiny or a mode of urban activism? As we have seen, signage must plan for all contingencies. Early in *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein writes of “a person [who] naturally reacted to the gesture of pointing with the hand by looking in the direction of the line from

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finger-tip to wrist, not from wrist to finger-tip.” Such a person might be confused by the directional of a pointing arrow, for if an arrow is designed with the shaft leading directly into the angle of the indicating chevron, such as $\rightarrow$, and as the arrows in Standard Medium are, the site of intersection may be visually weighty enough that the joint could contradict the direction of the arrow. Pointing arrows are thus not enough to signal direction because they can visually contradict their indication by their very design; they must be paired with other elements such as pictures, colors, lines, or words to suggest their directions, their “fine shades of behavior,” as Wittgenstein would have it. Indeed, in its signage suggestions Unimark consistently supplemented its own signs, pairing a pointing arrow with words indicating exits, transfers, and directionality and with color-coded subway line names listed in circles to avoid this possibility (fig.49). (“It seems signs can always point to the ‘doubt’ we assume they are meant to assuage.”) From the sign that points the way to the line that leads the eye, the path must constantly be reinforced by the designer.

Unimark’s signage suggestions were not consistently followed throughout New York’s subway stations. Despite Noorda’s and Vignelli’s insistence on mechanically silkscreened letters to maintain visual consistency, as the signs were installed throughout the 1970s, the Transit Authority commissioned hand-painted signs made according to Unimark’s specifications. Although the hand-painting approximated the typeface, it inevitably betrayed the individual quirks of the painters in the thickness of the letters’

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379 *Philosophical Investigations*, §185.

380 *Philosophical Investigations*, 176.

381 *New York City Transit Authority Graphics Standards Manual*, 64.

lines and the spacing within and between letters and words. In their designs, Unimark regularly drew the subway signs with a black bar across the top of the signs to indicate the metal housing into which the signs would be fitted so that they could be hung from ceiling hardware. These bars were interpreted by the sign painters as a design element, and so the New York City subway system maintains a decorative bar on its signs, even though it was never intended by the firm to be included in the signs themselves. To Noorda’s and Vignelli’s further dismay, the Transit Authority did not install the new signs all at the same time, but instead fitted out stations piecemeal, with old signage coexisting with the newer signs. The 1969 Plan for New York City, published by the City Planning Commission a year after Unimark’s proposal, noted that “The signs and street furniture of our townscape ought to be vastly improved. The Transit Authority did launch a program to redesign the incredibly complicated signs of the subway system, but it seems to have gone awry and the maze is as confusing as ever.”

Unfortunately for Unimark and the city, the situation did not quickly improve. Writing in 1979, fully ten years after Unimark completed its subway research, the New York Times architecture critic, Paul Goldberger, noted that,

The poor state of the physical environment of the New York City subway system has for years been matched by an equally poor system of graphics. What normal person, entering a subway station, could tell what trains left from there, where they came from, how often they came, or where they ended up? In many stations, the signs are so confusing that one is tempted to wish they were not there at all – a wish that is, in fact, granted in numerous other stations and on all too many of the subway cars themselves. And the system is so complex that one might feel that signs make very little difference – a rider may as easily find his destination by taking a chance as by any sort of careful planning.


Perhaps surprisingly then, despite the errors that occurred in executing Unimark’s subway signage system, passengers continued to try to follow the signs. Why the commitment to following signs and their rules, even when previous experience suggested that the voyage might be just as successful when undertaken as a chance operation? First and foremost, there must have been a hope that the signs were installed for the safety and efficiency of the people who followed them. A tourist visiting New York City via subway had no option but to follow the signs. Without a regular commuting habit to guide him or her, the signs were required to provide some sort of suggestion of the paths to take. If nothing else, it could always be assumed that a hopelessly lost visitor would leave the station and attempt a different approach.

But it is clear that Goldberger and the other design critics examined in this chapter (and even Acconci himself, who is documented using the subway throughout two performances pieces, Room Piece and Service Area, both from 1970) were not tourists, but instead were seasoned passengers who used the subway regularly, who knew the trouble with the sign systems, but tried to follow their rules anyway. Interestingly, the reason to follow rules seems to reduce to convention. If “no course of action could be determined by a rule, because any course of action can be made out to accord with the rule,” then there is a strange circularity at play. Perhaps people follow signs because the signs are made to be followed. In *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein asks,

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385 In his notations for *Service Area*, for which he had three months of his personal mail redirected to the Museum of Modern Art and which required travel to collect his correspondence, Acconci writes, in images suggesting the train system, “Reasons to move: adapt to a circulation route (I can get on track – keep to the track – go through a point, go by a point).” Vito Acconci, “Room Piece,” and “Service Area,” *Avalanche* 6 (Fall 1972): 16-7.

386 *Philosophical Investigations*, §201.
“‘How am I able to obey a rule?’ – if this is not a question about causes then it is about the justification for my following the rule in the way I do. If I have exhausted the justifications I have reached bedrock, and my spade is turned. Then I am inclined to say: ‘This is simply what I do.’”

Even a seasoned traveler who knows the dangers follows signs and maps because it is simply what is expected to be done. To follow signs – to trust them and to expect that they are trustworthy – runs so deeply that it feels like nature, even when they are designed.

The convention of following signs must rely on a belief, reinforced by prior experience, that at least some signs are followable. Theoretically, the reinforced path should retain its pertinence even when it is consciously ignored. In such interventions as a Situationist International member’s tour through “the Hartz region of Germany, with the help of a map of the city of London from which he blindly followed the directions,” the map still played its part. Although this exercise in urban drifting called attention to the artificiality of such maps, it would not have been as effective had the map used not worked for its originally-intended setting and audience. After all, the Situationists did not suggest that their colleague should have walked through the city with a fictional map. It was precisely because the map was useful somewhere that it was so completely useless in this instance. Furthermore, such an intervention ironically underpinned the way that maps

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387 Ibid., §217.

388 Stanley Cavell notes that it is convention (not rules, not decisions), or “forms of life,” that are constantly emphasized by Wittgenstein. Thus, according to Cavell, “Wittgenstein does not discuss whether language games ought to be played, for that would amount to discussing either (1) whether human beings ought to behave like the creatures we think of as human; or (2) whether the world ought to be different from what it is.” Stanley Cavell, Must We Mean What We Say? A Book of Essays, updated edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002): 50-1.

and signs presume to be used: “When I obey a rule, I do not choose. I obey the rule *blindly*.”

It is the logic of sign systems, working in conjunction with their artificiality, that permits following and wayfinding to take place, while also allowing an element of user empowerment and urban transformation, the goal for which the Situationists and their American counterparts strived. Acconci was adamant in early interviews that he was practicing a Situationist “drift” through the streets of New York rather than an insistent “drive.” If a figure had not appeared to be followed, according to this reasoning, Acconci could just as easily have drifted by following signs blindly, not least because, as we saw, he identified himself as only one element in their larger system.

Signage can run the danger, however, of falling into what Baudrillard calls the “precession of simulacra,” in which “the map precedes the territory.” Thus can a sign become nearly more visible than the thing to which it points, because in order to lead viewer/users to landmarks, signs must become landmarks themselves. Kevin Lynch’s *The Image of the City*, a milestone text for designers who create a city image as well as Situationists who disrupt it, calls for a “sequential series of landmarks, in which one detail calls up anticipation of the next and key details trigger specific moves of the

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391 “Without such rationality... no meaning can be derived from chance occurrences and the individual is placed in a position of a ‘passive attitude of expectation.’” Ibid., 74.

392 These terms come from Acconci’s interview with Liza Béar: “LB: You want to slow down your drive into something more fluid. VA: Yes, because the drive is too much involved with points, and I want that surrounding more than I want the point... It could be a drift with a drive at the back of its mind.” “... a drift with a drive at the back of its mind: Interview with Vito Acconci,” 77.

observer.” Lynch recommends this sequence for emotional comfort as well as efficiency in travel, something the Situationists would actively upset. Though criticized for emphasizing the comfort that he believed came from orderly urban environments, in later writing Lynch also emphasized the pleasure viewer/users take in wayfinding in a city for themselves:

Unless we are mentally at risk, our great pleasure is to create order… This is the pleasure that designers so enjoy – and so often deny to others. The valuable city is not an ordered one, but one that can be ordered – a complexity whose pattern unfolds the more one experiences it… Hence our delight… in ambiguity, mystery, and surprise, as long as they are contained within a basic order, and as long as we can be confident of weaving the puzzle into some new, more intricate pattern.

The “ordering” of the city, then, is left up to the traveler who engages or rejects the signs that point the way. Thus the need for sequentiality, for performative iterability, for Acconci’s “adjunctive relationship.” This use becomes a method for visualizing the city and determining one’s place in it, as predictability allows the viewer/users to know their coordinates. Wittgenstein saw the same situation occurring in a philosophical “placing” of the user:

We can walk about the country quite well, but when forced to make a map, we go wrong. A map will show different roads through the same country, any one of which we can take, though not two, just as in philosophy we must take up problems one by one though in fact each problem leads to a multitude of others. We must wait until we come round to the starting point before we can proceed to another section, that is, before we can either treat of the problem we first attacked or proceed to another. In philosophy matters are not simple enough for us to say "Let's get a rough idea", for we do not know the country except by knowing the connections between the roads. So I suggest repetition as a means of surveying the connections.

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394 The Image of the City, 83.


If repetition is the means by which philosophers, designers, and artists survey connections, the way to employ such repetition is by instituting following pieces.

The idea of the well-designed city as a playground for the pleasure of its inhabitants signals an important rethinking of the role of designers in the development of the urban landscape. Although not often discussed, as artists such as Acconci moved into the streets from the confines of galleries, designers similarly moved from an almost exclusive focus on commercial design to concentrate more regularly on projects intended for the civic good. These moves were in part inspired by such artistic movements as the Situationist International, but were also deeply motivated by the student actions of 1968 and Vietnam War protests, during which activists occupied the streets so as to make their causes visible. Street protests are visually most successful when they deliberately subvert the rules established by street signage, when the protestors move the wrong way down the street or occupy a space where stopping is not permitted. Acconci observed in a later essay that,

What allowed me to shrug off (or not even think about) questions of illegality [in his artwork] was the general atmosphere of the time in which I made these works. This was the end of the 1960s, the beginning of the 1970s: it was the time of demonstrations against the Vietnam War (which appeared to validate the effectiveness of individual and community action against what was called – or called itself – the establishment.)

That artists and designers began to see these protests as viable ways to reconceive their own work marks a new moment of aesthetic conceptualization that would radically change the tactics that art and design deployed. As we shall see in the next chapter, the

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question of who defined themselves as “establishment” and how others avoided the moniker, along with the disruption of the city and the impulse to order it nonetheless will prove important to New York’s artists and designers in the early 1970s.

Rather than see sign systems as regimens that must be followed, then, it may be most interesting to consider instead their repetition as compilations of city aphorisms, those components that build up the visible city and that are “irremediably edifying.”

“An aphorism never enjoins. It does not exclaim; it neither orders nor promises. On the contrary, it proposes, stops and says what is, period that’s all.”

And so perhaps with signage. An aphoristic sign cannot make anyone do anything: it can only suggest a path or point to a landmark, even if it uses Standard Medium. The previous sign did, as well, and so will the next sign. Thus sign systems open themselves up to viewer/users having their way with them. It is up to the traveler to decide how to use them. Signage has to follow along.

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400 Ibid., 121.
Chapter 5: What’s the Matter with the Megalopolis?

As we saw in the last chapter, by the late 1960s and into the early 1970s, traffic jams, aging buses and subways, heavy pollution, and confusing street signage made transportation through New York City nightmarish. Though writing in a rhetorical style that included a note of hyperbole, the graphic designer William McCaffery claimed in an essay included in *Print* that an ant could make it downtown faster than any human traveler could, so congested was the built environment facing New York’s citizens.\(^{401}\) The crawl of traffic described in the article, though, was not viewed as merely a problem with cars, city streets, or density, but rather was laid out as a complex agglomeration of factors, one for which a simple fix such as a freeway cutting through Manhattan neighborhoods would not be an acceptable cure. To engage with such complexity would require collaboration from several areas of expertise. As we have seen in previous chapters, designers began to examine the problems facing New York City’s built environment in earnest in the mid-1960s, teaming with urban planners, the mayor’s office, and architects to devise solutions via visual communication. However, designers also began to understand that their own expertise would be called upon to complete these tasks. As McCaffrey wrote,

Those of us who live and work in this growing confusion of a city can’t sit back and expect a mayor or a governor or more policemen to solve our problems; particularly if we are art directors and designers and writers and photographers and filmmakers – i.e., communicators. We’re the ones who must face up to the

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\(^{401}\) William McCaffrey, “How to Get Downtown Faster than an Ant,” *Print* July/August 1972, 22.
responsibility of relating our work to the lives we live and the life we observe around us. We must apply our skills and tools to the job of giving form and order and meaning to urban processes. By making the city even a bit more understandable, we make it a bit more livable.\footnote{Ibid.}

Coming from the world of advertising, in which overhauls of corporate identities, branding, and advertising were adopted wholesale so as to optimize their effectiveness, graphic designers must undoubtedly have anticipated similar implementation of their civic designs, as well. The urban solutions proposed by these designers, though, whether Midtown street signage or subway wayfinding, were often only partially adopted, and thus, because of holes in the systems, were frequently as troubled with inconsistencies and missed opportunities as the largely undesigned-designs that had plagued the city prior to their interventions.

In 1972, the problems facing New York (and other major American cities) seemed to have reached some sort of breaking point. The theme of that year’s International Design Conference in Aspen was “The Invisible City,” recognizing that the situation in most urban centers had become so problematic that the cities themselves had become “invisible.” Conference speakers included such design luminaries as Louis I. Kahn and Paolo Soleri.\footnote{The Aspen Papers: Twenty Years of Design Theory from the International Design Conference in Aspen, ed. Reyner Banham (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1974): 8.} The chairman of the event, Richard Saul Wurman, published his handbooks \textit{Making the City Observable} (under the auspices of the Walker Art Center), which elucidated the ways that confusing design and unnecessary bureaucracy prevented cities from being easily understood, and the \textit{Yellow Pages of Learning Resources} (with MIT Press), a handbook that highlighted social services and educational
opportunities that existed in most American cities, in 1971 and 1972, respectively.\textsuperscript{404} And, in the fall of 1972, two Manhattan exhibitions ran at the New York Cultural Center in Columbus Circle: “Making New York Understandable,” a graphic design exhibition sponsored by the Art Directors’ Club, and “Making Megalopolis Matter: The Artists Answer,” a show that followed directly on the design exhibition’s heels and that featured several artists who were developing international reputations, including Yoko Ono, Hans Haacke, Vito Acconci, and Gordon Matta-Clark.\textsuperscript{405} This chapter focuses on the intertwined exhibitions in order to examine the interplay between art and design at the moment just before New York’s near collapse and subsequent revitalization as a commercial and financial capital.

\textit{Politically-Engaged Design in New York City}

“Making New York Understandable” grew out of several years of dialogue surrounding the possibility that design could improve life in New York.\textsuperscript{406} For example, in 1967, designers, educators, and politicians met in Central Park for a “design-in.” Although the event associated the visual communication developed by designers with the vernacular design (such as placards and flyers) created by protesters and borrowed


language from international protest movements such as sit-ins, in which protestors occupied places associated with authority and shut them down by these passive actions, the design-in was jointly sponsored by New York University, the New York Chapter of the Industrial Designers Society of America, and New York City’s Department of Parks. As noted by the New York Times coverage of the event, the day, “opened with a parade headed by the Department of Sanitation Band,” and featured speeches by the mayor, John V. Lindsay; Thomas Hoving, the New York City Parks Commissioner; and Councilman (and later mayor) Edward I. Koch. Although a political event developed jointly by protestors and public officials would undoubtedly have been anathema to other protest movements (as was certainly the case with recent New York-based public protests such as the 1969 Stonewall actions promoting equality and safety for homosexuals and the Columbia University riots against the Vietnam War and racially-segregated neighborhood buildings of 1968), this interaction between designer/occupier and the authorities, whether political or industrial, is typical of the design protest movements of this time. Such cooperation was undoubtedly cynical, as admen and art directors surely understood the power of selling their “products” to those with discretionary power over city budgets, but there was also a sense of common purpose shared between politicians and designers. Mayor Lindsay told a reporter from Print magazine that he was, “so deeply convinced of the contribution of graphic design, in the broadest sense, can make toward a more human and humane environment.” And Edward Koch was quoted as advising the participants of the design-in that “in any crusade ‘you must get some


408 Lahr, 50.
completely dedicated person who is almost at the edge of paranoia and who refuses to compromise, ” in order to yield the desired results.  

Perhaps, too, the comfort with the authorities was the result of designers’ own belief that working within the system would be most profitable to their movement. One of the design-in members said that, “the most difficult thing is to work within an establishment and continue to try to subvert it.” Designers’ work required them to negotiate with businesses and city offices alike. Because of this, they were made aware of the problems facing New York from an interesting perspective. Expected both to work within the system and to improve it, designers themselves would adopt the autocratic stance of those in power in order to insert their designs where they felt they were necessary. As noted in the previous chapter, for example, Massimo Vignelli, a design principal associated with Unimark International, the firm hired to revamp the subway system’s signage, suggested that “the wrong approach is to do it [implement design reform] on a democratic basis.”

However, by the time of “Making New York Understandable,” designers despaired of convincing politicians to install their designs as they created them. Despite its determination to impose its designs on the subway system, Unimark’s own work for the Transit Authority was never executed as the firm had intended. Instead, the signs were painted according to early renderings of the system and were installed in areas that

409 Schumach, 49.

410 Ibid., 49.

411 Massimo Vignelli, as quoted in Lahr, 53.
had not been indicated by Unimark’s location studies. As the members of the Art Directors Club saw it, New York’s greatest problems were those of navigation and communication. In the opening statement of the special issue of Print published to accompany the exhibition, Richard Saul Wurman, its organizer, included what amounted to a mission statement for the show:

The resources of the city are its people, places, and processes. It is our collective attitudes toward these resources that either encourage the destruction of the city through apathy and abandonment or reaffirm the necessity of the city to civilized progress and life itself by participation and use. Use as the place for learning; participation as the involvement of everybody in the role of teacher. People telling about why they’re doing what they’re doing where they’re doing it – the show and tell is the city itself.

We live in the un-understandable city. A place where public information is not public; a place that is not maintained because it is not creatively used… We have avoided our responsibilities to the city.

This statement makes clear the problems of New York as designers saw them: they were those of illegibility. An un-understandable urban environment without information made available to its citizenry could never be used efficiently because this prohibited people from improving their experiences of the city. Calling the city “un-understandable,” too, only underscored the ugliness of the situation as these designers saw it. Formed from a group of ad men, copy writers, and signage designers, the members of the Art Directors Club were dedicated to finding elegant solutions to sales and way-finding. An un-understandable city was one in which communication was impossible; it was literally unreadable.

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412 Ibid., 53.

The conviction that New York was a city that could not be understood stemmed from designers’ appropriation of the concept of “cognitive mapping,” as discussed by Kevin Lynch in *The Image of the City* (1960). Lynch noted that cities were easily understandable to people if they were navigable via landmarks and monuments, be they naturally occurring or man-made. Although Manhattan’s street grid should have made the city unproblematic for navigation, a combination of factors prevented its “understandability.” First, the grid pattern broke down in the oldest parts of the city, making the cardinal directions that were usually simple to determine via the equation of numbered streets to avenues more complicated to establish. Second, the train system of New York seemed to coincide with the street grid and theoretically should have been easy to memorize and follow, but because the lines did not always run directly under the paths of the streets and did not always feature stops at street corners, difficult wayfinding underground was echoed above ground, as well. Finally, navigation in Manhattan was complex because of that feature so characteristic to the city: its skyscrapers. Because of the density of New York’s skyline, “canyons” formed on the avenues between the tall buildings, rendering navigation by monument essentially impossible. Thus, faced with a break-down of regularized paths, conflicting routes above and below ground, and pedestrians trapped in the perceptual narrows between buildings, it made sense that the admen and designers of the Art Directors Club would turn to signage and graphic design problem-solving to create alternative monuments to those visually inaccessible landmarks.


The solution to such problems, for graphic designers at least, lay in legibility and in more easily readable forms of text. It is significant that nearly all of the designs proposed in “Making New York Understandable” to cure ills ranging from navigating confusing hospital hallways to discovering the best Chinese food in the city involved visual communication and text-based designs. To do so, though, the designers were keen to pare down their messages and to use the evocative, everyday, commonplace language gleaned from advertising’s decade-old Creative Revolution. Thus, text and image worked in many of these design solutions in a relationship in which a provocative image reinforced the message thrown to it by simple, easy-to-understand text. In advertising, as we have seen, this permitted the Volkswagen to become a necessary brand for the American intelligentsia; in civic design, these strategies served populist ends by opening up the city to navigation even without cars. Furthermore, by appropriating the language of protest movements, the performance strategies of sit-ins, and the visual punch of placards, designers turned their communications skills toward reclaiming the urban landscape back from advertising and the city government.

By making these moves, the designers’ projects anticipated Michel de Certeau’s manipulation of Wittgensteinian everyday language for political ends. In de Certeau’s formulation, Ludwig Wittgenstein’s insistence on practicing a philosophy that used everyday speech and did not resort to philosophical language that had no everyday counterpart served as a model for an attitude in which consumers developed an awareness of the use they made of the commercial, institutional, and governmental products and rules that infiltrated their lives. The deliberate nature of the practitioners’ manipulation of external forces and subversion of official or commercial expectations permitted them to

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assume a political – and defiant – stance that refuted the expectations of compliance from a passively indulgent and enraptured public. The designers included in “Making New York Understandable” assumed that the language and graphic strategies employed in advertising campaigns and the persuasion practiced on the purchasing public could be turned to altruistic, civic ends and therefore could encourage citizens to make their own use of New York’s services and opportunities if only they understood what they were.\textsuperscript{417}

Despite the designers’ best intentions, though – and we must assume that at least some of the designers included in “Making New York Understandable” were well-intentioned and shared the anti-war, anti-poverty, anti-establishment political values and beliefs of their counterparts in the New York cultural cognoscenti if not perhaps engaging in the more radical actions of street protestors and occupiers – the idea of design borrowing from protests and politics was viewed with critical grains of salt. After all, if designers could so easily assume the positions of activists for their civic projects, these tactics could (and sometimes were) very easily be turned to commercial devices, as well, thus perverting the concept of “use” and turning users back toward a consumer model.

In her review of “Making New York Understandable” published in \textit{New York}, the art critic Barbara Rose noted the need for such civic solutions. Comparing the stress of New York City living to the grace of Paris, Rose wrote,

\begin{quote}
The Paris \textit{Métro}, like that city’s logical, radial plan is a triumph of the Cartesian mind. By the same token, the incoherent, irrational chaos of competing and duplicating non-communicating bureaucracies of New York is the result of the American philosophy of piecemeal pragmatism and rugged individualism… [I]t is virtually impossible to understand New York, to find out what is going on or how to get there. For some years I believed information was deliberately withheld – that New York was a game with all the cards stacked against the provincial, the
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{417} For a recent critique of de Certeau’s discussion of the possibilities of resistance in the everyday as applied to art, see Tom McDonough, “No Ghost,” \textit{October} 110 (Fall 2004): 117-21.
tourist, the foreigner—so that only the strongest would survive. Now I know better. New York is simply the essence of the American Way, a triumph of the spirit of Free Enterprise.\textsuperscript{418}

But even while acknowledging the city’s desperation for such services as the Art Directors Club suggested in the exhibition, and applauding the designers for offering them when the city itself seemed to have lost interest in doing so, Rose remained suspicious of the social controls implied by the solutions. Her mistrust was prompted by her wariness of the designers’ use of language and letters: “Promising so much and delivering so little, their exhibition exposes the inability of media people to communicate real information. Confusing and unfocused, the displays look and read like ad copy, which has never been a means of communication, but a means of psychological manipulation.”\textsuperscript{419}

\textit{The Artists Answer}

Rose’s skepticism about the art directors’ priorities, messages, and manipulation identified the need for a critical response, a stance that would be exploited by the artworks collected in “Making Megalopolis Matter: The Artists Answer.” The bulk of “Megalopolis” was culled from an earlier exhibition included at the 1972 New York State Fair. Called “Enviro-Vision,” the show was a juried exhibition that included “the creative talents of artists, architects, and ecologists from all over the country” with the hope that the works selected would “act as a stimulus to all viewers to contribute their own ideas and talents to new and practical solutions to the basic architectural and environmental


\textsuperscript{419} Ibid.
problems facing the State.”⁴²⁰ Because it included the work of artists from around the country who were somehow meant to address statewide problems and make Manhattan residents care about them, the art from “Enviro-Vision” was little addressed in the reviews of “Megalopolis.” Simply not explicit enough and seemingly too provincial really to speak to the problems of Manhattan, the upstate exhibitors were dismissed as “tired and increasingly tiresome exercises in esthetic modification and fantasy.”⁴²¹ Added to the “Enviro-Vision” checklist were projects by New York City-based artists inserted by the director of the Cultural Center, Mario Amaya. What resulted was a hodge-podge of installations pulled from artists, scientists, and architects across America, academics, amateurs, student artists, and examples of some of the most sophisticated performance and conceptual art then being produced by the New York art scene.

If reviewers were suspicious of the designs that the “Making New York Understandable” art directors had on the city, they were no less skeptical of the art included in “Megalopolis.” Performance, installation, and conceptual art were, of course, only in their nascent stages at the time of the exhibition, and the critics tasked to review the show were bluntly vicious. For example, a “happening” intended to draw drivers’ attention to the quality of the street at Columbus Circle – a piece involving four hundred pounds of flour poured onto the pavement by sculptor Cristo Gianakos – was marred by a


⁴²¹ Ada Louise Huxtable, “‘Megalopolis’ Show: Artists and the Urban Scene,” New York Times 31 October, 1972, 54. Interestingly, a text written by Huxtable for her New York Times column was included in the Enviro-Vision catalogue: “We are only beginning analysis and evaluation of this kind of urban anatomy now. The job will not be done through ‘consensus by iterations,’ to quote a research institute program busy computerizing ‘expert’ opinion. It is going to be done by a new breed of planner. As the gentleman in The London Times points out, it calls for ‘scholarship, humility and expertise.’ With him, we ask, where are those planners now?” Enviro-Vision, 24; and “Satisfactions of the Human Spirit,” New York Times 30 November, 1969, D25.
heavy rainstorm that coincided with the event. The resulting flour tracks were described as resembling “more a soggy, uncooked pizza than a work of art” by one *Times* reviewer and prompted another to note that

“Making Megalopolis Matter” is the “artists’ answer” to the problem of making the city a better place to live in. Is it necessary to say more than that one solution was to dump several hundred pounds of flour in the street in front of the museum for traffic to run through? (The dismal event, made consummately dismal by a rainy day, was reported in last Sunday’s New York Times.)

Considering the problems the city has, the only valuable implication of this silly, pretentious show is that one place to begin solving them would be to run all the artists out of town.422

However, removing all of New York’s artists was obviously not a solution to the city’s ills. As the designers involved with “Making New York Understandable” observed, the city appealed to *artists*, who would live and work in cheap, unsafe neighborhoods, thereby making them safe for tourists and for middle-class residents to return to the city.423

It is important to recognize that though the shows were paired in the New York Cultural Center’s calendar and that “Megalopolis” was positioned as an “answer” to design solutions, the exhibits did not, in fact, directly respond to one another. While some of the design objects and plans were developed specifically for “Understandable,” many more were undertaken as commissioned projects well before the call for submissions came from the Art Directors’ Club. And very little of the art included in “Megalopolis” was inspired by its parameters either; some of it included performances that had been


423 The classic account of downtown Manhattan’s revitalization is Sharon Zukin’s *Loft Living: Culture and Capital in Urban Change* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982).
realized several years earlier or were objects that had been exhibited in previous exhibits in Manhattan or in the greater New York City area. So, whereas we may be tempted to read “Megalopolis” as a commentary on what was included in “Understandable” – and certainly, that is arguably justified given the way the exhibitions were set up by the institution – it seems clear that the artists were not critiquing specific designed objects. Neither were the designers deliberately setting themselves and their projects up for parody or perversion by fine art. Though it may be quite often the case that “mass culture is prior and determining; [and] modernism is its effect,” interestingly both the design and art included in “Understandable” and “Megalopolis” were responding to a mass culture that encompassed them but that was also larger than both of them. In both exhibitions, the participants’ response to the urban crisis facing New York was to make things, yielding creative correctives that elucidated the divide between art and design and their respective concerns while simultaneously collapsing the differences in their outputs, all of which were visual. Though the art included in “Megalopolis” often did not respond to the design in “Understandable” on a point-for-point basis, larger themes were addressed that make it clear that the problems facing New York were well-identified and experienced by both exhibitions’ participants; it was these problems to which the designers and the artists were responding, and we can productively read their work with each other as well as against each other.425


425 Possible exceptions might be the “Prattaxi,” a newly-designed, significantly smaller taxi cab submitted for “Making New York Understandable” by a team of students and faculty from the Pratt Institute and the “Foldmobile” exhibited at “Making Megalopolis Matter,” “which, when open, seats six and, when closed, fits through the front door or into a bicycle parking space.” Interestingly, though it offered the interior
Thus, Yoko Ono’s *Black Bag* action, conducted in Columbus Circle outside the Cultural Center during a day devoted to performance pieces, was not conceived for “Making Megalopolis Matter,” but rather was first performed by Ono and her then-husband, Tony Cox, in 1962. The piece was re-staged several times throughout the 1960s and 1970s, and was incorporated into Ono’s repertoire of performances protesting the Vietnam War (and was eventually performed with Ono’s third husband, John Lennon, who commemorated it in the lyrics to the 1969 song *Give Peace a Chance*: “Ev'rybody's talking about/Bagism, Shagism, Dragism, Madism, Ragism, Tagism…”427) (fig.50).

Within the context of “Megalopolis,” however, *Black Bag* did not read solely as a protest against American involvement in Vietnam. In its initial manifestations, Ono and Cox covered themselves with a black bag, removed their clothing and put it back on, and emerged from the bag; in the performance related to “Megalopolis,” performers wearing the bags meandered around the Columbus Circle area. If read as a stance concerning the possibility of living in what was deemed an unlivable city, *Black Bag* develops nuances about personal space, the boundaries of a citizen’s privacy, and the protection of her body. In his *New York Times* review of the day of performances, Martin Arnold noted that *Black Bag* was intended for “New Yorkers suffering from some form of paranoia, the

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therapeutic value being that once inside the bag they could see out but could not be seen. This led a girl with long dark hair, who was passing by, to say, ‘I need one.’”

Though Arnold’s tone throughout his review is one of skepticism and barely concealed bemusement, what if Black Bag’s earnestness were read seriously within the context of “Making New York Understandable” and “Making Megalopolis Matter”? In a city such as New York, facing constant congestion, rampant crime, and slow-responding bureaucracy, perhaps the passer-by’s remark about needing such a bag confirmed its aptness. Ono remarked of the Bag pieces that, “If we were not to have the shape we have, would we still be ourselves?... When you are in a bag, you can see outside. But when you are outside, you can only see the outline of the bag... When we hide what we consider to be all the exterior aspects of ourselves... we are still who we are.”

In her examination of Ono’s œuvre, the critic Chrissie Iles links the Black Bag performances to the Shadow pieces generated at the same time, in which Ono marked the outline of participants’ shadows on the pavement with chalk. Tying the two together, Iles writes, “Like the bag, the shadow changes its shape - a large object can create a small shadow, and vice versa - without changing the actual shape or size of the object, or body, it outlines.... If this is the case, then Black Bag offers its wearer a form of resistance, permitting a situation in which he or she establishes a visual presence on the street, but is not subject to its gaze.

In this way, Black Bag might be seen to anticipate – perhaps oddly – such proposals from “Making New York Understandable” as the Ginkelvan, a minibus

428 Arnold, 36.


430 Iles, 79.
designed by the Montreal firm Van Ginkel Associates and intended to run in special lanes on so-called “pedestrian streets” (fig. 51).\textsuperscript{431} (A common feature of many of the city-wide plans produced in the 1960s and 1970s was a proposal to make Madison Avenue a pedestrian-only thoroughfare to form the “Madison Mall,” some of them even going so far as to imagine an arcade covering the 54th-Street block between Madison and Fifth Avenues. The current pedestrian zones reclaimed from live Manhattan streets in recent years are remnants of these plans.\textsuperscript{432}) Though the differences between \textit{Black Bag} and the Ginkelvan are clear, the vehicle was proposed because city travelers faced problems similar to those experienced by Ono’s audience: cramped quarters, city services that were unresponsive to individual needs and peculiarities, and an overarching pressure placed on citizens to conform to standard expectations.\textsuperscript{433} The Ginkelvan was described as a vehicle in which the individuality of its riders was understood and taken into consideration: “It has 15 individual seats (with arm rests!), wide entrances for people with large packages, a floor six inches from the curb, a small ramp for wheelchairs and baby carriages, a standing area for six-footers, carpeting and large windows that can be

\textsuperscript{431} “Making New York Understandable,” 36. Interestingly, there were no projects in “Making New York Understandable” investigating the homeless situation in New York at the time, a population to which Ono’s \textit{Black Bags} seem ready to respond. I thank Aron Vinegar for suggesting the relationship between Ono’s \textit{Bags} and the self-protection of homeless people on city streets.

\textsuperscript{432} Ibid., 37-8.

\textsuperscript{433} “Did we say midtown Manhattan was congested? Within a six-minute walk from the proposed Manhattan Mall, nearly 800,000 people – workers and residents – are bumper-to-bumper at midday. This teeming mass comprises more than 70 per cent of the traffic, but gets only 35 per cent of the surface space. Guess what gets the rest? The Mall plan would exclude private autos and taxis from 42nd to 57th Streets, substituting benches, bus shelters, fume-free arcades. Sidewalks would be broadened (from 13 to 29 feet), roadways narrowed. There would be a two-lane vehicular roadway in its center and 10’-wide delivery parking zone, a plaza behind St. Patrick’s Cathedral, large trees (averaging 16 per block), and an extension of some commercial activities, e.g., sidewalk cafes. Regular buses, minibuses, and minitaxis would be allowed. (So what if private autos and taxis are \textit{verboten}? They only bring in 9 per cent of the people to midtown anyway.)” Ibid., 37.
In such claims for this version of public transportation, individual preference via mass transport trumped individual vehicles. Interestingly, renderings suggest that the seats all faced inward, leaving open the question of what kind of view was intended for the “large windows.” It is here that the relationship between the design work and the artwork produces creative friction. Though both, frankly, were outlandish designs that could not offer protection from New York-derived paranoia or that would not be put into production, we can see each as commenting on the situation of the other. Ono’s *Black Bag* provides protection from the gaze and maintains the boundaries of the occupier’s body while (most likely) inhibiting the wearer’s movements – she is free from prying eyes but limited in geographic scope. The Ginkelvan’s inward facing seats would have forced at the very least a communal gaze on its occupants but promised to make amends by liberating Midtown pedestrian traffic and providing ease of movement. Both projects demand compromises on the parts of their participants, provoking the question: what does it mean to have to forego some comfort – either physical or psychological – in order to establish one’s own place in the city?

_Vito Acconci, Signage, and Designs on the Community_

Another “Megalopolis” artist whose work demanded compromises on the viewer’s part (and often of himself, as well) was Vito Acconci. As we have seen in Chapter 4, several of Acconci’s performances and installations engaged with the logic and language of sign systems, taking them literally, but pushing them to their furthest degree. In this manner, Acconci’s pieces, though often outlandish and threatening, were “logical” and explored how letters, words, and language imposed themselves on their

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434 Ibid., 36.
readers. I would like to suggest that Acconci read the exhibition’s title, “Making Megalopolis Matter,” literally, installing a piece that responded to the crisis situation in which New York found itself. Although it could be read as a defensive posture, in that the artists’ works included in the show were meant to render New York important, the title can also be understood as using the stuff of the city, the megalopolis, as “matter” itself. In this suggestion, Robert Smithson’s understanding of language becomes important to my reading of Acconci’s contribution to this exhibition. In 1972, the same year as the two New York Cultural Center shows, Smithson added an addendum to an artist’s statement he had originally written in 1967: “My sense of language is that it is matter and not ideas – i.e. ‘printed matter.’” More than any other artist included, Acconci employed the [printed] matter of the megalopolis in his work.

Acconci’s facility with and reliance on printed matter was established early in his career as a poet. Throughout his writings, Acconci made clear that he was employing language and its letters as physical entities. In his essay “Early Work: Movement over a Page,” published in *Avalanche* in 1972, Acconci wrote that, “My involvement with poetry was with movement on a page, the page as a field for action. My aim was to find a language that went with the page rather than against it: use language to cover a space rather than to uncover a meaning.” If language moves with a page to cover it as space,

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435 The full text of Smithson’s artist statement, called “Language to be Looked At and/or Things to be Read,” which acknowledges the power of reading literally, also includes the statement: “The scale of a letter in a word changes one’s visual meaning of the word. Language thus becomes monumental because of the mutations of advertising.” As we have seen, the scale of letters was a common theme in the advertising, design, and signage literature of the time. Robert Smithson, *The Writings of Robert Smithson: Essays with Illustrations*, ed. Nancy Holt (New York: New York University Press, 1979): 104.

then that language is acting as the letters on signs do in signage systems and as the ideal
street graphics examples from “Making New York Understandable” would, as well.

“Making New York Understandable” offered several examples of model signage
systems, including Unimark International’s proposals for the revised signage on 53rd
Street (fig.52) and the firm’s recommendations for the subway systems designed by its
New York principals, Massimo Vignelli and Bob Noorda. Vignelli and Noorda’s projects
were intended for New York City and took into account the variety of its traffic patterns:
pedestrians, automobiles, and mass transit. “Making New York Understandable” also
included a display drawn from the recently released workbook Street Graphics, published
by the American Society of Landscape Architects Foundation, and an accompanying film
of the same name. Print’s feature on Street Graphics noted that “street graphics work as
an index to our surroundings so that people can find things… Included are examples of
the best street graphics from cities around the world (not including New York – does that
tell us something?).”437 Though “Making New York Understandable” was focused on
that city, the designer behind Street Graphics, William R. Ewald, Jr., did not find the
circumstances in other American cities that much better: “Driving down America’s street
is often unpleasant not only because it is ugly; it is fatiguing, impossible to manage,
calling for an effort either to read it [signage] all or not to read any of it, while attempting
to drive safely.”438

In discussing his design for and positioning of signs, Massimo Vignelli suggested,
“undemocratically,” that signs should be placed to avoid visual clutter and should be


438 William R. Ewald, Jr., Street Graphics: A Concept and a System (McLean, VA: The Landscape
installed only when and where a viewer might need them, as determined by the designer. Vignelli’s partner, Noorda, also told Print that the “[b]asis of [their] system was ‘to give the information only at the point of decision – never before, never after.’”439 By installing signs at the point of decision making, Unimark permitted its signs to insinuate themselves in the place of the monuments and landmarks by which a viewer would steer in a city navigable via cognitive mapping. Street Graphics’ author, William R. Ewald, Jr., assuming that the average reader of street signs would be driving a car, suggested, similarly, that “graphics are directed to shoppers as they pull in to park or after they have left their cars in the parking lot and are walking about, not to cars passing on the highway.”440 In addition to the fact that the installation of signage at the point of decision would have the potential to cut down on the tendency toward the “Times Square super graphics [of] vulgar vitality,”441 the designers were using information gathered from recently published psychological studies that examined the upper limit of items that humans could retain in their short-term memories. Ewald deliberately, and Unimark perhaps intuitively, employed George A. Miller’s discovery that at most, people were able to retain seven types of information fairly soon after being exposed to them.442 Because the units of information considered by the designers were not only words (and sometimes syllables, depending on how words were displayed on signs) and symbols, but also “color, brightness, duration, and size” – the very formal qualities that would go into

439 Bob Noorda, as quoted in ibid., 34.
440 Ewald, 8.
441 Ibid.
442 Ibid., 20-3; “Making New York Understandable,” 34. The study cited by Ewald is George A. Miller, “The Magical Number Seven, Plus or Minus Two: Some Limits on Our Capacity for Processing Information,” The Psychological Review 63 no.2 (March 1956): 81-97.
designing a sign – the “magical number seven” was quickly reached in most sign systems. It is no wonder, then, that these designers were adamant that information should reach the viewer/user in targeted bursts, only conveying what was needed at that very moment.\footnote{Ewald, 22.}

The manipulation of letters, leading to the manipulation of the viewer, recalls Smithson’s belief that “letters become monumental because of mutations” in their scale and deployment in a sign system.\footnote{Smithson, 104.} Similarly, Acconci acknowledged the manipulative and immediate quality of his poetry, one to which the reader responded in “a present-tense space of encounter in which the reader has little option but to retrace the path laid out by the poet.”\footnote{Liz Kotz, \textit{Words to Be Looked At: Language in 1960s Art} (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2007): 164.} One of Acconci’s poems, called “Text” (1969), reveals his use of language as such a system, occupying space on the page and making information available “only at the point of decision – never before, never after.” The poem begins,

\begin{quote}
READ THIS WORD THEN READ THIS WORD READ THIS WORD NEXT READ THIS WORD NOW SEE ONE WORD
\end{quote}

If the reader visualizes the movement of the eye across the page as each word is encountered, the act of reading the poem becomes equivalent to the act of moving through a space and coming upon signs just at the moment one reads them (fig.53). A comparison between the act of reading Acconci’s poem and that of reading street signs that come into view as a driver approaches them or reviewing Unimark’s chart mapping

\footnote{Acconci, as reproduced in Kotz, 166.}
the “sequence of decision points” in Grand Central Station (seen in Chapter 4), reveals striking correspondences, as the viewer/reader moves from each word or sign to the next. In Acconci’s poem, the word “then” plays the same role as that of the arrows in Unimark’s schematic, marking the directionality and linkages between one decision, or one word, and the next, and the viewer’s eye paces across the page in the direction laid out by the designer or poet. The eye consumes distance as the words occupy space. Each of these “texts” can even be similarly critiqued: both poem and map imply a single direction – forward – and do not account for the viewer who misreads or trips over a word, something easy to do if moving through Grand Central during rush hour or attempting to read Acconci’s tightly-packed poem printed entirely in capital letters.

In Acconci’s “Text,” the words’ placement on the page by the poet attempts two actions simultaneously. First, the letters and words become objects, signage, they are “not transparent” because they are “language to be looked at and/or things to be read.” The literary theorist Craig Dworkin notes that it is the written quality of Acconci’s poems that makes them objects:

Acconci’s poetry constitutes an extended meditation on the grammar of reading and writing: what it means ‘to read,’ and how wide a range of use the predicate ‘to write’ can compass. While many of Acconci’s poems are dictionary-driven, Wittgensteinian investigations of ordinary language, they all announce themselves as written, rather than spoken texts, and all put the act of reading and writing in question. Indeed, even when the ostensible source or subject of Acconci’s investigations is spoken language, his poems are still based on the opacity of the written text.

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447 Lahr, 51.


449 Dworkin, 95.
Acconci’s lines, however, are also declarative. Even though, as Dworkin suggests, they were not written with the intention that they be read aloud, they do make statements, and in this sense they are performative. Acconci’s directives to the reader, Ewald’s advice to the street graphics designer, and Unimark’s directions to the viewer/user, are speech (language) acts: “Speech acts (or what Wittgenstein calls language games) define utterances in terms of their pragmatics, the relationships established between addressor and addressee. These relationships are rule-governed, bound by laws of appropriateness and acceptability.”\textsuperscript{450} However, Acconci’s poem differs from and plays with the rules for signage in an important way: the possibility of something going wrong – of the reader stumbling over a word, for example – is not grounds for failure as it would be if a viewer/user misunderstood a sign and missed a turn or the correct path to a train. If the philosopher J.L. Austin called these moments of failure in speech acts “infelicities;” then it was seemingly Acconci’s project to explore infelicities in their various nuances and permutations.\textsuperscript{451}

And indeed, Acconci established his work as such. In “Notes on Performing a Space,” he wrote of his “reasons to move” (“I can go in order to have something at hand – I can have something in mind in order to go. I can go in order to escape something – I


\textsuperscript{451} “Besides the uttering of the words of the so-called performative, a good many other things have as a general rule to be right and to go right if we are to be said to have happily brought off our action. What these are we may hope to discover by... classifying types of case in which something goes wrong and the act... is therefore at least to some extent a failure: the utterance is then, we may say, not indeed false but in general unhappy.” J.L. Austin, \textit{How to Do Things with Words}, ed. J.O. Urmson and Marina Sbisà, 2\textsuperscript{nd} ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975): 14.
might have to escape something in order to go...”

In “Making Megalopolis Matter,” Dead End, was an exercise in being trapped (fig.54). Dead End involved, “A polygonal three-part bay window, covered by a transparent curtain, [it] is mirrored by a three-part wood screen a few feet away; in-between is a wood bench, an audio-speaker beneath the seat” (fig.55). On the tape that was hidden beneath the bench, Acconci speaks his lines while breathing heavily, “as if from running,” and performs the entrapment of the viewer/listener by claiming that he himself is trapped and cannot remove himself from the space. The text concludes with these lines: “i could climb up away from you/i could climb up out of your reach/i’d have to watch every move you make/i couldn’t turn to look out the window/i couldn’t let my mind drift/i’d want you to think i’m on your side/i couldn’t convince you/you’d be shaking your leg/you’d raise your hand/i’d have to watch every move you make/you’d be sitting there on the bench/you’d be making plans.”

The modes of entrapment occur in two ways in Dead End. First, in order to experience the aural element of the installation, the viewer/listener must remain in the small space that Acconci has carved out of a larger building. Caught between the opacity of the screen and the transparent curtain covering a closed window, the viewer becomes a mark in a closed system, as screen mirrors window, captor mirrors victim, and language mirrors action. In this sense, Acconci is employing the “narcissistic” feedback loop identified by Rosalind Krauss in her essay on early video art,

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454 Ibid., 309.
“Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism.” However, Acconci ambushes and implicates the viewer/listener as well by ensnaring him or her in language. *Dead End’s* text employs the future unreal conditional tense throughout: “If I would do this/then you would respond” or vice versa. By setting up the text in such a way that the visitor or Acconci are constantly preparing to respond to an action that could happen in the future – in the unreal – the clarity of the viewer/listener’s position in relation to the unseen, absent artist is never concretely established. This form of the conditional, in which an event will happen only if another event in the future might occur first, backs the audience into a corner, delaying them in the gallery in a literal corner. The constant risk, too, that there might be a failure of systems in the city (i.e. “If I would mistake my way, then the city could become un-understandable.”) is also suggested in this piece, pointing to a possible disruption in the well-designed city.

As with many of Acconci’s pieces from the late 1960s and early 1970s, there is a latent menace lurking in the structure of this installation. What is often left unexplored in Acconci’s work, however, is that the menace works in both directions, from the artist toward the viewer and back again to make the artist a potential victim. After all, the last line of *Dead End* is the ominous, “You’d be making plans” to retaliate, strike back, turn the tables. Whereas at first it seems as though the viewer is about to be turned into a statue by the artist, pinned between words and actions, instead the artist and viewer act on each other, rejecting the idea that either has a monolithic claim on the other. It is in

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456 “That the polity could be represented as a single gigantic individual indicated the respect for individual rights on which it rested. That this huge individual could also contain the multitude showed symbolically that this respect for individual rights was in fact the principle that unified the citizenry.” Michael North, “The Public as Sculpture: From Heavenly City to Mass Ornament,” *Critical Inquiry* 16 no.4 (1990): 866.
these interactions that Acconci moves far from art and its conception of an audience and closer to a dismantling of the principles espoused by the designers of “Making New York Understandable” by making designs on its public.

Because Acconci remained absent – entirely unseen by the viewer – his menacing relationship to the gallery’s visitors was “provable” only by the connection he made between the pause of the viewer behind the screen and the recorded sound of his voice. Acconci has suggested that by establishing his presence through his vocal response to the presence of an other, he has created a peculiar form of community, one that engages in a test of limits, that works via exposure. Dead End, then, through its use of words, develops a public of sorts, through which Acconci makes a connection, pushing the communication designers’ beliefs in the ability of words to form communities to their very limits. In his writings, Acconci discusses the viewer as a channel, as an extension of his letters; through the design of the space and his performance of words, he creates an aural image of relations between him and the visitor.

In turning the devastated New York occupied by “perverts of all persuasions” who implicate strangers into their fantasies of domination and subordination, into a

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457 Acconci wrote of his experience performing Seedbed, “I can go on as I think of you, you can reinforce my excitement, serve as my medium (the seed planted on the floor is a joint result of my presence and yours). You can listen to me; I want you to stay here; you can walk around me; walk past me; come back; sit here; lie close to me; walk with me again.” Acconci, Vito Acconci: Diary of a Body, 286.

458 Vincent Canby’s New York Times review of the 1981 film Escape from New York is often cited as a candid example of a critic associating the devastation of the New York of the 1970s and 1980s with dystopian film. Canby writes, “Manhattan is a giant island-prison inhabited by humanity’s dregs—murderers, terrorists, thieves, swindlers, perverts of all persuasions, petty criminals, and people who are permanently disoriented... There are no services, no government, no work. The place is a random trash-heap. Life is a permanent scavenger hunt, a nonstop game of hide-and-seek – when you’re ‘it,’ you’re dead. This isn’t the nightmare of someone who decided to stay in town last weekend but the startlingly eerie premise of ‘Escape from New York...’” Vincent Canby, “Film: ‘Escape from New York’ A Very Tall
design for a new community, Acconci perverts both the menace and the designs to make the city safer and more understandable. Acconci is a cunning artist, as he claims art must be to de-design the designed city, and he recognizes the importance of authoritarian spaces so that the public will activate itself politically. In his essay “Public Space for a Private Time,” Acconci notes that, “The built environment is built because it’s been allowed to be built. It’s been allowed to be built because it stands for and reflects an institution or a dominant culture… Public art exists to thicken the plot.”

In envisioning the model for the way that his public art might exist in the designed city, Acconci makes a claim for the way music manifests itself in a city. But in the language he uses, he could be describing city words, as well: “Music is time and not space; music has no place, so it doesn’t have to keep its place, it fills the air and doesn’t take up space. Its mode of existence is to be in the middle of things; you can do other things while you’re in the middle of it. You’re not in front of it, and you don’t go around it, or through it.”

In addition to this serving as an apt description of music in the city, it also mimics the logic that works through signs, pushing those logistics to their null point. They are not place, and yet they also fill the air while not taking up space. Constantly, signs are never fully in front of or in the way of their viewer/users but the viewer cannot go through them. In the same way that Acconci performed his words on the page and moved into the streets,

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459 “For [public art] to have a function in the design of city spaces, ‘art’ has to be brought back to one of its root meanings: ‘cunning’… The function of public art is to de-design,” Vito Acconci, “Public Space in a Private Time,” Critical Inquiry 16 no.4 (1990): 915.

460 Ibid., 918.

461 Ibid.
signage replicates the task of reading as performing and reading *while* performing. If it is the case that “a kind of art nearer the condition of nonart could not be envisaged,” then it is also seems plausible that the kind of nonart nearest to the condition of Acconci’s art was design. 462

*The Plan for New York City, Hans Haacke, and the Medium of Research*

If Acconci’s performances and installations recalled the logic of sign systems and the performative realization of communication design’s action language, then Hans Haacke’s contributions to “Megalopolis,” *Sol Goldman and Alex DiLorenzo Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, a Real-Time Social System, as of May 1, 1971* and *Shapolsky et al. Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, a Real-Time Social System, as of May 1, 1971*, borrowed urban planning’s design penchant for charts, figures, and the dry language of reports. Only one year earlier, Haacke’s one-man show at the Guggenheim Museum had been cancelled because of the inclusion of these two pieces. Thus, “Megalopolis” marked the first time that the notorious *Shapolsky et al.* had been exhibited in New York City, the city whose slum holdings the piece displayed. 463


Shapolsky et al. and Goldman and DiLorenzo, though ostensibly taking the same topic as their subject (the real estate holdings of rich men who were known as bad landlords), assumed different visual manifestations. Goldman and DiLorenzo was displayed with enlarged maps of pertinent sections of Manhattan, typewritten factual descriptions of the buildings owned by Sol Goldman and Alex DiLorenzo, and photographs of the buildings in question displayed in contact-sheet format running down the side of the pages to the left or right of the descriptions. These photographs, reproduced in the small size and surrounded by the black bands of contact sheets, resemble strips of film; the viewer can imagine running them through a projector and watching the real estate holdings of these men flicker past the eye as quickly as film moves through a camera (fig. 56). Such a display is necessary to suggest the vastness of the amount of real estate in question. According to documentation provided by Haacke,

In 1971, the partnership of Sol Goldman & Alex DiLorenzo represented the largest noninstitutional real estate holdings in Manhattan, with a market value estimated at $666.7 million (Forbes, June 1, 1971). In addition, the two partners were reported to own 300 real estate parcels in other boroughs of New York and 400 more nationwide... Goldman claims to own more than 600 properties, seventy-five percent of them in the New York metropolitan area.\footnote{Ibid.}

In order to convey the sheer numbers represented in Goldman and DiLorenzo’s portfolio, Haacke borrowed from the visual idiom of the movies. The impact of the image strips – the film running in the viewer’s imagination – paired with the map enlargements, on which Haacke had circled all of the properties owned by Goldman and DiLorenzo in the area, bluntly insinuated the methods by which these men made money from their fellow citizens.\footnote{And from luxury commercial towers such as the Seagram Building, discussed in Chapter 3.}

\footnote{Ibid.}
While Goldman and DiLorenzo borrowed from the visuality of film, Shapolsky et al.’s formal nods are wider-ranging (fig.57). In addition to the enlarged maps marking the locations of Shapolsky-owned buildings, Haacke exhibited Shapolsky et al. with charts that elucidated the linkages between the owners of the buildings and the investors who funded their purchases, as well as 142 8x10-inch, tightly-cropped photographs of the buildings with the ownership information and land values on typewritten sheets of paper displayed underneath. Installation images show the photographs and textual information mounted six-abreast within a single frame, and the frames hung horizontally in rows (in smaller spaces, the frames have also been installed on top of each other so that multiple rows of images are hung on a single wall). As with Goldman and DiLorenzo, the effect is one of a mass of accumulation, but the significantly larger photographs and horizontal framing of the images in Shapolsky et al. suggests the movement laterally across a city block rather than a vertical movement through a movie camera. The framing calls to mind the unfolding, landscape quality of an Ed Ruscha artist book such as Every Building on the Sunset Strip (1966), though the tight cropping and rigorously maintained viewpoint indicate a photographer on foot rather than a viewer passing in a car. Conversely, because of the regularity of the position of the camera, Haacke’s photographs may also superficially seem to point to an influence in the images taken by Bernd and Hilla Becher. However, in a recent essay, Benjamin H.D. Buchloh records and dismantles many of the supposed ancestors of Haacke’s documentation of Shapolsky’s real estate holdings. Neither indebted to the Bechers nor to Ruscha because of a lack of interest in the systematic recording of “topographical or typological” information, Haacke seems to be recording something else entirely and, indeed, Buchloh maintains
that Haacke instead re-establishes the components of factographic art-making pulled from early twentieth-century Russian Constructivists models while also pushing against the linguistic establishment of the “expanded field” that sculpture occupied in the 1970s.\textsuperscript{466}

In so doing, Buchloh suggests, Haacke’s work played with the aesthetic expectations and occupations of both Minimalist sculpture and Conceptualist installations.

But, of course, \textit{Shapolsky et al.} and \textit{Goldman and DiLorenzo} pull together and present their facts in such a way that they demand to be examined by Haacke’s audiences. Though there is debate about how effective Haacke’s political statements could be in the context of the larger political world,\textsuperscript{467} and what his politics were to begin with, from the very first, \textit{Shapolsky et al.} and \textit{Goldman and DiLorenzo} were read as foregrounding a political point of view. It was this assumption of the works’ politics that prompted the Guggenheim to cancel the artist’s 1971 one-man show, despite the fact that Haacke protested that, “Mr. Messer [the director of the Guggenheim] is wrong on two counts: First in his confusion of the political stand which an artist’s work may assert with a political stand taken by the museum that show his work; secondly in his assumption that my pieces advocate any political cause. They do not.”\textsuperscript{468}

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\textsuperscript{467} In a 1986 essay concerning Haacke’s work, Leo Steinberg writes of \textit{Shapolsky et al.} and Haacke’s later \textit{Isolation Box}, “Haacke was not merely ‘recycling minimalism’; he was implicitly chiding its uselessness, for if Minimalism lacked ‘contemporary use,’ what other use could it offer?... In the final account, Haacke’s \textit{Isolation Box} will embarrass the Minimalists more than the military, and that’s why it’s art.” Leo Steinberg, “Some of Hans Haacke’s Works Considered as Fine Art,” in \textit{Hans Haacke: Unfinished Business}, 15, 16.

\textsuperscript{468} Hans Haacke, as quoted in Grace Glueck, “The Guggenheim Cancels Haacke’s Show,” \textit{New York Times} 7 April, 1971, 52. Steinberg notes a worrying tendency in Haacke’s real estate projects to single out Jewish landlords, complicating Haacke’s claims of apoliticism. Steinberg, 16-7.
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That Shapolsky et al. and Goldman and DiLorenzo are free of political messages and are simply presenting facts is an argument that could be made within the context of the Guggenheim retrospective. But what about within the context of “Making Megalopolis Matter”? Was it possible to claim the political neutrality of facts within an exhibition that claimed that artists were answering for the ills of the city? Among the surrounds of the Cultural Center exhibition, and following the explicitly-stated political stance of “Making New York Understandable,” Shapolsky et al. and Goldman and DiLorenzo’s first Manhattan audiences understood these pieces as politically-motivated statements and suspected that they went beyond mere “factographic” presentations of information and actually advocated that legal action be taken against the owners whose holdings were on display. In his negative review of “Megalopolis,” Times critic John Canaday singled out Haacke’s work as one of only three items included in the show that were worth considering: “There are a few exceptions, for instance… a suggestion that something be done about slum landlords – if that comes as news.”469 A more receptive critic, Ada Louise Huxtable, also foregrounded Haacke’s work in her review, which warrants quoting at length:

The presentation is a mixture of trivia, irony, sight gags and a few items of impeccable commentary. The best of these is a work by Hans Haacke that was banned from the Guggenheim Museum in 1971, a highly publicized act that resulted in the cancellation of what was to have been a one-man Haacke show. The excluded exhibit shown here, based on facts, is a marvelous black real estate joke, deadly serious, like all good black jokes.

[Shapolsky et al.] purports to trace in charts and diagrams the ownership, transfer, and mortgaging of approximately 145 properties of mostly older, miserable, minor Manhattan building types over a 20-year period, an operation that proceeded under more than 70 corporate names, with a Shapolsky always involved…

469 Canaday, 27.
Three walls of the room are covered with meticulously recorded photographs of the tenements, taxpayer structures and vacant lots that were the subject of the transactions, with their valuations.

The Shapolskys may be model realtors. But through these graphic devices, the artist defines the world of incestuous real estate relationships, transient and dummy companies, slumlords and sleazy property hide-and-seek against which planners and mere people are powerless. Presented as a succinct visual phenomenon, it may or may not be art, but it is superb social analysis and it’s boffo.470

It appears that in the context of “Megalopolis,” Haacke’s work could not avoid its political attachments – or the experience of having viewers attach politics to it. The problems identified at the Guggenheim, which were couched only in the negative, were positively perceived as being part of the works’ appropriate civic stances, putting Haacke’s factographic research to use for “the common good.” However, this positive reception developed another issue for Shapolsky et al. and Goldman and DiLorenzo: it questioned whether or not they were art at all.

It must not have been merely the messages that reviewers believed they were gleaning from Haacke’s installations which led to the question of their viability as art. Rather, their very mode of address must have made them seem far closer to the design work displayed the month before in “Making New York Understandable.” In discussing Shapolsky et al., Leo Steinberg observed that,

> Obviously, neither the title nor the aspect nor the size of Haacke’s huge documentary were meant to delight. Like a good realist, the artist was putting factuality first, and like a conscientious designer, he was making form follow function; you can’t quarrel with that. What caused the alarm was the function itself: the delivery, to the wrong address, as it were, of information gathered on

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New York streets and in the County Clerk’s Office, itemizing the buildings controlled by one major Manhattan landlord.\footnote{Emphasis mine. Steinberg, 8. As quoted in note 467 above, Steinberg finally comes down on the side of “art” for Haacke’s work.}

Within the surrounds of “Megalopolis,” and following the politically-motivated visual communication observed in “Understandable” it may have been impossible in the fall of 1972 to see Haacke’s works as solely being politically-disinterested, formalist art. Instead, they must have seemed far closer to design work, both in their research methods and in their presentation.

If it is in fact the case that Haacke’s reliance on research as a medium made it seem visually more akin to design than to the art of the period, of what design were reviewers thinking? One of the complaints that surfaced in the design press in reviews of “Making New York Understandable” was that information about city government and services was freely available, but it was so tiresome and difficult to collect that the task hardly seemed worth pursuing. Similarly, one of Haacke’s defenses of his work was that all of the information on display in Shapolsky et al. and Goldman and DiLorenzo had always been available to anyone interested in pursuing the matter of their real estate holdings; the only issue was taking the time and the trouble to collate the findings

(Indeed, in a testament to how difficult it was to gather information from multiple sources in New York, Haacke was contacted by law enforcement officials after Goldman and DiLorenzo was displayed to request his files as supplements for a case they were building against the men.).\footnote{Haacke notes in his commentary on Goldman and DiLorenzo that “The partners have been accused of planting pimps and prostitutes in their residential buildings and of having tenants physically attacked by hired goons. During a strike by building employees at the Chrysler Building, they hired a firm related to the Carlo Gambino crime family for assistance. They have been charged with large-scale tax} The city bureaucracy in New York had reached the point where
there was simply too much of it to yield easily digestible chunks of information, and it was this overload that, designers believed, was in fact causing further disruptions in the city fabric.\textsuperscript{473} The designer William McCaffrey noted that, “The decay of the city increases as it becomes less understandable to its citizens,” and called in “Making New York Understandable”’s wall text “for the city’s ‘communicators’ in visual and verbal fields to address themselves to the problem of communication between the citizen and his habitat.”\textsuperscript{474} Several of the guidebooks and maps in “Understandable” aimed to make the information of the city clearly available, but perhaps none of the objects included in the exhibition attempted it at such a scale as \textit{The Plan for New York City}, a collection of six oversized volumes that examined New York City borough-by-borough, and neighborhood-by-neighborhood (fig.58). Undertaken in 1969 by New York’s City Planning Commission under the auspices of Mayor Lindsay and published by MIT Press, the \textit{Plan for New York City} offered a top-down masterplan that listed population numbers, demographic make-ups, services provided, and the various building types included in neighborhoods.\textsuperscript{475} \textit{Print}’s description of the \textit{Plan for New York City} praises its purview and its design qualities:

delinquencies, nonpayment of electric bills, and serious building violations which, in one case, led to the deaths of three pedestrians... Alerted by reports in the press, law enforcement agencies in New York requested access to the data in the work in the hope that it could assist them in an investigation of suspected ties between Sol Goldman & Alex DiLorenzo and the underworld.” Haacke, 88.

\textsuperscript{473} The term “chunk” in association with information was cited by Ewald in \textit{Street Graphics} as a term employed by cognitive psychologist “to mean units of a message, which can be quite different for different people in regard to the same message.” George A. Miller, as quoted in Ewald, 22.


Making the city understandable and observable on a larger scale is a more formidable challenge [than, for example, showcasing neighborhood information in “Flash Maps”]. Usually, especially if government is involved, results work against making public information public. Or perceivable. Happily, that isn’t the case with the massive New York “Plan.” The Planning Commission has organized and codified the city’s life and systems, suggesting growth programs in a form that laymen as well as “experts” can understand. In lieu of gobbledygook, there is straight talk on the city’s 2.3 million blacks and Puerto Ricans, on the number of unoccupied seats in its 900 school buildings, on which firehouses have which equipment – the works. Instead of fourth-generation mimeos on outdated data, there are 950 interpretive and graphic maps and charts. Hundreds of affectionate and moving photos of real people are integrated into the text, reminding us on page after page of what the whole thing is really about.476

In addition to the population statistics charts, the Plan for New York City also included aerial photographs that pinpointed where the new construction of public housing would be built, as well as zoning maps that proposed mixed-use buildings beginning in Midtown and continuing into lower Manhattan. It is this kind of design object, all six volumes of which were on display in “Understandable,” that would have made Haacke’s own work seem to point back to a design heritage.

However, if it is critics’ design education that prompted them to question Haacke’s aesthetics, then it is the politics perceived in Haacke’s work that can surely be taken back to a closer examination of the Plan for New York City. After all, what is the “straight talk” needed concerning New York’s black and Puerto Rican residents? The Plan for New York City, while a “remarkably prescient” document in many respects, was also a product of its era.477 The authors of the plan wrote,

> New York could never be an ideal city. It has too great a dynamism and its problems are immense because they are in part a consequence of it. The slums are a terrible problem, but the blacks and Puerto Ricans came to them because they

476 “Making New York Understandable,” 27. The volumes were designed by Don Page and Jan V. White.

were looking for a better life, and their new militancy, disturbing as it may be, is a sign of hope and not despair. The fierce competition for land, the crowding, the dislocations of demolition and rebuilding are vexing problems but they are also problems of vitality.\footnote{Plan for New York City: A Proposal, introductory volume, 20.}

The layout of the volumes of the Plan include what Print described as “affectionate and moving photographs of real people,” illustrating the lives of residents of the various neighborhoods discussed by the authors. Throughout, families, shops, and places of worship are depicted and described, all of which are intended to provide snapshots of the flavors of the neighborhoods. It is Harlem, though, that warrants a special section devoted to a discussion of the crisis of its neighborhoods which calls for the construction of high-rise public housing blocks (as opposed to the mixed-use, mixed-level zoning intended for midtown\footnote{Compare, for example, the large numbers of high-density housing projects scheduled for construction in East Harlem (145) with the photomontages suggesting a mixture of high-density residential towers and significantly lower brownstone buildings suggested for Midtown (55). Plan for New York City, v.4.}), and, for East Harlem, a removal of most of the captions from the volume’s illustrations. Apparently, the images are meant to speak for themselves, and what they depict are lives of misery that other neighborhoods and boroughs do not exhibit, as residents walk through garbage (fig.59) and the same family is depicted several times fascinatedly watching a television set tuned to no channel that displays only static (fig.60). In what is possibly the most startling image, a man approaches the photographer, menacingly advancing with raised fists (fig.61). The caption, “Upper Lexington Avenue,” includes no information about context or background.\footnote{Plan for New York City, v.4, 148.}

In contrast to the images included in the Plan for New York City, Hans Haacke’s photographs avoid any sort of social documentary tendency: his photographs are rigidly
factual and do not exhibit what could be perceived as empathy for the occupants of the buildings. Rosalynd Deutsch notes that “the real estate piece departs from the conventions of [a] representational genre in which similar iconography of lower-class urban neighborhoods has already entered the precinct of the modern art museum – liberal social documentary, or what Allan Sekula labels the ‘find-a-bum school of concerned photography.’” She quotes Sekula again later: “‘The subjective aspect of liberal esthetics is compassion rather than collective struggle. Pity, mediated by an appreciation of “great art,” supplants political understanding.’” It is this pity mediated by the planners’ understanding that “progress” creates the unavoidable displacement of families and horrific poverty against which Haacke’s pieces testify.

Buchloh writes that, “Haacke’s photographs construct the paradoxical coincidence of ‘straight’ and ‘committed’ photography, whole avoiding at the same time any association with the tradition of social documentary. Thus, for example, they programmatically exclude any reference to the actual presence of the inhabitants within the slumlord properties, and avoid even the slightest trace of any atmospheric or contextual surplus.” Buchloh’s last observation is not entirely true: in several of Haacke’s photographs, people are seen sitting on the stoops of the buildings (implying that they are residents of the building or neighborhood) or leaving through their front doors. In many others, passersby turn to look at the photographer and, in one instance, a child being pushed in a wheelchair waves at Haacke’s camera. Haacke’s tight cropping

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482 Allan Sekula, as quoted in ibid.

483 Buchloh, “Hans Haacke: From Factographic Sculpture to Counter-Monument,” 47.
removes unnecessary information, but it does not remove all of the human life surrounding and infiltrating the buildings owned by Shapolsky, Goldman, and DiLorenzo. Because such instances of human occupation would presumably have been easy to avoid, we can only assume that Haacke included them deliberately. The human population, not reducible to charts or maps, and not cropped out, is the necessary information here.

_Gordon Matta-Clark and the New York Subway Map_

Perhaps more than any other artist included in “Megalopolis,” Gordon Matta-Clark was familiar with the planning issues raised by the designers who participated in “Understandable.” As is well known, Matta-Clark received training as an architect but never practiced, turning his attention instead to art-making and what he called “Anarchitecture,” a deconstruction of architectural concerns from within the discipline and its objects.⁴⁸⁴ In 1972, Matta-Clark’s best known works, such as _Splitting_ and _City Slivers_, were still ahead of him, but, uniquely among the artists represented in “Megalopolis,” he was also featured in the publications celebrated in “Understandable” –

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as the subject of an Underground Gourmet review for “Food,” the restaurant he and several friends opened in 1971.

The Underground Gourmet was a feature that ran in New York magazine, a weekly alternative to The New Yorker that began publication in 1968. The graphic designer and illustrator Milton Glaser was the staff designer for New York but also served as the magazine’s Underground Gourmet food critic throughout the publication’s first decade. Several New York features were included in “Understandable.” The magazine itself was cited for “its… chic East Side style, New York takes a service approach that both defines the city and aims at making New Yorkers more community conscious,” as well as for its design sensibilities.485 New York’s “Handbooks,” special occasional sections focusing on such topics as “Getting the Most for the Lease: A Guerrilla Guide for Consumers” which were bound into the magazines, were praised as “the service approach raised to the nth degree,” whose “graphics – sort of an updated catalog style – are superb.”486 Finally, the Underground Gourmet’s reviews were also included, for “when subject and presentation are ingenious, guidebooks give the city an extra savor and scope.”487

The restaurant with which Matta-Clark was affiliated, Food, was the subject of a 3 January, 1972 review written by Glaser and Jerome Snyder which ran with an accompanying illustration by Glaser. The illustration, which depicts the restaurant’s customers seated on a motley assortment of unmatched chairs, stars a hirsute cook

486 Ibid., 60. The Handbooks were designed by Milton Glaser and featured illustrations by Glaser as well as a number of other illustrators, including Seymour Chwast.
487 Ibid., 62-3.
stirring pots (though tempting to identify him as Matta-Clark, the artist did not wear a mustache). Food is described as an experiment in communal dining, cooking, and restaurant management. Glaser and Snyder write,

Food… is a restaurant commune founded and operated by eight artists who live and work in the SoHo area. The culinary responsibilities are shared by Carol Goodden (soups and menu planning), Gordon Matta-Clark (everything), Robert Prado (soups, stews, and gumbos), Suzy Harris (vegetables), Tina Girouard (Cajun cuisine), Anne Marshall (dinners), Rachel Lew (guest dinners and factotum). In addition to the core staff, guest chefs are invited to prepare the Sunday dinner. Because the chefs are ever changing, the menu is unpredictable; but since all the chefs are gifted and vitally interested, the odds are good that you will eat well.488

After describing several meals, including lunch, dessert service, and dinner, the authors conclude, “Food opened a few weeks ago. The broad windows are still soaped and interior construction is at various stages of completion. [But] Food has already gained a strong following among residents of the SoHo area, including artists and young families. As we were leaving, a young woman who recognized us said somewhat touchingly, ‘Please don’t write about this place!’489

Thus even before his inclusion in “Megalopolis,” Matta-Clark and the communal restaurant with which he was affiliated were understood as attempting some sort of answer to the isolation and confusion of New York City, realizing McCaffrey’s suggestion that “what may [make you a better artist, a better designer] is doing your thing where you live.” Indeed, throughout “Making New York Understandable” and the projects displayed within it, such as the Plan for New York City, designers issued calls for


489 Ibid.
greater integration of New York’s boroughs, neighborhoods, services, and subway
system. That Matta-Clark was aware of the isolation identified by the designers and
planners is made clear in his interviews and writings. But whereas projects such as the
Plan identified Harlem, for example, as being economically and strategically removed
from the rest of Manhattan, Matta-Clark saw isolationist tactics as working the other way
round:

By undoing a building there are many aspects of the social conditions against
which I am gesturing: first, to open a state of enclosure which had been
preconditioned not only by a physical necessity but by the industry that
profligates suburban and urban boxes as a context for insuring a passive, isolated
consumer - a virtually captive audience. The fact that some of the buildings I have
dealt with are in black ghettos reinforces some of this thinking, although I would
not make a total distinction between the imprisonment of the poor and the
remarkably subtle self-containerization of higher socio-economic neighborhoods.
The question is a reaction to an ever less viable state of privacy, private property,
and isolation.

Rather than Harlem residents being kept from the activity of the city by all of the
problems identified in the Plan – poverty, drug use, lack of opportunities, even poorly-
designed neighborhoods – Matta-Clark places the responsibility for integration with his
own audience, the affluent art viewer who would be inclined to bypass such districts.

WallsPaper, Matta-Clark’s contribution to “Megalopolis,” is an exercise in such
urban visibility. The installation involves two presentations of the same material: color
images of condemned buildings in the Bronx printed on newsprint either stapled to the

490 Hilary Ballon notes the irony of these designs’ call for greater cooperation and coordinated project
management: “The publication of the Plan of [sic] New York City in 1969 thus marks a sea change in the
role of the City Planning Commission, which under the leadership of Donald Elliott, its chairman from
1966 to 1973, was an extraordinary laboratory of planning ideas. However, the appeal of top-down
master planning had passed; expertise was suspect, and New York City was in the process of
decentralizing its services and school system.” “The Physical City,” 146.

491 Gordon Matta-Clark, as quoted in “Gordon Matta-Clark’s Building Dissections: An Interview with Gary
walls in a random grid (so that no color combination would appear next to itself and no pattern of colors would emerge) or folded like newspapers and placed on the floor in tied bundles (fig.62). As with many of the art objects in “Megalopolis,” Wallspaper had been exhibited earlier in the year at 112 Greene Street, the art space with which Matta-Clark was most closely affiliated. Already in this early work, many of the trademarks for which Matta-Clark was known are recognizable. His work with abandoned buildings was just beginning, the vibrant color for which he would later become known surfaced, and the punning title pointed to later works that relied on wordplay and a nimble readership to convey their messages.

Matta-Clark’s installation, colorful wallpaper depicting houses about to be destroyed, turned the officially-sponsored destruction of city buildings into something aesthetically appealing. A wall covering that literally papered over other raw surfaces, Wallspaper acted as a visual panacea, a multi-colored scrim that served to cover over urban blight even as it exposed city-sanctioned cover-ups. In its way, the piece mimicked and mocked the fixes proposed by designers, exposing their fears for the reception of their master plans, attractive signage, shelters, and maps: that it would not in the end fix anything, that it would be seen only as cosmetic, that it was in the end only decoration. (Indeed, Walter Kacik, the designer behind newly-designed sanitation department signage and street furniture, described his work in an interview thus, “We didn’t want to

492 See the photo documentation in, for example, Corinne Diserens, ed., Gordon Matta-Clark (London; New York: Phaidon, 2003): 68–9.

493 At this point in his career, in addition to Food, Matta-Clark had performed his building cuts (Untitled, 1971) at the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes in Santiago, Chile; Pipes (1971), a wall cut-out-and-photograph installation; Open House (1972) a street installation on Greene Street involving a Dumpster fashioned into a residence; and Bronx Floors (Threshold) (1972).
contribute to the general Christmas tree effect you see in the city. We were also setting up a general sign control."\textsuperscript{494}

This despair was, perhaps surprisingly, admitted to in \textit{Print}'s coverage of “Making New York Understandable.” The last page of the special issue was devoted to “a note of frustration”:

If the solutions posed on the preceding pages remind us that it is possible to make New York understandable, we have to also be reminded that they are still far more the exception than the rule. The rule is pretty much the sort of informational mishmash called a map/guide that the New York transit system hands out to hapless subway riders. We defy you to find your way to Brooklyn without having to pore over this “guide” for half a day.\textsuperscript{495}

Even as the editors lamented the probability that many of the projects they featured in the exhibition and the magazine would not come to fruition, they saw one reason for hope. The description of New York’s current subway map ended with an asterisk, which pointed to this note: “As we go to press, we learn that the Metropolitan Transit Authority has replaced the old, unreadable subway map with a new, more legible one. Hooray!”\textsuperscript{496}

The subway map to which the editors referred was the (in)famous map designed by Massimo Vignelli.\textsuperscript{497} As discussed in the previous chapter, Vignelli’s firm, Unimark

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{494} Lahr, 55. There were reports that the new, Kacik-designed “Curb Your Dog” signs proved so popular that they were stolen from the streets on which they were installed. Kacik also redesigned New York’s garbage cans, replacing the old receptacles that looked distressingly similar to mailboxes. See Peter Blake, “A New Image for Garbage: New York Has Lately Had Some Pretty Sophisticated Ideas on Trash, Which Is Why Tourists Mail Letters in 5th Avenue Litter Cans,” \textit{New York Magazine}, 29 July, 1968, 22-7.

\textsuperscript{495} “Making New York Understandable,” 64.

\textsuperscript{496} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{497} For more on Vignelli, see Jan Conradi, \textit{Unimark International: The Design of Business and the Business of Design} (Baden, Switzerland: Lars Müller, 2010); as well as Massimo Vignelli’s own collections of his work, Lella and Massimo Vignelli, \textit{Lella and Massimo Vignelli: Design in One} (Mulgrave, Vic.: Images, 2004); Massimo Vignelli, \textit{Vignelli: From A to Z} (Mulgrave, Vic.: Images, 2007); and Massimo Vignelli, \textit{The Vignelli Canon} (Baden: Lars Müller; London: Springer, 2010).
\end{flushleft}
International, had redesigned the MTA’s subway signage system several years before. In 1972, before any concerted installation of the new system had taken place, Vignelli released the corresponding map. Vignelli’s subway map was unlike any previous New York subway guide, and is unlike the map used today (fig.63). Rather than drawing from the geography of New York’s boroughs and indicating the streets under which the subway lines run, the designer borrowed from the London Underground map and created instead a diagrammatic representation of the entire system, thus “setting aside geographic space for graphic space.”

London’s map, designed in 1931 by Harry Beck, removes all reference to the city above the subway with the exception of the Thames, which orients the user in terms of cardinal directions. In so doing, the subway lines themselves take precedence over the corresponding city, “the map’s representational priority essentially shifted from the particularity of the places the Underground linked to the idea of the Underground as a conduit for the flow of trains and people, and ultimately, capital itself.” Vignelli’s map attempted the same, bringing three different train companies running across multiple boroughs into a single entity called the subway.

The 1972 map, in addition to removing street names, skewed the geography of Manhattan, making the island appear squatter and fatter, to better permit the map lines representing the train lines to run smoothly and uninterruptedly. This geographic

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500 Hadlaw, 34.
distortion led to further warping: on the Vignelli map, Central Park is represented as a square rather than a rectangle. And, in order to develop visual coherence and promote ease of use, the map’s color scheme was strictly regimented. The overlying city footprint was rendered in shades of beige, with parks a greyer brown, and the water surrounding the island tinted a darker shade of tan. All of New York was subsumed to the colors of the subway lines, which were themselves anchored to the colors Vignelli had already assigned them as part of the signage plan.

The initial response to the maps was ecstatic. The New York Times reported that the new map was a “best nonseller,” with many of the 1.5 million copies of the first edition of the map taken by travelers in the first day they were distributed. An advance reviewer of the map reported that “each route flows, on the maps, as majestically as the Mississippi to the sea – in its own solid unbroken color.” However, New York’s subway stations are in fact skewed to the streets under which they run (in name only if nothing else), and the development of a diagrammatic map proved unworkable for New York City; at its worst, it was read as a willful refusal to acknowledge the city it served. Fairly quickly, qualms were raised about the “cynical reality” of the color scheme of the Vignelli map, which seemed to suggest that New York’s waterways and parks were, in actuality, mostly brown and grey. New subway maps were called for that returned to


502 The New York Times previewed the subway maps at a ceremony for their unveiling a week before they were introduced. In a sorry precursor to the map’s rocky reception, the paper reported that at the ceremony, William J. Ronan, the MTA chairman, approached a train to view the newly installed map, but before he could board “the doors closed and the empty train headed south. Embarrassed MTA employees spent 10 minutes bringing the train back.” “New Subway Maps Introduced; To Be Distributed Next Monday,” New York Times 5 August, 1972, 52.

“cartographic verities” such as a rectangular Central Park instead of giving the viewer/user only “the spaghetti.” Even the color of the lines was called into question. For some critics, the colors were not differentiated enough, leading to beliefs that people following the map would be led astray by them. But for others, the problems with the subway map’s colors were just as Matta-Clark predicted and the designers of “Making New York Understandable” feared: they were only Christmas trees. In a 1978 article calling for the map’s revisions, Paul Goldberger noted that, “The Vignelli map, a variant of which is still in use today, was at once the best and the worst of the attempts to bring order to the subways. Here, the colors used for each line became rich and almost luscious; the entire subway system looks like a skillfully drafted exercise in polychromy, as if a draftsman had attempted to echo a Morris Louis painting.” The subway map was called out for making the city, once again, un-understandable. Not art, and not useful design, it was decried as design playing at being art: to its critics it was merely ornament. In year following Goldberger’s critique, it was replaced, the geography of the city reinstated.

Matta-Clark’s “solution” for the city’s ills was something that would most likely have been unconscionable to the designers involved in “Making New York Understandable.” He called for an opening up of the concerns of the city and a stripping away of the beauty, rather than systems designed to make it legible. In his later

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504 Ibid.


interviews, Matta-Clark notes that he himself is interested in undertaking a project underground as a form of sculpture, performance, and (below) street theater. When asked about his relationship to performance art, Matta-Clark responded that he wanted for his work,

only the most incidental audience - an ongoing act for the passer-by just as the construction site provides a stage for busy pedestrians in transit. So my work has a similar effect. People are fascinated by space-giving activity. I am sure that it is a fascination with the underground that captures most captures the imagination of the random audience; people can't resist contemplating the foundations of a new construction site. So in a reverse manner, the openings I have made stop the viewer with their careful revealings....

Matta-Clark intuited that in addition to pleasure, it was ugliness that caused people to pay attention. It was the hiding in plain sight and the unexpected reveal that fascinated Matta-Clark, something he called “paper bag privacy,” the private space a paper bag covering a bottle of beer affords the drinker on the street. At the beginning of this chapter, I suggested that designers’ turn to civic designs using the language of advertising called to mind Michel de Certeau’s claim for a “practice” of everyday language. If this is so, then Matta-Clark’s play with civic design toward artistic ends might be akin to de Certeau’s perruque, the beard that covers mildly illicit behavior. The paper bag acted, for Matta-Clark, as a tactic for city-dwellers to maintain and protect their own space and interests. Like the artists he exhibited with and admired, Smithson, Haacke, and Acconci, Matta-Clark used the destruction of the city and the attempts at its resuscitation in his work, not

as means for civic improvement but rather to bring to light the city’s entropic decay.\textsuperscript{509}

According to Matta-Clark, this was inevitable, despite even good designers’ best intentions. It was an unavoidable part of the make-up of the evolution – or maybe devolution – of the city:

\begin{quote}
There are no solutions because there are no \textit{problems}

There are no solutions bec. There is nothing but change -

There are only problems because of human resistance - passing through resistance.

Surprise is passing through and seeing what you have always expected.\textsuperscript{510}
\end{quote}

\textit{Notes on a Conclusion}

Despite the publicity that these two exhibitions garnered, the important critics assigned to review them, and the major artists and designers who participated in displaying their work, “Making New York Understandable” and “Making Megalopolis Matter” have been largely forgotten. In fact, they have not been extensively discussed since “Megalopolis” closed in November 1972. At least one reason for their disappearance from the critical discourse might be that reviews of them were mixed. If the exhibitions received only very bad or only very good reviews then there would be cause for remembering, but good and bad reviews tend to average one another out and lead to a neutral position, one in which such exhibitions would not make an impact.

Reasons for a lack of historical notice about “Making New York Understandable” were suggested in a commentary written by Ada Louise Huxtable and inspired by the

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{509} Robert Smithson’s relationship and fascination with entropy is well documented. Acconci’s turn away from art and toward often strangely useless design has occupied him since the late 1970s. “For Haacke, architecture was never available as a site for the utopian expansion and collectivization of use value, nor was it a space of emancipatory communication. Instead, it was and has remained a space of social entropy and aesthetic decrepitude, a site of regulation and control, a locus of economic exploitation.” Buchloh, 43.

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exhibition. In her essay, Huxtable predicted that, even though the projects suggested by individual designers and firms were promising and that such obvious fixes as legible subway signage (for example) made sense, it would be only the enormously expensive and complex projects that would be completed. Citing such initiatives as the Bedford-Stuyvesant superblock, the Harlem River Bronx State Park, and Battery Park City, Huxtable noted that these were included in the exhibition in only the “most offhand way” (not least because the organizations undertaking these developments did not include themselves in the show – they only appeared as works already in process in other projects’ plans), despite the fact that “the big dreams are the most real thing about this unreal city these days. They have the substance of money, law, and steel.” According to Huxtable, everyday New Yorkers did not even notice these projects, either because they had been trained not to expect progress by state and city inefficiencies or because the superblocks and high rise apartment towers were too abstract and overarching to seem applicable to problems down on the ground, such as navigating the subway or safely crossing a street. “If there is another lesson in the show,” Huxtable continued, “it may be that it is easier to build immense, planned developments than to get a rational taxi or a clear street sign. We do the hard things first. In New York, in fact, we only do the impossible. Understand a city like that?” It was the most expensive and all-encompassing projects that would be funded and seen to completion because they were signals of big thinking and of large-scale planning and demonstrated some sort of control over the ungovernable city. Projects such as signage, which demanded coordination

512 Ibid.
between city bureaucracies, participation from designers, and good will from commuters, absorbing revenue without creating any, seemed doomed from the start.

But beyond the issues related to smaller tasks that Huxtable identified, there was also a growing dissatisfaction with officially-sponsored projects, even those that were successfully completed. New neighborhoods built on planning principles derived from European architects, or graphic design based on Swiss and German strategies of the typographic grid and sans serif typefaces, began to seem un-American and inappropriate for the design needs of the United States, especially in the face of protest cultures that themselves borrowed from the psychedelic design of rock posters and record sleeves.513 We might look, for example, to the writings of Jane Jacobs and the impact that they had to suggest such unease with massive governmental development projects. In *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Jacobs placed blame for large-scale apartment blocks and the social problems they highlighted squarely on the shoulders of Le Corbusier. Though acknowledging that Le Corbusier intended a “social Utopia” with his plans for the Garden City, Jacobs noted that

Le Corbusier’s dream city has had an immense impact on our cities. It was hailed deliriously by architects, and has gradually been embodied in scores of projects, ranging from low-income public housing to office building projects... This vision and its bold symbolism have been all but irresistible to planners, housers, designers, and to developers, lenders, and mayors too. It exerts a great pull on “progressive” zoners... No matter how vulgarized or clumsy the design, how dreary and useless the open space, how dull the close-up view, an imitation of Le Corbusier shouts “Look what I made!” Like a great, visible ego it tells of

513 Graphic design firms like Push Pin, founded by Seymour Chwast in 1954 and featuring the work of designers such as Milton Glaser (see above), were established to reopen American graphic design to idioms beyond the “International Style” espoused by Swiss designers such as Josef Müller-Brockman. To do so, they appropriated such visual languages as those from the Old West, Art Nouveau, and psychedelica, all ignored by high modernist design. See Seymour Chwast, *The Push Pin Graphic: A Quarter Century of Innovative Design and Illustration*, ed. Steven Heller and Martin Venezky (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2004).
someone’s achievement. But as to how the city works, it tells, like the Garden City, nothing but lies.\textsuperscript{514}

Jacobs and other protestors were successful in shutting down Robert Moses’ plan to run a highway through Washington Square Park by proving that traffic had not built up around the Park after it was closed to automobiles, and overturned plans to have a section of Greenwich Village declared “urban blight” so that it could be cleared for development.\textsuperscript{515} What Jacobs and her colleagues, along with a series of articles in the \textit{New York Times} focused on “the problems of New York City,” also demonstrated was that city officials had very little power to determine how land and buildings were built, used, or updated in New York, even if they were sympathetic to the protestors. Much more power rested at the state level (which was why Moses had been so successful) and with developers who had money to invest once blight was declared by planners.\textsuperscript{516} And the public reputations of New York’s city planners were further degraded when it was revealed in the \textit{Times} in 1966 that the chairman of the City Planning Commission had a city-map dart board game hanging in his office that “spoof[ed]” the “knotty issues” of city planning.\textsuperscript{517} When the chairman’s dart landed on “‘Kookie [Cooper] Square,’ site of a citizens’ revolt against urban renewal, the instruction is to ‘engage in dialogue with raging mob,’” and if a dart landed in “‘Wild West Village’ he ‘walks up six stories for


\textsuperscript{516} See the last article in the series, Richard Reeves, “The Changing City: Power is Limited,” \textit{New York Times}, 8 June, 1969, 1, 94.

\textsuperscript{517} The board was a Christmas gift from William F. R. Ballard’s staff. “City Planning, Played with Darts: Targets on Ballard’s Board are a Spoof on Knotty Issues,” \textit{New York Times}, 26 January, 1966, 1.
At best, the commissioner’s dart board made it appear as though he thought the problems facing New York were a game; at worst, it made his decisions seem arbitrary, as arbitrary as hitting a spot on a dart board. There was a sense that planners and designers were increasingly out of touch with the needs and concerns of the people who lived in the city, and in response, the public will was not with these large projects.

The case for design remedies was not helped, of course, by the fact that no civic projects from “Making New York Understandable” were successfully implemented. For all the press surrounding Unimark’s “imposition” of design standards on the subway, the signage system was never fully installed as Unimark had intended. Indeed, after “Making New York Understandable” closed, the situation in New York became exponentially worse, as infrastructure continued to crumble, the city defaulted on its credit in 1975, and services such as police and fire departments were cut in response to tightening budgets.

In a fascinating example of vernacular design, the Council on Public Safety (a group founded by police officers and fire fighters) released a 1975 pamphlet titled “Welcome to Fear City: A Survival Guide for Visitors to the City of New York,” as a response to the cuts in those departments. Featuring the Grim Reaper on the cover, the authors of the pamphlet warned their readers that, “By the time you read this, the number of public safety personnel available to protect residents and visitors may already have been still further reduced. Under those circumstances, the best advice we can give you is this: Until things change, stay away from New York City if you possibly can.”

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518 Ibid., 42.

519 Council on Public Safety, *Welcome to Fear City: A Survival Guide for Visitors to the City of New York* (New York: Council on Public Safety, 1976), 2. If the reader had to remain in New York, the pamphlet
have the wherewithal to keep its citizens safe, it certainly had no budget to make design improvements. In such circumstances, civic design was in a position to promise much but permitted to deliver little. Comparatively, advertising design seemed much more successful, but insinuated itself (sometimes forcefully) into citizens’ lives as well via billboards and print and television ads. No wonder, then, that the homemade design of *Fear City* advised readers to stay away.

Despite New York’s hazards, inconveniences, and abandonment by governmental officials, it makes sense that artists infiltrated New York’s neighborhoods for the inexpensive real estate and the opportunity to claim space in the city. It is a truism that after artists move into a neighborhood, their presence makes the city safe for other residents and businesses.\(^{520}\) And yet, as we have seen, one reviewer of “Making Megalopolis Matter” claimed that “one place to begin solving [the city’s problems] would be to run all the artists out of town.”\(^{521}\) “Making Megalopolis Matter” received significantly more negative reviews than did “Making New York Understandable.” Undoubtedly, at least part of the negativity stemmed from the fact that the reviewers assigned to the exhibition were not necessarily art critics. However, even art critics may not yet have recognized, in 1972, the future importance of young artists such as Acconci, 

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520 For an early example of this claim, see Grace Glueck, “Neighborhoods: Soho is Artists’ Last Resort Here,” *New York Times*, 11 May, 1970, 71. See also Charles R. Simpson, *SoHo: The Artist in the City* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981): 219-43. This concept has more recently been explored by Richard Florida in *The Rise of the Creative Class: And How It’s Transforming Work, Leisure, Community, and Everyday Life* (New York: Basic Books, 2002). Florida’s ideas have been taken to heart: In Columbus, OH, the location of Ohio State University, a recent development project touted its centrality as an “active corridor for Central Ohio’s creative class.”

Haacke, and Matta-Clark. In addition, with the exception of Haacke whose work was already notorious because of its rejection by the Guggenheim Museum, the artists in “Megalopolis” did not exhibit works for which they are best known.

The changing look of art in the 1970s must have made the exhibition difficult to appreciate, as well. Very little traditional painting or sculpture were included in “Megalopolis,” with space given over to performance, installation, photography, video, and conceptual art. While these are the media we would expect to see in a contemporary art show today, this was not yet the norm in 1972 (At this point, Acconci had been a practicing artist for three years and Matta-Clark was only twenty-nine years old.). The artists and the curator, Mario Amaya, were involved in and aware of aesthetic developments in New York, but the mainstream media was still to catch up.

Perhaps, too, the idea of art that took a subject, and more particularly, art that took the death of the city as its subject, was what was so objectionable. That art might have a motive beyond its own self-criticality (or “objecthood”) was something once again being explored by artists after the austerity of minimalism and a concept that critics were working through for their audiences and for themselves. That this art, too, might have a civic motive, one that was not easily reducible to formalist justifications as were the images of Pop art but rather pointed to – and in some instances even attempted to rescue – a city in trouble, was extraordinary. It is notable that the art included in “Megalopolis” that had an overt intention to improve people’s lots in the city was barely reported on. It was the artists who illustrated the decay and danger of the city and reveled in it who were singled out in the press, whether for praise or for critique.
Thus, after “Making New York Understandable” and “Making Megalopolis
Matter” were taken down, their audiences were left with visual remnants that seemed
suspiciously alike: visual objects developed with a civic intention, but without use or
application. I suspect that in blurring the boundaries between art and design, politics and
advertising, and word and action, rigid typologies wound up blurred as well, making
“Understandable” and “Megalopolis” difficult to assess and the work in them challenging
to classify. Unimark International’s sign systems and Vito Acconci’s word play do not
look alike, for example, but their deployment of language is surprisingly apposite, as
were their expectations of the viewers’ reception of the work, pointing to a
correspondence in the output of each that exploits the same fears, audience, and city.
Critiquing the Plan for New York City via Shapolsky et al. and vice versa suggests that
the intellectual space separating the issues of design work and those of artwork is
extremely thin and quite possibly porous. If the boundaries were flimsy here, they may be
so elsewhere as well. In the attempt to make New York understandable, the categories of
art and design became less so, and the words used to define and demarcate them
dissolved into Babel.
Coda

Although the Vignelli map was discontinued only six years after its introduction, its fame as an object has lived on. Its beauty and even its purported unusability have turned it from a disappointment to an icon. Stripped from its context and its use, it has come closer to the status of “art” than possibly any other design example of the period I have examined here, as it is hung on walls, acquired by museums, and treasured by collectors. In 2011, the Metropolitan Transit Authority reintroduced the Vignelli map… after a fashion. Relabeled “The Weekender” (fig.64), the map now exists online at the MTA’s web site and serves – perhaps fittingly, perhaps justly – to tell of mistakes, delays, and disruptions in service. On some weekends, Paul Fleuranges, the MTA communications director has said, the map might be “lit up like a Christmas tree.”

Figure 2 Alfred Hitchcock, Still from North by Northwest, 1959. (Image from Rob Giampietro, “Movement and Ideology in North by Northwest & The Limey,” Lined & Unlined [blog], 22 February, 2009, blog.linedandunlined.com.)
Figure 5 Saul Bass, poster for Vertigo, 1958. (Image from Jennifer Bass & Pat Kirkham, Saul Bass: A Life in Film & Design [London: Laurence King Publishing Ltd., 2011]: 178.)
Figure 6 Saul Bass, poster for North by Northwest, 1959. (Image from Internet Movie Poster Awards, http://www.impawards.com/1959/north_by_northwest_xlg.html.)
Figure 9 Saul Bass, title sequence for North by Northwest, 1959. (Image from “1000 Frames of North by Northwest, 1959. Frame 10,” Alfred Hitchcock Wiki.)
Figure 10 Saul Bass, title sequence from North by Northwest, 1959. (Image from “1000 Frames of North by Northwest, 1959. Frame 16,” Alfred Hitchcock Wiki.)
Figure 11 Are They Making Turnpikes Shorter This Year? Advertisement for Plymouth, 1961. (Image from Jim Heimann, All-American Ads: 60s [Köln: Taschen, 2003]: 155.)
Figure 14 Doyle Dane Bernbach, How to Do a Volkswagen Ad. Advertisement for Volkswagen, 1962. (Image from Clive Challis, Helmut Krone, the Book: Graphic Design and Art Direction After Advertising’s Creative Revolution. [Cambridge: Cambridge Enchorial Press, 2005]: 70.)
Figure 15 Doyle Dane Bernbach, Two Shapes Known the World Over. Advertisement for Volkswagen, 1962. (Image from Jim Heimann, All-American Ads: 60s, 195.)
Figure 17 Andy Warhol, Coca Cola, 1962. © The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Inc. (Image from ArtStor: ARTSTOR_103_41822001047248, artstor.org.)
Figure 18 Andy Warhol, 210 Coke Bottles, 1962. © The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Inc. (Image from ArtStor: ARTSTOR_103_41822001047255, artstor.org.)
Figure 19 Doyle Dane Bernbach, No Point Showing the ’62 Volkswagen. 1962. (Image from Hatena FotoLife, http://f.hatena.ne.jp/ chuukyuu/20080825023437.)
Figure 20 Andy Warhol, Double Elvis. 1963/1976. Seattle Art Museum. (Image from ArtStor: ASEATTLEIG_10312600076, artstor.org.)
Figure 21 Chris Burden, Trans-fixed. 1974. (Image from Fred Hoffmann, ed., Chris Burden [Newcastle upon Tyne: Locus+; New York: Distributed Art Publishers, 2007]: 297.)
Figure 24 Robert Rauschenberg, Stripper. 1962. Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Nationalgalerie. Art © Robert Rauschenberg / Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY. (Image from ArtStor, ARTSTOR_103_41822001599255, artstor.org.)
Figure 27 Robert Rauschenberg, Untitled (Man with the White Shoes). Detail. 1954. Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art.
Figure 30 Robert Rauschenberg, Trophy I (for Merce Cunningham). Detail. 1959.
Figure 31 Robert Rauschenberg, Trophy I (for Merce Cunningham). Detail. 1959.
Figure 34 Robert Rauschenberg, Black Market. Detail. 1961. (Image from Paul Schimmel, ed. Robert Rauschenberg: Combines, 268.)
Figure 36 Robert Rauschenberg, Estate. 1963. Philadelphia Museum of Art. Art © Robert Rauschenberg / Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY. (Image from ArtStor, ARTSTOR_103_41822001605185, artstor.org.)
Figure 38 Robert Rauschenberg, Bait. Detail. 1963.
Figure 39 Robert Rauschenberg, Skyway. 1964. Dallas Museum of Art. Art © Robert Rauschenberg / Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY. (Image from ArtStor, AMICO_DALLAS_103842727, artstor.org.)
Figure 40 Robert Rauschenberg, Skyway. Detail. 1964.
Figure 41 Hiya Folks, New York City subway signage. c.1965. (Image from William Lansing Plumb, “Telling People Where to Go: Subway Graphics,” Print XIX no.V [September/October 1965]: 14.)
Figure 42 Bob Noorda, Traffic flow, Grand Central Station. 1966. (Image from Paul Shaw, Helvetica and the New York City Subway System: The True [Maybe] Story [New York: Blue Pencil Editions, 2009]: 33.)
Figure 43 Bob Noorda, Decision Tree, Times Square Station. 1966. (Image from Paul Shaw, Helvetica and the New York City Subway System: The True [Maybe] Story, 34.)
Figure 45 Vito Acconci, Following Piece. Detail. 1969. (Image from ArtStor, ARTSTOR_103_41822001500139, artstor.org.)
Figure 46 Vito Acconci, Following Piece. Detail. 1969. (Image from ArtStor, ARTSTOR_103_41822001500154, artstor.org.)
Figure 48 Vito Acconci, Following Piece. Detail. 1969. (Image from ArtStor, ARTSTOR_103_41822000092831, artstor.org.)
Figure 50 Yoko Ono and John Lennon, Happening in a Sack. 1969. (Image from “Artists,” Flash Projects, http://www.flash-projects.co.uk/index.php?location=item&item=7408&exhibition=1297.)
Figure 51 Van Ginkel Associates, Rendering of a Ginkelvan. 1972. (Image from “Making New York Understandable,” Print 26 no.4 [July/August 1972]: 36.)
Figure 52 Unimark International, 53rd Street Signage Proposal. 1967. (Image from Jan Conradi, Unimark International: The Design of Business and the Business of Design [Baden, Switzerland: Lars Müller, 2010]: 164.)
READ THIS WORD THEN READ THIS WORD READ THIS WORD NEXT READ THIS WORD NOW SEE ONE WORD SEE ONE WORD NEXT SEE ONE WORD NOW AND THEN SEE ONE WORD AGAIN LOOK AT THREE WORDS HERE LOOK AT THREE WORDS NOW LOOK AT THREE WORDS NOW TOO TAKE IN FIVE WORDS AGAIN TAKE IN FIVE WORDS SO TAKE IN FIVE WORDS DO IT NOW SEE THESE WORDS AT A GLANCE SEE THESE WORDS AT THIS GLANCE AT THIS GLANCE HOLD THIS LINE IN VIEW HOLD THIS LINE IN ANOTHER VIEW AND IN A THIRD VIEW SPOT SEVEN LINES AT ONCE THEN TWICE THEN THRICETHEN A FOURTH TIME A FIFTH.

Figure 53 Vito Acconci, Text. 1969. (Image from Liz Kotz, Words to be Looked At: Language in 1960s Art [Cambridge: MIT Press, 2010]: 166.)
Figure 55 Vito Acconci, Dead End. Installation view at New York Cultural Center. 1972. (Image from Vito Acconci, Sarina Basta, and Garrett Ricciardi, eds. Vito Acconci: Diary of a Body, 1969-1973, 309.)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Address</th>
<th>Block/Lot/Size</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Owner</th>
<th>Transfer Date</th>
<th>Land Value</th>
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<td>372, Lot 38, 80 x 124'</td>
<td>17 story fireproof elevator apt. bldg.</td>
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<td>36, 50 x 100'</td>
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<td>3 story store bldg.</td>
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<td>10-11-1963</td>
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<td>104-86 Dyckman St.</td>
<td>61, 42 x 100'</td>
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<td>160-66 Dyckman St.</td>
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<td>2 story store bldg.</td>
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<td>1-2-1971</td>
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Figure 57 Hans Haacke, Shapolsky et al. Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, a Real-Time Social System, as of May 1, 1971. Detail. 1971. (Image from Brian Wallis, ed., Hans Haacke: Unfinished Business, 95.)
Figure 60 Burk Uzzle, East Harlem. New York City Planning Commission, Plan for New York City, 145.
Figure 61 Burk Uzzle, Upper Lexington Avenue. New York City Planning Commission, Plan for New York City, 148.
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