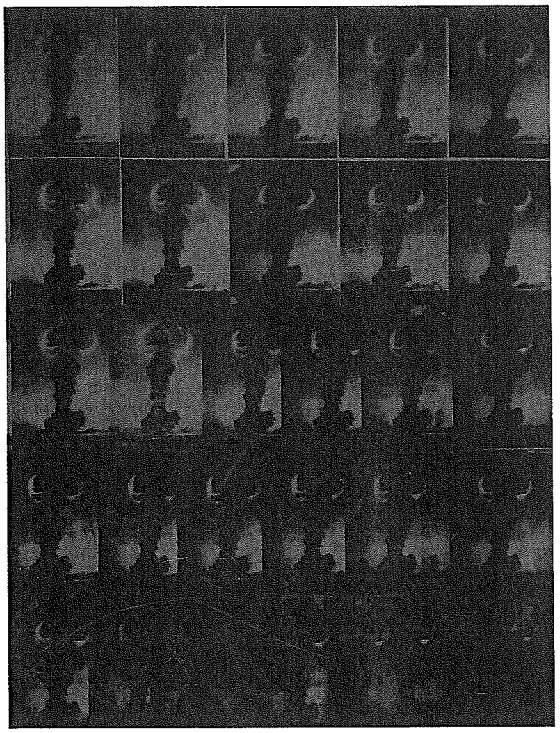
JOHN J. CURLEY



A CONSPIRACY OF IMAGES

ANDY WARHOL, GERHARD RICHTER, AND THE ART OF THE COLD WAR

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Jacket illustrations: (*front*) Andy Warhol, *Red Explosion (Atomic Bombs)*, 1963 (fig. 135), and Gerhard Richter, *Uncle Rudi (Onkel Rudi)*, 1965 (fig. 102); (*back*) John McHale, *Forms of Coding*, 1955 (fig. 17)

THE ART THAT CAME IN FROM THE COLD

The Cold War claimed its most famous victim on November 22, 1963, with the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. Paranoid theories involving Soviet spies, American double agents, and a mysterious second gunman proliferated from the start. Images from the assassination, like the ambiguous stills from Abraham Zapruder's home movie, which had unwittingly captured the crime, immediately prompted conspiracy theories.[1] As a spectacular event of global political significance, the assassination gave the ideological battle between capitalism and communism a specific story of personal and national tragedy. Working on opposites sides of the Atlantic, artists Andy Warhol and Gerhard Richter each addressed the Kennedy assassination in paintings of 1964: the former's *Thirty-Five Jackies (Multiplied Jackies)* and the latter's *Woman with an Umbrella* (figs. 1, 2). Not only do both depict Jacqueline Kennedy, the American president's grieving widow, but each also uses paint to approximate photographic effects. The artists' overlapping subjects and formal concerns at this moment are not surprising, given the international fascination with the story, as well as the role photographic technologies played in its mass media narration. What might surprise, however, is how these paintings engage the Cold War's conspiratorial culture: while they appear legible, Warhol's and Richter's portraits of the conflict's most famous widow are not what they seem.

Warhol's *Thirty-Five Jackies* is made up of thirty-five small canvases arrayed in a grid, all with the same silkscreened visage.[2] The artist selected a famous source image associated with the Kennedy assassination: Jackie in a bloodstained dress, looking on as Lyndon Johnson is sworn in aboard Air Force One (fig. 3). Warhol drains the emotion from this iconic photograph, however, through a close cropping of the widow's head from its larger context, a serialized patterning of the image, and the near invisible quality of Jackie's facial features on canvas. Her face is also partially obstructed, a detail heightened through Warhol's technique: his crude silkscreen method, which transforms the sheen and halation of Jackie's hair into a brushstroke-like blemish, threatens to overcome and hide her countenance. It is only because viewers are familiar with Warhol's canonical and ubiquitous photographic source in the aftermath of the assassination—reprinted millions of times in many different press sources around the world—that Jackie is legible in this painting.

In *Woman with an Umbrella,* Richter uses a different strategy in order to obscure the identity of his famous subject.[3] Jackie is not mentioned in the painting's title (unlike in Warhol's), and Richter also selects an unfamiliar photograph showing the widow in a pose of hiding: turning slightly away, covering the bottom half of her face with her hand. Similar to Warhol's rough silkscreening, Richter's hand-painted, horizontal blur also threatens to erase the image, while his application of glossy, dark paints in his depiction of the widow's hair and background engenders a confusion of figure and

FIG 1
Andy Warhol
Thirty-Five Jackies (Multiplied Jackies), 1964.
Silkscreen ink and acrylic on canvas.
100⅝ × 113 in.
(255.7 × 286.8 cm).
Museum für Moderne Kunst Frankfurt am Main, former collection of Karl Ströher, Darmstadt

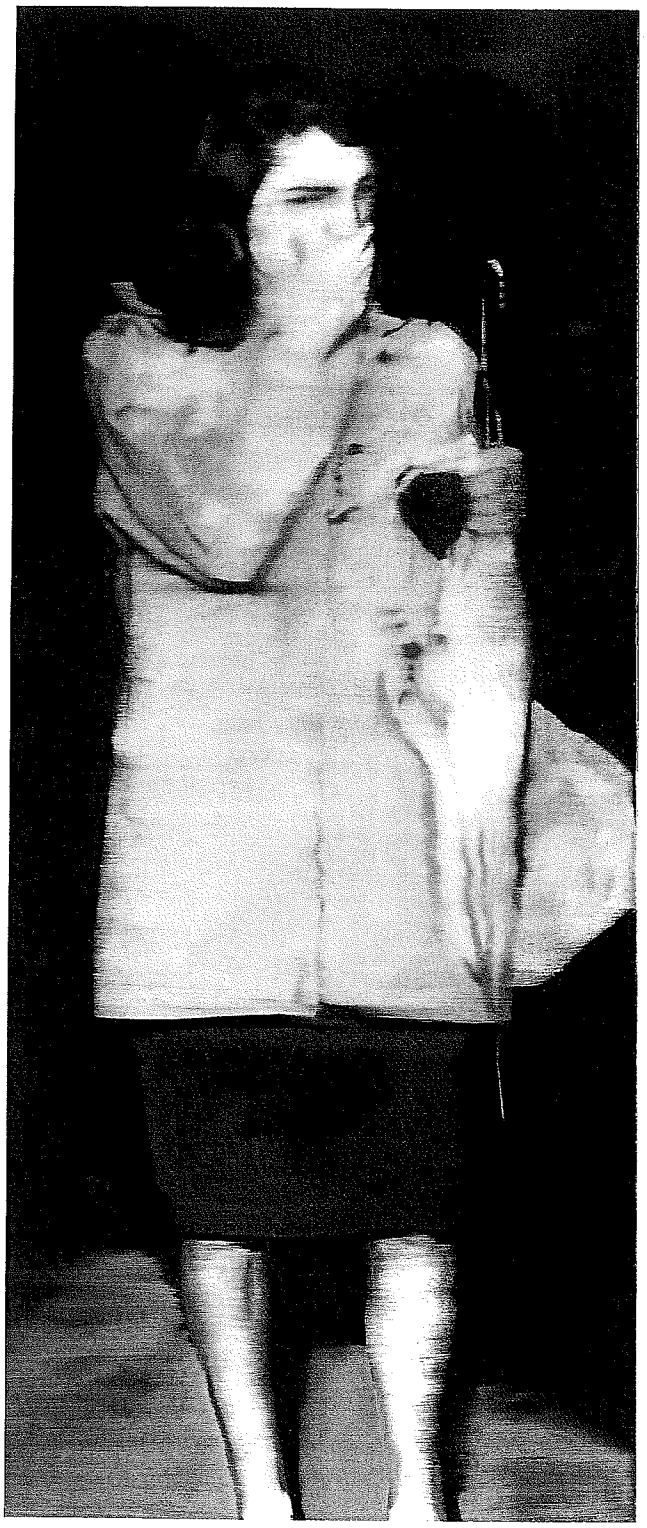

FIG 2
Gerhard Richter
Woman with an Umbrella (Frau mit Schirm), 1964.
Oil on canvas.
63 × 37⅜ in. (160 × 95 cm).
Daros Collection, Zurich

FIG 3
Cecil W. Stoughton
Lyndon B. Johnson Taking the Oath of Office on Air Force One, 1963.
White House Press Office, Washington, DC

ground. The point of Richter's depiction seems to be that photographs can dissemble; the painting's surface may appear to show something, but not necessarily anything useful. That said, without knowing the original source, how do we know that this woman is even Jackie? Richter has said so in interviews, but must we take the artist's word, especially when no source photograph has been traced?[4]

Despite these differences, one overarching similarity is striking in Warhol's and Richter's renditions of the former First Lady: both artists simultaneously depict and erase her.[5] Despite the visual ambiguity of Warhol's portraits or Richter's full-length depiction, the paintings each seem intelligible, at least at first glance. Only by viewing these respective paintings *as paintings,* as pictures requiring a sustained gaze—as works resisting the passive consumption of images associated with the mass media—can Jackie's pictorial strangeness emerge. Considering the mystery surrounding JFK's murder, which was already inspiring tales both plausible and far-fetched in 1964, Warhol's and Richter's paintings of Jackie thematize their own conspiracies of looking.[6] Under close scrutiny, the certainty normally attributed to photography is replaced with the doubt associated with handmade paintings. Warhol's and Richter's respective blurs in each painting even begin to approach abstraction, an artistic practice still popular in both the United States and Western Europe in 1964.

Around this same time, the artist Jasper Johns framed this matter of visual scrutiny in explicitly conspiratorial terms. In a sketchbook musing from 1964, Johns differentiates a "spy"—one who watches and interprets what he or she sees—from a "watchman," who merely looks passively. If the watchman "leaves his job & takes away no informa-

tion," then the spy, simply put, must make determinations based on a contextual history of visual clues and experience. Furthermore, unlike the watchman, the spy "designs himself to be overlooked"—he must remain hidden in the shadows.[7] While cryptic, Johns's remarks situate artistic practice as something akin to espionage and inform Warhol's and Richter's respective portraits of Jackie. If the ambiguity underpinning these depictions goes unnoticed, what does this condition suggest about images, especially those drawn from the mass media, during the Cold War? Can paintings be spies?

The shared qualities of these paintings of Jackie—in terms of both subject matter and their distorted approximations of photography on canvas—demand to be understood as constitutive of visual protocols that operated circa 1964, whether in Warhol's New York or Richter's Düsseldorf, West Germany. The paintings can suggest Jackie's international celebrity, the transatlantic reach of the mass media, and the ways that image replication is also a process of image degradation—seen in Warhol's and Richter's particular painted blurs. Despite their differences, I have described the paintings as expressing similarities that span geographic and national borders. These transnational affinities become even more urgent once one considers Warhol's and Richter's respective backgrounds: they were trained on the opposite sides of the Cold War.

In the 1950s, Warhol was a commercial artist in New York, and Richter was a mural painter in socialist East Germany before he escaped to West Germany in 1961. In this context, each was a cultural cold warrior, creating by hand the respective visual cultures of capitalism and socialism. Warhol's drawings from this period often appeared in advertisements, selling luxury items like expensive shoes. Richter's murals from this same era extolled the virtues of East German socialism. These artists, despite their antithetical backgrounds, arrived at a similar painted aesthetic in late 1962—fashioning blurry versions of found photographs, as with their portraits of Jackie Kennedy.[8] This eventual confluence of artistic strategies thus indicates something important about the Cold War: opposed ideologies could produce similar visual forms. Discounting the ideological basis of their artistic training—merely considering Warhol and Richter as representative of international currents of Pop art and image culture in the early 1960s—ignores important Cold War differences. Not only are they two of the most important individual artists of their generation, but their stories, when placed in dialogue with one another, become a means to reveal the similarities of the visual cultures of capitalism and socialism.[9]

This book seeks to situate Warhol and Richter as Cold War artists, going beyond the usual designation of "Pop art." Prioritizing this context can radically alter our understanding of these artists, especially given the limited role the conflict has played in the vast literature dedicated to each artist.[10] What follows also has implications beyond Warhol and Richter, as it can recapture the dynamic relationship between the Cold War and art. Not only does the Cold War provide a vital context for conceptualizing the production and reception of postwar art, but paintings—and images more broadly—were crucial to the actual waging of this largely nonmilitary conflict.

By theorizing the active relationship between painting and the mass media during the Cold War, *A Conspiracy of Images* offers a new art-historical account during the conflict's most contentious years, around 1960. This is the same period explored in John

le Carré's classic spy novel *The Spy Who Came In from the Cold* of 1963, from which I draw the title of this introduction.[11] That story of espionage and counterespionage, infused with ideological confusion and conflicting claims of Cold War "truth," underscores the art history that I relate in this book. The art that came in from the cold, like the novel's protagonist, Alec Leamas, acknowledges the false certainty of rigid Cold War choices and the ways in which a painting can readily confuse the conflict's binaries, often secretly, like a double agent. Warhol's and Richter's artworks can disclose a shared discourse between pictorial ambiguity and the Cold War's contest over ideology, thus complicating the conflict's persistent and powerful binary logic. Crucial to this revisionist history is my theorization of the visual protocols operative on both sides of the Iron Curtain, what I identify in this book as "Cold War visuality."

COLD WAR VISUALITY

With their shared subject and style, I have already suggested some of the ways in which Warhol's *Thirty-Five Jackies* and Richter's *Woman with an Umbrella* might constitute a Cold War visuality. But before further exploring this term and its significant implications for art history, I must first identify and briefly discuss its constituent parts.

The Cold War was the ideological battle between the Soviet Union and the United States that started at the close of World War II and ended suddenly in 1989 with the fall of the Berlin Wall and subsequent dissolution of the Soviet Bloc. While tensions between these wartime allies were nothing new, the defeat of Nazi Germany in 1945 spurred contentious questions about postwar reconstruction: who would rebuild, and thus control, a devastated Europe? Would it be Soviet socialism or American capitalism?[12] In a famous 1946 speech, Winston Churchill noted the increasing animosity between these two sides and coined a phrase that lasted the length of the Cold War: "An iron curtain has descended across the Continent. Behind that line lie all the capitals of the ancient states of Central and Eastern Europe. Warsaw, Berlin, Prague, Vienna, Budapest, Belgrade, Bucharest and Sofia; all these famous cities and the populations around them lie in what I must call the Soviet sphere, and all are subject, in one form or another, not only to Soviet influence but to a very high and in some cases increasing measure of control from Moscow separating Europe into two Blocs."[13] Churchill's chillingly industrial and militaristic imagery describes an impenetrable and opaque Iron Curtain of partition, carving Europe into an Eastern Bloc and a Western Bloc. This image of a mutually exclusive binary defined the Cold War, at least rhetorically, until its end in 1989—denying or repressing explicit overlap of these two ideologies.

The conflict escalated quickly after Churchill's 1946 speech and remained hotly contested until its conclusion, although there was a relaxing of tensions in the 1970s known as détente. Widely reported events exemplified anxiety on both Cold War sides, especially during the 1950s and early 1960s. Even an abbreviated list can capture period tensions: the Korean War from 1950 to 1953, the Red Army's intervention in Budapest to quell prodemocracy protests in 1956, the Soviet launch of the satellite *Sputnik* in late 1957, the failed CIA invasion of Cuba at the Bay of Pigs and the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961, the assassination of President Kennedy in November 1963, and

the escalation of American involvement in Vietnam beginning in 1964.[14] Presiding over these events was the threat of nuclear war's mutually assured destruction (aptly given the acronym MAD), endowing even minor disagreements with the gravity of potential apocalypse. This book considers these crisis years of tension and paranoia before the emergence of détente, with a focus on the early to mid-1960s.

The Cold War was about more than controlling territory and populations. It was also a fight between two worldviews or ideologies. American cultural critic Dwight Macdonald characterized the conflict at its start in 1948 as a choice between two "impossible alternatives."[15] Who would write the global narrative of history? Would it be told from a standpoint of class struggle or the accumulation of individual rights and property? Recalling Churchill's Iron Curtain terminology, the conflict's pointed rhetoric perceptually foreclosed the existence of any middle ground between the poles of capitalism and communism. This persuasive Cold War frame, especially during the 1950s and early 1960s, thus artificially organized the complexity and uncertainty of modern experience relative to the conflict's two ideological positions.[16] Partisans and media outlets propagated the binary, regardless of its basis in actual lived reality, as it allowed the ideological limitations and failures of each respective system to be blamed on an enemy "other." The binary logic of the Cold War even penetrated down to the level of the domestic environment, with the traditional American nuclear family serving as a bastion against communism in the 1950s, as scholars like Elaine Tyler May have demonstrated.[17] Both Cold War sides attempted to control perception, superficially organizing events and experiences relative to their own ideological preference.

Examining these frames, which manage human perception along ideological lines, engages question of visuality. This concept emerged in the late 1980s, in part due to a collection of essays entitled *Vision and Visuality* edited by Hal Foster. In the preface, he introduces "visuality" as a means to "historicize modern vision, to specify its dominant practices *and* its critical resistances." Vision is not merely a biological and a historical process but must be considered as something embedded within particular sets of conditions, technologies, and ideological imperatives.[18] In this same collection, Norman Bryson equates visuality with a screen existing between the beholder and the object of his or her gaze: "Between the subject and the world is inserted the entire sum of discourses which make up visuality, that cultural construct, and make visuality different from vision, the notion of unmediated visual experience. Between retina and world is inserted a *screen* of signs, a screen consisting of all the multiple discourses on vision built into the social arena."[19] To be able to perceive the existence of this mediating screen—especially the ways it changes according to time, place, and ideology—is to see the operations of vision and the ways various scopic regimes use its seeming naturalness for political ends.

More recently, Whitney Davis has suggested that art historians are uniquely placed to interrogate visuality, which he describes as the "culturality of vision."[20] This task is especially pressing for the Cold War, since the conflict was structured as a binary condition that attempted to foreclose interpretative ambiguities, no matter the nuances and contradictions of lived reality. Through visuality, we can understand the ways in which

FIG 4
Photomontage featuring Senator Millard Tydings (right) and Communist Party USA general secretary Earl Browder (left), 1950

vision was mapped onto ideology during the Cold War, how forces on both sides of the Iron Curtain managed perception as a means of social control. And while understanding the contested nature of visuality is important for any historical period, it is especially crucial for the Cold War. As media theorist Marshall McLuhan argued in 1964, the Cold War was "really an electric battle of information and of images."[21] With no direct military confrontations between the United States and the Soviet Union (other than proxy wars in Korea, Vietnam, and elsewhere), it was largely fought at the level of mass media representations. To comprehend Cold War visuality is to understand how images attempted to control the interpretation of events, and indeed, history.

Visual images from both sides, such as those found in newspapers, magazines, and on television, were relied upon as sources for impartial information but were also vehicles for propaganda. As such, I will consider the mass media as a "third space" of sorts, a discourse that supersedes the usual Cold War binaries. The German media theorist Hans Magnus Enzensberger realized this in the 1960s: "This [mass media] is essentially the same all over the world, no matter how the industry is operated: under state, public, or private management, within a capitalist or socialist economy, on a profit or nonprofit basis."[22] For instance, the hugely successful American weekly *Life,* long recognized as perpetuating a patriotic and staunchly anti-Communist stance throughout the 1950s, had admirers in unlikely places. In 1959, holding aloft a copy of *Life* in front of supporters in Cuba, Fidel Castro is reported to have said: "I want something like this."[23] Castro realized that the *form* of the picture magazine produces effective propaganda. A visuality of the Cold War recognizes that editors in both the Eastern and Western Blocs desperately tried to control and compartmentalize their different models of history through the mass media machine.

During the early, contentious years of the Cold War, a number of theorists began to conceptualize the political nature of the mass media image. Roland Barthes, for one, noticed what was at stake, ideologically and otherwise, with photographic ambiguity during the conflict. In his *Mythologies* from 1957, he explored various forms of "ideological abuse" perpetuated by the mass media on individuals.[24] Barthes's later essay "The

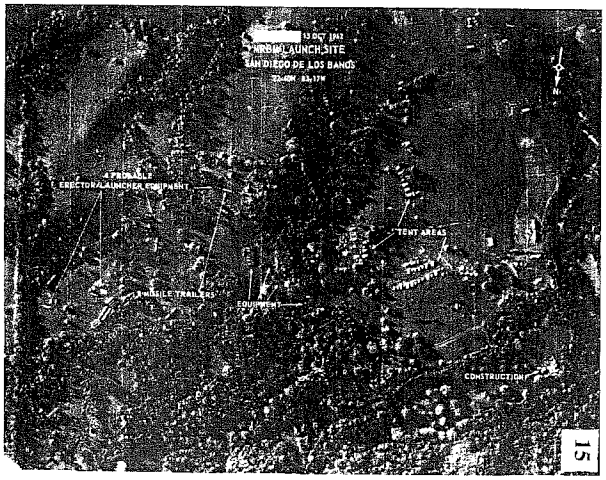

FIG 5
U-2 photograph of Cuba, October 14, 1962. Dino A. Brugioni Collection, The National Security Archive, Washington, DC

Photographic Message" (1961)—his first sustained piece about photography—more specifically addressed the ideological abuse of *images* by describing how press photography obscured its constructed and intentional nature: "the photograph allows the photographer to *conceal elusively* the preparation to which he subjects the scene to be recorded." And among his most memorable examples is a forged photograph used by Senator Joseph McCarthy during his controversial efforts in the 1950s to uncover Communists working in America, especially in government positions (fig. 4).[25] This image suggested a familiar relationship by collaging together two photographs—one of a senator and the other of a Communist leader—while minimizing the seam between them.[26] With their prime position in the logic of Barthes's argument, the Cold War and its battle of images loom large over his career-long theorization of the semiotic complexity of the photograph. For him, press images depended upon their means of transmission or surrounding context for efficacy and agency. As was clear with the image used by McCarthy and his followers, forces on both sides of the Cold War indeed needed this ambiguity to be able to twist and contort images into fulfilling some partisan function.

The basic contradiction of Cold War visuality hinges upon this ambiguity: despite the need for stable images on both sides of the conflict—pictures that could not be misinterpreted or misconstrued—this ideological clarity was an impossible dream. It was assaulted by the ubiquity and ambiguity of images in the mass media, which gradually eroded, or blurred, notions of certainty. Put simply, images alone could not fulfill the roles required of them during the Cold War. When isolated, studied, or pressured, an image could expose its own inadequacy and emptiness, as well as its mediation and artificiality. It is fitting that the term for irrational behavior predicated upon strong partisan beliefs is *visual* in nature: "ideological blindness." The phrase even came into popular use precisely during the period under consideration in this book.[27]

This need for image clarity, and its attendant impossibility, took center stage in 1962, when global annihilation publicly depended upon the careful interpretation of photographs. The pictures in question were high-altitude photographs of a tropical landscape with fields, trees, and winding roads (fig. 5). If viewed in another context, they would not

seem especially important or interesting. These photographs, however, were taken by a U-2, the United States' most advanced spy plane, high above Communist-controlled Cuba on October 14, 1962. Analysts at the National Photographic Interpretation Center (NPIC), examining miles of photo transparencies with magnifying glasses and other visual aids, found important needles in a giant intelligence haystack: the blurry and subtle visual signatures of Soviet missile systems.[28] These photographs established that the Soviets were secretly introducing offensive nuclear weapons into Cuba.

If the NPIC analysts could read the complex visual language of aerial photography, others could not, at least not without expert guidance. When shown the images in the Oval Office, President Kennedy suggested that one of the sites in question looked like a "football field." Robert Kennedy, the president's brother and trusted adviser, was more specific in his bewilderment, saying he could decipher only what looked to be "the clearing of a field for a farm or the basement of a house." A high-ranking NPIC official even admitted that the president or other nonspecialists would have to take the evidence, at least partially, "on faith."[29] Lacking a descriptive context, ambiguous images—even those produced as military intelligence—provoke whims of interpretative fancy, not unlike the inkblots of a Rorschach test.

Specific captions provided one way to manage image ambiguity; those appended to the Cuba photographs used for the Oval Office briefing transformed vague blurs into "missile trailers," "erector/launcher equipment," and other entities. By the time President Kennedy addressed the nation on the evening of October 22, he described the photographs as "unmistakable evidence." Despite such public certainty, officials at the CIA were nevertheless worried about the creditability of the photographs.[30] Would the grainy surveillance images justify the American blockade of Cuba—and perhaps even nuclear war—to an international audience? The answer to this question was overwhelmingly affirmative: despite expected Soviet denials and initial British doubts, the pictures themselves were never called into question.[31]

For his voyage from pictorial bewilderment, seeing a "football field," to an interpretative certainty that could justify a high-risk naval blockade, President Kennedy had access to the best images available—printed from the original negatives on glossy stock. The rest of the world, however, did not see such quality reproductions; they viewed the images either as flickering on a blurry television screen or as brutal newsprint halftones, both mediums later described by a CIA official as "appallingly deficient" considering the magnitude of the Cuba images.[32] Yet again, there was no public discussion about the veracity of the fuzzy evidence. Although an extreme example, these photographs and their distribution dramatize what I have briefly described as Cold War visuality. What is chilling about the aerial photographs from Cuba is not what they depict but rather the repressed ambiguity of their form; they speak directly to the confused partisanship of photography in the Cold War. In other notable examples from the period, falsified photographs, distributed by Soviet and Chinese authorities, "proved" the American use of germ warfare in Korea, and the same photograph of a mutilated corpse was presented as evidence of atrocities by both sides in the 1956 Budapest uprising.[33] The Cuban intelligence photos can pinpoint a larger Cold War crisis of *images.*

Certain qualities of these surveillance photographs of Cuba recall Warhol's and Richter's paintings of Jacqueline Kennedy: all acknowledge that ambiguity can reside on the surface of public images. Each also addresses the ways in which image replication, whether as a photograph reprinted in a newspaper or painted onto a canvas, can accelerate image degradation. Warhol's and Richter's paintings of Jackie and the images that sparked the Cuban missile crisis thus share these visual hallmarks of Cold War visuality. They all dramatize the ways the conflict attempted to naturalize the interpretation of images in a war that was based more on managing perceptions than actual warfare.[34] Historian John Lewis Gaddis has discussed the conflict relative to such questions of visual deception: "The Cold War itself was a kind of theater in which distinctions between illusions and reality were not always obvious."[35] It is tempting to suggest that the emergence of postmodernism in the 1960s, so often associated with the paintings of Warhol and Richter (and Pop art more broadly), is a product of the Cold War. The conflict's mandate of visual certitude, when coupled with the dizzying postwar proliferation of image culture in the mass media, tested the visual image as never before. Perhaps it was the historically specific visuality of the Cold War that gave rise to postmodernism's mistrust of images. This book, through close examination of Warhol and Richter, both individually and in tandem, explores these connections between the emergence of Pop art, larger questions of interpretative doubt, and the Cold War. A consideration of their paintings can provide corrective lenses to the period's attendant ideological blindness.

It is important to acknowledge, however, that a painting by Warhol or Richter is different from an aerial intelligence photograph or other images from the mass media; a painting occupies its own discursive space and display context. Its surfaces and brushstrokes present a site to explore, with deliberate patience, the nuances and processes of vision and perception. It is a place where vision can be denaturalized and examined as visuality. For this reason, the Cold War and its contradictory visuality urgently demand an art-historical perspective for their fullest explication. Might it then be more than coincidence that one of the most infamous Soviet spies in this period was the renowned British art historian Anthony Blunt?[36] His understanding of the mutability of images—how paintings can house and manage contradictions, ideological and otherwise—might have provided a model of deception that allowed him to work undetected for years. What might it mean for the Cold War, and for art history, to consider *paintings* as spies?

ART AND THE COLD WAR

The Cold War's Manichean thinking also structured the dominant artistic narrative of the period: abstraction in the capitalist West versus a figurative realism in the socialist East. Two paintings from around 1950 illustrate these positions: for abstraction, Jackson Pollock's drip painting *Autumn Rhythm* (fig. 6), and for Socialist Realism, the large canvas *Bread*, painted by the Soviet artist Tatyana Yablonskaya (fig. 7). The Pollock canvas, according to accounts in the East, was meaningless scribble emblematic of decadent capitalist values; for the West, it represented the inevitable culmination of the avant-garde tradition and formed a humanist bulwark against totalitarian tendencies. Attitudes toward Socialist Realist paintings like *Bread* were also polarized along Cold

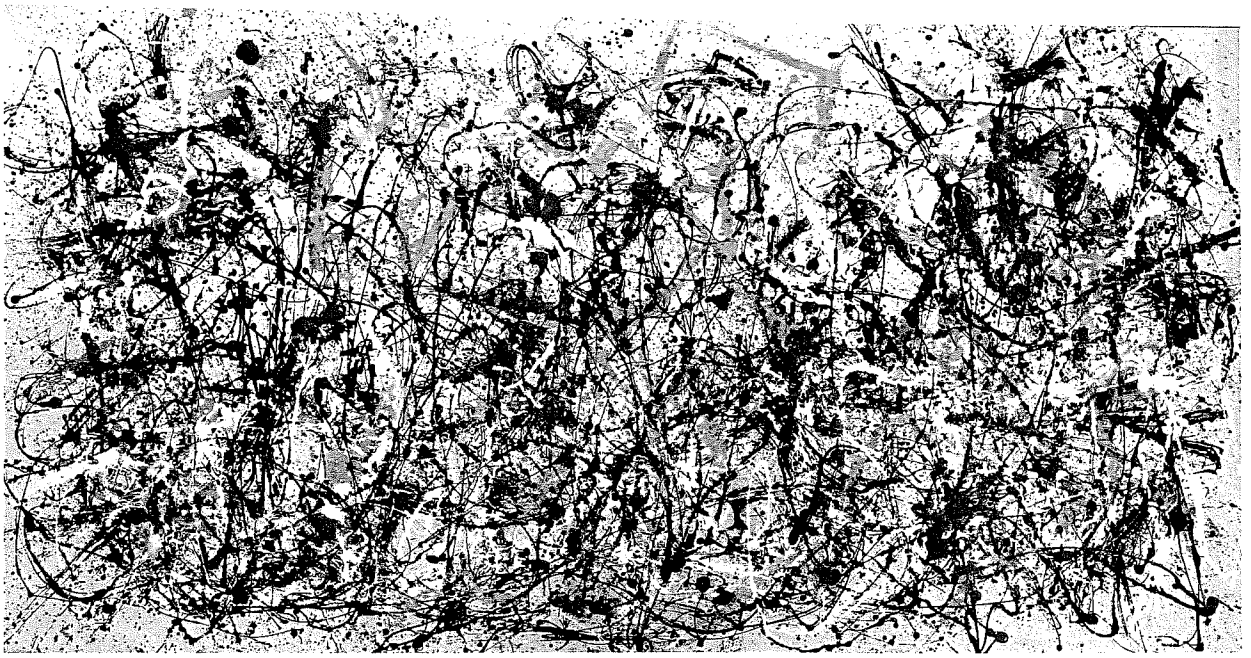

FIG 6
Jackson Pollock
Autumn Rhythm: Number 30, 1950, 1950.
Enamel on canvas.
105 × 207 in. (266.7 × 525.8 cm).
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, George A. Hearn Fund, 1957

War lines—something regressive and totalitarian or an art painted for and by the working classes. During these especially contested early years of the conflict, ideological and aesthetic positions explicitly overlapped. And this contest of abstraction versus figuration has continued to dominate scholarly accounts of postwar painting. Socialist Realist paintings, for instance, are still rarely mentioned in the same breath as Pollock, other than as a foil to his heroic turn to pure abstraction.

The continued power of this interpretative model has significant consequences for art history. To subscribe to this artistic division when considering the art of this moment—that is, to view Pollock and Yablonskaya as only opposites—is, in part, to replicate the Cold War's ideological blindness. Even revisionist accounts detailing the political maneuvers behind the emergence of Abstract Expressionism have reinforced the binary's power. As Eva Cockcroft first noted in the 1970s, a number of prominent American museums organized international exhibitions—receiving secret support from government agencies—that positioned American abstract paintings as emblems of liberty.[37] In the following decade, Serge Guilbaut produced the first major study of art's propagandistic role in the Cold War, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art* (1983). In this important text, Guilbaut reveals how Abstract Expressionist painting, which he describes as "an art that saw itself as stubbornly apolitical," became what Cockcroft had identified as a potent political tool.[38] A canvas by Pollock may have initially repudiated the ideological rigidity of the early Cold War moment with its rejection of explicit political subjects, but—in a particular context—its abstraction could nevertheless be pressed into service as an undercover and unwilling American cultural soldier. The importance of Guilbaut's book for Cold War art history resides in its materialist account of the conflict; he directly implicates abstract paintings in the Cold War's larger "battle of information and images."

FIG 7
Tatyana Yablonskaya
Bread (also titled **Corn**), 1949.
Oil on canvas.
79 × 145¾ in. (200 × 370 cm).
State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow

While Cockcroft's and Guilbaut's accounts revealed the ideological underpinnings of artistic style, they retained the Cold War dualism of abstraction and figuration. Scholars have yet to fully grasp the ways in which the divide between these two styles was itself an ideological and artificial construct of the Cold War, with many conflicting agendas seeking to control images and their interpretation. As I will argue, the distinctions between "abstract" and "figurative" can dissolve under even the slightest scrutiny. Macdonald's description of the Cold War more broadly and its "impossible choice" thus also had consequences for artists; to label a work as either "abstract" or "figurative" ignored the complexities and ambiguities of artistic process. Such blindness could allow, for example, Willem de Kooning's figurative Woman paintings from the early 1950s to quickly become emblems of American "abstraction." Pop art, with its painted images appropriated from the mass press, is an even more revealing case. Why did this blunt reintroduction of the figure in paintings from the United States and Western Europe around 1962 *not* confound Cold War questions of style? Despite the ways Warhol, Richter, and select others scrambled ideological and artistic binaries, these interventions did not register as critiques of the conflict's rigid logic. Like Jasper Johns's spy, the subversive intentions of the works eluded understanding.

The ideological mandates of image control during the Cold War thus governed a Pollock drip painting and aerial photographs over Cuba; the distinction between "work of art" and "intelligence document" was crucial to the construction of ideological certainty. Abstract painting disdained the mass media for aesthetic reasons, while the mass media could not acknowledge the interpretative possibilities of photography. But to recognize the overlapping nature of these discursive spaces around 1962 reveals the Cold War importance of Warhol's and Richter's early Pop painting and situates the concerns of art history as vital to any explanation of the conflict.

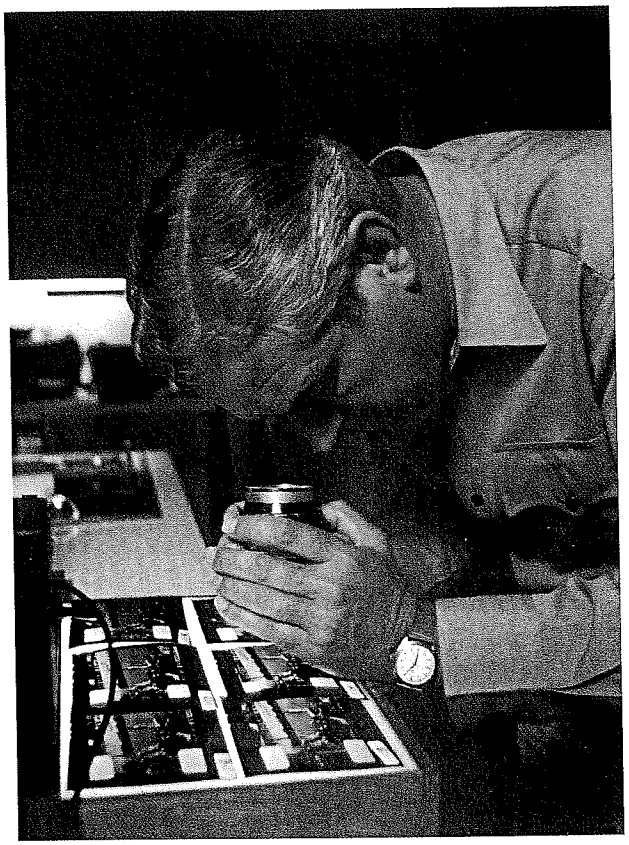

FIG 8
James J. Rorimer of the Metropolitan Museum of Art examines **Autumn Rhythm** by Jackson Pollock, **Life,** November 9, 1959. Photo by Walter Sanders

FIG 9
Governor John Connally of Texas peers though a magnifying glass at enlargements of frames from Abraham Zapruder's assassination movie, **Life,** November 25, 1966. Photo by Don Uhrbrock

Two features in *Life* demonstrate this shared territory. In 1959, a photograph showed James Rorimer, the director of New York's Metropolitan Museum, closely examining Pollock's *Autumn Rhythm* through a magnifying glass, no more than an inch from the canvas's surface (fig. 8). This photograph by Walter Sanders accompanied the headline "Baffling U.S. Art—What It Is About."[39] Pollock's painting is presented here as a code to be cracked—every drip full of intention, every attenuated line revealing some insight. Close looking, the photograph suggests, can uncover the meaning of an abstract painting. A few years later in 1966, *Life* published another photograph of intense visual scrutiny: Texas governor John Connally using a magnifying glass to study transparencies from the Zapruder film, the home movie that became crucial evidence in the Kennedy assassination (fig. 9).[40] Editors paired this Don Uhrbrock photo with the headline "A Matter of Reasonable Doubt," marking the interpretative mystery of these famous photographic images. Scrutinizing various blurry stills as if they were paintings allows haphazard details to assume intentional significance. Is that a second gunman on the grassy knoll? These two *Life* photographs pose a counterintuitive relationship between painting and photography; if a close examination of an abstract painting unlocks meaning, then the same attention only leads to visual doubt in the photographic image.

Falling chronologically between these *Life* features, Warhol's and Richter's paintings of Jackie from 1964 propose an overlap between the two modes of close looking.

These works, as well as some of their others, acknowledge that a press photograph must be interpreted with the same seriousness as a Jackson Pollock canvas. The artists' respective acts of *painting* these press sources confuse the disparate spheres of modernist work of art and the mass press. Not only do Warhol's and Richter's canvases straddle the abstraction-figuration divide through a blurred, degraded appropriation of images, they dramatize that paintings cannot escape the Cold War battle of images. As such, Warhol's and Richter's works resist the certainty that *Life* posited for abstraction in 1959 (and that President Kennedy proclaimed for the Cuba images). Note the declarative—not interrogative—voice of the headline: "Baffling U.S. Art—What It Is About." By rendering the media image on canvas, Warhol and Richter reinvest painting with some of the later uncertainty of the 1966 examination of the Zapruder film. With Cold War visuality, meaning was, to borrow from *Life*, a "matter of reasonable doubt."

In this way, Pop art reintroduces the skepticism that has long defined various avant-garde movements, but was missing from the critical frameworks surrounding abstraction in the 1950s. A skeptical modernism informs Gustave Courbet's dismantling of history painting at the Salon of 1849, Picasso's Cubism probing the thresholds of representation circa 1910, Marcel Duchamp's aping of industrial forms to question the nature of art with his readymades beginning in 1913, and Surrealist doubts concerning the rational world in the 1920s. If modernity required rationality and certainty, these modernist artistic practices offered a corrective. Postwar abstraction grew out of these various avant-gardes, but critics, like eventual cold warrior Clement Greenberg, removed the skepticism from these practices during the early years of the conflict. Abstract painting, as revealed by Serge Guilbaut, could become affirmative of capitalist modernity, especially when placed in relief against Soviet Socialist Realism.

The Cold War thus troubled artistic modernism, transforming its skeptical forms into their opposite. The emergence and initial understanding of variations of Pop art in the late 1950s and early 1960s—whether in America, France, Great Britain, or West Germany—are instructive in this regard. Around 1963, Pop art was seldom taken seriously as questioning Cold War stylistic or ideological assumptions, save for a few especially perceptive critics whom I will address in the chapters that follow. It was largely dismissed as mere provocation—a kind of neo-avant-garde, Duchampian joke without political, artistic, or social specificity. It is crucial to view this initial casting as a strategy of image control, a means of keeping Pop art's stylistic and ideological fluidity at bay.

This is not to say that our understanding of Warhol and Richter, as well as Pop art more generally, has stagnated. Scholars since the late 1970s have interrogated the complex visual questions posed by these artists, whether considering their works as dialectically engaged with both high modernism and mass culture or as expressive of the spectacle and violence of Western capitalism. While this book does build upon the important foundations established by Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, Hal Foster, Thomas Crow, and others, it also proposes a new model: Warhol and Richter are Cold War artists who intervene into the false certainty of the conflict's interrelated battles of images, ideology, and art.[41] And to think otherwise is to repress Warhol's and Richter's most radical qualities.

Warhol and Richter, soon after they began appropriating media images in paint, consciously addressed this very issue: punning on communism, Warhol called his paintings of everyday consumer products "commonism," and Richter identified his own photo-based works as "capitalist realism," riffing on the Socialist Realism of the Eastern Bloc. Critics have long described the political ambivalence of these works in relationship to capitalism, but when we consider their stylistic and discursive ambivalence together—across geographic and ideological boundaries—their engagement with Cold War visuality emerges.

CONTAINMENT, ENCRYPTION, CONSPIRACY THEORY

In the wake of the active conflict of World War II, the Cold War perfected a number a strategies for controlling the flow of information and influencing the perception of reality. As I have suggested, the mass media—including its new technologies of image transmission—was central to the conflict's "battle of information and images." These media outlets attempted to maintain and perpetuate Cold War frameworks. But, as I have described, these advances also put enormous pressure on the image. To quote the art historian E. H. Gombrich in 1960: "Never before has there been an age like ours when the visual image was so cheap in every sense of the word."[42] During the Cold War, images, including paintings, could thus mean everything or nothing, a condition that this book will address in three of its key themes: containment, encryption, and conspiracy theory.

I have already discussed the ways in which the ideological imperatives of the Cold War suppressed the ambiguity of the Cuban missile crisis photographs and controlled the meaning of Jackson Pollock's drip paintings. In Cold War terms, these images were subject to containment—coerced into unequivocal, ideological messages. George Kennan, the American ambassador to the Soviet Union during the late 1940s, first used the term *containment* in its well-known Cold War context: preventing further Soviet territorial and ideological advances.[43] More broadly, it has come to describe aspects of American life during the 1950s and early 1960s—primarily a desire to protect what were viewed as core American values from outside, corrupting forces. The focus on the safe, secure, and heterosexual nuclear family during this period in America has been understood, for instance, as an outgrowth of Cold War fears.[44] Homosexuality, as Jonathan D. Katz has pointed out, was very much subject to this American culture of containment, and the work of artists like Warhol, as well as Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns, was structured by the Cold War closet.[45] But when we consider containment as the dominant narrative of *both* Cold War sides, even broader implications emerge. As Alan Nadel has argued, "containment" needs to be considered as a "rhetorical strategy that functioned to foreclose dissent, preempt dialogue, and preclude contradiction."[46] Through repressing or erasing discourses damaging to one's ideology, containment could veil internal dissent or ideological fluidity under a unifying national narrative. Thus, any utterance from the Eastern or Western Bloc needed to be as unambiguous as possible; explicit signs of contradiction or weakness from news reports or photographs were often censored or otherwise controlled through formal and textual means.

Issues of containment come to the fore in two of the book's chapters, especially in