

Partisan Pictures: Art and Images in the Cold War

An Online Professional Development Seminar



John Curley

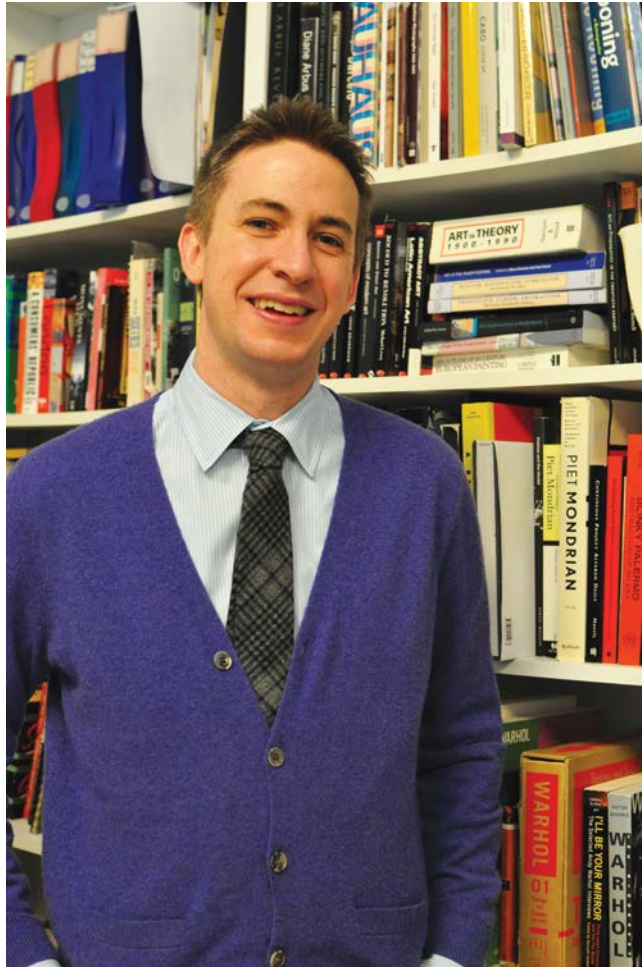
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FROM THE FORUM

- How does American and Soviet art of the 1950s and 60s illustrate opposing perceptions of the Cold War?
- How can Soviet art be used to humanize our Cold War opponents?
- To what extent was the high art, of both sides, employed as propaganda?
- In what ways does the art of the 1950s and 60s reflect the paranoia of the Cold War?
- To what extent did American artists consciously express Cold War concerns in their work?



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*A Conspiracy of Images: Andy Warhol,
Gerhard Richter, and the Art of the
Cold War (2013)*

Introduction

1. What was the Cold War and why were images important in the conflict?
2. Why did each Cold War side gravitate toward a particular style of painting -- abstraction in the U.S. and figuration in the Soviet Union? How did art critics connect these respective styles of art to Cold War politics?
3. How and why did the CIA and other American governmental agencies support exhibitions of American abstraction abroad in the 1950s?
4. How does press photography factor into this discussion of Cold War images? How can we understand a photograph in Roland Barthes's terms as a "message without a code"?
5. How do the photo-based paintings of Andy Warhol and Gerhard Richter intervene into the image battles of the Cold War? What do these paintings say about the relation between abstraction, figuration, and photography?

[The Cold War] is really an electric battle of information and of images that goes far deeper and is more obsessional than the old hot wars of industrial hardware.

- Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media* (1964)

The Cold War itself was a kind of theater in which distinctions between illusions and reality were not always obvious.

- John Lewis Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (1997)

Clement Greenberg (1909-1994)



- an American essayist known mainly as an influential visual art critic closely associated with American Modern art of the mid-20th century
- best remembered for his promotion of the abstract expressionist movement
- was among the first published critics to praise the work of painter Jackson Pollock

Courage indeed was needed for this, because the avant-garde's emigration from bourgeois society to bohemia meant also an emigration from the markets of capitalism, upon which artists and writers had been thrown by the falling away of aristocratic patronage. ... Yet it is true that once the avant-garde had succeeded in 'detaching' itself from society, it proceeded to turn around and repudiate revolutionary as well as bourgeois politics.

(p. 531)

Discussion Questions

- What is the "avant-garde" for Greenberg?

Clement Greenberg's "Avant-Garde and Kitsch"

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

(p. 534)

Discussion Question

➤ What is “kitsch”?

Clement Greenberg's "Avant-Garde and Kitsch"

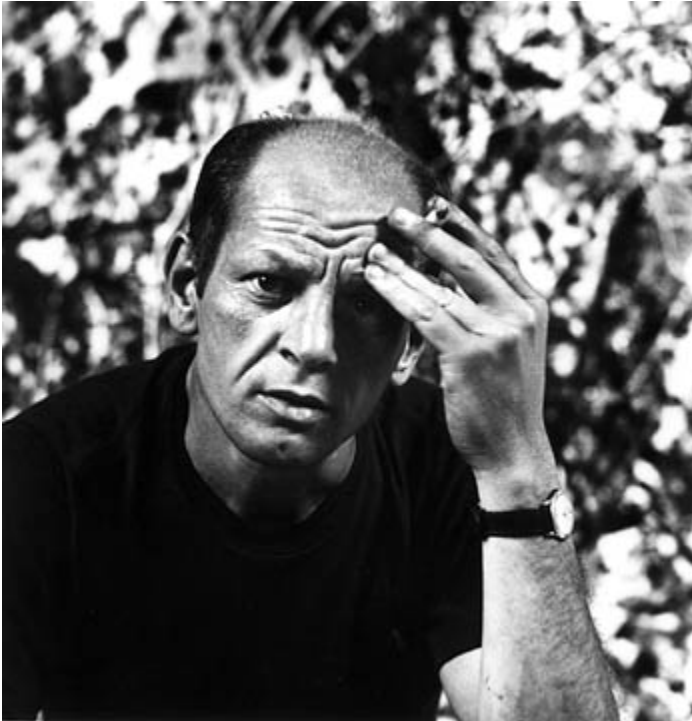
Where today a political regime establishes an official cultural policy, it is for the sake of demagoguery. If kitsch is the official tendency of culture in Germany, Italy and Russia, it is not because their respective governments are controlled by philistines, but because kitsch is the culture of the masses in these countries, as it is everywhere else. The encouragement of kitsch is merely another of the inexpensive ways in which totalitarian regimes seek to ingratiate themselves with their subjects.... It is for this reason that the avant-garde is outlawed, and not so much because a superior culture is inherently a more critical culture.

(p. 539)

Discussion Question

- How can we understand Greenberg's notions of "avant-garde" and "kitsch" relative to politics, especially relative to what will become the Cold War?

Jackson Pollock (1912-1956)



- An influential American painter and a major figure in the abstract expressionist movement.
- He was well known for his unique style of drip painting.
- During his lifetime, Pollock enjoyed considerable fame and notoriety, a major artist of his generation.
- Regarded as reclusive, he had a volatile personality, and struggled with alcoholism for most of his life.

Clement Greenberg's "Avant-Garde and Kitsch"



Jackson Pollock, *Autumn Rhythm (Number 30)*, 1950.
Enamel on canvas. 105 x 207 in.
(<http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/57.92>)

Tatyana Yablonskaya (1917- 2006)



- Yablonskaya is an award-winning Russian painter and “Bread”, her most famous work, won the Stalin Prize
- Yablonskaya swiftly rose to fame after winning the Stalin Prize
- While the rich harvest portrayed in the painting was probably not a true representation of the austere life in the post-war USSR, the strength of her artistic vision was instantly recognized by fellow artists and common people alike.
- The image was reprinted countless times and in 1967 it was used on a Russian stamp.

Clement Greenberg's "Avant-Garde and Kitsch"



Tatyana Yablonskaya, *Bread*, 1949.
Oil on canvas. 79 x 145 in..

Clement Greenberg's "Avant-Garde and Kitsch"



Discussion Question

- How specifically do these paintings play into Greenberg's schemata of art and politics?



Harold Rosenberg (1906-1978)



- An American writer, educator, philosopher and art critic.
- He coined the term “Action Painting” in 1952 for what was later to be known as abstract expressionism.
- Rosenberg is best known for his art criticism. Beginning in the early 1960s he became art Critic for the *New Yorker* magazine.

At a certain moment the canvas began to appear to one American painter after another as an arena in which to act—rather than as a space in which to reproduce, re-design, analyze or ‘express’ an object, actual or imagined. What was to go on the canvas was not a picture but an event.

(p. 581)

Discussion Questions

- What is “action painting” for Rosenberg?
- Does it relate to Greenberg’s notions of “avant-garde” and “kitsch”? If so, how?
- How might we consider this position on painting, relative to Cold War ideology?

Harold Rosenberg's "The American Action Painters"

Discussion Question

- How might we consider Rosenberg's position on painting, relative to Cold War ideology?



Hans Namuth, Jackson Pollock Painting
(photo)



Vladimir Kemenov



- Soviet art historian and critic.
- A member of the Academy of Arts of the USSR.
- Taught at several educational institutions in Moscow, including the State Institute of Theatrical Arts (1933–38).
- Between 1938 and 1940, Kemenov was the director of the Tret'iakov Gallery.
- He was the deputy minister of culture of the USSR from 1954 to 1956.
- Kemenov's principal works are devoted to the conflicts among various trends in contemporary art and aesthetics, the affirmation of socialist realism in the fine arts, and questions concerning classical Russian and foreign art, as well as Soviet art.

Vladimir Kemenov's *Aspects of Two Cultures*

As opposed to decadent bourgeois art, hypocritically hiding its reactionary class nature behind phrases such as 'pure art' and 'art for art's sake,' Soviet artists openly espouse the ideas of Bolshevism expressing the advanced ideas of the Soviet people who at present represent the most advanced ideas of the world, for they have built up Socialism, the most advanced form of contemporary society. As opposed to decadent bourgeois art with its anti-humanism, Soviet artists present the art of socialist humanism, an art imbued with supreme love for man, with pride in the emancipated individual of the socialist land, with profound sympathy for that part of humanity living under the capitalist system, a system which cripples and degrades men.

(p. 648-649)

Discussion Question

- Why does Kemenov laud Soviet Socialist Realism as “humanist”?

Vladimir Kemenov's *Aspects of Two Cultures*



Discussion Questions

- How do we see this specifically in Yablonskaya's *Bread*?
- Why is Pollock a "decadent" painter in Kemenov's view?



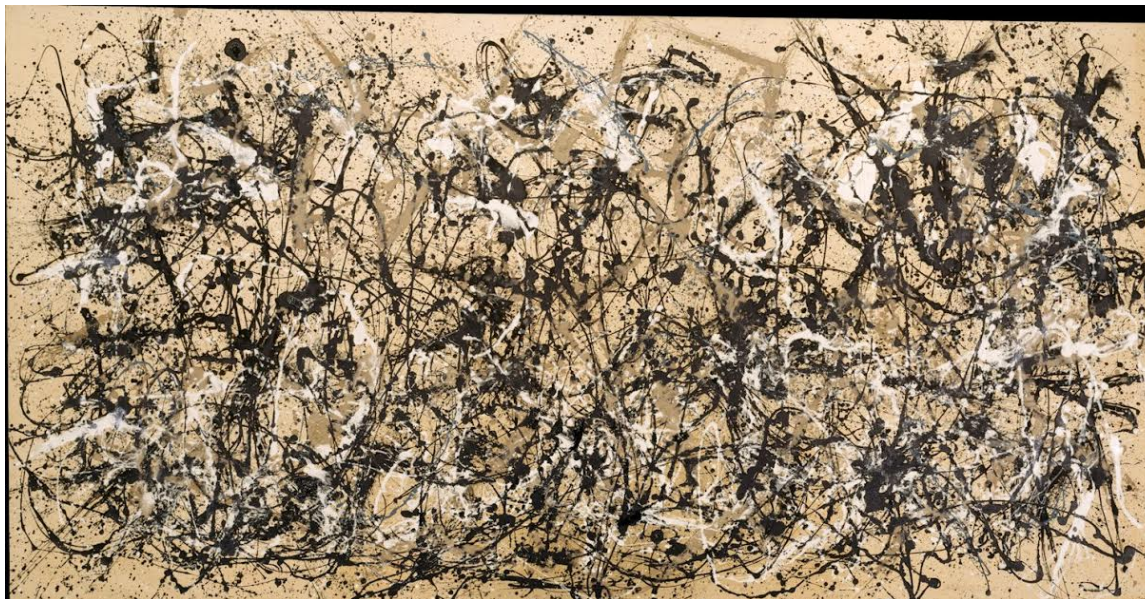
Eva Cockcroft (1938-1999)



- American artist, writer, and muralist who was dedicated to community-oriented artistic projects
- Also wrote important art criticism for magazines like *Artforum*, often exposing de-mystifying mythologies of art

Links between cultural cold war politics and the success of Abstract Expressionism are by no means coincidental, or unnoticeable. They were consciously forged at the time by some of the most influential figures controlling museum policies and advocating enlightened cold war tactics designed to woo European intellectuals.

(p. 148)



Discussion Questions

- How can this abstract painting by Jackson Pollock be considered as Cold War propaganda?
- Why did this official American support for abstract painting have to be covert in the 1950s?

Roland Barthes (1915-1980)



- Barthes was a French literary theorist, philosopher, linguist, and critic.
- Throughout his career, Barthes had an interest in photography and its potential to communicate actual events.
- Many of his monthly myth articles in the 1950s had attempted to show how a photographic image could represent implied meanings and thus be used by bourgeois culture to infer ‘naturalistic truths’.

Roland Barthes, “The Photographic Message”

The press photograph is a message. Considered overall this message is formed by a source of emission, a channel of transmission and a point of reception.

(p. 521)

The photographic paradox can then be seen as the co-existence of two messages, the one without a code (the photographic analogue), the other with a code (the 'art,' or the treatment, or the 'writing,' or the rhetoric, of the photograph); structurally, the paradox is clearly not the collusion of a denoted message and a connoted message (which is the -- probably inevitable -- status of all forms of mass communication), it is that here the connoted (or coded) message develops on the basis of a message *without a code*.

(p. 525)

...the reader receives as a simple denotation what is in actual fact a double structure – denoted-connoted.

(p. 527)

Discussion Questions


- What does Barthes mean when he calls the press photograph a “message”?
- Why is this a paradox?
- How do Barthes’s ideas about press photography work against our usual assumptions?

Roland Barthes, "The Photographic Message"


SPEAKING OF ...Beds use these with phony captions

The pictures on these pages constitute one of the latest attempts ever made to use photographs to tell lies. The perpetrators of these lies are Communists. Their purpose is to support their charge that the U.S. has been waging germ warfare. The pictures first appeared in the Peking People's Daily (left) on March 15 and then are reprinted in the documentary "germ" that American pilots have been bombarding North Korea and China with thousand-ton bombs. But when examined closely (below) the photographs turn out to be uncut and unaltered photos.


The Chinese captions for the pictures state that they show infected flies and mosquitoes, microscopic views of meningitis and gas-germ-producing germs and "germ bombs," all dropped by U.S. bombers. Actually the insects are ordinary flies and mosquitoes of various kinds which carry these germs. This was determined by Dr. C. H. Cannon, curator of insects and spiders at the American Museum of Natural History, one of several experts called in by the New York Times to evaluate the Red's "evidence." The photomicrographs, which were studied by Dr. Reed Dubois, a prominent bacteriologist at the Rockefeller Institute, show only bacteria



PHOTOS APPEARING WERE IN CHINESE "PEOPLE'S DAILY" BY HAN CHU



"KILLER MOSQUITO FLIES" says Chinese caption. They could crawl but not fly. In Chinese picture cut this white out, all Red-cuts, see P.




"MOSQUITOES" similar to mosquitoes spread into Chinese territory by U.S. planes" is first photograph of infectious mosquito from which wings have been removed. "It belongs to the genus Anolis but not to any group that is capable of carrying disease," says Dr. Cannon. "It is a clumsy creature to describe."


PICTURES... to 'prove' their big germ-warfare lie

Bacteria and some kinds of flies. The "germ bombs" are the non-explosive bullet containers (right) which have long been used in Korea and which the Army says are not even theoretically adaptable for carrying germs.

The Red's germ warfare propaganda campaign, of which these photographs are only a small part, is one of the most intensive they have ever conducted. It went into high gear two months ago and has since then been used to explode the truth talks in Pusan and to stir up bloody riots in such places as Tokyo. In the U.S. Department of Commerce, Russia's Ambassador Malik made wild accusations that U.S. pilots were dropping infected "spiders, locusts, gnat swarms and bats." He refused to let the Red press investigate the charges and finally made up by being kicked out of office. Why are the Communists doing this? They may be trying to cover up natural epidemics, they may want a ready excuse for breaking off the truce talks at any time or they may be applying the old Communist trick of accusing the West of doing what they themselves plan to do. The phony photographic propaganda is aimed not at the U.S. but at Asia, where millions of people whom it will have no chance to get the facts.




"GERM-CARRYING BOMB" AND BULLETS U.S. MILITARY BOMB, LIKE THESE



"TINY BLACK MOSQUITO" under microscope," says Chinese caption. "Side view of the insect; it is not long and 1/1000 mm wide." This is probably a *Musca Spangola*, common in Europe and Asia. Dr. Cannon. "They feed chiefly on decaying vegetation. Because of habits they are widely susceptible of carrying disease."



"FUNGUS AND BOMB BOMB," says Chinese caption, were used by "another type of germ bomb which exploded upon hitting the ground. Flies were found on fragments." Dr. Cannon pointed out it is quite common for flies to sit on wet, warm surfaces when one is sick. Flies shown here could not carry disease.



"MOSQUITO BOMB" dropped by bomber right into two prison camps located, thereby spreading germ-carrying insects," Army said. "This is false picture of the bullet bomb showing litged insect (shown in picture top right) which is in fact lit by ignited in the air by a time fuse and wind to spread bacteria over a wide area."

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Life, "Speaking of Pictures," April 14, 1952

Roland Barthes, “The Photographic Message”



Photomontage featuring Senator Millard Tydings (right) and General Secretary of Communist Party USA Earl Browder (left), 1950, from *Life*, 12 March 1951, 54.

Roland Barthes, “The Photographic Message”

SPEAKING OF
...Reds use these with plucky captions

The photos on these pages constitute one of the boldest attempts ever made to use photography as a lie. The government of these five nations...
 The Chinese appear to be genuine even that their about adulterated and...
 The Chinese appear to be genuine even that their about adulterated and...
 The Chinese appear to be genuine even that their about adulterated and...

PICTURES ...
to 'prove' their big germ-warfare lie

Scientific and news bodies of the "Five Nations" and the newspapers...
 The Red's germ-warfare propaganda...
 The Red's germ-warfare propaganda...
 The Red's germ-warfare propaganda...

美雷定校細菌在顯微鏡下的形態

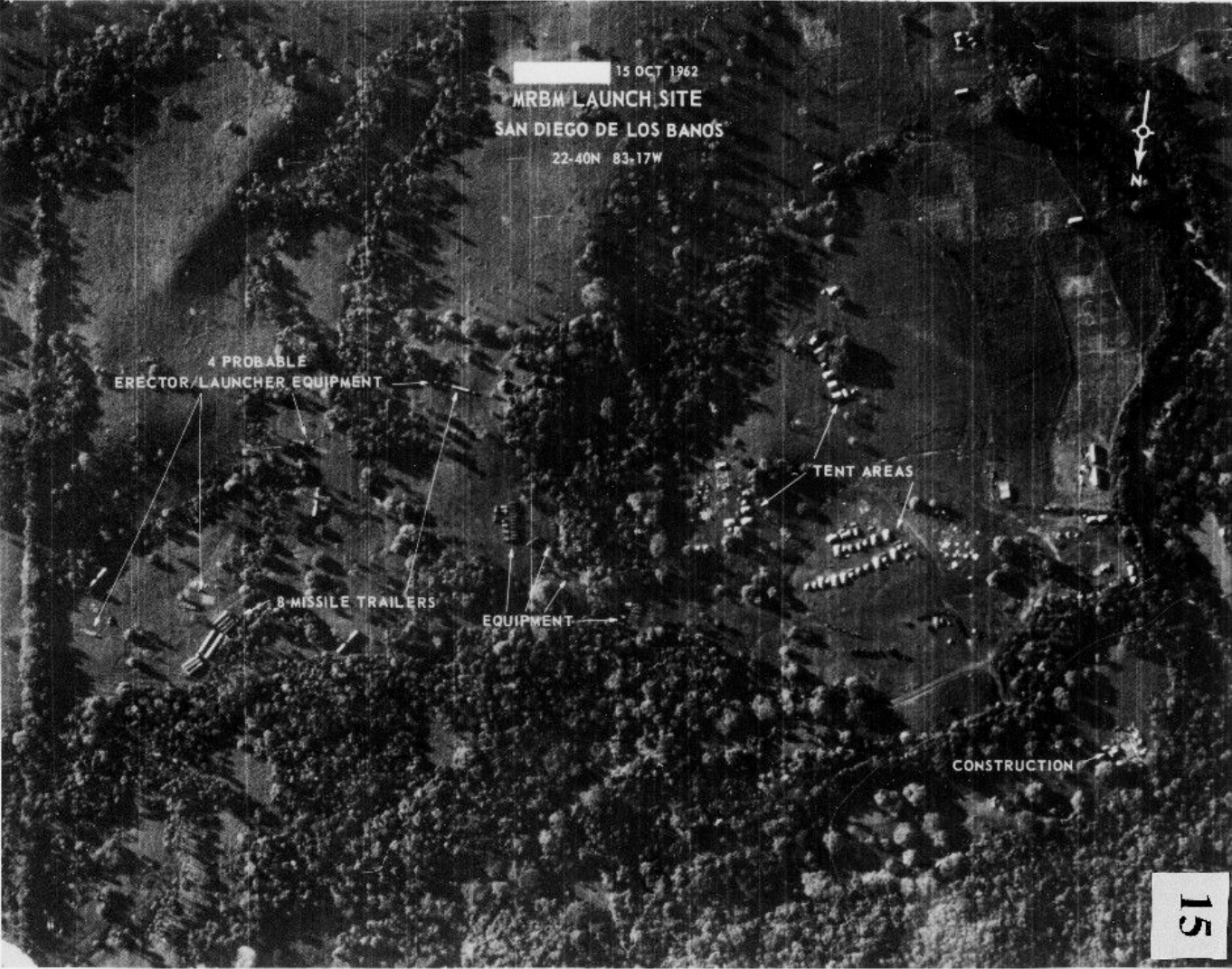
“BIOLOGICAL WEAPON”

Discussion Question

➤ How do we see these ideas in each of these images?



Images from the Cuban Missile Crisis



October 14, 1962: U-2 photograph of Cuba, Dino A. Brugioni Collection

John Curley's *A Conspiracy of Images*

What is chilling about the aerial photographs from Cuba is not what they depict what rather the repressed ambiguity of their form.... The Cuba intelligence photos can pinpoint a larger Cold War crisis of *images*.

(p.30)



October 14, 1962: U-2 photograph of Cuba, Dino A. Brugioni Collection

Discussion Questions

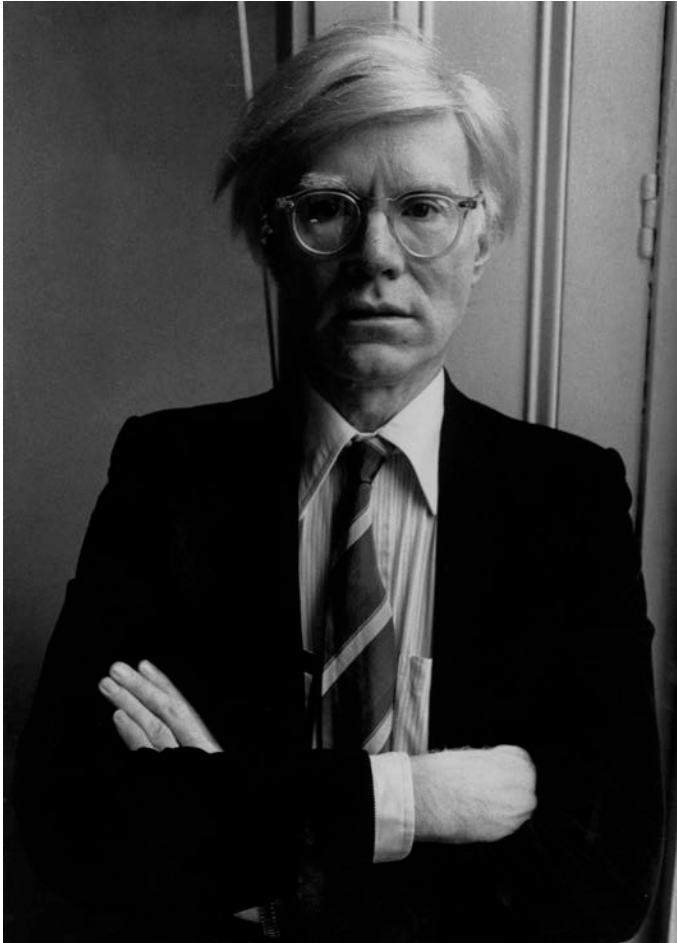
- How can we understand the photographs that spurred the Cuban Missile Crisis in Barthes's terms?
- Can we relate them to the Cold War artistic styles of abstraction and figuration discussed earlier? If so, how?

John Curley's *A Conspiracy of Images*

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.

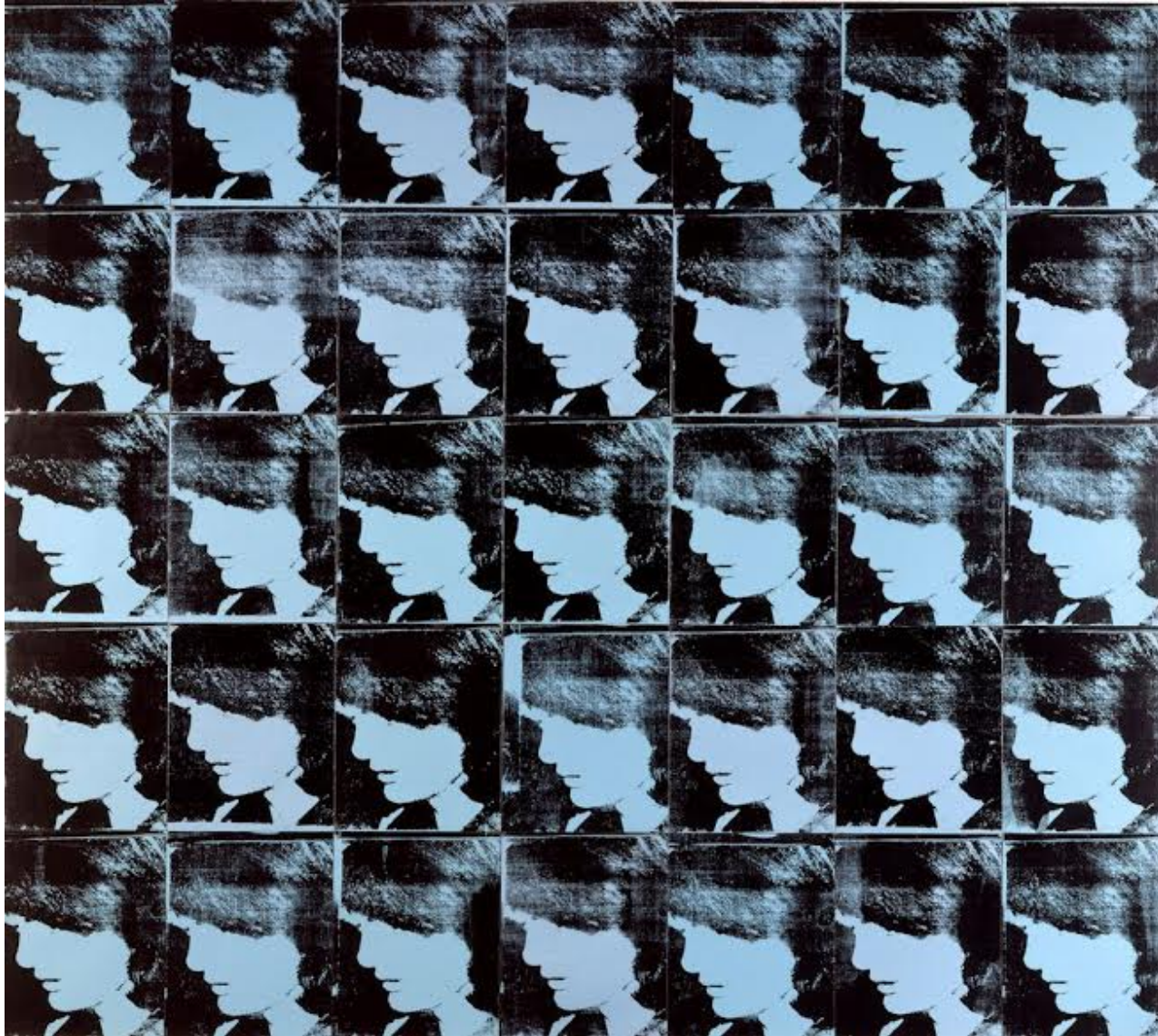
(p. 13)

Andy Warhol (1929-1987)



- an American artist who was a leading figure in the visual art movement known as pop art.
- His works explore the relationship between artistic expression, celebrity culture and advertisement that flourished by the 1960s.
- After a successful career as a commercial illustrator, Warhol became a renowned and sometimes controversial artist.

John Curley's *A Conspiracy of Images*



Andy Warhol,
Thirty-Five Jackies
(Multiplied Jackies), 1964.
Silkscreen ink and acrylic
on canvas, 100 2/3 x 113 in.

Gerhard Richter (1932-)



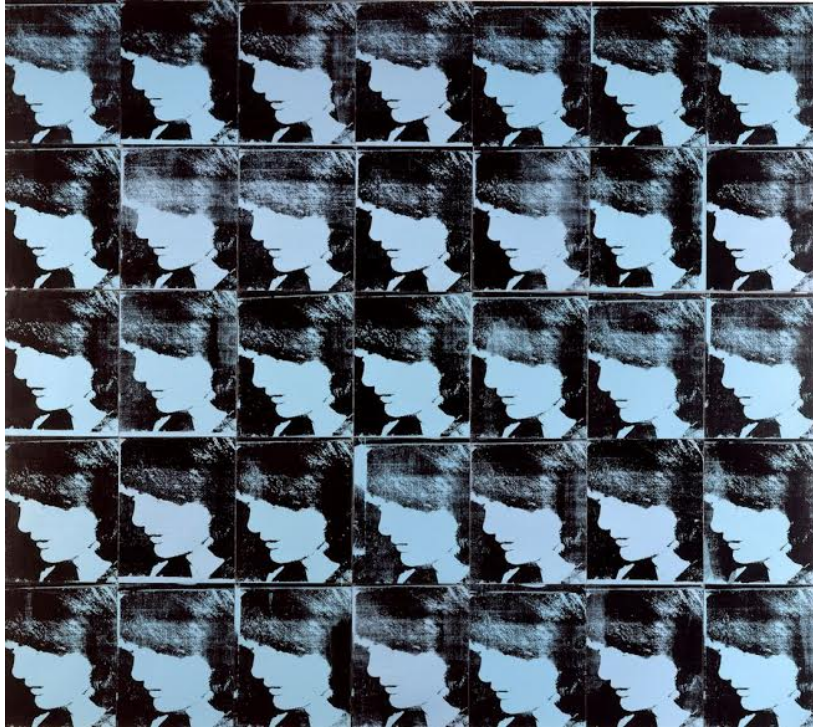
- a German visual artist and one of the pioneers of the New European Painting that has emerged in the second half of the twentieth century.
- Richter has produced abstract as well as photorealistic paintings, and also photographs and glass pieces.
- His art follows the examples of Picasso and Jean Arp in undermining the concept of the artist's obligation to maintain a single cohesive style.

John Curley's *A Conspiracy of Images*



Gerhard Richter, *Woman with an Umbrella* (Frau mit Schirm), 1964.
Oil on canvas, 63 x 37 3/8 in.

John Curley's *A Conspiracy of Images*



Discussion Questions

- What are Warhol's and Richter's respective paintings of Jackie Kennedy saying about Cold War painting? Cold War photography?
- How do they intervene into the Cold War battle of images?

Final Slide

Thank you