Meyer Schapiro's Obsolescence: New York and the Portents of Postmodernism

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Despite his well-known and widely celebrated commitment to the art of his own time, in his later years the American art historian and New York intellectual Meyer Schapiro (1904–96) self-consciously stopped keeping up with the newest and most radical art being produced around him.[1] In a 1983 interview with the journalist Helen Epstein, a 79-year-old Schapiro described this change in his temperament at some length:

> In my earlier writings, I took a stand with regard to what I found unsatisfactory or incomplete or inconsistent in what was going on around me, in the approach to art in general. When I was younger, I often felt that my colleagues' concerns were rather narrow. I wanted to do more in the way of analysis and interpretation and philosophical study, so that I was constantly re-exploring the objects of common interest from my point of view. [...]
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> Now I care much less about that. I want to develop my own ideas without regard to my position vis-à-vis the others. That means I go out less and I read less of other people's works. I don't have much to do with the current art world. I no longer go to the galleries or museums or the periodical rooms in the library. [...]
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> It's a normal process, a very common experience. For some of my colleagues it began at 40; for some people at 90. I began to change at about 65. I regret that I see so little; I know there are things which would please me, and even if they didn't please me they'd interest me as something new, something different, and promising for the

[1] The most widely known summary of Schapiro's relation to the artists of his time remains: Thomas B. Hess, "Sketch for a Portrait of the Art Historian Among Artists," *Social Research*, vol. 45, no. 1 (spring 1978), 6–14. Largely anecdotal, Hess does not discuss at much length, if at all, the artists and artworks I analyze here.

> future. But none of the things I see in reproductions, books and catalogues of new art interest me as much as what I saw in the 1940s and 1950s. This is the simple fact of it.[2]

Based on this recollection, we can date the beginning of Schapiro's retreat from the world around him—what I tendentiously here call his self-diagnosed obsolescence—to 1969. As Schapiro confesses, however, his identification with truly contemporary art started to slip already a decade earlier. This change corresponds to the scholarly association between Schapiro and the New York School; yet it also poses something of a paradox. For even though it is evident that Schapiro had an uneven relationship with the art that displaced Abstract Expressionism—specifically with Allan Kaprow's happenings, Jasper Johns's targets, Robert Rauschenberg's combines, and Andy Warhol's soup cans—Kaprow credited Schapiro as a significant inspiration for his work and Johns was indebted to him for his early success. In a 1963 letter to Schapiro, for instance, Kaprow wrote: "I know you've scratched your head, so to speak, these past five years watching me, but take heart, I did learn something from you and it hasn't gone to waste."[3] And in a 1991 interview, Johns recalled Schapiro defending his target paintings already in 1956 and even selecting one of them for their first museum exhibition; yet, in the same interview, Johns was convinced that Schapiro was baffled by Rauschenberg's famous goat sculpture, claiming that Schapiro "didn't think it was art."[4]

How are we to make sense of this double relation, a relation in which Schapiro is both integral to and yet at odds with a famed paradigm shift of postwar American art? Were artists like Kaprow merely ingratiating themselves with Schapiro, or even placating him, because he was a powerful figure in the New York art world? Or was there a real and substantial connection between Schapiro and the artists he supported but ostensibly didn't understand? In what follows I offer up an answer to these questions by investigating Schapiro's under-discussed relation to the now-canonical artists and artworks of this transitional moment, a moment that many have identified as the watershed of postmodernism.[5] While I agree with the consensus view that Schapiro did not fully recognize this proto-postmodern art for what it was—and therefore Schapiro does effectively serve, as he so often has done, as a modernist straw man—I will also argue that the post-Abstract Expressionist artists and critics who he inspired did not fully understand him either.[6] The misunderstanding at the center of Schapiro's relation to the origins of postmodernism, so to speak, is a two-way street. Analyzing the

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[2] Meyer Schapiro, quoted in Helen Epstein, "A Passion to Know and Make Known," *ArtNews*, summer 1983, 92–95.

[3] Allan Kaprow to Meyer Schapiro, January 14, 1963, Meyer Schapiro Collection, series II, box 140, folder 1, Columbia University Libraries. The emphasis is in the original.

[4] Jasper Johns, *Jasper Johns: Writings, Sketchbook Notes, Interviews* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1996), 273.

[5] For instance: Arthur Danto, *After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and the Pale of History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 3–19.

[6] For an example of Schapiro being positioned as a typical modernist, see: Michael Camille, "How New York Stole the Idea of Romanesque Art: Medieval, Modern, and Postmodern in Meyer Schapiro," *Oxford Art Journal* vol. 17, no. 1 (1994), 65–75.

lineaments of these misunderstandings reveals Schapiro's art-historical writing, thinking, and teaching to be more compatible with the traditionally understood tenets of postmodernism than perhaps even he himself realized. As those tenets—specifically, forms of skepticism about norms of evaluation that gave way to heated arguments about identity—have not only exerted an abiding impact on how visual art is perceived but are also some of the very issues at the heart of the crises of our current moment, revisiting how a widely celebrated intellectual and art historian grappled with the rise of postmodernism has continuing, in fact, pressing, relevance. To tease out the import and ramifications of Schapiro's engagement with these issues, I will draw significantly on unpublished material and start with Schapiro's mentorship of Kaprow, then consider his relation to Johns, Rauschenberg, and Warhol, before concluding by focusing on Schapiro's remarkably elastic conception of Abstract Expressionism.[7]

Schapiro, Kaprow, and Performance

If we step back and assess how Schapiro understood modernism from a long-term chronological perspective, it is clear that the early twentieth-century Dada performances that prefigure the happenings of Allan Kaprow barely register in Schapiro's writing. The readymades of Duchamp and provocations of Picabia, moreover, that foreshadow with their irony central premises of Pop Art, are also given short shrift.[8] In this regard, Schapiro was quite comparable to other modernist critics of his generation. Little wonder, then, that Schapiro's relation to the art of Kaprow is importantly comparable to his relation to other forms of post-Abstract Expressionist art practice that emerged in the late 1950s, all resonating with earlier forms of artistic production the historical importance of which Schapiro was prone to downplay.

Nevertheless, the associations between Schapiro and a figure like Kaprow are extensive, well documented, and have attracted some, though not much, critical commentary. In the most compelling interpretation of their friendship to date, Robert Haywood has argued that Schapiro's theory of non-instrumentalized artistic labor—articulated in his 1957 *ArtNews* essay "On the Liberating Quality of Avant-Garde Art"—is the main belief that connects their work. This theory tacitly runs throughout much of Schapiro's postwar scholarship and is also fundamental to the emergence and development of Kaprow's happenings.[9] Under

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[7] Schapiro relationship with the prominent Minimalist Donald Judd, of course, could also be considered in the context of this article. However, for reasons of space and clarity, I postpone that especially complicated topic for a yet-to-be-written, future essay.

[8] For instance, in his most widely read collection of essays, *Modern Art: 19th and 20th Centuries,* Schapiro only mentions Picabia once and Duchamp twice; neither is given much importance.

[9] Robert Haywood, "Critique of Instrumental Labor: Meyer Schapiro's and Allan Kaprow's Theory of Avant-Garde Art," in Benjamin Buchloh and Judith Rodenbeck, eds., *Experiments in the Everyday: Allan Kaprow and Robert Watts—Events, Objects, Documents* (New York: Wallach Art Gallery, Columbia University, 1999), 27–46. See also: Robert Haywood, *Allan Kaprow and Claes Oldenburg: Art, Happenings, and Cultural Politics, 1958–1967* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017); and Eva Meyer-Hermann, Andrew Perchuk, and Stephanie Rosenthal, eds., *Allan Kaprow—Art as Life* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2008).

this interpretation, Kaprow's very decision in 1958 to stop making what he called "gallery art" was motivated by an interpretation of what Schapiro had laid out so clearly two years earlier. As Schapiro there put it, indulging in some evidently romantic hyperbole:

> Paintings and sculptures, let us observe, are the last hand-made, personal objects within our culture. Almost everything else is produced industrially, in mass, and through a high division of labor. Few people are fortunate enough to make something that represents themselves, that issues entirely from their hands and mind, and to which they can affix their names.
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> [...] Standardized objects produced impersonally and in quantity establish no bond between maker and user. They are mechanical products with only a passing and instrumental value.[10]

Steeped in such exaggerated and nostalgic doctrines, already in the late 1950s Kaprow seems to have recognized that the Abstract Expressionist paintings that he himself had made up to that point had themselves become, at least in an expanded sense, the very "standardized objects" of "instrumental value" that Schapiro criticized. Just as Schapiro had explicitly warned in 1956 of the "dangerous corruption" that haunts the "high market value" of art objects, so too did Kaprow describe his performance of 1961, *Yard*, in relation to the "financial consequences" of its "ephemeral existence," not being "a thing to be possessed."[11] Schapiro and Kaprow were hardly lone voices in the wilderness on this point. Imitators of de Kooning and Pollock, as Barbara Rose noted in 1965, had become so widespread in New York galleries at the time that they caused a crisis, their commodity-like production so readily facilitating the exchange of abstract gestural paintings that those paintings might as well have been mass produced.[12] Such a connection is a powerful means of explaining how Kaprow did indeed draw on Schapiro's work, and it helps partially explain both the distance and the similarity between Kaprow and Warhol, both artists making work that challenged the artworld's economy.

Unlike Warhol, however, Kaprow's and Schapiro's respective practices were both indebted, albeit in fundamentally opposed ways, to a curious common source: the writing of John Dewey. Having studied with Dewey as an undergraduate and having struggled with the legacy of Pragmatism throughout his career, Schapiro drew on many of Dewey's ideas—

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[10] Meyer Schapiro, "Recent Abstract Painting," (originally published in 1957 as "The Liberating Quality of Avant-Garde Art"), in *Modern Art: 19th and 20th Centuries* (New York: Braziller, 1979), 218.

[11] Schapiro, "Recent Abstract Painting," 224; Alan Kaprow, "Some Observations on Contemporary Art," in *New Forms—New Media, I* (New York: Martha Jackson Gallery, 1961), cited in Haywood, "Critique of Instrumental Labor," 39.

[12] Barbara Rose, "The Second Generation: Academy and Breakthrough," *Artforum*, vol. 4, no. 1 (September 1965), 53–62. In fact, the Italian artist Giuseppe Pinot-Gallizio, though unknown in New York at the time, had arguably already literalized this idea. See: Frances Stracy, "Pinot Gallizio's 'Industrial Painting': Towards a Surplus Life," *Oxford Art Journal*, vol. 28, no. 3 (2005), 391–405.

including his capacious theory of experience—but was notably critical of his theory of art.[13] Kaprow, in turn, was similarly attentive to, if not fetishistic of, experience as well, evidently drawing on Dewey's writing in the construction of his own artistic practice.[14] If this shared inspiration might initially appear quite far removed from the postmodern debates that are my focus here, it is nevertheless clear that Dewey's writing played a central role in how both Schapiro and Kaprow approached questions central to postmodernism. In his famed confrontation with Jacques Derrida at Columbia in 1979, for instance, Schapiro is reported to have replied to Derrida's deconstructive take on his interpretation of Van Gogh's shoes by asserting that he was a student of John Dewey and he believed in the truth.[15] And Kaprow's understanding of experience, though evidently connected to Dewey's, is also fundamental to how his work disrupted authorial intention, itself a topic so fundamental to the postmodern thesis concerning the death of the author.[16] It is a remarkably underrecognized fact that Dewey's philosophical aesthetics of 1934, *Art as Experience*, radically declared that "the epidermis is only in the most superficial way an indication of where an organism ends and its environment begins," a proposition that follows evidently from the book's well-known opening: "The existence of the works of art upon which formation of an esthetic theory depends has become an obstruction to theory about them."[17] The former follows from the latter because it is the constraints or borders placed around objects as works of art and authors as producers of those works—both prototypical modernist assumptions central to claims about artistic autonomy—that are the very obstructions of which Dewey complains. In breaking down those borders, Dewey locates art not in the frame, so to speak, but in the totalizing experience of it, thereby emphasizing the work of the spectator as much as, if not more than, the work of the artist or author. The participatory nature of Kaprow's happenings follow through on such an idea quite literally and radically, expanding and diffusing the artwork into the plural experiences of it.

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[13] For Schapiro's relation to the writing of John Dewey, see: C. Oliver O'Donnell, *Meyer Schapiro's Critical Debates: Art Through a Modern American Mind* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2019), passim; see also: Molly Nesbit, *The Pragmatism in the History of Art* (Pittsburgh and New York: Periscope, 2013).

[14] For Kaprow's relation to Dewey's writing, see: Jeff Kelly, "Introduction," in Allan Kaprow, *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), xi–xxvi. See also: Jeff Kelly, *Childsplay: The Art of Allan Kaprow* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

[15] David Shapiro, "Van Gogh, Heidegger, Schapiro, Derrida: The Truth in Criticism (Notes on Restless Life)," in Joseph Masheck, ed., *Van Gogh 100* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1996), 281–94. Such a statement, or something similar, has been confirmed by other witnesses.

[16] For an admirable contextualization of the idea of the "death of the author," see: John Farrell, *Varieties of Authorial Intention* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017). As Christa Robbins's recent work shows, this famed thesis is still very much part of the scholarship on Abstract Expressionism. Christa Robbins, *Artist as Author: Action and Intent in Late-Modernist American Painting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021).

[17] John Dewey, *Art as Experience* [1934], in *John Dewey: The Later Works, 1925–1953*, vol. 10 (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987), 64, 9.

Having attended at least one of Kaprow's happenings Schapiro did have the opportunity to have such an experience himself. But the occasion didn't bring him around to Kaprow's and Dewey's point of view. To dissolve the artwork into our experience of it (we can imagine Schapiro, the romantic anti-capitalist, asserting) will not successfully remove art from its economic system of exchange, as, for instance, the commodification of conceptual art by dealers like Seth Siegelaub would soon demonstrate.[18] What's more, the critique of artistic labor that Kaprow's work offers becomes remarkably self-referential, being largely significant as a critique of how visual art, as a single, specific commodity, is bought and sold under capitalism rather than being a critique of how all commodities and all forms of labor are bought and sold under that economic system.[19] After all, the attendees of Kaprow's happenings—including Schapiro—were largely artworld insiders, and Kaprow's reception and historical import has always rested on his position as a visual artist. Much like Warhol's supposedly indiscernible Brillo Boxes, Kaprow's happenings are premised on *erasing* a fundamental distance—that between art and life—that Schapiro saw as fundamental to the critical work on society as a whole that modernist representation can perform, be that representation objective or non-objective.[20] As David Craven long ago noted, the very purchase that abstract painting had in 1950s America, for Schapiro, was that it was *not* a stereotypical product of the time, that it stood in stark contrast to the machine-made objects that dominated the era, and thereby captured at least part of what that moment's Taylorist production was sacrificing, wittingly or unwittingly.[21] On this interpretation, art's *difference* leverages open a gap, allowing us to see the limitations currently imposed on life by an era's culture and thereby question those limitations. If art historians often celebrate the postmodern collapsing of that gap by positioning it as culturally appropriate or even inevitable—think, for instance, of Rauschenberg's fêted assertion that he wanted to "act in the gap between" art and life—the destabilizing effects that truly accepting this position has for the discipline as a whole and the knowledge that it produces is a far less comfortable topic. Schapiro would resist such a concession, though his mentorship of Kaprow had called it into being.[22]

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[18] See: Alexander Alberro, *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003).

[19] This fact has led some scholars understandably to accuse Kaprow of naïveté. See: Benjamin Buchloh, "Andy Warhol's One Dimensional Art: 1956–1966," in *Andy Warhol: A Retrospective* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1989), 45.

[20] Schapiro made the stakes of this clear in a widely cited passage in his critique of Alfred Barr's 1936 exhibition "Cubism and Abstract Art." There, he wrote: "All renderings of objects, no matter how exact they seem, even photographs, proceed from values, methods and viewpoints which somehow shape the image and often determine its contents. On the other hand, there is no 'pure art,' unconditioned by experience; all fantasy and formal construction, even the random scribbling of the hand, are shaped by experience and by nonaesthetic concerns." Meyer Schapiro, "Nature of Abstract Art," *Modern Art: 19th and 20th Centuries*, 196.

[21] David Craven, *Abstract Expressionism as Cultural Critique: Dissent During the McCarthy Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

[22] By making this claim I do not intend to downplay how fundamental the work John Cage was for Kaprow on this point as well. See: Paul Schimmel, "'Only memory can carry it into the future':

Schapiro, neo-Dada, and Pop

Such resistance on Schapiro's part, however, should not be confused with political conservatism. Even in his struggle with the emergence of proto-postmodern art, Schapiro showed himself to be forward-looking. Especially notable here is Jasper Johns's recollection of Schapiro's role in the selection of works for the 1957 exhibition "Artists of the New York School: Second Generation" at the Jewish Museum, where Schapiro served as an adviser for many years. During the presentation of possible works for the exhibition to what Johns presumed to be an informal jury, Johns recalled how an unidentified man approached him and Schapiro and said

> 'Oh Dr Schapiro, there is another painting of Jasper Johns and there just wasn't enough room for it in here, so we have it in another space'— [...] it's a huge space with thousands of paintings! We walked through a hall or something, and opened a broom closet, and it was my *Target with Plaster Casts*.
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> I was livid; I didn't know what to do, and I was also very polite. They pulled this thing out and Meyer Schapiro and these people started looking at it. I went back in and said something to Bob [Rauschenberg]: 'I'm getting out of here... I'm furious!' Then this man came in and said, 'Jasper, Meyer Schapiro likes that painting of yours very much, and thinks it ought to be in the exhibition. But my colleagues tell me that if it's in the show, I will lose my job. Now would it be all right with you if we close some of the compartments.' There were plaster casts, and one of them was a penis.[23]

Based on this account, Schapiro's motivation for offering support to Johns after his work had been literally closeted is unclear. The mere display of a simulacrum penis within one of the small cupboards in *Target with Plaster Casts* need not be read in relation to Johns's sexuality, though it is unsurprising that the episode has been featured prominently in Gavin Butt's scholarship on "queer disclosures in the New York art world."[24] Schapiro's ostensible recognition of and resistance to this presumed act of censorship would be far from an anomaly within his career as a public intellectual. Already in the 1930s Schapiro called out Thomas Hart Benton's homophobic values in print; later, in the 1960s, Schapiro would defend his friend Whittaker Chambers against slanderous claims about his sexuality in a wild psychobiography.[25] Chambers himself was a famous posterchild for the widespread association during the

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Kaprow's Development from the Action-Collages to the Happenings," in *Allan Kaprow—Art as Life* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2008), 8–15.

[23] Johns, *Writings*, 273.

[24] This was not the only time Johns's work was censored. See Gavin Butt, *Between You and Me: Queer Disclosures in the New York Art World* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 155.

[25] For Schapiro's comments on Benton, see: Meyer Schapiro, "Populist Realism," *Partisan Review* 4 (1938), 57; here Schapiro explicitly names "the effeminacy that [Benton] cannot tolerate in homosexuals," and concludes by lamenting that Benton "is not more feminine." For Schapiro's defense of Chambers, see: Meyer Schapiro, "Dangerous Acquaintances," *New York Review of Books*,

McCarthy period between communism and homosexuality, which was often used at the time in efforts to damage personal reputations.[26] Could this fact stand behind Schapiro's defense of Johns's *Target with Plaster Casts*? Though the meaning of Johns' work surely remains open to interpretation, the association between its literal iconography of a target and his persecuted or targeted sexual identity has long been an evident possibility.[27] Indeed, one can understandably suppose that the Jewish Museum's attempted act of censorship was the result of its unnamed employees having made that very connection.

In the broader context of Schapiro's late career, such details help unmask some of the potential misunderstanding embedded within Jacques Derrida's claim that there is a heteronormative desire at the heart of Schapiro's insistence on Van Gogh's painting of shoes decidedly representing a *pair*.[28] On the contrary, Schapiro explicitly explored the role that homosexual desire can play in artistic creation—notably, in his essays "Freud and Leonardo" and "Cézanne's Apples." His conclusions, granted, were skeptical; nevertheless, it should come as no surprise that the latter essay especially has played a role in opening up more recent queer interpretations, for instance that of Satish Padiyar.[29] Though scholars today undoubtedly go further than Schapiro did and rightfully subject him to critique, here again we see how his work foreshadows the present, having brought to the surface some of the very questions concerning the relation between artistic identity and creation that define the crises of our current moment. An evident source of Schapiro's interest in what we now call identity was his Marxism, being a tradition that, already in its mid-century American formation, became sensitive to the important role that identity can play in the pursuit of social justice.[30]

February 23, 1967. For a contextual discussion of Schapiro's relation to the politics of gender, see: Patricia Matthews, "Gender Analysis and the Work of Meyer Schapiro," *Oxford Art Journal*, vol. 17, no. 1 (1994), 81–91; see also: Donald Kuspit, "Dialectical Reasoning in Meyer Schapiro," *Social Research*, vol. 45, no. 1 (spring 1978), 93–129.

[26] For discussions of Chambers's sexuality as it was perceived to relate to his espionage work for the Soviet Union, see the scholarship of K.A. Cuordileone, for example: "'Politics in an Age of Anxiety': Cold War Political Culture and the Crisis in American Masculinity, 1949–1960," *Journal of American History*, vol. 87, no. 2 (September 2000), 515–545. Chambers's sexuality is still a topic of scholarly research and contention, as is the Hiss-Chambers affair more generally.

[27] For an interpretative discussion of Johns's target paintings as metaphors of his sexuality, including references to the vast literature on them, see: Christopher Reed, *Art and Homosexuality: A History of Ideas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[28] Jacques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 332–3; see also: Niall Lucy, ed., *A Dictionary of Postmodernism* (Chichester: John Wiley, 2016), 101. In a 1991 interview, Schapiro claimed that Derrida "neither understood nor cared to understand the nature of my criticism [of Heidegger]." Meyer Schapiro, Lilian Milgram Schapiro, and David Craven, "A Series of Interviews (July 15, 1992–January 22, 1995)," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 31 (spring 1997), 159–68.

[29] Satish Padiyar, "Building a World Between Men (or Cézanne with Arendt)," in *Modernist Games: Cézanne and His Card Players* (London: Courtauld Books Online, 2013), 123–50.

[30] For a historical overview of the contemporary concept of identity as it relates to Marxism, see: Marie Moran, "Identity and Identity Politics: A Cultural Materialist History," *Historical Materialism*

It therefore seems important that Schapiro expressed his debt to Marx throughout his life, however transformed his understanding of Marxism certainly was by the 1950s. Another source of Schapiro's sensitivity to issues of identity, it seems plausible enough, was his lifelong friendships with queer artists, artists whose lives became viciously associated with totalitarianism during the McCarthy period and whose work, as exemplified above, Schapiro did not shy away from defending during moments of censorship. In this regard it is surely important that queer artists also supported Schapiro in turn. Johns, Rauschenberg, and Warhol, for instance, each donated works to the portfolio of prints, titled "For Meyer Schapiro," which was auctioned to raise funds to create the endowed chair at Columbia University that bears Schapiro's name.[31]

Be this as it may, Schapiro was undoubtedly confused by Pop Art. An important expression of this confusion comes in the form of a typescript dated February 27, 1971, and titled "The Campbell Soup Can, An Experiment on Size, Meaning, Affect in Painting." Over the course of five factual paragraphs, Schapiro recounts how he asked his friend, the artist and educator Martha Hyams, to conduct an experiment on his behalf with her painting students.[32] The explicitly stated goal was to test the idea "that the enlarged painting of a Soup Can would bring out qualities and values of the can not evident in the actual can or in its enlargement in actuality or in a picture on a billboard, advertising the can."[33] In short, we might say, the point of the experiment was to query the difference—rather than the indiscernibility—between a painting and the object it represents. The simple task was to have a group of artists all make paintings of the same object and to have them write statements about their efforts. No matter how naturalistically or even imitatively of Warhol's by-then canonical images, Schapiro posited that the resulting paintings would nevertheless unconsciously betray—rather than consciously parade—the artists' own interests and associations, thereby putting pressure on the claims about indiscernibility associated with Pop Art.[34]

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vol. 26, no.2 (2018), 21–45. For an attempt to trace a longer-term history of the emergence of identity as a conceptual linchpin, see: Yascha Mounk, *The Identity Trap: A Story of Ideas and Power in Our Time* (Dublin: Allen Lane, 2023).

[31] The portfolio was released in 1974 and it includes works by Lichtenstein, Kelly, Johns, Motherwell, Warhol, Hayter, Rauschenberg, Steinberg, Oldenburg, Liberman, and Masson.

[32] For further context on Hyams, who taught at Manatee County College in Florida, and her husband Ralph Hyams, see: Barbara Newsom and Adele Silver, eds., *The Art Museum as Educator* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 357–9.

[33] Meyer Schapiro, "The Campbell's Soup Can: An Experiment in Size, Meaning, Affect in Painting," Meyer Schapiro Collection, series IV.3, box 239, folder 5, Columbia University Libraries.

[34] Collective exercises of comparative painting such as this have an interesting history themselves, including within art historiography. A prominent example is found at the beginning of Heinrich Wölfflin's *Kunstgeschichtliche Grundbegriffe* of 1915, where the common object is a landscape. By making the distinction between "betraying" versus "parading," I am intentionally drawing on the writing of Charles Sanders Peirce as filtered through Edgar Wind and Erwin Panofsky. See: Tullio Viola, "Peirce and Iconology: Habitus, Embodiment, and the Analogy between Philosophy and Architecture," *European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy*, vol. 4, no. 1 (2012), np.

Schapiro, unsurprisingly, acknowledged that this exercise—almost absurd in its naïve faith in rudimentary experimentation—was a failure, the resulting paintings and artist statements never fully resolving into or explaining each other; however, the experiment's old-fashioned premise is not without interest. For Warhol himself would champion indiscernibility, claiming that his work brought high art down to the masses, leveling the playing field, so to speak. As he memorably put it,

> 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 know that the President drinks Coca-Cola, Liz Taylor drinks Coca-Cola, and just think, you can drink Coca-Cola, 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.[35]

From such a statement it has long been possible to infer that, with his artworks representing popular commodities, Warhol was attempting to erase the distinction between a rich art collector owning and displaying an autographed painting of a given object and a middle-class consumer owning and displaying a mass-produced poster of that same object. Warhol himself even interpreted his work in these terms, stating that "Pop art is for everyone. I don't think art should be only for the select few, I think it should be for the mass of American people."[36] Such conclusions are certainly understandable and provocative, yet they are also furtively incomplete. On the one hand, Warhol's first efforts to produce such paintings betray the influence of the high art style that was still dominant at the time, Abstract Expressionism, a fact that is echoed by the evidently hand-made qualities of many of Warhol's works and that is at least partially explained by Warhol's tongue-in-cheek confession that he couldn't believe "why [he] was never an abstract expressionist."[37] On the other hand, and as Jennifer Sichel has recently demonstrated, settling some longstanding scholarly arguments, Warhol's machine-like production was centrally connected to his queer identity.[38] An unedited recording of Warhol's widely reproduced interview with Gene Swenson in *ArtNews* in 1963 reveals that Warhol explicitly connected his famous claim that "everybody should be a machine" with the claim that "everybody should like everybody," by which he meant "both

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[35] Andy Warhol, *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol: from A to B and back again* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1975), 100–01.

[36] Andy Warhol, interview with Gretchen Berg, "Nothing to Lose: Interview with Andy Warhol," *Cahiers du Cinéma in English* 10 (May 1967), 38–43.

[37] Warhol, *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol*, 150. For my understanding of Warhol, I am indebted to Anthony E. Gruden, *Warhol's Working Class: Pop Art and Egalitarianism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017) and Michael Golec, *The Brillo Box Archive* (Hannover, NH: Dartmouth College Press, 2008).

[38] Jennifer Sichel, "'Do you think Pop Art's Queer?': Gene Swenson and Andy Warhol," *Oxford Art Journal*, vol. 41, no. 1 (2018), 59–83.

men and women," "sexually and in every other way."[39] As such comments were edited out of the original interview by Thomas Hess—the *ArtNews* editor who originally published the interview and who practiced extreme editorial license with others' work as well—Schapiro himself would not have been directly confronted by these associations.[40]

In light of Schapiro's above-noted engagements with queer artists and intellectuals, however, Sichel's revelations do more than just call Schapiro's understanding of Warhol's production into question. Schapiro's judgment, for instance, that he was "not an admirer of Warhol's work... [because Warhol] was a man who worked very much in the spirit of advertising" is evidently based on incomplete information.[41] Warhol's works were never intended *merely* to erase the boundary between a commodity and its advertisement, an object and its representation—as critics like Arthur Danto long ago asserted and as Schapiro's "experiment" with the Campbell's soup can presupposed—but were quite explicitly invested with feelings, or, to use a word from the title of Schapiro's typescript, "affect." Said another way, the very quality that Schapiro attempted to find in Pop art, but could not, is the quality that more recent interpretations of Warhol have not only found but also established to be fundamental to Warhol's work.[42]

This twist of the historiographic screw interestingly and quite paradoxically shows that Schapiro's defense of abstract paintings as irreducible expressions of artistic personality or "self" that are saturated with feeling is in fact remarkably compatible with the intentions behind Warhol's images of popular objects and icons, however iconographically divergent the two undoubtedly are. As Schapiro wrote:

> [A]rt is deeply rooted, I believe, in the self and its relation to the surrounding world. The pathos of the reduction or fragility of the self within a culture that becomes increasingly organized through industry, economy and the state intensifies the desire of the artist to create forms that will manifest his liberty in this striking way—a liberty that, in the best works, is associated with a sentiment of harmony and achieves stability, and even impersonality through the power of painting to universalize itself in the perfection of its form and to reach out into common life. It becomes then a possession of everyone and is related to everyday experience.[43]

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[39] Ibid., 67.

[40] Schapiro himself experienced Hess's forceful interventions; he gave Schapiro's essay "The Liberating Quality of Avant-Garde Art" its title, a fact that Schapiro complained about and corrected in the second volume of his *Selected Papers* by more soberly naming the essay "Recent Abstract Painting." Other writers also complained of Hess's editorial license. See: Sichel, "'Do you think Pop Art's Queer," 61.

[41] Deborah Solomon, "Critic Turns 90: Meyer Schapiro," *The New York Times*, 14 August, 1994, §. 6, 22.

[42] For instance: Jonathan Flatley, *Like Andy Warhol* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), in which "affect theory" plays a central role.

[43] Schapiro, "Recent Abstract Painting," in *Modern Art: 19th and 20th Centuries*, 222.

Granted, this description was undoubtedly intended to describe New York School paintings by figures such as Rothko and Pollock and could be applied to many works of modern art, which have a long history of being read in relation to liberatory politics. Nevertheless, Schapiro's emphasis here on the fragility of the self within an oppressively organized culture, on a desire for liberty and harmony that reaches out into common life and becomes the possession of everyone, very much parallels the ideals articulated in recent queer reinterpretations of Warhol. Indeed, Warhol's claim was not just that he should be secure in his queer identity but rather that "everybody should like everybody," that his art should, to use Schapiro's words, "reach out into common life," become "a possession of everyone," a part of "everyday experience." In conjunction with the fact that Schapiro did not understand how Warhol's depictions of commodities were explicitly invested with such sentiments, it seems appropriate to conclude that Schapiro was deprived from truly experiencing Warhol's works and that Schapiro's writing was not nearly as opposed to Warhol's art as he believed.

Just as Schapiro misunderstood Warhol, however, so too did Warhol misunderstand Schapiro. In a 1962 interview with David Bourdon, Warhol was directly confronted with Schapiro's ideas:

> A few years ago [Bourdon states], Meyer Schapiro wrote that painting and sculptures are the last handmade, personal objects within our culture. Everything else is being mass-produced. He said the object of art, more than ever, was the occasion of spontaneity or intense feeling. It seems to me that your objective is entirely opposite. There is very little that is either personal or spontaneous in your work, hardly anything in fact that testifies to your being present at the creation of your painting. You appear to be a one-man Rubens-workshop, turning out single-handedly the work of a dozen apprentices.

To this Warhol simply replied: "But why should I be original? Why can't I be non-original?"[44] However cutting, petulant, and even goading Warhol's retort may be, his unoriginality was undoubtedly original, and his success and appeal has long rested on this very paradox. Moreover, as noted above, Warhol's works are deeply invested with "feeling." The essay by Schapiro that contains the argument that Bourdon quotes—the essay from *ArtNews* discussed above—is not principally an argument about originality at all but rather an argument about humanity. There, Schapiro writes that the very development of modern art

> was related to a broader and deeper reaction to basic elements of common experience and the concept of humanity, as it developed under new conditions. [...] In a number of respects, painting and sculpture today may seem to be opposed to the general trend of life. Yet, in such opposition, these arts declare their humanity and importance.[45]

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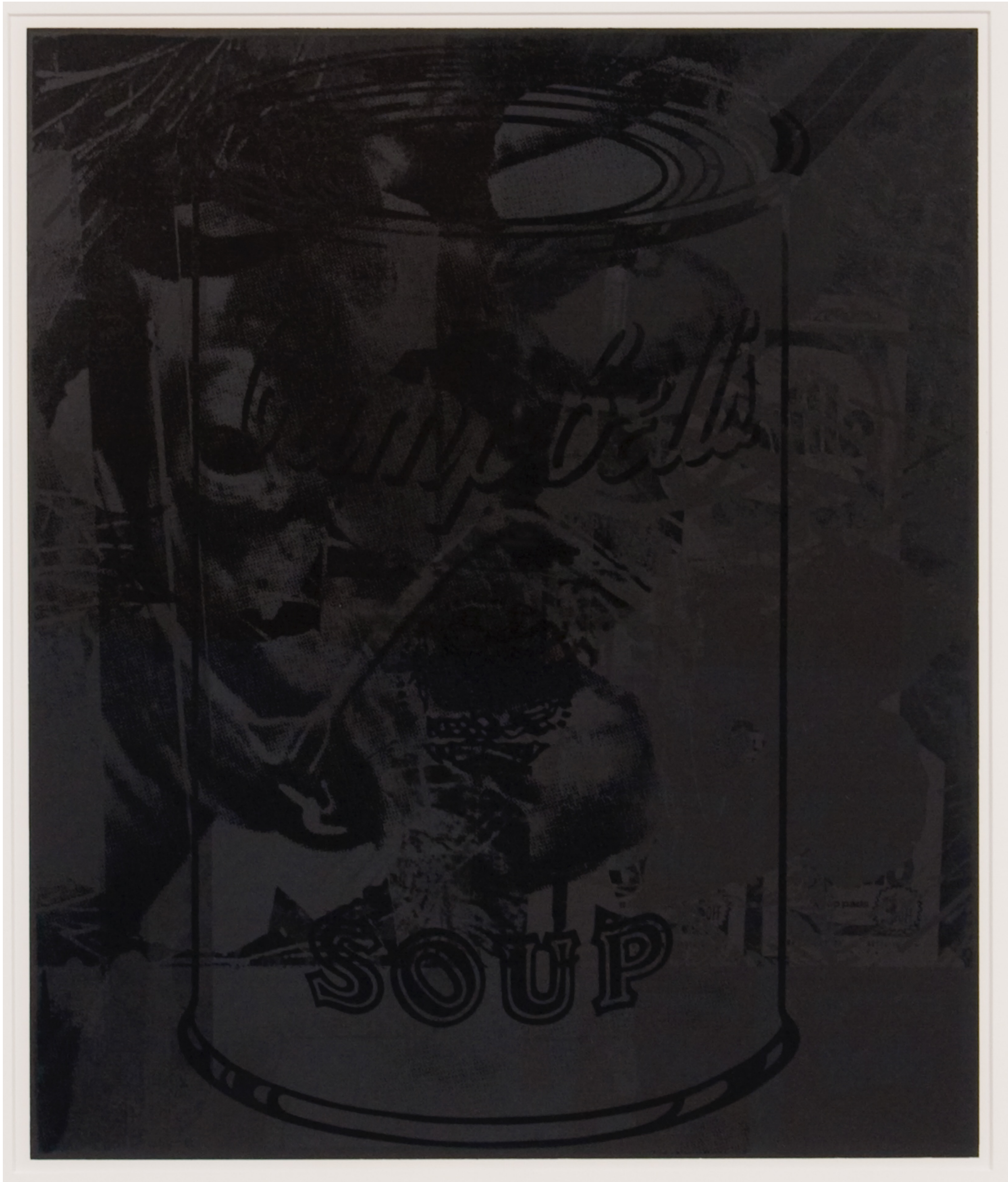
[44] Kenneth Goldsmith, ed., *I'll be Your Mirror: The Selected Andy Warhol Interviews* (New York: Hatchett Books, 2004), 7.

[45] Schapiro, "Recent Abstract Painting," 217.



1. Andy Warhol, “Untitled 12” from *For Meyer Schapiro*, 1974. Screen print, 19 x 16 in., edition 71/100, University of North Dakota Art Collection. Image courtesy of the University of North Dakota.

Anodyne and perfunctory though these comments undoubtedly appear, Schapiro's emphasis here on the importance of humanity to his approach to modern art courts the self-evident possibility that any style might fulfill that end, including Pop Art. But Schapiro did not understand this potential of his own writing, his generation being too sexually closeted, not to mention having too much fidelity to the events of the Great Depression, to be able to see how Warhol was using the language of mass media and commercial advertising for subtly subversive ends.

Going further, based on the interviewer's confrontational tone and Warhol's well-known strategies of protection and concealment, it seems appropriate to note that Warhol's misunderstanding of Schapiro may have been fittingly skin-deep. The work that Warhol donated to the endowed professorship at Columbia that bears Schapiro's name can be taken to show that Warhol understood the tension between himself and Schapiro quite well. That work, *Untitled 12* (Fig. 1), is a blacked-out compilation of Warhol's iconic images, each laid over the other to produce a monochromatic, black rectangle, very much resembling a canonical painting by Malevich or, better, Reinhardt. The intentionally obstructive layers of the print require us to spend time with this dissimulation in order to be able even to identify the otherwise iconic—and therefore almost instantaneously recognizable—forms within it. Through this literal palimpsest, one can see Warhol both camouflage himself with a high style of modernist abstraction—the very language, for Schapiro, that was "ultimately opposed to communication"[46] in a technocratic world—and at the same time obscure the capitalist language of advertising and indiscernibility that has long been a foundation of interpretations of Warhol's work. In so doing, we can therefore provocatively conclude, Warhol made an image that represented his queer politics of "liking things" while at the same time being a fitting homage to Schapiro, an image that embodied Schapiro's most cherished beliefs about modernism, but which also revealed how those beliefs contained the seeds of humanity, of identity, and paradoxically, of postmodernism, within them.[47]

...

Such anecdotes, possibilities, and conclusions, of course, pertain not only to Schapiro's relation to the period's artistic production but also to his relation to art historiography in the age of postmodernism. As is widely known, as important as Schapiro's mentorship of figures like Kaprow was his impact on the generation of art historians who came to dominate the field during the late twentieth century. From Linda Nochlin's confession that she "never stopped reading Schapiro"[48] to T.J. Clark's 1985 assertion that Schapiro's writing on impressionism

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[46] Schapiro, "Recent Abstract Painting," 223.

[47] Warhol used camouflage, both explicitly and implicitly, in other works as well and notably in self-portraits. For an interpretation of Warhol's work with camouflage that references earlier literature and relates it to his queer identity, see: Flatley, *Like Andy Warhol*, esp. 30–31.

[48] Linda Nochlin, interviewed by James McElhinney, June 9–30, 2010, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. See also: Linda Nochlin, interviewed by Anne Lafont, *Perspective: actualité en histoire de l'art* 1 (January 2015), n.p.

was "still the best thing on the subject,"[49] Schapiro's scholarship played a pivotal role in guiding art history through what was perceived to be a true "crisis in the discipline," a crisis that looks somewhat quaint in retrospect.[50] Rosalind Krauss remembered that "at the graduate level, [she] naturally thought [she] would work with Meyer Schapiro, since it never occurred to [her] that there was anyone else possible."[51] And Annette Michelson, who herself was drawn to become a pioneering film scholar precisely because she resisted models for her work, nevertheless confessed that Schapiro "was *certainly* a model of a kind."[52]

Be this as it may, the question remains whether or not the generation of art historians that Schapiro directly inspired took in his work as a whole. Most scholars cite or analyze moments from Schapiro's long career, for instance, Andrew Hemingway's brilliant analyses of Schapiro's early Marxist writing or Hubert Damisch's interpretations of Schapiro's late semiotic essays.[53] Such studies are deeply valuable and have paved the way for my analysis here; however, with a little more historical and generational distance, it seems evident that art history's New Left selectively read Schapiro, seeing his work as more in harmony with, for instance, the Frankfurt School than it actually was.[54] Moreover, much like the artists who he inspired, the scholars and critics who were indebted to Schapiro also were conflicted about his work, sometimes going so far as to accused him of being a Stalinist and other times claiming that he was complicit with the rise of postwar neoliberalism.[55] In hindsight, it seems

[49] T.J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 5.

[50] Henri Zerner, "Editor's Statement: The Crisis in the Discipline," *Art Journal*, vol. 42, no. 4 (1982), 279.

[51] Quoted in: Amy Newman, *Challenging Art: Artforum, 1962–1974* (New York: Soho Press, 2000), 76.

[52] Newman, *Challenging Art*, 80. The emphasis is in the original.

[53] For Hemingway's excellent scholarship on Schapiro, see: Andrew Hemingway, "Meyer Schapiro and Marxism in the 1930s," *Oxford Art Journal*, vol. 17, no. 1 (1994), 13–29; and Andrew Hemingway, "Meyer Schapiro: Marxism, Science and Art," in Andrew Hemingway, ed., *Marxism and the History of Art: From William Morris to the New Left* (London: Pluto Press, 2006), 123–42. For Damisch's writing on Schapiro, see: Hubert Damisch, "Six Notes in the Margin of Meyer Schapiro's 'Words and Pictures,'" *Social Research*, vol. 45, no. 1 (spring 1978), 15–35; and Hubert Damisch, "These Are All about Me," in *Meyer Schapiro Abroad: Letters to Lillian and Travel Notebooks* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2007), 5–16.

[54] For an example of this overstatement, see: David Craven, "Meyer Schapiro, Karl Korsch, and the Emergence of Critical Theory," *Oxford Art Journal*, vol. 17, no. 1 (1994), 42–54. More recently, Pamela Lee has also read Schapiro through a lens that very much echoes the Frankfurt School, though she subtly does not equate Schapiro's work with it. Pamela M. Lee, *Think Tank Aesthetics: Midcentury Modernism, the Cold War, and the Neoliberal Present* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2020), esp. 49–86. For an alternative take, see: C. Oliver O'Donnell, "Meyer Schapiro: Thinking Between Art and the 20th Century," *Bilderfahrzeuge Blog*, March 19, 2021, https://bilderfahrzeuge.hypotheses.org/5296.

[55] T.J. Clark accused Schapiro's 1934 essay "The Social Bases of Art" of being Stalinist. See T.J. Clark, "Jackson Pollock's Abstraction," in *Reconstructing Modernism*, ed. Serge Guilbaut (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1983), esp. pp. 223–234. The most prominent association between Schapiro and postwar

more historical simply to recognize that those two political positions were dynamics of the reality through which Schapiro lived, and if his claims or decisions concerning them are certainly controversial, the historical questions of *why and how* he can be understood to have flirted with those two political positions is just as important as *if* he was or was not justified in doing so.

Such considerations, it seems to me, should considerably inflect the established association between Schapiro and Abstract Expressionism. For even though many of the artworks, artists, and critics that classically define that category have been criticized for a variety of reasons—including for their associations with Cold War cultural imperialism, for their sexist and misogynistic tendencies, and for their racist and homophobic exclusions—in Schapiro's hands Abstract Expressionism was explicitly open and counterintuitively diverse.[56] The clearest expression of this attitude was Schapiro's principal role in curating the

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liberalism remains: Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).

[56] This is not to say that Schapiro was attuned to questions of race as scholars are today. He was not, though he did write sympathetically about the work of the Black modernist painter Bob Thompson. See his brief remarks in in the exhibition catalogue, *Bob Thompson* (February 11–March 6, 1969) Wollman Hall, New York Art Center, New York City. While some have defended Schapiro's writing as explicitly anti-primitivizing, others have called out his insensitivity to the important differences that structured discrimination against African Americans. For an example of the former, see: Risham Majeed, "Against Primitivism: Meyer Schapiro's Early Writing on African and Romanesque art," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 71/72 (2019), 295–311. For an example of the latter, see: Louis Menand, *The Free World: Art and Thought in the Cold War* (New York: Harper Collins, 2021), esp. 610. Here Menand calls attention to Schapiro's role on the editorial board of *Dissent* and his support of Norman Mailer's controversial essay "The White Negro," which *Dissent* published in 1957. Neither Majeed nor Menand, however, seem aware of the following passage, not unusual for Schapiro's generation but rightfully full of contempt for Black American inequality: "In our own country, the problem is more painful and close. We have a great minority, the Negroes, whose status, eighty years after the Civil War, is a scandal; in many communities, they still cannot exercise the rights guaranteed them by the Constitution, even during a war against fascism in which Negroes are members of the armed forces. Now it is notorious that for years the 'inferiority' of the Negro has been justified through his arts. His so-called gifts for music and dancing were indicated as signs of his soul: He was accustomed to slavery, one said; he accepted his inferior place with cheerfulness; he was by nature an entertainer, a clown, a funny man, an energumen of expression; there are Negro educators who have tried to direct Negro artists back to the old African styles, as if these represent the inherent mind of black peoples." Meyer Schapiro, "The Fine Arts and the Unity of Mankind," [1947] in *Selected Papers* V (New York: Braziller, 1999), 245. The reference to "Negro educators" here likely refers to arguments associated with Alain Locke. See Alain Locke, *The Negro in Art: A Pictorial Record of the Negro Artist and of the Negro Theme in Art* (Washington, D.C.: Associates in Negro Folk Education, 1940). Schapiro had long been critical of all forms of racial essentialism, which he seems to have associated with Locke. See: Meyer Schapiro, "Race, Nationality, and Art," *Art Front* 2 (March 1936), 10–12. Kobena Mercer has recently claimed that Schapiro misunderstood Locke by failing to see how the latter was trying to create solidarity among a subaltern people. Kobena Mercer, *Alain Locke and the Visual Arts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2022), 94–95, 109. See also: Leah Dickerman, "Diaspora Modern," *October* 186 (fall 2023), 113–36.

already-mentioned 1957 exhibition *Artists of the New York School: Second Generation*, which opened in March of that year and which Allan Kaprow also helped organize. Not only was Schapiro prescient in his decision to choose now-canonical works by Elaine de Kooning, Joan Mitchell, and Grace Hartigan for the show, but he also included works by Helen Frankenthaler, Robert Rauschenberg, and Jasper Johns that explicitly foreshadow how the New York art scene would transform over the next decade.[57] Indeed, if most of the paintings in the exhibition have at least some of the tell-tale signs of Abstract Expressionism—most notoriously loose gestural brushwork and thick impasto surfaces—many can also be read as moving beyond those canonical qualities. The centeredness and popular iconography of Johns's *Green Target*, for instance, the protruding block of wood at the bottom of Rauschenberg's *Red Import*, and, of course, the colorful, yet translucent stains of Frankenthaler's *Break-Through* and *Early Summer*, all expand, if not contradict, how the New York School was then defined.

In his opening remarks at the exhibition, Schapiro was explicit about this having been his intention, wanting the exhibition, by way of its radically contemporary selection, to disrupt the acts of classification that so often accompany the experience of more historically distant art. To recapture the fullness of Schapiro's views, I quote his unpublished remarks delivered at the exhibition's opening at length:

> The confrontation of contemporary painting, in the truest sense, of a new work, just created, work which is doubtful even to the artist himself, even when he is a great artist, the confrontation, as I say, with work which has an absolute freshness and arises from the experiences of the moment and the problems of the artist, which have not been fully resolved, this at once engages the spectator of the work in an effort of attention, understanding, sympathy, or doubt, and of recovery from doubt, and the need to return to the objects—which I believe are the most important gifts of the experience of art. Without that, the experience of works of art tends to be more or less a routine, conventional; [...] a result of classification. [...]
>
> The thing which strikes me in looking at this exhibition is that it is not dominated by any single way of working. It doesn't constitute a 'school', in the sense of some doc-

[57] See the catalog of the exhibition, which contains a checklist of all the works included: *The New York School: Second Generation* (New York: The Jewish Museum, 1957). Though Allan Kaprow was instrumental to the organization of this show, Barbara Rose correctly notes in her 1965 *ArtNews* essay "The Second Generation" that Schapiro was principally responsible for making the final selections, a fact that has been somewhat obscured by Kaprow's involvement and the fact that Leo Steinberg wrote the catalog's only essay. To confuse matters even more, Kaprow clearly felt slighted by being usurped by Schapiro, writing that Schapiro was "called in at the last moment to correct some of the 'deficiencies'... namely that there wasn't enough soul-searching painting in there, which I wasn't terribly interested in." Quoted by Melissa Rachleff, "Flowering in Dark Soil: A Rediscovery of the Pioneering Artwork of Jean Follett," *Ursula* 4 (fall 2019), 57–65. Richard Bellamy, however, remembered Schapiro's "extreme patience" with Kaprow's "discourteous" pleas; quoted in Judith Stein, *The Eye of the Sixties: Richard Bellamy and the Transformation of Modern Art* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 2016), 67.

> trine, or commitment to a particular coloring, a particular style of method created by a previous master, which has become canonical, or a sign of modernity.
>
> On the contrary, you will find works, certainly, which can be called abstract, works which can be called figurative, works which are lyrical, works intense and sober, works which are rather small and intimate and playful—there is such an interesting range of qualities in the works that I have at once the feeling of a whole mass of individuals, truly individual, in this power of projecting their own feelings and striving for what perfection they can attain within the means that they employ, that sentiment of individuality, or freedom, searching, daring, of all the risks of painting, which in turn are transmitted to us as an audience.
>
> You, yourself, must adopt attitudes of feeling and response, which are appropriate to this kind of painting, since the painting is, itself, so individual and so fresh, since it takes so many risks, you are not in a position to resolve any difficulty or judgment instantaneously.
>
> You are led, on the one hand, to respond immediately, to the shock effect of the work. But then you are also disposed, by the character of these works, and the great variety, not to dismiss them in terms of one idea or characteristic. You can not say, "This is abstract expressionism and we know what that is."[58]

Capturing so much of Schapiro's celebrated style as a lecturer, including his syncopated speech patterns and his tendency to address his audience directly, here Schapiro takes his listeners by the hand and talks them through the holistic experience of the works in the exhibition. Along the way, it becomes clear that Schapiro was drawn to or interested in the art of the New York School less because of its specific artistic qualities—what he would elsewhere call the non-mimetic signs of modernism—than because of the challenge its artworks posed to the viewer.[59] At its best, this is difficult, experimental painting and its appeal lies precisely in the proverbial gauntlet that it throws down at the gates of perception.[60] No wonder then that Schapiro sought out and included works in the exhibition that put pressure on how Abstract Expressionism had then already come to be defined. And no wonder that Schapiro would continue to defend that style—or perhaps better that anti-style—and his

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[58] Meyer Schapiro, "Address Delivered at the Opening of 'The New York School: The Second Generation,'" Meyer Schapiro Collection, series III.3, box 199, folder 14, Columbia University Libraries, 2–6.

[59] Though associated with his semiotic writing, Schapiro's interest in the non-mimetic elements of visual art can be traced back to the beginning of his career. See: O'Donnell, *Meyer Schapiro's Critical Debates*, esp. 123–142; Hemingway, "Schapiro: Marxism, Science and Art," 14–34.

[60] Slightly later, in 1964, Schapiro would celebrate this form of perception as "critical seeing," itself a metaphor that speaks quite widely to his scholarly work. Meyer Schapiro, "On Perfection, Coherence, and Unity of Form and Content" [1966], *Theory and Philosophy of Art: Style, Artist, and Society* (New York: Braziller, 1994), 33–50. According to Darby English, this approach to perception allowed Schapiro to be more sympathetic to the variances of abstraction and to the full humanity of the individuals who created it. See: Darby English, *1971: A Year in the Life of Color* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018), 74–92.

association with it throughout the tumultuous postmodern days of his retirement. As a "nonauthoritarian erudite," as Max Kozloff called him, whatever abstract expressionism would come to signify to others, Schapiro rightly knew what it had once meant to him: a searching, critical, and exploratory mode of painting that—despite its evident blind spots, prejudices, and dead ends—is what it might continue to mean today.[61] Insofar as his views on Abstract Expressionism, therefore, can still inflect how we understand the New York School, Meyer Schapiro, in the face of our own version of his postmodern moment, does not seem obsolete at all.

[61] Max Kozloff, quoted in Newman, *Challenging Art: Artforum, 1962-1974*, 53.