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The silent camp: queer resistance and the rise of Pop Art

American Life is a billboard; individual life in the U.S. includes something nameless that takes place in the weeds behind it.
Harold Rosenberg[1]

Let me begin by refuting any purely chronological determination of the sixties. Already in 1959 – and we'll be going back even further – Harold Rosenberg could write, 'You cannot fit into American life except as a camp.'[2] It's a formulation that sounds very Warhol sixties, at once world-weary and blasé in its conspiratorial wink, yet here it is at the end of the fifties. Years before the rise of Pop Art, camp was already on the intellectual menu – the better to fit into the American way of life. Camp is the billboard; and individual life takes place behind it.

Rosenberg even went so far as to assert that the infamous conformity and conservatism of the decade was in fact itself nothing but a form of camp, 'A good deal of the notorious conservatism of the present generation is ancestor "camping" – that is a deadpan take-off on life with Grandpa. In the camp, the masquerade becomes the real thing [...].'[3] Rosenberg thus found in the outward obeisance to cultural norms and values at the close of the fifties – what he called 'life with Grandpa' – a quality of performance, in which daily life had become but a species of costume drama.

Rosenberg recorded these observations in an article he entitled 'Death in the Wilderness', critiquing the very consensus once deemed so necessary to triumph in the Cold War.[4] To understand American life as a billboard, obscuring the real life taking place behind it, is to thematize a split self – a public and private identity – as endemic to American life. In characterizing the 'mental world' of the Cold War generation as this kind of camp melodrama, Rosenberg offers a new vector for analyzing resistance within what has, uncritically, been labeled the age of consensus.[5]

Of course, to argue, as Rosenberg does, that the oppressively conformist socio-political climate of the Cold War 1950s is but a kind of put on would surely come as news to those other Rosenbergs, but it is, I think, symptomatic of a major shift in intellectual currents that begins in the mid-fifties and reaches a zenith in Pop Art. [6] What's at stake here, of course, is a question at the heart of any account of the politics of the cold war era – namely when did the fabled fifties metamorphose into the equally fabled sixties, or, in other words, how did the era's deadly serious politics of policed consensus mutate into playful camp – and, more importantly, why.

Remarkably, Rosenberg's late-fifties vision of camp has not been cleansed of its homosexual genealogy. Rosenberg continues in his account of camp, 'Just how much playacting there is in this [...] is indicated by the enthusiastic participation of the homosexuals in the Reconstructed Family movement; indeed fairies and near-fairies were in the vanguard of the new domesticity...'.[7]

This is thus an account of the inheritances and disinheritances into the sixties of a particular kind of ironic response to dominant norms and values popularly, and somewhat uncritically, lumped under the label camp. It's also about the role of homosexuals in promoting that form of response, and finally it's about why a once largely homosexual discursive trope came to be seen as emblematic of an entire movement, such that the nod to fairies in Rosenberg's article becomes a wholesale indictment seven years later in a *Village Voice* article by Vivian Gornick entitled 'Pop goes Homosexual: It's a Queer Hand Stoking the Campfire'.[8]

Central to my argument will be the assertion that the camp noted by Rosenberg, not to mention the fabled camp of Pop, is ontologically related to the hoary silences and negations of the art of the early fifties. Loosely put, that, for example Robert Rauschenberg's stately *White Paintings* (1952) and Warhol's banal comic strip imagery of 1960 are cousins. I'll even be arguing that works like John Cage's infamous 1954 *4'33"* of silence, a musical composition in which every note is silent or Rauschenberg's 1954 *Erased De Kooning* – a drawing by the Abstract Expressionist master which Rauschenberg laboriously erased – not to mention the *White Paintings* – were all species of camp, and as such can be thought of as progenitors of Pop.

Now I know that positing a connection between Rauschenberg's or Cage's earnest emptiness and Warhol's riotous pop imagery can seem a stretch, so at this point I want to simply recall Warhol's own storied reticence, his monosyllabic mien, his brandishing of tape-recorder and later video-camera as a kind of protective shield inhibiting communication. Remember that upon the occasion of Warhol's first showing of his Pop pictures to would-be collectors, he wore a mask, gave others masks, and played music so loudly that it restrained, if not arrested speech.

A new generation of scholars have been trying to break through the reticence of Warhol's self-described mentors Jasper Johns and Rauschenberg, and their mentor John Cage – ascribing these artists' coy refusal of questions of sexuality and identity to their membership in the pre-Stonewall, pre-liberationist generation of gay men. But there are problems with the attribution of an interest in silence and negation simply to a pre-liberationist, closeted sexuality. Why, for example, would a person of John Cage's radicality, unconventional lifestyle, disdain for public opinion, and anarchistic leanings nonetheless uphold the highly restrictive social compact of the closet?

And if the embrace of anti-expressiveness on the part of these queer artists was an attempt to escape notice – as the silence of the closet presumably is – it was a manifest failure. Cage and his friends and colleagues Johns and Rauschenberg became notable precisely *for* their silences – clear proof of its unsuitability as a strategy of evasion. Closeted people seek to ape dominant discursive forms, to participate as seamlessly as possible in hegemonic constructions. They do not, in my experience, pointedly seek to negate them.

My point is that if silence was, paradoxically, in part an expression of identity as a closeted homosexual during the Cold War, it was also much more than that.

Silence was not only a symptom of oppression, it was also, I want to argue, a chosen mode of resistance. This silence is not the passive stratagem of a closeted homosexual unwilling and unable to declare his identity within a hostile culture. On the contrary, it got them noticed. Indeed, in recuperating silence, absence, negation and other forms of anti-expressionism as a means of what I will characterize as a specifically queer resistance during the Cold War, we will find that it shares more than may at first seem evident with the-anything-but-silent cultural resistances of the sixties.

The kind of silence I'm referring to is a specularized, performative and highly ironized silence – a form of political engagement now so distinctly undervalued in a post-Stonewall gay political context as to render it all but invisible as a political genre. But, to put it blandly, the times were different under a savagely policed, McCarthyite America and silence could and did prove effective as a strategy of dissent.

John Cage telegraphs precisely such a context of grave constraint in beginning his 1961 essay on Robert Rauschenberg with this report on the state of affairs in the art world during the first half of the fifties. 'Conversation was difficult and correspondence virtually ceased. (Not because of the mails, which continued.) People spoke of messages, perhaps because they'd not heard from one another in a long time. Art flourished.'[9]

I'm particularly struck by the connection between a flourishing art and a cessation of correspondence. Note here that as conversation declines and correspondence ceases, Cage writes that people spoke of messages. Messages, as distinct from more directed forms of communication like conversation, are a means of disseminating ideas or making points without requiring self-disclosure. As such, messages are well-suited to communication within a policed context, for the content of a message need not index its author. One art work above all emblematizes such a cessation of correspondence nonetheless laden with messages: Rauschenberg's 1954 *Erased De Kooning*, a work Cage celebrates in the same 1961 article along with the *White Paintings* for precisely, paradoxically, their plenitude.

Cage repeatedly underscored that there was no such thing as emptiness or silence, at least not as it is commonly understood. Emptiness was simply the other side of seeing, as noise was the other face of music, and Cage set out quite deliberately to deconstruct these false polarities. His infamous *4'33"* of course sprang from this intuition, and it's important to bear in mind that the work is fully scored; it's just that each of the notes is silent. The incidental noises inevitably produced by the audience during the performance of *4'33"* only served to drive home the point about the relatedness of sound and silence, emptiness and fullness. Within this frame of reference, a silencing was hardly a form of silence, and a blank or erased canvas was to quote Rauschenberg 'never empty'.[10] In his 1949 'Lecture on Nothing', Cage said, 'what we/re-quire/is/silence/;/ but what silence requires is that I go on talking.'[11] So silence and speech need each other, are in fact mutually implicative. After all, what would silence without sound sound like, or a brushstroke without ground? So silence isn't the opposite of sound, nor blankness the opposite of form, but rather an element within it.

In deconstructing these polarities, Cage and Rauschenberg serve to open up the process of signification. They introduce a kind of noise, or its visual equivalent, into the process of meaning – a noise we can call mediation. In defining silence as not silent or emptiness and erasure as not empty, these artists manifest a negative relationship between what their works say and what they actually mean. Here, the significance of the work – the authors repeatedly tell us, as well as show us, is powerfully *not* the literal meaning specified in the work as it were denotatively – for they're not empty and they're not silent.

And these works weren't received denotatively either. Allan Kaprow, after seeing the *White Paintings*, came to understand his role as mediator of meaning precisely because of the emptiness of these works. He wrote, 'in the context of Abstract Expressionist noise and gesture, they suddenly brought one face to face with a numbing, devastating silence [...]. It threw the responsibility of art onto the spectator.'[12]

As early as 1958, the year before he would prescribe camp as the method, Harold Rosenberg had singled out authorial silence or absence as the touchstone of what he understood to be an entirely new aesthetic movement – one conceived in distinct contrast to Abstract Expressionism. Rosenberg organized an exhibition in Houston entitled 'Audience as subject', which included the work of Rauschenberg and Johns. For him, as for Kaprow, their work was silent because the present, authorial 'I' was subsumed to the spectatorial 'you'.

Like Kaprow, Rosenberg argued that such art adumbrated the viewer as mediator of meaning, 'Instead of concentrating on art, its problems and its needs, the artist speaks to the audience about itself [...]. The art that holds up the crooked mirror to the audience

is timely not with regard to art, but with regard to society.'[13] Three years later Rauschenberg would second Rosenberg's insight when he proclaimed on a MOMA panel that, 'Meaning belongs to the people.'[14] In his 1961 article about Rauschenberg's *White Paintings*, Cage says pretty much the same thing in the terse formulation 'the thing is, we get the point more quickly when we realize it is we looking rather than that we may not be seeing it.'[15]

Much in literary studies describes this move away from a denotative or literal meaning (if such a thing could exist) and towards meaning as a product of mediation by an audience. One variant we call irony, and it names precisely this production of a gap between what one says and what one actually means. When it assumes a negative relation between what is said and what is meant, as in the *White Paintings* or *4'33"* or *Erased De Kooning* then literary theorist Ross Chambers has dubbed this figure ironic negation.[16] Through negation, Cage and Rauschenberg figure a distance or fissure into the relation between text – be it visual or musical – and the perceiving subject. The revelation of mediation introduced into any discursive situation produces instability, for no longer is meaning a 'natural' product of its means of signifying – but in the case of negation, that instability yields the possibility of an understanding that is precisely otherwise to its literal terms. Thus, an empty canvas can suggest the impossibility of emptiness. In short, negation can produce an opposition, but an opposition that – and this is key in a policed 'consensus-based' Cold War context – belongs to the perceiving or mediating subject and not to the author.

So what do these particular negations of Cage and Rauschenberg negate? Well, for one thing, expression of course. Negation can succeed in marking a distance from a freedom of expression, manifesting subjection without declaring the terms of its subjugation. It can tell a story without words. But as a readerly relation, silence is recognized, not written or spoken, understood, not declared. It manifests resistance, but does not articulate the position or identity from which that resistance comes. And especially in the context of the presumptively expressive media of music or art, negation can open a space for a new audience relation modeled as an appeal or seduction towards opposition, rather than as a declaration of expressly oppositional terms.

In short, white paintings or silent music inaugurate a process of reading or examination that at least potentially moves the viewer or listener from an unselfconscious complicity with dominant forms of expression (wherein the meaning is passively registered as inherent IN the piece) towards a degree of self-consciousness about one's role as a reader or maker of meanings – towards, in other words, an awareness that meaning is the result of a reading, of an exegetical process that has been naturalized and thus become transparent.

By negating or emptying out heretofore naturally expressive forms like music or art they become denaturalized and thus their seemingly automatic claims to meaning are replaced by an awareness of the conditions through which their meanings come into being. As Chambers notes, let there be no doubt that this recognition of meaning as actively constructed and conditional as opposed to inherent is ideological, but it's an ideological recognition of a very particular kind – the kind of ideology that recognizes another discourse as ideological without offering or specifying the position or identification from which to view it.

Negation offers no naturalized or transparent foothold, no steady or solid framework substituted for the position under pressure. Rather, it stands in perpetual alterity, appended to its target but capable of shifting shape and adopting new characteristics like an endlessly mutable parasite in response to the changes made by its host. Especially within the avant-garde, this other face, whether as silence or white painting or erasure, helped foreground and make textured precisely those relations of audience and authorship that much of Modernism was so successful at obscuring in the name of the transcendent author/genius. And since negation is an oppositional mode that refuses articulated oppositionality, it offered precisely the kind of cover required to seed discontent in the policed cultural context of the American Cold War era – especially for closeted homosexuals.

As closeted gay men, Rauschenberg and Cage well understood the utility and instrumentality of a silent resistance in the face of adversity, for as Cage once put it, 'silence in antipathy is a positive thing.'[17] Recent post-structuralist analyses of the dynamics of opposition have repeatedly underscored the extent to which the logic of opposition must mention, and thus reinscribe as central and defining, precisely that which it seeks to invalidate. As Cage once said, 'protest is all too often absorbed into the flow of power, because it limits itself to reaching for the same old mechanisms of power, which is the worst way to challenge authority! We'll never get away from it that way!'[18]

As an instance of the suspension of the mechanisms of power that always already impart meanings, authorial silence is one way of tearing down the master's house without using the master's tools – thus avoiding the reinscription of those categories which are being challenged in the first place. A specular, performative silence operates by opening up a space between what is said (or not said) and what is meant. Remember that dominant culture has long met with silence a number of identities and possibilities subculturally articulated. Here silence stands as a means or exercise of cultural power, the power not to notice, not to speak, even to erase what is transparently present. To be silent thus need not imply being silenced. It could indeed imply the opposite, an

exercise in power. It's an important distinction. Not recoverable as specifically oppositional, negation nonetheless opposes. Think of a child holding her breath.

But note something else important. Each instance of negation I've mentioned took place within a specific and highly charged artworld discursive frame: Rauschenberg erases a De Kooning, Cage praises silence and emptiness before the assembled Abstract Expressionist multitude at the Club, the *White Paintings*, about the size and shape of a gestural canvas, are made for exhibition at the then epicenter of Abstract Expressionism, Betty Parson's Gallery, though she ultimately refused them. In each case, these negations do their work within the naturalized expressivity of the Cold War's dominant Abstract Expressionist discursive clime. Theorist Chambers has noted, 'It can be hazarded that the irony of negation is characteristic of discursive situations in which power occupies a position of centrality and legitimacy, such that opposition can know what it is opposing (without necessarily knowing in the name of what it is opposing it.)'[19]

I want to argue that the relatively centralized and consensus-based Abstract Expressionist artistic context of early and mid-fifties America, organized around the Club or the Cedar Tavern, not to mention the highly policed, 'consensual' conformist culture of McCarthyite America, offered precisely the kind of legitimated and concentrated power center that negation requires to work its charge. Remember that this was the period ultimately dubbed by Daniel Bell *The End of Ideology* – a period repeatedly characterized as marking an end to questions of power and influence in America through the attainment of that holy grail of the Cold War, consensus. Here, negation works as opposition precisely because of the centrality and visible legitimacy of its discursive targets.

But what happens when that legitimacy begins to fray, when other competing discursive possibilities are allowed a hearing?

By the late fifties, in part under pressure from figures like Johns and Rauschenberg and Cage, Abstract Expressionism was hardly the only game in town. Dealers like Eleanor Ward, Leo Castelli and Betty Parsons, each of whom had deep and abiding connections to the Abstract Expressionists were nonetheless centrally involved in the promotion of a post-Abstract Expressionist generation. Some of the most important collectors of Abstract Expressionism, figures like Ben Heller and Emily Tremaine, immediately and aggressively sought out the work of a new generation (and Heller even actively promoted it through his criticism). Museums like the Museum of Modern Art, which was organizing and circulating groundbreaking exhibitions of Abstract Expressionism also bought and showed non-Abstract Expressionist new work – practically as soon as it appeared. Moreover, critics centrally associated with Abstract Expressionism's rise to prominence like Frank O'Hara, John Bernard Myers and even T.B. Hess positively and occasionally enthusiastically reviewed these post-Abstract Expressionist modes as well.

I want to suggest, at the risk of oversimplifying a very complex story, that this decentralization of power, both within and without the art world, yielded a significant historical shift in the deployment of irony as a means of resistance. Once the Abstract Expressionist hegemony itself began to fracture, and once Cold War culture moved into a less centralized, post-McCarthy phase of increasing cultural and political contestation, negation would not do, for increasingly the operations of power were no longer so identifiable and visible – and thus no longer so easy to oppose. A decentralized and diffused sphere of power, such as that found in America in the post-McCarthyite fifties, where authority increasingly camouflaged itself as authority, engendered a new field of social contestation. And in this new field, the appropriation of authority, not its negation, became a chief means of resistance.

Absent an 'end to ideology' and its dream of consensus, power in a diffused political arena is up for grabs and appropriation can become precisely such a means of grabbing power. By appropriation, I of course mean the assumption or citation of an authoritative form that causes it to bear meanings or significance beyond that of its denotative function. To see such an appropriation at work, let's listen to critic Nicolas Calas describe his reaction to Johns's 1954–5 *Flag* painting in a 1959 review: 'What is the function of a sign that has lost its significance? What can Notre Dame have meant to a 15th Century Greek who had fled invaded Constantinople and had lost Hagia Sophia?'[20] At the end of the fifties, the decade above any other in which the image of the American flag and all it denoted was raised to the status of an icon, how ripe this image had become for appropriations in service to other meanings. Johns's appropriation of a discourse of power emblematized by the flag had instead served to deflect Calas's desire away from the purposes decreed by this symbol towards other meanings for other purposes. Calas continued, 'From a national emblem the flag becomes a symbol of ambiguity...'[21] To convert so potent and 'present' an image as the American flag into any other usage at this time – much less one so riven with doubt and despair – is testimony to the success of appropriation as an anti-authoritative seduction.

Johns's *Flag* is thus transformed into Rosenberg's billboard of American life. And individual life is indeed taking place in the weeds behind it, for it is here that the meanings of the flag are hammered out. Were I pressed to give a date for the beginning of the sixties it would be as far back as 1954–5, as Johns causes the American flag to at least potentially carry other meanings, and thus turns the power used to establish its authority against itself. He didn't burn the flag, but he started down that road. Here the sixties can be defined as precisely the appropriation of dominant discursive forms in the interests of that which is other to the needs of power – which is but another way of describing all the anti-war protesters at Moratorium marches in military regalia.[22]

I want to be very clear here that an appropriation is not itself a statement, but rather constitutes a seduction of another towards the making of their own statement – like Calas does. In recognizing other possibilities not in the interests of power within authoritative forms like flags, an appropriation nonetheless works indirectly, irresponsibly, even playfully with authority. It is assuredly not confrontational. Johns says nothing in *Flag*. Rather, in making the image available for meanings beyond its denotative ones – which is to say in countering the flag's own claim to literality – he offers a site for new, unauthorized mediations. The appropriator discovers that discourses of power are always vulnerable to 'misreadings' – no matter how authoritative. Note that here I say the appropriator, not Johns, because there are many appropriators at work here – Johns of course, but also Calas and also me and also you. That's one reason I think of this as an *Ur* work of the sixties: it has caused us individually to, quoting a slogan of the period, take back the power. But it does so without it being possible to locate any agent or discursive framework with control over this process – other than ourselves.

So again, in allying himself with a highly individuated inducement towards self-conscious mediation, Johns performs an act of self-effacement. We don't know what this flag means to him, and I would hazard that for Johns and for that matter, for the other great appropriator, Warhol, a continuous effort was required to make themselves 'other' to us such that we cannot get inside them or claim to know them.[23] In producing their author functions as 'other' to us – and both Warhol and Johns were/are famously slippery interviewees – we are blocked from the shortcut of identifying with them as authors and thus having them mediate their works for us. Rather, as appropriations, the signification of their work remains open, indeed subject always to further appropriation, as Johns's appropriation of his own work in images like *Three Flags* suggests. Absent direction as to how to mediate these appropriations, like a child learning to walk, the casual spectator is left palpably, insistently and uncomfortably alone. Well not exactly alone. In proffering or even fostering a site for the identification of our own meanings, appropriation's deflection from the literal entails a deviation. While allowing us to acknowledge what we already know of ourselves, by definition those who deviate are deviants. In a sense, an appropriation works a seduction as an act of self-recognition, and occasionally even articulation, of one's deviancy, of desires repressed by the codes of social control. Thus an appropriation has the power to produce in the viewer a new socially-constructed identity born of an otherness to the literal or denotative meanings the discourse of power seeks to secure. An appropriated text's otherness to its denotative meanings replicates the viewer's own otherness from the self the image presumes to denote to. Thus to see an appropriation otherwise to its literalness is to recognize one's own otherness, and the image becomes the site of a conversion to an other constructed identity.

We are, I think, back at Rosenberg's camp, and its prescription as a panacea for participating in American life. Take a look at Warhol's *Torn Campbell Soup Can*. How many of you read 'camp' in label here and what does it say of you if you do? Perhaps this is what Rosenberg meant when he said that you couldn't participate in American life except as a camp. Camp acknowledges the subject's inevitable construction within and by dominant culture, while initiating a resistance from the site of greatest domination, a demonstration that control cannot be absolute, and that the potential for any mode, no matter how authoritative, to be turned to 'other' purposes lies in the very means that serve to exercise and naturalize control. But the only language we have for resisting domination is the same language through which that domination is written. By the late fifties, there were all these potential appropriators walking around increasingly recognizing that they were *other* to the selves the dominant discursive forms presumed them to be. Rosenberg continued in the same article with which I began this piece, 'To keep a straight face has become an elementary health precaution.'[24]

We are where we began. If the closeted homosexual and the average viewer both understand keeping a straight face as a social imperative, then the gap between them, at least at this historical moment, isn't so wide after all. As the workers of seductions away from normative meanings towards highly individuated recognitions of one's own otherness, these late fifties gay artists, from Cage to Warhol, operated as seducers – even recruiters. From their early negations of Expressionism to their subsequent ironic appropriations of images like flags and Campbell soup, the result of their seductions, as Calas illustrates, often included the shadowy self-recognition of one's own deviation from a social norm. In this sense, Pop Art helped and in turn was helped by, the general spread of 'social deviancy' characteristic of the decade. And increasingly, fifties-style alienation, with its highly individualized exclusion from the social norm, found itself supplanted by a new sixties politics which was actively, and even communally, dissident.

But as Vivian Gornick concluded her 1966 article 'Pop goes Homosexual: It's a Queer Hand Stoking the Campfire': 'It is the texture, the atmosphere, the ideals, the notions of "camp" (a term, from its beginnings, the private property of American and English homosexuals) which currently determines middle-class taste, directs its signs, and seems to nourish its simple-minded eagerness to grind the idea of "alienation" into yet another hopelessly ironic cliché.'[25] The very social alienation which had once, but a few years before, engendered a turn towards irony as a means of resistance was now itself characterized as but merely ironic. A middle class could now be said to find not critique, but confirmation of its status in the rise of Pop Art. This reading of Pop would of course prove the dominant one (such is the chief weakness of camp as a means of resistance, for it must resemble that which it critiques) and so Pop's dissidence would be lost to the

pages of history. But this is a deflection; the fact that the middle class willingly took direction from a homosexual discursive trope suggests that camp was nonetheless still capable of producing productive misreadings, and thus still operating at full power.

1 Harold Rosenberg, 'Death in the Wilderness', in *Tradition of the New*, Chicago, 1959, p. 258. This article is dedicated to Andre Dombrowski, without whom it could not have been written.
2 Ibid.
3 Ibid., p. 242.
4 As early as 1951, an article called 'The Younger Generation' in *Time Magazine* made social conformity into the scapegoat of consensus: Said a girl in Minneapolis, 'The individual is almost dead today, but the young people are unaware of it. They think of themselves as individuals, but really they are not. They are parts of groups. They are unhappy outside of a group [...].These kids in my group think of themselves as individuals, but actually it is as if you took a tube of toothpaste and squeezed out a number of little distinct blobs on a piece of paper. Each blob would be distinct – separated in space – but each blob would be the same.' *Time*, 5 Nov. 1951, in J. H. Satin, *The 1950s America's 'Placid' Decade*, Boston, 1960, p. 46.
5 The phrase 'mental world' is in Rosenberg's 'Death in the Wilderness' (see note 1). As early as 1955, Rosenberg would write a polemic against McCarthyite witch-hunts called 'Couch Liberalism and the Guilty Past' which understood political confession itself to be but a species of performance or masquerade. '[M]odern history-changing needs the services of a new kind of martyr: persons prepared to make a gift of their own pasts to the one under construction [...] the genuine "I" of the confessor is not the interest of either the accused or his prosecutor. The defendant must give away a past larger than the one he actually possesses.' Rosenberg, 'Couch Liberalism and the Guilty Past', in *Tradition of the New* (see note 1), p. 22.
6 The origins of this shift in the fifties towards what would be called Pop is signaled in an untheoretical way in nearly every Modern Art textbook; after all, Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg, as artists born of the fifties, are implicitly connected to the sixties through being routinely characterized as Pop, or some variant like proto-Pop, or pre-Pop.
7 Rosenberg, 'Death in the Wilderness' (see note 1), pp. 242–3.
8 Vivian Gornick, 'Pop Goes Homosexual: It's a Queer Hand Stoking the Campfire', *The Village Voice*, 11, 7 Apr. 1966, no. 25, p. 1.
9 John Cage 'On Robert Rauschenberg, Artist, and His Work', *Metro*, May 1961, reprinted in *Silence: Lectures and Writings by John Cage*, Middletown CT, 1961, p. 98.
10 Ibid., p. 103.
11 Ibid., p. 117.
12 Allan Kaprow, *Art News*, March 1966, no. 65, pp. 60–3.
13 Harold Rosenberg, introduction to *Audience as subject*, exh. cat., Houston, 1959, unpag.
14 Robert Rauschenberg in unpublished 1961 transcript of the 'Symposium on Assemblage' organized by William Seitz following *The Art of Assemblage* exhibition at MOMA, MOMA archives, 23.
15 Cage, *Silence* (see note 9), p. 108.
16 Ross Chambers, *Room For Maneuver: Reading Oppositional Narrative*, Chicago, 1991. Here, as throughout the remaining text, I am heavily dependent on Chambers's extraordinary insights.
17 Thomas Hines, 'Then not Yet "Cage": The Los Angeles Years, 1912–1938', in Marjorie Perloff and Charles Junkerman, eds., *John Cage: Composed in America*, Chicago, 1994, p. 74.
18 John Cage and Daniel Charles, *For The Birds*, Boston, 1981, p. 236.
19 Chambers, *Room* (see note 16), p. 241.
20 Nicholas Calas, 'ContiNuance: On the possibilities of a new kind of symbolism in recent American painting and what such symbols could possibly mean', *Art News*, 57, Feb. 1959, p. 39.

21 Ibid.

22 Of course any opposition between negation and appropriation demands deconstruction, for each implies the other. To negate a discourse is to appropriate that which it denotes and turn it against itself, while all appropriation negates the literal or denotative meaning of that which it appropriates, for if it didn't it would be simply a citation of a dominant discursive form and not an appropriation.

23 Indeed, both Johns and Warhol developed famously opaque artistic personas. See for example Michael Crichton, *Jasper Johns*, New York, 1977, and Victor Bockris, *The Life and Death of Andy Warhol*, New York, 1989.

24 Rosenberg, 'Death in the Wilderness' (see note 1), p. 242.

25 Gornick, 'Pop Goes Homosexual' (see note 8), p. 1.

Summary

This essay tracks the changes in artistic practice from the immediate post Abstract Expressionist innovations of John Cage and early Robert Rauschenberg to Pop Art. Pop, in its colorful, celebratory commodity vocabulary seems worlds away from the parched, ascetic silences of Cage and early Rauschenberg. Yet this paper finds beneath such superficial differences a deep continuity in artistic practice centered on a new understanding of the role of the observer. Artistic negations such as Cage's *4'33"* of silence or Rauschenberg's *White Paintings* and artistic celebrations like Warhol's many pictures of *Liz* or *Marilyn* share at core a specifically homosexual discursive practice that can be called camp. And it is this camp approach, with its very particular relationship to the seeding of dissent, that constitutes the core of a definite turn in post war American art.