Serial images: The Modern Art of Iteration

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Chapter Six

Subjectivity on the Surface:
Andy Warhol’s Serigraphs

Exhibitionism: How to Look at Warhol

Within nine years of Andy Warhol’s death the artworld moved to “consolidate his reputation as one of the greatest artists of the second half of the twentieth century” (1). The 1999 large-scale exhibition “Andy Warhol: A Factory” was opened. The exhibition offered a means of understanding Warhol and his work: Warhol was presented in terms of his own self-description, “I want to be a machine”, and his oeuvre was presented on the model of a factory (Stockholm, 1968). Warhol’s famous images, such as those of Mao, Marilyn, Jackie, Diamond Dust Shoes, 1980, Cow Wallpaper, 1966 [Fig.20], and Brillo Boxes, 1964, were presented alongside photographs of Warhol’s Factory personalities, letters and postcards, diaries, magazine articles, publicity images, cookbooks, art historical texts, Warhol’s gift books, drawings, sketches,

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1 In the context of his analysis of Warhol and queer theory, Crimp’s essay is an attempt to understand the various ways in which Warhol, a notoriously difficult artist to slot into a canonical tradition of serious makers of art, is nevertheless considered to be one of the greatest artists in the twentieth century.

2 This exhibition was presented in 1999 by the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York and the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Brussels, in collaboration with the Kunstmuseum Wolfberg. My account is based on its exhibition in Brussels.
and countless Warhol paraphernalia. The magnitude and variety of cultural artifacts hung, pasted, or projected onto the walls, shown on television screens, blaring out of stereo speakers, exhibited throughout the floor space, and displayed in glass cabinets, presented Warhol's output on the model of collaborative work-sharing in industry.

Warhol-the-machine was made a metonym for the factory that produced cultural goods in his name. The exhibition catalogue, with more than 550 pages of photograph, painting and print reproductions, intensified the mass-production reading in which it framed Warhol's works.

Viewers were urged to see Warhol's work through his powerful public persona and to take seriously his mechanistic self-description of himself and his practice in a factory. They were also invited to consider Warhol's art in terms of the media-oriented, 1960's transgressive public image of his Factory: Warhol's public persona was on display. The surplus of artifacts not only magnified the output of his factory, but recreated the excessive environment in which he worked. Masses of Factory paraphernalia and candid photographs dissimulated a viewing context grounded on an image of the Factory as a drug-based, sexually charged, but nevertheless artistically productive West Village pleasuredome. Sounds of the Velvet Underground provided the aural context for viewing Warhol's Mao prints, while Warhol's Brillo Boxes had to be considered in relation to looped out-takes of a glamourously trashy Edie Sedgwick on film. Warhol's "factory" produced both artworks and personalities, including Warhol's. With equal enthusiasm, viewers were led to examine Warhol's serigraphs and pieces of his mail. Through the decadent, historically-situated Factory image, they were compelled to get involved in the repetitive
momentum of his series, to succumb to the seduction of a playful factory and become its viewing machine. However, to present the artwork through the artist and the artist through the artwork is tautological and, in Warhol’s case, does not lead to any understanding of the significance of his oeuvre.

Critical interpretations of his work take positions similar to that of the exhibition: they read the artist’s work or the structure of his work in terms of its cultural and political environment. For instance, Arthur Danto claims that Warhol’s works “remain political” because they concretize “the American soul, mis a nu” (1997:15). Danto insists Warhol must be read as a symptom of his media-oriented culture at a unique historical moment. Yet reading the artworks through Warhol’s intentions renders their meaning derivative of the historical circumstances of their production. The artworks become wholly contingent and irretrievably lost for the present that came after him.

In contrast, Simon Watney’s analyzes Warhol’s creative activity in terms of Warhol’s construction of the persona “Warhol”. He argues that Warhol is significant because he presents a new type of artist and artistic practice, which requires a reconceptualization of the relation between life and art. What Watney calls the “Warhol effect” in his essay of the same name “quietly invalidates” “predetermined models of artistic value”; Warhol’s relation to his life explains his relation to his art (122). Watney’s argument stands in contrast to those put forward by Benjamin Buchloh and Rainer Crone. They argue that in fact there is developmental consistency to Warhol’s practice that shows him to be a serious originator of novel aesthetic objects and that his work and practice must be read in relation to that which came before him.
Warhol does not splinter from, but instead develops, the conceived model of the modern artist as heroic originator by presenting himself as a serious and unique, but above all glamorous creator. He politically and culturally problematizes traditional conceptions of the significance of iconography by repeatedly presenting contemporary icons as meaningless. As a primary feature of his art, Warhol's iconography is read in relation to his ridiculously glamorous persona, another form of meaningless iconography, but the development of Warhol's artistic practice is shown to be serious and deliberate. In each case, Warhol's artworks are interpreted with reference to Warhol's persona: both are similarly formulated cultural constructions and their relation tells us how to understand his art.

In The Return of the Real, Hal Foster distinguishes three types of critical analysis of Warhol's work. The "simulacral" view is similar to the way Buchloh and Crone see Warhol's iconology in contrast to his practice. The iconology is basically understood to be arbitrary and meaningless because it is a reflection of apathetic commercialism and commodity fetishism in both content and structure. Warhol's fetishization of commodity culture reveals his glamorous facade to be as impassive as his imagery. The "referential" view takes seriously the themes in Warhol's imagery and claims that Warhol reveals

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3 See Buchloh and Crone.

4 See Foster (1996b). Douglas Crimp criticizes Foster's scheme from the standpoint of debates about the subject in queer theory.

5 This argument is expertly discussed in De Duve.
something tragic and real about his culture. Thus he is seen to be politically engaged, critical, and empathetic by presenting images which force viewers seriously to consider what happens beneath the iconography of commodity fetishism. Foster cites Thomas Crow's interpretations as examples of the referential view, for Crow argues that Warhol’s images are affective. He claims that Warhol deliberately selects his images to affect the viewer and that the insistent repetition of the image is an affective structure, forcing the viewer to take a stand with regard to issues like the death penalty, racism, and late modern capitalism. Foster’s third view is his own account of Warhol’s “traumatic realism”. Warhol’s “traumatic” iconology of car crashes, criminals, and death is tied to the repetitive structure he employs. This simultaneously distances viewers from the icon’s traumatic affect and forces them to be affected. Foster claims that Warhol’s “multiplicity makes for the paradox not only of images that are both affective and affectless, but of viewers that are neither integrated ... nor dissolved” (1996b:182). In all these readings, the repetitive structure of Warhol’s images obtains its meaning in relation to the iconology that is taken to be primary in an interpretation of his art.

However, Foster does not see the repetitive structure of Warhol’s thematic series of images as sheer duplication. Aberrations that Foster calls “pops” are found throughout any series, such as slippages of colour or spontaneous irregularities in format. The differences they create between serial images leads to the view he shares

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6 Foster’s interpretation of Warhol’s work as “traumatic realism” is best articulated in Foster (1996a).
with Richard Meyer that Warhol’s repetitive structures are forms of “duplication that can accommodate difference” (105-106). For Foster, the “difference” is the undecidability of Warhol’s images as both affective and affectless. For Meyer, it is directly related to the erotic re-presentation of icons like Elvis and Warhol’s Thirteen Most Wanted Men, 1964. Meyer reads Warhol’s dramatic recontextualizations of Hollywood icons and his use of differentiating repetition as providing a model for queer subjectivity. The basis of Meyer’s interpretation is Judith Butler’s notion of performative subjectivity. He directly relates the fact that Warhol’s printing practice never reproduces identical images, and always leaves a trace of difference, to queer subjectivity. Formative matrices, such as political systems or discursive structures, cannot completely articulate the subject. They always leave a remainder of excess. This is both the difference of the subject and the locus of its freedom within a formative matrix. While Meyer’s interpretation is compelling, it still grounds a reading of the art in the persona of the artist, in this case Warhol’s homosexuality. The trouble with each of these different analyses is that they take Warhol’s self-description, his practice, and his subject matter far too seriously in an attempt to prove Warhol, as Crimp claims, “one of the greatest artists of the second half of the twentieth century”(1). Yet, at the same time, they reveal a significant feature of Warhol’s art. Difference is indeed a fundamental feature both of Warhol’s repetition of previous or found icons and of Warhol’s use of repetition as the structure of his series of images.

7 See Meyer (2002) and Butler. See Siegal on performativity and queer culture in Warhol’s oeuvre.
There can be no doubt that a critical analysis of Warhol’s oeuvre must take into consideration the relation of Warhol’s life to his artwork. As I will show, the two are intimately intertwined. Like the “simulacral” analyses, I argue that Warhol’s imagery presents the insignificant and arbitrary, but only insofar as it is the mundane. Warhol’s art and his practice of art-making reflect on and continue artistic traditions which came before him. Yet they also radically differ from those traditions by reinterpreting the meaning of structures and images with which we are familiar. Thus, like the “referential” analyses, I maintain that Warhol’s imagery is meaningful because it reveals the significance of the mundane, which includes not just ordinary everyday life but also features of the familiar world, such as previous cultural and aesthetic icons and practices. Crucial to my analysis here is the notion of difference, for Warhol’s serial images reveal that the activity of making things the same also makes them different. When this apparent paradox is read in the context of Warhol’s mundane imagery, it leads to a way of understanding the structure of the mundane as a continually repeated sameness which in becoming the same always becomes different. I will argue that Warhol’s serial images present the structure of the mundane as a dynamic structure of serial actualization and that everything in the mundane world – including Warhol himself – is taken to be an instance of that structure.

Warhol’s statements about his own art, about previous art, and about modern culture are amusing and often seem so facile that they are difficult to take seriously. Yet they can be revealing and useful commentaries. For instance, he claims that, “Everything repeats itself. It’s amazing that everyone thinks that everything is new, but
it's all repeat" (1997:273). To take such a claim too seriously leads straight into intentionalist readings such as Danto's. Yet coming from an artist who produces repetitive series of popular icons, that claim should not be taken too lightly either. As Gilles Deleuze points out, "repetition belongs to humour and irony: it is by nature transgression and exception, always revealing a singularity opposed to the particulars subsumed under laws, a universal opposed to the generalities which give rise to laws" (1997:5). In my view, Warhol and his oeuvre should be considered neither too seriously nor too lightly, but ironically. For when Warhol's art is read as a humourous challenge to an overwhelmingly sacred and speculative tradition of image-making, it is found to be extraordinarily meaningful. Warhol's art delivers a profound message that reflects the meditative or speculative quality of abstract expressionism, but in terms of subject matter to which abstract expressionism never attended. It presents the viewer with powerful icons, but they are icons of the mundane rather than the divine. Warhol's art iconologically treats the mundane as the divine. He provides a reinterpretation not only of how art and art-making are to be conceived, but of how creativity itself is to be conceived. I will argue that Warhol's serial imagery reveals the significance of the everyday because his series of mundane images shows the everyday to be the grounding of continual and freely iterative constructive activity.

"It's all repeat": Warhol's Iconophilia and the Serially Iterative Surface
Considered primarily in terms of their subject matter, Warhol's images continue and rework a tradition of
Christian iconography. In his serigraphs, the stark frontality, simplicity of design and the subject's situation in empty space recalls the popular Christomorphic iconography of the Renaissance. Like the Sudarium, or holy face, images of Christ, Warhol's subjects are static and presented independently of any contextualizing background or spatio-temporal location. This gives Warhol's images the ex nihilo effect of the holy face icon: they appear self-generating, atemporal and otherworldly. And like renaissance icons, Warhol's images are produced in large numbers and to a pattern. Thus he can be read as a maker of icons, surrounded by apprentices working in a type of Renaissance studio (Honnef, 26).

Iconologically, however, Warhol's subjects are insistently mundane. He replaces the divine with objects such as soup cans, movie stars and toys. This is because his images are self-referentially engaged in questioning iconography itself. Taken at face value, their iconic semblance allows them to be seen as devotional in terms of their iconic semblance. Hence Matthew Tinkcom argues that Warhol's images can be understood as camp visions of glamour (112). Detached from any contextualizing narrative, such as a film, a newspaper article, an advertisement, or everyday life, Warhol's larger than life images render his objects glamorously mystifying. "The glamorous image," Tinkcom explains, "entreats us to defer to its power without recourse to understanding under what circumstances the image was made" (112). Tinkcom's

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8 See Schellman on Warhol's iteration of traditional religious imagery.

9 For an historical account of the use of Christomorphic imagery in the Renaissance, see Koerner.
notion of glamour is a version of the Lacanian mirror stage, for the glamorous icon manifests what viewers can never be, but nevertheless strive to be. The glamorous icon is mysterious and unanalyzable, for viewers are given nothing about the circumstances of its production and are presented only its mystifying presence. Tinkcom points out that in Warhol viewers are not shown how glamour is produced either in glamorous icons or in Warhol’s own images of glamorous icons. In each case, the mystifying status of the icon is not generated by contexts such as Hollywood advertising blitzes or a captivating film scene. Instead, Tinkcom argues it is produced by viewers who pull the icon out of a causal context and imaginatively place it in one that is alien or otherworldly (112). For instance, the Hollywood film industry could not have anticipated the gay, camp embracement of Marilyn Monroe or Judy Garland as glamorous icons. Similarly, the Campbell’s company did not design its soup cans to be an icon of late-modern, capitalist, consumer culture. By transposing these images, Warhol’s art manifests and probes the iconic status of the mundane in 1960’s American popular culture.

Interpreting Warhol’s art in terms of his subject matter reveals that Warhol exploits an iconographic tradition in order to reinforce the iconic status of cultural objects and images. Throughout Warhol’s series of Campbell’s soup cans, toys, electric chairs, car crashes, Mariylins, and his own self-portraits, the figures presented have a disturbing passivity. The viewer gazes at a subject that is pure surface flatness - neither a mirror nor a deep
For instance, viewers learn little about Elvis Presley or themselves through Warhol's magnification of him in Elvis I and II, 1964. Iconologically, the image is only an aggrandized promotional shot of a ready-made cultural icon, one that is glamorous only if viewers already believe the icon to be mysterious. Here, the icon is shown to be a product of belief rather than understanding. By fetishizing mundane objects in the place of divine images, Warhol repeats a long-standing tradition of image-making, but exposes that tradition as one that renders the iconic image unanalyzable.

There is a similar effect when Warhol's images are read in terms of their presentation. Warhol's images rework the familiar features of abstract expressionism, such as largeness of scale, repetitive and simple designs, and stark frontality. But unlike abstract expressionist

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10 In Joselit's theory of modernist and postmodernist surface as flatness, this iconological understanding of Warhol would situate him in both periods. Warhol is seen to be both denying mimetic identification in order to encourage psychological affect (Foster's "referential") and also denying mimetic identification in order to reveal a lack of psychological affect (Foster's "traumatic realism"). I argue that the serially iterative structure of differentiation in Warhol's images is also meaningful, and does not deny either mimesis or identification.

11 This reading of Warhol's oeuvre as developing the theme of the "sacred" in Abstract Expressionist painting is clearly presented in Coplans (1970), and more recently in Foster (1996a). Foster analyzes the theme of death in Warhol's works in conjunction with the themes of repetition and mass subjectivity and with reference to Lacanian psycho-analytic theory. He argues that Warhol's art represents a contemporary, cultural desire to represent the trauma of the real that is intrinsically "unrepresentable". This presents Warhol as not only continuing the abstract-expressionist project of representing the unrepresentable, but as more or less identical to it. For an
images, Warhol's images do not incite the viewer to enter the profound meaning of the artworks. Warhol's silkscreens are not Mark Rothko's doorways to the divine; viewers are not encouraged to meditate before the mysterious spirituality of a series of Coco-Cola bottles. Warhol subverts the features which made the art prior to him meaningful by putting images of Elvis, Marylin, Coca-Cola, the American dollar in the place of the unrepresentable divine of high art. In Warhol's own words, he produced "images that anybody walking down Broadway could recognize in a split-second ... all the great modern things that the abstract expressionists tried so hard not to notice at all" (1980:3). Interpreting Warhol's images either in terms of their subject matter or in terms of their presentational structure discloses ways in which Warhol continues past art historical traditions. Yet each analysis leads to the problematic claim that by putting images of the mundane in the place of the unrepresentable, Warhol's images are rendered meaningless, for all they can say about the mundane objects they represent is that they are given.¹²

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outstanding account of this abstract expressionist project, see Armstrong (2001).

¹² By relating Norman Bryson's distinction between "megalography" and "rhopography", "the depiction of things which are great....[and] the depiction of things which lack importance", such as still life subjects, to the contrast between the presumed profundity of abstract expressionism and the mundanity of Warhol's imagery, a further aspect of his images is revealed (61). Warhol is not only a portraitist like Bacon, but also a still life artist. His serial images adhere to features of still-life images which Bryson describes: the elimination of narrative, the universalization or levelling of meaning across all things equally, and the presentation of an irreducible fact of life. See especially
In Warhol’s images, it is the brilliant colours contrasted with heavily blackened areas, the simple designs, and the familiarity of the subject matter that makes them attractive, not least because they appear so easily discernible. Yet while Warhol’s images are striking, they can become boring when the same image is presented repeatedly. It is tempting to pass quickly from one to the next, as if seeing one Flowers print, 1970 [Fig. 21], implies seeing them all. The initial attraction of the repeated image wanes due to its repetitive nature.

However, when the visual approach is shifted from the individual prints to their series, the perception of the images changes radically. Viewed in terms of series, Warhol’s images turn out to be, not series of repetitions of the same image, but series of differential repetitions. The differences between the serial images become obvious. For instance, the differences between the Flowers prints are not infinitesimal. They are stark variations. While the basic design is repeated, no two prints are the same. The silkscreening is sloppy and never identically applied, and the flat colours of each image always differ drastically from the others. Focussing on the differences between the images reveals that the similarities between images are structural and that their structure produces their differences. These differences are not incidental effects of Warhol’s repeating process, but the explicit results of his mode of printing. The structure of Warhol’s series is a structure of repeated differentiations. Here, the process of repetition generates differences.

Bryson’s Chapters One and Two. On Warhol’s focus on the mundane, see Wilson (1968).
The similarities within Warhol's series are primarily similarities of design, of garish colours and of obvious mistakes in the silkscreening process. All the prints maintain a relatively flat picture plane. There is no distinction between ground and image, and the images are magnified beyond the proportions of everyday experience and are usually about one metre tall. Moreover, they are compositionally inert. Warhol's images are centred on the canvas, image and background appear continuous, and no element is delineated over and against any other. There is no critical determination of the edge of his picture planes. Moreover, in most of Warhol's series, there is no narrative thread by which to understand each image and there is no hierarchy of rank, position or meaning amongst the serial images. Warhol's subject matter is usually banal, and its banality is intensified by its redundant repetitions.

Warhol's prints characteristically unify surface and image. His repetitive use of the modular screen makes the surface and the image identical. Thus there is little depth to the images because subject and ground exist on the same field. Perspective is denied, which gives the effect of pure surface. There is no beyond to read into the pictures, no utopian vanishing point, and ultimately no entrance into the images: the viewer is not invited to read any hidden meaning behind them. They sit flatly identical with the two-dimensional picture plane. Moreover, the silkscreened or, less often, the painted surface is not used as a conduit. The surface does not illusionistically yield meaningful subject matter because it is presented as pure surface. The surface exists on equal terms with the image. It is essential to recognize, however, that the surfaces of the serial images are crucial to their differentiation.
The surface differentiates Warhol's images. Silkscreening, a process which allows for maximum precision in repeated images, is paradoxically used by Warhol to illuminate differences, almost as if Warhol set out to undermine its precision, subvert the power of mechanical reproduction, and sought out accidents in the process of replication. For instance, Warhol's medium is often stroked across the image unevenly, or the squeegee is not cleaned between applications, resulting in varying densities and streaks in the colour. The sharpness of Warhol's colour-medium varies, due either to the uneven exertion of pressure on the squeegee or its incorrect angle. Furthermore, there is often insufficient medium to complete a stroke, which means the image must be completed by hand. With Warhol, the silkscreened print becomes as arbitrary, random and unpredictable as paint was for the abstract expressionists before him.

Each of Warhol's differentiating series are indefinitely repeatable, for they have no obvious beginning or end and they can be added to indefinitely. While there was undoubtedly a first print to each series, they have no determinate order. The parameters are limited only by Warhol's decision to put an end to the series. Thus the redundant, repetitive nature of his series is heightened by the lack of any determining, non-arbitrary totalization of the series. Differentiating repetition itself appears to be their only telos.

This is emphasized by the fact that most of Warhol's images are repeated from other sources, such as instruction manuals, publicity shots, book covers, newspaper photographs, or advertisements. Warhol's images are based on staged or contrived photographs already familiar to the viewer for their style, if not for their
actual content, because they are usually promotional shots of individual subjects. Even those images elaborated from Warhol's own Polaroid's, like those of Mick Jagger, 1975, or Debbie Harry, 1980, are composed so that they resemble publicity photographs. They present the subject in an almost full-facial, or more than three-quarter profile, with an elevated chin and a direct engagement with the viewer. Hence each of Warhol's repeated serial images is a repetition of an already familiar or familiarly composed subject. Viewers are led to look at these images as they would look at billboards or magazine advertisements: they look less into the subject of the images than at them.

Repetition, understood as redundancy, is a feature both of the composition and of the subject matter of Warhol's serial images.

As already indicated, Warhol's use of differentiating repetition in his series is most often analyzed either in terms of consumer fetishism or in terms of what Foster calls "traumatic realism". While the first approach denies any meaning to Warhol's images, the second claims that their meaning is in their undecidability. However, Warhol's use of differentiating repetition in the construction of his series has also been understood in terms of narrative temporality. The viewer can read Warhol's series as differing temporally.

For instance, while Warhol's series of images repeat each other, as seen with 210 Coca-Cola Bottles, 1962, or Red Race Riot, 1963 [Fig. 22], they contain variations. The cola bottles are filled to different levels, they are in different colours, and the delineation of each bottle differs. With Red Race Riot, the viewer is presented with the disturbing image screened in red, but each image contains different streaks and a different amount of
Individual images in Warhol's series vary in luminosity, colour, colour density and value, and size, while some series contain reversals of the same image. Their varying values, density and luminosity recall Monet's series of haystacks or of Rouen Cathedral. Like Warhol, Monet presents repetitive series of the same object. Moreover, time is an effect of serial repetition in Monet. The apparent variation of light, suggested by the differing value, density and luminosity of their colours, indicates different amounts of daylight and suggests different times of day. The viewer is led to read the passage of time into the shifting light of each image. John Coplans finds the same temporal narrative presented in Warhol's series. Coplans argues that:

Warhol takes the same image, repeats it, and creates in the viewer a strong sense of seeing a whole series of light changes by varying the quantity of black from image to image. Thus the same image runs the gamut of blacks or greys, apparently indicating different times or amounts of daylight, when in fact the viewer is perceiving a single photo printed with a variety of screening effects (1997:299).

By altering the tonality of each image, Coplans suggests, Warhol develops the temporal effects of Monet's

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Like Foster (1996a,b), Buchloh (1989), and Crow, I think death is a theme in Warhol's serial images. Yet, unlike them, I hold it must be read in the context of the serially iterative structure defining all his works, including toys, reproductions of other artworks, and himself. I contend Warhol presents a way of reading his subject matter, rather than explicit commentaries on what it is about.

See Wildenstein (Vol.1: 274-275).

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impressionist use of seriality. Warhol's series of coca-cola bottles can be seen as a narrative of sequence of the consumption of the drink or even as a sequence of different presentations of the bottle. Similarly, the series Marilyn - Nine Multicolored Marilyns (Reversal), 1986, can be read in terms of the various light effects of different times of day.

Yet this sort of narrative is not an obvious reading of Warhol's series, and in fact it usually does not work. Different images of soup cans appear as no more than different images of soup cans, just as various coloured portraits of Mao Tse Tung seem to be just that, with no suggestion of temporal differentiation. Warhol's images do not look like the captured instant of Monet's serial moments. Moreover, reading Warhol's series with reference to the impressionist narrative ignores not only the surface emphasis of Warhol's work, but also the nature of his accidents, which have little connection with Monet's transitional temporal narrative.

Upon closer comparison, however, there are revealing similarities between Monet and Warhol's different types of series. Both treat individual subjects serially. Where Monet broke new ground with series of different repetitions of a single, identifiable subject, Warhol follows. Monet also reworked the possibilities inherent in one image into many adumbrations of that image, rather than producing variations on a theme in the manner of, for instance, Cezanne or Poussin. Monet prioritized repetition by taking a single image and repeating it differently. When seen in these contexts, Warhol can be said to develop the serial tradition of Monet. This leads to a critical point of comparison.
Like Monet's, Warhol's series underscore not only the repeated depiction of a single subject but the differentiation which is repeated with it. Furthermore, the differences amongst serially related images are shown to be the result of differentiating treatments of the surface of each image. Both Monet and Warhol treat the surface as the site of differentiation. In the series of both artists, the apparently loose and imprecise treatment of the medium is a fundamental feature of their differentiating repetitions. In this way, Warhol's artwork can be seen to drive Monet's treatment of surface to the limit, uniting surface with image and ground, such that the subject represented is now almost incidental to the artwork. Warhol's withdrawal of any traditional use of perspective sharpens the unreality of the image, indicating to the viewer that this is not the rendering of a scene or an impression. It shifts the viewer's visual interest from the subject matter to the surface of the work itself. The representational nature of Warhol's works, specifically the familiar representation of famous and immediately identifiable subjects, drains the subject matter of any unfamiliarity. In this way, unlike with the serial works of other pop and pre-pop artists such as Josef Albers, Frank Stella, Morris Louis and Mark Rothko, the viewer is not encouraged to look into the subject matter for a profound meaning. For Warhol, representation serves to foreground the surface as the site of meaning; it is the site of differentiation.

There is a further way of reading Warhol's art in the context of temporal narrative. Warhol's series rely on the model of the advertisement or promotional shot in their composition and subject matter. Because of the very similarity between advertising images and Warhol's works, viewers are led to read each image as if it were a billboard.
or a magazine advertisement. Those images which actually contain words amplify the effect. Seen in terms of an advertisement, the series can be read from left to right and top to bottom. The linearity of the series is read on the model of the orderly sequence of parts evoked by the structure of words. Further, Warhol's series can be read on the model of the television or film sequences of contemporary culture, where each image is like a frame of a moving picture. Each is unique and different from the others, but can be read as part of a continuum. Supporting this reading are the silver backgrounds with which Warhol presents film personalities like Marilyn or Elvis. These resemble movie screens, allowing the viewer to project the model of the film onto Warhol's series thereby giving them a temporal dimension. On this model, colour is seen to be applied theatrically in a way that is reminiscent of coloured stage lights. As Coplans suggests, it is highly keyed, unnatural, amorphous colour that pervades the surface of Warhol's subjects (1997:299-300). His colour does not map directly onto particular features of actors or props, but hits them generally, for instance red on the left, yellow on the right. Moreover, these media-based techniques of light variations, of linear, left to right structure, and of theatrically applied colour, are repeated throughout Warhol's series of high-profile subjects who are identifiable primarily through their publicity shots, films, advertisements or magazine appearances. Insofar as temporality is an effect produced by Warhol's series, it is an effect of the differentiation inherent in his serial repetitions.

However, problems arise with this media-oriented or commercial model of temporal succession when it is applied to Warhol's series. The subject matter is familiar,
but too overused and banal to suggest the structure of a particular narrative medium. Furthermore, the lack of perspectival depth in Warhol's images prevents the viewer from accessing the subject in the image. Instead, it deflects the viewer's attention to the surface of the image and therefore to the serial differences between images themselves. The features of advertising, theatre, film and television which could suggest a way of reading Warhol's series in terms of a temporal narrative are relevant only to the surface of his images as the site of differentiation. Warhol's use of the film still and publicity shot composition, taken together with the theatrical lighting, silver-screen background, and the linearly sequential structure of his series, positions the viewer to look at Warhol's series as surface images. Viewers are led to view the images as without depth, to treat the subject matter with the same disinterest as a highway billboard, a magazine advertisement, or a television commercial. The subject matter is only minimally interesting.

15 Maharaj argues that the banal subject matter of pop-art renders them "indeterminate signs", which waver between satirically iconizing the glamour of high art and being icons of the commonplace. The suggestion is that art like Warhol's resists totalization in any theoretical scheme. Like Foster, Maharaj claims Warhol's art is both semantically full and empty because it simultaneously endorses the ceaselessly unsatisfied desire of commodity culture and it questions that culture. Maharaj considers the self-reflexive, satirical, and unstable features of pop-art, but roots the analysis only in the obvious socio-politico-economic readings of this art. I suggest that, with Warhol at least, pop-art comments on much more than the role of art in twentieth-century consumerist society, for it comments on much more than its immediate, historical situation. In this way it shares the same concerns as a great deal of previous art.
It is just here, nevertheless, that the media-oriented reading is valuable, for it leads to a recognition of the importance of Warhol's practice and of the structure of his images. The media-oriented reading brings out the fact that the medium is indeed the message in Warhol's serial images. Because Warhol's series respond to the repetitive, serial structures which Monet's representational series and the surface structure of commercial advertising set as precedents, they can be recognized to position the viewer's visual engagement with his images right on the surface of the artworks.

Thus meaning is produced in Warhol's series through the repetition of the differentiating surface of his images. Warhol's subject matter is revealing only insofar as it is seen to be united with the surface and the ground of each image, and therefore to restrict the viewer from entering the space of the picture plane. The viewer is deflected from looking for meaning in the subject matter and led back to the surface of each image in Warhol's series. The surface is the site of differentiation, articulated by the repetition of familiar subjects that are screened onto the ground. The articulation of the surface is random, arbitrary and different in each serial image. Each image is flat and any series of flat images is interesting only because the articulation of the surface always differs despite the basic similarities of, for instance, subject matter amongst Warhol's serial images. Throughout Warhol's serial images, the making of the same image is identical to the making of different images. The repetition of the same is the repetition of difference or, more precisely, the repetition of differentiation.

Repetition is the repetition of differentiation because the imperfections in Warhol's activity of making
his images are explicit traces of the making of difference, which with Warhol is identical to the making of the artwork. As with the majority of Warhol's modernist precursors, Warhol's activity is not concealed but manifestly exposed in his images through, for example, the imperfections in silkscreening, the haphazardly applied paint, and the scrawls scratched onto them. What distinguishes Warhol from his precursors is that his self-reflexive traces are not the self-portrait of a great creator. For instance, they are not to be read as equivalent to Raphael's self-inclusion in his *School of Athens*, 1510. On the contrary, Warhol's imperfections are ironical: they attest to the finite, fallible, and mundane nature of the artist. His imperfections expose the artist as a blundering rather than masterful creator. They reveal the hand of the artist who cannot precisely render unambiguous subject matter in a medium made for precision. The imperfections in Warhol's images are presented as accidents. They are traces of the making of accidents, traces of the activity of making accidents happen. Thus understood, Warhol's accidents display the making of differences as identical to the making of the same in his serial oeuvre. For this reason, the meaning of Warhol's art is to be found in the differences manifested by each image.

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16 The presence of self-reflexive traces of the artist is, in fact, a feature which extends further back than modernism. It becomes a primary feature of modernism, however, in response to the cultural and philosophical relocation of meaning and truth from the shifting and unstable external world to the equally unstable but familiar interior world of the self. See Alpers, Bryson, and Elliot and Wallace.
The Accidental Artist: Understanding Warhol's Redundant Differences

In this context, the interpretation of Warhol's repetitive, differentiating series of artworks by reference to Deleuze's theory of difference opens up a new reading of Warhol's differentiating accidents. It does so because it allows differences to be taken at face value. By analysing Warhol's differences as differences, his art emerges as more than a document of the ceaseless production-consumption structure of everyday, media-oriented, consumer society. It is revealed to be more than a pop reaction against an avant-garde separation of art and life. Close consideration of the differences marking Warhol's repetitive series allows them to be read as more than the work of his factory, for it reveals the work that Peter Burger argues is covered in the illusionary aura of art.17

In this respect, Warhol's art can be understood as an ironical response to abstract-expressionism, against which he is consistently read. Like abstract expressionism, Warhol's art is concerned with the real. However, unlike the art of his precursors, Warhol's does not seek or herald the unrepresentable structure of the real.18 In Warhol's work, the order of the mundane is not a concealed mystery hidden under or within the mundane; rather, it concerns the activity of difference that is mundane.

17 See Burger, Chapters Four, Five.

18 The theological and metaphysical concerns presented in abstract expressionist art can be understood not only through critical analyses of the art, but also through a comparison of the statements of artists such as Rothko, Newman, and Stills, with those of Warhol. See Armstrong (2001), Elliot and Wallace, and Krauss.
In his book *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze provides an account of the notions of difference, differentiation and repetition. This constitutes an ontology of “two types of repetition and the difference that lies between them” (Piercey, 271).¹⁹ There is the repetition of the same, “difference without concept” where “we find ourselves confronted with identical elements with exactly the same concept” (Deleuze, 1997:23). Seen in terms of its subject matter alone, a series of Warhol’s Marilyn portraits, like *Marilyn Monroe (Twenty Times)*, 1962 [Fig. 23], is understood to be many instances of a portrait of Marilyn Monroe. On this view, the differences of individual portraits are incidental; they are all understood under the concept of Marilyn. However, Deleuze argues that this “bare, material repetition (repetition of the Same) appears only in the sense that another repetition is disguised within it, constituting it and constituting itself” (1997:21). This other repetition is the “secret subject, the real subject of repetition, which repeats itself through” each repetition of the same (Deleuze, 1997:24). In Warhol’s serial imagery, the repeated instance of Marilyn is a repetition of difference. In making another Marilyn portrait, Warhol makes a different portrait. The fact that the many portraits have something in common, namely that are related as portraits of Marilyn Monroe, is no more important than the differences between them. In making the same thing, Warhol has made uniquely different things. No two portraits are the same. The repetition of the same is correlative with the repetition of difference.

¹⁹ Deleuze’s analysis of these three notions is rigorous and complex. Piercey and Badieu provide excellent commentary on Deleuze’s notions of difference and repetition.
This repetition of difference in sameness, or “secret repetition”, is for Deleuze the activity of differentiation, “a destabilizing or decentering force which shatters fixed identities” (Piercey, 273). As Piercey explains, Deleuze’s non-conceptual difference, the repetition of the same, occurs only because the “secret” repetition occurs within it (271). The repetition of difference is that which “unfolds as pure movement”, an ungrounding, differentiating activity that makes each thing what it is (Deleuze, 1997:24). The upshot of Deleuze’s analysis is that in order for there to be similar repetitions, there must first be the repetition of the process of making the thing that is to be repeated. It is this activity of differentiation which must be repeated. Paradoxically, it is always the same, even while it is always different precisely because it is the activity of differentiation.

Seen in this light, the real significance of the surface differences in Warhol’s series emerges. There is little meaning to a series of Marilyn portraits if viewers focus on their similarity. Similarity allows for the organization of the images, but divulges little of their significance in series. Without beginning, end or determinate sequence, the serial images stand as badly rendered copies of one another. Moreover, there is no original because the original is a promotional shot, a copy of an already famous and disseminated image. The redundancy of repetition in Warhol’s series is emphatic. However, the differences between the serialized images not only break the monotony of Warhol’s imagery but show that, in the activity of making the images, what is the same is the differentiating activity that makes them different.

Each of Warhol’s series are united by the theme presented in their imagery. On the surface, each image in
a series is a repetition of the same thing. However, there is a level of difference in Warhol's series that could be said to be deeper than the initial sameness of the images, were it not that this other level operates on the same field as sameness: the surface. Difference is overtly emphasized in Warhol's images through surface effects, the accidents which overtly differentiate the images. The construction of differences in the series is shown to be the construction of making the images. The differences between images are traces of acts which could not be determined in advance. Thus they are traces of the unpredictable in Warhol's activity. Warhol may have sought accidents, but there is no way in which he could have predicted how the dirt on the squeegee, or the lack of paint, or the slippage of colour, or his companion's work would manifest itself on the canvas. There is no overarching concept that is represented in Warhol's process, only the random and arbitrary event of the accident. The trace of the accidental act is what makes each image unique. This is the trace of the unpredictable, that which cannot be known in advance. It is simultaneously profound because it constructs the new and it is banal because it is a feature of the mundane.

De Duve argues that the accidents in Warhol's art show how Warhol "knew how to exploit the imperfections of the photosilkscreen". His accidents are his signature and make Warhol both a brand-name and fulfill "the historical necessity for the painter to want to be a machine" (12). Warhol, he claims, "maps ... (the consumerist political economy) ... totally onto that of the aesthetic field", becoming a machine of "constant capital" (9-10). I do not disagree with De Duve, insofar as I also take Warhol's claim to being a machine at face value. However, De Duve still reads Warhol's practice as subordinate to both his imagery and his public persona. De Duve also fails to see the irony of Warhol's statements in light both of Warhol's art and of his 'signature' accidents.
something common to all Warhol's subjects including himself.

The differentiating act that makes Warhol's images different is unique to every accident. Understood in terms of Warhol's accidents, differentiation emerges from the constructive activity of making. It is novel in each of its instances, constructing things differently with each constructive act. Hence the differences in Warhol's images are traces of the activity of constructing differences. They reveal that during the repetitive activity of production, difference is actualized, which means the construction of sameness is identical to the construction of difference. This is because in making any Marilyn image, for instance, Warhol's practice makes generous room for the unpredictable to occur. Rather than avoiding accidents, Warhol appears to make them a priority. Warhol doesn't just allow accidents to happen; he makes accidents happen. In making another Marilyn image, Warhol makes unpredictable accidents occur which result in a different image of the same thing. Yet because the repetition of the same is the repetition of difference, it is also the destruction of fixed identity. In Warhol’s series, he ensures there is no authentic or original image of which the others are copies. The series he presents are series of different images. Warhol’s art making can thus be understood as an ungrounding activity which continually destabilizes the originality of his images as they are made original in virtue of the unpredictability of the accidental, central to his practice. Attending to the differences between Warhol’s serial images reveals that without an original, each serial

21 See Ganis.
image can only be compared to another serial image. Sameness dissolves in the face of difference.

A Warholian Theory of the Accident
Warhol's serial images show the making of accidents to be unpredictable, random and arbitrary. The differences of the series are not explained with reference to similarities, such as their subject matter. Each difference is unique and unprecedented. It is the accident that Warhol never avoids making, for the making of accidents is the making of Warhol's art. Understood as traces of his making activity, accidents are displayed overtly on the surface of his images. Thus Warhol's colours are unnatural, theatrical, and randomly articulate the subjects in each image. The unnaturally large size of images exaggerates not only their flatness but also the accidents which differentiate them. Further, sloppy brushwork, hatching or scribbles over the images heighten the element of arbitrariness. The accidental, differentiating activity of Warhol is presented as fundamental to his practice and therefore to his images.

Yet Warhol called himself a machine working in a factory. On this model, Warhol's images should be identical and flawless reproductions of both each serial image and the image of his subject matter. This is the irony of Warhol's self-description in relation to his so-called accidents. Warhol undermines the mechanism of his practice, for the Warhol machine continuously repeats unpredictable accidents. Warhol's machine is a random generator of accidents, generating and regenerating flaws in its generation of the same. In describing himself as a machine, Warhol ironically pushes the metaphor to its ridiculous limit. The machine repetitively performs the
same operation of differentiation which continually produces the same product: difference as accident.

All over Warhol's artworks there are traces of a subjectivity that does not by any means resemble a machine. The Warhol-machine repetitively constructs unique and novel serially related images. As a machine, Warhol performs the function of Deleuze's activity of differentiation. However, Warhol's differentiation activity is not presented as a "secret" subject. With Warhol's artwork, the artist is the agent of differentiation. He is the subject who carries through the differences that viewers find in the canvases. The subject of Warhol activity of differentiation is not in the least "secret". In order to understand what sort of subject Warhol is, it is ironically useful here to return to the information provided about him in the exhibition "Andy Warhol: A Factory".

The exhibition makes clear that Warhol the artist is neither one machine nor one person, but many people often acting independently of the person who happens to be called Andy Warhol. Thus differences in Warhol's art are not traces of the performance of an isolated, directing individual subject. Warhol's subject is first of all a communal subject. Many people are involved in the production of Warhol's art, including his factory associates, patrons, friends, his mother and various printing agencies. These people are more than apprentices on the model of a Renaissance studio, where Warhol would be the sole determining agent of his creative output. Rather, others are involved in the productive process of selecting, printing and making accidents happen. Warhol is a uniting element in a disparate community in which no member can determine the outcome of their accidental activity.
Warhol is also the free individual *par excellence*, as any account of his life attests.\(^{22}\) Warhol’s life is overtly public. His art is created by himself and by the very public and constantly transforming community of Factory associates. Furthermore, freedom is a fundamental feature of Warhol’s practice. His self-presentation as an artist is of one who takes up other people’s suggestions and actions without much deliberation. His response is automatic: he just does it. If there is a problem or “accident” involved in the printing of his art, he prints regardless. If another person wants to get involved, he does not stop them. If Warhol wants to interfere, he does. In this way, Warhol is indeed a machine. But he is an ironic machine because he is free and spontaneous.\(^{23}\)

Insofar as viewers are made aware of his persona as an artist, Warhol was one of the most public, overt and free subjects imaginable. The irony of calling this overt, public, free persona a machine accentuates the fact that if we look at Warhol’s artist-persona on the surface, namely his activity, there is no relevant distinction to be made between the artist’s observable behaviour and his private, interior subjectivity. His free, public activity is the subject who produces and responds to differences; “just look at the surface of my paintings, and films, and me, and there I am”, he claims, “There’s nothing behind it”.\(^{24}\) There is no

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\(^{22}\) For an example, see Warhol and Hackett (1980).

\(^{23}\) Michelson’s analysis uses the Bakhtinian notion of carnival to develop an account of freedom in Warhol’s oeuvre. Nettleton criticizes the performative Warholian subject for generalizing “whiteness”.

\(^{24}\) Warhol, in Berg, p.40.
need to look behind the artist's art-making activity to find some meaning to his art, for the meaning is in that art-making activity and is traced all over his art. Warhol is a subject of public, free, and communal, activity.

Warhol is not a directing, commanding subject but one who urges as many free variables as possible to encounter one another in the production of his art. At most, he is the instigator who makes accidents happen, encouraging all the participants in the artistic process to intermingle in unpredictable ways. Freedom or spontaneity is primary in Warhol's art; it is right on the surface but often missed and missed, paradoxically, in its overtness.

In order to understand Warhol's communal, public, and free subject in terms of spontaneity, it is useful to understand what sort of spontaneity is at issue. Spontaneity can be understood either in terms of the standard notion of chance or in terms of the indeterminable, free eruption of novelty. On the standard notion, chance is the non-predictable intersection of at least two causal chains. It is fully explicable in terms of antecedent, causal determinations. On this view, Warhol was merely unable to predict how a particular image of Marilyn would turn out. However, after completing it, anyone would be able to determine that, for instance, because he had not cleaned the squeegee, had left trace amounts of another colour on it, and did not align the colours with the ground image, a blurring and disjunction of

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25 For an account of chance theory, see Cahn. Boemer's account of chance in modern or new music also shows the difference between spontaneity and chance. However, what he calls 'chance' I call 'spontaneity'.
colour and ground image was bound to happen. Yet there is more at issue here.

For spontaneity can be understood as an account of freedom in which an outcome is not totally derivable from or exhaustively traceable to the causal chains out of which it emerges. While spontaneous events have a genealogy, that does not entirely explain their emergence. Spontaneity is irruptive and undeterminable freedom. In Warhol’s art, numerous variables interact in various ways to produce the art made under his name. Many participants are involved in the process of, for instance, selecting, making, and printing the images. Under the standard notion of chance, it remains possible that the causal chains constructing an image can be determined retrospectively. However, this account overlooks what is traced all over Warhol’s images: activity. The accidents are explicit traces of Warhol’s constructive activity. His activity is not reducible to the artwork or any other variable in the constructing process. Activity is the underivable element. Between the given art-making situation and the resulting image is a middle term that is overt in its absence: the activity of structuring or making which carries the structure itself forward.

Warhol’s activity of art-making activity is free or spontaneous activity which is not exhaustively determined by any other element in the process. Moreover, it is intrinsically relational. It carries the open, variable and multiple past into the present, realizing a new difference out of given antecedent conditions. Hence free, relational activity is here synthetic or constructive activity. In making difference, the past is reworked into a different realization of the present. Free, relational, synthetic activity thus has a structure in Warhol’s series. It is iterative: the realization of
difference is the process of reshaping past conditions into a new thing, like a different artwork. In each of Warhol's series, there is an obvious genealogy to the images, but each serial image of, for instance, Marilyn is an unpredictably different realization of the same. The free, relational, synthetic activity which makes for Warhol's series itself has a structure: the structure of serial iteration. Warhol's series can be viewed in any order because their only telos is the repetition of differentiation itself. Furthermore, accidents happen unpredictably, which means the spontaneous realization of difference is purely irruptive. For this reason, Warhol's constructive activity might seem impervious to rational analysis and thus is to be understood on the model of the unanalyzable and mysterious icon. However, the very serial structure of Warhol's images gives this activity a rational structure. In whatever order they are viewed, each serial image differentiates from the last. Serially, each image is a different continuation of the same structure. Had the series been ordered by one image necessarily following another, the serial order would be determinate, where one determines the next. But while not determinately ordered, the images are serially ordered. In series, the past is open, revisable, and not wholly determinate; what came before can always be viewed in a new way. Warhol's series can be understood in the same terms as Mondrian's, for here the relational activity that continues the serial structure, making each image a different realization of the structure of the same, is the iterative and constructive free activity of making. Activity is the iterative persistence of Warhol's series. Only his arbitrary decision puts an end to the otherwise indefinite iteration of the series. Warhol's series
gives a serially iterative structure to the underivable activity of differentiation.

This serial structure of Warhol's artwork is crucial because it shows the persistent nature of the activity which produces Warhol's art. Without seriality, the activity traced in Warhol's artworks would indeed be a "secret", for it would be difficult to spot or even consider accidents as such with only an original. But as repetitive series, Warhol's serial accidents reveal an active process of differentiation. Their seriality reveals the iterative structure of the activity of differentiation, which is thereby explicitly relational because it enacts both the continuation of the same and the continual iteration of differentiation. The process of making differences out of the past is presented in terms of the underivable but serially structured, and thereby rational, activity of differentiation in Warhol's artwork.

Warhol's Serial Subject: The Ironic Machine

Warhol's serial images can thus be seen to provide an account of the ongoing structure of the mundane. The world of car-crashes, superstars and toy trains actively persists by iterative and constructive free activity which makes things continually, and uniquely what they are. The question now is how the ontology presented in the artwork is to be understood in relation to the world beyond Warhol's images. The answer is found in the Warhol's persona as an artist.

As shown, Warhol is presented as a free, communal, public artist. Considered in terms of his art, Warhol is a construction fashioned through the spontaneous activity that makes him what he is. He is a
product, continually re-iterated differently, of the recursive and synthetic free activity that makes him what he is. This means Warhol is not a complete, reflexive subject who agonizes over and accompanies his productions. As an artist, he is the subject of the activity of differentiation. He is not a directing, mastering subject who follows a pre-ordained telos, because the only telos here is the realization of free activity or self-actualization. The subject is the subject of his activity of self-actualization, the iterative and constructive free activity of differentiation.

Thus the subject is neither a directing subject nor a subject wholly fashioned by a given situation, making the best of whatever formative language games or discursive practices he happens to participate in. Like the subject in Schiele's images, the Warhol-subject is not a transcendent principle but is immanently free, for while genealogically bound to the past, he is continually able to realize himself differently. This subject is part of a serially structured world in which every member persists by way of spontaneous self-realization, bound by the constraints of its past but pushed into continual differentiations from the past by its own underivable activity of differentiation.

Thus both Warhol the persona and his art are to be understood in terms of immanent spontaneity. This is illustrated by Warhol's accidents, the traces of his constructive activity. The artist self-reflexively traced through Warhol's art is not one person, but anything involved in the process. The accidents are "metonymic representations in the image" of both Warhol and everything that constructed the image as what it is (van

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26 Gilbertson provides a feminist account of Warhol's serially differentiating and performative subject.
They are all subjects of the serially iterative and constructive free activity presented in Warhol's serial images.

This does not mean that Warhol, pieces of dirt, and each image are to be understood on the same terms. Each has its own kind of freedom, for each thing has a unique past; each difference is realized by a unique act of differentiation. Further, the history of each differentiation is open and variable, due to the spontaneous nature of its free activity of differentiation. Each thing, nevertheless, is constrained by the elements of its own situation. Marilyn never becomes a soup can and the soup can never becomes Andy Warhol. While every product of the activity of differentiation is immanently free, it is bound by its past. Thus there remains a fundamental difference between persons and artworks: they are actualized out of different histories. The freedom by which they are realized differs in virtue of their different pasts. This means that the subject is both product and condition of the rule of free, iterative self-realization.