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Reference

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BOOKS

POP TRICKSTER FOOL: WARHOL PERFORMS NAIVETE

by Kelly M. Cresap. University of Illinois Press, Champaign, IL, U.S.A., 2004. 216 pp., illus. Trade; paper. ISBN: 0-252-02926-7; ISBN: 0-252-07181-6.

Reviewed by Michael R. (Mike) Mosher, Saginaw Valley State University, University Center, MI, U.S.A. E-mail: <mosher@susu.edu>.

David Bowie sang about him even before he met him. Michigan teenagers Destroy All Monsters lived as if they were superstars in his underground films. A bookstore owner who hosted him said he was the dullest person she ever met. Andy Warhol cut a contradictory figure in society, from the Pop Art Sixties until his surprising, untimely death in 1987, cultivating a hazy naivete each step of the way. Author Kelly M. Cresap reads both Warhol's aesthetic and persona as rooted in his homosexuality, and his jester-like naivete as a well-chosen strategy for maximum freedom in a circumscribed world.

Cresap contrasts fey Warhol with the

mythic macho of the New York school, Jackson Pollock and Willem de Kooning and other two-fisted action painters boozing it up and slugging it out at the Cedar Bar and other smoky, manly dives. These tough guys cast a pall on the next generation of artists: witness the trepidation and delicacy of Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg, gay artists only slightly older than Warhol, who kept the sissified fact that they had decorated store windows as secret as their relationship. A former commercial illustrator, Andy Warhol created his Factory studio, where he directed assistants serigraphing imagery on paper and canvas. They joined Warhol for evenings out on the town, attending parties, snapping Polaroids, shooting movie footage almost at random, projecting films behind the noisy band the Velvet Underground. Warhol's colleagues called him "Drella," a name containing his unique mix of Cinderella, awestruck at her good fortune, and Dracula, the scheming nocturnal vampire. In the musical tribute performed at Warhol's funeral, *Songs for Drella*, the Velvet Underground's Lou Reed and John Cale sang of his compulsive productivity.

In universities in the early 1980s, some gay and lesbian painting students (Robert Morgan at San Francisco State, among the best) depicted domestic "gay genre" scenes of themselves and their friends that no longer read as particularly transgressive. Twenty years before, Warhol created gallery pinups of macho figures such as Marlon "Wild One" Brando and the gunslinging cowboy Elvis Presley and tragically overdetermined female stars such as Marilyn Monroe and Elizabeth Taylor. Warhol's quickly eradicated *Most Wanted Men* mural at the 1964 World's Fair used mug shots from the "Wanted" posters seen in post offices, and the subtext may have been that Warhol craved the bad men's passions. A near-fatal shooting in 1969 may have weaned him from dangerous company, for after that he seemed to prefer celebrities, safely illuminated by flashbulbs.

The book's least-successful chapter is a panoply of contradictory quotes on Warhol that the author calls the "Free Andy" Open Forum. Here readers are given brief items from myriad sources on aspects of Warhol's persona and career, including the artist's relationship to the artistic legacy of Marcel Duchamp. The chapter seems to aspire to be a theater piece rather than an

entr'acte in this otherwise clearly argued book. To this gripe the author might reply that a lack of a centered thesis is more Warholian. What Cresap calls an "anti-cogito" locates Warhol in various currents of anti-intellectualism in American society. When I encountered *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol* (1975) in college, I was struck by its celebration of triviality and subjectivity. Why, one musters a case for or against something with evidence, not on the whims of a moody schoolgirl! To read a middle-aged artist going on like that was amazing. Meanwhile, Warhol's cool-looking *Interview* magazine was like a big bowl of ice cream with sprinkles, so mind-bogglingly vacant and agape that it almost gave one a headache to read it.

Cresap builds the case that the most significant historical current in which to locate Andy Warhol is that of camp—the ironic sensibility crackling through much urban gay male discourse—and the author credits Warhol as its major rejuvenator. I remember when the excitedly anticipated (by 8-year-olds) television show *Batman* debuted, and my parents and neighbors defined it as an example of camp, "so bad it's good." Perhaps their appraisal of Warhol as "weird" and "sexless" was their way of discussing the Queerness That Dare Not Speak Its Name. Four decades later Kelly M. Cresap voices concern that popular culture is now entirely camp-dominated, its mainstream so cynical and admittedly trivial that there are no longer great verities against which outsiders and sexual outlaws can snidely dish. We will never see another Pop Trickster Fool like Andy Warhol.

THE SITUATIONIST INTERNATIONAL: A USER'S GUIDE

by Simon Ford. Black Dog Publishing Limited, London, U.K., 2005. 208 pp., illus. Paper. ISBN: 1-904772-05-6.

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All minds (*esprits*) which to an extent are informed of our time agree on that which is evident—that it has become impossible for art to assert itself as a superior activity, or even as an activity of compensation to which one could honorably devote one self. The reason for this degeneration is visible as the



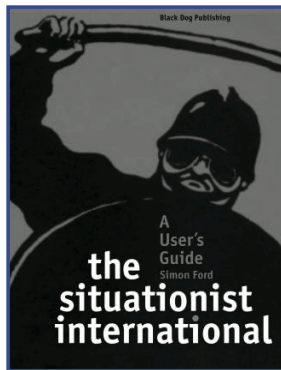
emergence of productive forces that necessitate other production relations and a new practice of life [1].

Had these sentences been written recently, perhaps, our glance into the future would contain more optimism. Yet, as some may know, they were written nearly 50 years ago.

Since 1989, when the first major retrospective exhibitions on a group that had referred to itself as an avant-garde movement—the Situationist International (SI)—were held, the theoretical and artistic works of the SI have been acknowledged by a wider public. Consequently, publications by the SI appeared in reprints, and numerous books of scholarly research were published.

In 1995 the British author Simon Ford published a book entitled *The Realization & Suppression of the Situationist International, An Annotated Bibliography, 1972–1992* [2], listing 363 mostly English titles. Ten years later we have a second publication by Ford, in which the author builds upon the extensive research he performed for his previous publication.

The book is named *The Situationist International: A User's Guide*. For those familiar with the works of the SI, it certainly will not be a surprise to be addressed as users instead of readers. They may recognize as well the opening citation of this review as belonging to a text written by Guy-Ernest Debord, the key figure of the SI, together with Gil J. Wolman. The text was first published in French shortly before the foundation of the SI in May 1956 in *Les Lèvres Nues*, a journal considered close to the surrealist movement, and translated into English as *User Guide to Détournement*.



Those familiar with SI texts in the original French will also be aware that *The Revolution of Everyday Life*, by Raoul Vaneigem, the second major theoretical book by the SI after Debord's *Society of the Spectacle*, was meant "for use by the younger generations." In the case of Debord, Wolman and Vaneigem, it is obvious who was addressed: those, possibly younger, who could contribute to the transformation of a society that was perceived as alienated from life into a society of constant revolutionary practice, those who could contribute to developing a new practice of life. Now, in 2006, one may wonder what kind of user is addressed in the *User's Guide* presented to us.

In a sense, the book is a classic. It could be categorized as a history book. As such, however, it has a very specific focus on a limited number of persons involved with the Situationist International, a movement located in a specific time that has been described as the last avant-garde art movement. In four chapters the book presents an overview of the SI, the main actors associated with it and their ideas and actions within their historical context. All chapters are extensively illustrated. Numerous black-and-white photographs show SI members at their gatherings, and many images present examples of work by the SI, paintings, comics and other illustrations. Additionally, various citations are inserted within the text and provide an idea of the style in which the SI theses were passed on to the public. An extensive number of side notes point to primary and secondary literature, mostly English publications, and invite further reading.

The first chapter is dedicated to "The Pre-Situationist Years, 1931–1956," in which many of the later key ideas of situationist theory were developed, for example, psychogeography, *dérive* and *détournement*. Chapter 2 collects the events in "The Early Years of the Situationist International, 1957–1965." It includes brief accounts of several principal artists associated with the SI, as well as a description of the scission from the German and Scandinavian section, the Spurists and the Nashists. Chapter 3 describes "The Beginning of an Era, 1966–1968," with the two major theoretical publications by Debord and Vaneigem as well as the SI's involvement in the 1968 student revolt. The last chapter is dedicated to "The Dissolution of the SI and Its Aftermath, 1969 and Beyond." It includes several pages written about Debord's films of the

1970s as well as notes on various groups that understood themselves as Situationist or were rather unwillingly associated with the SI by the media.

Ford's book ends:

To study and learn from the lessons of the SI is no idle pastime or exercise in passive contemplation. It is nothing if not a determined step towards the realisation of a future society where the SI's ideas about a useful life are no longer quite so exceptional.

At this point one certainly realizes that the users addressed by his book are of inclinations similar to those addressed by Wolman, Debord, Vaneigem and others associated with the SI. They are potential revolutionaries, the exception being that this time they are expected to wrap themselves rather modestly in history and not in slogan. One can assume that such a practice has the potential of becoming a very clandestine revolution, and as such, a possibly successful one towards a new practice of life. "Historical consciousness is an essential condition of social revolution," as René Viénet, a sometime member of the SI cited by Ford, once wrote.

References

1. G.-E. Debord and G.J. Wolman, "Mode d'emploi du détournement," first published in *Les Lèvres Nues* No. 8 (May 1956), <http://sami.is.free.fr/Oeuvres/debord_wolman_mode_emploi_de_tournement.html>, excerpt translated to English by the author of this review.

2. S. Ford, *The Realization and Suppression of the Situationist International, An Annotated Bibliography, 1972–1992* (AK Press, 1995).

THE CRADLE OF HUMANITY: PREHISTORIC ART AND CULTURE

by Georges Bataille. Michelle Kendall and Stuart Kendall, trans. Zone Books, New York, U.S.A., 2005. 210 pp. Trade. ISBN: 1-890951-55-2.

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"For the animal, being essentially man's double, had something of the divine, the very thing he no longer attains except in the prodigious effervescence of festival" (p. 177).

With this assertion, along with others, Georges Bataille seeks to interpret prehistoric art and culture. But such is characteristic of Bataille. His work on