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“My Mind Split Open”: Andy Warhol’s Exploding Plastic Inevitable

BRANDEN W. JOSEPH

At no point in time, no matter how utopian, will anyone win the masses over to a higher art; they can be won over only to one nearer to them.

—Walter Benjamin [K3a,1]

In 1968 a fledgling critic by the name of Wayne McGuire sent an unsolicited article to *Crawdaddy!* magazine proclaiming the Velvet Underground to be “prophets of a new age, of breakthrough on an electronic: intermedia: total scale.”¹ Describing them as “the only true intermedia group in the country,” McGuire situated them within the context of Andy Warhol’s Exploding Plastic Inevitable, or EPI, an overwhelming expanded cinema production collaboratively orchestrated from 1966 to 1967.² At the height of its development, the Exploding Plastic Inevitable included three to five film projectors, often showing different reels of the same film simultaneously; a similar number of slide projectors, movable by hand so that their images swept the auditorium; four variable-speed strobe lights; three moving spots with an assortment of colored gels; several pistol lights; a mirror ball hung from the ceiling and another on the floor; as many as three loudspeakers blaring different pop records at once; one to two sets by the Velvet Underground and Nico; and the dancing of Gerard Malanga and Mary Woronov or Ingrid Superstar, complete with props and lights that projected their shadows high onto the wall. Advertisements for the EPI emphasized the variety of included effects, touting in addition to Warhol and the music:

Superstars Gerard Malanga And Mary Woronov On Film On Stage On Vinyl: Live music, dancing, ultra sounds, visions, lightworks by Daniel Williams; color slides by Jackie Cassen, discotheque, refreshments, Ingrid Superstar, food, celebrities, and movies, including: Vinyl, Sleep, Eat, Kiss, Empire, Whips, Faces, Harlot, Hedy, Couch, Banana, Blow Job, etc., etc., etc. all in the same place at the same time.³

The cumulative effect was one of disruptive multiplicity and layering, as the Velvet Underground, Nico, and other of Warhol’s superstars appeared amidst the barrage of sounds, lights, images,



Exploding Plastic Inevitable, 1966.
Multiple screen projections,
including two reels of *Vinyl*, 1965.



Andy Warhol. *Vinyl*, 1965.
© 2002 The Andy Warhol
Museum, Pittsburgh, PA,
a museum of Carnegie Institute.
Film still courtesy of the Andy
Warhol Museum.

and performance. Critics who saw the shows consistently labeled the effect “decadence” or “perversion.”⁴ While noting the showing of such anodyne films as *Eat* (1964), they more consistently pointed to such scenes as Malanga’s sadomasochistic reprogramming in *Vinyl* (1965); Mario Montez’s drag in films like *Harlot* (1964), *Mario Banana* (1964), and *More Milk*,

Yvette (1965); the slyly allusive activity of *Blow Job* (1964); or the explicitly pornographic engagements in *Couch* (1964)—all accompanied by the Velvet Underground’s lengthy, atonal improvisations and dark, provocative songs like “Heroin,” “Venus in Furs,” and “Sister Ray.”⁵

“It is no accident,” noted McGuire,

that the Velvet Underground was an organic element in Andy Warhol’s Exploding Plastic Inevitable. The now defunct Inevitable remains as the strongest and most developed example of intermedia art. Although productions . . . have since achieved greater technical dexterity on a visual plane, no one has yet managed to communicate a guiding spirit through the complex form as well as Warhol and the Underground.⁶

Elaborating on this guiding spirit, McGuire related Warhol to William S. Burroughs—as the “two oracles” of the time—and proceeded to explain that:

Put in a nutshell, the real question is: how can we control and humanize an increasingly uncontrollable and proliferating technology, an overpoweringly dehumanizing technology, when the value foundation for that attempted humanization is rapidly disintegrating and when the attempt by humans to control such power (who would be the master programmer?) would most certainly be corrupting in the extreme?⁷

McGuire was not alone in setting the EPI at the forefront of the development of intermedia artforms. In 1966 Jonas Mekas credited “The Plastic Inevitable” with being “the loudest and most dynamic exploration platform” for the new “intermedia shows and groups.”⁸ Nor was McGuire the only writer to relate the Exploding Plastic Inevitable to such social and technological developments. A few months later, Bob Stark of the Detroit underground paper *The Fifth Estate* published a more concise, but no less intriguing, review of the *Velvet Underground and Nico* album. Neglecting the conventional format of the record review or any attempt at

qualitative evaluation, Stark was prompted instead to ask, “Have you . . . ever considered what your role in society will be after the impending Cybernetic revolution?” Like McGuire, he then proceeded to relate Warhol and the Velvet Underground to Burroughs’s “Nova Police,” to the displacement of a traditional humanist subjectivity, and to the then unimaginable possibility of a future in which “everybody can have one computer or machine which he or she can sit and watch all day.” “What will you (yes, YOU) do,” he asked,

when machines do all the manual labor and computers run all the machines?

On a much larger scale, how will you as a part of society be able to maintain your ego role as The Superior Being on Earth when machines have replaced you and all your work functions and can do a better job? And who will program the computers? You, maybe? Or maybe your elected representatives? Or maybe the computers themselves? Then what will you do?

. . . I can only suggest places to look which brings us to the subject of the article. . . . The one group working in the context of Rock that presents a system which represents anything more than their own personal temporary answers to any of these questions is the Velvet Underground.⁹

If I am drawn to the testimony of Stark and McGuire to begin an analysis of the Exploding Plastic Inevitable, it is not on account of their conclusions; far from it. For neither one does, ultimately, arrive at satisfactory answers to the provocative questions that they pose.¹⁰ Rather, it is for the manner in which their invocations of cybernetics, automation, the dissolution of humanist subjectivity, and Burroughsian visions of social control foreground, with particular concision, a constellation of ideas that hovered insistently about Warhol’s late-sixties production—his relationship to what a reviewer of *a*, Warhol’s tape-recorded novel from the same period, called “a bizarre new class, *untermenschen* prefigurations of the technological millennium.”¹¹ But I am also drawn to the fact that certain individuals, like Stark and McGuire, saw in the apparent darkness and chaos of the EPI a possibility of transformation, if not liberation, a possibility that was both within and somehow at odds with the general ethos of the sixties, one that was, in McGuire’s words, “bathed in a strange light, a demon light electric.”¹²

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Far from Warhol’s first foray into popular music, the Exploding Plastic Inevitable actually resulted from a longer line of related investigations. These began as far back as early 1963, when Warhol



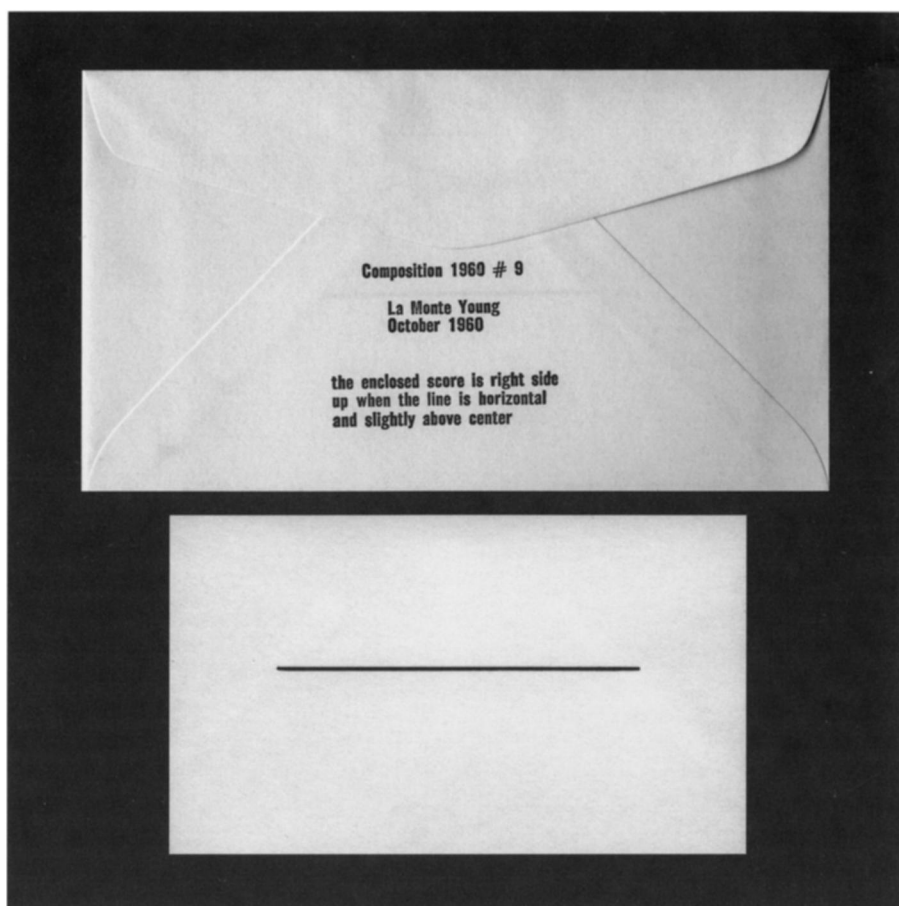
Andy Warhol. *Eat*, 1964.
© 2002 The Andy Warhol
Museum, Pittsburgh, PA, a
museum of Carnegie Institute.
Film still courtesy of the Andy
Warhol Museum.

collaborated with Claes and Patti Oldenburg on an ill-fated attempt to form a rock band. This somewhat unlikely project included Patti Oldenburg as lead singer; Warhol and the artist Lucas Samaras as her backups (Warhol, by his own admission, “singing badly”); the artists Larry Poons and Walter De Maria on guitar and drums; minimalist composer

La Monte Young on saxophone; and Jasper Johns, who was apparently enlisted to contribute the lyrics.¹³ Although Warhol could not remember the specific role played by Claes Oldenburg, the project appears to have been conceived along the lines of other of Oldenburg’s performances such as *Sports* (1962) and *Store Days* (1961–62), earlier happening-type events that appropriated similar sites of popular spectacle and consumption. After only a few rehearsals, however, the project folded when Young, who unlike Warhol did not share the Oldenburgs’ interest in commercial culture, abandoned the group.¹⁴ Despite the theatricality and Zen-like humor of Young’s earlier, proto-Fluxus pieces like *Piano Piece for David Tudor #1* (1960)—in which a piano was fed a bale of hay—the minimalist aesthetic he was developing at the time staunchly opposed popular forms of amusement. As Young announced at the important series of concerts he organized at Yoko Ono’s loft in 1960 and 1961, the purpose of his work was “not entertainment.”¹⁵

Despite this apparently fundamental divide, Warhol and Young would enter into another collaboration in the fall of 1964. As a last-minute addition to the Second Annual New York Film Festival, Warhol had been invited to project a collection of his films, not in the theater, but in the mezzanine lobby of Lincoln Center’s Philharmonic Hall.¹⁶ In response, Warhol produced an installation that featured excerpts from his films *Eat*, *Sleep* (1963), *Kiss* (1963–64), and *Haircut* (1963), each of which was shown individually on a separate Fairchild 400 projector—a machine recently developed for easy home viewing by back-projecting 8mm film cartridges onto small, television-sized screens.¹⁷

Warhol’s film production had already been associated with commercial culture, either through his explicit adoption of television as a model in, for instance, the unfinished film project *Soap Opera* (1964) or by using pop radio as a soundtrack to the premiere of *Sleep*. In the context of Lincoln Center, therefore, his choice of the small, backlit Fairchild projectors initially appears as a characteristically Pop conflation of cinema and TV.¹⁸ The



promotional literature surrounding the event seems to reflect just such a position. Whereas the Festival promoted itself as the celebration of “a new cultural reality in New York: the belated and triumphant acceptance of film as high art,” Warhol’s participation was officially described as a “festival side show” and “extra-added-attraction.”¹⁹ Warhol, however, clearly regarded the marginalized and subordinate position accorded his films as a slight, one that he still resented bitterly over a decade and a half later.²⁰

Warhol responded by adopting Young’s minimalist strategy of reductive negation. By transferring a single, three-minute segment from each of his films onto the repeating loop cartridges, Warhol further reduced their already minimal variation and eliminated any appreciable development while extending their duration indefinitely by means of continuous repetition. As reported in a press release, “The quartet of Warhol films, according to the artist’s definition, are ‘endless.’”²¹ The soundtrack provided by Young complemented the installation’s visuals perfectly. Realizing a version of his *Composition 1960 #9*—the score for which consists of a horizontal line—Young and Marian Zazeela performed a single sustained tone on a bowed brass mortar. Then, dubbing a separate but identical recording to accompany each of Warhol’s films, Young had all four tapes broadcast simultaneously and at an earsplitting volume. In a manner similar to the “continuous frequency environ-

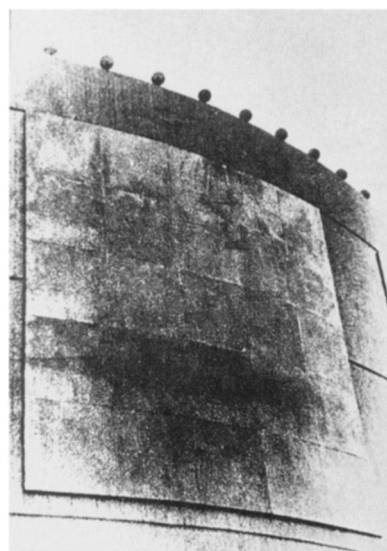
LaMonte Young. *Composition 1960 #9*, 1960. October, 1960. Reproduced with permission from *An Anthology* (1963). © La Monte Young 1963, 1970.

ments,” or Dream Houses, that Young would conceive at around the same time, the amplification of his soundtracks would not only have filled the lobby, but would have melded the four tones into an acoustical structure that interacted both with their surroundings and each other.²²

The result was of a complex sonic environment of slowly shifting sound waves that replaced traditional compositional variation with the phenomenological interaction of listener and sound. Ambulant spectators, enveloped within the sound and passing through different complexes of standing waves, would become sensitized to the subtle acoustical differences audible at different points in space and thereby become cognizant of the role played by their own movements and perceptions in the production of the musical experience.²³ In this way the installation formed a semi-autonomous zone that acted to negate, rather than embrace, the realm of commercial culture, allowing for a consciousness of individual perception and an experience of bodily depth against the expropriating alienation of spectacle. Exemplifying a minimalist strategy of—as Young’s close associate, Robert Morris, summarized it—“reducing the stimulus to next to nothing,” the installation “turn[ed] the focus on the individual, as if to say, ‘whatever you got in the past you brought along anyway, so now really work at it.’”²⁴

Warhol’s film loops operated in a similar manner. Their visual reduction and temporally extended repetition so minimized the aesthetic experience as to throw the viewer back onto an attentiveness to his or her own perceptual engagement with the work, thereby exemplifying Warhol’s comment that his “first films using the stationary objects were . . . made to help the audience get more acquainted with themselves.”²⁵ As with Young’s music, this afforded a certain critical distance from the temporal and perceptual organization of spectacle: an organization Warhol once described in terms of “the same plots and the same shots and the same cuts over and over again” of “all the most popular action shows on TV.” As he went on to explain, “Apparently most people love watching the same basic thing, as long as the details are different. But I’m just the opposite: if I’m going to sit and watch the same thing I saw the night before, I don’t want it to be essentially the same—I want it to be *exactly* the same.”²⁶

Despite his temporary artistic alliance with Young, Warhol would almost certainly have recognized in the strategies of minimalism a mimetic relation to the same logic of seriality that it denied.²⁷ Indeed, while each of Warhol’s individual film loops displayed a stark, minimal repetition, the collection of the four projectors together amounted to differences in details, instantiating much the same logic of pseudodifferentiation that Warhol disparaged in commercial TV. Situated at what Hal Foster has



termed “the crux of minimalism,” Warhol’s Lincoln Center installation occupied a pivotal, but ultimately provisional and perhaps fragile, moment of dialectical tension between a resistant, modernist autonomy and a postmodern aesthetic collapse into the expanded field being colonized by capital at that time.²⁸

Like the Oldenburgs’ rock group project, Warhol’s Lincoln Center installation would be short lived. For in addition to producing an environment of subtle acoustical interactions that could only be achieved through amplification, the volume of the installation’s soundtracks staged an evident and aggressive intervention into the space of the Lincoln Center Festival. In an act that recalled the censorship of Warhol’s *Thirteen Most Wanted Men* at the 1964 New York World’s Fair (which was painted over in silver at the instigation of the exhibition’s organizers), officials at Lincoln Center almost immediately directed Young to reduce the volume. Realizing that its critical edge would be blunted and its integral minimalist aesthetic destroyed, Young reacted by withdrawing his soundtracks completely, leaving Warhol’s loops running harmlessly on the Grand Promenade for the remainder of the festival.

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In the first phase of his collaboration with the Velvet Underground (one of whose members, John Cale, had worked extensively with Young),²⁹ Warhol would exacerbate the dialectic put into play within his Lincoln Center installation, increasing the aggressive negation of popular spectacle even as his promotion of a rock group tied him to it all the more completely. Initially entitled Andy Warhol’s Up-Tight, the performance made its now infamous debut at a dinner for the New York Society for Clinical Psychiatry held at Delmonico’s Hotel on January 13, 1966. In that incarnation, in which Warhol screened several of his films before appearing on stage with the Velvet Underground, Nico, Edie Sedgwick, and

Left: Andy Warhol. *Thirteen Most Wanted Men*, 1964. © 2002 Andy Warhol Foundation/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Right: Andy Warhol. *Thirteen Most Wanted Men*, 1964. Panels covered by aluminum paint. © 2002 Andy Warhol Foundation/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.



Andy Warhol, *Up-Tight*. New York Society for Clinical Psychiatry dinner, Delmonico's Hotel, New York, 13 January 1966. Film by Jonas Mekas.

Malanga, the incessant, multimedia barrage of the Exploding Plastic Inevitable had not yet been fully implemented. Instead, once the concert began the audience found themselves subjected to the guerrilla-type assaults of filmmaker Barbara Rubin, who, with the help of Jonas Mekas, thrust flood lights and running movie cameras into their faces. Careening from table to table, Rubin and Mekas filmed the hapless psychiatrists' responses to blunt and embarrassing sexual questions such as "Does he eat you out?" or "Is his penis big enough?" and aggressively stated interjections like "You're making too much noise."³⁰

These and other similarly filmed interventions by Rubin played an integral role in all of the *Up-Tight* performances. The shock they effected was intended not only to destroy the audience's traditionally contemplative attitude toward the spectacle taking place on stage but also to make them—as exemplars of bourgeois culture, norms, and comportment—reveal themselves and the society of which they were a part as "up-tight."³¹ As John Wilcock noted of the group's appearance at Rutgers University on March 9, 1966,

There's something about authoritarian creeps which is triggered instantly by the tiniest glimmering of anarchistic freedom and Barbara [Rubin] exploits it ruthlessly. Her continuing cycle of day-by-day documentaries—she was busy filming now—is aptly entitled, the *Uptight* Series. It invariably depicts the helplessness of people who are blowing their cool, losing control.³²

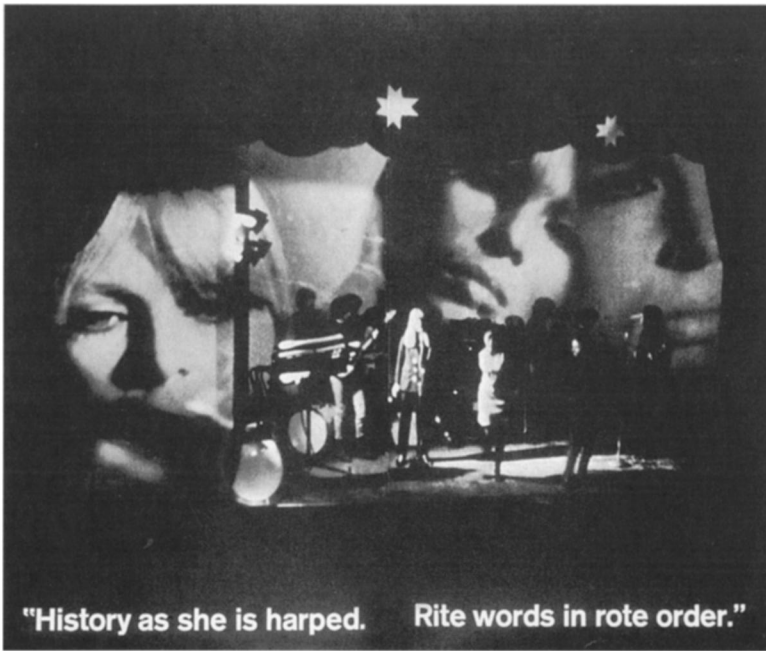
Already at Delmonico's the effect of such explicitly avant-garde interventions was to instantly and powerfully divide the representatives of the new culture from those of the old.³³ "You want to do something for mental health?" asked one of the enraged psychiatrists of a reporter for the *New York Times*, "Kill the story."³⁴

Another, lesser-known, activity within the Up-Tight series reveals the group's interest in intervening in the mass media as one of the exemplary sites of bourgeois ideology. Instead of a concert this involved a disruptive and chaotic appearance by Warhol, Rubin, and members of the Velvet Underground and the East Village band The Fugs on David Susskind's television program. During the course of the show, Rubin and Danny Williams's filming, Ed Saunders's political advocacy of oral-genital relations, and Cale's languid caressing of Malanga with a cattle whip, caused the TV host to angrily lose his cool. Halfway through the taping, as Wilcock reported, "Susskind is getting rattled. The roving cameramen, the disorderly group, the smell of pot, the occasional clicks, shrieks and catcalls from Barbara are apparently so much more than he expected."³⁵ Halfway through the taping Susskind and his staff abruptly decided to cancel the second hour of the program.

In the later, more fully developed version of the Exploding Plastic Inevitable, this aspect of direct, personal confrontation between performer and audience was replaced by the more encompassing, multimedia experience familiar to Stark and McGuire.³⁶ By the end of March 1966—with the waning of Rubin's participation and the full development of the projections and light show—the term "up-tight" had come to take on a different meaning. As noted at the time by Ingrid Superstar, "Uptight means to have so many different confusing things going on at one time, to attract or detract the audience's attention in order to confuse them and make them nervous. Sometimes it even makes us nervous."³⁷



To a certain extent, considerations such as those by Stark and McGuire had been prompted by Marshall McLuhan, who included the Exploding Plastic Inevitable in his popular pictographic handbook *The Medium Is the Massage* of 1967. As indicated on the subsequent two-page spread (illustrated with a Roy Lichtenstein-like, comic book "BANG"), the EPI represented the "auditory space" of electric media, which, as McLuhan explained, was multidirectional, synaesthetic, and interactive. "The ear favors no particular 'point of view,'" McLuhan observed, "We are *enveloped* by sound. It forms a seamless web around us."³⁸ As he explained more precisely in an earlier article, "The Agenbite of Outwit," such an auditory space designated



Collage representing the Exploding Plastic Inevitable in Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, *The Medium is the Massage* (1967).

any pattern in which the components co-exist without direct lineal hook-up or connection, creating a field of simultaneous relations [which] is auditory, even though some of its aspects can be seen. . . . They form a mosaic or corporate image whose parts are interpenetrating. Such is also the kind of order that tends to exist in a city or a culture. It is a kind of orchestral, resonating unity.³⁹

Prior to implicating the EPI, the privileged site of McLuhan's electronic space was television. Although the TV image was flat, the children of the electronic age—sitting, in McLuhan's descriptions, with a characteristic closeness to the screen—were enveloped by the scanning electrons beamed forth from the cathode-ray tube, "bombarded," as McLuhan put it, "by atoms that reveal the outside as inside in an endless adventure amidst blurred images and mysterious contours."⁴⁰ Within this all-encompassing, audio-visual environment, the flickering half-presence of television's (then) low level of resolution was seen to create a "mosaic" that called forth the spectators' "participatory" in-filling and a synaesthetic, multisensory response. "The TV image," McLuhan explained in *Understanding Media*, "requires each instant that we 'close' the spaces in the mesh by a convulsive sensuous participation that is profoundly kinetic and tactile."⁴¹ For McLuhan, the ultimate result of such electronic media was to be both the return to an organically "retribalized" global village—"where everything happens to everyone at the same time: [and] everyone knows about, and therefore participates in, everything that is happening the moment it happens"⁴²—and an equally holistic transformation of the individual into "a complex and depth-structured person emotionally aware of his total interdependence with the rest of human society."⁴³ In an inverse, but no less ideological, appeal to

the great “Family of Man,” McLuhan’s “tribal” imagery sought to naturalize the decade’s thoroughly technological transformations (to such a point, in fact, that *The Medium Is the Message* illustrated this idea with Nat Farbman’s photograph of Beschuana villagers from the famous exhibition by Edward Steichen).⁴⁴

To date, the reception of the Exploding Plastic Inevitable remains unproblematically tied to McLuhan’s apologetics. In the book *Up-Tight*, Victor Bockris and Gerard Malanga declare that a “formal definition . . . of the aims of the E.P.I.” could be found in McLuhan’s statement that “Our new [electronic] environment compels commitment and participation. We have become irrevocably involved with, and responsible for, each other.”⁴⁵ More generally, Gene Youngblood claimed expanded cinema as “a paradigm for an entirely different kind of audiovisual experience, a tribal language that expresses not ideas but collective group consciousness.”⁴⁶ Following McLuhan’s claim of an impending return to self-presence, Youngblood further explained that “We are tragically in need of a new vision: expanded cinema is the beginning of that vision. We shall be released. We will bring down the wall. We’ll be reunited with our reflection.”⁴⁷

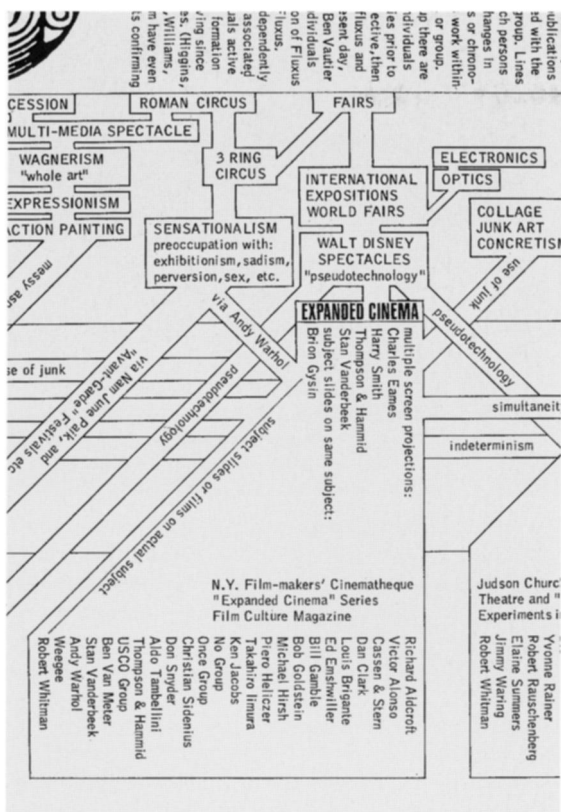
By all accounts, however, viewers of the Exploding Plastic Inevitable did not feel returned to tribal unity or subjective self-possession so much as uprooted and disoriented by the incessant bombardment of audiovisual shocks. Art Seidenbaum of the *Los Angeles Times* described it as “like ducking in the midst of shrapnel, not knowing what’s hitting next from where.”⁴⁸ Another reporter noted more precisely and dispassionately that, “It’s a dislocation of the senses—a breaking down of ordinary responses.”⁴⁹ “At a slight distance,” wrote reviewer Michaela Williams, “the Exploding Plastic Inevitable seems like a Fun Machine. People move into it and become nothing more than parts of it, receptors essential to its functioning but subordinate to it and manipulated by it.”⁵⁰ “He has indeed put together a total environment,” she later declared of Warhol,

but it is an assemblage that actually vibrates with menace, cynicism and perversion. To experience it is to be brutalized, helpless.

. . . The strobe lights blaze, spots dart, flickering pistol lights start in on [the audience] and their humanness is destroyed; they are fragments, cutouts waiving Reynolds Wrap reflectors to ward off their total disintegration.



Marshall McLuhan.



George Maciunas. *Expanded Arts Diagram*. Published in *Film Culture* 43 (1966). Detail.

“Eventually,” she concluded, in lines that the group would quote gleefully in subsequent advertisements, “the reverberations in your ears stop. But what do you do with what you still hear in your brain? The Flowers of Evil are in full bloom with the Exploding Plastic Inevitable; let’s hope it’s killed before it spreads.”⁵¹

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Without mentioning McLuhan, George Maciunas’s 1966 *Expanded Arts Diagram* traced the genealogy of the Exploding Plastic Inevitable from International Expositions and World Fairs, to Disney-esque spectacles, to the multiple screen projections of Expanded Cinema, a category headed by the name of Charles Eames.⁵² Indeed, in 1964—the year before the Cinematheque’s first “Expanded Cinema Festival”—the publication of McLuhan’s

Understanding Media would likely have been overshadowed by Charles and Ray Eameses’ *Think* presentation in the IBM Pavilion at the New York World’s Fair. The Eameses’ audience—lifted hydraulically before a vast hemispherical wall of movie and slide projections—was bombarded by information at a pace too rapid to be fully absorbed. More so than television, the *Think* installation—with its literal mosaic of screens, its fragments of information, and its synaesthetic, or at least multisensory, engagement—exemplified McLuhan’s descriptions of an “auditory,” electronic space.

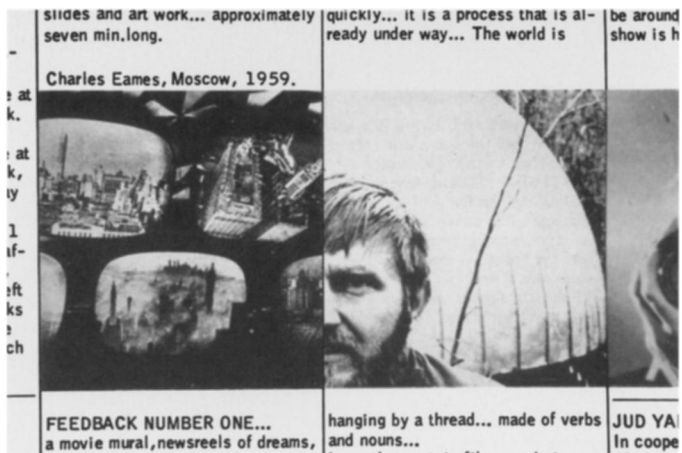
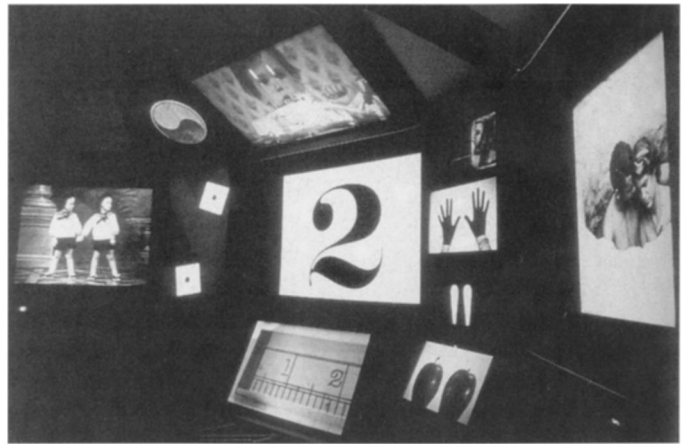
Although lacking the full visceral impact of the EPI, visitors nonetheless found the IBM Pavilion “occasionally confusing,” “frustrating,” and “too fragmented to be entirely successful.”⁵³ In his “Movie Journal,” Jonas Mekas described the experience as “A very busy performance[,] confused, overcrowded, perfectly unfunctional, and, I would dare say, silly.”⁵⁴ In part, such disorientation attests to the displacement of earlier forms of more focused spectacular attentiveness established with the sound film.⁵⁵ Like the Eameses’ 1959 installation, *Glimpses of the USA* (reproduced in the same issue of *Film Culture* as Maciunas’s “Expanded Arts” graph), the IBM Pavilion was a privileged site of the type of perceptual retraining that Jonathan Crary has revealed as integral to capitalism’s dynamic of de- and reterritorialization. The “IBM information machine,” as the installation was called, sought to naturalize the newly developing, technologically mediated modes of absorbing the augmented speeds and diversity of stimuli within

an emerging information economy. These modes of subjective assimilation were now to be claimed as actually truer to human perception. Although “the pace of the show,” as one observer recalled, “is so fast that a person does not have enough time to weed out what he wants to see or not see,” the tuxedoed IBM “host” explained that the installation actually “brings you information in much the same way as your mind gets it—in fragments and glimpses—sometimes relating to the same idea or incident. Like making toast in the morning.”⁵⁶

Think derived from years of the Eameses’ research into the most effective means of communicating multiple stimuli.⁵⁷ According to Beatriz Colomina, they had found that the “awareness of relationships between seemingly unrelated phenomena [was] achieved by ‘high speed techniques’” that “produce an excessive input from different directions that has to be synthesized by the audience.” The IBM Pavilion, channeling the newly emerging dislocating effects of electronic technology to the contemporary operations of commercial mass media, rendered the audience’s “impulse to make connections,” as Colomina observes, into a form of “participation,” the desired result of which was to surpass intellectual engagement in favor of an “emotional response, produced as much by the excess of images as [by] their content.”⁵⁸

While McLuhan generally presented such an interactive participation as leading to the holism of the global village, the controlling effect of this new mode of distraction was not entirely absent from his discussions either. Although apparently unable to elucidate its significance fully, he nonetheless broached it toward the end of *Understanding Media*. “In the course of many studies of audience reactions to TV teaching,” McLuhan observed,

there recurs this puzzling fact. The viewers feel that the teacher has a dimension almost of sacredness. This feeling does not have its basis in concepts or ideas, but seems to creep in uninvited and unexplained. It baffles both the students and the analysts of their reactions. Surely, there could be no more telling touch to tip us off to the character of TV.



Top: Charles and Ray Eames.
Think, 1964.

Bottom: Charles and Ray Eames.
Glimpses of the USA, 1959.
Published alongside image of
Stan VanDerBeek in *Film Culture*
43 (1966).

This is not so much a visual as a tactual-auditory medium that involves all of our senses in depth interplay. For people long accustomed to the merely visual experience of the typographic and photographic varieties, it would seem to be the *synesthesia*, or tactual depth of TV experience, that dislocates them from their usual attitudes of passivity and detachment.⁵⁹

As in the IBM Pavilion, then, the “participatory” closing of an auditory, mosaic space—the individual’s connection of diverse, fragmentary bits of information—actually produces a more active form of suture, an identification with and subjection to the electronic image. “Potentially,” remarked McLuhan, television “can transform the Presidency into a monarchic dynasty. A merely elective Presidency scarcely affords the depth of dedication and commitment demanded by the TV form.”⁶⁰

For both McLuhan and the Eameses the forms of perceptual training and interpellation produced by electronic media were understood to bypass conscious assimilation in order to impact subindividual or automatic processes. Seen from this perspective, the mutual, participatory involvement and proximity within the global village—the contact over distance allowed by electronic communication—reveals itself as a subjective permeability to external forces of signification. In a 1964 review of the conflictual, electronic battlegrounds of *Naked Lunch* and *Nova Express*, McLuhan’s habitual discourse underwent a highly symptomatic rupture, temporarily drawing back the ideological veil of tribalization to reveal the more nefarious dimensions of this electronic space. Burroughs, he noted, presents,

a paradigm of a future in which there can be no spectators but only participants. All men are totally involved in the insides of all men. There is no privacy and no private parts. In a world in which we are all ingesting and digesting one another there can be no obscenity or pornography or decency. Such is the law of electric media which stretch the nerves to form a global membrane of enclosure.⁶¹

It is certainly a coincidence that Warhol characterized Pop art—in terms that recall McLuhan’s descriptions of television and electronic space—as “taking the outside and putting it on the inside or taking the inside and putting it on the outside.”⁶² Yet it is, I would suggest, this dimension of the global village—its spatial and subjective interpenetration—that was modeled by the Exploding Plastic Inevitable. Within it spectators became keenly aware of the subindividual transformations effected by media technologies.⁶³ Surpassing then current perceptual norms more intensely than had the IBM Pavilion, the EPI formed a similarly

enveloping “membrane of enclosure,” a vast electronic environment, the space of which Warhol momentarily even contemplated furnishing with individual television sets on every table.⁶⁴



Sheldon Renan, who coined the term *expanded cinema* in his 1967 *Introduction to the American Underground Film*, explicitly defined it in terms of the dissolution of the medium: it was, in his words, “cinema expanded to the point at which the effect of film may be produced without the use of film at all.”⁶⁵ More recently, Rosalind Krauss has described the related historical development of television and the advent of such intermedia arts. The artistic adoption of the Portapak video recorder, she explains in the essay “*A Voyage on the North Sea*,” effectively extinguished the modernist practice of structural film and “shatter[ed] the notion of medium-specificity,” opening onto a “post-medium” condition where aesthetics and capital could permeate all aspects of culture.⁶⁶ Far from a postmodern concession of oppositional art, however, Krauss appealed to Walter Benjamin’s idea of allegorical appropriation to argue that “it is precisely the onset of higher orders of technology . . . which allows us, by rendering older techniques outmoded, to grasp the inner complexity of the mediums those techniques support.”⁶⁷ For an artist like Marcel Broodthaers, she explains, the late-sixties advent of television, electronics, and intermedia prompted a Benjaminian recovery of early, artisanal film as “a medium whose specificity is to be found in its condition as self-differing.”⁶⁸

Warhol’s earliest films, like *Sleep*, *Kiss*, or *Empire*—ones that Broodthaers might have seen in Belgium at the Experimental Film Festival in Knokke-le-Zoute—have long been related to both the recuperation of early cinema and the development of structural film.⁶⁹ Neither interest, however, characterizes the EPI. For far from redeeming earlier cinematic models, the Exploding Plastic Inevitable—which Mekas described as “all Here and Now and the Future”⁷⁰—employed Warhol’s films as components of an intermedia space with all the impure promiscuity that Krauss ascribes to television: “a discursive chaos, a heterogeneity of activities that could not be theorized as coherent or conceived of as having something like an essence or unifying core.”⁷¹

Yet the appropriation of an outmoded medium was only one of the oppositional strategies theorized by Benjamin, who similarly regarded the moment of a technology’s emergence as dialectical. In the famous “Work or Art” essay and the *Passagenwerk*, Benjamin described technologies—“at historical turning points”⁷²—as developing within social and subjective complexes of perceptual modalities and habitual actions. The largely unconsciously

developed habits that emerged with the advent of new technologies and that came to the fore in artistic modes of distraction, he argued, could be channeled in either progressive or reactionary directions, mobilized through identification with either proletarian workers or with Hollywood stars and Führer cults. While aware of the latter, regressive outcomes, Benjamin nonetheless defended the possibility of anticipatory, artistic operations to reveal (as in a dream) the repressed potentials of these unconscious aspects of subject formation.⁷³ At the moment of its emergence, early film, he maintained, performed two oppositional functions: expressing the institutional sedimentations of habitual actions and revealing within them repressed or hidden potentials.⁷⁴ Bursting asunder the offices, factories, and other “prison-worlds” of institutional power, cinematic disjunctions (as anticipated by Dadaist montage) revealed “entirely new structural formations” of the depicted subject and opened onto new possibilities and articulations.⁷⁵ “On the one hand,” he explained of this optical unconscious,

*film augments awareness of the necessities governing our lives by its use of close-ups, by its accentuation of hidden details in familiar objects, and by its explorations of commonplace milieus through the ingenious guidance of the camera lens; on the other hand, it manages to assure us of a vast and unsuspected field of action.*⁷⁶

In 1935 Theodor Adorno would find Benjamin’s theory of distraction unconvincing.⁷⁷ Yet Benjamin’s argument was largely confined to the cinema of the twenties; and while he would concede that the advent of sound film had delivered the political promise of early cinema to the forces of fascism and capital, he firmly defended the “revolutionary primacy of the silent film.” At its emergence, he maintained, a new technology incites a mixture of “reactions that [are] hard to control and hence politically dangerous” to instituted powers.⁷⁸ While such reactions only become progressive or reactionary in the artistic and sociological assemblages that they form, it is their initial, ambiguous duality that the anticipatory artist must be given to understand.⁷⁹ “The artist,” as Gilles Deleuze summarized, glossing Benjamin by means of Hans Jürgen Syberberg, “is always in the situation of saying simultaneously: I claim new methods, and I am afraid that the new methods may invalidate all will to art, or make it into a business, a pornography, a Hitlerism . . .”⁸⁰

Responding to contemporary economic and sociological developments, the mid-sixties saw the earlier, spectacular regime of perception that had emerged with the sound film giving way to new forms of electronic information. It was at this historical turning point that Warhol’s Exploding Plastic Inevitable emerged to

contest ideological naturalizations of the type posed by McLuhan and the Eameses.⁸¹ Forming a contradictory, experimental space, the EPI trafficked in emergent technological forces still lingering on the threshold before their complete subsumption within the market.⁸² As opposed to naturalization, the EPI produced a dislocating, environmental montage where different media interfered and competed with one another, accelerating their distracting, shocklike effects to produce the three-dimensional, multimedia equivalent of a *moiré*. Such was described by reviewer Larry McCombs, who noted the manner in which “The lights have become a dim blue flicker, but a flicker that goes faster and slower and pauses now and then, just as your eyes get used to each kind of flicker.” “Too much happening,” he continued:

it doesn't go together. But sometimes it does—suddenly the beat of the music, the movements of the various films, the pose of the dancers, blend into something meaningful, but before your mind can grab it, it's become random and confusing again. Your head tries to sort something out, make sense of something. The noise is getting to you. You want to scream, or throw yourself about with the dancers, something, anything!⁸³

The EPI, as Wayne McGuire noted, rejected the many “false resolutions” of the time, refusing both McLuhan’s rhetoric of retribalization and the Eameses’ attempted naturalization onto images of nuclear families and morning toast. Instead, Warhol’s multimedia presentation linked contemporary, capital-driven, technological dislocations with more volatile forms of social and libidinal transformations, signaled in part by the “decadent” contents of both his films and the lyrics of the Velvet Underground.⁸⁴ This was indeed “a demon light electric,” an ambiguous and threatening form of deterritorialization, played out to the volume, feedback, length, and shifting tempos of a music that failed—in extended bouts of dissonant improvisation—to cohere comfortably within the norms of popular spectacle. Within this environment, however, identifications were not disarticulated entirely into some kind of postmodern flux; the EPI was not simply a bricolage of existing signifiers, practices, and codes.⁸⁵ Rather, it formed a multiplicitous situation or “image” in which the possibilities of subjective transformation were opened to forms of political appropriation. Not primarily by the proletarian mass or the official, and often essentialist, counterculture, but by delinquents, drag queens, addicts, and hustlers: a “group,” as Kathy Acker observed about the Factory, “who at that time no decent person, not even a hippy, would recognize as being human.” It was a group, however, that would later emerge within punk and a politicized gay subculture.⁸⁶

In 1967, therefore, as artists such as Robert Smithson, Dan Graham, and Mel Bochner were exploring postindustrial subur-



The Velvet Underground on the grounds of Philip Johnson's estate, New Caanan, Conn., 1966. Photo: Billy Name.

ban landscapes and the serialized pages of magazines, Warhol was not simply touring the country with a rock band but was occupying the newly emerging spaces of information.⁸⁷ Rather than merely capitalizing on them, however, the Exploding Plastic Inevitable acted to articulate these zones within the taut ambiguities of a contemporary dream image, one that would be seized upon by emergent forces of subcultural resistance. Today, at the outset of the twenty-first century, Warhol's formerly futuristic "brutal assemblage" has no doubt become outmoded in turn. Yet, in its time the EPI mobilized the conflictual, deterritorialized forces of electronic media toward the explosion of a newly developing, postinstitutional prison-world . . . amongst the far-flung debris of which some, at least, would find it possible—less calmly, perhaps, but no less adventurously—to go traveling.⁸⁸

Notes

I am grateful to John Smith and Matthew Wrban at The Andy Warhol Museum, Robert Haller and Jonas Mekas at Anthology Film Archives, Callie Angell of The Andy Warhol Film Project, and Jay Reeg for allowing me access to important and hard-to-locate sources and documents. I am also grateful to Michael Jennings for allowing me to consult recently revised translations of Walter Benjamin's texts. This article is dedicated to Jay Reeg, on whose particular set of 1960s interests I will probably never again write so specifically.

1. Wayne McGuire, "The Boston Sound," *Crawdaddy!* August 1968; reprinted in, *The Velvet Underground Companion: Four Decades of Commentary*, ed. Albin Zak III (New York: Schirmer Books, 1997), 18.

2. McGuire, 25. The last Velvet Underground concert to be associated with the Exploding Plastic Inevitable seems to have occurred in May of 1967 at Steve Paul's Scene in New York City. The final performances with Nico occurred at the Boston Tea Party in Boston on 26–27 May 1967. Concert posters show that the group continued to be billed as "Andy Warhol's Velvet Underground," however, until at least July 1967. The *San Francisco Oracle* apparently ran a small advertisement announcing "The [sic] Andy Warhol's 'EPI' with The Velvet Underground" for a 20 December 1967 performance at The Cinematheque Coffee-house Palace of Pleasure, but there seems to be no mention of the Exploding Plastic Inevitable in 1968. For dates and a history of the Velvet Underground and the EPI, see Victor Bockris and Gerard Malanga, *Up-Tight: The Velvet Underground Story* (London: Omnibus Books, 1983). See also the concert and poster listing on The Velvet Underground Web Page, available at <http://members.aol.com/olandem/vu.html>.

3. Advertisement for "Andy Warhol's Velvet Underground and Nico" at 23 St. Mark's Place [The Dom], *East Village Other*, 15 April 1966, 5. For some of the most informative (although not always positive) descriptions of the EPI, see, among others, Bockris and Malanga; John Wilcock, "A 'High' School of Music and Art," *East Village Other*, 15 April 1966, 5; Paul Jay Robbins, "Andy Warhol and the Night on Fire," *Los Angeles Free Press*, 13 May 1966, 12; Michaela Williams, "Warhol's Brutal Assemblage: Non-Stop Horror Show," *Chicago Daily News*, 22 June 1966, 34; and Barry Lord, "Velvet Underground in Hamilton," *Arts Canada* 105 (February 1967): 15–17.

4. See Timothy Jacobs, "The Velvet Underground," *Vibrations* 2 (July 1967): n.p.; Kevin Kelly, "O, Andy, How Sad," unattributed clipping [review of EPI performance at the ICA, Boston, 29 October 1966], in Scrapbook vol. 2 Small, p. 1, Archives Study Center, The Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh, Penn. [hereafter cited as Warhol Archive]; Richard Mortifoglio, "The Velvet Underground and Nico," in *The Velvet Underground Companion*, 57–62; Robbins, 12; and Williams, "Warhol's Brutal Assemblage," 34.

5. It is important to note that in performance with the Exploding Plastic Inevitable, much of the Velvet Underground's set consisted of long, dissonant improvisations (often erroneously described in reviews as tuning up) much different from the songs heard on the released albums. Known by such titles as "Melody Laughter" or "The Nothing Song," these improvisations often took up more than half of an evening's performance. See, for instance, the recording of the full EPI performance at the Valleydale Ballroom in Columbus, Ohio on 4 November 1966, released on CD as "If It's Too Loud for You Move Back!" An excerpt of the Valleydale Ballroom performance of "Melody Laughter" was included on disk two of the five CD set, *Peel Slowly and See* (Polygram 31452 7077-2). This cut, unfortunately, falsifies the effect by editing the over twenty-

eight-minute improvisation into a ten-minute-and-forty-three-second format more closely resembling a conventional song structure. Such experimental improvisations by the Velvet Underground are similar to John Cale's former associate, Cornelius Cardew's contemporary work in London with the free-noise improvisational group AMM. Compare, for example, the improvisations at the Valleydale Ballroom with those on *AMM Music 1966* (Machless Recordings).

6. McGuire, 24.

7. McGuire, 21.

8. Jonas Mekas, "On the Plastic Inevitables and the Strobe Light" (26 May 1966), in *Movie Journal: The Rise of a New American Cinema, 1959–1971* (New York: Macmillan, 1972), 242. This article is also cited by McGuire.

9. Bob Stark, "The Velvet Underground," *The Fifth Estate*, 14 November 1968, 11. Stark almost certainly also had the context of the Exploding Plastic Inevitable in mind. The EPI had been well-received in the Detroit–Ann Arbor area where it played some four times in 1966–1967. *The Fifth Estate* had previously reported on Warhol and the Velvets' appearance at the Michigan "Mod Wedding" ("Warhol Here for Mod Wedding," *The Fifth Estate*, 15 November 1966, 2).

10. In the face of their own observations both Stark and McGuire end up advocating variants of direct action liberationism that their meditations on technology would seem to preclude. For his part, Stark concedes that "I know a lot of questions but only a few answers." In McGuire's case, his provocative characterization of the EPI is somewhat undermined by a typical 1960s mysticism and an affirmation of the possibility of experiencing, in music, "pure essence and perpetual presence" (23), tellingly connected with an interest in the writing of Mel Lyman, later an "acid fascist" commune leader, but who worked for a time with Jonas Mekas. In the 1966 "Expanded Arts" issue of *Film Culture*, Lyman is listed as available for "A full evening show alone or together with Eben Siven, Ronna Page, Jonas Mekas, light, images, voice, human presence" (*Film Culture* 43 [1966]: n.p.).

11. Robert Mazzocco, "aaaaaa . . .," *New York Review of Books* 12, no. 8 (24 April 1969): 36.

12. McGuire, 22.

13. On the rock band project, see Glenn O'Brien, "Andy Warhol: Interview," *High Times*, August 1977, 34 (partially reproduced in Bockris and Malanga, 25); Patti Oldenburg, quoted in Victor Bockris, *Warhol* (New York: Da Capo, 1997), 147; and La Monte Young, "Question à La Monte Young," in *Andy Warhol, Cinéma*, ed. Bernard Blistène et al. (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1990), 55. Additional information, including the project's date and its connection to the context of happenings, derives from the unpublished transcript of an interview with La Monte Young and Marian Zazeela by Legs McNeil and Gillian McCain, New York City, 1995. I am thankful to Legs McNeil for providing me with a copy of this interview.

14. Young's departure after a couple of rehearsals is noted in Blistène, 55, as well as McNeil and McCain. Although he does not give a specific reason for the group's breakup, Warhol recalled that "We met ten times, and there were fights between Lucas and Patti over the music or something" (O'Brien, 34; repr. in Bockris and Malanga, 25).

15. Cited in K. Robert Schwarz, *Minimalists* (London: Phaidon, 1996), 32. Young's statement referred to all of the series' performances.

16. For accounts of this installation, see David Bourdon, *Warhol* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1989), 190; Young, "Question à La Monte Young," 55; Eugene Archer, "Festival Bringing Pop Artist's Films to Lincoln Center," *New York Times*, 12 September 1964, 15; and Joseph Gelmis, "Russian 'Hamlet' Shown as Film

Festival Opens," *New York Newsday*, 15 September 1964.

17. Warhol's copies of the advertisement for the Cine Magnetics, Inc., Fairchild 400 projector and instructions for its use are preserved in Time Capsule 65, Warhol Archives. Callie Angell, head of The Warhol Film Project, has determined that the excerpt from *Haircut* was from what is now designated *Haircut* (No. 2), and not *Haircut* (No. 1), which has been preserved and is currently in circulation.

18. On the relation of Warhol's films to television, see Callie Angell, "Andy Warhol, Filmmaker," in *The Andy Warhol Museum* (Pittsburgh: The Andy Warhol Museum, 1994), 139–140. On the inclusion of a radio at the premiere of *Sleep*, see Angell, *The Films of Andy Warhol: Part II* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1994), 11. The Fairchild 400's resemblance to television is noted both in the advertisement found in Time Capsule 65, and in "Festival Side Show," one-page, typed press release, in Time Capsule 37, Warhol Archives. This last document describes Warhol's film excerpts as lasting twenty minutes. Given the unanimity of the other descriptions of the installation, however, this twenty-minute loop—which was the capacity of a full film cassette—likely consisted of the shorter, repeated film segments.

19. "Festival Side Show"; and Amos Vogel, "Film at Lincoln Center," three-page, typed press release, copy located in the Billy Rose Theater Collection, Performing Arts Library, New York Public Library, file "Festivals-Cinema-U.S.-N.Y.-1964."

20. See Warhol's comments in Andy Warhol and Pat Hackett, *Popism: The Warhol Sixties* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980), 211. It wouldn't have helped matters that Jean-Luc Goddard, with whom Warhol seems to have felt some rivalry, had not one but two films, *A Woman Is a Woman* and *Band à Part*, screened as part of the festival.

21. "Festival Side Show."

22. LaMonte Young references Dream Houses in "from concert program notes, 1964," in La Monte Young and Marian Zazeela, *Selected Writings* (Munich: Heiner Friedrich, 1969), n.p. In another text dating from 1969, Young and Zazeela date the concept to 1962 (Young and Zazeela, n.p.).

23. As Young and Zazeela explained of the analogous situation in their Dream Houses: "When a continuous frequency is sounded in an enclosed space such as a room, the air in the room is arranged into high and low pressure areas. In the high pressure areas the sound is louder, and in the low pressure areas the sound is softer. Since a sine wave has only one frequency component, the pattern of high and low pressure areas is easy to locate in space. Further, concurrently sounding sine waves of different frequencies will provide an environment in which the loudness of each frequency will vary audibly at different points in the room, given sufficient amplification. This phenomenon can rarely be appreciated in most musical situations and makes the listener's position and movement in the space an integral part of the sound composition" ("Dream House," in Young and Zazeela, n.p.).

24. Robert Morris, "Letters to John Cage," *October* 81 (Summer 1997): 73.

25. Gretchen Berg, "Nothing to Lose: An Interview with Andy Warhol" (1967), in *Andy Warhol: Film Factory*, ed. Michael O'Pray (London: British Film Institute, 1989), 58.

26. Warhol and Hackett, 50 (emphasis in original). Here and throughout, my discussion of "spectacle" is, of course, made in reference to Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone Books, 1995).

27. This would have been clear, for example, in the relationship between

Warhol's installation of *Brillo* and other box sculptures at the Stable Gallery in 1964 and the serial objects developed by Minimalist sculptors.

28. Hal Foster, "The Crux of Minimalism," in *The Return of the Real* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996), 35–69.

29. John Cale worked with La Monte Young, Marian Zazeela, and Tony Conrad as part of the Theatre of Eternal Music from 1963 through the end of 1965. Judging from "Loop," the first recording issued by the Velvet Underground, it was at least in part Cale's relationship to the minimalist aesthetic that interested Warhol in the group. "Loop," released on side two of the flexi-disk included in the "Fab" issue of *Aspen Magazine* coedited by Warhol, was composed and probably realized almost exclusively by Cale (*Aspen Magazine* 1, no. 3 [December 1966]: n.p.). To a degree far beyond even the most experimental of the group's other releases, "Loop" exemplifies the minimalist aesthetic with which Young and Cale were involved. Seven and a half minutes of continuously undulating feedback, "Loop" ends with a locked groove which—like the film loops in Warhol's Lincoln Center installation—extends the duration of the piece indefinitely by means of repetition. (Cale's "Loop" is the prototype for Lou Reed's later two-album *Metal Machine Music* of 1975, which also ended with a repeating locked groove.) A slightly earlier instrumental improvisation by the Velvet Underground entitled "Noise" was included as part of a sound collage in the "Electric Newspaper" issue of the *East Village Other* recorded on 6 August 1966 and released as ESP-Disk 1034. The Velvets' contribution is well-hidden within the audio collage.

30. On the performance at Delmonico's, see Warhol and Hackett, 147; Grace Glueck, "Syndromes Pop at Delmonico's," *New York Times*, 14 January 1966; and Seymour Krim, "Andy Warhol's 'Velvet Underground': Shock Treatment for Psychiatrists," *New York Herald Tribune*, 14 January 1966. See also accounts of the performance of Andy Warhol-Uptight at the Filmmakers' Cinematheque in New York, which took place from 8–13 February 1966, in Archer Winston, "Reviewing Stand: Andy Warhol at Cinematheque," *New York Post*, 9 February 1966; Bosley Crowther, "The Screen: Andy Warhol's 'More Milk, Yvette' Bows," *New York Times*, 9 February 1966, 32; and "Reprinted from the Fire Island News," in Andy Warhol et al., *Andy Warhol's Index (Book)* (New York: Random House, 1967), n.p. The Filmmakers' Cinematheque press release for this event describes a screening of Warhol's film *More Milk, Yvette* to be accompanied by an appearance of the Velvet Underground and Nico, Edie Sedgwick, Gerard Malanga, and Barbara Rubin. (This listing is, no doubt, the source of the widespread but erroneous idea that the Velvet Underground provided the soundtrack to *More Milk, Yvette*.) Crowther's review indicates that *More Milk, Yvette* was shown in double-screen projection with Warhol's film, *The Velvet Underground*, followed by a double-screen showing of *Lupe*. The event is described in the press release as "the second in the projected UP-TIGHT series, the first of which was held at the psychiatrists' convention at the Delmonico Hotel in January" ("Special Press Screening of a Film by Andy Warhol," one-page press release, late January or early February, 1966, Anthology Film Archives, New York, file "Warhol, Andy. Prog. Notes, Pres rel, . . .").

31. I am using the term *bourgeois* with regard to Rubin's activities advisedly, in reference to what seems the specifically historical avant-garde underpinnings of her interventions.

32. John Wilcock, "On the Road with the Exploding Plastic Inevitable," in *The Autobiography and Sex Life of Andy Warhol* (New York: Other Scenes, 1971), n.p.

33. See Van M. Cagle's discussion of the Delmonico's event in Cagle, *Reconstructing Pop/Subculture: Art, Rock, and Andy Warhol* (Thousand Oaks,

Cal.: Sage, 1995), 4–8.

34. Cited in Glueck.

35. John Wilcock, “Other Scenes,” *East Village Other*, 15 February 1966, 4. Wilcock’s article reports this event in detail. At the bottom of the accompanying photograph, in which Cale and Malanga are clearly visible, the caption identifies the event as “Barbara Rubin, The Uptight Series.”

36. One notable relapse into a directly confrontational style occurred in Ann Arbor, where “someone yelled ‘Andy Warhol’s queer’ and got hit ten times with the blinding [spot] light. Warhol never smiled once” (David Freedman, “Andy Warhol and the Plastic Quadrangle,” unattributed clipping, Scrapbook Vol. 10 Large, p. 72, Warhol Archives).

37. Ingrid Superstar, “Movie Party at the Factory: A Trip and a Half,” one page typed manuscript, dated 26 March 1966, Time Capsule -7, Warhol Archives (punctuation slightly altered). The first phase of the EPI, which I have been referencing under the title Up-Tight seems to have come to an end in March 1966, concurrently with the adoption of a more intense use of strobe lights. Warhol reports that strobes were initially used at the group’s first appearance at Ann Arbor (Bockris and Malanga, 29). This occurred as part of the Fourth Ann Arbor Film Festival at the University of Michigan on 12 March 1966. In posters for this performance, however, it was still billed as Up-Tight with Andy Warhol. See Ingrid Superstar’s description in Bockris and Malanga, 29. The title Exploding Plastic Inevitable seems to have debuted during the April 1966 performances at the Dom on St. Mark’s Place in New York.

38. Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, *The Medium Is the Massage: An Inventory of Effects* (New York: Bantam Books, 1967), n.p. (emphasis in original).

39. Marshall McLuhan, “The Agenbite of Outwit” (1963), in McLuhan, *Media Research: Technology, Art, Communication*, ed. Michel A. Moos (Amsterdam: G+B Arts International, 1997), 123–124.

40. Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), 327.

41. McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 314.

42. McLuhan, “The Agenbite of Outwit,” 124.

43. McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 50–51.

44. The Farbman image reproduced in *The Medium is the Massage* to illustrate the phrase “The new electronic interdependence recreates the world in the image of a global village” is taken from Edward Steichen, *The Family of Man* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1955), 120.

45. Bockris and Malanga, 36; see also pages 26 and 42.

46. Gene Youngblood, *Expanded Cinema* (New York: Dutton, 1970), 387.

47. Youngblood, 49. Tellingly, Youngblood avoids a direct discussion of the EPI in favor of Ronald Nameth’s film of the performance, which effectively tames the overall effect. See Youngblood, 102–105. Nameth’s film is perceptively characterized by Richard Whitehall: “From Warhol’s intermedia, the sharp cry of pain and desperation which seems to be the heart of all his work, Nameth has employed a pulsation of light and sound to modulate an event into an abstraction” (Whitehall, “Nameth/Warhol Replace Arc with Strobe,” *Los Angeles Free Press*, 5 January 1968, 16).

48. Art Seidenbaum, “Andy Peacepimple Puts a New Complexion on Night Life,” *Los Angeles Times Calendar*, 15 May 1966, 3.

49. Susy Dooley, “An ‘Experience’—Warhol Version,” unattributed clipping [review of first Chicago show at Poor Richard’s, 1966], Scrapbook Vol. 10 Large, p. 70, Warhol Archives. See also Jonas Mekas’s comments on the fragmentation of the ego, in “On the Plastic Inevitables,” 242; and Stephen Koch’s description

of the EPI, in *Stargazer: The Life, World and Films of Andy Warhol*, 2nd ed. (New York: Marion Boyars, 1991), 70–72.

50. Michaela Williams, “Andy Warhol and His Marvelous Fun Machine,” unattributed clipping [preview of first Chicago show at Poor Richard’s, 1966], Scrapbook, Vol. 10 Large, p. 62, Warhol Archives.

51. Michaela Williams, “Warhol’s Brutal Assemblage,” 34. Compare with the advertisement, “Andy Warhol’s Exploding Plastic Inevitable Returns,” *Village Voice*, 29 September 1966, 22 (the final seven words of the Williams quotation are omitted).

52. *Film Culture* 43, special issue on “Expanded Arts” (1966): n.p. As we shall see, Maciunas’s perceptive notation of Warhol’s relationship to “exhibitionism, sadism, perversion, sex, etc.” is not unimportant.

53. Mina Hamilton, “Films at the Fair 2,” *Industrial Design*, May 1964, 36–38; quoted in Pat Kirkham, *Charles and Ray Eames: Designers of the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995), 325, 328.

54. Jonas Mekas, “Movies at the World’s Fair” (9 July 1964); reproduced in *Film Culture* 43 (1966): n.p.

55. On the relation of spectacle to the conjunction of sound and vision in the sound film and early television, see Jonathan Crary, “Spectacle, Attention, Counter-Memory,” *October* 50 (Fall 1989): 97–107. It is part of the argument of this paper that the transformations that Crary sees in television in the 1970s begin to be visible within the culture at this moment in the mid-1960s. On the transformation in television, see Jonathan Crary, “Eclipse of the Spectacle,” in *Art after Modernism: Rethinking Representation*, ed. Brian Wallis (Boston: David R. Godine, 1984), 283–294.

56. Hamilton, 36–38; quoted in Kirkham, 325, and IBM “host,” quoted in Beatriz Colomina, “Enclosed by Images: The Eameses’ Multimedia Architecture,” *Grey Room* 02 (Winter 2001): 20.

57. See Colomina, *passim*; and Sheldon Renan, *An Introduction to the American Underground Film* (New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., 1967), 229–233.

58. Colomina, 19, 23. Colomina relates the Eameses’ installations to the media on page 20.

59. McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 336 (emphasis in original).

60. McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 336. Reviewer Art Seidenbaum sensed a similar dimension in the multisensory impact of the EPI. “Andy [Warhol] is providing the stimulus for us,” he wrote, “our rock, our master. All we have to be is passive, the empty vacuum bags which he will fill with his genius” (Seidenbaum, 3). The student reviewers from Columbia University, however, saw more clearly the distinction between the EPI and the strategies of identification at work in multimedia events more directly aligned with capital. As they wrote laconically in contrasting the EPI with Murray the K’s World, “Inside, the screens carry photos and movies of Murray, Murray with a motorcycle, and the Playboy Bunny softball team. Soon there is a shot of the team with Murray.” Calling Murray the K’s World a “veneer, a thin covering over Murray’s real talent: making money,” they concluded that, “Warhol still has the best entertainment in New York” (Mitch Susskind and Leslie Gottesman, “Keep Your Cool: An Exploding World,” *Columbia Daily Spectator*, 27 April 1966). It is worth noting that Murray the K’s World (which cynically announced that “the individual [presumably other than Murray] is the focal point”) was explicitly based on McLuhan’s ideas about electronic media (Jane Tamerin, “Sights and Sounds of the New Night Life,” *New York Herald Tribune*, 17 April 1966, 14).

61. Marshall McLuhan, “Notes on Burroughs” (1964), in *Media Research*, 89.

62. Warhol, quoted in Berg, “Nothing to Lose,” 57. Hal Foster has also noted

this quotation, making an argument about Warhol's place within a "pathological public sphere" that is relevant to the arguments about the space of electronic media developed below (Foster, "Death in America," *October* 75 (Winter 1996): 37–59).

63. Reporter David Freedman, for instance, described spending days following a performance "trying to recover his sensibilities from the onslaught" (Freedman, "Andy Warhol and the Plastic Quadrangle," n.p.).

64. During the first EPI performance at the Dom, Wilcock reported, "Somebody was watching the late news on a tiny, portable television set. 'Wow!' said Andy. 'Wouldn't it be great if we could have one of those on every table?'" (Wilcock, "A 'High' School of Music and Art," 5).

65. Renan, 227.

66. Rosalind Krauss, "A Voyage on the North Sea": *Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2000), 24.

67. Krauss, 53.

68. Krauss, 44.

69. See, most notably, Jonas Mekas, "Notes after Reseeing the Movies of Andy Warhol," in *Andy Warhol: Film Factory*, 37–39; and P. Adams Sitney, *Visionary Film: The American Avant-Garde*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 371–374.

70. Jonas Mekas, "On the Plastic Inevitables," 243.

71. Krauss, 31. Filmmaker Hollis Frampton similarly speaks of the "metaphoric simultaneity" of video as realized in the "dissolve." Hollis Frampton, *Circles of Confusion* (Rochester: Visual Studies Workshop Press, 1983), 167. As he comments further, "Photons impress upon the random delirium of silver halide crystals in the film emulsion an illusion of order; electrons warp the ordered video raster, determinate as a crystal lattice, into an illusion of delirium" (163).

72. Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1936), in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 240; translation revised as it will appear in Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility" (Third Version), in *Selected Writings*, vol. 4, ed. Michael W. Jennings and Howard Eiland (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003).

73. It is in this way, as Benjamin explained in the *Passagenwerk*, that the superstructure "expresses" the lived conditions of the masses. Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 392. Such "dream images," as he called them—the arcades were one; film, in a different way, another—were ambiguously intertwined sites that manifest at the same time the immanent forces of utopian longing and those of ideological repression (4–5 and 388–404 [convolute K]).

74. See Benjamin's comments on the film's revelation of habitual actions, in "The Work of Art," 237.

75. "Our bars and city streets, our offices and furnished rooms, our railroad stations and our factories seemed to close round us hopelessly. Then came the cinema and exploded this prison-world with the dynamite of the split second, so that now we can, at our leisure, set off on journeys of adventure among its far-scattered debris" (Benjamin, "The Work of Art," 236; as revised in Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, vol. 4). The earlier translation famously rendered the last part of the citation as "in the midst of its far-flung ruins and debris, we calmly and adventurously go traveling." In the revised translation, the phrase "entirely new structural formations" is rendered as "entirely new structures of matter."

76. Benjamin, "The Work of Art," 236; as revised in Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, vol. 4 (emphasis added). This dynamic formed the contemporary dialectical counterpart to the outmoded dream images of the nineteenth-century arcades,

which, in the midst of a commercial space, reveal (as their unconscious) the immense field of constructive possibilities of iron and steel building technologies.

77. In Ronald Taylor, ed., *Aesthetics and Politics* (London: Verso, 1980), 123. See Giorgio Agamben's discussion of parts of this correspondence, in "The Prince and the Frog," in *Infancy and History: Essays on the Destruction of Experience*, trans. Liz Heron (London: Verso, 1993), 107–124.

78. In Taylor, 140.

79. I am thinking here of Benjamin's famous idea of ambiguity as "the manifest imaging of dialectic, the law of dialectics at a standstill" (Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 10). In early film this law was to be found in the coexistence of a certain level of critique or negation, brought on by the shock effect produced by cinematic technology, and a consumability—as "something stirring, useful, ultimately heartening"—by which this effect was "brought closer" to the masses who did not thereby reject it as they would more distant forms of high art. See Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 395; and Benjamin, "The Work of Art," 234. It was the very volatility of this moment of combined reception that Benjamin saw as a necessary, although not sufficient, condition for the audiences' awakening to their lived situation and that called for a political channeling in one direction or another.

80. Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 266 (ellipses in original). The context of Deleuze's remark is both a commentary on Benjamin and a meditation on the possibilities of a resistant art in the age of television.

81. And others, such as spiritualism or an idea of the EPI's merely illustrating an LSD trip. For their part, the members of the EPI consistently rejected both interpretations. See comments in Barrie Hale, "The Warhol Happening," *The Telegram* (Toronto), 14 November 1966, 44; and Judy Altman, "Warhol 'Happening': It's Like a Noisy Bomb," *Philadelphia Daily News*, 12 December 1966, 4.

82. Benjamin comments on this "threshold" in *The Arcades Project*, 898.

83. Larry McCombs, "Chicago Happenings," *Boston Broadside*, July 1966, in Scrapbook Vol. 2 Small, p. 7, Warhol Archives.

84. On the relationship of capitalist dislocations to the emergence of liberationist struggles, see Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London: Verso, 1985), esp. 160–161; and Ernesto Laclau, "New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time," in *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time* (London: Verso, 1990), 3–85.

85. Thus, although it intersects with it, the EPI is not fully assimilable to the critique of late capitalist culture developed by Fredric Jameson. Nor is it adequately characterized from a cultural studies approach like that of Dick Hebdige, which seeks a subversiveness within the displacement of existing codes via certain rituals of consumption. See Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Routledge, 1979), esp. 102ff. Warhol's work with the EPI is ultimately more productive (not least through its augmentation of technological dislocations) than either of these models would seem to allow. On issues of sub-cultural resistance in relation to modern art, see Thomas Crow's indispensable "Modernism and Mass Culture in the Visual Arts," in *Modern Art in the Common Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 3–37. Crow's article—which is more Adornian in nature, and thus distinct from the argument about sub-cultural resistance developed here—references at the beginning the "Happenings" of Warhol, among others.

86. Kathy Acker's quote is found in "Blue Valentine," in *Andy Warhol: Film Factory*, 65. See also Peter Wollen's comments at the end of "Raiding the Icebox," in *Andy Warhol: Film Factory*, 25–26. Jon Savage spoke of the role played by

the image of the Velvet Underground and Warhol's Factory for the development of British punk in "Choose a Side to Be On" (talk at the conference "Warhol's Worlds," The Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh, Penn., 21–23 April, 1995).

87. Jonathan Crary points to the relation of the suburban "non-sites" investigated by Smithson and "what might be called the 'tele-visual' city" of the new electronic media in "J.G. Ballard and the Promiscuity of Forms," *Zone* 1/2 (1986): 159–165. Works such as Mel Bochner's *Alfaville*, *Godard's Apocalypse* (1968; which critiques Godard's humanism on the basis of Warhol, Burroughs, and Roger Corman) and, later, Dan Graham's *Rock My Religion* (1982–84; which allegorizes this moment of passage from art to music) take up issues raised by the EPI and, I would contend, form part of its extended artistic reception.

88. "And all this time you probably thought the Velvet Underground was talking about drugs, homosexuality and sadomasochism. Look a bit closer" (McGuire, 45).